

## Unpublished Preface to *Traces of a Daoist Immortal*

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The assassination attempts failed. Well, perhaps they succeeded, but we survived. As outcastes. In exile. Partially with the help of the immortals and the invisible underground. Herein named and beyond name. Unnamed and unnamable. They kept telling us things that were lost in the book-burning campaigns, the attempts to erase us from history. The mysterious and numinous traces that cannot be erased. When the capital was finally taken, the immortals dispersed and fled to the mountains and forests, watching as the last vestiges of the archives of possibility and freedom fell in the distance. The former universities. Now military outposts and feedlots, slave-colonies and debtor-camps. We found ourselves unexpectedly running through the woods, crossing streams and trying to read the old branches. That's when the woodcutters taught us about foraging and wildcrafting and fire-lighting. It provided enough sustenance to keep us going. And farther still, we met Chén Tuán 陳搏, the obscure tenth-century Daoist hermit of Huàshān 華山 (Mount Hua), the Western Marchmount, whose immortal traces are (un)hidden within these pages, held in your hands. In some vaguely remembered sleep, between waking and dreaming, he said, "Make these words live again, in a new language, for another time." Here is that record of the future.

