LEGITIMATION OF A ‘MARGINAL DYNASTY’: THE GREAT XIA IN SICHUAN, 1362-1371
- A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

The focus in scholarship on imperial Chinese history generally rests on the history of the legitimate ‘major dynasties’ (Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing), thus following what has been labeled as “the Zhou interpretation of history, whereby all of the Chinese past is seen as having originated from one (mythological) source leading inexorably to the Zhou and continuing thereafter in an unbroken succession of ‘legitimate’ dynasties.”¹ This interpretation is most evident in the dynastic tables. But these are misleading exactly because they suggest an unbroken succession of the dynasties. In reality “[n]ew powers and contenders for power often overlapped with established rulers.”² However these rival powers are mostly neglected, albeit a considerable number of them did persist for some time, as in the case of the Great Xia 大夏. For the purpose of this paper such short-lived and locally confined rules will be called ‘marginal dynasties’. Since the control over all of the realm (tianxia 天下) was a central point in the theory of the legitimate succession of dynasties (zhengtong 正統), traditional Chinese historiography considered them to be illegitimate.³ Opposite to the unified rule of a legitimate dynasty, they were regarded to merely have achieved partial peace (pian’an 偏安) in a section of the realm. Generally they are labeled as states (guo 國) ruled by a king (wang 王), as distinct from a legitimate dynasty (chao 朝) ruled by an emperor (di 帝) or straightly dismissed as usurpers (jianjun 僞君 or jianqie 僞竊) who established illegitimate dynasties (weichao 僞朝).⁴

There are ‘marginal dynasties’ that are represented on the conventional dynastic tables and those like the Great Xia that are not. During long-lasting

¹ Wilkinson 2000, p. 7.
³ For the development of the theory of the legitimate succession of dynasties see Rao Zongyi 1977. Especially Ouyang Xiu’s writings on it have been very influential, Chan 1984, pp. 38-39; Trauzettel 1967; Davis 1997.
times of political fragmentation, major parts of what was conceived as the realm were controlled by ‘marginal dynasties’. They are generally put together under the collective terms of Sixteen States (shiliu guo 十六國) (304-439) and Ten States (shi guo 十國) (902-979). While these somehow officially recognized ‘states’ have been studied to some extent, those not represented in the dynastic tables have not received much attention so far.

A tentative inquiry into era names (nianhao 年號) revealed up to 184 potential ‘marginal dynasties’. Although era names were mainly a method of recording years, their adoption at the same time was equivalent to “an affirmation of the sovereignty of the ruler”. And since “not only the emperors themselves but also leaders of non-Han and rebel governments adopted nianhao”, they offer a way to identify ‘marginal dynasties’. However, only very few of the 184 would qualify as dynasties in the sense that they established “a line of hereditary rulers of a country”. Over 80% of them lasted merely one (if at all) to three years and only had one ruler. Just four of them (one being the Great Xia) succeeded in passing their power on to their sons. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that all of them attempted to establish a dynasty and wished to pass on their rule to their descendants. They established their own courts (chao 朝) as the adoption of an era name, a proper dynasty name (in 66 cases) as well as the often mentioned appointment of officials (zhi guan 置官) suggests. Traditional historiography leaves no doubt about its repudiation of these rules. Either it is said that they proclaimed or declared themselves (!) ruler (zili 自立, zicheng 自稱 or zihao 自號), thus stressing the fact that they lacked the appropriate support, or it is emphasized that they “ascended a false throne (jiweii wei 即偽位)”, arrogated to themselves the title of emperor (jianhao 僚號 or jiancheng 僚稱), “unlawfully ascended the throne (jianji wei 僚即位)” or even “unlawfully ascended a false throne (jianji weiwei 僚即偽位)”.

5 The Three Kingdoms (sanguo 三國) (220-280), which actually also fall under this category, are somewhat exceptional. They have a very prominent position in Chinese history and from early on have been subject to substantial romanticization. See Shen 2003.


7 An exceptional study is Kleeman 1998.

8 All data are the result of a preliminary evaluation of Li Chongzhi 1981. This compilation has the advantage of giving short extracts of the relevant sources. Due to the great number, I have not checked all the original sources. The evaluation cannot claim to be all-encompassing. It is very likely that there were more such rules. This evaluation is just intended to give an impression of the scale.

9 Wilkinson 2000, p. 182. However, one has to bear in mind that the practice of era names, which began in 116 BCE, was subject to change. Until 1368 emperors would adopt different era names in the course of their reign, only from then on the era name became equivalent to the reign of one emperor. For a more detailed discussion, see Wilkinson 2012, pp. 276, 510-515.


11 Results of the evaluation of Li Chongzhi 1981.
A simple look at the chronological distribution shows a clear concentration within periods of disunity, especially 4th to 6th century (50 of 184), but also the early 7th century (26) as well as the 17th century (16) reveal obvious peaks. Besides chronological clusters there also seems to be a geographical concentration. The best example is Sichuan, where the Great Xia (1362-1371) with the emperors Ming Yuzhen 明玉珍 and his son Ming Sheng 明昇 are but one of many ‘marginal dynasties’ in the history of this area. This has led to the verdict on Sichuan being China’s stronghold of rebellions: “Is the realm not in rebellion yet, Shu (i.e. Sichuan) is the first to rebel; Is the realm already under rule, Shu is the last to be ruled [天下未亂蜀先亂，天下已治蜀後治].”

This article explores, how the Great Xia – as exemplary case of a ‘marginal dynasty’ – claimed its legitimacy. In the first part a detailed history of the rise and fall of the Great Xia will be presented. The second part examines their legitimation strategies. By contrasting evidence for traditional patterns of legitimation and elements of radical millenarian beliefs in the sources it will be shown that, although the Xia’s origins lay in a religiously motivated uprising and these beliefs continued to be vital, its leaders eventually turned to the established tradition and their representatives, former officials and scholars, in order to secure legitimacy.

1. The Great Xia

A general obstacle when studying ‘marginal dynasties’ like the Xia poses the character of the historical tradition in China. It is dominated by official historiography and since ‘marginal dynasties’ were considered illegitimate they did not receive their own official history. In the official histories they are only treated marginally. Moreover, official historiography served certain purposes. It “was not about facts, but about good and bad examples” that originally were to be used for ethical instruction of the princes, i.e. the future rulers. History was always conceived to be a mirror of the past, that should serve as either encouragement or warning to later generations. This is especially true for the

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12 Gongsun Shu 公孫述 established his Cheng 成 Dynasty (25-36) in Sichuan during the chaotic period at the end of Wang Mang’s 王莽 rule. From 220 to 263 Sichuan was ruled by Liu Bei 劉備 and his son Liu Chan 劉禪 as emperors of Shu 蜀. In 306 Li Xiong 李雄 proclaimed a Cheng 成 Dynasty in Sichuan, which after Li’s death 335 was renamed Han 漢 and lasted until 347 (see Kleeman 1998). Two of the Ten States were found in Sichuan (see Tietze 1980). Wang Jian 王建 and his son Wang Yan 王衍 ruled as emperors of the Former Shu 前蜀 (907-925) (see Wang 2011). And only a few years later in 934 Meng Zhixiang 孟知祥 proclaimed the Later Shu 後蜀, his son Meng Chang 孟昶 followed on the throne and ruled until 964 (see Amthor 1984). For a general history of Sichuan, see Chen Shisong and Jia Daquan 1986.

13 Shu Jing Lu 蜀警錄 by Ouyang Zhi 歐陽直 (1621-?), in Zhongguo Yeshi Jicui 2000, p. 62.

biographical sections (*liezhuan* 列傳), in which founders of ‘marginal dynasties’ are often treated – as is the case for the Xia’s founding Emperor Ming Yuzhen. The biographies were not only “selected to provide precepts and examples for the reader”, but can also be related to certain categories. Founders of ‘marginal dynasties’ often serve as the bad model for incompetent rulers, whose power lacks legitimacy. Seunghyun Han, for example, has shown for Zhang Shicheng 張士誠, one of the contenders to the founder of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, that he was represented as a mere villain by the Ming official historiography, in order to portray Zhu as the legitimate ruler. Hence Zhang is described as an incompetent, lazy, hypocritical and murderous bandit.

In case of the Xia there fortunately are other sources available that allow a different perspective than the one of official historiography. Since the compilation of history played a vital role in the process of legitimation, it was quite natural for rulers of ‘marginal dynasties’ to create a history office. Normally the material collected by the court historians would then serve as a basis for the official history of a dynasty, which as a rule was compiled by the successive dynasty. As the Xia were not considered a legitimate dynasty there is no official history, but a scholar named Yang Xueke 楊學可 made use of such materials and wrote a private history of the Xia, the *Mingshi Shilu* 明氏實錄 (*Annals of the Ming Family*). Another important source is the stele inscription that was found during the excavation of Ming Yuzhen’s tomb. A more detailed description of the sources is to be found in the appendix.

The exceptionally good source material has inspired quite a few studies on the Great Xia by Chinese scholars. In the beginning, modern Chinese scholarship on the Xia was undertaken within the framework of research on peasant uprisings (*nongmin qiyi* 農民起義), which were identified as forerunners of the communist movement in China. Main task of this highly ideological approach, generally, was to merely identify class backgrounds, determine collaboration and class loyalty, as well as to describe the repercussions of such uprisings. While scholars before the Cultural Revolution dismiss Ming Yuzhen as a member of the landlord class (*dizhu jieji*...
Legitimation of a “Marginal Dynasty”: The Great Xia in Sichuan

later scholars identify the Xia as a revolutionary peasant regime (nongmin geming zhengquan 農民革命政權). The excavation of Ming Yuzhen’s tomb in 1982 was followed by a great number of studies on the stele inscription and questions related to the new information it revealed. Besides a small number of articles on questions of detail the majority of them deal with the entire history of the Xia. Their authors mostly examine the history chronologically by giving the main facts. A major problem remains that even newer works persist in simply labeling the protagonist as revolutionaries or reactionaries. And, although the authors make use of all sources and acknowledge inconsistencies within, they do not apply a systematic approach to the sources.

In Western research the Great Xia have not gained much attention so far. Otto Franke briefly mentions Ming Yuzhen and the Great Xia in his unfinished Geschichte des chinesischen Reiches (History of the Chinese Empire). Vincent Shih and Chan Hok-lam insignificantly touch on Ming Yuzhen in their articles on the ideological background of uprisings in Chinese history. Works on the early Ming focus on Zhu Yuanzhang and discuss the Xia merely as one of the many antagonists of the Ming’s founder. Furthermore, because the Xia are not considered to be a major antagonist – these are Chen Youliang 陳友谅 and the aforementioned Zhang Shicheng – they for the most part remain a side topic. The so far best account on the Xia is the entry on Ming Yuzhen in the Dictionary of Ming Biography. Since this is a dictionary entry, it naturally does not treat the topic exhaustively and even more importantly, Ming Yuzhen’s tomb was not yet discovered at the time of its publication.

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21 Wang Chongwu 1954, pp. 95, 99; Wu Han 1965, p. 137.
25 Franke 1948, pp. 539, 546.
26 Shih 1956, pp. 200-201; Chan 1969, p. 215. The same is true for two works on folk religions: Overmyer 1976, p. 29; Ter Haar 1992, p. 16, note 3. Dardess 1970 does not treat the Xia at all in his article on the background of the late Yuan rebellion.
28 Dardess 1976b.
As is the case for the Ming Dynasty the Xia’s antecedents lay within the uprisings of the so-called Red Turbans (hongjin 紅巾). While Zhu Yuanzhang had joined the Northern Red Turbans, Ming Yuzhen, founder of the Xia Dynasty, had joined the Southern Red Turbans. The former had their center within the modern province of Anhui and the latter in Hubei. Both movements were driven by similar religious ideas propagating the advent of Maitreya, Buddha of the future, which would usher in a new utopia. But they acted independently from each other.

Han Shantong 韓山童, leader of the Northern Red Turbans proclaimed that “the empire is in great disorder, Maitreya Buddha will descend to be reborn and the King of Light shall appear in this world [天下大亂，彌勒下生，明王出世].” The revolt he incited among the workers that were drawn together to repair the Grand Canal in 1351 failed and Han was executed. Shortly thereafter, some of his surviving followers successfully rose for a second time, now worshiping Han’s son Han Lin’er 韓林兒 as Small King of Light (Xiao Ming Wang 小明王). In 1355 they even proclaimed him emperor of their newly established Song 宋 Dynasty. Spectacular military successes, that brought the rebels as far as Korea, were soon followed by major setbacks. In 1363 Han Lin’er, then trapped in his besieged capital Anfeng 安豐 (Anhui), had to be saved by Zhu Yuanzhang, who had joined the movement in 1355. Some years later Zhu finally arranged for the death of Han Lin’er, who posed an obstacle in the legitimation of his own aim for power.

The leader of the Southern Red Turbans at least nominally was a certain Xu Shouhui 徐壽煇, an itinerant peddler of cloth from Luotian 羅田 (Hubei). He was chosen to be the leader because of his exceptional appearance. According to the stele inscription found in Ming Yuzhen’s tomb the Red Turbans in the south already staged their uprising in 1350, thus earlier than in the north. And more importantly they also proclaimed a Song Dynasty, with Xu Shouhui as their emperor. Tianwan 天完, the dynasty name transmitted in most sources, is an invention made by the Ming-time historians, who compiled the Yuanshi 元史 (Official History of the Yuan).
Like the Northern Red Turbans, the movement in the south in the first stage was able to conquer large territories. Ming Yuzhen joined Xu Shouhui’s forces during this period of expansion. Ming was a peasant from Mei qu 梅丘, a village near Suizhou 隨州 (Hubei). Born in 1329 he, in contrast to Zhu Yuanzhang, who descended from a poor peasant family, most probably belonged to the richer families of his home community. It is said that he once served as Commander of the Local Patrolling Archers (xunsi gongbing paizitou 巡司弓兵牌子頭) and after the outbreak of the Red Turban rebellion the village elders entrusted him with the defense of the village. For this he set up a militia and build a rampart on a nearby mountain. Why Ming Yuzhen joined Xu’s forces is not clear. Whatever the reason, he remained loyal towards Xu Shouhui. Shortly after the Southern Red Turbans, confronted with a major offensive by Yuan loyal troops, lost more and more ground and eventually fled into remote areas. Even under these circumstances Ming did not defect. He had been appointed Grand-marshal of the Troop Fighting the Barbarians (tongbing zhenglu da yuan shuai 统兵征虜大元帥) and led his homeland militia-men under the high command of Ni Wenjun 倪文俊. It was this Ni, who, starting in 1355, led the Southern Red Turbans’ counterattack. They finally regained control over most of the territory, which had previously been lost. In 1357 Ming received order to make his way up the Yangzi from Yiling 夷陵 (Hubei) to seize grain which was to serve as provisions for the Red Turbans’ troops. He clearly went to Sichuan in order to plunder.

While preparing for the return trip, he encountered the men of a Yuan militia, who had fled from Chongqing 重慶 after their commander, Yang Han 楊漢, had come into conflict with the Mongolian Öljeitu 完者都, Sichuan’s Governor to the Right. The men urged Ming Yuzhen to take his chance and seize the barely defended city. The seizure of Chongqing indeed went without

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34 For the most detailed account on the military operations of the Southern Red Turbans see Yang Ne 1982.
35 XGZB.
36 Caomuzi, 3: 54. This is a sort of local police force, which were first established during the Song (960-1279). They were subordinate to the local police office (xunjiansi 巡檢司). Hanyu Dacidian 1986-1993: Vol. 4, p. 80; Yuanshi, 101: 2594-2596.
37 MSSL 2; Ming Taizu Shilu 明太祖實錄 (hereafter: TZSL), 19: 265.
38 While his tomb’s stele inscription states that Ming joined the Red Turbans of his own free will, MSSL 4 and TZSL 19: 265 emphasize that he had to be forced into cooperation. The sources also have different dates. XGZB gives 1351, MSSL has the 11 month of the year guisi (December 1353/January 1354) and TZSL does not give a date at all.
39 MSSL 4.
40 MSSL 5-7; XGZB; TZSL 19: 265; Yuanshi, 45: 940. The authors of the Yuanshi misleadingly write that it was Ni Wenjun who made his way to Sichuan. The MSSL, the only source that has Ming start his travel to Sichuan already in 1355, while all others note the year 1357, emphasizes the benevolent character of Ming’s trip. The author states that Ming intended to look for grain (shao liang 哨糧) to help the starving population. TZSL clearly speaks of plundering grain (lüe liang 掠糧).
difficulties and opened the way into the Sichuan basin. After reporting his success to Xu Shouhui, Ming was appointed Provincial Governor of Sichuan. But there still remained strong Yuan forces in Sichuan. Under the command of Öljeitu, who had escaped from Chongqing, as well as Nanggiyatai 郎革歹 and Zhao Zi 趙資, two other Yuan generals, they were holding major cities such as Jiading 嘉定 (modern Leshan) and Chengdu. It took until 1360 before Ming Yuzhen had defeated them, seized all major cities and taken the three leaders prisoner, who were executed on the marketplace in Chongqing, after Ming Yuzhen had vainly tried to win them over.

The Yuan forces were not the only enemy Ming Yuzhen had to cope with. There was also the Green Turban Army (qingjinjun 青巾軍), a splinter group of the Northern Red Turbans, who had been active in Shaanxi and then penetrated into Sichuan about the same time as Ming Yuzhen seized Chongqing. After their complete defeat in one decisive battle it seems that many of them joined Ming Yuzhen. The most prominent example is Fu Youde 傅友德, who later, because Ming Yuzhen failed to employ him, became an important general of Zhu Yuanzhang and played a crucial role in the Ming army’s conquest of Sichuan.

Shortly after Ming Yuzhen had conquered Chongqing, brutal and bloody struggles erupted among the Southern Red Turban followers of Xu Shouhui. Ni Wenjun, who had been the key person in the revival of the Southern Red Turbans, fell prey to the ambitious Chen Youliang. Chen justified the killing by spreading the rumor that Ni had planned to murder Xu Shouhui. Ming Yuzhen at the time being occupied in Sichuan was not able to intervene directly, but sent a message to Xu Shouhui warning him of the emulous Chen Youliang. This was

42 MSSL 8; TZSL 19: 265-266. The sources differ in the account of Yang Han’s fate. According to the TZSL Yang was able to escape, while the author of the MSSL has him murdered by Öljeitu.

43 MSSL 11, 13, 17; TZSL 19: 266; XGZB. See also a text dedicated to the three leaders of the Yuan troops written by Zhao Bi 趙弼 (1465-1487), which gives more details: Shu Sanzhong Zhuan 蜀三忠傳 in Xiaopinji 效顰集, Shang 8-11: 309-311. Since Zhao lived sometime after the events and his text obviously serves the purpose of moral exhortation praising the three men for their unyielding loyalty, this source has to be treated with caution.

44 The Green Turbans and their leader Li Xixi 李喜喜 are mentioned in: MSSL 14, 15; TZSL 17: 240 and 19: 270. For a study of the Green Turbans that identifies further sources, see Chen Shisong 2006. Li Zhongxian 李仲賢 mentioned in XGZB is most likely to be identified as Li Xixi. Fu De 傅德 mentioned in the XGZB is probably to be identified as Fu Youde. On Fu Youde’s career, see Mote 1976.

45 The general interpretation of Ni Wenjun’s attempt to assassinate Xu Shouhui, mentioned in Yuanshi, 45: 939 and also almost identical in TZSL 8: 101, is that he tried to seize power. This interpretation is shared by Taylor 1976, p. 602; Xu Wenbin 1982, p. 46 and Yang Ne 1982, pp. 125-126. Dardess (1970, pp. 551-552) sees the conflict in the light of a shift in strategy among the rebels after 1355. Ni stood for a more opportunistic approach, which was disliked by the advocates of the old messianism and led to open conflict. I follow the interpretation of Liu Kongfu and Pan Liangchi 1986, pp. 24-25, who have pointed out that it was Ni Wenjun who had revived Xu’s power and thus had no interest to kill him. This is further corroborated by the account in Caomuzi, 3: 53 suggesting that it was a struggle over power between Ni Wenjun and Chen Youliang. Ming Yuzhen’s warning and the attempt to assassinate him are mentioned in XGZB.
answer by a failed attempt to assassinate Ming Yuzhen. Chen continued to expand his power base in Jiangxi and in 1359 when Xu Shouhui, for unknown reasons, came to Jiangxi, he had his guards slain, took Xu prisoner and proclaimed himself King of Han (Han Wang 漢王). He then endeavored to eliminate Zhu Yuanzhang, with whom he fought over the control of the lower Yangzi region, engaging in a major campaign to seize Zhu’s capital (the later Nanjing). For this offensive he not only sent message to Zhang Shicheng, the third contender for power in the lower Yangzi region, summoning him to attack Zhu from the east but also on behalf of Xu Shouhui ordered Ming Yuzhen to send troops supporting him. In the light of initial advances and feeling confident of a final victory, he in 1360 had Xu Shouhui killed and proclaimed himself emperor. Ming Yuzhen, believing to have received Xu Shouhui’s orders, firstly dispatched soldiers until he learned of Chen’s regicide. He then promptly executed Chen’s envoy and called back his men immediately. In the period following, he publicly condemned Chen’s misdeeds and discontinued all contact with him. As a reaction to Chen’s claim to power, Ming proclaimed himself King of Long and Shu (i.e. Shaanxi and Sichuan) (Long Shu Wang 隴蜀王), thus making clear that he did not acknowledge Chen’s proclamation. During the ensuing period Liu Zhen劉楨, most important adviser of Ming Yuzhen, repeatedly urged Ming to establish a dynasty and proclaim himself emperor. Ming finally acquiesced and in 1362 ascended the throne in Chongqing declaring himself emperor of the Great Xia.

In the following years Ming Yuzhen did not show any ambitions to interfere in the ongoing struggle in the east between Chen Youliang, Zhang Shicheng and Zhu Yuanzhang. Instead he endeavored to enlarge his territory to the north and south. But the campaigns were not successful. In the north, only the region around Jiezhou階州 (southwestern Shaanxi) could be permanently occupied, while the conquest of Hanzhong 漢中 (Shaanxi) and thus further expansion to the north failed. The campaign in spring 1363 to conquer Yunnan, which was controlled by the Mongolian Boru Temür 孛羅帖木兒,
ended in a disaster. The Xia army entered Yunnan on three different routes. The initial seizure of Zhongqing 中慶 (modern Kunming) by the army under the command of Wan Sheng 萬勝 was followed by a devastating defeat by the Mongolian troops, who had secured the support of the local tribe leadership. The Xia troops suffered large losses and had to completely retreat from Yunnan. After the expansion efforts had failed Ming Yuzhen concentrated again on administration in order to stabilize his rule. He implemented a reform of the central administration and adopted a system roughly based on the Yuan’s with a Central Secretariat (zhongshu sheng 中書省), with Chancellors to the Right and Left, and a Bureau of Military Affairs (shumi yuan 樞密院), replacing a system modeled after the Zhouli 周禮 (Rituals of Zhou), which had been installed after the proclamation of the Xia Dynasty. The three-level local administration with prefecture (fu 府), district (zhou 州) and county (xian 縣) remained unchanged. However, on the district level, new officials were appointed to seven strategically important cities in the north, south and east.

Ming Yuzhen’s attempts to stabilize the Xia’s rule were interrupted by his sudden death of an unknown disease in 1366. His then ten-year-old son Ming Sheng was declared emperor and his mother was designated to serve as regent. Even before Ming Yuzhen was buried, severe conflicts among his followers erupted. The information on this struggle are rather fragmentary. There seemingly were two rivaling groups, who gathered around the two highest ministers – Wan Sheng and Dai Shou 戴壽. Both men had been supporters of Ming Yuzhen from the time he put together his first militia and Wan Sheng, who had led the Yunnan campaign, in addition was also his sworn younger brother (yidi 義弟). However, it was Dai Shou who seems to have enjoyed the support of the imperial family. After Wan Sheng had killed Zhang Wenbing 張文炳, member of the Bureau of Military Affairs, he was lured to court by Ming Yuzhen’s sworn son (yizi 義子) Ming Zhao 明昭, where he was strangled to death. The control over the court was then in the hands of Dai Shou. But the dynasty did not come to peace yet. 1367 Wu Youren 吳友仁, a regional official, first protested against the murder of Wan Sheng in a letter and then openly rebelled. After military attempts to put down the rebellion had failed, Dai Shou finally reached an agreement with Wu Youren sacrificing Wan Sheng’s...
murderer, who was executed immediately. Dai Shou thus regained control over the Xia’s whole territory.\textsuperscript{51}

In the meanwhile Zhu Yuanzhang had been able to gain victory over his two rivals, Chen Youliang and Zhang Shicheng, and now openly contested the Yuan for power proclaiming himself emperor of the newly founded Ming Dynasty in 1368. In the following years he was able to gain control over almost all of China. In 1371 only Sichuan and Yunnan were not yet conquered by his armies, but this was only a matter of time.\textsuperscript{52}

There had been constant diplomatic contacts between Ming Yuzhen and Zhu Yuanzhang. In a number of letters, in which he frequently alluded to historical examples from the time of the Three Kingdoms (220–265), Zhu tried to win over Ming’s support to fight the Mongols and even offered him to maintain his rule in Sichuan. Ming, though, remained skeptical and declined the offer.\textsuperscript{53} After Ming Yuzhen’s death Zhu Yuanzhang continued to send envoys to Sichuan and the Xia equally sent men to the Ming court in Nanjing. At first Zhu followed a strategy to convince the Xia court to surrender. At the same time one of his envoys also acted as scout bringing back a map of the territory. This shows clearly that Zhu was already preparing for a campaign if it became necessary. The Xia court was quite aware that an attack was imminent, but decided to trust in the geographical advantages of Sichuan, which is protected by a mountain range to the north and only accessible from the east through the Three Gorges (\textit{sanxia} 三峡), and simultaneously to continue the diplomatic exchange to win more time. The exchange continued, but Zhu’s intentions became increasingly unambiguous. In one of his letters he stressed the fact that Sichuan, despite its geography, throughout history never had been able to hold out for long. In a last attempt, one of Zhu’s envoys appealed to the preservation of the Ming family. As all this remained without avail, he gave order to prepare for an invasion of Sichuan. The necessary pretense to start the campaign was given when, in August 1370, Wu Youren attacked Hanzhong. The expedition began in January 1371 and only eight months later the Xia Dynasty’s Emperor submitted his capitulation in Chongqing.\textsuperscript{54}

The Ming army advanced on two different routes. General Tang He 湯和 was to lead his troops from the east through the Three Gorges towards

\textsuperscript{51} Ming Yuzhen’s death: MSSL 32; TZSZL 19: 269–270; XGZB. MSSL does not mention a disease. Conflicts after Ming’s death: MSSL 37, 41, 43. Short biographical note on Wan Sheng: MSSL 38. \textit{Caomuzi}, 3: 54 mixes Ming Yuzhen’s death with the following struggle among his followers claiming that he was murdered by a younger brother.

\textsuperscript{52} For Zhu Yuanzhang’s fight against Chen Youliang, Zhang Shicheng and the Yuan, see Dreyer 1982, pp. 25-73; Mote 1988, pp. 44-57; Dreyer 1988, pp. 72-100.

\textsuperscript{53} There are four letters by Zhu Yuanzhang extant but only one by Ming Yuzhen: TZSL 18: 243-244, 17: 239-241; MSSL 28, 29.

Chongqing; Fu Youde, the former Green Turban, took the route familiar to him in the north, from Shaanxi towards Chengdu. Zhu Yuanzhang’s plan to surprise the Xia with an unexpected attack from the north was successful. The first advances along the Yangzi failed at the fortification in Qutang 瞿塘, the most western of the Three Gorges, where the Xia had installed iron chains across the river and catapults on the river banks. The breakthrough achieved by Liao Yongzhong’s 廖永忠 naval forces was only possible after the Xia had withdrawn forces from Qutang to meet the anticipated attack on Chengdu by Fu Youde. When Tang He’s army reached Chongqing, the empress dowager decided – against other advice – to surrender without a fight. Soon after Chengdu fell, where Dai Shou had held out. The last to offer resistance was Wu Youren in Baoning 保寧. The city finally fell in September and Wu was taken prisoner. The leading generals of the Xia, if they had not lost their lives during the fighting, were executed while most soldiers were integrated into the Ming army and put on garrison duty in Xuzhou 徐州 (Jiangsu). Ming Sheng and his mother were brought to Nanjing. There Zhu Yuanzhang demonstrated his generosity and exempted Ming Sheng of the expected submission ceremony. He even bestowed him the title of Marquis Turning to Righteousness (guiyi hou 歸義侯) and gave him and his mother residence in the capital. But only a year later Ming Sheng and his mother along with Chen Li 陳理, Chen Youliang’s son, were deported to Korea. Zhu Yuanzhang feared that these two potential contenders for power would stage uprisings against him. Both Ming Sheng, who married the daughter of a Korean official, and his mother died in Korea. Their descendants still live in Korea today.  

2. Legitimation of the Xia Dynasty

The concept of legitimacy has since long been, and remains, a much-discussed and often debated subject, which makes it impossible to find one universally accepted definition. Therefore, it might be best to put it in simple terms: 

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56 For a recent overview see Peter 2010.
“Legitimacy is the recognition of the right to govern.” Legitimation, then, is the process by which legitimacy is created and maintained.

For imperial China there exist various studies on the legitimation of single dynasties and rulers, but a general account on the legitimacy and legitimation processes of the imperial system in China remains a desideratum. Quite naturally there have been changes and differences in the patterns of legitimation throughout imperial times; nonetheless, two fundamental concepts can be named. First, the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven (天命), according to which Heaven assigned the right to rule. At the same time this mandate was not unconditioned nor eternal, it could be transferred to others if its holder proved unworthy. Secondly, the Confucian ideal of benevolent rule by a sage king assisted by the cultured elite. This ideal held that a benevolent and morally erect ruler would provide the people with adequate food, soldiers to defend the country, and use moral suasion rather than coercion to achieve his objectives. Source of this ideal were the mythical model sage kings of antiquity, the Confucians’ Golden Age, when a perfect rule was thought to have prevailed. Every new rule thus was an attempt to reestablish this perfect order. Although Edward L. Farmer in his book Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation treats the Xia only marginally, he has put forward an interesting assumption on the legitimation basis of the Xia Dynasty. He writes: “What we see in the Xia state, then, is an effort to combine appeals to the Confucian traditions of the Han elite culture at the same time that lip service was paid to the symbols of the radical millenarian movement.” Farmer continues to argue that Ming Yuzhen tried to merge elements of the radical millenarian belief “with enough of the Chinese elite tradition to legitimize the Xia in the eyes of both the upper and lower strata of society”. However Farmer’s assumption seems to be merely based on the secondary account in the Dictionary of Ming Biography.

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58 The most useful general presentations for the moment are the introductory chapters in Chan 1984 and Wechsler 1985. See also Chan 1980. Yau 1996 is an attempt of a general presentation, with a focus on the aspect of myths in the legitimation process. For studies of single dynasties and rulers, see Franke 1978; Guisso 1978; Goodman 1998; Chaussende 2010. See also in Leung 2007. Unfortunately the proceedings of the “Conference on the Legitimation of Chinese Regimes” held at Asilomar, Monterey, California, 15-24 June 1975, remained unpublished. Jack L. Dull’s contributions, including introductory and concluding remarks as well as studies on the legitimation of the Qin and Han, are available online: http://e-asia.uoregon.edu/static/homer [viewed 17 July 2012]. C. Leban’s contribution was published posthumously: Leban 2010.
59 Chan 1984, pp. 24-25. Wechsler 1985, pp. 12-13 names the “cession of the throne to a moral worthy” (the model being the legendary rulers Yao and Shun) to be the second key idea of political legitimacy in China. But this stood in conflict to the political practice of dynastic houses handing the power from father to son and thus caused a constant tension between political ideal and practice in imperial China.
63 Dardess 1976b. The Mingshi Shilu is not listed in Farmer’s bibliography.
It is thus necessary to scrutinize the actual sources. Taking up Farmer’s hypothesis the sources will be examined for (a) traditional (Confucian) patterns of legitimation and (b) elements of the radical millenarian belief. Furthermore the question of how to assess the sources itself will be addressed.

(a) Traditional Patterns of Legitimation

The two traditional concepts of legitimation mentioned above are best tangible in rituals that served to demonstrate and verify legitimacy. In case of the Xia there are no detailed descriptions of rituals performed, but the Mingshi Shilu quotes two edicts by Ming Yuzhen and one by Ming Sheng, which clearly show the use of traditional patterns to legitimize the Xia’s rule. The first of Ming Yuzhen’s edicts was proclaimed after he had just adopted the title of a king in 1360:

胡元運去，中國豪傑竝起而逐之。予本鄉農，因亂為眾所推，始為自保，豈敢圖人。邇者，義兵一起，羣醜底寧，湖湘向化。顧玆蜀地久被青巾之亂，莫有爲之剪除者。予奉天誅罪，豈能自安，已經殄滅兇徒，幸爾坐收全蜀。是乃天意，夫豈人謀。方今圖為畫一之規，與民共用太平之治。誠恐百姓不知，以予為爭地殺人之師，非弔民伐罪之舉。予取爾蜀於青巾之手，非取諸元。爾輩亦當復見中華文明之化，亦不可安于胡元之陋習也。更宜洗心從治，慎勿取惡招尤。

The fortune of the barbarian Yuan is gone, the heroes of China have raised and chased them away. I am originally just a peasant, who in troubled times has been elected by the masses. In the beginning I just wanted to protect myself, how would I have dared to make plans for others. As soon as the troops of righteousness had arisen, the racketeers became calm and peaceful, and Huxiang pledged allegiance. However, Shu (i.e. Sichuan) had to suffer under the ravages of the Green Turbans for a long time, there was no one, who would destroy [the Green Turbans] for them. Since I have received order by Heaven to punish the culprits, how could I have remained idle, I have already annihilated all villains and fortunately in all of Shu they were caught with ease. This was Heaven’s will, how could it have been plotted by man. Now I intent to draw up uniform laws, in order to share a peaceful rule together with the people. But I am really afraid that the people do not realize [this] and deem me to be a leader, who kills people, strives for land and does not take it upon himself to have pity on the people and punish the culprits. I have wrested your Shu from the Green Turbans’ hands, not the Yuan’s. You will again witness the culture of the Chinese civilization, for we must not rest in the corrupt customs of the barbarian Yuan. You should purify your heart and obey the government’s instructions, take care not to do evil or to summon misfortune.

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65 MSSL 14.
This edict makes it clear that the Yuan have lost Heaven’s mandate and Ming Yuzhen’s conquest of Sichuan is claimed to be sanctioned by Heaven. All this is elaborated on in the second edict issued with the establishment of the Xia Dynasty in 1362:

Heaven gives birth to this people and has to install a herdsman for it. There have been changes of dynasty from Xia to Shang to Zhou and the transfer of power from Han to Tang to Song; such changes have occurred for a long time. When it came to the rulers of the Yuan, the northern barbarians besmirched our China, therefore moral principles were obscured and people were annihilated by them. All say, this was Heaven’s calculations, but I dare to call it man-made plans. Soon [our] sons and grandchildren would have lost the correct way and the benign destiny would have faded, [but] Heaven possesses the Mandate and has indicated his disgust and the right moment to overthrow [the Yuan]. The heroes took this opportunity and initiated the plan for expulsion. Our state has its origins in Huxiang and intends to end the violence and save the people. You, my ministers, have established the state and taken its territory. Cheng Tang’s [forefather] possessed an area of [only] 70 [square] miles, [but] his abundant charisma was felt even in Sanba. The power was transferred for 800 years until, due to miraculous achievements, it was taken by a single rule. Since I have received the Mandate of Heaven from above and below I am in accord with the people’s hearts, on the second day of the third month in the year renyin (28 March 1362) I have respectfully made sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, to my ancestors as well as to the rulers of the former dynasties, before ascending the imperial throne. My state is named Great Xia and my era name Celestial Rule begins this year. Alas! I will reverently execute the punishment appointed by Heaven – extirpate the stain of the barbarian rule, reveal my abundant merits and bring the great order of our civilization to perfection. [For this] I depend on [the support of] heroes from near and far – do not be stingy with good advice. I hope, senior and minor officials in harmonious cooperation will achieve great feats.

67 MSSL 16.
The opening phrase alludes to a sentence from the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Commentary of Zuo*) referring to the concept of the Mandate of Heaven.\(^{69}\) Further below no doubt is left that the new ruler, who has received the Mandate of Heaven, is to be Ming Yuzhen. This is also made evident in the choice of the era name Celestial Rule (*tiantong* 天統). Following the first sentence reference is made to the theory of legitimate succession of dynasties, reflecting very much the then prevailing opinion by just naming the major dynasties.\(^{70}\) Interestingly enough, the Yuan are not only depicted as wicked rulers, a common topos in the representation of last emperors of a dynasty in imperial histories, which is to legitimate the transfer of the Mandate of Heaven, but they are denied any legitimacy at all. This clearly xenophobic view, stressing the non-Chinese character of the Yuan, seemed to be quite common at the time. Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺 (1357-1402) for instance writes very negatively about the barbarians (*yidi* 夷狄) and shares the opinion that their rule was not legitimate.\(^{71}\) Likewise Zhu Yuanzhang deemed the Yuan’s rule to be illegitimate, albeit his view on the Yuan appears to be quite inconsistent.\(^{72}\) In the same way Zhang Shicheng’s effort to restore old customs and public morality among the people reflects the notion of a general degeneration under the Mongol rule.\(^{73}\)

No reference is made to Xu Shouhui’s Song Dynasty, whom Ming Yuzhen had served loyally, in the edicts itself. But both stele inscription and *Mingshi Shilu* report that Ming publically paid tribute to Xu Shouhui after he had been murdered. The *Mingshi Shilu* mentions the construction of a temple in honor of Xu, where regular sacrifices were made.\(^{74}\) The inscription adds further details:

不易國號，不改元；謚宋主曰應天啓運獻武皇帝，廟號世宗，猶舜之宗堯也。

[Ming Yuzhen] neither changed state name nor era name and bestowed the ruler of the Song with the posthumous honorary title “Emperor who according to Heaven has established a [new] cycle and achieved military merits” and the

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\(^{69}\) The exact wording is found in Hu Anguo’s 胡安國 (1074-1138) commentary on *Lunyu* 13.9 (*Lunyu Jizhu* 1958, p. 580), which ultimately is based on a sentence in *Zuozhuan* Xiang 14: “Heaven gives birth to the people and installs a ruler for them, so that he takes care of them [天生民而立之君，使司牧之].” *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, The ICS Chinese Texts Concordance Series 1995, p. 256.

\(^{70}\) Ouyang Xiu, whose ideas on the legitimate succession were prevalent at that time, further counted the Western Jin (265-316) as legitimate: Fincher 1972, p. 60. For detailed discussions, see Trauzettel 1967; Davis 1997.

\(^{71}\) Fincher 1972, p. 61. Fincher’s work is based on an examination of Fang Xiaoru’s *Shitong* 釋統 and *Hou Zhengtong Lun* 後正統論, in *Xunzhi Zhai Ji*, 2: 52-61. Interestingly MSSL 34, 53 includes comments on the two Xia emperors by Fang Xiaoru. For more details, see Fölster 2009, pp. 86-87, 110-111.

\(^{72}\) Dardess 1978, p. 7. Zhu Yuanzhang’s view of the Yuan Dynasty, according to John Dardess, is inconsistent in many ways. The picture he draws varies, because it served Zhu’s purpose of justifying his rule in different periods and contexts.

\(^{73}\) Mote 1962, p. 214.

\(^{74}\) MSSL 14.
temple name Shizong. He venerated him as his model like Shun had venerated Yao as his model.

The relation to Xu Shouhui was a delicate issue in terms of legitimation. The loyalty (zhong 忠) of the subject in his relation to the ruler is a core value in Confucian thought and is incorporated in the five human relations (wu lun 五倫) as well as in the three cardinal guides (san gang 三綱). Turncoat officials (er chen 貳臣), who have served two different dynasties, are condemned as disloyal and treacherous. A subject, who dispossessed his master in order to proclaim himself emperor, was considered all the more condemnable. The step to first proclaim oneself king before ascending the imperial throne, which was also carried out by Zhu Yuanzhang and Chen Youliang, can be interpreted as a strategy to avoid an all too clear break with one’s former lord and allegations of disloyalty. At the same time this enabled the enforcement of one’s claim to the succession. Traditionally the transfer of imperial power was to be performed by a formal abdication ritual (shan rang 禪讓). But this already had not been the case when the Yuan succeeded the Song.

The stele inscription gives further credit to Ming Yuzhen’s succession by alluding to the mythical model rulers Yao and Shun. Shun served the Emperor Yao, who impressed by Shun’s achievements appointed him as his successor to the throne. This story is the blueprint for succession by virtue rather than heredity.

In connection with the accession to the throne Ming Yuzhen performed the obligatory rituals publicly claiming the Mandate of Heaven. He ‘reported’ his claim by making sacrifices to Heaven and Earth as well as to his ancestors. Later he “erected an altar for the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, where he made sacrifices in spring and autumn and posthumously named the last four generations of his ancestors emperors and erected an ancestral temple, where he made sacrifices in all four seasons [立郊社，祭以春秋。追帝其四代，立廟，祭以四時].” The stele inscription lists all his ancestors by name and posthumous honorary title (shi 謚), male and female, and further notes that: “he posthumously named all of them emperor and empress and made sacrifices to them according to the rites and music of the son of Heaven, equally grand as the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth [皆追王曰皇帝、皇后，祀以天子禮樂，與郊

75 Hu 1992, No. 2499; 7745; 10978.
76 “[…] advancement to [king], was in practical term, as close as one could get to the throne without actually taking it.” Leban 2010, pp. 39-40.
77 Franke 1978, p. 10. According to Leban 2010, p. 3 the practice of formal abdication was invented by Wang Mang (45 BCE-23 CE) and lasted into the period of the Five Dynasties (907-960).
78 The most detailed study on the legend about Yao and Shun is to be found in Allan 1981, pp. 27-54.
79 MSSL 17. The practice to bestow four generations of the emperor’s ancestors with imperial titles and posthumous titles was a common practice among founding emperors: Wang Shoukuan 1995, pp. 62-64.
The imperial ancestral rites based on the Confucian idea of filial piety (xiao 孝) were since the Han (202 BCE-220 CE) recognized as one of the most important imperial rituals. They were “of obvious importance, in view of the need to maintain and prove continuity on an hereditary basis”. The sacrifices “to the rulers of the former dynasties” were equally important and at this time already an age-old tradition. New emperors could thus portray “themselves symbolically as the end-points on a long line of heroic monarchs” and “share in their charisma”.82

Besides these ceremonies there are other symbols of imperial rule mentioned. According to the stele inscription Ming Yuzhen received imperial seal and ribbon (huáng xiōu 皇緞). Later the Ming Dynasty’s army captured a large number of insignia, which were all brought to Nanjing. In addition to the imperial seal, there are listed golden seals, a crown, banners, 58 silver and 640 bronze seals. Another unambiguous symbol for imperial rule is the picture of a dragon found on the sepulchral stele’s head, as well as on one of the robes retrieved from Ming Yuzhen’s tomb. In both cases the dragon has five claws, which, since Han times, was the emblem of imperial power. Ming Yuzhen also made use of traditional imperial prerogatives such as the proclamation of a calendar and the issuance of money. The calendar he proclaimed was named “in advance of Heaven (xiántián 先天)”, which most probably is a further expression of the claim of the Mandate of Heaven.

Besides the abundant references made to the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, there is also evidence for the Confucian ideal of a benevolent ruler as a way of legitimation. In the above-cited edicts, Ming Yuzhen styles himself as a savior of the people, who brings peace and stability. His intentions were “to end the violence and save the people” and then “to draw up uniform laws, in order to share a peaceful rule together with the people”. The stele inscription states that his efforts to establish a stable order were successful. Under his rule “rites

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80 Loewe 1994, p. 107. For the obvious political function of the imperial ancestral cults, see also Wechsler 1985, pp. 123-126.
81 MSSL 16.
83 Loewe 1994, p. 105: “From early times, the imperial seal came to constitute a material symbol of authority which was lodged in the person of a rightly acclaimed emperor.” See also Wechsler 1985, p. 87.
84 MSSL 51.
86 Williams 1979, p. 137.
87 On the Money issued under the Xia, that can be identified by the era name, see Dong Qixiang 1988. The calendar name is mentioned in XGZB. It probably stems from Yìjīng, Qiàn 23: “[… ] When [the great man] acts in advance of heaven, heaven does not contradict him. When he follows heaven, he adapts himself to the time of heaven. If heaven itself does not resist him, how much less do men, gods, and spirits! [先天而天弗違，後天而奉天時。天且弗違，而況於人乎？況於鬼神乎？]” Translation: Wilhelm 1967, pp. 382-383. On the promulgation of a calendar as monopoly of the emperor see Wechsler 1985, p. 212.
88 MSSL 16, 14.
and music, punishments and administration, regulations and laws were in outstanding order [禮樂刑政，紀綱法度，卓然有緒].”

In other parts well-established topos are applied to emphasize the ruler’s legitimacy. This begins with the elevation of the ruler by his adherents. In this topos, the future emperor is offered rulership by his followers but only accepts it after having declined the offer three times (san rang 三讓). In the Mingshi Shilu, Ming Yuzhen’s elevation to king is already described as a kind of election: “The masses chose Yuzhen to be King of Long and Shu [眾推玉珍為隴蜀王].” The establishment of the Xia Dynasty was supposedly preceded by repeated requests on the part of the advisers. In the end Ming Yuzhen “had no choice but to counsel with the masses and comply with them [不得已，諮謀於眾，從焉].” The topos is most explicit in the stele inscription:

父老豪傑告留曰: 《生民無主, 欲將何之?》峻辭固讓再四。諸將遂立誓推戴曰: 《臣等不股肱王室, 鬼神殛之。》始允眾志。

The old and the leading local figures asked him to stay: “The people are without a ruler, where else would you want to go?” He sternly declined and persistently renounced again and again. Only when all generals swore an oath and supported him as leader – “If we do not protect the royal house, devils and spirits shall kill us!” – he yielded to the will of the masses.

The attribution of unusual characteristics to a ruler – such as supernatural appearances during their birth, unusual physiognomy or special talents at very early age – is yet another often used topos to demonstrate an emperor’s designation to rule. Ming Yuzhen is also delineated in this way. His mother is said to have become pregnant with him after having encountered a dragon in dream. Ming is described as having been extraordinary tall and allegedly had double pupils (chong tong 重瞳) in one eye. The Ming family chronicle, which was compiled by Ming Yuzhen’s descendants in Korea, portrays him as a sort of wunderkind, who already knew several Confucian classics and books on military strategy by the age of nine. It also reports a typical prediction, where a stranger, impressed by Ming’s appearance, foretold that “this man will be among those that contest for the realm (天下爭衡者此人)”. In the same way the birth-date inscribed on the sepulchral stele, “9th day of the 9th month in the year jisi (己巳九月九日)” (3 October 1329), with the double nine, which is the

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89 In his detailed study of Cao Pi’s accession to the throne in the year 220 Knechtges (2005) refers to the san rang as part of a “rhetoric of refusal”.
80 MSSL 14.
81 MSSL 15.
82 MSSL 1. Chan Hok-lam has identified several stories, in which Zhu Yuanzhang is attributed different semi-mythical imperial attributes: Chan 1975.
83 Cheng Weiguo 1997, p. 39. These kind of prophesies are a standard instrument in legitimizing emperors. See the examples for Zhu Yuanzhang (Chan 2005, pp. 92-99) and Zhu Di (Chan 2007, p. 101).
highest Yang-number, can equally be interpreted as an expression of Ming Yuzhen’s uniqueness.

In this context, the repeated allusions to the mythical model rulers are to be named. The comparison to Shun, who, by the way, is said to have had double pupils, is to bolster Ming’s legitimation, after Xu Shouhui’s death has already been mentioned above. There is a further allusion to Shun in a message to Ming Yuzhen by his general Zou Xing 鄒興 during the disastrous Yunnan campaign, in which he reports on the initial successes:

恭惟皇帝陛下, 智勇如湯, 文明協舜, 深慨中華之貴, 反為左袵之流, 矣在位之貪殘, 致生民之困悴, 恭行天罰, 遂平定於多方。禮順人情, 即進登於五位。[...]

Distinguished Emperor, Your Majesty; Your wisdom and courage resemble (Cheng) Tang’s, Your cultivation and brightness comply with Shun’s. Deeply moved by China’s nobility and revolted by the barbarians’ customs as well as their ruler’s corruption and ferocity, that have led to misery and despair among the people, you have respectfully carried out the punishments meted out by Heaven and thus have pacified many places. When the rites were in accord with the people’s feelings you have ascended the throne. [...]

Here again Ming Yuzhen is described as benefactor, whose actions were in accord with Heaven’s and the people’s will. Besides being a general model for a wise ruler the comparison to Shun in the context of this military campaign in the south might have been chosen because Shun is said to have pacified different barbarian tribes himself.\textsuperscript{95}

The mythical model ruler Cheng Tang, founder of the Shang Dynasty (ca. 16\textsuperscript{th} century-1045 BCE), is also referred to in the edict on the occasion of the establishment of the Xia. The edict actually alludes to Cheng’s forefather Qi 契, who is said to have possessed only a very small territory (70 li). In the end however Cheng Tang was able to unify the realm under his rule.\textsuperscript{96} This might be interpreted as a justification for the fact that Ming Yuzhen could not claim to have unified the realm, which after all was a central prerequisite for a legitimate rule according to the theory of the legitimate succession of dynasties.

Interestingly Yu 禹, the founder of the legendary ancient Xia Dynasty, is not mentioned at all. After all Ming Yuzhen adopted the same dynasty name. This deliberate choice is to be understood as a programmatic statement, proclaiming a return to the pure origins of Chinese culture, the ancient Xia were believed to be the very first Chinese dynasty, and an overcoming of the

\textsuperscript{94} MSSL 36.

\textsuperscript{95} Mathieu 1989, pp. 85-87. Zhao Shanpu 趙善璞, who declined an offer by Ming Yuzhen to serve the newly established dynasty, wrote a poem in which he justifies his decline equating himself to the ancient eremites Xu You 許由 and Chao Fu 巢父, who had declined similar offers by Shun and thus indirectly compares Ming Yuzhen to Shun. MSSL 22; Yufeng Zhao Xiansheng Zhuang 玉峯趙先生傳, by Zhao Bi 趙弼, Shang 15-17: 313-314. The entire poem is found in the biography by Zhao Bi, but he writes of Zhao Shanying 趙善瑛.

\textsuperscript{96} On Cheng Tang’s forefather see Shiji, 13: 505.
Legitimation of a “Marginal Dynasty”: The Great Xia in Sichuan

The edicts make clear that the people “must not rest in the corrupt customs of the barbarian Yuan” and that Ming Yuzhen wants to “extirpate the stain of the barbarian rule” in order to “bring the great order of our civilization to perfection.”

The establishment of an administration after the model of the Zhouli and the taxation according to the well-field system (jing tian) are also to be seen in this light. Right after the proclamation of the Xia Dynasty a central administration with Six Ministers (liu qing) was installed. Taxation was modeled after the ancient well-field system, “levying one tenth (十取其一)” of the harvest. And also the division of Sichuan in eight circuits (ba dao) might have originated in ancient models. These models are essential for the Confucian ideal of perfect order as it allegedly was in place under the Western Zhou Dynasty (1045-771 BCE). Especially the Zhouli has a long tradition in being seen as an idealized blueprint for government organization. Throughout history there have been several attempts to apply it to the actual administration of the state. In all cases the reference also served purposes of legitimation. Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE - 23 CE) employed it in an effort to legitimize his short-lived Xin Dynasty (9-23 CE) that he had established in a coup. Leaders of the Northern Wei, Western Wei and Northern Zhou invoked the Zhouli “to provide their non-Chinese dynasties […] with classical precedent and Confucian legitimacy”. And in case of reform efforts Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) used the book “to authorize the ill-fated New Policies of 1069”. The Xia obviously followed this tradition, seeking to legitimize their new rule by invoking the Zhouli.

Finally, the posthumous honorary names that were given to Ming Yuzhen follow traditional patterns. As befits a founding emperor, he is granted the temple name Grand Ancestor (taizu 太祖). His posthumous title Qinwen Zhaowu Huangdi 欽文昭武皇帝, which might be translated “emperor, who was patron of the civil and successful warrior”, contains the two most common characters wen and wu that were among the guidelines for honorific titles. The
same holds true for the two-character posthumous titles that were bestowed on his ancestors. In the same way Ming Yuzhen’s ascension to the throne followed traditional patterns, his son’s succession emulated such patterns. However, it has to be remarked that there is an important difference. While Ming Yuzhen’s succession was inter-dynastic his son’s was intra-dynastic. This is also reflected in the legitimation strategy. Ming Sheng had been declared heir apparent right after the establishment of the dynasty. After his succession a new era name, Beginning Prosperity (kaixi 開熙), was adopted and the following edict proclaimed:

August Heaven regards one with his favoring Mandate and gave his blessing to me. Our Great Ancestor, the August Emperor respectfully consoled the people and punished the villains, he established the empire, laid the foundations and hoped to pacify the central plains in order to reach perfect order. [But], the dragon (i.e. the emperor) ascended [into Heaven] before he was able to accomplish his great undertaking, and in all of the country servants and populace have bewailed [his death]. I, the small child, am in deep mourning, nonetheless officials and populace have asked me to succeed to the throne. It is said that the magic vessel (i.e. the throne) should not be vacant for a long time and that a country cannot be without a ruler, [so] I was urged repeatedly [to ascend the throne, and] it was useless to decline. On the first day of the fourth month (10 May 1366) I have respectfully informed Heaven and Earth and my ancestors before ascending the throne. I am young and I lack virtue, therefore I am ashamed of taking up the position of emperor and teacher, only out of respect for Heaven I want to strive toward the welfare of the populace. Concerning the cultivation of one’s character, I follow the example of my ancestor and continue his grand heritage; I will boundlessly expand this great

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100 XGZB. In MSSL 32 the posthumous title is slightly different, but also contains the two characters: Wenwu Zhisheng Huangdi 文武至聖皇帝. For the practice and guidelines of awarding posthumous titles to emperors, see Wang Shoukuan 1995, pp. 17-70. The titles bestowed on Ming Yuzhen’s ancestors are mentioned in XGZB. Besides temple name and posthumous title emperors traditionally also received a tomb name (Wilkinson 2000, pp. 109-110). For Ming Yuzhen there are two different tomb names attested in the sources. According to XGZB it is ruiling 叡陵 while MSSL 32 notes yongchangling 永昌陵 as tomb name. The different names probably stem from the fact that Yang Xueke did not have knowledge of the tomb name, since imperial tomb names traditionally were not publically announced, and therefore made up a name on his own. On this assumption, see Dong Qixiang 1982a, pp. 106-108.

101 On the difference between inter-dynastic and intra-dynastic types of succession, see Leban 2010, p. 2.

102 MSSL 17.

103 MSSL 35.
enterprise and promulgate his civil and military achievements everywhere and I pray for a long-lasting Mandate of Heaven. Nevertheless, I rely on my servants and officers to harmonize with my intentions, to surmount this time of hardship together, to rectify my shortcomings, to point out my mistakes and to assist me with what I do not accomplish.

Again reference is made to the concept of the Mandate of Heaven as well as to the ideal of a benevolent ruler, whose main concern is the people’s welfare. The mandatory sacrifices (heaven, earth, ancestors) are performed and also the topos of the ruler, who repeatedly declines the offer to ascend the throne made by his advisors before finally accepting, is to be found. Due to the intra-dynastic character of the succession, there are many references made to Ming Sheng’s father and predecessor Ming Yuzhen. It is clearly stated that Ming Sheng wants to continue his father’s tradition.

The edict’s first four characters are taken from the Shujing 《書經》 (Classic of Documents). They are culled from a section which deals with the aforementioned legendary Emperor Shun, who had succeeded Yao, and his abdication in favor of Yu, the founder of the ancient Xia Dynasty. This sets the tone for Ming Sheng’s succession. Like in the case of Ming Yuzhen a linkage to the earliest dynastic legends is evoked. Then the text takes up the expression dusheng “to be blessed by Heaven” from the Shijing 《詩經》 (Classic of Odes), where it is used to describe the birth of King Wu 武王, whose father King Wen 文王 was the founder of the Zhou Dynasty. Both are revered as model rulers in Confucian thought. King Wu’s successor, his son King Cheng 成王 also serves as a model, especially for intra-dynastic succession. As in Ming Sheng’s case King Cheng was a child when he ascended the throne and his uncle, Dan the Duke of Zhou 周公旦, took responsibility as a regent until his nephew was old enough to rule himself. In Ming Sheng’s case it is the mother, who is reported to have acted as regent. Quite clearly both allusions are meant to give further credit to Ming Sheng’s succession to the throne.

Cultivation of one’s character (xiushen), which is referred to in the edict, is a key term from the Daxue 《大學》 (Great Learning). This is the first of the Sishu 四書 (Four Books), which in this form gained their importance through Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200). In 1313 they became the basis of the civil service examinations and remained to be the basic curriculum until the abolishment of the examinations in 1905. According to Zhu Xi’s understanding the Daxue is the fundamental text that gives a concise outline of Confucian

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104 Shangshu 3 (Legge 1972a, p. 54).
105 Shijing 236 (Legge 1972b, p. 435). According to Zheng Xuan’s (127-200) commentary on the Shijing, the expression dusheng means that Heaven had blessed the mother, whereupon she gave birth to the equally blessed King Wu (Shisanjing Zhushu Maoshi, 16: Vol. 5.1491).
doctrine. Therein cultivation of one’s character is described as one prerequisite in a hierarchical model of steps to attain a well-governed state.\(^{106}\)

(b) Elements of Radical Millenarian Belief

It is much more difficult to detect elements of the millenarian belief under the Xia than it is to demonstrate the impact of traditional Confucian patterns of legitimation. One major reason for this, as will be shown, is the biased character of the available sources. It is without doubt that the Xia developed out of the religiously motivated Red Turban movement in the South. However, information on their actual belief is scarce.

Evidently, there was a first uprising 1338 in Yuanzhou 袁州 (Jiangxi) that is related to the Red Turban movement in the south. It was led by the (former?) monk Peng Yingyu 彭瑩玉 and his disciple Zhou Ziwang 周子旺. The authorities quickly put down the rebellion, in which Zhou Wangzi and Peng’s family were killed, while the monk himself was able to escape. The religious character is quite obvious. Quan Heng 權衡, author of the *Gengshen Waishi* 庚申外史 (Unofficial History for the Gengshen Emperor) which reports on the years 1333 to 1368, notes: “All rebels wrote the character for Buddha on their back and heart, believing that with the character for Buddha [on their body] they would be invulnerable [反者背心皆書佛字，以爲有佛字刀兵不能傷].”\(^{107}\) Quan continues to describe Peng as a kind of miracle healer who was highly esteemed by the people. Also the names of Peng Yingyu’s sons, Heaven’s offspring (*tiansheng* 天生) and Earth’s offspring (*disheng* 地生), and his wife, the Buddha mother (*fomu* 佛母), have a definite religious connotation.

The Southern Red Turbans are said to have “venerated the monk Peng Yingyu” (宗彭瑩玉和尚).\(^{108}\) And according to the *Ming Taizu Shilu* 明太祖實錄 (Annals of the Ming Dynasty’s Grand Ancestor), official annals of Zhu Yuanzhang, the movement’s initiator Zou Pusheng 鄒普勝, a Macheng 麻城 (Hubei) blacksmith and disciple of Peng, “used his (i.e. Peng Yingyu’s) skills propagating prophecies, and proclaimed that Maitreya shall descend to be reborn and serve as ruler of the world [以其術鼓妖言，謂稱彌勒下生當為世主].”\(^{109}\) This millenarian expectation has to be seen as the central message of their

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\(^{106}\) Gardner 1986.


\(^{109}\) TZSL 8: 100. Whether another uprising in 1348 under the leadership of a certain Peng Guoyu 彭國玉 is in any way related to Peng Yingyu is unclear. Some scholars deem them to be the same person (Lian Lichang and Qin Baoqi 2002, pp. 57-58) other scholars hold the opposite opinion (Yang Ne 1982, p. 109; Yang Ne 2004, pp. 151-153). At the same time it is by far not clear to what degree Peng Yingyu was involved in the uprising led by Zou Pusheng. Zhang Cailie 1986, p. 57 tries to show the relation between Peng Yingyu and Xu Shouhui.
ideology. This idea is shared by many millenarian movements throughout Chinese history and has its origins in the early medieval period (roughly 220-600). Contemporaries further describe their religious character, stating that “they recited Buddha’s name, burning incense and spreading the six characters (念佛燒香俵散六字)” and that “they madly relied on the holy man from the Western Regions (誑托西方聖).” The six characters might either refer to *namo mile zunfo* 南無彌勒尊佛 (“Oh, Venerable Buddha Maitreya”) or *namo amituofo* 南無阿彌陀佛 (“Oh, Buddha Amitâbha”). The Western Regions is an “obvious reference to the Western Paradise of Amitâbha”. It is thus clear that the movement had its seeds in lay Buddhist activism. How far the Red Turban movement was related to what generally is labeled White Lotus Teaching (*bailianjiao* 白蓮教) is the subject of much controversy. For a long time the general assumption was that the White Lotus Teaching was the result of a process, in which peaceful Buddhist laymen activists, who commonly were organized under the name White Lotus Society (*bailianshe* 白蓮社), gradually incorporated the millenarian Maitreya belief. This process was believed to have culminated in the Red Turbans’ uprising. Barend ter Haar, however, has convincingly shown that the Northern Red Turbans were not connected to the White Lotus teaching at all. However, in case of the Southern Red Turbans Yang Ne has demonstrated a definite link to the White Lotus. He identifies as many as 18 persons among Xu Shouhui’s followers, who carried the character *pu* 普 as part of their name. The character was a common sign of affiliation to the White Lotus movement and goes back to Mao Ziyuan 茅子元 (1086/88-1160), who is held to be the founder of the White Lotus Teaching.

Xu Shouhui, whom Ming Yuzhen served so faithfully, seems to have been identified as the reborn Maitreya. The *Ming Taizu Shilu* reports that he was

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110 Ye Ziqi in his *Caomuzi* 3: 51 and Tao Zongyi 陶宗巵 in *Nancun Chuogenglu* 南村輟耕錄, 28: 355, both contemporaries of the time, also note on the rebels belief in the advent of Maitreya. On the background of the millenarian Maitreya belief see Chan 1969, p. 213. The concept of Maitreya as a savior seems to go back to the *Maitreya-vaśkarāṇa-sūtra* 佛說彌勒下生經, which was translated into Chinese in the 3rd century. For an English translation of the part describing the utopian paradise, see Chan 1969, pp. 212-213. For a more detailed discussion of the early Maitreya belief, see Ma Xisha 2011, pp. 19-25. See also Nattier 1988.


112 First quote from *Chunyu Xuanji* 春雨軒集, second quote from *Shichuji* 石初集, both taken from Yang Ne 2004, pp. 146-147; see also Yang Ne 1983, p. 215. The translations are taken from Ter Haar 1992, p. 126.

113 Ter Haar 1992, p. 126.

114 Ter Haar 1992 gives a summary of the relevant research on this topic in his introduction. On the Northern Red Turbans see ibid., pp. 119, 125-126, see also Ma Xisha 2011, pp. 43-44, who also concludes that the Northern Red Turbans were not connected to the White Lotus Teaching, and Seiwert 2003, p. 199-202.

115 Yang Ne 1983, p. 215; Yang Ne 2004, pp. 142-144. On affiliation characters (*pu* and *jue* 覺), see also Ter Haar 1992, p. 80-87. Seiwert (2003, p. 181, note 48) points to the problem that the same affiliation characters were also used by another tradition.
designated ruler because “his appearance was different from all [相貌異眾].”

Ye Ziqi 葉子奇, the author of the late 14th century text Caomuzi 草木子 (Master Plants), gives a slightly different story, which points in the same direction: “When Xu bathed in a salt water pond, the people saw fine rays of light emanate from his body. Everyone was astounded. Thereupon they made him emperor [徐於鹽塘水中浴, 眾見其身上毫光起。眾皆驚異。遂立為帝].”

The chaotic and disastrous conditions of the 1350s apparently caused many people to draw hope from the Maitreya prophecy, according to which the establishment of an earthly paradise promised to end all their misery, and to join the Red Turban movement.

The reason for the relative scarcity of information is that all transmitted sources were invariably written or compiled by members of the elite, whose mindset was heavily formed by the Confucian education they had received in preparation for a career as officials. They were thus not in favor of, or candidly rejected, the Red Turbans’ religious beliefs, especially since the Red Turban movement in the beginning acted openly hostile toward the elite. This is most evident in the slogan “Destroy the rich to benefit the poor (摧富益貧)” recorded by an eye-witness in his description of the rebels entry into the city of Shaowu 邵武 (Fujian). In many places local officials and members of the landlord gentry were humiliated or massacred. Although, as John W. Dardess notes, the driving force behind this rather were the shiftless elements, who had joined the rebellion later, than the original followers of Peng Yingyu, members of the gentry were not likely to have made this distinction.

The same problem holds true for the sources on the Xia. A look at their authors’ biographies corroborates this. The stele inscription from Ming Yuzhen’s tomb and also most of the edicts were composed by Liu Zhen. Liu was a native of Luzhou 瀘州 (Sichuan). Other sources remark that his family originally was from Changzhou 昌州 (Yunnan) and that his grandfather had fled to Luzhou at the end of the Song Dynasty. Liu received a presented scholar (jinshi 進士) degree from the palace examination in 1330 and thereafter served as Registrar (jingli 經歷) in Daming 大名 (Hebei). After having resigned from his office, for reasons not mentioned, he went back to Luzhou. During the turmoil in Sichuan he took refuge in the mountains nearby. Around 1359 he met Ming Yuzhen. The description of their encounter in the Mingshi Shilu alludes to the famous meeting of Liu Bei 劉備 (162-223) with Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-
Legitimation of a “Marginal Dynasty”: The Great Xia in Sichuan

234), which became the emblem for an emperor personally visiting a talented man to recruit him. Liu Zhen became Ming Yuzhen’s most prominent adviser holding various important offices. The repeated comparison to Liu Bei’s famous adviser Zhuge Liang emphasizes the central position he held. Allegedly, it was he who urged Ming Yuzhen to establish the Xia Dynasty. According to later historians, he was also responsible for the installation of the education and examination system, the building of ancestral shrines and most probably also for the installation of a central administration modeled after the Zhouli. His zi 字, name given on coming of age, Weizhou 维周, which might be translated as “preserve the Zhou”, could well be expression of an ideological conviction. Liu seems to have lost influence after the reform of administration in 1365, since he is no more mentioned among the high officials. But he regained an official post after Ming Yuzhen’s death before he finally died in 1369.121

Like Liu Zhen, the author of the Mingshi Shilu, Yang Xueke, was also a Confucian-trained scholar. Yang was a native of Xindu 新都 (Sichuan). According to the biography, written by a certain Liu Weide 刘惟德, who had met him in 1409, Yang was the descendant of the famous scholar Yang Zhen 杨震 (?-124), who was known as the Confucius from Guanxi (Guanxi Kongzi 關西孔子) (area in today’s Shaanxi province). He had received the customary training in the Confucian classics, but decided not to take up an office. Instead, he devoted himself completely to the field of study and teaching. He fled the fightings in Sichuan to Kunming (Yunnan), where he was received positively. According to Liu Weide, he continued teaching the Confucian classics and at the same time acted as a kind of political adviser. His biographer hints at certain tensions in his relation to the local decision-makers that led Yang decide to return to Sichuan. Yang supposedly realized that he was not able to impose his Confucian thoughts on the ‘barbarians’ in Yunnan. Back in Sichuan Ming Yuzhen offered Yang an official post, which Yang declined pleading an illness. In the same manner, Yang later declined a similar offer made by the victorious Ming Dynasty. The phrasing on Yang’s refusal of Ming Yuzhen’s offer seems unambiguous but the time of his return to Sichuan, just after Ming Yuzhen had conquered Sichuan, as well as his obvious political ambitions give room for doubts. Further acknowledging the fact that the Mingshi Shilu uses material, which clearly must have originated from the Xia Dynasty’s archive, it becomes

121 MSSL 12, 15, 17, 37, 45. TZSL 19: 267-268. On his family background and for the date of the palace examination see Yu Ji’s 虞集 (1272-1348), whose family originally came from Sichuan and who always kept contact to Sichuanese (see Smith 1992), Song Jinshi Liu Zhen Xu 送進士劉楨 (in Daoyuan Xuegu Lu 道園學古錄, 6: 12a/b), which is a short text written as a farewell to Liu Zhen from the capital, where he had sat the imperial examination. See also: Luxian Zhi, 4: 589. Later historians on Liu Zhen: Mingshi, 123: 3703; Mingshu 明書, 90: 1822 and Mingshi Jishi Benmo 明史紀事本末, 11: 37. According to XGZB Liu Zhen also served as court historian and as teacher to the heir apparent.
obvious that Yang Xueke most probably had a closer relation to the Xia Dynasty than his biographer wants to admit.\textsuperscript{122}

Finally, the *Ming Taizu Shilu*, the third of the major sources on the Xia, as an official product from the Office of Historiography at court was doubtlessly compiled by scholars, whose thinking was dominated by mainstream Confucian ideas.\textsuperscript{123}

In spite of the biased character of the sources there is some evidence for millenarian beliefs under the Xia. The most obvious evidence is the proscription of Buddhism and Daoism declared by Ming Yuzhen: “He banned Buddhism and Daoism and had a Maitreya temple build [去釋老二教，並彌勒堂].”\textsuperscript{124} In the official annals of Zhu Yuanzhang the wording is only slightly different: “He banned Buddhism and Daoism and only revered the teaching of Maitreya [去釋老教，專奉彌勒法].”\textsuperscript{125} This has been interpreted as establishment of the Maitreya belief as a kind of “state religion”.\textsuperscript{126} But all there is on the proscription are these meager lines. If such a proscription were actually implemented, this would have involved the closing of monasteries and the persecution of monks. One would expect some kind of reflection of it in historical sources, which is not the case as far as the author can tell.

Further evidence for the worshipping of Maitreya under the Xia are eight statues chiseled into the stone along the riverbank of the Yangzi near Chongqing. According to the 19\textsuperscript{th} century local gazetteer of Baxian 巴縣, a town south of Chongqing, this was the work of Zou Xing, the above mentioned general, whose letter to Ming Yuzhen from the Yunnan campaign has been quoted.\textsuperscript{127} The eight statues are situated in two different alcoves. According to Wen Yucheng, who has studied the statues, one alcove shows Maitreya between two of his disciples, while in the other alcove there are three seated Buddhas (佛) again framed by two disciples. The Buddha in the middle rides on an ox, while the left disciple sits on a lion and the right disciple on an elephant. For Wen Yucheng, who remarks that such depiction normally is unknown to Buddhist art, this shows that the statues present Manichaean deities.\textsuperscript{128} Wen draws on the earlier assumption made by Wu Han. Wu argues that the Red

\textsuperscript{122} *Qingfeng Xiansheng Zhuan* 清風先生傳 in *Quan Shu Yiwenzhi* 51: 1557-1559.
\textsuperscript{123} On the background and involvement of one of the key figures among the compilers, Xie Jin, see Chan 2005.
\textsuperscript{124} MSSL 17.
\textsuperscript{125} TZSL 19: 268.
\textsuperscript{127} *Baxianzhi* 1, *Xia*: 164.
\textsuperscript{128} Wen Yucheng 2002. Unfortunately the black and white photographs of the statues in the article only give a very unclear image. Besides the interpretation of the statues in this light also some peculiarities in Ming Yuzhen’s tomb were explained by drawing on the assumption of a Manichaean influence. The fact that no cloth was found in the coffin was interpreted in reference to Manichaean instructions, according to which the body had to be buried naked: Dong Qixiang 1982a, p. 103; Xu Wenbin 1982, p. 53. Also the representation of sun and moon on silk found among the burial objects were linked to Manichaean beliefs: Jiang Wanxi, Wang Chuanping and Liu Yuchuan 1982, p. 6; Wen Yucheng 2002, p. 47.
Legitimation of a “Marginal Dynasty”: The Great Xia in Sichuan

Turbans’ belief was influenced by Manichaean thought and that the Ming Dynasty’s choice of name reflects this influence. Wu Han’s study is mainly concerned with the Ming Dynasty and its origins among the Northern Red Turbans, Ming Yuzhen is only mentioned marginally. Wu asserts, without giving any proof, that Ming Yuzhen’s original family name was Min 映 and that he later adopted the name Ming 明 due to his Manichaean conviction – one Chinese term for Manichaeism is Mingjiao 明教 (Teaching of Light). Wu Han’s assertion has been accepted without questioning by many Chinese and Western scholars.

Not only has Wu Han’s assumption of Manichaean influence been disproved, but also the assertion of a name change lacks convincing evidence. Wu Han’s assertion of name change probably stems from Huang Biao’s Ping Xia Lu 平夏錄 (Record on the Pacification of the Xia). Huang quotes sources, without naming them, according to which Min was Ming Yuzhen’s actual family name and Yuzhen his zi 字. Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 writes in his private history of the Ming Dynasty from 1632, again quoting not further specified sources, that Ming Yuzhen’s original name was Min Rui 映瑞 and Yuzhen his zi. Common source might be Caomuzi, whose author Ye Ziqi writes of “one-eyed Min (旻眼子)” instead of using the name Ming Yuzhen. This nickname is connected to the story that Ming Yuzhen lost one eye during a battle on Dongting Lake 洞庭湖 (Hunan) against Yuan forces around 1355. No other contemporary source mentions the name Min. Unfortunately there is little information on Ye Ziqi and his work. This makes it difficult to explain, why he notes Min as the family name. Ye was a native of Longquan 龍泉 (Zhejiang), in 1362 he had passed the local exams (zhoushi 州試. He offered his service to Zhu Yuanzhang, but to no avail. Nonetheless, he served as Assistant Magistrate (zhubu 主簿) in Baling 巴陵 (Eastern Hunan) for a few years. Back in his hometown in 1378, he became entangled in a scandal and was sent to prison.

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132 Huangming Shigai 皇明史概, 4: 102.

133 Caomuzi, 3: 53-54. The other sources are MSSL, TZSL and Gengshen Waishi, Shang 23: 1220 (German translation: Schulte-Uffelage 1963, p. 62). Battle and lost eye are mentioned in more detail in MSSL 4 and TZSL 19: 265. In Lang Ying’s (1487-1566) Qixiu Leigao, 8: 88, for which he clearly used Caomuzi for the entry on Ming Yuzhen, the nickname interestingly becomes “one-eyed Ming” 明眼子.
This is where he began the work on his *Caomuzi*.\(^{135}\) Hence, he probably only possessed second-hand information about Ming Yuzhen, maybe even only from hearsay. Min is a rather unusual family name, if it exists at all.\(^{136}\) One explanation might be a confusion with the personal name of Ming Yuzhen’s son Ming Sheng, at least the characters Min 明 and Sheng 昇 are quite similar, and there are other instances where Ye Ziqi obviously confused information.\(^{137}\) More likely, is it related to Ye’s rejection to use the character Ming 明 caused by his unfavorable opinion of the Ming Dynasty. Pan Jinghui has shown that Ye consequently evades the use of this character when referring to the Ming Dynasty and relates it to Ye’s experience with Zhu Yuanzhang who did not employ him.\(^{138}\) Whether Rui was his personal name and Yuzhen his zi cannot be said with certainty. Only the use of Yuzhen as personal name can be regarded genuine, since there is multiple evidence that the name was tabooed, according to common imperial practice, after he had become emperor.\(^{139}\) In short there is no evidence in support of Wu Han’s assertion of a name change motivated by religious beliefs. In addition, there simply is no hard evidence on the personal belief of Ming Yuzhen whatsoever. Even if one has “to recognize that no amount of textual evidence will ever indisputably prove what any historical personage might have believed at any given moment in time”,\(^{140}\) not one source states that Ming joined the rebellion because of religious conviction. One might be able to interpret Ming Yuzhen’s relation to Xu Shouhui, which above has been characterized as a traditional subject to emperor relation, in religious terms.

\(^{135}\) On Ye Ziqi and his *Caomuzi*, see Pan Jinghui 2000; Longquan Wenshi Ziliao 2000, pp. 175-176. The title *Caomuzi* (Master Plants) seems to derive from a statement in Ye Ziqi’s foreword, in which he explains his motivation to start writing: “Distressed in prison, I became afraid that once I had gone before my brief time, I would rot like plants do and I was truly sad about this [幽憂於獄，恐一旦先朝露，與草木同腐，實切悲之].” *Caomuzi*, Zixu: 5. However, the information on the events at the turn from Yuan to Ming probably were not part of the original *Caomuzi* but of a different work by Ye Ziqi, the *Qidong Yeyu* 齊東野語. His descendent Ye Pu 葉溥, who in 1514 made the first print of *Caomuzi*, most likely merged the two works into one. Pan Jinghui 2000, pp. 216, 218.

\(^{136}\) There is no person with the family name Min in *Zhongguo Lidai Renming Dacidian* 2005. The *Wanxing Tongpu* 萬姓通譜 (19: 362), a work on family names by Ling Dizhi 液廬知 (1529-1600), notes this family name, but does not give any examples as is the case for other names. For the family name Ming Ling gives 23 examples, from which six are from Ming times (53: 814-815). Ming Yuzhen is not among them. The Ming family’s family chronicles from Korea traces the origin of their name back to *Chunqiu* times, 722-481 BCE (Cheng Weiguo 1997, p. 40). Since this was general practice for all family names, it is without real meaning.

\(^{137}\) For example the death of Ming Yuzhen gets mixed up with the subsequent struggle among his followers, claiming that he was murdered by a younger brother and that his wife tried to kill the younger brother. *Caomuzi*, 3: 54. See also the number of obviously wrong dates that Pan Jinghui (2000, pp. 220-221) was able to show.

\(^{138}\) Pan Jinghui 2000, pp. 218-220. There only is one exception: *Caomuzi*, 3: 61.

\(^{139}\) XGZB and MSSL (1) mention the taboo. The town Zhenzhou 真州 in Guizhou was renamed Zhenzhou 珠州 because of the taboo (*Mingshi*, 43: 1034; *Zhongguo Gujin Diming Dacidian* 2005, p. 2015). Other later historical works mention that his name was written Yuzhen 玉真 instead of Yuzhen 玉珍 because of the taboo (*Mingshu*, 90: 1821; *Zuwei lu* 紫微錄, *Zhuans* 6: 230).

\(^{140}\) Bokenkamp 1994, p. 60.
Perhaps Ming’s expression of reverence had its origin in the religious role of Xu Shouhui. In any case, Ming obviously did not break as radically with the religious background of the rebel movement as Zhu Yuanzhang did. Zhu soon condemned the Red Turbans to be mere trouble-makers and completely denied that he once might have shared similar beliefs. He now wanted to establish a stable dynastic order himself and knew all too well about the potential threat of a millenarian movement. In the end, he even enacted a law prohibiting religious groups who worshipped Maitreya. Ming Yuzhen, on the other hand, as has been shown above, seems to have protected the Maitreya belief by law, at least nominally.

A further evidence for the dissemination of millenarian beliefs under the Xia are a number of religiously motivated uprisings, which took place on the Xia’s former territory after 1371, and that had to be put down by the Ming authorities. Li Shoukong, who has collected the sources on these upheavals, links them to the religious beliefs propagated by the Xia. In 1379 Peng Pugui led an uprising in the region around Chengdu and Jiading. He was charged “to have deluded the masses with prophecies (以妖言惑衆)”, a standard wording used for this kind of religiously motivated uprisings. In 1381 there was a short revolt, in which the leader claimed to be Maitreya. In 1397 finally a rebellion led by Gao Fuxing, Tian Jiucheng and the monk Li Puzhi broke out in Mianxian, a town west of Hanzhong, and spread over the whole area. Tian Jiucheng called himself August Emperor Ming of the Han (Han Ming Huangdi 漢明皇帝) and adopted the era name Dragon and Phoenix (longfeng 龍鳳). The name Ming might well have been adopted as reference to the Xia’s ruling family. Gao Fuxing claimed to be Maitreya. The Ming authorities were able to get hold of Gao Fuxing the same year the rebellion broke out, but Liu Puzhi, Tian Jiucheng and others, among them a certain Liu Pucheng, continued to cause trouble in the mountainous region between modern Shaanxi and Sichuan provinces. Only in 1409 were the authorities able to capture them.

Although there is no explicit link to the Xia Dynasty, it is obvious that the millenarian Maitreya belief played a crucial role in all of these uprisings. Furthermore, it is striking that there are many persons among the rebels with the character pu 普 as element to their name. As has already been mentioned above, Yang Ne has identified many persons with this character in their names.

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141 Zhu Yuanzhang criticizing the Red Turbans: Dardess 1983, pp. 188-189. On Zhu’s disassociation from the millenarian movement, see also Dardess 1970 and Taylor 1963. Zhu explains that the circumstances pressed him to join the rebellion. Since the ruling Yuan turned against its own people, they were forced to take up arms: Dardess 1983, pp. 192-193. For the law prohibiting the worship of Maitreya see Jiang 2005, p. 112.
142 Li Shoukong 1968, pp. 33-35.
144 TZSL 138: 2181.
145 TZSL 249: 3606-3607; 249: 3608; 255: 3677; Ming Taizong Shilu, 94: 1253.
among Xu Shouhui’s followers. This at least suggests an indirect link to the Xia Dynasty, since Ming Yuzhen also belonged to Xu Shouhui’s followers. Another much later rebellion is explicitly linked to the Xia. In 1475 people of a local tribe in Chenzhou 辰州, a town in modern Guizhou province close to the border of Sichuan and Yunnan, staged an uprising. Their leader Shi Quanzhou 石全州 claimed to be a descendant of Ming Yuzhen. He adopted the title Ming Wang 明王 (King of Light or King Ming). Whether the title refers to millenarian religious beliefs or was chosen as reference to Ming Yuzhen is not entirely clear.146

Conclusion

The examination of all sources has shown that there is rather weak evidence for the importance of millenarian beliefs under the Xia. At the same time there is ample evidence of traditional patterns of legitimation. Nonetheless, it would be premature to conclude that millenarian beliefs did not matter at all. Considering that the authors of all relevant sources were members of the elite their mindset must have had a heavy impact on the content. They either do not mention, or at least would not elaborate on, what does not fit into their view of the world, which results in the few and weak mentions of the religious aspects of the Xia Dynasty. But, since there is such evidence at all, it should be taken seriously. It means the authors could not completely ignore the fact that these religious beliefs somehow played an active role. Scholars have shown that in earlier periods, especially during China’s early medieval period (roughly 200-600), millenarian beliefs were very common and even influenced emperors and the cultural elite. During this time they were frequently employed by emperors to legitimize their rule.147

Nonetheless, in the light of the biased sources, it remains difficult to assess to what degree the millenarian Maitreya belief played an active role in the legitimation of the Xia. In the end, what Dardess has called the “transformation of messianic revolt” probably also holds true for the Xia. The Red Turbans’ millenarian belief “predicted the doom of the old order and the beginning of a new millennium of peace and prosperity”, but itself was “incapable of providing the organizational rationale whereby the new era might actually be brought into being”.148 They thus turned to the elite and their traditional Confucian ideas. This doctrinal shift has been extensively described for Zhu Yuanzhang and the Ming.149 In case of the Xia the former Yuan official Liu Zhen is the best

146 Ming Xianzong Shilu, 140: 2611-2612. See also Li Shoukong 1968, pp. 39-40. Dardess 1976b also mentions this uprising.
149 In addition to Dardess 1970 see the following studies: Taylor 1963; Dardess 1983; Farmer 1995; Ma Li 2002.
example. He is said to have initiated the establishment of the dynasty in the first place and he is also responsible for the installation of an administration system. Moreover schools on the local level, a Directorate of Education (guozi jian 国子监) and a Hanlin Academy (hanlin yuan 翰林院) at court were set up, at which a number of less prominent officials took up positions.\footnote{Installation of schools and academies: MSSL 17; TZSL 19:268. MSSL 19 mentions Liu Zhan 刘湛, who served the Xia as Chancellor of the Directorate of Education (guozijian jijiu 国子监祭酒), Niantu Tunan 年徒圖南 (Mou Tunan 年圖南 in TZSL 19: 268) as Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy (hanlinyuan chengxiang 翰林院丞相) and Shi Tianzhang 史天章 a Hanlin Academician (hanlinyuan xueshi 翰林院學士). TZSL 20: 275 further mentions another Hanlin Academician, who acted as envoy of the Xia. MSSL 18, 39. Zhou Lasheng 2008 merely reproduces the few information found in the sources.} Examinations to recruit officials were held in 1362 and 1366 with a total of 17 successful candidates.\footnote{Wechsler 1985, pp. 21, 35; Goodman 1998, p. 13.} Furthermore, Ming Yuzhen in person actively tried to recruit scholars. Besides Yang Xueke there are other cases of local erudites, whom Ming was not able to win over.\footnote{Landes 2000, pp. 107-108.} This strategy also is reflected in the official edicts of the two Xia rulers, which are directly addressed to members of the elite and openly call for their support. This is most clearly articulated in the closing paragraph of Ming Sheng’s edict: “Nevertheless, I rely on my servants and officers to harmonize with my intentions, to surmount this time of hardship together, to rectify my shortcomings, to point out my mistakes and to assist me with what I do not accomplish.”\footnote{Chen Derong 陈德荣 (Daoguang Chongqing Fuzhi 道光重庆府志, 114: 355) Liu Chen 劉鎮 (Luxian Zhi 6: 1007-1008; see also Mingshi 124: 3719) and Zhao Shangpu 趙善璞 (MSSL 22; Yufeng Zhao Xiansheng Zhuan 玉峰趙先生傳, Shang 15-17: 313-314) all declined Ming Yuzhen’s offer to serve the Xia. Since Sichuan had suffered immensely under the Mongol invasions (1231 to 1280), which led the local elites to leave Sichuan and never to return (see Smith 1992), it can be assumed that there was no large pool of talents for the Xia to recruit from.} Besides the need for bureaucratic and technical know-how of the local elite causing a deliberate turn to the Confucian trained experts, it should also be remarked that they were equally needed for their knowledge of ritual. It has been argued that ritual serves to demonstrate and verify legitimacy. However, ritual cannot simply be made up by anyone, it always draws on or imitates recognized precedents. Rituals and symbols applied by the Xia likewise prove this. The members of the elite were the ones who disposed of the knowledge how to employ and interpret these precedents.\footnote{MSSL 35.} Yet another point, that should be taken into consideration, is an ebbing of millenarian expectation. Examining millenarian movements in medieval Europe Richard Landes points out that all written records were compiled after the climax of millenarian expectation had passed. As the immediate disturbances and excitement declined the authors denied or toned down the nature of these beliefs, even if they earlier might have shared them.\footnote{Wechsler 1985, pp. 21, 35; Goodman 1998, p. 13.} Of course, the European
setting with its own characteristics due to the Christian faith is not immediately transferable to 14th century China. It is for instance rather doubtful that the authors of the Chinese sources, which have been studied in this paper, ever shared the millenarian beliefs of the Red Turbans. But in Europe as in China adherents of millenarian movements at some point must have realized that the prognosticated new age of peace and harmony did not come true. They would either completely turn away from the millenarian hope or maintain their expectation, just postponing the advent of millenarian paradise. In any case the millenarian belief would become less fervent and lose its immediate impact on society. Millenarian expectation did not vanish completely and could be reactivated, for which the repeated outbreaks of rebellions in the region at the end of the 14th century are ample evidence. In the end the results of this study speak against Farmer’s assumption of a combination of traditional and millenarian elements in order to legitimize the Xia Dynasty. It clearly were the traditional elements that were applied to seek legitimacy.

Generally it might be possible to state that the support of the Confucian trained elite was vital for the legitimation of any newly found dynasty, since the know-how for governing and ritual was inextricably tied to this group. This support would enable rebels to create a stable regime and eventually establish a ‘marginal dynasty’. However this is merely one factor among many others deciding, whether a ‘marginal dynasty’ could evolve into a major dynasty.

Appendix: The Sources

There are three major sources for the history of the Xia. Besides (1) the Ming Dynasty’s official annals (shilu) and (2) a private history written by Yang Xueke there further exists (3) a stele inscription belonging to the Xia founding emperor’s tomb.

(1) The Ming Taizu Shilu 明太祖實錄 (Annals of the Ming Dynasty’s Grand Ancestor) were compiled by the Ming court historians after the death of Zhu Yuanzhang, whose temple name is Grand Ancestor, using the material collected at the history office during his reign. It further served as raw material for the official history of the Ming that was completed in 1739. This source thus offers the Ming Dynasty’s point of view.\footnote{The Ming Taizu Shilu were revised twice. This was done on order of Zhu Di who had usurped the Ming throne in 1402. In order to provide his legitimation, he had to make sure that the mentioning of the original throne heir was eliminated from the shilu. This most probably did not affect the parts on the Great Xia. Generally on the background of the compilation of the shilu, see: Franke 1968, pp. 8-16, see also the rev. and enlarged version Franke 2011, and Franke 1961. Specifically on the revision ordered by Zhu Di, see Chan 2005, 2007.}

(2) The Mingshi Shilu 明氏實錄 (Annals of the Ming Family) is a private history compiled by Yang Xueke. The technical term for this kind of source is zaiji 載記, which might be roughly translated as ‘chronicle’. In the
Siku Quanshu 四庫全書 (Complete Library of the Four Treasures) there is a whole category with this name, under which also Yang’s work is to be found. According to the compilers’ introduction to this section the term goes back to the Hanshu 漢書 (Documents of the Han), in which its compiler Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) collected accounts of certain ‘usurpers’ under this term. Later works also used the terms false histories (weishi 偽史) or warlord histories (bashi 霸史).

The compiler obviously had access to material from the Great Xia’s archive, since he reproduced imperial letters and edicts. Yang, a native of Xindu in Sichuan, witnessed most of the Xia’s history. According to his biography he had fled to Yunnan from the turmoil at the end of the Yuan, but returned to his home after the establishment of the Great Xia.

It is noteworthy that he chose to name his work shilu, which normally was used for the official annals of an emperor. This unusual usage was already noted by the compilers of the Siku Quanshu. Though Yang’s work was not incorporated in the actual collection, it is among those that received a critical note. In this note the compilers mention three other works that make use of the term shilu in their title and state that it was quite a common term in old times. They thus do not recognize it to be an attempt to grant it the rank of an official history. At the same time they wonder why Yang of all possibilities chose this term, noting that other histories of this kind are generally named chronicle (zhi 志), record (lu 錄), note (ji 記), or transmission (zhuan 傳). However, they do not offer any further explanations.

On the one hand Yang’s choice is certainly to be explained with the method applied. As is the case with the official shilu he compiled extant material from the archive in an annalistic manner. On the other hand one should not exclude the possibility that he indeed attempted to enhance the Great Xia’s status. After all his work gives a very positive appraisal of the Great Xia, which is clearly criticized by the Siku Quanshu compilators. There are four textual witnesses of the Mingshi Shilu.

157 Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyaoy 1933, pp. 1425-1449. Yang Xueke’s history of the Xia is listed on p. 1443. On the background of the term zaiji, see Rogers 1968, pp. 16-17.

158 Yang Xueke’s biography: Qingfeng Xiansheng Zhuan in Quan Shu Yiwenzhi 51: 1557-1559.

159 Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyaoy 1933, p. 1443. The three other works mentioned are: Dunhuang Shilu 燜煌實錄 by Liu Bing 劉城 (Northern Wei); Jiankang Shilu 健康實錄 by Xu Song 許嵩 (Tang); Huangzu Shilu 皇祖實錄 by Li Aoji 李翱集. Only the Jiankang Shilu received a critical note by the compilers, see Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyaoy 1933, p. 1091. See also Franke 2011, p. 17.

(3) The Xuangong zhi Bei 玄宮之碑 (Stele of the Dark Palace) is the only true primary source, since all other sources are compilations of older materials. The stone stele had been erected in front of Ming Yuzhen’s tomb. It was excavated in 1982 when Ming’s tomb was found coincidentally during construction works in Chongqing. The stele measures 134 x 57 x 23.5 cm and the inscription consists of a total of 1004 characters in 24 lines. The text was compiled by Liu Zhen, Ming Yuzhen’s most prominent adviser, and gives an account of the Great Xia’s emperor’s life. It offers many additional information which are not mentioned in other sources. At the same time others are deliberately left out, since the purpose of such an epitaph is to pay tribute to the deceased. It is quite clear that Liu emphasized Ming Yuzhen’s accomplishments while passing over his failures.

Other texts explicitly dealing with the Great Xia are all based on the Ming Taizu Shilu and/or the Mingshi Shilu. This is the case for Huang Biao’s Ping Xia Lu 平夏錄 (Record on the Pacification of the Xia) and the chapter on Ming Yuzhen in Qian Qianyi’s (1582-1664) Guochu Qunxiong Shilüe 國初群雄史略 (Brief History of the many Heroes at the Beginning of Our Country) as well as the official history of the Ming and other privately compiled histories of the Ming Dynasty. Some make use of further sources, but these only add some minor details. While Huang Biao does not account for his sources, Qian Qianyi does so in giving a collection of all sources available to him, even if they are contradictory. He also quotes a further, probably lost source, the Mingshi Shiji 明氏事跡 (Traces of the Ming Family’s Deeds). The Ping Shu Ji 平蜀記 (Notes on the Pacification of Shu) on the other hand is a mere copy of relevant passages from Ming Taizu Shilu.162

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