An Interlude
Chapter 40. Climbing Yang Terrace

The year 744. Li Bo and his young friend Du Fu ascend Yang Terrace, the mountain residence of his late teacher, Sima Cheng-zhen. At the summit, Li Bo does this calligraphy.

His text:

Tall mountains, long rivers,
a thousand million images and things.
Without the brush-stroke of the ancients,
your lucent vigor will fail you.

Written by Li Bo, the Great White, on ascending Yang Terrace the eighteenth day of the moon
In 725 the Emperor had requested Sima’s presence on Mount Wangwu and built for him the Abbey of Yang Terrace (Yangtai guan 阳臺觀).

Sima would live there until his death in 735, aged eighty-nine. At that time his disciples sent this official report to the Bright Emperor:

On the day of his death, a pair of white cranes circled the altar. A white cloud surged from within the altar, mounting right to Heaven. The Teacher’s face appeared to be alive.\(^{345}\)

The outer Yang Terrace atop Mount Wangwu takes its name from the inner Yang Terrace, the grotto-heaven concealed within that mountain.\(^{346}\) This grotto-heaven is preeminent among such caverns, the concealment place of Highest Clarity scriptures. *From the Declarations of the Perfected:*

Lord Pei said, “The Terrace of Yang is the Adjunct Heaven of the Immortals at Mount Wangwu. When they first attain Dao, everyone pays a visit to this Yang Terrace. It’s the Palace of the Clear Void.”\(^{347}\)

But Yang Terrace, the terraces of yang, the bright, is also the name of another ancient place, where the King of Chu met his shaman lover. But only for one night.\(^{348}\)

Li Bo’s poem speaks of “a thousand million things and images.” “Things” is *wu* 物, and “images” *xiang* 象. “The ten-thousand things” is how you’d say “all the appearances of this world.” Regarding *xiang*, Isabelle Robinet writes:
The xiang are images that make things apparent; they are part of reality, and inherently contain and manifest the cosmic dimension of things and their structure. This is why the xiang are often considered to be the “real forms” (zhengxing 真形) of things, or the fundamental substance (ti 體) of beings. They are visible but lie before and beyond the world of forms. They allow us to understand the world and to get along in the universe; hence they are guides and models of conduct.349