Xiao Baozhen Encyclopedia Article

Xiao Baozhen

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Xiao Baozhen

XIAO BAOZHEN (d. 1166 CE), Daoist master of the Jin period and founder of the Taiyi sect of Daoism. A native of Ji prefecture (present-day Henan province), he was also called Yuan Sheng. Neither his occupation before becoming a Daoist master nor the training he undertook to that end is known. During the Tianjuan period (1138–1140) of Emperor Xizong's reign, Xiao established the Taiyi sect in Ji prefecture. Of the three new Daoist sects established in the northern reaches of the Jin kingdom (Quanzhen, Zhenda, and Taiyi), Taiyi was the most similar in character to existing Daoist teachings. Its practices centered on the talisman called Taiyi Sanyuan that had allegedly been transmitted to Xiao from an immortal. Although the contents of the talisman are not known, it is clear that the sect placed great importance on talismans and incantations. Because of Xiao's ability to relieve people's suffering, disperse evil spirits, and cure illnesses, he gradually attracted many disciples and succeeded in establishing the Taiyi sect. As Xiao's teachings became a source of salvation for people wracked by the social unrest of the time, his sect's power grew apace. Hearing of his growing reputation, Emperor Xizong invited him to the court during the eighth year of his reign (1148). While at court, Xiao demonstrated his spiritual prowess by curing a sick person. Deeply impressed, the emperor presented Xiao with a name plaque inscribed "Taiyi wanshou gong," the name he bestowed on Xiao's Daoist temple in Ji prefecture, thereby indicating official recognition and patronage of Xiao's sect. Xizong is also said to have been converted to Taiyi Daoism by Xiao.

Although part of Xiao's teachings centered on the use of talismans, he did not adopt elixirs of immortality or other elements of the immortality cult. Instead, he upheld the "middle way," forbidding the drinking of intoxicants and the consumption of the five pungent substances. He also forbade priests to marry. It is clear that the rules of conduct that he taught were strict and aimed at transforming Daoist speculative theories into a disciplined monastic practice. He also required that successive head priests of his school take his own name. Unfortunately, many elements of his life remain unclear.

See Also

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