

HUANG Lingwei (ca. 640-721)

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Though many facets of her life remain poorly known, Huang was one of the notable Taoist women of Tang China. She was ignored by the official historians, but we know some details of her career from two inscription texts composed by the accomplished statesman/ scholar Yan Zhenqing. In 768/69, Yan was appointed prefect of Fuzhou, where Huang had been active, and he soon composed an epitaph for inscription at her shrine at Linchuan. A few years later, he again explained her life in an epitaph prepared for inscription at the nearby shrine of "Lady Wei" (Wei Huacun: 251-334), the Tianshi libationer who posthumously participated in the Shangqing revelations (*Quan Tang wen* 340.17a-22b). Naturally, Du Guangting visited Huang's life in his anthology of materials on female Taoist figures, the *Yongcheng jixian lu* (in *Yunji qijian* 115.9b-12a).

Though Huang's entire early life is essentially unknown, Yan's first text (in *Quan Tang wen* 340.1a-3b) identifies her as a native of Linchuan, giving no information about her parentage. (He makes no mention of her ever having a husband or children.) At the age of twelve, she was reportedly ordained as a *daoshi* (a plausible datum in that period). Then, Yan says nothing more about Huang's life until she was about fifty, no doubt because that part of her life was passed over in silence by his informants. In her maturity, Huang, for unknown reasons, began seeking the long-lost shrine of Lady Wei. She was unsuccessful until late 693, when she received help from a theurgist named Hu Hueichao. Following his directions, she found Lady Wei's shrine and excavated some religious artifacts. Yan relates that the Empress Wu confiscated the artifacts but did not order an account of the matter to be recorded. Amidst wonders, Huang located and restored a second nearby shrine, and apparently continued *zhai* observances there for nearly thirty years. In 721/22, she informed her disciples that she wished to ascend, and instructed them not to nail her coffin shut, but only to cover it with crimson gauze. A few evenings later, lightning struck, leaving a hole in the gauze and an opening in the roof. The disciples who looked into the coffin found no body, only her shroud and "screed" (*jian*). That is, she had

undergone *shijie*. Yan says little more about Huang's disciples, mentioning only one by name, a woman named Li Qiongxian. Apparently, Li and female colleagues maintained the shrines for some years, with male *daoshi* continuing the *zhai* and *jiao* observances. Later, the shrines evidently fell again into desuetude. Yan depicts Huang as a woman of humility, piety, and courage, and seems quite comfortable in eliciting readers' approval of a woman who passed beyond the "traditional" norms.

Du Guangting reproduces an 882 rescript by the emperor Xizong, which calls Huang an immortal who had descended from heaven. She has no biography in the standard histories, evidently because she did little to recommend herself as a political exemplar. She apparently wrote nothing, and we know nothing more of her beliefs or practices.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Schafer 1977: 124-37; Kirkland 1991: 47-73; Kirkland 1993: 156-60; Cahill: 33-34

SEE ALSO: Wei Huacun; Du Guangting

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