An Interlude
Chapter 30. Jade Woman Hotspring

Written at Jade Woman Hotspring near the walled city of Ying
A Jade Woman riding a chariot cast herself into this spring.\textsuperscript{237}

A divine woman died in this remote dark place, now a river flows from her hotspring. Beneath the earth yin and yang fuse as burning coal, this sacred spring opens from their transformation. A cinnabar fire glistens here, and white smoke rises through the sand. Pearls bubble up and over the clear-sky moon, its white mirror enveloped by empty Heaven. Life-energy floats in that river, orchid fragrance everywhere, colors that swell like peach blossoms. When you know their essence, the ten-thousand things aren’t separate — just as, underground, this river links up the seven Southland lakes. It heals all sickness, it restores balance to Dao. You can clean your robes in its pure waters, and bless your unbound hair in its steam. The river spreads through the ancient realm of Chu, dividing so it may water the fields of ancient kings. The hotspring should receive a visit from the Bright Emperor, it doesn’t matter that it’s rustic and far away! And you yourself can follow any river to the ocean, for even tiny brooks will be carried in homage to the sea.\textsuperscript{238}

安州應城玉女湯作
神女歿幽境，湯池流大川
A fifth-century CE geographer writes:

There’s a hot spring in Hui Marsh. In winter months, while you’re still some miles away, you can see white $qi$-energy floating like smoke, shining up and down and shaped like fine silk threads. There’s also the form of two shafts of a chariot. It’s said that long ago a Jade Woman riding a chariot cast herself into this spring. These days people sometimes see a young woman there, lovely of appearance, idling to and fro.\textsuperscript{239}

Today it looks a lot like this:

![Fig. 40. The current site of the Huaqing Pool.\textsuperscript{240}](image)
This is the Yangtze River basin. This is the ancient kingdom of Chu, the moister South, land of seven lakes, where the King met and lost a shaman lover, and Song Yu recorded it in *The Song-texts of Chu*.

And what is this Jade Woman? And what will happen when you meet her? Well, she could be so many things. In the Daoist text *Zhen’gao* 真誥 she and her many siblings descend bearing texts, splendid young women with yellow skirts, or dressed in green outfits, “like flying birds in their appearance” (*zhuang ru feiniao* 狀如飛鳥). Or they may attend to the needs of the Perfected.

In those milieux we only see her manifestation as a serving girl, or as serving girls by the dozen, sure, she can do that. But actually she is made of light, which is the essence of jade, though not a mineral jade, and her clothing is light as well, but not a light-of-this-world. To tell the truth, she’s an immortal herself, in one incarnation the goddess of Mount Tai, in another the Mother of Dao (*daomu* 道母), and so the mother of Laozi.

The Bright Emperor had a fondness for the mountain hot-spring of Huaqing, twenty-five kilometers east of the Tang capital, where he first courted his Precious Consort. A later poet tells how:

As springtime was cold, he bathed her at Huaqing Pool. Warm spring waters slid over her smooth plump skin. Servant girls helped her from the pool, as she was delicate and frail. This was the time she first received the Emperor’s grace.

Here’s how a twenty-first-century Chinese imagines that scene:
Fig. 41. A statue of the Precious Consort at the Huaqing Pool complex.