

LIVIA KOHN

*Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts*

## The Looks of Laozi

### **Abstract**

Laozi, a key deity of the Taoist religion, represents the Tao in both of its aspects: the unborn, uncreated source of the universe and the continuously changing reality of the world. The first aspect is expressed in Laozi's true body and the second aspect in his teaching body, so that he appears physically as both universal principle and ideal human. Both appearances are described in lists of seventy-two or eighty-one divine marks that are found in medieval Taoist texts. The physical characteristics of Laozi go back to three sources: traditional Chinese physiognomy, which discerns a person's character and fate on the basis of his or her looks; the Taoist doctrine of "immortals' bones," which says that all potential attainers of heavenly states have to be registered in Heaven and will show celestial marks on their bodies; and the list of thirty-two marks and eighty secondary signs that indicate the exceptional nature of the Buddha. Integrating these various background traditions into a unique mythical vision of their own, Taoists create a powerful vision of the central deity of their universe.

**Key words:** physiognomy—immortals' bones—true body—teaching body—energy

Your Excellency, I know it was the Archangel. He had one hundred and forty pairs of wings, and he was clothed in linen. He had an illuminated feminine silver head, a purple, slender neck, golden yellow radiant arms with huge biceps, a delicate slate gray torso, epicene legs in sky blue, sort of whirling and scintillating, and he had women's blue feet. He was unmistakable, Your Excellency.

Louis de Bernières,  
*Señor Vivo and the Coca Lord*

**P**OPULAR RELIGION in many cultures attributes special and often rather mysterious looks to the gods and their communicants on earth. In ancient China it was not only the sage rulers of Confucian myth who were stylized in such a fashion but also Laozi 老子, the Highest Venerable Lord and primary deity of the Taoist religion. A tenth-century text by the famous ritualist and hagiographer Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933) describes him as follows:

When Laozi was born, within three days his body underwent nine changes. It grew to a height of nine feet. He had gray eyebrows and white hair. On his forehead, he had the Sun Horn and the Moon Crescent. His nose had a double rim, and his ears three openings. His face was adorned with beautifully shaped eyebrows and a square mouth. He showed the sign of lordship on his feet and had the mark of the ruler on his palms. All in all, he possessed the seventy-two divine signs and eighty-one auspicious marks of the sage on his body. (*Yongcheng jixian lu* 壻城集仙錄 1.2a [Record of the assembled immortals in the heavenly walled city], DZ 783)<sup>1</sup>

This description of Laozi, however odd it may seem at first glance, responds to the popular need to characterize the deity in widely supernatural terms.

In addition, it has a specific and most profound meaning in the context of the Taoist religion because it represents the physical perfection that is the only way the absolute nature of the Tao can ever manifest itself on earth.

Laozi, the Venerable Lord, is originally the Tao and as such can neither be seen nor heard nor touched. As the *Daode zhenjing xujue* 道德真經序訣 [Introductory explanation to the true scripture of the Tao and its virtue]<sup>2</sup> describes him:

Laozi embodies spontaneity and just is. Born prior to Great Nonbeing, he arises without cause and passes freely through heaven and earth. His beginning and end cannot be estimated. He ends with the never-ending, penetrates the impenetrable, reaches the nonultimate. Thus he is himself without final end.

Here Laozi is described in the same terms as the Tao in earlier philosophical, Taoist texts. Unlike that Tao, however, he is not merely a process but also a person, a deity, a being envisioned as having limits and sensory organs. He is a humanized symbol of the Tao, the representation of a cosmic force in human guise. As such he is embodied, has a physical form, is visible with a clear set of characteristics. Whereas the Tao of the philosophers was an ineffable and invisible force of universal order that manifested in cosmic rhythms, Laozi as the Tao is a god who also has shape and looks and personality. He is a fully developed being, however much he remains within the void and at the root of all creation.

The visible embodiment of Laozi has two major aspects: a true body and a teaching body. This distinction is adapted from the Buddhist doctrine of the *trikāya* (three bodies) of the Buddha: the *dharmakāya* (body of the law), the true spiritual body of the deity that represents the essence of his being, the absolute and norm of the universe; the *sambhogakāya* (reward body), the celestial manifestation of the Buddha in which he enjoys heavenly bliss; and the *nirmānakāya* (transformation body), the human appearance in which he takes shape on earth (SOOTHILL and HODOUS 1937, 77).<sup>3</sup>

The true body of the deity is one with the void. As Xie Shouhao's 謝守灝 *Hunyuan shengji* 混元聖記 [Sage record of chaos prime] (DZ 770), an encyclopedic exposition of Laozi's exploits dated to 1191 (BOLTZ 1987, 133), describes it:

Originally the Venerable Lord does not have a permanent body. Dissolving, he becomes energy; resting, he is a man. He may congeal in the midst of great emptiness and obtain the appearance of a perfected [one]. Then his physical stature is so big that it has no ends, auspicious

signs covering it all over. Above, he has nothing to hold on to; below, he has nothing to step on.... Yet he may also sit inside a lotus blossom, adorned with a glass headdress of sevenfold radiance and covered by a soft gauze cape of nine colors. The top of his head is enveloped in a bright halo that illuminates heaven and earth. (2.7a)

Here Laozi's true body is described, like that of many celestials and immortals in the various heavens, as originally composed of subtle energies and as clothed in a superbly fine garb of utterly pure materials.<sup>4</sup> Like the other divine beings, he manifests in continuous transformation, appearing "in spring as a luminant lord...and in summer as an old man, wearing the headdress of the nine dragons and clad in a yellow patterned robe over a yellow feather skirt" (*Hunyuan shengji* 2.7b).

Despite these apparently physical manifestations, it must again be emphasized that the true body of the deity is ultimately and always one with the void. Laozi's true body, as described in the Song hagiography *Youlong zhuan* 猶龍傳 [Like unto a dragon] (DZ 774; BOLTZ 1987, 131), is "utterly complete and entirely still, never arising, never passing" (1.5a). It is invisible and its visionary or artistic representations can only vaguely approach the inherent majesty of the god. Nevertheless it is the true body that is approached in statues, physical representations of the Tao.<sup>5</sup> Adepts use these man-made replicas as guides to visualization and, praying at the deity's altars, act as if they were facing his actual true body. Thus they learn to "observe with proper penetration" and eventually find that "his body is no longer a proper body" (*Youlong zhuan* 1.5a). The image of the deity becomes true and coincides with the void; adepts penetrate the true Tao, in which Laozi is shapeless. "The Tao cannot be seen—if you see it, it is not the Tao," says the *Youlong zhuan* (1.4b).

The teaching body of Laozi, on the other hand, is of a clearly human form, and is described in detail in the hagiographies that tell of his birth among humanity. This body too shows the characteristics of Laozi's supernatural status and, as in the true body, is not completely fixed. Like in heaven, so on earth, Laozi undergoes a set of transformations, commonly numbered nine, in each of which he grows a foot and appears with a different ornamented headdress and celestial robe of wondrous gauze.<sup>6</sup> The transformations are a sign of heavenly power, symbolizing the identity of the divine infant with the pure yang energy of the sun, whose nine phases he imitates; they show Laozi's celestial dimension through radiance, mythical symbolism, and sun mythology.<sup>7</sup>

Born on earth and in a human body, Laozi is characterized by seventy-two divine signs and eighty-one auspicious marks. These, both in principle

and specific detail, reflect the Chinese concept of the ultimate unity of body and mind, integrating various strands of traditional Chinese thought and practice. They draw not only from the ancient art of physiognomy or body divination, which read a person's fate and character from his or her bone structure and bodily features, but also from the Taoist belief that all celestial beings when manifest on earth have wondrous characteristics, so-called immortals' bones (a belief also found in the Confucian tradition, which equips the sage rulers with various wondrous physical signs). Laozi's divine signs also imitate the auspicious characteristics of the Buddha as specified in his thirty-two primary and eighty secondary marks, which accord with the appearance of the *mahāpuruṣa*, the "great being" of ancient India.

The present article discusses the looks of Laozi in three parts: 1) background traditions, including physiognomy, immortals' bones, and the marks of the Buddha; 2) Laozi's standard signs; and 3) Laozi's meditational signs, a set of seventy-two marks found in the *Lingbao* 靈寶 [Numinous treasure] tradition that describes the cosmic rather than the teaching body of the deity. It concludes with an overall evaluation of Laozi's two bodies in the context of Taoist soteriology.

#### BACKGROUND TRADITIONS

##### *Physiognomy*

Physiognomy is the art of reading the mind's construction in the face and the body. Also called anthroposcopy (FORKE 1972, 304) or body divination (LESSA 1968), it is known to the Chinese as *xiang*, the character for which, 相, consists of the pictures of a tree and an eye. The *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, a character dictionary from the Han dynasty, defines it as "eye meets thing" or "to inspect." The "meeting" aspect of the word *xiang* is also responsible for its meaning of "mutual" or "reciprocal"; its sense as "eye meets thing" leads to its connotation of "appearance." This latter sense is strongest in Buddhist translations, where *xiang* signifies the outward, apparent reality as opposed to the inner truth of Buddha-nature. With regard to physiognomy, the most important connotation is "to inspect."

The word *xiangren* 相人 (to inspect people) was first used to mean "physiognomy" in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 [Mr. Zuo's commentary] (*wen* 1, LEGGE 1969, 1: 230) and appears again in chapter 7 of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 [Writings of Zhuangzi]. The *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 [Mr. Lü's spring and autumn annals] mentions a master of inspecting and judging swords (25.3b), a specialist in the evaluation of dogs (26.1b), and a number of ancient horse analysts. On the latter, it says:

The signs according to which these specialists judged horses were dif-

ferent but all of them knew exactly upon seeing just one characteristic of a horse how high or low his joints were, whether he would run swiftly or stumble often, whether he had strong or weak energy, and for how long he would endure.

But such is not the case only with horses: human beings have secret signs, too, as do events and situations. The knowledge of the sage reaches for millennia into the past and the future—he is not guessing at things; he always has reasons for what he says. (20.22a)

Thus physiognomic inspection does not consist of guessing—it is the recognition of what is natural, of what is there latently, invisible to the untrained, nonintuitive observer. The sage, the one who knows, brings hidden realities to the surface, revealing the supersensual, intuitional, and hidden realities of things, affairs, and people. He does so by means of the senses and explains his insights verbally. He observes, he sees or feels, he knows. The physiognomist may be a technician as well as a sage. The sage, as part of the underlying power of the Tao, spontaneously intuits people's standing in the world, while the fortune-teller or shaman is a trained technician who has learned his or her skill by memorizing signs and the character types associated with them.

The two tend to be at opposite ends of the spectrum and are often at odds with one another. A famous story about a meeting between two eminent representatives of the two traditions is recorded in the *Zhuangzi*. A Taoist named Huzi 壺子 (Gourd Master) gives in to the urgings of his disciple and lets himself be analyzed by a physiognomist shaman. The shaman comes repeatedly, seeing a different personality or mind-image each time. On his fourth visit, after having been more flabbergasted each time, he flees in terror. Huzi explains:

Just now I appeared to him as that which has not yet emerged from the source. I came at him totally empty, wriggling and turning, not knowing anything about who or what, now dipping and bending, now flowing in waves. That's why he ran away. (WATSON 1968, 94–97; see also GRAHAM 1960, 51)

The divine reality underlying all outer forms can thus never be fully grasped. The Taoist master is at home in every realm and state of the universe, controlling all forms even of the most primordial mind, from the energy that has not yet emerged from the source, through the vastness of the primeval ocean and the beginning stages of heaven and earth that are without name or substance but are already working, to the pattern of earth that is “still and

silent, nothing moving, nothing standing up." The Taoist sage can go beyond existence and nonexistence, floating freely in and out of being and nonbeing. He cannot be evaluated by his outer appearance.

The knowledge of the shaman, on the contrary, is the knowledge of the world. Although more highly developed than that of the average person, it is still a long way from the perfection and universal truth attained by the Taoist master. Historically the shamans have been the primary practitioners of physiognomy, and it is they who created its fame through the ages by recognizing future tendencies and helping the state and its officials to achieve the best possible destiny.

The historical sources on physiognomy are varied. There are first scattered anecdotes in texts of the Warring States period (*Zuozhuan*) and the early Han (*Huainanzi* 淮南子 [Writings of the prince of Huainan] and *Shiji* 史記 [Historical records]), joined by comprehensive discussions of the art both favorable (*Qianfu lun* 潜夫論, *Lunheng* 論衡, 2nd c. CE) and critical (*Xunzi* 荀子, 3rd c. BCE). In the middle ages, formal treatises on physiognomy (*xianglun* 相論) appeared, written by well-known poets, thinkers, and Taoists. They are now collected in chapter 75 of the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 [Classified collection of artistic writings]. There are also biographies of famous masters<sup>8</sup> as well as manuals by and for practitioners, the earliest surviving examples of which date from the Song dynasty (KOHN 1986, 237; 1988). In the early fifteenth century, Yuan Zhongzhe 袁忠徹 compiled these into a standard handbook of physiognomy entitled *Shenxiang quanbian* 神相全編 [Complete guide to spirit physiognomy], the major manual of the art still used in China and Japan (LIANG 1980; see also LESSA 1968 and KOHN 1986).

Classical Chinese physiognomy is based on the theory of *qi* 氣 (vital energy, breath, pneuma, ether). *Qi* energy always and inevitably manifests in a shape; all shapes, vice versa, are an expression of energy. Physiognomy, as a field that studies and evaluates *qi*, is accordingly related to Chinese geomancy (*fengshui* 風水), the divinatory art that observes and interprets the energies of the earth (see BODDE 1959; EITEL 1973), and also to the diagnostics of Chinese medicine (PORKERT 1983). In all cases *qi* is seen as the basic constituent of existence, while outer appearance is considered indicative of the inherent quality of this *qi*. The interpretation and evaluation of energy in all of these arts equally aim to improve human life and help people live in greater harmony with their inner being, their environment, and their destiny (see HOU 1979).

In the human body, energy appears on two distinct levels: the deep level of inner endowment and the more superficial level of current outer appearance. Bones, flesh, and voice are features one is endowed with from birth;

they indicate the course of life as a whole and represent inherent character traits and destiny tendencies that one can either fight or accept but never lose. Acquired habits, current behavior, and facial complexion change from situation to situation, and vary greatly in the different phases of life.

These two energy levels interact closely with each other. Body movements and facial complexion are seen as momentary expressions of the same energy that one is endowed with at birth and that is primarily reflected in the bones and the voice. This endowment is fundamentally fixed but can be altered in its concrete manifestations. The individual thus has a certain measure of free will and must make active choices in directing his or her potential. The role of the physiognomist in this context is to give advice—helping the person to distinguish the set foundation he or she is born with from the outer behavior and complexion that can be actively controlled.

A well-meant piece of advice taken to heart can significantly alter the course of events. A tendency ripening at the moment may not blossom after all, while another—possibly better—one might take its place. Correct recognition of one's limits as set by the original endowment must be closely accompanied by a proper analysis of the current trends. As Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 of the fifth century says in his *Xiangjing xu* 相經序 [Introduction to the *Classic of Physiognomy*]:

The relation of fate and appearance is like that of sound and echo. When a sound moves in the center, the echo is perceived in due response. Despite the vast differences among people in terms of longevity versus early death and wisdom versus stupidity, things are all greatly related to each other and can be measured on the same scale. (*Yiwen leiju* 75.1288)

Typical signs for a good energy endowment, according to him, include quick perception, the ability to speak clearly, and radiant, spirited eyes together with straight lines in the palms and well-shaped bones. Especially important are the Sun Horn and the Moon Crescent, two round bones above the eyebrows, as well as the Jade Pillow at the back of the head and the Rhinoceros Horn at its side. All these are good if visible and highly auspicious if prominent. Liu further lists typical signs of weak energy:

Deep eyes and a long neck; receding forehead and knitted brows; slithering walk and vulture posture; pig snout and bird's beak; muscles not seeming to hold the body together; blood not shining rosily; hands not soft like the fresh sprouts of spring; hair disheveled like hemp in winter. (*Yiwen leiju* 75.1288)



Classically, then, radiant eyes and complexion as well as prominent and well-rounded bones indicate an individual of high cosmic standing, while features resembling various unappetizing animals, bones that are knobbly and receding, and odd shapes that create a disharmony in the body show a less fortunate fate.

Within this general framework, physiognomic analysis proceeds from the obvious to the subtle, from the basic to the complex. The Ming-dynasty master Yuan Liuzhuang 袁柳莊, in his *Zalun* 雜論 [Miscellaneous discussions], distinguishes three levels of analysis beginning with the fundamental indicators of voice, spirit, and overall energy. He says, “Generally, a clear voice reveals a pure spirit; when the spirit is pure, so is the energy. First one tries to understand these three, next one turns to the body,” which in turn gives access to understanding the subtler forms of energy (*Shenxiang quanbian* 7; LIANG 1980, 199). Among the bones, the “root and trunk” of the body, the physiognomist finds good fortune in “integrated, flourishing, pure, lofty, regular, and brilliantly elegant” forms. Then he moves on to distinguish different kinds of energy:

Expanding energy is reflected in a blossoming, rosy complexion; quiet energy manifests in a shining facial color; rich energy radiates smoothness, elegance, and beauty. All these are positive signs. Others again include misdirected or one-sided energy, present in a worn-out look of the face; obstructed energy that gives a dried-up appearance; and low energy that is manifest in a haggard, clouded complexion. All these indicate bad fortune. (*Shenxian quanbian* 7; LIANG 1980, 200).

These signs, however, apply only to ordinary people, who are born with a limited amount of celestial quality and spend their lives squandering their heaven-given nature. Taoist masters, both as subjects and practitioners of physiognomy, are exceptions with their “bodies like withered trees and minds like dead ashes.” Instead of representing the haggard looks of low or deficient energy, such signs in them indicate a being who is “tranquil and resting, having nothing in common with the world” (LIANG 1980, 200). The sage is truly transcendent and has gone far beyond ordinary signs and indications.

The Taoist sage, having left the world in favor of transcendence, is one extreme of physiognomy; Laozi, the god who has come from the perfection of the heavens to manifest celestial purity on earth, is another. Where the sage may look nondescript and emaciated, or, as in the aforementioned case of Huzi, may embody many different forms of energy to the confusion of ordinary beings, Laozi the god in his human form exhibits all the ideal signs

of perfection and the highest possible good fortune known in physiognomy. The Tao, if it is to be embodied to its fullest, can only manifest in a material form that is suited to its nature, a physical body that is, most fundamentally, already made up of an energy close to the purest power of the world. The Tao, born in visible shape on earth, therefore shows all the most auspicious physiognomic signs; in bones, voice, and complexion, Laozi represents the most perfect of human specimens. His appearance is thus not that of a Taoist sage but incorporates all the best features of humans as well as those of incarnated immortals, celestials who come to earth already visibly divine.

### *Immortals' Bones*

Medieval Taoist doctrine states that any person destined to rise to immortality in the other world must have the proper registration in heaven and, while on earth, show the corresponding celestial marks. A description of the more obvious of the living immortals' physical characteristics is found, along with a colorful contrast with the looks of ordinary mortals, in the *Jiuzhang ba'nan yi* 九章八難義 [Meaning of the eight hardships in nine sections] (cited in *Sandong zhunang* 三洞朱囊 8; hereafter abbreviated SDZN).<sup>9</sup>

All celestial beings have auspicious signs: long eyebrows and high ears, bony noses and square pupils, gray kidneys with silky lines, cinnabar hearts with damask-patterned lungs.

Ordinary people, on the contrary, have crane backs and turtle chests, heads like roebucks, faces like deer. They have fish mouths or birds' beaks, the noses of rams and the cheeks of horses. Their necks look like those of deer, their muscles are thin like those of pheasants. They walk like ducks and have feet like pigs. (8.2b–3a)

The bodies of immortals, unlike those of ordinary people, are originally celestial, and manifest as such when born into the human world. Their bones “ooze the jade radiance of the five emperors,” while their faces “look like a vast spring of flowing gold” (*Dadong jing* 大同經, cited in SDZN 8.8b). Unless such immortals' bones are present from the beginning, the person has no chance of ever encountering the Tao.

More particularly, the distinct physical signs of immortals on earth are dependent upon their status in the otherworld. The *Housheng daojun lieji* 後聖道君列紀 [Annals of the latter-day sage, Lord of the Tao] (DZ 442) gives a detailed list of thirteen possible ranks and appearances. For example,

People with golden names in the jasper tablets of [the heaven of] Great Simplicity have white spots on their chests and emit purple

breath from their mouths. Compassionate in virtue and pervasive in spirit, they are deeply benevolent and help the masses. (10a; also in SDZN 8.16a)

The looks and characters of immortals were thus linked with celestial status in medieval texts. Prior to that, however, certain classical physical characteristics were understood to be the result of active Taoist practice—a specific diet and exercise regimen. This was believed to enhance the beauty of the person and to manifest in a golden radiance issuing from the body. The latter was also achieved through the ingestion of a cinnabar elixir or golden fluid. According to the *Baopuzi shenxian jinzhuo jing* 抱朴子神仙金鈞經 [The spirit immortals' scripture on the golden fluid as transmitted by the master who embraces simplicity] (DZ 917), an alchemical text of the early Six Dynasties, "Upon taking the golden fluid, a golden complexion will radiate from the face. This is firm proof that one has attained the Tao" (1.7b).

In addition, immortals are often described in the early period as exhibiting extensive body hair or feathers and possessing unusual physical stamina. For example, according to the second-century *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 [Immortals' biographies], Wo Quan 僊侏

loved to eat pine nuts. After some time, his body hair grew to a length of several feet and his pupils turned square. He could walk as fast as if flying and easily outran a galloping horse. (KALTENMARK 1953, 54)<sup>10</sup>

In the Later Han dynasty the characteristics of the early immortals were applied by the Confucians to the mythical sage rulers of old, giving them, as part of a retrospective mythological standardization (KARLGRÉN 1946), the status of immortals. These sages first appeared in the so-called apocrypha, new interpretations of the Confucian classics that saw mythical and cosmological correlations between natural events, astral movements, calendar organization, government affairs, and human life. Here the words of the classics were used to develop prophecies and reinterpretations of the sacred texts within a new mythological framework.<sup>11</sup>

Ancient rulers were accordingly equipped with numinous physical marks. Yu, for example, ended up nine feet tall, with a tiger nose and river-like eyes, joined front teeth and a bird's beak, plus ears with three openings (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37).<sup>12</sup> The Yellow Emperor was even taller and had ears fully attached to his head yet with bulging, prominent lobes. He also had a long, fine beard and a flower-shaped swelling on his head. Like Yu he had river-like eyes, but also displayed a dragon's forehead, the Sun Horn, and a

dragon's countenance (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37).

A comprehensive list of the most popular signs attributed to the ancient sage rulers in the Later Han is found in Wang Chong's 王充 *Lunheng* 論衡 [Balanced discussions] of the year 83 CE:

According to tradition, the Yellow Emperor had a dragon face and Zhuangzi was marked with vertical lines on his forehead. Emperor Ku had joined teeth, Yao had eight-colored eyebrows; Shun's eyes had double pupils, while Yu's ears showed three openings. King Wen of the Zhou had four nipples on his chest, whereas King Wu's spine was curved backwards. Similarly the Duke of Zhou was stooping forward, Gaoyao had the mouth of a horse, and Confucius's arms were turned backward. (FORKE 1972,1:304)

These signs of the sages in turn influenced the Taoist tradition, so that adepts of immortality were equipped not only with the classic glow and long hair, but with unusual eyes and strange cranial formations like the Sun Horn and the Moon Crescent, bones mythically associated with Fu Xi 伏羲, the first culture hero (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37). The immortal Lu Ao 盧敖 ended up with "deep eyes, a large nose, high shoulders, a long neck, a broad forehead, and a pointed chin"; Pengzu 彭祖 had "odd cranial bones and strange hair all over his body"; Wang Yuan 王遠 showed "a yellow complexion, thick whiskers, and a long nose"; Sun Deng 孫登 had hair so long it covered his whole body; and Li Gen 李根 displayed pupils that were perfectly square (*Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳, in SDZN 8.5a).

The eventual result of this confluence was the complete doctrine of "immortals' bones,"<sup>13</sup> which attributed unusual bones and wondrous marks to leading Taoists of the Six Dynasties. Thus Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406–477), ritualist and cataloger of the first Taoist canon, was described as having "double wheels on his soles, feet with two ankle bones, hands with lines that read 'great', and spots on his body that formed the pattern of the Dipper" (*Daoxue zhuan* 道學傳 7; SDZN 8.21a).<sup>14</sup> Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), eminent Shangqing patriarch under Emperor Wu of the Liang,

was over seven feet tall and had a lofty head. From his high ears more than ten long hairs sprouted forth. On his right thigh he had several dozen black spots, forming the pattern of the Seven Stars of the Dipper. His eyes shone with the most extraordinary radiance. (*Daoxue zhuan* 8; SDZN 8.21a)

In line with this vision of incorporated immortality, Laozi in the Six

Dynasties was equipped with numerous formal characteristics to form, as a perfect human specimen and an embodiment of the purity of heaven, a living example of the physiognomic ideal.

### *The Buddha's Marks*

In addition to such indigenous Chinese notions of the ideal body, Laozi's looks also incorporate the thirty-two marks of the Buddha, first described in Chinese translation in the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 [Sūtra of the original life of the prince in accordance with all the good omens] (T. 185, 3.471–83),<sup>15</sup> translated by Zhi Qian 支謙 in the third century.<sup>16</sup>

The Buddhist list is far from standardized. The earliest version appears in the *Mahāvastu* (2.26; trans. in STRONG 1983, 46), a “compilation of facts and tales, undertaken by the Mahāsaṃgika” (PAUL 1979, 71). The same list, with minor variants and in reversed order (moving from feet to head),<sup>17</sup> is found in the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, a basic Chinese rendition of which is contained in the *Sanzang fashu* 三藏法數 [Dharma numbers of the Tripitaka; trans. in HURVITZ 1962, 353–55]. The version contained in the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* roughly corresponds to the latter, but, if read mechanically in three- or four-character rhythm, contains only twenty-two marks (KARETZKY 1992, 24–25). However, with creative punctuation and a comparison with the various earlier versions of the list one can detect all thirty-two marks (see table 1).<sup>18</sup>

The signs of the Buddha go back to the noble indications of the “great person” (*mahāpuruṣa*) of the Vedic tradition, and are related to the Indian practice of having newborn children analyzed to predict their destiny (WAYMAN 1957, 243). Over time the signs came to reflect two different visions of the Buddha's body, one reflecting the mainstream or Hinayāna notion of the Buddha as an entirely human figure (and thus with the signs all on an actual living body), and the other the Mahāyāna idea of the Buddha as a celestial power (and thus with signs adorning a body that appears only in heaven; WAYMAN 1957, 246). In either case, the thirty-two primary marks were supplemented by eighty secondary signs, which served as explanations or commentaries (WAYMAN 1957, 249).

Taoists, here as elsewhere, integrated both the mainstream and Mahāyāna visions, placing Buddhist signs on both the teaching body and the true body of Laozi. The Buddhist model was used to enhance and standardize the Taoist list, raising its doctrinal levels, deepening the mythological dimensions, and strengthening the uniqueness of the Taoist vision. Far from merely copying the Buddhist system, Taoists developed it to suit their own needs, integrating not only the various Chinese forerunners described above but creating a mythical system of their own.

The total numbers of the signs are a good example. Although standard-

TABLE 1: THE THIRTY-TWO DIVINE SIGNS OF THE BUDDHA (the *Mahāvayutpatti* numbering and variants are added in parentheses after the abbreviation “MV”).

*Head*

1. His entire body is of golden color.
2. His head has a topknot of flesh. (MV 1)

*Hair*

3. His hair is purple-black.
4. White hair grows between his eyebrows. (MV 4)
5. His head glows with sun radiance. (MV 4: The hair gives off a glow)

*Eyes*

6. His eyelashes are of purple color.
7. Above and below, they cover the pupils.

*Teeth*

8. His mouth has forty teeth. (MV 6)
9. His teeth are very white. (MV 9)
10. His teeth are even. (MV 7)

*Cheeks*

11. He has square cheeks.
12. They are broad like wagon wheels. (MV 11: full, like those of a lion)

*Tongue*

13. His tongue is long. (MV 12: when extended, it covers his face, its tip touching the hairline)
14. It covers the seven harmonies.

*Posture*

15. His chest is full like a lion's. (MV 19)
16. He stands perfectly and erect. (MV 20: he stands tall and broad like a banyan tree)

*Arms*

17. His shoulders are delicate. (MV 14: round and full)
18. His fingers are long. (MV 28)

*Feet*

19. His heels are fully round. (MV 24: having no concavities)
20. His toes are perfectly even. (MV 30)

*Hands*

21. His hands fold both inward and outward.
22. His palms are harmonious and soft. (MV 26: His hands and feet are soft)

*Patterns*

23. His hands and feet have the image of a wheel. (MV 29)
24. They form patterns with a thousand spokes.

*Members*

25. His sexual organs are concealed. (MV 23)
26. His legs have the grace of a deer. (MV 32)
27. His bones are evenly joined.

*Body hair*

28. His body hair grows clockwise. (MV 21)
29. Each pore grows one hair.

*Skin*

30. His skin is fine and smooth. (MV 17)
31. It is perfectly resistant to dust and water.

*Sign*

32. His chest shows the sign of the swastika.

ized under Buddhist influence, Laozi's signs consisted not of thirty-two primary and eighty secondary marks (totaling 112), but of seventy-two divine signs plus nine cosmic marks (totaling 81). The number of the Buddhist signs follows the ancient Indian preference for the numeral 4 (deriving from Brahmanic sources), while the number of Laozi's signs is based on 9, the Chinese number of highest yang. Here 81 (9 x 9) totals the power of yang and stands for the all-encompassing power of the uncreated cosmos; 72 (9 x 8) is the number of yin and symbolizes the totality of the created world. In addition, as the *Hunyuan shengji* explains, the number 8 shows Laozi's power in the eight directions and symbolizes his rule over the world, in correspondence to the eight trigrams of the *Yijing* 易經 [Book of changes]. The nine is the sum of the One, the creative nub in the center, and the eight on the periphery, and symbolizes the power of the Tao at the creative root of all, just as the Great Ultimate stands in the midst of the eight trigrams (2.34ab). The eight and nine combined thus symbolize Laozi's power both inside and outside the boundaries of the universe, finding him everywhere, in all forms, as well as in the central One. All eighty-one signs, individually and in their entirety, thus represent the Chinese vision of the perfection of the divine body on earth, joining—as the Taoist tradition always does—ancient technical knowledge with spiritual vision and foreign influences.

#### LAOZI'S STANDARD SIGNS

The first source that describes the wondrous physical appearance of Laozi is the second-century scripture *Laozi bianhua jing* 老子變化經 [Scripture of the transformations of Laozi] (S. 2295, ÔFUCHI 1979, 686–88). The portion that focuses on his facial features and the lines on his hands and feet is corrupt to a point where it can be understood only with the help of the first formal Laozi hagiography, Ge Hong's 葛洪 *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 of the fourth century (SEIDEL 1969, 61 n. 5). According to this,

Laozi had a yellow-whitish complexion, beautiful eyebrows, and a broad forehead. He possessed long ears, big eyes, gaping teeth, a square mouth, and thick lips. On his forehead he had the signs of the three powers and five phases. He had the Sun Horn and the Moon Crescent sticking out above his eyebrows. His nose was broad and straight and had a double rim, while his ears had three openings. On the soles of his feet he had the signs of the two forces yin and yang and the five phases; his palms contained the character for the number ten. (KOHN 1995b, 57)<sup>19</sup>

Laozi's signs were standardized and grew to their full number of eighty-one with the establishment of formally organized Taoist schools in

the fifth century. The complete system of signs is first found in the *Falun jing* 法輪經 [Scripture of the wheel of the law; SDZN 8.14a–15a], from whence they entered the great Song hagiographies in two variants, one with only minor changes in the *Youlong zhuan* (3.9a–10a) and the other with certain major differences in the *Hunyuan shengji* (2.36ab).<sup>20</sup> In either case, the standard list describes the appearance of the newly born Laozi from top to bottom, pointing out the wondrous nature of his bones, complexion, spots, signs, and overall physical harmony. The signs, as mentioned above, show the influence of traditional Chinese physiognomy and include features associated with immortals, sage rulers, and buddhas. The list is translated and explained below, following its oldest version and giving variants in brackets (YL = *Youlong zhuan*, HS = *Hunyuan shengji*; MV indicates signs mentioned in the *Mahāvīyutpatti* but not in the Chinese sources).

### Head

1. His head, perfectly round, is patterned on heaven.
2. The top of his head resembles Mt Kunlun.
3. His Concealed Morning Star [HS: Rhinoceros Horn] is prominently coiled.
4. His Jade Pillow stands out straight [YL: eminently].

The perfectly round shape of Laozi's head goes back to ancient Chinese body cosmology and mysticism, where “the roundness of the head is an image of heaven, while the squareness of the feet represents the pattern of earth” (*Huainanzi* 7; KOHN 1991, 227).<sup>21</sup> It also mirrors the round protrusion at the top of the Buddha's head, the “topknot of flesh” or *uṣṇīsa* (sign no. 2).<sup>22</sup> The head of the Buddha is, moreover, described as “umbrella-shaped” in the list of his secondary characteristics (WAYMAN 1957, 251).

Mt Kunlun 崑崙 is one of the two major paradises of Han Taoism. Located in the center of the cosmos, it is the mythological counterpart of the North Culmen or Northern Dipper and represents the axis mundi (see SÖFUKAWA 1981). It is also a symbol for heaven and, in some Laozi hagiographies, represents the celestial realm to which he ascended. Kunlun, furthermore, is formed from the head of Laozi in a Taoist adaptation of the popular creation myth of Pangu 盤古 (T. 2103, 52.144b), the Chinese version of the Indo-European creation myth of Purusa found in the *Rgveda* (LINCOLN 1975, 124). Laozi, with heaven as his head, is thus firmly situated in the very center of an anthropomorphic cosmos, integrating in his first physical feature the most elementary myths of Taoism, Chinese popular religion, and old Indo-Europe.

Laozi's head is also characterized by three unusually prominent bones: the Concealed Morning Star (*fuchen* 伏晨), the Rhinoceros Horn (*fuxi*



伏犀), and the Jade Pillow (*yuzhen* 玉枕). The Concealed Morning Star, located behind the ears, is usually hidden. “When it rises up so that it is visible on the outside, it is called the Concealed Morning Star;” and indicates greatness in its bearer (*Jiuzhang xianxiang yi* 九章仙相義, in SDZN 8.3a). The Rhinoceros Horn, also hidden, is found in the center of the forehead, straight into the hairline (*Renlun datong fu* 人倫大純賦 1.16a; see KOHN 1986, 241). The Jade Pillow is the occipital bone, frequently used by physiognomists to determine a person’s destined rank: the more prominent the bone, the nobler the subject (LIANG 1980, 285).

Just as the perfectly round head shows Laozi’s close connection with heaven, so the various individual bones indicate his nobility in a more mundane, fortune-telling, manner.

### *Hair*

5. He has white hair like a crane.
6. It is longer than seven feet.
7. He has the mustache of a tiger and the whiskers of a dragon.
8. His mustache and whisker hair is white and as fine as silk.

Laozi’s hair, white from birth, is the reason why he received his name (“Laozi” means “old child”). According to the myth, his hair turned white during his long sojourn in the womb of seventy-two or eighty-one years (*Laozi bianhua jing*, *Shenxian zhuan*), an occurrence indicative of his unusual longevity and celestial stature. The comparison with a crane, too, suggests extraordinary old age, the crane being the symbol of long life in the East. Interestingly, traditional physiognomy regards prematurely white hair as an indication of weakness in the blood. Such people are lucky and lead blessed lives but do not enjoy exceptional longevity (LIANG 1980, 80).

The quality of Laozi’s hair is auspicious by both Taoist and physiognomic standards: the softer and longer the hair, the nobler the person (LIANG 1980, 80). Mustaches and sideburns, too, if black, shining, and abundant, indicate high social standing and success in an official career (LIANG 1980, 102). Laozi’s similarity with the tiger and the dragon show, moreover, his close relationship with the noblest of animals, both natural and supernatural.

The Buddha, in comparison, has purple-black hair as a sign of youthful vigor (sign no. 3). His secondary characteristics include hair that is thick, black, fragrant, and neither disordered nor shaggy but lovely, soft, glossy, and regular (WAYMAN 1957, 251). No specific length is mentioned, but it curls in a clockwise direction (MV 2).

### *Eyebrows*

9. His eyebrows are shaped like the Northern Dipper.
10. Their color resembles that of fresh green vegetation.
11. He has fine purple hairs in their middle [YL: between them].
12. They are over five feet long.<sup>23</sup>

The eyebrows are known in traditional Chinese parlance as the Flowery Canopy (*huagai* 華蓋), the constellation Cassiopeia in the human face (in the body, the Flowery Canopy is the lungs). The eyebrows should be gentle, fine, straight, and long (LIANG 1980, 81), all characteristics seen in the Buddha's eyebrows as well (WAYMAN 1957, 251). In Laozi's case the eyebrows are more than just a sign of nobility; they also indicate his heavenly stature in their resemblance to the pattern of the Dipper. In this, Laozi follows the example of the sage rulers, some of whom had rows of spots on their foreheads showing the patterns of constellations (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37). In addition, Laozi's eyebrows are fresh and green-black, indicating his intimate connection with the creative force.

Spots between the eyebrows indicate nobility to a physiognomist, while hair in this area—even a single long strand—shows exceptional longevity (LIANG 1980, 81). The Buddha too has hair between his eyebrows, but it is colored white (sign no. 4). Laozi, with several long purple hairs, is more exceptional, especially since purple is the color of the heavens, of royalty, and of the center (PORKERT 1961, 439).

### *Ears*

13. His ears have no outer rim [HS: hanging lobes].
14. They have three openings.
15. Their frame rises higher than the top of his head.
16. They are thick and very solid.

Laozi's ears are a prominent feature of his personality, all the more so since his given names are *Er* 耳, "ear," and *Dan* 聃, "rimless" (KALTENMARK 1953, 64 n. 8). *Er* is said to refer to the size of Laozi's ears, which in turn indicates his sagacity, hearing being the foremost characteristic of the sage (DEWOSKIN 1982, 37). *Dan*, sometimes written with the "tongue" radical (訖; *Hunyuan shengji* 2.35a), relates, it is said, to Laozi's philosophy of the weak overcoming the strong (*Shenxian zhuan*). The story is elaborated in the *Huahu jing* 化胡經 [Scripture on the conversion of the barbarians].

Yin Xi said: "May I please ask the venerable master's name and appellation?" Laozi stuck out his long tongue and showed it to him. "All the teeth in my mouth have already fallen out," he explained, "only the

tongue is still left.” Yin Xi understood. “Old Rimless! Lao Dan! There are thirty-six teeth in the mouth, hard and strong like frost. Now all the teeth have fallen out and only the tongue is left. Thus I know that the soft can control the hard and the weak can overcome the strong.” (SDZN 9.16a)

In ordinary physiognomic usage, the ears are closely connected with the brain and the mind (LIANG 1980, 95); an absence of rims means that the subject will have no wife (LIANG 1980, 181) or no sons (*Taiqing shenjian* 太精神鑑 1.7b; see KOHN 1986, 237). Thick strong ears show a long life largely free from sorrows, while long wide lobes indicate material wealth (LIANG 1980, 95). The same seems to have been true on the Indian side, since the Buddha too had “ear flaps thick and long” among his secondary characteristics (WAYMAN 1957, 252).

Openings inside the ears generally show wisdom, more openings indicating higher wisdom. Laozi’s three openings, in particular, follow the example of the sage ruler Yu, whose three openings are interpreted as a sign of his supernatural perception (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37; FORKE 1972, 1:304). All in all, Laozi’s ears are splendid towers of high intelligence, longevity, and good fortune. They indicate clearly the divine and superhuman stature of the newborn deity.

### Eyes

17. His two [YL: river-like] eyes mirror enormous depths [HS: are like the sun and the moon].
18. They are full of the essence of the sun and radiate purple.
19. The pupils are square, and shine refined and clear [HS: fresh and strong].
20. His glance is penetrating, fresh and strong.

The eyes, through which the clarity of the spirit can be determined, are a central feature in physiognomic analysis (LIANG 1980, 84). They are especially significant in analyzing small children. Historically, the eyes were the sign by which Yuan Tiangang 袁天綱 of the Tang first recognized the inherent nobility of the later Empress Wu Zetian 吳則天:

Taking a step toward the infant, Yuan ordered the nurse to hold up Zetian’s head so that he could examine the eyes. “Wow,” he exclaimed in surprise, “this young lord has dragon eyes and a phoenix nose. He shows the highest possible indications of nobility.” Then he moved to examine the infant from the sides. He was even more astonished. “Should this baby be a girl, then her career would be entirely beyond

imagination! She might well become ruler of the empire!" (*Jiu Tangshu* 191)

The color of the eyes' radiance is particularly significant: white indicates a future killer, while yellow and red are signs of sickness. A black shadow in the eyes shows a tendency toward treason (LIANG 1980, 85). Purple, as in Laozi's case, is not commonly encountered, but is presumably another indication of his supernatural standing.

The eyes are the sun and moon of the body, and are mentioned as such in the Pangu myth and in Taoist meditational manuals (KOHN 1991, 235, 240). They are the mirror of the spirit, so that only those of highest immortal standing have eyes radiating with full power. As the *Housheng daojun lieji* has it,

People coming to life with a jade name in the [heaven] Golden Pavilion have sunshine in their eyes. They show pure teeth and white blood. Benevolent and compassionate in character, they love immortality. Bright and versatile, they are of high excellence. (9b; SDZN 8.15b)

Eyes are good, and the larger and more numerous they are the better. Cangjie 蒼頡, the legendary inventor of writing, had four eyes, a sign that he could look in many different directions and discern things inaccessible to ordinary mortals (DEWOSKIN 1982, 170). Yu and the Yellow Emperor both had eyes wide like rivers, expressing their exceptional insight into reality (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37). The Buddha, too, had large, long, clear, pure eyes (WAYMAN 1957, 252); in addition, his eyelashes were purplish (sign no. 6) and thick like those of a bull (MV 5).

Unusual pupils, like the three ear openings, are in the Chinese tradition an indication of extraordinary wisdom: "Chicken's pupils—incomparable!" the physiognomist exults (LIANG 1980, 186). They occur already among the ancient sage rulers. Yao 堯 had eight-colored pupils, showing that he could penetrate everything with his gaze, while Shun 舜 had double pupils, revealing his power as the "primal luminant" (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37). Laozi with his square pupils—another sign of exceptional perception and wisdom—is again in good company.

"His glance is penetrating, fresh and strong." Here the physiognomist comments:

Shining forth and penetrating: Light shining forth shows the spirit, but if the glance is not penetrating, a licentious person is revealed.

Glancing in concentration without avoidance: This shows fullness of

spirit.

Looking around without flickering: This shows proper cultivation of spirit. (LIANG 1980, 85)

Laozi's eyes are thus everything one could expect from the primary deity of the cosmos newly incarnated into human shape. They have strong radiance like sunlight, are large and clear, and shine forth with vigor and penetrating insight. Nobody confronted with a pair of eyes like these could doubt the inherent divinity of their bearer.

### *Nose*

21. His nose has a double rim.

22. It is formed like a cut-reed pipe [HS: its even bone is highly prominent].

The nose is the “central peak,” the center of the human face. In traditional physiognomy it symbolized the middle period of the subject's life, indicating his or her eminence, health, and general success (LIANG 1980, 91). Among the sage rulers the nose was frequently strong and prominent—Yu's, for example, was like a tiger's (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37). The Buddha's face, similarly, was crowned by a high and straight nose (WAYMAN 1957, 252).

Laozi's nose, among all these famous examples, is unusual in that it features a double bone. This again reveals his superior standing and high quality among humans. It is straight and even and clearly featured, promising that the middle period of the deity's human life will be truly active and successful.

### *Mouth*

23. His mouth is as wide as an ocean.

24. His lips are red like red cinnabar [YL: bubbling cinnabar].

25. His breath has a purple color.

26. It is fragrant like orchids.

The mouth, according to physiognomic theory, is the outer gate of the mind, where reward and punishment issue and right and wrong come together (LIANG 1980, 97). If square and wide the subject will enjoy long life; if, in addition, the lips are moist, glossy, and red like cinnabar, he will achieve nobility of rank and encounter good fortune (LIANG 1980, 100). This holds equally true in ancient India, where the Buddha's lips are said to have been “red like the Bimba fruit” (WAYMAN 1957, 252). Among the sage rulers, Yu had the beak of a bird (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37), while immortals of high standing are often described as having “dragonlike mouths and soft tongues” (SDZN 8.16a). If registered in the jasper tablets of Great Simplicity, they

moreover exhale purple breath and are “compassionate in virtue and pervasive in spirit; deeply benevolent, they help the people” (*Housheng daojun lieji* 10a; SDZN 8.16a).

Laozi, as ruler of the immortals, is registered in all of these ledgers and combines the total power of all possible forms of immortality. He is the most perfect being in terms of destiny, rank, power, and character. His physical appearance accordingly integrates the multitude of divine signs.

### *Teeth*

27. His teeth are like rows of shells.
28. They are hard like silver.
29. They number six times eight.
30. Their upper and lower rows match perfectly.

Straight, white, even teeth are a good sign, especially when perfectly matched and hard like silver, showing that the subject is a thoroughly upright person (LIANG 1980, 101). The Buddha, too, had white teeth (nos. 9, 10) that were perfectly regular (WAYMAN 1957, 252). They also had no spaces between them (MV 8), just as in the ancient Chinese tradition Yu and King Wu of the Zhou had joined front teeth. In their case the feature was interpreted as revealing enormous vigor and strength (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37).

The number of teeth, too, is significant. In blatant contradiction to evolutionary evidence, people with twenty-eight teeth or less are considered inferior, and are thought to “belong among the paupers” (LIANG 1980, 101). Kings and lords should have thirty-eight teeth or thereabouts, placing the Buddha with his forty teeth (sign no. 8) in this noble category. Laozi, however, bests them all: he has forty-eight, in six rows with eight teeth each.

### *Tongue*

31. His tongue is long and wide.
32. It is marked like a piece of patterned brocade.
33. His Jade Spring is overflowing [YL: full to abundance].
34. It tastes both sweet and fragrant.

The tongue should, in an auspicious body, be long, wide, generous, and beneficent. Indeed, it should be long enough to touch the nose (LIANG 1980, 101), a feat considerably bettered by the Buddha, whose tongue “when extended, covered his entire face” (sign no. 13). The tongue is especially important in Laozi’s case because, as mentioned above, it serves as a symbol of his teaching that, to cite Bertold Brecht’s famous poem,

Soft water, by attrition  
 Over the years will grind strong rocks away.  
 In other words, that hardness must lose the day.  
 (BRECHT 1979, 315)

According to traditional physiognomy, lines on the tongue, like those on the palms and soles, show a person's potential official standing and rank (LIANG 1980, 102). Patterns as intricate as embroidered brocade, as in Laozi's case, reveal a superior position and eminent personal standing.

Saliva is poetically called the Jade Spring (*yuquan* 玉泉) in Taoist meditational texts and is seen as a lake within the inner landscape of the head (KOHN 1991, 236). It is important in Taoist practice, representing one form that the vital energy takes within the body. It is regulated by letting it accumulate for a time and then imbibing it in an even rhythm, usually in thirty-six swallows (KOHN 1993, 184). Plentiful saliva indicates an abundance of energy and therefore shows high cosmic standing.

The same holds true for the sweetness and fragrance of both saliva and breath. Especially those immortals "with a red entry in the clear gold ledgers of the Highest Prime in the [heaven] Dark Palace" have "fragrant breath issuing from their mouths and a plentiful jade spring behind their teeth." In their case these features indicate that their bodies are pure and their bones firm, and that their characters are "honest and sincere, profound and withdrawn" (*Housheng daojun lieji* 10b; SDZN 8.17a). On a more mundane note, the inherent sweetness of the saliva makes life more palatable: for the Buddha, it "improved the flavor of everything he ate" (MV 10).

### *Voice*

35. His voice is like gold.

36. Its tone is like jade [YL: all he utters are wondrous words; his voice sounds like gold and jade].

The voice is one of the most essential characteristics of the person, and is, along with the eyes, of special importance when examining infants. It is, in fact, the first physiognomic sign ever mentioned in Chinese texts:

The mother-in-law was going to see the child but when she got to the hall she heard his voice and turned away, saying: "It is the voice of a wolf. A wolfish child will have a wild heart. None but he will destroy the clan of Yangshe." For this reason she would not look at him. (*Zuozhuan*, Zhan 28; LEGGE 1969, 2:727)

The voice is regarded as the most immediate expression of the body's vital energy, following the Chinese concept that all embodied beings not only have energy, but that this energy always produces sound. Divination by means of sound was a common practice.

Armies are appraised by the sound of their approach; the tones of the winds foretell major events; bird calls are analyzed for their prognosticatory import; voices are studied as physiognomic clues; and pitches are analyzed to determine surnames. (DEWOSKIN 1982, 37)

As first mentioned in the *Zhuangzi*, the entire universe was thought to be patterned in sets of hollows, through which energy or wind passed, producing various sounds. "The Great Clod belches out breath," the text says, "it is blowing on the myriad beings in a different way so that each can be itself" (chap. 2; WATSON 1968, 37). In other words, each being, through the energizing blowing of heaven and earth, comes to emit a specific sound characteristic for its particular natural endowment, for its most personal inner nature.<sup>24</sup>

An auspicious voice sounds like bells or drums, and is harmonious and pleasing. The best possible voice, however, sounds like gold and jade, or rather, like musical instruments made from these precious substances, instruments that serve solely to please the ear and have no link with warfare, timekeeping, or other worldly activities. Immortals with "names enrolled in the jade ledgers of [the heaven of] Great Clarity" have such voices; in character, they are "generous to a fault, loving all widely and treating everyone as dearly as their own mothers" (*Housheng daojun lieji* 10a; SDZN 8.16a). The Buddha, too, had a voice that was clear and carried far (MV 13). A more detailed analysis of his voice describes it as having eight characteristics: "extremely agreeable, soft and gentle of tone, harmonious and suitable, venerable and sagacious, non-effeminate, unmistakable, profound and far-reaching, and inexhaustible" (LINK 1957, 7). Laozi, giving forth pleasing sounds and uttering words of great wisdom, once again represents the epitome of human development and nobility.

### *Facial Bones*

37. His cheeks look like horizontal river banks [HS: are high and prominent].
38. His chin is like a hill [YL: flat hill] [HS: is as square as it is short].
39. His Sun Horn is round and clear.
40. His Moon Crescent [YL: crater] is hidden and subtle.

The bones of the face are essential in physiognomic analysis, though differ-



ent models of physiognomic theory arrange and interpret them differently. According to one system, the major bones of the face are seen as a geographical map. As Yuan Liuzhuang describes it,

The forehead, the rim of the nose, the chin, and the cheekbones are described as the five sacred mountains, while the eyes, ears, mouth, and nose are seen as the four streams. Then again, the face is divided into parts that represent the nine provinces and the twelve astral constellations. (LIANG 1980, 200)<sup>25</sup>

Another common system analyzes the facial bones as indicators of a temporal sequence. The theory is that the spirit gradually moves from top to bottom, so that the fate in one's earlier years can be divined from the forehead, the central period from the nose, and old age and posterity from the chin (KOHN 1986, 253). A yet different model sees the keys to analysis as lying in nine major facial bones, each indicating certain psychological characteristics of the person. Spirit, for example, is judged by the cheekbones, while body posture and overall standing is seen in the nose. Body movement and behavior are related to the Moon Crescent, whereas the complexion and essential outlook are seen through the Sun Horn (KOHN 1986, 252).

The cheekbones, important either as two of the sacred mountains (and thus as mainstays in the physical landscape) or as signs of the spirit and the period of early adulthood, should be prominent and clear, as they are in Laozi. The Buddha, too, possesses this sign, his cheeks being square and broad like wagon wheels (nos. 11, 12). Laozi's chin, on the other hand, is rather short and square. Although of considerable longevity (as seen in the even, not pointed, form of this bone), he had no descendants but emigrated to convert the barbarians. This goes together with his rimless ears, which indicate the absence of wife and/or sons. His Sun Horn and Moon Crescent are both clearly discernible, revealing a supernatural stature on a par with that of Fu Xi, the great culture hero.

### *Complexion*

41. His rhinoceros bones show straight patterns.
42. His dragon complexion undergoes divine transformations [HS: is highly majestic].
43. His appearance radiates golden, his complexion is yellow [HS: his form is like jade].
44. His jade-like looks are full of glossy color [HS: His phoenix glance is relaxed and fresh].

The complexion, as described earlier, is an integral part of the entire body picture. It should be full and glossy, shining radiantly and brimming with energy. As the physiognomist and Taoist master Chen Tuan 陳搏 points out in his *Fengjian* 風鑑 [Mirror of auras]:

Complexion should be full and not transparent, intense and not scattered. It arises both from within and without the five inner organs and adorns the entire body with radiance and smoothness. (KOHN 1988, 241)

Immortals have especially radiant complexions. The Buddha's body, similarly, is of a golden color (sign no. 1), and his skin is fine and smooth yet so strong that neither dust nor water can penetrate it (nos. 30–31). Laozi's bones, originally like the noble rhinoceros, are always straight; his complexion, like that of a dragon, is full of divine transformations. Its basic hue is yellow, the best of all shades and worthier than red, white, black, green, peach-blossom, blue-black, or any others (KOHN 1986, 248). His overall facial looks are glossy, not dried out and withered, showing his intense vitality.

#### *Face*

- 45. His forehead has three parallel lines [HS: the sign of radiance].
- 46. It shows the signs of the three [powers] and five [phases] in the center.
- 47. His Heavenly Yard is even and full [HS: solid].
- 48. He has the face of fullness and the signs [YL: countenance] of longevity.

The lines on the forehead foretell the official standing and longevity of the subject (LIANG 1980, 281). Three parallel lines, called the "hanging moon lines," indicate a high position among humanity (LIANG 1980, 282). Laozi, moreover, shows the more complicated "three and five" pattern, reflecting the basic vertical and horizontal powers of the universe. The Heavenly Yard (*tianting* 天庭) is the area above the nose and between the eyebrows, the space between the Sun Horn and the Moon Crescent, which indicates the standing and level of nobility of the subject (LIANG 1980, 30); the fuller and more even it is, the better. Laozi's entire face is, therefore, replete with the signs of power and divinity.

#### *Spots*

- 49. His chest has [HS: cheeks have] small white spots.
- 50. His chin has a round jade circle.

Spots, usually small black dots on the skin, are considered an important mark of the person, especially when on the face (LIANG 1980, 293).

According to physiognomic theory, they are like trees growing on the mountains, like lumps of fertile soil dotting the earth (LIANG 1980, 295). Various ancient sages are said to have had facial spots resembling the patterns of starry constellations, and Laozi himself shows the Flowing Kui Star on his back (see sign no. 57 below). The *Housheng daojun lieji* notes that “people with golden names in the jasper tablets of Great Simplicity have white spots on their chests” (10a; SDZN 16a). This shows that they are “compassionate in virtue and pervasive in spirit.”

A circle, resembling the jade disk used as an insignia of power by the rulers of old, is located on Laozi’s chin, not only marking him as the ruler of all creation but linking him with yet another type of celestial registration.

Immortals registered in the dark jade ledgers of the Dipper have nine nipples in their heart area and brocade-like lines outside their lungs. They are also marked by a jade circle on the lower cheek, green muscles in their eyes, vertical double lines straight above the eyebrows and lines around them. Bare of hairs, their foreheads shine brightly, while their Halls of Light are even and white. Their vertical lines are the ford to perfection, while their broad foreheads are the receptacle of numinosity. Compassionate and loving toward the pure and humble, they are kind even to birds and beasts. (10b; SDZN 8.16b)

The spots and marks on Laozi’s chest or cheeks and chin establish yet one more link with the registers of the immortals above and the indications of highest nobility on earth.

### *Neck*

- 51. His neck has three even lines.
- 52. It is soft like a crane’s, straight and lofty.

No particular remarks are made about the neck in physiognomic manuals, nor does the Buddha have any special bones or signs in this area. Laozi’s neck is likened to that of a crane, the Eastern symbol of longevity and the flying conveyance of the immortals. Here too the three lines may represent the three forces (heaven, earth, and humanity) or perhaps the lines of the *Yijing* trigram for heaven. In either case, they show the cosmic centrality of the god.

### *Hands*

- 53. His hands [YL: arms] hang down below his knees.
- 54. His hands have the sign for “ten.”

55. His fingers end in nails of jade [HS: are long and slender; they each have special patterns].
56. His body is covered with fine green hair [HS adds: his claws end in nails of jade].

Lines on different parts of the body—especially the palms and soles—were an early object of Chinese physiognomic analysis. Two manuscripts recovered from Dunhuang concentrate entirely on the former (P. 2572 and P. 2797), listing a total of nineteen prominent hand patterns and their interpretations. The patterns grew in number as physiognomic manuals developed, so that the *Shenxiang quanbian* has a list of fifty-six (chap. 8; LIANG 1980, 221–38). Lines on the feet were also looked at closely, but their importance waned in the early Song dynasty, possibly in connection with more rigid standards of morality and the beginnings of footbinding (KOHN 1986, 250).

In the “ten” on his palms Laozi resembles the Taoist Lu Xiuqing, whose hands read “great.” This, in turn, follows the rule about immortals on earth. As explained by the *Housheng daojun lieji*,

Immortals with a clear writ in the cinnabar ledger tablets of the Great Ultimate have distinct patterns in their hand lines, such as the character for “man” or “great.” Withdrawn and cautious in character, they love perfection. Pure and empty, they are truly exceptional. (9b–10a; SDZN 15b)

In this respect Laozi resembles the Buddha as well, who has either the wheel of the dharma on his palms and soles (sign no. 23) or the pattern of a lion’s throne, fish, banner of victory, thunderbolt, hook, or flask in the lines of his hands. Moreover, these lines, in whatever form they came, were deep, straight, and glossy (WAYMAN 1957, 254). Chinese physiognomists, however, list none of these signs; their most auspicious palmar pattern is a group of parallel vertical lines, like the strings of a zither, that show lordly or even royal qualities (LIANG 1980, 221; LESSA 1968, 107; P. 2572, P. 2797).

The “ten” on Laozi’s palms can be interpreted on both the pictorial and the symbolic level. As a picture, the character is a simple cross that shows the perfect meeting of the horizontal and the vertical, indicating the centrality of the deity as he stands at the hub of the universe. In terms of symbolism, “ten” is short for “ten directions,” the number of totality in the Taoist religious universe.

Fingers and fingernails should, according to physiognomy, be long and slender, which shows intelligence and highly developed faculties (LIANG

1980, 248). Nails express superiority in the Buddhist context when copper-colored, smooth, and elevated (sign no. 18; WAYMAN 1957, 254). In both the length of his fingers and the extraordinary extension of his arms, Laozi follows the looks of the Buddha (MV 18).

The covering of fine green hair on Laozi relates in part to the Buddha's distinct body hair, which grew perfectly clockwise (sign no. 28, MV 2) and fully erect (MV 22), with exactly one strand to each pore (sign no. 29). It relates also to the unusual hairiness of the ancient immortals, like Maonü, the Hairy Lady, who was also covered with fine green hair (*Liexian zhuan* sign no. 54; KALTENMARK 1953, 159), and the cave dweller Sun Deng, whose hair was long enough to enwrap his entire body. Laozi here is visually characterized as a living ascetic immortal, not just as one registered in the heavens.

#### *Torso*

57. His back has the Flowing Kui Star.
58. His breast has a perfect sternum.
59. His heart area shows nine nipples.
60. Their aureolas show patterns like brocade [HS: His heart area shows patterns of brocade].

The Buddha had a swastika sign on his chest (sign no. 32), but otherwise (and according to the earlier tradition) his skin was soft and glossy and entirely free from any marks (WAYMAN 1957, 253). Laozi, in contrast, resembled many other famous Taoists in having spots on his back, spots that in his case fell into the distinct pattern of the “Flowing Kui Star” (*hekui* 河魁), which is another name for the Dipper, the central constellation in the Taoist universe (*Jiuzhang xianxiang yi*, SDZN 8.3a).

The straightness of his sternum not only relates to the lion-like fullness of the Buddha's chest (sign no. 15) but follows the general physiognomic demand for straight and clear bones that are prominent and easy to see. It is also a sign of immortals who have “a jade registration in the golden books of Highest Clarity.” Such immortals—who show, like Laozi, both the Flowing Kui Star and the straight sternum—are “generous and harmonious in character and take good care of others, their virtue extending even to insects and worms” (*Housheng daojun lieji* 9b; SDZN 15b).

The multiplicity of Laozi's nipples goes back to the signs of the sage rulers, among whom King Wen of Zhou had four nipples, interpreted as an indication of the wide and encompassing quality of his goodness (YOSHIOKA 1959, 37). Laozi's cosmic endowment with all-embracing compassion is reflected in his nine nipples and chest area patterned after the lines of

universal energy. In this he corresponds to the “immortals registered in the dark jade ledgers of the Dipper” mentioned earlier (see sign no. 50 above). Both his back and chest thus mark him as a powerful being at the center of the world.

### *Abdomen*

- 61. His navel is one inch deep.
- 62. His belly is soft as silk.

The abdomen is another feature with both a Taoist and a Buddhist background. A soft and glossy navel appears particularly in Taoist immortals who have “a purple name in the red-character records of the Vermilion Palace”; it shows their overall openness to all creation (SDZN 8.16a). The Buddha, similarly, has among his secondary characteristics a well-rounded abdomen that looks as if it were thoroughly polished and a deep navel that is pleasant and fully round (WAYMAN 1957, 253). Thus the central area of the entire body in both Laozi and the Buddha represent the depth and softness of the divine person as a whole.

### *Feet*

- 63. His feet are square as a carpenter’s measure.
- 64. On both heels he has the wheel of the law.
- 65. On the soles of his feet are the two (forces) and the five (phases) [HS: are two swastikas].
- 66. On his toes are the lines of the *qian* and *kun* trigrams.

The feet represent the earth and are thus, in the deity, as perfectly square as the head is round (KOHN 1991, 227). But even ordinary mortals should have heels that are thick and full, according to physiognomic theory, since this indicates leisure, joy, rank, and fame (LIANG 1980, 248). Numerous fine lines on the soles indicate nobility. In particular, the “turtle,” a round pattern with spikes (or rather, feet), promises a high official income; the “wild bird,” two sets of wavy lines at right angles, indicates an official rank; and the sign “ten” signifies great accomplishment (LIANG 1980, 250).

The wheels of the law on Laozi’s heels indicate the same world-ruling qualities as they do in the Buddha (sign no. 23). The “two and five” stand for the two forces (yin and yang) and the five phases, the moving powers of the Chinese universe. They signify Laozi’s central standing in the world and have the same connotation as the swastikas attributed to him in the *Hunyuán shengjī*. The lines on his toes, like the parallel lines on his neck, show the trigrams for heaven and earth, providing yet another indication of his cosmic standing.

*Body*

67. His flesh is full of blood and shines white.

68. Its outside reveals an old appearance.

69. His body is twelve feet tall.

70. It is beautiful and elegant all over.

The flesh of the body, to be auspicious in the eyes of physiognomists, should show a whitish glossy color and be covered with skin both delicate and fresh. Dark dry flesh with black smelly skin is a bad sign. The flesh should also be solid and firm, straight and upright; it should not be loose or let the bones show through, and not be fat either since that would indicate a shortness and failure of energy (LIANG 1980, 44). Since the flesh is the residence of the blood it should be well filled with it, again showing neither surplus nor insufficiency. Laozi's entire body, covered with shining flesh, is thus bright, glossy, and fragrant. In this he once more matches the Buddha, whose body was clean, regular, and smooth (WAYMAN 1957, 253).

An "old appearance" is a good sign. As the *Fengjian* says,

There is old and young complexion. "Young" is used to refer to a complexion inappropriate to a person's age. Thus, in complexion, "old" is auspicious, while "young" is inauspicious. (KOHN 1988, 241)

The height of the deity here follows the symbolism of yang. Usually the height is given as sixteen feet, a number inspired by Buddhist sources and ultimately going back to Buddhist art, where giant statues of the Buddha tended to measure sixteen feet (*Mouzi lihuo lun* 牟子理惑論; T. 2102, 52.1c). Laozi's posture, finally, is straight and noble, just like that of the Buddha, who stands tall and erect like a banyan tree (sign no. 16).

*Movements*

71. He walks like a tiger pacing.

72. He moves like a dragon dancing.

Resembling a tiger and dragon in one's walk is the most auspicious physiognomic sign possible, indicating that one moves in a way that is smooth and easy, harmonious and natural. As the manual says,

People with an auspicious walk move naturally like a boat going with the current. Wherever they proceed, they encounter nothing but benefits. An unlucky walk, on the contrary, is like a boat losing the rhythm of the water, swaying and bobbing about. (LIANG 1980, 107)<sup>26</sup>

Following this come nine “auspicious marks.”

*Cosmos*

- 73. In his left, he holds the green dragon.
- 74. In his right, he grasps the white tiger.
- 75. From his head rises [HS: Before him guides] the vermilion bird.
- 76. His feet rest on [HS: Behind him follows] the dark warrior.

The four animals mentioned here are the numinous beasts that symbolize the power of the four directions of the universe (see MAJOR 1986). Holding two and controlling the others, Laozi is situated in the center of the world, revealed as the pillar and axis of the cosmos. His position is that of the Tao, a position also occupied by Taoist adepts in their practice. The last part of the *Daode zhenjing xujue*, for example, instructs disciples to visualize themselves in much the same position as they prepare to recite the *Daode jing*.

Imagine the green dragon to your left, the white tiger to your right, the red bird in front of you, and the dark warrior in your back.

Your feet stand between the eight trigrams, the divine turtle and the thirty-six masters bow to you. In front of you, you see the seventeen stars, your five inner orbs give forth the five energies, a network pattern streams across your body. (KOHN 1993, 174)

The first four auspicious marks of the deity therefore place him solidly in the center of all creation and link him with active practice of Taoist meditation.

*Radiance*

- 77. His body is solid as gold.
- 78. His looks are rosy like jade.
- 79. He radiates the light of the five planets [HS: He radiates with the five planets and shines like the sun].
- 80. His head has [HS: is hidden in] a halo of purple energy.
- 81. On his chest he has the character “perfection.”

The highest and most conspicuous sign of perfect divinity is an overall radiance that oozes from and fully envelops the body. It makes the divine figure seem like a statue made from gold, and similarly solid and dependable (bringing to mind the diamond body of the Buddhist tradition). This radiance is a fine glow, soft and unobtrusive like jade, yet rosy and alive like human skin. Its light is like that of the five planets or even the sun, emphasizing once again the close relation of the deity to these cosmic bodies.



Purple, as mentioned earlier, is the color of the center and the essential hue of pure Taoist divinity. It is by the purple cloud moving slowly toward the west that Yin Xi recognizes the emigrating Laozi (KOHN 1989, 57). Similarly, the immortals who are registered “with purple names in the plain dark books of [the heaven of] All Directions” radiate with “a purple glow that brightly illuminates their entire bodies.” This shows their inherent celestial purity, due to which they are “deeply dedicated to the cultivation of the wondrous” (*Housheng daojun lieji* 10a, SDZN 15b).

The last sign of the cosmically empowered yet humanly born Laozi is the celestial character for “perfection” on his chest, which corresponds to the swastika on the chest of the Buddha (sign no. 32). Bright and radiant, erect and noble, the deity even as an infant has supernatural status and celestial power written all over him. The character for “perfection” represents the culmination of all that has gone before, summarizing in a single word everything there is to know and see about the god, and placing him, once again and unmistakably, among the ranks of the celestials in the central purity of the Tao.

#### LAOZI'S MEDITATIONAL SIGNS

The literature records another set of signs for Laozi in addition to the seventy-two or eighty-one standard signs. This set, containing seventy-two characteristics, is found in the SDZN, where it is cited from the *Lingbao sanbu bajing jing* 靈寶三部八景經 [Numinous Treasure scripture on the eight luminants in three divisions; 8.10b–12b]. The *Lingbao sanbu bajing jing* is related to an early Numinous Treasure scripture entitled *Ershisi shengtū* 二十四生圖 [Charts of the twenty-four gods of life] (DZ 1407).<sup>27</sup> Mentioned in various early Taoist texts and listed in the first Numinous Treasure catalog by Lu Xiujing in the year 437, the *Ershisi shengtū* probably dates back to the early fifth century (REN and ZHONG 1991, 1117).

The *Ershisi shengtū* presents descriptions of and sacred charts or talismans for twenty-four deities, divided among the three sections of the body: upper, middle, and lower. The deities, also called luminants (*jing* 景), are understood to be the spiritual representatives of the heavens within the body. The upper division contains the gods of the brain, hair, skin, eyes, cheeks, occipital bone, nose, and tongue. In the middle section are the deities of the throat, lungs, heart, liver, gall-bladder, left kidney, right kidney, and spleen. In the lower section we find the luminants of the stomach, anus, large and small intestines, inner large intestine, diaphragm, hips, left testicle, and right testicle (DZ 1407; 6b–18a). The text as extant contains no marks for Laozi, but its offshoot, the *Lingbao sanbu bajing*, does. Following the same basic pattern, it lists twenty-four divine signs for the deities in each of the three divisions (see table 2).

TABLE 2: LAOZI'S SEVENTY-TWO MEDITATIONAL SIGNS

*Top Division*

1. His eyes have a twofold radiance.
2. His eyebrows are like newly risen half-moons.
3. His hair is blue-black in color.
4. The top of his head has a cloudy topknot like a purple golden seal.
5. The top of his head is perfectly round.
6. The top of his head is round, while its lower part is square.
7. His Heavenly Center is radiant and prominent.
8. His Golden Flower shines forth like the Seven Treasures.
9. His Dark Cinnabar shows a double heavenly pillar.
10. His Great Sovereign is square like a jade disk.
11. His Hall of Light is round like a wagon wheel and naturally sprouts white hair.
12. His Cavern Chamber has bright purple-red lines.
13. His Niwan Palace shows golden essence fluid that merges together the myriad ends.
14. His ears have rims like golden walls.
15. His face is like a pink lotus blossom and round like the full moon.
16. His eyelashes are dense like the sovereign of Great Tenuity.
17. His eyelids are like hanging half-moons, covering clear and penetrating pupils that move at leisure and never flicker.
18. Behind his ears, his bones are like the handle of the Dipper.
19. His nose is like a golden pillar and contains three openings.
20. His mouth is like cinnabar and vermilion with three openings to the throat; from here spouts forth saliva that is always sufficient and without measure; his voice and tone are subtle and wondrous.
21. He has connected bones and joined teeth.
22. His tongue is covered by golden fluid; it is so wide and long that it covers his entire face.
23. His cheeks are like those of a lion; his chin looks like a sacred seal.
24. His head is like the heavenly pillar; it pervades the Three Essentials.

*Middle Division*

25. His heart area has nine nipples, from each of which sprout nine hairs.
26. His chest area shows divine patterns (such as the wheel of ten thousand spokes) and clearly legible characters.
27. His entire body is erect and straight, with arms long enough to reach below his knees.
28. His armpits are perfectly flat, with their area as full as the Pivot Star.
29. His torso shows the Equalizer [Dipper Handle].
30. To the left of his heart is the Palace of Great Radiance.
31. To the right of his heart is the Palace of Great Darkness.
32. His abdomen hangs down like the Suspended Bowl [of the Dipper].
33. His navel looks like the pearl of Numinous Treasure.
34. It pervades the Three Essentials.
35. He has the complexion of a dragon and the bearing of a phoenix.
36. His shadow looks like a lotus.
37. His back is straight as if he was riding on a cloud.
38. His left is like the Tower of Eastern Florescence.
39. His right is like the Tower of Western Numen.
40. He sits like a dragon crouching.
41. He bends like a yoked ox.
42. He walks like a soaring phoenix.
43. His marrow turns into bones, which are like those of a flying dragon.
44. His complexion is blossoming, his flesh like jade.
45. His radiance shimmers golden, his appearance is purple.
46. His nipples are arranged like the Dipper.

47. The area underneath them represents the South Culmen.
48. His entire body has a purple radiance, a golden shine as bright as the sun.

*Lower Division*

49. His feet are even and full, like Towers of Double wheels.
50. His soles show wheels of one thousand spokes.
51. They also have the pattern of the Milky Way.
52. His toes are long and webbed into a network.
53. His soles show lotus flowers that look like wheels.
54. His heels are full and auspicious with brightness.
55. His arches are high and even, matching the heels perfectly.
56. His ankles are like dams.
57. His shins are like pillars.
58. His calves are like boats covered with gold.
59. Each pore of his body grows a single hair; it is bright and soft and grows in a clockwise direction.
60. His knees of jade look like the Piao Star.
61. Their inside is like the fruit of the *se* tree.
62. Their outside is like the flower of the *se* tree.
63. Their top is like a jade casket.
64. His thighs are like jade axles.
65. They show the Jade Equalizer [Dipper] on their inner skin.
66. Outside they look like golden bridges.
67. Above them hovers a jade radiance.
68. Inside they have double bones, long like dragons.
69. His bones are gold, their marrow jade; they are fully transparent.
70. His entire body is big and tall, it is solid as a diamond.
71. His complexion is like purple gold, neither shallow nor deficient.
72. His entire body is bright and pure and radiates powerfully throughout the ten directions.

This alternative list repeats to some extent the standard marks already discussed. It places strong emphasis on radiance and stresses the roundness of Laozi's head, the penetrating quality of his glance, and the redness of his mouth. It also mentions his joined teeth, nine nipples, straightness of posture, dragon complexion, square feet, round heels, and well-shaped bones. In contrast to the standard list, however, it integrates a number of Buddhist marks not usually associated with Laozi. His hair is blue-black in color instead of white, he has a natural topknot made of cloud, he shines like the Seven Treasures, and he looks like a lotus blossom. He also has particularly thick eyelashes, a tongue big enough to cover his face, and cheeks that give him a leonine look. He imitates the Buddha also in the wheel symbol on his chest, the flatness of his armpits, the webbed nature of his toes, and the clockwise turning of his body hairs.

This list, which might be called the "meditative list" of Laozi's signs, is not only more influenced by Buddhist hagiography but also follows the later Mahāyāna tradition of placing key emphasis on the supernatural body, so that the deity's wondrous marks are acknowledged primarily in a celestial context. Accordingly, Laozi's body has no need here to accommodate his

earthly career. There is no more white hair, for example, the feature that explained his name Laozi. No need either to have rimless ears, which gave rise to his name Dan; instead, his ears are crowned by “rims like golden walls” (see sign no. 14 in table 2), imitating the Golden Towers of heaven.

The entire body of the god in this meditative vision is made from gold and jade, and is strong, erect, and diamond hard. His head, both round and square, imitates both heaven and earth. It contains the Nine Palaces where the celestial divinities reside and is significantly marked by patterns, lines, and a bone structure apparent on the scalp. The same holds true for his chest area, the middle Cinnabar Field of Taoist practice, which contains a residence for the gods and is covered by sacred patterns, has nine nipples, and is flanked by the divine palaces of Radiance and Darkness. Laozi’s navel, too, is stylized—the center of his body looks like the perfectly round pearl of the Numinous Treasure, symbolizing his inherent power as well as his utter perfection as a divine being. The pearl symbolizes purity and essence and resembles the pill of immortality; it is also reminiscent of the form in which Laozi descends to earth in the classic story of his birth. His feet, finally, show the signs of heaven and earth: they are square and solid and show wheels of the law, lotus blossoms, and other divine marks. They, together with his legs, form two strong pillars on which the deity and the world may stand at ease.

There are, in addition, numerous astral palaces and constellations everywhere on Laozi’s true body as visualized in meditation, from the Heavenly Center (the nose) above, through the Hall of Light and Celestial Pivot (the heart) in the middle, to the North Culmen (the navel) and Milky Way below. The Dipper appears variously, both *in toto* and in part, represented by individual stars. Laozi has the entire constellation etched on his torso, its bowl represented on his abdomen, the Equalizer showing on his chest and the Jade Equalizer on his thigh. He is marked, clearly and without doubt, as the central deity of the world, the one central agency that governs all.

Laozi’s body openings, too, are described supernaturally. They appear as sources of great energy, be it the light that shines from his eyes, the saliva that gathers in his mouth, or the understanding that penetrates his ears. Most of his orifices have more than the usual number of apertures, as, for example, his throat, which has three openings into his mouth. Laozi possesses not only open lines of communication and superlative energies within but also excellent contact with the world outside; he is connected in essence to all existence and penetrates it with ease.

Moreover, while Laozi’s standard signs as the newly born divine child are often described through comparisons with real creatures, his true

appearance can only be represented in terms of mythical creatures like unicorns and phoenixes. This is related to the theory that extraordinary beasts can grow from ordinary animals in the same way that humans can develop into immortals. As the *Hunyuan shengji* has it,

Snakes attain the Tao and turn into dragons; wild birds reach the Tao and become phoenixes. Beasts attain it and develop into unicorns, while people who find it are transformed into immortals. (4.7a)

Laozi's resemblance to such mythical animals therefore stylizes him as an a-priori immortal, just as various other of his divine signs mark him as the deity at the center and hub of all.

Understanding the celestial body of the god, with its heavenly palaces and starry constellations, presupposes a highly esoteric knowledge accessible only to initiates. Through such understanding adepts can visualize Laozi as a complete replica of the active Taoist universe, so that he forms a link between the heavenly and the human, a representation of the life-force at its most potent that is yet accessible to practicing Taoists. Active imagination of the deity eventually allows adepts to acquire his celestial signs and thus reach out to immortality and celestial realization (*Sanyuan pin* 三元品 in SDZN 8.13a). Laozi in this cosmic vision is therefore the truth of the Tao personified rather than the divine child born in human form. As an integrated mythical replica of the universe, his cosmic or true body becomes the vehicle that takes initiated practitioners through active visualization to oneness with the Tao in its true primordial state.

#### CONCLUSION

Laozi, the Highest Venerable Lord, is the body of the Tao. Since the Tao is also the world, Laozi's body is the world as the Tao. Religious Taoist doctrine understands the Tao on two levels: as the continuously changing pattern of nature and destiny pervading the world; and as the formless creative principle underlying all. This doctrine is expressed mythologically in the concept of the two bodies of Laozi: his earthly teaching body, which is human, changing, and auspicious; and his heavenly true body, which is diamond, vibrant, and eternal.

The teaching body, described in the list of Laozi's eighty-one standard signs, is utterly real, made of flesh and bones; it shows numerous concrete characteristics of human excellence, corresponds to the demands of mundane physiognomy, and displays the physical changes experienced by immortality practitioners of old. It also follows the Confucian stylization of the mythical sage rulers and integrates certain distinct signs of the Buddha's

divine appearance. In all cases, however, the signs relate to an actual living deity on this earth and present perfection within the known, physical world of a real human body.

The true or cosmic body, in contrast, manifests the formal Taoist symbolization and sacred classification of the universe, and is visualized in meditation in order to realize the pervasive power of the Tao on earth and within one's own being. There is no real infant at the center of observation, no actual human form with skull bones and black spots to be examined. Laozi's true body is a model to describe the universe, and is thus on the same mythological level as the transformation of Pangu or Puruṣa in the Indo-European creation myth. The world as the Tao is described on the pattern of the human body; the body is a model, a symbol for an integrated organism. Its main importance lies in providing an overall structure; it is not a real body at all.

By extension, Laozi's two bodies represent the sacred reality of human life as seen in religious Taoism. Just as people participate in the Tao by just living, so they are potentially Laozi and can be fully one with the Tao and the world. People have physical bodies that change, providing signs of their inner character and emotional state. They also have spiritual or immortal bodies, through which they participate in the totality of the cosmos and are linked with the eternal life of the astral palaces and celestials above.

Just as the Western tradition distinguishes a physical, an emotional, and a spiritual body, so the Taoist religion recognizes a distinction between a mundane (physio-psychological) and a divine (soul and spirit) one. Laozi's two bodies represent both. While his teaching body on earth shows clear *signs* of immortal potential, his true body in heaven has *actualized* this immortal potential. It has attained full cosmic realization of the Tao through joining the palaces, passageways, and patterns of the entire universe. The looks of Laozi express the power of both the teaching body and the true body of the Tao, and thus represent the inherent potential not only of the world as Tao but of every human being as a replica of the universe and seat of eternal life.

#### NOTES

1. Texts in the Taoist canon (*Daozang* 道藏, abbreviated DZ) are given according to SCHIPPER 1975.

2. This is a Dunhuang manuscript, found in S. 75, P. 2370 and reprinted in ŌFUCHI 1979, 509–11. The first section cited here claims to go back to the third century but its date is controversial. See KOHN 1995a, 102.

3. The Taoist system merges the first two into the true body of Laozi as the Tao, and retains the third as his teaching body. Details of the Taoist theory as it relates to its Buddhist

counterpart are outlined in the second section of the *Daojiao yishu* 道教義樞 [The pivotal meaning of the Taoist teaching] (DZ 1129). See also KOHN 1992, 149.

4. A classical description of such celestial fashions, matching Laozi's looks, is found in the *Fafu kejie wen* 法服科戒文 [Rules and precepts regarding ritual garb] (DZ 788). Here the highest god of the Tao wears "a precious cap of ten thousand transformations and nine colors, and a flowery skirt of green brocade, ten revolutions and nine transformations together with pearly slippers of the ten jewels and transformations of the five species" (1b; KOHN 1993, 337).

5. Laozi statues are described in the *Fengdao kejie* 奉道科戒 [Rules and precepts for worshipping the Tao] (DZ 1125) as wearing "capes of nine-colored loose gauze and five-colored cloudy mist. Underneath that they are garbed in long robes of yellow variegated brocade with mountain-and-river patterns. Their gold or jade headdresses should have tassels to the right and left, and their belt pendants should be of gold and jade" (2.2b; see also REITER 1988, 62).

6. The nine transformations of Laozi are first mentioned in the *Laozi ming* 老子銘 [Inscription for Laozi], dated 165 CE (SEIDEL 1969, 41), and are described in more detail in the *Falun jing* 法輪經 [Scripture of the wheel of the law] as cited in the encyclopedia *Sandong zhunang* 三洞朱囊 [Bag of pearls from the three caverns] (DZ 1139, 8.13b–14a).

7. According to ancient Chinese mythology, there were originally ten suns that took turns illuminating the earth. Nine were shot down by Archer Yi, after which the remaining one underwent nine transformations in keeping up the ten-day rhythm of the Chinese week (see MÄNCHEN-HELFFEN 1936; ZHENG 1992). Laozi's nine transformations not only link him with the sun in this way but also render him similar to the creator deity Pangu (SEIDEL 1969, 63).

8. Including such renowned personages as Guan Lu 管路 (biography in *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 29, translation in DEWOSKIN 1983, 91–134) and Yuan Tiangang 袁天綱 (*Tangshu* 唐書 204; *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 191).

9. The *Sandong zhunang* (DZ 1139) is a seventh-century encyclopedia that contains many citations from earlier works on the divine appearance of the celestials.

10. Such strange immortals, winged beings with animal-like features, are also often depicted on Han-dynasty mirrors found in tombs (see LOEWE 1979; SPIRO 1990, 44).

11. The apocrypha are not extant as independent works but have survived only in citations. The most comprehensive collection of them is found in YASUI and NAKAMURA 1972. They are the direct forerunners of the mythological tradition of religious Taoism. See DULL 1966; SEIDEL 1983.

12. Yoshioka provides extensive apocryphal passages. He cites Yu's marks following Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 commentary on the *Shangshuwei diming yan* 尚書緯帝命驗 [Miracles in the lives of ancient rulers in apocryphal interpretation of the Book of Documents]; Song Jun's 宋均 explanations of the *Liwei hanwen jia* 禮緯含文嘉 [Embodied eminence and blessings in apocryphal interpretation of the Book of Rites]; and the *Chunqiuwei yanqong tu* 春秋緯演孔圖 [Wide interpretative charts in apocryphal interpretation of the Spring and Autumn Annals].

13. This is clearly formulated in the *Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經 [Perfect scripture of great cavern], as cited in SDZN:

One whose human body naturally has neither precious bones nor fresh blood, nor shows a divine radiance like gold and jade from the five inner organs, can never come to hear or see the Tao of the [gods] Female One or Imperial One.

Similarly, for someone to encounter this scripture, his body must naturally have the glossiness of vermilion clouds and the energy of jade harmony.... The Highest Emperor of Heaven will not order any sacred texts bestowed upon anyone lacking the divine signs. (8.9b)

14. This text, “Biographies of Taoist Adepts,” is a Highest Clarity collection of the lives of prominent Taoists that has not survived in its entirety. Its fragments are collected in CHEN 1975, 454–504.

15. Texts in the Buddhist canon are cited after the Japanese Taishō Tripitaka edition (abbreviated T.), giving the serial number, the volume, and the pages.

16. Before that, a few isolated characteristics are listed in the second-century *Mouzi lihuo lun* 牟子理惑論 [Mouzi’s correction of errors]: sixteen feet tall, golden radiance, topknot of flesh, cheeks like a lion, long tongue, hands with signs of the wheel (T. 2102, 52.1c).

17. The same reversed order is found among the Tibetan Sherpas, who link the body not only with the cosmology of the universe but also with a sequence of increasing purity:

The feet are two pouches of flesh,  
the knees are the wheel of the law,  
the testicles are two bags joined at the top,  
the waist is the ceremonial bell.

(DESJARLAIS 1992, 42)

This follows the famous image of the lotus that sprouts from the mud, symbolizing sensory and bodily experience, and flowers above the surface, symbolizing enlightenment. The Tibetan case suggests that the bottom-to-top version is the more original and has a deeper doctrinal foundation in Buddhist teaching than the more common later list.

18. Fourteen marks listed in the *Mahāvīryūtpatti* are not found in the Chinese biography:

2. His hair grows clockwise.
3. His forehead is perfectly flat.
5. His eyes are dark blue.
5. His eyelashes are like those of a bull.
8. His teeth are without spaces between them.
10. His mouth always contains a saliva that improves the flavor of anything he eats.
13. The sound of his voice is clear and carries.
15. His soles, palms, the tops of his shoulders, and the crown of his head are flat.
16. There are no hollows in his armpits.
18. His hands reach below his knees.
22. His body hair stands erect.
25. His anklebones do not protrude.
27. His hands and feet are webbed.
31. His soles do not touch the ground.

19. Similar features are mentioned in the visualization instructions on the god found in Ge Hong’s *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 [Book of the master who embraces simplicity]: “Laozi’s body is nine feet tall, of a yellow coloring. He is bird-mouthed and has an arched nose. His bushy eyebrows are five inches long, his ears measure seven inches. There are three vertical lines on his forehead, his feet are marked with the eight trigrams, and he lies on a golden turtle.” (chap. 15; see WARE 1966, 256–57)

20. The second version lacks fourteen items (nos. 11, 12, 18, 20, 33, 34, 41, 63, 64, 67, 68, 77, 78, 81), conflates two items in three cases (nos. 19–20, 39–40, 59–60), and adds two (nos. 55, 56). It is also found in the biography of Laozi’s mother in the *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian houji* 歷世眞仙體道通鑑後紀 [Comprehensive mirror through the ages of perfected immortals and those who embody the Tao, supplementary collection] (DZ 298; 1.2b–3b) and in the *Laozi shilue* 老子史略 [Brief history of Laozi] (DZ 773; 2.14b–15a). For a comparative table



see YOSHIOKA 1959, 142–47.

21. The same idea is found in the second-century *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 [Variegated remarks on the Spring and Autumn Annals] by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (KOHN 1991, 228) and from there made its way into Taoist doctrine.

22. Numbers in parentheses refer to the list of the Buddha's signs in table 1.

23. The later version (HS) reverses items 7–8 and 9–10 and does not have 11 and 12.

24. This theory is parallel to the medical concept that “wind is the cause of the hundred diseases; ... it enters the body and exhausts human energy” (VEITH 1972, 107–108). It is also applied in divination, especially in the observation of pitch pipes. Made of bamboo, jade, or bronze, these pipes are either blown, one each in the twelve months of the year, or buried vertically in a roofed chamber. Here the yin or yang ether could blow through and displace the ashes placed on top of the pipe (BODDE 1959, 16).

25. The distribution of the nine provinces on the face is in three lines of three, not unlike the *Luoshu* 洛書 [Writ of the River Luo] diagram. Three are placed on the forehead, three on the mid-face (two on the cheeks and one on the nose), and the last three on the chin. An illustration is found in LIANG 1980, 297 (*Shenxiang quanbian* 10).

The twelve constellations, or prognosticatory palaces, deal with fate (center between eyes), wealth (tip of nose), siblings (eyebrows), property (eyelids), offspring (eyebags), servants (corners of chin), marriage (temples), health (nose), moving (forehead far sides), official position (forehead center), fortune (forehead above eyes), and the overall patterns of life (face as a whole). See LIANG 1980, 34–38.

26. To examine a person's gait, one should “have him walk about ten paces, then call him to turn his head. If he turns to the left, he will be an official of some standing; if he turns to the right, he will be out of a job and lack even food and clothing. If he walks like a turtle, he will be very bright; if he walks like a deer or a horse, he will encounter hardships. If he looks neither up nor down while walking, he has the looks of someone rich and noble; if his pupils move about a lot, he will decline early” (LIANG 1980, 107; citing Master Xu Fu).

27. This text consists of one scroll in forty-seven pages, and is also cited in the eleventh-century encyclopedia *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 [Seven tablets in a cloudy satchel] (DZ 1032; 80.1a–18a).

#### REFERENCES CITED

ALLAN, Sarah

1981 Sons of suns: Myth and totemism in early China. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44: 290–326.

BODDE, Derk

1959 The Chinese cosmic magic known as watching for the ethers. In *Studia Serica Bernard Karlgren Dedicata*, ed. Søren Egerod, 14–35. Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard.

BOLTZ, Judith M.

1987 *A survey of Taoist literature: Tenth to seventeenth centuries*. China Research Monograph 32. Berkeley: University of California.

BRECHT, Bertold

1979 *Poems, 1913–1956*. Trans. John Willet and Ralph Manheim. London: Methuen.

CHEN Guofu 陳國符

1975 *Daozang yuanliu kao* 道藏源流考 [Studies in the development of the Taoist canon]. Taipei: Guting.

DESJARLAIS, Robert T.

1992 *Body and emotion: The aesthetics of illness and healing in the Nepal Himalayas*.

- Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- DESPEUX, Catherine  
1994 *Taoïsme et corps humain: Le Xiuzhen tu*. Paris: Guy Tredaniel.
- DEWOSKIN, Kenneth J.  
1982 *A song for one or two: Music and the concept of art in early China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies.  
1983 *Doctors, diviners, and magicians of ancient China*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- DULL, Jack  
1966 A historical introduction to the apocryphal (*ch'an-wei*) texts of the Han dynasty. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington.
- EITEL, Earnest John  
1973 *Feng-shui or the rudiments of natural science in China*. Cambridge: Coleague. (first published 1873)
- FORKE, Alfred  
1972 *Lun-Heng: Wang Ch'ung's essays*, 2 vols. New York: Paragon. (first published 1907)
- GRAHAM, A. C.  
1960 *The book of Lieh-tzu*. London: John Murray.  
1990 The origins of the legend of Lao Tan. In *Studies in Chinese philosophy and philosophical literature*, ed. A. C. Graham, 111–24. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- GÜNTSCH, Gertrud  
1988 *Das Shen-hsien-chuan und das Erscheinungsbild eines Hsien*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- HOU Ching-lang  
1979 Physiognomie d'après le teint sous la dynastie des T'ang. In *Contributions aux études de Touan-houang*, ed. Michel Soymié, 2: 55–70. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- HURVITZ, Leon  
1962 *Chih-i (538–597): An introduction to the life and ideas of a Chinese Buddhist monk*. Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises.
- KALTENMARK, Maxime  
1953 *Le Lie-sien tchouan*. Peking: Université de Paris Publications.
- KARETZKY, Patricia E.  
1992 *The life of the Buddha: Ancient scriptural and pictorial traditions*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America.
- KARLGREN, Bernhard  
1946 Legends and cults in ancient China. *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 18: 199–365.
- KOBAYASHI Masayoshi 小林正美  
1990 *Rikuchō dōkyōshi kenkyū* 六朝道教史研究. Tokyo: Sōbunsha.
- KOHN, Livia  
1986 A textbook of physiognomy: The tradition of the *Shenxiang quanbian*. *Asian Folklore Studies* 45: 227–58.  
1988 Mirror of auras: Chen Tuan on Physiognomy. *Asian Folklore Studies* 47: 215–56.  
1989 Die Emigration des Laozi: Mythologische Entwicklungen vom 2. bis 6. Jahrhundert. *Monumenta Serica* 38: 49–68.  
1991 Taoist visions of the body. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 18: 227–52.  
1992 *Early Chinese mysticism: Philosophy and soteriology in the Taoist tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.  
1993 *The Taoist experience: An anthology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- 1995a *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhists and Taoists in medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 1995b Laozi: Ancient philosopher, master of longevity, and Taoist god. In *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald Lopez, Jr., 52–63. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- LEGGE, James  
1969 *The Chinese classics*. Taipei: Jinwen.
- LESSA, William  
1968 *Chinese body divination*. Los Angeles: United World Press.
- LIANG Xiangrun 梁湘潤, ed.  
1980 *Shenxiang quanbian* 神相全編. Taipei: Hongye.
- LINCOLN, Bruce  
1975 The Indo-European myth of creation. *History of Religions* 15: 121–45.
- LINK, Arthur E.  
1957 Shyh Daw-an's Preface to the *Yogacarabhumi-sutra* and the problem of Buddhist-Taoist terminology in early Chinese Buddhism. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 77: 1–14.
- LOEWE, Michael  
1979 *Ways to paradise: The Chinese quest for immortality*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- MAJOR, John S.  
1986 New light on the Dark Warrior. *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13/14: 65–87.
- MÄNCHEN-HELFEN, Otto  
1936 Der Schuss auf die Sonnen. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*. 44: 75–95.
- ŌFUCHI Ninji 大淵忍爾  
1979 *Tonkō dōkei: Zuroku hen* 敦煌道經圖錄編. Tokyo: Kokubu Shoten.
- PAUL, Diana  
1979 *Women in Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- PORKERT, Manfred  
1961 Untersuchungen einiger philosophisch-wissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe und -beziehungen im Chinesischen. *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 110: 422–52.  
1983 *The essentials of Chinese diagnosis*. Zürich: Acta Medicinæ Sinensis.
- REITER, Florian C.  
1988 The visible divinity: The sacred icon in religious Taoism. *Nachrichten der deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* 144: 51–70.  
1990 *Der Perlenbeutel aus den drei Höhlen: Arbeitsmaterialien zum Taoismus der frühen T'ang-Zeit*. Asiatische Forschungen 12. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- REN Jiyu 任繼愈 and ZHONG Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬, eds.  
1991 *Daozang tiyao* 道藏提要. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe.
- SCHIPPER, Kristofer M.  
1975 *Concordance du Tao Tsang: Titres des ouvrages*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- SEIDEL, Anna K.  
1969 *La divinisation de Lao tseu dans le Taoisme des Han*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient. (reprinted 1992)  
1983 Imperial treasures and Taoist sacraments: Taoist roots in the apocrypha. In *Tantric and Taoist studies*, ed. Michel Strickmann, 291–371. Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises.

- SÔFUKAWA Hiroshi 曾布川 寛  
1981 *Konronsan e no shōsen* 崑崙山への昇仙. Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha.
- SOOTHILL, William E., and Lewis HODOUS  
1937 *A dictionary of Chinese Buddhist terms*. London: Kegan Paul.
- SPIRO, Audrey  
1990 How light and airy: Upward mobility in the realm of immortals. *Taoist Resources* 2/2: 43–69.
- STRONG, John  
1983 *The legend of King Aśoka: A study and translation of the Aśokavadāna*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- VEITH, Ilza  
1972 *The Yellow Emperor's classic of internal medicine*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- WARE, James  
1966 *Alchemy, medicine, religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- WATSON, Burton  
1968 *The complete works of Chuang Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- WAYMAN, Alex  
1957 Contributions regarding the thirty-two characteristics of the great person. In *Liebenthal Festschrift*, ed. Kshitish Roy, 243–60. Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati University.
- YASUI Kōzan 安井香山 and NAKAMURA Chōhachi 中村璋八, eds.  
1972 *Isho shūsei* 緯書集成. 6 vols. Mimeographed edition. (first published 1960)
- YOSHIOKA Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊  
1959 *Dōkyō to Bukkyō* 道教と仏教. Vol. 1. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai.
- ZHENG, Chantal  
1992 Le mythe de l'archer et des soleils. In *Mythe et philosophie à l'aube de la Chine impériale: Études sur le Huainan zi*, ed. Charles Le Blanc and Rémi Mathieu, 27–48. Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- ZÜRCHER, Erik  
1959 *The Buddhist conquest of China: The spread and adaptation of Buddhism in early medieval China*. 2 vols. Leiden: E. Brill.  
1991 A new look at the earliest Chinese Buddhist texts. In *From Benares to Beijing. Essays on Buddhism and Chinese religion in honour of Prof Jan Yün-hua*, ed. Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Shopen, 277–304. Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press.