

Li Hanguang (683-769)

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Received:

Date of this version: 2/8/98

Words: 500 / 523

Li Hanguang, the spiritual heir of Sima Chengzhen, was recognized as the thirteenth Shangqing Grand Master. He spent most of his career supervising the Maoshan establishment and restoring the textual relics of the Shangqing founders. His unusually well-documented life is recorded in two early inscription texts by renowned officials, as well as in numerous local histories and Taoist anthologies, though not in either Tang dynastic history. The inscription texts present Li as a filial son, skilled calligrapher, and accomplished scholar, whose counsel was sought by emperors and officers of state. As Sima's successor, he was assiduously courted by Tang Xuanzong, and their extensive correspondence has been preserved.

A biography by the eminent scholar Yan Zhenqing (dated 777), like a 772 inscription by Liu Shi, relates that Li's forebears had held government positions for centuries, but his grandfather chose a life of seclusion, and his father "practiced the Dao of old Dan," (i.e. Laozi). Yan adds that Li's mother was a person of character and intelligence from the eminent Wang clan of Lang-ya. After private study with an obscure local master, Li Hanguang took ordination as a *daoshi* in 705, and devoted himself to studying the Daoist classics. In 729, Sima transmitted his "grand formulae" to Li, whereupon Xuanzong summoned him to reside at an abbey on Mt. Wangwu where Sima had dwelt. A year later, Li returned to Maoshan, and declined further summonses. In 745/46, he was summoned to court, but when Xuanzong requested a transmission of Daoist formulae (such as he had earlier received from Sima), Li refused, citing a foot affliction. With his court nonplussed by such an excuse, Xuanzong desisted, but continued to inundate Li with letters and gifts. He installed Li at Ziyang, where the Shangqing founders had lived, and there Li continued to restore the manuscripts of the tradition. In 748, he was apparently obliged to grant Xuanzong a ritual transmission, but thereafter he continued to excuse himself from court on grounds of illness.

Li died at Ziyang on 16 December 769. Liu Shi reports that Li announced his "transformation" in advance, and, amidst numinous clouds, ascended "the stages of *xian*-hood."

In panegyric passages, Yan Zhenqing asserts that Li "concocted comestible potions," but otherwise gives little reason to envision him as a practitioner of operative alchemy (a legacy of Tao Hongjing seldom mentioned in accounts of Li's immediate predecessors).

Yan reports that Li compiled a pharmacological guide; study notes on *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and the *Zhouyi*; and notes on "Study of Inner Matters" (*neixue*). None of those texts, or others mentioned in Liu Shi's inscription, survive.

Li was apparently the first "Grand Master" since Wang Yuanzhi to conduct his activities at Maoshan full-time, and perhaps the endurance of both that great center and the Shangqing sacred literature owed considerably to Li's efforts. His great fame in courtly circles, meanwhile, doubtless owed to his status as the successor to Sima Chengzhen. The odd fact that the compilers of the *Tangshu* chose to ignore a figure of such eminence seems explainable by the fact that Li, unlike other Taoists of his day, could not easily be portrayed as having played any exemplary political role.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Schafer 1989: 82-84; Barrett 1996: 69-70; Kirkland 1986a: 43-67; Kirkland 1986b: 72-95, 298-323.

SEE ALSO: Maoshan; Wang Yuanzhi; Pan Shizheng; Sima Chengzhen; *shijie*
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