

The Anti-Messianism of the *Taiping Jing*

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Throughout the most voluminous of the textual layers which the *Taiping jing* divides into, that consisting of answers given by a Heavenly Teacher (*tian-shi*) to questions put to him by six Perfected Ones (*zhenren*),¹ a doctrine is expounded that can best be characterized as “anti-messianic millennialism”—the age of perfect peace is hailed as being imminent, but its coming is not claimed to be due to the intervention of a world saviour.

Reactions to messianic movements often consist in mere reassertions of orthodoxy, but in this stratum of the *Taiping jing* (hereafter to be called *TPJ-A*) one finds an attempt to defuse messianic ideology by presenting a reasoned alternative to the belief that a person of a messianic cast is capable of rescuing the good from the impending cataclysm. The author of *TPJ-A* is able to do this because he isolates millennial from messianic beliefs, claiming that the former are true and the latter are false—that the era of supreme peace is about to arrive, but that a Sage-to-Come is not needed to usher it in.

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¹ Reference is made to Wang Ming’s edition of the *Taiping jing*, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 2nd ed. (Beijing, 1979). Passages are identified by reference to *juan* number of the *Taiping jing*/page number in Wang Ming’s edition and to part (*bu*) number of the *Taiping jing chao* (A–J)/page number in Wang Ming’s edition. I will here define the extent of the stratum discussed in this article by pointing out which parts of the *Taiping jing* do not belong to it, the strata I call *TPJ-B* and *TPJ-C*, and the interpolations found in the *Taiping jing chao* and in quotations from the *jing* in encyclopedias. *TPJ-B* includes D/212.3–214.6, 110/524.4–112/585.2, 114/591.5–627.6, and I/710.2–712.4. *TPJ-B* divides into two substrata. *TPJ-C* includes B/1.1.4–8, B/12.8–10, D/193.3–194.3, D/209.4–211.10, E/305.10–307.9, E/308.3–7, E/309.2–310.4, F/330.3–7, 89/338.4–399.13, F/403.3–404.2, 100/455.6–456.9, 101/457.5–458.9, and 103/469.4–472.8. *TPJ C* may not be completely homogeneous. Interpolations probably include 1.3–8.14, 10.1–2, 10.4–10, 303.10–304.3, 457.11, 627.8–628.1, 708.12, 709.4–6, 715.2–8, 716.12–13, 718.3–6, and 732.5–6. Their precise extent is open to discussion; in the notes to this article I argue that several passages only evidenced in the *Taiping jing chao* invite suspicion. The rest of the text belongs to the strata discussed in this article, *TPJ-A*. The analysis of the *Taiping jing* into different strata was commenced by Xiong Deji, “*Taiping jing* de zuozhe he sixiang ji qi yu Huangjin he Tian-shidao de guanxi”, *Lishi yanjiu* 1962, No. 2, pp. 8–15, and continued by Hachiya Kunio, “*Taihei kei* ni okeru genji bunsho—kyō, shū, tsū no shisō”, *Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo Kiyō*, Vol. 92 (1983), pp. 36–8. There is no major disagreement as to what belongs to the stratum I call “*TPJ-A*”.

Anti-messianism can be viewed as the fundamental message of *TPJ-A*, as it integrates the theme that the guilt threatening to eradicate mankind has been inherited (*chengfu*) from the past and the theme that the collation (*goujiao*) of a scripture from already existing texts is capable of doing away with inherited guilt, themes that are pervasive in this textual stratum. The point of the doctrine of inherited guilt is that the destruction that threatens the world will be caused by evil committed in the distant past and not, as messianists claim, by the conjunctions of cosmic cycles or by the evil perpetrated by men living in the present age. The doctrine that a supreme scripture can be collated from already existing texts is also an answer to messianism, its message being that any truth a new sage might bring to earth is bound to be just as partial as those truths brought to earth by former sages: instead of waiting for yet another sage one should collate the texts already existing in the world, as their respective partialities cancel each other out and as the aggregate of the wisdom contained in them is fully capable of saving the world from the effects of inherited guilt. In this way *TPJ-A*'s arguments against those who hope for a coming messiah are interwoven with two of the major ideas developed in this textual stratum and, indeed, form the background for presenting them.

In this article I will try to present the ideas contained in *TPJ-A* as much on their own as possible, reserving my attempt to place these ideas within the context of the history of Chinese messianism for the article's concluding section.

***TPJ-A*'s Criticism of the Cyclical Theory of Disasters**

A prominent target of attack in *TPJ-A* is the idea that large-scale cataclysms occur because certain conjunctions of cosmic cycles have been reached:

—[The Perfected:] We wish to ask a question. Ever since the creation of Heaven and Earth mankind has become extinct (*sijin*), sometimes because of violent illnesses, sometimes because of water and sometimes because of weapons. We want to ask about the meaning of this—what crime is it that mankind has committed? Does this happen because of the conjunctions of Heaven and Earth (*tiandi zhi jihui*) or because of the hardship brought about by inherited guilt (*chengfu zhi e*)?

—[The Heavenly Teacher:] Well, the texts of ancient and modern times often say that it is because of the conjunctions of Heaven and Earth and Yin and Yang (*tiandi yinyang zhi hui*). This is not true: it is all because of hardship brought about by inherited guilt. (92/370-1)

Different ways in which life has been annihilated in the past are mentioned and the question is posed whether such destruction is due to the conjunctions

of cosmic cycles, as a certain textual corpus indicates, or to inherited guilt. The Heavenly Teacher denies the first possibility, denies that such catastrophes occur as a consequence of the complicated mechanical workings of the universe: he does not deny that cataclysms have occurred, but asserts that they have been caused by a human factor, by inherited guilt. From the terms used it seems that the cyclical theory of disasters criticized by the Heavenly Teacher has its roots in a calendar-based omenology.

The Heavenly Teacher, however, shows his willingness to accommodate his position that only inherited guilt is to be blamed for the impending cataclysm with the idea that such cataclysms happen at critical moments in the cycles of Heaven. The Perfected ask:

If it is not the case that people die at the completion of the periodic revolutions of the Way of Heaven (*tiandao shiyun zhou er si*), then why is there always chaos at the conjunctions of Heaven and Earth (*tiandi jihui*), wars at the conjunctions of the Five Phases (*wuxing jihui*), and misery at the termination of the Numinous Calendar of the Five Emperors (*wudi zhi shenli*)? (92/372)

The inclusion of many kinds of periodicities suggests that the general principle of temporal revolutions as causes of large-scale destruction is discussed. The answer given by the Heavenly Teacher is that life follows a cycle just as the year goes through four seasons, in other words that the death of winter is part of the natural course of events, the old giving rise to the new and the new giving rise to the old. As we shall see, the Heavenly Teacher is quite willing to accept the view that cosmos follows one and only one cycle; he is opposed to theories that posit certain combinations of a multiplicity of cycles as especially auspicious or inauspicious. But though according to the Heavenly Teacher the universe does develop cyclically, this cyclic progression is not seen by him as the actual cause of misery; the Heavenly Teacher explains how people have come to interpret natural disasters in such false terms:

It is just like families making a living: those who have accumulated much will survive without fail even if they meet with a bad year on account of inherited guilt and cannot harvest. The families that accumulate on a large scale will keep alive even though year after year they run into bad harvests. The families that accumulate only little will die from hunger if they are unable to harvest year after year. The families that are constantly poor will die out if they run into but one year with a bad harvest; they are unable to save themselves (*zi duchu*) and thus fall into dire straits and leave no progeny (*wu shi*). (92/373)

The principle of “the survival of the diligent” is used to illustrate the eschatological “survival of those without inherited guilt”. The analogy fails to

hold completely, however, as a person with no inherited guilt would not, according to the thought of *TPJ-A*, be in possession of anything that positively enabled him to survive; in *TPJ-A* goodness cannot be accumulated to offset evil as one stores up grain to avert hunger. The analogy is introduced by the Heavenly Teacher in order to distinguish between causes of different levels, one cause being the objective variation in man's environment and the other being man's subjective contribution to the amelioration of his condition. The Heavenly Teacher continues:

The Way of Heaven has its laws—such things happen because of [periodic] revolutions and not because of conjunctions (*yun, fei jihui ye*). If in summer and autumn people work hard at harvesting, they can sit down and eat in winter and spring. It is certain that if they do not work hard at harvesting in summer and winter they will die of hunger and be extinguished (*miejin*) in winter and spring. In times of old the heavenly books of the sages accordingly wrote this down as being caused by conjunctions (*yin ci gong ji wei jihui ye*). If you wish to know why, this was how it came about. (92/373)

The meaning of the harvest simili is that winter and spring do not cause starvation as such: the actual cause of people dying of hunger is that they do not work hard to accumulate food in summer and autumn. The world passes through its annual cycle, but this is only dangerous to those who do not prepare for what is in store for them. The Heavenly Teacher criticizes the theory propounded in a certain corpus of literature for only noticing the superficial fact of the simultaneity of conjunction and catastrophe, not the real cause behind the latter, inherited guilt.

The Heavenly Teacher does not entertain the messianic hope that the select will survive destruction on the day of doom; it holds that all, good and bad, are doomed to go under if the last day should come. The Perfected ask who it is that kills people when they die from droughts, cold, hunger, and epidemics, and the Heavenly Teacher replies that August Heaven and Greater Yang do.

[People who die in these ways] only happen to meet with the extreme of inherited guilt (*dan feng qi chengfu zhi ji*), and when Heaven's anger erupts, it does not ask whether someone is good or bad: those who happen to meet with it suffer the great calamity. (92/370)

But even here the Heavenly Teacher pays attention to the scholastic distinction between primary and secondary causes, for he continues:

If you wish to know how it really is, then it is like man: someone is very angry; he is mad at A but is not avoided by good people

and so instead harms B, C and D. What fault have B, C and D committed? They only meet with the eruption of someone's anger; the eruption of Heaven's anger is like this. Therefore when the blame of inherited guilt is most severe, it will cause people to die, with no distinction being made between good and bad. The great fault lies in this. My book is in accordance with the Heavenly Teachings and I wish now to get completely rid of the blame of inherited guilt. (92/370)

Elsewhere in *TPJ-A* the belief that eclipses of the sun and moon occur at periodic intervals is attacked by the Heavenly Teacher as coming from texts that only record the superficial fact that they occur together with such revolutions. His theory is that the occurrence of eclipses depends on whether goodness is practised by the emperor or not, and that the "release" of eclipses at the interstiches of time can be likened to the chance meeting of people whose former mutual acquaintance has predisposed them to be friends or enemies.²

The converse of this theory, that had the process of inherited guilt not been initiated, the occurrence of conjunctions would present no danger, is also expressed:

Now the Qi of Great Peace (*taiping qi*) is coming and peace will always reign, so one ought not to speak any more of death at conjunctions. [...] If those living before had all constantly observed the Essential Way and the Essential Virtue, [those living afterwards] would not die even though they met with a conjunction (*sui zao jihui, bu siwang ye*). (92/373)

This clearly shows that the author of *TPJ-A* consistently makes some rather subtle distinctions when analysing problems relating to the temporal effectuation of causes. In the thought of *TPJ-A* cosmic periodicities serve a trigger function, releasing the primary cause of misery, man's inherited guilt.

The fatalism implied by the theory of cosmic revolutions the Heavenly Teacher finds abhorrent, and he presents the following utilitarian argument against propagating it:

People of today are very stupid and extremely benighted: they tell each other that each time a periodic revolution is completed, auspicious and inauspicious things happen. If they say this, what benefit can there be in doing good? What harm can there be in doing evil? If the periodic revolutions are a natural matter (*shiyun ziran*), what merit can accrue to those who ardently practise good?

² 92/365–7, especially 92/367.4–7 (for *ai*, read *chu*). We note in passing the fact that once again the theories attacked by the Heavenly Teacher do not come out of nowhere—they are said to come from a group of texts, presumably texts known to the author of *TPJ-A*.

That the sages in times of old³ constantly followed the mind of Heaven and taught people to do good was precisely because of this. To talk about periodic revolutions but still bring chaos to the Way of Heaven: such words make Heaven and Earth unhappy.

As a matter of fact it is brought about by men's actions, whereas they instead talk about the periodic revolutions of Heaven. They are themselves evil, but are unwilling to call themselves that and instead consider Heaven and Earth evil—just as if a family has an unfilial and evil son who is not willing to call himself evil, but calls his father and mother evil: this is what it is. Therefore Heaven is furious and on the occasion of this periodic conjunction (*yin shi yunhui zhe*) kills man and fights with him, wanting to do away with his race (*le yi qi shilei*). (92/374–5)

A theme that plays a large role in the formulation of the theory of inherited guilt is introduced here: man tries to get rid of the guilt inhering in him by blaming it on objective factors. Not only is the attribution of the cause of disasters to objective factors wrong: to propagate such ideas is evil, as man, unburdened with the responsibility for his own behaviour, is sure to persevere in evil, and as Heaven, finding out that man blames it for things it has not done, is sure to extinguish mankind in revenge. With a rather engaging twist of logic the Heavenly Teacher argues that the cataclysms occurring at cyclical conjunctions are caused by proponents of the idea that cataclysms occur at cyclical conjunctions.

The Heavenly Teacher does not picture Heaven as an entity with the prime function of generating cycles; Heaven is intensely personal and just as it intervenes in history out of pity for the predicament of man, it does not like being blamed for what it has not done and is ready to smite man for his hypocrisy when cyclical conjunctions make this opportune. But though Heaven presents this aspect, within the context of the thought of *TPJ-A* as a whole one can best understand Heaven as an entity that effectuates the consequences of inherited guilt. Although the Heavenly Teacher basically offers a non-theistic explanation of the destructive effects of inherited guilt, he is tempted at times to introduce Heaven in his scenario of the final day because of his vehement dislike of man casting the blame rightly his onto Heaven.

At times the Way takes on the same role as Heaven; if man does not accord with the laws governing the universe,

the Way will fight and annihilate the human species (*juemie shilei*). The reason why the Way fights and there are droughts and epidemics and people become extinct (*sijin*) is that the ruler

³ For *ji*, read *gu*.

of man has accumulated [guilt] from the former kings and people living before and therefore does not accord completely with the intentions of Heaven. After a long time has elapsed there comes this conjunction and if people are unable to save themselves (*ji zi bu neng zi du*),⁴ they will be totally annihilated (*miejin*), i.e. totally annihilated so that no [members of the human] species are left over (*wu yu zhonglei*). (92/372–3)

The guilt man has inherited from his forebears causes (by itself or through the mediation of Heaven) the death of all of mankind. The eradication of human life is imagined to proceed in many ways: epidemics, floods, droughts, and warfare have been mentioned above and we shall learn of destruction by fire below. But this is not all. As man is a constituent element of the universe, his disappearance will lead to the disintegration of the cosmos itself:

The Three Lineages (*san tong*)—Heaven, Earth and Man—depend upon each other for their existence and develop giving form to each other, just like man has a head, feet and a stomach. If one Lineage is annihilated, all three Lineages will be destroyed.⁵ It is just as if a person has no head or feet or stomach: if one is missing, all three are doomed. Therefore when man loses⁶ the Way, Heaven and Earth will be destroyed. When the Three Lineages have been extinguished, it will become dark and gloomy and the ten thousand things will disappear (*wanwu yiner wang*). When things have been extinguished (*wu jin*), they cannot be born again immediately. How long will they be missing because of this? How long will they be extinct? (92/373)

According to the Heavenly Teacher the disruption of the triunity (*sanhe*) of the universe⁷ may continue for different lengths of time, depending on the magnitude of the destruction inflicted, but no matter how this is to be understood, it is at least clear that inherited guilt can lead to chaos of truly cosmic proportions.

It would seem that mankind has no hope for salvation at all, but the Heavenly Teacher mentions two ways of surviving the cataclysm attending the end of the world, one individual and one collective. The individual way consists in surviving by techniques for attaining immortality and the collective in

⁴ For *er*, read *nai* (i.e. *neng*, a very common abbreviation in *TPJ-A*).

⁵ For the theory of Three Lineages, cf. 40/80, 93/383, H/681. It is often linked with the necessity of procreating, of man carrying on the Lineages of Heaven and Earth; cf. 36/43–4, D/218–21, G/649. Inherited guilt hinders man in his duty to procreate; cf. 35/35–6.

⁶ For *da*, read *shi*.

⁷ See Rao Zongyi, “Xiang'er jiujiu yu sanhe yi”, *Qinghua xuebao*, n.s., Vol. 4, No. 2 (1964), pp. 79–81.

the universal obliteration of inherited guilt through putting into effect the truth contained in a scripture collated according to the Heavenly Teacher's instructions.

The reference to the ability to save oneself in the quotations above is a hint that—at least theoretically speaking—man can do without the Heavenly Teacher's help. This theme is taken up by the Heavenly Teacher when he says that

human life has its end: [those belonging to] the upper, lower and middle [categories] each live out their Heaven-allotted years.⁸ There may be those who have obtained the true Way and who are therefore able to save themselves from the world (*neng de du shi*); these people have no blame of inherited guilt (*wu chengfu zhi guo*)—this is in accordance with nature.⁹ (92/372)

The techniques mentioned by the Heavenly Teacher as enabling one to escape the world are only discussed within the framework of inherited guilt in this one passage and I think it is safe to say that they do not play an integral part of the complex of ideas discussed in this article, interesting as this would be.¹⁰ The author of *TPJ-A* has adopted concepts found in other strata of the *Taiping jing*, often distorting them in the process,¹¹ and some of the immortality techniques mentioned by him have been borrowed in this way. Such loans have often not been assimilated to the thought that characterizes *TPJ-A* as a whole. Individual absolution from inherited guilt is not easily harmonized with the doctrine, repeated time and again in *TPJ-A*, that only the collation of a scripture according to the Heavenly Teacher's prescriptions is able to do away with the evil besetting this world, and I will therefore disregard this idea in the following discussion.

⁸ The three categories mentioned are probably 120, 100 and 80 years; cf. 102/464. The effect of the world following the ultimate scripture is not that all will attain eternal life, but that all will live out their allotted span of life and not “die one after the other (*xiang sui si*)” or “die in a heap (*bing si*)” (92/372) on account of inherited guilt (36/46); cf. 49/161, 90/340, 98/451. However, even in the most categorical statements of the mortality of man, the exception is made that man can “save himself from the world” and become an immortal; cf. 72/258, 92/372. As mentioned below, *TPJ-A*'s ideas related to immortality seem to have been borrowed from other strata of the *Taiping jing* and from other texts, and these ideas have not been integrated in the thought of *TPJ-A* as a whole; hence the inconsistency.

⁹ For the meaning of the expression “*ziran zhi shu*”, which I have translated as “in accordance with nature” (and not “in accordance with natural techniques”), cf. 35/36, 36/44, 92/378, 98/448, 116/643, 118/680.

¹⁰ A connection between the practice of the meditative technique *shouyi* and the disappearance of inherited guilt is made by *Taiping jing chao* C/60; the *Taiping jing chao* is not true to the *Taiping jing*, however, as there is nothing to indicate such a connection in the corresponding passage of the *Taiping jing*.

¹¹ The concepts of, e.g., *chengfu* and *goujiao* have been borrowed from *TPJ-B*. Space does not permit explaining the meaning of these concepts in the different strata in which they occur.

Sages and their Soteriological Role

Above, cataclysmic events that a messiah might have been able to help one through have been discussed, but we have not yet heard what *TPJ-A* has to say on the subject of sages and their role in history.

A fundamental principle of *TPJ-A* is that Heaven and Earth cannot communicate directly with mankind.¹² Heaven and Earth have two ways of conveying what is on their mind:¹³ implicit and destructive omens¹⁴ and explicit and constructive sages which they send to earth to instruct mankind, as “all sages and wise men are born of Heaven” (41/87):

Heaven and Earth do not speak to man, so therefore from time to time they give birth to a sage, a sagely teacher, and make him convey what they have to say. (G/651)¹⁵

The cosmic powers have to reveal truth to man by means of sages as they cannot force him to do good. The subjective involvement of each and every person is called for in order to bring about the era of peace and therefore Heaven and Earth have to use indirect, communicative, means to initiate the reformation of the world:

—[The Perfected:] If Heaven and Earth are the most authoritative, the most¹⁶ spirit-like, if they are spirit-like and¹⁷ numinous and have the most supreme rank, why do they not eradicate the maladies [besetting the world] themselves, instead of transmitting their words to mankind?

—[The Heavenly Teacher:] Heaven and Earth are the father and mother of the ten thousand things, but even though a father and a mother are good, if their child lives among them doing evil, being evil on purpose and defying their instructions, then even though they are good, it would still be an evil family. [...] If Heaven and Earth therefore want goodness and peace to reign they have to make spirits and sages transmit their words and issue numinous scripts in order to communicate [with man] (*yi xianggaoyu*).
(53/200)

¹² See, e.g., 102/462.

¹³ A way of minor importance is the revelation of numinous texts by, for example, letting them emerge from the He and Luo rivers; cf. 41/85, 47/140–141, 48/152, 86/131, 91/348, 102/460. Texts of this nature do not seem to play a significant role in the thought of *TPJ-A*.

¹⁴ Catastrophes are a way for Heaven and Earth to speak to man; cf. 43/103, 86/315–16, 86/321, 1/714.

¹⁵ Cf. 50/169, 67/254.

¹⁶ For *zi*, read *zhi*.

¹⁷ For *neng*, read *er*; a mistaken reconstitution of the abbreviation mentioned in note 4.

Only by hearing truth can man mend his ways, and man can only hear truth if Heaven and Earth use the medium of language—“the sayings of Heaven and the dicta of Earth” (*tiantan diyu*)¹⁸—to convey it to mankind.

Heaven gives birth to sages because it is moved to pity by the human predicament, and the question naturally arises why Heaven does not come to the rescue of mankind now by giving birth to a new sage (Earth does not figure in this role):

—[The Perfected:] I wish to ask why [Heaven] does not again give birth to a good sage (*he bu geng sheng shan shengren hu*), now that Heaven and Earth are so chaotic and suffer so much from such violent illnesses? If Heaven¹⁹ again gave birth to a Sage-to-Come, why would this be of no avail (*tian fu sheng houshengren nai wu yi, he ye*)?

—[The Heavenly Teacher:] [. . .] I have personally been sent down because of this matter; I dare not hide anything and enrage Heaven. Fine, listen carefully! I will explain this matter to you point by point and say everything about it, above as below. Please be comfortably seated!

—Yes, yes.

—Fine! The sages of ancient and modern times have their strengths and weaknesses, each being superior in one matter. They all present the sayings of Heaven and the dicta of Earth, but what each does is different. What the many sages who have appeared before and after (*zhongsheng qianhou chu zhe*) have done is different in each case. They all find joy in knowing the mind of Heaven and the intentions of Earth, in doing away with evil and inducing goodness, but their words are not completely identical; sometimes they agree, sometimes they disagree, but generally speaking [their teachings] resemble each other. The many sages are not able [each on his own] to know completely the intentions of Heaven and Earth, and therefore Heaven and Earth constantly suffer from violent illnesses that cannot be eradicated. If [Heaven] was once more to give birth to a sage, it would be like this again (*fu yu sheng shengren, hui fu ru si*). Heaven has been sad for a long time and for this reason it has sent me down to speak for it and tell you. The reason I tell it to you is that the spirits of Heaven say that in all the universe only you take joy in goodness and wish to accord with the mind of Heaven. Therefore I will tell the circumstances to you. What I say is not empty words—do you

¹⁸ For this expression see. e.g., 56/200, 86/320–1, 102 467. The Heavenly Teacher is also said to present “the sayings of Heaven and the dicta of Earth”: cf. 46/127, 51 187. 90–345. So are sages: cf. 50/169.

¹⁹ For *li*, read *tian*.

not know it?

—Yes, yes!

(91/350)

There is, I believe, a textual problem in this passage; I argue in the last section of this article that originally it did not contain the locution “*hou-shengren*”, which I have translated as “Sage-to-Come”. But even if we have to reject this occurrence of a term used in early Taoism to denote the messiah, the sage discussed in the above passage is undoubtedly a figure of the hypothetical future, as the possibility whether he would be able to deliver man from his present troubles (and not whether he could have delivered man from his past troubles) is discussed. Though it is not spelled out in which way the Perfected think he may save the world, he is clearly thought to appear in response to the chaos and suffering that the world is experiencing at the time the question is put. As the Heavenly Teacher attributes the cause of such misery to inherited guilt but times its appearance in the final phase of the cyclic motion the universe goes through, it seems that the advent of a new sage is supposed by the Perfected to lie in the near future, as according to *TPJ-A* the world is presently in the final phase of its periodic revolution, the Lower Antiquity of the Five Despots.²⁰

“Sages have been given birth to in different eras” (*yi shi er sheng*; 70/279),²¹ but they have not been able to grasp all facets of absolute truth, their view of it necessarily being partial:

Ever since the creation of Heaven and Earth the former teachers (*xianshi*) have not been able to expound exhaustively and differentially the Great Limits of Heaven²² at [past] revolutions of Heaven (*tian shiyun*), thus making the emperors lose the rule of Heaven and letting these catastrophes arise. (69/270)

The lack of ability to save the world on the part of the sages who appear at the termination of cosmic cycles is also the reason why Heaven has arranged the meeting between the Perfected and the Heavenly Teacher, making the former ask questions on its behalf and making the latter give answers on its behalf:

²⁰ Cf. the expressions “*jin xiagu*”, “*jin wuba*”: 36/46, 47/139, 49/161, 72/293, 96/436, 103/589, 116/636, 117/665.

²¹ The temporal distance involved is sometimes quite staggering; says the Heavenly Teacher, “[I only] present an outline [of the truth] and show its beginnings in order that you can take [what I say] as a model and write it down. When writing about ancient and modern affairs, the essential truths [written by you] will of themselves be exactly identical with what the divine sages (*shensheng*) have written down—even though they are trillions of years (*yiyiwan nian*) away, it is as if you talked to them face to face (*xiangdui er yu*).” (91/259–60)

²² “*Buji*”. This concept has been borrowed from *TPJ-B* and is difficult to explain within the context of *TPJ-A*. Takahashi Tadahiko, “*Taihei kei no shisō kōzō*”, *Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjō Kiyō*, Vol. 95 (1984), pp. 303–5, has a discussion.

When in [past] Heavenly cycles sages have been given birth to (*tianyun sheng shengren*) and made to speak, they have not been able to²³ eradicate its maladies completely, and so it has made you, the Perfected, come to me and be face to face with me (*yu wu xiang du*) in order that I can tell you everything for Heaven. (109/675)

It is tempting to regard the Heavenly Teacher as a saviour, but the Heavenly Teacher thinks himself different from the sages the world has seen hitherto, different in that he does not bring with him any new doctrine. A sage is someone with something to say to mankind on behalf of Heaven, and the Heavenly Teacher, strictly speaking, does not bring any message of a doctrinal nature. In the Heavenly Teacher's description of his own mission on earth only the practical task of collation is mentioned:

[Heaven prizes orthodoxy and abhors deviance] and therefore it has sent me down in order to collate [the ultimate scripture] and thereby get rid of these grudges and this hardship, making tranquil the virtuous state and absolving [man] from the blame inherited since the beginning of the universe, making evil disappear completely and causing orthodox Qi to rule completely. (91/361)

According to the Heavenly Teacher truth already resides in the world. He holds that each sage has limitations but that the aggregate of the doctrines brought to earth by them constitutes the whole truth—he only instructs people how to edit the supreme scripture on the basis of the fragments of truth left behind in the world by the sages of former times.

The heavenly scripts, sagely books and wise sayings of the past and present are already complete (*yi beizu*); the only thing to worry about is how to assemble (*ji ju*) them. Each is superior in [but] one matter, so if one was now to use the methods of one school, one would not be able to get completely rid of the catastrophes of Heaven and Earth. Therefore catastrophes have been allowed to continue and have been inherited by those living afterwards, causing them to increase in severity day by day.²⁴ (41/86)

In order to do away with the inherited guilt causing cosmic disasters one needs to be in possession of the complete truth which Heaven has dispensed to mankind in its component parts. Each part is like a medicine which can cure only one kind of disease. Each component part of the complete truth is good; the Heavenly Teacher does not consider heterodoxy to consist in holding

²³ For *er*, read *neng*.

²⁴ For *yue*, read *ri*. Compare this passage with the similar 51/188.

one's partial truth to be the whole truth, and the incompleteness of partial truth thus only causes maladies to linger in the world—it does not actually give rise to the same maladies (as would be the case with heterodoxy). The Heavenly Teacher continues to describe this unrecognized gradual accumulation of truth:

Heaven pities the virtuous ruler for inheriting it in his turn. Heaven knows²⁵ that those living afterwards are not in a position to give rise to these²⁶ catastrophes and this culpability all by themselves—in reality the blame rests on the sages living before who each were superior in one matter and who each had things they did not understand and points on which they were wrong. Heaven recognized the incompleteness [of truth] and so from time to time let scripts and charts emerge from the He and Luo Rivers as well as other spirit writings—but they did not say the same thing either (*bu tong ci*). Sages emerged in different eras (*yi shi er chu*), each doing one thing, but they did not say the same thing either—each had something which he did not touch upon, each had a weak point. From this it is clear that they did not completely know the ultimate truth (*dongji zhi yi*) and because of this caused catastrophes to constantly linger in the space between Heaven and Earth. Throughout time it has never broken off—there is only a question of its being more or less severe.

(41/86)

The idea of the objective but dispersed existence of absolute truth is linked by the Heavenly Teacher with the futility of Heaven giving birth to another sage. The Heavenly Teacher goes on:

Therefore Heaven has planned that when the scripture is made now it shall be absolute and complete above and below, so that if a sage were to be given birth again (*fu sheng shengren*) there would be nothing he could do, nothing he could add, nothing he could say,²⁷ nothing he could help the ruler of great virtue of Heaven and Earth with. If Heaven were again to give birth to a sage (*ruo tian fu sheng shengren*), his sayings would again be superior in one field [only] and catastrophes whose venom never ceases would still linger on—he would in no way be different from the former sages.

(41/86)

TPJ-A's doctrine of the completeness of truth holds that the world has seen several sages, who have each contributed to the stock of truth in the world.

²⁵ For *he*, read *zhi*.

²⁶ For *bi*, read *ci*.

²⁷ *rong* is probably a miswritten *yan* and should be deleted.

Sages, however, are not individually capable of speaking the whole truth; the whole truth can be obtained only by editing into one scripture the fragments of truth left by the former sages; only with this in one's hands will it be possible to rid the world of the cause of all its troubles, inherited guilt.

Inherited Guilt

The doctrine of inherited guilt²⁸ is first and foremost designed to explain why innocent people suffer and evil people have success—a child may, for instance, suffer harm from its fellow villagers because its parents have wronged them in some way.²⁹ In the parlance of the Heavenly Teacher those who suffer in this way are called “those living afterwards” (*housheng* or *houren*), whereas those who originate a chain of events causing other people to suffer are called “those living before” (*xiansheng* or *xianren*). Such terms invite interpretation in genealogical terms, hinting perhaps that guilt should be explained as “running in the family”. But though the parent-child relationship is used by the Heavenly Teacher to illustrate the concept of inherited guilt, it would be wrong to interpret the concept in such a restricted way.³⁰ Guilt is not inherited biologically, but in a pervasive and indiscriminate manner; the doctrine is not used to explain why certain people are affected by sins committed by their ancestors, but why all of the present age suffer under the transgression committed by “those living before”:

Those living before just slightly (*shaoshao*) discarded the Way and the Virtue, and after long, long times have gone, [the guilt they incurred] has been inherited and those living afterwards suffer from its grievous venom and severe catastrophes. All this is because [the rulers] did not rule in accordance with the Way. As for [the human race's] being extinguished at conjunctions (*yunhui miejue*) without being able to escape (*bu neng zi chu*), the main cause to be blamed lies in this. (92/373–4)

Guilt is not just passed on from one generation to the next but grows epidemically once let loose and is contracted by an ever larger group of people. The Heavenly Teacher uses the spread of evil doctrines to illustrate this aspect of inherited guilt:

²⁸ Previous studies of the topic of inherited guilt include Ōfuchi Ninji, “Taihei kei no shisō ni tsuite”, *Tōyō gaku*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (1941), pp. 152–6; Takahashi Tadahiko, “Taihei kei no shisō no shakaiteki sokumen”, *Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo kiyō*, Vol. 100 (1986), pp. 250–2; Kamitsuka Yoshiko, “Taihei kei no shofu to taihei no riron ni tsuite”, *Nagoya Daigaku Kyōyōbu kiyō*, Vol. 32 (1988), pp. 41–75.

²⁹ 37/54, 40/80, 45/121, 67/251.

³⁰ This is not to say that such an idea is not expressed (cf. 67/252, E/308, 86/314–15), but that it does not seem to be typical of the thought of *TPJ-A*.

If one teacher teaches ten disciples and his teachings are heterodox and untruthful (*xie bu shi*), and each of his ten disciples teaches ten persons, then as many as one hundred persons will adhere to false teachings (*wei shuo*). [The one hundred persons teach one thousand, who in their turn teach ten thousand, and] if ten thousand persons propagate [such teachings] in all the four directions, the whole world will adhere to heterodox teachings. Since those who propagate [such teachings] are so many, and since they corroborate each other by transmitting [the same teachings] in such numbers, they cannot be opposed, and thus [what they teach] will become the dominant teaching (*chang shuo*). This is originally because one person failed to speak the substantiated truth (*shihe*), but on account of it all fail to speak the substantiated truth, thereby rebelling against Heaven's orthodox scriptures (*tian zheng wen*) and changing the habits and customs [of the whole world]. The world considers it a serious malady, but is unable to prohibit it, and later on it becomes worse. Such is the hardship of inherited guilt: it is clear that it is not the fault of those living afterwards. Men of later times do not realize that its origin is far off and instead criticize their contemporaries, thereby begrudging each other and producing Qi of injustice which cannot be got rid of and which becomes worse every day. (37/58)

The exponential spread of heresy may well be the paradigm of inherited guilt, the process that led the author of *TPJ-A* to formulate his theory. Though the relationship between the moral and doctrinal realms is not discussed by the Heavenly Teacher, it is much more understandable how he can entertain the thought that a scripture can eradicate evil if evil is viewed primarily as doctrinal deviation: once people get a chance to learn the truth they will adhere to it and evil will disappear of itself. There are several places where the Heavenly Teacher makes this link explicitly, showing that for him moral evil was a result of doctrinal deviance.³¹ In a passage following the above, for example, such doctrinal deviance is not just an illustration of inherited guilt, but constitutes it:

The Fundamental Way is constantly orthodox and does not cheat people with heterodoxy. People only suffer³² from the rulers and teachers living before going slightly amiss of orthodoxy in their teaching (*Jiaohua xiaoxiao shi zheng*); they lost the orthodox words and the orthodox way of nourishing themselves,³³ and

³¹ See, e.g., 42/92–3, 51/190, 677244, 96/415–16, 98/447.

³² For *zuo*, read *zuo*.

³³ Cf. 37/55–6, 47/136, 49/164, 102/466.

subsequently [people] learned from each other; because of this it is worse day by day for those living afterwards. (37/59–60)

The evil inhering in this world is imagined to have begun with one person, the teacher who started telling lies. This “one man” of the past has a counterpart in the “one man” of the present: whereas the Heavenly Teacher blames the “original sinner” for the evil of the present, the present blames it on the emperor, the person they hold responsible for the miserable state of the world. This comes out clearly in a following passage:

[Things get worse and worse through inherited guilt], but the stupid are unaware [that its origin is far off in the past] and instead blame the contemporary ruler (*shi jun*) and contemporary people (*shi ren*): do [the contemporary ruler and the contemporary people] not thus suffer great injustice? All in the world are heterodox but they are unable to realize this. If the one person of the emperor (*diwang yi ren*) had the virtue of ten thousand [good] men, would it not still³⁴ be like this? (37/60)³⁵

Just like everybody else, the emperor is the victim of inherited guilt, and a powerless victim at that, as there is virtually nothing he can do on his own that can help the world. To blame him is therefore an act of evil which compounds the misery of the world, creating “knots” (*jie*) of injustice.

The expression “*yi ren*” (“one man”) is also used to signify the new sage whose coming is unnecessary and belief in whom is dangerous.³⁶ Moreover, the supreme scripture “should be read by all in the world; it has not arisen just for the sake of one person”,³⁷ “one person” here presumably referring to the emperor. Though hypothetically the misery of this world may be attributed to one person (of the past), it is not to be blamed on one person (of the present), nor can the world be delivered from it by one person (of the future); moreover, the salvation of the world is not performed for the benefit of one person (of the present). *TPJ-A* clearly thinks in terms of the collectivity of mankind.

There are two main views—often combined—as to who is the carrier of inherited guilt: one is that it is mankind in general, the other that it is the emperor. The first of these views is more easily harmonized with the other doctrines presented in the text, but it is not difficult to see why the emperor is often said to be the one who needs to be liberated from inherited guilt, for he is the one blamed for its effects by the rest of the world. The word “*chengfu*” (“inherited guilt”) very often occurs in phrases such as “the blame of inherited guilt” (*chengfu zhi ze*, *chengfu zhi zhe*, etc.), indicating that

³⁴ For *du*, read *you*.

³⁶ 96/420–1; cf. 42/92.

³⁷ 96/419; cf. 98/451.

inherited guilt has two aspects, a real malady affecting the world and the accusation that someone is responsible for that malady. The same ambiguity exists regarding who set in motion the process leading to the present misery. Whereas it is often stated to have begun with ordinary people going amiss of the intentions of Heaven, in many passages its origin is attributed to “the former kings” (*xian wang*), presumably because causation and responsibility are concepts that are difficult to keep apart.

The theme of blame occurs in another context. The Heavenly Teacher explains how ever since Middle Antiquity (*zhonggu*)—when the decline of the world set in—people have paid scant attention to the important duty of selecting the right persons for office. This neglect is inherited and has been exacerbated in the contemporary Lower Antiquity, thus incurring the displeasure of Heaven and the uninterrupted occurrence of bad harvests. The Heavenly Teacher says that

...[people] do not know that Heaven abhors [their choosing wrong persons for office]; they do not blame themselves, but talk about Heaven’s periodic revolutions (*tian shiyun*), saying that in ancient times it was like this [too]. The Heavenly Way does not like people shifting their guilt onto Heaven; the ignorant do not reflect on their own mistakes, but instead pass their³⁸ blame upwards, shifting their guilt onto the emperor.

(96/418)

Man thus tries to objectify his guilt in two ways, by attributing it to the emperor and by attributing it to the periodicities of Heaven. As we saw above Heaven wants to destroy mankind when insulted in this way. It is interesting to note that though the Heavenly Teacher has equally good grounds for casting the emperor in the role of the avenger, this is not done: though he pictures Heaven as willing to do evil, he seems to have had reservations about saying anything that could place the emperor in an unfavourable light. This may reveal the author’s motivation for writing *TPJ-A*: it is meant to serve as an apology for the temporal ruler who is given the glorious role of inaugurating the coming era of peace but who is not to suffer the indignity of being blamed for the present misery of the world.³⁹

The injunction against blaming Heaven and the emperor might be taken to imply that man should consider himself culpable; though to some extent this is the case, the Heavenly Teacher has prepared an excuse for each person

³⁸ For *gong*, read *qi*.

³⁹ Cf. also the apologetic tone of the following statement: “That the rule of the king is not peaceful is not really the fault of the king only; it is because ordinary people lose the Way and make light of things and do wrong: those that commit faults are not just one man—there are ten thousand origins and this makes it difficult for [the king’s] rule to obtain peace and so it goes awry” (35/34). For passages with similar intent see, e.g., 35/33, 35/39, 37/54–5, 42/95, 48/151, 49/165, 86/316.

living in the present age; this excuse is that their guilt is not their own but has been inherited from the past:

—[The Perfected:] Why don't you punish man for not following the Way?

—[The Heavenly Teacher:] That cannot be done.

—Why is that?

—Those living before only went very slightly amiss of the Way; [their guilt] could be evidenced in their acts, but it was not enough to warrant punishment. Those living afterwards inherited their guilt and by accumulating (*xuji*) it committed transgressions. Even though those living afterwards commit crimes that should be punished by the death sentence and even though they are heterodox and flimsy in their actions, they have only learnt this from those living before. So even though they go amiss of the Heavenly Way and rule contrary to the Way, it has all been transmitted from one teacher to the next, each having taught it to somebody else. It is thus not one person [i.e. the emperor] who has made all these transgressions and therefore one ought not to punish him severely. The crimes of men in the present⁴⁰ age of Lower Antiquity all warrant the death sentence, but when the sages make laws, they cannot subject mankind to severe punishments all of a sudden, thereby destroying the human race (*mie ren shilei*). For this reason Heaven has sent me down in order to reform their actions and eliminate their guilt [...] (108/515)

Though all men deserve to die, the sage is not to act as a messianic smiter of evil, as this would result in the extermination of mankind, evil being pervasive rather than concentrated in a certain group of people; and as people of the present age are not personally responsible for their sins, their guilt having been inherited from the past. The evil of the present is moreover not rooted in evil of the past. The transgressions committed by those living before were very slight, being in the nature of innocuous mistakes rather than sins, but left alone to breed, they have turned into cardinal sins that can, superficially at least, only be absolved by capital punishment.

In this way both the originators and the inheritors of the guilt that threatens to destroy the world are absolved from blame. The Heavenly Teacher is obviously not out to seek scapegoats, but his “theodicy” seems to be a refined way of objectifying guilt, in postulating that excusable transgressions can acquire the quality of cardinal sins if their quantity is sufficient. The Heavenly Teacher attempts a definition of the word “*chengfu*”, where the same theme occurs and where those living before are completely absolved from guilt as their transgressions are said to be inadvertent:

⁴⁰ For *nian*, read *jin*.

—[The Perfected:] [. . .] We do not know whether *cheng* and *fu* are the same or not.

—[Heavenly Teacher:] Well, “*cheng*” refers to before, “*fu*” to afterwards. “*Cheng*” means that those living before originally acted in accordance with (*cheng*) the intentions of Heaven, but then unconsciously (*bu zi zhi*) went amiss of them ever so slightly; after a long time had elapsed, [their mistakes] had amassed and those of today living afterwards then through no guilt of their own succeed to (*meng*) [the formers’] mistakes and culpability and so continuously suffer under the catastrophes engendered by them. Therefore that which is before is *cheng* and that which is afterwards is means that the catastrophes do not arise from one man’s rule [i.e. from the rule of the emperor]. In close succession there have been times of unquiet and “before” and “after” each encumber the other, which is why it is called “*fu*”. “*Fu*” means that those living before encumber (*fu*) those living afterwards. (39/70)

Strictly speaking, this attempt at semantic analysis explains *cheng* as something good—following the intentions of Heaven—and *fu* as something bad—passing on one’s own guilt to the coming generations. As “*chengfu*” is used as one word this would make it morally ambivalent and it seems much more likely that in the above passage “*cheng*” is implicitly glossed as “*meng*” (“to succeed to”, “to receive”).

One might think that good deeds could be inherited over the generations too, but this is not the case. As goodness consists in conformity with the way the universe works, it has no causal efficacy—it blends in completely with the cosmic background and “does” nothing. The gradualist explanation of the origin of evil thus does not entail a gradualist method of salvation: small acts of good cannot offset small acts of evil.⁴¹ The author is compelled to postulate the instantaneous reversion of mankind to its initial stage; if the debt of guilt cannot be reduced little by little, some way has to be found of cancelling the burden of compounded evil in one move. The entity that has causal efficacy to do this is the scripture collated according to the prescriptions of the Heavenly Teacher when handed over to a virtuous emperor and distributed to mankind at large.⁴² We will now examine how this is to be done.

⁴¹ See, however, B/22–4, where the ideas that good may offset evil and that good may be accumulated are elaborated. In this passage three other themes are presented that are not typical of *TPJ-A*: the inheritance of guilt within families, time limits to the inheritance of guilt for different categories of men, and the use of cyclical characters in the explanation of inherited guilt. Though I see no formal grounds for doubting the authenticity of this passage of the *Taiping jing chao* (which has no counterpart in the fragmented *Taiping jing*) the concentration of so many untypical ideas makes the passage unreliable as a basis for the interpretation of the thought of *TPJ-A* as a whole.

⁴² There is one passage where the origin (and disappearance) of inherited guilt is pictured in a natural way, as the last stage in the development of cosmos. “[The Primal Qi gives birth to

The Collation of a Supreme Scripture

The necessity of collating a supreme scripture⁴³ comes from the bias inhering in the revelations made by sages of former times:

Heaven does not once again make a sage speak (*tian bu fu shi shengren yu*), as he cannot totally rid [the world] of its maladies; therefore it makes men of all the world speak and collect all ancient scriptures and study them. (91/356)

The object of the search for every scrap of truth seems to be twofold: the sayings of men of the present age and the writings of the ancient sages. However, the former must be committed to writing, so the task prescribed by the Heavenly Teacher is that of editing textual material. Immediately following the Heavenly Teacher's answer to the question why Heaven does not once again give birth to a sage, we hear that

the reason why the numinous writings of Upper Antiquity, of Middle Antiquity and of Lower Antiquity are to be collated is that perhaps the numinous writings of Upper Antiquity do not talk about something, whereas those of Middle Antiquity do, or the numinous writings of Middle Antiquity do not talk about something, whereas the numinous writings of Lower Antiquity do. In this way matters will be arranged according to category and complement each other (*yi lei xiang cong xiang bu*), forming together one good saying (*yi shan ci*) that is why man is made to collect the texts, for only then can the Numinous Book and the intentions of Heaven and Earth be seen. (91/350–1)

Heaven and Earth, who together produce man.] The Three Lineages [i.e. Heaven, Earth and Man] together produce and nourish all things; they are called 'goods'; goods produce desires, desires produce heterodoxy, heterodoxy produces treachery, treachery produces deceit, and deceit produces harm. If harm cannot be stopped then chaos comes, and if chaos cannot be stopped and order cannot be restored, [the world] distressfully returns to its origin. Therefore it is called 'inherited guilt'" (E/305). While this seemingly seeks to derive the historical downfall of mankind from cosmological principles, it is frankly difficult to see how such a definition of inherited guilt can be harmonized with what we hear about it elsewhere in the text—thus, e.g., the position that inherited guilt "will be eliminated of itself" is expressly criticized elsewhere (72/295). The passage implies *inter alia* that inherited guilt will vanish of itself, that once it has reached its extreme and general chaos reigns, the universe will regenerate itself. Either this naturalistic interpretation of inherited guilt is one of the many ideas found in *TPJ-A* that have not been fully assimilated to the main thought of the text, or the passage has suffered corruption from being abridged in the *Taiping jing chao*.

⁴³ Previous studies of the topic of the compilation of an ultimate scripture include Max Kaltenmark, "The Ideology of the *T'ai'-p'ing ching*," in: *Facets of Taoism*, ed., Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven 1979), pp. 24–9; Hachiya Kunio (1983), pp. 35–81; Takahashi Tadahiko (1984), pp. 310–12.

Two scriptures are spoken of as being able to deliver the world from evil in *TPJ-A*, one authored by the Heavenly Teacher and one constructed from already existing texts. The author of *TPJ-A* is bound by logic to hold that the Heavenly Teacher does not present any new doctrine for the salvation of the world: such a plan would necessarily be just as partial as those put forth by former sages. Nonetheless *TPJ-A* is full of references to “the Heavenly Teachers book” and suchlike, references that imply that the Heavenly Teacher does make a positive statement after all.⁴⁴ There may be no way of explaining away this contradiction.

The idea of collating a supreme scripture may have arisen as a way of proving that the truth imparted by the Heavenly Teacher is also validated by the textual corpus identified in *TPJ-A* as advocating the practice of Holding unto the One (*shouyi*), a practice that the Heavenly Teacher at times denigrates as superficial and preparatory and at times praises as consistent with the truth brought by himself.⁴⁵ The Heavenly Teacher wants to prove that his ideas are in harmony with the ideas about Holding unto the One:

I fear that the common people are stupid and will not believe my book as they have been deluded for a long time. Therefore I give instruction to unite (*he*) it with the ancient and modern texts on Holding unto the One and to arrange [these texts] according to categories so that they may validate each other (*xiang zhengming*). (96/410)

The same vocabulary is used to describe the collation of the supreme scripture and later on in the same section the expression “*goujiao*” (“to collate”) describes the same process with regard to texts on the Way and on spirits,⁴⁶ categories more diffuse than that of texts on Holding unto the One. If this attempt to co-opt his adversaries was what led the Heavenly Teacher to propound his idea of the collation of a supreme scripture, it would be quite understandable why in the more advanced forms of this theory, when only texts already existing in the world are to be collated, the book authored by the Heavenly Teacher himself still hovers (to us, inconsistently) in the background.

The Heavenly Teacher repeatedly informs the Perfected that what he tells them is only an outline (*gang*) and a beginning (*shi*) of truth⁴⁷ and what

⁴⁴ That some truths have not been told by the former sages is implied by passages to the effect that there are things (like the injunction against drilling wells in Mother Earth) “that the sages of former revolutions of Heaven have not touched upon” (45/114; compare with 45/124). Undoubtedly, there are passages where the Heavenly Teacher implies that he brings new truths, but it is significant that there are no passages that state this explicitly.

⁴⁵ For *shouyi* see, e.g., B/18, 92/369, 96/421–2. The doctrine of *shouyi* is mentioned as belonging to a separate corpus of texts 96/408, 102/459–60, 1/712. At times *TPJ-A* mentions other corpora of texts; cf. 65/230, 91/359, 92/380.

⁴⁶ 96/411.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., 42/94, 67/245, 68/260, 109/518.

the Perfected ponder over and ask questions about is a short text that will allow them to decide which of the myriad texts existing in the world are to be included in the ultimate scripture.⁴⁸ Says the Heavenly Teacher:

Therefore on the basis of my book (*an wu shu*) examine the scriptures and the people's sayings, ask in depth about their meaning and how they have arrived at their teachings, collect them according to category; only then will the scriptures and sayings of all the world be completely fathomed—the teachings of the Heavenly Way can be seen! Good and evil sayings can be penetrated!
(91/363)

The ultimate scripture is produced in two stages. All texts are to be collected in one place and arranged according to category, and after being classified in this way, duplicates (*chongfu*) are to be eliminated.⁴⁹ This is the mechanical stage; upon this follows the qualitative sorting of good and bad texts, where the guiding principle is that any text that is in agreement with (*xiang ying*) what the Heavenly Teacher says is to be retained, the rest discarded.⁵⁰

As the Heavenly Teacher's book plays the role of a touchstone of truth, another touchstone would be needed in order to render it unnecessary. Perhaps the theory that the effects of putting into practice a text is what shows whether it is good or bad could have performed this function, but such a pragmatic theory of truth is rather applied to the Heavenly Teacher's own book,⁵¹ and this, combined with the above considerations, shows that the author of *TPJ-A* was unable to develop consistently his theory that truth is already complete in the world.

There seem to be two different conceptions about what kind of material is to be used when compiling the ultimate scripture. The most easily under-

⁴⁸ The Heavenly Teacher's book is only in one *juan*, whereas the texts of the past amount to trillions (*yiyiwan*) of *juan* or measure 30 *li* when piled on top of each other; see, e.g., 44/110, 67/255, 93/398, 96/413, 97/434, 1/709. The Heavenly Teacher often says that he is repetitious on purpose in his explanations to the Perfected; cf. 90/347, 92/376, 117/664. Though this is often expressed as the Heavenly Teacher's book's being repetitious (cf. 68/260, 96/423, 97/430), what is meant is probably that his oral statements when taken down by the Perfected are so. Thus there seem to be two books "authored" by the Heavenly Teacher, one he brings with him and one he dictates to the Perfected (for the Perfected taking notes of what the Heavenly Teacher says, cf. 50/168, 65/224, 67/243, 71/282, 96/405). When the Perfected ask the Heavenly Teacher about things they do not understand in his book, the one he brought along with him is probably indicated; cf. 48/243, 67/234, 68/258–9. This book given by the Heavenly Teacher to the Perfected is called "the basic text (*benwen*) (98/448), i.e. the text to be explained by a commentary; cf. 70/277–8, 96/420.

⁴⁹ Cf. 41/84–5, 72/292, 72/299, 86/333, 91/351, 91/354.

⁵⁰ Cf. 39/64, 50/170, 50/182, 51/191, 70/277, 116/632.

⁵¹ See, e.g., 42/92, 49/165, 67/255, 91/358, 92/376, 97/434, 108/514–15, 119/677. For its application to scriptures in general, see 67/250.

standable is that which seeks to gather together all scriptural wisdom extant in the world. This process is more or less that of establishing an orthodox canon or library.⁵²

According to another conception of the process of compilation, people are to report to the emperor on political matters, that is, on the performance of officials and on omens occurring because of maladministration. Merit evaluations by junior officials and by the populace at large are to be collectively discussed (*jiyi*) and collated, in order to be purified of misrepresentations, and so are reports on freaks of nature.⁵³ An intricate procedure for compiling such an “ultimate scripture on Heaven’s affairs of state” (*da dongji tian zhi zhengshi*)⁵⁴ is also described.

Viewed within the context of the thought of *TPJ-A* as a whole, the aim of the collation of an ultimate scripture seems to be to make the role played by the Heavenly Teacher in the salvation of mankind as indirect as possible. First of all, the Heavenly Teacher does not bring truth itself; the Perfected (or undesignated wise men) are to produce the ultimate scripture according to the designs imparted by him. Secondly, the Heavenly Teacher does not hand over the ultimate scripture to its first recipient, the temporal ruler—the Heavenly Teacher will even leave the Perfected before the scripture is compiled.⁵⁵ While the Heavenly Teacher is no teacher of kings, neither are the Perfected; they are explicitly instructed not to transmit the scripture to the emperor themselves, but to entrust it to “ordinary people” who are to

⁵² There are similarities between the technical terms used by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin in their compilation of the Han court library; thus the words “*jiao*” (“to collate”), “*chi ben*” (“holding the basic text” to be orally collated) and “*chongfu*” (“a duplicate” to be eliminated) are used both of the compilation of the Han court library and of the compilation of the ultimate scripture. For the former see, e.g., Wang Chongmin, “*Qi liie zai wo guo muluxueshi shang de chengjiu yu jangxiang*”, *Lishi yanjiu*, No. 4 (1963), pp. 177–90.

⁵³ A term employed in this connection for the process of collation is “*shihe*” (“to substantiate”). It is often used to describe the weeding out of the unorthodox texts rampant in the present age: “For the sole reason that one lives and resides in the space between Heaven and Earth one ought to study the true Way. Superficial and frivolous texts (*fuhua zhi wen*) are not able to cause men to live long; the blame for all the miseries arising from inherited guilt lies in there not being a substantiated Way (*shihe zhi dao*). Now Heaven will get rid of them [i.e. the unorthodox texts]” (39/66). For the term “*shihe*” see, e.g., 43/98, 48/153–5, 86/328, 91/362, 96/419–20.

⁵⁴ 41/87. For the use of this term take, e.g., the following passage: “Then take [the writings] [...] and hand them over to a supremely virtuous ruler and let his ministers order them together, arranging them according to category. They will submit those that are perfectly good and get rid of the deviant words and so make an ultimate scripture (*dongji zhi jing*), and it will be called ‘The Ultimate [Scripture on the] Affairs of the State of Heaven’ (*tian dongji zhengshi*). When this is done the illnesses of Heaven and Earth will all be obliterated, the rule of the emperor will become supremely tranquil and the catastrophes and hardship inherited over ten thousands of generations will all disappear (*chengfu wanwan shi zhi zai ehui, qie yidou qu ye*). When this is done the ten thousand things and all the spirits will have nothing to complain about and they will not report to Heaven on man’s evil any more. [Heaven has] ordered that [the writings] be collated and this is why Heaven has sent me down to instruct you” (91/348–9). See also Kaltenmark (1979), pp. 24–9.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., 40/82, 46/126, 68/258–9, 69/261, 88/334, 93/394.

present it to the throne when the time is right.⁵⁶ This injunction against the Perfected delivering truth directly to the emperor is repeatedly expressed without motivation; only once does the author of *TPJ-A* attempt an explanation:

Heaven has become very upset about [inherited guilt] and so I urgently transmit the Heavenly Sayings. From ancient times till now, whenever Heaven and Earth have had something that worried them, and whenever they have become depressed and blocked-up, and when ordinary people have been unable to realize this, they have made spiritual sages transmit their words—it is not just the case with me: do not think it strange! I have already left the world (*qu shi*) and cannot recklessly return to be seen among people, and therefore I transmit the book to you, the Perfected. But you have already left the world and cannot now become the teachers of ordinary people. Therefore I make you seek out good people (*liangmin*) who are able to⁵⁷ deliver it, that you may hand over [the scripture] to them, and that you may order them to proceed to hand it over to the virtuous ruler. (67/255)

The distance between wisdom and power is explained by the Heavenly Teacher and the Perfected's being immortals,⁵⁸ but the circuitous road truth is to take before it becomes effective is hard to see as anything other than an attempt to cast the Heavenly Teacher in a role as far removed as possible from that of a messiah.⁵⁹

The culmination of the eschatological process seems to be the presentation of the ultimate scripture to the emperor, but *TPJ-A* says very little about what he is to do to reform the world once he has come into possession of this treasure. Though the book in his hands often seems to act with an almost magical force, there are many passages that imply that the emperor first of all functions as the distributor of the redeeming scripture to his subjects

⁵⁶ See my “The Early Traditions Relating to the Han Dynasty Transmission of the *Taiping jing*”, Part I, *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. 50 (1989), p. 150 (about 102/459–60). Other passages testifying to the indirect transmission of the ultimate scripture include 53/198, E/303, 96/422, 117/653. A specific time of transmission is indicated in 39/65-6, 102/459–60.

⁵⁷ For *er*, read *neng*.

⁵⁸ Different views are expressed in *TPJ-A* about the eschatological stage reached by the Perfected. Thus the Perfected are said to be ordinary people (*fanren*) who have not yet become immortals (*du*) 98/422. The frequent mention of the possibility of the Perfected adding to their lifespan, even of making it infinite, would seem to indicate that they have not yet become immortals; cf. 35/34, 88/334, 93/394, 93/398, 98/452. In other passages the Perfected are, however, stated to be immortals; cf. 47/141, 53/195, 91/354, 117/658. The Heavenly Teacher seems to be an immortal (cf. 51/189, 86/334); see however 51/191, 116/635.

⁵⁹ There are other features that serve to de-emphasise the role of the Heavenly Teacher. Thus he himself has had teachers and is leaving the Perfected because he has an assignment elsewhere; furthermore, he is not the first teacher under whom the Perfected study. Cf. 47/138, 96/406–7. The Perfected are not unique either, as Perfected exist in other worlds; cf. 93/397.

and that the ultimate recipients of it are thus the commoners (*fanren, suren*) primarily afflicted by the effects of inherited guilt.⁶⁰ For instance, we hear that all in the world, high and low, young and old, civilized and barbarian, are to be rewarded for delivering the wisdom they possess to the local administrations, and after compendia of popular truth have been made locally the process is repeated centrally with respect to the local compendia. At court the wise men (*zhong xian*)

collaborate to order (*ci*) them, editing (*bian*) them to form an ultimate scripture (*dongji zhi jing*). After the wise men have been greatly enlightened by it, it is handed over to the people (*minjian*), and ordinary men and commoners (*baixing wanmin*) all at one move are transformed into being good (*yi dan hua wei shan*) and do not any longer know the ways of evil.
(88/333)

The vision of fragmented truth being collected in order to be dispersed again in its immaculate form is first of all a statement to the effect that no one in this world, be he emperor or sage, has a monopoly on truth—truth is to be elicited from anyone who might possess it and the Heavenly Teacher seems quite convinced that truth is to be found everywhere, in the words and sayings of even the basest of humans. It is also a statement to the effect that all need to receive truth before the world can be set right again:

—[The Perfected:] We wish to ask who is to be asked to collate [the supreme scripture]?

—[The Heavenly Teacher:] Each should be employed according to what he is able to do.⁶¹ Those who are good at [holding] the basic text, should hold⁶² it and those who are good at making use of it should stand around him and explain it, letting their words flow. Thus from the emperor to the commoners (*shuren*), all will change their old ways and follow the collective deliberation (*heyi*). [The supreme scripture is collated at successively higher levels and handed over to the emperor.] When the emperor and his ministers all know the ultimate scripture to be true, it is sent down to the people (*xia yu minjian*), in order that all in the world may be able to recite the orthodox scriptures (*songdu zhengwen*).

When this is done the Qi of Orthodox Qi of Heaven will have been obtained!
The Great Peace will have arrived!
(51/192)

There are many passages where the prime beneficiary of the scripture seems to be the emperor himself: he is to rule in the “Taoist” way, being without

⁶⁰ One passage (88/334) asserts that the part of the ultimate scripture about matters relevant to the emperor’s government activities is to be withheld from ordinary people. This does not seem to be the general position of *TPJ-A*.

⁶¹ For *er*, read *neng*.

⁶² For *shi*, read *zhi*; cf. 51/191.

any worries and roaming about with the sound of music in his ears.⁶³ But the idea that a change in the hearts of each and every person is called for in order to reform the world is more characteristic of the thought of *TPJ-A* than the classical, rather trite, view that the ultimate scripture is to be “handed over to the virtuous ruler” (*fugui dejun*).⁶⁴

TPJ-A goes even further than demanding that each individual receive the ultimate scripture and reform himself by studying it; as seen above it suggests that each individual should partake in writing it. When one person writes something it is not to be trusted, and when a couple of persons write something together there is a great danger that they will collude to obscure the truth. *TPJ-A*'s concept of “collective deliberation” (*gongyi, jiyi, heyi*) as a prerequisite for compiling the ultimate scripture rests on the idea that the more people that partake in writing it, the more checks there are against its containing misrepresentations (this idea is intimately bound up with the “political” variant of the compilation process):

Therefore all, old and young, wise and stupid, men and women, and even slaves are to partake in the major and minor collective deliberations, so there cannot be any deceit [in the scripture] [...] (86/327)

This emphasis on the participation of all of mankind is also evidenced in the following passage; though the description of the effects of the collective effort to compile the ultimate scripture centre on the person of the emperor, criticism against the sage, that other “singular” person, is implied:

The words of one man cannot be followed alone. The words of the multitude (*zhongren*) penetrate the sayings of the ancient wise men and accord with Heaven in their core. If [the ultimate scripture] is established collectively (*gong ding er zhi zhi*), the emperor will day by day be more illuminated, all catastrophes and evil will be eradicated and Heaven will have no worries. Those who make it collectively (*gong wei zhe*) will prosper; those who discard it will suffer from eradicable catastrophes. (70/280)

⁶³ 88/333–7.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., 40/82, 49/167, 98/451, 116/640. One statement of this kind is of some interest: “The revolutions of Heaven and Earth have their progressions (*li*). Reveal [my book] according to the periodic revolutions and make it constantly followed, so the state will be greatly auspicious and not be endangered. The reason why it is not handed over to common people (*xiaoren*), but to the emperor, is that the emperor's progressions are constantly in accord with Heaven and Earth, enabling him to put it into practice. Common people are not able to put it into practice, so attach yourselves to a superior man (*junzi*) and hand it over to him” (46/130). This is a way of thought that—at least in its emphasis—is in conflict with what *TPJ-A* elsewhere says. At least it has the merit of trying to explain why the prince must have the ultimate scripture first (and of explaining this in terms of cosmic periodicities), but nothing is said in it about the subsequent distribution of the ultimate scripture to mankind at large. There are no other passages in the text that argue that the prince is the sole recipient of the ultimate scripture.

Though they are necessary for the salvation of the world, a considerable irritation against the “one-man” sages and their “uncorroborated statements” (*guci danyan*)⁶⁵ is expressed in *TPJ-A*:

The scriptures of the Heavenly Officials originally told man to collectively deliberate on what is right and what is wrong, but [now] one man is furtively made to speak. The sages are not able to⁶⁶ know the Way of Heaven and Earth completely all by themselves and therefore what the sages who have been born before and later have written is different in each case. Heaven says that [their writings] are each superior in [but] one matter and cannot completely eradicate the catastrophes and so it has instructed me to collect and collate them. Now instead one man’s words are believed—how can he be of any use? (96/420)

The “one man” referred to here seems to be someone held to be a messiah with a monopoly on truth. Perhaps the thought of the Heavenly Teacher was evolving in the direction that such privileged spokesmen for Heaven were not needed at all, truth being distillable from the everyday sayings of common men. *TPJ-A*’s idea that the sagacity of each member of the human race shall contribute to saving the world and that the emperor is only an honorary editor-in-chief and publisher of the supreme scripture is remarkable indeed!

The Cosmic Cycle According to *TPJ-A*

Above, the Heavenly Teacher’s arguments against a cyclical theory of disasters have been described. The Heavenly Teacher does, however, espouse a cyclical theory of his own and he has come to earth because according to the cycle followed by the world a propitious moment to deliver the ultimate scripture to the emperor has arrived. Are the ideas behind this stratum of the *Taiping jing* inherently confused or is there a way of accounting for the fact that the Heavenly Teacher both criticizes and espouses a cyclical theory of the development of the universe?

One may begin by noticing that a different tone is used when the Heavenly Teacher expounds his own theory: exhilarantly the imminent coming of the Qi of Great Peace is hailed over and over again; the tone is optimistic, with no word about destruction as a necessary preparation for the new world being uttered.⁶⁷ Also, the vocabulary used by the Heavenly Teacher in such chiliastic pronouncements is different: no use of “conjunctions” or of similar

⁶⁵ For this expression see, e.g., 96/420.

⁶⁶ For *er*, read *neng*.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., 35/37, 35/39, 37/60, 49/157, 53/196, 72/291, 93/400, G/647, G/650. A message to the effect that the Qi of Great Peace is imminent is said to be included in the Heavenly Teacher’s book (the one he has brought with him); cf. 48/146, 66/234. In one passage fifteen years (as opposed to thirty years under normal circumstances) are said to be needed for Great Peace to

concepts belonging to omenology, but instead announcements to the tune that “the Way of Heaven is like a ring; when it has turned one great round, it starts anew” (65/227):⁶⁸

Now Heaven and Earth have turned one great round and start anew (*dazhou gengshi*) so catastrophes will soon disappear, with no remainders left.⁶⁹ Therefore I instruct mankind to collate the scriptures of ancient and modern times and to collect the good [sayings] among them in order to make an ultimate scripture (*dongji zhi jing*) and define what is good so it can never be changed again and so that even sagely and wise men are unable to doubt⁷⁰ its words. (H/686)

Whereas the disaster theories operate with a multiplicity of cycles, the interstiches (*hui, ji*) of which have special import, the Heavenly Teacher employs a basically mono-cyclic view of the processes of nature. The cyclical progressions he does envisage move in tandem and the only term from calendrology employed is that of devolutions of time” (*shiyun*) which characteristically does not involve more than one cycle. The only places where the Heavenly Teacher expresses himself in terms that imply a multiplicity of cycles is where he seeks to accommodate his theory that inherited guilt is about to destroy the world with his opponents’ theory that cyclical conjunctions are. If the Heavenly Teacher here seems to adopt the view of his opponents, this should be seen as an argumentative strategy, not a profession of his own beliefs.

The Heavenly Teacher’s concept of the cyclical motion of the universe is bound up with the special role he gives the element fire:

If you six Perfected do not believe my words, just prohibit metal weapons at once—those who dare to carry them all incur heavy guilt and when the time comes they will be extinguished in the fire catastrophe (*huozai*) and the government [of all the world] will at once become equitable and in All-under-Heaven there will be no one who will not exclaim, “Good!” (65/226)

Fire is the phase corresponding to the new age and therefore the fire catastrophe is as much a sign of what is to come as a means of getting rid of the past, the weapons belonging to the age of the Five Despots of the present

assert itself; cf. 93/399. D/215 has it that Great Peace will come gradually (*jian*); whether this refers to the fifteen years or whether the *Taiping jing chao* again is corrupt is unclear. The dominant thought in *TPJ-A* seems to be that Great Peace will arrive instantaneously.

⁶⁸ Cf. 66/237, 116/635, G/651, 119/767. Compare also the statement that “from now on things are different from in the past” (117/666); cf. 118/673, 119/683.

⁶⁹ For *liang*, read *zhong*.

⁷⁰ For *zhi*, read *zhi*.

time. It is not stated clearly whether the carriers of weapons or the weapons themselves are to founder through the agency of fire, but the interpretation consistent with the rest of the thought of *TPJ-A* is that the weapons themselves are to be destroyed—just as in *TPJ-A* there is no notion that the good are to be selectively rescued, there is no notion that the evil are to be selectively destroyed.

The reason why metal is to be eliminated is that metal conquers wood, and if wood is suppressed it cannot nourish fire. Punishments are not to be used in setting right the world as punishments are the paradigmatic function of weapons, i.e. metal. Fire was the element ruling in the beginning of the universe, the element that will usher in the new age of peace and the element characterizing the ruler who presides over the regenerated universe.⁷¹

Fire is co-ordinated with a host of other principles, but it seems that concepts such as “Yang”, “south”, and “mind” play a subsidiary role, explaining the qualities of fire. The Heavenly Teacher sees the phase of wood as important to the strength of fire and therefore he advocates siding with the qualities of both wood and fire, tempering the clarity of the birthgiving function of the latter with the benevolence and fostering function of the former. As Yin is associated with water, metal and earth, and Yang with wood and fire, all negative qualities are identified as the influences of Yin—Yin is to be shunned as death and Yang is to be sought as life.⁷²

Within the eschatological context there can be little doubt that the emphasis is on fire—the “numinous calendar of the five emperors” mentioned above is probably a reference to the cycle of five elements, and this cycle commences with fire:

—[The Perfected:] We wish to ask why now, when the Way has completed a great cycle (*wei dazhou*) and is at its Primal Beginning, one has to change the great law (*geng dashu*) and scrutinize the orthodox scriptures?

—[The Heavenly Teacher:] [...] Well, the time now is the superior of the Five Yang, the Beginning of the Five Fires. [...] The spirit of fire is the human mind. The human mind is sagely; the sagely human mind is the most exalted thing of all. Therefore the sagely human mind is capable of creating all things (*shenshengren xin nai neng zaozuo fan shi*); it is the commencement of the Primal Beginning. Therefore the laws of the sages all without exception arise from the mind, explaining everything (*gu shensheng zhi fa, nai yi cong xin qi, wu bu jieshuo*). (109/678)

⁷¹ For passages related to Fire, see, e.g., 65/224–6, 65/229–31, 69/262–4, 69/271–2, 92/375–7, 109/520, 117/653, 119/682.

⁷² This occasions some problems of interpretation as the Heavenly Teacher also espouses the classical idea of the interdependence of Yin and Yang.

One sees here a corollary to the position that “fire is the lord of the five elements” (108/669) and that fire “is capable of transforming itself into the [remaining] four elements” (B/20): as the human mind is associated with the element of all elements it is endowed with cosmic creative powers.⁷³

As “all things arise from the mind”, the solution to the problem of inherited guilt would seem to lie in the mind of the ruler—if such a subjective idealism was entertained by the Heavenly Teacher, why could he not just ask the ruler to rid the world of its evil by the sheer effort of his will? The Heavenly Teacher does to some extent follow this train of thought, in that he allows that this was how the rulers of ancient times maintained peace in the universe, but rulers of the present age have lost this capability.⁷⁴

As hinted in the first quotation of this article, the Heavenly Teacher seems to think that the world has been in the present apocalyptic situation several times in the past. As the Heavenly Teacher believes several temporal revolutions to have elapsed since the creation of the world, and as the sages sent to earth in former times had the mission of delivering mankind from their imminent destruction, he would indeed seem committed to such a view. However, nowhere in *TPJ-A* is this intriguing possibility discussed and it would perhaps be unfair to attribute it to the author in its systematically expressed form; as we shall see below, there are places where he instead asserts the uniqueness of the present situation.

We saw above that the coming holocaust would cause the annihilation of cosmos itself—returning to a state of chaos it would only slowly regain order. The Heavenly Teacher obviously envisages a somewhat similar chaos at the birth of the universe⁷⁵ and the question poses itself whether he foresees that the world has to revert to its original condition now that the great cycle is starting anew. Though logic would seem to demand this, there are no indications that the Heavenly Teacher holds that chaos in a cosmological sense must arrive before the reign of great peace can commence. Though inherited guilt threatens to wipe out mankind, the Heavenly Teacher has come to earth to prevent this from happening, not to see that it proceeds as smoothly as possible. There is a way out for man: just as conjunctions and suchlike can trigger the release of the effects of inherited guilt, so the coming age presents an opportunity to reform the world:

Heaven is very upset about man doing evil and all the time talking about the inauspiciousness of periodic revolutions. The Superior August Qi is coming and the virtuous ruler ought to be assisted in his rule. [Heaven] is afraid that man will not change his ways and

⁷³ Passages related to the *TPJ-A* concept of mind include 68/258, 69/271, E1/311, 92/369 70, 92/375–7, 96/426, 108/512–13, 109/518, 109/520, H/687–8, J/718–19, J/722, J/731.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., 54/204, E/311. Also, the first rulers had no need of scriptures; cf. 48/155, 50/171, 54/205–6, 1/712.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., 48/148–9, 109/678.

that he will commit evil acts to disturb the Orthodox Qi [about to come] and to destroy the Heavenly Treasure (*tianbao*),⁷⁶ and therefore it has sent me down to reveal a scripture to the virtuous ruler in order to educate the masses of men and make all constantly follow my scripture in their actions so that they no longer sadden Heaven and Earth and no longer transgress the heavenly prohibitions. (92/375)

The Heavenly Teacher and the Perfected are to act as midwives now that the time has come for the delivery of the new age. The birth is fraught with complications and if they were not sent by Heaven to work out the way to reconstitute the truth, that instrument that can perform the necessary Caesarian section on the world, “the Superior August Qi will not be able to come” (86/312).⁷⁷

—[The Heavenly Teacher:] That you Perfected come to put questions to me is because Heaven wants once and for all to clear up this matter [i.e. that man should honour Heaven and Earth] and make people know themselves. The common people (*baixing*) only know how to blame Heaven, not how to blame themselves.

—[The Perfected:] But why does Heaven all of a sudden make me ask these questions?

—The reason why it makes you ask these questions is that Heaven’s Superior August Qi of Great Peace is about to arrive and the rule [of the world] ought to be peaceful. It fears that stupid people will unceasingly transgress the prohibitions of Heaven and Earth and bring chaos to the orthodox Qi, making it harmful. If this happened the Qi of great peace would not attain its periodic harmony (*shihe*)—that is why it makes you ask these questions. (45/125)⁷⁸

The cyclical preconditions are there, but man’s subjective effort is still needed and the world does not just automatically change from bad to good because Fire starts ruling and the Qi of Great Peace is coming. “Since the beginning of Heaven and Earth there has never been a time like the present” (45/125),⁷⁹ but man can miss this opportunity to experience perfect peace if he does not mend his ways to accord with the intentions of Heaven. On the other hand, man has the possibility of subjectively contributing towards making

⁷⁶ For the use of this expression, see also 46/129, 68/260, 117/654.

⁷⁷ That good rule has to be restored to Earth before the Qi of Supreme Peace can assert its influence is often stated; cf., e.g., 86/322, 93/385, 98/451, 109/518. This is attributed to influence from the ultimate scripture; cf., e.g., 47/134, 86/328.

⁷⁸ Compare 48/151.

⁷⁹ Cf. the following passage: “Since the creation of Heaven and Earth the Superior August Qi [of Supreme Peace] has never [before] come to assist the Emperor in his rule” (91/355).

the world a fit place to live. If he does this, the Heavenly Teacher seems willing to concede that history will stop; if the Qi of Great Peace is given a chance to assert its influence, then from now on, and presumably for ever, peace will reign. The Heavenly Teacher does not discuss the possibility of a future decline in the state of the world; the present moment thus seems to present man with a chance to jump out of history and create a world where no change occurs and no change is needed.

The Thought of *TPJ-A* in Relation to Chinese Messianism

We have seen how the ideology of *TPJ-A* in many ways may be viewed as an answer to a kind of messianism. The question remains whether it is any kind of messianism known to us.⁸⁰

The only student of the *Taiping jing* who to my knowledge may in passing have entertained the thought that *TPJ-A* contains anti-messianic elements is Yoshioka Yoshitoyo.⁸¹ Yoshioka notices the expression “*houshengren*” (“Sage-to-Come”) of *TPJ-A*, but denies that there is any connection between it and the “*housheng dijun*” (“the Lord Emperor, Sage-to-Come”) of Taoist messianism and he instead tentatively attributes the *TPJ-A* concept of “*houshengren*” to influence from Xunzi’s idea of the Latter Kings (*houwang*).⁸² This is not convincing, however, as Xunzi’s concept of legalistically oriented Latter Kings does not fit the chiliastic Sages-to-Come mentioned in *TPJ-A* at all; nor does Yoshioka’s interpretation take into account that Sages-to-Come are *personae non gratae* in *TPJ-A*, whereas Latter Kings have appeared in the world and are positively evaluated by Xunzi.

The word “*houshengren*” occurs but once in *TPJ-A* and I think that one should consider the possibility that it is a scribal corruption. In the same sentence that contains the characters “*houshengren*”, the character “*li*” (“energetically”) is almost certainly a corruption of “*tian*” (“Heaven”), and I wish to suggest that “*hou*” (“later”) was at one stage of the transmission of *TPJ-A* written in its abbreviated form and that this abbreviated “*hou*” was a corruption of the character “*shan*” (“good”); the locution “*shan shengren*” (“a good sage”) we find evidenced in the preceding sentence. I think the evidence is **to** weak to postulate that the target of the *TPJ-A* criticism of messianism

⁸⁰ Studies of early Chinese messianism include Anna Seidel, “The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism: Lao-tzu and Li Hung”, *History of Religions*, Vol. 9, No. 2–3 (1969–70), pp. 216–47; Erik Zürcher, “Prince Moonlight: Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism”, *Toung Pao*, Vol. 68, No. 1–3 (1982), pp. 1–75.

⁸¹ In note 17 on pp. 251–2 of his *Dōkyō to bukkyō*, Vol. 3 (Tokyo 1976).

⁸² Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l’histoire du taoïsme*, Vol. 2 (Paris 1984), p. 107, thinking along similar lines, argues that “*housheng*” should be translated “Latter Sage” (i.e. a sage appearing in the recent past), but this is out of the question: note, e.g., how the *housheng dijun* receives a prophecy (*shouji*) to appear at a later time in the biography of the Shangqing messiah incorporated in the *Taiping jing* (A/3). This is an obvious Buddhist importation with clear futuristic implications.

is the medieval Taoist belief in the advent of the *housheng dijun*, however tempting this would be.

The sources for early Chinese messianism, Taoist as well as Buddhist, are not numerous and most have been subject to study. There is, however, one feature recurring in almost all messianist fragments of any length that seems to have gone unnoticed. This is the theme that the consummation of the eschatological process is the direct beholding of the messiah, an idea which seems to have entered Chinese messianic thought from the cult of Maitreya.⁸³ It is interesting to note that in the *Taiping jing chao*, the digest of a Tang dynasty edition of the *Taiping jing*, one finds a passage seemingly belonging to the *TPJ-A* stratum that employs this theme:

To “hold unto the One” means truly to become one. When man is born his spirit is complete and if he holds onto it, not letting it disperse, he can be saved from the world (*dushi*) and become the father and mother of the good people (*wei liangmin fumu*), behold the Prince of Supreme Peace (*jian taiping zhi jun*), and be loved by the spirits (*[wei] shenling suo ai*).

(I/716)

It is evident that this passage contains genuine messianic elements. However, I do not think that it shows that *TPJ-A* contains direct loans from medieval Taoist messianism; as I have shown in another article, the latter half of the section from the *Taiping jing chao*, in which this passage occurs, is very suspect and parts of it seem to have been interpolated into the edition of the *Taiping jing* that served as the basis for the *Taiping jing chao* at the same time as the biography of the Shangqing messiah, the *housheng dijun*.⁸⁴ If this is true we can discard the relevance of the passage for our understanding of *TPJ-A*.

Generally speaking, one may say that the Heavenly Teacher plays the role of a messiah in *TPJ-A* and it may thus be seen as significant that the Perfected are said to have had the good fortune to “behold him face to face” (*xiangdui er du*). However, this is hardly a convincing example of a messianic loan if there are no other indications that the concept of the elect is to be found in the text, and I do not think that there are.

In the same Taoist texts that contain locutions like “*jian taiping zhi jun*” (“to behold the Prince of Supreme Peace”) one also finds what seems to be a derived usage, “*jian taiping*” (“to behold Peace”). In a *Taiping jing chao* passage that gives the impression of having been abstracted from the *TPJ-A*

⁸³ I will not attempt to document this interpretation in the present article as this would demand too much space and as I do not use the interpretation to prove anything about *TPJ-A*. For quotations from Taoist texts that use expressions like “to behold the Prince of Great Peace”, cf. Ōfuchi Ninji, *Dōkyō kyōtenshi no kenkyū* (Tokyo 1964), pp. 488–9, 494–5; Yoshioka (1976), pp. 76, 81, 90, 229–35.

⁸⁴ “The Early Traditions Relating to the Han Dynasty Transmission of the *Taiping jing*”, Part 2, *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. 51 (1990), pp. 202–11.

stratum there is a phrase that resembles this, “*du taiping zhi qi*” (“to behold the Qi of Supreme Peace”). But as the occurrence of the expression might be explained in other ways (“*du*” also having the meaning of “to experience”), and as it occurs only in the often suspect *Taiping jing chao*, this is again too weak a foundation from which to argue that there are direct messianic loans in *TPJ-A*. Also too vague are the many passages in both *TPJ-A* and Taoist messianic texts that hail the imminent arrival of the new age (expressions like “*taiping chui zhi*” which are very common in *TPJ-A*).⁸⁵

The method of personal salvation mentioned most often by the Heavenly Teacher is that of meditating in a secluded chamber (*youshi*). This enables one to derive nourishment from the Primal Qi (*yuanqi*) and to give up ordinary food, and salvation is evidenced by the adept vanishing from his hut.⁸⁶ In a section where the Heavenly Teacher expounds his theory that there are nine Qi in the world and nine ranks of men entrusted with bringing them into harmony,⁸⁷ a link is made between the themes of individual salvation and inherited guilt. When the nine ranks of men all adhere to the Way, the guilt inherited over ten thousand generations will disappear and the adept who has vanished from his chamber is said to “assist the Heavenly Rule of the Immortals and the Primal Qi” and to be in charge of “selecting good people” (*Jianyue shanren*; 42/90). This is clearly an idea with messianic potential.

The passage mentioning the selection of good people is however inspired by a theme which occurs in an older stratum of the *Taiping jing*, but those picked out in this stratum are persons eligible for state welfare grants.⁸⁸ One might object that though the original context of this theme was not messianic, it had a messianic ring to the author of *TPJ-A* and was invested with a messianic meaning through its adoption by him. While this may be true, I fail to see any evidence to support an argument that the *TPJ-A* passage is to be given a messianic interpretation. The good people are not selected in order to be saved, but in order to fulfil a function in the rule of the cosmos, as they are entrusted with the control (*tiaohu*) of the weather in both *TPJ-A* and in the older stratum that inspired its author.⁸⁹

There are places in *77V-A* where messianic behaviour, rather than messianic ideology, seems to be attacked. A theme occurring in *TPJ-A* is that man is often tested (*shi*) by spirits by being tempted to do evil.⁹⁰ As an example of what someone might be led to do if he listened to heterodox words whispered in his ear by spirits, the Heavenly Teacher mentions that such a person will try to cheat his master, “saying that [he] is about to become

⁸⁵ See texts quoted Yoshioka (1976), pp. 76, 90, 229–30.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., 42/90, 96/411–12, 98/438, 108/510. J723–4.

⁸⁷ See Max Kaltenmark (1979), pp. 31–3.

⁸⁸ These themes also occur together at 117/653, 117/656, 117/658, 117/660; cf. also D/222–3.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., 112/584.

⁹⁰ See, e.g., 96/414, 98/439–40.

a sage, to become a ruler of man” (91/286). The use of the term “*shengren*” (“sage”) might indicate that the spirits would indirectly tempt someone to think that he is a Sage-to-Come with a mission to rise in rebellion to save the world. In the same section, a Perfected confesses that he was once tempted to think that he would become a ruler of man and then ascend to Heaven as an immortal, but that he became crazy after joyously receiving this prophecy.

Another indirect reference to the spread of messianism may be seen in an illustration of the concept of inherited guilt given in another part of *TPJ-A*. The theme is that one man’s transgressions can lead to the misery of many: a person misleads people in the marketplace,

proclaiming that the earth is about to collapse and turn into a swamp (*xian cheng hanshui*). With tears streaming down his face he says this, and all in the marketplace go home and talk about it and so ten thousand households know of it. Old and young and large and small proceed in all directions to tell of it and so all in the world get to know of it and all in the world are cheated: those [hearing about it] later add to it, so in far-off regions it becomes especially severe. This came originally from the words of one man: this is the culpability of inheriting false words—what fault have those living afterwards committed? (37/58)

According to the Heavenly Teacher the world is in danger of foundering because of inherited guilt; here the Heavenly Teacher seems to use the way an apocalyptic frenzy develops to illustrate this phenomenon.

Both these possible references to messianic behaviour are too vague, however, to be used to identify the target of the Heavenly Teacher’s criticism; they may conceivably refer to behaviour inspired by messianic ideas, but it is not clear which kind.

Chinese messianism postulates certain combinations of cyclical characters used in calendars as indicating the coming of the age of peace. Some of these, like *renchen*, derive from secular calendrology while some, like *dinghai*, have been viewed as auspicious since the Chinese began to commit their thought to writing. Though *TPJ-A* contains much on the cyclical characters,⁹¹ no influence from these speculations is to be seen. In *TPJ-A*, as in one of the older strata of the *Taiping jing*, the scripture capable of saving the world is to be delivered to the emperor when the *jiazi* cycle starts anew.⁹² This is Chinese cyclical thought at its most conventional and it does not give us any indications as to how *TPJ-A* is to be placed within the context of Chinese messianism.

⁹¹ See my “The *Taiping jing* and the *Shuowen jiezi*”, in: *The Master Said: To Study and...: To Søren Egerod on the Occasion of his Sixty-Seventh Birthday*, ed. Birthe Arendrup et al. (Copenhagen 1990), pp. 139–49, for some examples.

⁹² Cf. 102/459, 112/583.

In conclusion I think it has to be said that though the thread binding together the various strands of thought in *TPJ-A* is a doctrine that can best be characterized as anti-messianism, *TPJ-A* does not contain any clues as to what kind of messianism the author thought so pernicious that he determined to write a book in order to prove it wrong.

List of Characters

an wu shu	按吾書
baixing	百姓
baixing wanmin	百姓萬民
benwen	本文
bian	編
bingsi	并死
bu neng zi du	不能自度
bu tong ci	不同辭
bu zi zhi	不自知
bujie	部界
changshuo	常說
cheng	承
chengfu	承負
chengfu wanwan shi zhi zai ehui, qie yidou qu ye	承負萬萬世之災厄會, 且一都去也
chengfii zhi e	承負之厄
chengfu zhi ze	承負之責
chengfu zhi zhe	承負之謫
chi ben	持本
chongfu	重復
ci	次
da dongji tian zhi zhengshi	大洞極天之政事
dan feng qi chengfu zhi ji	但逢其承負之極
dazhou gengshi	大周更始
dinghai	丁亥
diwang yi ren	帝王一人
dongji zhi jing	洞極之經

dongji zhi yi	洞極之意
du (“to behold”)	睹
du	度
du taiping zhi qi	睹太平之氣
dushi	度世
fanren	凡人
fu	負
fu sheng shengren	復生聖人
fu yu sheng shengren, hui fu ru si	復欲生聖人，會復如斯
fugui dejun	付歸德君
fuhua zhi wen	浮華之文
gang	綱
geng dashu	更大數
gong ding er zhi zhi	共定而置之
gong wei zhe	共為者
gongyi	共議
goujiao	拘校
gu shensheng zhi fa, nai yi cong xin qi,	故神聖之法，乃一從心起，無不解說
wu bu jieshuo	
guci danyan	孤辭單言
he	合
he bu neng sheng shan shengren hu	何不更生善聖人乎
heyi	合議
hou	後
hou (abbreviated)	后
houren	後人
housheng	後聖
housheng dijun	後聖帝君
houshengren	後聖人
houwang	後王
hui	會
huozai	火災
ji	際
ji zi bu neng zi du	即自不能自度

jian	漸
jian taiping	見太平
jian taiping zhi jun	見太平之君
jianyue shanren	簡閱善人
jiao	校
jiaohua xiaoxiao shi zheng	教化小小失正
jiazi	甲子
jie	結
jiyu	集居
jin wuba	今五霸
jin xiagu	今下古
jiyi	集議
juan	卷
juemie shilei	絕滅世類
junzi	君子
le yi qi shilei	樂易其世類
li (“energetically”)	力
li	里
li (“progressions”)	歷
liangmin	良民
meng	蒙
mie ren shilei	滅人世類
miejin	滅盡
minjian	民間
neng	能
neng de du shi	能得度世
qushi	去世
renchen	壬辰
rong	容
ruo tian fu sheng shengren	若天復生聖人
san tong	三統
sanhe	三合
shan	善
shan shengren	善聖人
shaoshao	稍稍

shengren	聖人
shensheng	神聖
shenshengren xin nai neng zaozuo fan shi	神聖人心乃能造作凡事
shi	始
shi jun	時君
shi ren	時人
shihe (“periodic harmony”)	時和
shihe	實核
shihe zhi dao	實核之道
shiyun	時運
shiyun ziran	時運自然
shouji	受記
shouyi	守一
shuren	庶人
sijin	死盡
songdu zhengwen	誦讀正文
sui zao jihui, bu siwang ye	雖遭際會，不死亡
suren	俗人
Taiping jing	太平經
Taiping jing chao	太平經鈔
Taiping jing hejiao	太平經合校
taiping chui zhi	太平垂至
taiping qi	太平氣
tian	天
tian bu fu shi shengren yu	天不復使聖人語
tian dongji zhengshi	天洞極政事
tian fu sheng houshengren	天復生後聖人迺無益，何也
nai wu yi, he ye	
tian shiyun	天時運
tian zheng wen	天正文
tianbao	天寶
tiandao shiyun zhou er si	天道時運周而死
tiandijihui	天地際會
tiandi yinyang zhi hui	天地陰陽之會

tiandi zhi jihui	天地之際會
tianshi	天師
tiantan diyu	天談地語
tianyun sheng shengren	天運生聖人
tiaohe	調和
Wang Ming	王明
wanwu yiner wang	萬物因而亡
wei dazhou	為大周
wei liangmin fumu	為良民父母
wei shenling suo ai	為神靈所愛
wei shuo	偽說
wu chengfu zhi guo	無承負之過
wu jin	物盡
wu shi	無世
wu yu zhonglei	無餘種類
wudi zhi shenli	五帝之神歷
wuxing jihui	五行際會
xia yu minjian	下於民間
xian cheng hanshui	陷成涵水
xiang ying	相應
xiang zhengming	相證明
xiangdui er du	相對而睹
xiangdui er yu	相對而語
xiangsui si	相隨死
xianren	先人
xiansheng	先生
xianshi	先師
xianwang	先王
xiaoren	小人
xie bu shi	邪不實
xuji	畜積
yan	言
yi beizu	已備足
yi dan hua wei shan	一旦化為善
yi lei xiang cong xiang bu	以類相從相補

yi ren
yi shan ci
yi shi er chu
yi shi er sheng
yi xiang gaoyu
yin ci gong ji wei jihui ye
yin shi yunhui zhe
yiyiwan
yiyiwan nian
youshi
yu wu xiang du
yuanqi
yun, fei jihui ye
yunhui miejue
zhenren
zhong xian
zhonggu
zhongren
zhongsheng qianhou chu zhe
zi duchu
ziran zhi shu

一人
一善辭
異世而出
異世而生
以相告自語
因此共記為際會也
因是際會者
億億萬
億億萬年
幽室
於吾相睹
元氣
運，非際會也
運會滅絕
真人
眾賢
中古
眾人
眾聖前後出者
自度出
自然之術

Character emendations in notes

for ai, read chu
for bi, read ci
for da, read shi
for du, read you
for er, read nai
for er, read neng
for gong, read qi
for he, read zhi
for ji, read gu
for li, read tian
for liang, read zhong
for neng, read er
for nian, read jin
for shi, read chi
for yue, read ri
for zhi, read zhi
for zi, read zhi
for ruo, read zuo

for 愛, read 處
for 比, read 此
for 大, read 失
for 獨, read 猶
for 而, read 耐 (i.e. 能)
for 而, read 能
for 共, read 其
for 和, read 知
for 吉, read 古
for 力, read 天
for 糧, read 種
for 能, read 而
for 念, read 今
for 恃, read 持
for 日, read 日
for 致, read 置
for 自, read 至
for 座, read 坐