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## Time After Time: Taoist Apocalyptic History and the Founding of the T'ang Dynasty

Revolutionary chiasm thrives best... where history is imagined as having an inherent purpose which is preordained to be realized on earth in a single, final consummation.  
Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*

In 1970, Anna Seidel published what was to become perhaps her most influential work, "The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism: Lao-tzu and Li Hung."<sup>1</sup> She boldly demonstrated the continuing importance of Taoist eschatology throughout the Six Dynasties, and thus added much to what we knew at that time concerning the origins of religious Taoism in the millenarian peasant rebellions at the end of Han.

In that initial article, which was followed by several others on related issues, Seidel chose to focus on one vital aspect of the larger complex, the image of Lao-tzu and, later, his avatar Li Hung as that of "politico-religious saviors" who people expected to descend and rule over the elect in an era of Great Peace. Throughout her study, Seidel emphasized that "we are dealing less with the evolution of an ideology than with the varying expressions of the same belief in different strata of society: in dissenting peasant movements, among literate Taoist priests in organized sects, and at the imperial court."<sup>2</sup> She supported this assertion with impressive documentation, drawn from Tun-huang texts, canonical scriptures, and standard histories, showing that a number of emperors – including Li Hsiung of the Ch'eng-Han, Liu Yü of the Liu-Sung, T'o-pa Tao of the Northern Wei, and perhaps even Li Yüan of the T'ang – all saw themselves as conforming to the prophecies of Lord Li messianism. This finding directly contradicted

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Religions* 9 (1969-70), pp. 216-47.

<sup>2</sup> Seidel, "Image of the Perfect Ruler," p. 245.

the received image of Taoism as a religion of the illiterate masses and a partially literate priesthood, a “hodge-podge of coarse-grained superstitions.”<sup>3</sup> Seidel had successfully implicated Taoist ideology in that most serious of traditional Chinese intellectual projects – the establishment of an ideal imperial order.

In subsequent years, and even today, the idea has not gone down easily. For example, Howard Wechsler, after reviewing the evidence forwarded by Seidel and others, subsumed the influence of Taoist ideology in the founding of the T'ang under the general rubric of portents. By Wechsler's account, Taoist ideology was just another “useful vehicle of exploitation” to be employed by skeptical emperors.<sup>4</sup> By this view, Taoism had gained in importance, but only incrementally, from something the literati would not touch to something they might condescend to use as a privileged route to the hearts and minds of the masses. Although I myself may have been at least partially responsible for this way of dodging Seidel's thesis,<sup>5</sup> nevertheless, in the present paper I hope to recast my hypothesis.

The problem, as Wechsler and I came to define it, concerns the insoluble question of what Li Yüan, the founder of the T'ang, actually believed. We are dealing with a religion, so questions of belief are naturally foregrounded.<sup>6</sup> Yet we need to recognize that no amount of textual evidence will ever indisputably prove what any historical personage might have believed at any given moment in time. All of the statements that Wechsler cites to prove the skepticism of Li Yüan might equally be taken as the feigned reluctance to accept favorable portents traditionally considered

appropriate to a dynastic founder. Skepticism is always possible, both on the part of emperors and of historians. The probing of individual belief, I now want to argue, is just not a promising subject for historical inquiry.

More to the point, it matters little whether or not Li Yüan believed in the portents presented to him, since Taoist millenarian ideology is not reducible to the individual portents it offered as proofs. It is best seen not as a series of discrete historical events, but as a coherent complex of themes and images that express in different ways a politico-religious concern central to Taoism itself – the establishment of Great Peace 太平. Whatever Li Yüan's personal faith might have been, he came to the throne at a time when concepts of kingship had been profoundly changed by Taoism. In particular, millenarian expectations were high and he could not but fashion an image reflective of these expectations.

In this paper I reexamine certain aspects of Taoist apocalyptic thought – its origins and its relation to other ideologies of state formation – in yet another effort to fashion a suitable footnote to Seidel's 1970 article. Seidel stressed in her article the image of the messiah. Here I widen the focus somewhat and examine Taoist notions of both history and the dynastic cycle in an attempt to isolate some of the enduring ideological constituents that contributed to the remarkable persistence of apocalyptic thought throughout the Six Dynasties period. Subsequently I isolate specific images of impending apocalypse and of the sage-lord of the new age. These were images that troubled the Sui monarchs and provided a new opportunity for the founder of the T'ang.

## HISTORY AND ITS ENDS

The words of Norman Cohn, scholar of Judaic and Christian millennialism, cited at the beginning of this paper serve to remind us that chiliastic visions are closely connected to a precise view of history, and that insofar as China did not share this view of history the word “millenarian” cannot properly apply. It is well known that China held to a cyclical view of history. No matter how long the cycle, it was thought to end only in the beginning of a new cycle of time. My use of the terms “millennium” and “apocalypse” should be taken in this sense.<sup>7</sup> They refer to points on a circle rather than to

<sup>3</sup> This characterization of Taoism is by Édouard Chavannes, quoted in Max Kaltenmark, *Lao-tzu and Taoism*, Roger Greaves, trans. (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1969), p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> See chap. 3, “The Management and Manipulation of Portents,” Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1985), pp. 55–77; the quoted phrase is on p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> My 1980 paper “Taoist Millenarianism and the Founding of the T'ang,” presented to the Conference on the Nature of State and Society in Medieval China, Stanford, California, seems to have informed Wechsler's thinking on the subject. He was present at the conference where I presented the paper and kindly cited it in his discussion of these events. At the time, both Robert Somers, who was discussant for my presentation, and David Johnson took issue with my “reductionist” assertion that Li Yüan had somehow “manipulated” the Taoist portents presented in support of his mandate. I have had ample opportunity, over the last fourteen years, to reexamine the opinions I expressed on that occasion. I am grateful to Somers and to Johnson for their thoughtful criticisms. My only regret is that Howard Wechsler, another fine scholar taken from us in an untimely way, is not around to debate the issue once again.

<sup>6</sup> Seidel herself speaks of “varying expressions of the same belief” (cited n. 2, above).

<sup>7</sup> The term “millennial” derives from references to the 1,000-year period of earthly rule of Jesus Christ in Christian eschatology. In the sense in which I apply the term, one already

final events on a time-line.

But we cannot dispose of the question of history so easily, for Taoism did not invent its eschatological vision, but rather inherited it from classical Confucianism. Already in the pre-Han *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* we find a passage that might fit in any Taoist text of the Six Dynasties:

Whenever a Thearchical king is about to arise, Heaven invariably first manifests auspicious [signs] to the people below. At the time of the Yellow Thearch, Heaven first made to appear large earthworms and large mole-crickets. The Yellow Thearch said: "The earth-pneumas are ascendant." Since the earth-pneumas were ascendant, he venerated yellow as his color and modeled his affairs on the [phase] earth. Coming to the time of Yü, Heaven first manifested plants and trees which did not wither in autumn and winter. Yü said: "The wood-pneumas are ascendant". . .

This is one of the earliest expressions of five-phases thought as applied to the political doctrine of the heavenly mandate 天命. The view of human history presented here is decidedly cyclical and by implication apocalyptic, following the orderly progression of the Five Phases in the "mutual conquest" order. What makes the passage "apocalyptic" in the Chinese sense is the prediction with which it closes. After revealing that king Wen of the Chou had risen in resonance with the fire phase, the passage continues, ominously:

That which replaces fire must undoubtedly be water. Heaven will first manifest the ascendancy of water -pneumas and, due to the ascendancy of water-pneumas, [the new ruler should] revere black as his color and, in his affairs, model himself on the [phase] water. *If water-pneumas reach*

adapted by Seidel, the "millennium" is the era of "Great Peace," or perfect rule, following the inauguration of a new world-era. To designate such an era, Taoist texts regularly employ the term *chieh* 劫, borrowed from early-Buddhist translations of the Sanskrit term *kalpa*. The word "apocalypse" derives from Greek *apokalypsis* ("unveiling"). Traditionally, the secrets "unveiled" in apocalyptic writings dealt both with the heavens and with the fate of the world, and, as Norman Cohn has pointed out, the two sorts of secret are intimately connected. See Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1993), pp. 163-93. Here, I use the term in the sense proposed by Jan Nattier, "a world view that anticipates the radical overturning of the present religio-political order as a result of action by forces acting on a cosmic (i.e., transhuman) level"; Jan Nattier, "The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth: A Typological Analysis," in Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, eds., *Maitreya, The Future Buddha* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988), p. 43, n. 44.

*their apex and he does not know the [fated] numbers and preparations, it will shift on to the [phase] earth.*<sup>8</sup>

There is no mention here of the catastrophic warfare, drought, and flood that would attend the end of each dispensation. There did not have to be. The very mention that water-pneumas might "reach their apex" already implies that each age was marked by a waxing and a waning familiar to historical accounts of "good first" and "bad last" dynasts. Further, philosophers of the late-Warring States period generally tended to proclaim that they were living in the depraved final days, sometimes strangely characterized as "near antiquity" 近古 or "lower antiquity" 下古, as opposed to the preceding ages of "higher antiquity" and "middle antiquity."<sup>9</sup>

During the Han dynasty, this tendency to mark three major cycles in the turnings of time found its fullest expression in the Triple Dispensation calendar 三統曆 (more properly known as the Grand Inception calendar 太初曆) of Liu Hsin 劉歆 (d. 23 AD).<sup>10</sup> Liu Hsin sought, in Needham's

<sup>8</sup> *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 呂氏春秋 (sect. "Ying-t'ung 應通") (Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng edn.) 13, pp. 126-27. This monitory advice, associated with Tsou Yen, was heeded by several rulers, most notably Ying Cheng 嬴政, who took the phase water as his model and styled himself the "Inaugural Thearch of the Ch'in."

<sup>9</sup> The origins of the tendency to divide history into the three components "highest antiquity," "middle antiquity," and "lower antiquity" can be traced at least as early as *Meng-tzu* 2B/7, which states the first two and merely implies the last. The strange-sounding "near antiquity," referring to the Shang and the Chou, appears as the third term of the triad in *Han-fei-tzu* 韓非子 (Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng edn.) 49, p. 339. For the term *san-ku* 三古 in Taoism, see Max Kaltenmark, "The Ideology of the *T'ai-p'ing ching*," Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1979), pp. 22-23, and Anna Seidel, "Le sūtra merveilleux du Ling-pao Suprême, traitant de Lao-tseu qui convertit les barbes (le manuscrit TH S. 2081): Contribution à l'étude du Bouddho-taoïsme des Six Dynasties," in M. Soyumi, ed., *Contributions aux études de Touen-houang*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient 135 (Paris: EFEO, 1984) 3, pp. 319-20. Taoists were not alone in adopting this compelling three-tier model of history. Jan Nattier has recently presented evidence that the tripartite system of East Asian Buddhist scripture - *cheng-fa* 正法 ("True Dharma"; Sk. *saddharma*), *hsiang-fa* 像法 ("Semblance Dharma"; Sk. *saddharma-pratirūpaka*), and *mo-fa* 末法 ("End of the Dharma") - was developed in China. (See Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), esp. pp. 65-118.)

<sup>10</sup> I here follow Nathan Sivin's conclusion that it was in fact Liu Hsin who, while borrowing from earlier astronomers, fashioned the universal system that informed this calendar; see Sivin, *Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969; rpt. from *TP* 55.1-3), p. 11, n. 1. Sivin translates the name of this system as "Triple Concordance," while Needham translates "Three Sequences" (Joseph Needham and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilisation in China* [Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1958] 3, p. 407). As discussed below, the word *t'ung* is used in a technical way in the system, designating a set of conjunctions occurring every 1,539 years. Nonetheless, the *san-t'ung* were unambiguously

words, "to reconcile the irreconcilable" through discovering the supposed regular interrelations of the sexagenary cycle, the lunar cycle, tropical years, eclipse periods, the "year-star" Jupiter's synodic revolutions, and conjunctions of the five naked-eye planets – all in accord with the celestial and terrestrial movements of the Five Phases 五行. The fundamental technical terms of the system are as follows:

|                  |   |  |
|------------------|---|--|
| 1 <i>chang</i> 章 | = | 19 years (235 lunations)   |
| 1 <i>pu</i> 部    | = | 4 <i>chang</i> (76 years)  |
| 1 <i>hui</i> 會   | = | 27 <i>chang</i> (513 years, 17 lunar eclipse periods)  |
| 1 <i>t'ung</i> 統 | = | 3 <i>hui</i> (1,539 years)   |
| 1 <i>yüan</i> 元  | = | 3 <i>t'ung</i> (4,617 years, the smallest concurring period of sexagenary cycles, lunations, years, and eclipse periods) |

Jupiter calculations:

|                 |   |  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| 1 <i>chi</i> 紀  | = | 20 <i>pu</i> (1,520 years, Jupiter's synodic revolution)   |
| 1 <i>yüan</i> 元 | = | 3 <i>chi</i> (4,560 years, a number equated to the <i>yüan</i> above, after subtracting 57 disaster-years) |

In terms of accurately predicting celestial events, the system was an astronomical failure. It was modified almost immediately, in 85 AD, with little greater success and abandoned fully by the third century.<sup>11</sup>

Much ink has been expended both to understand the system and to explain why intelligent Chinese astronomers, working in an environment where each unpredicted eclipse was a bad omen for the state and threatened at the very least their own livelihood, might ever have toyed with it. Engaged in this effort, modern scholars tend to slight the fact that the Triple Dispensation system was intended not only to chart astronomical sequences but to map out dynastic history.<sup>12</sup>

Liu Hsin was at once the Stephen Hawking and the Kari Marx of his day. The all-inclusiveness of his universal theory made it one of the most remarkable achievements of the time. It was to have resonances extending

associated with the rule of the Hsia, Shang, and Chou dynasties, hence my translation.

<sup>11</sup> See the excellent discussion by Nathan Sivin on the fate of the calendar and "the demise of the cosmos" (Sivin, *Cosmos and Computation*, pp. 64-69).

<sup>12</sup> Thus, for example, the proofs Liu gives are not based on observational astronomy, but are drawn from earlier canonical records of eclipses.

far beyond its limited usefulness as a calendrical device.

It is not strange then that the three *t'ung* (Dispensations) are associated with that all-important triad of Chinese thought, Heaven-Earth-Humanity 天人地, and, in parallel, with colors (red, yellow, and black) and with the dynasties Hsia, Shang, and Chou, the calendars of which placed the new moon of the first month on *chia-tzu* 甲子, *chia-ch'en* 甲辰, and *chia-shen* 甲申 days, respectively, of the sexagenary cycle.<sup>13</sup> The Triple Dispensation system thus confirms the ancient notion of orderly cycles of human history, tying them, quite literally, to the revolutions of the stars.

The eschatology built into the Triple Dispensation system is, at first sight, equally reassuring. In terms of the cycles Liu Hsin sought to reconcile, the beginning of time, when all the various wheels were set in motion, would have occurred when "midnight on a day number one of a sexagenary day cycle. . . begins year number one of a sexagenary year cycle at the new moon on a winter solstice, the sun, moon, and five planets are lined up in conjunction, and on the next full moon there is a lunar eclipse."<sup>14</sup> Through a simple mathematical calculation, Liu determined that this universal concordance, the Superior Epoch of Grand Culmination 太極上元, as he called it, occurred once every 23,639,040 years.<sup>15</sup> Thus, heaven and earth had begun over 140,000 years before and would end to begin again a mere 23.5 million years hence. Others, as we see, calculated differently. What is significant is that predictions of cosmic end-times began to enter the picture and that these were tied to a regularized vision of the dynastic cycle.

Another prominent feature of the Triple Dispensation calendar was likewise to take on a life of its own. In order to reconcile the Jovian epoch of 4,560 years with the *san-t'ung* epoch of 4,617 years, Liu Hsin took out of count fifty-seven *yin* and *yang* disaster-years. In each *san-t'ung* epoch, he argued, there would be years of drought and flood in the following progression:

<sup>13</sup> *Han-shu* 漢書 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1962) 21A, pp. 984-85. See also Ku Chieh-kang 顧頡剛, "San-t'ung shuo ti yen-pien" 三統說的演變, *Ku-shih pien* 古史辨 ( rpt. Hong Kong: T'ai-p'ing shu-chü, 1963) 7, pp. 282-90, for a discussion of how this concept was elaborated in the *wei*-texts 緯書.

<sup>14</sup> Sivin, *Cosmos and Computation*, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Other cosmogonists used the term "Grand Culmination" to mark the final phase in the process of differentiation by which cosmos came into being; that is when *yin* separated from *yang* and the "ten-thousand things" came into existence. See Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: Tang Approaches to the Stars* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1977), pp. 25-29.

| NORMAL YEARS    | DISASTER YEARS                |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 106 followed by | 9 of drought ("yang-nine" 陽九) |
| 374 followed by | 9 of flood ("yin-nine" 陰九)    |
| 480             | 9 of drought                  |
| 720             | 7 of flood                    |
| 720             | 7 of drought                  |
| 600             | 5 of flood                    |
| 600             | 5 of drought                  |
| 480             | 3 of flood                    |
| 480             | 3 of drought                  |
| 4,560 minus     | 57 = 4,617 years              |

Given the frequency of flood and drought in ancient China, these numbers hardly seem disturbing. Still, nine straight years of drought or flood would, in an agricultural society, mean a calamity of almost unimaginable proportions. Whether for this reason or others, the words by which the system was known – *yang-chiu pai-liu* 陽九百六 ("yang-nine, one-hundred-six") – became synonymous with the disasters that augured apocalypse in many later texts, Taoist texts prominent among them.

Taoist scriptures function on Liu Hsin's model of cosmic history, modified by the contributions, which remain to be accurately assessed, of other cosmogonists and of the *weft-texts* 緯書.<sup>16</sup> Generalizing from a number of different accounts, we find that Taoist "history" begins with three pneumas, which divided from *yin* and *yang* at creation.<sup>17</sup> They are associated not with the triad Heaven-Earth-Humanity, but with the triad Heaven-Earth-Water, and are given the colors blue, yellow, and white. Human history proper is a story of decline, which begins after these three original pneumas have divided. The smaller cycles of dynastic history occur because humanity is, through desire, unable to maintain the "rule of the three heavens," the complex balancing act that keeps the three pneumas,

<sup>16</sup> The role of Han apocrypha in shaping Taoist means of communication with heaven and concomitant involvement with imperial symbols of legitimation is elucidated in Anna Seidel's "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha," in vol. 2 of Michel Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies: In Honour of R. A. Stein*, Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques 21 (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983) 2, pp. 291–371.

<sup>17</sup> For some of the sources on which the following account is based, see my forthcoming *Traces of Transcendence: Taoist Scriptures from the Second to the Sixth Centuries*. (Berkeley: U. California P.).

the Five Phases, *yin* and *yang* – in short, the various constituents of the Tao – in harmony. The world has gone tragically awry and must be fixed by the restoration of the "rule of the three heavens."

From time to time, the Tao will take pity on suffering humanity and reintroduce into human time the laws of the three heavens through revelation brought to earth by the Tao in anthropomorphic form. When the revelatory sage is heeded, as for instance was Chang Liang 張良 (d. 189 BC) at the founding of the Han, then sage-rule is established for a time.<sup>18</sup> But human willfulness and desire soon disrupt the harmony once again. Thus Taoist texts preach morality to those seen as living in the decadent age of lower antiquity, describing in vivid and awful terms the imminent apocalypse and methods for surviving it.

Taking this Taoist historical message in its totality, it is clear that Taoist scriptures functioned to keep alive millennial expectations only alluded to in Han texts through continued reference to the fragmented and perilous condition of contemporary society. They not only give evidence that an era of terrestrial Great Peace has occurred before and thus is recoverable, but provide for adherents the moral requirements (usually cited as the Confucian virtues of humaneness 仁, duty 義, and filiality 孝) necessary to realize it once again. This traditional moral component of the Taoist message must have helped to recommend the religion to those rulers who sought to reunify China under the banner of Great Peace.

It is impossible to gauge how widely Taoist texts spread in Six Dynasties society. Yet clearly after about 400 AD they were fairly widely known, because during the first half of the fifth century two rulers with ambitions of unification, one in the south and one in the north, took on the mantle of Taoist "Ruler of Great Peace" 太平之君.<sup>19</sup> They were exceptions in their times only in the extent to which they adopted Taoist imagery, not in the fact that they did so. For finally, there was nothing in the Taoist conception of history that contradicted in any profound way the Confucian views of history outlined above. By the Sui dynasty, all prospective rulers, claiming descent from Lao-tzu or not, would to an extent take into consideration the Taoist refinements on what was after all a pan-Chinese notion of history.

<sup>18</sup> On Chang Liang, see Wolfgang Bauer, "Der Herr vom Gelben Stein," *OES* 3 (1956), pp. 137–52, and, on his importance in Taoist texts, see Seidel, "Taoist Sacraments," p. 344.

<sup>19</sup> I refer to Liu Yü (363–422) of the Liu-Sung and T'o-pa Tao (r. 424–452) of the Northern Wei. See Seidel, "Taoist Sacraments," pp. 349–58.

THE FAILURE OF TAOIST  
PROPHECY AND APOCALYPTIC EXPECTATION

In *The Founding of the Tang Dynasty*, Woodbridge Bingham notes a curious fact concerning the rebellions that brought down the Sui. Of the twenty-nine rebel leaders who took titles for themselves, nine were surnamed Li.<sup>20</sup> Coupled with prognostications known to Yang Kuang 楊廣 (569-618), the last full emperor of the Sui, that claimed a man named Li was destined to rule, this fact takes on added significance. (We examine such prognostications, below.) Seidel is quite correct in connecting this with the Taoist image of Li Hung, but incorrect, I think, in suggesting that once Li Hung became deified in canonical scripture, he lost his political relevance.<sup>21</sup> I argue instead that any apocalyptic account, no matter how fancifully visionary, has political relevance as long as it was expected to occur on earth and in human time.

The specific scripture at issue is Yang Hsi's 楊羲 (330-?) influential *Ling-shu tzu-wen* 靈書紫文 [*Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits*].<sup>22</sup> This text, composed of materials personally received by the deity Lord Azure Youth 青童 from the Sage of the Latter Heavens, Li Hung 李弘, includes the Azure Youth's biography of Lord Li and an account of his deputation of mysterious Transcendents to save the seed people from the final cataclysms.<sup>23</sup> The forty-sixth *ting-hai* 丁亥 year after that having occurred during the ancient rule of T'ang 唐 [the sage-king Yao 堯] was to mark the

<sup>20</sup> Woodbridge Bingham, *The Founding of the Tang Dynasty, The Fall of the Sui and the Rise of the Tang, A Preliminary Survey* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1941), pp. 52-56, 130-39.

<sup>21</sup> Seidel, "Image of the Perfect Ruler," p. 243.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* refers to this text as the *Shang-ch'ing hou-sheng tao-chün lieh-chi* 上清後聖道君列記 [*Cheng-t'ung*] *Tao-tsang* 正統道藏 work no. 442, following the numbering order given in Weng Tu-chien, comp., *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Series 25 (Peking, 1925; hereafter cited as *HY*). As Isabelle Robinet has shown, however, *HY* no. 442 was originally part of *Ling-shu tzu-wen*, the major introductory portion of which is now collected in the *Tao-tsang* as *HY* no. 639. In this paper, I will refer to both simply as *Ling-shu tzu-wen*. On its composition, see Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient 137 (Paris: EFEO, 1984) 2, pp. 101-10. The entire text is translated in my forthcoming *Traces of Transcendence*.

<sup>23</sup> One of the Shang-ch'ing texts on the Azure Lad is translated and studied in Paul W. Kroll, "In the Halls of the Azure Lad," *JAO* 105.1 (1985), pp. 75-94. For the origins of the figure of a god of the east associated with cosmic order and divine retribution, see Jeffrey K. Riegel, "Kou-mang and Ju-shou," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5 (1989-90), pp. 55-84.

beginning of the end. There would appear a weak, young ruler, supported by hegemony:

Later, both before and after the *chia-shen* year of his rule, the good will be planted as seed people and the remaining mortals will be weeded out. Pestilence and flood will wash over them; weapons and fire will circle below them. All the evil will be eradicated at once; all the violent will be destroyed. Those who delight in the Tao will hide away in the land, the good people will ascend mountains. The flowing filth will be shaken off, driven into the vast abyss. In this way all mortals will be divided, the good from the evil.<sup>24</sup>

In the following *jen-ch'en* 壬辰 year, the sage Li Hung will himself appear in the heavens, after the evil people have all been eradicated.

This account is Yang Hsi's version of the Celestial-Master notion that, at the final days, the "seed people" will be saved from cataclysms.<sup>25</sup> The term "seed people" 種民, which we might also translate "electi," is a pun. In the depraved present age, when the Tao is not able to fully circulate within humanity, it "implants" its morality and power in a select few, who are then to serve as the "seeds" of a new populace in the era of Great Peace once the evil ones have been eliminated by the catastrophes attending the last days of the old era.

In the Shang-ch'ing 上清 scriptures the notion that the final days were at hand functioned as no more than a backdrop against which the drama of personal salvation was played out. Nonetheless, we know from the researches of Michel Strickmann that the prediction given here was taken seriously. The disappearance of the principals in the original Shang-ch'ing revelations and their possible deaths through ingestion of elixirs may have been a function of their belief that the horrific end-times were to begin in 387. The Taoist scholar Tao Hung-ching 陶弘景, using his own calculations, fig-

<sup>24</sup> *Shang-ch'ing hou-sheng ti-chün lieh-chi*, p. 3b. My discussion of this text and the translation of the passage provided here are indebted to the translation of portions of it in Michel Strickmann, *Le taoïsme du Mao chan: Chronique d'une révélation* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1981), pp. 209-78.

<sup>25</sup> On this term, see Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, "Rikuchō Dōkyō no shūmin shisō" 六朝道教の種民思想, *idem, Dōkyō to Bukkyō 道教と佛教* (Tokyo: Kokushō kankokai, 1976) 3, pp. 221-84; Seidel, "Le sūtra merveilleux," p. 319; and Erik Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," *TP* 68.1-3 (1982), p. 5, n. 10.

ured that the year of Li Hung's appearance must be 512.<sup>26</sup>

When even this calculation failed, a new version of the original prophecy appeared (a well-known text of it is carried in the "Chia-pu" 甲部 section of *Tai-p'ing ching* 太平經 [*Scripture of Great Peace*]). It allowed that a "minor yang-nine" would occur forty-six *ting-hai* years after Yao, signaling the appearance of a "minor lord of Great Peace."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the "major yang-nine" and the concomitant appearance of Li Hung were scheduled for fifty-five *ting-hai* years after Yao.<sup>28</sup>

Another way that Taoist texts tended to avoid the pitfalls of specific prophecy was through adapting the apparent numerical specificity of Liu Hsin's Triple Dispensation calendar to their own ends. The *Ling-pao* scriptures thus provide for five different minor and major *yang-chiu pai-liu* cycles, each associated with a five-phases aspect. At the time of each major cycle, the appropriate one of the Five Thearchs would, according to the scriptures, send his envoys to the directionally appropriate Marchmount to save the elect from harm. After 999,999 years, there would be a general catastrophe, heaven and earth would change places, and all would be destroyed including the very heavens themselves. For those bearing the

<sup>26</sup> Michel Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," Welch and Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism*, pp. 151-55.

<sup>27</sup> Wang Ming 王明, ed., *Tai-p'ing ching ho-chiao* 太平經合校 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1979), pp. 1-10. On the late-6th-c. dating of this portion of the text, see Seidel, "Taoist Sacraments," pp. 335-40, and Barbara Kandel, "The Origin and Transmission of the Scripture on General Welfare: The History of an Unofficial Text," *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* 75 (1979), pp. 77-79. As mentioned, the terms "yang-nine" and "one-hundred six" lose all specificity in Taoist texts. Though still associated with *yang* and *yin*, respectively, the terms come to denote no more than the catastrophic drought and flood that attend the end of an era. This process can be seen already in the Shang-ch'ing texts of Yang Hsi. His divine informants told him of two island-mountains in the eastern seas named "Yin Completed" and "Yang Extended," which serve as barometers. When "yang-nine" is about to arrive the waters of Yin Completed Mountain are exhausted and, at the same time, begin to cover Yang-Extended Mountain; when "one-hundred six" approaches, the situation is reversed. The passage ends with the warning that the water level over Yin-Completed Mountain has already reached the height of 90,000 feet. The floods of "one-hundred six" are soon to come, they warn Yang. (See *Chen-hao* 真誥 [*HY* no. 1010] 14, pp. 20a-b.)

<sup>28</sup> The other scripture containing this prediction is *San-t'ien cheng-fu ching* 三天正法經, a text of the Shang-ch'ing lineage but not composed by Yang Hsi. (See Robinet, *Shangqing* 2, pp. 87-91, for an analysis of this text and a comparison of surviving versions.) *Tung-yuan shen-chou ching* 洞淵神咒經, an apocalyptic text composed ca. 420, may have been the earliest to recast the Li Hung predictions. It mentions the descent of Li Hung and emphasizes the same cyclical year-designations mentioned in *Ling-shu tzu-wen* without providing any count from the reign of Yao. See Christine Mollier, "Messianisme taoïste de la Chine médiévale: Étude du *Dongyuan shenzhou jing*," (Ph.D. diss., Université de Paris VII, 1986), pp. 284-304.

charms of Ling-pao, however, destruction "seems but a sleep," and they would be reborn in the new heaven and earth.<sup>29</sup>

The text titled *San-t'ien cheng-fa ching* 三天正法經 (*Scripture of the Correct Law of the Three Heavens*) contains yet another method of computation. This method is based on the relative "revolutions" of heaven and earth. Relative to the Dipper, the heavens are said to revolve once each 36 days and the earth once each 33 days. Multiplying this number by 360 in the former case and 330 in the latter, we get one *chou* 周 of heaven and earth. In the case of heaven, a minor *chieh* 劫 occurs after 3,600 *chou* and a major one after 9,600 *chou*. For heaven, the numbers are 3,300 *chou* and 9,300 *chou*.<sup>30</sup>

While such numbers are impossibly large, they are nonetheless anxiety-producing, for no one could know when the cycles began or just where they were in the progression. The Ling-pao text that I have cited states that the grand dénouement is to take place "in the *keng-tzu* 更子 year after the three dragons."<sup>31</sup> This oracular pronouncement may have had some meaning for the author and original recipients of the text, but I have found it nowhere elucidated for the benefit of later readers.

At the same time, such texts are quite specific on the sufferings in store for the miserable humans of the latter days. One reads such phrases as "floods will reach up to the heavens and, of human and beast, only one in 10,000 will be spared," "the sun and moon will depart from their orderly cycles, the five grains will not ripen, and the people will flee as the massive waters rise," "the rivers will all dry up and dust will rise from the bottoms of the seas," or "great floods will wash away the filthy and unclean." In all their gory specificity, such descriptions differ only in scope from that other currently popular genre of scare literature, descriptions of the damned in the earth-prisons, which, we must remember, were based on the all too real

<sup>29</sup> *Tuan-shih wu-lao ch'ih-shu wu-p'ien chen-wen* 元始五老赤書五篇真文 (*HY* no. 22) 2, pp. 4b-9a.

<sup>30</sup> Cited, with minor variants, in *HY* no. 1130 (6, pp. 3b-4b); *HY* no. 1131 (9, pp. 1a-4b); and *HY* no. 1026 (2, pp. 4b-8a). Citation in *Wu-shang pi-yao* 無上秘要 (*HY* no. 1130) confirms that this text was in circulation by 574. (For these and other surviving fragments of the text, see Robinet, *Shangqing* 2, pp. 87-91.) Yet a third method of computation appears in *Tai-shang Lao-chün chung-ching* 太上老君中經 (*HY* no. 1160) 2, pp. 15b ff. (see Kristofer M. Schipper, "Le Calendrier de Jade: Note sur le Laozi zhongjing," *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* 125 [1979], pp. 75-80), but this text appears to be much older than those under consideration here.

<sup>31</sup> *HY* (no. 22) 1, p. 6b, l. 8.

sufferings of those charged with crimes facing brutal official inquisitors. Descriptions of the apocalypse, too, were based on both actual events and contemporary perceptions of disorder during the tumultuous days of the Period of Division. Is it any wonder that the bravest of mortals quailed at such uncertain prospects?

While its specific prophecy had failed to materialize and had to be adjusted in various ways, the *Purple Texts* remained influential. At least half a dozen later Taoist scriptures associated with various textual lineages recounted the imminent advent of Li Hung, some spelling out his name 木子弓口 in prophetic verse.<sup>32</sup> By the sixth century, as Seidel and Zürcher have shown in a remarkable pair of articles, we find Buddho-Taoist amalgams – a Ling-pao text in which Li Hung is to descend arm-in-arm with Maitreya and a Buddhist apocryphal scripture, full of Taoist imagery, in which the promised savior is to come from Mount P'eng-lai 蓬萊.<sup>33</sup> Even texts that did not specifically mention Li Hung tended to borrow imagery from the *Purple Texts* with the effect that for nearly three centuries religious writers in China were obsessed with the notion that they lived in the final days.<sup>34</sup>

## THE SUI CONFRONTS THE MILLENNIUM

Yang Chien 楊堅 (541-604), founder of the Sui dynasty, was fully aware of the opportunities and dangers of coming to the throne in an apocalyptic age. Arthur F. Wright has amply demonstrated Yang Chien's appeals to the ritual and symbolic values of both Buddhism and Taoism to reaffirm his rule over a newly unified China.<sup>35</sup> In assessing Yang's claim to be the sage-ruler of the new era we need not distinguish sharply between

the two religions for, as Seidel and Zürcher have shown, apocalyptic writing was one area where interchange between Taoism and Buddhism was intense. Thus, while one of Yang Chien's concerns as a ruler was clearly to rebuild the Buddhist establishment after the repressions of the Northern Chou dynasty, he was not loath to accept Taoist symbolism as well when it served to prove that a new age of Great Peace had dawned.

The clearest indication that Yang wished to present himself as ruler of a new cosmic era was his adoption of the reign-title *k'ai-huang* 開皇 (Inaugural Luminary). As the Sui court historian Wang Shao 王劼 noted, this is the name of a *kalpa*-cycle drawn from the Ling-pao scriptures.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, that *kalpa* is the one (among three initial *kalpa* in the creation of the world) in which the supreme deity of the Ling-pao scriptures, the Heavenly Worthy of Primal Origins, first takes human shape to rule over an aeon of unspeakable bliss.<sup>37</sup> Among other auguries presented to the throne in support of this claim, there was the best of scientific proofs that the new era equaled that of the mythical ruler Yao – the evidence of the gnomon that days were growing longer.<sup>38</sup>

As we might expect, the populace as well was invited to join in the blessings of the new era. Wang Shao's *Record of [Auspicious] Responses Evoked by the Śarīra* describes Yang Chien's establishment of thirty stupas throughout the kingdom to house holy relics he had received from a mysterious priest, and the author notes the way in which these holy objects were greeted by the people. They came daily in droves to conduct prayer-services, to accept Buddhist precepts, and to vow that "from today forward we will practice good and eradicate evil; life after life, generation after generation being born again as servants of the Great Sui."<sup>39</sup> Here, then, were the "seed-people" of the new dispensation.

<sup>32</sup> These include *Tung-yuan shen-chou ching* (HY no. 335), *Cheng-i T'ien-shih kao Chao Sheng k'ou-chüeh* 正一天師告趙昇口訣 (HY no. 1263), *Lao-chün yin-sung chieh ching* 老君音誦戒經 (HY no. 784), *T'ai-shang ling-pao Lao-tzu hua-hu miao-ching* 太上靈寶老子化胡妙經 (Stein ms. no. 2081), and the *chia-pu* sect of *T'ai-p'ing ching*, all mentioned by Seidel, as well as *T'ai-shang ling-pao t'ien-ti yün-tu tzu-jan miao-ching* 太上靈寶天地運度自然妙經 (HY no. 322), analyzed in Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," pp. 38-44.

<sup>33</sup> Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," and Seidel, "Le sūtra merveilleux."

<sup>34</sup> By the end of the Six Dynasties, references to the apocalypse had begun to occur in the works of secular writers as well. (See below, n. 62.)

<sup>35</sup> Arthur F. Wright, "The Formation of Sui Ideology, 581-604," John K. Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1957), pp. 71-104, and idem, *The Sui Dynasty: The Unification of China, A.D. 581-617* (New York: Knopf, 1978), pp. 126-38.

<sup>36</sup> *Sui-shu* 隋書 (Peking; Chung-hua, 1973) 69, pp. 1606-7.

<sup>37</sup> See, *inter alia*, HY no. 457, pp. 2a-3b; HY no. 23, pp. 11b-13b; and HY no. 318, pp. 12-b. According to this Taoist vision of past paradise, it is not until the beginning of the reigns of the Three Luminaries 三皇 that the perfect world of the "former heavens" begins to erode.

<sup>38</sup> *Sui-shu* 69, pp. 1610-11.

<sup>39</sup> *Kuang Hung-ming chi* 廣弘明集, in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-35; hereafter, *T*), no. 2103, vol. 52, ch. 17, p. 214b. This text states that Yang Chien was to revive the Buddhist dharma as "benevolent father of all the heavens" after it had been "wiped out" 滅 by the Chou. Of course this scenario accords with none of the canonical Buddhist accounts of the "end of the dharma." See also Miyakawa Hisayuki 宮川尚志, *Rikuchōshi kenkyū shūkyō hen* 六朝史研究宗教篇 (Kyoto: Heiraku shoten, 1964), p. 182.



While Yang Chien took steps to proscribe the apocryphal west-texts in 593, most likely in an effort to end eschatological speculation, he himself reveled in the assurances such books brought him. Among the proofs of the new age presented to Yang Chien were several that were to become prominent again at the time of Li Yüan's rise. According to Wang Shao, a "pneuma-watcher" had, during the reign of Chou Wu-ti 武帝 (560-578), noticed a "Child-of-Heaven pneuma" over Hao-chou 亳州 (in present-day Anhui province). Because of this prediction, Wu-ti had killed the inciting notary of Hao-chou, replacing him with Yang Chien. Nor was this all. A bit to the northwest, in Ch'en-liu 陳留, a shrine to Lao-tzu featured an ancient, withered cypress tree said to date to the time of the sage himself. Legend had it that when the branches of this tree curled on the southeast side, pointing northwest, a sage-ruler would appear and Lao-tzu's teachings would flourish again. During the Ch'i dynasty, the tree began to grow branches on the appropriate side, and three "youths" appeared at night to sing "In front of Lao-tzu's temple, the ancient, withered tree – its branches to the southeast form a canopy. A sage lord will appear from here." When Yang Chien served in Hao-chou, he visited the shrine, and the withered branches indeed began to point to the northwest, the direction of the capital.<sup>40</sup>

Whether they portrayed themselves as divine rulers of Buddhist or Taoist stripe, the Sui rulers' assurances that the new era had dawned were not finally satisfying. Apocalyptic expectations arose again with a fury during the reign of Yang Kuang (Sui Yang-ti 煬帝; r. 604-617). The background events leading to the new wave of oracles seem to have been the flood in the lower Yellow River valley in 611 and the failure of Yang's campaigns from 612 to 614 against the Koguryö.<sup>41</sup> At about this time,

<sup>40</sup> *Sui-shu* 69, p. 1604. The T'ang historiographers under the direction of Wei Cheng 魏徵 (580-643) have doubtless deleted many of the propitious signs proffered the Sui rulers, but they did leave for posterity accounts, such as the above, which seemed to augur the rise of the T'ang. The rebirth of the withered tree near Lao-tzu's temple in Hao-chou was represented in this way, not only by later historians (*Hsin Tang-shu* 新唐書 [Peking: Chung-hua, 1975] 34, p. 874), but by Lao-tzu himself, when he appeared to the illiterate Chi Shan-hsing 吉善行 in 620 (see below, n. 66, for references to this event).

<sup>41</sup> Bingham, *Founding of the Tang*, pp. 39-43. It is a measure of the times that in 609, when a band of white-crowned sectarians, carrying incense and flowers and proclaiming one among their number to be the future Buddha Maitreya, stormed the "Establishing the Kingdom" 建國 Gate of Lo-yang, the guards there did not stop them, but fell back and did obeisance. Over one thousand families in the capital district were implicated in this uprising (*Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* 資治通鑑 [Peking: Chung-hua, 1976] 181, p. 5648).

popular ditties, traditionally known as "youth prophecies" 童謠, like the song chanted by the three youths mentioned above, began to circulate, foretelling that a man surnamed Li was destined to rule or, in another case, that "a white-flag child of heaven will emerge from the Eastern Seas."<sup>42</sup> The former, the "Peach-plum child" 桃李子 song, seems to have been circulated in support of the rebel Li Mi 李密.<sup>43</sup> Whatever the origin of the songs, they drew upon that common stock of apocalyptic imagery that found its earliest literary expression in the *Purple Texts*. We find reference to the surname Li, to the mythical emperor Yao, and to the "Eastern Seas," site of the mythical isles.

It is not surprising, then, that one of the earliest rebels, T'ang Pi 唐弼, rose up under the banner of an "emperor" named Li Hung, while taking for himself the title "king of T'ang." Even T'ang Pi's name is significant – it means "assistant to T'ang."<sup>44</sup>

Yang Kuang's several symbolic responses to these events are telling as well. In 615 he executed two officials, Li Hun 李渾 and Li Min 李敏 (whose youthful name was Hung-erh 洪兒 "flood-child"), together with their families. He did this in the first place because the mage 方士 An Chia-t'o 安伽陀 had informed him that one of the Li clan was destined to rule, but also because the given name of one of them was a near homophone to the word "flood" 洪, while the other was once called "flood-child": "hung" ("flood"), being homophonous with the *hung* of Li Hung, made the names of these unfortunate two, in effect, "Li Hung."

At about the same time, although rebellion had already spread throughout the northern parts of his realm, Yang Kuang went to his Fen-yang 汾陽 Palace in Lou-fan 樓煩 (present-day Ching-yüeh county in northern Shansi) to "escape the heat."<sup>45</sup> Wen Ta-ya 溫大雅 provides information suggesting that the purpose of this visit might have been somewhat different. Fen-yang Palace was built, Wen tells us, in response to the prediction of another "pneuma-watcher" that there was a "child-of-

<sup>42</sup> Both of these are mentioned in Wen Ta-ya's 溫大雅, *Ta-Tang ch'uang-yeh ch'i-chü-chu* 大唐創業起居注 (TSCC edn.; hereafter, *CYCCC*) 1, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the various versions of this song, see Woodbridge Bingham, "The Rise of Li in a Ballad Prophecy," *JAOS* 61 (1941), pp. 272-80.

<sup>44</sup> This is the particular bit of evidence that attracted the attention of Seidel ("Image of the Perfect Ruler," p. 244). I have the late Michel Strickmann to thank for suggesting the significance of T'ang Pi's name.

<sup>45</sup> Bingham, *Founding of the Tang*, pp. 47-48.

heaven pneuma" in the northwest, at Lou-fan. We noted, above, that the story of the cypress tree at Lao-tzu's temple also involved a rejuvenation beginning in the northwest, and thus Wen's assertion is provided with a wider context.<sup>46</sup> If the desire to reassert his role as sage-lord prompted, at least in part, Yang Kuang's journey, he failed miserably, both symbolically and actually.<sup>47</sup> He was besieged at Yen-men 雁門 by the Turks for a month. This humiliating defeat, historians agree, was the beginning of the end for Yang Kuang.

### LI YÜAN RESPONDS

The story of Li Yüan's uprising and of the auspicious signs that attended it has been told several times. We need not recount it again. Here, we want simply to assess the major themes of the image that Li Yüan created for himself (or that was created for him). For this purpose, there is no better source than the prophetic verses forwarded to Li by P'ei Chi 裴寂 (560-619) and other officials as they participated in the ritual dance whereby the officials of a reluctant conqueror urge him thrice to take the throne. These are recorded in the unique eye-witness account of the T'ai-yüan uprising written by Wen Ta-ya.<sup>48</sup> The T'ai-yüan verses, as I will call them, make reference to nearly every celestial sign or augury that attended Li Yüan's seizure of power. This is a clear indication that they are *ex eventu* prophecy (or perhaps judiciously selected fragments of a larger corpus), for they fit the account Wen Ta-ya gives of the events the verses purport to verify only too closely. This fact should not lead us to suspect

<sup>46</sup> CYCCC 1, p. 4. The northwesterly direction, the "Gate of Heaven" according to the "Latter Heaven" arrangement of the eight trigrams used by Taoists for ritual purposes, is seen below, in the verses presented to Li Yüan.

<sup>47</sup> There are other indications that Yang Kuang sought symbolically to preempt the role of sage-lord: when he accompanied his troops to Liao-tung 遼東 in preparation for the first of his Korean campaigns in 612, two large white birds were seen to descend from the sky. Yü Cho's 虞綽 stele-inscription commemorating this event plays on the images of the "Emperor on campaign from the east" and the mystical isles of the eastern seas in a way that suggests influences from those texts (discussed above) that treat of Li Hung, the Blue Youth, and Maitreya (*Sui-shu* 76, pp. 1739). Further, "large white birds," sometimes swan-geese 鴻 and sometimes cranes 鶴, are part of the stock of apocalyptic images found in Taoist texts; see Robinet, *Shangqing* 1, p. 140.

<sup>48</sup> CYCCC 3, pp. 37-38. On the importance of Wen Ta-ya's account for the history of this period, see Woodbridge Bingham, "Wen Ta-ya: The First Recorder of T'ang History," *JAS* 57-4 (1937), pp. 368-74.

that they were offered skeptically, for, as I hope to show, they also tally closely with prominent images in the Tao-Buddhist apocryphal writings that we have been discussing. Whether written before or after the fact, whether accurately reported from preexisting sources or rewritten for the occasion, the T'ai-yüan verses – and the portents that inform them – present a unified image of Li Yüan, descendant of Lao-tzu, queller of disorder, and sage-lord of the new eon. It is the textual depth and thus the religious resonance of this image, rather than any contemporary sighting or *ad hoc* proof, which made it ring true.

Below I provide first a translation of the verses themselves, followed by glosses drawn from Wen Ta-ya's account. Following that, we look at the primary themes and images of the verses and at their "canonical" sources.

The first five verses, or fragments of verses, were said to have been composed by a "spirit-person" 神人 of T'ai-yüan, Hui-hua ni 慧化尼. The name leads one to suspect that they may have been attributed to a nun (perhaps from the T'ung-tzu Temple 童子寺 that figures in the verses), but no further information is given, and this "spirit" is unknown in other sources.

1

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Eighteen Children of the Eastern Seas,          | 東海十八子 |
| Eight wells summons the Three Armies.           | 八井喚三軍 |
| In his hands he holds a pair of white sparrows; | 手持雙白雀 |
| On his head he wears purple clouds.             | 頭上戴紫雲 |

"Eighteen children" spells out the graphic elements in the surname Li (十八子 = 李), and "Eight Wells," together with "three," the given-name Yüan (八井 = 井 + 彳 = 彳井 = 淵).<sup>49</sup> The "Three Armies" of the T'ang uprising were led by Li Yüan's two sons, Chien-ch'eng 建成 and Shih-min 世民, and by P'ei Chi. On July 23, 617, the day after Li Yüan had appointed his three generals, a white sparrow was captured and presented by a monk whose lay surname was Li. That afternoon, another white sparrow came to rest on a tree in front of Yüan's standard. For the next three mornings, a purple cloud in the shape of a dragon or tiger was observed to hover over his residence.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Tun-huang Taoist scriptures dating to the Six Dynasties and T'ang periods regularly employ the graphic variants 淵, or 泐, for 淵 (yüan). See Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍齋, *Tonkō Dōkyō mokurokuhen* 敦煌道經目錄篇 (Tokyo: Fukutake shoten, 1978), p. 396. Li Hu 虎 (d. 551), Li Yüan's father, himself wrote the graph in this fashion. See *Chung-kuo shu-fa ta-tzu-tien* 中國書法大字典 (Taipei: Ta-t'ung shu-chū, 1971), p. 696.

<sup>50</sup> CYCCC 1, p. 10.

2

*Ting-ch'ou* together with *chia-tzu*,  
He hid away, entering the hall.  
Why does he sit in the hall?  
In the center is the child of heaven.

丁丑與甲子  
深藏入堂里  
何意坐堂里  
中央有天子

This verse refers to June 23, 617, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month of the *Ting-ch'ou* reign-year, when Li Yüan outwardly broke with the Sui by imprisoning two Sui officials. As if a sign from heaven, a Turk raid occurred two days later. As a result, the two officials were charged with having incited the raid and were executed. "Sitting in the hall," in addition to standing for Li Yüan's title (duke of T'ang) and the eventual name of his dynasty, refers to the fact that the Turks withdrew of their own accord, awed by Li Yüan's "surpassing knowledge and courage, which must have been granted by heaven."<sup>51</sup>

3

From the northwest, heavenly fire reflects  
on Dragon Mountain.  
The youth's red beams link with the Dipper.  
The youth hangs a white banner atop a tree.  
Hu soldiers spread about, before and behind;  
Clapping their hands, they sing "t'ang-t'ang"  
And chase sheep that flee to the south.

西北天火照龍山  
童子赤光連北斗  
童子木上懸白幡  
胡兵紛紜滿前後  
拍手唱堂堂  
驅羊向南走

On February 5, 617, a light like a burning fire appeared in the night northeast of Li Yüan's Chin-yang Palace 晉陽宮, hovering directly over Dragon Mountain. This apparition pointed to the southwest, the direction of the capital. A purple pneuma also appeared over the T'ung-tzu 童子 (Youth) Temple on Dragon Mountain, breaking through the glittering fire and reaching up to the Northern Dipper.<sup>52</sup> The second and third characters of line three use the temple to spell out the surname Li (子 + 木 = 李). Through homophony, "sheep" refers to Yang Kuang and the song to the name of the coming dynasty. After his month-long encirclement by the Turks at Yen-men in 615, Yang Kuang withdrew to his southern capital.

<sup>51</sup> *CYCOC* 1, pp. 5-6.<sup>52</sup> *CYCOC* 1, p. 4.

4

If the Hu soldiers do not give aid,  
Han will not be whole.  
The Protector who should rule  
the center is eight wells.

胡兵未濟漢不整  
治中都護有八井

This verse refers to the Turkish support of Li Yüan. The "central capital" is Ch'ang-an, and "eight wells," as above, Yüan himself.

5

We rise up, rank on rank,  
With humanity and duty we march.  
With military virtue nine times nine,  
He achieves fame and renown.  
The youth below the tree, water a  
hundred *chang* deep.  
The eastern family's well is layered, with  
pentachrome stars.  
If you do not place faith in my words,  
Then ask the Prior-born Wei.

興伍伍  
仁義行  
武德九九  
得聲名  
童子木底百丈水  
東家井重五色星  
我言不可信  
問取衛先生

The opening lines contain homophonic word-play: that between "rank" and "military" and between "virtue" and "to achieve." The "youth below the tree" spells out the surname Li; and water (水 = 氵) plus "layered well" (井 = 井) forms another way of writing the name Yüan (see above). "Prior-born" was at this time a Taoist term of respect for a master. Master Wei refers to Wei Yüan-sung 衛元嵩, putative author of the following verse which was said to have been composed in 570:

6

1 *Hü* and *hai* years (614/15), lord and  
ministers in chaos. 戌亥君臣亂  
*Tzu* and *ch'ou* (616/17), destroy the city walls. 子丑破城隍  
*Yin* and *mao* (618/19), pacified as we wish; 寅卯如欲定  
Dragon-snakes quell the four quarters. 龍蛇伏四方  
5 Eighteen becomes a male; 十八成男子  
Flood waters rule beside the sword. 洪水主刀傍  
In market and court, duty returns 市朝義歸政  
to governance -

- The people know peace, all undisturbed.  
 A person's words are enduring;  
 10 People again speak of that which  
     is not enduring.  
 Consider well for the lord,  
 < . . . > Yü and T'ang.<sup>53</sup>  
 Peach Spring flowers < . . . >  
 As the pear tree rises loftily.  
 15 Just watch for the *yin* and *mao* years,  
 When deep waters inundate  
     the yellow poplar.<sup>54</sup>
- 人寧俱不荒  
 人言有恆性  
 也復道非常
- 為君好思量  
 < . . . > 禹湯  
 桃源花 < . . . >  
 李樹起堂堂  
 只看寅卯歲  
 深水沒黃楊

The chronology of the first three lines reflects the fall of the Sui and the founding of the T'ang. "Eighteen becomes a male" (line 5) spells out the surname Li; and "waters rule beside a sword" is another way to form the name Yüan (水主刀傍 = 洿 = 泐). "Duty . . . governance" (line 7) refers to the fact that the T'ang armies were called the "duty-bound troops" 義軍. "That which is not enduring" (line 10) alludes to the opening words of *Tao-te ching* - "The Tao may be spoken of, yet this is not the enduring Tao." "Again speak" 復道 may equally be read "again make a Tao of." The point seems to be that, under a constant ruler, the people may again return to the Tao, speaking of that which, while it cannot be caught in words, should be spoken of in all its extraordinary multiplicity.<sup>55</sup> Line 14's "the pear tree rises loftily," were we to drop the last character, might be read "the Li family establishes the T'ang." "Poplar" (line 16) is the surname of the ruling family of the Sui dynasty.

<sup>53</sup> Howard Wechsler has attributed the lacunae here to the fact that at first two ancient methods of gaining the mandate, that of Yü (by moral virtue) and that of the founder of the Shang, T'ang 湯 (by military might), were thought to be united in Li Yüan, a concept that was later abandoned; Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, pp. 67-68. For the two rulers in one phrase, the *locus classicus* is a remark of a Lu minister that the rapid rise of Yü and T'ang could be attributed to the fact that they "took blame on themselves," unlike evil rulers who "blamed others"; see *Iso-chuan* (Chuang 11), Shih-san ching chu-shu edn. (Peking: Chung-hua, 1980), vol. 2, p. 1770a. Since this line goes with the preceding ("Think well of the lord"), it is likely that this implication applies here as well. The ellipsis might then read "<who blamed themselves, as had> Yü and T'ang."

<sup>54</sup> This poem has been translated and discussed by Bingham, "The Rise of Li," pp. 277-80.

<sup>55</sup> As we see below, the phrase 非常 had by T'ang times acquired something of its modern sense of "extraordinary," in addition to the classical sense of the *Lao-tzu* text.

The most prominent apocalyptic image in the T'ai-yüan verses is that of the flood, which is mentioned specifically three times (no. 5, line 5; no. 6, lines 6, 16).<sup>56</sup> Two of these instances occur in connection with the spelling out of Li Yüan's given name, which by itself means "watery abyss." The alternative rendering of it as "eight wells" (1.2; 4.2; and 5.6) also plays obliquely on this flood image. As mentioned above, already in 615 Yang Kuang executed two officials not only because their surname was Li, but because their given names had something to do with the word *hung* [flood]. The sage-lord of the Shang-ch'ing *Purple Texts*, Li Hung, while not in this text unilaterally associated with flood, also has a given name homophonous with *hung*. More to the point, it was this sign of the end-time that had come to be emphasized in Taoist apocalyptic texts.<sup>57</sup> Section "chia-pu" of the *Scripture of Great Peace*, for instance, singles out the flood of the "Lesser Lord of Great Peace" for specific treatment: "There will be in turn disasters of warfare, illness, and fire, but no great flood. [Instead], there will be widespread minor floods . . ." <sup>58</sup> The prophetic verses of the *Scripture of the Revolutions of Heaven and Earth* fixate even more on the flood image. In this scripture, warfare and flood are the twin horsemen of the apocalypse:

Weapons and swords will strike from all sides,  
 Not one day can this be delayed!  
 Then, the conjunction of flood -  
 Spreading and rising until it joins with heaven.<sup>59</sup>

Another prominent image in the T'ai-yüan verses is that of the "youth 童子" (3.2-3 and 5.5), reinforced by the use of the word "child" 子 (1.1 and 6.5) in various combinations to spell out the surname Li. This image, too, seems to originate with the *Purple Texts* and specifically with the figure of the Azure Youth, who, while not surnamed Li, was the Supreme

<sup>56</sup> The Sui took for itself the phase "fire," which, according to the "mutual conquest" order of the Five Phases 五行, is overcome by water. By this time, however, the five phases were associated with successive dynasties according to the "mutual production" order. Indeed, the T'ang took for itself the phase earth and not water. The prevalence of flood images in the writings of this period, then, is to be traced to apocalyptic literature rather than to standard works on the succession of the five phases.

<sup>57</sup> Christine Mollier points out that the prevalence of flood imagery in Taoist accounts of "T'apocalypse purificatrice" stems from the pervasive influence of the myth of sage-king Yü quelling the flood. (Mollier, "Messianisme taoïste," pp. 302-4.)

<sup>58</sup> Wang, *T'ai-p'ing ching ho-chiao*, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> *HY* (no. 322), pp. 5b, ll. 6-7.

Minister of Li Hung. Associated with the east, nascent *yang* energies, and new growth, he is a primary symbol of the dawning age. In the *Purple Texts*, which he compiled for the salvation of humanity, the Azure Youth reveals the particular markings of the "seed people," who were to populate a rejuvenated earth.<sup>60</sup> Due to this soteric role and to the fact that, as the highest-ranking of the deities to appear to Yang Hsi, he was engagingly described in Yang's transcripts of his visions, the Azure Youth is the true "savior" of the Shang-ch'ing texts.<sup>61</sup> Certainly he is the most accessible of the higher deities. His residence was not in the heavens, but on the earthly plane; on *Fang-chu* 方諸, one of the mystical isles floating in the eastern seas.

Our suspicion that images of the youth in the T'ai-yüan verses might have something to do with the Azure Youth thus finds reinforcement in the fact that this youth is also associated with the "Eastern Seas" 東海 (1.1) or, more obscurely, the "eastern family's well" 東家井 (5.4).

There is further evidence that, by the late-sixth century, the Azure Youth had become firmly associated with the apocalypse and that this association was widely known. The poet Yü Hsin 庾信 (513-581), for example, refers to him in this fashion in the opening verse of his "Ten Stanzas to the Taoist Tune 'Pacing the Void'"; this despite the fact that the "Stanzas" are more thoroughly indebted to the Ling-pao scriptures, where the Azure Youth does not appear.<sup>62</sup> The image of the Azure Youth even had its influence on Buddhist apocryphal literature of the period. *The Scripture of the Monk Shou-lo* (*Shou-lo pi-ch'iu ching* 首羅比丘經), which Erik Zürcher dates to the sixth century, portrays the messianic activities of the Bodhisattva Candraprabha-kumāra in a way that, as Zürcher cogently dem-

<sup>60</sup> HY (no. 442), pp. 5b-13a.

<sup>61</sup> For Shang-ch'ing references to the Azure Youth, see Kroll, "Azure Lad," pp. 75-79. Since the Azure Youth was the teacher of Wei Hua-ts'un 魏華存 (252-344), Yang Hsi's own primary instructress from the realm of the Perfected, many of Yang's scriptures originated with him. His compassion for humanity and his painful search for scriptures to reveal to those worthy in the world below are fully described in the opening passages of *Ling-shu tzu-wen*.

<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, Yü breaks up the Azure Youth's name, much in the style of the prophetic verses we have been examining: "The Azure-robed one 青童 ascends Lesser Chamber (a peak of Mount Sung); The Youth 童子 proceeds to P'eng-lai. He roams about, listening in the four directions, / And in a trice we pass through the Three Calamities." (Hsi I-min 許逸民, ed., *Yü Tzu-shan chi-chu*, 庚子山集注 [Peking: Chung-hua, 1980] 2, p. 392.) The "Three Calamities" are fire, flood, and warfare - a clear reference to the end-times. Yü Hsin here portrays the Azure Youth in the role of savior, already presented in the *Purple Texts*, "listening" for reports of the just seed-people whom he will save from the coming disasters.

onstrates, marks it as a representative of "Buddho-Taoist eschatology."<sup>63</sup> While it is quite possible that the image of the Azure Youth during the Six Dynasties had something to do with the elevation of this "obscure Bodhisattva," whose name meant for Chinese ignorant of Sanskrit "Moonlight Youth" more than "Prince Moonlight," to a position of eminence in apocalyptic Buddhist literature, it is even more striking that in this text the Bodhisattva's residence is on Mount P'eng-lai in the eastern Seas. Once again, then, we have a "youth" of the eastern seas who was to come and lead the elect into a new age.

One feature of the T'ai-yüan verses that, to my knowledge, never appears in Taoist-inspired apocalyptic literature is the association of the messianic figure with the color white (1.3 and 3.3). As noted above, Li Yüan was early on made aware of the prophetic verse claiming that "a white-bannered Child of Heaven will emerge from the eastern seas." This image seems to come from the Buddhist side of a thoroughly Buddho-Taoist amalgam of apocalyptic imagery. In early Buddhist texts dealing with the end of the dharma, monk's robes turning from black to white was a sign of automatic laicization. Maitreya movements subsequently adopted white as the color of their robes, and the *Scripture of Verification* 證明經, an apocalyptic Buddhist text composed between 560 and 589, makes constant reference to "the white robed" - members of the group for whom the text was written.<sup>64</sup> But Li Hung, the Azure Youth, and Lao-tzu are (with the exception that the latter was born with white hair) never associated with the color white.<sup>65</sup> When we come to the reported appearances of Lao-tzu in confirmation of Li Yüan's mandate, however, the god invariably dons white.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," esp. pp. 33 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Michel Strickmann, "The *Consecration Sūtra*: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Buddhist Apocrypha in East Asia and Tibet* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1990), p. 114, n. 35.

<sup>65</sup> It may be significant that in the 5th-c. Taoist apocalyptic text studied by Seidel, Li Hung is to descend *together with* Maitreya at the inauguration of the era of Great Peace; Seidel, "Le sūtra merveilleux," pp. 323-25. While white robes are not mentioned in this text, it may be among sects such as the one that produced this scripture that the image of a white-robed Lao-tzu or Li Hung first appeared.

<sup>66</sup> This new iconography is presented most strikingly in the numerous accounts of Lao-tzu's several appearances to the commoner Chi Shan-hsing on Mount Yang-chiao in 620, during the T'ang force's campaign against Liu Hei-ta 劉黑闥. In addition to the usual white hair, Lao-tzu is described as riding a white horse and garbed in unbleached silk from head to foot. Each time he appears, he is accompanied by attendants carrying items that

Other isolated symbols found in the T'ai-yüan verses – the north-eastern “gate of heaven,” the white bird, purple clouds, and the like – are easily identified in the apocalyptic literature of the fifth and sixth centuries. We shall not trace these individually, but shall turn to one final feature of the verses that is, I think, very significant: The final verse is attributed to Wei Yüan-sung, the apostate Buddhist monk from Shu who was most influential in encouraging the Chou emperor Wu-ti to proscribe Buddhism and force the laicization of monks in 574. While the proscription seems, on the face of it, to have been directed at Taoism as well, both Taoist and Buddhist sources agree that the emperor's true purpose was to fashion a new state ideology tinged heavily with Taoist principles.<sup>67</sup> Further, Buddhist sources are unanimous and persistent in blaming Wei Yüan-sung personally for the catastrophe, which was taken by contemporaries as a sign that the “end of the dharma” 末法 had arrived.<sup>68</sup>

Given this, coupled with Yang Chien's related attempts to rebuild the Buddhist establishment during his reign, it seems strange that Li Yüan and his image-makers would have included prophecies ascribed to Wei Yüan-sung. At the very least, it is not hard to imagine how thoroughly mention of this name in connection with the legitimation of a new dynasty must have chilled the hearts of the Buddhist priests who learned of it.

indicate, through the homophony of the words used to describe them, the names of the districts that will next fall to the T'ang. For instance, Lao-tzu first appears with two attendants, one carrying a red whisk 紅拂 and another a towel 巾 (\**kjên*). These represent Chiang 絳 (scarlet) and Chin 晉 (\**tsjên*) districts, respectively. For the fullest accounts of these epiphanies, see Chia Shan-hsiang 賈善翔 (fl. 1086-1101), *Yu-lung chuan* 猶龍傳 (HY no. 773) 5, pp. 112-14b, and Hsieh Shou-hao 謝守灝 (1134-1212) *Hün-yüan sheng-chi* 混元聖記 (HY no. 769) 8, pp. 42-92; also, *Tang hui-yao* 唐會要 50, p. 865; Tu Kuang-t'ing 杜光庭 (850-933) *Li-tai ch'ung-tao chi* 歷代崇道記 (HY no. 593), pp. 42-52; the inscription erected on the site commissioned by the Hsüan-tsung emperor (r. 712-756) recorded in *Lung-chiao shan chi* 龍角山紀 (HY no. 966), pp. 12-4b; and Hsieh Shou-hao, *T'ai-shang Lao-chün nien-p'u yao-lieh* 太上老君年譜要略 (HY no. 770), pp. 9b-10a. This event is discussed in Miyakawa, *Rikuchoshi*, pp. 181-82, and Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>67</sup> See esp. John Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao: Somme taoïste du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient 124 (Paris: EFEO, 1981), pp. 1-33. Involved in these events were several Taoists who were rewarded for their roles in aiding Li Yüan and who thus are most likely to have been involved in the composition of the T'ai Yüan verses. Especially well-treated were Ch'i Hui 岐暉 (558-630), who changed his name to P'ing-ting 平定 (“pacified and settled”) in response to Li Yüan's uprising, and Wang Yüan-chih 王遠知 (d. 635). As might be expected, nothing in the sources – as far as I am aware – implicates either in the creation of apocalyptic portents.

<sup>68</sup> On this point, see T'ang Yung-t'ung 湯用彤, *Han Wei liang-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao Fo-chiao shih* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 ( rpt. Taipei: Shih-hsüeh, 1974), pp. 514-45. It is noteworthy that the founder of the Sui, Yang Chien, was influenced by these events to accomplish a “restoration” of the Buddhist faith.

I have no verifiable explanation for the invocation of this ill-omened name. While it is perhaps not justified to see Li Yüan's dependence on Taoist imagery as a religious stance consciously adopted against the Buddhist leanings of the Sui monarchs, there is a certain significance to the fact that he chose to identify himself closely with a religion that portrayed itself as the Chinese answer to an imported faith. This open opposition was to be foregrounded again immediately, through yet another attempt to proscribe Buddhism. The main figure in this new attempt, Fu I 傅奕 (555-639), had also been involved in the Northern Chou debates.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, he seems to have been a Li Yüan partisan because he warned Yüan, through the secret presentation of a portent, of Li Shih-min's impending coup d'état.<sup>70</sup> Fu I's anti-Buddhist memorials resulted in an imperial decree delimiting the influence of both Taoism and Buddhism – precisely the way the Chou emperor Wu had proceeded with his suppression of Buddhism. On the day following his seizure of power, Li Shih-min forced his father to rescind this decree, which had been in effect for only about a month.<sup>71</sup> Due to Li Shih-min's subsequent revision of the historical record, we are left with little more than the above, admittedly circumstantial, evidence.

While we cannot know, then, whether the invocation of the name of Wei Yüan-sung in the T'ai Yüan verses was meant in earnest of things to come, we do know something of Wei's reputation as predictor of the apocalypse. Despite the fact that none of Wei's prophecies have survived intact, we know that they remained in existence as late as 690.<sup>72</sup> Further, we know from the few fragments cited that the body of Wei's verse was prophetic, as claimed by T'ang historians. One telling fragment, cited by Tao-hsüan 道宣 (596-667) reads: “From the dragon's head azure smoke rises, / Ch'ang-an, in one generation, a (funeral) mound.”<sup>73</sup> Clearly, there

<sup>69</sup> See Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao*, p. 18, and, for Fu I's memorial, see *Kuang Hung-ming chi*, p. 160A-C.

<sup>70</sup> *Chiu T'ang-shu* 舊唐書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1975) 79, p. 2716, and *Hsin T'ang-shu* 107, p. 4059.

<sup>71</sup> *Chiu T'ang-shu* 1, pp. 16-17, and *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* 191, p. 6002. This series of events is fully explored in Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1987), pp. 5-11.

<sup>72</sup> See Antonino Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century: Inquiry into the Nature, Authors, and Function of Tunhuang Document S. 6502, Followed by an Annotated Translation* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1976), pp. 204-5, for yet another verse attributed to Wei Yüan-sung and offered to Wu Chao.

<sup>73</sup> Tao-hsüan 道宣 (596-667), *Chi ku-chin Fo-tao lun-heng* 集古今佛道論衡 (Tno. 2104), vol. 52, ch. 2, p. 372A.

was in the collected verses of Wei Yüan-sung ample purchase for those who wished to show that Ch'ang-an would rise again under the rule of a man named Li.

The first petition that Yü Chi and company present to Li Yüan, though it merely introduces the T'ai Yüan verses, is equally informed by apocalyptic images.<sup>74</sup> In this case, though, the emphasis is not on recent events, but on the cycles of history, as can be seen in the following summary: Once solely the province of Confucian officials, who attempted to regularize its patterns, the cosmic cycles of heaven are now to be apprehended by other means. Rather than focus on the varying accounts of "pen and tongue," we should observe the brilliance emanating from the "treasure registers" 寶錄 that indicate the dispensations of heaven.<sup>75</sup> Li Yüan is the sage proclaimed by these heavenly documents, filled by the spirits and moving in perfect accord with the cycles. "When the myriad beings encountered mud and soot, he lifted them up to humaneness and long-life; when they had met with the perversities of the hundred-six, he undertook the enterprise of founding [a new dynasty with the speed and forcefulness of] lightning from the clouds," thus completing a new heaven and earth.<sup>76</sup>

Reference is then made to the confirmatory auguries and to the evidence of Li Yüan's name. This is followed by the invocation of Li Yüan's descent from Lao-tzu, through an allusion to the opening passages of *Tao-te ching*: "He embodies the extraordinary 非常 Tao and has established extraordinary acts of merit. In fact, he is an extraordinary man who has accomplished extraordinary feats." This emphasis on the "extraordinary" or "irregular" nature of the Tao, and of the man who embodies it, leads to a statement that runs counter to everything that thinkers from Tsou Yen to

<sup>74</sup> *CYCCC* 3, pp. 36-37.

<sup>75</sup> For this term, and much else regarding the Taoist involvement in proclaiming the Mandate of Heaven, see Anna Seidel, "Imperial Treasures," pp. 291-371; see p. 368: "A Taoist who transmits registers to an emperor does so as a member of and an emissary from the same spiritual hierarchy from which the Son of Heaven himself derives his mandate."

<sup>76</sup> "Mud and soot" 塗炭 describes the sufferings of the common people, through flood and fire, at the end of a dynastic cycle. In Taoism, the term came to be applied to a ritual of penitence during which participants would smear their faces with mud and soot. Lu Hsiu-ching 陸修靜 (406-477) described the goals of the rite as expiation of one's own and one's ancestors' sins, as well as "to save the people from danger and calamity"; idem, *Tung-hsuan ling-pao wu-kan-wen* 洞玄靈寶五感文 (*HY* no. 1268), p. 7b; and, for a study of the rite, Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, Frank A. Kierman, Jr., trans. (Amherst: U. of Massachusetts P., 1981), pp. 381-86.

Liu Hsin and the Han cosmologists had striven to prove – "The mandate of heaven is *not regular*; it is granted on the basis of virtue alone." Thus Li Yüan should, having responded appropriately to the times, not fail to fulfill the role heaven has assigned him.

In this memorial, we find mentioned all of the key words that during the Han marked the orderly cycles of time for Chinese thinkers.<sup>77</sup> Here, though, they do not signify as they once did. Logically, to assert that the T'ang could inaugurate a new cycle so soon after the Sui one would have to abandon the idea of orderly cyclical progression altogether. That this was not done testifies, I think, to the way in which Taoist apocalyptic writings were able constantly to reassert the notion that the Tao directly intervened in history through extraordinary 非常 persons even in the face of its ultimate unpredictability (also 非常). On hearing this suitably Taoist paradox, the descendant of Lao-tzu responded with a suitable silence. Finally, after hearing the evidence of the T'ai-yüan verses, he responded: "The reason I have avoided your entreaties for the third time lies not only in the matter of ceding the mandate; I also feared that you were merely flattering me to my face. Now I deduce that what you say is true."<sup>78</sup> With the assurance of history that the opening of a new era was clear to all, he accepted the mandate.

## CONCLUSION

Of course this is not the end of the story. Seidel has shown that the image of Li Hung lived on past the T'ang. Further, some of the same apocalyptic images we have been discussing appear again on the political stage not too many years after the founding of the T'ang in support of the mandate of Wu Chao 武曌. Enough information has been presented, though, to withdraw the suppositionals from one of the statements with which Seidel ended her seminal article. Rather than stating that "Li Yüan may well have felt himself to be the fulfillment of the messianic hopes that we first met with under Wang Mang and that had reechoed throughout the whole Six Dynasties: a Lord Li, emissary of Lao-tzu, was to be ruler,"<sup>79</sup> we

<sup>77</sup> There is mention of the Five Phases, Three Luminaries and Five Thearchs 五帝, the Hsia-Shang-Chou triad, etc.

<sup>78</sup> *CYCCC* 3, p. 38.

<sup>79</sup> Seidel, "Image of the Perfect Ruler," p. 244.

might now wish to assert, with equal caution, that Li Yüan, coming to the throne in an age troubled by apocalyptic expectations and yearning for a sage-ruler – perhaps associated with Lao-tzu, perhaps with Maitreya – whose image had been outlined in a number of interrelated religious texts, sought to fulfill those expectations. We still cannot claim to know what Li Yüan himself believed, but we do know how he presented himself to the world.

*LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

- CYCCC      Wen Ta-ya, *Ta-Tang ch'uang-yeh ch'i-chü chu* 大唐創業起居注  
 HY          Wang, ed., *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in  
 Two Collections of Taoist Literature (Tao-tsang tzu-mu yin-te  
 道藏子目引得)*, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index  
 Ser. 25
- T            *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經  
 TT          *Cheng-i'ung Tao-tsang* 正統道藏