Introduction

Once upon a time, a gentleman traveling in southern China visited Jiaoshan, a small island in the Yangtze River near today's Zhenjiang, Jiangsu (plate 1). There, he found a pair of cranes dancing in the courtyard of a temple. The dance was so elegant and swift that the gentleman was inspired to write calligraphy in the air with his finger, following the rhythm of the moving birds. Before leaving, he purchased the cranes from the temple and arranged to collect them when he returned from his journey. After a few months, during which he thought constantly of the cranes and the calligraphy he had imagined writing, he returned to Jiaoshan, only to learn that the birds had died. Heartbroken, he was guided to a cliff beneath which the cranes had been buried. He then composed an epitaph for the birds in a calligraphic style inspired by their dance and had this carved in stone above the tomb.[1]

The gentleman in this strange tale, part of the folklore of Jiaoshan, was Wang Xizhi (ca. 303–ca. 361), known as the Sage of Chinese Calligraphy. The epitaph the story attributes to him is known as *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* (Yi he ming). The "tombstone" was discovered early in the eleventh century at the foot of Jiaoshan, where the carved rock had partially collapsed into the muddy waters of the Yangzi River and broken into pieces. Only during the winter months, when the water level of the river was lower, were curious adventurers able to see the inscription on the fragmentary rocks. However, the unusual calligraphy of the *Eulogy* and the story of its heartbroken creator fascinated generations of visitors to the island—a fascination that was only heightened by the difficulty of accessing the inscription. In 1713, after a few unsuccessful attempts, five fragments of the inscription were painstakingly chiseled off the rocks, hauled from the river, and placed on view on the island. Today they are exhibited in a dedicated hall of the Jiaoshan Stone Inscription Museum (plate 2).[2]

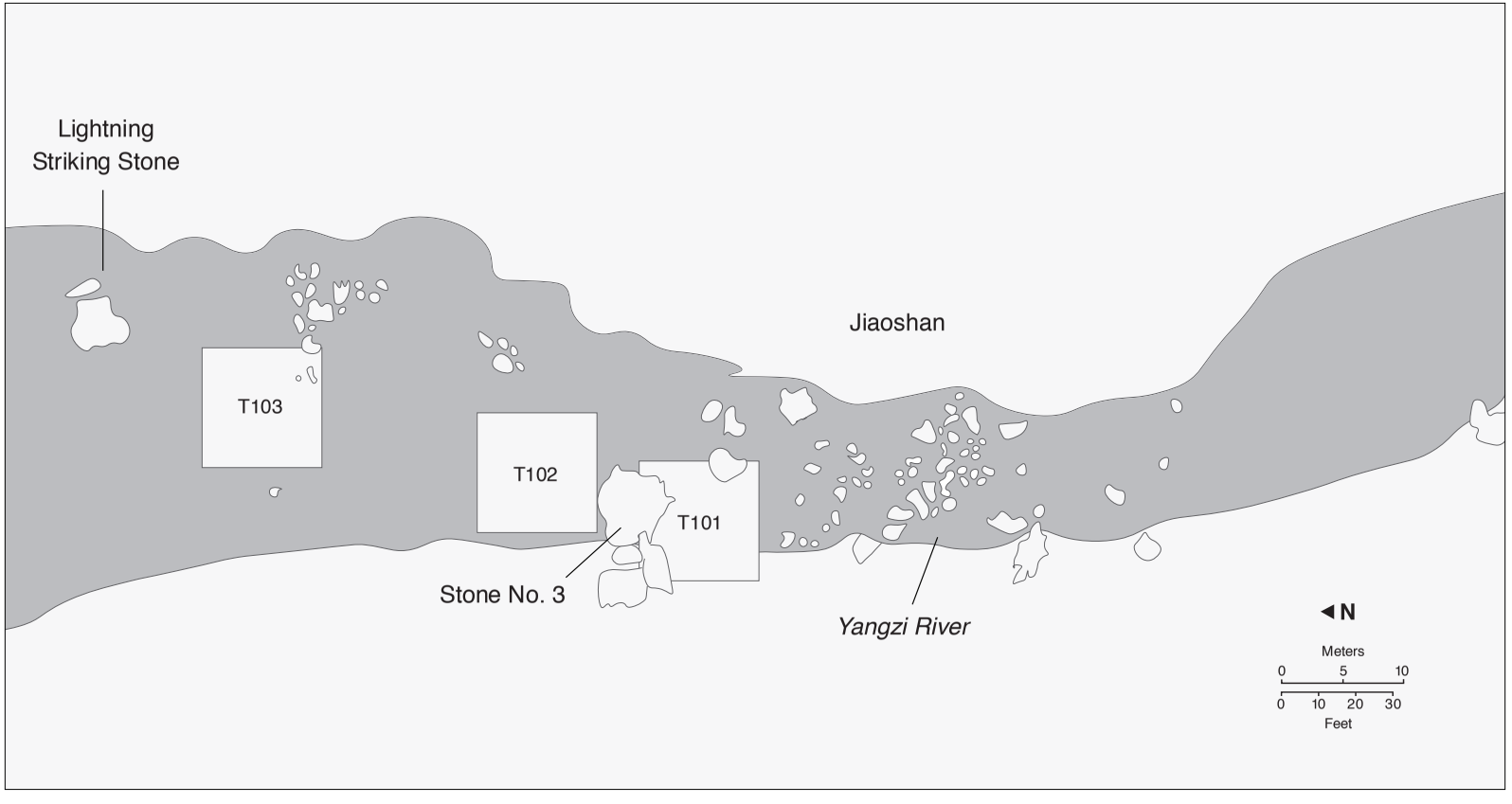

FIGURE 1.1. Plan of Excavation at Jiaoshan in 1997. Courtesy of Jiaoshan Stone Inscription Museum. Redrawn by Mary Yang.

FIGURE I.2. Boulders at the shore of Jiaoshan. Author's photo, 2007.

There is no record of the *Eulogy*'s original location on the mountainside. The shattered rocks that remain on the shore, however, do provide some clues. In 1997, an archaeological survey was conducted at the west foot of Jiaoshan, focusing on three areas (marked T101, T102, and T103 in figure I.1), in particular the large boulders (figure I.2) between T101 and T102. These investigations yielded a positive identification of the locations of the inscription before the removal of the fragments from the water; traces of cutting and chiseling are still clearly visible on the largest boulder (stone no. 30 in figure I.1; on the right in figure I.2).[3] Given the size of the boulder, it is unlikely that it was brought to the site by water. The *Eulogy*, therefore, was perhaps originally located on the cliff right above these boulders, on the west side of Jiaoshan (as marked on the contour map in figure I.3), somewhere above Luohan Rock (Luohanyan; figure I.4).

Over the centuries, visitors to Jiaoshan left their own inscriptions on the cliff or the rocks along the mountainside (figure I.4). Some of the authors did so to pay tribute to the *Eulogy*, while others celebrated their own visit (see appendix 1 for a list of these inscriptions, as recorded in textual sources), and many of them survive on the island, mainly located at Luohan Rock and Floating Jade Rock (Fuyuyan; see their locations in figure 1.4). The list may only reflect a small portion of the inscriptions that have been carved in the island—many more were probably destroyed by frequent landslides and floods over the last millennium. These inscriptions are important witnesses to the history of the island and *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*.

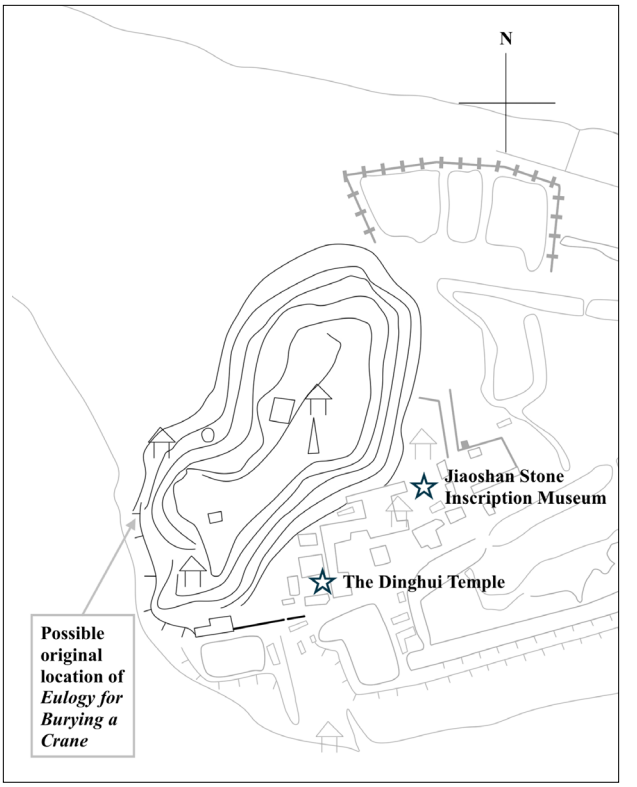

FIGURE 1.3. Contour map of Jiaoshan. Courtesy of Jiaoshan Stone Inscription Museum. Redrawn by Li Bin.

The Enigma of the *Eulogy*

Although the Wang Xizhi story suggests that there were two birds, nothing in the inscription supports this idea, and it appears that the monument refers to only a single bird. The epitaph begins with a short biography of the crane from birth to death, continues with an elaborate eulogy alluding to the history and mythology of the crane, and ends with emotional condolences. Names of the mourners were inscribed on the far right side of the epitaph, though none of them are real. Instead, all are titles of Daoist immortals, which only increases the mysterious aura surrounding the inscription.

The story has no basis in historical fact; there is no evidence that Wang Xizhi visited Jiaoshan, and the calligraphy of the inscription looks nothing like other writings attributed to him. Although it appears to have been invented, the story has had enduring appeal—especially for the denizens of Jiaoshan and the surrounding area—for two reasons: the fame of Wang Xizhi added to the luster of local history, and, more significantly, the story satisfied a desire, widespread among connoisseurs and antiquarians in China, to associate notable works of art with the names of famous people, however fanciful these attributions may have been.

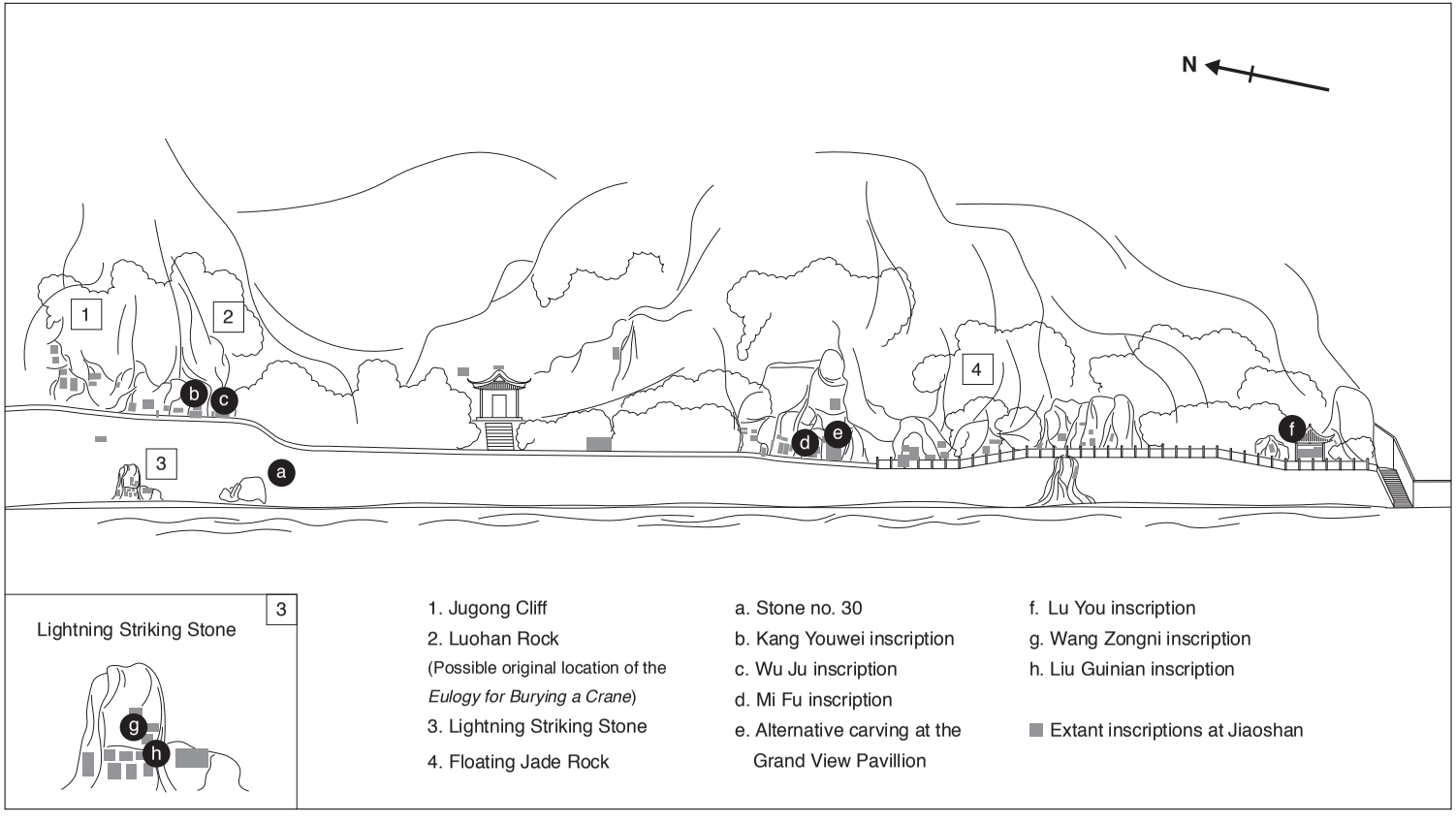

FIGURE 1.4. Westside of Jiaoshan and locations of major inscriptions mentioned in the book. Adapted from a drawing provided by Jiaoshan Stone Inscription Museum. Redrawn by Mary Yang.

Since the eleventh century, skeptical scholars who have focused on textual evidence and calligraphic style have asked this central question: Who was the author of this work, if it was not Wang Xizhi? The only clues are the names, both clearly aliases, that appear next to the title of the inscription, identifying the author as the Perfected Recluse of Mount Huayang (Huayang Zhenyi) and the calligrapher as the Woodcutter of Mount Shanghuang (Shanghuang Shanqiao). Opinions vary widely over the significance of these names and the periods in which the individuals thus identified might have lived.[4] Today, most scholars accept that the inscription dates to 514 CE and was perhaps created by Tao Hongjing (456–536), the prominent scholar, calligrapher, and Daoist master at nearby Maoshan (see map 1 at beginning of book), a thriving Daoist community.[5] Tao left almost no reliably attributable surviving works that would enable a comparison of calligraphy.[6] As some scholars point out, however, contemporary inscriptions on stone wellheads and bricks discovered at Maoshan suggest what engraved calligraphy within the orbit of Tao Hongjing and the Maoshan community might have been like.[7] Other candidates have been proposed, but they have received less support.[8] Barring the discovery of new evidence, the question of the identity of the *Eulogy*'s calligrapher will probably remain unanswered.

Many things about the crane's tombstone are unique. First, to my knowledge, it is the only monument in Chinese history dedicated to an animal or bird. True, many literary compositions about birds and other creatures have been transmitted to us, some of them in the form of eulogies or epitaphs, but such works appear to have been literary concoctions that were never intended to be carved in stone, still less to mark an actual place. Although the text of the *Eulogy* belongs to this literary tradition, it was transformed into a physical stone monument, placed directly on the surface of the earth and embedded in the landscape of the island of Jiaoshan. Second, within the known corpus of medieval stone inscriptions, the design of the inscription is also highly unusual. The texts of almost all carvings were arranged in strictly ordered rows and columns, and the characters for these highly formal inscriptions display an equally measured decorum of compositional structure and brushwork. In comparison with these, the crane's epitaph displays an unusual freedom of design in the characters' layout and their unpredictable changes in size and compositional orientation.

Finally, the status accorded *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* in the history of Chinese calligraphy and the frequency with which later calligraphers imitated this work are puzzling. Having been submerged in the water for centuries, the stone carving was difficult to see, and rubbings taken from the stones varied widely in quality and reliability. In spite of these impediments, the *Eulogy* emerged at various times in history as a source of inspiration for calligraphers, particularly at moments of change. Two paragons in the history of Chinese calligraphy, Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) and Dong Qichang (1555–1636), admired the *Eulogy* and studied the calligraphy seriously. It entered the calligraphy canon thanks to its inclusion in a popular calligraphy model book in the early seventeenth century. Ironically, a couple of centuries

later, it was during a fervent attack on the traditional canon that the *Eulogy* was elevated to become one of the best-known calligraphy models.

This book is a cultural biography of this stone, building upon the meticulous scholarship on the subject over the last millennium, recent archaeological finds in the region, my fieldwork at the site, and a reexamination of textual and visual materials ranging from the fifth century to modern times. The story I tell in the following pages, however, is by no means a transparent and straightforward one. The origin of the *Eulogy* is obscure and its reception controversial, and both demand a fresh look. More broadly, the inquiry into each episode of the stone's story reveals the diversity, complexity, and, sometimes, the paradox of the cultural practices that have been generalized as "Chinese calligraphy."

Historiography of Chinese Calligraphy

Traditionally, the history of Chinese calligraphy has often been divided into two phases: the art of writing and the art of the calligrapher. In the first phase, the artistic potential of writing—its visual form, color, materiality, and placement—was fully recognized and explored as early as the second millennium BCE, as demonstrated by extant oracle bone inscriptions, and continued to be experimented with in later engraved monuments. What distinguished Chinese calligraphy from its counterparts in other cultures, however, is the second phase, believed to have begun in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE), when calligraphy evolved to be a vehicle of self-expression, an embodiment of personal character, and a tool for social cohesion among cultural and political elites. After the fall of the Han, during the time of division, the art was refined and perfected in the south by Wang Xizhi, the protagonist of the folk story, and his son, Wang Xianzhi (344–386). The north, ruled by consecutive dynasties of nomadic origins, was believed by later scholars to have been left behind in the development of the art form until the reunification of China in the great Tang dynasty (618–907). The works of the Two Wangs (as they were later called), codified as the imperial standard, became the core of the classical tradition of Chinese calligraphy in subsequent centuries. Alternative approaches have emerged throughout the history of Chinese calligraphy, such as the monumental style of the Tang statesman and calligrapher Yan Zhenqing (709–784), the individualistic pursuits of the Northern Song literati, and the antiquarian calligraphers in the late Qing. However, it is believed that the core values initiated by the Two Wangs have remained unchanged. Such a belief sustains the transhistorical notion of *shufa* (literally, "the method of writing"), the Chinese word for calligraphy.

This received historical narrative, while persuasive in many other situations, is less so when trying to make sense of many of the episodes in the story of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*. The date of the inscription falls between the lifetime of the Two

Wangs and the codification of their works in the seventh century. Its calligraphy, however, bears little sign of an inevitable trajectory in the historical progression, as was formerly believed. Instead, this and other contemporary specimens of writing reveal an unfamiliar picture of calligraphy during the Southern Dynasties. Furthermore, the canonization of the *Eulogy*'s calligraphy in later times entailed a wide range of contradictory discourses, disoriented debates, and curious artwork that does not easily fit into a linear historical narrative. These paradoxes in the story of the *Eulogy*, all demanding a contextualized interpretation, prompt us to rethink both the definition of calligraphy as a "fine art" and the collective term "calligrapher"; these terms' actual connotation and denotation can be revealed only in specific social and historical contexts.

The historiographic problems require us to reexamine historical writings on calligraphy that have often been cited as "evidence." For example, the Tang critic Zhang Huaiguan's (fl. early eighth century) *Evaluation of Calligraphy* (Shu duan, preface 727 CE) has been the major source for studying pre-Tang calligraphy. However, in addition to the textual corruptions that have inevitably taken place over the centuries, caution is called for on at least three other levels when using these sources. First, the text is a mixture of earlier sources and a later account of an earlier history and thus not free from Zhang's mid-Tang projection. Second, the text was edited and included in *Essential Records on Calligraphy* (Fashu yaolu, preface 847 CE) and may therefore reflect editor Zhang Yanyuan's (815–907) personal view—or even his own political agenda—in the mid-ninth century.[9] Third, as the original copy of *Essential Records on Calligraphy* has been long lost, its contents were collected and published in the late-eleventh-century *Ink Pond Compilation* (Mochi bian). That publication, whose text is now mixed with that of *Evaluation of Calligraphy*, was not free from the new aesthetic values and historical perceptions of the literati and antiquarian scholars at the time.[10] Given the layers of possible editing and interpretations, therefore, historians have to select carefully from the sources and read them critically, although their judgments often risk revealing their own self-serving biases.

Furthermore, an additional challenge for art historians is that these critical and historical discourses may be visualized and materialized in their own corpus of images, which, in turn, often present themselves as "visual evidence" to support the discourses themselves. Many of the extant Two Wangs specimens, for example, are the later products of the imaginations of the elusive fourth-century masters—yet they are still treated as visual evidence that sustains the historical narrative of the formation of the Two Wangs tradition. Moreover, to challenge the traditional canon, the calligrapher-theorists of the nineteenth century systematically formed their own canon, mostly of long-ignored anonymous ancient stone inscriptions, to justify their revisionist narratives. Thus, the visual materials we will encounter in this book are not value free and always require cautious examination.

Last but not least, the study of calligraphy—or any Chinese literati art—calls for special attention to be paid to the literary nature of the written sources. Appropriation, parody, and sarcasm, among many other literary and rhetorical devices,

often appear in historical and critical writings and can even be present in works of calligraphy, creating endless intertextual games and constantly shifting meanings. Sometimes, a specific social context plays a decisive role in decoding the language. For example, when Dong Qichang, the arbiter of taste in his time, called something "authentic," he did not necessarily mean it thus. He may have just wanted to save face for a peer collector, support a business partner, or put forward his own art theory. His true motive can be carefully uncovered only in the context of the immediate social, economic, and political environment.

Terms for Calligraphy: The Character, Script Types, and Styles

A Chinese character can be imagined as a matrix of individual strokes. The character *yong* 永 is traditionally used to illustrate the fundamental elements (figure I.5); each stroke has its own name and is executed in a certain direction—generally speaking, from top to the bottom, like *shu* (3), *pie* (6 and 7), and *na* (8); or from left to right, like *heng* (2) or the slightly slanted *ti* (5). A hook, *gou* (4), is an exception in that it goes in the opposite direction. *Zhe* (2–3 and 5–6) or *wan* (3–4) is the name for one turn that joins two continuous strokes. The most diverse stroke is *dian* (1), or dot, which can go in any direction, depending on the structure and flow of writing. There are many variations of strokes, often with fancy names, which do not need to be elaborated upon for the purposes of our discussion.[11] The sample character *yong*, meaning "eternal," represents the basic form, or *duti zi*. Most Chinese characters, however, are combined of two or more compounds, which are called *pianpang*, or radicals.

To compose a character, the strokes are written down in a prescribed order (as shown in numbers 1 to 8). Sometimes the pattern (starting from either the top or the center part of the character) follows one's instinct, yet it is largely the result of conventions that must be memorized through consistent practice. Although the modulated quality of brush-written strokes is lost in modern pen writing, the directions and orders are still imposed in the classroom. It is in the dynamic balance between

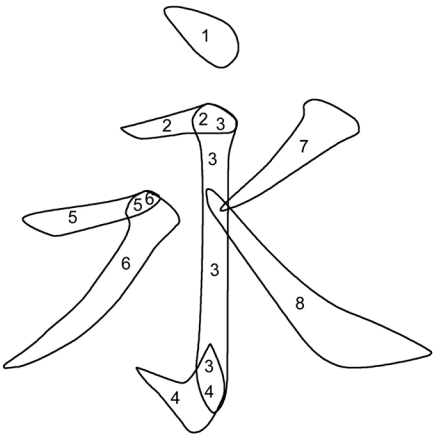

FIGURE I.5. Strokes of the Chinese character *yong*. The numbers indicate the sequence in which the individual strokes are made. Drawn by Li Bin.

all these elements and in the energy flow throughout the writing that the calligrapher demonstrates skill and personal style.

When studying the history of Chinese calligraphy, the first lesson always begins with script types (figure I.6):

Standard script (*kaishu*, *zhengshu*, or *zhenshu*, "true script") is the most commonly seen script for printed materials. The strokes are executed with consistent thickness and moderate variation. The compact and square structure gives the alternative name to the Chinese characters, *fangkuai zi*, or "square character," that every primary school student must memorize and practice.

Running script (*xingshu*) has an irregular composition, often tilting to one side, but still maintains the consistency of stroke width of standard script. Strokes vary in thickness and are sometimes connected to each other for faster writing. Because of its expressive power, running script was favored by aristocratic calligraphers and, later on, literati scholars.

Cursive script (*caoshu*) has the appearance of being created more quickly than running script and with many more lined strokes; sometimes, as in the given example, it is completed with one continuous move. The shapes of characters vary greatly, as strokes were often abbreviated or even omitted. The structure is open, making it easy to connect one character to the next, which creates an unbroken flow of writing. As opposed to what is commonly believed, however, the cursive character follows a quite strict formula.

Clerical script (*lishu*) is an archaic formal script type featuring squat composition, as if compressed vertically, and modulated strokes. Horizontal strokes are often elongated and ended with a distinctive wavy upward tail.

Seal script (*zhuanshu*), a more archaic formal script, is distinctive for its even thickness of strokes (often called "lines" for their wire-like quality). Unlike the clerical and standard scripts, which feature sharp and angular turns, seal script can be easily identified for its smooth and curvy turns. Its structure is regular and closed.

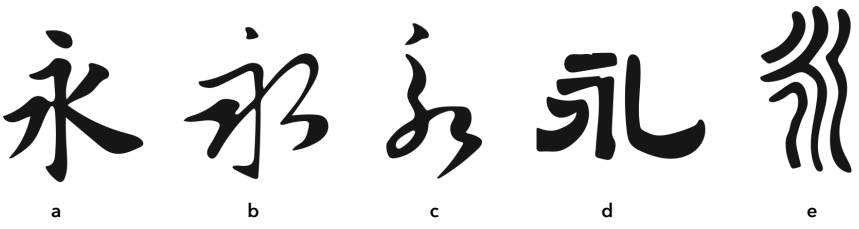

Figure I.6. Major script types of Chinese characters: (a) standard script, (b) running script, (c) cursive script, (d) clerical script, (e) seal script. Drawn by Mary Yang.

Here I have given the most straightforward definitions that are based on the form and without any historical connotations. Generally speaking, standard script was "evolved" from clerical script, and clerical from seal script, which came from more ancient scripts that trace back to oracle-bone inscriptions.[12] Nevertheless, the older script types were preserved and often reused in later times, juxtaposed with newer script types, for formal ritual purposes or artistic expression.[13] Cursive and running scripts evolved in parallel with the formal scripts. Historically, all these scripts were used for everyday writing, depending on the occasion. Today, however, besides standard script, which is still practiced by every student learning Chinese, other script types are reserved for calligraphy, either as a fine art or for decorative purposes. Technically, anyone could write in a self-fashioned "running" or "cursive" script, but they would immediately be dismissed for their script's lack of the "method," a schema of structure and brushwork formed over the course of history.

The seemingly objective categories of script types are inseparable from certain established historical styles (*ti*) that are often attributed to individual calligraphers. Even a beginner of calligraphy may recognize that, for example, the first character in figure I.6a is more or less in *Liu ti*, or the style of Liu Gongquan (778–865), the prominent Tang dynasty calligrapher whose writing specimens have served as the most popular models for school students. A more informed reader might speculate that the last character, in the seal script shown in figure I.6e, might be a modern reinterpretation of ancient script. It is these historical and cultural connotations that transform a piece of writing (*xiezi*) into a work of calligraphy (*shufa*).

It should be noted that these categories are artificial, made for the convenience of students of calligraphy. When we try to apply them to historical examples, we may encounter problems. The terminology may cause confusion for today's reader; the two terms *kaishu* and *lishu*, for example, were interchangeable when referring to contemporary standard script during certain time periods and were not differentiated by those who used them. More fundamentally, the "evolution" of scripts, more or less based on a biological analogy (an easily written script replaced an older and more difficult one because it was better adapted to social use), is often accepted at the cost of overlooking historical specificities and complexity. In the following discussion, we will use the script types for descriptive purposes, but the reader should be aware that these categories are themselves historical constructs and cannot be applied uncritically to our analysis.

Media for Calligraphy: Rubbing and Model Letters

The calligraphy works discussed in this book were executed in a wide range of media and materials. One major genre, and perhaps the most complex, is rubbing. The word "rubbing" encompasses many different types of artifacts. In the field of calligraphy,

there are two major categories: *taben* (rubbing copies), which are made directly from stone inscriptions (collectively called *bei*, or "stele"); and *fatie* (model letters), which replicate ink-written works (generally called *tie*, or "letter").[14] (The word "letter" is derived from the earliest collected calligraphy works, which are often in the form of short handwritten messages.[15] Unlike self-titled steles like the *Eulogy*, most of the "letters" bear no original title and thus are traditionally named after the first few characters of the text.) Whereas *taben* are mainly for documenting historical materials (and later for calligraphy study) and are also found in other cultures, *fatie* are intended to reproduce calligraphic works and thus can be treated as a unique kind of publication.

To make *fatie*, the original (a handwritten work, a tracing copy, or sometimes even another rubbing) first needed to be carved into a stone (or woodblock, in some cases). The process entailed at least four major steps: first, the original was traced on a thin piece of paper (*goumo*); then the other side of the tracing copy was covered with cinnabar (*tianzhu*), creating a reversed image; before it dried, the cinnabar image was impressed on the surface of the stone (*shangshi*); and finally, the stonecutter chiseled away the cinnabar characters (*tuizao*), creating an intaglio (an incised carving).[16] This was followed by the rubbing process (which was the same for making *taben*): a wet piece of paper was laid on the stone and smoothed and pounded until the paper was pressed into the engraved strokes; ink was then carefully applied to the paper. The ink covered only the space around the characters, which remained as blank paper, thus creating a negative black-and-white image.[17] A set of rubbings could be cut, trimmed, and mounted in the form of a book or album, and several volumes could be placed in a case to create a multivolume compendium.

Critics and connoisseurs of rubbings are known for their meticulous studies and sometimes heated debates on the authenticity of the original ink-written works, accuracy of reproduction, chronology and lineage of rubbings from different times, appraisal of the *shanben* (better or earlier editions), and their ability to distinguish between the rubbings from *chongke* (the recarved inscription, if the original is lost), *fanke* (the replicated inscription, if the original still exists), and *weike* (a forged inscription).[18] Because of limited access to rubbing objects, art historians must rely heavily on the judgment of rubbing specialists. The latter's knowledge is not always reliable, however. Before the widespread use of photography and digital images, such appraisals were often based on specialists' comparisons with what they remembered of other examples or on brief "cheating notes" about the physical traits of datable rubbings. Furthermore, in most cases, the absolute date of a rubbing is almost impossible to know. To my knowledge, it is unusual for a rubbing maker to add a date and signature on a rubbing. Most rubbings, including those considered in the present study, are dated to a certain early time (like so-called *Song ben*, or Song dynasty editions) merely according to collectors' colophons or seals, which themselves are often problematic.

Dimensions of This Study

In reconstructing the biography of the legendary *Eulogy*, my approach is largely based on my visual analysis of transmitted works, including both brush-written calligraphy and ink rubbings, in the context of archaeological materials and a critical reading of historical writings. This book delves into issues in the established field of calligraphy, such as the meaning and context of individual calligraphic works, the problem of canon formation, and other historical dimensions of calligraphic practices and discourses. Following a small number of exemplary studies of Chinese calligraphy in English, as well as much more extensive scholarship in China and Japan, I opt to focus on micro-historical case studies and sociopolitical interpretations.

This book also explores the gray zone between calligraphy and what may be called the visual culture of writing. Calligraphy is fundamentally writing. The manner of displaying and viewing writing has dictated whether it is deserving of the term "calligraphy"; this, in turn, has permeated the very fabric of everyday life and profoundly shaped social and psychological spaces in traditional and modern China. This issue has been explored in an edited volume, *Writing and Materiality in China*, which includes Wu Hung's insightful article on rubbings.[19] Robert E. Harrist's research into *moya*, or cliff-carving inscriptions, provides a new perspective that combines the history of writing/calligraphy and "place studies."[20] Craig Clunas's recent publications concern the visuality of writing/calligraphy in Ming society.[21] These studies, among many others that broaden and reveal historical issues that have often been muted or tamed, have informed the present study.

This book deals with two different kinds of "history" of the *Eulogy*. It begins by situating the *Eulogy* within the literary and visual cultures of the early sixth century, recovering a long-forgotten memory once crystallized in the monument. Concentrating on the symbolic nature of the inscription, it analyzes metaphoric writings and imitative genres in Chinese literary history and reconsiders the status of the *Eulogy* as a work of public writing intended to transform the island of Jiaoshan into a virtual tomb. The efficacy of displaying writings developed in conjunction with Daoist beliefs at the time and added a new dimension to the culture of Chinese calligraphy. Careful reading of its text and visual form suggests that the inscription was erected by a Daoist community to mourn their suffering during a period of imperial proscription.

The following chapters trace the afterlife of the *Eulogy* by focusing on two pivotal and lively moments in Chinese cultural history: the late Northern Song (960–1127) and the late Ming (1368–1664). Historical records, colophons, and art criticism on the rediscovery of the stone of the *Eulogy* and other ancient artifacts during the eleventh century were generated by the rise of antiquarianism, a mixture of fascination with antiquity and a deep cultural anxiety on the part of Northern Song literati scholars. Paradoxical intellectual attitudes regarding the *Eulogy*, represented by the conflicting views among major scholars of the time, shaped later writings on the

Eulogy and many other canonical works. Recarving and replication of the inscription ironically expressed the search for antiquity, and the boundary between the original, the copy, and the forgery becomes blurred.

The canonization of the *Eulogy*'s calligraphy through its reproduction and transmission in the complex late Ming cultural milieu was characterized by a dynamic interaction between continuing antiquarianism, commercialization of model-letters publication, and experimentation in calligraphy in the transition to a modern visual culture. Interest in the *Eulogy* resurged thanks to a burgeoning taste among the urban elite for leisure, spectacle, and a taste for strangeness. A close examination of model-letters productions in the context of contemporary print culture reveals how the *Eulogy* and other historical calligraphic works became accessible to a larger audience of diverse social classes and gained canonic status. Against this background, elite theory and practice in calligraphy interacted with contemporary popular culture.

The book concludes with a review of the material history of the *Eulogy* stone from the late seventeenth century to our own time, in which investigation, restoration, and enshrinement of the inscription's fragments again sparked antiquarian interest and imperial cultural propaganda, leading to further appropriation and commodification of the *Eulogy* among calligraphy theorists and practitioners who encompass traditional literati circles and the early twentieth-century art market in Shanghai, as well as to archaeological excavation, cultural promotion, and media consumption of the *Eulogy* through the last decades.

Altogether, this study explores the historical construct—which is still ongoing—of Chinese calligraphy through the microscopic lens of an individual stone monument. It by no means offers a comprehensive survey of calligraphy history; for example, I do not discuss every important historical period, such as the Tang dynasty (618–907). The noncontinuous timeline, partly reflecting the nature of the story of the stone itself, may help us escape the traditional linear narrative and seek an alternative contextualization of calligraphic works and events. To do so, however, we may first need to unlearn and defamiliarize ourselves from many prescribed notions, concepts, and historical narratives about calligraphy. One advantage of the present case study is that *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*, the strange tombstone for a bird, has consistently revealed its paradoxes to viewers, readily inviting controversies and problematizing what we have learned about calligraphy, the most revered art in China.

CHAPTER 1

Inscribing the Island

In 2018, there were about 780,000 visitors to the small island of Jiaoshan.[1] Many of them were calligraphy lovers who came to worship the stone carving of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane.* Housed in a traditional-style building in the garden of the Jiaoshan Stone Inscription Museum, the five fragments are pieced together in a kind of faux cliff intended to approximate the appearance of the original site (plate 2, figure 1.1). To help the visitors see the characters in the dim lighting, each stroke is filled in with white plaster.

Despite its dilapidated status and large size (approximately 235 × 204 cm), it is clear that the rectangular layout was like that of stone epitaphs from medieval China. However, unlike the characters on those artifacts (or those on freestanding stone steles, which are carefully polished before the writing is added), the characters were carved directly into the rough surface of the unquarried rock. The calligrapher adapted the characters to the irregularity of the stone, making some larger than others and avoiding a strict regularity of columns or rows. Whereas some characters show clear strokes, others display odd shapes that make the viewer wonder if they reveal the original brushwork or are rather the result of natural erosion or numerous campaigns of recarving and alteration. Still, it can be ascertained that the strokes were carved from the two edges, creating a wide-open V-shaped groove on the stone, as shown in figure 1.2.

These fragments, traditionally numbered one through five (hereafter noted as F1–F5, as marked on the rubbing in figure 1.1), vary in size, shape, and texture. F1 (plate 3), the smallest stone, has lost most of its characters and shows many signs of scraping and other abrasions. F2 (plate 4) is rectangular and has a relatively smooth surface; the carving of the characters on this fragment is shallower than that on the other stones, which makes some scholars suspect that it was a later recarving. F4

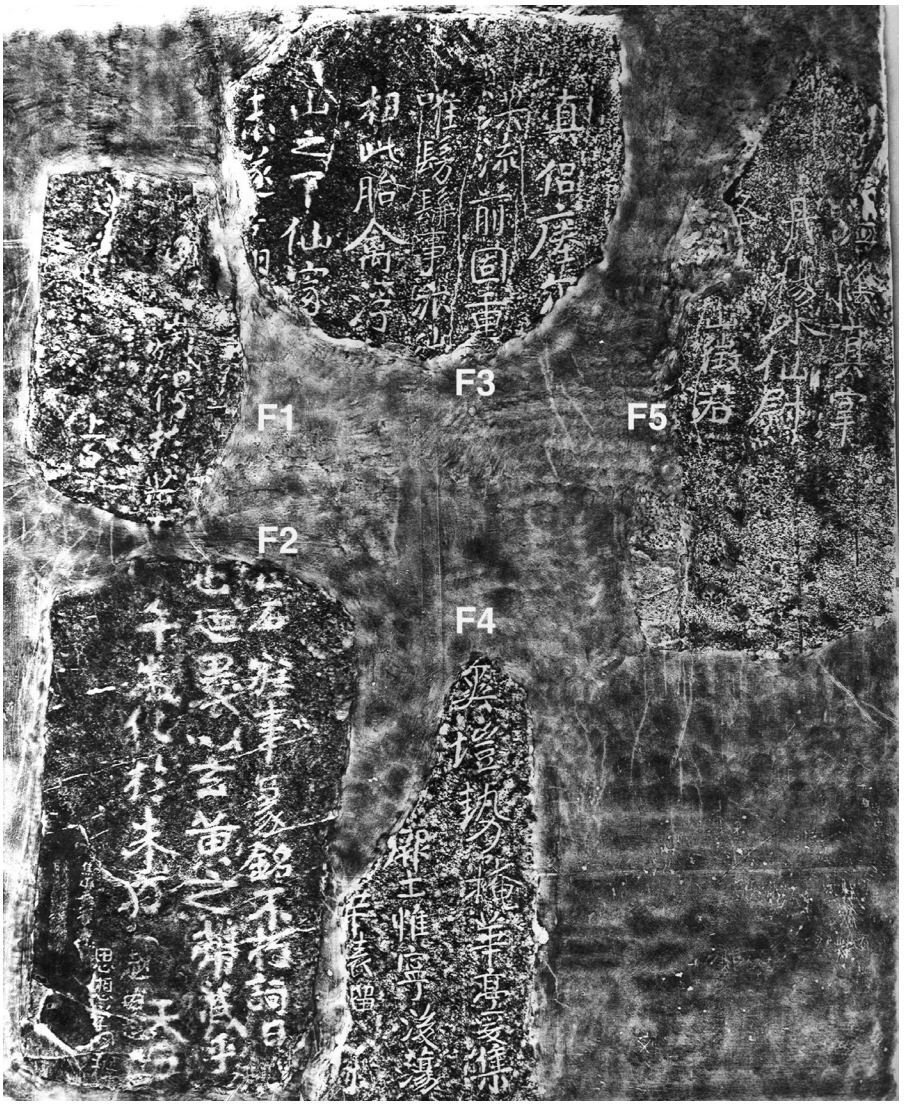

FIGURE 1.1. Overview of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*. Ink rubbing, approx. 235 × 204 cm. Courtesy of Jiaoshan Stone Inscription Museum. The numbers F1–F5 refer to the extant fragments.

(plate 6) presents the same problem and has the most irregular surface, marked by several deep indentations. Characters are deeply carved and possibly the result of late modification. F3 (plate 5) and F5 (plate 7) appear quite different in texture from the other fragments. Numerous tiny pockmarks on their surfaces (figure 1.2) show the effects of natural erosion that are often found on limestone (similar to those on the porous Taihu stones that adorn traditional Chinese gardens). Although it is reported that the inscription was heavily damaged after it was removed from the water in 1713 (see conclusion), F3 and F5 seem well preserved; the location and shapes of dents and pores match their traces (referred to as "stone flowers" by

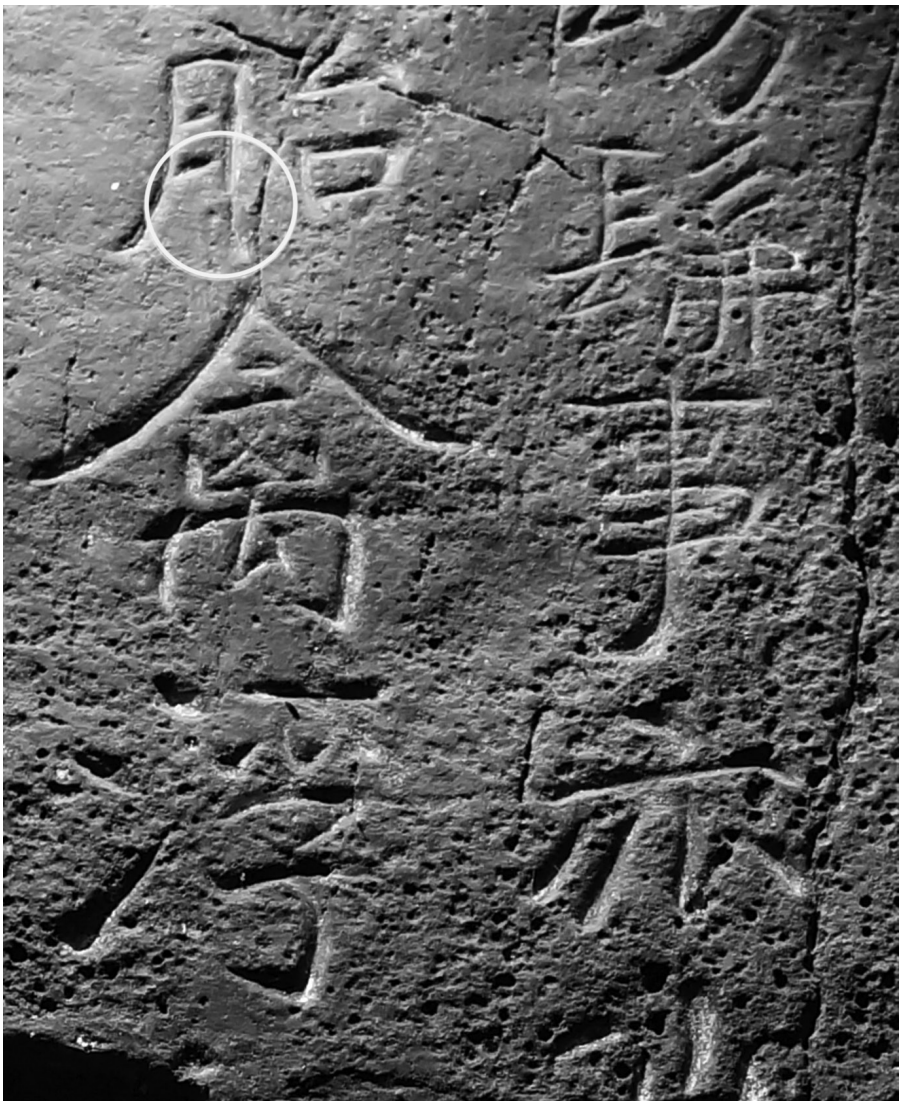

FIGURE 1.2. Detail of Fragment no. 3 of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*. The circle indicates the worn strokes discussed in the text.

rubbing connoisseurs) left on the early rubbing (figure 1.3; see full image in figure C.9), which is arguably dated to the Song dynasty.[2]

Even so, the engraved strokes are hardly intact. Take the example of the character *tai* 胎, which appears complete and crisp on the rubbing. On today's stone, however, the bottom of the *shu* stroke in the *yue* 月 radical (figure 1.2, marked with a circle) is almost worn away. Oddly enough, the top section of the same stroke is still deeply carved, even lower than the worn area—very likely a result of rechiseling. The modification even causes the entire *yue* radical to pull away a little from the right radical. Looking closer at the *yue* radical, one can find traces of modification in the double

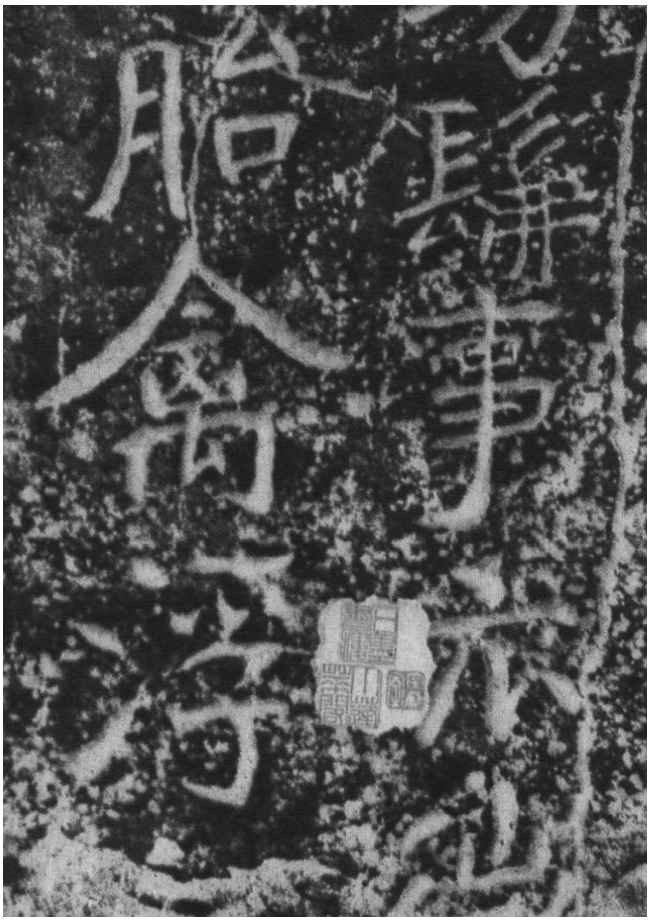

FIGURE 1.3. Rubbing of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*. Detail. Palace Museum, Beijing. From *Zhongguo meishu quanji: Shufa zhuanke bian* 2:142.

lines at the bottom of the *pie* stroke (figure 1.2). Whereas these possible modifications (and even alterations) may not affect our reading of the text, we shall proceed with great caution in the discussion of the "original" stone of the *Eulogy*—indeed, of any original stones of famous monuments from ancient times. Instead, our analysis of the calligraphy will be based mainly on the rubbing images, even though they are not free from similar problems.

The Text: Reconstruction and Translation

The ninety total characters on the extant stones (including twelve partly damaged characters) constitute only about two-thirds of the original inscription (plate 8; early accounts report characters in yellow that no longer survive on today's fragments). Other characters in the chart were reconstructed by Zhang Chao (1625–1694) and Wang Shihong, the latter of whom combined the characters extant in his time with an earlier reconstruction of the text, said to have been made before the stones

completely fell into the river (see the concluding chapter for details). Some characters (noted in the translation below and also marked in red in plate 8) were added to make the text coherent, but these were pure speculation.[3] The inscription reads from left to right, a format unusual but not unique in traditional Chinese writing. Full of literary allusions and tropes, the text is cryptic to modern readers without annotations, and the fragmentary status only increases the challenge of reading:

Eulogy for Burying a Crane, with Preface
Composed by the Perfected Recluse of Mount Huayang[4]
in the calligraphy of the Woodcutter of Mount Shanghuang[5]
No one knows the age of this crane.
I acquired him in the year *renchen*[6] in Huating.[7]
He transformed in the year *jiawu* at Zhufang.[8]
Did Heaven not allow me to soar about the cosmos as I wish?[9]
Why take away the crane so quickly?
I therefore wrapped him in [Daoist ceremonial] black and yellow silk[10]
and buried him at the foot of this mountain.
The immortals do not hide . . .[11]
. . . my . . .
I then set up a stone to honor his virtues
and carved a eulogy so that the crane will not be forgotten.
The eulogy reads,
To judge the physiognomy of the "viviparous bird,"[12]
[The immortal] Master Fuqiu wrote the *Crane Classic.*[13]
I do not wish to say anything more.
You [the crane] have hidden the spirit.[14]
At the Thunder Gate you departed the drum;[15]
on the *huabiao* pillars you left behind your shadow.[16]
The meaning is obscure and subtle;
these events are elusive and mysterious.[17]
Where is it that you will go?
Released and transformed[18] . . .
to the west bamboo grove, the sacred place.[19]
The land is quiet and peaceful.[20]
Behind flows the raging torrent;
in front stand firmly the double-layered gates.[21]
The left side reaches to the Kingdom of Cao;[22]
the right side is fenced with a thorny gate.[23]
The shady side of the mountain is dry and lofty.
The height of the place overlooks Huating [the crane's home].[24]
Therefore, I have gathered my perfected companions,[25]
buried you here, and written this eulogy.

The Recluse of Mount Jiang[26]
The Outer Immortal Commandant of Danyang[27]
The Perfected Steward of Jiangyin.[28]
(1A)[29]

At first glance, the literary form of the *Eulogy* text is no different from that of countless medieval epitaphs surviving today. It opens with the title and the name of the author (though the calligrapher is rarely mentioned in other cases). Next comes a prose biography of the deceased, here the crane (lines 4–10). The prose section is followed by a eulogy in tetrasyllabic verse praising the bird by likening it to notable cranes of antiquity (lines 15–24). The *Eulogy* closes with the description of its landscape setting (lines 25–33)—an indispensable part of an epitaph to announce the safe and auspicious burial location to both the living and the underground world. What would be unusual for a common epitaph is the names of three witnesses who presumably attended the burial (lines 36–38).

Traditionally, scholars have read this poem as evidence that Daoists actually buried and mourned a pet crane at the foot of Jiaoshan. Based on this assumption, they have spilled much ink decoding place names and aliases in the text, confident that—in spite of its strangeness—the carving was a *real* epitaph for a *real* crane. This assumption, however, more or less overlooks the place of the *Eulogy* within the history of early medieval Chinese literature and material and visual culture.

The complex allusions and poetic language mark the text as part of a tradition of writing about birds and other animals as a way to metaphorically express feelings about human misfortunes. The "epitaph" also appropriates medieval funerary objects in multiple dimensions; the text may be read as a literary parody imitating mortuary writing, while the physical form, though appropriating that of entombed medieval epitaphs, distinguishes itself from a real epitaph by its public visibility. Furthermore, the placement of this unprecedented epitaph near the base of Jiaoshan took advantage of the topography of the island and transformed it into a symbolic monument.

Imagery of the Crane

Cranes are a family of bird that includes many species, but the most distinctive kind, or at least the type most often represented in Chinese visual art, is *Grus japonensis—danding he* in Chinese—the red-crowned crane. As its Latin name suggests, its habitat is in northeastern Asia. This is a tall, regal bird with shiny white plumage trimmed with black feathers along its primaries (the wing's outer flight feathers). It has a black face and throat and a striking vermillion cap on the top of its head. These large, beautiful birds are known for their elegant dance and clear singing. They migrate south in winter. Such a seasonal appearance must have made people wonder about the remote country they traveled from and associate the crane with the otherworld. Such

FIGURE 1.4. Bronze *hu* vessel. Eastern Zhou dynasty. 118 cm (height). From Xinzheng, Henan. Palace Museum, Beijing. From *Zhongguo meishu quanji: Gongyi meishu bian* 5: plate 13.

an imagination might have been materialized in the dancing crane atop an exquisite bronze *hu* (figure 1.4) dating to the sixth century BCE.[30] For the *hu*'s creator, who lived in the heartland of China, the exotic bird, like the mythical beasts crouching on the side of the vessel, might have represented a mysterious place where immortals were also believed to live.

On the other hand, cranes might have been kept as pets, since they are fairly easy to tame and highly intelligent. Since time immemorable, they have wandered in palaces and gardens, turning the mundane world into an immortal land, and have become the subject of poems and prose. An early visual representation can be found in a literal "burial" of cranes (actually bronze sculptures) that was discovered in the necropolis of Qin Shihuangdi, the First Emperor of the Qin (r. 220–210 BCE).[31] These bronze birds, along with geese, ducks, and other birds, appear to be real-life building decorations. However, buried with the emperor, perhaps they were believed to exert their magical power even in the afterworld.

The imagery of immortals riding the crane can be traced to Eastern Han writings, if not earlier, and is certainly attributable to the spread of Daoism and the impact

of Daoist beliefs. *Biographies of Exemplary Immortals* (Liexian zhuan), the oldest surviving text of its kind, records the legendary Wangzi Qiao (ca. 565–ca. 549 BCE), also known as Prince Jin, a son of King Ling (d. 545 BCE) of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 BCE), who left his home at an early age to seek the immortal way. When his family sent a messenger to find him in the mountains, Wangzi Qiao told them that he would present himself on the seventh day of the seventh month on the top of Mount Goushi (in today's Yanshi Henan). When that moment arrived, the biography text recounts,

> [Wangzi Qiao,] riding a white crane, appeared on top of the mountain. People were able to see him but not able to reach him, as Qiao was waving his hand to greet the people. [The scene lasted for] a few days before he departed.[32] (1B)

Tomb decorations from the fifth and sixth centuries that depict immortals riding on the back of a crane might reference this story. In one scene, discovered in a painted tomb (figure 1.5), a slim immortal, surrounded by flying clouds or currents of mystic energy and wearing a strange tall hat, rides on a large white crane (the figure has his own wings too—perhaps a reference to *yuren*, the mythic winged man in Daoist lore). Although there is no red cap on the head of the crane, its wings and legs are marked with touches of red color. Holding a long staff and turning back, the immortal may be waiting for the soul of the tomb's occupant to follow his direction to the otherworld. The tomb's location in today's northeastern China, then the northern border of the Korean Goguryeo Kingdom (37 BCE–668 CE), may be more than coincidental, as the region is the major habitat for red-crowned cranes.[33]

This imagery of a crane-riding immortal was part of the lore inherited by the *Eulogy*'s author; the latter's wish to "soar about the cosmos" (line 7 of the *Eulogy* text), for example, was derived from the old beliefs. And the allusion to the ancient immortal Ding Lingwei riding the crane over a *huabiao* pillar (line 21) in many ways resembles the Wangzi Qiao story.[34] Nevertheless, the place of cranes in Daoist mythology should not deflect attention from a different role played by the crane in early Chinese literature. More than other creatures, birds and their sounds were often used since antiquity to symbolize human feelings, especially those of sorrow and regret. On the words of a dying man, Zengzi (505–436 BCE), one of Confucius's disciples, made a famous analogy with birds: "When a bird is about to die, its notes are mournful; when a man is about to die, his words are good."[35] An association between birds and the expression of human sorrow was developed in the literature of the Han dynasty, especially in the genre of *fu*, or rhapsody.[36] Famous examples include Jia Yi's (200–168 BCE) "Rhapsody on the Owl" (Funiao fu), which, though ostensibly about the bird, was intended to express the sorrows and political dissatisfactions of the author when he was banished from the court.[37]

Despite its multivalent meanings and associations in early literature, the crane's association with human sorrow seems more intense than any other avian subject, in

FIGURE 1.5. Immortal riding on a crane. Fifth century. Tomb mural at Tonggou, Jilin. From *Zhongguo meishu quanji: Huihua bian* 12: plate 82.

particular in writings from the Wei and Jin periods (220–420), when themes of anxiety and loneliness caused by political isolation were popular.[38] Cao Zhi (192–232), a famous literary prodigy, wrote two works on cranes, "Pair of Cranes" (Shuang he) and "Rhapsody on a White Crane" (Baihe fu). The closing lines of the latter describe the painful isolation of a crane:

> [The crane] sorrows at betraying his nature,
> lamenting about leaving the flock and staying alone.
> He flees [from predators] and roosts in hiding all the time,
> crying sadly and folding his feathers.[39]
> (1C)

According to many later explications, what Cao Zhi expresses here are feelings of anxiety and desperation induced by his tense relationship with his brother, Cao Pi (187–226), the founder of the Wei Kingdom (220–265).[40] The poet's anxiety was also tinged with a longing for personal freedom:

> Hoping that the net will come loose,
> Then he can fly into the far distance.[41]
> (1D)

Cao Zhi's allusion to a net recalls the historical fact that because of their beauty and intelligence, cranes were often captured and put into cages as pets, becoming, in turn, symbols of humans subjected to external restraints. According to an anecdote

in *A New Account of Tales of the World* (Shishuo xinyu), in order to keep a pair of pet cranes from escaping, the scholar-monk Zhidun (314–366) clipped their pinions. Responding to the reproaches implicit in the birds' cries, he finally allowed their feathers to grow back and then set the birds free.[42] This anecdote became a popular allusion used by writers in later periods, perhaps including the author of the *Eulogy*, to evoke the freedom and dignity they desired but rarely obtained.

Although they lived in somewhat more settled political environments, many writers of the Southern Dynasties continued to use the crane as a symbol of spiritual freedom. Examples of this can be found in works such as Bao Zhao's (414–466) "Rhapsody on Dancing Cranes" (Wuhe fu), Shen Yue's (441–513) "Hearing a Crane Crying at Night" (Wen ye he), and Yu Xin's (513–581) "In Praise of Cranes" (He zan), to name a few.[43] The theme of the mournful, crying crane reappears in literary works in the Tang and later periods.[44]

Eulogy for Burying a Crane was not the first example of mortuary writing dedicated to a crane. Zhan Fangsheng (fl. early fifth century), a poet of the Eastern Jin (317–420), composed "Dirge for a Crane" (Diao he wen), which informs the *Eulogy* in so many ways that it is worthy of full translation. This passage is dedicated to a lonely crane that was probably dying in captivity. It starts with a preface:

> On a long night in the deep winter, I suddenly heard a crane singing in front of the stairway. The pure and sharp sound penetrated the chilly wind. The sorrow mounted as the bitter atmosphere was felt. I listened carefully and was deeply moved before the song ended. Then I composed a text to lament it. (1E)

Then the author continues to imagine the life of the crane using the form of a dirge:

> Here is a marvelous bird from the other end of the sea,
> born with the vigorous pneuma.
> He can vie with a phoenix and fly with it together,
> and has a spirit superior to other feathered creatures.
> He has washed himself in the pure ice and frost,
> and uttered a unique sound from the deepest wetland.[45]
> He has pecked the remaining grains from the "wild court,"[46]
> and drunk water from the remote river.
> He has rested the feathers when seeing clouds spreading,
> and departed again for a journey, facing toward the morning glow.
> (1F)

After praising the divine bird's past glories, the author turns to the bird's suffering when it loses its freedom:

> After escaping from the Wangzi [Qiao]'s sacred reins,
> he was captured by the gardener with a rope;

After leaving the immortal friends in caves of the elixirs [*danxue*],
he has to stay in the court with other common birds.
He wants to soar about the sky as he wishes,
and is still frightened when he turns to look at the nets and cages.
In the deep of the night his heart is heavier,
And he begins to sing when the sharp frost sets in.
Although he has strong feathers allowing him to soar in the sky,
now he is not different from other birds.
Although he has a long life like the mythical *mingling* tree,
he is withering like autumn foliage.
It is not the bird itself that deserves my sorrow.
It is fate itself that stirred me to write [this poem].[47]
(1G)

Due to the lack of historical information, it is difficult to speculate on the context in which Zhan Fangsheng wrote. The loneliness and desperation of the crane can only be read metaphorically as the physical or psychological state of the man, as Zhan makes clear at the end of his dirge. Furthermore, to anyone familiar with the Chinese poetic tradition, the tone of the dirge is unmistakably derived from Qu Yuan's (ca. 340–ca. 278 BCE) classical poem "Encountering Sorrow" (Li sao), which conveys an exiled poet's desolation and yet unchanged loyalty and dignity.[48]

Seen in the context of a rich literary tradition of writing focused on cranes, *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* no longer stands alone as a literary composition dedicated to a bird. The imagery of a dead crane echoes the description of the captive crane and the dying birds in the works noted above, in particular in "Dirge for a Crane." It draws from the same storehouse of allusions and symbols used in earlier works, which often express human sorrows.[49] Thus, when understood within the literary tradition of writing about cranes and the concomitant use of allusions, the text of the *Eulogy* can be read less as a eulogy for a real bird than as a literary concoction inspired by the author's feelings and personal history. The latter is revealed in two emotional lines in the *Eulogy* (lines 7–8):

Did Heaven not allow me to soar about the cosmos as I wish?
Why take away my crane so quickly?

While the rest of the text seems to concern the bird and the burial, these two lines, echoing the ending of Zhan Fangsheng's work, hint at another subtext altogether: the fate not of the birds but of the subjects who mourned them.

We will return to the symbolism of the *Eulogy* and the possible historical event behind it soon. For now, the dense literary references and the poetic sentiment in the lines of the *Eulogy* prompt us to a more urgent question: Is it a real epitaph? To better answer this question, we need to consider both the textual and material aspects of epitaph in its historical context.

Epitaph as Literary Genre

The character *ming* in the title of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* (Yi he ming) is a short form of *muzhiming*, or inscription on marking the tomb—the Chinese equivalent of the Western epitaph. A literal translation of the *Eulogy* could thus be "Inscription on Burying a Crane." More precisely and narrowly defined, *ming* refers only to the verse section of the epitaph text (the prose section is *xu*, or "preface," as we read in the *Eulogy* text). At any rate, the term *ming* or *muzhiming* has a double meaning: it designates not only a highly conventionalized genre of writing but also the artifact on which such a text is carved. A close examination of its textual and physical form reveals that though *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* evidently takes the form of a medieval epitaph, it distinguishes itself at both levels from real epitaphs as an *imitative* work. The interpretation of the work should therefore go far beyond a literal reading.

It should be noted, however, that the English translation of "epitaph" for the Chinese term *muzhiming* may be misleading, since unlike their Western counterparts, which were displayed in cemeteries or churches, epitaphs in medieval China were not put on view for public reading but were buried *inside* tombs.[50] The origin of these entombed artifacts remains unclear. Based on archaeological finds, scholars have traced the prototype of entombed epitaphs to the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), when bricks and tiles inscribed with the names of the deceased were placed in the graves of prisoner-workers.[51] These inscriptions were used to identify the bodies for later reburial. Another important precursor to the entombed epitaph was the miniature stele found inside tombs during the Western Jin (265–316 CE).[52] In the following century, the custom of burying epitaphs was known in southern China, though the forms of these objects were different, usually consisting of inscribed bricks or cheap stones; the writing and carving was very casual and thus lack any ceremonial significance.[53]

By the end of the fifth century, epitaphs were consistently placed in tombs. A more elaborated form of epitaph was developed, carved on square or rectangular limestone slabs. The texts on these slabs were much longer than earlier epitaphs and normally documented the family history and career of the deceased in a formulaic pattern of prose and verse—the form from which the *Eulogy* derived. Epitaphs were usually placed in the underground tomb corridor near the tomb chamber or in front of the coffins. Once the tombs were sealed, the readership of the entombed epitaphs was restricted to the world of the spirits, and texts helped the deceased to resume their identity in the afterlife.[54]

In the south, the best examples of elaborate epitaphs are those made for the imperial families. The epitaphs of the prince of Guiyang, Xiao Rong (472–501), dated 502, and his wife, Wang Qishao (473–514), dated 514, are typical.[55] Both have lengthy texts (528 and 696 characters, respectively) carved in standard script in an elegant calligraphic style. In the north, then ruled by the Tuoba Wei dynasty (386–535, known also as the Northern Wei), the making of epitaphs was taken to another

level. These epitaphs incorporated elements from other tomb artifacts and gained a more important ritual function. The calligraphy and carving is highly refined, and the text is sometimes protected by an inscribed ornamental cover.[56]

On the other hand, by the sixth century, epitaph writing had become such a mature literary genre that it often occupies an independent section in noted writers' anthologies.[57] Most texts of this category bear titles such as "*Muzhiming* of . . ." (followed by the name of the deceased). Normally, the text consists of a prose introduction setting forth the genealogy, place of origin, career, and notable achievements or virtues of the deceased; this section is followed by tetrasyllabic verses that elaborate on the information in the preface, often praising the dead in effusive language. Take, for example, the epitaph for Xiao Rong. The text was composed by Ren Fang (460–508), one of the most noted writers of his time. The preface elaborates on Xiao Rong's family history and career; this is followed by an account of his death:[58]

> In his thirtieth year the prince died on the twelfth day of the twelfth month in the third year of the Yongyuan era [501 CE]. In the second year of the Zhongxing era [502 CE] he was posthumously granted the titles "executive assistant" and "gentleman attendant at the Yellow Gate." His August Highness with divine martial prowess dispelled the disorder and greatly benefited the people; [with these actions] the grievances and shame [of the past] were cleansed and the posthumous glory was granted.[59] (1H)

The preface then rephrases an imperial decree to commemorate Xiao Rong and concludes with the execution of the epitaph, including its formal title and the author's name and official title:

> On the *yimao* day, the first day of the eleventh month in the first year of the Tianjian era [502], when the year-star was in *renwu*, he was entombed near Mt. Yipi [according to proper] ritual. Alarmed that bronze and stone can become corrupted, and hills and valley do not stay put, we venture to compose an account of his lingering conduct, [and place] a model inscription in his chamber by the [Yellow] Springs.
>
> The entombed epitaph inscription of the Liang dynasty's late cavalier attendant-in-ordinary and grand general controlling the armies, the prince of Guiyang, [Xiao] Rong, posthumously canonized as the Guileless Prince.
>
> Composed in accordance with imperial decree by the probationary gentlemen of the interior for the Ministry of Personal in the Secretariat, Minister Ren Fang. (1I)

The lengthy and elaborate *ming* eulogizing the deceased begins with the following lines:

Oh! How brilliant is the imperial lineage!
It enjoys an exclusive claim on the excellence of former kings.
[Its destiny foretold in] green charts and cinnabar records,
[And manifest on] gold writing strips in jade cases.
The royal shrines have multiplied, blessed by the heavenly order,
and the [imperial] enterprise flourished under Ji Chang.[60]
[Its members] continued ceaselessly to be written about in cinnabar,[61]
[Their reputations] are stainless and long lasting.
Illustrious, indeed, and resolute,
[Xiao Rong] opened a wide path to spread wisdom.
Exhausting [his study of the] lacquered documents of literary arts,
He completed his learning [by mastering everything] that has been written on silk.[62]
He was affectionate toward his filial brothers;
There is no room for gossip [in his family].
(1J)

As part of a text used in a funeral ritual, these lines of the epitaph adhere to a formal rhythm and display deliberately archaic and extremely ornate language (barely reflected in the plain English translation) appropriate to their solemn function.

There is no doubt that in form, *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* follows conventions detectable in Xiao Rong's epitaph: the self-referential title indicates that it was an epitaph for a crane; the preface recounts the life and death of the bird; and the rhymed *ming* (in its narrow definition) eulogizes the deceased crane and expresses the sorrow of the living. Nevertheless, there are some differences between conventional epitaphs and the one expressed in the *Eulogy*. First, the subject matter is odd; to my knowledge, there was no known tradition of erecting epitaphs for animals in any period of Chinese history. Second, the rich literary symbolism and allusions would not have been considered suitable for the formal language of epitaph writing, which, although highly decorative, was not supposed to stir the literary imagination. Last—and most important—is the lyrical language and self-expressional nature of the text, which is subtly but profoundly different from the ritualized expression in an actual epitaph.

What we encounter in the *Eulogy*, thus, is a work of parody, a phenomenon not unusual in literary works from the fifth and sixth centuries. Parodies were based on the vocabulary and form of established genres, especially those usually reserved for formal ritual use, but they were enlivened by new meanings, satirical or not.[63] Zhan Fangsheng's "Dirge for a Crane," cited above, easily falls into such a category; his imitation of the mortuary genre of a dirge makes sense only when understood as an expression of mourning for the fate of human beings. This combination of parody and symbolism can also be found in the *Eulogy*—a written parody appropriating the form of a medieval epitaph.

Transcending the Epitaph

As a parodic epitaph, *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* was not alone among sixth-century writings. "Inscription on Thinking of the Past" (Si jiu ming), a work by Yu Xin, the most prominent literary figure of his time, seems to have been written in the same manner. Identical in its formal structure to an epitaph, this work is ostensibly a lament for the author's dead friend Xiao Yong (d. 558), a nobleman of the Liang imperial family who served the Northern Zhou (557–581) after the Liang dynasty (502–557) collapsed. The piece begins conventionally with a "preface":

> In the year of *sheti* [the year of the tiger], when the star is located in *guoshou* [early in the fifth month], the marquis Guanning of the Liang, Xiao Yong, died. Oh, how sorrowful it is! How a man's annihilation can be avoided [even if his name is inscribed on] the metal and stone [monument]? How the laments of the gentlemen can be different between the past and present?[64] (1K)

Following the passage is a dazzling array of literary allusions to occasions of all kinds evoking feelings of sorrow in ancient history: the tragic suicide of Xiang Yu (232–202 BCE), the warlord who toppled the Qin empire, and the bitter exile of Li Ling (d. 74 BCE), the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) general who had been distrusted by his home country, among others. The long list ends with the famous Lu Ji's last word about cranes singing at Huating, which we have read in the *Eulogy* (line 5, note 7). What has been omitted, in a complete departure from the convention of epitaph writing, is the biographical information about the deceased.

Moreover, whereas a conventional *ming* section is often concluded with a generic mourning, Yu Xin's piece ends with another series of literary images that refer to the personal and intimate perspective of the surviving widow:

> After the farewell in the south of the mountain,
> there survived the old person [widow] alone.
> On her loom remained only horizontal threads.
> She is living like a single crane or a lonely phoenix.
> In the inner chamber in the quiet night,
> wind and moon feel chilly.
> Her life has come to the end,
> Yet her remembrance will last forever.
> In the box she keeps the broken zither strings;[65]
> From the neighbor comes the sad flute music.[66]
> The general's former official tent
> now has been converted into the curtained funeral setting.[67]
> (1L)

Yu Xin uses these many allusions to compel the reader's sympathy, and the direct expression of personal grief far overshadows the ritual decorum of a real epitaph, which is represented in the archaic phrases and liturgical language that we found in the epitaph for Xiao Rong. Yu Xin's composition may be read, therefore, as an imitation or literary representation of mortuary writing.[68] As Ni Fan (1637–1704), the later commentator on Yu Xin's writings, correctly pointed out, rather than a lament for his dead friend, "Inscription on Thinking of the Past" may be better understood as an expression of Yu Xin's own homesickness.[69]

The significance of the *Eulogy* is illuminated when its text is read in this literary historical context. In addition to the lyrical expression, Yu Xin's work finds other striking parallels with *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*: in both works, dates are indicated by *ganzhi* compounds only. This avoidance of a precise date may be intended to distance the work from any practical function. Whereas Yu Xin's writing deliberately leaves out biographical details, *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* is also ambiguous about the crane's actual life: its age was unknown, the date vague, its story "elusive and mysterious" (line 23). Although one poem was composed for a deceased man and the other ostensibly for a bird, both works transcend the formulaic compositions they imitate. And both serve the purposes of their lyrical expression beyond the face value of the genre.

Paradox in the *Eulogy*

It seems unlikely, however, that Yu Xin's "Inscription on Thinking of the Past" would have been carved in stone and buried in his friend's tomb, although it was apparently dedicated to a real person. At least, no such archaeological example has ever been found, to my knowledge. This differentiation may be reflected in the later compilation of Yu Xin's collected works; two entire volumes, labeled "*zhiming*," consist of real epitaphs that follow all the conventions of the genre. They were very likely carved in stone and actually placed in tombs, though none of them has been discovered so far.[70] "Inscription on Thinking of the Past" is instead found in a different volume, labeled "*ming*," which consists of a miscellaneous group of commemorative eulogies. Some of them are ritual inscriptions, but many of them, though so titled, are more likely literary compositions that were not supposed to be actually inscribed.[71]

Eulogy for Burying a Crane, however, presents a paradox: whereas it shares the lyrical quality of "Inscription on Thinking of the Past," it, like the real epitaphs we saw above, was actually carved in stone. Indeed, some radical differences can be found between the visual presentation of the *Eulogy* and that of conventional epitaphs. First, compared to contemporary epitaphs, the *Eulogy* inscription (approximately 235 × 204 cm) is much larger (about four times larger than Xiao Rong's epitaph at 60 × 60 cm). Second, the characters of the *Eulogy* are arranged in an informal manner not found among contemporary epitaphs, where neat characters are executed in regular

grids. Finally, the material was not a piece of quarried, polished stone like that on which most medieval epitaphs were carved but a wall of rock displayed in a public space. Unlike entombed epitaphs, which address the invisible spirit world, such an object was clearly intended to attract the attention of readers in the real world, who, being aware of the literary expressions in the text, would have also recognized the paradox in the visual presentation of the "epitaph."

What, then, was the purpose of this "epitaph"? If the meaning of an epitaph cannot be separated from its configuration within a tomb, the interpretation of the *Eulogy* must take into account its location within a particular landscape setting. While the physical form of the inscription is indeed appropriate for an epitaph, it must also be considered in the context of another tradition of stone inscription that was not unfamiliar to sixth-century audiences: *moya*, or inscriptions carved on natural cliffs.

Inscribing the Mountains

Inscribed on cliffs or rocks, early *moya* inscriptions—most date to the Eastern Han and are found in western China—initially functioned as monuments to celebrate the completion of massive road- and tunnel-building campaigns and to eulogize the officials in charge of these projects.[72] As a special genre of inscription, *moya* achieve their monumental effect by displaying super-large writings in spectacular mountain settings. Few *moya* inscriptions were carved after the fall of the Han, but in the sixth century, the practice of carving words on natural stone surfaces was revived in several areas of China.[73] As Robert E. Harrist argues in his study of the visual spectacles of *moya*, inheriting the legacy of Han precursors, these new *moya* inscriptions, often driven by religious purposes, took advantage of the topography and transformed their environment into a kind of mind landscape.[74]

The most striking examples, and most pertinent to the *Eulogy*, are the Daoist *moya* inscriptions carved on Cloud Peak Mountain (Yunfengshan) and on nearby peaks in the coastal area of Shandong, composed or supervised by Zheng Daozhao (ca. 455–516), a Daoist adherent and high official of the area.[75] At the base of the mountain, Zheng had an epitaph carved for his late father, who was in fact buried far away. Higher up the mountain, Zheng inscribed the names of imaginary paradises and immortals, as well as poems evoking sightings of supernatural beings. The inscription illustrated in figure 1.6, for example, reads, "Prince Jin pilots a phoenix and rests on Mt. Taishi."[76] The effect of these inscriptions was to transform the granite mass of Cloud Peak Mountain into a representation of a mountain paradise in which, it was hoped, the soul of Zheng's father would dwell.[77]

This efficacy of large *moya* writing may also have been inspired by the Daoist belief in mysterious writings that reveal themselves in the heavenly domains.[78] One early Daoist sutra describes vividly how "natural writing" emerges in the sky:

FIGURE 1.6. Inscriptions at Cloud Peak Mountain, Laizhou, Shandong. Courtesy of Lai Fei.

> The eight flying mysterious and natural characters are each as large as one *zhang* [about 2.5 m at the time]. The shining pattern and color are illuminating through the eight directions.[79] (1M)

On some occasions, these radiant characters are said to appear on windows, pillars, and other architectural parts of celestial buildings;[80] in others, the mysterious characters are believed to be carved on Daoist mythic mountains:

> After seven thousand years, [the heavenly writings] were inscribed on the chambers of Mt. Kunlun and the source of the Northern Caves. The size of

each character is one *zhang.* The pattern is flourishing and shining, radiating the light to four directions. Rising from the void in the mist they are looming and disappearing. The shimmering light and purple pneuma [*qi*] clean up the dust, and the golden essence and cold refinement polish the text. Over the multiple kalpas [*jie*], the form of the writing is still bright and illuminating.[81] (1N)

It is worth noting that these scenes are not just literary imaginings. The monumental placement and presence of the writings are supposed to be seen in the mind's eye during the practice of *cunsi*, the Daoist adherent's visualization of his or her spiritual journey to the cosmic world.[82] The imagined spectacles of heavenly writings at Mt. Kunlun may have inspired the sixth-century revival of the *moya* inscriptions, although the texts themselves are not sacred. It is believed in the Daoist tradition, however, that initially, the heavenly writings were illegible to human eyes and needed to be translated into certain forms of human writing.[83] Tao Hongjing, for example, mentioned that the celestial "script of the three origins and eight connections" (*sanyuan bahui zhi shu*) was translated into legible script by early masters of the Shangqing sect.[84] As modern scholars have suggested, such a translation process may have stimulated the aesthetic sensitivity and given birth to a calligraphic innovation in the Six Dynasties.[85] The Daoist *moya* of Cloud Peak Mountain thus may have originated in similar logic: the large inscriptions were meant to materialize and translate heavenly writing in front of a human witness.

Although no other comparable examples are found, the Daoist practice of inscribing text on a natural landscape must have been practiced elsewhere at the time.[86] We do know that Tao Hongjing, the alleged author of the *Eulogy*, once planned to have a series of his poems, "Eulogy on Huayang" (Huayang song), carved on rocks.[87] Had it materialized, the project would have resembled the one on Cloud Peak Mountain. Viewed from this context, *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*, enlarged and inscribed at the base of Jiaoshan, may also be the manifestation of the same Daoist vision. If the inscriptions at Cloud Peak Mountain were meant to create a virtual paradise, the *Eulogy* may have been intended to transform this mountainous island into a monument of a very particular kind—a virtual tomb mound.

To a sixth-century viewer, tombs and mountains were closely associated sites. Back in the Han dynasty, some royal tombs had been cut into the sides of mountains.[88] The custom was carried on later, though not in the same exact fashion. Royal tombs of the Southern Qi dynasty (479–502), for example, were often located on mountainsides.[89] These tombs took advantage of the topography and made the natural mountains resemble artificially raised mounds over burial sites—an ancient form of mortuary monument invented in the Eastern Zhou (770–225 BCE).[90] The author of the *Eulogy* must have been well aware of mountain-burial traditions. The tumulus-like form of Jiaoshan would have inspired its choice as a burial site. Furthermore, two huge rocks in the water, named Song and Liao—only one is still standing in the river today, but both can be seen on the left side of a eighteenth-century

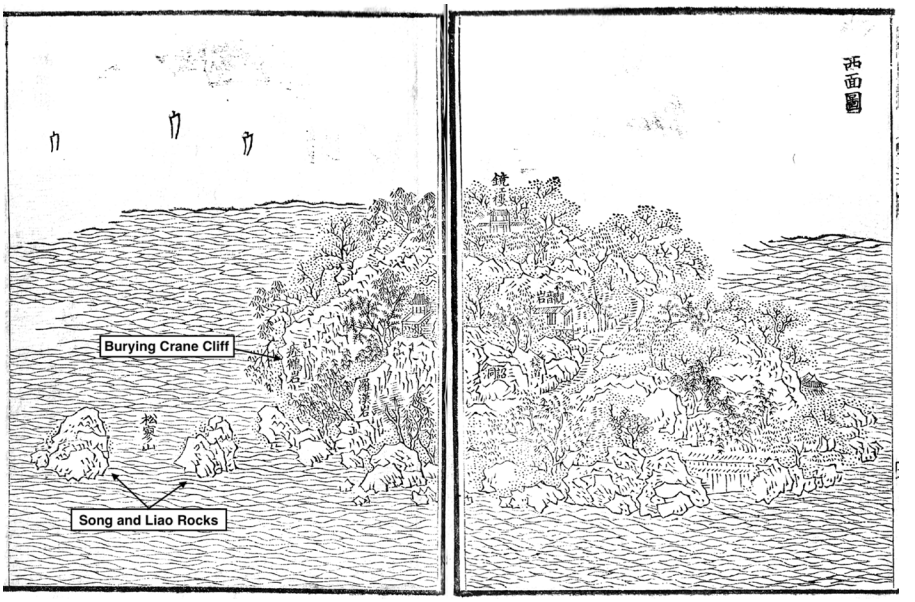

FIGURE 1.7. West view of Jiaoshan. Woodblock print. From Wu Yun, *Tongzhi Jiaoshan zhi* (1865).

woodblock print (figure 1.7)—resemble the pair of *que* towers that mark cemeteries in the Later Han dynasty.[91] This natural setting echoes the description about "quiet and peaceful" land in the text (lines 27–34), which demonstrates a great attention to the auspicious geomancy of the site. Thus, the inscribed *Eulogy* transforms real topography into a symbolic landscape, now a representation of a colossal tumulus.

Revisiting the Eulogy's Authorship

To summarize our observation and speculation so far, the *Eulogy* seems to resemble real mortuary monuments in many aspects—textual, physical, and visual—but at the same time distinguishes itself from such monuments by the metaphorical language of the writing, the paradox in its textual and material form, and its power to transform the physical landscape. Running throughout the "epitaph" and the virtual tomb it marks is the symbolic representation of human misfortunes and suffering that we discerned in the literary imagery of the crane. Thus, *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* should not be read as a literal epitaph for a dead bird, if there was one, but as a much more complex monument erected as an expression of discontent and sorrow.

If my interpretation is correct, who, then, was in a position to conceive the sophisticated design and have the inscription carved in Jiaoshan? As the Japanese scholar Toyama Gunji has correctly pointed out in his discussion of Zheng Daozhao's project, "It is not difficult for us to imagine the scale of the project, which could only have been patronized by very few powerful families such as Zheng's. Such a project must have

benefited from his wealth and political power. With this support, Zheng was able to realize his artistic dream and thus leave us a great number of *moya*."[92] This insight can be applied to the present case as well. The most fundamental one concerns the size of the inscription; this was a big monument, and its production was radically different from that of a text brushed on bamboo, silk, or paper or carved on a piece of quarried stone. Carving the text on the cliff at Jiaoshan involved meticulous planning and considerable expense, as well as a certain degree of authority over the landscape of this island. The composition of the text, moreover, demanded full knowledge of elite literature and culture. In other words, certain political and cultural elites with wealth and power must have been behind the production of the monument.

The authorship of Tao Hongjing may still be debatable. But even for skeptics, it is hard to overlook the connection between the *Eulogy* and the members of the Shangqing (highest clarity) school of Daoism, of which Tao was a leading master, headquartered at Maoshan (see map 1 at beginning of book), which had become the dominant school of Daoism in southern China by the late fifth century.[93] The school originated in southern China and was remarkable for the lyrical language of its teachings and its focus on the interiorization of religious practice, which was highly popular among the southern aristocracy.[94] The Shangqing Daoists also tended to live together, much in the manner of Buddhists living in monasteries. It is reported that major priests built their own residential halls (*daoguan*) on Maoshan, where they and their disciples formed a large community.[95] According to a later compiler of a Maoshan gazetteer, more than fifty *daoguan* were built under the Qi and Liang dynasties, and the community enjoyed continuous imperial sponsorship.[96] Tao Hongjing was certainly among the most distinguished masters in this community.

The connection between *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* and the Shangqing Daoists may be found in the crane imagery itself. While the crane had a universal role in Daoist beliefs, it had special meaning for the Maoshan sect. It is believed that the founding masters of the sect, the three Mao brothers, arrived at the mountain on white cranes. By no later than the fifth century, a temple to the cranes was built on top of the mountain.[97] One subpeak of Maoshan is named Mt. Dinggong and was the site where Ding Lingwei, the mythical Daoist, transformed into a crane (see the *Eulogy* text, note for line 21).[98] For Tao Hongjing and his contemporary Maoshan Daoists, the crane was a part not only of ancient myth but also of daily reality. It was reported that around 495, Zhang Yuanzhi (fl. late fifth century), one of the headmasters at Maoshan, built a structure at his residence called the Crane Platform (Hetai) to commemorate the place where "cranes often come to visit."[99] Thus, while there is no direct mention of cranes in the surviving writings of or about Tao Hongjing, he was certainly familiar with the company of cranes in his environment.

These close connections between Maoshan and cranes only provide a general background for our reading of the "epitaph," however. If, as we read above, the *Eulogy* text did draw on a literary tradition of using crane imagery to express human sorrow, and if the inscription was designed as a virtual monument and was sponsored by

powerful men, the inscription had to be associated with specific people and historical events. Assuming that the author was indeed Tao Hongjing or one of his associates from Maoshan, is it possible to discover a connection between the lament voiced in the text and the circumstances of their lives? Was there occasion for Tao or his fellow Shangqing adepts to turn to the symbolism of cranes in a literary response to misfortunes visited upon the Maoshan community?

Tao Hongjing's Discontents

These questions prompt me to reexamine a murky episode in the history of early sixth-century Daoism: a proscription decreed by Liang Wudi, or Emperor Wu, founder of the Liang dynasty (r. 502–549). The emperor was reportedly born to a family with a Daoist background, but he turned to Buddhism soon after ascending the throne.[100] His decision seems to have contributed to a rise in existing religious tension. In early 504, the emperor held a debate on religious topics at his court, perhaps in response to the escalating conflict between Buddhism and Daoism.[101] A source found in a Buddhist document indicates that the result of this debate was that the emperor formally declared his conversion to Buddhism, issued an edict denouncing Daoism as a "delusive way" (*xiefa*) and commanded all ministers, officials, and imperial family members to abandon their Daoist beliefs.[102] It is unknown how much the account exaggerates the situation because of its Buddhist stance. But fragmentary information gathered from various sources, including Tao's hagiography in the *Daoist Canon* (Daozang), suggests that Tao Hongjing and the Maoshan community indeed faced serious trouble under Liang Wudi's reign, very likely a consequence of religious proscription.

Born into a family of scholars, Tao Hongjing was known for having an exceptional literary talent at an early age. He served in the office of Xiao Daocheng (427–482), who would go on to found the Qi dynasty in 479. In the Qi period, he seemed to have had a successful career and gained fame as an expert on alchemy, calligraphy, and the connoisseurship of swords. When he retired from official duties and departed for Maoshan in 492, according to his biography in the *Southern History* (Nan shi), Tao was granted a generous imperial honor:

> [The emperor] bestowed silks, and ministers set a farewell banquet in the Conquering Barbarian Pavilion. The meal was luxurious; chariots and horses filled the road. All said nothing like it had been seen in the Song and Qi dynasties. People from the court and the countryside all honored him.[103] (1O)

And after the founding of the Liang dynasty, the biography continues,

> whenever the state faced auspicious or inauspicious affairs and matters of military policy, [Liang Wudi] would ask for advice. There were often several

> correspondences in a single month. At the time, Tao was called the "Prime Minister [Retreating] in the Mountains." The emperor and the crown prince, as well as other aristocrats, sent their regards to him constantly. Their gifts never stopped.[104] (1P)

The biography, compiled at a later time (the early seventh century), says nothing about the proscription against Daoism, leading some historians to doubt whether it was even a true account.[105] However, a more complicated image of Tao Hongjing and his fellow Daoists emerges when one reads closely more "internal" sources preserved by the Maoshan sect, in particular the "Internal Biography for Tao the Hermit at Huayang" (Huayang Tao Yinju neizhuan) by a Tang dynasty Maoshan Daoist named Jia Song (dates unknown).[106]

In the court debates held in 504, Tao Hongjing was firmly on the side of the Daoists, of course, but it does not appear that he was punished for his stand.[107] His problems arose, however, from the emperor's constant demands for elixirs. The dark side of Tao's career was long ignored until it was revealed in a recent study.[108] Although Liang Wudi had become an ardent Buddhist, he was reportedly interested in alchemy and, like many of his predecessors, eager to achieve longevity or immortality through magical potions. He likely funded Tao and his Shangqing associates in their alchemical research, but they were apparently unsuccessful.[109] Around 506 CE, after several failures, Tao asked the emperor for a leave of absence to search for a better location for producing the desired elixir—a request the emperor denied, perhaps recognizing it as an excuse to escape royal control.[110] Two years later, and after a few more failures, Tao's concern for his own safety seems to have grown. The "Internal Biography" records that on one occasion, he told his disciples:

> It is not impossible for me to release in the form of a pillow and staff. But it is a lesser way that only can benefit myself. Abandon you and depart like this—that would not serve a good example for our teaching.[111] (1Q)

In this context, the Daoist "release" (line 25 of the *Eulogy* text) may be read as referring to Tao's consideration of suicide. Tao rejected the idea, however. The same biography relates that one night in the fourth month of 508 CE, without the emperor's permission, Tao Hongjing fled from Maoshan under the cover of an assumed name and in the company of two disciples.[112] They remained in the coastal region around today's Wenzhou until the emperor sent an emissary in 512 CE to find them. There seems to be no indication that Tao was punished. Instead, the emperor ordered that a new residential hall be built for him at Maoshan in 516. The emperor's demand—an elixir of immortality—remained in force, however, and Tao may have had no choice but to return to work. Around 519, he claimed success and decided to try the elixir himself, but when a deity appeared to him in a dream and said, "Do not try it," he gave up on the experiment.[113] The elixir project then seemed to go nowhere.

What is not mentioned in the "Internal Biography" is the curious move that Tao took on his way back to Maoshan in 512: he visited the Asoka stupa in Maoxian (modern Ningbo, Zhejiang) and took the Five Precepts, the formal ritual of commitment to the Buddhist path.[114] Furthermore, a mortuary stele for Tao Hongjing, composed by Prince Xiao Lun (507–551), son of Liang Wudi, recalls that when Tao returned to Maoshan, he began to "set up Buddhist icons, write sutras, and build stupas."[115] And perhaps not without a little exaggeration, a seventh-century Buddhist account reports, "At Maoshan, [Tao] built two halls for Buddhism and Daoism and worshipped at them on every other day. The Buddhist hall has an icon; the Daoist hall does not."[116] This seemingly impossible development is found in Tao's own writings as well. In *Stele for the Old Studio and Altar* (Jiu guan tan bei, dated 518), which still survived at Maoshan in the sixteenth century, Tao depicts a memorial site at Maoshan that had just received a renovation:

> [This site] follows the imperial standard and explicates the general law. On the east seating the green altar; on the west standing the white pagoda. Between the altar and the pagoda is the foundation site [of the old buildings].[117] (1R)

The "green altar," or *qingtan*, is where a Daoist ritual is performed;[118] the "white pagoda" is evidently a Buddhist structure.[119] This strange blending of two religions continued until his death in 536; according to his biography in *Southern History*, Tao left a will instructing that his body be dressed in Daoist clothes but covered with a *kāṣāya*, the robe of an ordained monk.[120]

Some scholars interpret Tao's embrace of Buddhism as an expression of religious syncretism common in many periods of Chinese history, but the reality was probably more complex. Although it was not unusual for Buddhist elements to be adopted into Daoist theology,[121] Tao Hongjing's assumption of dual religious identities at Maoshan, in particular its materialization in architectural form, may be better explained in relation to Liang Wudi's suppression of Daoism. Under great political pressure, Tao's conversion may have been an expedient device to both please the emperor and win protection for the Maoshan community. We do not find anywhere in his writings a defense or explanation of his conversion, but his intentions were perhaps an open secret and can be inferred from his comparison between himself and Zhang Liang (ca. 250–186 BCE), a Han dynasty minister who successfully avoided conflict with the emperor by withdrawing from the political scene. "No worthy person in history can match him [Zhang]," said Tao Hongjing.[122] Tao and his Daoist fellows at Maoshan may have been rewarded for their adoption of Buddhism, sincerely or not. It is reported that the emperor promulgated a harsher edict in 517, closing all Daoist temples and commanding Daoists to return to secular life, but the Maoshan monasteries appear to have been exempt and survived to Daoism's next golden age under the Tang dynasty.[123]

This relatively secure environment did not mean that Tao was able to live in peace, however. Instead, Tao's compromise may have been regarded by some as a betrayal of his original faith. This can be discerned in accounts of disappointment and dissent among his followers at Maoshan. One of Tao's disciples, Huan Kai (fl. early sixth century), was probably among the malcontents. In an account of meeting a "perfected immortal" (*zhenren*), he delivers the latter's message: despite being a highly intelligent person who has made a great contribution to the sect, Tao Hongjing will not be able to achieve immortality because he was "not consistent in searching for the truth."[124] No direct evidence shows how Tao Hongjing responded to such criticism. There is, however, a corresponding record dated 515 CE by Tao himself: one night, he dreamed a deity came to announce that his appointment to an immortal official position was suspended—a dream that caused him considerable unease.[125] Furthermore, right before his death—his "release"—Tao was told that he would be assigned the immortal official title Supervisor to the Water of Penglai (Penglaidu Shuijian), a quite low, if not downright insulting, rank in the Daoist pantheon that in no way matches Tao's influence and status in life.[126]

The experiences of Tao and his Maoshan fellows would have made the allegorical imagery of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane* suitable for the literary expression of their misfortunes. The traditional date of the inscription, 514, was right after Tao's return to Maoshan and his conversion to Buddhism and before the uneasy dream caused by mounting criticism of his betrayal. In this atmosphere, the imagery associated with the death of a crane would have been a perfect vehicle for conveying the discontent that Liang Wudi's policies and demands had caused. The literary and visual devices that disguised the inscription as an epitaph would have been carefully chosen to express Tao's frustration while avoiding a direct confrontation with the emperor.

Revisiting the Island

To proceed with my assumption, why, then, did Tao Hongjing choose Jiaoshan as the location? A simple explanation might be that whereas carving the inscription anywhere at Maoshan would have revealed the Daoists' intentions, a place such as Jiaoshan seemed a safer location for the project. And the topographic resemblance to a tomb mound, discussed above, may partly account for the choice. Nevertheless, a more direct connection between the island and Daoist belief, and in particular that of the Shangqing sect, can be found in its historical association with Daoism and the mental landscape it evokes.

Today, the island is near the southern bank of the Yangzi River and a long distance from the ocean.[127] In the early sixth century, however, the coastline was much closer and the river wider.[128] Jiaoshan, along with the adjacent rocks, Song and Liao, was called Ocean Gate (Haimen), implying a structure leading directly to the Pacific.[129]

This topography made Jiaoshan resemble an imaginary island of the immortals. Upon visiting Jiaoshan, the Eastern Jin general Xun Xian (322–359) vividly described what he saw:

> Although I am not able to see the Three Mountains, [this scene] makes me want to soar up to the clouds. If the emperors of the Qin and Han [were to see this], they would surely "lift up their skirts" and get their feet wet [to cross over the water to the mountains].[130]

"Three Mountains" refers to the belief that at the eastern extremity of the Chinese world, immortals lived on fantastic mountains floating offshore. It was their longing to find these island-dwelling immortals and to achieve immortality themselves that lured the First Emperor of the Qin and Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty (156–87 BCE) to the seacoast of Shandong, where they gazed across the waves, hoping for a glimpse of the mist-shrouded mountains and their deathless inhabitants.[131]

Viewed from the shore through the mist of the river, Jiaoshan readily evokes the appearance of immortal islands. Aside from the comment by Xun Xian, few records survive from the sixth century or earlier indicating how people appreciated the scene. A little later, however, the great Tang poet Li Bai (Li Bo, 701–762), also known as a Daoist adherent, visited the site and left the poem "Standing on Jiaoshan and Overlooking the Song and Liao Mounts" (Jiaoshan wang Song Liao shan):

> Viewed from the cliff, the Song and Liao
> look as if amidst the blue clouds.
> Where can I find the five-color rainbow
> and make it into a long bridge crossing over the sky?
> If the immortal favors me,
> he will raise his hand in welcome.[132]
> (1S)

Judging from the location of Song and Liao rocks (figure 1.7), Li Bai's position was only a few yards from the *Eulogy*. Unfortunately, the poet did not leave any writing about the inscription, if indeed he saw it. What Li Bai depicts vividly in his poem is not just a generic literary imagination. He may have been attracted to the island by its particular Daoist association.

The name of the island is derived from Jiao Guang (dates unknown), an Eastern Han dynasty hermit who is said to have retreated to the mountain and finally become immortal there.[133] By the early sixth century, Jiaoshan was known as a place to achieve immortality—at least to the Maoshan Daoists. Two such cases are reported in *Declarations of the Perfected* (Zhen gao), a collection of early Shangqing texts compiled by none other than Tao Hongjing:

> In the past there was a Master Fu. He pursued Daoism at a young age and retreated to a stone chamber on Jiaoshan. After seven years, the Old Lord of the Great Ultimate [Taiji laojun][134] visited him and gave him a wooden drill to drill a five-*chi*-thick stone disk. [The Old Lord] said, "Once you drill it through, you will achieve immortality!" The man then drilled day and night. After forty-seven years, when the drill had completely worn out, the stone disk was drilled through. The man then acquired the divine elixirs and ascended to the Upper Clarity to become the Perfected Man of the Southern Peak [Nanyue Zhenren].[135] (1T)

The next paragraph in the same collection records another man, Huang Guanzi, who also entered Jiaoshan and, after passing the tests, became an immortal.[136] We do not know the dates for Master Fu and Huang Guanzi, or indeed whether there were such persons. And Master Fu's stone chamber left no traces in today's Jiaoshan. But the strong Daoist tradition might be part of the reason for inscribing the *Eulogy* at the foot of the island.

The landscape of the monument becomes even more inspiring when it is viewed from a distance, especially from Mount Beigu, a famous and historic hill on the bank of the Yangtze River, less than two miles to the west of Jiaoshan (see map 2 at beginning of book). Numerous people have no doubt climbed the hill to view Jiaoshan from this vantage point. Among them was the emperor Liang Wudi, who is known to have visited here at least once, in the spring of 544 CE, and left a poem describing the epic view of the Yangzi River.[137] Today, the lower water level of the Yangzi and the modern apartment complexes along its bank have changed the landscape forever, but one can still imagine the spectacle in the sixth century: the silhouette of Jiaoshan looming in the mist over the expanse of water, evoking the image of the immortal mountains in the sea. Gazing at their monument in the distance, Tao and his fellows may have recited the text of the "epitaph" they had carved on the cliff and mourned the faith and freedom lost in the imperial proscription against their religion.

Coda

This chapter has sought to demystify the origin of *Eulogy for Burying a Crane*. While the poem is unique, its literary form follows patterns similar to the parody tradition of medieval literature, its physical form appropriates that of contemporary stone epitaphs, and its spectacular appearance and the surrounding environment manifests the cultural tradition of *moya* inscriptions that was revived in the sixth century. These features merit consideration in relation to the significance of medium and space for understanding calligraphy or, more broadly, the visual culture of writing.

The physical presence of the *Eulogy* has prompted us to reconsider it as a monument far more significant than a literal tombstone for a bird. That the monument might have been erected by Tao Hongjing and his fellow Maoshan Daoists as a way to silently mourn Liang Wudi's proscription against Daoism in the early sixth century may never be proved with hard evidence. This explanation at least rescues the *Eulogy* from a generalized discussion of its symbolic meaning.

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