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# Messianism and the Heaven and Earth Society: Approaches to Heaven and Earth Society Texts

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During the last decade or so, social historians in China and the United States seem to have reached a new consensus on the origins of the Heaven and Earth Society (Tiandihui; “society” is the usual translation for *hui*, which, strictly speaking, means “gathering”; for the sake of brevity, the phenomenon is referred to below with the common alternative name “Triad,” a translation of *sanhe hui*). They view the Triads as voluntary brotherhoods organized for mutual support, which later developed into a successful predatory tradition. Supporters of this interpretation react against an older view, based on a literal reading of the Triad foundation myth, according to which the Triads evolved from pro-Ming groups during the early Qing dynasty. The new interpretation relies on an intimate knowledge of the official documents that were produced in the course of persecuting these brotherhoods on the mainland and on Taiwan since the late eighteenth century. The focus of this recent research has been on specific events, resulting in a more detailed factual knowledge of the phenomenon than before (Cai 1987; Qin 1988: 1–86; Zhuang 1981 provides an excellent historiographical survey).

Understandably, contemporary social historians have hesitated to tackle the large number of texts produced by the Triads because previous historians have misinterpreted them and because they are full of obscure religious information and mythological references. Nevertheless, the very fact that these texts were produced (or copied) continuously from the first years of the nineteenth century—or earlier—until the late 1950s, and served as the basis for Triad initiation rituals throughout this period, leaves little doubt that they were important to the members of these groups. Historians, therefore, need to make a serious effort to understand them.

The principal mistake of previous historians in reading the texts has been to

take them as sources of historical facts and dates. While the texts may reflect actual events, other readings of them might be more fruitful. Alternative approaches could include:

1. A historical or diachronic approach, relating early evidence on Triad ritual and mythology to similar pre-existing traditions;
2. A textual approach, reading the texts within themselves as a closed system, explaining elements and structures only by referring to other parts of the same system;
3. A normative approach, collecting all extant interpretations by adherents from confessions, changes in the transmission of the tradition, field reports, and so forth;
4. A contextual approach, comparing elements and structures from the tradition with elements and structures from other contemporary traditions, in an effort to obtain the cultural framework with which adherents themselves approached Triad ritual and mythology.

Ideally, each reading should result in fairly similar interpretations. In fact this is by no means the case. On the contrary, as I shall argue below, the first and second approaches indicate that Triad ritual and mythology derived from a messianic tradition. However, the available normative interpretations relate the texts to an initiation ritual, in which elements from funerary and birth rituals are reenacted. This last interpretation also best reflects the kind of rituals and beliefs with which the average member would have approached Triad lore.

This chapter adopts the first approach, a historical reading of elements from Triad ritual and mythology. These elements have not been chosen haphazardly; together, they constitute an essential part of the plot of the Triad foundation myth and ritual including the form, transmission, and content of the political and religious message, some principal figures in the myth, and the most basic elements of the initiation ritual. Almost all these elements can be traced from the earliest appearance of the Triads in historical sources in 1787 down to the second half of the twentieth century.

Like messianic traditions elsewhere, Chinese messianism builds on the concrete expectation that one or more saviors will descend to earth to rescue a select group of human beings from imminent or currently raging apocalyptic disasters. These saviors often appear as human rulers, who will subsequently reign over a radically changed world. The disasters include fierce attacks by all kinds of gruesome demons, such as those of plagues and other diseases. The group of elect would be protected from such demons by an army of spirit soldiers. Thus, Chinese messianism has both strong political and exorcist dimensions. These two aspects of messianic and millenarian prophecies are elaborated on below. Here it should be pointed out that preachers of these prophecies often played the role of healers in the present world as well.

In any analysis of Triad beliefs and mythology, the foundation myth occupies

an important place. This story of support of the Qing court by the monks of the Shaolin monastery and their subsequent betrayal upon the advice of jealous ministers is probably the part of Triad lore that is best known to many readers, not only from Triad texts but from typical Hong Kong martial arts movies. It can be shown not only that this myth contains well-known literary themes, but even that several late Ming and Qing religious groups possessed a surprisingly similar foundation myth. Crucial elements from this myth can be ascertained as early as the first confessions by Triad adherents, in 1787.

In addition to the foundation myth, the initiation ritual of the Triads merits close analysis. This chapter summarizes the results of this analysis with respect to the messianic background of this ritual, but much evidence has had to be left out for reasons of space. Crucial parts of the ritual are the blood oath, that is, an oath, accompanied by drinking blood mixed with wine and by passing through a gate of knives, and a set of ritual implements (contained in a wooden rice bucket). The blood oath in this particular form seems to stem from rituals practiced only—by the late Ming and Qing periods—among ethnic minorities. The ritual implements are extremely common in Chinese rituals, usually involving exorcism of evil demons.

Because the Triads continued and further developed existing beliefs and practices, this raises the question of whether we can identify particular earlier groups that already contained essential characteristics of the later Triads. Traditionally, scholars have pointed to the widespread—and therefore also rather general—phenomenon of the sworn brotherhood, but I propose two more specific traditions. One is a predatory tradition that operated since the late Ming in northeastern Guangdong and southern Fujian provinces, which like the Triads possessed a mix of self-defense or predatory practices, substantial religious rituals, and a distinctive jargon. Some nineteenth-century Triad jargon (“secret language”) was already used in this older tradition. The other possible precursor is a messianic group led by a certain Ma Chaozhu, whose teachings show many similarities to Triad mythology.

This chapter is part of a larger study and, as a result, detailed discussion of specific cases, as well as full evaluation of the source materials, have had to be omitted. In order to enable the reader to put the present discussion into its proper perspective, it seems advisable to give some general idea of the larger study on which it is based. Instead of focusing on specific events, the dating of the precise origins of the Triads, or actual uprisings, this larger study attempts a reconstruction of the extremely well-documented beliefs and mythology of the Triads.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, events are of interest insofar as they provide information about the interpretation or function of these beliefs by adherents or opponents of the Triads. Since the temporal perspective is not restricted to a specific period, this allows the use of a much broader set of source materials than is available to most historians of the Triads. These range from forced (and therefore distorted) confessions and descriptive pieces by contemporary Chinese as well as Western

officials, journalists, or historians, to texts and pictures produced by Triad adherents, and even include a short film reenacting the initiation ritual, produced by the Hong Kong police force in the late 1950s with the assistance of former high-ranking members of the Triads.

A further concern in my larger study is the question of how much adherents really knew about the Triad beliefs and stories, or even how seriously they took them. The answer to this question largely determines the historian's evaluation of the relevance of Triad ritual and mythology to an understanding of the nature of the Triad groups themselves. The available confessions by Triad adherents in the Qing archives actually have little to say about the content and meaning of the Triad texts. This problem of relevance is also tied to more general questions about the nature of Chinese ritual practice and religious beliefs. On the one hand, captured adherents probably concealed as much as possible of their knowledge of Triad traditions; on the other hand, anthropologists of Chinese religion have observed that in the Chinese religious context, worship and participation (*orthopraxis*) are much more important than beliefs and actual comprehension. During recent fieldwork in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Xiamen, I had the opportunity to confirm this observation. In my view, this last point is basic to our understanding of the relationship of Triad adherents to their ritual and mythology. While my larger, ongoing study should permit a more detailed investigation of these matters, my approach in the present chapter is purely historical. Leaving aside the other three approaches—especially the normative one—is, however, a practical expedient because of space limitations.

### **Form and Transmission of the Messianic Message**

Messages from the world of the gods were always encoded in special allusive and arcane language, including the use of split characters, as if these were the real meaning-carrying elements. This testified to the heavenly origin of the message and facilitated flexibility of interpretation. Some of the symbolism involved is discussed below, in relation to the names of messianic saviors. Split characters were (and still are) familiar to most Chinese from fortune-telling (Smith 1991: 201–4 and *passim*). They were particularly common in messianic prophecies. Already in the oldest Triad confessions, such characters appear frequently as a means of expressing special names.

A frequent example of splitting a character is the character *ming*, which can stand for the name of the former dynasty or a messianic figure (see below). *Ming* is often split into *ri* (sun) and *yue* (moon). The common surname of Triad adherents, Hong, is frequently split into *wu dian er shi yi* (lit. five dots and twenty-one), or later into *san ba nian yi* (lit. three-eight-twenty-one).<sup>2</sup>

The most important case of split characters in Triad lore undoubtedly is the phrase *muli doushi zhi tianxia*. In confessions extracted by Qing authorities, Triad members did not (or at least professed not to) know what the phrase *muli*

*doushi* meant. In one confession from 1787, the four characters are interpreted as a reference to specific years, but three of the four years are actually the first years of the first three Qing reign periods.<sup>3</sup> This seems rather trivial. Neither contemporary confessions nor later confessions, nor other independent sources, confirm this interpretation. It makes more sense to take *mu* and *dou* together, since the *mudou*, or wooden rice-measure, is a crucial object in Triad ritual, even in simplified versions. The characters *mudou* were already used during the late ninth century as a reference in split characters to the family name Zhu (Sun 1981, vol. 16: 117 [in 874–79]). I would propose this reading here as well. The complete phrase might be translated literally as “when ‘wood (*mu*)’ stands and it is the age of ‘the bushel (*dou*)’, [somebody] will rule all under Heaven.” This can then be interpreted as “the Zhus will rule all under Heaven.”

At least as important as its form and content was the carrier of the supernatural message. This could be a real person, an object, or a written text. The primary revealed text in the mythology of the Triads was transmitted by an incense burner. A religious cult in Chinese culture minimally consists of presenting incense to the gods, and therefore the incense burner has always been central to religious practice (Lagerwey 1987; Schipper 1982). An oath from 1787 specifically mentions the burning of incense, which is confirmed in slightly later sources from 1808 and 1811 (Qin 1988: 153, 154, 161). Furthermore, Heaven might send precious objects such as an incense burner, a seal, or even a rare book as physical evidence of its support for a ruler (or a claimant to the throne) or for a religious cult.

In the founding myth of the Triads, the incense burner occurs at a pivotal point early in the plot and brings the will of Heaven to the fleeing monks of the Shaolin monastery. The burner already features as such in the earliest full-fledged version (from 1811).

An incense burner of white stone (weighing fifty-two ounces) floated upward to the surface of the sea. On the bottom of the incense burner were the four characters [meaning] “Restore the Ming and Extirpate the Qing.” The men then took the incense burner [made of] Baiding [porcelain], and swore an oath before heaven. . . . [They choose Wan Tiqi as their leader and gathered 108 persons, who] (bound together) their righteousness before heaven, and (indicated) Hong as their surname, smeared blood and worshipped the covenant, becoming one Hong family. (*Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 4; on Baiding, see Schlegel 1866, 14 n. 4).

This myth makes explicit the significance of the incense burner as a ritual object and as a provider of legitimacy. It was sent by Heaven and carried a sacred text that summarized the aims of the tradition. For centuries, both actual rulers and aspirants to the throne had made use of dynastic treasures such as incense burners to substantiate their claim of having received the Heavenly Mandate. During the Qing, dynastic treasures had lost their formerly central position in elite per-

ceptions of legitimacy; instead, they now emphasized the moral virtues of the ruler as shown in ritual and political practice. Rebels, however, still made use of them. They were long ago incorporated into Daoist rituals and ordinary temple cults, where they are still very much alive today (Seidel 1983; ter Haar 1992). This story is, therefore, a very strong politico-religious statement about the central mythological aims of the Triads, one that most people would have comprehended easily. Not only does the burner bring an important message, but its weight (*wu shi er*) hides the common surname (*hong*) of the Triad adherents!

One of the first paragraphs of the 1811 initiation manual states that in 1643 an "Inscription by Liu Bowen" was spit out by the (Yellow) River in Kaifeng. A text with this name had been circulating since at least the early eighteenth century (and can still be found today in many temples on Taiwan). It predicted the return of the Ming under the Zhu family, bringing peace to the nation.<sup>4</sup> The historical Liu Ji had been one of the most important advisers to the founder of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang. In later mythology, he is always referred to by his courtesy name (*zi*), as Liu Bowen. A tradition well established since the Ming made him a prophet who forecast the future of the Ming and all later rulers. The widely known *Baked Cake Ballad* (Shaobingge), a famous prophetic text dating back in one form or another to the late Ming, was eventually also ascribed to him. The ballad in its present form is full of anti-Manchu and pro-Ming sentiment. The text stresses the barbarian threat (Chan 1970, 1973). Barbarian invasions had been a typical apocalyptic disaster in eschatological texts since at least the third century. By placing the "Inscription by Liu Bowen" so prominently in the text, the author(s) of the 1811 manual suggest that the Triads would guarantee the fulfillment of the widespread prophecies about the return of the Ming.

## **The Nature of Triad Ming Loyalty**

### ***The Political Dimension of Messianism***

The past views that the Triads arose from the purely political Ming loyalty of early Qing literati or from the resistance led by the merchant-pirate Zheng Chenggong are surely incorrect (Cai 1987; Qin 1988; Zhuang 1981). But does this mean that the many political statements about restoring the Ming dynasty in one form or another, which we find in Triad sources, are a later and unimportant development, and not representative of the earliest Triads? A detailed analysis of the earliest confessions from 1787 and later written texts shows that this is not the case.

Apart from insufficient understanding of some specific terminology (to be discussed below), in my opinion, this confusion results from a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of the references to the Zhu imperial family and the term or name "*Ming*." Rather than purely political references, these are both messianic and political in nature. "*Ming*" can mean "luminous" or specific-

ally refer to the former Ming dynasty. As we shall see, this convergence of meanings is probably not a coincidence.

In Chinese messianism the savior was often perceived as an ideal king who would not only dispel all diseases and disasters but would also become a secular ruler. The saviors in messianic prophecies frequently bore the family names Li, Liu, Zhao, and Zhang. These names were often written in split characters. Imperial houses or aspirants to the throne would use such beliefs to support their claims of legitimacy. In the case of the Song, the ruling Zhao family even actively created such beliefs, which remained popular after the fall of the dynasty in 1279 (Mollier 1990, 22–25 and 56–58; Noguchi 1986, 141–212; Seidel 1969–1970, 216–47; ter Haar 1992, 115–16).

### *The Tradition of the Luminous King*

A relevant case is the messianic tradition of the assistant of the Buddhist savior Maitreya, the *mingwang*, or Luminous King. This tradition antedates the Ming dynasty by many centuries. In 1351, Han Shantong (succeeded by his son Lin'er) and his general, Liu Futong, started an uprising against the Mongol Yuan dynasty, which eventually brought the Ming dynasty to power. He gathered support among people in the Huai region who were working on repairs of the Grand Canal by claiming to have found a statue carrying a prophecy of the advent of apocalyptic disasters. He announced the coming of the savior Maitreya and his assistant, the Luminous King. Significantly, the uprising began in a *mao* (1351) year; since the late Tang, this date has figured, together with the preceding *yin* year, in millenarian prophecies, and often appeared together with elements from the Luminous King tradition. Han claimed to be a descendant of the Northern Song emperor Huizong, despite his different surname. In those same years and in the same region, prophecies also circulated about the advent of Great Equity (*taiping*) (ter Haar 1992, 115–23 and the primary sources referred to there; on the significance of the *yin* year, see Ke 1983, 188–89; 1987, 364–71).

The founder of the Ming dynasty, a former traveling monk called Zhu Yuanzhang, started his career as a rebel in one of the bands that followed Han's son Lin'er, who was also called the Small Luminous King (*xiao mingwang*). Although after 1355 his own military power far exceeded that of Han Lin'er and Liu Futong, Zhu Yuanzhang continued to accept the religious authority of Han Lin'er until the latter drowned in 1366. The name of Zhu's dynasty, Ming, and the first year title, Hongwu (Vast Martiality, using the same character *hong* that is so prominent in messianic prophecies about apocalyptic disasters), were likely an effort to incorporate some of the messianic charisma for Zhu's own benefit. After the dynasty had been established, however, different choices about the legitimation of power were made that excluded the use of messianism. As a result, few documents exist about whether and how ordinary subjects connected messianism to the Ming dynasty. After the dynasty had fallen, however, the



much older tradition of the Luminous King was soon combined with beliefs in the restoration of the Ming imperial family. Something similar had happened after the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties fell, when rebels also often claimed to be descendants of the imperial families of these dynasties: Liu, Li, and Zhao, as well as messianic saviors.

### *Political Claims of the Triads*

Both the political and messianic dimensions of the belief in the restoration of a descendant of the imperial Zhu family of the Ming, or a Luminous King/Ruler, go back to the earliest documented stage of the Triads, around 1787. This section discusses the political aspect first, in a more concise manner, and reserves a more detailed treatment of messianic aspects for the following sections. In reality, however, they are closely intertwined and thus some repetition of the evidence is unavoidable. The political dimension of the belief in restoration takes various forms. Here, three aspects will be presented: legitimation of religious and political charisma by physical descent, the restoration of the Ming as a political unit (a nation); and the receipt of the Heavenly Mandate.

Many examples exist of the belief that religious and political legitimacy (and therefore charisma) are transmitted by descent. It is the basis not only of rulership by a dynasty but also of the recurrent claims by messianic saviors and nonreligious rebels that they descend from past imperial houses. We already encountered the example of Han Shantong, who claimed descent from the Song house. The following section discusses several examples of non-Triad claims about saviors descending from the imperial family of the Ming.

The foundation myth of the Triads (first related as a complete story in the 1811 manual, although many constituent elements are already present in much earlier material) claims a physical line of descent of its founders from the Ming imperial family. An Imperial Concubine Li (which means "peach") is said to have fled the palace after Li Zicheng had rebelled. She bore a son, the Young Lord (*xiaozhu*) in the Gaoxi Temple, who went on to found the Triads. The five cofounders of the Triads are described as his physical sons, even though they have different surnames. These are referred to by a standard kinship term as the Five Houses (*wufang*), *fang* being a common way of referring to a sublineage (Freedman 1958, 36).<sup>5</sup>

From the beginning, the elements of physical descent from the Zhu family, motherhood in connection with a peach, and a Gaoxi temple or cloister occur together. A written oath found in 1787 speaks of a Luminous Ruler (*mingzhu*) who transmits the lineage in this cloister. In confessions from that same year, a Young Ruler called Zhu is mentioned, who had been begotten from eating a peach (which can be *li*, the name of the concubine, *tao*, or *taoli*) of the immortals (lit. *xiantao*). Evidently, the Young Ruler Zhu was the same as the Luminous Ruler, who transmitted the lineage of the Zhu imperial family (see above, "The

Luminous King and Other Saviors"). The messianic element of the Luminous Ruler is discussed in more detail below.

The mention of the phrase "subjugating oneself to/supporting the Ming (or: the Luminous One)" in two documents uncovered in 1791 proves that this political ideal existed very early, if not from the very first appearance of the Triads in our sources in 1787. The two texts had been composed in that same year by Triad adherents who had been arrested and banished to Xinjiang in 1787 and had lost touch with local developments in the south (*Tiandihui* 1986, vol. 5, 413). In written oaths uncovered in 1800 and 1808, as well as in the story of the incense burner in the 1811 manual, the full ideal of restoring the Ming and overthrowing the Qing is always explicitly mentioned.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the name of the Ming dynasty is often concealed in the form of the split characters *ri* and *yue* (*ming*). The earliest example of this might be a poetry line from 1787, and clearer references can be found from the rudimentary manual of 1806 onward (see note 1).

Of course, the claim of having received the Heavenly Mandate always had to be underpinned with physical evidence: miracles, natural occurrences, or actual objects, such as the incense burner mentioned above. There were also old fixed phrases for expressing this claim. Triad texts make abundant use of such phraseology, which they could have borrowed from different sources: government publications, Daoist texts, millenarian and messianic texts, previous uprisings, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Particularly important are the phrase "following Heaven and carrying out the Way" (*shuntian xingdao*, often abbreviated to *shuntian*) and the term "Heaven's Revolution" (*tianyun*) Qin 1988, 153–61 [1787, 1806, 1808, 1812 documents]; (*Tiandihui* 1982, vol. 1, 70, 71, 87 [1787 confessions]; 1986, vol. 5, 413 [1791 documents]). The phrase "following Heaven and carrying out the Way" must be understood as "following the will of Heaven" or "following the Heavenly Mandate (*tianming*) and bringing into practice the Royal Way (*wangdao*) of governance." Historically, the phrase goes back to writings about the Heavenly Mandate in Han and pre-Han political thinking.<sup>8</sup> The term "Heaven's Revolution" in this context refers to the period of rule allotted to a dynasty by Heaven. It can be traced to at least the Period of Disunion, but I have been unable as yet to find its precise source (Mollier 1990, 164; Zürcher 1982, 38 n. 70 and 41 n. 77). The participants in the 1787 uprising of Lin Shuangwen on Taiwan already used this terminology, but it was also common among contemporary adherents of the Triads on the mainland. All literate as well as many illiterate Chinese would have known this terminology and its meaning.

Even if we look only at the political dimension of Triad beliefs, the elements of physical descent of the founder of the Triad tradition from the Ming imperial house, the restoration of the Ming as a political entity and conventional concepts of legitimation are present in the earliest sources from 1787. In no way does this substantiate the traditional claim of a link to the pro-Ming loyalist feelings among literati of the early Qing. There are two much more likely sources for the Ming loyalist message in Triad lore. One is the existence of the messianic tradi-

tion of the Luminous King, which is discussed below, and the other is the likely continuance of pro-Ming feelings among local bandit and pirate groups, which I discuss in detail in a forthcoming study.

The above section ignores one knotty problem: the relationship among messianism, political ideals, and actual practice. In a way this problem resembles the question referred to in the introductory remarks, whether and how people actually believed in the messianic contents of Triad ritual and mythology. Chinese messianism was and is inherently political in theory and implications, and there can be no doubt about the political nature of the common legitimization terminology used in Triad texts from the earliest evidence onwards. Nevertheless, the preceding discussion concerns only the historical origins and the internal context of the written material (in other words, the first two approaches outlined initially). The normative reading by actual adherents themselves may well have diverged considerably.

## Messianic Saviors

### *The Luminous King and Other Saviors*

In Triad ritual and mythology, three saviors are frequently mentioned, a figure alternatively called Luminous King or Prince or Ruler (*mingwang*, *mingjun*, *mingzhu*), and two figures with the surnames Zhu and Li. The previous sections introduced the Luminous Ruler and a savior with the surname Zhu. They function against the background of ideals about the restoration of the Ming.

The belief in the Luminous King dates back to a tradition from the sixth century, which featured three figures who act as saviors: Maitreya, the young Prince Moonlight (*yueguang tongzi*), and the Luminous King as their assistant (Zürcher 1982, 1–59). The belief in the Luminous King was transmitted, for instance, in the still extant *Classic of the Five Lords* (Wugongjing). This text inspired many uprisings from the late Tang until this century, including the most important messianic tradition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Vietnam, the Buu Son Ky Huong tradition that evolved into the Hoa Hao religious group (or "sect"; on my objections to this term, see ter Haar 1992) founded in 1939. Sometimes, the Luminous King appeared together with Maitreya, but more often he appeared alone or with the figure of Luo Ping (Ke 1983, 1987; on Vietnam, see Tai 1983). These beliefs played an important role in late Yuan uprisings, especially the one inspired by Han Shantong. The Luminous King, the importance of *yin* and *mao* days, and the era of Great Equity are all prominent in this *Classic of the Five Lords*. Other works also mention the Luminous King (see Ma 1989, 48, for additional references).

During the Qing, incidents involving prophecies of impending doom and the advent of saviors were at least as frequent as during preceding dynasties. Especially prominent were saviors from the Li and Zhu families, starting with the

figures of Third Prince Zhu and Li Kaihua. Four cases, all close in time to 1787, the year that the Triads first appear in historical sources as a distinct phenomenon, illustrate the links of Triad mythology with Qing messianism. Without going into detail about them, it is possible to select elements that are directly relevant to our topic.

In the first example, the 1729–30 case of Li Mei in Enping (Guangdong), the saviors are called Third Prince Zhu and Li Jiukui (Nine Sunflowers Li) (Sasaki 1970, 188; Suzuki 1982, 239). Their followers believed that Third Prince Zhu and Li Jiukui lived in the “Little Western Heaven,” situated in Vietnam, and would come with a large army. Li Mei himself claimed that “[the] Heaven[ly Mandate] has been given and the Way will be carried out (*tianyu daoxing*).” He also sold certificates (*zha*), which would provide protection against the disasters of plagues and demons (*Kangyongqian* 1976, 613–16; *Shiliao xunkan tian*, 1930 especially 21a–b, 24a, 53a–b).

A case that caused the central government real headaches was that of Ma Chaozhu (Suzuki 1982, 267–80). He had been active from 1747 onward in the Hubei region, preparing a messianic uprising. Most of his followers were rounded up in 1752, but he himself was never caught. His teachings concerned a young descendant of the Ming imperial house, called Zhu Hongjin, whose assistants included, among others, one Li Kaihua. Zhu Hongjin was called a Young Ruler (*youzhu*) and a Luminous Ruler (*mingzhu*). From his kingdom in the Western Ocean—believed to be situated in Sichuan—he would come leading a large army of spirit soldiers to conquer China and restore the Ming. Followers had to pay a fee in silver and conclude a blood oath covenant. Ma Chaozhu presented himself as one of Zhu Hongjin’s generals. The profusion of historical documents on this case preserved in the Qing archives on Taiwan and in Beijing shows in considerable detail that the beliefs spread by Ma reflect an earlier stage of the same tradition from which the Triads originated (*Kangyongqian* 1979, 657–60).

In 1752, at about the same time as the Ma Chaozhu case, authorities arrested a group of people in Shangrao, Jiangxi. They had been inspired by the claims of their leader, Li Dexian, that he possessed the magical technique of summoning spirit soldiers. They carried flags bearing, among others, the names Li Kaihua, Zhu Hongzong, and Zhu Hongzhu. Unfortunately, historical sources on this group are rather scarce (*Kangyongqian* 1979, 664–65).

The three cases of Li Mei, Ma Chaozhu, and Li Dexian antedate the first appearance of the Triads in our sources, but equally interesting are the almost contemporary prophecies that circulated before the great uprising of 1796–1804 in the Sichuan-Hunan-Hubei border region, which is traditionally called a White Lotus uprising (see Satō 1983, 109–29; on the White Lotus teachings, see ter Haar 1992, 250–61). One of its preachers, Zhang Zhengmo, confessed in 1796 that he had been told in 1794 of the birth of a True Ruler (*zhenzhu*), called Li Quanr or Canine Li, who had the characters for sun (*ri*) and moon (*yue*) on his

hands. He was to be assisted by Zhu Jiutao, "Nine Peaches" Zhu, who is never identified as a specific historical person. Apocalyptic disasters, including floods, fires, and plagues, were approaching and would kill countless people.<sup>9</sup> Li Quanr himself had already been arrested in 1794 and had testified that he was only 18 *sui* and was actually called Liu Xi Gour (or Canine Liu Xi). His stepfather had told him that his deceased natural father had been called Li and was a Maitreya, or an Immortal (*shenxian*). This made him, the son, an Immortal Lad (*xiantong*), that is a Maitreya as well (*Qingzhongqi* 1981, vol. 1, 14–15 [1794], same text as *Shiliao congbian* 1983, vol. 9, 191–92).

Prophecies also circulated at the same time in roughly the same region about the advent of another Maitreya who would help a certain Niu Ba (the split character form of Zhu) to "start an undertaking" (*qishi*) to save people from apocalyptic disasters.<sup>10</sup> His present reincarnation was as a youth. By paying money to join the group and by worshipping Maitreya and Niu Ba, people could avoid the coming disasters. Fierce rows developed between this group and the group supporting the Li Quanr/Liu Xi Gour figure, both claiming to have the real Maitreya (*Qingzhongqi* 1981, vol. 1 3ff [confession 1794]; *Shiliao congbian* 1983, vol. 9, 203–4). Other people who were arrested at the time also spoke of a Zhu Hongtao "red peaches Zhu," who is not further identified (*Qingzhongqi* 1981, vol. 1, 4, 14ff [1794 confessions]). These saviors were not regarded primarily as political leaders. Worship of them was supposed to offer an escape from human misery and apocalyptic disasters. The original prophecies were hardly rebellious, because everything was preordained and there was no need for action. Only increased Qing pressure on the personal networks of the various messianic preachers eventually made violence inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

Several symbols, above all the surname Zhu of the saviors and the characters for "sun" and "moon" on the hands of Li Quanr/Liu Xi Gour, suggest that in addition to messianic expectations, political pro-Ming sentiments were involved in these movements. Explicit confirmation of this can be found in a proclamation pasted to a wall in Xing'an (modern Shaanxi) in 1797. It stated unequivocally that the authors' aim was "to resurrect the Han and destroy the Man[chus]" (*xinghan mieman*), and declared that the "Son of Heaven of the True Ming" (*zhenming tianzi*) had already appeared. The document addressed the local inhabitants as "subjects" of the former Great Ming. Furthermore, it claimed the receipt of the Heavenly Mandate, using standard terminology: "to accept the affairs of the Revolution on behalf of Heaven" (*weitian cheng yunshi*) (Zhang 1980). Several confessions by members of the rebel army that posted this proclamation confirm that this use of the phrase "*zhenming tianzi*" was political, and they refer to their leader Wang Fasheng as a descendant of the Ming imperial house (*Qingdai nongmin* 1990, vol. 6, 73, 205, 208–9). Admittedly, no extant confessions mention the claim of restoring the Ming and overthrowing the Qing, but this simply suggests that the information in the confessions is incomplete. Either the rebels never confessed to the claim, or unknown officials who edited

the material deleted the reference. The evidence of the publicly posted proclamation is unequivocally Ming restorationist. Such discrepancies between the evidence in forced confessions and in documents produced voluntarily by the rebels themselves show that the absence of references to the Luminous King does not prove that the belief was not involved.

### *Collective Characteristics of Messianic Saviors*

Despite the apparent disparity of the evidence summarized in the preceding overview, numerous themes recur. In order to understand the connections between Triad mythology and Qing messianism, I shall first recapitulate the evidence from the preceding section in a more systematic fashion. First of all, several features indicate the mythical nature of the saviors and their safe havens. For instance, the curious personal names: beginning with the figure of Li Kaihua, there is a consistent use of flower (especially peach) symbolism, a wealth of puns on the sound “*hong*” and the recurrent use of the number nine (*jiu*). The descendant of the Zhu family is first called Third Prince Zhu, but later the characteristics of the Li figure, *viz.* the flower, peach and other symbolism, are transferred to the Zhu figure as well.

The flower symbolism combined several associations that must have been familiar to most Chinese. Peaches (*tao* or *taoli*) have always been linked with the messianic surname Li and the ideal of long life.<sup>12</sup> The blossoming of flowers in political, messianic, or millenarian prophecies always announced an important event, such as the restoration of the Ming or the advent of the savior.<sup>13</sup> In Chinese folklore, at least in southern China, there was (and still is) a widespread belief that women were represented in Heaven (called, for instance, the Heavenly Flower Garden) by plants. The birth of a child was thought of as the opening of a new bud on the parent plant.<sup>14</sup> Thus, even the straightforward name of Li Kaihua could be taken to mean literally “the Li that will be born.”

The puns on the sound *hong* may reflect the old tradition of the savior Li Hong, but also the term *hong* “floods, vast.” Floods are a standard eschatological disaster (Mollier 1990, 22–23, 159–62, 173; Seidel 1969–1970, 236–46; Zürcher 1982, 38, 41–42, 53). The same Hong occurs in the year title of the founding emperor of the Ming, Hongwu, “Vast Martiality.” It was suggested above that the emperor or his advisers might have chosen this year title because of its millenarian connotations. *Hong*<sup>a</sup> (red) is the dominant Chinese auspicious color. The importance of the number nine in Chinese religion and mythology hardly needs to be pointed out.

Although the modern observer easily recognizes these saviors and their safe havens, such as the Little Western Heaven or the Western Ocean, as mythical, Qing officials (for example in the case of Ma Chaozhu) spent months looking for them. Beijing exerted immense political pressure to come up with real physical places and persons.

A second point to be noticed is the youth of the incarnations of the Li and Zhu saviors (whether real or fictional). This is a peculiar feature of the tradition of the Luminous King. It further confirms that the saviors themselves were not political figures, but functioned most of all as symbols on whom people could project their hopes during the imminent apocalypse. Because of their youth, they were still close to an ideal unspoiled state of human nature.

The final point concerns the transmission of messianic and millenarian prophecies. There was no standardized transmission of these prophecies through specific organizations ("sects," "secret societies"), even though some written texts circulated and had considerable impact. The changing names of the Li and Zhu saviors, as well as the varying combinations of constituent beliefs, all show that they were transmitted orally. Elements from various traditions could be combined differently by an individual preacher and serve as the basis for forming ad hoc religious groups.

### *Saviors in Triad Mythology*

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the figures of the Luminous King/Ruler and the two saviors from the Li and Zhu families were well-established personae in Qing messianism. What was their place in early Triad lore? The oath from 1787 already mentions a Luminous Ruler: "Today, because the Luminous Ruler (*mingzhu*) from the Phoenix Flower Pavilion (*fenghua ting*), in the Gaoxi Cloister, in the Maqi Temple, in Guangdong, transmits the lineage, this night we smear blood and conclude a covenant" (Qin 1988, 153). This last phrase was a standard formula to describe all types of blood oath covenants and reveals nothing about its form; drinking (human or chicken) blood mixed with wine was the common method.

Other confessions from 1787 as well as later material confirm the existence of a savior with the surname Zhu, who is also associated with the Luminous King. Thus, one confession from 1787 mentions a mysterious figure: "there was a certain Zhu Hongde, who was begotten from eating a peach of the immortals." He was about 15 or 16 *sui*.<sup>15</sup> Some depict him as a monk. Other adherents confirm the belief in this young person, whom they call Zhu or Zhu Dingyuan (Qin 1988, 311–13; *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 90, 97, 111–12; confessions by three different persons). Most likely, this person was actually the same Luminous Ruler who "transmits the lineage" (in the 1787 oath) and the (very young) son of the concubine Li (in the 1811 manual). In the 1811 manual, the Luminous King is mentioned frequently (and independently of references to the Ming as a political unit). The shorter term, "Ruler" (*zhu*) is used in both the 1808 oath and the 1811 manual; it refers to either the son of the concubine Li or to the Hongwu Emperor. In the 1811 manual, the son of the concubine is also depicted as a monk (Qin 1988, 154 [1808 oath]; for the 1811 manual, see *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 4–6, 11, 12, 17, 18, 22).

From the beginning, the evidence shows a belief in a principal savior, who is a young descendant of the Ming imperial family and a monk. He is identified as the Luminous King/Ruler. His status as a monk probably reflects the fact that Zhu Yuanzhang (Hongwu) also started his career as such.

Another mysterious figure in the 1787 confessions is Li Taohong ("peaches are red Li") or Hong Litao ("Vast Li peaches").<sup>16</sup> The surname Li is, of course, the old messianic surname. Here it is combined with the terms "peaches" (*tao*) and "vast" or "red" (*hong* and *hong*<sup>a</sup>). The names of the Li Taohong/Hong Litao figure can be interpreted as a hidden reference to Zhu Hongde's mysterious birth, similar to the name Li Kaihua.

The 1787 confessions also mention an even more mysterious figure, called Monk Hong Erfang, who either remains obscure or is identified with a figure called Monk Wan Tuxi (a mythical founder of the Triads and the same as Wan Tiqui).<sup>17</sup> The name Hong Erfang simply means Hong of the Second House and in later mythology he is alternatively called Fang Dahong or Hong Dasui. This figure is almost always presented as being in charge of the Second House.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from its occurrence in the names of important figures in Triad mythology, the messianic pun on the sound "*hong*" is continued in one very unexpected way by the Triads. All those who took the blood oath became members of one family with the common surname Hong (*hong*, "vast" or "flood"). As noted before, the name was often transcribed in split characters.

Thus significant resemblances exist between the contemporary messianic traditions and the Triads with respect to the leading figures in the two traditions. These are the recurrent puns on the sound "*hong*," the use in the names of persons of the same flower symbolism, the appearance of the Luminous King/Ruler and the saviors from the Li and Zhu families, and finally the crucial place of the youthful founding father. The messianic traditions and the Triad versions constantly restate the same mythological and religious themes.

## Messianic Apocalypse and the Triad Foundation Myth

### *Cities as Places of Refuge*

The similarities between Triad mythology and the messianic tradition of the Luminous King go much further than merely having several saviors in common. A summary of the most relevant aspects in the messianic tradition concerning the advent of the apocalypse and the rescue of a limited number of chosen people will form the basis for a general discussion of similar elements in Triad mythology.

In the sixth-century messianic tradition of Maitreya and Prince Moonlight, accompanied by the Luminous King, the world is plagued by apocalyptic disasters: epidemics, floods, and barbarian invasions. Maitreya, Prince Moonlight, the Luminous King, and other saviors appear in the human world to lead the elect away from this world, across a bridge into the Magic City. Before this happens,



the chosen few are to be gathered in numerous safe havens, which are also conceived of as cities or fortresses (actually the cumbersome translation "walled enclosures" for "*cheng*" would be more correct). Two of these are Yangzhou (note the special Chinese character) and Liucheng, both meaning "willow." The text also describes the use of secret finger signs (Zürcher 1982, 36, 41–42, 50).

Although Yangzhou and Liucheng are only two in a much longer list of cities that serve as safe havens in this tradition, we also find these two cities—especially Yangzhou—appearing as safe havens from apocalyptic disasters in other early eschatological scriptures.<sup>19</sup> This belief in a city as a refuge for the elect in the case of apocalyptic disaster continued to inspire believers of messianic prophecies from the Tang through the Ming and into the nineteenth century. Qing adherents of the Eternal Venerable Mother tradition commonly believed in a Cloud City or Golden City as the location of paradise. Through buying certificates from the leaders of their religious groups, they would be assured the right of passage into this city after their death, instead of being left to continue the vicious cycle of birth and rebirth. In this way, the millenarian belief became routinized and lost its original urgency. In the Eternal Venerable Mother tradition, strictly speaking, the Cloud City/Golden City had taken over the role of Amitabha's Western Paradise.<sup>20</sup> However, the messianic dimension of the belief lived on in other contexts, such as the *Classic of the Five Lords*. According to this work, the Luminous King would rule the world in Jinling (that is, Nanjing).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at least three important (near-) rebellions were fueled by the belief in a city as a safe haven. Ma Chaozhu ultimately planned to attack Nanjing in 1752. Lin Qing actually penetrated the Forbidden City of Beijing in 1813 in the hope of founding a messianic kingdom from there (Naquin 1976, 13–14 and 291 n. 27). The Taipings conquered Nanjing, where they indeed started to put their messianic ideals into practice (Wagner 1982, 67–81). These cities were not merely imperial capitals to be captured for political or military purposes, but also possessed a religious dimension as a safe haven.

The Triad initiation ritual also makes this identification of city and safe haven, calling this place by the name City of Willows (*muyang cheng*). In the ritual, candidate members are led over a bridge into the City of Willows, where they are then initiated. The structure of this ritual (as well as the foundation myth on which the ritual is partially based) must ultimately go back to the sixth-century tradition of the Luminous King, because it uses the same name for the city and possesses the same structural element of the bridge, as well as the common savior figure of the Luminous King. The city is clearly presented in textual material as a safe haven for the adherents. The name City of Willows is used as early as the 1806 rudimentary manual (*Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 12). *Yang* is synonymous with *liu*, and the two characters are frequently used together to denote willows. *Muyang* is the split and recombined version of *yang*. Interestingly, an alternative name for the City of Willows in the 1811 Triad manual is Forbidden City (Qin 1988, 159 [1806 rudimentary manual]; *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 12 [1811 manual]).

### *Barbarian Invasions as an Apocalyptic Threat*

The above three elements, the Luminous King, the City of Willows, and the bridge, are all typical of and more or less unique to the sixth-century tradition of Prince Moonlight and the Luminous King. Other elements of Triad ritual and mythology can be documented in other messianic and millenarian traditions as well. Some elements can definitely not be traced to the sixth-century tradition of the Luminous King, but only to other messianic traditions.

Of the several standard apocalyptic disasters, plagues do not seem to play a prominent role in Triad lore. Floods, however, appear more frequently, and the word *hong*, as already discussed, appears extremely often in Triad texts.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, floods are not crucial to the mythology of the Triads. Quite the reverse is true of barbarian invasions. In Chinese messianism, barbarian invasions are one of the archetypal apocalyptic disasters (Bauer 1973, stations 10, 13, 15, 30, 32; Ma 1989, 45–48, 157, 165–74; Mollier 1990, 22–25, 68–71; Zürcher 1982, 32–33, 48, 50–51). In the Triad foundation myth, their role is absolutely essential. First of all, they appear as the *xilufan* (“Western Lu barbarians”), whom the Shaolin monks defeat on behalf of the Qing (Manchu) emperors. Because of plotting by jealous ministers at the court, these same rulers turn against the monks. This betrayal eventually leads to the founding of the Triads by a young Ming prince in order to take revenge on the Manchus.

Given that barbarian invasions are a typical eschatological disaster, I would even go so far as to suggest that the anti-Qing and anti-Manchu posture of messianic groups in general and of the Triads in particular is not primarily a reaction to a declining or oppressive Qing government or to socioeconomic conditions. Rather, it represents the traditional place of barbarians in Chinese religious beliefs.

### *The Role of Signs, Numbers, and Contracts*

Secret finger signs constituted a core part of Triad lore since its beginnings. Such signs enabled adherents to recognize each other and thereby served as a means of mutual protection. One had to stretch out three fingers, hold a teacup or a pipe of tobacco with three fingers, or press three fingers to one’s breast (*Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 69–72, 87, 104, 111, 121). The thumb symbolized Heaven, the small finger earth (*Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 69, 70, 71, 121). A comparison of these signs with the relevant (though very cryptic) passage in one of the texts from the tradition of the Luminous King does not indicate any similarities in content (Zürcher 1982, 41 n. 77, 44–45, 58, and 74, lines 289–90). Of course, such signs may well have changed considerably over time, or, alternatively, the source of inspiration for the Triad’s finger signs may have been elsewhere. Finger signs are, for instance, found in Daoism. The various parts of the fingers and the hand (especially the left hand) represent the Eight Trigrams and the Twelve Earthly

Branches. In addition, the little finger, index finger, and the thumb represent the stars above the Big Dipper (Lagerwey 1987, 17, 70, 113). Clearly, the finger signs of the Triads use exactly the same type of symbolism. Before we identify with certitude the origins of the Triad finger signs, we need to know more about the use of finger signs by (semi-)messianic groups, such as perhaps the modern *Yiguan dao*, an extremely popular Daoist religious group on Taiwan, which is still prohibited on the mainland.

As is common in Chinese millenarianism and messianism, Triad lore shows a fascination with numbers (for example, the split forms of the common family name Hong) and dates. Especially important is the use of the same cyclical date for crucial events. The advent of a savior or of eschatological disasters is often predicted for years with the cyclical characters *jiazi* (which is the first combination of the cycle of sixty) (for instance, Zürcher 1982, 3, 20–22). In the *Classic of the Five Lords*, the Luminous King is said to appear in a year with a cyclical combination that has as its second character *yin* or *mao* (which actually occur consecutively in the cycle). Many uprisings involving beliefs from this book actually took place in such years (Ke 1983, 199–200, and 1987, 367).

Significantly, the 1811 manual uses the cyclical characters *jiayin* (the fiftieth combination of the sixty-year cycle) four times for crucial events, namely the day of the blood oath by the 108 founding monks, the “appearance in the world of the tree from the pit of a peach” (*taozishu chushi*) to signify the appearance of the savior, the burning of the Shaolin monastery, and the advent of the brothers in the world (*Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 4, 15, 17, 19). The obviously mythical nature of *jiayin* years also casts doubt on many of the theories that ascribe a specific year to the founding of the Triads on the basis of its founding myth.

Finally, an element that is not present in the sixth-century tradition but is quite common in messianic and millenarian beliefs during the Qing is the belief in purchasing certificates (*zha* or *hetong*, “contracts”) as a guaranteed means of avoiding the apocalypse. This has been mentioned above in connection with the Eternal Venerable Mother tradition and was quite widespread.<sup>22</sup> The Triads also used certificates (called *zha*) for their adherents, which functioned primarily as membership certificates. However, another important function of these certificates was protection. They were, I believe, conceptually modeled on certificates such as those sold by Li Mei in 1729–30 to guarantee protection against the imminent apocalypse. The earliest examples of such certificates among adherents of the Triads are probably two small sheets carrying crucial mythical information, given in 1791 by adherents (who had been banished in 1787) to Liu Zhaokui, a follower of the Eight Trigrams tradition (*Tiandihui* 1986, vol. 5, 404–24).

Considering the present state of the evidence, as analyzed above, I would therefore suggest that the Triads culled both from a specific, probably written (but as yet unidentified), messianic tradition of the Luminous King and the City of Willows, and from more widespread oral traditions, evolving continuously

during the Qing, about saviors from the Li and Zhu families. The associations of the name of the savior Luminous King/Ruler had been further enriched during the Ming by its use as a dynastic title. During the Qing, anti-Manchu feelings, too, were reinforced—if not produced outright—by the adoption of these messianic beliefs, which saw barbarian invasion as one of the traditional apocalyptic disasters.

### Concluding Remarks

This preliminary analysis of the historical origins of crucial and mutually coherent elements from Triad lore raises several new questions—questions that could never have been asked on the basis of a purely social-historical approach in which one looks only at the activities and social backgrounds of adherents. In this chapter I have taken the reverse track, stressing the meaning(s) of the texts rather than the scarcely documented interpretations and activities of the adherents. Even if we assume that the messianic contents of the rituals and myths did not matter to the majority of the adherents, this leaves the important problem of why those who eventually transmitted the tradition to later generations did care and what the messianism meant to them. Did the Triads remain messianic in orientation (that is, was the messianic focus regenerated from time to time), or—as is my impression—did the messianic aspect become routinized? In the latter case, we can find parallels with the Eternal Heavenly Mother groups described by Susan Naquin; these groups often restructured the messianic ideal of a post-apocalyptic paradise into a long-term expectation, which could be guaranteed by buying certificates. Moreover, did the religious element in general become more and more subjugated to the social activities of various individual groups? These are questions for further research, but it is quite clear that there are significant parallels to the evolution of the messianic Eight Trigrams tradition (which influenced many predatory groups in northern China, although the tradition itself retained its original messianic nature) and the change of the devotionalist Non-Action movement, founded by Luo Qing, into a mutual-aid organization of laborers on the Grand Canal, and eventually into a scarcely disguised criminal organization.

A major issue in scholarly work on the Triads has always been their attitude toward the Qing and the Manchus. Past scholars have seen the Triads as a proto-nationalist political movement, whereas recent scholars have attempted to underplay this political dimension. This investigation points to an altogether different interpretation, founded on a more detailed understanding of legitimation terminology and of the nature of politico-messianic traditions. In my opinion, the anti-Qing posture of the Triads, and—lest this be forgotten—other roughly contemporary messianic traditions, reflects the traditional role of barbarians as an apocalyptic threat. Thus it did not originate in Ming loyalism among literati (with whom the Triads had little connection historically) or the socioeco-

nomie or political decline of the dynasty, both of which have been adduced to explain the appearance of this element. Pro-Ming and anti-Qing notions were already present in the teachings of Ma Chaozhu (1747–52), in the 1797 proclamation by a rebel army during the so-called White Lotus uprising of 1796–1804, and in the earliest material on the Triads itself. Rather, the anti-Qing and pro-Ming posture of the Triads originated in a messianic tradition that antedated the Qing and the Ming by many centuries.

The fact that this originally messianic expectation does not seem to have been prominent in the minds of most Triad adherents need not mean that it was unimportant in their overall beliefs. One might, perhaps, compare it to the general Christian expectation of the kingdom of Christ that will come one day, and for which each good believer should prepare. Although this conviction is actualized only in some smaller religious groups within Christianity, it is quite basic to the beliefs of all Christians.

### Notes

1. This research is being carried out with a Research Fellowship of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences.

2. On *ming*: Qin 1988, 160 (1806 manual); *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 2, 71 (1787 confession); and 8 and 9 (1811 manual). On *wu dian er shi yi*: *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 97 (same as Qin 1988, 310); on *san ba nian yi*: *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 7.

3. *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 69–71. The phrase is repeated in many confessions and ritual texts, such as the earliest full-fledged manual (from 1811, hereafter referred to as the 1811 manual), see *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 8. The interpretation has been copied by all later scholars, starting from Schlegel 1866, 24–25. See Qin 1988, 97–98, for the most recent statement.

4. *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 4. Earliest mention of this title is 1729, see Sasaki 1970, 167–73; Suzuki 1982, 241. Earliest preserved version, see Ma 1989, 166–67; the text was found in 1813.

5. *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 4–5, 12 (1811 manual). On the Gaoxi Cloister, see also: Qin 1988, 153 (1787 oath), and *Tiandihui* 1986, vol. 5, 413 (1791 documents by people banished in 1787).

6. *Tiandihui* 1987, vol. 6, 420 (1800); Qin 1988, 154 (1808); *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 4–6, 8, 11, 13, 15–18, 21, 22 (1811 manual). The ideal of restoring the Ming is often phrased as the need to recover “the rivers and mountains,” which is a *pars pro toto* for “the nation,” see Qin 1988, 154 (1808 oath) and 159 (1806 rudimentary manual).

7. For their use in Daoist texts, see Lagerwey 1987, 28–29, 66. For their use by the government, see for instance the posthumous titles of the first Ming emperors and the phraseology of imperial edicts, as they are quoted in the Veritable Records of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Many rebels also used this terminology, as early as the late Tang. I present the evidence in full in my forthcoming study.

8. The concepts are, for instance, fundamental to Dong Zhongshu’s thought on legitimation and rulership, see *Hanshu* 1962, 56, 2495–2528.

9. *Qingzhongqi* 1981, vol. 5, 37 (confession 1796). Riddle poems and apocalyptic prophecies circulated from 1768 onward within the same network of preachers: *Shilitao congbian* 1983, vol. 9, 159, 160–61 (1768), 166, 169 (1775), 173 (1785); *Qingzhongqi* 1981, vol. 1, 6, 7 (1794 confessions), and so forth.

10. Naquin 1976, 21 and 90, translates *shi* as “rebellion.” I prefer the more literal “undertaking”: followers of the prophecies did not perceive of their activities only (or primarily) as a rebellion, but as something that was fated to happen by Heaven.

11. See for instance the confession by Liu Song, a major teacher, in *Shiliao congbian* 1983, vol. 9, 202–4. The confessions abound with such remarks. See also ter Haar 1992, 250–61.

12. In *Shuyiji, xia*: 3a, people eating *taoli* (peaches) become immortals. This shows that the term was used as a synonym for *tao* (peaches) in its function of providing immortality. At the end of the Sui, prophecies on *taolizi* (the son of the peaches/the son of peaches-Li) about the advent of a savior called Li circulated widely, discussed by Bingham 1941, 51–54, 68. On peaches in millenarian/messianic prophecies, see also Toller 1990, 96. In descriptions of the countries of immortals behind grottoes and in mountains, special trees, including peach trees, are always a prominent element; see, for instance, Bokenkamp 1986, 77.

13. In political apocryphal prophecies: *Zhongguo erqiannian zhi yuyan*, in different sets of prophecies: 1970, 42, 46, 86, 91. In messianic and millenarian prophecies: *Qingzhongqi* 1981, vol. 1, 40, on the advent of the Buddhas, when the flowers blossom on the 15th day of the second month, and Naquin 1976, 112, 321 n. 137, on the projected start of the 1813 Eight Trigrams uprising, namely when the yellow flowers blossom on the 15th day of the eighth month (as well as an example of red [*hong*²] flowers blossoming). The 1811 manual (*Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 15, 16, 21) contains very explicit references to this effect.

14. The precise ethnographic history of this custom is as yet unclear, but there can be no doubt that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this mythology existed throughout northern China. A complete survey of the secondary literature would take us too far. See, for instance, Berthier 1988, 123–36, 210–21, 259–71.

15. *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 87. There are many references in the 1811 manual to the lowering of peaches as a sign of the advent of a savior (*Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 15, 16 and 21) and the “appearance on earth” (*chushi*, the common term for the incarnation on earth of a savior) of a tree from the pit of a peach (*Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 15).

16. Qin 1988, 311; *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 87, 111–12; also compare the surnames of tree of the founders in *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 6–7 (1811 manual). Most confessions mention only the surnames Li and Zhu, without the personal names.

17. *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 90 (two confessions), 97, and 111–12 (Yan Yan’s confession), 139, and Qin 1988, 310 (by the supposed son of Monk Wan, who claims his father also was Monk Hong).

18. Qin 1988, 154 (1808 oath: Fang Dahong of the Second House), and 157 (1797 summary: Fang Dahong of the Second House), 158 (1806 rudimentary manual: Fang Dahong of the Third House); the 1811 manual is inconsistent, *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 5–7 (Long Dasui of the Second House) and 11 (Fang Dahong).

19. Apart from the texts mentioned by Zürcher, also see various texts pointed out to me by Ad Dudink, such as *Daozang* 1195 (Schipper enumeration) lines 147–152 and *aozang* 322, 5a8. Seidel 1984, 312 and 344, mentions the *sanyang di* (Three Willow land) as a place where people will be elected to be saved from the apocalypse.

20. Schafer 1965, 549; Seidel 1984, 310 and 348 (in a late sixth-century messianic text, although not as a central element). Luo (1509) contains a complaint about preachers of Maitreyan prophecies who claim that the elect can take refuge from disasters in the city. The commentary specifies that this is the Silver City. On the belief in the Cloud City Golden City during the Qing, see Naquin 1976, 13–14, and 1985, 268.

21. On *hong* meaning “flood” in Triad lore, see *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 87 (1787 confession) and 8 (1811 manual); compare other references to disasters and the fall of the ‘nasty’ in the 1811 manual, *Tiandihui* 1980, vol. 1, 7.

22. Suzuki 1982, 163–64, uses this as a criterion for distinguishing religious groups (he differentiates this type from that of the Triads, which he defines primarily by the use of the blood oath) and illustrates this type with numerous cases in the rest of his article. Also see Naquin 1985, 267–268.

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