

CHANG KAO--NOTEWORTHY T'ANG TAOIST?

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Certain Western-language works on the history of Taoism--notably those by Maspero and Welch--contain references to one Chang Kao lt, an eighth-century figure accorded the title T'ien-shih, "Celestial Master," by T'ang Hsuan-tsung

(1) The style and context of some of those references suggest that Chang was a figure of particular importance for T'ang Taoism.(2) Yet the effort to determine the historical significance of Chang Kao leads one down a long and unrewarding path.

Chang is not listed in general biographical reference works, either Chinese or Western. Nor is there a biography of him in either of the T'ang standard histories. The latter fact is not in itself indicative of minimal historical significance: on occasion, a truly noteworthy T'ang Taoist is omitted from the official histories.(3) Yet, in the numerous collections of biographical materials preserved in the Tao-tsang, one finds only two brief treatments of Chang's life, and those in fact date only from the Yuan and Ming periods. Moreover, in the remaining literature of local histories and other pertinent sources, one finds no biographies of Chang Kao at all. (4) One begins to wonder whether Chang was actually a meaningful figure in T'ang Taoism. After all, several T'ang Taoists were the subjects of more than a dozen biographical accounts, and one--Ssu-ma Ch'eng-chen (646-735)--is immortalized in more than forty accounts in both Taoist and non-Taoist materials.(5)

Nonetheless, it is certainly possible for a person to rank as a notable historical figure despite relative neglect in the historiographical tradition. Perhaps the contents of the two existing biographies disclose facts concerning Chang which would justify the notion that he was in fact a figure of some importance.

The first account appears in the Li-shih chen-hsien t'i tao t'ung-chien (HY 296). This work is a massive biographical anthology compiled by the Taoist Chao Tao-i around the time of the Yuan dynasty. The account of Chang (19. 7 a-b) reads as follows:

Chang Kao, courtesy name of Shih-lung,(6) was the eldest son of Tzu-ming [i.e. Chang lz'ucheng]. (7) He studied the Tao and embraced the doctrines of the Perfected Ones (chen-jen). He would drink up to a gallon of liquor without becoming intoxicated. T'ang Ming-huang summoned him to appear in the capital, erected an altar and received the registers (lu). He granted [Chang] gold and silk and bountifully remitted taxes. He conferred [upon Chang] the title of Celestial Master in the Han Lineage (Han-tsu t'ien-shih). Su-tsung sent down incense, initiated a chiao ritual, and personally issued his signature in order to bolster the Celestial Master. During [the era of] "Pure Prime" (chen-yuan, 785-805), [Te-tsung] deigned to provide support Lfor Chang]. He provided support [in the form of] gold plate, silver incense, and thurible incense, together with purple gauze and raw silk,

gold kerchiefs, and yellow lined garments and implements. He died at home at the age of 91 sui.

The second account of Chang's life appears in the Han T'ien shih shih-chia (HY 1451), an early Ming compilation by Chang Cheng-ch'ang. That equally laconic account adds no significant biographical data, varying only in that Chang's age at death is given as 93.

While the largess granted to Chang by the three T'ang emperors might at first glance appear impressive, a survey of the lives of other T'ang Taoists reveals that the honors granted Chang were actually quite modest. Compared to the patronage of such personages as Ssu-ma Chteng-chen, Yeil Fa-sha, and Li Hankuang, Chang Kao was treated with courtesy and generosity, but not with profound respect or admiration. Chang is not said to have been invited to advise the ruler on policy. He is not said to have been kept at court. No temple or monastery was constructed to house him in honored splendor. He was granted neither official appointment nor canonical title. He was not eulogized at death by the emperor or by any prominent official. Even the mention of conferral of the Taoist registers upon Hsuan-tsung (a form of ordination) is overshadowed by the ordinations conferred by Ssu-ma and Li.(8)

Nor is there any indication that Chang enjoyed a special prominence as a private individual. He is not said to have studied with an illustrious master or to have been in residence at a celebrated religious establishment. He neither transmitted scriptures nor composed new works on any subject. Nor is he reported to have impressed his contemporaries with his scholarship, wit, or skill in any of the various arcane arts.

It would appear, then, that Chang's sole claim to fame was the title accorded him by Hsuan-tsung, Han-tsu t'ien-shih. Chang was presumably granted the title because he belonged to the same clan as the late Han founders of the Cheng-i or "T'ien-shih" order of Taoism. (Whether Chang Kao was in fact the direct descendant of Chang Taoling in an unbroken line of succession does not concern us here.) I have located no reference to such a title being accorded any other T'ang Taoist, even though several other figures bore the Chang surname. Be that as it may, there is no imperial edict connected with the title, or any other perceptible evidence that the awarding of the title was considered an event of particular historical significance. It should also be noted that the title T'ien-shih was not-- in T'ang times at least--reserved for a scion of the Chang clan who headed the Cheng-i order: such figures as Hu Hui-ch'ao, Yeh Fa-shan, Ssu-ma Ch'eng-chen, and Wu Yun were sometimes referred to as T'ien-shih.

It would appear, then, that Chang Kao was in actuality an undistinguished Taoist with a reputation (at least in certain quarters) as a descendant of Chang Tao-ling. On the basis of that reputation, Hsu'an-tsung--who patronized Taoists even more assiduously than did his predecessors--summoned Chang to an honorary ordination ceremony, then apparently sent him on his way with a relatively meaningless honorific title. Though Su-tsung reportedly summoned Chang to conduct a chiao, it would seem that in Later life Chang's fortunes declined: Te-tsung provided him economic support, but no additional honors such as prominent Taoists were often accorded in their later years.

Hence, while Chang Kao cannot, dismissed as a person of no consequence whatever, it is evident that he does not warrant acclaim as a principal figure in the history of T'ang Taoism. Students of T'ang culture would be advised to direct their attention instead to the several great Taoist masters who enjoyed true prestige in T'ang society.

NOTES

1. See Holmes Welch, Taoism: The Parting of the Way, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 144; Henri Maspero, Melanges posthumes (Paris: Civilisations du Sud, S.A.E.P., 1950), II, 180; see also Maspero's Taoism and Chinese Religion, translated by Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p. 398.

2. Welch (p. 144) discusses Chang between two red letter events in Taoist history--the career of K'ou Ch'ien-chih (a prominent Taoist at the Northern Wei court in the fifth century) and the establishment of the T'ien-shih center at the Lung-hu shan near Kuei-chi in 1016. More tellingly, in his "Chronological Chart" (p.185), Welch lists Chang Kao and the poet Li Po as the two "important Taoists" of the eighth century. It is remarkable that Welch makes no mention of any of the other well-known Taoists of the period – Yeh Fa-shan, Ssu-ma Ch'eng-chen, Li Han-kuang, Ho Chih-chang, Wu Yun, etc. Maspero mentions only Ssuma.

3. One thinks most readily of the case of Li Han-kuang(683- 769), the thirteenth patriarch of the Shang-ch'ing (or Mao-shan) order, who enjoyed a long and intense relationship with T'ang Hsuan-tsung. An extensive correspondence between Li and Hsuan-tsung is preserved in Ch'uan T'ang wen, ch. 36 and 927, and in Mao-shan chih (HY304), ch. 2. Funerary inscriptions are contained in Mao-shan chih, ch. 23, and biographies in at least six other Taoist collections and two local histories. Yet Li is conspicuously denied a biography in either T'ang shu. Another prominent Taoist to be spurned by the court historians was the prolific author Tu Kuang-t'ing (850- 933). Tu composed more than twenty-eight works preserved in the Tao-tsang, and another nineteen preserved in the Ch'uan T'ang wen. He was patronized by T'ang Hsi-tsung (r. 874-889) and, after the fall of the T'ang, was appointed by the king of Shu to several positions, including that of tutor to the crown prince. See the discussion by Yen I-p'ing in his introduction to Tu's work Hsien-chuan shih-i in Yen's Tao-chiao yen-chiu tzu-liao (Taipei: I-wen shu-chu, 1974), I, 9-20.

4. There are no biographical materials relating to Chang listed in a recent reference work, Fu Hsuan-tsung et al., T'ang Wu-tai jen-wu jen-wu ch'uan-chi tzu-liao tsung-ho so-yin (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1982). This work indexes some 86 collections directly or indirectly pertaining to T'ang biography, though it excludes virtually the entire corpus of the Tao-tsang. There is an entry on Chang in a reference work on Taoism: Li Shu-huan, Tao-chiao ta tz'u-tien (Taipei: Chu-liu t'u-shu kung-ssu, 1979), p. 289-90. That entry, however, is merely a precis of the biography of Chang given in the Han T'ien-shih shih-chia.

5. These matters are treated in detail in my dissertation, "Images of T'ang Taoists, 705-756 C. E.: Their Portrayal in Contemporary and Later Accounts" (forthcoming, Indiana University).

6. A note in the text here reads, "One [source] says, 'Courtesy name Shih-lung, afterward changed to the courtesy name Shih-lung to avoid the tabooed name of T'ang Hsuan-tsung,'" i. e. Li Lung-chi.

7. For Chang Tz'u-cheng, see Li-tai chen-hsien t'i-tao t'ung-chien, 19.7a, and Han T'ien-shih shih-chia, 2.1

8. For the ordination by Ssu-ma, see Chiu T'ang shu (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1975), 192.5128; for that by Li Han-kuang, see Hsuan-p' in lu (HY 780), 4.25b. For the Taoist registers, see Anna Seidel, "Le Fils du Ciel et le Maitre Celeste: Note a propos des 'Registres' taoiques," Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan 24 (1979), 119-27.