

Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign:
An Annotated Translation and Study
of the Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth
by
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ABSTRACT

Sacred apocalyptic texts claim to foretell coming events, warning the faithful of some terrible fate that lies beyond the present. Such texts often derive their power from successfully recasting past events in such a way as they appear to be "predicted" by the text and thus take on additional meanings beyond the superficial. This *ex eventu* status allows apocalyptic texts to increase the credibility of their future predictions and connect emotionally with the reader by playing on present fears. The fifth-century Daoist apocalyptic text, the Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth (*Tiandi yundu jing*, 天地運度經), is no exception. This thesis examines the apocalyptic markers in the poetic sections of the text, attempting to develop a strategy for separating the generic imagery (both to Chinese texts and the apocalyptic literary genre as a whole) from the more significant recoverable references to contemporary events such as the fall of the Jin dynasty and the subsequent founding of the Liu-Song dynasty.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Sacred apocalyptic texts claim to foretell coming events, warning the faithful of some terrible fate that lies beyond the present. Such texts often derive their power from successfully recasting past events in such a way that they appear to be “predicted” by the text and thus take on additional meanings beyond the superficial. This *ex eventu* status allows apocalyptic texts to increase the credibility of their future predictions and connect emotionally with the reader by playing on present fears. The fifth-century Daoist apocalyptic text, the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* (*Tiandi yundu jing*, 天地運度經) is no exception. Upon first reading, the text is a generic pastiche of supposedly forthcoming natural disasters and social turmoil common to the genre of apocalyptic literature. A deeper reading of its poetic sections, however, reveals the scripture to be a powerful commentary on the social and political chaos of its period. Thus, in the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*, the apocalypse is portrayed as both future and present. This paper will examine the apocalyptic markers in the poetic sections of the text, attempting to develop a strategy for separating the generic imagery (both to Chinese texts and the apocalyptic literary genre as a whole) from the more significant recoverable references to contemporary events.

Chapter 2

THE APOCALYPTIC LITERARY GENRE

As mentioned in the introduction, apocalyptic literature contains *ex eventu* material. As such, a work's acceptance and authority comes from its ability to persuade the reader(s) that the current situation fits into the apocalyptic narrative. "[An] apocalyptic [text] succeeds or fails with its audience to the degree that it persuades them of their situation within the particular historical pattern of temporal fulfillment represented in its mythic imagery."¹ In the case of the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*, the text does this in three ways. First, it uses the common imagery of natural disasters and breakdowns in the social order. Second, it infuses those images with unique culture markers—historical allusions and correlative cosmology primarily—to connect the generic apocalyptic imagery to Chinese society. Finally, the text composed in the *chenwei* style, a Chinese literary genre that mixes prophetic verse (*chen*, 讖) and apocryphal texts (*wei*, 緯). An influential genre which arose during the Eastern Han, *chen* uses rebuses and homophony to conceal additional text. In this work, the author uses *chen* to suggest details such as contemporary events and names. Such texts were popular and often used to criticize or legitimize a dynasty.

¹ Stephen O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford Press, 2005), 13.

Because of their political influence, *chen* were frequently—though often ineffectively—banned throughout the Six Dynasties in both the north and south.²

Returning to the critical role that time plays in the acceptance and narrative of apocalyptic literature, it is important to remember that those texts which do survive present a temporal structure that can be appropriated by other apocalyptic texts, allowing the text's sacred message to be recycled and adapted for new and varied circumstances. Indeed, Chinese texts that quote or draw from the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* do so from the prose summary at the end of the text that contains the cycles of cosmic time.³

² See Zongli Lu, *The Power of Words: Chen Prophecy in Chinese Politics AD 265-618* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2003) 35-81.

³ See for example the *Pearled Bag of the Three Caverns* (*Sandong zhunang*, 三洞珠囊) 9.5b and the *Most High Secret Essentials* (*Wushang biyao*, 無上祕要) 7.106.

Chapter 3

APOCALYPTIC ACTIVITY AND IMAGERY IN CHINA

Chinese apocalyptic texts and millennial movements are quite different from their Western or Middle Eastern counterparts. Unlike apocalypses in the Judeo-Christian or Zoroastrian traditions, Chinese apocalyptic texts are not about a climactic battle between good and evil, but rather describe apocalypses in terms of order and chaos. Like earlier Greco-Roman cults, the Chinese viewed time as cyclical, so apocalypses led to a restoration of a lost golden age.⁴ The messianic figures in this literature take the guise of a sage-king, an archetypal Chinese good ruler who offers political and social salvation from chaos, rather than a personal salvation from evil or sin.⁵ The length of the messianic figure's rule varies greatly. In the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*, the length is given as "three times the reign of Yao," or three hundred years. For these reasons, the term "messianic" is often used to describe Chinese apocalyptic movements, rather than the more common term of "millennial," which carries specific connotations that simply do not apply to Chinese eschatology. Although the term "messianic" is more common, it still is not a particularly accurate since the salvation provided by such figures is neither universal (affecting the entire world) nor permanent.

⁴ This is not true for Chinese Buddhist apocalypses where time is linear and divided into three sections: the True Dharma, the Semblance of the Dharma, and the Decline of the Dharma.

⁵ This is not the case in Chinese Buddhism, where the messianic figure of the Maitreya is seen as filling the role of both socio-political and personal savior.

Regardless of religious affiliation, apocalyptic texts have certain types of imagery in common. One of these types of imagery is the upending of the natural order through floods, droughts, and famines. Anciently, civilizations were agricultural and clustered around reliable sources of water such as rivers. China was no exception. The heart of Chinese civilization, as well as the residence of the majority of the population, was the Central Plain of the Yellow river valley. Chinese civilization was dependent on the regular flooding cycles of the river, though not to the same extent as Egypt or Mesopotamia for example, due to a more temperate climate.

Disruptions in the natural order— such as when the Yellow river changed course—produced great resonance within China due to the premium placed on order by Chinese society. The fundamental philosophies of China were developed during a period of extended war and thus the problems they strove to solve revolved around the breakdown and rebuilding of social order. Chinese Confucianism, for example, at its core is a system of ethics and rites designed to promote and maintain social order through a rigid hierarchy. Daoism, which arose as a religious movement later, particularly emphasized the human world as a microcosm of the cosmos. Thus imbalance in one was reflected in the other. This adds an extra layer of meaning to natural disasters within a Daoist context.

Apocalyptic activity in China dramatically increased in frequency between 220 and 589, peaking in the sixth century.⁶ After the Han dynasty collapsed in 220, Chinese society fell into a period of chaos. The disorder only increased after Turkic nomads flooded the traditional Han Chinese homelands in the early 300s, leading to a popular belief that the end of the present *kalpa* or world-cycle was at hand. As John Landes has noted, millennialism is a form of revolutionary ideology and such ideologies only spread when a significant number of people feel “close to the moment of turning, of transformation.”⁷ Apocalyptic texts of the time describe the signs of the *kalpa*’s end in terms of natural disasters, outbreaks of disease, famine, and a total breakdown of social order. These events would usually begin the twenty-first year of the sexagenary cycle (the *Jiashen* year) and continue until the twenty-ninth year (the *Renchen* year), when the deity Li Hong (in Daoist texts) or Prince Moonlight (in Buddhist texts) would arrive and usher in a golden age of good government, social harmony, and peace.⁸

⁶ See Anna Seidel, “Taoist Messianism,” *Numen* 31 (December 1984) : 162.

⁷ John Landes, “Roosters Crow, Owls Hoot: On the Dynamics of Apocalyptic Millennialism” in *War in Heaven, Heaven on Earth: Theories on the Apocalyptic*, ed. Stephen O’Leary and Glen S. McGhee (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 20.

⁸ Christine Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste du Ve siècle: Le Livre des Incantations Divines des Grottes Abyssales* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1990), 170-173.

Chapter 4

INTRODUCTION TO TEXT

The *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* is a Chinese religious work from the fifth century. Its full title is the *Most High Cavern Mystery Numinous Treasure Self-Generating Wondrous Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* (*Taishang dongxuan Lingbao tiandi yundu ziran miao jing*). The scripture is comprised of a mixture of prose and poetry. The prose sections begin with an account of cosmogenesis and the beginnings of humanity. This is both a trait of Daoist works and also of apocalyptic works in general where the outlining of the cosmogenesis serves to create a common understanding of humanity's relationship with the heavens. It also offers reassurance that creation in the cosmic sense is cyclical. The *Scripture of the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* demonstrates this clearly by including the origins of man as part of the cosmogonic narrative and explicitly stating that "people are equal to heaven and earth." The anonymous author then laments the corrupted and fallen state of humanity in the current period. Fortunately, humanity has received secret instruction regarding the coming apocalypse from the Most High Lord of the Dao. The author then exhorts the reader to be diligent in Daoist study and practice of ritual before reciting ten poetic stanzas describing the imminent destruction and rebuilding of society under the Immortal Lord of Peace, Li Hong. The text ends with a description of how the scripture should be transmitted and a warning for those who would transmit it unworthily or outside of the established rites.

Chapter 5

THE TEXT

太上洞玄靈寶天地運度自然妙經 (The Most High Cavern Mystery Numinous

Treasure Self-Generating Wondrous Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth)

道言：太上靈寶，先天地而生.然後有天地。數起於一，立於三，成於五，盛於七，極於九。故天去地九萬里;積陽氣.道陰形列布崑崙，為地柱。氣上通崑崙者，地之中地。崑崙直東一億萬六千五百里，崑崙直西一億萬六千五百里，崑崙直南一億萬六千五百里，崑崙直北一億萬六千七百五十里.地周遊四匝四億二萬六千二百五十里焉。

The Dao said: As for the most high numinous treasure [scriptures], they arose before heaven and earth. This being the case, later there was heaven and earth. The numbers began with one, were established as three, complete in five, flourishing in seven, most perfect in nine. Therefore, heaven is separated from the earth by 90,000 *li*; and [heaven] accumulated yang qi. The Dao's yin took form and was arranged into Kunlun, which is the earth's pillar. That which is the qi that rises up to penetrate Kunlun is the center of the earth. Going straight east [from the center] Kunlun is one hundred million, ten thousand, six thousand, five hundred *li*, going straight west, Kunlun is one hundred million, ten thousand, six thousand, five hundred *li*. Going straight south, Kunlun is one hundred million, ten thousand, six thousand, five hundred *li*, going straight north, Kunlun is one hundred million, ten thousand, six thousand, five hundred *li*. The earth's circumference, roaming all four sides, is four hundred million, 26 thousand, two hundred and fifty *li*.

道言：夫日月徑上千里，周三千里，運行八十一域，更迭朦朦暝暝。北斗九星，二星陰不見.相去九萬里，以沈潤八十一州，八百一十域。北斗當崑崙上，抱崑崙.氣運注天下，春夏為零露，秋冬為霜雪。人與天地同也。天地八方之外，萬物受性，皆懷憂苦，常傷人民。含血蠕動，不得自在，與天地爭命，皆當歸死，骸骨消入於地，精神飛翔，輾轉五道，為善上天，為惡入淵。凡人生時所為善惡，精神魂魄隨其罪

福。唯學道求生，達運度極，致可以長存，復陽九之運。

The Dao said: Now, the sun and the moons' orbits above [the earth] are a thousand *li*, their circumference is three thousand *li*, their orbits move through the eighty-one regions. Further, they alternate between dim haze and darkness. As for the nine stars of the Big Dipper, two stars are hidden and cannot be seen. They are separated from each other by 90,000 *li*, in order to sink into the eighty-one prefectures and the eight hundred and ten regions. The Big Dipper should be above Kunlun, [it is] supported by Kunlun. The qi that penetrates [it] pours down on the sub-celestial realm. In spring and summer, it is the rain and dew, in the fall and winter it is the frost and snow. People are equal to heaven and earth. Outside of the eight regions of heaven and earth, the myriad of living things received their inherent natures. In every case, [they experience] mourning, anxiety, and sorrow, constantly [the Dao] pitied the people. [All beings who] contain blood or squirm like worms, [they] cannot obtain independence. They struggled to live as long as heaven and earth, [but] in every case [they] should eventually die. Their marrow and bones disappear, entering into the earth. Their essence and spirits fly in circles [above their corpses]. [They] twist and change through the five paths.⁹ If they were good, they ascend to heaven; if they were evil, they enter into the abyss. Generally, the good and evil people do during their lives results in their essence, bodily deities, cloud-souls and white-souls receiving in turn either blame or blessings. Only [those who] study the Dao and seek to live [forever], can extend their lives to the end of the cycle and in this way maintain long-life, and live through another cycle of the Yang Nine.¹⁰

道言：人生涉胞胎，當經十月日，死如大風，卒起無期。死至無時，當與心爭為善勿疑。故以經道勸勵學士：目所不見，耳所不聞，琚琦珍物，亦何益於身。諸為道者，當信經誠，守善以死，不犯惡而生。道不可失，德不可違，違道失德，如兒生無母，如魚脫淵。若志學，輪轉死生，如蠶在繭中，混混沌沌，故一旦變形易數，道

⁹ This is a Buddhist term for the five paths of rebirth: hells, hungry ghosts (*pretas*), animals, peoples, and lesser divinities (*devas*).

¹⁰ The yang nine are drought years specifically, but here they simply stand for the disasters preceding the apocalypse. See Stephen Bokenkamp, "Time After Time: Taoist Apocalyptic History and the Founding of the T'ang," in *Asia Major* Third Series 7 (1994) : 66.

成於微。長齋誦經，爲德之根，自然玄解運度
足于神方之外，得禮太上玉京之尊，乃作頌
曰：

The Dao said: People are born through the placenta as fetuses, and should experience [gestation for] ten months. Death is like a great wind, in the end it rises up without an appointed time. [When] death arrives, it is without a season, [therefore you] should in your heart-mind to strive to become good without doubts. Therefore, [we] use the scriptures and the Dao to encourage scholars: That which is not seen by the eyes and that which is not heard by the ears [is precious?], [I have] jade ornaments and precious things, and yet how to they benefit me? All who practice the Dao should trust the scriptures and the precepts, safeguarding good [acts] so that when they die, they will not be judged evil and under those circumstances be reborn. The Dao cannot be lost, virtue cannot be transgressed. Transgressing the Dao and losing virtue is like a child being born without a mother, like a fish escaping from a deep pool. If your ambition is to study, and to cycle through life and death, [then] you are like silkworms residing in cocoons, [still in] primordial form. Therefore, one day [you will] change forms repeatedly, for the Dao is complete in the minute details. As for mediation and reciting the scriptures, these are the roots of virtue. The self-generating mysteries explain the cycles [of heaven and earth] sufficient for [those] outside of the deities' regions. [When you] are able to pay your respects to the honored of the Most High Jade Capital, sing a hymn of praise saying:

我唯年衰時， 百病皆當經。 冰消而火起，
災衝解其形。 百骸生分離， 大劫要當傾。
吾故畏是痛， 求道願長生。 去此塵中累，
會彼至寂貞。 高行期大乘， 自然學道成。
輪轉無上德， 忘我故不名。 靜惠度八難，
逍遙竟何營。

When I alone age and decline, the hundred illnesses are what I will experience. The ice disappears and the fire rises, disaster cuts across [the realm], severing its form. The hundred marrows arise and divide, the great kalpa should collapse. I thus consider awe-inspiring this suffering, seeking the Dao and wishing for long-life. Departing here, inside the dust category, I gather together with the quietly loyal. Those with lofty actions expect this great vehicle, the self-generating study of the Dao is complete. Passing through the cycles of life without ascending in

virtue, [they] forget me, thus I am not named.¹¹ Quietly worrying, I cross over the eight hardships,¹² roaming and wandering, in the end where to make camp?

道言：夫生，惟人爲貴。既有其生，宜獎而成之。而貪財悋惜，不肯施散。奉事師寶以求昇度，孰自思惟：今身非我身所有，財寶亦非我有；官爵俸祿爲身重累，將何益於己身？老病死者，皆不能爲我却之，不能自拔爲道，厚自文飾，謂生已足，譬如陸鳥愛其尾，終爲射夫之所得。爲學者當勤心上契，知是皆不隨人魂神去，空爲困苦。當思拔度之根，絕三惡之道，令入三善道：一者不老，二者不病，三者不死，長生度世¹³去厄會¹⁴，遇運得太上之寶。乃作頌曰：

The Dao said: Now of the living things, only people are noble. Since their birth, it is proper to encourage and complete them. Yet [they are] greedy for riches and miserly, not willing to give alms or distribute [the wealth]. Offering service to masters in order to seek ascent [to the heavens], [they are those] who think of themselves only. Now, the true body is not the body which I have, riches and treasures also are not what I have; an office and title and a salary entangle me, in the future how will they benefit me? Old age, sickness, and dying, in every case I am not able to avoid it; I am not able to pluck myself out and practice the Dao. I only value decorating myself. Just like the Lu bird loves its tail, [yet] in the end

¹¹ Or known.

¹² A Buddhist term. The eight hardships are the eight conditions that inhibit achieving enlightenment. In Lingbao Daoism, the eight hardships are “to be reborn human and male, to be reborn with wisdom, health, and wholeness, to be reborn in a kingdom possessed of the Dao, to be reborn poor, yet able to give to others, to be reborn rich and honored, yet able to revere the Dao, to be reborn able to help others to reach transcendence, to be reborn with the opportunity to encounter the three caverns of scriptures, and to be reborn able to receive the direct teachings of the transcendentals, sages, and the Perfected.” See Stephen Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 435n.12.

¹³ This phrase carries the connotation of becoming a transcendent.

¹⁴ Refers to speaking misfortune.

because of [its tail, it is] shot by men to obtain it.¹⁵ Those who practice and study the Dao should make diligent their heart-minds above friends. Knowing this, they should not follow people, ghosts, and deities and depart; [for] the emptiness creates all-encompassing sorrow. They should think about the roots of remediating the sins of the dead, severing the Way of the Three Evils,¹⁶ [and] command to enter the Way of the Three Goodnesses: the first of which is not aging, the second of which is not being sick, the third of which is not dying. [Having] long life and departing the world, I left [when] disasters met; encountering fortune, I obtained the treasures of the Most High. Then I composed a poem saying:

自念老病盡， 三界之大患。 福訖命將終，
 氣絕入棺槨。 冥冥成灰土， 魂魄無暫安。
 吾故畏是故， 學道無夭殘。 攝意存正真，
 淑心諒可觀。 耽成三寶園， 自能伏魔官。
 故我損身施， 志超生死岸。 混然既無待，
 永保億齡歡。

I contemplate age, illness, and death, the three realms' of great worries. Fortune ends, my life soon will end, my *qi* will be severed and I will enter the inner and outer coffins. In the underworld, I become dust, my souls lack complete rest. My reason for fear is this therefore; studying the Dao, without premature death or injury, I concentrate on preserving the upright and perfect, [with] a kind heart-mind, [I am] honestly able to observe. Delaying completion of the three treasure garden, I am able myself to vanquish the demon official. Therefore, I renounce my body willingly, my ambition is to pass beyond the shores of life and death. Confusingly, immediately, depending on nothing, I eternally nourish a hundred million years of happiness.

道言：夫修長生，志在昇度，求無爲之道，身超
 於塵垢，絕跡于羣方者，當先知天地運度大
 期之數、陽九百六之災。去厄即安之，宜如其

¹⁵ This appears to be a classical allusion, but I have been unable to find its source.

¹⁶ The Three Evils are the three worms or three cadavers in every body. They are the roots of death and bad karma. See Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 436n.14 for more.

¹⁷ The Three Treasures is a Buddhist term. In Daoism it refers to the three treasures of compassion (*ci*, 慈), simplicity (*jian*, 儉), and humility (*buganweitianxiatian*, 不敢為天下先).

不爾，雖自求道終年，而希昇騰，將復費其功夫，卒爲徒勞也。今開示爾劫運之期、盈縮之分。保躬求生，以招長命，豈但在一軀而已哉，亦將七祖¹⁸反胎也。仙公曰：夫學道精研，能明運度陽九百六之會，亦必得度世無危傾也。要在長齋久思，遠去人事，想累兼忘，然後可期肉飛之舉。如其一毫不盡，不可謂永，求太極真人誦法言十首：

The Dao said: Now, to cultivate long life, your ambition should lay in ascending [to the heavens], seeking the Dao of non-action, your body surpassing the dust and dirt. To sever traces, those who are in crowded regions should first know the method of the great seasons and cycles of heaven and earth, the six hundred disasters of the Yang Nine. If you are able to depart [from] the disasters, then you will be at peace. But, if you are not able to avoid [them], seek the Dao until the end of your years and hope to ascend [into heaven]. Continue to expend meritorious effort and in the end it will not be in vain. Now, I will reveal the time of that kalpa cycle, [and] the division of longevity and premature death. Protect yourself and seek life, in order to attract long-life, how can it be but residing in one body and that is all? Also, you will cause your Seven Ancestors will return as fetuses. The transcendent duke said: “Now, if you study the Dao very deeply, you are able to comprehend the cycles of the six hundred meetings of the Yang Nine; also you will certainly obtain the crossing over of the generation without danger of collapse. Your desire [should] lay in longevity, fasting for a long time, and meditation, far departing from people and matters, thinking of categorizing and simultaneously forgetting; this being the case, later you can seek the most extreme perfected beings [by] chanting the law’s words in ten stanzas:

- 1) 赤書土出治， 金玉復爲夫。 青龍甲申會，
奄至誰能知。 雖著天水文， 寶侯王子期。
辰中色當變， 先時睹胡兒。 崑元最其充，
積石次不治。 蕭蕭上學士， 後天奉天時。
福非一朝過， 七葉積善基。 太平契孟津，
樂哉何熙怡。

¹⁸ The Seven Ancestors are one’s father, grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, the founder of one’s branch of the family, the founder of the family, and the founder of the surname.

As for the Crimson book, it came out to rule this land, the gold and jade again make men. The azure dragon and the Jia-shen year conjunction, as for its arrival, who is able to know [when]? Consequently, [this text was] written in “heaven and water script,” in order to await the treasure lords, princes, and their sons. In the Chen hour,¹⁹ one’s color should change, having formerly seen the Hu child. Kun’s primal [qi] is utterly depleted,²⁰ [yet] the accumulated stones do not next rule.²¹ Xiao Xiao was a high scholar, when the present generation served heaven. This fortune is not in one day surpassed, the seven leaves accumulate a good base. The Great Peace is engraved at Meng Ford.²² Oh, how joyous! How glad!

2) 玄運金馬末， 古月侵神州。 陸上既無子，
兄弟亦迭遊。 河洛子空盡， 燕趙成洪流。
荆陽柳其次， 已刻中嶽符。 芒子盡十載，
東海桑中遊。 宜先入福地， 八石以鍊軀。
柳城即生地， 伏龍不爲悠。 玉筭²³近世間，
桐栢甚易求。

As for the mysterious cycles at the gold horse’s tip, the ancient moon sleeps the spirit states. The land then is without sons, older brother and younger brother also wander again and again. The He and Luo rivers, their sons are empty and exhausted, Yan and Zhao form the flood’s flow. Jing[zhou], Yang[zhou], Liu[cheng] is next, [you] already carved the middle marchmount talisman.²⁴ As

¹⁹ 7-9 am

²⁰ 昆元 is a reference to Liu Kun (劉琨, 271-318).

²¹ A reference to the state of Later Zhao, which was ruled by the Shi (石) family.

²² The site where the feudal lords swore their allegiance to Zhou, prior to the overthrow of the Shang dynasty. It is included in just two other Daoist scriptures: the *Laozi bianhua wuji jing* 老子變化無極經 and the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神咒經, both fifth-century works. See Paul A. Jackson, “Apocalypse Now: Internal Structures for the Propagation and Survival of a Fifth Century Daoist Apocalyptic Text, the Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing” (MA thesis, Indiana University, 2007), 34n. 136.

²³ Name of a mountain in modern-day Jiangxi. Here the Queen Mother of the West bestowed the *Graph of the Upper Clarity Numinous Registers* (*Shangqing baolu tu*, 上清寶錄圖) on Han Wudi. The Most Mysterious Method of Happiness Heaven (*Taixuan fale tian*, 太玄法樂天) was located under it.

²⁴ 9-11 am

for the awn's offspring [grain], it is exhausted in ten years, the Eastern Sea wanders in the mulberries. To first enter the blessed lands, take the eight stones to refine one's body.²⁵ Willow City,²⁶ since it is a safe place, the prostrate dragon does not create worry. The Immortal of Yusi mountain is near the world of men, the Tongbo Perfected is easy to seek.²⁷

3) 丁亥不云遠， 八公²⁸同會俱。 玄生浮紫雲，
誨以九靈子。 令未負災充， 雷電不可止。
出在申酉歲， 彌漫留十紀。 至于水龍時，
仙君乃方起。 弓口十八子，²⁹ 高吟相營理。
百官森列序， 穆穆皆首士。 勤心慕松喬，
劫盡已度已。 平日解帶遊， 寸毫寫衿裏。

As for the Dinghai year, do not speak [of it] as far, the eight dukes together meet to prepare. Mysteriously students float on purple clouds, taught by Jiulingzi.³⁰ [He] commanded them [saying] “You do not yet bear the disasters’ fullness, the thunder and lightning cannot stop. Going out in the shen and you years, [they] fill the air, remaining for ten generations. When it reaches the time of the water dragon,³¹ the Lord of the Immortals will rise up in the region.³² Bow-mouthed,

²⁵ Refers to alchemical practice. The eight stones are cinnabar, ruby sulphur, arsenic trisulfide, mica, brimstone, rock salt, salt peter, and malachite.

²⁶ “Willow City” refers to a mythic place of peace. It is a place of some significance in Chinese Buddhism. See Erik Zürcher, “‘Prince Moonlight’: Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism,” *T'oung Pao* 68 (1982) : 41n.77.

²⁷ The Tongbo Perfected is Wangzi Qiao (fl. sixth century BCE), the Perfected in charge of the Golden Court Grotto Heaven. The grammatical structure of this line suggests a specific deity of Yusi mountain as well, but I have been unable to find any other references to this deity.

²⁸ This refers to the eight retainers of Liu An, King of Huainan during the Han.

²⁹ This is a rebus for Li Hong.

³⁰ “Gentleman of the Nine Numens,” name of a Daoist immortal.

³¹ This might be drawing on Chinese Buddhist eschatology in which dragon kings (*naga*) save the righteous people from apocalyptic floods. See Zürcher, p. 41 n.78.

eighteen sons, reciting aloud and administering to them. The hundred officials spread out like trees in the forest;³³ they dignify and revere in every case the chief gentleman. They make diligent their heart-minds, admiring Song Qiao,³⁴ The kalpa is exhausted; already the generation has crossed over. [On that day] they loosened their belts and wandered,³⁵ [using] a tiny brush to write inside their collar.

4) 方平記大鳥， 當來東南翔。 下愚不見事，
賢者披神方。 郊境沒夏首， 太白失度常。
雲霧皆變化， 魚鱉遊汪洋。 一時淪東海，
無復起子喬。 壬午之南嶽， 即陰以爲陽。
揚州可度世， 時誦生神章。

As Fangping recorded,³⁶ a great bird will come and circle the southeast. Extremely foolish people, they do not see the matter, those who are worthy open their spirit recipes. Establish a Chinese head [of state], the Great White loses its cycle's constancy. Clouds and mist in every case change and transform, fish and turtles wander boundlessly. At once [they] sink into the eastern sea, [they] do not again raise up sons.³⁷ In the Renwu year, go to the southern marchmount,³⁸

³² The Lord of the Immortals is Li Hong.

³³ The hundred officials are the deities of the body.

³⁴ This is Master Red Pine (Chisong zi, 赤松子), an immortal. It can also be a general reference to an immortal or a hermit.

³⁵ “To loosen one’s belt” 解帶 refers to leaving public office.

³⁶ Wang Fangping, a legendary Daoist immortal sent to aid the Han government. In the Shangqing tradition, Wang Fangping is conflated with Wang Yuan, the Perfected of the Western Citadel.

³⁷ This may be a reference to the *Jiaoshi yilin*. The *Jiaoshi yilin* is a mid-Han dynasty rhyming divination text that is modeled on the *Yijing*, but borrows frequently from the *Shijing*.

³⁸ In the *Laozi bianhua jing* (S.2295), the deified Laozi commands his followers to search for him on the southern marchmount and promises to save those who do. See Seidel 1969, 225.

immediately yin is taken as yang. In Yangzhou, [you] are able to cross the generation, at that time chanting the *Shengshen zhang*.³⁹

- 5) 張氏著鵠鳴， 識緯金馬末。 反白相中傷，
 婁衿不解帶。 官兵悉竄走， 賊疆日凶大。
 九重雖衣裳， 宮墻時了壞。 荊棘當庭生，⁴⁰
 王侯沒虜賊。 妻婦亡異域， 使役無時泰。
 銜賣諒可哀， 千載豈復會。 未若早學道，
 宅志霄霧際。

[When] Master Zhang Clan arrived at Heming,⁴¹ he knew the weft [texts about] the golden horse's tip. The returning white harms each other's centers,⁴² [yet people] wear collars, they do not loosen their belts. Officials and soldiers all disorderly flee, bandits become stronger by the day, so great is the curse. As for the Ninefold Wrapped,⁴³ although dressed [for court], the palace walls have been completely ruined. Brambles and thorns should in the courtyard grow. The princes and feudal lords sink among the prisoners and thieves. Wives and concubines disappear in different lands, [having been] used as servants without a period of rest. The hawked wares [of the ruined palace], this is truly lamentable, [even after] a thousand years, how can they again meet? Nothing is like early study of the Dao, lodge [your] ambition in the clouds and mist.

- 6) 修學諸祭酒， 治法當今勤。 不謹百八十，
 至時如火煎。 近在金氏世， 念此當可言。
 兵刀四衝至， 一日不可延。 然後洪災會，
 浩哉!與天連。 行尸無所覩， 聖人知信然。
 先學悟玄京， 方寸會名山。 歛衽之勝地，
 至道固靈祖。

All libationers who cultivate the Dao, the parish laws should now be active. [If

³⁹ This is the *Scripture of the Life-giving Spirits* [*Lingbao dongxuan ziran jiutian shangshen zhuan jing* (靈寶洞玄自然九天生神章經)], an early-fifth century text.

⁴⁰ The *Zhonghua Daozang* has “刑”instead of “荊.”

⁴¹ Also read Huming

⁴² The planet Venus.

⁴³ This is a reference to the emperor.

you] do not heed the hundred and eighty [precepts], then when it reaches that time, it will be like being cooked over a flame. Approaching the generation of the metal clan, [if you] remember this [then we] should be able to speak [with you]. Soldiers and weapons arrive from the four corners [of the world], [even] one day you cannot postpone [this]. Then, the floods and fires meet, oh how numerous! [And they will] join with the heavenly cycles. Walking corpses do not see that,⁴⁴ [but] wise men know to trust [this]. Previously [they] studied, and comprehended the mystic capital, in their hearts joining with the famous mountains.⁴⁵ Bringing together their sleeves and going to the splendid place, the Ultimate Dao strengthens the numinous ancestors.

7) 平都述翰墨， 福地諒可往。 庚辰羌胡動，
 壬午有奇賞。 先當之福鄉， 高詠以自養。
 萬里望無烟， 壬辰未消殃。 既平仙君治，
 八方息羅網。 如吾玉斧惠， 永謝塵中壤。
 華祿豈足貪， 於茲絕冥想。

The peaceful metropolis follows the brush and ink,⁴⁶ as for the blessed lands, oh to truly able to go! In the Gengchen year, the Qiang and Hu move.⁴⁷ In the Renwu year, there are marvelous rewards, first [the Lingbao scriptures] should go to the blessed villages. Loudly chant it in order to nourish yourself, for 10,000 *li* [you] gaze out in the distance without seeing smoke. In the Renwu year, the disasters will not yet be extinguished. Once at peace the Lord of the Peaceful Immortals will govern.⁴⁸ The eight regions will rest in the net,⁴⁹ like my jade axe's favor.⁵⁰ I

⁴⁴ “Walking corpses” is a Daoist term for non-Daoists.

⁴⁵ A reference to the Five Marchmounts.

⁴⁶ The “peaceful metropolis” (*pingdu*, 平都) was one of the eight “roaming” Celestial Master parishes. It is also an important Daoist site in modern-day Sichuan.

⁴⁷ Could also be read as a single term. The Qianghu are a nomadic non-Han people in the north, in the area around the He and Luo rivers. As previously, the idea is that non-Han peoples are now becoming active. In 384 Qianghu established the state of Later Qin, with their capital at Chang’an.

⁴⁸ A reference to Li Hong.

eternally release myself from the dusty world, the blossom emoluments, how are [they] enough to covet? At this, cut off dark imagings.

8) 孔生遺明藏，木對若有因。甌山可遊處，
九夷拂輕塵。陋廬守空寂，玄默湛冥緣。
泉涌不繼本，卯金無傷人。刀曲不覺痛，
今世傷爾身。

Student Kong rose and left behind the bright canon, the trees will face you, if you have cause. As for Zeng mountain,⁵¹ you will be able to wander and dwell on it. The Nine Yi [peoples] sweep away [like] light dust, [your] simple hut protects the emptiness and quiet. The mysterious silence deepens your karma, the springs gush [but the water] does not continue from its origin. Minister Jin does not harm the people,⁵² the dagger is crooked, [but] you will not know pain. The present generation harms your body.

9) 太白山可詣，鴈門其明真。鹿堂信可貴，
和民至壬辰。十八无出治，⁵³子來合明真。
吳地偏多仙，荆湘最困貧。

As for Taihe mountain,⁵⁴ you are able to visit it; as for the Wild Goose Gate, it's bright and true. Lutang is entrusted [to you and you are] able to be noble,⁵⁵ harmonize the people until [the time reaches] the Renchen year. The eighteen then

⁴⁹ “Eight regions” are the eight directions: north, northeast, northwest, south, southeast, southwest, west, and east. This is a Chinese idiom for “the whole world.”

⁵⁰ 玉斧 is a lesser style name of Xu Hui (341-c.370), one of the patrons of Yang Xi.

⁵¹ Zeng mountain is located in Jingzhou (present-day Hubei, across the river from Hanzhou). Later legends connect it with Chen An (陳安, d. 323).

⁵² Reading 卿 for 卯.

⁵³ The Xianzheng edition has “既” instead of “无.” The Xianzheng character is probably correct.

⁵⁴ Another name for Mt. Wudang in modern-day Hubei.

⁵⁵ Lutang was one of the twenty-four original Celestial Masters parishes.

goes out to govern,⁵⁶ he comes [as is] suitable for a luminous Perfected. As for the Wu lands, compared to other parts, they have many immortals, but Jing[zhou] and Xiang are extremely impoverished.⁵⁷

10) 柳谷安可親， 三倍放勳世。 爾乃知苦辛，
聖帝无出治。⁵⁸ 其在壬辰始， 明星煥水母。
申後留十紀， 大鳥東南聚。 生血城門裏，
羣鼠緣高木。 衆多不可止， 女子入宮府。
雲龍無比擬， 愚者謂不然， 賢者自方峙。

The Liu Valley is secure and you are able to draw near [it], [for] more than three times Fang Xun's generation.⁵⁹ You then will know bitterness and pain; the wise thearch then goes out to govern. It happens at the start of the Renchen year, the bright stars make lustrous the water mother. After the Shen year, it remains for ten generations and the great bird in the southeast gathers. [There is] fresh blood inside the city's gates and hordes of rats climb tall trees. Crowded and numerous, they are not able to stop; yet women enter palaces and men government offices; [There are] cloud dragons without matches. Those who are foolish say it is not so, those who are wise straighten themselves and stand resolutely.

道言：靈寶自然運度，有大陽九、大百六、小陽九、小百六。三千三百年爲小陽九、小百六；九千九百年爲大陽九、大百六。天厄謂之陽九，地虧謂之百六。至金氏之後、甲申之歲，是天地運度，否泰所經，陽九將會。至時道德方明，凶醜頓除，聖君受任於壬辰之年也。此太極人法言十篇，神趣妙暢，微旨朗空，期運之數，去就之要，可詳謂矣！可謂盡矣！

The Dao says: As for the Numinous Treasure Self-Generating Cycles, there are the great Yang Nine, the great 106, the small Yang Nine, and the small 106. Three thousand, three hundred years make the small Yang Nine and the small 106;

⁵⁶ The eighteen are the eighteen sons with bow mouths previously mentioned. It is an abbreviated rebus for Li Hong.

⁵⁷ Xiang is common shorthand for Hunan province.

⁵⁸ The Xianzheng edition again has “既” instead of “无.”

⁵⁹ Fang Xun is the given name of Emperor Yao. Three times his generation is equal to three hundred years.

nine thousand nine hundred years make the great Yang Nine and the great 106. The heavenly calamities are called the great Yang Nine, the earthly losses are called the 106. Until after the Jin clan, in the Jiashen year, this is the cycles of heaven and earth, bad and good are that which [you] experience, the Yang Nine will soon meet. Arriving at that time, the Dao and De just then brighten, the cursed and evil are suddenly removed, [and] the wise lords receive appointments in the Renchen year. This is the most extreme person's method and doctrine in 10 sections, the spirits' interest is wondrous and unrestrained, subtle in intention and bright in the void, the repletion of chance and opportunity, the desire of leaving and going, you are able to completely speak! You are able to speak until finished!

道言：若能常諷誦冥韻，則得度洪災於陽九，
受位任於丁亥。約當先長齋靜詠，默絕囂累，
然後求釋解之微旨，發清音於唇吻，則七祖
反胎，已身長存，經運周而無害，受仙而登焉。
妙哉微矣！非言所宣。子若遇之，則得上遊玉
京，爲聖帝牧民理治。

The Dao says: If you are able to regularly from memory chant the deep sounds, then you are able to measure the floods and fires of the Yang Nine, receive a position and appointment in the Dinghai year. If invited, you should first for a long time fast and silently chant, silently sever clamoring things, then seek the solution of the profound and subtle, issue forth pure sounds from the lips, then the seven ancestors will return to fetuses, your own body will be preserved for a long time, passing through the cycles of planets without harm, receiving transcendence and ascending to them [transcendents]. Wondrous! Subtle! [These are] not words which spread. If you sir encounter them, then you will be able to above roam in the Jade Capital, becoming a wise thearch governing the people [and] managing [them].

道言：傳受之科，如吾稱舊典。清齋二十四日，
別齋上金五兩、丹地錦百尺，以爲盟誓。受者
奉而行之。若不依科而妄傳，則風刀考罰矣。
受者辛勤詳慎之哉！

The Dao says, as for the rules of transmitting and receiving, [it is] like I say in the ancient regulations. Purely fast for 24 days, separately offering up gold five pairs [of what?] and ten *chi* of silk from the cinnabar lands, [this is] taken as a binding oath. Those who receive [this text] should serve and practice it. If you do not rely on these rules and unlawfully transmit it, then daggers as sharp as a cold wind will for a long time punish [you]. Those who receive it, diligently, carefully, and cautiously [guard] it!

Chapter 6

ANALYSIS OF TEXT

Although the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* is translated here in its entirety, the emphasis of this analysis will be on the ten stanzas of poetry. First, I will examine the text for the most general of apocalyptic imagery. Then, I will look at the imagery that is culture-specific, but still generic within the culture. Finally, I will consider the specific imagery—much of it in code—that are references to contemporary events. It is important to remember that categories may overlap. What are stock phrases in this text may not be in older texts and original imagery in this text may be used as part of a trope in later works. Thus, the categories must be fluid over time.

- 1) 赤書土出治， 金玉復爲夫。 青龍甲申會，
奄至誰能知。 雖著天水文， 寶侯王子期。
辰中色當變， 先時睹胡兒。 崑元最其充，
積石次不治。 蕭蕭上學士， 後天奉天時。
福非一朝過， 七葉積善基。 太平契孟津，
樂哉何熙怡。

General apocalyptic imagery is nonexistent in this stanza. This is because, as a reading of the coded sections of the stanza will reveal, the events in this stanza are presented as predating the apocalypse, as well as the time the text was written. The author is setting the historical stage for later stanzas, beginning the text with a description of the coming forth of Lingbao texts and the founding of the Jin dynasty. This is mostly done through historical allusions, but also through code. The Crimson Book is the *Perfected Script of the Five Tablets Written in Red* (*Chishu wupian zhenwen*, 赤書五篇真文). The first Lingbao text in the canon, it

dates to c. 400 and contains the Perfected Script (*zhenwen*, 真文), which can act as protective talismans, and a brief liturgical calendar.⁶⁰ The azure dragon is associated with the phase of wood, but has no apocalyptic connections outside this text. The Jiashen year is the commonly given in Chinese apocalyptic texts as the date when the calamities begin. “Leaves” (*ye*, 葉) is frequently understood as “generation” (*shi*, 世) in classical Chinese and should be so read here. The Great Peace is a state of perfect social harmony and comes from a properly balanced relationship between the heaven and earth, as reflected in the relationship between the emperor and his subjects. First adopted into Daoism from Han Confucianism, by the Six Dynasties period its meaning had been altered to describe a utopia or even a realm of perfect harmony beyond the human world.⁶¹ Meng Ford is an important site in Chinese history, as it is the site where the various feudal lords swore their allegiance to Zhou prior to overthrowing the Shang dynasty.

The coded sections clarify the chronology that will be laid out in the remaining stanzas. “Kun’s primal” could stand for Liu Kun (劉琨, 271-318), with the homophonous character 崑 substituted for 琨. Liu Kun was a scholar-official

⁶⁰ Hans-Herman Schmidt, “Yuanshi wulao chishu yupian zhenwen tianshu jing” in *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, vol. 1, ed. Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 215-216. Note the many variant titles for the scripture.

⁶¹ See Yamada Tashiaki, “Taiping,” in the *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (Oxford: Routledge, 2007) *Religion Online* [Electronic database] http://www.routledgereligiononline.com:80/Book.aspx?id=w185_p200145b99970271001.

who served in the final days of the Western Jin as the governor of Bingzhou. His fame was sufficient to warrant a biography in the *Jin shu*. Celebrated for his literary talents, he was also one of the last Jin loyalists in the north. Even after his defeat by Shi Le (石勒, 274-333) in 316, he remained in the north and loyal to the Sima family until his death in 318 at the hands of one of Shi's Xianbei allies.⁶² Shi Le's attempt and failure to control China is referred to in the next line, “[yet] the accumulated stones do not rule.”

It is tempting to read the next line, “Xiao Xiao is a high scholar,” as a reference to Xiao Tong, but this would be incorrect as it doesn't fit with the chronology laid out by the scripture. Rather, it probably refers to the eminent scholar Wang Su (195-256, 王肅), whose given name is visually similar to Xiao (蕭). Born into a high-ranking scholar-official family, Wang became the leading Confucian scholar of his day. Well-respected for his commentaries on the Classics, as well as his ability to apply the words and examples of the ancients to contemporary governance, Wang served as an imperial advisor before switching his allegiance to the Simas in the struggle for regency power over Cao Fang (曹芳, r. 239-254). His daughter was the principal wife of Sima Zhao (司馬昭, 211-265) and the mother of the founding Jin emperor, Emperor Wu (晉武帝, r. 265-290). Under Sima Zhao's regency, he enjoyed great influence at court, simultaneously holding the ranks of Commandant of the Capital (*zhonglingjun*, 中領軍) and Cavalier Attendant-in-Ordinary (*sanqichangshi*, 散騎常侍), an honorific given to

⁶² For more information, see David R. Knechtges, “Liu Kun, Lu Chen, and Their Writings in the Transition to the Eastern Jin,” *CLEAR* 28 (2006): 1-66.

the close friends and trusted advisors of the ruler.⁶³ After his death, he was further honored as General of the Guards (*weijiangjun*, 衛將軍). Within academic circles, Wang's interpretation of Confucianism was accepted as orthodoxy during the Wei-Jin period.⁶⁴

Returning to the first stanza, we now read the fifth, sixth, and seventh couplets differently. "Liu Kun is completely defeated, yet the Shi [family] does not rule. Wang Su was a high Confucian scholar, when the present generation served heaven. This fortune is not in a day surpassed, seven generations [referring to the first seven rulers of the Jin dynasty] build a good foundation." Such "double-speak" will be used throughout the remaining stanzas. With the first stanza more fully illuminated, let us turn our attention to the second stanza.

2) 玄運金馬末，古月侵神州。陸上既無子，
兄弟亦迭遊。河洛子空盡，燕趙成洪流。
荆陽柳其次，已刻中嶽符。芒子盡十載，
東海桑中遊。宜先入福地，八石以鍊軀。
柳城即生地，伏龍不爲悠。玉筭近世間，
桐栢甚易求。

The general apocalyptic imagery is easily identified in this stanza. The droughts, famine, and flood are all standard. Separated family members (the "wandering" brothers) and "in the Eastern sea, we wander among the mulberries"

⁶³ For a further discussion of the title of Cavalier Attendant-in-Ordinary, see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 395.

⁶⁴ Wang Su's official biography is included as part of his father's, Wang Lang (王朗). See "The Biographies of Zhong You, Hua Xin, and Wang Lang" (*Zhong You Hua Xin Wang Lang zhuan*, 鍾繇華歆王朗傳) in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi*, 三國志). Chen Shou, ed., *Sanguo zhi*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 414-423.

are common to Chinese apocalyptic texts. The latter phrase reflects the passage of time and comes from the *Biographies of Divine Transcendents* (*Shenxian zhuan*, 神仙傳). In the biography of the transcendent Ma Gu (麻姑), she descends at the invitation of Wang Fangping and states that since become a transcendent, she has “seen the Eastern Sea turn to mulberry fields three times.”⁶⁵ The former phrase merely demonstrates the break-down of the social order. The spirit regions are the Central Plain, so-called because it is where the spirits of the ancestors reside. The He and Luo rivers are the Yellow and Luo rivers in central China. The Luo is a tributary of the Yellow and the ancient capital Luoyang is on the north (*yang*) side of the Luo river. Yan and Zhao are also names of ancient Chinese states in the Northeast.

The “coded” sections are also fairly easy to identify. “The golden horse” (金馬) is a reference to the Jin dynasty. The Chinese word for “golden” and the name “Jin” are homophones. The connection between the two homophonous characters is reinforced by correlative cosmology as the Jin dynasty adopted the phase of metal (金) as the dynastic phase.⁶⁶ The dynasty was ruled by the Sima (司馬) family, here represented by just the last character for a bit of obliqueness. The character *mo* (末) refers the tip or end of a hair (or something made of hair

⁶⁵ Robert Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: a Study of Ge Hong's Biographies of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 262.

⁶⁶ An interpretation first put forth by Yoshioka Yoshitoyo. See Anna Seidel, “Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism: Lao-tzu and Li Hong,” *History of Religions* 9, vol. 2-3 (November 1969-February 1970): 240.

like a brush). In this case, it refers to the end of the Jin dynasty. This meaning of the word is also used in the Chinese Buddhist term for the apocalypse (*mofa* or “the end of the Dharma”). “The ancient moon” is in fact, the character *hu* (胡) for “barbarian,” meaning any of the non-Han people to the north of China, divided into its two radicals. Lu (魯, homophonous with the character for land 陸) is an ancient name for the Shandong peninsula in Northeastern China; it was the home of Confucius. The term “*shang*” meaning “above,” is often used to refer to the Emperor. The territory of Yan and Zhao at the time of the *Tiandi yundu jing* were occupied by Non-Han peoples. The Murong, a Turkic nomadic people, resided in Yan and the Xianbei, also Turkic nomads, in Zhao.

Reading the text with the coded words included, the first line now reads “As for the mysterious cycles at the end of the Jin, barbarians invade the Central Plain.” This clearly refers to the loss of the northern China to the various nomadic peoples between 304 and 317. “Lu’s emperor then is without sons.” Both of the Jin emperors during the period from 304-317 had no children. “Older brother and younger brother wander in the land” has already been established as a trope. “The He and Luo rivers are empty and exhausted” refers to more than just drought, but the forcing of the Han from the Central Plain and the capital of Luoyang specifically in 313. Also as previously mentioned, Yan and Zhao are home to non-Han peoples. Thus “Yan and Zhao form the flood” refers the flood of Turkic nomads sweeping over the Yellow river valley. Now the text is plainly describing the events surrounding the fall of the Western Jin dynasty.

Since this is a religious text, there are also instructions for the faithful woven into the stanza. Engraving protective talismans was (and still is) a common Daoist practice. Using the “eight stones to refine one’s body” refers to the Daoist practice of alchemy. The ingesting of elixirs made from minerals—in this case cinnabar, ruby sulphur, arsenic trisulfide, mica, brimstone, rock salt, salt peter, and malachite—in order to purify and refine the body—was common medieval Daoist practice.⁶⁷ Finally, the examples of divine beings are invoked, specifically the Immortal of Yusi Mountain and the Perfected of Tongbo. The Immortal of Yusi Mountain is an obscure deity. Yusi Mountain has been a holy site since early Daoist times, but it was not formally recognized until the Tang dynasty when a monastery was built there under imperial auspices.⁶⁸ Even post-Tang, the mountain does not seem to have a connection to a specific deity. Consequently, it is unclear who the text is referring to here. Fortunately, the history of the Perfected of Tongbo is less murky. The Perfected of Tongbo is a title of Wangzi Qiao, a model of transcendence. Recognized as a semi-divine figure who pre-dates Daoism, he was one of the immortals who bestowed the Shangqing revelations. His home is in the Golden Court Grotto beneath Mt. Tongbo, hence his title. His cult status began to rise during the late Han and continued to ascend through the Six Dynasties period. His name is used in this text as a model student of the Dao, encouraging practitioners to be faithful even in difficult times.

⁶⁷ See Ho Peng Yoke, “Alchemy on Stones and Minerals in Chinese Pharmacopeias,” *Chung Chi Journal* 7, no.2 (May 1968) : 155-170.

⁶⁸ Xu Xiaoxuan 許小軒, “Summer on Yusi Mountain” [夏游玉笥山] *Jiangxi Pictorial* [江西畫報] 3 (2009) : 35.

3) 丁亥不云遠， 八公會俱。 玄生浮紫雲，
 誨以九靈子。 令未負災充， 雷電不可止。
 出在申酉歲， 彌漫留十紀。 至于水龍時，
 仙君乃方起。 弓口十八子， 高吟相營理。
 百官森列序， 穆穆皆首士。 勤心慕松喬，
 劫盡已度已。 平日解帶遊， 寸毫寫衿裏。

The third stanza is unusual. It contains no generic apocalyptic imagery, being mainly concerned with sketching out a chronology and description of the apocalypse, while providing guidelines for what the faithful should do to survive. These guidelines rely mostly on culture-specific imagery, but also use hermetic knowledge as well. For culture-specific imagery, there is reference to the Dinghai, -shen, and -you years, the Eight Dukes, and the loosening of the belt.

The Dinghai year is the twenty-fourth year of the sexagenary cycle. Although Daoists of the fifth and sixth centuries believed the apocalypse was to start in a Jiashen or twenty-first year, the earlier Shangqing tradition held that the apocalypse would start in the Dinghai year instead.⁶⁹ This is likely how the reference was to be understood and reflects the composite nature of the Lingbao scriptures, which drew on previous Daoist scriptures, non-canonical texts, and Buddhism. The -shen and -you years are the previously mentioned Jiashen year and the succeeding Yiyou year. The Eight Dukes, also known as the Eight Immortals of Huainan, were the eight retainers of Liu An (劉安, 179-122 BCE), who are credited with composing the *Huainanzi*.⁷⁰ The *Huainanzi* is an important

⁶⁹ Mollier, 170-173.

⁷⁰ It has been suggested that this could be a discreet reference to the Rebellion of the Eight Princes; however, the Eight Dukes are clearly being

encyclopedic work, synthesizing Confucian, Legalist, and Daoist strains of thought into the composite philosophy of Han correlative cosmology. A commentary on the *Huainanzi* is included in the Daozang. In the Jin, the term was also used for eight nobles who supported Sima Yan in founding the new dynasty. Unlike most cases in this text, this second meaning isn't meant to replace the first. Rather, it is to heighten the connection between the text and the current period, by linking a historical allusion to the present. "Loosening the belt" is a common expression for retiring from public office, which has its origins in the *Later Han History* (*Hou Han Shu*, 後漢書).

Most notable in this stanza is its reliance on hermitic knowledge. Beginning with the second couplet, purple clouds are an auspicious omen. Jiulingzi is a minor Daoist immortal, whose biography is found in the *Biographies of the Divine Immortals* (*Shenxuan zhuan*, 神仙傳). According to it, he practiced the Way of the Five Phases (*wuxing zhi dao*, 五行道). He ultimately ascended to the immortals and left this world. Of far more importance is the appearance of the messianic figure, Li Hong. In the fifth and sixth couplets give both his title, Lord of the Immortals, and the rebus of his name backwards, "bow-mouthed eighteen sons."⁷¹ The hundred officials are the hundred deities of the body who manage the

instructed by Jiulingzi in the text. This image of the Eight Dukes as Daoist adepts is not supported by descriptions of the eight Sima princes that gave the rebellion its name.

⁷¹ The characters for Li Hong are usually presented as a rebus. Anna Seidel suggests it may have been a method of avoiding taboo. I am inclined to agree with her. That the name is presented in reverse order, with personal name first and surname last, is of no particular significance. See Seidel 1969, 237n.69.

body's functions. Finally, Song Qiao is Master Red Pine (Chisong zi, 赤松子), a skillful practitioner of the Dao in high antiquity. He was praised by Ge Hong as a model student of the Dao, just like Wangzi Qiao. Indeed, they were often invoked as exemplars together.⁷² He is the Perfected of the Southern Marchmount in the Shangqing tradition. The southern marchmount plays an important role in the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* and will be discussed fully later in this paper.

Although this stanza's primary focus is on laying out a brief chronology of the apocalypse, its disasters, and how danger may be avoided, it still demonstrates the close connection between present and future in apocalyptic texts by referring religious figures popular at the time of the text's composition and especially by playing upon the multiple sets of "Eight Dukes." With this stanza more clearly understood, let us move our attention to stanza four.

4) 方平記大鳥， 當來東南翔。 下愚不見事，
賢者披神方。 郊境沒夏首， 太白失度常。
雲霧皆變化， 魚鱉遊汪洋。 一時淪東海，
無復起子喬。 壬午之南嶽， 即陰以爲陽。
揚州可度世， 時誦生神章。

The fourth stanza shows a return to generic apocalyptic imagery with the verse's overarching theme of spiritual blindness on the part of those who do not accept the text's message and preparedness on the part of those who do. "The

⁷²See Gil Raz, "Chisong zi," in the *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (Oxford: Routledge: 2007) *Religion Online* [Electronic database] http://www.routledgeonline.com:80/Book.aspx?id=w185_p200145b99970271001.

extremely foolish do not see this matter,” referring to the clear signs of the apocalypse. Their behavior is contrasted with the faithful, “those who are worthy” as the author calls them, who practice alchemy (“spirit recipes”), gather to a sacred place, and recite scripture. Ultimately, their preparedness leads them to be saved, as they “cross over the generation” into the new creation that is supposed to follow the destruction of the world.

The cultural markers are plenty: Fangping, a “great bird” (*daniao*, 大鳥), and the “Great White” (*dabai*, 大白) and its fall from its orbit. Fangping is Wang Fangping (fl. mid-first century B.C.E.?, 王方平), a mythical figure revered as an immortal prior to the development of religious Daoism. According to his hagiography in the *Biographies of Divine Transcendents* (*Shenxian zhuan*, 神仙傳), he was particularly renowned for his knowledge of *chenwei* and his ability to foresee “the flourishing and decline of all beings in the heavens and among men, and could foretell fortune and misfortune in the nine regions.”⁷³ He supposedly descended to assist the Liu family in governing during the early Han dynasty before returning to the realm of the immortals on the back of a crane. In the Shangqing tradition, Wang Fangping is conflated with Wang Yuan, the Perfected of the Western Citadel, and one of the revelatory deities who appeared to Yang Xi.

⁷³ Company, 259.

What he “recorded” is not likely to be the Shangqing scriptures, but rather a short text he carved into an imperial gate regarding the future.⁷⁴

A great bird is a common symbol in Chinese apocalyptic texts. Sometimes described as a phoenix; other times described as a *honghu*, a legendary bird of enormous size. According to the Shangqing tradition, there are three entities who appear as judges at the end of the world: one is the Great Bird, the others are the Water Mother (*shuimu*, 水母) and the Celestial Horse (*tianma*, 天馬).

Unfortunately, the origins of the Great Bird are more obscure than the other judges.⁷⁵ The appearance of a great bird in this stanza may hold dual meanings. The first is that the Great Bird, the judge of the world at its end has arrived, and thus the apocalypse has already begun. The second is a lesser omen: a great bird, often ridden by immortals or by humans who have just achieved transcendence and are leaving the world, is flying above the southeast. This is where Yangzhou is located and where—according the last couplet of the stanza—the faithful will be saved. Thus the great bird flying over the southeast may also represent the imminent salvation of the Daoists there.

⁷⁴ Again, according to the *Biography of Divine Transcendents*, he was summoned to the imperial court, but refused to speak. Instead, he “wrote an inscription on a palace gate, over four hundred words, all concerning future events. The emperor disliked this and ordered the words effaced. The words on the outside [of the gate] were successfully removed, but the ones on the inside appeared even darker and were pressed into the grain of the wood.” Campany, 259.

⁷⁵ Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l’histoire du taoïsme*, vol. 1 (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1984), 140.

Finally, the “Great White” is the planet Venus, a prominent player in Chinese astrology and correlative cosmology. In Chinese astrology, any deviations in its orbit were powerful and terrible omens. For it to fall from its orbit—literally, “to lose its orbit’s constancy”—at the establishment of a new dynasty would be an unmistakable sign that the dynasty lacked the Mandate of Heaven and was thus illegitimate. The planet was also associated with the metal (*jin*, 金) phase in correlative cosmology, which is again homophonous with the Jin (晉) dynasty. Thus, the deviations in Venus’ orbit aren’t just a sign of the end of the kalpa, but also a sign that the Jin dynasty has lost the Mandate and thus its legitimacy. This is probably a reference to the re-establishment of the Jin court in Jiankang in the south in 317.

Like the second stanza, the final two couplets of the fourth stanza are instructions for the devout. The line “In Renwu, go to the southern marchmount” is a very direct command. The idea of gathering believers to the southern marchmount is not unique to the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*. At least two other fourth-century Daoist apocalyptic texts contain the same command. For example, in the *Scripture on the Transformations of Laozi* (*Laozi bianhua jing*, 老子變化經), the deified Laozi urges his followers to travel to the southern marchmount in order to escape danger. “I have instructed all of you five or six times. When the Great White falls to the side, quickly come and follow me. On the southern marchmount, pursue me. [Then] you can cross over the dangers [of

the end of the world.]” 教告子吾⁷⁶六度大白橫流，疾來逐我，南嶽相求，可以度厄。⁷⁷ I believe it is important to note that the believers are instructed to go in the Renwu year, the nineteenth year of the sexagenary cycle, before the events of the apocalypse are scheduled to begin.

The run of three simple characters (壬午之) suggests it may be another coded section; however, I have been unable to identify any characters comprised of the three radicals. Unfortunately, that does not exclude the possibility of code, as the characters could also be a visual riddle. That is, the strokes of the characters could be rearranged to form a new phrase. This is not uncommon in *chen* writings, and it makes it particularly difficult to speculate what any coded meaning might have been.

But why retreat to the southern marchmount? The aforementioned southern marchmount is Mt. Heng (衡山), which is located in Jingzhou (荊州).⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Mistake for 五.

⁷⁷ 8.182.28b-1c. The punctuation in the *Zhonghua Daozang* places 五六度 at the beginning of the next line. Here I am following the punctuation given in Seidel 1969, 225.

⁷⁸ James Robson has pointed out that the proper name and location of the southern marchmount have shifted throughout time. The imperially recognized southern marchmount during the Six Dynasties was Mt. Huo (霍山) in present-day Anhui, having been moved from Mt. Heng in 107 B.C.E. by Han Wudi. However, southern Daoists also recognized Mt. Chicheng (赤誠山) as the southern marchmount as well. However, given that a number of places referenced later in the text are located in Jingzhou, I believe the southern marchmount in this text is indeed Mt. Heng. See Robson, *The Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak (Nanyue, 南嶽) in Medieval China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 57-89.

Jingzhou borders Yangzhou on the left and a number of places mentioned later in the text are located here as well. As previously mentioned, there are other Daoist texts from the period that encourage members of the faith to retreat to the southern marchmount. Politically, the mountain was important for various imperial sacrifices (including the *feng* and *shan* offerings), although the ceremonies were often carried out at Mt. Huo instead as it was closer to the imperial city. The political capital of the southern marchmount increased after the loss of northern China to non-Han forces in 317, as it was the only one of the five sacred peaks that remained under Han control. Religiously, the southern marchmount was considered a particularly efficacious site for alchemical practices. Such beliefs can be traced back to the late Three Kingdoms period. Its prestige and reputation as a place where transcendence was more easily obtained increased throughout the Six Dynasties. By the beginning of the Tang, the mountain had already acquired its “Nine Perfected,” nine Daoist adepts believed to have achieved transcendence while residing on the mountain. The history and reputation of the mountain aside, it is not surprising that the author of the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* chose it as the place where the Daoist faithful would achieve salvation after the mention of “spirit recipes” in the beginning of the stanza and the reference to Master Red Pine, the Perfected of the Southern Marchmount, earlier in the text.

“Yin immediately becomes yang” refers to the changing of the kalpa. According Daoist eschatology, time is composed of minor *kalpas* and major *kalpas*. The minor *kalpas* are part of the major *kalpas* and alternative between yin

and yang. This changing of the *kalpa* is emphasized again in the last couplet where it refers to “crossing the generation” (*dushi*, 度世).

The final couplet of the stanza is quite interesting. “In Yangzhou, you can cross the generation; at that time, chant the *Shengshen jing*.” As previously mentioned, crossing the generation refers to salvation. All of the early schools of religious Daoism believed that at the end of the world, a select number of practitioners would be saved and would re-populate the world after the apocalypse ended and the new *kalpa* began. Sometimes these “seed people” (*zhongmin*, 種民) would re-merge with the Dao and thus would be reborn with the next cycle of creation. In later Shangqing and Lingbao texts, after messianic figures were added to the eschatological narrative, these elect are spared from the cataclysmic destruction and have the privilege of rebuilding society when the prophesized messiah descends.

Yangzhou is a region in southern China and its inclusion here warrants close attention. During the medieval period, it was a hotbed of rebellion against the imperial government. William Crowell has pointed out that religion—Daoist, Buddhist, and a particular mix of the two plus local shamanistic traditions often called Chinese popular or folk religion—appears to have played an especially prominent role in rebellions within Yangzhou during the Six Dynasties.⁷⁹ This is likely a reflection of the high number of messianic and millenarian movements in the area. Of these rebellions that combined messianic fervor with political

⁷⁹ Crowell, “Social Unrest and Rebellion in Jiangnan during the Six Dynasties,” *Modern China* 9, no. 3 (July 1983): 326.

rebellion, the Sun En rebellion (399-410) at the end of the Eastern Jin dynasty is the best-known, although it certainly wasn't the only one. Crowell also points out the tenuous grip the Han government had on Yangzhou prior to the dynasty's collapse as another significant factor in explaining the amount of rebellious activity in the province.

The *Scripture of Life-Giving Spirits* (*Shengshen jing*, 生神經) is an early fifth-century Lingbao text. Designed to reverse the decaying of the body's spirits, the scripture promises those who practice its teachings will be among the seed people who will cross the generation. Blending Celestial Masters, Shangqing, and Buddhist teachings, it is the quintessential Lingbao writing. Receiving these benefits from merely reciting the *Scripture of Life-Giving Spirits* is a new twist added by author of the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*.

Like the previous stanza, the fourth stanza focuses on what the believers should do to prepare and endure the end of the world. Yet the cultural touchstones—the inclusion of politically significant as well as religiously significant places such as the southern marchmount and activities such as correlative cosmology—deliberately tie the present to the past. This synchronizing of the present with the future strengthens the stanza's prophetic rhetoric. The fifth stanza, seen below, exhibits the same technique developed more fully.

5) 張氏著鵠鳴， 識緯金馬末。 反白相中傷，
婁衿不解帶。 官兵悉竄走， 賊疆日凶大。
九重雖衣裳， 宮墻時了壞。 荊棘當庭生，
王侯沒虜賊。 妻婦亡異域， 使役無時泰。
街賣諒可哀， 千載豈復會。 未若早學道，

宅志霄霧際。

The generic apocalyptic imagery in this stanza is similar to the first, as this stanza is completely concerned with the breakdown of the social order. Soldiers abandon their posts, officials abandon their offices, families are torn apart, and the people are oppressed. Much of the social chaos is expressed in uniquely Chinese terms. Bandits were a serious problem in Chinese history. More than roadside thieves, they were people who had gone off-grid, so to speak. The government then was unable count them in the census and thereby tax them. If the number of people off the tax rolls became too great, the loss of revenue alone could topple the government.⁸⁰ The Ninefold Wrapped is the emperor, who is ready for court, but there is no place to hold it. His male relations (the princes and feudal lords) appear no different than common criminals, their wives and concubines are split up and disappear into the chaos. Chinese society preserved order through a rigid hierarchical system. To have the apex of society (the imperial family and aristocracy) indistinguishable from the lowest members of society (criminals) is unthinkable and reflects a society completely bereft of order. Even the palace goods are stolen and sold. This is a terrifying picture of government collapse.

The second layer of meaning of this stanza is dependent on the reader's knowledge of Daoism. Master Zhang is Zhang Daoling, the founder of Celestial Master sect of Daoism. At Mt. Heming, he encountered the Lord Lao, the deified Laozi, who provided the sacred texts, talismans, and rites that form the core of

⁸⁰Crowell discusses at length the severity of the banditry problem and its connections to popular rebellion in Yangzhou specifically during Six Dynasties. See Crowell, 322-326.

religious Daoism. The weft texts are Han-dynasty apocryphal Confucian texts. Considered non-canonical, these texts—which include apocalyptic predictions—often divined the future and claimed to predict dynasties to come based on correlative cosmology. It is not surprising then that this stanza would claim these texts foretold the end of the Jin dynasty. “The returning white” is the planet Venus. In Chinese correlative cosmology, Venus is the planet associated with metal which, as stated previously, is homophonous with the name of the dynasty. Thus, it isn’t Venus harming the people, but the Jin dynasty. More worrying is the fact that the baleful omens of Venus go unheeded. In a previous stanza, the reader was advised to alter his apparel and retire from office at the end of the kalpa. Yet here, with clear omens that the end has indeed arrived, the people continue to go about their business. The author hints that it may already be too late in the last line, when he comments that nothing is better than studying the Dao early in life.

6) 修學諸祭酒， 治法當今勤。 不謹百八十，
 至時如火煎。 近在金氏世， 念此當可言。
 兵刀四衝至， 一日不可延。 然後洪災會，
 浩哉！與天連， 行尸無所覩。 聖人知信然，
 先學悟玄京。 方寸會名山， 歛衽之勝地。
 至道固靈祖， 平都述翰墨。

The generic apocalyptic imagery is almost *too* generic in the sixth stanza. “Soldiers arrive from the four corners of the world” represents war. But are these soldiers foreign invaders or Chinese soldiers moving towards the capital as part of a dynastic struggle? The text doesn’t say. There are disruptions of the natural order as seen by the “floods and fires,” but where are these disasters? When? All

the author says is that “they will join with the heavenly cycles.” This whole verse is frustratingly vague, even for its genre. To understand why such undefined images are used in the sixth stanza, one needs to consider the issue of audience.

The *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* is broadly addressed to those who study the Dao. The sixth stanza is addressed to a very specific group of Daoists, making it unique amongst all of the ten verses. This stanza is addressed to “all libationers who cultivate the Dao.” In Celestial Masters Daoism (*tianshi daojiao*, 天師道教), the heads of congregations or parishes (*zhi*, 治) were called libationers (*jijiu*, 祭酒). These parish leaders are exhorted to keep the regulations of Celestial Masters Daoism, along with the one-hundred-and-eighty precepts of Lingbao Daoism. Obviously, the only Celestial Masters who keep the Lingbao proscriptions would be those who converted to Lingbao themselves. This stanza then reflects Lingbao Daoism’s early proselytizing efforts. Those Celestial Masters who convert are promised communication with the deities of Lingbao. “[If you] remember this [then we] should be able to speak [with you].” The standard translation of the next line of the verse would usually be “walking corpses do not see that, [but] wise men know to trust [this],” with the “walking corpses” being non-Daoists and the wise men being the Daoists. However, the author of the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* clearly believes Lingbao to be superior to the other schools of Daoism. With that in mind, it is possible that the “walking corpses” are in fact other Daoists and the “wise men” are those who follow the Lingbao practices.

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of the discussion of this stanza, it can now be answered why the text is so very vague in its apocalyptic imagery in this verse. The first answer is that the purpose of this verse is to persuade other Daoists—particularly Celestial Masters—to adopt the Lingbao tradition. It is not necessary to go into great detail about the kinds of suffering that will accompany the apocalypse; the previous five stanzas already did that. The only detail in the entire stanza is the reference to the “metal clan.” It has already been discussed that the Jin dynasty adopted metal as its phase and the characters for the dynasty and metal are homophones. Reference to the present dynasty here simply drives home the point that the “future” apocalypse is really occurring now. If the reader is unconvinced of his fate by now, there is little hope for saving him. The vague references to wars and natural disasters are merely a final turning of the screws for those who are still uncommitted to their salvations. The second answer is that the sixth stanza reflects a turning point in narrative. Chronologically, we have reached the end of the “present-future” of the apocalypse and are now moving into what happens *after* the disasters, death, and suffering, into the millennial part of the apocalyptic tale. Again, “millennial” is used here to describe a time of great peace following the apocalypse, rather than the literal thousand years of peace the term represents in Christian apocalypses.

7) 平都述翰墨， 福地諒可往。 庚辰羌胡動，
 壬午有奇賞。 先當之福鄉， 高詠以自養。
 萬里望無烟， 壬辰未消殃。 既平仙君治，
 八方息羅綱。 如吾玉斧惠， 永謝塵中壤。
 華祿豈足貪， 於茲絕冥想。

The generic apocalyptic imagery of the first five stanzas gives way to generic messianic imagery in the seventh stanza. Finally, the reader is introduced to the main messianic figure in the text and Daoism, Li Hong, as well as further instructions as to how to avoid being swept away in the waves of apocalyptic destruction by separating one's self from the world and traveling to the "blessed lands." In a broad sense, the blessed lands represent a refuge for the faithful amid the turmoil of the apocalypse. There, the people should spiritually feed themselves with holy scriptures and permanently separate themselves from the "dusty world" as they await the coming of the messiah. As the author points out, the fine trappings of world, here the ornaments of imperial office that signified one's status, are ultimately hollow. Worldly things cannot save one from the sufferings and destruction of the end of the world, only the Dao can.

As for culturally-specific imagery, the image that looms over the entire stanza is Li Hong. Yet there are numerous others: the peaceful metropolis, the blessed lands, "the jade axe," and retiring from public office. The cultural significance of retiring from public office has already been discussed and will not be repeated here. Starting at the beginning of the verse is the peaceful metropolis. As previously mentioned in the footnotes, the "peaceful metropolis" (*pingdu*, 平都) was one of the eight "roaming" Celestial Master parishes. This is what the text may be referring to when it says "the peaceful metropolis follows the brush and ink," assuming the "brush and ink" are copies of the scriptures. However, there is also a Mt. Pingdu, which is the site of one of the blessed lands. It was also the center of Wang Fangping's cult during the early and medieval periods, being

considered the site where both he and Yin Changsheng ascended to heaven in broad daylight. Thus, “the brush and ink” may instead allude to Wang’s record that was mentioned in the fourth stanza.

As for the blessed lands, they are seventy-two in number. Franciscus Verellen describes the blessed lands as places where religious objects of unusual power can be found such as ingredients for alchemy, medicinal plants, talismans, texts, oral instructions and transmissions, and direct interaction with deities.⁸¹ They are also the homes of lesser Daoist immortals. Apparently, even the lesser immortals were judged in need of the superior instruction and practices of the Lingbao scriptures by the author.

The “jade axe” is an interesting reference. Jade axe (*yujin*, 玉斧) was a lesser style name of Xu Hui (許翽, 341-c.370). The youngest son of the Xu family, his father was Yang Xi’s main patron. Yang Xi, of course, received the revelations that became the core of Shangqing Daoism. Xu Hui himself retired from official life to pursue the Dao under Yang’s tutelage. Like all of Yang’s faithful followers, he was promised an office in the otherworldly bureaucracy.⁸² Why Xu Hui was chosen to embody rest and retirement from public office is

⁸¹ Franciscus Verellen, “The Twenty-Four Dioceses and Zhang Daoling: The Spatio-Liturgical Organization of Early Celestial Masters Daoism,” in *Pilgrims, Patrons and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions*, ed. Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 34-35.

⁸² See Michel Strickman, *La Taoisme du Mao Chan: Chronique de la révélation* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Ecoles Chinoises, 1981), 82-98.

unclear, as there are many more prominent Daoist figures who could fill this role. Perhaps the author chose to include Xu Hui as a way of incorporating a Shangqing figure into the Lingbao pantheon.

The most important figure in this stanza is the Daoist messianic figure, Li Hong. Anna Seidel produced several critical articles on Li Hong, identifying Li as a political messiah. In some texts he is considered an avatar of the Lord Lao; in others he is a lesser deity who is sent by the Lord Lao to restore good government in the subcelestial realm. This can be seen in a number of Six Dynasties texts produced by all Daoist traditions such as the “The Oral Instructions Revealed to Zhao Sheng by the Celestial Master of Grand Orthodoxy” (*Zhengyi tianshi gao Zhao Sheng koujie*, 正一天師告趙昇口訣) and “The Arranged Records of the Upper Clarity Latter Sage and Lord of the Dao” (*Shangqing housheng daojun lieji*, 上清後聖道君列紀).⁸³ The apocalyptic narrative in the latter scripture particularly follows a similar outline as the one in *The Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*: Li Hong descends in the Renchen year to create a new political order and institute a new rule by sages.⁸⁴

As mentioned in the introduction, medieval China was a particularly turbulent place. Following the fall of the Han Dynasty in 220, the empire fell into a number of warring states as competing noble families, states, and generals pushed their respective claims to the throne (which no longer existed in a singular

⁸³ Seidel 1969, 240, 243. Translated in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 339-362.

⁸⁴ Seidel 1969, 243.

sense) and attempted to reunify the old Han empire. The Jin dynasty succeeded in restoring order to the old Han territory in 280, only to see their new empire threatened by constant internal disorders, rebellions, and external invasions from the non-Han peoples to the north and west of China. By 317, the dynasty had lost not only control of the capital, but also of the Central Plain itself. Forced across the Yangzi River, the dynasty was continually beset by further rebellions, before finally collapsing in 420. Following the disintegration of the Jin state, the former Han empire split into a number of minor states and dynasties (the aptly-named “Six Dynasties and Sixteen Kingdoms” period) with ever-changing boundaries and ruling houses. The land would remain in this state of utter chaos until 589.

Additionally, Chinese society was experiencing something of an existential crisis. Forced in 317 to cede the imperial capital and the Yellow river valleys that comprised the homeland of Chinese culture to nomadic Non-Han peoples, the Han arrived in southern China and struggled to adapt to a very different world. Physically, the south was rugged, filled with mountains and narrow gorges. The flatter coastal areas were swampy and considered havens for miasmas and disease. Psychologically, the Han had been displaced from their homeland by peoples they considered inferior and “barbarians.” The closely-held belief in Han superiority was being challenged in a most direct and serious way. The great families particularly struggled as Northern and Southern social hierarchies vied for supremacy. Some lost their social status, and others felt their traditional ranks were cheapened.

In the context of this massive dislocation and resulting culture-wide anxiety, it is easy to understand why apocalyptic texts and messianic movements were thriving during this time in Chinese history. After all, “millennialism perceives chaos and then orders it.”⁸⁵ There was not a more chaotic time, and this among a society that placed a high premium on order and harmony. It is also easy to understand why a *political* messiah such as Li Hong would have been especially appealing at such a time. It is not surprising then that the benefits of Li Hong’s arrival are discussed in the final three stanzas.

8) 孔生遺明藏， 木對若有因。 甌山可遊處，
九夷拂輕塵。 陋廬守空寂， 玄默湛冥緣。
泉涌不繼本， 卯金無傷人。 刀曲不覺痛，
今世傷爾身。

Switching from generic apocalyptic imagery to millennial in the eighth stanza, there is freedom from foreign oppression. Freedom from oppression is a very common millennial image. “The Nine Yi [peoples] sweep away like a light dust.” Traditionally, the Yi were non-Han peoples to the east of the Central Plain. However, in this case, the term is being used more loosely as simply “non-Han.” Thus, the Han will reclaim the Central Plain from the various Turkic groups currently residing in the north and will do so with great ease.

More interesting are the cultural references in this stanza to Confucius, the re-affirmation of Han superiority, and the ideal of a hermit life. The “Student Kong” who left a “bright canon” is Confucius. His “canon” is the *Analects* (*Lunyu*,

⁸⁵ Cathy Gutierrez, “The Millennium and Narrative Closure,” in *War in Heaven, Heaven on Earth: Theories on the Apocalyptic*, ed. Stephen O’Leary and Glen S. McGhee (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 53.

論語), and the other works of high antiquity that were credited to him such as the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu zhuan*, 春秋傳). Mentions of Confucius, particularly positive ones, are relatively rare in Daoist scriptures. Its inclusion here may reflect the syncretic nature of Lingbao texts. “The Nine Yi [peoples] sweep away like a light dust” is more than just a generic millennial image of freedom from foreign oppression. It is a re-affirmation of Han superiority, which would have been enormously comforting and popular during the fifth century, for the reasons previously outlined in the discussion on the seventh stanza. Finally, the ideal of the hermit life is repeated several times in this verse. Wandering and living in the mountains, having a simple hut that is empty and quiet, silent contemplation which deepens your karma, these are all hallmarks of a hermit. Not only is a life of reclusion considered a worthy alternative to official service for a gentleman, but it is also a socially accepted response to political turmoil to avoid having to serve an unworthy dynasty. Such a lifestyle is considered most beneficial to studying the Dao and achieving transcendence. Astute readers will remember that the faithful were commanded in the third stanza “to cut their belts and wander,” here the reward is presented. The turmoil of the age is passing, while those who followed the author’s instructions are insulated from worldly troubles and freely pursuing transcendence.

The eighth stanza also contains critical coded sections as well, with a reference to an important advisor and general of Liu Yu’s, and the repeated “spelling out” of the surname Liu. Kong Jing (孔靖, 347-422) originally served the Jin dynasty as a minor official in the service of the Imperial Heir during the

reign of the Emperor Andi (安帝, r. 397-403, 404-419). Later he was put in charge of a cavalry unit and made magistrate of Shanyin, but Kong failed to advance further under the Simas. In 401, while Liu Yu was suppressing the Sun En rebellion, the two of them formed an alliance. Kong is credited with encouraging Liu Yu to wait until his rival Huan Xuan (桓玄, 369-404) claimed the throne for himself and proclaimed a new dynasty. Thus, Liu could overthrow Huan in the name of restoring the Jin dynasty. This was a tactic that had previously been successful in Chinese history and allowed Liu to gather strength while Huan dispensed with their mutual rivals. Kong was promoted to the powerful position of the Director of the Department of State Affairs (*shangshuling*, 尚書令) after Liu replaced Huan. He actively participated in Liu's military campaigns and after Liu ascended the throne, he repeatedly offered Kong the high rank of Area Commander Unequaled in Honor (*kaifuyitongsansi*, 開府儀同三司). Kong continually declined the honor, and so was posthumously elevated to the rank and additionally awarded the title of Grand Master of Radiant Fortune on the Left (*zuoguangludafu*, 左光露大幅).⁸⁶ If Student Kong is indeed a reference to Kong Jing, then the “bright canon” could be a reference to his position in the Department of State Affairs (*shangshu*, 尚書) as the second character *shu* means “books” or “writings.” Like the name dropping in previous stanzas, the mention of Kong Jing here is meant to tie the stanza more closely to

⁸⁶ See “The Biography of Kong Jing (*Kong Jing zhuan*, 孔靖傳)” in the (Liu-) Song History (*Song Shu*, 宋書). Shen Yue, ed., *Song Shu*, vol. 8 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 1531-1532.

the present and Liu Yu in particular, whose surname appears towards the end of the stanza.

The second-to-last couplet of the verse “spells out” the surname Liu (劉) by breaking the character into its component radicals *mao* (卯) and *jin* (金). Such “spelling out” of the surname Liu was well-known. The final radical, *dao* (刀), is usually omitted since it means “dagger” and thus has violent connotations. However, in this text, it begins the next line where the author is quick to explain that the dagger will not cause pain. Thus, the line “Minister Jin does not harm the people” should be read “Liu does not harm the people.” In the final couplet, “the present generation harms your body,” the present generation is the Jin dynasty, as the previous verses have made abundantly clear. When added to all the references to Liu Yu in the earlier stanzas, as well as the numerous criticisms of the Jin Dynasty, this verse makes a strong case for the argument that at least the poetic sections of the *Scripture on the Cycle of Heaven and Earth* were written to bolster the legitimacy of the Liu-Song Dynasty, narrowly dating the text to 420-479. The text was probably written closer to the beginning of the dynasty, as it would be odd to include such negative references to the present age if Liu-Song dynasty was already well-established.⁸⁷ Such use of *chen* to bolster a dynastic claim were not uncommon.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ There is a problem with this dating. In Lu Xiuqing’s (陸修靜, 406-477) *Catalogue of Lingbao Scriptures* (*Lingbao Jingmu*, 靈寶經目), it is listed under the section “not yet revealed.” Excluding the text’s clear support of the Liu-Song dynasty, it features strong anti-Jin sentiment and clearly links the fall of that dynasty with the apocalypse which would be odd in text written two dynasties

- 9) 太 and 山可詣， 鴈門其明真。 鹿堂信可貴，
和民至壬辰。 十八无出治， 子來合明真。
吳地偏多仙， 荆湘最困貧。

In the ninth stanza, the generic millennial imagery is very limited. There's the actual descent of the messianic figure Li Hong, but the description is very vague. We're told that he will go out to rule and that he will come as befitting a luminous Perfected, but where will he descend? Will he descend in a chariot or on a cloud or some other means? Will he rule from his site of descent or return to a capital? These may seem like nitpicking, unnecessary details, but consider how much more detailed descriptions of the Jewish messiah are. The prophet Isaiah describes the messiah and his coming in just two verses: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength...Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?"⁸⁹ Or Daniel who says,

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve

later. There are two possible explanations for this discrepancy. One is that the scripture was erroneously placed in the wrong section, either by Lu Xiujing or later editors. The second is that the scripture as a whole was composed after 477, but incorporated earlier material such as the prophetic stanzas. See Stephen Bokenkamp, "Lingbao Jingmu," in *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), *Religion Online* [electronic database] http://www.routledgeonline.com:80/Book.aspx?id=w185_p200145b99970672001.

⁸⁸ See Lu for examples from the Six Dynasties, and Stephen Bokenkamp, "Time After Time: Taoist Apocalyptic History and the Founding of the T'ang Dynasty," *Asia Major* Third Series 7 (1994) : 59-88 for Sui-Tang examples.

⁸⁹ KJV Isaiah 63: 1-2.

him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” (KJV Daniel 7:13-14)

While the description from the Book of Daniel is still quite vague, it offers significantly more detail than the ninth stanza of the *Scripture on the Cycle of Heaven and Earth*. This lack of detail is not uncommon in fifth-century Chinese apocalyptic texts for several reasons. First, the apocalyptic textual genre was still very new at this time and it makes sense that earlier texts would be less-detailed than later texts, which would have more material to draw on. Second, in the particular case of the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*, the purpose of the millennial section (beyond narrative closure) is not to present a vision of a new society, but rather a return to previous times before the nomadic invasions and the loss of the north. Because of that, the text does not need to go into much detail since it is describing recent history, which its audience would have been sufficiently familiar with.

Stanzas nine and ten return to the frequent use of culture-specific imagery seen in the first five stanzas. Mt. Taihe is another name for Mt. Wudong, an extremely holy Daoist site. Yet, at the time this text was likely composed, the mountain had not gained such an exalted status. Rather, like the other mountains mentioned in this text, it was associated with Daoist hermits. Like Mt. Zeng mentioned in the previous verse, Mt. Taihe was located in Jingzhou. Beyond its physical location, it was probably included in this text because of its name. Taihe (太和) means “great harmony” and is another way of writing “great peace” (*taiping*, 太平), the importance of which was discussed earlier in this paper.

Wild Goose Gate (*yanmen*, 鴈門 or 雁門), also known as Wild Goose Gate Pass (*yanmenguan*, 雁門關), is a strategic mountain pass in the north of China. Located in modern Shanxi, the pass was traditionally a chokepoint preventing the northern Turkic peoples from invading. It also represents the northern border of traditional China. During the Tang, the pass was strongly fortified and later was incorporated into the Ming-dynasty Great Wall. Initially, its appearance in this text seemed unusual, as the other geographical sites mentioned by the author are all located in southern China. Remembering that it represents the northern border, I believe it is included here to symbolize the recovery of the Central Plain and a return to the traditional geopolitical status quo with China in the center and the nomads on the fringes.

Lutang (lit. “Deer Hall”) is one of the original twenty-four Celestial Master parishes, located in the Chengdu basin. But it was more than just a parish, it was one of the eight “Superior” parishes (*shangpinzhi*, 上品治) and the site of the Covenant of Powers of Grand Orthodoxy (*zhengyi mengwei*, 正一盟威).⁹⁰ The lines “Lutang is entrusted [to you and you are] able to be noble, harmonize the people until it reaches the Renchen year” could be a directive to the Celestial Masters libationers like the entire sixth stanza was. It could also reflect the

⁹⁰ Verellen, 46. Verellen also goes into detail about the origins of the parish system and its use of Han correlative cosmology. Given this text’s frequent use of correlative cosmology, it is tempting to look for further connections between Lutang and the references in this stanza, I have been unable to match any of the Celestial Masters’ use of correlative cosmology in relation to Lutang parish and this text.

complete triumph of Lingbao over the other Daoist schools, as such an important Celestial Masters parish was unlikely to simply fall into the hands of another Daoist tradition.

Wu is an old name for southern China, referring to the lands held by the kingdom of Wu during the Three Kingdoms period (220-265). Both of the provinces mentioned in the next line, Jing and Xiang, fell within the boundaries of Wu. The line “as for the Wu lands, compared to other parts, they have many immortals” likely hints at the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*’s audience. Given the many references throughout the ten prophetic verses to geographical features in the south, as well as its interest in the Liu-Song dynasty, it is probable that the scripture was written for Daoists residing in the south. Thus, the text is pandering to its audience by noting the high number of Daoist adepts in the region.

The eighth and ninth stanzas are both uncharacteristically short. The other stanzas are composed of seven to nine couplets, with eight being the most common.⁹¹ By comparison, the eighth and ninth stanzas only have four and five. Additionally, the final character of the eighth stanza (身) rhymes with the final character of the ninth (貧) in medieval Chinese (cĭen and bĭən, respectively). This suggests that the eighth and ninth stanzas may have originally been a single stanza that was later split into two. However, the text repeatedly states that there are ten stanzas of prophetic verse. This leaves three options. One, the scripture originally

⁹¹ There is an additional irregularity at the end of the tenth stanza where half of a couplet appears to be missing in the received text.

had only nine stanzas, but a later hand split the eighth stanza into two, creating a total of ten stanzas, then changed all references to the number of stanzas in the text to reflect the change. This is extremely unlikely as what would the reason be for this change? Presumably, if material was added, the stanzas would have been matched to the others in length to make the alteration to the prophecies less obvious. The number ten symbolizes completeness, but the number nine is also auspicious in Daoist numerology. The second option is that there were originally ten stanzas, but one was lost somehow. To compensate, one stanza was split into two so that the number of stanzas referred to in the text remained consistent. This scenario is possible, but unable to be proven since texts that predate the received version of the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* only quote a small prose section from the end of the scripture. The third option is that there is nothing significant about the length of the stanzas and the rhyming characters are mere coincidence.

10) 柳谷安可親， 三倍放勳世。 爾乃知苦辛，
 聖帝无出治。 其在壬辰始， 明星煥水母。
 申後留十紀， 大鳥東南聚。 生血城門裏，
 羣鼠緣高木。 眾多不可止， 女子入宮府。
 雲龍無比擬， 愚者謂不然， 賢者自方峙。

The tenth stanza is quite odd. Chronologically, it seems to jump backwards in the narrative, starting its account prior to the descent of Li Hong in stanza nine and seemingly focusing on apocalyptic rather than millennial imagery after the messianic figure's arrival. It is possible that this stanza is out of order in the received text, although such a conclusion is untenable.

The Liu Valley was home of He Zhong, a figure from remote antiquity. A

semi-divine being, he presided over the west and was a contemporary of the Emperor Yao (堯, r. 2356-2255 BCE). According to legend, this was also the place where the sun rose. The line “The Liu Valley is secure and you are able to draw near [it], [for] more than three times Yao’s generation” suggests that the faithful will find a refuge in west, possibly Sichuan. Sichuan was the home of the Celestial Masters Daoists who resided in the Chengdu basin until Cao Cao forcibly relocated many of them to the north. The following line “you then will know bitterness and pain” clarifies that the western refuge is to be a temporary one and that the faithful will not be able to avoid the sufferings of the apocalypse. This seems to contradict other information in the text that the blessed lands and perhaps the Five Marchmounts will be free from the turmoil engulfing the generation.

The “wise thearch Ji” has already been revealed as the messiah Li Hong and this verse adds no additional information about him, although it does agree that he should come in the Renchen year. Chronologically, the stanza then seems to skip back to before Li’s arrival by mentioning the “Great Bird” last seen in the fourth stanza and his companion, the “Water Mother.” As the great bird’s role in Daoist apocalyptic texts was already discussed, I shall focus on the water mother instead.

Like the great bird, the water mother is one of the three judges of the Apocalypse according to the Shangqing scriptures. Originating in the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci*, 楚辭), the figure is associated with the direction west, Yin, and, in Shangqing texts, the moon. The water mother is also a term for the Queen Mother

of the West (*xiwangmu*, 西王母).⁹² The third judge, the celestial horse (*tianma*, 天馬) or the metal horse (*jinma*, 金馬), is absent from this text. Usually, the three judges appear together; however, throughout the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*, the author has used the character for horse (*ma*, 馬) and the particular term, metal horse, to refer to the ruling family of the Jin dynasty, the Simas (司馬). It makes sense, therefore, for the author to omit the celestial horse in order to avoid confusion between the figure of the judge and the Sima clan. Next comes the image of bloodshed and an upheaval of the nature order. “[There is] fresh blood inside the city’s gates. Hordes of rats climb tall trees, crowded and numerous, they are not able to stop.” This is contrasted with the description of normal human life in the next line. “Women enter palaces and men government offices.” This again depicts the many cosmic signs that the apocalypse is near, yet people continue to go about their business as if it were any other time, As he has repeatedly cautioned, the author concludes the stanza with “those who are foolish say it is not so, those who are wise straighten themselves and stand resolutely.”

⁹² See Robinet, 140.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

Obviously there is a high degree of speculation in work such as this. “For people who have entered apocalyptic time, everything quickens, everything enlivens, everything coheres. They become semiotically aroused—everything has meaning, patterns.”⁹³ But how can one be sure that the reconstructed meanings and patterns presented here were the same the author of the text saw? Connections that were obvious to cognizant readers fifteen hundred years ago may be obscured by the passage of time, others seen only by modern eyes. Additionally, apocalyptic texts are often deliberately vague, leaving it to the reader to “fill in the blanks.” Thus, it is unlikely that any two people will interpret the text in the exact same way. With those significant limitations acknowledged, I have nevertheless tried to ground my speculations in logic and probability, supporting them with the surviving evidence from the historical record. The goal of this paper then has been to study the apocalyptic markers in the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*, attempting to separate the generic imagery from the more significant references to contemporary events, in order to present a plausible interpretation and explanation of the text. From the stanzas analyzed here, it is clear that the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth* is a fifth-century Daoist text, written to add legitimacy to the emerging Liu-Song dynasty. Its audience was southern Daoists, as evidenced by the multitude of geographical references. While an apocalyptic work, the scripture appealed to medieval

⁹³ Landes, 21.

Chinese readers as much through providing a coherent framework for the political and social chaos that engulfed the state as through its ultimate message of Han superiority. In this way, the *Scripture on the Cycles of Heaven and Earth*, like all apocalyptic texts, is as much about the present as it is about the future. This is necessitated by the *ex eventu* status of such texts and serves as a reminder to modern scholars about the important temporal aspect of sacred literature and texts.

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