



Royal Taste

THE ART OF PRINCELY COURTS
IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY CHINA

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Ming Imperial Patronage of the Wudang Mountains and the Daoist God Zhenwu

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Imperial devotion to and patronage of Daoist gods, rituals, and institutions flourished during the Ming dynasty. Emperors, empresses, and eunuchs in Beijing, as well as princes enfeoffed in territories throughout the country, sponsored Daoist activities, many of which involved commissioning works of art. Emperors ordered the compilation and printing of new editions of the Daoist canon featuring woodblock-printed illustrations. They commissioned the performance of Daoist rituals, many on a grand scale, at court and at sacred sites throughout the country, sending court officials and eunuchs as emissaries. Imperial largesse also extended to new temple-building projects and renovations to existing sites with freshly commissioned statues, paintings, and a wide variety of ritual paraphernalia such as vestments, banners, tablets, scriptures, incense burners, bowls, vases, candlesticks, and bells. Many of the Daoist statues included in this volume can be linked to Ming imperial patronage of the Wudang Mountain range in Hubei province, home to the Daoist god Zhenwu (the Perfected Warrior). This essay outlines some of the historical contexts and material evidence of royal support for the god and temples on Wudang. Because the Daoist pantheon remains, for the most part, understudied and often misidentified, statue sets are reconstructed and the identifying characteristics of a selection of Daoist figures are highlighted.

THE YONGLE EMPEROR'S PATRONAGE OF DAOISM AND ZHENWU

Zhu Di (1360–1424), the Yongle emperor, stands out as one of the most significant imperial patrons of Daoism during the

Ming dynasty. His involvement began during his early years as the Prince of Yan in Beijing.¹ Under the guidance of his advisor Yao Guangxiao (1335–1418), also known by his monastic name Daoyan, Zhu Di decided to attack the armies of his newly installed nephew and usurp the throne for himself. As he prepared to advance with his soldiers, Zhu Di reputedly had a vision of an armored deity with long, loose hair who was surrounded by banners. After Yao identified the figure as Zhenwu, the future emperor loosened his own hair and took up his sword, thereby leading his forces to eventual victory.² Zhu Di and his advisors thus asserted that the god had sanctioned his ascension. Shortly afterward, he ordered the compilation of a new Daoist canon in 1406, supervised by members of the Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) school, including the 43rd Celestial Master Zhang Yuqu (1361–1410) and the 44th Celestial Master Zhang Yuqing (1364–1427).³ Concerned with bolstering his legitimacy as emperor, Zhu Di ordered the building of numerous temples dedicated to the god, including the Temple of the Perfected Warrior (Zhenwu miao) in Beijing, the Hall of Imperial Peace (Qin'an dian) in the Forbidden City, and a massive complex of temples on Zhenwu's reputed home, Wudangshan, from 1412 to 1424.⁴ He also renamed the range Mountain of Supreme Harmony (Taiheshan), designating it the most important sacred site in the country.

Zhenwu's history extends back to the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) when the god was known as Xuanwu (Dark Warrior) and represented as a tortoise entwined with a snake.

Emerging as an anthropomorphic martial deity associated with the north around the tenth century, the entwined animals eventually transformed into the god's vanguard (cat. 80). Zhenwu, also known as Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven (Xuantian shangdi), appears with long, unbound hair flowing down his back and bare feet that refer to his forty-two-year period of meditation and cultivation in the Wudang Mountains. He wears armor under his black robe, suggesting his essentially martial nature, confirming his rank and power as a military commander, and signifying his regality as an emperor on high. Zhenwu served as protector of the country and its people, grantor of legitimacy to rulers, vanquisher of demons and converter of malevolent forces, and bestower of a variety of worldly benefits to individuals at all levels of society. Though Zhenwu received considerable imperial patronage during the Northern and Southern Song periods (960–1279) as well as in the Tangut Xia (1038–1227) and Mongol Yuan (1271–1368) eras, royal support for the god reached its zenith during the Ming.

The Yongle emperor commissioned the production of *Records and Pictures of Auspicious Responses by the Emperor of the Dark Heaven in the Great Ming* (*Da Ming Xuantian shangdi ruiying tulu*), an illustrated book preserved in the Daoist canon. It visually and textually documents seventeen miraculous episodes reported during a key phase of the projects at Wudangshan in the early fifteenth century—all of which were considered to be evidence of Zhenwu's approval of these endeavors.⁵ Several entries depict marvelous horticultural signs, while others reveal huge beams of wood and metal bells magically floating in the water for easy retrieval.⁶ Others represent occasions when the god materialized anthropomorphically, each accompanied by a specific date and time. For instance, on August 17, 1413, Zhenwu descended on his black cloud and appeared above the Palace of the Jade Void of the Dark Heaven (Xuantian yuxu gong) with two attendants (fig. 6-1). One carried Zhenwu's seven-star sword of the three terraces (*santai qixing jian*) while another bore the god's flag, which featured the seven stars of the Northern Dipper asterism (Beidou).

COMMISSIONING RITUALS AND SENDING STATUES TO WUDANGSHAN

Zhu Di's restoration and building of temple complexes at Wudangshan prompted the creation of numerous statues and objects for veneration, for the performance of Daoist rituals, and for the adornment of sacred spaces. Highly skilled artisans from



Fig. 6-1. *Zhenwu Appears above the Palace of the Jade Void*, Da Ming xuantian shangdi ruiying tulu 大明玄天上帝瑞應圖錄 (DZ 959), 1444–45. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Chinois 9548 (952)

the capital crafted these items using sumptuous materials such as red lacquer, jade, silk, bronze, silver, and gold. Sets of ritual utensils usually included an incense burner (cat. 77), bottles, candle stands, silk lamp covers, incense boxes, and other tools. The court also sent lavish donations of bells, stone chimes, dragon tablets (*longpai*), multiple copies of Daoist scriptures, incense, and candles. In addition to the Palace of the Jade Void mentioned earlier, three other complexes received significant imperial largesse in the early fifteenth century: the Palace of the Purple Empyrean (Zixiao gong), the Palace of the Southern Precipice (Nanyan gong), and the Palace of the Five Dragons (Wulong gong). Under Zhu Di, the Marquis of Longping Zhang Xin, Vice Minister Guo Jin, and the emperor's son-in-law Mu Xin led more than two hundred thousand artisans and soldiers who remained at Wudangshan for the duration of the project. Zhang Yuqing selected more than six hundred Daoist clerics who arrived on the mountain to staff the temples and perform periodic rituals.

In 1416, Zhu Di commissioned one of the largest surviving Ming statues of Zhenwu for the Golden Hall (Jindian) at the Palace of Supreme Harmony (Taihe gong) located on the range's highest peak (fig. 3-9). This finely crafted, five-ton bronze exemplifies many iconographic and stylistic characteristics common to other Ming statues of the god, suggesting that it may have served as a

model for other fifteenth-century images. The broad-shouldered, beefy-armed god sits with legs pendant and bare feet set fairly wide apart. His long hair is slicked back close to his head before descending down his back. His long beard extends straight down to his chest, upon which armor is revealed from underneath a robe gathered above his waist by a medallion-decorated belt. This imperially commissioned statue, its attendants, and the Golden Hall itself displaced a fourteenth-century bronze hall, effectively reclaiming Wudangshan for Zhu Di from its former Mongol Yuan imperial patrons.

Ming editions of gazetteers, veritable records, and books within and beyond the Daoist canon contain detailed descriptions of imperially commissioned rituals, statues, and other materials for Wudangshan's temples by the Yongle emperor and later Ming rulers.⁷ Many sponsored Purgation Rites of the Golden Register (*Jinlu zhai*) at Wudangshan to solicit blessings, male heirs, and longevity for the emperor and his family.⁸ In all, at least eight Ming emperors sent statues, ritual paraphernalia, and other materials on at least twenty-seven different occasions. They included Zhengtong (r. 1436–49) Chenghua (r. 1465–87), Hongzhi (r. 1488–1505), Zhengde (r. 1506–21), Jiajing (r. 1522–66), and Wanli (r. 1572–1620).⁹ By the middle of the fifteenth century, eunuchs were charged with organizing and supervising donations and projects. Imperial edicts indicate that objects and craftsmen from the imperial court made the three-month journey to Wudangshan. A typical trip would involve dozens of yellow imperial boats and more than eighty artisans traveling to Hubei. Artists carved platforms for statues on site from imported Henan jade, and this process, along with the installation of statues, often lasted more than two months. Wang Zuo, Grand Eunuch of the Interior Court (*neigong taijian*), served in the court of Jiajing. He worked at Wudangshan from 1539 to 1557, supervising many aspects of imperially commissioned projects from architectural renovations to the installation of new statues.¹⁰ As a prince, Zhu Houcong, the Jiajing emperor, had lived in Huguang near Wudangshan with his father, Zhu Youyuan (1476–1519), Prince Xian of Xing, who was a Zhenwu devotee and annual visitor to the mountain. Zhu Houcong's refusal to honor the previous Hongzhi emperor, as prescribed by ritual codes, prompted the Great Rites Controversy that concluded with the Jiajing emperor posthumously elevating his own parents. Thus the series of renovation projects at Wudangshan sponsored by Zhu Houcong beginning in the second year of his reign and continuing for more than thirty years, stemmed not only from the emperor's

Daoist beliefs and the need for Zhenwu's protection and support, but also as an act of his loyalty to his father. For example, in 1552, Jiajing commissioned a huge memorial arch (*pailou*) at the foot of the Wudang range proclaiming *Dark Peak that Governs the World* (*zhishi xuanyue*) (fig. 6-2).

Because several Ming emperors commissioned sets of statues for Wudangshan, temples accumulated multiple sets of images. A typical grouping included a seated Zhenwu (cat. 79) accompanied by an entwined turtle and snake (referred to as *shuihuo yizuo*) thus connoting connections with Daoist *neidan* (inner alchemy). Four additional attendants, a numinous official (*lingguan*) or jade lad (*jintong*), jade maiden (*yunü*) (cat. 81), flag holder (*zhiqi*), and sword holder (*pengjian*) completed the core of Zhenwu's retinue. On several occasions, the god's entourage expanded to include a group of four, ten, or twelve celestial lords (*tianjun*) and celestial marshals (*yuanshuai*) as his assistants, reinforcing his connection with the Daoist Thunder Department (*leibu*).¹¹ These specific combinations of statues echo standard groupings found in fifteenth-century texts on thunder rites, including the *Golden Book of Perfect Salvation of the Numinous Treasure of Highest Purity* (*Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu*).¹² For instance, in 1494, a set of statues installed in the Palace of the Southern Precipice incorporated twelve marshals from three groups: Deng, Xin, Zhang, and Tao, the Four Great Celestial Lords of the Thunder-clap; Gou, Bi, Pang, and Liu, the Four Great Celestial Lords of the Thunder Gate; and Ma, Zhao, Wen, and Guan, the Four Great Celestial Marshals of Upper Purity.¹³ Surviving Ming woodblock-printed ritual manuals, illustrated scriptures, and compendia help us to decode the iconography of these celestial lords and marshals such as Gou, who has a third eye and wields a hammer and spike (fig. 6-3 and cat. 82).¹⁴

Wudangshan attracted pilgrims from all over the country during the Ming dynasty. Devotees who journeyed there followed pilgrimage routes that highlighted sites linked to episodes from Zhenwu's hagiography. While most surviving visual narratives of the god take the form of murals, hanging scrolls, painted albums, or illustrated books, we can also identify a few narrative sculptures. In one such work (fig. 6-4a), Zhenwu sits astride an entwined turtle and snake wielding a sword, only the hilt of which remains in his right hand. The temple behind him represents the Yongle-era Golden Hall. Five robed, dragon-faced figures are positioned at the bottom (fig. 6-4b). Supported by individual clouds, each figure gazes reverently up at the god while wearing a Daoist cap and holding up a *hu*, a type of object



Fig. 6-2. Stone memorial arch at the foot of Wudangshan, 1552. H. 39 ft. 4 in. (12 m)



Fig. 6-3. Celestial Marshal Gou of the Thunder Gate (Leimen gou yuanshuai 雷門苟元帥), *Precious Scripture of the Jade Pivot* (Yushu jing 玉樞經), 15th–16th century. Accordion-folded, woodblock-printed book, 13 x 5 in. (33.2 x 12.5 cm) each page. The British Library, ORB 99/161

held by subservient officials before the emperor. The five *longjun* (dragon lords) can be connected to an episode from Ming-period hagiographies of Zhenwu. According to the *Chronicle of Sacred Revelations of the Emperor on High of the Dark Heaven* (*Xuantian shangdi qisheng lingyi lu*), five dragon lords escorted Zhenwu during his apotheosis, when he ascended from Wudangshan to the court of the Jade Emperor.¹⁵ Although there are many individual and groups of dragon deities, either dragon deities (*longshen*) or dragon kings (*longwang*), within Daoist, Buddhist, and local pantheons, the survival of dragon lord statues at Wudangshan (cat. 84) suggests that sculptural assemblages representing this story may have also existed.

BUDDHO-DAOIST HYBRIDS

Statues representing additional deities also appeared in temples on Wudangshan during the Ming. Images of Taiyi Jiuku tianzun (Celestial Worthy of the Great Unity, Savior from Suffering)

(cat. 86) and Doumu (Primordial Goddess, Mother of the Dipper) (cat. 85) demonstrate continuing hybridity and borrowing between Daoist and Buddhist traditions. In many ways, Jiuku tianzun represents a Daoist version of the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion, Guanyin.¹⁶ Both possess the ability to perform miracles, transform into multiple forms, and respond to appeals from people from all walks of life. Jiuku tianzun also adopts a few elements of Guanyin's iconography such as the healing willow branch and *hou* lion vehicle.¹⁷ In painting, he wears a blue robe and often holds a willow branch in his right hand and a bowl of elixir in his left (fig. 6-5). However, his moustache, beard, Daoist crown with suspended jewel, as well as the nine-headed lion mount assert his identity as a male Daoist deity, compared with the androgynous or motherly Guanyin. Sculptural forms of Jiuku tianzun sometimes incorporate additional Daoist visual markers like the three-legged curved armrest associated with images of Lord Lao as one of the Three Pure Ones (*Sanqing*), Daode tianzun (Celestial Worthy of the



Fig. 6-4a. *Zhenwu Ascending from Wudang to the Celestial Court*, 15th or 16th century. Bronze, H. 47⁵/₈ in. (121 cm). The British Museum, BM OA 1990.12-15.1

Fig. 6-4b. Detail of dragon lords



Fig. 6-5. *Celestial Worthy of the Great Unity, Savior from Suffering* (Taiyi Jiuku tianzun 太乙救苦天尊), late Ming or early Qing dynasty. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper. The Baiyun Abbey, Beijing

Way and Its Power). Beliefs about Jiku tianzun also shared territory with the salvific powers of the bodhisattva Dizang who could rescue one's deceased relatives from regions of hell. Thus many images of Jiku tianzun served in mortuary contexts. Similarly, the Daoist goddess Doumu yuanjun shares several iconographic features with the Buddhist goddess of dawn, Marīci. The sow or boar serves as a vehicle for both deities, either as a single animal or a group of seven pulling a chariot with the goddess inside (fig. 6-6). Doumu's identity as a Daoist goddess comes from her role as the mother of the stars of the Northern Dipper asterism, which is sometimes represented by seven sows.



Fig. 6-6. *Primordial Goddess, Mother of the Dipper* (Doumu Yuanjun 斗姆元君), late Ming or early Qing dynasty. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper. The Baiyun Abbey, Beijing

In her multiple armed form, she holds a sun and moon, the latter of which relates to her ability to dispense the beneficial elixir crafted in the lunar environment by a hare.

Though the Yongle emperor's dedication to Tibetan Buddhism and Tibeto-Nepalese style, mercury-gilded bronze statues crafted in imperial workshops during the era are often mentioned, this brief exploration that spotlights his significant support for Daoist institutions and art, continued by subsequent Ming rulers and their families—particularly in honor of Zhenwu

and temples on Wudangshan—balances our picture of imperial patronage of religious art during the period. The statues, steles, and ritual implements preserved in Hubei province included in this volume evince the vibrancy and variety of Daoist visual culture throughout the Ming dynasty.

NOTES

1. As the Prince of Yan, he added to and restored halls at Changchun gong (Palace of Perpetual Spring) now known as Baiyun guan (White Cloud Abbey). See Wang, *Ming Prince and Daoism*, 91, 93, 251.
2. Shin-yi Chao, *Daoist Ritual, State Religion and Popular Practices*, 97.
3. The new canon was presented at court in 1422, but the task of carrying out the printing, completed in 1445, took place under the Zhengtong emperor.
4. The Qin'an dian, initially established in 1420, is located behind the rear garden of Kunning palace (the empress' palace), inside the Xuanwu gate.
5. DZ 959. The episodes correspond to the start and completion of construction on the great roof of the main hall of the Palace of the Jade Void.
6. *Qianlin* or *langmei* (betel nut plum) trees reputedly first bloomed and fruited once Zhenwu had achieved the Dao. Blossoms and fruit supposedly appeared in abundance during the spring of 1413. The beam and bell were reputedly incorporated into Yongle-reign halls.
7. For an extensive survey of Ming imperial patronage of Wudangshan, see deBruyn, "Le Wudang shan"; and Yang Lizhi, "Mingdi chongfeng zhenwu," 73–109.
8. For an overview of texts on the Golden Register rite, see Schipper, *Taoist Canon*, 995, 998–1000, and 1006–08. Yongle commissioned a rite at the end of the major work at Wudangshan, but it ended up being performed one day after his death in 1424.
9. Major sources for records of imperial patronage of the mountain include Ren Ziyuan, *Chijian dayue Taihe shan zhi* (1431 edition).
10. Wang Zuo, *Dayue Taihe shan zhi* (1556).
11. Several Daoist traditions, including Tianxin (Celestial Heart), Qingwei (Pure Tenuity), and Shenxiao (Divine Empyrean), created complex systems of divine bureaucracy and codified elaborate exorcistic thunder rites in liturgical manuals beginning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.
12. ZWDS 698, compiled by Zhou Side (1359–1451), a prominent Daoist priest at the courts of the early Ming. Chapter thirty-five lists several cadres of thunder deities within the instructions for a Zhenwu *jiao* (offering ritual). For more on thunder rituals in the Ming, see Meulenbeld, "Civilized Demons," 244–50.
13. Ren Ziyuan, *Chijian dayue Taiheshan zhi* (1431), *juan 2*.
14. Another celestial lord, Deng Tianjun, also typically wields a mallet and spike, but Deng has avian features.
15. A similarly sized bronze sculpture, dated by inscription to 1616, featuring the five dragon lords at its base, is in the collection of the Wudang Museum.
16. For a discussion of Jiku tianzun in medieval Chinese texts, see Mollier, "Guanyin in a Taoist Guise," 177–208.
17. For example, see *Guanyin Bestowing a Son*, hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, late 16th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989.152.

Daoist Works





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銅鑲金龍紋鉢

Bowl with dragons over the sea

Hongzhi reign, 1497

Gilt bronze, H. 4½ in. (11.5 cm), Diam. 5⅞ in. (15 cm)

Danjiangkou Municipal Museum

Five-clawed, lolling-tongued imperial dragons wrap around this bowl, emerging from the seas rendered near the foot and surrounded by clouds. The inscription on the bowl's shoulder shows that court artisans originally made it for the Palace of Earthly Tranquility (Kunning gong), which served as the residence for the empress within the inner court of the Forbidden City in Beijing. Emperor

Hongzhi's wife Empress Zhang (1470–1541) devoted herself to Daoism and had close relationships with members of the Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) order. A surviving handscroll painting in the San Diego Museum of Art, which documents Empress Zhang's 1493 ordination by the 47th Celestial Master Zhang Xuanqing (d. 1509), demonstrates the strength and depth of her piety.¹ Sixteenth-century gazetteers compiled under the direction of Ming eunuchs at Wudangshan record the donations of statues and ritual paraphernalia for the performance of a massive, imperially commissioned, seven-day Golden Register Retreat (*Jinlu zhai*) in 1494 and the receipt of a bronze bell, silk banners, and ritual utensils

for the Palace of Tranquil Joy (Jingle gong) in 1501.² This bowl may have been part of one of those donations on behalf of Empress Zhang.

NG

INSCRIPTION IN STANDARD SCRIPT ON THE VESSEL:

大明弘治丁巳年十二月吉日坤寧宮施

Bestowed by the Palace of Earthly Tranquility on an auspicious day in the twelfth month of the *dingsi* year [1497] of the Hongzhi reign of the Great Ming.

1. Luk, "Ordination Scroll of Empress Zhang."

2. Wang and Jia, *Dayue Taiheshan zhi*, juan 4.

狻猊鈕雲紋蓋浮雕龍紋銅爐

Censer with dragon and cloud motifs

16th century

Bronze, H. 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (23.7 cm)

Hubei Provincial Museum

As one of the most important objects used in religious rituals, the incense burner is always included in sets for the altar. It served to sanctify the space, and its smoke traveled as a summons and offering from the earthly to celestial realms. Most Daoist rituals explicitly refer to a censer in both the opening procedure of lighting the incense burner and closing formula of extinguishing it. Beyond its use as a material object, the censer also serves as a metaphor for the incense burner operating within the body of the Daoist practitioner—with both performing a transformation of interior and exterior space. This small tripod censer's lid, decorated in openwork cloud patterns, allows smoke to flow up and out in elegant waves. Said to enjoy not only sitting still but also fire and smoke, the mythical lion known as *suanni* here is a common element atop incense burners. The face of the *suanni*, rendered with curly eyebrows, wide nose, and squared teeth, adorns the top of each leg where each connects with the bowl section of the censer. Each leg then finishes in a claw. The heads and necks of two dragons emerge in high relief from either side, attaching to the top rim with loops at the back of their ears and serving as handles. Four-clawed dragons wrap themselves around the bowl of the censer, echoing the cloud patterns on the lid. Because incense served such an important role in rituals, local elites and even imperial patrons, offered large quantities and varieties of incense to temples of many faiths, where they often topped the list of donations. NG





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雀鈕蓋銀罐

Jar with bird-shaped finial

16th century

Gilt silver, H. 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (19.5 cm)

Wudang Daoist Association

The shape of this sumptuous silver jar resonates with ancient bronze ritual vessels, yet its décor features a painterly scene of temples surrounded by trees in a mountainous setting. The roofs of the temples are brightly gilded, and the plum blossom flowers that adorn the top and bottom of the main section of the jar effectively frame the scene. Fine-lined scrolling vines wrap around the neck and decorate the handles and legs. The lid includes a knob in the form of a black sparrow (*wuque*) that retains gilding along with green, blue, and red pigments. Such jars were often donated in pairs and may have been used to store clean water for use during ritual performances. NG

Statue of Zhenwu

16th century

Bronze, H. 14½ in. (37 cm), W. 10½ in. (26.7 cm)

Hubei Provincial Museum

The ubiquity of statues and other images of the Daoist god Zhenwu (the Perfected Warrior) reflect the height of his popularity during the Ming.¹ Believed to be a protector of the country and dynasty, he received the patronage of many emperors, empresses, and imperial eunuchs who built and renovated temples dedicated to him throughout the country. The god's reputed home in the Wudang Mountains in Hubei province attracted pilgrims from all walks of life. Numerous newly commissioned statues like this one inhabited the many imperially sponsored temples at the site.

Zhenwu's bare feet and long hair link him with other exorcistic deities within the Daoist Thunder Department. This elegantly rendered statue presents him as an emperor with appropriate auspicious physiognomic features such as a full-moon face, dragon eyeballs, phoenix eyes, and upturned eyebrows as described in his hagiographies. Long hair flows down his back. The folds of his robe tuck neatly into the sides of his waist while the heavy drapery of his sleeves cascades over his arms and down the sides of his legs. Elaborately coiled dragons amidst clouds adorn his legs and shoulders in high relief. His middle finger points upward and touches the thumb of his left hand in a gesture known as the Zhenwu *shoujue* (hand sign) or *shouyin* (hand seal), which is specific to the god. The arrangement of the jeweled belt across the middle of a frontally oriented, five-clawed imperial dragon accompanied by clouds covers most of the chest and abdomen, suggesting a sixteenth-century date for this statue, which was likely cast during the Jiajing or Wanli reigns.² NG



1. Giuffrida, "Representing the Daoist God Zhenwu."
2. A bronze statue (dated by inscription to 1544) of Zhenwu in a throne chair has a similar dragon-and-cloud composition on the front of the robe with a belt over the top. See Keverne Gallery, *Fine and Rare Chinese Works*, 14–15.

銅鑲金真武履玄武立像

Statue of Zhenwu on Xuanwu

15th century

Gilt bronze, H. 29¾ in. (75.5 cm)

Wudang Museum

This sculpture suggests Zhenwu's intervention and descent as a Daoist exorcist with the power to rid the world of plagues, demons, and other evil forces. Texts such as *Yuanshi tianzun shuo beifang Zhenwu miaojing* (*The Mysterious Scripture Spoken by the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning on Zhenwu of the North*, DZ 27) recorded several particular days throughout the year when Zhenwu would descend. The most frequently mentioned days for these interventions included the ninth day of the third lunar month and the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, but the god was also anticipated on double dates (for example, the fifth day of the fifth month) as well as on the first and fifty-seventh days of the traditional sixty-day cycle. Naturally, ritual activity increased around these descent days and the god's hagiography is replete with examples of his success in vanquishing malevolent forces. In this piece, Zhenwu's right hand grasps the hilt of a now-missing sword while he raises his left arm toward his chest with his first finger pointing upward. This hand sign, known as the finger method of the Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven (*Xuantian shangdi zhifa*) refers to Zhenwu's power to vanquish malevolent forces and is ordinarily reserved for images of the god in motion, standing atop his vehicle of an entwined turtle and snake known as the dark warrior (*xuanwu*), the god's pre-anthropomorphic form. The two animals engage each other in a playful manner that contrasts with Zhenwu's solemn gaze and purpose. The scarves that swirl around the back of his head, over his shoulders, and down



the sides of his body add to the sense of motion. This sculpture from Wudangshan is one of the larger surviving pieces of its type. The subtly rendered armor underneath Zhenwu's robe, which has a modest hem at the neck and fabric tied at the middle chest, stylistically links this work with other fifteenth-century statues of the god. NG



御賜銅鑲金玉女立像

Standing statue of Jade Maiden

15th century

Gilt bronze and polychrome, H. 28¾ in.

(73 cm)

Wudang Museum

Divine jade maidens (*yunü*) usually serve as attendants to deities in sculptural and pictorial assemblies. Like several other female figures in the Daoist pantheon, this jade maiden wears a crown of phoenixes. Bixia Yuanjun (Sovereign of the Clouds of Dawn) is typically adorned with a crown of three or more phoenixes, while Xiwangmu's (Queen Mother of the West) headgear includes a single phoenix.¹ Though now damaged, this



Fig. 9-17. Painted bronze statue of a Jade Maiden, H. 27¾ in. (70.1 cm), bestowed by the Ming court to Wudangshan. Wudang Museum

jade maiden's crown once incorporated three of the mythical birds. The small square seal that she holds wrapped in a cloth allows us to place her within Zhenwu's basic sculptural retinue of four attendants. A jade maiden is customarily paired with a golden boy (*jintong*) holding a plaque. The other pair includes two male attendants, one holding Zhenwu's sword and the other his black flag, with both featuring the Northern Dipper asterism. A complete set of these four figures, dated to the early fifteenth century, survives in the Golden Hall (Jindian) on Wudangshan (fig. 3-9).²

The rendering of the face, robe, and accoutrements of this jade maiden suggest a fifteenth-century date. She has a low forehead with wide open eyes and hair exposed under her crown. Wearing a cloud-patterned breastplate and spaulders, she is also ornamented with a cloud-shaped pendant. Her multilayered robes feature a feathered hem as well as a baroque hem of flowers and vines, rendered in relief. This statue may have been paired with a similarly styled and sized jade maiden whose hands are positioned to hold Zhenwu's plaque (fig. 9-17). NG

1. Several other female Daoist deities are depicted with phoenixes. For instance, the bird accompanies Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heavens (Jiutian xuannü), who also tends to hold a scripture roll as in the British Museum's *Deity with a Phoenix*. See Zhang, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting*, 256.

2. The Jindian jade maiden holds a much larger seal, and her crown contains two phoenixes.



82

御賜銅鑲金雷門苟元帥立像

Statue of Celestial Marshal Gou of the Thunder Gate

15th century

Gilt bronze and polychrome, H. 28¾ in. (73 cm)

Wudang Museum



83

御賜銅鑲金元帥立像

Statue of Celestial Marshal

15th century

Gilt bronze and polychrome, H. 26¾ in.

(68 cm)

Wudang Museum



Several Daoist traditions created complex systems of divine bureaucracy, including a large and powerful Thunder Department populated with a host of deities, officials, soldiers, and assistants. Daoist practitioners summoned its members to intervene in the terrestrial world to bring rain and to exorcise demons that caused illness or misfortune for individuals, families, and communities. With the rise of the Celestial Heart (Tianxin), Pure Tenuity (Qingwei), and Divine Empyrean (Shenxiao) traditions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, elaborate thunder rites invoking a variety of deities were codified in scriptures. Individual celestial marshals (*yuanshuai*) and celestial lords (*tianjun*) attracted cults of their own, while cadres of these figures appeared in the entourage of the supreme Daoist thunder god Celestial Worthy of the Sound of Thunder Transforming All (Leisheng Puhua tianzun) whose bare feet, long hair, third eye, notched sword, and *qilin* are his main attributes.¹ The prevalence of thunder rituals during the Ming prompted the inclusion of marshals in the entourages of other deities as well, particularly Zhenwu and Primordial Goddess, Mother of the Dipper (Doumu yuanjun).

Ming gazetteers record many imperial donations of statues, including sets of four, ten, or twelve *yuanshuai* and *tianjun* to accompany Zhenwu in temples on Wudangshan. For instance, the Palace of Supreme

Harmony (Taihe gong) and the Palace of the Southern Precipice (Nanyan gong) received a set of statues that included Gou in 1473 and 1494 respectively. These two figures likely belonged to one such set. Celestial Marshal Gou has a third eye in his forehead and he wields a hammer and spike. Despite this figure's small stature, his bulging eyes, furrowed brow, and wide-open mouth leave no doubt about Gou's power. He is a member of a quartet (Bi, Pang, and Liu are the others)

associated with the thunder gate. Other figures from this sculptural group are similarly dynamic and animated in their poses and facial expressions. Damage to most of the attributes once held by the marshals makes specific identification of many of the figures uncertain. NG

1. For a representative painting of Puhua tianzun with an entourage of thunder marshals, see *Shuilu shen quan*, 72.

Standing statue of a Dragon Lord

15th century

Bronze, H. 26 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (67 cm)

Wudang Museum

Dragon deities have long populated Daoist, Buddhist, and local pantheons for their reputed ability to bring beneficial rain and guard tombs. Usually referred to as kings (*wang*) or gods (*shen*), a multitude are mentioned in Buddhist texts like the *Lotus Sutra* and Daoist works such as *Taishang zhao zhu shenlong anzhen fenmu jing* (Scripture of the Most High Summoning the Various Divine Dragons to Guard Tombs).¹ Combinations of four or five dragon deities are often associated with the five directions, four seas, five colors, and five elements. There are several specific references to dragons on Wudangshan, including the Wulong gong (Palace of the Five Dragons) and *Wuqi longjun* (dragon lords of the five pneuma).² Hagiographies of Zhenwu describe how these five dragon lords accompanied him in his apotheosis:

Suddenly auspicious clouds and celestial flowers descended from the sky, filling the valley for three hundred miles in all directions.... With bare feet and clasped hands, he [Zhenwu] stood on top of Purple-Sky Peak. After a moment, dragon lords of the five pneumas clustered around the clouds [that supported the god] and they ascended [together to] the grand summit of Tianzhu Peak [on Wudangshan].³

This figure's dragon face with a large toothy jaw and short whiskers, combined with his courtly robe and hat, resemble sculptural, painted, and printed depictions of the dragon lords of the five pneumas. However, this *hu* (audience scepter) is inscribed *nanfang huolong* (Fire Dragon of the South), linking him with directional and elemental deities. Thus, this figure may represent a conflation of a more universal dragon god with the more specific connotations of dragon lords at Wudangshan.⁴

NG



1. In the *Lotus Sutra*, eight dragon kings are enumerated in the assembly at Vulture Peak. Groups of four, five, and thirty-eight dragon kings are invoked in *Taishang zhao zhu shenlong anzhen fenmu jing* (DZ 363). For a brief overview of this text, see the entry by John Lagerwey in Schipper and Verellen, *Taoist Canon*, 960.

2. Here, *qi* is a Daoist esoteric character made up of *wu* (non-being) and *huo* (fire) that refers to subtle heat within the body.

3. Five Dragons Raise the Sacred Being (*Wulong peng sheng*) in *Xuantian shangdi qisheng lingyi lu* (*Chronicle of Sacred Revelations of the Emperor on High of the Dark Heaven*) (DZ 961), *juan* 1. Several Ming and Qing period murals, hanging scrolls, and woodblock-printed books also illustrate this scene.

4. Before being transferred to the museum, the statue was housed in the Palace of the Jade Void (Taishan miao within Yuxu gong). See Yang, *Wudangshan zhi*, 196.

铜鎏金斗姆坐像

Statue of the Primordial Goddess, Mother of the Dipper

15th century

Gilt bronze, H. 24 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (61.4 cm)

Wudang Museum

Doumu yuanjun (Primordial Goddess, Mother of the Dipper) is a Daoist stellar deity associated with the Northern Dipper asterism (Beidou). According to scripture, she gave birth to nine sons following a miraculous conception in a pond with nine lotuses.¹ These became the nine stars of the Northern Dipper. Although many traditions acknowledge seven stars in the asterism, Daoists recognize nine, two of which are visible only to adepts. Rituals and veneration of Doumu focused on hopes for longevity, particularly because of the Northern Dipper's role as arbiter of fates.

Doumu shares some iconography with Marīcī, the Buddhist goddess of dawn, and both have been referred to in Chinese as Molizhi tian. They typically incorporate sows or boars, either as vehicles or, in the case of Marīcī, as one of several faces (fig. 6-6). Both appear with multiple arms that hold a variety of attributes, most frequently a sun and moon, particularly for images of Doumu. This six-armed form includes the solar and lunar elements in the upper two arms while the lower arms hold a scroll and a disk. The central arms are pressed together in a gesture of prayer. Her headdress features a phoenix with feathers outstretched. A girdle of pendants and necklaces arrays across her long, slim torso and continues below the waist. The figure's short legs are folded into lotus posture.

Some scholars have speculated that Doumu's correspondences with Marīcī originated during the late thirteenth century, during the Mongol Yuan proscription of Daoism, when some scriptures were recast within a Buddhist framework in order to avoid destruction (cat. 70).² Doumu represents part of a larger tendency to incorporate more female



and Buddhist-linked figures into the Daoist pantheon during the Yuan and Ming. NG

1. Other major scriptures about Doumu include: *Taishang Xuanling doumu dasheng yuanjun benming yansheng xinjing* (Scripture of the Heart for Prolonging Life of the Most Sacred Goddess, Mother of the Dipper of Mysterious Luminosity) (DZ 621) and *Xiantian*

doumu zougao xuanke (Mysterious Rites of Petitioning the Dipper Mother of Former Heaven) (DZ 1452).

Schipper and Verellen, *Taoist Canon*, 952 and 1234.

2. Kohn, "Doumu," 175.

銅鑲金太乙救苦天尊

Statue of the Celestial Worthy of the Great Unity, Savior from Suffering

15th century

Gilt bronze, H. 42 in. (106.7 cm)

Wudang Museum

Taiyi Jiuku tianzun (Celestial Worthy of the Great Unity, Savior from Suffering) represents a Daoist adaptation of the Buddhist bodhisattva Guanyin. Both are compassionate, salvational figures with widespread appeal. Jiuku tianzun also took on some powers linked with the bodhisattva Dizang, who has the ability to rescue people from the torments of hell (fig. 9-18). Unlike Guanyin, who can appear as male, female, or androgynous, Jiuku tianzun's long moustache and beard mark him as unmistakably male, while his lotus crown identifies him as Daoist. This figure's original beard, once attached at the ears as a separate piece, is now missing. This sculpture incorporates several other Daoist attributes such as the three-legged armrest often depicted in images of Lord Lao as one of the Three Pure Ones (Sanqing).

During the Ming, Jiuku tianzun and Guanyin sometimes appeared mounted on a *hou* lion as in this sculpture.¹ While this form of Guanyin with a single-headed lion tended to relate to the bringing of sons, Jiuku tianzun's lion is customarily represented with nine heads. Additional heads are arrayed around the neck in this sculpture. The deity's open mouth and hand gestures suggest the practice of *qingtan* (pure conversation) or perhaps a lecture. This statue of Jiuku tianzun provides visual evidence of exchanges within Daoist iconography as well as between Buddhist and Daoist artistic traditions during the Ming. NG

1. See the hanging scroll *Guanyin Bestowing a Son* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989.152).

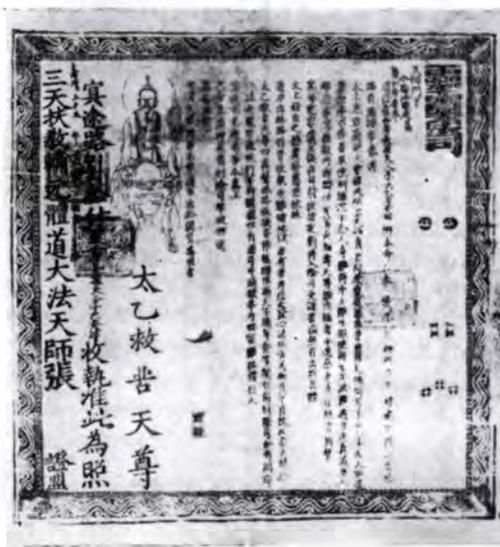


Fig. 9-18. Underworld passport from the Celestial Worthy, Savior from Suffering (*Jiuku tianzun mingtu luyin* 救苦天尊冥途路引). Printed ordination register from the tomb of Lady Li (1538-1556), consort of Prince Xuan of Yi in Nancheng, Jiangxi.





87

黄杨木雕八仙像

Statues of the Eight Immortals

16th century

Yellow poplar wood, H. 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ –13 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.

(32–34 cm)

Hubei Provincial Museum

The eight immortals are a group of legendary, semi-historical figures that are part of the Daoist pantheon as well as that of popular religion. These intricately carved statues not only include the immortals' customary attributes but also incorporate an animal companion for each figure. Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin are recognized as patriarchs of Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) Daoism. The former's large exposed belly and long beard are typical, while his usual fan is replaced by a flywhisk and a curly haired lion. Lü wears a scholar's robe and distinctive cap while his willow tree spirit attendant peeks out from behind.¹ Li Tieguai perches one foot on

his iron crutch while holding a double gourd. He Xiangtu is the only female member of the group. She holds a lotus, while a deer, rather than her customary phoenix, stands at her feet. Rounding out the group are Zhang Guolao, who is shown with a donkey; Han Xiangzi, who is accompanied by a ram; Cao Guojiu, who grasps a pair of clappers with one hand while the other rests on a horned feline; and the androgynous Lan Caihe, who is shown with hair bundled in two topknots.²

The detailed texturing of the animals' fur along with flowing beards and drapery, carefully sculpted headgear, and the wide-eyed expressions of the immortals give these wooden figures a sense of immediacy and movement. While several of the immortals resemble their depictions in woodblock-printed compendia from the late Ming known as *Soushen daquan* (*Compendium of the Search for the Supernatural*), others are the result of the creative combinations of

attributes and animals to unify this particular set. The auspicious theme of the eight immortals crossing the sea has been popular in Chinese art since the Yuan dynasty, as shown by a surviving mural on the lintel in the Hall of Pure Yang (Chunyang dian) at the Quanzhen Daoist temple Palace of Eternal Joy (Yongle gong), which dates to the mid-fourteenth century.³ NG

1. Lü's typical sword is not included. For an in-depth study of Lü, see Paul Katz, *Images of the Immortal*. Lü and the willow tree spirit appear together in many late Ming and early Qing woodblock-printed books. For example, see Wang Qi, *Lü Chunyang zushi quanzhuan* (*Complete Biography of the Patriarch Lü Chunyang*) (1662), Harvard-Yenching Library Rare Books Collection.

2. On Han Xiangzi, see Clart, *Han Xiangzi*.

3. *Yongle gong bihua*, 236–37.



銅鑲金仙藥童子立像

Immortal holding a numinous fungus

16th century

Gilt bronze, H. 19 in. (48.3 cm)

Hubei Provincial Museum

This figure probably represents the Daoist immortal Lan Caihe. The belt fashioned from leaves and the gourd attached in back are typical immortal accessories. Lan is often represented as an androgynous figure with the youthful double-knot hairstyle that we see here. The position of the left hand suggests that it once held something now missing, likely the basket of flowers associated with Lan Caihe. Instead of holding a flower or other attribute, Lan holds a *lingzhi* (numinous fungus) aloft in his right hand, reinforcing the figure's connection with medicinal herbs and Daoist elixirs intended to promote longevity and even immortality.

Lan stands above mountain peaks and swirling waves that appear on the base, indicating this figure's membership in a group of statues assembled to represent the famous eight immortals, who were also displayed in the imperial celebration of the Lantern Festival at the court, as shown in a surviving Ming court painting (fig. 2-1). Small bronze statues of popular deities of the time, such as the moon goddess Chang'e and the Daoist immortal Liu Haichan, are often represented with this type of mountain-shaped base.¹

In the pursuit of longevity, self-cultivation, and immortality, several Ming princes and emperors practiced *waidan* (external alchemy), ingesting elixirs refined from herbs, vegetables, minerals, and toxic substances such as cinnabar, mercury, and arsenic. Others engaged in *neidan* (inner alchemy), characteristic of Quanzhen Daoism, which combined physical, meditative, and breathing techniques aimed at achieving transcendence and unity with the Dao. NG

1. Hubei Provincial Museum obtained this and other Ming bronze statues from the Wudangshan region in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The relatively large size



and quality of the statues suggests their possible manufacture from government-controlled workshops.



89

銅東方朔立像

Standing statue of Dongfang Shuo

16th century

Gilt bronze, H. 13 in. (33 cm)

Hubei Provincial Museum

Dongfang Shuo (159–93 BCE) served in the Han court of Emperor Wu (r. 140–86 BCE). Known as an outspoken advisor, Daoist adept, eccentric recluse at court (*chaoyin*), and sometimes referred to as a jester, he is said to be a deity demoted from the heavenly court and a manifestation of the planet Jupiter. Here he wears characteristic immortal garb, including a collar and belt made of numinous leaves. He sports a grin celebrating his successful theft of a precious peach of immortality from Xiwangmu's (Queen Mother of the West) domain on Mount Kunlun where peaches ripen every three thousand years. The cloud suggests his flight to Penglai, the Island of the Immortals in the east, as detailed in *Inner Biography of Emperor Wu of the Han* (*Han Wudi neizhuan*, DZ 292). NG

Model for acupuncture and moxibustion instruction

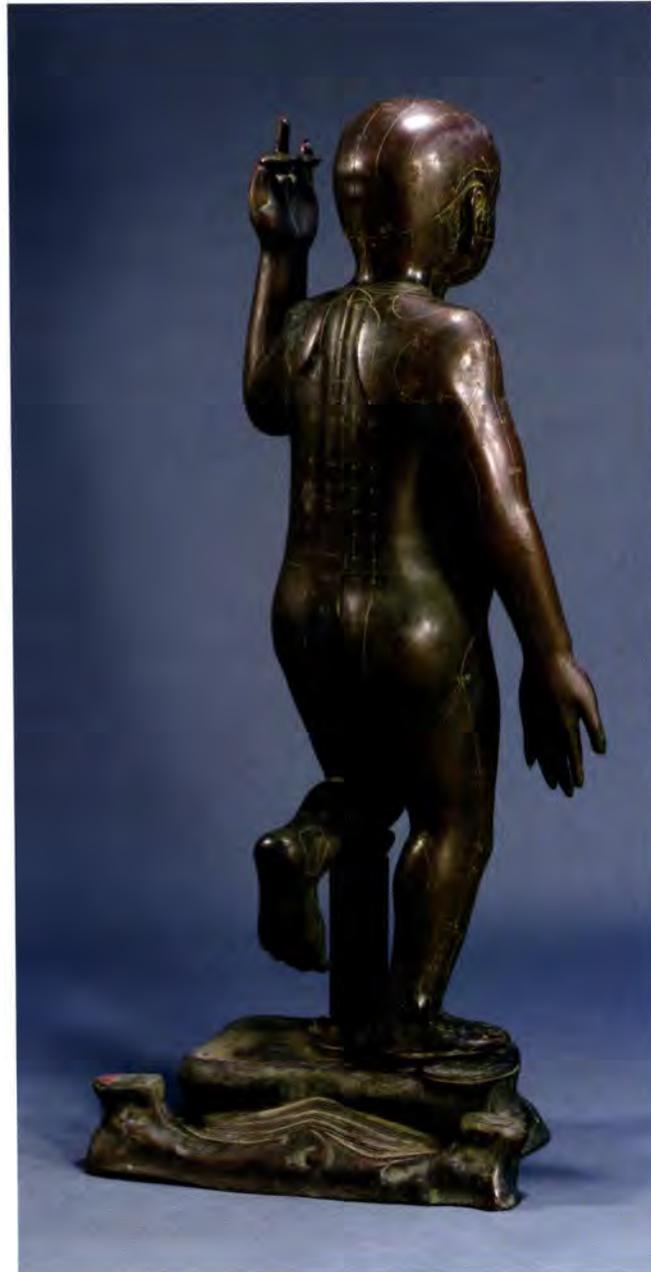
16th century

Bronze with gold, H. 34 in. (86.5 cm)

Hubei Provincial Museum

Sculptural models like this one played an important role in the instruction and transmission of concepts and techniques of Chinese acupuncture (*zhen*) and moxibustion (*jiu*). In traditional Chinese medicine, needles are applied to particular points on the body in order to stimulate the circulation of *qi* (breath or vital energy) through a network of meridians or channels (*jingluo*), often to alleviate pain or sickness. *Moxa* (dried mugwort) can be burned directly onto the skin or in combination with needles. These therapeutic practices aim to unblock and correct the flow of *qi* through meridians that are connected to particular bodily organs. In addition to the twelve organ meridians, there are two more: conception channel (*renmai*) and governing channel (*dumai*) that run along the front and back of the body.¹

Here gold lines indicate meridians and each of the acupressure points on the model is marked with a gold dot and labeled with identifying characters. Unlike many other surviving models, the pose of this figure allows practitioners to see acupressure points on the top and bottom of the foot. Correspondences between the number, names, sequence, and position of the points with surviving woodblock-printed texts and illustrations from the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries suggest a Ming date for this model. For instance, the positioning and sequence of acupressure points resembles descriptions from *Shisi jing fa hui* (*Routes of the Fourteen Meridians and Their Functions*) and *Zhenjiu dacheng* (*Great Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*).² NG



1. For an introduction to these concepts and practices, see Needham and Lu, *Celestial Lancets*.

2. Hua Shou, *Shisi jing fa hui* (*Routes of the Fourteen Meridians and Their Functions*) published in 1341. *Zhenjiu dacheng* (*Great Compendium of Acupuncture*

and *Moxibustion*), compiled by Yang Jizhou and published by Zhao Wenbing in 1601. The latter includes *Tongren mingtang tu* (*Pictures of Copper Figurines of the Bright Hall*).





120

铁铸如意宝磬

Chime in the *ruyi* shape

Yongle reign, 1415

Cast iron, H. 49½ in. (125 cm), W. 37¾ in. (95 cm)

Wudang Museum

Believed to regulate the cosmos and create harmony in the country, music has played an integral role in Chinese court and religious rituals extending back to around 1000 BCE. In Daoism, music serves not only as an accompaniment to daily practices such as scripture recitations but also as an essential component in grand purgation (*zhai*) and offering rites (*jiao*). Musical accompaniment assists in pacing and coordinating ritual practices, particularly those of priests as they perform sacred writing, burn talismans (*fu*), and engage in ritual movements such as pacing the void (*buxu*). Daoist musical instruments include winds, plucked strings, and a variety of percussion such as drums, cymbals, bells, and chimes.

The inscription on this chime indicates its manufacture by the Ministry of Works for the Palace of the Five Dragons (Wulong gong). Renovations to this temple were part of Yongle's overall building projects in the 1410s. Signaling the importance of support for Daoist music, a member of the Office of Imperial Music (Shenyue guan) at the court, Zhang Daoxian, was ordered to serve as superintendent of the temples at Wudangshan.¹ Unlike the majority of temples at Wudangshan, which were associated with Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) Daoism and received the majority of imperial patronage during the Ming, the Palace of the Five Dragons maintained links with Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) Daoism. Ming imperial support for this temple can be traced back to 1382, when the abbot of the palace, Qiu Xuanqing, met with the Hongwu emperor.

This chime takes the form of the head of a *ruyi* scepter that connotes links with not only authority and power but also Daoism and auspiciousness. One of the Three Pure Ones (Sanqing) who occupy the supreme levels of the Daoist celestial pantheon, the Celestial

Worthy of Numinous Treasure (Lingbao tianzun) wields a *ruyi* as an attribute. Numinous *lingzhi* believed to extend life and even confer immortality also mimic this cloud-like shape. As a motif found in Ming textiles, the combination of the *ruyi* and a chime (*qing*) creates the homophonous phrase: "May there be great joy and may all your wishes come true (*jiqing ruyi*)."² NG

INSCRIPTIONS IN STANDARD SCRIPT,
24 CHARACTERS:

敕建大岳太和山興聖五龍宮 (front)
大明永樂十三年九月吉日造 (back)

Imperially commissioned for the Palace of the Five Dragons at the Supreme Marchmount and Mountain of Supreme Harmony; Cast by the Ministry of Works on an auspicious day in the thirteenth year (1415) of the Yongle reign of the Great Ming.

1. Cao and Pu, *Wudangshan daojiao yinyue*, 273–81.

2. Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art*, 265.