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Mirror, Moon, and Memory in Eighth-Century China: From Dragon Pond to Lunar Palace

Why the Flight-to-the-Moon

The Bard's one-time felicitous phrasing of a shrewd observation has by now fossilized into a commonplace: that one may "hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."[1] Likewise deeply rooted in Chinese discourse, the same analogy has endured since antiquity.[2] As a commonplace, it is true and does not merit renewed attention. When presented with a physical mirror from the past that does register its time, however, we realize that the mirroring or showing promised by such a wisdom is not something we can take for granted. The mirror does not show its time, at least not in a straightforward way. It in fact veils, disfigures, and ultimately sublimates the historical reality it purports to reflect. A case in point is the scene on an eighth-century Chinese mirror (fig. 1). It shows, at the bottom, a dragon strutting or prancing over a pond. A pair of birds, each holding a knot of ribbon in its beak, flies toward a small sphere at the top. Inside the circle is a tree flanked by a hare on the left and a toad on the right. So, what is the design all about? A quick iconographic exposition seems to be in order. To begin, the small sphere refers to the moon. Since ancient times, the lunar landscape occupies a special place in the Chinese imagination and takes on a distinct character. A nebulous sphere at once watery and crystalline, it is not the barren and dusty planetoid our modern imagination now takes it to be. A cinnamon tree is said to dominate its landscape. The toad, a clammy and slimy creature with watery associations, epitomizes the damp world there.[3] The indefatigable hare persistently pounds herbs into an elixir in the mortar, producing a thump that reverberates in this otherwise hushed and eerie lunar landscape. These objects are fairly easy to explain. The hard part is what to make of the pair of ribbon-clenching birds flying toward the moon? Further, what is the mannered dragon doing below? Simple as the design may appear, we are actually dealing with a complicated iconography. No ready textual sources illuminate the matter. It takes a convoluted set of historical circumstances for them, and us, to get there. Tracing its genealogy is edifying, for it may help us appreciate how a deceptively simple design may belie complex circumstances, or vice versa, how a riot of historical reality crystallizes into schematic forms.

Fig. 1. Mirror with the Flight-to-the-Moon, 8th century, Diam. 15.2 cm. Sichuan Provincial Museum. After *Zhongguo qingtongqi quanji* [Complete works of Chinese bronze] (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998), 16: 151, pl. 148.

Fig. 2. Mirror with a Coiling Dragon, first half of the 8th century, Diam. 10.2 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman Lee, 1995.367.

The mirror also presents another problem. A mirror bearing the image of the moon is infinitely suggestive. It materializes a long-standing analogy between the moon and the mirror that gained particular currency in eighth and ninth centuries, when the moon appears to have caught the collective fancy.[4] A great deal was invested in the moon, both symbolically and emotionally. The moon mirror provides a material testimony to this interest. However, the symbolic charge of the moon mirror underwent some drastic changes in different phases of the Tang dynasty, as registered accordingly in the changing designs of the moon mirrors.

The Coiling-Dragon Mirror

The design known as the coiling-dragon mirror (fig. 2), seemingly unrelated to our moon mirror at the outset, has in fact everything to do with it. The coiling dragon that takes up the entire composition here corresponds to the prancing dragon over the pond in the flight-to-the-moon mirror. According to archaeologists' reports, the coiling-dragon mirror predates the flight-to-the-moon mirror by roughly seven decades.[5] The chronology as such suggests a possible continuity between the two. The question then is: what makes this coiling-dragon motif so enduring and how may it have enriched the visual rhetoric of the flight-to-the-moon mirror? To answer this question, we first need to find its significance.

In Tang times, the best bronze mirrors were produced in Yangzhou, a prosperous metropolis in the lower Yangzi River basin. According to *Record of the Mirror Dragon* by Zhang Yue (667–730), in 715 Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) received from the governor of Yangzhou a so-called heart-of-water mirror with a coiling-dragon design on its back. Lü Hui, the craftsman who produced the mirror, is said to have had a strange encounter. Two unexpected visitors, a white-robed old man named Dragon Protected and a black-robed boy named Dark Numinous, showed up at the production site and offered to help with the process. The old man claimed that he "knew how to make real dragons." At Dragon Protected's order, Dark Numinous went inside the cauldron. No one was allowed to come near. Three days later, the cauldron was opened, but nowhere were the two visitors to be found. A sheet of paper was left by the cauldron, on which was written a pronouncement in small-seal

script, to the effect that the "mirror dragon is 3 *chi* and 4.5 *cun* in length"; it represents the cosmic scheme of things. The inscription says:

> The sageness of the Emperor of the Kaiyuan period [713–741] resonates with the divinity. I therefore give my blessing: this mirror shall avert evils and reflect the myriad things. . . . Coiling dragon and coiling dragon hide inside the mirror . . . capable of endless variety of transformations: summoning cloud, issuing mist, causing rain and wind. The Transcendents of the High Purity have thus descended to offer divine wisdom.

On that note, Master Lü then proceeded with the mirror production. He placed the cauldron on a boat sailing on the Yangzi River. On the fifth day of the fifth month, Lü began smelting and casting. The river surged and dragons sang. The mirror took shape and was then presented to the emperor who ordered the imperial workshop to safeguard it. In 719, four years after the court acquired the mirror, a devastating, long drought hit the region of the capital city. The emperor asked a Daoist priest named Ye Fashan (616–720) if he had seen a "real dragon." No, said the Daoist, "but your humble servant has heard that a pictorial dragon, so long as it resembles in some way the real dragon in view of the four limbs, would cause some numinous response. To pray with the [dragon image] will cause the rain to fall." The emperor then sent an imperial commissioner to escort the Daoist to look for what he may need in the imperial collection. They found the dragon mirror from Yangzhou. The Daoist then prayed to heaven in an attempt to invoke the presence of the mirror dragon. Instantly, a white cloud issued from the dragon's nose [that is, the knob of the mirror]. A sweet rain poured down from the sky that lasted for seven days. Delighted, the emperor ordered the court painter Wu Daozi to paint the image of the mirror dragon.[6] Another source speaks of the "horrendous drought during the Kaiyuan years" and how the emperor ordered an artisan from the Directorate for Imperial Manufactories to paint dragons on the walls of a newly built hall beside the Dragon Pond. White smoke leapt from the walls into the pond. Soon a white dragon soared into the air and "sweet rain" poured down.[7]

No doubt, these tall tales reek of some fictive spinning. There is nevertheless some historical ground to them. The standard histories record a long drought in 718 and 719.[8] A set of formal texts in the form of memorials, eulogies, and prayers composed by Zhang Yue, an official of Xuanzong's court, that celebrate the long-awaited rainfall following a drought lends further credence to the circumstantial reality described in the dragon-mirror tales.[9]

Bronze mirrors are traditionally invested with the symbolic power to avert calamities. The dragon image is always associated with, among other things, the efficacy of invoking rains. Daoist scriptures and ritual practices convey the conviction that the dragon pictures (*longwen*) and prayer can call forth dragons who dive into the four seas to bring waters to the drought-inflicted area.[10] It is customary, therefore, to see the coiling dragon as a dominant design on the caisson ceiling of a traditional architectural interior. The underlying premise is that its presence will ensure the building against a possible fire.[11] The "Eulogy on the Water Mirror" by Jia Zeng (d. 727) praises the power of a type of mirror with

Fig. 3. Ink rubbing of Mirror with Paired Dancing Horses, first half of the 8th century, Diam. 23.6 cm. Shanghai Museum. After *Zhongguo qingtongqi quanji,* 16: 20.

"coiling dragon residing in it" and its synergy with water.[12] Jia had been appointed Secretariat Drafter, a handler of central government documents, at the beginning of the Kaiyuan era. As an eye-witness to the events of the early Kaiyuan years, he was very likely alluding to the possible use of the "water mirror" in the prayer for rain that took place in 719.

The Thousand-Autumn Festival

As the Tang dynasty eased into a period of increased stability and prosperity under Emperor Xuanzong, the dragon mirror was put to a more celebratory use. In the seventeenth year of Kaiyuan (729), the emperor turned forty-four. At the suggestion of Zhang Yue and other court officials, with which the emperor gladly concurred, the imperial court officially made Xuanzong's birthday—the fifth of the eighth month of the Chinese lunar calendar—a national holiday and named it the Thousand-Autumn Festival.[13] It was the first time in Chinese history that the emperor's birthday was treated thus, thereby setting a precedent for subsequent imperial practice. Previously such an occasion would have resulted in either the emperor's sad remembrance of his parents or some small-scale celebration restricted to the royal clan or imperial court.[14] Under Xuanzong, it became the occasion for public extravaganza. There were circus shows of the famous dancing horses (fig. 3) that were trained and choreographed to do such amazing feats as holding wine cups in their mouths or dancing on a couch held by a strong man.[15]

The birthday celebration culminated in the banquet the emperor threw under the Calyx Tower. Since the banquet was held in the open air in the evening and the emperor's birthday fell on the fifth of the eighth month of the lunar calendar, a time of the full moon, one amusement was to gaze at and savor the moon. The banquet therefore involved a great deal of poetry composition. It is inevitable that the authors of these occasional poems would evoke the moon/mirror analogy. At least from the mid sixth century on, poets frequently drew on this conceit. The trope also has its share in mirror inscriptions. The emperor thus enthused about "the moon holding the mirror with flowers and *shou*-ribbons." He also spoke of the mirror as "the moon on the table."[16] It was also the occasion for awards, gift exchanges, and eulogy compositions. The royal family members, officials, and aristocrats presented the emperor

Fig. 4. Mirror with Paired Phoenixes and Auspicious Animals, 8th century, Diam. 27.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.350.

with bronze mirrors with attached ribbons, "dew-gathering bags," and other objects, as birthday gifts.[17] The emperor in turn awarded officials above the fourth grade with "bronze mirrors, pearl swags, and silk."[18] The decorative patterns on the bronze mirrors used for the festival are of two iconographic types: the coiling dragon and the ribbon-clenching birds.

The mirror design with paired flying birds (fig. 4) came to serve this occasion well. Two ostensible features of the design are particularly notable. First, the paired birds face each other,[19] indicating the response of the mirror decoration to a general fashion manifested in textile design that gained momentum in the seventh century.[20] Beginning in 694, the court officials were given brocade robes with patterns of paired figures—geese, unicorns, tigers, eagles, bulls, leopards, and falcons.[21] The design apparently found its way into other contexts, and left its impact on some eighth-century mirror designs as well (figs. 3, 5, and 11). Second, the ribbons carried by the paired birds are doubly significant. Attached to official seals, the ribbons indicate eminent official status;[22] as the character *shou* (綬, ribbon) is homonymous with *shou* (壽, longevity), it makes a perfect symbol for the emperor's birthday. This feature was therefore duly noted in the writing occasioned by the Thousand-Autumn Festival, as both the emperor and the officials waxed poetic on such occasions. Their eulogies in turn provide textual evidence and, by extension, inadvertent explication of the mirror designs. The emperor spoke of himself being deeply moved by the images of the birds "holding long shou-ribbons" and felt grateful that his officials were so "considerate."[23] In return, the court officials sang alternately of the "dragons" and "phoenixes" on the mirrors.[24]

Among the celebrants was Zhang Jiuling (678–740), a high-ranking official and a prominent poet, who joined the chorus but remained somehow more sober and aloof. While other court officials were scrambling to present mirrors to the emperor on the occasion of the latter's birthday celebration in 736, Zhang presented the emperor with a petition titled "Record of the Thousand-Autumn Bronze Mirror." A mirror is for oneself to look into and see his own visage, says Zhang. Presented to others, it is meant to reflect the auspicious and inauspicious and to provide a perspective on past, present, and future. Using the mirror as a cue, Zhang pleaded with the emperor to reflect on, and draw morals

Fig. 5. Mirror with Paired Animals, 8th century, Diam. 18.3 cm. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. After Umehara Sueji, *Tōkyō Taikan* [Conspectus of Tang mirrors] (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1984, reprint of 1945 edition), 1: 57.

Fig. 6. Mirror with Lunar Landscape, dated 722, Diam. 16.1 cm. Shanghai Museum. After *Zhonghua wuqiannian wenwu jikan: Tongjing pian* [Five thousand years of Chinese art series: Bronze mirrors], 2: 226.

from, the decline and fall of the ancient dynasties. The message between the lines is a caveat against excess. Instead of being offended, the emperor actually rewarded Zhang with a calligraphic piece for his outspoken virtue.[25] Four years later, Zhang died.[26] More than a millennium later, in 1960, his tomb was excavated by archaeologists in south China. It contains none other than a coiling-dragon mirror.[27]

Soul-Baring: Illuminating the "Liver and Gall"

The moon/mirror analogy is suggestive in a number of ways. Its overtones also changed over time. In general, before the mid eighth century, its rhetorical signification rested primarily on the attribute of purity and transparency associated with the moon and the mirror. A bronze mirror dated 722, now in the Shanghai Museum (fig. 6), presents the earliest dated surviving Tang mirror design known to us that depicts the lunar landscape. The inscription, taking up three concentric rings, is the longest and most loquacious ever seen on a Tang mirror. It is a statement by a mirror-maker named Lü Shenxian from Yangzhou, the urban center known for its mirror production:

> Mr. Lü of the city of Yang[zhou], descends from Lü Gongwang who was enfeoffed in the Eight-Hundredth Year of Qi. [The Lü family's fortune] fluctuated with the decline and fall of the Zhou dynasty. When the opportunist minister Tian the Bastard overtook [the Qi],[28] the descendents of the [Lü clan] took flight and settled in the Huai-Yang region. The gentleman [Mr. Lü] harbors august aspirations and possesses a refined disposition. For generations, [the public] rarely know him well enough and [the fact that his] heart is like the bright mirror. One has to say: acquire his refinement! It is often said that the bright mirror of the King of Qin illuminates the gall and the heart. It possesses the efficacy unobtainable even by good craftsmen. Each time I see a superb ancient mirror, I regret that I am unable to set it back in time; if I could take out one or two hundred years, the mirror I have produced will also leave nothing—not even fine hairs—unexposed. Today, I have produced this mirror for Du Yuanzhi, Governor of

> the Qi Prefecture, a gentleman with a taste for curiosa. This mirror is also the crystallization of the thought of my entire life. Smelted on the Fifth Day of the Fifth Month, the Tenth Year (722) of Kaiyuan Era. Inscribed by Lü Shenxian from the Dongping Prefecture.[29]

The Lü family in Yangzhou was apparently a well-established atelier specializing in mirror production. The heart-of-water mirror presented by the governor of Yangzhou to Xuanzong in 715, seven years before this moon mirror, came from the hand of a craftsman named Lü Hui.[30] The rhetoric of the inscription should not be lost on us: the cherished primacy of ancient mirrors leads the mirror producer to resort to what must be a fabrication of his own family lineage that is traced all the way back to the fifth century BC. This dramatic statement of an antiquarian taste is further reiterated in Lü's fanciful claim that his mirror may just as well be viewed as if it were already one or two hundred years old. A further archaicizing conceit is the invocation of the famed mirror of the king of Qin. According to a time-honored legend, a large mirror in the Qin palace had the magical capacity of revealing the inner viscera of a person in front of it. It would localize the cause of an ailment in one's body. If a woman harbors licentious thoughts, the mirror would expose her "expansive gall and quivering heart" that would lead to her execution.[31]

What makes this mirror particularly intriguing is not only the long-winded rhetorical flourishes rarely found in a mirror inscription, but also the novel and idiosyncratic visual design that corresponds to the inscription. The visual rhetoric, though, is not immediately self-apparent to the modern eye. Inside the band of the inscription is a lunar landscape with the proverbial hare pounding away and the toad dancing. Even though the lunar lore involving the hare had long existed, it was not without controversy in its overtones, at least in the late seventh century. A court official named Li Xiao-yi (李孝逸) was once charged with the intention of contending for the throne. The ground for this accusation concerns the character *yi* (逸) in his name, which contains a component that happens to be the character *tu* (兔, hare). "His name," according to his detractors, "contains a hare in it. The hare is a lunar creature. [It follows that this man] harbors a contention for [the status of Son of] Heaven." Fortunately, Wu Zetian, to whom this was presented, had the good sense to dismiss this groundless allegation.[32]

By the early decades of the eighth century, a growing taste for Daoism revived the interest in the lunar symbolism. Zhang Guo, the well-known Daoist master of *fangshi* (esoterica) who convinced Xuanzong of the efficacy of occult pursuits,[33] provided his contemporaries with a glossing of the image of the hare in the moon: "There is a hare in the moon. It symbolizes the East Quarter, Wood, and liver. Liver is of the *yang* and cloud-soul class. . . . Therefore the moon is illuminated by it."[34] The image of the hare, an emblem of "liver," in the moon mirror thus visually resonates with the line in the inscription "the bright mirror of the King of Qin illuminates the gall and the heart." *Gan* (liver) and *dan* (gall) are often linked in Chinese expressions to form a compound phrase, *gandan* (liver and gall); the two characters are therefore largely interchangeable in metaphoric senses. Moreover, making the hare a visual trope of "liver and gall" is very much in keeping with a rhetorical convention of mirror inscriptions. An early Tang mirror shows some animals, whose identities

are at best ambiguous and somewhere between a dog and a wolf, running in a counterclockwise fashion (see p. 32, fig. 6). The poetic inscription on the outer band, composed in the quatrain mode, reads:

> I received a gift: the mirror of the King of Qin.
> For this, I would have paid willingly a thousand taels of silver.
> In no way would I use it to unveil your gall.
> Verily, I only wish to lay bare my own heart.[35]

The conceit is built on the famous legend of the Qin king's magical mirror capable of "illuminating one's gall." On that cue, the mirror becomes a means of baring one's soul. As shrewdly observed by Ju-hsi Chou, "the author of the poem thought to subvert its cruel intention and instead skillfully create a distinction between the subject of love and the lover. The owner of the mirror, the mirror maker cleverly intimated, wished only to reveal his own soul, and did not doubt the hidden desires of the lady fair."[36]

This in fact continues a long-standing rhetorical convention in mirror inscription that goes as far back as the first century BC. A type of mirror excavated from Changsha dating from the late Former Han bears the inscription:

> Untarnished brightness at your service, Sir,
> Lest gloom should dim the light;
> [I speak] else benefits ensuing from this magic alloy
> Be forgotten with the lapse of time.
> Even though my fair qualities endure unchanged,
> The false intrigues of others may yet win your favor.
> By virtue of its intrinsic purity [this mirror] reflects the light;
> Its radiance is like that of the sun and moon.
> My heart aspires to prove its loyalty;
> But it is thwarted and has no vent.[37]

Although the Han mirror inscription is built on the *Chuci* tradition, one essential conceit turns on the luminous and optical condition of the bronze mirror and the analogy with the sun and moon. There is an anxiety that "gloom [may] dim the light . . . ensuing from this magic alloy." The speaker hopes that the "intrinsic purity" of the mirror "reflects the light; / Its radiance is like that of the sun and moon." Thereby the owner of the mirror may prove his loyalty.

Much of the same rhetoric is played out in the 722 moon mirror (fig. 6). A beast in the center, probably the legendary unicorn, devours another animal. The fray may refer to the "wrangling" of unicorns, which causes the eclipse of the sun or moon,[38] thereby "dimming the light."[39] The mirror-master does complain that "for generations, [the public] rarely know him well enough," which is tantamount to saying that his true worth is eclipsed by the public misunderstanding. But his mirror does "illuminate [his] gall and heart." Thereby his true worth ought to be seen clearly.

The mirror-master's self-advocacy aside, such a rhetoric built on the moon analogy serves a number of purposes. The essential conceit remains the mirror's illumination, hence, revelation, of one's "gall and heart," despite the temporary dimness caused by the eclipse of the sun and moon.

To reveal one's "liver and gall" is a common medieval trope suggesting a range of senses: heroic spirit, valor, open-heartedness, and devotion. Loyal officials typically spice their remonstrations to the emperor or their superiors with the pledge: "I now reveal my liver and gall on pain of death!"[40] Or "I display my liver-and-gall loyalty. Even though it may be my last day, it could be my day of rebirth."[41] Or "[I know] I am incurring your rage. However, I am not afraid of axes and knives [to be laid on my neck]; today I have to expose my liver and gall."[42] It is not surprising that such a conceit should accordingly be extended to the mirrors, a medium that, by its nature, easily provokes thoughts about its capacity for illumination and revelation. Qiao Lin, who obtained his *jinshi* (advanced degree) in the early 740s, wrote a rhapsody in praise of a mirror as a gift presented by Taiyuan, his native place, to the emperor: "The mirror that discerns beauty and ugliness has long lasted; those who are willing to bare their liver and gall are numerous."[43] Even with the coiling-dragon design, in view of its original function as gift to the emperor, the underlying conceit operates at the level of the dimness-and-clarity interplay, which in turn gives a structure to the rhetoric of anxiety about one's true worth languishing in recognized obscurity. Thus wrote Zhang Yue:

> The treasure mirror is like a bright moon,
> Derived from the Qin palace model.
> In relief are the paired coiling dragons,
> Clenching pearls facing each other.
> My concern is with your neglect,
> Leaving it confined to the cold interior of the box,
> Gathering gloom that shadows its brilliance,
> Its solitary heart clouded under dust.
> If only the silk sleeves may brush it,
> It will radiate on the jade table of toilet.[44]

Given its primary reference to the context in which officials pledge to bare their heart to the emperor, we can nevertheless imagine how easy it is for the same rhetoric to be extended to a suggestive use in interpersonal communications. Assuming the voice of a forlorn wife missing her husband in the distant frontier, the speaker in the "Sighing Over a Pure Mirror" by Meng Haoran (689–740) pours out thoughts on cue of a coiling-dragon mirror (fig. 2):

> I have a coiling-dragon mirror
> That radiates pure luminance even in daylight.
> Ever since it gathered dust on its surface,
> It appears as the fog-shrouded moon.
> In sorrow I occasionally look at it,
> Sitting by myself, I sigh over my white hair growing.
> Word has been sent to the man in the frontier:
> How long it has been since your departure.[45]

In many ways Meng's poem echoes Zhang Yue's rhetorical structure. The difference is that the poem displaces the court world to the woman's bedchamber. The poetic rhetoric here turns essentially on the interplay between luminance and overcast, both associated with the optical conditions of a bronze mirror. The "coiling-dragon mirror" may be of the

Fig. 7. Mirror with the Flight of Transcendence, 8th century, from a tomb at Hansenzhai, east of Xi'an, dated 745, Diam. 25.3 cm. The National Museum of History, Beijing. After *Zhongguo qingtongqi quanji,* 16: 141, pl. 138.

kind involving a pair of coiling dragons, thereby harmonizing with the poetic thought concerning a separated couple. Regardless of the variety of uses to which the mirror/moon analogy is put, the essential conceit as such in the first half of the eighth century focuses on soul-baring and a pledge of loyalty.

Bird's Flight and "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats"

In 748, the emperor's birthday was renamed Eternal-Heaven Festival (天長節). The change registers the deepening yearning for the transcendent Daoist realms of immortality, spurred in part by the emperor's own obsession. Some novel mirror designs in currency in the Tianbao period (742–755) reflect this new sensibility. Two designs are particularly worth noting. One is exemplified by the composition on the mirror unearthed from the Tang tomb 1 at Hansenzhai (fig. 7), which shows a pair of cloud-borne female figures clad in long robes and trailing scarves, suggestive of Daoist transcendents, flying by a mushroom-capped mountain of Daoist immortality toward the celestial realm at the top.[46] The other is represented by the bronze mirror from the tomb of Dou Chengjia at Dahuaishu dated 756,[47] identical with the mirror in the Carter collection (fig. 4).

The Hansenzhai mirror is particularly notable. Indeed, the appearance of fairies' flight on bronze mirrors has precedents, exemplified by the mirror from the tomb of Yan Wan, dated 724, at Yunxian, Hubei. On it, four fairies, each holding a glossy *lingzhi* (mushroom, *Ganoderma lucidum*) in hand, alternating with four birds, fly along one direction in a circular manner.[48] In comparison, the Hansenzhai mirror reduces the figures to a pair and sets them soaring toward a higher realm. It thus re-orients and polarizes the unified space of the Yunxian mirror into a binary opposition: earth and heaven. In doing so, the mirror frames the flight, and its corresponding heavenward aspiration, from the human point of view based in this world. One can imagine how the perception of the ethereal flight of birds may inspire an analogous viewing of graceful female figures, a trope often seized upon in medieval Chinese writing. In particular, the Daoist aspiration of "ascending to heaven in daylight" thrives on the analogy with the bird's flight.[49] The corpse of the Daoist paragon Wang Ziqiao is said to have turned into a bird flying away, to the amazement

Fig. 8. Mirror with Phoenix Dancing to the Tune Played on a Vertical Bamboo Flute by the Transcendent Wang Ziqiao, 8th century, Diam. 10.7 cm. Private collection, Springfield, Mass. After Umehara, *Tōkyō Taikan,* 2: 70a.

Fig. 9. Screen Panel with Lady in Bird-feathered Dress, 8th century, H. 136 cm. North section of the Shōsō-in, Tōdai-ji, Japan. After *Nihon bijutsu zenshū* (Tokyo: Gakushū Kenkyūjo, 1978), 5: 81.

of some eye-witnesses.[50] Another version of his hagiography paints Wang as playing a syrinx to call forth the phoenix; he is last seen riding a phoenix.[51] The imaginary scenario is apparently the subject of an eighth-century bronze mirror design (fig. 8). In any case, Wang's association with birds had been cemented in the public imagination by the seventh century. The legend gained such a wide currency in Tang times that a Daoist aficionado named Zhang Changzong, whom Wu Zetian took as her lover in 697, was recognized as a Wang Ziqiao "reincarnate."[52] Eulogies by court officials and guest scholars followed.[53] Bemused by this fanciful comparison, the aging female emperor obsessed with immortality then ordered Zhang to re-enact Wang Ziqiao by "putting on a bird-feathered coat, playing the syrinx, riding a wooden crane. With the music being played in the courtyard, it was as though Zijin [Ziqiao] were riding in the air."[54] The idea caught on. In 708, Wu Zetian's granddaughter Princess Anluo (d. 710) had made for herself a colorful "skirt of feathers from hundred birds," which was worth one hundred million cash. The design led to a faddish following by aristocrats and even plebeians, which in turn led to a frenzy of bird-hunting in mountain forests. Alarmed by the excess, the Xuanzong government eventually banned wearing such fanciful dresses.[55] This prohibition did not mean, however, that Emperor Xuanzong was averse to the symbolism associated with the feather-dress. He became increasingly indulgent in Daoist fantasies of immortality and had a "predilection for various techniques of longevity and levitation."[56] Such techniques would involve practices about which we can get glimpses from Daoist classics:

> Medicines of the highest type put the human body at ease and protract life so that people ascend and become gods in heaven, *soar up and down in the air,* and have all the spirits at their service. Their bodies *grow feathers and wings*. . . . The various (five) excrescences [mushrooms, lichens, etc.] may be nibbled, and cinnabar, jade flakes, laminar malachite, realgar, orpiment, mica, and brown hematite may be taken singly, and any of them can *enable a man to fly* and to enjoy Fullness of Life.[57]

No wonder that, upon a visit to a Daoist residence in the storied Mount Song, Li Bo wrote:

> My humble wife loves to ride a *luan*-bird,
> My lovely daughter is fond of flying on a crane.
> Together we visit the immortal,
> From now on, we shall refine the gold elixir.[58]

Additional evidence from Xuanzong's time provides an eloquent testimony to this fancy about bird-like flight. Bird feathers were initially overlaid on some painted screens, as exemplified by the paintings at the Shōsō-in (fig. 9). A transformation tableau at Dunhuang from the Tianbao period shows a flying apsaras with trailing scarves soaring into the sky (fig. 10).[59] Granted, such a figural motif goes back to the introduction of Buddhism to China. Yet it was ostensibly in the eighth century that such a soaring figure began to be integrated into a spatial illusionism that posits a bird's-eye view. The bird-like flight therefore corresponds to the bird's-eye view so that the implied viewer of the painting may experience acutely the dizzying sensation of flying high, overlooking the rooftops and vast land receding into the distance. Lest we forget, the flying figure in the tableau visually resonates with the soaring figures on the Hansenzhai mirror (fig. 7).[60]

One meaningful event occurred in 754 when the music department of the Xuanzong court changed the name of a musical tune set to a dance. The tune, "Brahman," originated in India and was presented to the Xuanzong court in the Kaiyuan period (713–741).[61] A few decades later, the title of the tune became "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats," a more Daoist-sounding name, apparently to cater to the emperor's taste. A description by Bo Juyi (772–846) provides some details:

Fig. 10. Flying Apsaras, detail of the transformation tableau of Amitayus Pure Land, wall painting on the north wall of cave 172, Dunhuang, first half of the 8th century. After *Zhongguo bihua quanji: Dunhuang,* 6: pl. 162.

> Wind blew upon the goddess's sleeves,
> billowing as they rose,
> and it still resembled her dancing
> "Coats of Feathers, Rainbow Skirts."[62]

Based on his observation of the "Feathered Coats" dance that had been continued in his own time, Bo was not in the position to see what the dance was like in Xuanzong's time. Matching this telltale title and Xuanzong's taste for "techniques of immortality and levitation" with the soaring figures on the Hansenzhai mirror from the Tianbao era, when the tune was renamed "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats," we can sense that Bo's description is not inaccurate.

Moon as the Conduit between Different Worlds

The bubble of prosperity and extravaganza burst in 755 when the An-Shi insurgence tore apart the Tang empire. It is significant that, for posterity, the remembrance or visualization of this catalytic historical event of gravest consequences hangs precariously on a sort of unbearable lightness of being—the rainbow skirts and feathered coats:

The high place of Mount Li's palace
rose up into blue clouds,
where the music of gods was whirled in winds
and everywhere was heard.

Song so slow and stately dances,
notes sustained on flutes and harps,
and all day long our lord and king
could never look his fill.
Then kettledrums from Yu-yang came
making the whole earth tremble
and shook apart those melodies,
"Coats of Feathers, Rainbow Skirts."[63]

The year 755 was indeed a watershed. The post-755 years were no longer the same. It was the morning after. The mood was much more subdued. Emperor Suzong, the postrebellion ruler, designated his birthday,

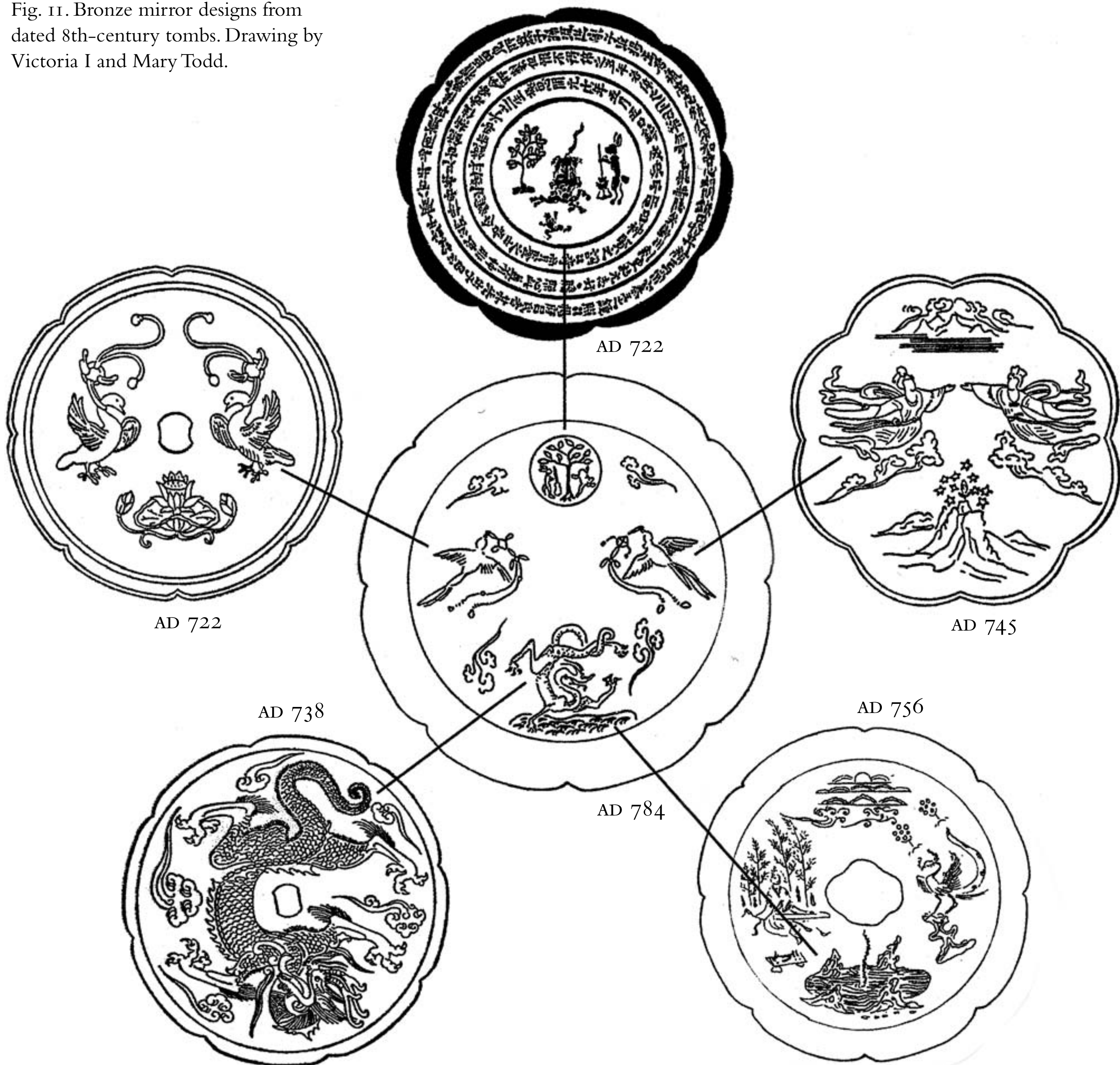

Fig. 11. Bronze mirror designs from dated 8th-century tombs. Drawing by Victoria I and Mary Todd.

the third of the ninth month, as the annual Festival of Leveled Heaven and Accomplished Earth. The Thousand-Autumn Festival was dropped from the calendar and its celebration discontinued. However, on the night of the full moon of the year, the fifteenth of the eighth month, the moon was looked at with a complex feeling.[64] It hung in the sky as a relic or celestial eyewitness to a past that was still fresh in the minds of many, yet irrevocably lost:

> Man of today does not see the moon of old,
> Yet the moon of today did shine on the men of old.
> People of past and present are like flowing streams,
> Yet they look at the moon all the same.[65]

The full mid autumn moon came to be associated with the Xuanzong years. Before the Kaiyuan period, there was a surprising collective nonchalance about the mid autumn moon. The annual Thousand-Autumn Festival of the Kaiyuan period drew public attention to it. In the post-755 period, the mid autumn moon became a memento of the Kaiyuan festivities, and by extension, prosperity and stability; it also reminded them of their irretrievable loss and absence in the landscape. It is therefore notable, as Sun Ji points out, that since the mid Tang era there was a dramatic increase in the number of poems inspired by the mid autumn moon.[66]

It was in this context that a new mirror design, the flight-to-the-moon type, appeared around 780 (fig. 1).[67] Encompassing various motifs from the designs of the preceding decades, the reconfigured new composition is suggestive (fig. 11). The nexus of new significance merging out of it is larger than the sum total of its parts. It formalizes the complex feelings attending the gaze at the moon in the second half of the eighth century by pressing into service various evocative motifs resonant with strands of visual and cultural memory and cognitive values. The coiling dragon, no doubt, recalls the mirror with the identical dragon motif (fig. 2). By the mid Tang, its association with Emperor Xuanzong and the High Tang had been cemented, as the coiling-dragon mirror began to be referred to as the "son-of-heaven mirror."[68] This alone would have set the memory rolling. Its association with Xuanzong's times is further reinforced by the paired ribbon-clenching birds, another telltale sign that harks back to the type of flower-and-bird mirror of the Kaiyuan years (fig. 4) and Xuanzong's Thousand-Autumn Festival associated with it. The moon at the top recalls the moonscape design that had appeared in the 720s (fig. 6). All three elements—dragon, paired birds, the moon—therefore combine to evoke the Kaiyuan mood, in particular, the moon-gazing in the annual Thousand-Autumn Festival (fig. 11).

It is, however, a moon of the old, seen in the distance and somewhat beyond reach; or it is simply quite a stretch to get there. Much of the force of the design can be brought out in relief once we compare it with the Tianbao period mirrors that anticipate this design. Two mirrors from the Dou Chengjia tomb, dated 756, are particularly revealing. One contains a pair of ribbon-clenching phoenixes, as shown on its twin at the Carter collection (fig. 4), the other a phoenix dancing to the tune of the zither played by a recluse, again, almost identical to a mirror in the Carter collection (fig. 12). If we lift the paired birds from figure 4 and

the pond from figure 12 and put them together in a new composition, we would have the basic elements of the flight-to-the-moon design (figs. 1, 11). Yet the bird in figure 12 does not seem to be soaring, just as the birds in figure 4 do not convey the idea of movement, in spite of the two intervening hoofed animals running to the right. For the momentum of skyward flight, we need to turn to the Hansenzhai mirror (fig. 7), which forcefully conveys that effect. Before this compositional innovation, mirror design contained or presupposed a virtual void, either allowing for a circular figural movement, in the case of symmetrically paired birds (fig. 4), or presenting a neutral background space with little indication of perspective or directional movement. The Hansenzhai mirror reorientates this imaginary space. It polarizes the hitherto unified void into a binary opposition between heaven and earth. In doing so, it anchors its beholder's point of view on earth, thereby making the cloud-capped mountains at the top a realm of transcendent otherness, often kept out of reach, something to be aspired for. In other words, the design articulates a yearning for what lies beyond the human reach. In the case of the Hansenzhai mirror, it is the fairyland of immortality.

However, nothing in the design of the Hansenzhai mirror explicitly evokes the moon. The mirror with the zither player evokes the moon through a visual allusion. The pond is in fact intended to represent the moon, as the inscription on the mirror with an identical design (fig. 12) suggests: "the yin and yang are paired; the sun and moon frequently meet." Retaining the pond while adding a dragon, the flight-to-the-moon mirror makes the moonscape at the top the center of gravity and focus of attention. It occupies the point where the flight routes of the paired birds converge. Keeping in mind Xuanzong's world of the Thousand-Autumn Festival, which all the constituent motifs in the composition recall, it is

Fig. 12. Mirror with a Tortoise Knob, a Musician [a zither-playing transcendent] and a Phoenix, 8th century, Diam. 21.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.369.

hard not to see the lunar landscape at the top as evocative of the moon that had once shone on Xuanzong's land and now had receded into distance. To appreciate the perception of the moon as a bridge between two temporal worlds, we need to align ourselves with the medieval mental structure articulated most succinctly by the eighth-century poet Li Bo: "the moon of today did shine on the men of old. / People of past and present . . . look at the moon all the same."[69] In other words, we look at the same moon that once was looked at by people of a vanished world and time. The moon links the past to the present; since that past is no more, the moon, in fact, holds the possibility of registering or retaining the reflected images of that vanished past in its reflective surface, a seemingly blank disc. To look at the moon is to pry open the mystery of the past and to communicate with it. The flight-to-the-moon mirror design registers that aspiration.

Zhang Hui, who obtained his jinshi degree in 794, provides us with the most eloquent testimony to the period perception of the flight-to-the-moon mirror in his "Rhapsody on the Thousand-Autumn Mirror." The object of his eulogy, hence the cue for the rhapsody, is exactly this type of mirror.[70] His quasi-reminiscence of the Thousand-Autumn Festival (he never experienced it himself) recapitulates what we already know from other sources about the Kaiyuan circumstances out of which the mirror designs of coiling dragons and magpies arose. What is most remarkable about his writing on the subject is that throughout the rhapsody he manages to sound as if he were an eyewitness to the events and circumstances of the Kaiyuan era in which he immerses himself. In other words, he resolutely casts the flight-to-the-moon in the past tense.

Moon and Pond

This visual rhetoric is partly reinforced by the dragon pond. On the zither-player mirror, the pond, representing the moon as opposed to the sun above, fits into the yin-yang scheme of the design. By retaining the pond in the same position, the flight-to-the-moon design appears to disregard the familiar vertical yin-yang alignment (that is, sun/yang above and moon/yin below). Occupying both the top and bottom are images evocative of the moon, one explicitly, the other indirectly. The underlying conception is that at the top is the moon whose reflection is captured in the earthly pond at the bottom. More specifically, the design explicitly and self-consciously refers to the Kaiyuan mirror. The dragon and pond, for instance, allude to the tale of the legendary coiling-dragon mirror produced in Yangzhou in the Kaiyuan years. In Bo Juyi's time, such a mirror was known as the "son-of-heaven mirror" or "multi-refined mirror" (*bailianjing*). Bo speaks of the smelting of the mirror on a boat in the river, the mirror turning into an "autumn pool," and the "heavenward-flying dragon on its back."[71]

In another sense, the top sphere is the distant other realm, the bottom pond is its continuation into the here and now, at once doubling or recapitulating the self-referential sense of the mirror/moon and figuring something of the mind's eye. "[The mirror] is like the clear pool, peerless," says Zhang Hui, "like the moon cast in the jade pond." He then disputes the well-known line from the *Classic of Poetry*—"my mind is unlike the mirror"—to reinforce the analogy that his mind is like the mirror: "privately I liken myself to the presence at the pond. If the image of the old can be reached, it is nearly obtained right here on the spot."[72]

In other words, through the pond, a surrogate of his mind's eye, the ideal image of the past can be glimpsed, which is to say that the moon is finally acknowledged to be a distant otherness.

While such a design speaks to the post-755 nostalgia for the good old days of the Xuanzong years, it may, in a more general way, simply articulate and reinforce the distant otherness of the moon, either of another time or space, or both, which casts its shadow on the here and now, figured in the pond as the ready receptacle of the moonlight whose source lies far beyond human reach. The flight to the moon then articulates a yearning toward what is normally beyond the reach.

The moon above and the pond below thus form a mirroring structure. Tang poets appear to take particular delight in savoring at once the moon and its reflected image captured on the surface of a pond, either over a calm water or a pattern of quivering ripples resulting from the water surface being gently ruffled by the evening zephyr. Thus wrote Zhang Zirong, an eighth-century poet:

> One peeps into the clear pond on a cool night,
> The deep void contains the water moon of autumn.
> When at the full disc, it is as if the jade mirror had sunken,
> As a silvery crescent, half of the white-soul has fallen.
> Producing ripples, the toad's shadow gently rocks,
> Across the shoal, the caltrop flowers sail.
> . . .
> If only one could move the thoughts of thousand leagues afar,
> To illuminate the sadness of the Chu land here and now.[73]

The vertical alignment of the moon and the pond therefore visualizes the brute fact of disjuncture between the two worlds, spatial and temporal. The horizontally paired birds flying to the moon embody the soaring thoughts turning toward and yearning for the remote otherness—either other places or times. As such, the composition maps out a poetic conceit long in existence since the sixth century, if not earlier: "My fair

Fig. 13. Mirror with Chang'e, Hare, and Toad in the Moon, 8th century, Diam. 14.7 cm. After Umehara, *Tōkyō Taikan,* 2: 72b.

one is far away, all news is cut off; / Although a thousand leagues apart, we share the same moon."[74]

Such a conceit gained wide currency in the eighth century, famously intoned by Zhang Jiuling (673–740) in "Looking at the Moon, My Thoughts Turn Afar:"

> The bright moon rises from the sea;
> Distant lands apart share this moment.
> Resentful of the long, long darkness, the lovers
> Sit up the whole night, thinking of each other.[75]

In such a scenario when the sea is evoked, the poet in fact often takes cues from a pond that is imagined as—and made to stand for—the "sea."[76] In other words, the pond here on the flight-to-the-moon mirror could just as well be envisioned as the sea. The vastness of the sea spatializes the physical separateness of the lovers in distant lands apart from each other, corresponding to the yawning gap between the moon and the pond, bridged only by an imaginary union or leap of faith.

Chang'e on the Moon and Female Voice

The flight-to-the-moon scenario thus envisioned naturally takes the soaring imagination to a close-up view of the lunar landscape itself, which had been pictured in bronze mirror design before 722. However, the overtone of the moonscape had changed in the second half of the eighth century. The hare and the toad on the 722 mirror (fig. 6), as we recall, are the prime inhabitants of the moonscape, alluding to the "liver and gall." Later, some time before 784,[77] a new iconography of the lunar landscape came into being. Added to the moon scene is Chang'e, wife of Yi the Archer who was a mythological demigod whose superhuman feats include shooting down with his corded arrows the ten suns that scorched grains and plants in primordial times.[78] Yi's lonely wife, neglected by her busy husband, steals his elixir of immortality. On the strength of the drug, she flies to the moon where she turns into a toad, the Moon Spirit.[79] In one mirror design based on this tale (fig. 13), Chang'e is shown flying in midair, about to land on the moon. She holds a plaque on which is inscribed "daji" (great auspiciousness). Apparently, the allusion is to one version of the tale in which Chang'e seeks divination from Youhuang and is told: "Auspiciousness. The fluttering returning young woman (*pianpian guimei*) alone shall head toward the west. The day may be dim; but panic not. Great prosperity soon follows."[80] The scene is faithfully conveyed through the design.[81] Most of the lunar mirrors of this type place the cassia tree in the center, thereby accenting the sense of *gui* (returning).

The new composition of the lunar landscape as such is indeed intended to give force to the cheerful mood of return, which sublimates the desire for reunion with the loved one in a time of frequent dislocations and separations. Moreover, installing Chang'e into the lunar landscape adds a distinct feminine presence, mood, and sensibility to the picture. It spoke to a period sentiment in a time of a social uprootedness and family disunion. Poets were increasingly given to the rhetorical device of speaking from a woman's point of view, complaining about the loneliness, neglect, and separation from her husband sent to the cold and barren northern frontier to fight the "barbarians." In this context, they often evoked the mirror and the moon.

Fig. 14. Attributed to Emperor Huizong (r. 1101–25; d. 1135), *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk,* early 12th-century copy of an 8th-century painting, handscroll, ink, color, and gold on silk, L. 145.3 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Chinese and Japanese Special Fund 12.886.

Moon and Frontier: A Spatial Displacement

In the Tang imagination, the moonscape is a congruence and conflation of two domains. It is both the crystalline sphere above in the sky and in the northern frontier—the far-flung western region and foreign countries farther beyond, out there. The conflation is made possible because the western region is perceived as the abode of the moon. Somewhere is the "moon grotto." Moreover, the moon and the moon grotto converge in the realm of spatial imagination and perception. Both places were perceived to be chilly and unfathomable, fraught with infinite possibilities, at once frightening and titillating. Xuanzong's flight-to-the-moon tales, as cited below, would have us believe that the dance tune "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats" comes from the moon. Yet historical reality shows otherwise, and the re-allocation of a tune from its western region origin to the moon makes perfect sense to us because they were essentially interchangeable in the Tang imagination. It is not surprising, therefore, that we find images of foreigners from the western regions adorning the mirror design; to the Tang imagination, they were inhabitants of the moon grottoes.

This poetic logic helps us understand a well-known twelfth-century copy of an eighth-century painting at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 14).[82] The women are seen preparing newly woven silk to be sent to their husbands encamped at the northern frontier. What can be easily missed is the poetic rhetoric of this painting. It evokes an understated mood of chilliness, hinted at by the brazier that emanates warmth, only to accentuate the surrounding coldness. It is the chill and desolation associated with the moon, evoked by the round silk fan, that is often likened to the moon and mirror. More explicitly, the women's pounding the silk with long rods ostensibly recalls the hare on the moon pounding away with his pestle. This is not to say that the women are the hares, but they are in a moon-like world, like Chang'e, living in cold and loneliness, whose life is measured away by the monotonous thumping of the pestle. Their thoughts are of course turned toward their husbands encamped at the cold frontier. This is another way of evoking the moon, considering the point made earlier about the moon/frontier conflation. This lyrical logic is affirmed *via negativa* by a twelfth-century painting that shows a group of near-naked demons preparing silk in hell (fig. 15), a place known for its chilly desolation. As a sort of parody on the *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk,* it says much about the latter's understated forlorn mood.

Emperor Minghuang [Xuanzong] Visiting the Moon Palace

The conflation of the moon and western frontier is explicitly played out in the popular tales about Xuanzong's spiritual journey. In the early years of the Kaiyuan era, so one tale goes, the emperor was looking at the moon and watching the lantern display in the capital city. The magician Ye Fashan remarked to him that, much as the lantern show in the capital city was spectacular, the one at the Western Liang prefecture was just as marvelous. "Is there any way I may go and see it?" asked the emperor. "That should be easy," the Daoist master replied. He then requested that the emperor close his eyes. Soon they were cloud-borne, and after a while they found themselves in Liangzhou where Xuanzong indeed had a feast for his eye. The same text goes on to relate how the same Daoist master, using the same technique, took Xuanzong to the lunar palace where the emperor saw the celestial fairies and divine maidens dancing to the tune of "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats."[83] Similar tales involve another Daoist master named Luo Gongyuan:

> During the Kaiyuan period, [it was customary] to gaze at the night [sky] in mid Autumn. As Xuanzong was savoring the moon in the inner palace, Gongyuan asked: "Does Your Majesty wish to go into the moon to take a look?" He then tossed his staff into the sky, which morphed into a big silvery bridge. [Luo Gongyuan] invited Xuanzong to ascend. Having traveled for about ten leagues, they were dazzled by some luminance and greeted by a chill. They found themselves in front of the gate of a big city. This, said Gongyuan, is the Moon Palace. They saw fairy ladies in the hundreds, all clad in white loose-fitting silk dress, dancing in a spacious court. "What is this tune?" asked Xuanzong. "It is the "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats" came the reply.[84]

Fig. 15. Zhou Jichang, *Five [Hundred] Arhats*, Southern Song dynasty, c. 1178, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, H. 112.8 cm. Daitoku-ji, Kyoto. After Bunkachō, ed., *Kokuhō jūyō bunkazai taizen* [Comprehensive collection of important cultural properties and national treasures] (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1997–2000).

Xuanzong memorized the tune. Upon returning to his earthly palace, he had it replayed and the dance re-enacted. It comes as no surprise that Xuanzong is cast as the protagonist of such tales, and that "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats" remains its main focus. After all, it was the Kaiyuan moon, or rather, the Kaiyuan experience of the moon and its festival mood epitomized by the tune that was held in the heart by the heir to that ideal or idealized era.

The fictive scene is faithfully represented on a Jin mirror (fig. 16). Here we see some of the familiar trappings we have encountered so far: the dragon,[85] the cassia tree, the hare, the toad, and so forth. However, new significant details are added in accordance with the tales of Xuanzong's visit to the lunar palace: the bridge conjured up by the Daoist master and the cloud-born female figures, who are likely to represent the "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats" tune.[86]

Xuanzong's landing on the moon signals a domestication of the lunar landscape by the medieval Chinese imagination. The moonscape started on Tang mirrors as a symbolic and rhetorical analogy ("liver and gall") for one's transparent integrity and masculine ostentation in service of public functions and social courtesies. It evolved into a lunar realm as a distant otherness, evoking a different time and space. Then it was charged with a subtle feminine sensibility, articulating private moods and sentiments of nostalgia, longing, and self-pity. Finally, with Xuanzong acting as the figure of identification in the imaginative landing on the moon, the eerie otherness was internalized into a familiar landscape. The domestication of the lunar landscape, as epitomized on the Jin mirror (fig. 16), demystifies the eerie otherness of the moon, and the pathos of the yearning for that which is beyond the reach, an emotional force captured in the flight-to-the-moon mirror. However, the mirror bearing Xuanzong's visit to the Moon Palace opens up a floodgate of another sort. It was to become a setting for endless dramatic remakes of Xuanzong's dream journey in search of his lost lover, Lady Yang Guifei, often closely associated with "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats" in the collective imagination. In other words, the moonscape eventually became a fixture in the Chinese imagination. Throughout, Xuanzong played a key role, in both real historical settings and fictive scenarios, in a process registered in mirrors ranging from the coiling-dragon mirror to the flight-to-the-moon mirror. To return where we began: one can indeed hold a "mirror up to nature, to show . . . the very age and body of the time his form and pressure," provided that we have a way with the "form and pressure."

Fig. 16. Mirror with Lunar Palace, Jin dynasty (1115–1234), Diam. 21.3 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee, 1995.375.

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark,* 3.2.19–20.

2. See Eugene Y. Wang, "Mirror, Death, and Rhetoric: Reading Later Han Chinese Bronze Artifacts," *Art Bulletin* 76, no. 3 (1994), 511–34.

3. In fact, as shown below, contrary to our modern intuition, the toad, for all the slimy impression it gives, was considered a symbol of yang, instead of yin.

4. Sun Ji observes quite aptly that before the Kaiyuan era, poets do not seem to care that much about the moon. Beginning in the Kaiyuan period, the poetic interest in the moon increased dramatically. See Sun Ji, "Zhongqiujie, qianqiujing, yuegongjing," in Yang Hong and Sun Ji, *Xunchang de jingzhi* [The refinement of the ordinary] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 33.

5. A coiling-dragon mirror was found in the tomb of Li Jingyou at Xingyuan of Yanshi, Henan Province. The tomb is dated 738. See "Six dated Tang tombs at the Xingyuan village, Yanshi, Henan," *Kaogu,* no. 5 (1986). Xu Diankui, "Tangjing fenqi de kaoguxue tantao" [Periodization of Tang mirrors: an archaeological perspective], *Kaogu Xuebao,* no. 3 (1994), 321–22. A flight-to-the-moon mirror was found in the tomb of Zheng Xun, also located in Xingyuan, Yanshi. The tomb is dated 778. See Xu, "Tangjing fenqi," 316. Sun Ji dates the flight-to-the-moon mirror to the Kaiyuan era on the basis of a line from Zhang Hui, *Rhapsody on the Thousand-Autumn Mirror:* "Carved are dragons; and chiseled are the birds." The dating is questionable. Zhang Hui was indeed writing about the flight-to-the-moon mirror, as evidenced in other details mentioned in his text, and the mirror apparently makes references to the Thousand-Autumn Festival of the Kaiyuan era. However, since Zhang obtained his jinshi degree in 794, what he wrote about the Kaiyuan era was largely reconstructive and imaginary. Further, Zhang enumerates the events associated with the Thousand-Autumn Festival. His description of the mirror designs is certainly not limited to one composition. The couplet cited above pertains to the variety of designs, even though the motifs of dragon and birds appear on the same design of the type of the mirror Zhang saw that had come into currency in the second half of the eighth century, as evidenced in the dated tomb in which it was found. See Sun, "Zhongqiujie," 31.

6. Li Fang, ed., *Taiping guangji* [Extensive records of the Taiping era] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 231: 1771–772. The version contained in *Taiping guangji* comes from *Yiwen ji* [Collection of abnormal tales]. It dates the events to the third year (744) and seventh year (748) of the Tianbao reign. Through a careful study of these texts and the related circumstances, Li Jianguo has pointed out that the dates should be the third (715) and seventh (719) year of the Kaiyuan reign. See Li Jianguo, *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* [Annotated catalogue of anomaly accounts and romances of the Tang and Five Dynasties] (Tianjin: Naikai daxue chubanshe, 1993), 1: 151–53.

7. Zheng Chuhui, *Minghuang zalu* [Miscellaneous records of Minghuang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 27.

8. The *Old Tang History* speaks of an "excessive drought that has lasted quite long"; *Jiu Tang shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 8: 180. The *New Tang History* mentions that the emperor "sought refuge from the drought, cut down court entertainment and food," and "worried about the condition of the prisoners due to the drought" in 718 and 719; *Xin Tang shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 5: 126–27.

9. Zhang Yue, "Fenghe shengzhi xiyu fu," in *Quan Tang wen* [Complete Tang prose], ed. Dong Gao [1740–1818] et al. (Shanghai: Guji, 1990), 221: 983; "He qiyu ganying biao," in ibid., 23: 993; "Fengchi Chiditan qiyuwen," in ibid., 233: 1040–41.

10. See *Bawei zhaolong miaojing*, in *Daozang* [Daoist canon] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1987), 6: 237–45; *Shuoqing yulongwang jing,* in *Daozang,* 6: 245–46; *Chishu yujue miaojing,* in *Daozang,* 6: 187.

11. The worry is particularly well-founded since Chinese architecture is largely built of wood, and therefore prone to fire.

12. *Quan Tang wen,* 277: 1241–442.

13. Zhang Yue, "Qing bayue wuri wei Qianqiujie biao," in ibid., 223: 994; Xuanzong, "Da bailiao qingyi bayue wuri wei qianqiujie shouzhao," in ibid., 30: 143. The presentation of the "bronze mirror with ribbons" for the Thousand-Autumn Festival is also mentioned in Liu Su, *Sui Tang jiahua* [Illustrious tales of Sui and Tang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 3: 50.

14. On his birthday in the twelfth month of 646, Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649), for instance, first thought of his deceased parents. He lamented the fact that he could no longer attend to them. With that, he was in tears. So were the ministers. Wang Xinruo et al., comp. *Cefu yuangui* [Models from literature] (Hongkong: Zhonghua, 1960), 27: 296. Naba Toshisada, *Tōdai shakai bunka shi kenkyū* [Studies in social and cultural history of Tang] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1974), 28–33.

15. Zheng, *Minghuang zalu,* 45. Yang Hong, "Mawu yu wuma" [Horse dance and dancing the horse] in Yang and Sun, *Xunchang de jingzhi,* 35–38.

16. *Quan Tang shi* [Complete Tang poetry] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 3: 41.

17. *Jiu Tang shu,* 8: 192. Zhang Yue, "Fenghe shengzhi qianqiujie," in *Quan Tang shi,* 87: 943.

18. *Jiu Tang shu,* 8: 195.

19. Yan Juanying [Yen Chuan-ying] points out that this paired-birds design both harks back to the Han tradition and takes cues from textiles of the western region. See Yan Juanying, "Tangdai tongjing wenshi zhi neirong yu fengge" [Style and content of the decorative patterns of bronze mirrors of the Tang dynasty], *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiushuo jikan* 60, no. 2 (1989), 309. See also Xu, "Tangjing fenqi," 314–17.

20. Zhang Yanyuan notes, "The design on brocades of pairs of pheasants facing one another, fighting rams, soaring phoenixes, and wandering dragons that have been in the Inner Storehouse since the time of Gaozu (618–627) and Taizong (627–650) were originated by Dou Shilun and are prepared to this day." Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji* [Record of famous paintings through the dynasties], annot. Yu Jianhua (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu, 1964), 10: 196; translation based on William B. Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), 2: 271, with slight modifications. Acker's translation omits "wandering dragon."

21. *Tang huiyao* [Important documents of the Tang], comp. Wang Pu (Shanghai: Guji, 1991), 32: 680. Yan, "Tangdai tongjing," 309.

22. *Song shu* [History of the Song] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 18: 505. *Sui shu* [History of the Sui] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 12: 258. *Jiu Tang shu,* 45: 1944–445. *Tongdian* [Encyclopedic history of institutions], comp. Du You (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), 63: 1751.

23. *Quan Tang shi,* 3: 32. All three poems written by Xuanzong in connection with the Thousand-Autumn Festival invariably note the "ribbon." See ibid., 3: 32, 3: 38, and 3: 41.

24. Xi Yu, "Fenghe chici Gongzu jing," in ibid., 111: 1142.

25. Sima Guang, *Zizhi Tongjian* [Comprehensive mirror for aid in government] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1956), 214: 6821.

26. Xu Hao, "Tang Shangshu youchengxiang zhongshuling Zhang Gong shendaobei," in *Quan Tang wen,* 440: 1987. *Zizhi Tongjian,* 214: 6840.

27. "Tangdai Zhang Jiuling mu fajue jianbao" [Excavation report of the tomb of Zhang Jiuling of Tang dynasty], *Wenwu,* no. 6 (1961), 45–51. Had it not been for the transmission of Zhang's writing, however, we would have no idea how he may have seized upon the Thousand-Autumn bronze mirror as a rhetorical cue and to remonstrate with the emperor and lodge a resounding point.

28. The allusion is to Tian Chang, initially bearing the name of Chen Heng, who hailed from the state of Chen but defected to Qi ruled by the Jiang clan. Tian killed Jianggong, king of Qi, and usurped the throne in 481 BC.

29. A transcription of the inscription appears in Liu Yongming, *Han Tang jinianjing tulu* [Illustrated catalogue of dated mirrors of Han and Tang periods], 129; *Zhonghua wuqiannian wenwu jikan—tongjing pian* [Compendium of cultural relics of China of five thousand years—bronze volumes] (Taibei: Zhonghua wuqiannian wenwu jikan bianji weiyuanhui, 1993), 2: 288. Liu's transcription is more accurate.

30. *Taiping guangji,* 231: 1771.

31. Liu Xin, *Xijing zaji,* in *Han Wei Liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan* [Comprehensive collection of *biji* and stories from the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties periods] (Shanghai: Guji, 1999), 3: 97. Ju-hsi Chou, *Circles of Reflection: The Carter Collection of Chinese Bronze Mirrors* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2000), 63.

32. *Zizhi Tongjian,* 204: 6446.

33. Ibid., 214: 6805.

34. *Taishang jiuyao xinyin miaojing*, in *Daozang,* 4: 312. Translation from Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: T'ang Approaches to the Stars* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 179. A Han author's exposition is also illuminating: "What are the hare and toad in the moon for? The moon is of yin nature; the toad, yang. Both the toad and the hare combine to illuminate the moon so that the latter's yin submits to the yang." Liu Xiang, *Wujing tongyi*, cited from Wu Shu, *Shileifu zhu* [Annotated *Shileifu*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 1: 18.

35. Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* 62–63, no. 50. I have made a modification of Chou's translation mainly to show the original use of the term "gall" in the inscription. Chou (63 n. 1) takes care to acknowledge that he "took the liberty of translating the word "dan" (gall) as "hidden desires."

36. Ibid., 63.

37. See *Changsha fajue baogao* [Excavation report from Changsha] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1957), 116: 68.3. One version of the inscription was recorded by Nicholaas Witsen (1641–1717), a Dutch scholar and diplomat, in his *Noord en Oost Tartaryen* (Amsterdam: privately printed, 1692), 337–38. The inscription has captured the imagination of nearly all scholars interested in bronze mirrors, including Luo Zhenyu, Liang Shangchun, B. Karlgren, W. P. Yetts, and Lien-sheng Yang. The version cited here is a composite text translated by W. P. Yetts and based on two inscriptions listed by Karlgren as nos. 83 and 84. See B. Karlgren, "Early Chinese Mirror Inscriptions," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities,* no. 6 (1934), 25; W. P. Yetts, "Two Chinese Mirrors," *Burlington Magazine* 74 (1939), 23–24; Lien-sheng Yang, "An Inscribed Han Mirror Discovered in Siberia," *T'oung Pao* 42 (1962), 334; Wang, "Mirror, Death, and Rhetoric," 529.

38. "The Treatise on the Patterns of Heaven" in *Huainanzi* states: "When the burning-mirror sees the sun, / It ignites tinder and produces fire. / When the square receptacle sees the moon, / It moistens and produces water. . . . When *qilins* wrangle, the sun or moon is eclipsed." *Huainan honglie jijie* [Huainan texts and commentaries], comp. Liu Wendian (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989), 3: 81–83; trans. John Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 65. Yang Jiong, a seventh-century author, wrote: "And as for the moon. . . . Faced by a mirror basin, it soaks it with shining water. . . . And when it makes the unicorns battle the dark tiger takes up a covert post." *Quan Tang wen,* 190: 845b; trans. from Schafer, *Pacing the Void,* 208.

39. A commentator on the "Spring Office" chapter of *Zhouli* states: "dimness, the result of the eclipse of the sun and moon." *Shileifu zhu,* 1: 12.

40. *Jin shu* [History of the Jin] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974), 10: 2622.

41. *Chen shu* [History of the Chen] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1972), 19: 260; *Nan shi* [History of the Southern dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975), 69: 1682.

42. *Bei shi* [History of the northern dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974), 24: 889.

43. *Quan Tang wen,* 356: 1598.

44. Zhang Yue, "Mirror," in *Quan Tang shi,* 86: 936–37.

45. *Quan Tang shi,* 159: 1629.

46. Xu, "Tangjing fenqi," 318–19; Yan, "Tangdai dongjing," 139.

47. The mirror is currently kept at the Henan Team no. 2 of the Institute of Archaeology of Academy of Social Science. See Xu, "Tangjing fenqi," 309, 320.

48. "Hubei Yunxian Tang Li Hui Yan Wan mu fajue jianbao" [Excavation report of the Tang-period tombs of Li Hui and Yan Wan at Yunxian, Hubei], *Wenwu,* no. 8 (1987). Cited from Xu, "Tangjing fenqi," 318.

49. See, for instance, *Baiyu hehe lingfei yufu,* in *Daozang,* 2: 167–69. On the immortals and their relationship with birds, see Maxime Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan* (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988).

50. Gan Bao, *Soushen ji,* in *Han Wei Liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan,* 1: 280. There are indeed other, different versions of Gan Bao's ascension to transcendence.

51. Zhang Junfang, comp., *Yunji qiqian* [Seven bamboo tablets from a cloudy satchel], annot. Jiang Lisheng (Beijing: Huaxia, 1996), 85: 525.

52. *Jiu Tang shu,* 183: 4734.

53. Ibid., 4735. Liu, *Sui Tang jiahua,* 3: 39. Zhang Zhu, *Chaoye qianzai* [Comprehensive record of stories from in and outside the court] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979), 5: 125. A surviving poem by Cui Rong on this subject is found in *Quan Tang shi,* 68: 767.

54. *Jiu Tang shu,* 78: 2706.

55. Zhang, *Chaoye qianzai,* 3: 71. *Zizhi Tongjian,* 209: 6624.

56. *Jiu Tang shu,* 24: 934. For an excellent study of Daoism under Xuanzong's reign, see Victor Xiong, "Ritual Innovations and Taoism Under Tang Xuangzong," *T'oung Pao* 82 (1996), 258–316. The relevant passage cited has been translated in Xiong, "Ritual Innovations," 316.

57. Ge Hong, *Baopuzi* in *Zhuzi jicheng* [Collection of distinguished philosophical works] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1996), 8: 11.44. Translation in James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u tzu)* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 177. Italics mine.

58. Li Bo, "Ti Songshan yiren Yuan Danqiu shanju," in *Quan Tang shi,* 184: 1875.

59. Dunhuang scholars date cave 172 to the Tianbao period. See Shi Weixiang, "Introduction," in *Zhongguo bihua quanji: Dunhuang* [Compendium of wall paintings of China: Dunhuang], ed. Duan Wenjie et al. (Tianjin: Renmin meishu, 1989), 6: 5.

60. This is also noted by Yan, "Tangdai tongjing," 307.

61. *Tang huiyao,* 33: 720. For a study of the circumstances surrounding the tune, see Chen Yinke, *Yuan Bo shi jian zhenggao* [Notes on poetry of Yuan Zhen and Bo Juyi], (Shanghai: Guji, 1978), 26–30; Fang Shiming, "Nishang yuyi chuanzhi yuegong de shenhua xinjie" [New interpretation of the folklore concerning the moon as the originating place of the "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats") *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* [Papers on Chinese literature and history], ed. Qian Bocheng (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), no. 48, 47–56.

62. Bo Juyi, "Song of Lasting Pain," translation from Stephen Owen, *The Norton Anthology of Chinese Literature* (New York/London: Norton, 1996), 446.

63. Owen, *Norton Anthology of Chinese Literature,* 443.

64. Sun Ji, "Zhongqiujie," 33.

65. Li Bo, "Bajiu wenyue" [Questioning the moon with wine cup in hand], in *Quan Tang shi,* 179: 1827.

66. Sun, "Zhongqiujie," 33.

67. A bronze mirror with the design of paired phoenixes flying to the moon and a dragon at bottom is found in a tomb dated to 784. See Xu, "Tangjing fenqi," 316. Sun Ji considers that the flight-to-the-moon type first appeared in the Kaiyuan years, occasioned by the Thousand-Autumn Festival. The evidence he draws on is the line from Zhang Hui's *Rhapsody on Thousand-Autumn Mirrors*: "carved dragon and smelted magpies." The textual description does not necessarily indicate that these motifs appear in the same composition, nor is the moon-within-mirror motif part of the picture here, as it appears in the flight-to-the-moon design. Zhang Hui's description does harmonize with mirrors excavated from the Tang tombs, if we match it with the simple design of paired magpies or other birds. The earliest example comes from the tomb of Lu at Yanshi, dated 722. See Xu, "Tangjing fenqi," 316.

68. Bo Juyi, "Bailianjing," in *Quan Tang shi,* 427: 4700.

69. Li Bo, "Bajiu wenyue," in *Quan Tang shi,* 179: 1827

70. This is evident in his own note that the rhapsody is based on the rhyme "the magpies fly toward the moon; the coiling dragon appears as if reflected in the pond." Zhang Hui, "Qianqiujing fu" [Rhapsody on the thousand-autumn mirror], in *Quan Tang wen,* 615: 2750.

71. Bo Juyi, "Bailianjing," in *Quan Tang shi,* 427.4700.

72. Zhang, "Qianqiujing fu," in *Quan Tang wen,* 615: 2750.

73. Zhang Zirong (active first half of 8th century), "Bichi wang qiuyue," in *Quan Tang shi,* 116: 1177.

74. Xie Zhuang, "Yue fu" [Rhapsody on the Moon], in *Wenxuan,* comp. Xiao Tong (Shanghai: Guji, 1886), 13: 602. From *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature,* trans. David R. Knechtges (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3: 39.

75. Zhang Jiuling, "Wangyue huaiyuan," in *Quan Tang shi,* 48: 591.

76. In two poems respectively by Ye Jiliang and Li Shangyin (c. 813–c. 858), with an identical or shared title ("Composed on the moon illuminating the pond"), apparently arising from one and same occasion, both authors speak of the pond as the "sea." See *Quan Tang shi,* 466: 5292–293; ibid., 540: 6219.

77. A moonscape mirror is found in a tomb dated 784. Mi Shicheng and Su Jian, "Luoyang cang jing lunshu" [Notes on mirrors from Luoyang], *Zhongyuan Wenwu* 4 (1987), 45–53. Yan, "Tangdai tongjing," 337.

78. *Huainan honglie,* 8: 255. Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University, 1993), 139.

79. *Huainan honglie,* 6: 217. *Soushen ji,* in *Han Wei Liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan,* 14: 385. Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London: George Allen & Unwin), 53–55, 127–33; Birrell, *Chinese Mythology,* 144–45.

80. *Soushen ji,* in *Han Wei Liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan,* 14: 385.

81. The design here tries to be faithful to the textual description. The fluttering returning woman (*pianpian guimei*) is conveyed through the fluttering scarves. The notion of returning woman (*guimei*) is made literal by the tortoise (*gui*) in the center. In this way, the tortoise and the female figure (*mei*) combine to make a complete embodiment of the returning woman, that is, Chang'e. Another possibility is to include the cassia (*gui*), which is a pun for "return" (*gui*). For the discussion of the pun of cassia, see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology,* 145.

82. For an introduction to the painting, see Wu Tung, *Tales from the Land of Dragons: 1,000 Years of Chinese Painting* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1997), 141–43.

83. *Taiping guangji,* 26: 172, 77: 486–87.

84. Ibid., 22: 146–47. Schafer, *Pacing the Void,* 200.

85. Ju-hsi Chou correctly identifies the dragon in connection with Xuanzong. However, he finds its appearance in this lunar landscape "curious" (Chou, *Circles of Reflection,* 87). In fact, if we keep in mind the mid Tang design of the flight-to-the-moon mirror that features the dragon-and-pond motif, we are hardly surprised to see its reincarnation on the Jin mirror.

86. Ju-hsi Chou identifies the group as two maids attending Chang'e (p. 87). An alternative interpretation could be that the group simply refers to the lunar-palace fairies dancing to the tune of "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats." Hardly any Tang-Song textual accounts of Xuanzong's visit to the lunar palace ever mention his encounter with Chang'e. The focus is invariably on "Rainbow Skirts, Feathered Coats." Likewise, Wu Gang has no place in this narrative setting. So the two figures crossing the bridges are Luo Gongyuan (or Ye Fashan) and Xuanzong himself. The dragon is a symbolic trapping associated with Xuanzong.