

Pan Shizheng (585-682)

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Pan Shizheng, the eleventh Mao-shan Grand Master (*zongshi*), was the spiritual heir of * Wang Yuanzhi, and the transmitter of Wang's authority to * Sima Chengzhen, the greatest of all Tang Taoists.

Pan's life is known from biographies in the standard histories (*Jiu Tangshu* 192.5126; *Xin Tangshu* 196.5605) and in Taoist sources (e.g., *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 25.4b-7b; *Maoshan zhi* 11.1a-2a). The standard biographies report that during the reign of Sui Yang-ti (r. 605-617), Pan took ordination as a *daoshi* and studied under Wang, then lived for many years as a recluse on Mt. Song, the "Central Marchmount" near Loyang. From 676 to 683, he received several visits from the emperor Gaozong (r. 650-684) and Empress Wu. Gaozong apparently sought to glorify himself by associating with an "honored recluse" (cf. Kirkland 1993: 153-56), but as in certain other cases, the association seems to have been less substantial than the ruler wished.

The Taoist biographies report that in 676 Gaozong requested "talismans and texts" (*fushu*), but that Pan refused. The standard histories do not mention this event, though we know that Xuanzong later received such a transmission from Sima Chengzhen. Scholars have speculated as to why Pan would have denied Gaozong's request (e.g., Benn 1977: 49-50). On one level, the issue seems to be one of great political significance, since the conveyance of such materials had for centuries signified religious sanction of a worthy ruler (Kirkland 1997). If Pan did refuse Gaozong such materials, the implication would have been that Gaozong's reign was spiritually deficient. Some have speculated (Benn 1977: 50) that Pan declined because the Empress Wu was already exercising more power than was acceptable in a sanctified reign. But more innocent explanations are possible. For instance, the talismans of the Shangqing order consisted primarily of diplomas that certified a certain degree of spiritual attainment on the recipient's part. Perhaps Pan merely judged Gaozong insufficiently advanced in spiritual matters

to receive such certification. Or perhaps Pan was just reluctant to involve himself in politics, like Sima's successor, Li Hanguang (see Kirkland 1986). It is also conceivable that the Taoist reports of the incident were merely reflections of events concerning Sima, Li or similar figures of the period.

Though no writings are attributed to Pan, the *Daozang* preserves a purported colloquy between him and Gaozong: *Daomen jingfa xiangcheng cixu* [HY 1120: TT 762]. Barrett (1996: 38-39) notes that the opening section summarizes basic elements of Taoist belief and practice; the conclusion constitutes a glossary of Taoist terms; and the body of the work reports Pan's answers to Gaozong's questions about the number and organization of the Taoist heavenly beings. The actual provenance of the text remains uncertain.

The standard biographies report that when Pan died in 682, both Gaozong and Empress Wu "brooded over it endlessly." They granted Pan a noble rank, and canonized him as the Elder who Embodies the Arcane (*Tixuan xiansheng*). But it remains unclear whether he ever welcomed imperial attentions. The data suggests that he may have been little more than a coveted worthy, whose true importance derived from his associations with Wang and Sima.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Barrett 1996: 38-39; Kirkland 1986: 44; Benn 1977: 49-50.

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