

# THE SCRIPTURE ON GREAT PEACE (*TAIPING JING* 太平經) AND THE SEARCH FOR THE MILLENNIUM

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### ***Scripture on Great Peace:***

- transmitted in the Daoist Canon 道藏
- edited in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE
- main contents: late 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE
- “Celestial Master” 天師 talking to students
- composed in vernacular language

### **millennium**

- **great peace** (*taiping* 太平) is the Chinese term for the newly arrived or future golden age
- it was first used by First Emperor of the Qin dynasty 秦始皇帝 (r. 221 – 210) and became a slogan
- in Han 漢 dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) political discourse
- in popular uprisings: Yellow Turban rebellion in 184 CE
- in early Daoist teachings

# Who was to realize the millennium ?

**The emperor** --- In 5 BCE Emperor Ai 哀, helped by an expert in vitality techniques (*fangshi* 方士) and the *Scripture on keeping the original mandate and on great peace, as in the calendar revealed by the offices of heaven* 天官歷包元 太平經.

## Leaders of uprisings

**Laozi 老子** --- “Since today the actions of heaven and earth are disturbed, I myself change destiny. In this present age I choose the good people. You must not select yourself; by [your] upright behaviour and self-control I recognize you.” 天地事絕吾自移運。當世之時簡滓良民。不須自去。端質守身。吾自知之 (Transformations; l. 77-79 Seidel 1969; Seidel 1969/70: 225)



# Who was to realize the millennium?

## The people

--- “People must aid heaven in bringing about great peace through their actions. Heaven’s understanding proceeds from the understanding of our people.” 人當助天為太平之行天聰明自我民聰明 (*Admonitions* 16b; Bokenkamp: 177).

--- “The people are responsible for activating central harmony. Central harmony is responsible for bringing the myriad things into agreement.... Great harmony brings forth pneuma of great peace.” 民者主為中和譚，中和者，主調和萬物者也。..太和即出太平之氣。  
(*Scripture of Great Peace, chao*, part 2, p.19).



# How to realize the millennium ?

## Standard texts

--- “If all over the world people recite and read well-adjusted texts pneuma of heaven will be found and great peace will come.” 令天下俱得誦讀正文，如此天氣得矣，太平到  
(*Scripture of Great Peace* 78.192).

--- “To recite these methods for self-completion helps everyone to enjoy a long life. A worthy person of superior rank will be able to support a country’s ruler, someone of medium status can become an official of low rank while a person of low standing and limited ability may not find official employment but will be able to raise and nourish those close to him and for a long time provide protection for sons and grandsons.” 誦此術以自全，令各樂得久存。上賢可以為國輔，中賢可為國小吏，下小人不能仕者，可長養其親，而久守其子孫(*Scripture of Great Peace* 129.337).



# The timing

Great peace arrives with, after or instead of a great cataclysm (the “apocalypse”).

--- “Formerly, during the latter generations of the Han house, strong men began to carve up the empire. ...Cities were plundered and the common people were victims of injustice, even to the extent of being made slaves. The people were being devoured just as mulberry leaves are consumed by silkworms and because of their grievances they began to consider revolt.” 昔漢嗣末世豪傑縱橫..抄盜城市怨枉小人更相僕役.蠶食萬民.民怨思亂 (*Admonitions* 17b; Bokenkamp: 179).

The imagined speaker is Zhang Lu 張魯 (d. 216 CE), leader of the first Daoist congregation formed in Sichuan after 142 CE.

The cataclysm is due to cosmic developments.

--- “As it is now the time of the juncture of the Three Troubles, disasters and prodigies are proliferating. Therefore, there have been famines and years of dearth, one following after another, so that there are no stores of grain left. 乘三難之際會，畜眾多之災異，因之以饑饉，接之以不贍 (*Hanshu* 85.3468; *Liu and Nylan* 299).

# The timing

The cataclysm is due to

--- heaven's command (*tianming* 天命) as documented in history.

“The people are in deep distress, epidemics and famine are everywhere. (In order to) turn your destiny I will shake the Han reign. On hearing this, my people, get determined .” 民人有憂疾病欲至餓者縱橫吾轉運衡托漢事吾民聞之自有志  
(*Transformations* I. 91-92, Seidel 1969; Seidel 1969/70: 225).

--- the load of trespasses that humans have accumulated.

“The reason why people on their way die from fights, floods, drought and epidemics is that due to [the load of trespasses] that kings and other people of former times have amassed their ruler has gradually forgotten what Dao feels and intends. After a while he finds himself in such a juncture that he cannot get out on his own. That is the reason why humans are wiped out. After they have been wiped out no kind of seed is left.” 所以道戰水旱癘病死盡者，人主由先王先人獨積，稍失道心意，積久至是際會，即自不而自度，因而滅盡矣，既滅盡無餘種類 (*Scripture on Great Peace* 134: 373-374 ; Hendrichske 2017: 61).

# The timing

Eschatological considerations:

--- “When humans lose Dao, they completely destroy heaven and earth. Once the three dispensations have been extinguished, the myriad things disappear in darkness and gloom.” 故人(大)[失]道大毀敗天地・三統滅亡，更冥冥憤憤，萬物因而亡矣 (*Scripture on Great Peace* 134.373; Hendrichske 2017: 62-63).

The cataclysm is avoided and great peace begins:

--- “Once they have put pneuma right, all nine groups of humans safeguard Dao. The inheriting and transmitting of the calamities [caused by] the myriad generations of former kings, end.” 氣得，則此九人俱守道，承負萬世先王之災悉消去矣 (*Scripture on Great Peace* 56.90; Hendrichske 2006: 209).



# The new world

## Innovation

- Reign period “Primal escort of the grand inception” (太初元將) in 5 BCE (*Hanshu* 75.3193).
- Li Bo's 李伯 title: “August Emperor of the grand inception” (taichu huangdi 太初皇帝) in 154 CE (*Hou Hanshu* 7.300).
- The rebellious Yellow Turbans, formerly “Great Peace Movement” proclaimed to replace the old bluish heaven with a new yellow one in 184 CE (HHS 71.2299).

## Health and happiness

- Han Ying 韓嬰 (fl. 150 BCE): “Traditionally, in a time of Great Peace there are no persons dumb, deaf, lame, one-eyed, feeble, dwarfed, or mutilated. ...On the roads there are no infants abandoned to be reared [by others]; and everyone ends his life in due course as if employing a physician of worth. Truly there is no other way of pacifying, putting in order and expelling disease than precisely that of employing men of worth.” 太平之時，無瘖、癰、跛、眇、尪蹇、侏儒、折短…道無襁負之遺育，然各以序終者，賢醫之用也。故安止平正除疾之道無他焉，用賢而已矣 (*Hanshi waizhuan* 3.10; Hightower: 87)

# The new world

## Happiness

--- “Heaven’s and earth’s illness are healed and the sovereign cannot be accused of inheriting and transmitting [trespasses]. Heaven and earth are happy that their health is restored, the sovereign is happy that his position is secure...the people ... are happy, since families are of sufficient wealth and size, male and female servants are happy to have a master who is agreeable...The twelve thousand things are each in their place and happy not to suffer any harm....Pneuma of supreme peace is happy, as it is able to come to reign and be in charge as the sovereign.” 天地病已除，帝王無承負之貴矣。天地得以無病而喜；帝王得以自安而喜...百姓...家富人足而喜；奴婢得其主，不為非而喜；二十物各得其處所，不見害而喜...太上平氣得來治，王者用事亦喜 (*Scripture on Great Peace*: 152.421; Hendrichske 2017: 143-144).

# The new world

## Survival

--- “In recent years, there have been plagues in the four quarters that have swept away all of the inauspicious. This was merely the slaughter of evil persons. Those who clung to the Dao and delighted in goodness were personally protected by Heaven as babes would be guarded from harm. Confronted by danger, they pass through it as easily as the tongue avoids the teeth.” 從比年以來四方疾病掃除群凶. 但殺惡人耳. 其守道樂善天自護之如赤子. 臨危度脫如舌之避齒 (*Admonitions* 18a-b; Bokenkamp 181).

## Seed people

--- “If you perform good deeds, practicing humanity and duty, then all will be well with you. You will see great peace. You will pass through the catastrophes unscathed and become the seed people of the later age. Although there will be disasters of war, illness and flood, you will confront them without injury.” 爲善行仁義則善矣. 可見太平. 度脫厄難之中爲後世種民. 雖有兵病水害之災臨危無咎 ( as above 15a; Bokenkamp 173).

# new world

## Seed people

Yang Xi 楊羲 (330-c.386): “The good will be planted as seed-people and remaining mortals will be eradicated. Pestilence and flood will wash over them; weapons and fire will circle below them. All the evil will be eradicated at once, all the violent will be destroyed. Those who delight in the Dao will hide away in the land; the good people will ascend the mountains. The flowing filth will be shaken off, driven into the vast abyss. In this way all mortals will be divided, the good from the evil.”  
種善人. 除殘民. 疫水交其上. 兵火繞其下. 惡惡並滅. 凶凶皆沒. 好道陸隱. 善人登山. 流濁奔蕩. 御之鯨淵. 都分別也 (*Chronicle of the Lord of the Dao* 3b-4a; Bokenkamp: 345-46).





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