

typeset, punctuated and provided with a bibliography, a chronology, and an index of personal names. This edition also contains additional material usually appended to each chapter which illustrates some of the issues of accuracy and interpretation that must be resolved as far as possible if a truer account of the dynastic founding is to emerge. Index references to the *Veritable Records of Ming T'ai-tsu* are to the National Peking Library manuscript copy that has been supplemented from other copies and photolithographically reproduced in Taiwan by the Institute of History and Philology under the editorship of Professor Huang Chang-chien 黃彰建. This edition includes an introductory discussion of the several manuscript copies or fragments of the *Veritable Records* and, in several appended volumes, a detailed comparison of this with other copies.

The basis of the map that accompanies this translation is the *Ming ti-li-chih t'u* 明地理志圖, photographed and assembled by Professors Edward L. Farmer and Lawrence Kessler from the *Litai yü-ti-t'u* 歷代輿地圖, 1906-1911. The *Ming ti-li-chih t'u* was published in Taipei in 1966 by the Chinese Materials and Research Aids Service Center, Inc. Translation of official titles generally conforms to those given in Charles O. Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 21 (1968).

I wish to express my gratitude to the Social Science Research Council for the grant that helped support me and my family in Taipei during my sabbatical year, 1966-1967, when I completed most of the work. Thanks are due also to my official sponsor, Professor Hsiü Cho-yun of National Taiwan University and to Professor Huang Chang-chien of the Institute of History and Philology for their kind assistance during that year. I should also like to thank Dr. Robert L. Irick and Professor Edward L. Farmer, my Minnesota friend and colleague, for their help and encouragement with the publication of this translation. Finally, I most particularly want to thank my wife, Irene, and my children, Sally, Jim, Judy, Dan, and Amy for helping make my year in Taiwan such a happy one.

The Basic Annals of Ming T'ai-tsu

A Discussion of the Text

The founding of the Ming dynasty in 1368 not only restored the imperial throne to a Chinese ruling family after a century of foreign rule, but also completed the last successful peasant revolution before 1949. Chinese imperial institutions, policy, and style were modified for centuries both by the example of the military and political megalomania of the Mongols, and by the precedents set by the Ming founder as a popular warrior-hero and foil to the civil-bureaucratic elite with their assumption of moral superiority-through-learning and their pride in metaphysical obscurantism. China, with all its immense wealth and population, had been incorporated into the world-empire of the Mongols. The rulers in the Chinese northern frontier capital of Ta-tu (Pei-ching) were also the rulers (but generally more in name than in reality) of all the other Khanates as well, the Jagatai in Central Asia, the Ilkhanate in Persia, and the Kipchak in Russia. History, in Chinese perspective, had thereby been turned inside out. As the Ming founder is said to have expressed it on the eve of his campaign against the Yüan strongholds in north China in 1367,

From ancient times, the sovereigns have ruled the world. The Middle Kingdom has occupied the center in order to control the barbarians and the barbarians have dwelt without in obedience to the Middle Kingdom. It was unheard of for barbarians to occupy the Middle Kingdom and rule the world. Since the overthrow and passing of the Sung regime, the Yüan have caused the northern barbarians to come in and rule over the Middle Kingdom and all the world. Within and without (the Middle Kingdom), none failed to make his submission. Could this have come about by the unaided strength of man alone? We may be sure that it was so ordained by Heaven. At that time, the (Yüan) rulers were intelligent, their officials were incorrupt and they were able to hold the

net-ropes of the world. However, among eminent men and ambitious officials, there were those who would turn everything topsy-turvy, upside down. Alas! From this time, the officials of Yüan have failed to observe the rules of their own government and have lost control of the nets.*

When T'ai-tsu offered this justification of his overthrow of Yüan, he was near the end of his career of anti-dynastic rebellion, a career that had brought him from the lower depths of the destitute Chinese peasantry of Yüan to the threshold of the imperial palace in just fifteen years. Born in 1328, he lost most of his family during the catastrophic famine and epidemic of 1344-1345. Before their death, his parents had already promised him to a local temple. He now took up the vocation of novice Buddhist monk, which he followed both in the temple and as a wandering mendicant, until 1352. In that year, after having respectfully divined the will of the Buddha (at least according to his own account of the matter), T'ai-tsu entered the household of Kuo Tzu-hsing, a local leader of the messianic White Lotus Society. The Society was then in full rebellion against the Yüan, disseminating its apocalyptic message of the imminent coming of a divine savior and directing its swelling army of uprooted and demoralized peasants against administrative centers of the imperial government. The messianic movement spawned several great rebel states, including those of Hsü Shou-hui and Ch'en Yu-liang (T'ien-wan, later called Han) centered in Hu-nan and Hu-pei, of Ming Yü-chen and Ming Sheng (Hsia) in Ssu-ch'uan, and of Han Shan-t'ung and Han Lin-erh (Sung) centered in the Huai valley. There were other important states that unlike Han, Hsia, and Sung were not involved in ideological heresy, but were no less independent and at least sporadically engaged in open conflict with the Yüan. Among these were Fang Kuo-chen's in Che-chiang and Chang Shih-ch'eng's (Chou, later called Wu) in Chiang-su. It was within the state of Sung that T'ai-tsu made his start as a rebel. The Yüan regime, itself torn by factional struggles, rapidly lost control of the vast populations of the Huai and Yang-tzu valleys. Loyal officials and gentry families, whether Chinese or foreign, made a stubborn de-

**Veritable Records*, 26. 10a-b.

fense of Yüan authority in their own areas, but without sustained and coordinated assistance from the Yüan strongholds in the north, they were unable to stem the tide. T'ai-tsu, although he remained formally within the Sung state until 1367, began as early as 1355 to build an independent base of military and political power centered on his capital in Nan-ching. He overcame the greatest obstacle to his imperial ambition when he destroyed the rival state of Han in 1363 and 1364. Chang Shih-ch'eng and Fang Kuo-chen submitted in 1367 and Ming Sheng in 1371. During 1368, the year of T'ai-tsu's assumption of the imperial throne, the Yüan emperor was driven from his main capital in Pei-ching and most of north China passed quickly under Ming control. The work of pacification was never quite complete, however. Military operations continued against the Mongols, who did not take readily to a reduced place in the Chinese polity, against the Man aborigines of the southwest, who stubbornly resisted the advance of Chinese imperial authority in their direction, and against the polyglot piratical enterprises along the seacoast.

Despite the fact that the new regime restored rule in the Middle Kingdom to a native house, and to that extent had achieved a return to normalcy, the scholar-officials who organized and edited the archives of the first reign and the Ch'ing dynasty scholars who wrote the official *Ming shih* 明史 ("Ming History") *from these materials must have found much to regret in the dynastic overthrow and the way in which it was achieved. Life for members of their class had not always been unpleasant or unrewarding under the Yüan, and for many of them, it was worse under the Ming. To a certain extent, the scholars had their way in shaping the new regime. The over-all pattern of governmental institutions and procedures of the Yüan was continued. In law, ceremonial, and social custom (in all of which the Yüan were thought to have been particularly barbarous or incompetent), T'ang and Sung models were adopted. On the other hand, T'ai-tsu seemed incapable of trusting or living with the great imperial bureaucratic apparatus that grew up beneath his throne. He never forgot his social origins and seems to have felt that the new bureaucratic elite was coming between him and the fulfillment of his role as the romantic hero and guard-

*For the editions used for this translation, see preface above.

ian of the common people. Both he and his archivists attempted (without ever quite succeeding) to purge the record of his career of the taint of the messianic heresy, and yet he shattered the norms of Chinese imperial administration by filling many of the highest civil offices with peasant generals who were utterly lacking in the cultural qualifications proper to their offices. He heaped titles of nobility on his old comrades and gave them his daughters in marriage. While his restoration of the public academies, which had been badly disrupted by the civil wars of late Yüan, was celebrated by some of the scholars, he called for an expansion of public education on such a scale that, had it been practicable and fully achieved, the effect might have been to make literacy more common and to broaden the social origins of the civil bureaucracy. He was more successful, however, in checking the tendency of the bureaucracy towards autonomous power when he decapitated civil, military, and censorial administration by permanently eliminating the highest level of offices in these hierarchies. Finally, his resentment and suspicion of his officials overflowed in several vast and bloody purges of the civil and military administration. In this, he was undoubtedly abetted by intense factionalism among the officials themselves, which enabled him to use one faction against another. Service under the new regime had become terrifyingly dangerous and recruitment of officials was, quite naturally, a frustratingly difficult problem for the new regime. Founder of one of the most powerful and durable of Chinese imperial dynasties, and the last one to be founded by a Chinese, Ming T'ai-tsu was also a hard and unmerciful master to his officials, which inspired profoundly ambivalent feelings in the official historians in Ming and early Ch'ing who were engaged in the task of preparing a final and orthodox account of his career.

The annalistic section of the *Ming History* comprises the first twenty-four chapters (or less than one twelfth) of the whole work. The annals of each emperor serve a double purpose, standing both as the official biography of the man and as a chronology of the imperial regime during his reign. The whole work was compiled in such a way that the annals may be used together with the monographs, tables, and biographies easily and with few inconsistencies of style or fact. Ming T'ai-tsu, with three chapters, is somewhat

slighted if one considers the due proportion of years *per* chapter. This is in spite of the intrinsic interest and importance of the dynastic founding and the precedents it set for succeeding emperors. The first chapter is the liveliest and most intelligible of the three. The second two, which cover the years of T'ai-tsu's imperial reign, often deteriorate into a dry chronological checklist of important events, which drives the reader either into the other sections of the *Ming History* for more information or into the official and unofficial sources for the period. In spite of this stylistic problem, there may be several good reasons for making a translation of the *T'ai-tsu pen-chi* 太祖本紀, ("Basic Annals of Ming T'ai-tsu"). In the course of attempting an analytical study of the Ming founding or of the founder's career, it may be useful to get the official version as clearly in mind as possible. This should provide a point of reference for the evaluation of other materials and for the definition of other perspectives. The official view has interest in its own right as an expression of orthodox historiography. The *Basic Annals* also illuminate the problem of the status and limitation of official orthodoxy as a means of dealing with historical realities. There are profound contradictions between the theoretically determined stereotype of the founder and many of the statements of fact that the annalists found it necessary to include. One may even find evidence of different and partially incompatible cultural perspectives within the text, owing to the inclusion, chiefly in the first chapter, of some material that appears to have been of folk origin. On quite a different level, this translation is intended to serve as a tool for those interested in finding and ordering data on the dynastic founding. For this reason, it has been provided with indexes, simple glossaries and a map, on which will be found most of the places mentioned in the text. Finally, it is hoped that this translation will be useful to the reader in providing a gauge of the range of data that one may expect to find through research into the official sources.

If one puts the Ming founding in larger perspective, however, it will be obvious that little is said in the *Basic Annals* about the Yüan regime during its last years, or about the other rebel states that rivalled T'ai-tsu's own for many years. Also, when one considers that this was at least in the beginning a peasant rebellion

with a messianic ideology, it is distressing that the compilers have told us nothing about the ideological, and little about the social conflicts that underlay the process they attempted to describe. They looked at history from the standpoint of a holistic theory of society and the cosmos. The existence, for them, of a correct hierarchical scheme complemented by an adequate ideology was assumed. Therefore, in place of the built-in processes of conflict, resolution, and change that we might look for, they saw only correct and incorrect doctrines and good and bad acts, all tending to advance or retard realization of the good society. It also followed that the didactic purpose of history would not be served by offering the reader instruction in bad ideology and the rationalizations of bad acts.

An understanding of the text requires that we know something about the official commission that produced it, the methods it employed, and the way in which the compilers themselves commented on some of the problems they experienced in their work. Li Chin-hua's 李晉華 *Ming shih tsuan-hsiu k'ao* 明史纂修考 ("Study of the Compilation of the Ming-shih") sheds a great deal of light on all of these questions. The first period of work on the *Ming History*, from 1645-1678, was rather unproductive. Many loyalist scholars were still unwilling to serve on the commission or served only reluctantly. (To assist in the compilation would have been to assent to the proposition that the Ming was finished and the Mandate had passed irrevocably to the new regime.) Much time during these years was spent in the search for materials, especially for the last three reigns. The K'ang-hsi 康熙 Emperor (r. 1662-1722), having become impatient with the poor rate of progress, reorganized the project in 1679 and recruited a new staff of fifty scholars divided into five teams. Each team was assigned the compilation of certain sections of the work. A timetable was set which required that drafts of all sections, annals, monographs, tables, and biographies, be submitted in three chronologically-defined installments: 1368-1521, 1522-1619, 1620-1643. The drafts, still incomplete, were submitted in 1681, 1683, 1682, respectively by the chief compiler, Hsü Yüan-wen 徐元文 (d. 1692). In 1684, Wan Ssu-t'ung 萬斯同 joined with Hsü in completing and revising the work. After Hsü had died, Wan carried on until 1702,

by which time the work was in very nearly its final form. Another compiler, Wang Hung-hsü 王鴻緒, made a few additional changes and submitted the work as though it had been his own in 1723. This work still exists under the title, *Ming-shih kao* 明史稿. ("Ming History Draft"). In that year, the Yung-cheng 雍正 Emperor directed Chang T'ing-yü 張廷玉 as chief compiler to make another revision of the *Ming History Draft*. Final presentation and imperial approval came in 1735.

After the reorganization of 1679, T'ang Pin 湯濱 was made responsible for several sections, among which were the *Basic Annals*, the biographies of empresses and consorts, and the monographs on omens (the *Wu-hsing chih* 五行志). His contributions were printed under the title, *T'ang Tsan-an hsien-sheng ch'üan kao* 湯濱庵先生全稿. His draft of the *Basic Annals* was compiled in four chapters and was more than a third longer than the three chapters of the approved *Ming History*. Practically the only source for both texts was the *Ming shih-lu* 明實錄 ("Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty"). Entry by entry, the relationships between each of the two texts and their common source is perfectly clear. The texts, therefore, differ from each other only in the somewhat different judgments the compilers made regarding the selection of material for the *Basic Annals*. A manuscript version of the Chang Ting-yü text was preserved in the imperial palace. The differences between it and the published version are spelled out in detail in Tuan Ch'ung-lin 段瓊林, *Ming-shih pen-chi yüan-pen pu-pen i-t'ung lu* 明史本紀原本補本異同錄, in *Ku-kung chou-k'an* 故宮週刊 nos. 105-121, (1931-1932). See also the Defense Ministry edition of *Ming History* described in the preface above.

The *Veritable Records* provided the main source for the *Ming History* generally, except for the late reigns, for which this compilation had never been made. The K'ang-hsi Emperor considered this to be a factually reliable source and the compilers found that it saved a great deal of time to resolve every factual conflict in their sources in its favor. The emperor's partiality for this source is not surprising inasmuch as his own reign would someday be the subject of an official history and it would be likely to turn out badly for him and

his dynasty if it were compiled not from his own *Veritable Records* but from private sources, which often contained scandalous "tales out of school." The compilers had several copies of the *Veritable Records* to work from (among which some discrepancies were found) and they broke them down into chronological or topical packages. It was reported, for instance, that a compiler of the *Shih-huo chih* 食貨志 ("Food and Money Monograph") had copied sixty volumes of relevant material from the *Veritable Records*.

Comparison of the *T'ai-tsu pen-chi* 太祖本紀 with the *T'ai-tsu shih-lu* shows that the source was used conscientiously and accurately.* While much was lost in reducing the vast bulk of the source, there does not appear to be any reason to suspect systematic distortion, whether intended or not.** The perspective and the biases of the *Basic Annals* are essentially those of the *Veritable Records*. If the copies of the *Veritable Records* in the hands of K'ang-hsi's commission were good facsimiles of the original revised version of the Yung-lo reign (1403-1424), then we may say that the *Basic Annals* gives us something very like an early fifteenth-century official image of the Ming founder and his new regime in summary form.

Compilers of the *T'ai-tsu shih-lu* were provided with an abundance of archival material for the years from about 1364, when T'ai-tsu re-established the practice of compiling a *Ch'i chü chu* 起居注 ("Diary of Activity and Repose"). This and other material were compiled in the *Ta-Ming jih-li* 大明日曆 under the direction of the historian Sung Lien (who also directed compilation of the *Yüan-shih* 元史 ["Yüan History"]) in one hundred chapters, covering the years down to 1374. As one goes back from 1364,

*For some errors in the *Ming-shih pen-chi*, see Huang Chang-chien 黃彰建, "Ming-shih Tsuan-wu" 明史纂誤. *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology*, Academia Sinica, volume 31 (1960), "Ming-shih tsuan-wu hsü," 明史纂誤續, vol. 36 (1966). (These and other errors are pointed out in footnotes to the translation).

**A rare possible instance of falsification is pointed out in the note to par. 17 of the translation

into the earlier years of T'ai-tsu's life, the record in the *Veritable Records* naturally thins out and becomes increasingly reliant upon T'ai-tsu's own lively autobiographical writings, such as the *Chi-meng* 紀夢 ("Dream Record") and the *Huang-ling pei* 皇陵碑, ("Imperial Tomb Inscription"), which was written for his father's tomb. Other sources used probably included accounts written for private or official use by officers who were in T'ai-tsu's service. This material and many entirely private writings afford images of T'ai-tsu that stand often in sharp contrast to the official view.*

Despite the reliance placed on the *Veritable Records* by the *Ming History* compilers, however, questions of bias were sometimes raised in the course of compilation. The K'ang-hsi Emperor told his historians that he was distressed by a report that the *Basic Annals* of T'ai-tsu, whom he considered to have been a great man, contained slanders against him. He also warned them that in writing the biographies of T'ai-tsu's followers they were not to exaggerate the achievements of the civil officials at the expense of the military men. Again, the anxiety inspired by the dangerous question of T'ai-tsu's association with the White Lotus Society was reflected in a discussion of the propriety of pairing the biography of Kuo Tzu-hsing, T'ai-tsu's father-in-law, with that of Han Lin-erh, ruler of the Society's state of Sung. Chang T'ing-yü defended this decision by pointing out that T'ai-tsu himself had acknowledged his connection with the society by adopting its reign-title for his official communications until 1367.

While the *Veritable Records* and the *Basic Annals* based on them provide a great amount of reliable information, the defects of both works should also be kept in mind. First is the narrow bureaucratic perspective of these official compilations. The events of official history were not set in the larger context of the

*Three works that provide an introduction to early Ming material on this dynastic founding are Wang Ch'ung-wu 王崇武, *Ming Pen-chi Chiao-chu* 明本紀校注, Shanghai, 1948; P'an Ch'eng-chang 潘稹章, *Kuo-shih K'ao-i* 國史考異, reprinted in *Ming-shih lun-ts'ung* 明史論叢, Taipei, 1968, vol. 2; and Ch'ien Mu 錢穆, *Tu Ming-ch'u K'ai-kuo chu ch'en shih wen chi* 讀明初開國諸臣詩文集 in *Ming-shih lun-ts'ung*, vol. 4.

whole of Chinese society with its rich variegated culture, its creative energy and developmental processes. However, this is hardly something for which the government scholars can be blamed; the limitation was inherent in the genre of the work they were ordered to produce. Another deficiency, and one that is harder to forgive, is that when the compilers of both works resolved a controversy on any question of fact, they neglected to inform their readers that they had done so. There was, and still is, controversy over such questions as the true circumstances of the deaths of Han Lin-erh and several other White Lotus figures. Some nonofficial sources implicate T'ai-tsu more or less directly.* What was the full case against the principal victims of the great purge trials? What was their defense? Was the Yung-lo Emperor really born to Empress Ma or was he the child of a lesser consort? ** One would never know from reading the official accounts of these matters that other versions had ever been published. It is sometimes possible, however, to identify places where deliberate suppression of material must have occurred at some time. For example, the *Veritable Records* generally provide a brief biography of important men under the entry recording their deaths. Two Chief Councilors, both of whom were figures of commanding importance in the new regime, Li Shan-ch'ang and Hu Wei-yung, were denied the usual biography. Even more remarkable is the fact that there are very few references to either of them in the *Veritable Records*, and these are not particularly illuminating. The reason for this was almost certainly that both men eventually incurred the wrath of T'ai-tsu and were executed. Another instance of discreet silence in the *Veritable Records* may be found in the compilers' handling of the delicate subject of the Yung-lo Emperor's usurpation of the throne from his nephew, T'ai-tsu's grandson and appointed heir. The *Basic Annals* contain a moving deathbed plea by T'ai-tsu in which he asked all his supporters to honor and protect his youthful and inexperienced heir. In view of the fact that the *Veritable Records* for T'ai-tsu's reign were compiled under the Yung-lo 永樂 Emperor the omission of this speech is not

*For example, see *Kuo-shih k'ao-i* in *Ming-shih lun-ts'ung*, vol. 2, pp. 58-59.

**See *Kuo-shih k'ao-i*, pp. 114-115.

difficult to understand.

From the perspective of our time and culture, the *Veritable Records* and the *Basic Annals* are simply inadequate by themselves as sources for sound interpretation of the founder and his career. This will require the enormous effort of searching, sifting, and studying the very large body of literature that has survived from T'ai-tsu's time and much historical literature produced during Ming and Ch'ing, to say nothing of several recent pioneering works of reinterpretation.* It may be possible, however, to establish the main outlines of the image of Ming T'ai-tsu that is presented in the *Basic Annals*. This, if it can be done, should at least provide a starting point for reinterpretation.

The T'ai-tsu of the *Basic Annals* was presented unambiguously and without apology as a man of destiny. His birth, his rise to the imperial throne, and his reign as emperor were all attended by portents, or reports and rumors of portents, that marked the course he followed and that helped him, by birth a poor peasant, to become a credible leader and emperor in the eyes of a sufficient number of followers and subjects. To say, as we must, that T'ai-tsu was perceived (after the fact, of course) as having been destined from the very outset to become a dynastic founder is not to say that fate, or the will of Heaven simply thrust him upon the throne. On the contrary, his destiny was conditional on his performance of the demanding role in which he was cast. He had to out-think, out-guess, and out-fight all of his opponents. He was allowed a few, but only a few, mistakes along the way. He had, moreover, to make it appear that he was no mere bandit or greedy militarist (a suspicion that was fully justified by the destructive and mindless behavior of many of the armed bands of his day), but that he was (before 1368) an uncrowned emperor whose selfless mission it was to restore peace to the land and cause men to behave towards one another as brothers each according to his station. The text introduces very little that was miraculous, therefore, in the historical process by which the peasant boy became an emperor. On the

*Wu Han 吳晗, *Chu Yuan-chang chuan* 朱元璋傳, Shanghai, 1948, is an excellent full-length biography that gets through the veil of official ideology.

evidence of the *Basic Annals*, one could say that he succeeded because he was strongly motivated and made the right decisions. From this, one might be tempted to conclude further that the concept of destiny and its supernatural manifestations were irrelevant literary or conventional embellishments of an otherwise sensible account. To ignore the supernatural element in the *Basic Annals*, however, would be to misunderstand the political process in fourteenth-century China and to misunderstand the text. If soldiers and people of the towns and countryside in T'ai-tsu's lifetime invented a great number of wonders and apochrypha concerning him and his "career", it was because this was how he was perceived by his subjects, or by those of them who accepted his authority. The question of how he was perceived, in turn, goes to the root of the political process. What were the grounds of obedience to public authority and how did the individual understand his role in the imperial polity? There is no warrant either, for doubting that the compilers of the *Veritable Records* and the *Basic Annals* believed in the relevance of those stories and portents that they recorded. They are not set off from other kinds of information by any stylistic convention and in some instances they are introduced in a causal relationship with other events. In a preface to the collected drafts of T'ang Pin, T'ang's friend and colleague, T'ien Lan-fang 田蘭芳 admitted that while in some cases it was clear that portents were granted as encouragement or as warning, it was sometimes difficult to determine their meaning. Even the difficult cases, however, could be understood if only one probed deeply enough into the principles, *li* 理, of man and nature. In the case of a career as spectacular and improbable as T'ai-tsu's, it must have seemed all the more necessary to try to see it in cosmic, not merely human, context and with the help of portents as cosmic clues.

Not only did the *Basic Annals* present T'ai-tsu as a man destined to play a role, but his image in the text may also be that of a charismatic hero in Max Weber's sense of the term. His mission was to perfect and rationalize the social order as ordained by Heaven, and his authority to do so was confirmed by heavenly portents. The posthumous commentary that concludes the *Basic Annals* acknowledges the prophetic aspect of his charismatic role:

In the beginning of his work as dynastic founder, he was able to plumb the most obscure depths and discern the changes that were taking place. Step by step he reduced the world to order. Liberally he brought forth his perfect plans. *

The charismatic aspect of T'ai-tsu's career was perceived even in his own time from somewhat different cultural perspectives, but those different perspectives met in their shared vision of T'ai-tsu as a predestined emperor. On the one hand, portents were reported and interpreted by scholar officials in terms of the rationalist orthodoxy. On the other hand, the *Basic Annals* include several of the mystery tales that reflect their origin in Buddhist or Taoist popular religion. Thus, despite the compilers' silence on nonorthodox ideologies, even in the *Basic Annals*, the charismatic image of T'ai-tsu is a complex one, reflecting something of the range and variety of Chinese culture.

The miracles that attended T'ai-tsu's birth: the magic pill given his mother by a spirit who came to her in a dream and the red glow that emanated from the place where he was born and, later, from places where he slept, served from the very beginning of the text to establish T'ai-tsu as a charismatic hero. The birth-miracles may also have served to explain away what may have appeared anomalous to the official historians; the peasant on the imperial throne. From the moment of his birth, he was in truth no peasant, but an emperor in disguise, whose true identity was hinted at again and again by a succession of portents and which was occasionally recognized by gifted persons. In agreement with this idea, the *Veritable Records* referred to T'ai-tsu as "Shang 上, ("Emperor")," and the *Basic Annals*, as "T'ai-tsu 太祖" before as well as after his assumption of the throne. This is in contrast with the usual practice of not referring to an emperor by any imperial title in contexts earlier than his enthronement. Thus, Emperor Ch'eng-tsu was referred to in the *Basic Annals* as the prince of Yen in pre-1403 contexts.

On the evidence of the account in the *Basic Annals*, it would

*Epilogue, p.¹²¹ below.

seem that T'ai-tsu himself was aware of at least some of the early supernatural clues to his real identity, but it was not until he was about twenty-four years old that he began to form a clear idea of his role. (T'ai-tsu's own biographical writings do not contain the birth-miracles and if he knew of these stories, he may not have believed them.) After he had left the monks' quarters for the second and last time to go into hiding from the rebel and government forces, he carefully divined the Buddha's will. In the course of this consultation, he learned that the Buddha would have him abandon his calling and begin a new undertaking, one that would end in great success. T'ai-tsu took the hint and went off to join the rebels. He himself attached such importance to this decision and the way in which he arrived at it that he left an extremely detailed account in the *Chi-meng*.^{*} His second great decision came three years later when he decided to cross the Yangtzu to the south bank with his now-considerable army. He thought this event so significant that long afterwards, when he had been emperor for six years, he ordered that his responsibility for providing relief to disaster victims throughout the empire be discharged retroactively to the time of the crossing. From that time, he had been politically and militarily on his own, despite his continued formal relationship with the rebel Sung state. Soon after this, he occupied Nan-ching, made it his capital and began to build a great territorial state of his own that was to be the base from which he completed the conquest of the empire. This fateful crossing was made possible by a providential rainstorm that floated his fleet over a bar in the river that led from the Ch'ao Lake to the Yangtzu. This prompted T'ai-tsu to say, "This is Heaven helping me." Once on the far bank, T'ai-tsu's followers wanted to gather up such loot as they could and hasten back to their hungry families. T'ai-tsu then made their return impossible by cutting their boats adrift and explained that the crossing had been an auspicious victory and if they failed now to press on (that is, to make the right response to the favorable auspice), they would destroy any chance of eventual success.

The *Basic Annals* inform us of a few more favorable portents

^{*}*Chi-meng* 紀夢, *Yu-chih wen-chi* 御製文集, photolithographic reprint, Taipei, 1965, ch. 16.

that were granted to T'ai-tsu to show that he was still on the true course to his imperial destination. Soon after he had established his state of Wu and assumed the title of duke, he accepted a gift of auspicious (double-headed) stalks of grain from some of his new subjects. This evidently signified Heaven's endorsement of his rule because a similar gift in 1373 was considered so important that T'ai-tsu, now emperor, announced the event in the Ancestral Temple. A year after the first gift of auspicious wheat, a particularly spectacular portent helped him establish his authority in the Che-chiang city of Wu-chou. When the city fell to T'ai-tsu, the people learned that the "chariot-shaped rainbow" they believed they had seen in the western sky the day before had marked the campsite of his army. Once again, in 1360, as at the time of the Yangtzu crossing, T'ai-tsu was helped by a providentially-timed rain to win a crucial battle. In his successful defense of Nan-ching against a powerful assault by the army of Ch'en Yu-liang, his arch-rival, he devised his strategy to take advantage of a rainstorm that both began and ended at the right moment. The climactic battle of T'ai-tsu's career and the sternest test of his heroic qualities was the great naval engagement on Po-yang Lake in 1363. Ch'en Yu-liang, we are told, had assembled a force of six hundred thousand and had built ships of an enormous size. The turning point in the battle came when "a strong wind from the northeast" enabled T'ai-tsu to send fire-ships against the enemy fleet and destroy it.

When he had been formally enthroned, T'ai-tsu treated the portents reported by his officials throughout the empire as heavenly communications to him as emperor. This corresponded to past imperial practice and the handling of such reports was a routine concern of government. The miracles and anomalies of his earlier career had had a more personal significance and a greater dramatic impact because they appear in the record as prophetic signs of T'ai-tsu's destiny. Once T'ai-tsu had begun his imperial reign, he had no need of omens to reveal his true identity and those that came to him were like those that might come to any reigning emperor. The problem posed by the portents now was to read them correctly so as to assist the emperor in his task of maintaining the cosmic equilibrium. Nearly all the portents reported were inauspicious, which could have been because these, unlike happy