

Options for Molding *Ming* (Fate) in the *Scripture on Great Peace**

Barbara Hendrischke

Abstract

This paper describes attitudes to “fate” (*ming* 命) that are documented in the *Scripture on Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經) which reaches back to the 2nd century C.E. The text’s authors link the term closely to the sets of moral and religious teachings that they propagate. For them, the distinction between good and bad fate lies in the length of life and they assure their audience that adherence to the right principles will result in a longer life. This promise is in some conflict with the idea that a man’s fate is decided by heaven and fixed at his time of birth. The authors do not refute this idea but juxtapose alternative ideas that restrain the deterministic impact of a pre-ordained fate. Here the image of heaven rewarding good and punishing bad conduct becomes powerful, and so does the view that individual fate depends on that of the community. Different parts of the long text provide different suggestions for moulding one’s fate. In the “model of heaven” (*tianfa* 天法) group, individual fate is said to depend on the extent of one’s awareness of and support for heaven’s natural order. The authors of the “great peace” (*taiping* 太平) group propose a historical situation where communal life is at the brink of disaster. Individual fate is therefore closely linked to support for social reform and other attempts

Barbara Hendrischke is an honorary member of the China Studies Centre of the University of Sydney. Her research is in early Daoism and Chinese intellectual history.

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at communal salvation. Authors of the “retaining spirits” (*shoushen* 守神) group have much to say on predetermining physiological conditions. However, they add that by means of close attention to rules of conduct a person can induce heaven or persuade the spirits within and around him to ameliorate his fate. For the authors of the transformation (*dahua* 大化) group a person’s fate is solely decided by converting to an attitude of self-reproach and faithful gratitude to heaven.

Keywords: *Scripture on Great Peace*, Han dynasty, fate, model of heaven, retaining spirits