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Connections Between Rebellions

Sect Family Networks in Qing China

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A rebellion is, almost by definition, an interruption, a break in and a strike against the status quo; the history of rebellion is usually the history of explosions that were intense but short-lived and independent of one another. In late Imperial China, most rebellions have been viewed as this sort of disconnected disconnector. The thoroughness with which uprisings were suppressed further assured little continuity between rebellions, and there are few examples of rebels who survived one uprising to lead another.

A great many of the rebellions in North China in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) were inspired by the White Lotus religion (*bailian jiao*)¹ and at first glance they also appear to have been quite independent of one another. Yet behind these uprisings lay less visible but powerful connections. The White Lotus religion, as both an ideological and organizational system (a *jiao* in both senses of the word), was the foundation for these linkages: The millenarian and devotional ideas were perpetuated in oral and written form, and the sectarian congregations and networks of teachers and pupils stretched through time and space. This article

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article was originally presented under a slightly different title at the workshop on "Rebellion and Revolution in North China: Late Ming to the Present," held at Harvard University, July 27-August 2, 1979. I am grateful to the participants in

will examine how the fabric of this religion could link separate uprisings and why it should be so surprisingly durable.

The survival of White Lotus sects should have been impaired by the fact that they were officially banned as "heterodox religions" (*xiejiao*) and prosecuted by government authorities whenever possible. At such times, local communities were alerted, religious books were confiscated, believers were arrested and punished, and the not inconsiderable power of the Qing state was brought behind the effort to discourage participation in sectarian activities. The occasional rebellion stimulated by White Lotus ideas not only meant prophetic failure but the loss of life for those caught up in the vortex of rebellion. Furthermore, even in normal times, the continuity provided by the religion could be quite fragile: There was an ever-present tendency for sect organization to fragment and dissolve and for religious ideas to become distorted or abandoned. And yet the number of adherents does not appear to have declined over time and the number of sect-inspired uprisings actually increased after the late eighteenth century. How do we account for this? Obviously, the relative weakness of the Qing state (that is, its inability to extirpate the sects entirely) and the apparent appeal of this religion in both its millennial and congregational forms to the Chinese people (at least some of them) can help explain the persistence of this "heterodoxy." But to understand more fully its continuing survival, we must look more closely at the structure of the religion.

Although one may refer to the fabric of this religion, it is better not to think of it as an evenly woven one. While descriptions of sects in the literature have hitherto emphasized similarities, there was, in fact, variation in ideas, activities, and structure. It is

that workshop for their comments. That paper was subsequently translated by Suzuki Chūsei and published in Japanese (Naquin, 1980). Several papers by Japanese on families discussed in this article have since been presented (Suzuki, 1981; Asai, 1981). I have made a number of small but significant corrections in this version.

NOTE ON CONVENTIONS: In the reference citations throughout the article, the following abbreviations for Qing dynasty reign periods have been used: YZ, Yongzheng; QL, Qianlong; JQ, Jiaqing.

precisely in this unevenness that we can find clues to White Lotus vitality.

One way of analyzing this religion is to contrast the strength of teacher-pupil ties in different groups.² At one end of the spectrum, itinerant teachers received new pupils into the sect after an intense but brief acquaintance and never returned to cement the relationship. Religious ideas and practices were thus often imperfectly learned and organizational links were brittle. At the other extreme, conversion followed preexisting ties of propinquity or kinship, and the relationship between pupil and teacher was lifelong and multifaceted. In these groups, sectarian beliefs and activities were preserved in fuller form and connections over time and space were more enduring.

The most tightly connected of all sects were those in which sectarianism was hereditarily transmitted within a single family. There, sect patriarchs were simultaneously lineage ancestors (both termed *zu*), parent-children relationships reinforced those between teachers and pupils, and the intimate and double-stranded connections between generations slowed the dilution of religious doctrine and the loss of organizational control. It is my hypothesis that such families could become a kind of sectarian elite, serving as religious professionals who preserved core White Lotus values over many centuries. The existence of such families was one of the factors that gave the White Lotus tradition its coherence and great strength. The tension and interplay between sects led by such families and more "peripheral" sects may also have given the religion its adaptability and vitality, and perhaps its volatility.

Quite a number of families were able to maintain positions of sectarian leadership for many generations in the early and middle Qing. Two of the most prominent and important were the Wangs of Luan Department in northeast Zhili Province (present Hebei) and the Lius of Shan County in southwestern Shandong. Let us look first at the Wangs and the Lius themselves, describing their family histories in a general manner, and then examine the ways in which such hereditary sect leaders were able to maintain power and to inspire rebellion over many centuries.

HEREDITARY SECTARIAN LEADERSHIP

The founder of the Wang family sect was a man known as Wang Sen, who lived in the sixteenth century. He founded a religious group called the Incense Smelling (*wenxiang*) sect and was successful in proselytizing in the vicinity of Beijing late in the century. Members of the court of the Wanli Emperor (1573-1619) were alleged to have been among his followers and a network of pupils extended throughout the North China Plain. Wang himself resided in Stone-buddha Village (Shifokou), a village on the main east-west highway some two hundred kilometers east of Beijing. He was arrested in 1595, released, and arrested again in 1614; he died in prison. Wang's teachings were closely associated with several early and important sectarian scriptures, including the *Nine Lotus Sutra* (*Jiulian jing*).³

Wang Sen's sect was carried on after his death by the now more fragmented structure of his pupils' sects, but particular authority fell naturally to his three sons. Shortly after Wang Sen's death, a pupil named Xu Hongru utilized the hereditary charisma of one son, Wang Haoxian, and in 1622 declared an end to Ming rule, a beginning of the era of "great completion and renewed victory" (*dacheng xingsheng*), and instigated a large-scale rebellion in southwestern Shandong. The uprising lasted three months and engaged perhaps two million supporters, but in the end was suppressed by imperial armies. The revolt was limited to the southern portion of the North China Plain and did not extend as far north as Luan Department.

Although Wang Haoxian was executed, his son and brothers survived. After the Manchus conquered China in 1644, much land around the capital was confiscated and assigned to Manchu banner families as a source of livelihood. Sketchy evidence suggests that members of the Wang family became tenants on what had been their own land. Perhaps as a result of these dislocations, two branches of the family moved from Shifokou northward, into villages in the low mountains of nearby Lulong County (NYC 42.16).

During the first century of Qing rule, the family continued to serve as sect leaders, and they reappear in the historical record in

1732. At that time, we find a great-great-grandson of Wang Sen living on banner land in Stone-buddha Village, holding the degree of military *juren*, and acknowledged as the head of the Great Completion (*dacheng*) sect by several thousand followers living elsewhere in the province. Sect activities included assemblies, sutra recitation, vegetarianism, the offering of tea to sect deities, and the making of small regular donations. The sect was discovered by the government and the leaders prosecuted. It is not clear how many members of the Wang family were implicated (NYC 42.13-22; Gongzhongdang [YZ] 7798).

Fifty years and two generations later, the family was again investigated. Members of a White Sun (*baiyang*) vegetarian sect in Hubei revealed that their sect master was Wang Zhongshun of Stone-buddha Village. By the time other sect members were arrested, followers of Wang Zhongshun had also been located in Henan, Anhui, and Jiangsu provinces. In 1771 Wang Zhongshun was executed and his father banished to Shaanxi, where he died, but the sect and the family's leadership of it continued. In 1788, Wang Zhongshun's younger brother (then aged thirty-six) began to renew the ties with his father's pupils in Hubei. In 1794 Zhongshun's son (then thirty-one) went himself to Jiangsu and Anhui to visit his father's pupils and to take new ones. In 1803 he moved to Jiangsu, returning home for a visit every five or six years. During these same decades, other members of the family traveled to and established connections with believers (who called their sects by a variety of names) all over north and central China. Some members of both these generations were arrested in 1811-1813 in Jiangsu, and the activities of most of these Wangs were more fully revealed in an exhaustive investigation that took place in 1815 (NYC 42.1-6, 42.13-22; Da Qing, 1937: [QL] 897.52-3, 899.51; Shangyudang: 333-338, JQ 20/12/25).

It was then learned that many features of the sect were similar to those described two centuries earlier, although the teaching was now known as the Clear Tea (*qingcha*) sect. Stone-buddha Village Wangs continued to be associated with the *Nine Lotus Sutra*, with certain mountains near their home, and with prophecies from a scripture known as the *Comprehensive Manual for Responding to the Kalpas of the Three Teachings*

(*Sanjiao yingjie zongguan tongshu*). This book stated that the Maitreya Buddha would appear in the family of the sect patriarch named Wang from Shifokou and would bring wealth and position to people in the sect (Shangyudang: 343-345, JQ 20/12/25; NYC 42.13-22).

In 1815 the governor-general of Zhili, Nayancheng, supervised the arrest of 39 women and 85 men from this now very large lineage, banished or executed them, and confiscated their property. The investigation was extended to include 7 men of the family known to be active religious leaders but not yet apprehended and several dozen of their pupils. Because of the persistence of this family in their commitment to heterodoxy, and because of the association between their leadership and millennial prophecies, Nayancheng attempted to eliminate the family by arresting innocent and guilty alike (NYC.1-49; Qing dai, 1979: 3).⁴

By contrast with the Wang family of Shifokou, the Lius of Shan County, Shandong, were (so far as I know) active sect leaders for only five or six generations. Their capacity to inspire rebellion was greater, however, and they present a somewhat different example of hereditary sect leadership.

Before his death in 1736, Liu Ruhan of Liu-family Village in Shan County (located not far from the Yellow River in south-western Shandong) had "long" been involved in a White Lotus sect that was practiced by his father and associated with his family. Despite a government investigation into his father's activities in 1706, Liu Ruhan was able to purchase a position as county magistrate (in Shanxi), but a second charge led to his impeachment and prosecution as a member of a heterodox sect in 1719. The Liu family teaching emphasized meditation and was called, inter alia, the Recover the Origin (*shouyuan*) sect; they revered an ancestor known as the Patriarch of Former Heaven (*xiantian zushi*), and expected the Maitreya Buddha to be born in the Liu family. But in 1732, when one of the Lius' Shanxi pupils came to their home to try to obtain Liu family support for his own revival of the sect (a revival linked to his declaration that the Maitreya Buddha had already arrived), the Lius would have nothing to do with him (Gondzhongdang [YZ] 10775; Da Qing,

1937: [QL] 309.42-44; Shiliao xunkan, 1930-1931: B.100-01; Naquin, 1981a: 186).

Almost one generation later, the family was charged with leadership of what was then called the Eight Trigrams (*bagua*) assembly. In 1771, Liu Ruhan's grandson, Liu Shengguo, was arrested (as were his sons and brother) and executed; at least a dozen other men from the area were also implicated (Da Qing, 1937: [QL] 907.50, 914.19; Gongzhongdang, [QL] 49245, 49720). Liu Shengguo's sons, although imprisoned, continued to serve as the focus of the activities of the followers of the family's sect. The eldest son, Liu Dahong, imprisoned in Shan County, was supported for fifteen years by money sent secretly by pupils. In 1786, members of an Eight Trigrams assembly in southern Zhili organized and rose in rebellion, their goal being the liberation of Liu Dahong and his reestablishment as sect master. The uprising was not successful and prompted a reassessment of the punishments of other members of the family. The second son of Liu Shengguo, who had been banished, was found living in Beijing, frequently assisted by contributions from sect members (Da Qing, 1937: [QL] 1262.11-12, 1262.26-28, 1261.18-21, 1261.33-36; Gongzhongdang [QL] 53345, 50189; Xunchangdang, 363-364, QL 51/9/6; 187-189, QL 51/8/17).

In 1791 another Liu, who had together with his brother been banished in 1782 for his sect activities, was found still to have been propagating the sect in exile in southwest China. Furthermore, in 1781, 1788, 1813, 1815, and thereafter, other sect members were arrested who identified themselves as followers of Liu Shengguo's sect (Gongzhongdang [QL] 41738, 41659, 54235, 54669; Da Qing, 1937: [QL] 1387.13-14; Jixindang, no page, QL 56/9/21; NYC 42.6-12). These and other groups used the names of different trigrams to identify themselves, and most of the important uprisings of the period were led by followers of the Lius. These included Wang Lun, who rebelled in 1774 in northwest Shandong; Lin Qing, leader of the Eight Trigrams uprising of 1813; and Cao Shun, leader of the Former Heaven (*xiantian*) sect uprising of 1835 in Shanxi (Naquin, 1981a, 1976; Qiao, 1957).

SOURCES OF POWER

These two families, the Wangs and the Lius, present different pictures of the range and authority of hereditary leadership in the White Lotus tradition, yet both illustrate the tenacity with which individual families survived and the loyalty with which their followers continued to support them. Both traced their families' religious leadership to patriarchs of the late Ming, the formative era of White Lotus sectarianism. But much more important than this pedigree was the fact that both the Wangs and the Lius claimed to be the family in which would be born on earth the Maitreya, Buddha of the Future, savior of sectarian believers.

For confirmation of their prophecy, the Wangs pointed to their scriptures. As we have seen, they had owned these "precious scrolls" (*baojuan*) as early as the sixteenth century, and those finely made Ming editions were preserved and shared with generation after generation of family and pupils. Other texts, written later by the Wangs or their pupils, similarly bolstered their power. Because of the danger that possession of "heterodox" books could entail, texts were also preserved orally. One Wang family member quoted the following passage, which makes explicit the connection between millennial expectations and family leadership:

In the past it was the Lamplighting Buddha who was in charge of the sect. Every year had six months, every day six hour-periods. In the present, it is the Sakyamuni Buddha who is in charge of the sect. Every year has twelve months, every day twelve hour-periods. In the future, it will be the Buddha to Come who is in charge of the sect. (The Buddha to Come is the same as the Maitreya Buddha.) Then, every year will have eighteen months, every day eighteen hour-periods. The Buddha to Come will be born on earth into the Wang family of Stone-buddha Village [NYC 42.13-22].

Another scripture described this millennium in more detail:

When the eighteenth kalpa is completed, things will change their form and shape. Eighteen months will constitute one year;

eighteen hour-periods will form one day; one month will include nine *jia* and forty-five days; one day will have one hundred and forty-four half-hour periods; and altogether eight hundred and ten days will form one year. Heaven and earth will be without waxing and waning; there will be no age or youth or life or death or femaleness. This is the great way of long life when all will live for eighty-one thousand years [Huang, 1883: 2.10].

Thus, in addition to their descent from Wang Sen, a revered patriarch of the Ming, this family could also assert that a particularly persuasive teacher from the family might indeed be the long-awaited savior.

The Liu family, by contrast, had not been active in sectarian affairs (according to evidence now available) until the early Qing and possessed only a few handwritten booklets for their scriptures. Instead, they relied primarily on oral transmission of religious verse, and eventually found most of their followers among those who could not read. But they also taught that *theirs* was the family of the Maitreya, who would come down to earth as the "sect master responsible for the kalpa," the Patriarch of Latter Heaven (*houtian zushi*) (Gongzhongdang [CL] 54235, 43914; Naquin, 1981b: 21-35). These predictions gained wide currency among their many pupils.

Prophecies such as these, appealing as they did to a persistent hope for dramatic change, were difficult to discredit and easily borrowed. Even if members of the Wang or Liu family chose not to associate themselves with millenarian behavior (preferring safer and more routine forms of religious life), they could not easily prevent others from laying claim to their charisma. Their pupils in particular could (and did) assert that the Maitreya was to be found in their sect (if not biological) family. The ten-year White Lotus uprising of 1796-1805 was, furthermore, organized by men who borrowed the mobilizing authority of both the Wang and Liu surnames without any explicit connection whatsoever. The persistence of such prophecies about the Maitreya, however misappropriated, ensured continuing power for the sect masters from the Liu and Wang families.

Ambiguously worded phrases from banned books or dimly remembered chants may seem a weak foundation for sustained religious authority (although they were not), but it is essential to realize also that White Lotus sects were able to generate considerable "real" power. Although as institutions these sects were loosely organized and usually without visible forms (such as buildings or public property), they had demonstrable strength. They had manpower and they had money, and both could be generated and wielded by sect leaders.

The normal pattern for the development of sectarian networks was one of diffusion and fragmentation. After a teacher's death, pupils each became sect leaders themselves and, especially if they lived in different places, often did not maintain horizontal ties with one another. Large sect networks created by the successful efforts of a persuasive teacher rarely outlived him. This regular fission was a source of protection for White Lotus believers in general, because it meant that sect size was not likely to become noticeably large. Small numbers gave safety from government detection. It was still possible, however, for a single individual to have a considerable following, and there are many examples of sects numbering in the hundreds or even thousands.

Hereditary sect leadership by one family could work to counter the fissive tendency inherent in White Lotus structure. Because special authority was lodged in members of a family like the Wangs of Stone-buddha Village, followers of a Wang of one generation maintained their connections with his descendants. These contacts were kept up by the efforts of the followers, who prized these links, and by the Wangs themselves, to whom loyal pupils were very advantageous.

In order to illustrate the way in which these links were secured, let us look at the case of Wang Diankui (of the Shifokou Wangs; NYC 42.1-6; Shangyudang, 333-336, JQ 20/12/25). When he was six (in 1771), his father was executed (and his grandfather banished) for sectarian activities in Anhui, as were (later) other male relatives of those two generations. By the time Wang Diankui reached the age of twenty, he had begun to take an active role in the sect. In order to reestablish connections with pupils of

the Wangs in the south, the young man relied on an old family servant who had previously accompanied his father on the latter's proselytizing journeys. In the early 1790s, Wang Diankui began to make expeditions to Anhui and Jiangsu, taken by the servant to the homes of his father's pupils. He made contact with certain key men ("chief" pupils, *zong tudi*) and through them with other followers in both provinces. If his father's pupils had already died, Wang Diankui met their sons (many of whom were likewise continuing to practice the sect) and "because their fathers were all my father's pupils, they acted as my pupils." Wang later took his own son with him when the latter was grown so that connections could be sustained in the next generation as well. Every year these followers passed on to Wang Diankui between twenty and forty taels of silver. (Based on other data about the average contribution an individual might make to a sect annually, we can extrapolate that these contributions reflect between forty and two hundred followers [see Naquin, 1976: 280]. We do not know if he kept this silver for himself or—as is more likely—passed along a portion to the rest of the lineage.)

The 1815 investigation into the Wang family revealed that Wang Diankui was by no means the only member of the family who had been on the road activating religious connections. Four of his uncles had also moved back and forth between Shifokou and areas of central China, each keeping in touch with one "chief" pupil, who in turn was responsible for sect members in his locality. One of these uncles, Wang Jingzeng, came from the branch of the family that lived in Lulong County. He moved into the family compound in Shifokou, remained there for a dozen years, and then traveled south to Hubei and Jiangsu, making converts. Eventually he moved to Yicheng County in the latter province "because it was more convenient," setting up house first outside the city and then in town near the county yamen. In Hubei he relied on a blacksmith from Wuchang prefectural city as his primary contact and pupil. His followers provided Wang Jingzeng with an unspecified income. We know in any detail only about one branch of this man's sect in the Lower Yangzi. An Yicheng pupil had converted a man from neighboring Anhui, and

the latter had converted a man called Fang Rongsheng. Fang was arrested in 1815 for writing seditious literature, for prophesying the arrival of the Maitreya Buddha, and for preparing a calendar for the coming millennium when time would be transformed. More than 150 people were involved in Fang's sect alone (NYC 42.1-22; Da Qing, 1937: [JQ] 257.31-33, 311.25-26; Shangyudang, 105-107, JQ 20/9/11).

Members of the Wang family apparently cultivated the pupils of their parents' generations as a routine matter, even if the link had been severed by natural causes rather than government action. For example, eight months after his father's death in 1810, Wang Shiyu went to Henan to find his father's pupils and to receive them in a formal ceremony as his pupils. He stayed there only four or five days, and was given nine taels of silver (a sum he later claimed to have thought too small to justify the trip; NYC 42.13-22; Shangyudang, 341-348, JQ 20/12/25).

Contributing money to one's teacher was a common White Lotus practice, made more formal among followers of the Shifokou Wangs by the use of special rituals and special terminology. Not only were all men in the family, regardless of their age, addressed as "sir" (*ye*) and allowed to remain seated while pupils of all ages kotowed to them, but the turning over of contributions was euphemistically designated "making a presentation" (*chaoshang*) and the money itself called "foundation money" (*genji qian*). According to one man, foundation money was given in the first and twelfth months of the year. Some teachers wrote to their pupils (rather than visit them), asking for donations. Like most religious contributions, these gifts were regarded as investments in the future. Later, said one leader, the gifts will be considered "great achievements money" (*yuanxun qian*); one follower called it "benefit-producing money" (*fuguo qian*). The investment was against the time when Maitreya would come into the world. Then, those who had demonstrated their commitment could be assured that, as prophesied, they would receive great benefits (NYC 42.13-33; Shangyudang, 341-348, JQ 20/11/25).

It should be obvious that many small sect groups, actively cultivated by a family like the Wangs, although located in different places, represented a substantial following and a considerable income. Pupils of the Wang family were found in 1815 to come from at least 26 different counties in 6 provinces (Zhili, Henan, Hubei, Anhui, Jiangsu, and Shanxi). If there were only 50 people in each place, the total size of the following might have been 1,300 people. If each person contributed only 200 cash a year (surely a minimum), as much as 260 taels could have been coming into the hands of the Wang family annually. In 1771, the Lius of Shan County were found to have an astonishing 12,400 taels of silver buried in their family compound, and further contributions continued to be made in subsequent decades (Naquin, 1981b: 32).

The prospect of regular income and devoted followers encouraged many to become White Lotus teachers. Those with connections to lineages like the Wangs or the Lius often found the association an irresistible advertisement and used this drawing power to mobilize men and money for themselves. Kong Yuxian of Zou County in Shandong, for example, was a pupil of Liu Shengguo. Although his family was implicated in the 1771 case against the Lius and the sect temporarily disbanded, a decade later Kong heard that Liu Shengguo's second son was in hiding, and he began reestablishing contact with sect members. Undaunted by the example of his uncle—beheaded in 1772—Kong revived the sect, taught new members the mantra “eternal progenitor in our original home in the world of true emptiness, now the Maitreya to Come is our master,” and solicited contribution in order, he said, to give assistance to Liu Shengguo's son. The appeal brought rapid results. Within two years, Kong Yuxian was enjoying the position of sect leader, had at least three dozen followers, and had collected fifty taels. As the result of the discovery of these activities in 1787, however, Kong lost everything (Gongzhongdang [QL] 50189).⁵

The combination of pupils whose loyalty was cemented generation after generation, regular income from their contribu-

tions, and enduring religious authority constituted a very tangible form of power for these hereditary sect masters. Families like the Wangs may be said to have constituted an elite within the larger community of White Lotus believers because their religious profession was based on both pedigree and possession of a scarce and valuable resource (religious texts) and brought them status and income, and because they were a model emulated by other believers. To have an established lineage connection with a late Ming patriarch, to possess sacred scriptures, to have one's name and native place cited by such texts—what sect leader did not wish for these? For these among other reasons, there appears to have been a preference for inherited participation in this religion among both leaders and followers, and a tendency for leaders to try to accumulate (or write) scriptures, to associate themselves with prophecies, and to hand down their authority and contacts to their children. Thus one finds a large number of families who were able to secure positions of sectarian leadership for two or three generations. Some, like the Shan County Lius, held on for five or six. Few had the staying power of the Shifokou Wangs.

In normal times, the Lius and the Wangs seem to have enjoyed an enviable degree of wealth and power, even if the threat of discovery was always present. It is not clear, however, whether these two families were content to use this power simply as the basis for continuing leadership in a devotional religion or whether they were willing to risk it in anticipation of the millenarian transformation in which they could play a central role. Incomplete evidence suggests that the impulse toward apocalyptic upheaval came not from these elite families but from their followers, especially those more distantly connected individuals who, on their own initiative, used the names and authority of these famous families for their own purposes. With the exception of Wang Haoxian in 1622, I have found no examples of direct involvement in rebellion by either of these families. Further research is necessary, however, before this point can be made definitively. Evidence for the borrowing of charisma by followers, on the other hand, is extensive.

Consider, for example, people who identified themselves as members of the Zhen Trigram Eastern Branch (*zhengua dong-*

fang), the sect of Wang Zhong, a follower of Liu Shengguo who was executed in 1772. Members of this sect were involved as leaders of the 1786 storming of Daming city (in southern Zhili), and people from the same sect line later participated as followers in the White Lotus uprising that began in 1796. Others were involved in the Eight Trigrams uprising in 1813, both through Li Wencheng (who was said to be the reincarnation of Wang Zhong) and Lin Qing (who claimed to be the Patriarch of Latter Heaven and the reincarnation of someone called Liu Lin). Members of the Liu family themselves, however, were not—as far as can be determined—directly involved in planning or executing any of these uprisings (Naquin, 1976: 65, 92-93). The historical record is full of examples of White Lotus sects of the even more “peripheral” sort attempting to use their connections with established elite White Lotus families to promote both modest sectarian revivals and outright rebellion.

Frequent claims that the Maitreya Buddha had indeed been reborn as someone named Wang or Liu, even when proved false, tended to reinforce the authority of these families. Because of the physical distance between these families and the periodic outbursts of millenarian enthusiasm, the leaders could also usually survive with some ease the loss of life entailed by such uprisings and, with more difficulty, the intensive investigations that followed in their wake. Let us look now at some of the ways that the dangers of being arrested could be avoided or ameliorated.

SOURCES OF PROTECTION

The description of elite White Lotus families living relatively undisturbed, supported at least in part by donations from many devoted followers scattered throughout north and central China, raises the question of how these families protected themselves in their home communities. What was the place of a family like the Wangs in Stone-buddha Village and in the county at large? How did they defend themselves against the (presumed) hostility of such competing elites as degree holders and local government officials, or of such competing religious establishments as

temples? Did all White Lotus sects in the area defer to Wang family authority, or was there competing sectarian activity? Did the Wangs scorn the traditional Confucian avenues of advancement, and concentrate their resources on their own heterodox community, or did they maintain a foothold in the orthodox establishment? Did they, like Daoist priests and Buddhist monks, try to provide religious services for the community, or did they boycott popular religious activities? Did they flaunt their special status within their home area or did they assume a delicately trimmed nonthreatening posture? What connections did they establish to reduce the likelihood of arrest?

Most of these questions cannot be answered without an exhaustive reconstruction of local community structures, orthodox and heterodox—which I am currently undertaking for the Stone-buddha Village Wangs. There certainly is evidence that neither the Wangs nor the Lius entirely scorned the Confucian ladder of success. As we have seen, an arrested member of the Wang family in the Yongzheng reign held a military degree, one Wang arrested in 1815 was a civil *shengyuan*, and two Lius had purchased government posts in the Kangxi reign (Gongzhongdang [YZ] 7798; Shiliao xunkan, B.100-101; NYC 42.22-26). Most of the fascinating basic questions about these families and their communities must, however, await further research.⁶

Setting aside the question of whether elite White Lotus families were able to use their local positions to protect themselves against government prosecution, let us now look at some of the other ways in which these families dealt with the threat and actuality of legal investigations, for it was in part their ability to cope with this ever-present danger that contributed to their staying power. Evading this routine government scrutiny was a perpetual problem for all White Lotus believers, leaders and followers, and the Wangs and Lius used techniques that were common to sectarians generally. They moved or changed their names, they changed the name of their sect, they maintained covert contact with relatives and pupils banished or in prison, and they relied on the women in the family to bridge the gaps created by the loss of the men.

The use of a variety of names by believers to refer to their sectarian teaching and organization has created the same confusion for the historian that it created for Qing (and Ming) officials. We have seen that the teaching of the Stone-buddha Village Wangs was known first as the Incense Smelling sect, later as the Great Completion sect, and in 1815 as the Clear Tea sect; it was also sometimes called the Clear Tea Red Sun (*qingcha hongyang*) sect, the Great Completion Clear Tea sect, and the Clear Pure (*qingjing*) sect. The group was variously called a teaching (*jiao*), an assembly (*hui*), or a school (*men*). Similarly, the Lius of Shan County thought of their sect as the Return to the Origin sect, while their pupils used a great variety of terms deriving from the eight trigrams.

This seeming confusion of names hides, I am sure, an orderly underlying procedure by which teachers used sect names to reflect their sometimes multistranded "parentage" and to identify explicitly (or to break completely) with well-known sects. But it also had the desirable effect of disguising these sometimes tenuous connections from the government, of blurring continuities over time, and of protecting believers from the criminal records of their predecessors. The consistent use of the name Zhen Trigram Eastern Branch by followers of Wang Zhong's branch of the Liu family's sect from the 1770s through the 1830s by people who could trace their sectarian connections back, through Wang, to Liu Shengguo, demonstrates, however, that sect names could be precise indicators of real connections.

It is nevertheless also very clear that believers were eager to change the name of their group (at least publicly), if not dissolve the sect entirely, when threatened by government investigation. They created new names, usually by drawing on terms from sect scriptures or by allowing errors in pronunciation or orthography to make new combinations. Take the case of Yao Yingcai, who

had taken Sun Guiyuan of his county as his teacher. Sun Guiyuan had founded the Return to the Origin heretical sect, but in 1785 he was seized in Hubei and executed. This criminal[Yao], being poor and without income, recently began to proselytize and to take in

contributions. He was afraid that people would know that he was in the Return to the Origin sect, so he changed the name to the Three Increases (*sanyi*) sect. But the mantra that he taught was identical [Gongzhongdang [QL] 57017].

When he still had difficulty finding converts, Yao Yingcai left home and went to another province to spread the teaching. Moving away from one's native place was a common way of seeking new converts while securing a kind of controlled anonymity (revealing one's identity as a Shifokou Wang, for example, only to those one trusted). We have discussed the extensive mobility of Wang Diankui and his uncles in the early nineteenth century in North China and the Lower Yangzi. Most of these men had set up residences in the south to be near their congregations, but kept alive their family ties by regular trips home to Stone-buddha Village; it was thus that several of them escaped arrest in 1815. Although I know of no instance of Wangs or Lius changing their surnames to avoid official detection (the association with prophecy may have been too valuable), others from similar families did (Naquin, 1976: 55-56).

Mobility and name changes were not, however, full protection against a thorough government investigation, and these families encountered the experience of prosecution with some regularity. Women ordinarily enjoyed positions of leadership in White Lotus sects (although in the Wang and Liu families, men were the active proselytizers),⁷ and believers took advantage of the fact that under Qing law women were punished more leniently than men in cases of heterodoxy and rebellion. Thus when the men of one or two generations were in the hands of the government prior to and during a trial and as a result of their sentences (which usually ranged from beating and release, to imprisonment and exile, to delayed or immediate execution), the women were ready to maintain family and sect continuity.

Wang Diankui's case provides a good example of this process. As we have noted, he was only six when his father was executed and his grandfather banished. His mother had already died, and so it was his father's mother who took charge. She initiated him

into the family sect, transmitting sect teachings to him orally, and instructed the family servant to take her grandson south to meet her husband and son's pupils and receive their allegiance. She also took charge of her second son (Diankui's uncle) who had escaped involvement in his father's case; she transmitted the teachings to him and told him the residences of his father's pupils as well (NYC 42.1-6; Shangyudang, 333-336, JQ 20/12/25).

Beyond relying on the women, it was possible for a family to cope in other ways with the imprisonment or banishment of its most active members. White Lotus networks proved effective in ameliorating these hardships. We have seen that Liu Shengguo's son, Dahong, was given money while in prison: one of his pupils was a yamen runner and had used his contacts to get money to Liu. Sending money to those exiled on the frontiers of the empire was logistically more difficult but probably less dangerous. Consider the example of Wang Zichong, son of Wang Zhong, the pupil of Liu Shengguo (Gongzhongdang [QL] 54669; Da Qing, 1937: [QL] 1382.23-27, 1384.14-16; Jixindang, QL 56/8/9, 56/8/8, 56/7/13). In connection with his father's case, Wang Zichong had been sentenced in 1788 to banishment as a slave to Kashgar, at the farthest reaches of Chinese Turkestan, some 3500 kilometers from his home in Shandong. A man called Liu Zhaokui, who had taken another member of the Shan County Lius as his teacher (but whose family lived in Shaanxi), volunteered to make contact with the banished leader. In the second month of 1790, Liu set out from Shandong on foot. He went west through Shaanxi to his home (arriving there in the fourth month), thence to Suzhou in the Gansu corridor. Travel through the Jiayu Pass into Central Asia was controlled by the magistrate there. Liu proceeded as follows:

When I reached Suzhou on the 16th day of the 6th month, I stayed at the Hall of the North Dipper Inn at the east gate. The innkeeper asked me my name and native place, and noted this in his register. I stayed there two days. I told him that I was going south to see my relative [sic] Wang Zichong, and gave him twenty cash and asked him to get a pass for me. . . . I went on to Hami, and then to

Kashgar, turning in my tickets at each place. It was always the innkeepers who went to get the new tickets for me.

When he reached Kashgar, Liu found that Wang Zichong was no longer (after two years in exile) serving as a slave to one of the Muslim Begs as sentenced. His owner having died, Wang was able to set himself up in business and was earning a regular income. ("What a situation!" exclaimed the Qianlong Emperor, appalled at the ease with which these criminals made a mockery of the law.) Finding Wang Zichong, Liu delivered letters and messages to him from family and pupils. He probably brought money as well. In return for this service, Wang Zichong awarded him a special title—"Realized Man of the Eastern Zhen (Trigram) Who Came Through the Pass"—and instructed him not only to contact other sect members banished to Central Asia and to southern China (promising enfeoffments to each), but also to return to Shandong and, with the assistance of Wang's nephew, to revive the sect there. Wang seems also to have given Liu both horses and silver bullion, for when he arrived home with these, a jealous relative reported him to the authorities and revealed these adventures. Clearly, banishment was not always an impediment to family and sectarian unity.

These techniques for evading and surviving government investigations, combined with the promise of salvation, nourished by the resources of a large and cultivated following, allowed families like the Wangs of Stone-buddha Village and the Lius of Shan County to retain positions of religious leadership for generations. Although the size of their sects expanded and contracted, although their names and books were used and misused by others, although investigations and rebellions forced them perilously into the limelight, these families did endure. And their presence strengthened the entire White Lotus "community."

Nevertheless, although families like the Wangs and Lius reinforced the fragile connections between White Lotus sects and slowed the fraying of religious belief, they did not and could not make this varied and loosely structured religion into a tightly knit unit. Hereditary sectarian organizations were interwoven with

weaker and more brittle threads and it was the flexibility of the combination that gave this millenarian tradition its durable character.

It has been one purpose of this article to suggest that in order to understand the nature of popular dissent in China we must not merely go beyond obfuscating terms such as "rebel" and "secret society" to focus on specific groups like White Lotus sects; we must further refuse to be satisfied with a simple and programmatic understanding of the sects themselves. Even the brief sketch presented here should indicate that the relationships between White Lotus sects of different types in normal times (not to mention the relationship of those sects to their communities) may help explain the vitality of millenarian rhythms. A closer look will, I am sure, reveal a fabric of variety and richness that if properly analyzed can illuminate not only the goals and patterns of popular uprisings, but also the structure and values of Chinese society in this late imperial period.

(Glossary, Notes, and References appear on pp. 358-360.)

GLOSSARY

bagua 八卦	qingcha 清茶
bailian jiao 白蓮教	qingcha hongyang 清茶紅陽
baiyang 白陽	qingjing 清淨
baojuan 寶卷	sanjiao yingjie 三教應劫
dacheng 大成	zongguan tongshu 總觀通書
dacheng xingsheng 大成興勝	sanyi 三益
chaoshang 朝上	shengyuan 生員
fuguo qian 福果錢	Shifokou 石佛口
genji qian 根基錢	shouyuan 收元
houtian zushi 後天祖師	wenxiang 聞香
huang ji jindan 皇極金丹九蓮	wusheng laomu 無生老母
jiulian zhengxin 正信皈真	xiantian 先天
guizhen huanxiang 還鄉寶卷	xiantian zushi 先天祖師
baojuan	xiejiao 邪教
hui 會	Yiguan Dao 一貫道
jia 甲	ye 爺
jiao 教	yuanxun qian 元勳錢
Jiulian jing 九蓮經	zhengua dongfang 震卦東方
juren 舉人	zong tudi 總徒弟
men 門	zu 祖

NOTES

1. The major exception is the Nian rebellion (1853-1868). For my usage of the term "White Lotus religion," see Naquin (1976: 8).

2. Another way of analyzing this vitality is to see Qing sects in terms of a spectrum ranging from the more congregational to the more individualistic. The former type was characterized by the importance of assemblies for purposes of sutra recitation, by vegetarianism and other monklike practices, and by greater familiarity with written sectarian literature. At the other extreme, teachers usually met with pupils on an individual basis, taught meditation and martial arts, relied on healing to attract followers, and transmitted sectarian ideas in oral rather than written forms. Considered in these terms, the Wang family discussed in this article was to be found in the first part of the spectrum, the Lius in the last (Naquin, 1981b).

3. For Wang Sen and the Xu Hongru uprising, see Asai (1978), Chu (1976), Overmyer (1976: 103-106), Li Jixian (1981). Asai (1981) gives Wang Sen's dates as 1535 to 1619. The *Jiulian jing* was surely the *Huang ji jindan jiulian zhengxin guizhen huanxiang baojuan* (Precious Scroll of the Imperial Ultimate's Golden Elixir and Nine Lotus [path to] Rectifying Belief, Espousing What Is True, and Returning to The Original Home), printed in 1523 (Naquin, 1981b: 11). A genealogy of the Wang family reconstructed by officials in 1815 was reprinted, together with many relevant documents, after this article was originally written (Qing dai, 1979: 1-90).

4. It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with the possible continuation of this family after 1820. However, a cursory look at the literature on White Lotus groups in the next century suggests that Nayancheng may not have eradicated these dissidents. A man named Wang Jueyi, who lived in Shandong in the late nineteenth century, well known as a patriarch of the Unity (Yiguan Dao) sect of the twentieth century, is alleged to have been a member of the Stone-buddha Village Wang family (Li Shiyu, 1948: 36).

5. It is indicative of the progressive dilution of sect ideas outward from families like the Lius that Li Wengong, whose father had also been Liu Shengguo's pupil, and who joined Kong Yuxian's revived sect in 1783, decided two years later that involvement with heterodoxy was too dangerous. He broke away from Kong, formed his own association with the orthodox name "Mount Tai Incense Society," and collected for himself more than twenty taels from those he had persuaded to join (Gongzhongdang [QL] 50189).

6. For more on the relationship between sectarian and popular religion, see Naquin (1981b).

7. The Maitreya appears always to have been seen as a man. Women who wished roles in these cosmic dramas most frequently claimed to be the incarnation of the supreme White Lotus deity, the Eternal Venerable Mother (*wusheng laomu*). See Naquin (1981a: 85).

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