

LIN ZHAOEN (LIN CHAO-EN: 1517-1598)

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A leading Taoist of Ming times, Lin is noted for his creative integration of elements from different streams of the Chinese religious heritage. Though influenced by Quanzhen models of self-cultivation, Lin rejected both the monastic focus of that tradition and the sacerdotal emphasis of Zhengyi. As had become common in his time, he looked for compatibility among China's "three teachings," and integrated elements of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism based on their usefulness in self-cultivation. Hence, to a Neo-Confucian pursuit of "mind-cultivation," Lin added ritual vows to Heaven, and a meditative recitation reminiscent of a Pure Land *nembutsu*, as aids for maintaining spiritual concentration. His "nine stages of mind cultivation" resonate with those of Yin Zhenren's *Xingming guizhi*, though Lin eschewed the traditional symbology of Inner Alchemy. Like earlier Taoists, he found value in both esoteric principles and ritual activity. But Lin basically constructed a program of "mind-cultivation" designed to feel comfortable to men of his own social, political, and economic class. He thus extracted from other traditions elements that seemed efficacious for such practitioners, and rejected elements that literati might perceive as alien. In that sense, he both revived the "gentry Taoism" of Tang teachers like Sima Chengzhen, and stretched into new social and cultural directions, like the 12th-century Zhenda and Taiyi movements, and the later Jingming school.

Born into a family of scholar-officials in Putian, Fukien, Lin followed the family tradition of scholarship. By eighteen, he seemed destined for a successful official career. After the death of his new wife the same year, he remarried, but the subsequent deaths of his grandfather, father, and uncle evidently reduced his enthusiasm for the official life. In 1546, he visited Luo Hongxian, a teacher of Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucian school, and reportedly "abandoned examination studies and took up the Way of sages and worthies, determined to seek the means to realize it in myself, obtain it in my mind, and manifest it in my actions" (Berling 1980: 64). For ten years, he sought answers in various directions, including Chan Buddhism and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. Most influential may have been a Taoistically inclined eccentric, Zhuo Wanchun, who in 1548 visited Lin and recommended "the ninefold-refined elixir" (*jiuhuan dan*). At some point before 1551, Lin claims to have met an enlightened master who gave him oral instruction, "directly pointing" to secrets of the mind, including healing powers. From that experience, Lin derived a mission to teach and to heal. He soon established a school, patterned after that of Confucius. In the 1560s, when Putian was invaded by Japanese pirates, Lin became a community leader in relief efforts and began to play a priestly role. For the next twenty-five years, he worked to propagate an accurate understanding of "the three teachings." Numerous writings, and collections of his sayings, survive.

Following his death, Lin became widely honored as a divine being, and his cult survives, not only in Fukien, but also among Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaysia.

See Further:

Berling, Judith. *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

Berling, Judith. "Taoism in Ming Culture." In *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8: *The Ming Dynasty*, Part 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 953-986.