Li Bo Unkempt

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Chapter 27. Hua, Sacred Mountain of the West

Song from Cloud Terrace of the Western Mountain, seeing off my friend Cinnabar Hill

Western Mountain, soaring, lofty, you’re only great vigor,
Yellow River, like silk thread flowing from the border of Heaven,
Yellow River, after ten-thousand miles you brush this mountain and turn,
you’re the hub of a great whirlpool, and the land thunders round you.
Splendid radiant life-energies, your tangle of five colors,
only once in a thousand years does a Sage Emperor of such clarity arise.

Once the River Spirit roared, snapped her fingers and split the mountain in two,
then she spat out flood waves that still shoot as far as the Eastern Sea.
With her hands she carved out emerald cliffs and cinnabar valleys,
leaving three great peaks behind the summit that now seem on the verge of collapse.

Once the White Emperor churned the primal life-energy, made lotuses from rocks and terraces from clouds.
These cloud terraces, linked by dark passageways, now hide the deathless master Cinnabar Hill.
Brightstar comes down from Heaven to sweep the floors for him,
divine Hemp Maiden lightly scratches his back with her talons.
Our Imperial Sovereign governs the economy of Heaven and Earth,
Cinnabur Hill talks Heaven’s ways with Heaven’s Sovereign. Coming and going from the palace, his body radiates light, from fairy islands in the east he returns to this Western Mountain.

Should we receive the jade elixir, we’ll drink it with the ancients, mount two grass dragons, and fly up to Heaven.²²¹

西嶽雲台歌送丹丘子

西嶽崢嶸何壯哉，黃河如絲天際來。黄河万里触山动，盘涡毂转秦地雷。荣光休气纷五彩，千年一清圣人在。巨灵咆哮擘两山，洪波喷箭射东海。三峰欲立如欲摧，翠崖丹谷高掌开。白帝金精运元气，石作莲花云作台。云台阁道连窈冥，中有不死丹丘生。明星玉女备洒扫，麻姑搔背指爪轻。我皇手把天地户，丹丘谈天与天语。九重出入生光辉，东来蓬莱复西归。玉浆傥惠故人饮，骑二茅龙上天飞。

Fig. 33. The western summit of Mount Hua.²²²
Huashan 華山, sacred mountain of the west. To reach the top, men of Tang drove metal spikes into the rock. In their current visage:

Fig. 34. The thousand feet cliff of Mount Hua.²²³

And there is also the river, and its love entanglement with the mountain — not just any river, but the Yellow River (Huanghe 黃河), in whose lower basin Chinese civilization made its birth. It had flowed nearly due south for several hundred miles, but where it meets Huashan, not far from the Tang capital, it abruptly changes course and heads east to the sea. Here, with Chang’an bearing its modern name, Xi’an:
Fig. 35. The Yellow River basin.