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Modern Daoist Eschatology: Spirit-Writing and Elite Soteriology in Late Imperial China*

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Abstract

This article explores a corpus of 18th and 19th-century scriptures revealed by spirit-writing and published by members of the elite. These scriptures propose a soteriology where the threat of an apocalyptic "turning of the kalpa" plays an important role, and enjoins on elites a duty to usher in a moral reform that alone can avert the advent of the apocalypse. It first shows the close relationship between spirit-written revelations, the Wenchang cult and eschatology in the earliest such texts, produced during the Song dynasty, and then shows that this relationship continued, and even intensified during the Qing. After discussing several bodies of revelations linked to Wenchang, Lüzu and other cults, it explores to what extent this discourse can really be categorized as eschatological. It

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* This article is dedicated to the memory of two great scholars who have left us

argues that this discourse should be understood as a transformation of, and possibly a counter-discourse to earlier and contemporary apocalyptic messianism that maintains the apocalyptic vision but routinizes the messiah and thus de-politicizes its vision of social change.

Keywords: eschatology, Daoism, Qing period, spirit-writing, Wenchang

Daoist (and to a lesser extent Buddhist) revealed scriptures throughout the ages very frequently sound eschatological themes.[1] The very need for a revelation is indeed justified by the fact that humanity is in a state of advanced decline and needs a new vehicle of salvation (the revelation) in order to redeem itself (or a selected group of elect) and avoid the impending apocalypse. Revelations have been occurring with little pause over more than two thousand years of Daoist history; there is thus a possibility of writing a very *longue duré* history of Daoist eschatology, with all its ebbs and flows. Some periods were characterized by heightened eschatological thinking, while at other times it was part of the discourse without being prominent. The end of the world, as it were, keeps changing but is always on the horizon.

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much too early, and whose work and insights have inspired it: Monica Esposito (1962–2011) and Judith M. Boltz (1947–2013). I would also like to thank Christian Wittern for providing access to the beta version of the electronic *Daozang jiyao*, and David Ownby, Philip Clart, Paul R. Katz, Mori Yuria 森由利亞 and Shiga Ichiko 志賀市子 for very fruitful comments on a first draft. Successive versions of this paper were presented at the conferences: "Changing Fate in Religious Daoism" (Erlangen, 13–14 June 2013); "Wars, Disasters and Popular Religious Movements in Modern East Asia" 戰爭·災害より見た近代東アジアの民眾宗教會議 (Gakushuin, Tokyo, 22 June 2013); and "Les eschatologies dans l'histoire religieuse chinoise" (Paris, 10 April 2014, co-organized by David Ownby and myself). I am extremely grateful to Terry Kleeman and Takeuchi Fusaji 武内房司 for their respective invitations and for providing me with excellent occasions to engage with other scholars on the ideas presented here, and to Philip Clart for incisive critiques during the Paris workshop. The paper presented in Tokyo was published as "Kindai Dōkyō no shūmatsuron: Min-Shinki ni okeru fūran to shitaifusō ni okeru shūmatsuron no bokkō" 近代道教の終末論：明清期における扶鸞と士大夫層における終末論の勃興, trans. Umekawa Sumiyo 梅川純代, in *Sensō, saigai to kindai higashi Ajia no minshū shūkyō* 戰爭·災害と近代東アジアの民眾宗教, ed. Takeuchi Fusaji (Tokyo: Yūshisha, 2014), 38–62.

[1] By revealed text, I mean a text given by gods to humans, and which the latter have to disseminate without altering its contents.

This article focuses on a corpus of late imperial (18th and 19th-century) scriptures revealed by spirit-writing (*fuji* 扶乩, *fuluan* 扶鸞, *jiangbi* 降筆) and published by members of the elite.[2] These scriptures propose a soteriology where the threat of an apocalyptic "turning of the kalpa" plays an important role. To what extent this discourse can really be categorized as eschatological is debated, and I will deal with this important issue in my conclusion. I argue that it should be understood as a transformation of earlier and contemporary apocalyptic messianism, and should thus be included in the larger field of eschatological discourses. The better-known Daoist eschatological texts, which have received sustained scholarly attention—including the *Nüqing guilü* 女青鬼律 (Demon Code of Nüqing, 4th century) and the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* 洞淵神咒經 (Scripture of Divine Incantations of the Abyssal Caverns, 5th century)—date from the medieval period.[3] While the texts that I focus on here are much later productions, both continuities with and innovations from the medieval scriptures are crucial to the understanding of these texts. I thus propose that in this endeavor (as in many other aspects of Daoist history) one should work simultaneously in (at least) two time scales: one that encompasses the whole of Daoist history and highlights very long-term continuities, and the other that looks at the specificities of the period under study. In this case, three time scales are relevant: the very *longue durée*; the period from the 12th century onward where a specific technique (spirit-writing) and discourse emerge and develop; and the early and mid-Qing where they take on particular relevance as an elite form of discourse in contrast to other types of eschatologies.

Before moving on to the historical narrative, some definitions are in order. While there are many different types of eschatologies (discourses on the end of the world), the dominant mode in all the

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[2] I am not discussing other late imperial eschatological texts (including the *baojuan* 寶卷) here.

[3] Christine Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste du Vè siècle: Le livre des incantations divines des grottes abyssales* (Paris: IHEC, 1990); Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Time after Time: Taoist Apocalyptic History and the Founding of the T'ang Dynasty," *Asia Major*, 3rd Series, 7 (1994): 59–88; Anna K. Seidel, "Taoist Messianism," *Numen* 31 (1994): 161–174. See also Erik Zürcher, "'Prince Moonlight'—Messianism and Eschatology in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism," *T'oung Pao* 68 (1982): 1–75.

texts discussed here is apocalyptic; that is, all or most humans will perish because of disasters (fires, floods, wars, epidemics) decided by the gods and meted out by demons. This apocalypse is conceived as the end of a kalpa (or cosmic cycle, *jie* 劫), and thus not as an absolute and definitive end of time, as another kalpa will follow. Some humans, the elect (often called *zhongmin* 種民 in medieval texts, but not in our late imperial scriptures where there is no specific term), may avoid the apocalypse and "cross over the turning of the kalpa" (*dujie* 度劫) or "be saved from the turning of the kalpa" (*jiujie* 救劫). In some cases, the elect will be gathered by a savior or messiah (hence the term "messianism") such as Maitreya 彌勒 or Li Hong 李弘; the messiah is often described as creating a kingdom of peace and plenty for the elect, safe from the apocalypse (hence the term millenarianism, since in Christian theology this kingdom is said to last for a thousand years). As we will see, the apocalyptic eschatology is a permanent fixture of Daoist doctrinal productions, but the messianic and millenarian elements can be (and often have been in late imperial and modern times) removed from it or at least radically reworked, as the savior of the early messianic tradition, who is expected to come down on earth as an incarnate ruler, becomes (at least in the elite eschatological discourse) a god who stays in Heaven but talks to humans through routinized revelation (spirit-writing).

While this typology may look neat, actual texts of course sometimes resist classification into convenient categories. One particularly salient case of such resistance is the multifarious uses of the most crucial keyword, *jie*. In direct continuity with earlier uses of the term, but with new added meanings, the discourse on *jie* in late imperial revealed scriptures (and other texts as well) is very diverse and complex. For the sake of the analysis, it can be classified under the following types:

(1) *jie* (or *jieshu* 劫數, *jieyun* 劫運) as individual disaster (even an illness), usually as punishment for a sin—linking in late imperial contexts (this is markedly different from medieval texts) the concept of kalpa with a functioning moral universe, where retribution is often immediate;

(2) *jie* as a particular condition in which humanity is embroiled, notably collective hardships or disasters;

(3) *jie* (or *mojie* 末劫, *dajie* 大劫) as the end of this world (to be followed by a new kalpa).

Thus, the term covers a large continuum ranging from individual to collective, and from specific disasters (in which some may die) to an all-encompassing apocalypse in which all humanity (bar the elect) will perish. The discourse on "saving (humans) from the *jie*" is thus addressing different issues simultaneously: how to teach individuals to improve their fate through good actions, and how to save the maximum number of humans from the impending apocalypse. This tension/oscillation between individual and collective fate is indeed a key to understanding the dynamics of Daoist doctrinal production concerning eschatology.

I. Eschatology and the Early Spirit-Written Scriptures

Many if not most fundamental Chinese religious texts (including those in the canons of the Three Teachings) are revelations. By beginning our narrative with the emergence of documented spirit-writing practice[4] during the 12th century as a specific technique for producing revelations, we open a chapter in the middle of a long history where other techniques (dream, hallucinatory trance—sometimes induced by drugs) had already long been in use. To what extent the revelatory technique informs the contents of the revelation (by informing ways of writing, quoting, arguing, and addressing the audience, etc.) is an open question, a question made all the more elusive by the fact that many revealed texts do *not* inform us about how exactly they were revealed. To give but one example germane to the 12th-century rise of new revelations, the *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (Tract on Action and Response, by the Lord on High) that quickly became the most revered of all morality books (printed in larger numbers than the Bible, complained late Qing missionaries) was revealed by the Lord on High—but how, we do not know. One characteristic of spirit-

[4] On the emergence of *fuji*, see Judith Magee Boltz, "On the Legacy of Zigu and a Manual on Spirit-writing in Her Name," in *The People and the Dao: New Studies in Chinese Religions in Honour of Daniel L. Overmyer*, ed. Philip Clart and Paul Crowe (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica, 2009), 349–388.

written revelations is that they very often say clearly that they are the product of *fuji* and not another revelatory technique.

The earliest well-documented stage in the history of the production of spirit-written scriptures takes places in Sichuan 四川 beginning in the late 12th century. A network of devotees of Imperial Lord Wenchang 文昌帝君 began at this point to produce various texts, including hagiographies of the god (notably *Zitong dijun huashu* 梓潼帝君化書 [Book of Transformations of the Sovereign Lord of Zitong], DZ 170), where Wenchang relates his successive lives and promotions in the Heavenly bureaucracy, when he gradually accumulated the merits and virtues that allowed him to finally climb to his very high-ranking position. Wenchang also revealed scriptures, notably two that quickly became extremely widespread and influential: *Dadong xianjing* 大洞仙經 (Immortal Scripture of the Great Cavern, revealed in 1168), and *Gaoshang Yuhuang benxing jijing* 高上玉皇本行集經 (Combined Scripture of the Founding Acts of the Jade Emperor on High, or *Yuhuang jing*, revealed around 1220, DZ 10). The first is a new version of an early and well-known scripture, *Dadong jing*, which was the central piece of the Shangqing 上清 revelations (late 4th century). The second is an arguably even more important text, as it quickly became the core scripture (*benjing* 本經) of the Jade Emperor, the head of the Heavenly bureaucracy, and is thus massively used in modern and contemporary Daoist liturgy. The *Yuhuang jing* was apparently produced in a context of bloody wars between the Jin and the Song, and it discusses in detail the salvation (through both preaching and direct granting of divine grace) of devotees caught in situations of disasters depicted as the apocalypse (*mojie*). To these devotees, the Jade Emperor makes a promise to reestablish cosmic order, morality, and peace.

The groups that produced these texts have been studied by Terry Kleeman and more recently Hsieh Tsung-hui.[5] These scholars

[5] Terry F. Kleeman, *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); "The Expansion of the Wen-ch'ang Cult," in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 45–73; Hsieh Tsung-hui 謝聰輝, "*Yuhuang benxing jijing* chushi de beijing yu yinyuan yanjiu"《玉皇本行集經》出世的背景與因緣研究, *Daoism: History, Religion and Society* 1 (2009): 155–199.

have shown that such groups are characterized by three elements that would later become constant features of late imperial, modern, and contemporary spirit-writing groups. The first element is the affiliation of adepts to the god producing the revelations as disciples (*dizi* 弟子), within an altar or shrine (*tan* 壇, the term naming both the physical site where spirit-writing is practiced and the community of the adepts engaging in the practice). Disciples receive from the god an ordination name, and thus are inscribed in heavenly registers. In the context of late Song Sichuan, these altars seem to be typically linked to large temples and the Daoist clergy, but they comprise mostly members of the local elites, both scholars and officials. The main medium of the earliest revelations from Wenchang, Liu Ansheng 劉安勝, was a scholar without an official position, but he counted in his circle officials who wrote prefaces for and transmitted the newly revealed texts. The second element is the representation of the revealing god as both a full-fledged member of the Heavenly bureaucracy, and a personal salvational god playing a unique role in the salvation of humanity and caring individually for each of his devotees.

The third element is a strong eschatological inspiration. As mentioned above, in the Chinese context many revelations are by nature eschatological. The production of spirit-written revelations from the 12th century onwards both carries on this ancient tradition and renews it to a significant extent. The eschatological elements are present throughout the corpus of texts revealed by Wenchang: one of his invocations (*baohao* 寶號, *shenghao* 聖號) calls him Jiujie Dacibei Gengsheng Yongming Tianzun 救劫大慈悲更生永命天尊 (the Heavenly Worthy of Great Compassion, Who Gives New Life, Extends Fates, and Saves from the Kalpa).[6] The most articulate text in this regard is *Yuanshi tianzun shuo Zitong dijun benyuan jing* 元始天尊說梓潼帝君本願經 (Scripture on the Original Vow of the Sovereign Lord of Zitong, Expounded by the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning, DZ 29).[7] This scripture was revealed after

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[6] This *baohao* is found in *Taishang wuji zongzhen Wenchang dadong xianjing* 太上無極總真文昌大洞仙經 (DZ 5), and in *Qinghe neizhuan* 清河內傳 (DZ 169).

[7] This text is included in the *Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要 with modifications and a new title that flags its eschatological nature: *Yuanshi xiaojie Zitong benyuan zhenjing* 元始消劫梓潼本願真經.

1194,[8] and builds on earlier texts such as the *Huashu*. It explains how the Jade Emperor, having examined the registers of humanity's good and bad deeds and realized the extent of accumulated sins, has decided to usher in the end of the world and sent demons to visit disasters on humans and "take them away." Implored by the gods, Yuanshi tianzun entrusts Wenchang with the task of saving as many humans as possible through moral reform instructions given by spirit-writing:[9]

> I entrust him [Wenchang] to engage in spirit-writing, to enlighten and convert humans, and to manifest himself throughout the world. Thus, even though the end of the kalpa cannot be called off yet, if one hopes to dispel it, then it should be thanks to this god [Wenchang]. I will now summon him for your benefit, and charge him with saving humanity on the brink of the end of the kalpa, so that the human race is not entirely annihilated.
>
> 委行飛鸞，開化人間，顯跡天下。蓋此末劫實未可除，若欲消之，此神其可。吾當為汝等召之，俾救度末世，勿使類絕。

This very important text is to my knowledge the earliest one to equate spirit-writing, the salvation of humanity, and morality—an equation that would prove extraordinarily productive during the following centuries.

II. From Song to Qing

Ever since the 12th century, spirit-writing groups producing scriptures have been continuously active and increasingly numerous. While these groups grew ever more diverse, they mostly maintained the three elements defined above, including eschatology. A number of works (liturgies, self-cultivation treatises, poetry, hagiography, scriptures) produced by such groups between the 13th and 15th centuries are included in the *Daozang*. One remarkable example is

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[8] See Terry Kleeman's entry in Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the* Daozang (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2:1207.

[9] *Yuanshi tianzun shuo Zitong dijun benyuan jing*, 2b. See also the preface to the *Huashu*: "吾先奉玉帝敕，授以如意飛鸞墨跡于天地之間也，救末劫，爰命梓潼君也" (6b).

the corpus of spirit-written texts produced between the late Yuan and early Ming around the Xu Brothers' cult (Xu Zhizheng 徐知證 and Xu Zhie 徐知諤), near Fuzhou 福州, Fujian province.[10] This cult produced among other texts one short scripture, where a high-ranking Daoist deity reveals he has sent the Xu brothers to Earth to teach morality and save humanity on the brink of collapse under the weight of its own sins.[11]

Wenchang was closely associated with the appearance of the theme of saving humanity from impending apocalypse through spirit-written morality books, but other gods soon jumped in and claimed to play the same role. Arguably the most influential of these gods was Zhenwu 真武, aka Xuantian shangdi 玄天上帝, who, soon after the Wenchang revelations, began to produce very significant numbers of revelations himself. Some of these revelations played up the apocalyptic theme. This is notably the case of a spirit-written tract dated 1302, in clear continuity with the *Yuhuang jing*, entitled *Wudang shan Xuantian shangdi chuixun wen* 武當山玄天上帝垂訓文 (Instructions Revealed by Supreme Emperor of Dark Heavens from Wudang Mountains).[12] This text repeatedly evokes the final cataclysm, full of hordes of murderous demons that will usher in the end of this world (*mojie*); it calls on

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[10] Schipper and Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon*, 2:1210–1216; Edward L. Davis, "Arms and the Tao, 1: Hero Cult and Empire in Traditional China," in *Sōdai no shakai to shūkyō* 宋代の社會と宗教 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1985), 1–56; "Arms and the Dao, 2 : The Xu Brothers in Tea Country," in *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual*, ed. Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 149–164.

[11] *Lingbao tianzun shuo Hongen lingji zhenjun miaojing* 靈寶天尊說洪恩靈濟真君妙經 (DZ 317). Note also another eschatological scripture in the *Daozang*, undated but likely Yuan or early Ming: *Taishang Jinhua tianzun jiujie huming miaojing* 太上金華天尊救劫護命妙經 (DZ 1196).

[12] *Wudang shan Xuantian shangdi chuixun wen*, Ming edition (date illegible), in *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992–1994), 22:416–418. This text would be later renamed *Xuantian shangdi jinke yulü* 玄天上帝金科玉律. See Vincent Goossaert, *Livres de morale révélés par les dieux, édités, traduits*, présentés et annotés (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 2012), 53–67; Wang Chien-ch'uan 王見川, "Zhenwu xinyang zai jinshi Zhongguo de chuanbo" 真武信仰在近世中國的傳播, *Minsu yanjiu* 民俗研究 3 (2010): 90–117, esp. 106–110. This text amplifies eschatological themes already present in a revelation by Zhenwu dated 1184, see *Taishang shuo Xuantian dasheng zhenwu benzhuan shenzhou miaojing* 太上說玄天大聖真武本傳神咒妙經 (DZ 775).

humans to follow Zhenwu and his moral teachings so as to be spared:[13]

> I make a precise record of all good and bad actions, and I measure exactly the sins and the blessings of everyone; when the sins are minor, I spare the life of half [the family] but when they are heavy I exterminate the whole family. The virtuous will be allowed to continue seeing the light of day, but the sinners will never see the advent of the great peace. Those who trust in me will survive the apocalypse, and the others will lose life and soul.
>
> 記錄作善作惡，較量罪福重輕，輕則減死一半，重則死絕滅門。
> 善者得見天日，惡者不見太平，信者得度末劫，不信喪命亡魂。

The state of the documentation does not yet allow us to follow closely the evolution of scriptural production through the course of the Ming period, but it would seem that after maybe two centuries (early and mid-Ming) of less intense production, a new phase began around the early 17th century when spirit-writing groups multiplied and their scriptures became ever more numerous and elaborate. From this period on, not only do we have isolated scriptures, but also comprehensive corpuses with detailed records about the groups that produced and circulated them.

During this period, Wenchang continued to be a major deity in spirit-writing cults and a source of important doctrinal developments. One major text that came to epitomize Wenchang's revelations concerning his mission to avoid or mitigate the end of the world is the *Wendi jiujie baojing* 文帝救劫寶經 (or *Jiujie baozhang* 救劫寶章, Precious Scripture by the Civil Emperor, on Saving Humans from the Kalpa),[14] also included in the *Daozang jiyao* under the alternative title of *Yuanhuang dadao zhenjun jiujie baojing* 元皇大道真君救劫寶經 (Precious Scripture by the True Lord of the Great Way of Original Splendor, on Saving Humans from the

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[13] *Wudang shan Xuantian shangdi chuixun wen*, 1b.

[14] Collected in *Zengding Jingxin lu* 增訂敬信錄 (1749, 1831 edition), 50a–59a, reprinted in *Sandong shiyi* 三洞拾遺 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2005), 5:714–718; and in *Chongkan Daozang jiyao* 重刊道藏輯要 (1906 edition, reprinted by Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1995), 9:439–441.

Kalpa). The origin of the text is unclear; it is already mentioned in Kangxi-period sources,[15] and may thus date to the mid-17th century, likely more or less contemporary with the other major Wenchang scripture, the *Wenchang dijun yinzhi wen* 文昌帝君陰騭文 (Text on Hidden Retributions by the Wenchang Sovereign Lord) which it quotes liberally.[16] By the 18th century, the text was widely circulated: it was included in a number of popular anthologies of morality books, including the *Jingxin lu* (Records on Reverence and Faith, first edition in 1749).

The *Jiujie baojing* has a prologue warning humans of the impending end of the world, and explaining Wenchang's efforts, on a mission ordered by Tiandi 天帝 (a common title for the Jade Emperor in late imperial scriptures), to save as many humans as possible from the apocalypse. Wenchang explains that he will save humans by "rectifying their hearts" and having them recite the *Taishang ganying pian* every day. This is followed by six short sections (*zhang* 章) that focus on individual morality and retribution, covering the same ground as other morality books, and providing edifying anecdotes illustrating the working of retribution. The final section reverts to the eschatological theme and to the issue of *collective* fate. Here is how Wenchang describes his role in the prologue:[17]

> I feel sorry for [humans faced with] the upcoming turning of the kalpa; [this is caused by] humans sinning without any limit. I am now dispatching three million great demons of the ten unforgivable sins, three million apsaras and divine kings, one billion six million divine

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[15] "Wenchang ci Ding Shouxian shengwei ji" 文昌祠丁守憲生位記, in Chen Xi 陳僖 (Kangxi period), *Yanshan caotang ji* 燕山草堂集, "*ji*" 記, 3.11a–12a, *Siku weishoushu jikan* 四庫未收書輯刊 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2000), 8.17:532; "Jingshan huibian xu" 鏡善彙編序, in Yao Wenran 姚文然 (1621–1678), *Yao Duanke gong wenji* 姚端恪公文集, 13.26a–27a, *Siku weishoushu jikan*, 7.18:361.

[16] On the *Yinzhi wen* and its dating, see Goossaert, *Livres de morale révélés par les dieux*, 15–24; Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫, *Zōho Chūgoku zenshu no kenkyū* 増補中國善書の研究 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1999), 1:509–544; Kleeman, *A God's Own Tale*, 77, 282; and "The Tract on the Hidden Administration," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 70–71.

[17] *Yuanhuang dadao zhenjun jiujie baojing*, 1b.

> soldiers and generals, all under the orders of the Thunder Gods of the five directions, to take sinners away. There will be storms, rains, flooding, fires, and epidemics to kill the sinners and complete the turning of the kalpa. The punishment is imminent: how pitiful. I now want to save living beings, and take upon myself to reveal the Heavenly decision [to kill all the sinners].
>
> 吾愍劫運之臨，世人造惡，無有窮已。今遣十惡大魔三百萬、飛天神王三百萬、神兵神將一千六百萬，以五道雷神主之，收取惡人。又大風、大雨、大水、大火、大疫並作，以收惡人，用充劫運，罪罰不遠，深可哀憐。吾今為度脫眾生，私露天機。

As a whole, the *Jiujie jing* shares many themes with earlier Wenchang texts, notably the *Benyuan jing*, but grants an even more important role to Wenchang since it is he who now sends demonic soldiers to kill sinners *en masse*. Another new feature is the close connection with morality books (the *Taishang ganying pian* must be recited daily by devotees who adhere to the scripture so as to save themselves) and the idea of a universal penal code (*tiantiao* 天條)[18] that underpins the meting out of individual punishments and collective disasters.

III. Eschatological Themes in 18th-Century Scriptural Productions

We do not know anything about the people who produced the *Wendi jiujie baojing*. By contrast, other contemporary scriptural productions are remarkably well documented as to their social, organizational, and intellectual contexts. The 18th century was marked by a strong movement of canonization—by which I mean here two related processes: the systematic collection of revealed texts emanating from savior deities in comprehensive collections, as well as the inclusion of these deities in state official sacrifices. This movement is important to our purpose because it legitimized and solidified the place of eschatology in Qing Daoist doctrine. I am devoting a separate article to this double process of canonization,

[18] I plan to devote a separate article to the theme of Heavenly codes in the history of Daoist scriptures, ritual, and morality.

and discussing in more details the shrines, people, and texts mentioned below; here I will only deal with eschatological themes.

One important spirit-writing group was created in Suzhou 蘇州 during the early years of the Qing by members of the most prominent gentry families there, including the Pengs 彭. One of its patriarchs, Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645–1719), whose name comes up in numerous morality books and revealed scriptures as editor, preface author, or outright recipient of the revelation, was among the leaders of private spirit-writing altars (devoted to various gods such as Zhenwu, Doumu 斗姥 and Wenchang) who merged during the 1660s into one large altar named Yu tan 玉壇, devoted to the Jade Emperor.[19] This altar continuously produced revelations over some decades, until they were compiled in 1714 in one large collection, titled *Yuquan* 玉詮 (Jade Expositions, 5 *juan*, collected in *Daozang jiyao*). This is not a scripture strictly speaking, but a series of rather short texts, mostly dealing with cosmology and self-cultivation. Yet it is significant because it seems to have influenced directly contemporary and slightly later groups such as those discussed below.

Although eschatology is not a dominant theme in the *Yuquan*, it is part of the worldview of the Suzhou elites that produced it. The various gods' pronouncements insist that the self-cultivation methods they teach serve adepts in overcoming the "kalpa disasters" (including both individual retribution and collective disasters):

> Don't you know that cultivating is the tool to cross over the kalpa? (1.63a)
> 不知修道乃超劫之具。

> All ye disciples, if you really can honor our spirit-writing shrine, you must distance yourself from the vulgar. Then your mind will return to the Great Dao, your body will reunite with nature and your family will obtain a new fate when the kalpa ends. (1.94b)
> 今諸子果能奉壇，須要遠俗，以此心還之大道，此身還之天地，此家還之劫數 。

[19] The textual productions within the Peng family are the topic of a PhD dissertation by Daniel Burton-Rose, Princeton University.

> This [self-cultivation] is the only way to stop disasters and dispel the apocalypse. (2.53b)
>
> 所以弭災消劫者在此矣。

> Self-cultivating and practicing allows you to subdue demons and be saved from the apocalypse. (5.8a)
>
> 煉玄行法，可以降魔救劫。

The gods descending at the Yu tan themselves express a vow to save humans from the kalpa (1.33a, 1.99a). In one instance, joining those at the Yu tan is presented as the one vehicle available to avoid being caught in the apocalypse:

> As for the huddled masses who have not yet joined our shrine and learned our instructions, how could they avoid falling into the calamities of the end of the kalpa? (4.31b)
>
> 何況林林總總之黎庶，未入大壇，未覩法訓，豈不墮斯灾劫乎？

And the choice (becoming a member or not) is between becoming a demon and ascending to Heaven:

> You are still hesitant and indecisive [about joining our group]: are you sure you are ready to become ghosts when the end comes, and not happy at the prospect of ascending to Heaven? (3.56a–b)
>
> 尚爾徘徊顧慮，甘為末劫之鬼魂，不樂身登於金闕。

This kind of worldview, as we will see, was quite typical of Qing-period spirit-writing groups.

A new stage in the history of scriptural production was the emergence during the early Qing of innovative groups devoted to the cult of Patriarch Lü 呂祖—Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, *hao* Chunyang 純陽, a probably legendary saint whose cult is attested as early as the 11th century. One particular group systematized and amplified the corpus of texts revealed by Lü.[20] It formed in Wuchang 武昌 (modern Wuhan, Hubei province), first at the residence of a local

[20] Many spirit-written revelations by Patriarch Lü are attested as early as the Song, and by the early Qing spirit-writing altars devoted to him were very numerous.

scholar, Song Shinan 宋式南, then in a temple that the group founded around 1702, the Hansan gong 涵三宮.[21] Thanks to this temple, the group institutionalized itself and became permanent; a later adept, Liu Qiao 劉樵 (other *ming*: Tishu 體恕, an official who rose to the rank of Prefect before being dismissed in 1749) compiled all the texts attributed to Patriarch Lü and considered authentic, including an important number revealed at the Hansan gong. The compilation was published in 1743 and titled *Lüzu quanshu* 呂祖全書 (Complete Works of Patriarch Lü).[22] Texts revealed at various altars during the Kangxi reign, and notably at the Hansan gong between 1700 and 1740 were in large part scriptures (*jing* 經) longer and doctrinally more complex than the earlier revelations. The group around Song Shinan and Liu Qiao thus significantly altered the contents of the Patriarch's teachings and his image.

Eschatological teachings abound throughout the newly revealed texts included in the *Lüzu quanshu*. Take for instance this opening passage from the *Wupin jing* 五品經 (Scripture in Five Chapters, apparently revealed in Wuchang in 1679):[23]

> In the fall of the year *jiwei* (1679?), the Heavenly emperor became furious [with the sins of humanity] and ordered the gods in charge of monitoring humans' transgressions to go over the records of people's sins and, according to the Heavenly codes, to determine the precise date for the apocalypse. Those who were listed as the future victims of the apocalypse were innumerable.
>
> 己未之秋，上帝震怒，命司過諸神，歷察人民罪案，盡依天律，註定劫數。其在劫眾生，不可勝紀。

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[21] Lai Chi-tim 黎志添, "Qingdai sizhong *Lüzu quanshu* yu Lüzu fuji daotan de guanxi" 清代四種《呂祖全書》與呂祖扶乩道壇的關係, *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊 42 (2013): 183–230; Li Ka Chun 李家駿, "*Lüzu quanshu* sanshi'er juan ben yu Jiangxia Hansan gong"《呂祖全書》三十二卷本與江夏涵三宮, *Daojiao wenhua yanjiu zhongxin tongxun* 道教文化研究中心通訊 26 (2012): 1–4. Li Ka Chun wrote a PhD dissertation on the *Lüzu quanshu* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012) which I have not seen. See also Yin Zhihua 尹志華, "*Lüzu quanshu* de bianzuan he zengji"《呂祖全書》的編纂和增輯, *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 1 (2012): 16–21.

[22] Liu Qiao, comp., *Lüzu quanshu* (1744 edition, reprinted by Shanghai: Qianqing tang, 1917).

[23] *Wupin jing*, in *Lüzu quanshu*, 12.2a.

In another scripture, the *Sanpin jing* 三品經 (full title: *Qingwei sanpin zhidao jixuan cantong miaodian dasheng dujie zhenjing* 清微三品至道極玄參同妙典大乘度劫真經 [True Scripture of Qingwei to Cross the Kalpa, through the Great Vehicle of the Marvelous Records of the Unity (of the Teachings), Very Subtle, and Reaching the Dao, in Three Chapters]; note the eschatological element in the title), revealed at the Hansan gong in 1740, Patriarch Lü is very clearly designated as the one deity in charge of "presiding over the disasters" (*zhuchi jiehui* 主持劫會), "postponing the end of the kalpa" (*wanhui jieyun* 挽回劫運), and "expanding his compassion to save humans from the apocalypse" (*guangtui jiujie zhi ren* 廣推救劫之仁).

The *Lüzu quanshu* rapidly proved extremely influential; during the following decades, it was modified, supplemented, and reprinted several times by other spirit-writing groups in other regions, showing that traveling elites spread these texts rapidly. A 1774 enlarged edition of the *Lüzu quanshu* edited by Shao Zhilin 邵志琳 (1748–1810) included more new scriptures.[24] One of them, revealed in Hangzhou 杭州, carries an explicitly eschatological title: *Guanghui xiuxin baoming chaojie jing* 廣慧修心保命超劫經 (Scripture to Cross the Kalpa and Protect One's Life, through Vast Wisdom and Self-Cultivation). Lüzu is presented in this scripture as the savior designated by the whole pantheon to save humans from their kalpa predicament—here again, the *jie*-kalpa are both individual destinies and collective apocalypse.

Another one of the groups that appropriated the Patriarch Lü corpus to reshape and expand it further formed around 1790 in the capital around high-ranking officials and a Buddhist monk named Mingxin 明心. The group was led by Jiang Yupu 蔣予蒲 (*zi* Yuanting 元庭, 1755–1819, whose career culminated as head of several ministries between 1806 and 1814). Their spirit-writing altar, Jueyuan tan 覺源壇, was active during the last years of the 18th and the first decade of the 19th century.[25] It first published a new version of the *Lüzu quanshu*, then embarked on a much more

[24] Shao Zhilin, comp., *Lüzu quanshu* (1774), reprinted in *Zhonghua xu Daozang* 中華續道藏 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1999), vol. 20. Lai Chi-tim, "Qingdai sizhong *Lüzu quanshu* yu Lüzu fuji daotan de guanxi" provides a very convenient list of the scriptures added to the 1774 edition when compared to the 1744 (216–217).

[25] On Jiang Yupu and the *Daozang jiyao*, see notably Monica Esposito, "The

ambitious project, achieved in 1806 with the publication of the *Daozang jiyao*. This collection includes over three hundred texts, two thirds of which come from the Ming *Daoist Canon*, and about one hundred texts that were produced (mostly spirit-written) during the 17th and 18th centuries.[26] Some of these new texts were produced by earlier spirit-writing altars (including the *Yuquan* and the scriptures revealed at the Hansan gong), and an important number were produced at the Jueyuan tan itself. The *Daozang jiyao* thus constitutes a culmination of a canonization process featuring a wide selection of the scriptures revealed by gods such as Patriarch Lü, Doumu, Wenchang, and Guandi. It is a particularly important collection because it encapsulates the state of doctrinal production by the turn of the 19th century, just before new developments would take scripture production in new directions (on which more below).

Eschatological scriptures are numerous in the *Daozang jiyao*. Besides texts that were already circulating during the 18th century such as the *Yuanshi tianzun shuo Zitong dijun benyuan jing* and the *Wendi jiujie jing*, adepts around Jiang Yupu at the Jueyuan tan also revealed their own scriptures. To give but one example, the *Jiuhuang Doumu jiesha yansheng zhenjing* 九皇斗姥戒殺延生真經 (True Scripture on Extending Life through Non-Killing [Preached by] Doumu [Mother of] the Nine Emperors [of Ursa Major]) revealed by Doumu provides a graphic description of the imminent annihilation of humanity caused by the accumulated butchering of

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Discovery of Jiang Yuanting's *Daozang jiyao* in Jiangnan: A Presentation of the *Daoist Canon* of the Qing Dynasty," in *Kōnan Dōkyō no kenkyū* 江南道教の研究, ed. Mugitani Kunio 麥谷邦夫 (Kyoto: Jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 2007), 79–110; "The Invention of a Quanzhen Canon: The Wondrous Fate of the *Daozang jiyao*," in *Quanzhen Daoists in Chinese Society and Culture, 1500–2010*, ed. Liu Xun and Vincent Goossaert (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2013), 44–77; Mori Yuria, "*Dōzō shūyō* to Shō Yofu no Ryoso fuki shinkō" 「道藏輯要」と蔣予蒲の呂祖扶乩信仰, *Tōhō shukyō* 東方宗教 98 (2001): 33–52; "Identity and Lineage: The *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* and the Spirit-writing Cult to Patriarch Lü in Qing China," in *Daoist Identity: Cosmology, Lineage, and Ritual*, 165–184; "Shō Yofu no Ryoso fuki shinkō to Zenshinkyō" 蔣予蒲の呂祖扶乩信仰と全真教：「清微宏範道門功課」の成立をめぐって, in *Dōkyō kenkyū no saisentan* 道教研究の最先端, ed. Horiike Nobuo 堀池信夫 and Sunayama Minoru 砂山稔 (Tokyo: Taiga Shobō, 2006), 82–108.

[26] The *Daozang jiyao* Project, initiated by Monica Esposito and now directed by Lai Chi-tim, is compiling a comprehensive description and analysis of the canon.

animals. Doumu preaches that only a radical and immediate change of attitude toward life can bring humans back from the brink, and even calculates the most cost-efficient way to accumulate merits in the little time available, and thus maximize the chances of avoiding doom:

> If one man practices this [non-killing] he can avoid disasters for himself; if the whole of humanity practices this, it can avoid the end of the kalpa. (20b)
>
> 一人行之，可救一身之難；眾人行之，可挽世運之劫。

> [Such accumulation of sinful killing of animals] will not need to continue for a hundred years, but within just a few decades, expect the advent of the end of the kalpa, and you will soon find yourself among those who will be annihilated. (23a)
>
> 且有不必積至百年，積至數十年，而待劫運之來，始同歸於盡者矣。

> There will be disasters such as fires and floods, wars and slaughter, pests and epidemics and they will combine in one apocalypse. And yet, I tell you, the arrival of the end of the kalpa, even though it is caused by the accumulation [of sins], can be avoided. The kalpa will end within a few decades, but in the meantime, the sinners who repent will achieve peace and immunity. (23b)
>
> 爰有水火、刀兵、虫蝗、疫癘等事，而為一大劫。然則劫運之來，但就其所積者而言，非謂必至。數十年始成一劫，而中間之肆虐者，反得優游無害也。

> [Killing living beings] causes disasters to befall the culprits on an even larger scale, and the end of all mankind to arrive even sooner. (28a)
>
> 致令一身之災禍益大，舉世之劫運益速。

From 1840 onward, and even more during the Taiping war (1851–1864), the eschatological discourse takes a new turn and expands quite spectacularly. New revelations starting in 1840 at a temple near Chongqing 重慶 (Sichuan) called Longnü si 龍女寺 explain that the Jade Emperor has decided to annihilate humanity, which he considers irredeemably sinful; only after pleas by Guandi (who from that point on becomes a central figure in eschatological discourse) is one last reprieve given, during which time he and other gods will multiply spirit-writing revelations in order to save

as many humans as possible.[27] Wang Chien-ch'uan has traced the origins and rapid diffusion of this discourse in the new context of the 19th century. From the early Republican period onward, redemptive societies[28] produced and diffused unprecedented amounts of eschatological scriptures (old and new), thus bringing the eschatological tradition down to the present. Wang and other historians have proposed to differentiate "classical" morality books and scriptures from those revealed after 1840, often linked to devotional traditions such as Xiantian dao 先天道 (and its later offshoots including the redemptive societies), more "popular" in style and more apocalyptic in tone. The post-1840 texts frequently mention dates when the apocalypse should occur and introduce the Three Ages, *sanqi* 三期 theory, which was not the case in the scriptures discussed above.[29] Yet, if this period indeed represents a turning point in the history of the production of scriptures and eschatological ideas, it should be noted that texts produced then were to an important extent rephrasing ideas already present in Song-period Wenchang revelations and carried over and developed by many 18th-century scriptures.

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[27] Takeuchi Fusaji, "Shinmatsu Shisen no shūkyō undō" 清末四川の宗教運動, *Gakushūin daigaku bungakubu kenkyū nenpō* 學習院大學文學部研究年報 37 (1994): 59–93; Wang Chien-ch'uan, "Taiwan 'Guandi dang Yuhuang' chuanshuo de youlai" 臺灣「關帝當玉皇」傳說的由來, in *Hanren zongjiao, minjian xinyang yu yuyanshu de tansuo: Wang Jianchuan zixuanji* 漢人宗教、民間信仰與預言書的探索：王見川自選集 (Taipei: Boyang, 2008), 412–430; see also Yau Chi-on 游子安, "Fuhua yunei: Qingdai yilai Guandi shanshu ji qi xinyang de chuanbo" 敷化宇內：清代以來關帝善書及其信仰的傳播, *The Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong* 香港中文大學中國文化研究所學報 50 (2010): 219–253, esp. 225–228. The Longnü si revelations are explicitly mentioned in numerous later texts, yet, curiously, no extant original text seems to survive (only later, revised versions).

[28] Redemptive societies are religious movements that developed during the Republican period, integrating pre-existing self-cultivation practices and doctrines (often eschatological), but in a modern organizational form (mass training, Church-like structures). See Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), chap. 4.

[29] Among works discussing 20th-century spirit-writing groups and eschatological ideas, see David K. Jordan and Daniel Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) and Paul R. Katz, *When Valleys Turned Blood Red: The Ta-pa-ni Incident in Colonial Taiwan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

IV. Eschatology in the Qing Context

When compared to the *Daoist Canon*, the *Daozang jiyao* as a product of accumulated spirit-written revelations of the 17th and 18th centuries features eschatological themes very prominently. The table of contents includes the foundational Wenchang texts discussed above, *Benyuan jing* and *Jiujie baojing*, and many of the revelations produced by the Yu tan, Hansan gong, Jueyuan tan and other altars. More than this, the highest-ranking officials who participated in the compilation and edition of the *Daozang jiyao* unreservedly associated themselves with these texts. Perhaps the most striking example is Zhu Gui 朱珪 (1731–1807), who is listed as having prepared the edition of the *Jiujie baojing*. Zhu Gui, a member of the Jueyuan tan and lifelong devotee of Lüzu and Wenchang, was one of the highest-ranking officials of the time. Having served as the preceptor of the future Emperor Jiaqing 嘉慶, who gave him unlimited respect, Zhu enjoyed a high-flying career as provincial governor, then settled in Beijing after Jiaqing assumed full power in 1799, and was showered with honors and privileges. He was the driving force behind Wenchang's canonization in 1801. In other words, arguably the most powerful official in the empire edited and published a spirit-revealed scripture warning humans that demons were about to exterminate them all. This is not the kind of information we can find in standard history textbooks about Qing China and its so-called Confucian elites.

Zhu Gui seems exceptional because of the historical stature of the person, but he was absolutely not a unique case; many 18th- and 19th-century officials combined a civil-service career and perfectly Confucian-orthodox writings in this capacity together with a rich and diverse private spiritual life where self-cultivation, spirit-writing, and the cults of gods such Patriarch Lü, Wenchang, and Guandi played a central role.[30] These officials probably did not

[30] See also the case of the Wanyan family in Liu Xun, "Immortals and Patriarchs: The Daoist World of a Manchu Official and His Family in Nineteenth Century China," *Asia Major*, 3rd Series, 17.2 (2004): 161–218; and Vincent Goossaert, "Yu Yue (1821–1906) explore l'au-delà. La culture religieuse des élites chinoises à la veille des révolutions," in *Miscellanea Asiatica*, ed. Roberte Hamayon, Denise Aigle, Isabelle Charleux, and Vincent Goossaert (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica, 2011), 623–656.

see a fundamental contradiction between the various aspects of their lives, and yet their private religiosity remains in most cases invisible in biographical sources heavily edited by disciples and heirs eager to erase anything that might seem objectionable, or just not appropriate for the specific genres of public writing that were selected for publication. Their convictions regarding their own postmortem destinies and the need to save ordinary sinful humans from a grim fate could not be expressed in public pronouncements, and thus had to find outlets in genres such as morality books and revealed scriptures. Yet, these texts were placed under the authority of officially-sanctioned gods (especially after the Jiaqing-period canonization of the spirit-writing gods: Patriarch Lü, Wenchang, Xu Xun 許遜, Guandi) and thus constituted a space of toleration and partial freedom crucial for expressing the worldview of the upper gentry.

Such toleration may come as a surprise when one considers the status of eschatological discourse at the time. Many strands of that discourse were carried by popular devotional groups (usually called "sectarian" in the scholarly literature) and exposed in great detail in their *baojuan* scriptures.[31] Because these groups were banned, occasionally repressed, and associated with millenarian rebellions, such discourse was banned and politically extremely sensitive. When Zhu Gui edited the *Jiujie baojing* and included it in the *Daozang jiyao* published in Beijing in 1806, the Qing state had just put down, after ten years (1794–1804) of ruinous and devastating war, a millenarian rebellion in the Sichuan-Shanxi-Hubei uplands. The last thing one would expect in such conditions is high officials publishing texts predicting the end of the world—yet they did.

This raises the issue of the acceptability of such eschatological discourse. Arguably, it was not the mere fact that *baojuan* talked of the endtimes that made them a target for repression, but rather who might and in what terms legitimately discuss eschatological themes. I thus propose to distinguish the eschatological discourse

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[31] Barend Ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999); Liu Kwang-Ching and Richard Shek, eds., *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

included in the scriptures collected in the *Daozang jiyao* from that of the *baojuan*. Scholars who have paid attention to the issue have dwelt on the resemblances and continuities between the eschatology of the *baojuan* and that found in medieval Daoist texts (and ignored the Daoist eschatological production contemporary with the *baojuan*).[32] While this approach is fully warranted and fruitful, it is also crucial to realize that the Chinese eschatological tradition is not monolithic and has taken different shapes, even during one single period. The eschatology of the early and mid-Qing spirit-written scriptures usually does not feature the Three Ages theory central to the *baojuan* eschatology,[33] but evokes a gradual and reversible decline of humanity; even more crucially, it is not messianic—at least not in a strict sense. That is, when the end is coming, no one (whether called Maitreya, Li Hong, the next emperor, or something else) descends on earth to gather the elect and guide them to a kingdom of peace and plenty. Rather, the role of the messiah is played by a god (Wenchang, Zhenwu, Doumu, or Lüzu) who descends in the phoenix but is not incarnate. This is an extremely significant difference, because (among other things) no one can claim to be the one and only incarnation of the messiah, since the "messianic god" is writing moral tracts all over the country at the same time. Such a multiplication of messianic charisma, indeed, a routinization,[34] removes the most politically objectionable aspect of apocalyptic eschatology, namely, the possibility for someone to proclaim himself the messiah (and even worse, new emperor). More generally, the kind of dynastic messianism that is found in earlier Daoist texts is absent here; the point is not to criticize the moral decline of the regime, but of humanity in general.

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[32] Lee Fongmao 李豐楙, "Jiujie yu dujie: Daojiao yu Mingmo minjian zongjiao de moshi xingge" 救劫與度劫：道教與明末民間宗教的末世性格, in *Daojiao yu minjian zongjiao yanjiu lunji* 道教與民間宗教研究論集, ed. Lai Chi-tim (Hong Kong: Xuefeng wenhua shiye, 1999), 40–72; Sze Tak Pui, "Eschatology in Ming-Qing Sectarian Precious Volumes (*baojuan*) and Its Daoist Elements" (MA thesis, Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2003).

[33] The *Guanghui xiuxin baoming chaojie jing* alludes to it; it should be noted that the Three Ages discourse were prevalent in medieval Daoist texts, and is therefore not a sure marker of "sectarian" influence.

[34] I am grateful to David Ownby for raising the issue of routinization.

I thus propose to define the eschatological discourse produced and disseminated by the spirit-writing groups of the Qing, and canonized in collections such as the *Daozang jiyao*, as modern elite eschatology. Modern because, while it is clearly in continuation with earlier texts, it also innovates on a number of key points (notably spirit-writing replacing the messiah), and characterizes a body of texts produced between the 12th century and the present. Elite because it is produced and disseminated by members of the gentry (including important numbers of upper gentry and active officials), which does not preclude larger audiences but certainly implies elite religiosity and values.

One marker of this elite religiosity is the central role of moral self-cultivation as the main way to postpone the apocalypse. It is not so much the so-called Confucian contents of the moral program that is relevant here, since morality books have from the Song onwards created a potent fusion of the "Three Teachings" moral discourse. Rather, it is the focus on "taking one's destiny in one's own hands" that forms the Daoist-Confucian basis for moral self-cultivation and soteriology (salvation through self-divinization). That the authors argued that a new age of moral reform could reverse the process of human decline, postpone the apocalypse, and return humanity closer to the pristine conditions of antiquity presumably made the discourse more acceptable, even though the talk of hordes of demons unleashed onto the sinning masses still colored these scriptures in a way that was not entirely palatable to everyone.

A consequence of this approach is that no calculation about the duration of the kalpa is made and no date is set for the apocalypse (no mention of a *renshen* 壬申 or *jiazi* 甲子 year as the preordained date for endtimes, for instance, as in medieval or *baojuan* eschatologies); the moment when the apocalypse strikes depends, up to the last minute, on what humans do and on the Heavenly bureaucracy's decision. The kalpa ends not by necessity (the exhaustion of the old *qi* 氣) but by decree, itself based on due process. Similarly, there is no preset number of humans who will be saved and survive the kalpa. This is an eschatology that gives humans much agency; it is also—and this admittedly stretches the category—an eschatology of threat (the apocalypse *might* come if

we do not do something about it) rather than certainty. However, while the discourse in morality books on individual salvation tends to be broadly optimistic (one can through moral self-cultivation reap earthly benefits and then become a god), the discourse on the collective fate of humanity is rather pessimistic, and increasingly through the Qing period colored by anxiety—to use a term that has been fruitfully used to discuss medieval Daoism. To put it bluntly, the members of the gentry engaging in spirit-writing are confident they can save themselves, but much less confident that they can save the population around them, and yet they feel it is their duty to do so. At the same time, the texts they produce constantly hover between the two, with the key term *jie* frequently meaning *collective* disaster in one sentence and *individual* retribution in the next; some texts are very explicit about all-encompassing apocalypse while others are not. Such ambiguity is not incidental; it is creative and useful to preachers and moral activists who can adjust their discourse according to audience and context, build up tension and attention by warning of the coming endtimes, and yet dwell on issues of self-cultivation and moral order here and now.

Another feature of late imperial elite religiosity is that demonology and ritual means of warding off demons play a much less important role than in medieval texts. Demons are mentioned, but, as they act on the orders of the heavenly bureaucracy, it does not matter much whether one knows their names, or formulas to repel them: the key thing is to convince the bureaucrats above to call them back.[35] This is clearly elite bureaucratic procedure-driven religiosity at work. Even then, ritual means are not entirely absent, as the *Lüzu quanshu* includes a "kalpa-saving spell" (*jiujie zhou* 救劫咒) and one revealed apocalyptic scripture included in the *Daozang jiyao* is based on formulas taught by Vairocana to dispel the various types of disaster-causing demons.[36]

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[35] The tension between plague-causing agents conceived as plague demons (*yigui* 疫鬼) and plague official deities (*wenshen* 瘟神) is one instance of this shift; see Paul R. Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang* (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 49–50.

[36] *Yuanshi shangdi Piluzheye shuo dadong jiujie zunjing* 元始上帝毘盧耶說大洞救劫尊經, in *Daozang jiyao*.

The rise of apocalyptic themes in spirit-written scriptures cannot be explained solely by the social context. While in some instances (such as the disastrous wars that formed the backdrop of the revelation of the *Yuhuang jing* in 13th-century Sichuan), a major disaster can be related to the production of eschatological scriptures, in most cases within the 18th-century corpus discussed above, any such explanation would be weak and unconvincing. It is true that 19th-century disasters (culminating with the Taiping war) were interpreted (even by some officials) within the context of an eschatological discourse. Yamada Masaru in particular has documented the rise of "eschatological morality books" (*jiujie shanshu* 救劫善書) in relation to actual disasters, beginning with a revelation by Wenchang explaining disastrous flooding in 1801 as a warning of the coming apocalypse (*dajie*).[37] Yet, this discourse had developed during the 18th century at a time when disasters were seen as only local and hardly threatening to the Chinese world as a whole. I propose that it is the internal dynamics of the spirit-writing groups that best accounts for doctrinal innovation and rising concerns about the endtimes.

V. Conclusion: Is There an Elite Eeschatology?

This article has attempted to outline the continuities in the eschatological discourse over the long term, and in particular, in its modern elite form, from the Song period onward. The notion that the world as we know it might come to an end and the large majority of humanity would perish was alive all the while, discussed in a large variety of genres (including anecdotes [*biji* 筆記], which discuss eschatological themes quite extensively and evidence the circulation of various opinions) and most fully articulated in revealed scriptures. To fully grasp its relevance, we need to maintain some critical distance from this eschatological discourse as deployed in revealed texts. Fieldwork-based studies show that groups can

[37] Yamada Masaru 山田賢, "Sekai no hametsu to sono kyūsai: Shinmatsu no kyūgō no zensho ni tsuite" 世界の破滅とその救濟：清末の救劫の善書について, *Shihō* 史朋 30 (1998): 32–41. I am very grateful to Shiga Ichiko for drawing my attention to this article.

produce, recite, and transmit strongly eschatological texts without living in fear of the end of the world.[38] Furthermore, the idea that savior deities plead the highest gods to save humanity from impending apocalypse was to some extent a trope that served to introduce scriptures; while certain texts elaborated on the idea, others did not, and all occurrences of this idea must not therefore be taken as solid proof of actual anxiety about the endtimes.

Philip Clart[39] has argued that the discourse of elite spirit-written scriptures is not eschatological because it does not predict a specific apocalypse and describe its horrific scenario; it merely uses the threat of possible disaster to emphasize what is its own core concern: maintaining or restoring social order. The key issue is order and disorder, not the end of time. Clart even proposes that the scriptures we have discussed constitute a counter-discourse to popular eschatology. This argument has much merit; in many spirit-written scriptures the end of the kalpa is indeed mentioned as a rather vague possibility that seems to serve the rhetorical purpose of focusing readers' or listeners' minds on the message of moral reform.

Yet, I would argue that in some texts such as those discussed above, the threat of the apocalypse is real enough to warrant the use of the category of eschatology. This, obviously, is a different sort of eschatology from the discourse where the end is certain—here, as so often, it pays to adapt and expand Western concepts rather than rule out their use in non-Western contexts. As we have seen, Qing elite soteriology was non-messianic, non-millenarian, but it had a definite apocalyptic element. Anxiety about terminal decline comes in various metaphors in the spirit-written scriptures, one of the most common being black vapors (*heiqi* 黑氣) produced by human sins that fill up Heaven and Earth. Scenarios were simpler than in other eschatological discourses, but the idea that higher gods may at any given moment unleash billions of demons on earth to kill most humans was taken very seriously. The reaction of literati to actually apocalyptic events of the 19th-century (culminating in the Taiping war) showed that these were the terms

[38] David Ownby, oral communication, Hong Kong, 14 December 2012.

[39] Oral comments during the workshop on eschatology in Chinese religious history, 10 April 2014.

in which they made sense of what they experienced. In other words, while they served to build ideal-typical "elite" and "popular" soteriologies (whether one qualifies the former as eschatological or not), these discourses actually covered a continuum and overlapped to a very significant extent. An important aspect of this overlap was shared visions of the apocalypse and the brutal divine collective punishment of humanity.

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近代道教的救劫論：扶乩與清代文人的拯救觀

高萬桑

摘要

本文探討了一批在十八至十九世紀間，由文人扶乩並出版的經典。這些經典提出了一種救世論，末世之「劫」所帶來的威脅在其中相當重要，文人精英們有責任引領一場教化運動，才可彌災消劫。首先，本文將展示出扶乩啟示、文昌信仰與宋代道經中救劫論之間的緊密聯繫，這種聯繫延續到了清代，甚至變得更為強化。其次，在討論了與文昌、呂祖和其它信仰有關的幾個乩壇和文獻之後，論文將深究這些經典中的論述究竟在何種程度上能夠真正被稱為「救劫論」。本文認為這種論述應該被視為是早期和近代（如白蓮等教）的末日救世主之說的轉變，或是一種「反話語」，它維持了末劫的觀念，卻常規化了救世主，由此把救劫與皇帝的天命這兩種論述分別開來。

關鍵詞：救劫論、道教、清代、扶乩、文昌