

Zhang Daoling Encyclopedia Article

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ZHANG DAOLING, semilegendary figure of the second century CE, depicted in hagiographies as a master of long life (*changsheng*) who put his disciples to tests, vanquished demons, and prepared the elixir of immortality. He is said to have received in 142 CE a revelation from Taishang Laojun the deified Laozi, who bestowed on him the title of Celestial Master (*tianshi*). The god gave him the "Doctrine of the Orthodox One [Resting on] the Authority of the Alliance" (*zhengyi mengwei dao*), revealing that the demoniac Six Heavens had been abolished and their reign replaced by a golden age governed by the Three Heavens. The people were to honor no gods other than those of the Alliance, the masters were to eschew all payment, and blood sacrifices were to be banished.

Subsequently, Zhang Daoling gathered together many disciples in Sichuan and launched a campaign for the reform of the religious practices of a people described as having lapsed into degeneracy. He started a health cult and wrote several books; however, his works are now lost and consequently nearly nothing is known about his doctrines. He is said to have established the basis of a theocratic state divided into twenty-four parishes corresponding to the twenty-four breaths of the year (one every fifteen days). This was later altered to twenty-eight, to correspond to the divisions of the Chinese zodiac. The followers of the sect were obliged to pay a tax of five pecks of rice, whence came the description of the sect as the Way of Five Pecks of Rice (Wudoumi Dao).

Zhang Daoling is considered the founder of the Daoist sect of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi Dao). His eldest son, Zhang Heng, succeeded him, and Zhang Heng in turn was succeeded by his son, Zhang Lu. Under Zhang Lu's leadership the movement rose in rebellion against the Han. The Way of the Celestial Masters was the first organized Daoist movement and has continued down to the present day in Taiwan through a succession of Daoist masters who are allegedly lineal descendants of Zhang Daoling. Many texts in the *Daozang* (the Daoist canon) derive from this religious movement, whose tendency is liturgical, demonological, and more or less shamanistic.

See Also

Laozi.

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