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Martial Arts, Apocalypse, and Counterrevolutionaries: Huidaomen and Rural Governance in
Modern China, 1919-1961

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of
Philosophy

in

History

by

Yupeng Jiao

Committee in charge:

Professor Karl Gerth, Co-Chair
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2020

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Co-Chair

University of California San Diego

2020

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCPM	Database for the History of Contemporary Chinese Political Movements, 1949-. The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
KMT	Kuomintang [The Nationalist Party]
NPYXZ chubanshe.	(New) Poyang xianzhi [Poyang County Gazetteer]. Beijing: Fangzhi
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSB	Public Security Bureau
PYGADA	Poyang xian gonganju dangan [Poyang County Public Security Bureau Archives], Special Collection of Contemporary Chinese Historical Sources at Shanghai Jiaotong University.
PYXZ Archives.	(Republican) Poyang xianzhi [Poyang County Gazetteer]. Poyang County
TCMC	Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic
TSS	The Society of Goodness (Tongshanshe)
XTD	The Way of Anterior Heaven (Xiantiandao)
YGD	The Way of Pervading Unity (Yiguandao)
ZGHDMSLJC	Zhongguo huidaomen shiliao jicheng [A collection of Historical Materials on the Chinese <i>Huidaomen</i>]. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Martial Arts, Apocalypse, and Counterrevolutionaries: Huidaomen and Rural Governance in
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Professor Karl Gerth, Co-Chair
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My dissertation is a socio-political microhistory on anarchic forms of rural power structure. This study examines the role of *huidaomen*, especially self-defense associations and

redemptive societies, in the cultural nexus of power in rural China. By analyzing their participation and intervention in local elections, lineage conflicts, defense against banditry, and merchant networks, I argue that the Nationalist Government's state penetration in rural China was a bureaucratic failure due to its poor management of informal power structure in local communities. It also explores how the Communist Revolution abruptly ended such existing informal power channels during the regime-change period. The anarchic rural political environment was finally destroyed by the Communists' three waves of Anti-Huidaomen Campaigns from 1950 to 1961. My study makes two contributions to the field of modern Chinese history. First, my dissertation introduces a critical but overlooked subject in local societies across China. With official statistics showing more than thirteen million lay members in the huidaomen nationwide in 1949, huidaomen were the largest non-state participants in local governance. Despite some scholarly research on their role in peasant rebellions based on Qing Dynasty legal cases, scholars know almost nothing about the presence of these societies in the twentieth century. My study focuses on the huidaomen without the presence of large-scale rebellions, which illustrates their role in an everyday setting and avoids the danger of labeling them indiscriminately as rebels. Second, my project pioneers the promise and challenges of using new and rare forms of internal public security files such as interrogations, confessions, and verdicts in the PRC. Relying on over a hundred complete criminal cases from the CCP's Public Security Bureau in the 1950s that deal with legal cases of both the Republican era and the early PRC, my dissertation is an unprecedented experiment in using systematic internal public security documents produced by the CCP as historical sources.

Introduction

During the early summer of 1949, immediately following the “liberation” of Poyang County in Jiangxi Province, hundreds of local self-defense association members attacked the town and county government newly established by the Communists. Members of the Yellow Crane Society (*Huanghehui*) and the Big Sword Society (*Dadaohui*), two of the largest self-defense associations in rural Jiangxi, performed invulnerability rituals before the attacks and chanted the spells that were believed to protect them from all forms of injuries and death while marching towards the government buildings. After having successfully raided several town governments in Poyang without any resistance from the new regime, all self-defense association members fled away instantly when the PLA shot at them and killed a few near the County Government. Meanwhile, local redemptive society members from the Society of Goodness (*Tongshanshe*) and the Way of Pervading Unity (*Yiguandao*) were also spreading “rumors” concerning the end of the world and a newly born emperor in China. In the case of the Society of Goodness, they even established their own military forces preparing to revolt against the new government. During the subsequent decade of the 1950s, the CCP labeled all these groups as counterrevolutionary “huidaomen” and suppressed them harshly. Most of the huidaomen leaders were sent to jail or executed, while some of them continued their activities underground until the 1980s.

To China historians who are familiar with the history of social unrest and the militarization of local society in Late Imperial China, the self-defense associations and

redemptive societies will instantly remind them of the Boxer Uprising and the White Lotus Sects. On the eve of the twentieth century, a number of rural self-defense associations in Northern China launched the Boxer Uprising, well-known in the West for targeting Christian missionaries, as China's beginning point of widespread anti-foreignism. The uprising and Western reprisals caused the death of thousands, while the Western powers also sacked Beijing, the imperial capital of the Qing Empire. On the other hand, the existence of the White Lotus Sects, who clearly adopted millenarian teachings, posed so huge a threat to the Qing Empire by organizing several large-scale uprisings during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The term "White Lotus" even became a generic term for all potentially insurgent groups in Late Imperial China. With the end of the Qing Empire in 1911, it seems that both the Boxers and White Lotus disappeared from history. Participants in the Poyang incident who adopted both invulnerability rituals and millenarian beliefs, however, suggest that such story did not end with the fall of the Qing.

The most pervasive threat to the Chinese Communist Party in the new regime was not its urban-based rival Nationalist Government, which had moved to Taiwan, but countless local volunteer groups, including but not limited to self-defense associations, redemptive societies, and secret brotherhoods, that were labeled by the CCP as counterrevolutionary *huidaomen* and had spread all over rural China. Stories of rural self-defense and millenarian sect revolts can be found in almost every county gazetteer in the early PRC. Official statistics in the early PRC counted more than thirteen million participants in such groups – a figure at least three times larger than the membership of the CCP. Many of these groups resisted the arrival of the CCP violently, often resulted in direct military confrontations and casualties on both sides.

From 1949 to the 1980s, the CCP had launched waves of political campaigns against huidaomen, which had led to huge collective fears among both the local cadres and rural residents, as well as severe punishment of countless innocent individuals who had never involved in sabotaging activities against the new regime. These local voluntary groups became the target of China's "Great Witch Hunt." While some existing scholarship naturally labels the PRC as a radical atheist and secular regime against religion and superstition, huidaomen groups' coexistence with the Nationalist Regime was not pleasant either. Starting from the 1920s, the Nationalist Government banned many millenarian sects. Self-defense associations in rural China also widely involved in anti-taxation and exploitation activities against the Nationalist Government. The CCP even allied with many of these groups during its early phase.

Due to the scarcity of reliable primary sources, despite some scholarly knowledge on the huidaomen's role in peasant rebellions and social unrest based on Qing Dynasty legal cases, scholars know almost nothing about the presence of these societies in the twentieth century. My dissertation aims at filling this scholarly vacuum by introducing one of the most critical but overlooked subject in local society across China.

A careful study of what the CCP labeled as "counterrevolutionary huidaomen" does not reveal a monolithic organization. In reality, such groups never had a clear organization and were usually loosely structured. Tracing the genealogy of these local societies is impossible. The questions I try to answer in this study include: What does the ubiquitous presence of huidaomen tell about the rural power structure in modern China? What were the rural residents' primary motivations behind joining such voluntary groups? Why did both the Nationalists and the Communists try to eliminate such groups? This study also explores the continuities of rural society in China after the fall of the Qing Empire.¹ If we take for granted that the end of the Qing

necessarily gave rise to a modern nation state and political institutions, why did huidaomen groups, which were almost identical to the Boxers and White Lotus tradition in Late Imperial China, continue thriving or even becoming stronger in rural China during the first half of the twentieth century? To what extent did rural China, before the complete establishment of socialism, remain the same as Late Imperial China? My study focuses on the huidaomen without the presence of large-scale peasant rebellions, which illustrate their roles in an everyday setting and avoids the danger of labeling all huidaomen groups indiscriminately as rebels.

Defining Huidaomen

Although the term “huidaomen” appears in archival sources produced by the CCP frequently, the definition of it has never been efficiently clarified by the government. What is more problematic, Western scholars have had a difficult time translating huidaomen into English. And the translation has never been unified.

In Chinese, the term “huidaomen” is composed of three different words: *hui*, *dao*, and *men*. “Hui”, “Dao”, and “Men” refer to any organization, association, or society composed of people who share similar interests or religious ideas. It can be either religious or secular or even both. Voluntary hui of craftsmen, merchants, or Buddhist believers were popular in late Imperial China and today. The Revive China Society (*Xingzhonghui*), established by Sun Yat-sen and his allies in Hawaii in 1894, was a typical example of a hui. It was later expanded to the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenhui*) in 1905. The earliest examples of dao include the Way of the Celestial Masters (*Tianshidao*), which is also known as the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice (*wu dou mi dao*), founded by Zhang Daoling in the Han Dynasty. The Celestial Masters was one of the earliest Daoist movements in China. Many sectarian groups adopted the name “Dao” in

the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, including the most widespread, the Yiguandao.

Hongmen, also known as the Heaven and Earth Society (*Tiandihui*), was a famous “Men” in late imperial China. In many cases, there was no fundamental difference between Hui, Dao, and Men. Essentially, *huidaomen* was never a unified, monolithic organization in Chinese society. It was more like a general category and a generic term the government used to describe all voluntary associations.

The term “*huidaomen*” has its precedent in late imperial China under the name “White Lotus Teachings.” The White Lotus sect was originally a lay Buddhist movement initiated by Monk Huiyuan of Lushan in the early fifth century.² According to B.J. Ter Haar, the name “White Lotus” was used by non-elites as an autonym for lay Buddhist gatherings before the mid-fourteenth century.³ From the sixteenth century on, “White Lotus” was more and more frequently used and finally became a label for all potentially rebellious groups related to religion. Ter Haar further points out that by the late Ming dynasty, Christianity, millenarian teachings, lay Buddhist, and even sexual techniques were all labeled “White Lotus.”⁴ But people within such groups did not necessarily call themselves “White Lotus.” This label existed only in official propaganda. “White Lotus” was only a generic term without precise specifications. The government could use it as a political label for all the voluntary associations that had rebellious potentials. The PRC’s use of “*huidaomen*” came from the same logic of political labeling.

Although the generic term “White Lotus” was widely used in archival records during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it is unlikely that the central government had ever created a clear definition of its use. In the Qing archives, “White Lotus” frequently appeared in the legal documents on heterodox religious sects and local riots with a religious element. Other similar terms, however, were also common in the archives. For heterodox religious sects, the term “Evil

Cults” (*xiejiao*) was widely used. The CCP also started to use the term “*xiejiao*” starting from the 1980s when traditional religious practice revived during the reform era.⁵ Similar terms, such as “Evil Practice” (*xieshu*), “Religious Bandits” (*jiaofei*), “Evil Teachings” (*xieshuo*), and “Heterodoxy” (*yiduan*) were also common in the Qing archives. In the cases when the Qing officials were clearly aware of the name of a specific religious sect, the document might also use the specific names too.

The archives produced by the Nationalist Government were more specific when talking about religious sects or potentially insurgent groups. In Republican-era legal documents, the investigators often clearly specified the names of the groups involved, although it is clear that many of the names were wrong or randomly used. Generic terms such as “Evil Cults” and “Superstition” were also commonly used when the investigators could not tell the names of the organizations or when there were more than one group participated in the incidents. The Nationalist Government did not try to homogenize one type of voluntary association with other types. In the case of Sichuan, for instance, religious sects like Tongshanshe and Yiguandao were clearly differentiated from gangs such as the Gowned Brothers. Self-defense associations in Shandong, such as the Big Sword Society, were also distinguished from other social groups.

On the contrary, at least from the late 1940s onward, the CCP relied heavily on generic terms when addressing issues related to local voluntary groups. As discussed before, the term “*huidaomen*” is composed of three different words. “*Huidaomen*” was not originally the standard term the CCP used. Instead, “*huimen*,” “*huidaomen*,” and “*daohuimen*” were all frequently used in the CCP’s archives. For example, as early as 1947, the CCP’s Shandong Provincial Department of Public Security issued a document asking local public security organs to investigate “*huimen*” activities.⁶ The 1947 document does not define what “*huimen*” includes

clearly. In 1949, the Public Security organs in Shandong continued using the term “huimen.” In one of its documents, Yiguandao and many other religious sects were clearly included in “huimen”.⁷ Although the word “dao” does not appear in huimen, huimen certainly include the groups with “dao” in their names. The meaning of “huimen”, however, was in general very elusive. In one of Shandong Public Security’s subunit’s report in July 1949, huimen activities even included superstitious activities without institutional religious affiliations such as praying for rain.⁸ During the same year, “huimen” and superstition appeared together in documents issued by the CCP as “*huimen mixin*.” In this case, huimen superstition included most large-scale institutionalized religious sects such as Yiguandao. Surprisingly, however, Christianity was also included in huimen superstition.⁹ It seems the use of generic terms was very random around 1949. Throughout the year of 1949, “huidaomen” and “daohuimen” were also used by the CCP in Shandong. The frequent use of generic terms does not mean that the CCP never uses specific names in the documents. When the document is specifically about one particular group, such as Yiguandao, the CCP may not use the terms “huimen” or “huidaomen” anymore.

In the case of Shandong, although generic terms like “huidaomen” were used as a broad and vague category for local voluntary groups, these terms had a strong religious aspect. In other words, most of these groups labeled as huidaomen were redemptive societies or charity organizations with a strong religious background. These religious associations include Yiguandao, The Way of Nine Palaces (*Jiugongdao*), The Way of the Saints (*Shengxiandao*), and many others. The Red Swastika Society (*Hongwanzihui*) and Sacred Religious Charity Society (*Shengjiaocishanhui*) were some of the major charity organizations categorized as huidaomen. The self-defense associations, however, were mostly excluded from *huidaomen* in the case of Shandong around 1949. Self-defense associations like the Red Spear Society (*Hongqianghui*)

and the Big Sword Society certainly have the word “hui” in their names. But they were not as religious as other groups that were labeled as huidaomen. But does that mean self-defense associations were not counted as huidaomen? The answer is “no.” In the case of Poyang County and the entire Jiangxi Province, both the Big Sword Society and the Yellow Crane Society were clearly labeled as huidaomen. It seems that the definition of huidaomen might be different in different regions. Therefore, the essential question we have to address here is that what exactly is huidaomen?

Without a clear definition from the Central Government, huidaomen’s meaning remained vague and broad during most of the time in PRC. And it varied significantly in different geographical locations. Looking at the legal cases investigated by the Public Security system could help in exploring the general consensus of the official rhetoric on huidaomen.

In 2004, the Chinese Academy of Social Science published two-volume primary sources on huidaomen called *A Collection of Historical Materials on the Chinese Huidaomen: Their Organization and Distribution across A Century*. The sources of this collection mainly come from more than 3,500 local gazetteers published in the PRC after October of 1949. In this collection of sources, the compilation committee defines huidaomen clearly as “feudal associations that operated secretly in order to spread their religious teachings.”¹⁰ The book points out that the term “huidaomen” began to be used since the early PRC when the new government noticed the widespread networks of secret societies in China. Although this definition clearly emphasizes the religious element of huidaomen, this book argues that huidaomen does not belong to the category of religion. The committee traces the history of huidaomen to Medieval China’s secret societies and then the White Lotus groups in late imperial China. They claim that huidaomen played a crucial revolutionary role in imperial China, but they gradually became

more and more counterrevolutionary after the fall of the Qing Dynasty. As a consequence, they cheated the ignorant people for money and allied with both the Japanese and the KMT.¹¹

Table 1: Categorization of All Huidaomen Groups¹²

Name	Number
会 hui	908
道 dao	1601
门 men	366
教 jiao	368
堂 tang	388
坛 tan	295
社 she	152
学 xue	14
军 jun	7
团 tuan	9
院 yuan	16
宫 gong	19
香 xiang	11
斋 zhai	19
派 pai	12
阁 ge	6
天 tian	6
党 dang	5
庙 miao	4
局 ju	4
队 dui	8
Others	324

Although the definition used by the Chinese Academy of Social Science has a strong political propaganda element in it, it helps to clarify what exactly was considered huidaomen activities during the political campaigns in the PRC. In this book, through carefully analyzing records of huidaomen activities throughout the country, the compilation committee concludes that they have found out 4,542 different huidaomen groups in China. Among the 4,542

huidaomen associations, there are 908 with the name “*hui*,” 1,601 with “*dao*,” 366 with “*men*,” 368 with “*jiao*,” 388 with “*tang*,” and many other names.¹³ Such statistics further confirm that *huidaomen* was used as a vague generic term for almost all voluntary groups in China.

The appendix of this book has a complete list of all these *huidaomen* groups listed above. In the list, all of the *huidaomen* groups that we have mentioned appear. If we follow this list of *huidaomen* groups, *huidaomen* can be broadly defined as any voluntary associations in China with a clear pattern of structure. It includes redemptive societies, self-defense associations, charity organizations, gangs, and many other local associations.

The definition of *huidaomen* is not merely a semantic question. The groups that were labeled as *huidaomen* were harshly suppressed from 1949 to the 1980s. As a relatively new topic to Western scholars, translating *huidaomen* into English proves to be a challenging task. Prasenjit Duara defines certain groups within *huidaomen* as “redemptive societies.” Duara admits that redemptive societies originated in traditional sectarianism and syncretism but emphasizes that such groups must be understood in the global context of the 1910s. “A number of them – with a strong elite base – viewed themselves explicitly in the new civilizational discourse as an Eastern solution to the problems of the modern world.”¹⁴ “Redemptive” here not only means individual salvation but also refers to a “way” that could rescue the world from degeneration. In many cases, as we will see in both *Tongshanshe* and *Yiguandao*, Chinese sectarian groups criticized modern discourses that promote science, societal progress of the West.¹⁵

Sectarians believed that the way human beings could survive was by going back to the origins of eastern civilization that, they argued, relied on meditation and self-purification. Certain groups, including Society of the Way (*Daoyuan*), Red Swastika Society, Society for the

Great Unity of World Religions (*Shijie zongjiao datonghui*), as Duara correctly points out, did have an elite base and a world-salvation agenda. Categorizing all the sectarian names together under “redemptive societies,” however, overemphasizes the impact of modernism on such groups. David Palmer traces *huidaomen* back to the White Lotus tradition in late imperial China and connects *huidaomen* with the discourse of suppressing heretical sects and evil cults.¹⁶ But certainly not all *huidaomen* groups had so strong a religious element, such was the case of many self-defense associations.

In the most recent article on *huidaomen*, Steve Smith’s “Redemptive Religious Societies and the Communist State, 1949 to the 1980s,” Smith seems to make no differentiation in talking about redemptive religious societies and *huidaomen* that he translates as “reactionary sects” in the PRC. In his notes, Smith says his use of “redemptive religious societies” comes from Goossaert, Palmer, and Duara, but he does not specify the relationship between redemptive religious societies and *huidaomen*.¹⁷ Are redemptive religious societies parts of *huidaomen*, or, since most of the sources he uses are *huidaomen* files in the PRC, redemptive religious societies the same as *huidaomen*? Admittedly, Smith’s work is not about the semantic side of the terms used, nor is it about the genealogy of the terms. The ambiguity in translating complicated generic terms into English, however, may lead to huge confusion in current scholarship. What does *huidaomen* exactly include when the CCP used such term in their campaigns? It is an essential question about which groups of people were suppressed during the political movements.

Based on the information provided by the more than three thousand local gazetteers in *A Collection of Historical Materials on the Chinese Huidaomen* and my own case study of Poyang County in Jiangxi, I accept a broad definition of *huidaomen*, as the Chinese Academy of Social Science does. Almost all voluntary groups in China were indeed labeled as *huidaomen* from the

late 1940s onward in political campaigns. It is inappropriate to define huidaomen exclusively as redemptive religious societies.

As a CCP's invention based on generic terms that were widely used in Late Imperial China, the term "huidaomen" is undoubtedly biased. The CCP shares the same agenda behind this term with the use of "White Lotus" in Late Imperial China, which highlights the rebellious potential of these groups. Meanwhile, the CCP's concern on public security also reflects the fact that huidaomen groups played a central role in the rural power structure. The CCP's full-scale suppression against huidaomen clearly manifests its anxiety about huidaomen's domination in rural governance. In contrast to the Nationalist Government's failed crackdown against huidaomen, the fact that huidaomen groups were mostly eliminated in rural China during the 1950s suggests that a radical change of rural power structure did not happen until the CCP came to power. Therefore, I believe that understanding the huidaomen groups is an essential key in unlocking the secrets of rural governance and its transformation in twentieth century China.

Peasant Society, Unofficial Power, and Modernity

The subject of this study, as my title shows, is about rural China. I define "rural" in this context as the administrative level below the city or far from major cosmopolitan centers. In other words, it means the county or the administrative structure below the county level. While people living in rural China before 1949 were not necessarily peasants, I use the term "peasant society" when discussing the rural economy and power structure. "Peasant society," as is used by scholars such as James Scott and Philip Huang, refers to agrarian and pre-capitalist societies where profit maximization was not the primary concern. Capitalist production modes, including

but not limited to financial investment, technological innovation, and transnational market, rarely appeared in a peasant economy.

Rural China was certainly not a homogenous geographical or political entity. While many historians highlight China's integration into the world economy or the rise of cosmopolitanism since Late Qing Dynasty; this study, on the contrary, shows that rural China remained largely unchanged from the Late Imperial Era to the point when the CCP launched waves of radical rural revolution and reforms since 1949. In this study, I focus on the maintenance and dissemination of power through various unofficial channels, as well as conditions of rural residents' most basic needs, such as safety, food, and health. Despite the rise of nationalism among urban intellectuals and the Nationalist Government's urgent agenda of transforming China into a modern state, the Nationalist Government's rural transformation was primarily a failure. Power, in rural China, was mostly exercised outside state bureaucracy. The irony of the warlords and Nationalist Government's rural penetration, as Prasenjit Duara points out, was their success in extracting rural resources than the capability of managing rural society.¹⁸

To understand the peasant society in China, we first have to accept the fact that a peasant society functioned fundamentally differently from modern capitalist society. People living in a peasant society also had a completely different mindset than what we think. In a peasant society in China, the same as many other peasant societies, too, the majority of the population constantly lived on the margin of subsistence. Instead of pursuing a higher living standard and fulfilling one's potentials and desires, survival was the single paramount concern in a peasant society. The "safety first principle," defined by James Scott as the "subsistence ethic," "was a consequence of living so close to the margin" due to the fear of food shortage and all kinds of threats that constantly endangered the rural residents' most basic needs of living.¹⁹ The subsistence ethic can

be found everywhere in rural China during most time of the twentieth century. It is the most fundamental key to unlock how peasant society functioned in China.

The thriving of huidaomen groups in rural China was predominantly a consequence of this survival crisis and subsistence ethic. In the case of Poyang, as we will see through chapters one to three, the self-defense associations rose because of the endemic threats from the bandits' existence. In the confessions of almost all self-defense association participants, as well as people in other huidaomen groups, the existence of bandit threats was part of rural residents' everyday life and a basic element of peasant society. Both the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society were spontaneous responses of the rural residents' survival strategy against bandits, albeit they also had other secondary functions in rural society. The self-defense associations' clashes with the PLA in 1949 across many areas in China were also a direct consequence of the PLA's relentless extraction of food and natural resources in the rural area that significantly endangered the subsistence of peasant society. In the eyes of many rural people, the PLA was not different from bandit gangs who raided their homes for food.

Even in the case of redemptive societies, rural residents living on the margin of subsistence sought to fulfill their most basic medical needs through participating in these religious associations. Healthcare was not necessarily performed through hospitals or clinics (Tongshanshe did offer material healthcare in Poyang), but also through prayer or meditation. The persistence of millenarian pursuits among these religious participants also reflects an urgent but unconscious vision of transforming one's life into a higher level that is free from the subsistence crisis.

Scott concludes that the subsistence ethic in peasant society led to a moral community where the notion of justice is defined as maintaining everybody's livelihood beyond the

minimum of subsistence margin through the reciprocity of both the rich and the poor. Therefore, peasant household tends to be risk-averse and “seeks to avoid the failure that will ruin him rather than attempting a big, but risky, killing.” Consequently, “the peasant household” has little scope for the profit maximization calculus of traditional neoclassical economics.”²⁰ The self-defense associations exhibit a clear pattern of elite dominance. It was usually the gentry leaders in rural China who invited martial arts masters. Moreover, local elites gradually turned the self-defense nature of self-defense associations into their tools for maintaining or even strengthening their hegemony within the local communities. As Scott points out, the reciprocity within a peasant economy does not lead to egalitarianism. To the rural poor, ensuring living above the subsistence margin usually means the loss of status and autonomy to the elite classes. To fulfill the basic needs of subsistence, the elite classes dragged the poor into their struggle and competition for power. As chapter two shows, the self-defense associations immediately became the elite classes’ “private armies” in local elections and other political conflicts. In the face of all forms of elite dominance and hegemonic power, the poor had no choice but to cooperate for their subsistence needs.

The logic of subsistence ethic was the target of many political scientists’ criticism that people within the peasant society also made investments and strived for improving their subsistence rather than simply maintaining it. According to this school of scholarship, peasants made rational choices that are fundamentally different from what Scott criticizes as neoclassical economics. The use of violence, in the forms of rebellions and revolutions, was not only a protective strategy against threats but also a mean to elevate their livelihood to another level.

Samuel Popkin’s case studies of the peasant economy in Vietnam shows several local voluntary groups and the subsequent social revolutions that are quite similar to huidaomen

groups in rural China. The Cao Dai Sect, for instance, which believed in syncretic religious teachings that are almost identical to both the Tongshanshe and Yiguandao, offered the poor rural protection against the French colonizers and the local big landlords. The Cao Dai leaders intentionally aimed at improving the rural defenseless' livelihood through radical reforms. Popkin concludes that the absorption of modern Western ideas and the Catholic structure had significantly changed the peasants' fate towards a higher end, and peasants did make rational choices in changing their lives.

In a similar but more radical manner, the Hoa Hao Sect, who also adopted Millenarian teachings like the Tongshanshe and Yiguandao and appealed to those peasants under constant threats from bandits, attracted the participation of poor peasants who were eager to donate money in exchange for a better livelihood in the long run. In both cases, rural residents did not simply aim at maintaining a basic livelihood slightly above the subsistence margin passively but also made risky investments for material benefits through radical social changes in the long run.²¹

Popkin is correct in pointing out the over-romanticizing of peasant society as opposed to the cold capitalist society in Scott's writings, but huidaomen groups in China showed little resemblance to neither the Cao Dai nor the Hoa Hao, despite the fact they shared some similar religious teachings and the harsh rural living environment. Neither self-defense associations nor redemptive societies in rural China had any explicit agenda to transform the status-quo or actively voice the need for radical reforms. In other words, they were both apolitical. Huidaomen groups in rural China manifest a pattern that is precisely summarized by Eric Hobsbawm as pre-political social movements in archaic forms.²²

This study of these pre-political or archaic groups directly challenges the notion of “Modern China;” or, at least, expresses an urgent need to redefine what “Modern China” exactly means. As Hobsbawm points out, “they do not as yet grow with or into modern society: they are broken into it.” “They are pre-political people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world.”²³ The existence of huidaomen groups in rural China as a result of a static peasant society that was completely incapable of adapting itself to modernity voluntarily.

In a Chinese peasant society, no revolution could take place without external intervention or leadership. Although many huidaomen groups during the Qing Dynasty were involved in rebellions and large-scale social unrest like the Taiping Rebellion and the Boxer Uprising, such social movements all lacked the language for peasants to voice a plan for social changes. Among huidaomen groups in rural China, millenarian sects had the highest potential of transforming themselves into revolutionary movements because of their religious vision for radical changes. Unfortunately, it was also in millenarianism that a peasant society shows its most significant departure from modern society. As chapter five shows, millenarian teachings in both Tongshanshe and Yiguandao only exhibit the urban intellectuals’ vision for a new and revolutionized Eastern society, in contrast to the Western version of modernity. Millenarianism was an export to peasant society, and people within the peasant society could hardly digest any of its meanings. Some China scholars, such as Prasenjit Duara and David Ownby, write about redemptive societies’ embrace of the notion of a world religion or transnational salvation, but such teachings made no sense at all to people in the peasant society. On the contrary, the invulnerability rituals of the self-defense associations, which had already been proved useless in

the case of the Boxer Uprising, were most attractive to rural residents. Millenarianism in Chinese peasant rebellions made no contribution to transforming Chinese society.

Comparing China with other pre-industrial countries in the first half of the twentieth century urges me to make a bold argument that the absence of colonialism in rural China had effectively distanced Chinese peasant society from the modern society and globalization. Rural China was a unique case that its production mode was utterly untouched by the modern capitalist economy (although China was forced to integrate into the world economy). As a result, the earliest outside intervention did not reach to rural China until the CCP came fully onboard in the 1950s. In Popkin's case studies of rural Vietnam, both the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao not only responded to the current survival crisis born from rural Vietnam but also colonial rule. In the case of Cao Dai, its structure was a direct emulation of the Catholic Church.

Colonialism had further deepened the survival crisis of many peasant societies; meanwhile, it also introduced new forms of cooperation and even revolutionary changes. At least, as Fernando Coronil shows in his study on Venezuela, colonialism and capitalist modes of production transformed the nature and eventually led to the deification of the state as an oil country.²⁴ Such influences of colonialism were nowhere to be found in China. Although the Qing Empire collapsed in 1912, the same pattern of subsistence crisis remained unchanged in rural China. Nor was there any radical call for social changes except for the CCP, whose influence was very limited before the founding of the PRC. In fact, CCP's extraction of rural production for building modern urban industries substituted the role of colonialism in China's rural development. While some millenarian movements in early Modern Europe did result in revolutionary changes due to rapid economic and social changes, as shown by Norman Cohn,

such economic and social changes did not appear in rural China.²⁵ No modern ideology could develop within peasant society itself without outside intervention.

Such a lack of changes in rural China shows the greatest weakness of the Nationalist Government's state building agenda, especially when compared to the CCP's successful penetration into rural society. Despite the fact that the Nationalist Government indeed introduced modern modes of production in big urban industrial centers, the Nationalist Government's rural management showed hardly any divergence from Late Imperial China. James Scott suggests that the premodern state was partially blind and knew little about its subjects. Consequently, it lacked a clear metric that could translate what it knew into an explicit standard. The modern transformation of the state, according to Scott, involved four basic processes: state simplification, high-modernist ideology, authoritarian state, and a prostrate civil society. "The legibility of a society provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering, high-modernist ideology provides the desire, the authoritarian state provides the determination to act on that desire, and an incapacitated civil society provides the leveled social terrain on which to build."²⁶ As we will see through chapters one to five, none of these processes were realized in rural China during the Republican Era. Rural affairs were basically illegible in the eyes of the Nationalist Government. While the CCP might not be able to read its rural subjects either, the CCP was able to eliminate the things unreadable and standardize what it knew through the violent simplification process – rural political campaigns.

The failure of the Nationalist Government's transforming rural China into part of its state modernization process indicates that rural power was certainly not concentrated in the hand of the state. On the contrary, power was predominantly exercised through unofficial channels, including the *huidaomen* groups. The lack of state power does not necessarily prevent people

from participating in politics or power competition. “The experience of anarchistic mutuality is ubiquitous,” according to James Scott. “Forms of informal cooperation, coordination, and action that embody mutuality without hierarchy are the quotidian experience of most people.”²⁷

Such informal channels, summarized by Prasenjit Duara as the “cultural nexus of power” in rural China, indicates that a peasant society was able to function on its own routinely without the intervention of a modern state. As chapter two shows, even during the process of the alleged democratization under the Nationalist Government, competition for elections was mainly carried out through the use of collective violence, which does not belong to a legitimate official channel of power. The way local elites competed for their seats within the government shows no difference from the traditional violent competition for lineage hegemony and natural resources. Chapter four shows that elite merchant networks were surprisingly coordinated through Tongshanshe and possibly other religious groups rather than a clear pattern of market reciprocity and supply chains between companies and industries we see in a capitalist economy.

Traditional forms of voluntary cooperation, predominantly through *huidaomen* networks, were a major foundation that supported the routine function of a peasant society. In other major social administrative areas, such as self-defense against banditry, state-led strategy proves to be significantly less efficient than self-organized self-defense associations. The modern state’s goal to routinize and bureaucratize rural society, in the case of Republican China, through the reestablishment of the *Baojia* System was more like a nightmare to rural administration. The lack of supervision and law enforcement resulted in a more corrupt rural bureaucracy, which actually worsened people’s livelihood on the subsistence margin.

Going back to the question of what “Modern China” means, the rural society we see in this study shows barely anything that can be obviously labeled as “modern.” Among common

modernist labels such as capitalist modes of production, the deification of the nation state, revolutionary social changes, the rise of modern political institutions, and the disenchantment of the old religious past, none of these found its root in rural China. The persistence of these traditional patterns of peasant society reminds us of the conflicting nature of modernity: the struggle against being modern or the absence of being modern is part of the complex picture of modernity itself. S. N. Eisenstadt summarizes such conflicting nature of modernity clearly that “In the discourse on modernity, several themes developed, none more important than the one that stressed the continued confrontation between more ‘traditional’ sectors of society and the ‘so-called’ modern centers or sectors that developed within them. So, too, there was an inherent tension between the culture of modernity, the modern ‘rational’ model of the Enlightenment that emerged as hegemonic in specific periods and places, and others construed as reflecting the more ‘authentic’ cultural traditions of specific societies.”²⁸

Huidaomen in Chinese History

Although the term *huidaomen* was an invention of the CCP during the late 1940s, groups that were labeled as *huidaomen* had existed for centuries before the CCP came to power. Most *huidaomen* groups caught the historians’ eyes through rebellions and social unrest in Late Imperial China.

Millenarian rebellions, especially through what is known as the White Lotus Sects, became a key subject of China historians in the 1980s through Susan Naquin’s studies on the Wang Lun Uprising of 1774 and the subsequently Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813.²⁹ Relying on Qing legal cases on these instances of social unrest, Naquin was one of the first historians who tested the promises and challenges of using judicial sources such as interrogations and

confession. In both uprisings, Naquin highlights the connection between uprisings and the mythical White Lotus Sects that were believed to be a critical rebellious group in Chinese history. In these case studies, Naquin examines the basic structure and teachings within the White Lotus Sects, as well as a general discussion of the socio-political context behind these unrests. The most important thing she studies is the process of how uprisings were organized and led through specific prominent individuals and how they came to the full-scale.

Recently scholarship on the White Lotus Sects, such as Yingcong Dai's *The White Lotus War*, can also be categorized as the typical case study on rebellion.³⁰ Dai discusses explicitly the development of military strategies and court politics related to a series of rebellions that were labeled as White Lotus and why the Qing Dynasty was not able to respond to such emerging social instability at the local level.

The trend of these studies on these emerging millenarian peasant rebellions is best summarized in Philip Kuhn's *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China*.³¹ Kuhn argues that the thriving of local unrest represents the breakdown of traditional Chinese society based on Confucian elite dominance. According to Kuhn, the maintenance of the Qing Dynasty relied fundamentally on the traditional elites "without which Chinese local government could not operate."³² Kuhn's analysis already clearly identified the weakness of the traditional Chinese state at the local level, which the Nationalist Government did not reform much, that the state power was unable to control the local area effectively. Before the early-19th century, when opium trafficking and local rebellions became routine in China, the reciprocity between the Qing state and traditional elites maintained its harmony. With the rise of imperialism and local unrest, such peaceful coexistence was destroyed – "As local security decreased, rural communities took steps

to protect themselves by erecting walls and raising militias. These trends were the early stages of a larger process of militarization that has lasted into the present century.”³³

Frederick Wakeman’s study of the San-yuan-li Incident and the Taiping Rebellion also illustrates Kuhn’s conclusion that the traditional balance between the state and the local was breaking down quickly in the Late Qing Dynasty.³⁴

The high intensity of social unrest during the 19th century, including but not limited to the White Lotus Rebellion, the Taiping Rebellion, the Nian Rebellion, and the Boxer Uprising, gave rise to a lively discussion on rebellions from historians. Interestingly, almost all social unrest shows clear connections with what the CCP called *huidaomen* later. CCP’s official rhetoric on the formation of *huidaomen* also traces back to social unrest in the late Qing. Instead of merely focusing on turmoil at the local level, another generation of China historians turned to explain why such unrest began and persisted.

Joseph Esherick’s study on the origin of the Boxer Uprising examines the detailed living environment of rural residents in Shandong Province.³⁵ In contrast to Naquin’s focus on how rebellions were organized, Esherick argues that the bankruptcy of the rural economy, the hegemony of German Catholic missionaries, and the devastating consequences of the First Sino-Japanese War all endangered the rural residents’ subsistence and contributed to the rise of radical anti-foreignism. In a similar manner, Elizabeth Perry discusses two primary forms of survival strategies in rural China: predatory and protective.³⁶ While the Nian Rebellion was a typical pattern of predatory strategy that the survival of one group relies on raiding the other groups, the rise of the Red Spear Society, for instance, represents a protective form of survival strategy when facing the predatory.

While such existing scholarship made a huge contribution to our knowledge on local militarization and how the Qing Empire fell; their studies, in most cases, view history only from the lens of large-scale rebellions and unrest that had clear political targets, being either the Qing State or foreigners. James Scott points out that “millennial and utopian thought typically make their appearance in the archives only when they take the form of sects or movements that pose a threat to the state.” As a result, “the written record is as negligent of ordinary forms of symbolic resistance as it is of everyday material resistance.”³⁷ Without the presence of the White Lotus Rebellion and the Boxer Uprising, how much can we know about huidaomen groups and their history in rural China?

Building on the existing scholarship on rebellions, my study aims at detaching the huidaomen groups from the labels of rebels or a source of social turmoil. In contrast, in my case study, no major rebellion or social unrest broke out to the point that it could be written into any history textbooks. The existence of huidaomen groups, in both forms of self-defense associations and redemptive societies, had firm connections with the local community. They would not give rise to rebellions in most cases. As chapter 1 to 5 shows, self-defense associations rose as a response to bandit threats under the leadership of local elites. They then also developed into a major source of violence in resolving local conflicts, especially on the competition for natural resources and power struggles between political factions.

On the other hand, millenarian sects showed no rebellious potential we see in the White Lotus. Tongshanshe was used by elite merchants to build and strengthen their networks with other merchants. Yiguandao was most attractive to the poor and gave them a new identity as religious leaders. All these huidaomen groups had a precise function maintaining the power equilibrium between various interest groups. They were not necessarily related to rebellious

activities, although the use of violence was common in rural China. Even during the early PRC, when the CCP was hostile toward all local powers, huidaomen groups never had any clearly articulated goals in challenging the power of the CCP. The self-defense associations' clash with the CCP as a result of natural disasters and competition for food. The CCP's suppression against millenarian sects followed the Nationalist Government's ban on popular religious institutions without a local justification in Poyang.

The CCP's suppression of huidaomen, following Kuhn and Wakeman's argument on the breakdown of the balance between the state and local power, was essentially a reversal of the declining state power since the late Qing. The CCP's anti-huidaomen campaigns in the 1950s restored and significantly expanded the state's power. All informal channels of powers, including the huidaomen groups, were perceived as a considerable threat to CCP's penetration in rural China. The CCP established the absolute authority of the state that the Nationalist Government had never fully accomplished in rural China.

Another trend in the study of huidaomen in China, as shown in early scholarship on secret societies, highlight huidaomen groups as revolutionaries. Borrowing ideas from secret society studies in the West, earlier scholars like Jean Chesneaux and Fei-Ling Davis argue that Chinese secret societies represent the "organized expression of a central contradiction in the traditional society."³⁸ Such scholarship tends to believe that secret societies were a primitive form of revolution that finally led to the modern forms of revolution in 20th century China.

My study completely rejects such an overly romanticized depiction of local voluntary groups. First, the term "secret society" cannot accurately describe the existence of huidaomen groups. As my study shows, the alleged "secret societies" were never secret in rural China. Although the Nationalist Government at the center was hostile towards the existence of

huidaomen groups, the local government rarely intervened in their development. Huidaomen participants openly talked about their identity and activities. Second, huidaomen groups never aimed at transforming society radically. In most cases, they were just an everyday form of how power was exercised. Labeling huidaomen groups as revolutionary is built on the wrong assumption that they directly challenged the state's authority. The state's power, as shown in my study, was not powerful enough to be perceived as an obstacle towards a better society. Moreover, most huidaomen groups at the local level were apolitical.

Recent scholarship on Chinese secret societies, for instance, Wang Di's study of the Gowned Brother in Sichuan Province, regards secret society as a unique channel of unofficial local power that defines local culture and maintains the traditional gender and family relationships. In that sense, the existence of secret societies was also a cultural phenomenon. Similarly, my study also discusses the religious rituals of huidaomen groups and their relationship with gender and family values. Huidaomen helped preserve the traditional social values built on Confucianism. Besides huidaomen's role in the local power structure, they were also an important channel of how the "traditional" was protected and carried out. Consequently, the CCP's hostility against huidaomen also originated from the CCP's ambitious goal of transforming the Chinese culture that they perceived as feudal and outdated.

Huidaomen as A Subject of Religious Studies

Outside the field of historical research on social unrest in Late Imperial China, huidaomen also draws the attention of scholars in religious studies. As early as the 1920s, Western missionary scholars in China already began their preliminary research on huidaomen groups. Among them were Gilbert Reid's "Recent Religious Movements in China" and Paul De

Witt Twinem's "Modern Syncretic Religious Society in China." They labeled huidaomen groups as a form of a new religious movement, which paralleled a similar trend in the West. Starting from the 1920s, Japanese scholars also wrote intensively on the development of new religious societies in China.³⁹ Chinese scholars' response to huidaomen was relatively late and scarce. During the Republican Era, Li Shiyu's *Contemporary Secret Religions in Northern China*, published in 1948, was the most influential book on huidaomen. In this book, Li briefly introduced four large new religious groups in China, including the Yiguandao, and their history and rituals. But Li's work was more like an introduction rather than an in-depth analysis of these groups.

Early scholarship during this period focuses on huidaomen groups that functioned predominantly as religious institutions, such as the Yiguandao and Tongshanshe. Due to the fact that the term huidaomen was mainly used by the CCP as a political label that lacks a precise definition, self-defense associations were not considered as religious groups by early scholarship. Such categorization has basically shaped later scholars' focus. The study on huidaomen gradually disappeared in history until the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century when new generations of religious scholars rediscovered the importance of such groups. In Prasenjit Duara's study on Manchukuo, he translated these groups as "redemptive societies," highlighting their salvationist agenda.⁴⁰ The term "redemptive societies" almost became routinized in scholarship on huidaomen during the next decades.

Duara emphasizes that the redemptive societies represent an alternative form of modernity in East Asia. Instead of accepting the hegemony of nationalism and secularism, redemptive societies believed in transnational salvation and argued against the Western style of modernity from an oriental traditionalist point of view. According to Duara, they criticized the

moral degeneration of Western modernity and called for returning to the traditional religious practices born from the East.⁴¹

While Duara accurately captured the conflicting views about being modern in the 20th century China, Duara's emphasis on the intellectual debates led to an elitist hegemony on the study of huidaomen in later scholarship. David Palmer and Vincent Goossaert's *The Religious Question in Modern China* and Rebecca Nedostup's *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* adopt Duara's translation of "redemptive societies," emphasizing their intellectual inconsistency against the modern nationalist narrative of history and politics. David Ownby's article on the "Dao" of huidaomen also engages heavily in the analysis of the huidaomen's elitist discussion of specific religious concepts.⁴² Even Steve Smith's discussion on huidaomen, which is based predominantly on rural huidaomen groups, also adopts the redemptive society model.

My study does not reject Duara's discussion on the alternative modernity in China, but I argue that such a one-dimensional analysis of huidaomen ignores the masses within such groups. Modern notions such as modernity, West, and East, transnational redemption, as I show in chapters four and five, did not make sense to those who participated in Tongshanshe and Yiguandao. At the local level, huidaomen groups did not provide new forms of religious "enlightenment," although the huidaomen's organizational structure differs fundamentally from traditional communal religion in China.⁴³ My study aims at deviating the discussion on intellectuals within the huidaomen and expand it to the lay participants in these groups who were, in most cases, illiterate or received very little education. What mattered most to the ordinary people was not the huidaomen's religious modernist perspective but practical needs

such as healing and getting a son, which were not different from other types of traditional Chinese religions.

Another trend within the field of Chinese religion treats huidaomen as dissenting against the state orthodoxy.⁴⁴ The White Lotus Sects' uneasy coexistence with the state had shaped our understanding of state-religion relationships since late imperial China. Similar to the scholarship on social unrest, scholars tend to label huidaomen groups as anti-state, probably due to the fact that the primary sources on huidaomen groups are always unilaterally written by state officials.

As I show, the relationship between huidaomen and the state was not necessarily unpleasant. Although both the Nationalist Government and the CCP banned many huidaomen groups, most huidaomen groups had little political agenda. In some cases, as I show in the case of the Big Sword Society and the Yellow Crane Society in Poyang, they not only coexisted with the Nationalist Government but also gained official recognition and cooperated with the KMT in suppressing the CCP. In the case of Tongshanshe in Poyang, most core leaders were all KMT party members. While revolts and riots organized by huidaomen did frequently happen during both the Republican Era and the early PRC, most huidaomen groups never had the explicit political intention to rebel against the current regime. Even in the cases of Tongshanshe and Yiguandao that their members were taught to rebel against the CCP, they did not take any real action. The clash between the self-defense associations and the PLA was the result of natural disasters and a subsistence crisis because of food shortage. Huidaomen does not necessarily have a clear rebellious pattern behind its relationship with the state.

Instead of studying Chinese Buddhism and Daoism, who have long historical traditions and clear operational structure, treating huidaomen as a subject of religious studies is immature and difficult. While most scholars accept Buddhism and Daoism as religions, can we really call

huidaomen religion? Redemptive societies, as Duara names them, had combined religious teachings from various traditions and did have meditational practices. Religious scholars sometimes call them syncretic religious associations. The CCP also acknowledge them as religious associations, although heretical. Can we call self-defense associations, such as the Big Sword Society and the Yellow Crane Society, religious? As chapter 1 will show, self-defense associations had their religious rituals, especially the invulnerability rituals, as well as the practice of spiritual possession. They also worshiped various deities that can be found in Chinese popular religion. Their functions, however, differed fundamentally from traditional religious institutions. From the White Lotus Rebellions to the Boxer Uprising, self-defense associations frequently cooperated with “heretical” religious sects in organizing social unrest through the use of force. As chapter 5 shows, the Tongshanshe also absorbed self-defense associations into its organization during the 1940s. It is almost impossible to clearly identify what can be called religious and what cannot in the case of huidaomen.

Western scholarship on religion emphasizes the uniqueness of religion as *sui generis* that always includes a higher concept. Thus, both Emile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade speak of the distinction between the “sacred” and the “profane.” The difficulty of applying such concepts to the Chinese context is that the Chinese religious landscape was much diverse than most religious communities that Western scholars have studied. During the first half of the twentieth century, traditional Chinese religions such as Buddhism and Daoism continued thriving in rural China, while both Western and Chinese Christian missionaries were also expanding ambitiously. Even within different redemptive societies, such as the Tongshanshe and Yiguandao, they were also competing with one another. As many confessions from Tongshanshe and Yiguandao members show, they did not care what religious associations they belonged to. People simply called

themselves “Buddha Worshipers (*baifo*, which simply means they are religious instead of having a clear religious affiliation).” And they did not follow a clear set of religious rules or practices either. Religion, most specifically *huidaomen*, consisted of a diverse pool of religious ideas that were not sufficiently organized. In comparison to existing scholarship on religion that heavily relies on the model of Abrahamic religions, religions in rural China were loosely organized and random.

Sources

My study relies on previously unavailable archives from a relatively secretive part of the Chinese bureaucracy – the Public Security Bureau (PSB). *Huidaomen* remains a sensitive topic in China, especially due to its close connections to heretical religious associations today. Moreover, the archives of the PSB, which was responsible for suppressing *huidaomen* groups in the early PRC, have never been opened to the public.

Despite the fact that getting access to archives is becoming increasingly difficult, during my research trips to China from 2015 to 2018, I visited archives ranging from the county level to the national level in nine provinces, as well as the special collections of research institutions and universities both inside and outside China such as Shanghai Jiaotong University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Hoover Institution at Stanford. I also conducted oral interviews in the Sichuan and Chongqing region. These materials cover the history of *huidaomen* from the Qing Dynasty to the 1970s. The main portion of my archival collection comes from the PSB in the early PRC, which was rarely used in previous scholarship.

Previously unavailable sources from the Communist Party’s Public Security Bureau provided unique insights into the rural power structure in modern China. These documents were

photocopied and preserved at Shanghai Jiaotong University's special collection of Contemporary China Archival Sources. The collection includes over one hundred detailed investigations and legal cases on *huidaomen* groups from the PSB in Jiangxi Province from the 1940s to the 1960s. No scholar has used these materials before.

These PSB documents in the early PRC can be categorized generically as inquisitions, a term that is often used in legal history. Inquisitions, defined as a process of intense investigations, interrogations, as well as confessions from the suspects, were the primary historical sources used in previous scholarship on Qing Dynasty rebellions, as we have seen in the case of the White Lotus Sects, secret societies, and the Boxer Uprising. While inquisitions could often provide historians with a clear and coherent narrative of what had happened, the narrative itself is always overly one-dimensional. In other words, they mainly reflect what the government and officials care about.

While such hostility against the use of inquisitions makes sense and there are indeed substantial distortions in the eyes of the inquisitors, a deeper analysis of inquisitions shows a more complicated picture. In this study, I argue that the use of inquisition can be read as first-hand anthropological materials. One of the most systematic uses of inquisitions can be found in the scholarship on witch hunt during late Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Carlo Ginzburg, who is most well-known for his study on the *benandanti* in Italy, takes a more neutral stance on inquisitions and believes that the inquisitors in witch trials often acted like modern anthropologists.⁴⁵

While admitting the individual identification is always lacking in inquisitions, and the inquisitors' suggestive questioning clearly distorts the "historical truth," Ginzburg notices the inquisitors' inability to understand "witch activities." In the case of the *benandanti*, Ginzburg

suggests that “both the gap and the benandanti’s resistance to inquisitorial pressure indicates that we have here a deep cultural layer which was totally foreign to the inquisitors.”⁴⁶ To the inquisitors in witch trials, they also had to experience the process of translating what was completely foreign or unknown to them into something that could be understood and deciphered. Such a translating process, which Ginzburg calls a “dialogic disposition”, is the heart of anthropology due to the permanent confrontation between cultures. What we do as historians is not fundamentally different from the inquisitors. Thus, what we often see in both cases of witch trials and huidaomen cases is what Clifford Geertz defines as “thick description,” a method that studies the complex context behind each case thoroughly.⁴⁷

In these huidaomen inquisitions, we can see an apparent cultural gap between the huidaomen participants and the inquisitors. Rituals and religious teachings, such as the invulnerability rituals, millenarian interpretation concerning the end of the world, and the birth of a new emperor in China, were all foreign and incomprehensible to the inquisitors, as they are to us. To understand the deeper context behind all these “superstitious ideas,” the inquisitors often allowed the huidaomen members to share their everyday living experiences and personal stories. These personal stories actually depict a much more colorful world than the questions during interrogations. For instance, the bandit problem never attracted the attention of the inquisitors. The personal confessions of almost every huidaomen member, however, focus heavily on the devastating consequences of bandit raids and the anxiety behind them. So was the case of merchant networks behind Tongshanshe. In the eyes of the inquisitors, what they concerned most was the political rumors and the sabotaging activities against the new regime. What really appears in these inquisitions, surprisingly, is people’s everyday life and what they cared about

most. Reading inquisitions is like the process of collecting anthropological notes. They offer unique and insightful perspective into everyday life in rural China.

While many scholars are anxious about the state's agenda behind inquisitions, especially given the fact that the suppression against huidaomen was an essential part of the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign in the 1950s, I argue that a cohesive state apparatus behind public security works was far from being unified. Through analyzing the inconsistencies between witch trials in various regions, Richard Kieckhefer argues that "there is no reason to suppose there actually was an institution in medieval Europe to which the term 'the Inquisition' might meaningfully be assigned. Heresy inquisitors during the Middle Ages were not held together by a structure of inquisitorial authority, which could ensure vigorous action, procedural regularity, or interaction of members."⁴⁸

In the huidaomen trials, local inquisitors' agenda deviated from the state's agenda significantly, although all these inquisitions were carried out under cover of huidaomen. To the inquisitors, many huidaomen participants showed clearly no pattern of sabotaging the new regime. While the state labeled all of them as "counterrevolutionaries," the local officials had to go back to investigate the "blood debts" they committed during the Republican Era frequently. Many of the huidaomen leaders were executed not because of rebelling against the PRC; on the contrary, they were punished for corruption or coercing people before the CCP came to power. These huidaomen cases show an apparent inconsistency between the state's goal of eliminating all counterrevolutionaries while the local officers had much more knowledge on their own history.

Meanwhile, I do not deny that the use of inquisitions is undoubtedly biased. The fundamental problem of using these sources is that they serve a particular political agenda, even

not necessarily unified with the state's. This partly explains why previous scholarship mostly emphasizes the huidaomen's rebellious and revolutionary potential in late imperial China and its confrontation with the Communists after 1949. Millenarianism, for example, is usually recognized as the most popular rebellious ideology against the current political system. Official documents also highlight the danger of millenarianism as a basic counterrevolutionary force among ordinary people. This is not unique to China. E. J. Hobsbawm argues that traditional millenarian movements can be turned into modern revolutionary movements by means of modern and often secular theories of history and revolution, including nationalism, socialism, and communism.⁴⁹ We cannot assume, however, that millenarianism necessarily leads to rebellion. We cannot simply take official archives at their face value.

I propose a threefold approach to using official archives: distinguishing procedural documents from conclusive documents, identifying formulaic structures and the standardized rhetoric of judicial sources, and looking beyond judicial sources. Chinese historian Cao Shuji, with whom I obtained most of the inquisitions from Shanghai Jiaotong University, has concluded that judicial archives in the PRC are mainly composed of procedural documents and conclusive documents.⁵⁰ The former refers to the detailed investigation procedure of the judicial system (only available to internal CCP organs), while the latter refers to the conclusion of the investigation published to the public as propaganda. The former usually has much higher credibility than the latter. Fortunately, SJTU's collection of huidaomen cases is primarily procedural documents. In other words, these materials were for internal discussion within the Party. The late imperial China literary scholar Robert Hegel believes that judicial documents in pre-modern China had its own formulaic structure and standardized rhetoric.⁵¹ This is also true for the PRC. The first step of reading judicial documents is to find out the patterns behind them.

Lastly, because the PRC before the economic reform in the 1980s was more like a police state where each individual's life was recorded in the archive, each individual's name frequently appeared in different types of documents, including judicial documents, economic documents, educational documents, etc. For example, several sect leaders in Jiangxi Province were involved in land disputes before 1949. And land disputes often resulted in bloody confrontations between different local autonomous groups. It is plausible that local religious sects were part of their lineage system, where they drew the boundary between land ownership. As a result, looking beyond the judicial documents will be helpful to depict a more comprehensive picture of the individuals and community as a whole.

It is true that distortions within official archives can never be fully eliminated; the fact that new PRC inquisitions are systematically used in the study of huidaomen still affirms the unprecedented value of my study. The only recent scholarship on huidaomen in the PRC, Steve Smith's "Redemptive Religious Societies and the Communist State, 49 to the 1980s," mainly uses official propaganda from the CCP with very little internal procedural documents. My study is the very first microhistory on the huidaomen groups based on internal inquisitorial sources of the PBC in the PRC.

Organization of Chapters

Part I (chapters one to three) of my study examines the history of self-defense associations in Poyang. Most of them were quasi-military associations. Born from the White Lotus Sects and the Boxer Uprising tradition, the self-defense associations were originally a violent response to widespread bandit problems. Meanwhile, these sects also immediately became a significant channel through which the local gentry, landlords, and politicians competed

with one another through illegal intervention in political elections, lineage conflicts, and competition for natural resources. As primary protectors of the existing rural power structure, these self-defense associations resisted the arrival of the CCP violently in 1949 in response to the PLA's grain borrowing and levy policies. They were completely suppressed by the Communists.

Part II (chapters four and five) explores the history of the two largest millenarian redemptive societies, the Fellowship of Goodness (Tongshanshe) and the Way of Penetrating Unity (Yiguandao). These religious sects manifested a clear pattern of class stratification and dominance: while the Fellowship of Goodness was dominated by wealthy merchants and KMT politicians, those who joined the other were mostly women and the poor. I also argue that neither the KMT nor the CCP could tolerate the millenarian teachings and the militarization of redemptive societies which directly challenged the narrative of China as a secular nation and the rise of a modern state. The ideological confrontation between millenarian sects and the government had existed long before the CCP came to power. The uncertainty in the new regime, especially the spread of political rumors, completely broke the existing social order as a moral community and further radicalized the millenarian teachings of both sects.

The Postface delineates the CCP's efforts to destroy huidaomen in rural China and the legal framework behind three Anti-Huidaomen Campaigns that lasted from 1950 to 1961 at the national level. The CCP labeled huidaomen as a core element of counterrevolutionary organizations which aimed at sabotaging the new regime. The campaign also went parallel to and was heavily influenced by other major political movements in the early PRC, including the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign, the Rectification (*Sufan*) Campaign, and the Great Leap Forward.

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- ¹ Many scholars, such as Kate Merkel-Hess in her *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and the State in Republican China*, emphasizes the historical trend of modernizing rural China. However, what I am asking in this project is the opposite: how much was modern China unchanged from the late imperial period?
- ² See Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 219-223.
- ³ Ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*, 165.
- ⁴ *Ibid*, 245.
- ⁵ The CCP did not start to use the term “evil cults (xiejiao)” until the 1980s. To avoid confusion and the negative implications behind the term “cult,” I will not call *huidaomen* groups “cults” in this study.
- ⁶ “Shandong sheng gongan zongju guanyu diaocha huimen zuzhi de tongzhi [Shandong Provincial PSB’s Notice on the Investigation of *Huimen* Organizations],” Shandong Provincial Archives G010-01-0053-005.
- ⁷ “Bohai qu wuliu yue fen huimen huodong zonghe baogao [Bohai District’s Comprehensive Report on *Huimen* Activities in May and June],” Shandong Provincial Archives G010-01-0247-011.
- ⁸ “*Huimen huodong cailiao* [Material on *Huimen* Activities],” Shandong Provincial Archives G042-01-0314-010.
- ⁹ “Luzhongnan gonganju guanyu fengjian huimen mixin tuanti de huodong qingkuang [Central and Southern Shandong PSB’s Report on Feudal Superstitious *Huimen* Activities],” Shandong Provincial Archives G042-01-0314-011.
- ¹⁰ ZGHDMSLJC, Preface.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*.
- ¹² *Ibid*, 1.
- ¹³ ZGHDMSLJC, vol. 1, 1.
- ¹⁴ Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 104.
- ¹⁵ See Yiguan daoang, *zhenlu zhibu yi* [The Scripture of Yiguandao, on the Truth, vol. 1]. Taipei: Yiguan yili bianjiyuan tianshu xunwen yanjiu zhongxin, 2010, 442.
- ¹⁶ See Palmer, “Heretical Doctrines, Reactionary Secret Societies, Evil Cults: Labeling Heterodoxy in Twentieth-Century China.”
- ¹⁷ See Smith, “Redemptive Religious Societies and the Communist State, 1949 to the 1980s.”
- ¹⁸ See Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*.
- ¹⁹ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, 2.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, 4.
- ²¹ See Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*.
- ²² See Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*.
- ²³ *Ibid*, 2-3.
- ²⁴ See Coronil, *The Magic State*.
- ²⁵ See Cohn, *The Pursuit of The Millennium*.
- ²⁶ Scott, *Seeing Like A State*, 5.
- ²⁷ Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, Preface, xxi.
- ²⁸ Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” in *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities*, 547.
- ²⁹ See Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion*; Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China*.
- ³⁰ See Dai, *The White Lotus War*.
- ³¹ See Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China*.
- ³² *Ibid*, 3.
- ³³ *Ibid*, 9.
- ³⁴ See Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*.
- ³⁵ See Esherick, *Origin of the Boxer Uprising*.
- ³⁶ See Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China*.
- ³⁷ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 332.
- ³⁸ Davis, *Primitive Revolutionaries of China*, 4.
- ³⁹ See Wang, “Introduction: The Emergence of Academic Research on Redemptive Societies.”
- ⁴⁰ See Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*.
- ⁴¹ See Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*; Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*; Duara, “The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism;” Duara, “Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900-1945.”
- ⁴² See Ownby, “New Perspective on the ‘Dao’ of ‘Huidaomen:’ Redemptive Societies and Religion in Modern and Contemporary China.”
- ⁴³ See Dubois, *The Sacred Villages*.

⁴⁴ See Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*; Ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*; Liu, *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China*; Palmer, “Heretical Doctrines, Reactionary Secret Societies, Evil Cults: Labeling Heterodoxy in Twentieth-Century China.”

⁴⁵ See Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*; Ginzburg, “The Inquisitors as Anthropologist.”

⁴⁶ Ginzburg, “The Inquisitors as Anthropologist,” 145.

⁴⁷ See Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.”

⁴⁸ See Kieckhefer, “The Office of Inquisition and Medieval Heresy: The Transition from Personal to Institutional Jurisdiction.”

⁴⁹ Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 57-59.

⁵⁰ Cao, *Zhongguo diquan jiegou de yanbian*, 2.

⁵¹ Hegel, *True Crimes in Eighteenth-Century China*, 18.

Chapter 1: Bandits, Martial Arts, and the Rise of Self-Defense Associations

Self-defense associations have a long history in China that can be traced back at least to the White Lotus movement. They were also the most important participants in the Boxer Uprising. In Poyang, self-defense associations emerged as a collective violent response to the banditry problem that had threatened people's livelihood continuously.¹ To understand why self-defense associations appeared and thrived in rural China, we first need to fully comprehend the insecure environment in rural China that repeatedly pushed people's livelihood out of the ordinary track. Instead of occasionally raiding rural communities for food and money, bandits attacked rural communities on a regular basis that had become a centerpiece of rural residents' memory. The bandit problem led to such a subsistence crisis that people had to grab their weapons defending their homes even at the cost of their lives.

Behind the emergence of self-defense associations was a complex network of wandering martial arts teachers and the tradition of martial arts that had been deeply embedded in people's minds. These wandering martial arts teachers taught people the fighting techniques and invulnerability rituals whenever there was a need. In most cases, local elites invited outside martial arts teachers to teach their people how to fight against the bandits. The use of invulnerability rituals also suggests that people not only considered defending their homes as a physical war but also a spiritual battle that engaged with religious rituals and sincerity against demonic powers.

The Bandit Problem

Banditry was one of the most enduring and endemic threats to people's livelihood in rural China before the CCP came to power and suppressed bandits nationwide. Rural residents were living in an environment that suffered predominantly from capital and human losses following bandit raids. It is impossible to understand China's rural society without considering the omnipresent impacts of bandit activities.

Academic inquiry about banditry began relatively late. British historian Eric Hobsbawm pioneered the field of banditry studies and laid out the foundation of the history of banditry in most area studies, including Chinese Studies. In his influential work *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Hobsbawm first recognizes that banditry is predominantly a rural phenomenon. Then he labels banditry as a form of peasant protest against exploitation and oppression. Finally, he concludes that banditry itself is pre-political and entirely inadaptable to any modern form of social movements. He names this bandit tradition the "social banditry."² Hobsbawm has a romanticized view of social banditry in which he believes local society regards social bandits as non-criminal and honorable. Bandits rely on the resources and protection offered by the locals. Bandits actually become an essential vehicle that peasants could fight against landlordism and other forms of oppression.³ In Hobsbawm's extended and refined study on banditry, he defines social bandits as "peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regarded as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported."⁴ Hobsbawm also specifically points out that banditry as a mass phenomenon "occurred only where power was unstable, absent, or had broken down." In the case of China, Hobsbawm argues, "those were the

situations when banditry became epidemic, even pandemic as in China at sometimes between the fall of the Empire and the victory of the Communists.”⁵

Although Hobsbawm’s research correctly reminds scholars of the complex social power dynamics in rural communities between the powerful and the exploited, as well as various forms of peasant struggles against oppression, his social bandit theory could hardly apply to the Chinese context. The relationship between bandits and the society they remain in is rarely as harmonious as Hobsbawm romanticizes. Banditry in China was not the revolutionary weapon against oppression that Hobsbawm suggests.

Banditry in China flourished in many areas during both the Ming and Qing Dynasties as least. Ming historian David Robinson shows that banditry in late imperial China was not a phenomenon limited to the society at the periphery. On the contrary, banditry was present even near the Ming capital Beijing, at the very heart of national politics. Robinson categorizes banditry as a representation of violence. He examines the problem of violence from the framework of an “economy of violence” that examines the management of violence and resources related to violence, as well as under what conditions people resort to the use of violence. Robinson argues that violence was a link that connected the lowest class of society to the highest. Violence was the vehicle and channel that provided opportunities for interests. Banditry, for instance, was actually an arena where the interests of local gentries, the military, merchants, and even factional competition within the palace met and fought with one another. The story of power behind banditry was much more complicated than Hobsbawm’s framework could show, and banditry could occur under the context of a stable empire with firm social control.⁶

Banditry was predominantly a product of poverty and social unrest. In his study on disorder and crime in Southern China from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, the historian Robert Antony examines explicitly the class composition and the internal power structure of bandits, as well as different forms of bandit activities. Building on the assumption that the mid-Qing witnessed the breakdown of the early social equilibrium that had finally led to the violent confrontation between the state and the local society, internal unrest became a defining feature of the empire. Bandits, according to Antony, were predominantly predacious. Contrary to Hobsbawm's romanticized view of social banditry that banditry is a platform against the powerful and oppression, Antony notices that bandits were primarily composed of the working poor who were in many ways living on the fringe of the society. He continues that bandits in nature were mobile and not tied to any specific communities. The two most common shared features of bandits were poverty and mobility.⁷ Moreover, most bandits were occasional bandits instead of professional law-breakers.⁸ People became bandits for survival, instead of against any specific classes or power structure. Antony also argues that government officials had many informal channels for cooperating with the local society against banditry. When the government was ineffective in responding to the bandit problems, the rural residents would solve the problem in their own way. Many forms of self-defense associations appeared as a response to the disorder. These self-defense associations, Antony suggests, were usually composed of similar groups of participants as the bandit gangs.⁹

With the fall of the Qing Empire and the subsequent power vacuum at various levels of the society, bandit activities became even more omnipresent and out of control. The Republican Era witnessed the structural transformation of bandit activities and the dramatic increase in the number of bandits and even more intense militarization of the society than the late imperial

period. The first half of the twentieth century was a period of “banditization.”¹⁰ After the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916, a unified power structure in China gave way to the warlords whose power bases varied fundamentally in size. None of the warlords was powerful enough to defeat his rivals, and the power and territories controlled by the warlords changed constantly over time. In order to maintain and expand the warlords’ territories, China became a highly militarized society. As historian Phil Billingsley points out, warlordism led to a vicious cycle: on the one hand, joining the army was an attractive career that provided people with food and clothing; on the other hand, such absorption of rural labor force further debased the productivity of rural society and finally the bankruptcy of peasant economy.¹¹

During the time of constant warfare when the demand for food was unbearable for the rural population, joining the bandits was a natural way for the rural masses to make a living. Unable to reach a stable equilibrium among the power of the warlords, constant dramatic changes in the size of the warlords’ armies and the defeated armies also produced a large number of deserted soldiers deprived of their military status who lived on the margin of life and death. For survival, these former soldiers had no choice but to become bandits.¹² In Poyang County, a large number of bandits came from the former Sichuan Provincial Army that was stationed in Jiangxi Province. After they lost their jobs, they stayed in Jiangxi as bandits rather than going back home in Sichuan.¹³ The military background helped these soldier bandits, and non-soldier bandits in the future, equip modern weaponry. William Rowe notices that the Macheng gazetteer recorded in 1935 that there were 1,388 automatic weapons registered at the government, which was only a small fraction of the total number in possession within the entire county.¹⁴ Soldier bandits differed dramatically from the traditional bandits before the Republican Era in the sense that instead of attacking carefully selected targets, soldier bandits adopted an indiscriminate

predatory attitude towards their targets that they often raided the entire rural society and destroyed their targets completely. The brutalization of bandit activities made banditry an even more formidable element of everyday life in rural China.¹⁵

Although a romanticized Robinhood-style social banditry, as described by Hobsbawm, did exist in Republican China, such as the case of the White Wolf (*bailang*), banditry in most cases was a temporary survival strategy.¹⁶ Except for the case of soldier bandits who became outlaws after losing their jobs, the social composition of bandits was primarily poor peasants, similar to the pattern of bandits in Robert Antony's study on the Qing Dynasty. Poverty was undoubtedly a determinant factor behind the prosperity of banditry. Phil Billingsley's case study on Henan Province shows that the fertile northern and central counties in Henan were much more immune from banditry than the poor southwestern regions in Henan.¹⁷ Even within the same county, banditry was more endemic in the mountainous regions, swamps, and the less prosperous border regions where nobody took care.¹⁸ In Poyang County, even though the land was fertile and the Poyang Lake was agriculturally so productive, bandits remained active in the less developed regions, especially the mountainous and bushy areas, and the borders.¹⁹ Even worse was the migration of hungry refugees after famines and wars from Henan Province. There were thousands of them in Poyang, and many of them turned to banditry.²⁰ Statistics from the CCP's Anti-Banditry Campaign in the early PRC indicate that bandits were mostly poor peasants and those with minimal control of resources. Among the twenty former bandits in the Tuanlin People's Commune, there were nineteen poor peasants and only one middle peasant.²¹ In the sixteenth district of Poyang in 1950, among fifty-six former bandits, thirty-one were poor peasants, eleven middle peasants, ten hired laborers, two landlords, one tenant farmer, and one rich peasant.²²

There were both professional bandits and occasional bandits. The latter only turned to banditry when facing a short-term crisis.²³ Banditry was also seasonal. Not all bandits were active through all the year, especially for those occasional bandits who had to go back for their regular agricultural cycle. Tiedemann notices three periods of highly intense bandit activities in Shandong Province: summer, when the sorghum grew so tall that the bandits could easily take cover; the Chinese New Year, when most people stayed away from agriculture and needed funds for their debts; and April when famine often occurred.²⁴

Bandits and the communities next to them were in a very complicated relationship. Instead of total confrontation, people sometimes turned a blind eye to the existence of banditry. Such coexistence between bandits and ordinary people might not be like Hobsbawm's social bandit that people welcome bandits as heroes, still, in many cases, "bandits operated outside the law, but not in conscious opposition to the system."²⁵ Bandits were careful not to destroy people's lives of their home base, or even tried to protect them. Bandits might also share their resources with the communities that hid them for reciprocal benefits. Elizabeth Perry notices that the White Wolf bandits in northern China did get support from the poor peasants from the bandits' home.²⁶ Billingsley also points out that banditry was a local product. When operating on the local ground, it differed from the local self-defense associations only in its class allegiance. When they moved to another area, they became enemies.²⁷ After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, bandits also helped to fill the local power vacuum. In the first half of the twentieth century, as we will see in the following chapters, China's rural society was mainly a self-governing entity. Government officials relied on the power and influence of local elites or former gentries. These elites also competed with each other. Unlike during the Late Imperial Era when gentries focused predominantly on the civil examination, the end of the civil examination system in 1905 and

constant turmoil also reorganized the gentries. To maintain their power, the gentry also had to rely on strongmen, including successful politicians, warlords, merchants, and bandits. Powerful gentries kept their own militias during times of unrest. Or, in many cases, they would ally with some gangs against the other. The gentries only cared about maintaining stability within their own areas. Therefore, they often chose to befriend the powerful bandits and manipulated their power to protect the gentries. Gentries themselves were a powerful patron behind many bandit activities.²⁸ Bandits were essentially part of the power game in China's rural power structure and inseparable from the environment where they lived.

People joined bandits for survival; they were not meant to be criminals. Consequently, the choices bandit chiefs made were highly opportunistic. They changed their strategies and targets frequently when the situation changed, especially during times of governmental suppression. Bandits and the official military units in charge of the area usually coexisted in a symbiotic relationship. People could join the military for survival, and they could join the bandits too. The identity of soldier and bandit constantly changed as well.²⁹ Former soldiers who lost their jobs often tried to retrieve their military status through predatory bandit activities: bandits wanted regular military status to live a more stable life also. Such a phenomenon led to a dialectical process that "the military became 'banditized' and the bandits became 'militarized.'" ³⁰ The bandit chiefs were also quite aware of the fact that the existence of banditry helped to justify the need for maintaining a large size army. Without the threat of bandits, the soldiers might permanently lose their jobs. The relationship between bandits and local military force was rather friendly than hostile. As a result, governmental suppression against banditry could rarely be successful. The military units lacked the incentive to wipe out the foundation of their own careers. When confronting serious bandit threats, the local government tended to

rectify the status-quo through pacification rather than eliminating the threats completely without calculating the cost.³¹

For bandit chiefs, the power they had acquired through banditry equipped them with the chips they could negotiate with the government. They were often not satisfied with being bandits whose livelihood was always on the margin of life and death. In successful cases, some bandit groups were finally incorporated into the official army and acquired formal stable military status. Some of the notable bandit chiefs even became politicians. Such was the case of Zhang Zuolin, the most powerful warlord in Manchuria who was initially a bandit.³² Although the stories of bandits turning to politics and the military were more often a failure than success, joining the bandits was one of the very few ways that the marginalized masses could climb the social ladder and change their fate. Under such a society of insecurity and turmoil, China was undoubtedly a kingdom of bandits.

Cao Mapi, A Notorious Bandit in Poyang

Hundreds of bandit gangs raided the Poyang Lake region regularly during the Republican Era. Still, Cao Mapi was undoubtedly the most notorious figure that has left countless myths and memories among the locals. The story of Cao Mapi is an exemplary case of how the economic and political environment of China's huge rural hinterland has shaped bandit activities. It tells us vividly how an ordinary person joined the bandits, negotiated with the government, and was eventually eliminated by the local self-defense associations.

Born in 1917, Cao Mapi was the youngest son of an ordinary peasant family who could sufficiently feed everybody within the household and send all the boys to the local private school (*sishu*) for two to three years of elementary education. Cao Mapi was not a good-looking boy

with lots of pocks on his face. His real name was Cao Fuxing, but the nickname “Mapi” literally means “skin full of pocks.”³³ The Cao family lived in a village called Caojialong, a bushy area on the border of three small towns in Jiangxi Province, and was very close to the Zhide County of Anhui Province. This place was known as a jurisdictional limbo in which all the four areas had no interest in being in charge of (*sibuguan*).³⁴ In 1937, when Cao Mapi was twenty, he got married. The joyful life did not last long, however, when less than three months later, the local bandits kidnapped his wife and asked for a ransom of 200 *yuan*. The Cao family had no choice but to make the full payment and got Cao Mapi’s wife back. Even worse, in 1937, soon after the bandit incident, the Second Sino-Japanese War broke. As one of the first areas where the new *Baojia* System of the Nationalist Government was firstly initiated, the conscription order was strictly and forcibly implemented in rural Jiangxi. The county magistrate and local *baozhang* (headman of the *bao*) constantly dragged the able-bodied males for military service (*zhua zhuangding*). In order to avoid being sent to the battlefield, the Cao family sold almost everything within their home and another 360 *dan* of grain to bribe the local officials. The family was starved, but the corrupt local power holders never stopped threaten and blackmail them for more.³⁵

The *Baojia* System played a vital role in rural governance. Originally initiated in the early Qing Dynasty, the *baojia* system was invented mainly for security and surveillance purposes. “Officially, under the *baojia*, ten households were arranged into one *pai*; every ten *pai* constituted a *jia*; and every ten *jia* formed a *bao*.”³⁶ The county magistrate appointed the heads of each level of *baojia* to be responsible for security affairs take place under their control. Everyone in rural society was placed under specific security surveillance from both their heads and peers. The function of the *baojia* gradually shifted from police control to rent and tax

collection and many other managerial duties, but the system as a whole did not strictly function as the inventors had anticipated. With the decline of the Qing Dynasty and the founding of the Republic, the effects of baojia waned and the state lost its control over the local society.³⁷

Starting from 1931, the Nationalist Government invented the New Baojia System in some areas in Jiangxi and expanded the new system to all the Nationalist-controlled areas in the province.³⁸ The reinvention of the baojia system was a direct response to the communist movement in Southern Jiangxi, notably after Mao Zedong established the Jinggangshan Base in the area. After defeating the communist forces in 1934, the Nationalist Government in Jiangxi was in great need of rebuilding social order and avoiding potential communist penetration from happening again. As historian Steven Averill points out, the new baojia system differs fundamentally from the Qing Dynasty one as the KMT built it on a society where social order was completely destroyed, rather than for a preventive measure in the Qing. Averill goes on arguing that the baojia was the cornerstone of the Nationalist Government's security system, "the collective responsibility and criminal apprehension functions of the system declined in importance, while organized military and logistical functions increased."³⁹ Based on his nuanced study of Macheng County in Hubei Province, William Rowe also believes that the new baojia system's "social militarization" meant that each young man had to serve the army so that the KMT maintained a stable number of military forces.⁴⁰

During the period of constant warfare, when a considerable number of able-bodied males were needed, the new baojia system was indeed the cornerstone for wartime conscription, as well as a primary source of corruption and exploitation. Working as the middlemen between the state and the rural masses, baojia leaders were usually the ones who made the final decision of whom

to conscript and how much food to allocate to those enlisted. The most commonly used method for choosing the able-bodied males at the local level was through the lottery.

Without adequate supervision, the baojia leader could leverage the power they had through the so-called lottery and literally ask people to bid for avoidance. Huang Chunen, who was a baozhang in Poyang County, changed the lottery results multiple times from 1941 to 1949. In order to erase his son's name from the conscription list, a local villager Liu Debao paid Huang Chunen 100 *yuan*, equaling around 40 *dan* of grain at the time.⁴¹ In 1944, Xu Debin, who was also a baozhang in Poyang County, changed the result of the lottery when Xu himself was drawn for conscription. He changed the name to Xu Dezhang, who was lame. Xu Dezhang's father sold his land and house to bribe Xu Debin, complaining that his son was disabled and could not join the army. Finally, Xu Dezhang's cousin was conscripted as a replacement. One year later, Xu Debin's own younger brother Xu Deyou was drawn for conscription. A local villager Xu Guanghui became the unlucky one who had no choice but to join the army.⁴² Corruption also occurred when the baojia leaders allocated grain to those conscripted. In 1945, after Xu Debin replaced his younger brother with Xu Guanghui, the peasant union assigned three *dan* of grain to Xu Guanghui. However, Xu Guanghui only received one *dan* of grain, while the rest went to the pocket of Xu Debin.⁴³ The same story happened countless times when the baojia leaders acted as the middlemen in charge of food allocation.

Under great desperation of poverty and insecurity, Cao Mapi chose the dark path of becoming a bandit. In the mountainous area of Houjiagang not far from the Cao family, there was a small bandit gang under the leadership of Zhao Pangzi with one pistol and two rifles. Cao Mapi joined the gang and became a disciple of Zhao. Soon after that, Zhao was shot by the governmental force. Cao Mapi became the new leader. Cao Mapi's fame grew into the public

realm in the region in 1938, when he attacked another bandit gang and took all their weapons. In 1938, when the 138 Division of the Nationalist Army was stationed in North Poyang, a bandit gang under the leadership of Li Andong stole twelve rifles and one machine gun from the 138 Division. On their way back, Cao Mapi's gang ambushed Li's gang, killed Li, and took all the weapons Li had just stolen. This incident of "bandits eating bandits" brought Cao Mapi unprecedented fame among the bandits in Poyang. Cao Mapi became a bandit master and officially opened up his own "mountain gate" (*kai shanmen*) recruiting disciple bandits. Following the bandit tradition, Cao Mapi held a magnificent recruitment ceremony every time when a new disciple bandit joined his gang. All the disciple bandits were ranked by their ages. Every time when Cao Mapi held banquets, all his disciples would toast and kowtow to their master. From 1939 to 1941, Cao Mapi's bandit gang raided the local areas many times, including the most notorious raid of the Town of Fenggang in May of 1941 when Cao Mapi sent out more than five hundred bandit soldiers. The trophy of this raid was marvelous to the bandits: four hundred *dan* of cloth, twenty *dan* of jewelry, ten rifles, ten pistols, two horses, more than ten oxen, as well as the kidnapping of three housewives and a *xiangzhang* (head of township).⁴⁴

During China's bloody first half of the twentieth century, soldiers within formal military units could turn to banditry for various reasons as discussed before. A substantial part of Cao Mapi's bandit force came from the military. The military also provided the bandits with a number of advanced modern weapons. In 1942, during the heyday of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Nationalist forces and Japanese fought over the Poyang Lake region for a long time. Pan Zuo, the Division Commander of the NO. 21 Army of the 148 Division Force, disobeyed the command of his higher authority and was relocated to the Shangrao region in Jiangxi Province. Upon his arrival, he was put to trial and executed. Pan's soldiers in Poyang suddenly lost their

boss and became jobless. Pan's vice commander Tan Zhiyuan led his army to become bandits in the Poyang Lake region and allied with Cao Mapi's bandit gang. Tan and Cao cooperated closely in raiding the Poyang area.⁴⁵

The Nationalist Government's suppression against banditry in Poyang proved to be *pro forma*. The Nationalist military forces did occasionally respond to the banditry problem where they stationed when bandits became too strong, but the fact that most bandit gangs frequently changed their targets and moved their bandit nests made it extremely difficult to wipe them out. In cases when the KMT forces could not find where the bandits were, to avoid being blamed by their higher authority, the military leaders often commanded their soldiers to arrest the innocent peasants and label them as traitors who cooperated and helped to hide the bandits.⁴⁶ In the eyes of the peasants, the KMT armies were as horrible as the bandits. There was a popular song in the region:

There is no peace here, bandits raid our homes,
The army comes, they kill us aimlessly also,
We mountainous people have suffered all kinds of pains,
When shall there be peace on earth?⁴⁷

Cao Mapi's bandit gang and Tan Zhiyuan's soldier bandits were very active in the Jiangxi-Anhui border region, kidnapping ordinary rural residents. When they kidnapped people from the Poyang Lake area in Jiangxi, they would hide the hostages in the Zhide County of Anhui; when they captured people from Anhui, they would hide them in Jiangxi. Neither the Jiangxi Nationalist forces nor the Anhui Nationalist forces had the intention to confront the bandits directly. Both sides only wanted to drive the bandits into the territory of the other party. Therefore, the bandits relocated constantly between the two provinces without encountering any serious military confrontation. Moreover, a large portion of both Tan Zhiyuan's soldier bandits and the Nationalist forces in Jiangxi were former warlords' armies from Sichuan Province.

Because of this acquaintance, both sides tried to avoid fighting with each other too. In a word, the Nationalist military forces did not have an interest in fighting against banditry in the Poyang Lake area.

After waves of fruitless military campaigns against Cao Mapi's bandit gang and other major bandit groups in the region, the only choice for the Nationalist Government in Poyang was peaceful negotiation. The early stage of the negotiation was as unsuccessful as the military suppression. The first meeting between the two sides was held in June of 1943. The government side included a few local gentry leaders from the region and Wang Qi, a representative of the Nationalist Government who killed Zhao Pangzi, Cao Mapi's bandit teacher when he first joined banditry. What Cao Mapi wanted at that time was simply revenge. Although both sides had agreed beforehand that no military conflicts should occur during the negotiation, Cao Mapi ordered his bandits to surround the negotiation site and kill Wang Qi. Luckily, Wang Qi escaped. The negotiation was a failure.⁴⁸

Then the Nationalist Government appointed Liu Mingzhen, known as "the elder" in Jiangxi, as the representative of the government. Liu Mingzhen was the manager of a prominent newspaper office in Jiangxi at the time. He was a typical Confucian intellectual with good fame and virtue. Liu entered the rural areas where bandits were active and visited each household explaining the government's goodwill. Surprisingly, one night, when Liu was sleeping at a peasant's home, Cao Mapi found him and asked for his intention of coming here. They talked and agreed for further negotiation from the two sides. After over a dozen rounds of negotiation, the government agreed to grant amnesty to Cao Mapi and his fellows, as well as offering the bandits three million *yuan*. Three million yuan was a tremendous amount of money to the local authorities. After carefully weighing the cost of being raided constantly and the casualties in

military campaigns, the county magistrate eventually decided to offer what Cao Mapi had demanded. Cao Mapi's bandit soldiers were reorganized into the local police forces. The government also promoted Cao Mapi and his principal fellows as captains of the local police forces.⁴⁹

Although a deal was finalized, absolute trust was never established between the two sides. Cao Mapi kept a small private army protecting him in case the government failed to keep their promise. Cao Mapi also frequently refused to participate in military drills. The former bandits' morale in the police forces was low too because very few of them would like to receive a high standard of military training, especially when the Second Sino-Japanese War was still ongoing. Cao Mapi's team was then relocated to Pengze County in the north of the Poyang Lake, where they fought in the battles against the Japanese.⁵⁰ Shortly after the war was over in 1946, Cao Mapi refused to participate in military drills again and resumed his career as a bandit.⁵¹ He led his bandits into Zhide County of Anhui Province where he was ambushed by the local self-defense association – the Big Sword Society. During the battle, Cao Mapi was slashed into pieces brutally.⁵²

Cao Mapi's story is typical in terms of the everyday living environment in rural China during the first half of the twentieth century. An ordinary peasant had almost no choice when confronting threats from banditry, warfare, corrupt officials, and poverty. Becoming a bandit was a natural and even rewarding career. The Nationalist Government had very little interest in eliminating all bandit forces in rural society. And it was indeed almost impossible to solve the banditry problem under such an unstable social condition. When the bandit problem became too strong, the government tended to solve the problem by negotiation instead of military suppression. Although bandits could be incorporated into formal military units, the relationship

between the former bandits and the government was very volatile and fragile. Both sides never fully trusted the other. All in all, the Nationalist Government was not capable of maintaining social order in the countryside. The job of protecting lives and homes fell to the hands of rural residents themselves. They established their own self-defense associations.

The Emergence of Self-Defense Associations in Poyang

Historians came to know self-defense associations and local military forces predominantly through the lens of peasant rebellions and social unrest in late imperial China. When introducing the history of self-defense associations, the Republican Era Poyang County Gazetteer argues that they were originally secret religious societies coming from the White Lotus Tradition in the Qing Dynasty.⁵³ The White Lotus Sect was initially a lay Buddhist movement initiated by Monk Huiyuan of Lushan (the Mount Lushan is right next to the Poyang Lake in Jiangxi Province) in the early fifth century.⁵⁴ According to religious scholar B. J. Ter Haar, the name “White Lotus” was used by non-elites as an autonym for lay Buddhist gatherings before the mid-fourteenth century.⁵⁵ From the sixteenth century on, “White Lotus” was more and more frequently used and finally became a generic label for all potentially rebellious groups. Ter Haar further points out that by the late Ming Dynasty, Christianity, Millenarian teachings, lay Buddhist, and even sexual techniques were all labeled “White Lotus.”⁵⁶ But people within such groups actually did not call themselves “White Lotus.” This label existed only in official propaganda, which is also true for the early PRC when the CCP labeled all local voluntary associations as “counterrevolutionary huidaomen.” (See Introduction) The White Lotus Sects organized some of the most large-scale peasant rebellions in the Qing Dynasty, and historians

often use the White Lotus as a symbol of the Qing Government's failure in controlling local society.⁵⁷

Self-defense associations differ from the earlier forms of White Lotus Sects in the sense that they were no longer primarily religious associations, and the use of violence was more often for practical needs, such as the case against banditry, rather than from a millenarian religious perception of the world. There were hundreds of different types of self-defense associations, among which were the most famous Big Sword Society (*Dadaohui*) and the Red Spear Society (*Hongqianghui*) in rural North China. The Big Sword Society was a military force behind the Boxer Uprising at the end of the nineteenth century. Famous for its Armor of the Golden Bell, a martial art technique with invulnerability rituals, the Big Sword Society was an influential military association in the Shandong-Jiangsu border region against rebellious forces and bandits. The local authorities also tolerated the existence of the Big Sword for banditry concerns and led to its flourishing in the 1890s and finally the Boxer Uprising.⁵⁸ Evolved from the Big Sword Society, the Red Spear Society was also a self-defense association that adopted similar martial arts techniques and invulnerability rituals.⁵⁹ In her classic book *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945*, Elizabeth Perry uses the Red Spear Society as an exemplary case of a protective strategy adopted by the peasants as a form of collective violence against predatory threats, among which banditry was a primary concern.⁶⁰ The Red Spear model later became the mother of a series of similar self-defense associations in rural China that adopted different names and slight modifications in their rituals.⁶¹

In Poyang County, the most widespread and powerful local self-defense associations were the Yellow Crane Society (*Huanghehui*) and the Big Sword Society. The Republican Poyang County Gazetteer believes that both associations evolved from the Boxer Uprising. The

gazetteer suggests that both the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword were foreign to Poyang County. They both came from the border region of Shandong, Henan, and Anhui Provinces.⁶² Both self-defense associations were well-known for their invulnerability rituals that could protect them from weapons. Such rituals certainly played a crucial role in encouraging and organizing the local people against bandits. There was even a female self-defense association called the “Flower Basket Society” (*Hualanhui*). The Flower Basket Society also adopted the invulnerability technique: the female members carried flower baskets with them and used them as shields. They believed that the basket could protect them from all the weapons, including modern artillery.⁶³

The new Baojia system also responded to the banditry problem but failed. Some Baojia leaders organized their own self-defense associations called the “Winter Protection Team (*Dongfangdui*).” For instance, Chen Shihai, who was a landlord and baozhang in 1943, organized a Winter Protection Team with the help of xiangzhang Xu Haipeng. Chen Shihai donated four hundred yuan and three dan of grain to the Team and collected a lot of money from the local people. They purchased thirteen guns from the neighboring Fuliang County and fought a battle with bandits in 1945. Chen’s Winter Protection Team lost in the battle, although killed four bandits. Their weapons were all robbed by the bandits. Chen later joined the Yellow Crane Society in early 1949.⁶⁴ Huang Chunen, who was also a landlord and Baozhang in 1943, organized a Winter Protection Team in 1943 and 1944. Born from one of the wealthiest families in the area, Huang donated a lot to the Team and forced many local peasants to join. But the Winter Protection Team did not function well until early 1949 when Huang joined the Big Sword Society, much as Chen Shihai had joined the Yellow Crane. The Big Sword Society turned out to be very active in anti-bandit campaigns.⁶⁵ Information about the Baojia-led self-defense

associations is scarce. The fact that people predominantly turned to the Yellow Crane and Big Sword makes it plausible that the Baojia system was not a satisfactory resolution to the banditry problem. And there is no mention of any specific martial arts or religious rituals in the Baojia-led self-defense associations at all. Both Chen and Huang later became leaders in the Yellow Crane and Big Sword.

The Yellow Crane Society

The rise of the Yellow Crane Society occurred because of both bandit threats and cross-regional martial arts networks. According to the gazetteer, in 1934, bandits constantly raided Poyang County. A traveler from Anhui noticed the situation and told the people in Poyang that he knew the technique of invulnerability. The local people tried using a sword slicing him, and he was not injured at all. After that, a lot of young peasants began to learn the technique and established the Yellow Crane Society.⁶⁶ During the 1950s, after interviewing a large number of former Yellow Crane Society participants during the CCP's Anti-Huidaomen Campaigns, the Public Security Bureau's investigatory reports tell a more nuanced story of the Yellow Crane's origin in Poyang. In 1934, banditry was a severe problem in Poyang. To defend against the bandits, a local boss called Wang Guowen went to Mount Jiulong of Nanjing in Jiangsu Province and invited seven martial arts masters to Poyang. Among them was the Grand Master Xiong Xinzhai, who was also known as Mr. Xiong Xueshan. Mr. Xiong established the very first Yellow Crane assembly hall on the Jiantian Street of District 11 with a banner "Protect Homes and Defend against Bandits (*baojia yufei*).” Mr. Xiong's assembly hall attracted more than one hundred local people to join instantly. Among the first group of students was Jin Deshan, who was originally from Anhui Province. Jin was chosen as the leader of all the disciples. In 1936,

two of the seven masters died, including the Grand Master Xiong Xinzhai. Jin Deshan became the new leader of the Yellow Crane, assisting him was the Xiong Xinzhai's nephew known as "the Lame." Under the new leadership, the Yellow Crane developed rapidly in the entire Poyang County.⁶⁷

It is noteworthy that the seven masters and the subsequent highest leader Jin Deshan were all non-locals. Little is known about the backgrounds of the seven masters, but the fact that the local boss Wang Guowen invited them from a mountain in Nanjing indicates that they were well-known among certain groups of people. It is probable that the seven masters were full-time martial arts specialists. In China, renowned martial arts schools were often affiliated with famous mountains, most notably the Shaolin School on Mount Songshan in Henan Province and the Wudang School on Mount Wudang in Hubei Province. Students went to these famous mountains to learn martial arts techniques. Some of them stayed on the mountain teaching new students, while most of them left the mountain and became wandering martial arts teachers wherever people needed them.

In premodern China, some of these wandering masters played an important role in uprisings against the government or joined the unruly forces such as bandits or robbers. Historian Meir Shahar's case study of the Shaolin Monastery shows that the Qing government was profoundly suspicious of the martial arts tradition of the Shaolin School in Henan. Emperors from Yongzheng onward all feared that the Shaolin School might become the origin of rebellions or hide criminals during the government's suppression of rebellion. They strictly forbade the use of fighting monks from the Shaolin Monastery in training Qing military forces.⁶⁸ The wandering martial arts specialists were also associated with the Boxer Uprising in the 1890s. Joseph Esherick's study on the Boxer Uprising shows that the invulnerability rituals were brought to

southwest Shandong by an outsider, possibly a “wandering Daoist priest.”⁶⁹ It is through this group of wandering martial artists that a similar type of boxing technique and invulnerability rituals reached to a large portion of China’s hinterland.

To some poor people, learning martial arts techniques was an alluring career during times of social unrest. Jin Deshan was such a person. Born in 1894 to a poor peasant family in Anhui Province, Jin spent his childhood doing farm work as an adopted son of his uncle. When he was nine, his uncle passed away. Jin’s mother took him to his grandfather’s home in rural Jiangsu Province. In 1934, there was a massive drought in Jiangsu. Jin had no choice but to leave with another four people heading for Jiangxi. On their way to Poyang, all the other four died. Once he arrived in Poyang, Jin immediately joined the Yellow Crane Society and became a full-time martial arts teacher.⁷⁰ It is through the Yellow Crane Society that Jin finally settled down and earned his reputation as a martial arts specialist.

Jin Deshan and the Lamé proved to be charismatic and actionable leaders. Each Yellow Crane unit is known as an assembly hall (*tang*). From 1934 to 1949, the Yellow Crane Society spread to seven districts in the Poyang County with at least twenty-eight assembly halls.⁷¹ The highest-ranking leader of the Yellow Crane was called the Grand Master (*diandaoshi*). Below him was a Preaching Master (*chuandaoshi*). Within each assembly hall, there were one schoolmaster (*xuezhang*) and one vice-schoolmaster (*fuxuezhang*). These two were the highest leaders within the assembly hall who were responsible for teaching fighting techniques and administrative affairs. Below them were one hall master (*tangzhang*) and one vice-hall master (*futangzhang*). They took care of religious worship in the hall and all the logistical issues.⁷² The Grand Master usually only stayed for a short period teaching the martial arts techniques and the invulnerability rituals. Then he left and appointed a new leader as his replacement. In Poyang,

the first Grand Master was Xiong Xinzhai from Nanjing. After his death in 1936, Jin Deshan became the new Grand Master.⁷³

Table 2: Numbers and Locations of the Yellow Crane Society in Poyang

	Number of Assembly Halls	Year When the First Assembly Hall Was Built
District 2	1	1945
District 3	9	1937
District 4	3	1938
District 8	3	1948
District 9	2	1944
District 10	3	1944
District 11	7	1934

The Big Sword Society

The history of the Big Sword Society in the Republican Poyang County Gazetteer is almost identical to the Yellow Crane. In 1946, bandits under the leadership of Gui Changqing raided the Hengyongxiang area in Poyang frequently. Unable to bear the bandit threats, local residents went to Anhui Province and invited the Big Sword specialists to Poyang.⁷⁴ The CCP's investigatory report in 1953 provides more details about the Big Sword Society's origin. In 1946, to solve the banditry problem of the Hengyouxiang area within District 12, a gentry leader Wang Zhenbo from the Xigang Village organized a meeting with the surrounding villages. They decided to go to the neighboring Zhide County in Anhui Province, inviting three Big Sword masters. The three masters established the very first Big Sword assembly hall (*tang*) in Xigang

Village. They claimed that learning the Big Sword will make people invulnerable to all the weapons on the battlefield. All the people from Xigang joined the Big Sword Society.⁷⁵ The death of the notorious bandit leader Cao Mapi also played a significant role in “advertising” the Big Sword Society. As we discussed before, after Cao Mapi turned to banditry again in 1946, he was ambushed and brutally killed by the Big Sword Society in Zhide County of Anhui Province. The incident took place right after the three masters from Zhide established the first Big Sword unit in Xigang Village.⁷⁶ The name of the Big Sword Society suddenly spread all over the entire Poyang County.

To many people, the Big Sword’s technique became mythical. Many bandits were also afraid to raid the rural communities with the presence of the Big Sword Society and called the Big Sword “the Tiger.”⁷⁷ In May of 1947, the Big Sword Society established its units in District 2, District 3, and District 4. During the second half of the same year, the Big Sword reached to District 10, District 11, and District 14. Among all the districts with the existence of the Big Sword, District 12 was the earliest and strongest one.

The associational structure of the Big Sword Society differed slightly from the Yellow Crane. Each Big Sword unit was also called an assembly hall. There was one hall master (*tangzhang*) who was overseeing all the affairs within the unit. Below him was a hall lord (*tangzhu*) taking care of the candles and incenses used for religious rituals. The members within a Big Sword assembly hall was organized into squads (*ban*) with ten people in each squad. There was one squad commander (*banzhang*) within each squad.⁷⁸ Comparing to the Yellow Crane, the structure of the Big Sword was more like a fighting unit with clearly numbered squads. The Yellow Crane, on the contrary, was more hierarchical, highlighting the importance of discipleship like a traditional martial arts school.

Rituals and Beliefs

It is debatable whether the two self-defense associations in Poyang County had any direct connection with the White Lotus Sects in the Qing Dynasty as the gazetteer describes, but the story of their origins, including an anti-bandit agenda, the wandering martial arts specialists, and the invulnerability rituals, clearly shows their resemblance to the self-defense associations during the Boxer Movement in north China.

Although the Boxer Uprising in north China was suppressed by both Qing military forces and foreign intervention and finally turned out to be a failure, it is fair to say that the Boxer as a movement or as a survival strategy had never ended in China before the anti-huidaomen campaigns in the early People's Republic. Joseph Esherick's study on the origin of the Boxer Uprising correctly starts with the socio-economic condition as a critical factor that led to the Boxer's emergence, rather than discussing whether it was a pro-Qing or anti-Qing movement.⁷⁹ During times when the existence of the central government was so weak and ineffective in responding to threats in the local society, people had to grab their own weapons and fight against these threats all by themselves. Although self-defense associations were primarily military in nature as a violent strategy against predatory threats, the morale of the participants could not be sustained without the presence of the religious and supernatural realms, because suffering and death were always so overwhelming a burden in the participants' everyday life. Such a fact did not change at all from the millenarian rebellions led by the White Lotus to the Boxer Uprising, and finally, the self-defense associations in Poyang during the 1930s and 1940s.

Choosing to join a self-defense association means responding to the banditry problem through violence, but how was violence understood? B. J. ter Haar suggests that the belief of

demons as the source of persistent danger to human beings was a basic notion in the religious culture of traditional China. People worshiped different deities when confronting various demonic threats, such as the deities of the bridge and the deities of health. Even bandits often adopted nicknames related to demonic forces, believing that such a connection would equip them with the power of demons that they became legitimate to kill. Ter Haar further points out that when people understood real-life enemies as of demonic origins, they would fight with them not only with physical force but also through exorcizing these demonic powers. Such belief permeated the entire Boxer Uprising and most self-defense associations in the Republican Era with religious rituals against injury.⁸⁰

Building on ter Haar's Chinese "demonological paradigm," William Rowe argues that the existence of this most basic and ubiquitous demonic threat "made violence into a fundamental imperative of human existence ... The gruesome violence threatened by these demons must be met with an equally determined response bent on bloody and complete extermination."⁸¹

Supernatural response to demonic power was also popular, such as summoning spirit armies against demonic forces.⁸² This was also true for both the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword in Poyang. Fighting bandits was not only a secular war relying on might and weapons but also a demonic war that required strict regulation on all the participants' moral behavior and gaining power from the spiritual realm.

Both the "Yellow Crane Society" and the "Big Sword Society" cannot be understood merely as the names of two voluntary associations; instead, they refer to two distinct schools of martial arts and rituals. When the participants talked about their experiences in the self-defense associations, they used the phrases that "I learned the Yellow Crane Society" and "I learned the Big Sword Society" instead of "I joined." In that respect, they emphasized the experience of

learning a particular set of martial arts techniques and religious rituals rather than being a member of a specific social group. In the case of the Yellow Crane Society, people often substitute the term “Yellow Crane Society” with the “Yellow School” (*huangxue*) or the “Yellow School Society” (*huangxuehui*). The use of the “Yellow School” is exactly the same as the use of “Shaolin School of Martial Arts.” The “Yellow School” distinguishes itself from other schools of martial arts, such as the Big Sword. In that sense, it is wrong to interpret the emergence of self-defense associations as a representation of a civil society where people form self-governed associations and participate in public affairs voluntarily.⁸³ It is also wrong to call self-defense associations a specific type of secret societies. The self-defense associations were, in nature, specific types of fighting techniques and religious rituals that could be used to solve real-life problems, such as banditry. Becoming part of a self-defense association was essentially a survival strategy rather than possessing a “membership card.” Consequently, the rules and invulnerability rituals we will see below did not function as codified laws but a guarantee that the survival strategies will operate functionally and successfully in face of severe demonic warfare.

Before joining the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword, all the incoming students were required to memorize and follow the rules of the associations:

The Yellow Crane Society’s Rules

When you enter the assembly hall and seek to learn the teachings of the Yellow Crane, you must first make an oath to the Bodhisattva with a spell, “I would like to take responsibility for my crime if I disclose the secret teachings to outsiders.”

Then you also need to follow the Ten Commandments:

1. Never disclose the secret teachings to outsiders, or I shall receive divine punishment;
2. Before entering the assembly hall, I must clean my body first;
3. I shall not rape, go whoring, gamble, and smoke opium, or I shall be beaten forty times;
4. If I sneak out of the hall and stop learning, I shall purchase four boxes of *fobiao* (a kind of paper sheet used in religious rituals) as punishment;

5. If I fall in sleep during my learning session, I shall be punished by kneeling for the time it takes to burn a joss-stick;
 6. Report as early as possible if I have to leave because of a family emergency;
 7. If I spit or sing during a ceremony, I shall be punished by purchasing a sheet of *fobiao*;
 8. If I become a thief, a bandit, or take the poor's possessions, I shall be punished by purchasing ten *jin* of sandalwood;
 9. Be careful when sitting in meditation, or I shall be punished by kneeling for four joss-sticks' time;
 10. If I speak and laugh without proper manner, I shall be punished for two bottles of oil;
- Besides all the commandments above, you are not allowed to eat three animals that the sky hates: wild goose, pigeon, and quail; the three animals that the earth hates: dog, horse, and monkey; the three animals the water hates: softshell turtle, cuttlefish, and eel. You are not allowed to have sex with your wife during the period of learning the teachings. If you can follow all these rules, you shall be permitted to join the assembly hall and learn.⁸⁴

The Big Sword used a different set of rules:

The Big Sword Society's Rules

When you enter the assembly hall and seek to learn the teachings of the Big Sword, you must first make an oath to the Bodhisattva with a spell:

To all the Buddhas above and all the creatures below,
 I shall seek the way with all my heart,
 I shall not seek precious treasures and beautiful women,
 I shall speak and act in a straightforward way of protecting our homes,
 I shall be loyal and righteous, always unite with my brothers,
 I shall save those who suffer, even when the rains and winds are against me,
 If I disobey the way, leave the way, or cheat,
 Heaven will terminate my life with a thunder.

You are not allowed to eat ox (loyalty), cuttlefish (filial piety), wild goose (chastity), and dog (righteousness). In forty days, you cannot have sex with your wife. Then you also need to follow the Ten Commandments:

1. I shall respect heaven and earth, meditate the spiritual realm, be filial to my parents, or I shall be punished for sixty sheets of *fobiao*;
2. I shall follow the discipline and obey the teacher, or I shall be punished for fifty sheets of *fobiao*;
3. I shall not be greedy, but cling to loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness, or I shall be punished for forty sheets of *fobiao*;
4. I shall stay away from lust and gambling, or I shall be punished for forty sheets of *fobiao*;

5. When people talk to you, shut up and listen; when people guide you, meditate and learn; obey all the rules;
6. I shall not bully others, or I shall be punished for sixty sheets of fobiao;
7. I shall not resist the state and all the taxation;
8. I shall not crave for money and women, or I shall be punished for thirty sheets of fobiao;
9. I shall save people from disaster and suffering, I shall help the weak and fight against the cruel, I shall eliminate the bandits with all I can offer;
10. I shall not cheat my teachers and the founder of our sect, I shall remain loyal and obey my teachers. Revolt shall not be tolerated.⁸⁵

Regardless of how strict all these rules were implemented, both the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword were not loosely organized. We can infer from these rules that the moral values of the two associations were very traditional and Confucian, including loyalty, respecting teachers, restraining oneself from evil desires, etc. Some habits that were very normal in China before 1949, such as prostitution, gambling, and drug addiction, were all considered evil to the spiritual realm. Aversion towards banditry was clearly mentioned in both associations' rules. All the two associations were for males only. Women were not only considered to be illegitimate participants, but also contamination to the effectiveness of the rituals. The Boxers clearly shared the same negative view about women.⁸⁶ There were also strict regulations on food: certain animals were considered to be contamination to or as a disturbance to the realm of morality. The primary form of punishment was material punishment than spiritual. There is no clue of a well-organized religious system. Like many popular religious sects in China, they embraced the syncretism that included all the deities in Buddhism, Daoism, and popular gods.

Although some of the rules were almost identical between the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword, we can also see huge divergences between them. The teachings of the Yellow Crane were secretive, completely exclusive to outsiders. But such secrecy was not mentioned at all in the Big Sword. The Big Sword's rules tended to be more moralistic than the Yellow Crane,

emphasizing the importance of filial piety, chastity, and teacher-student relationship. The world in the Big Sword Society seemed to be more like an egalitarian society that the rules require all the people taking care of the weak and the poor. The Big Sword held a worldview that was close to that of a romanticized Chinese society born from the popular literature such as the *Water Margin (shuihuzhuan)*. In that society, the heroes always fight for the poor against the powerful and try to build a world without exploitation and suffering. Building brotherhood was also considered as a paramount pillar of an ideal society. But such a romanticized worldview did not exist in the rules of the Yellow Crane. The Yellow Crane was likely more pragmatic. Its rules always focus on discipline and everyday behavior during teaching sessions. Lastly, the Big Sword was quite explicit that it was a pro-state association.

Invulnerability rituals were considered the most crucial content of teachings within both the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword. The invulnerability rituals were a complex system involving from chanting spells during the learning process, and wearing and carrying specific clothes and weapons during the battles. Failure to follow these requirements might contaminate the effectiveness of the rituals and lead to injuries and even death.

The Yellow Crane Society required a forty-nine-day learning period for the invulnerability rituals. During the forty-nine days, all the students must sit in meditation three times a day. During each meditation session, the students need to light joss sticks, burn yellow papers, worship the Bodhisattvas, and chant spells. The spells begin with listing many deities they worship, ranging from the Duke of Zhou (Zhougong) to regional deities. Then, the spells continue:

Our gods send peace to us and protect us,
Iron helmet and iron armor all come from the heaven,
I shall put on the iron clothes, iron armor, and iron helmet,
Guns, cannons, and firearms will stay away from me,

All the nine flood dragons will gather and protect us,
Guns, cannons, and firearms will stay away from me,
The Six Ding and Six Jia will gather and support us,⁸⁷
Knives and axes will stay away from me.

The spells end with listing another group of deities and repeating that all the weapons will stay away from us. There were various forms of spells for different fighting techniques. When fighting in battles, they must worship the Bodhisattvas first, then put on a specific set of headgear, waist belt, bottles (hanging on the waist belt), and straw sandals for ritual use. Then they will carry a pair of swords in their hands and march forward slowly. When marching forward, they will chant “we [disciples] truthfully invite the merciful Guanyin Bodhisattva to come protect our bodies from injuries.” The schoolmaster will lead in the front with a huge umbrella. Once the schoolmaster opens the umbrella when enemies approach, all the Yellow Crane members will become invulnerable to weapons.⁸⁸

The invulnerability rituals of the Big Sword Society were similar but more straightforward about the use of force and weapons. The Big Sword requires a learning period of ten nights. During these ten nights, the teachers would first teach the students how to avoid being hurt by placing heavy stones on the students’ bellies, then slicing the students’ bellies and backs with swords. Then the teachers would teach them how to use swords. When fighting on the battleground, everybody wore a bamboo rain hat, carried a big sword on his right hand, and chanted spells such as:

The Jade Emperor of Heaven and Earth,
Founder of our martial school,
Buddha of Seven Spirits,
Eternal Mother the Guanyin Bodhisattva,
Eternal Mother of the Lishan Mountain,
One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten.

Then everybody would become free from injuries during the battle.⁸⁹ People would chant different spells in different situations. Each set of spells were usually associated with a specific technique in fighting, such as the spells of Blocking the Spears (*Duqiangfa*) and Hiding My Body (*Yanshenfan*). To learn the spells, the teachers would tie a piece of yellow paper with the spells on it onto the skin of the students, and then slice the students with swords.⁹⁰

Participants in the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society did take the invulnerability rituals seriously. As discussed above, the self-defense associations were in nature about fighting techniques and religious rituals, rather than having specific social affiliations. The leaders of the self-defense associations often advertised their teachings only as the technique of invulnerability. Yu Peiyuan, for instance, advocated the effectiveness among his locals of the invulnerability rituals after becoming a disciple of Jin Deshan. He later became a vice-schoolmaster and actively involved in feuding among the local villages.⁹¹ Becoming invulnerable against the bandits were the primary driving force when people decided to join the self-defense associations. To many of those who lived under the constant threat of bandits, joining self-defense associations were simply about protecting themselves from the harms of the bandits through learning the invulnerability rituals, instead of solving the banditry problem completely by wiping out all the bandits in the region. There was a widespread belief among the people in Poyang that once you learned the Big Sword, the bandits would no longer rob your home.⁹²

People also used the invulnerability rituals practically to reach specific goals in real life. Zheng Laichao, who was a member of the Zheng lineage, decided to learn and teach the invulnerability rituals of the Yellow Crane Society to his own lineage people because the Zheng lineage had serious conflicts with the Xiong lineage. In 1948, the Xiong lineage people first invited a Big Sword martial master and organized their own Big Sword Society. In April of

1948, during a *xiedou* (feud) among the two lineages, the Xiong lineage Big Sword Society killed two people from the Zheng lineage. Zheng Laichao then invited a Yellow Crane martial master to teach his own people the rituals of invulnerability. Zheng Laichao also became a vice-schoolmaster. More than ten days later, in May, during the following *xiedou* between the two lineages, the Zheng lineage killed seven people from the Xiong lineage. The Zheng lineage people were all amazed by the effectiveness of the invulnerability rituals of the Yellow Crane. More and more people joined the Yellow Crane after that.⁹³

In another case, Zhang Yintang joined the Big Sword Society because he hoped it could bring him good fortune. Zhang was jobless and heavily addicted to gambling until he met a Big Sword teacher at his grandfather's home in 1944. Zhang learned the invulnerability rituals from the teacher and wished to go to the battlefield and fight against the Japanese. "If I can master the invulnerability rituals and go to the anti-Japanese frontline, becoming a (military) commander will be as easy as eating desserts and drinking tea."⁹⁴

Failure of the invulnerability rituals would definitely undermine the good impression of the self-defense associations in people's minds. In Zheng Laichao's case of the last paragraph, four months after the *xiedou* in May, when the Zheng lineage killed seven people of the Xiong lineage, another *xiedou* broke out. This time, Zheng Laichao even equipped himself with a machine gun. The result of the *xiedou*, however, was quite disappointing to the Zheng lineage. The schoolmaster Zheng Wenxiang was killed in the battle, the rest of Zheng lineage people ran away immediately. After the death of Zheng Wenxiang, people were more and more reluctant to join the Yellow Crane.⁹⁵ During the several cases when the self-defense associations confronted the PLA militarily in 1949 (see Chapter three), the failure of the invulnerability rituals led to the quick disbandment of most self-defense associations in Poyang. Cheng Hong, who was a

member of the Big Sword Society and participated in the fighting against the PLA, recalled later that the Big Sword forces were clearly not comparable to the PLA's weapons. His people were soon smashed into disorder, and all fled away.⁹⁶

Besides the invulnerability rituals, spirit possession rituals were also a key component of the self-defense associations in Poyang. Born as a form of communication between the human realm and the spiritual realm, spirit possession was widely seen in Chinese popular religion. Spirit writing that can be traced back at least to the Song Dynasty, for instance, was a most popular form of spirit possession among a large number of popular religious sects in the late Qing and Republican Era, including the Yiguandao.⁹⁷ Spirit possession also played an essential role in the rituals of both the Taiping Rebellion and the Boxer Uprising.⁹⁸

Unlike the invulnerability rituals that were made available to everybody and were frequently performed during learning sessions and before a battle, from all the cases I have seen, an ordinary participant in the self-defense associations did not qualify to be possessed by spirits. Spirit possession only occurred during some significant events, or when there was disagreement within the society. Spirit Possession was called "possession by the Bodhisattva" (*jiangpusa*), also known as the "horseshoe" (*majiao*).⁹⁹ Only the charismatic leaders had the qualification to be possessed by spirits. Within the circle of the Yellow Crane Society in Poyang, four people were well-known as the "Four Bodhisattvas": Peng Jiamao, Peng Guirong, Peng Jiawang, and Peng Wanggui. They all worked closely with the Grand Master Jin Deshan and the Lama. After the PLA arrived in Poyang in 1949, there were different voices among the society about whether the Yellow Crane should resist the coming of the PLA. During a few discussion sessions concerning the arrival of the PLA, the "Four Bodhisattvas" often became spirit-possessed and told the

people that the Yellow Crane should resist the PLA, otherwise the PLA would arrest all of them and rob the people of all their food.¹⁰⁰

Peng Bingnan, who joined the Yellow Crane Society in 1948, was another charismatic leader within a few villages, although his rank within the Yellow Crane was not high. He was said to be possessed by an “Old Bodhisattva.” Sometimes when the students became drowsy during the learning sessions, Peng would be spirit-possessed and beat the students harshly. Whenever they were preparing to fight, Peng always encouraged the people with auspicious words from the Bodhisattva. People were all afraid of him. When the PLA came in 1949, Peng was among those who genuinely wanted to resist the Communists. When some people expressed their reluctance to fight against the PLA, Peng always became angry and possessed by the Bodhisattva. Peng would not only tell people that the Bodhisattva was on the side of the Yellow Crane, he would also threaten the people that if you did not participate in the fighting, the Bodhisattva would kill everybody in your family. People were afraid and had no choice but to join the fighting. After the “liberation” in 1949, he continued using spirit possession healing the sick in his village until 1958.¹⁰¹

Stories in the Big Sword Society were similar. After the arrival of the PLA in 1949, many people within the Big Sword Society were reluctant to fight the newly-arrived PLA. During a training session when the Big Sword was preparing to fight the PLA, Zhang Tiansheng, who was a hall lord, became spirit-possessed. He shared with his fellows in the Big Sword Society that the Bodhisattva told him that there was an emergency going on in his family, he had to go home. Then he just left. He admitted in 1956 that his spirit possession experience was simply a trick so that others would allow him to leave without fighting against the PLA.¹⁰²

There is no evidence suggesting that spirit possession was an integral part of either the Yellow Crane Society or the Big Sword Society. I believe that spirit possession was already quite widespread in Poyang as an aspect of local popular culture. People within the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword simply borrowed it. Peng Bingnan's continued performing the spirit possession rituals until 1958 as a healing technique. The Yellow Crane Society disappeared in 1950 during the CCP's campaign against the Huidaomen. One of Peng's neighbors in the village also recalled that Peng had been performing the spirit possession rituals on February 2nd of the lunar calendar for years, not only the years when he was a member of the Yellow Crane Society.¹⁰³ In the "Four Bodhisattvas" and Zhang Tiansheng's cases, spirit possession was never used as a martial arts ritual. Instead, it was merely a way to persuade people believing the accountability of certain decisions when disagreement caused some troubles. This phenomenon is similar to the use of spirit possession during the Taiping Rebellion when Yang Xiuqing and Hong Xiuquan often used spirit possession as a way of persuasion.

Spirit possession was detached from the core values of the self-defense associations that were originally established to protect people from bandits. Moreover, during the Anti-Huidaomen Campaigns in the 1950s, spirit possession did not frequently appear in the documents, which is in sharp contrast to the frequency of the invulnerability rituals. Spirit possession also differs from the invulnerability rituals in the way of their functions. The invulnerability rituals were used as a form of active learning. People all wanted to master the techniques of invulnerability to protect themselves. In contrast, spirit possession was, in nature, a form of coercion. When the powerful within the society wanted to sell their ideas but received no response, they coerced people to believe in them through "spiritual violence" and established

their religious authority. Losing the war in the spiritual realm would also lead to huge or even more severe loss in the real world.

The rise of self-defense associations was a protective strategy against widespread predatory bandit activities. While self-defense associations originally aimed at protecting the local communities, their function soon shifted from self-defense to more aggressive power struggles within the local communities. The use of violence remained a major channel of how local conflicts were resolved. Now we will turn to the transformation of self-defense associations.

¹ The name of the Poyang County was changed twice after 1949. In 1957, the Poyang County was renamed Boyang County. In 2003, the name was changed back to Poyang. In this study, Poyang and Boyang refer to the same place.

² Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 5.

³ See Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, Chapter 2.

⁴ Ibid, 20

⁵ Ibid, 16.

⁶ See Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven*.

⁷ Antony, *Unruly People*, 137.

⁸ Ibid, 140.

⁹ Ibid, 96.

¹⁰ Tiedemann, "The Persistence of Banditry: Incidents in Border Districts of the North China Plain," 400.

¹¹ Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 25.

¹² Tai, *The Red Spears, 1916-1949*, 25.

¹³ "Lineages," PYXZ, vol. 12.

¹⁴ Rowe, *Crimson Rain*, 30.

¹⁵ Tiedemann, "The Persistence of Banditry: Incidents in Border Districts of the North China Plain," 422.

¹⁶ See Perry, "Social Banditry Revisited: The Case of Bai Lang, a Chinese Brigand."

¹⁷ Billingsley, 41.

¹⁸ Billingsley, "Bandits, Bosses and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China," 237-238.

¹⁹ "Cao mapi zhao'an shimo [How bandit Leader Cao Mapi Accepted Amnesty]," PYXZ, vol.14.

²⁰ "Lineages," PYXZ, vol. 12.

²¹ "Tuanlin gongshe fandong dangtuan, huidaomen lishi ziliao huibian [Tuanlin Commune's Collection of Historical Materials on Counterrevolutionary Organizations and *Huidaomen*]," PYGADA Z2-1-157.

²² "Wei dangtuan huimen dengjibiao [Registration Forms of Puppet Organizations and *Huimen*]," PYGADA Z2-1-45.

²³ Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 5.

²⁴ Tiedemann, "The Persistence of Banditry: Incidents in Border Districts of the North China Plain," 407-408.

²⁵ Billingsley, "Bandits, Bosses and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China," 239.

²⁶ Perry, "Social Banditry Revisited: The Case of Bai Lang, a Chinese Brigand," 377.

²⁷ Billingsley, "Bandits, Bosses and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China," 272.

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- ²⁸ Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 157-158; Billingsley, “Bandits, Bosses and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China,” 258-260.
- ²⁹ Billingsley, “Bandits, Bosses and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China,” 251.
- ³⁰ Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 205.
- ³¹ Billingsley, “Bandits, Bosses and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China,” 249.
- ³² Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China*, 200-205.
- ³³ “Feishou Cao Mapi [Cao Mapi, A Bandit Leader],” in Jiangxi wenshi ziliao [Jiangxi Historical Materials], vol. 49. Nanchang: Zhengxie Jiangxi sheng weiyuanhui, 1993.
- ³⁴ “Cao mapi zhao’an shimo [How bandit Leader Cao Mapi Accepted Amnesty],” PYXZ, vol.14.
- ³⁵ “Feishou Cao Mapi [Cao Mapi, A Bandit Leader],” in Jiangxi wenshi ziliao [Jiangxi Historical Materials], vol. 49. Nanchang: Zhengxie Jiangxi sheng weiyuanhui, 1993.
- ³⁶ Li, *Village Governance in North China*, 42.
- ³⁷ See Li, *Village Governance in North China*, 42-44.
- ³⁸ Averill, Steven. “The New Life in Action: The Nationalist Government in South Jiangxi, 1934-37.” *China Quarterly* 88 (Dec. 1981), p. 600
- ³⁹ Averill, “The New Life in Action: The Nationalist Government in South Jiangxi, 1934-37,” 603.
- ⁴⁰ Rowe, *Crimson Rain*, 298-299.
- ⁴¹ “Huang Chun’en fandong huidaomen an [Huang Chun’en Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-907.
- ⁴² “Xu Debin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xu Debin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1094.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ “Feishou Cao Mapi [Cao Mapi, A Bandit Leader],” in Jiangxi wenshi ziliao [Jiangxi Historical Materials], vol. 49. Nanchang: Zhengxie Jiangxi sheng weiyuanhui, 1993.
- ⁴⁵ “Cao mapi zhao’an shimo [How bandit Leader Cao Mapi Accepted Amnesty],” PYXZ, vol.14.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ “Feishou Cao Mapi [Cao Mapi, A Bandit Leader],” in Jiangxi wenshi ziliao [Jiangxi Historical Materials], vol. 49. Nanchang: Zhengxie Jiangxi sheng weiyuanhui, 1993.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ “Cao mapi zhao’an shimo [How bandit Leader Cao Mapi Accepted Amnesty],” PYXZ, vol.14.
- ⁵⁰ “Feishou Cao Mapi [Cao Mapi, A Bandit Leader],” in Jiangxi wenshi ziliao [Jiangxi Historical Materials], vol. 49. Nanchang: Zhengxie Jiangxi sheng weiyuanhui, 1993.
- ⁵¹ Ibid; and “Cao mapi zhao’an shimo [How bandit Leader Cao Mapi Accepted Amnesty],” PYXZ, vol.14.
- ⁵² “Feishou Cao Mapi [Cao Mapi, A Bandit Leader],” in Jiangxi wenshi ziliao [Jiangxi Historical Materials], vol. 49. Nanchang: Zhengxie Jiangxi sheng weiyuanhui, 1993.
- ⁵³ “Secret Societies,” PYXZ, vol. 12.
- ⁵⁴ See Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 219-223.
- ⁵⁵ Ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*, 165.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, 245.
- ⁵⁷ See Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China*; Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China*; Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion*.
- ⁵⁸ See Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, Chapter 4.
- ⁵⁹ See Tai, *The Red Spears*.
- ⁶⁰ See Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China*, Chapter 5.
- ⁶¹ See Tai, *The Red Spears*, Chapter 5.
- ⁶² “Secret Societies,” PYXZ, vol. 12.
- ⁶³ “Secret Societies,” PYXZ, vol. 12.
- ⁶⁴ “Chen Shihai fandong huidaomen touzi an [Chen Shihai Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-453.
- ⁶⁵ “Huang Chun’en fandong huidaomen an [Huang Chun’en Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-907.
- ⁶⁶ “Secret Societies,” PYXZ, vol. 12.
- ⁶⁷ “Zhenya fangeming huidaomen touzi dengjibiao [Registration Forms of *Huidaomen* Leaders during the Anti-Counterrevolutionaries Campaign],” PYGADA Z2-1-87; “Dadaohui, Huanghehui, Tonghshanshe, Yaomenjiao deng

zuzhi jieshao, renyuanmingdan [Introduction and Name Lists of the Big Sword Society, the Yellow Crane Society, the Society of Goodness, the Yao Sect, and Other Organizations],” PYGADA Z2-1-134.

⁶⁸ See Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery*, Chapter 7.

⁶⁹ Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 104-105.

⁷⁰ “Jin Deshan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Jin Deshan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1058.

⁷¹ “Huanghehui zuzhi jigou renmin deng qingkuang [Information on the Organizational Structure and Personnel within the Yellow Crane Society],” PYGADA Z2-1-87.

⁷² “Dadaohui, Huanghehui, Tongshanshe, Yaomenjiao deng zuzhi jieshao, renyuanmingdan [Introduction and Name Lists of the Big Sword Society, the Yellow Crane Society, the Society of Goodness, the Yao Sect, and Other Organizations],” PYGADA Z2-1-134.

⁷³ “Peng Jiawang fandong daoshou an [Peng Jiawang Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-234.

⁷⁴ “Secret Societies,” PYXZ, vol. 12.

⁷⁵ “Guanyu tingjin silingbu, dadaohui ji Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying deng diaocha [Investigations on Marching into the Command Headquarters, the Big Sword Society, Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying, and Others],” PYGADA Z2-1-93.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Secret Societies,” PYXZ, vol. 12.

⁷⁸ “Guanyu tingjin silingbu, dadaohui ji Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying deng diaocha [Investigations on Marching into the Command Headquarters, the Big Sword Society, Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying, and Others],” PYGADA Z2-1-93.

⁷⁹ See Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*.

⁸⁰ Ter Haar, “China’s Inner Demons: The Political Impact of the Demonological Paradigm.”

⁸¹ Rowe, *Crimson Rain*, 7.

⁸² Ibid, 8.

⁸³ Sociologist Richard Madsen defines “civil society” as “self-governed associations through which citizens can participate in an organized way in public affairs. See Madsen, *China’s Catholics*, 11- 15.

⁸⁴ “Huanghehui zuzhi jigou renmin deng qingkuang [Information on the Organizational Structure and Personnel within the Yellow Crane Society],” PYGADA Z2-1-87.

⁸⁵ “Guanyu tingjin silingbu, dadaohui ji Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying deng diaocha [Investigations on Marching into the Command Headquarters, the Big Sword Society, Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying, and Others],” PYGADA Z2-1-93.

⁸⁶ See Cohen, *History in Three Keys*.

⁸⁷ The “Six Ding and Six Jia” are a group of martial gods in Daoism.

⁸⁸ “Huanghehui zuzhi jigou renmin deng qingkuang [Information on the Organizational Structure and Personnel within the Yellow Crane Society],” PYGADA Z2-1-87.

⁸⁹ “Guanyu tingjin silingbu, dadaohui ji Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying deng diaocha [Investigations on Marching into the Command Headquarters, the Big Sword Society, Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying, and Others],” PYGADA Z2-1-93.

⁹⁰ “Fang Tanqing fandong huidaomen touzi an [Fang Tanqing Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-8.

⁹¹ “Yu Peiyuan fandong huangquehui fuxuezhang an [Yu Peiyuan Counterrevolutionary Yellow Crane Society Vice-School Master Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-347.

⁹² “Cao Rongxing fandong huidaomen an [Cao Rongxing Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-483.

⁹³ “Zheng Laichao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Laichao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-105.

⁹⁴ “Zhang Yintang fandong daoshou an [Zhang Yintang Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z3-1-180.

⁹⁵ “Zheng Laichao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Laichao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-105.

⁹⁶ “Cheng Hong fandong huimen an [Cheng Hong Counterrevolutionary Huimen Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-105.

⁹⁷ Jordan, *The Flying Phoenix*, 36.

⁹⁸ See Spence, *God’s Chinese Son* and Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*.

⁹⁹ “Peng Guixiang, Peng Guishu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang and Peng Guishu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-53.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ “Peng Bingnan fandong huidaomen an [Peng Bingnan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z3-1-376.

¹⁰² “Zhang Tiansheng fandong daoshou an [Zhang Tiansheng Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z3-1-158.

¹⁰³ “Peng Bingnan fandong huidaomen an [Peng Bingnan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z3-1-376.

Chapter 2: A Divided County: Xiedou, Factional Competition, and the Local Huidaomen in Poyang

Local self-defense associations emerged in Poyang as a protective survival strategy against widespread predatory bandit activities. But it is wrong to assume that these local associations were necessarily protective against outside threats. On the contrary, once these local associations gained power in Poyang and became an integral part of people's everyday life, they began engaging in local conflicts frequently through the use of violence, coercion, or even predatory strategies.

This chapter examines the two major forms of internal conflicts in Poyang: *xiedou* and factional competition. Local huidaomen associations, including self-defense associations and a few other new voluntary associations, became the vehicle that local elites and interest groups used to compete with one another. In many cases, the role of these local huidaomen associations transformed from protective to predatory and became a critical factor that disturbed the stability and security of the local communities. All these conflicts and local huidaomen associations with divergent and conflicting interests created serious splits within Poyang County.

Xiedou and the Proliferation of Self-Defense Associations

Xiedou, the most commonly used abbreviation of “*chixie xiangdou*” (to seize weapons and fight one another), was a widespread form of violence in rural areas in Chinese history.¹ In the Western scholarship on China, *xiedou* is often translated as “feuding” or “lineage feuding,”

highlighting such a phenomenon as a form of collective violence based on the boundary of kinship and bloodline.

Xiedou as a social phenomenon was first known to Western scholarship through anthropologists such as Maurice Freedman because lineage organization was the dominant theme in the field of Chinese anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s. In his influential *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*, Freedman defines a feud as hostility between lineages, although he does not use the Chinese term “xiedou” specifically.² Freedman notices that villages in Southeastern China were more like a kind of embattled settlement with warlike architecture where a large family or clan usually resided in as they feuded with other clans or families.³ Freedman also emphasizes that feuding always begins with an oath before the ancestors. If the two or more lineages at feuding were involved in cross-lineage marriage, the oath would state that no bribes would be exchanged and they would become direct enemies.⁴ Freedman’s early endeavor correctly captures the nature of xiedou as a result of China’s rural social organization that was firmly built on the same surname or same clan.

Since the late imperial period, rural residents had been equally familiar with the enduring and endemic problems of banditry and xiedou. Although xiedou seemed to be a natural part of traditional Chinese society that was largely built on lineage organizations, it also shows the weakness of China’s bureaucratic system that was not able to rule the local society effectively before the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949. During the Qing Dynasty, according to historian Harry Lamley, the government considered xiedou a form of private conflict that differed fundamentally from other types of social unrest such as banditry and rebellion.⁵ Therefore, local officials intentionally avoided intervening in the private sphere or reporting the cases to higher authorities. Moreover, lineage leaders involved in the xiedou often

bribed the local officials in order to avoid turning their conflicts into formal criminal cases.⁶ Thus, under such a condition of lax management from the government, xiedou often led to terrible consequences for the parties involved both physically and mentally.⁷ Lucien Bianco argues that xiedou in the first half of the twentieth century shows considerable continuity from the late imperial time, including the state's inability to respond to local disputes effectively. What was new in the twentieth century, according to Bianco, was "the demographic surge and the resulting increase in density."⁸

Xiedou became an even more serious problem after the fall of the Qing Dynasty. Technological advancement gradually introduced modern weapons into xiedou. Even during the Qing Dynasty, professional mercenaries with firearms were widely hired to participate in xiedou.⁹ Xiedou was not necessarily a single round of armed conflicts between lineages. In many cases, suspicion and hatred produced in one xiedou often developed into a vicious cycle of revenge between lineages that could potentially last for decades or even centuries. "Subsequent disputes were apt to revive old controversies, rekindle familiar patterns of revenge, and thus give rise to new feud cycles."¹⁰

Although participants in xiedou considered the use of violence as an integral part of maintaining their lineages' prestige, the direct causes of xiedou were predominantly material. Lucien Bianco's asserts that the vast majority of the xiedou in the first half of the twentieth century were conflicts over the use of natural resources or goods produced by humans. Bianco also notices that conflicts linked to water showed an unusually high frequency as the causes of xiedou due to the fact that ownership over water resources was volatile in nature and inappropriate handling of a water project in one community often led to severe consequences in another.¹¹

In Poyang County, most of the xiedou cases resulted from conflicts between lineages over material stakes. Among the most dominant material causes of xiedou were ownership of water properties, baojia affiliations, and factional competition over elections.¹² The only symbolic cause of xiedou in Poyang was revenge over the “blood debts” in the previous xiedou. In fact, even these xiedou cases with strong symbolic meanings often had resulted from material conflicts. Still, hatred as a consequence of death in xiedou gave rise to non-material incentives behind violence and led to a new cycle of xiedou as revenge. What was unconventional but not surprising in the xiedou cases in Poyang was the active participation of self-defense associations that were initially organized to defend the communities against bandits. Local martial arts teachers became martial arts careerists who promoted the use of force whenever lineage conflicts occurred.

The Polder Problem and Xiedou

As Lucien Bianco points out, conflicts related to water resources frequently led to xiedou in rural China during the twentieth century. Neighboring China’s largest freshwater lake Poyang Lake, Poyang County has undoubtedly witnessed an incomparably high intensity of xiedou activities because of ownership conflicts over the Poyang Lake. The single paramount lake property conflict was the unclear ownership of polder lands surrounding the Poyang Lake.

Polder refers to the lowland reclaimed from the sea, a lake, or a river that is protected by dikes. Through dike building projects, the new dikes increase the water level of the lake and create room for new land that could be cultivated at the cost of shrinking the size of the lake. Chinese scholar Wu Zhi studies the ecological consequence of building dikes and polder lands along the Poyang Lake as “*nongjin yutui*” (agriculture developing while fishery shrinking),

highlighting the tendency of lake districts' being transformed into crop farming communities in China's agricultural development.¹³

Building dikes and turning lakes and rivers into polder lands along the Poyang Lake and its tributary rivers have a long history. As early as the Latter Han Dynasty in the First Century, local officials in Jiangxi Province already started to build dikes in Nantangwan on the Poyang Lake in Nanchang (Nanchang is now the provincial capital of Jiangxi). Such practice continued in both the Tang Dynasty and the Yuan Dynasty. By the Yuan Dynasty, the dikes in Nantangwan were already dozens of *li* in length.¹⁴ The first polder along the Poyang Lake appeared in 1499 during the early Ming Dynasty.¹⁵ With the large-scale migrations from Northern China to the South during the Ming Dynasty, building dikes and cultivating polder lands along the Poyang Lake became a routine for rural residents in the Poyang Lake area. Among all the jurisdictions along the Poyang Lake, Yugan County, Poyang County, Nanchang County, and Xinjian County have the largest numbers of dikes and polders.¹⁶ Poyang County witnessed the most intensive dike building projects during the reigns of the Chenghua Emperor, Hongzhi Emperor, and Jiajing Emperor in the Ming Dynasty. In 1643 under the last Ming Emperor Chongzhen's reign, Poyang County already had 22 dikes of over 425 *li* long, which had made room for over 164,700 *mu* of land that could be cultivated.¹⁷ Constructions on the Poyang Lake during the Ming Dynasty have basically shaped the size of dikes and polder lands surrounding the Poyang Lake today.

During both the Qing Dynasty and the Republican era, very few new dikes were constructed. Local officials paid more attention to the maintenance of the existing dikes and consolidated the old constructions. The size of all the polder lands in the 1930s was only 3.1% larger than the size during the Wanli Emperor's reign in the late Ming Dynasty. In May of 1949, the entire Jiangxi Province had over 531 dikes of 3,310 kilometers and 4.4 million *mu* of polder

lands.¹⁸ In Poyang County alone, there were 71 dikes in 1949.¹⁹ Although new constructions along the Poyang Lake slowed down significantly after the Ming Dynasty, polders had already become one of the most reliable spaces for farming. In Yugan County, for instance, during Tongzhi Emperor's reign in the late Qing Dynasty, Yugan had over 196,000 mu of polders, accounting for 29.18% of all the cultivatable 673,527 mu of farmland in the entire county.²⁰ Cultivating polders was one of the driving forces behind agricultural development in Jiangxi Province.

Ownership and management issues over the dikes and polder lands were troublesome problems for both the government and rural residents. The Poyang Lake, as a public resource, never had any clear formal jurisdictional boundaries.²¹ In other words, the water and related resources were, in theory, open to everybody. Although both the Qing government and the Nationalist Government consolidated the dikes along the Poyang Lake, it could not change the fact that increasing the water level in the lake always poses threats to the surrounding area. When the flood destroyed the dikes, former polder lands cultivated near the dikes would undoubtedly be destroyed. Although people usually rebuilt the old dikes, the shape of the dikes and the size of the polder lands were constantly changing. Moreover, in order to expand the polder lands and prevent the flood, local people sometimes built a few layers of dikes, and the space between dikes became the new polder land. Polder land is, in nature, not a stable type of farmland.

With the dramatic increase of polder lands since the Ming Dynasty, demand for fertilizer also became a pressing issue for the farmers. Along the Poyang Lake, local residents realized the grasslands around the lake and on the small islands inside the lake are excellent sources of fertilizer. But the problem was who owned the grasslands? The grasslands were also a type of public resource. The situation got even worse due to the fact that the Poyang Lake is a seasonal

lake. The water level in the lake rises and falls dramatically in different seasons and different years when the amount of rainfall alters. Thus, the locations and sizes of grasslands were also changing constantly, making it impossible to regulate the ownership of the grasslands. Although both the Ming and Qing governments intervened in the grasslands disputes multiple times and tried to draw clear boundaries of grassland ownership between counties, it did not solve the problem at all. A large number of xiedou occurred during the Qing Dynasty and the Republican era because of grasslands ownership issues.²²

Without clear regulations from the government, ownership of water resources was often determined by the power of the nearby lineages. From the late Qing Dynasty to the Republican era, dominant lineages usually controlled a large portion of the polders and grasslands privately. When the power of several big lineages was in equilibrium, the public water resources nearby often became the wild area that nobody was permitted to possess privately. Changes in the lineage's power would also lead to the breakdown of the equilibrium and new tensions. From 1942 to 1949, for instance, Cao Haosen from Duchang County became the Provincial Governor of Jiangxi. Prominent lineages from Duchang expanded their "territories" along the Poyang Lake aggressively, and no other lineage was able to compete with them.²³

Other major lakes in China show similar patterns of conflicts as the Poyang Lake. Peter Perdue's case study of Dongting Lake in Hunan Province also suggests that polder land was extraordinarily fertile and attracted new people to the area. Polders in the lowland always fell under the control of powerful local landlords.²⁴ The Dongting Lake was also linked to many feuds produced by the undefined boundaries of lake grasslands.²⁵ During the Qing Dynasty, Perdue points out, dike building in Hunan went through three stages: official dikes, people's dikes, and private (illegal) dikes.²⁶ Construction usually began with funds from the government.

But once the locals realized the unprecedented material interests behind the dikes, private projects entered and flourished. The 1740 edict of exempting new polders from taxation further encouraged the proliferation of dike building.²⁷ With participation from various players and interest groups on dike building, cultivating new polders, as well as competing for limited grasslands, xiedou among lineages with conflicting interests seemed ineluctable.

In Poyang County, competition over the polder land was a major cause of xiedou between lineages during the Republican era. The violent nature of xiedou further intensified the militarization of the society originally as a response to bandit activities. In the Hongjiatan area in Northern Poyang County adjacent to the Poyang Lake, for example, competition for polder land not only led to frequent xiedou activities but also the proliferation of local self-defense associations.

During February of 1937, a xiedou broke out between the Peng lineage and the Hong lineage in Hongjiatan because of both lineages' attempt to control the polder land.²⁸ In order to expand their power, the Peng lineage allied with the Cao lineage and the Xu lineage, while the Hong lineage allied with the Zhou lineage. Twenty-four people were killed in the first xiedou between the two sides in February.²⁹ Bosses within the Peng lineage decided to militarize their lineage and invite martial arts masters to teach them how to fight and practice invulnerability rituals. The Peng lineage invited Jin Deshan, who had just become the new grand master of the Yellow Crane Society in 1936 (see chapter one), to Hongjiatan and helped the Peng lineage build their own Yellow Crane Society. Jin Deshan set up the first Yellow Crane assembly hall in Peng Guishui's home and trained twenty-six students as the first group of disciples in the Peng lineage. During the following year in 1938, Jin Deshan came to Hongjiatan again and established two new Yellow Crane assembly halls with more than thirty disciples in the Peng lineage.³⁰ In

1939, the second xiedou caused by the polder land conflict broke out between the two lineages. At least one person from the Peng lineage was killed in the xiedou.³¹ Jin Deshan visited the Peng lineage for the last time in 1944 and taught some twenty more students within the two 1938 assembly halls.³²

“Blood debt” resulting from xiedou appears to be a driving motivation for people to join the self-defense associations. Peng Jiamao from the Peng lineage joined the Yellow Crane Society as one of the first group of students. His father was killed in the first xiedou between the two lineages. Although Peng Jiamao had no formal appointment within the Yellow Crane Society, he was one of the most enthusiastic students. He also helped the martial arts teachers preach in the nearby villages.³³ Peng Jiawang joined the Yellow Crane Society in 1938 also because his father was killed in the first xiedou. He admitted that his motivation was simply hatred and revenge.³⁴ Although there were only two xiedou between the Peng lineage and Hong lineage in total, males in the Peng lineage considered joining the Yellow Crane Society and protecting the Peng family from other lineages as part of their lineage culture.³⁵

The emergence of the Yellow Crane Society in the Peng lineage led to a contagion effect of learning the Yellow Crane martial arts among many neighboring lineages. Peng Guixiang, who joined the Yellow Crane Society in 1937 following the first xiedou between the Peng lineage and Hong lineage, was appointed as the schoolmaster of the first Yellow Crane assembly hall. From 1938 to 1949, Peng Guixiang introduced Jin Deshan and the Lama to over eleven nearby villages and lineages. Jin and the Lama taught the Yellow Crane techniques at these communities and helped them establish their own Yellow Crane organizations. Material incentives played an essential role in Peng Guixiang’s “advertising” the Yellow Crane techniques. When Jin Deshan and the Lama went to one community and taught the Yellow Crane

techniques, they often received one *dan* of grain as honorarium. Those who introduced Jin and the Lamé would usually get one-third of the payment and share it with the members within their own assembly halls.³⁶ In another case, Peng Wanggui from the Peng lineage joined the Yellow Crane Society in 1938. He fought during the second *xiedou* between the Peng and Hong lineages. Then, in 1948, at the invitation of the Zheng lineage, Peng Wanggui led his own Yellow Crane Society in a *xiedou* against the Xiong lineage, claiming five or six fatalities.³⁷ Although it is unknown whether Peng Wanggui had received any material benefit from the Zheng lineage, local self-defense associations indeed became “professional mercenaries” and a dominant actor in *xiedou* conflicts between lineages in Poyang County.

Baojia Conflicts and Xiedou

As we have mentioned in Chapter 1, the Nationalist Government in Jiangxi Province reinvented the Baojia System as a response to the communist movement in 1931. From the perspective of the government, the new baojia would help in militarizing the rural society and routinizing forceful conscription during times of warfare. As we have seen in Chapter 1 as well, the new Baojia was loosely regulated. Corruption of the local baojia leaders might, in many cases, deteriorate the people’s livelihood and further destabilize the rural society (such as the case of Cao Mapi’s becoming a bandit in Chapter 1).

The 1930s and 1940s witnessed dramatic changes in the political structure of the Nationalist Government at various levels. Chinese historian Wang Qisheng divides local governance under the Nationalist Government’s rule from 1927 to 1949 into three periods: first, alleged self-governance (1927 – 1934); second, rebuilding the Baojia (1934 – 1939); third, the new county system (1939 – 1949).³⁸ With the implementation of the new Baojia System as a

national policy in 1934, the Nationalist Government established the district administration (*qu*) below the county level. It was the very first time that the bureaucratic power of the state penetrated below the county level.³⁹ During the last phase from 1939 to 1949, Wang points out, the Nationalist Government's bureaucratic power reached an unprecedented level and incorporated the leaders of the bao (*baozhang*) into its bureaucracy. And the *baozhang* was immune from military service from 1942 onward.⁴⁰

Although the bao became part of the Chinese bureaucracy in the 1940s, the role of the bao leaders was very ambiguous and controversial. Under the new county system after 1939, a bao office was established. Under the bao office, there was also a bao meeting where the representatives of the bao and *jia* met with the current *baojia* leaders. The *baozhang* was usually elected from the representatives and the representatives were elected from the ordinary *baojia* members.⁴¹ Bao leaders' role remains as a broker between the state and the society. And the bao leaders were mostly predatory "entrepreneurial brokers" representing the interests of the state and the brokers themselves, in contrast to the interests of the community under the brokers' control (e.g. the gentry in late imperial China).⁴² As the government officials at the lowest level, *Baozhang* received very little income from the Nationalist Government. Corruption under such a condition with few effective regulations was unavoidable (see chapter one). Wang Qisheng suggests that *baozhang* was continually facing a dilemma: the *baozhang* had to choose from protecting the local community from state extraction or fulfilling the *baozhang*'s personal needs at the expense of the local people. Under such pressure, local elites with high prestige were not eager to choose the career of becoming a *baozhang*. As a result, those who became *baozhang* in the end were often those who had opportunistic minds with little social prestige.⁴³ Becoming a

baozhang was a career to make a fortune and expand his or his family power at the local level, although it was not considered a prestigious job.

During the late 1940s in Poyang County, a series of xiedou took place because of conflicts caused by baojia affiliations and leadership. The xiedou between the Zheng lineage and the Xiong lineage was one of the most bloody and notorious. In this case, both lineages invited outside martial arts teachers and established their own self-defense associations.

This xiedou began with existing lineage conflicts. Powerful bosses from the Zheng Village (Zheng lineage), Xiong Village (Xiong lineage), and Caoli Village (Li lineage) had been competing with one another for years by the time of the xiedou in the 1940s. Both the Zheng and Xiong lineages were large and powerful. They frequently manipulated their power and bullied the smaller villages nearby. The Zheng lineage was the most aggressive one.⁴⁴ During March of 1948, the Xiao lineage was originally part of a jia under the Li lineage's bao. The Xiao lineage was a small lineage with only eight households next to the Caoli Village. Powerful bosses from the Caoli Village urged the Xiao lineage to detach from the Caoli Village's baojia unit and become an independent jia. Then the Xiao lineage would have to be responsible for all the taxation and military conscription as a complete jia. The Xiao lineage rejected and complained that most jia had over twenty households. The Xiao lineage simply could not afford to be an independent jia.⁴⁵ Then leaders of the Xiao lineage went to the Zheng Village for help, fearing that the Caoli Village might seek revenge against them. Zheng Jindong and Zheng Runqiu, who were both leaders of the Zheng lineage, decided to incorporate the Xiao lineage into an existing jia under the Zheng lineage's bao. The Zheng lineage's plan was that by enlarging the size of the Zheng lineage's bao through absorbing the Xiao lineage, the Zheng lineage leaders would have a

higher possibility of being elected as the bao representatives and further expand the power of the Zheng lineage.

As the Zheng lineage's most potent rival lineage, the Xiong lineage was outraged by the Zheng lineage's expansive plan and allied with the Caoli Village to counterattack together. During the evening of March 11, more than twenty people from both the Xiong lineage and the Li lineage (mostly Xiong lineage) ambushed three Zheng lineage leaders on their way back to the Zheng Village from work. They beat both Zheng Jindong and Zheng Runqiu to death. Zheng Jinpei, who was also a local boss from the Zheng lineage, was injured but lucky enough to escape and ran back to the Zheng Village. From this point onward, both sides began the preparation for xiedou.⁴⁶

The Xiong lineage quickly invited a few Big Sword Society masters to their village and established their own Big Sword assembly halls. During the first xiedou in April after the death of Zheng Jindong and Zheng Runqiu, the Zheng lineage chased a group of Xiong lineage Big Sword Society members into a mountain. But it was a trap. The Xiong lineage Big Sword Society killed two people from the Zheng lineage without severe casualties. The Zheng lineage was totally enraged because four people from their lineage had been killed by the Xiong lineage, but the people were also intimidated by the Big Sword Society's invulnerability rituals.

Zheng lineage leaders sought every opportunity to avenge and strengthen the military power of their lineage. In May, the Zheng lineage first built a self-defense team guarding their village and fields, but no xiedou broke out. A few days later, a fisherman from the Tongjatan area (where the xiedou between the Peng and Hong lineages took place) told the Zheng lineage people that the Peng lineage had learnt the Yellow Crane techniques and sought revenge against the Hong lineage successfully. The Zheng lineage immediately sent a delegation of four lineage

leaders to the Peng lineage and invited seven Yellow Crane teachers to the Zheng Village, including the Lama. On May 28, the seven teachers built two Yellow Crane assembly halls in the Zheng Village and held a big opening ceremony with seventy-two new students. They also appointed the leaders of the Zheng lineage Yellow Crane Society based on the criteria of wisdom, education, and courage. During the following seven days, the seven teachers taught the Zheng lineage people how to spell charms, worship deities, practice invulnerability rituals, as well as fighting techniques.⁴⁷

During June of 1948, more than eighty Zheng lineage Yellow Crane Society members and over one hundred and fifty non-members marched to the Xiong Village with weapons and shields, firmly believing in the effectiveness of the Yellow Crane techniques they had just learnt. They strictly followed the rituals of the Yellow Crane Society and fought bravely against the Xiong lineage. The xiedou began around eight o'clock in the morning and lasted for three hours. The Zheng lineage won the xiedou this time. Seven people from the Xiong lineage alliance were killed, including four people from the Xiong lineage and three people from the Li lineage. The Zheng lineage lost three people in the battle as well. The Zheng lineage's very first victory attracted more people into the Yellow Crane Society. More than ten young people joined the Yellow Crane immediately after this xiedou. In 1948, large-scale xiedou between the two sides occurred three times; small-scale xiedou took place more than ten times.⁴⁸ The Zheng lineage even used a machine gun during the two xiedou in September of 1948 and burnt several houses in the Xiong Village. But one Zheng lineage schoolmaster Zheng Wenxiang was killed in the xiedou during September, which had terribly discouraged the people's belief in the Yellow Crane Society's invulnerability rituals. People from the Zheng lineage gradually lost interest in the Yellow Crane Society.⁴⁹

Martial Arts Networks and Xiedou

Although both xiedou cases above were directly caused by competition over material interests, the participation of the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society had obviously intensified the level of violence in xiedou and vitalized the enthusiasm of the xiedou participants. In these xiedou cases, we can see a clear network of martial arts teachers that initially began their careers against banditry threats but later turned to other forms of violent conflict. The job of a martial arts teacher, such as Jin Deshan and the Lamé, was by nature not associated with any moral obligation in maintaining peace of the community. Most martial arts teachers were careerists who relied on their specialties to make a living and expand their economic interests. Consequently, whenever there was a need for professional training in martial arts, there was the presence of martial arts teachers.

After the death of the first Yellow Crane grandmaster Xiong Xinzhai in 1936, the new leaders Jin Deshan and the Lamé were more active and expansive than their predecessors. Jin Deshan participated in building all the Yellow Crane assembly halls in the Peng lineage. When the Peng lineage Yellow Crane schoolmaster Peng Guixiang introduced the Yellow Crane techniques to the nearby communities, both Jin Deshan and the Lamé joined and taught new students eagerly (see table below).⁵⁰ The 1945 new assembly hall established by Jin Deshan in Sanmiaoqian, for example, was also for the purpose of xiedou. The Sanmiaoqian Village and Yinjiagou Village were competing for the grassland that could be used for feeding oxen. After an initial xiedou broke out in 1943, people from Sanmiaoqian invited Jin Deshan and established their own Yellow Crane Society to fight against the Yinjiagou Village.⁵¹

Table 3: New Yellow Crane Assembly Halls Established by Jie Deshan and the Lame

Time	Leadership	Location
1938	Jin Deshan	Huang Lineage
1944	Jin Deshan	Cao Jiaju
1944	Jin Deshan	Shangmadun
1944	Jin Deshan	Xiamadun
1944	Jin Deshan	Sunjiaju
1945	Jin Deshan	Sanmiaoqian
1947	Jin Deshan, the Lame	Cheng Lineage
1947 ⁵²	The Lame	Zheng Lineage
1947	Jin Deshan, the Lame	Peng Village in Baotian
1948	The Lame	Peng Lineage in Tuanlin
1949	The Lame	Xu Village in Tuanlin

Jin Deshan was most active at the early stage of the Yellow Crane Society’s expansion from 1938 to 1945. Then the Lame gradually took over the job of establishing new assembly halls. The Lame even led the Yellow Crane Society and fought against the People’s Liberation Army when the Communists arrived in 1949 (see chapter 3). From 1947 to 1949, the Lame not only built several new assembly halls with the help from the Peng lineage but also resided in the Peng lineage. When the Zheng lineage went to the Peng lineage to learn the Yellow Crane, they called the Lame “Mr. Xiong of the Peng lineage”.⁵³ Under the guidance of both Jin Deshan and the Lame, the Peng lineage became the center of the Yellow Crane Society in Poyang. Among the seven Yellow Crane teachers who went to the Zheng lineage, six were Jin Deshan and the

Lame's students in the Peng lineage. Four of the Peng lineage Yellow Crane teachers were famous and charismatic leaders in Poyang known as the "Four Bodhisattvas" (see chapter 1). They were good at spirit possession and became the firmest anti-communist leaders in 1949 (see chapter 3).

Obviously, not all martial arts networks were built by local big names like Jin Deshan and the Lame. Some poor people also chose the path of becoming martial arts teachers and made a living from it. Such was the case of Dong Bakui. Born in 1917, Dong was from a poor peasant family. Similar to many poor people in rural China, Dong joined a lake bandit gang in 1940 and robbed several ships on the Poyang Lake in the following years. In June of 1946, Dong quit his bandit career and joined the Big Sword Society with thirty-eight people. Three months later, in November, the Jiang lineage in the Tuanlin area invited Dong's Big Sword Society to participate in a xiedou against the Zhang lineage. Dong killed one person from the Zhang lineage in the xiedou. In 1947, Dong spent the whole year as a wandering Big Society teacher in Poyang, teaching martial arts. In April of 1948, one month after the Xiong lineage murdered Zheng Jindong and Zheng Runqiu from the Zheng lineage, the Xiong lineage invited Dong and his Big Sword Society to prepare xiedou against the Zheng lineage.⁵⁴ Then, as I suggest above, the Xiong lineage's Big Sword Society killed two people from the Zheng lineage and finally led to the participation of the Yellow Crane Society in the xiedou.

Although xiedou was nothing new in the rural society in China, the proliferation of the self-defense associations had significantly intensified xiedou as a social problem. During the 1950s, when people talked about the xiedou between the Zheng and Xiong lineages, sometimes they referred to it as the xiedou between the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword. Xiedou and the self-defense associations became a new pair of symbiotic relations: participants in xiedou needed

the self-defense associations to improve their power, while the martial arts teachers in the self-defense associations needed xiedou to promote their careers. Such reciprocal “benefits” turned violence into a legitimate standard of power in rural society. Under a society with little state power at the local level, it was the use of violence that established the equilibrium between different interest groups.

Factional Competition and Huidaomen in Poyang

Among the three major material causes of xiedou in Poyang, factional competition over elections was the only one that was new to China under the Nationalist Government’s rule.⁵⁵ Factional competition in Poyang not only led to xiedou between different interest groups as a sign of the violent antagonism within Chinese culture but also led to various forms of competition (both violent and nonviolent) over limited resources among the elites.

China, from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republican era, experienced dramatic changes in the role of local elites. State power under China’s imperial system reached its apex during the mid-eighteenth century. With the rise of both internal and external unrest since the late-eighteenth century, especially large-scale rebellions and foreign imperialism, state power began to shrink. The local elites’ growing power started to break down the existing balance between state bureaucracy and local authorities. Mary Rankin’s study on elite activism in late Qing Zhejiang Province shows that the post-Taiping Rebellion reconstruction in Southern China since 1865 promoted the proliferation of non-governmental organizations that had ultimately undermined the state-societal balance and the authority of the imperial government.⁵⁶ Keith Schoppa further points out that local elite political development was significant to all the subsequent regimes after the Qing Dynasty. “The Guomindang, Japanese (in some areas), and Communists either had

to build on the elite structures, experiences, and processes that had developed in various zones or had to deal with their specific consequences.⁵⁷ Schoppa then recognizes five defining aspects of elite political development in the early twentieth century China: the significance of elite institutionalization, the increased importance of the public sphere in functional responsibilities, the significance of voluntary sociopolitical associations, increased elite participation in political processes, and the increasing elite identification with particular political space.⁵⁸ The general trend of the shrinking state power since the late Qing Dynasty gave rise to the active participation of local elites in politics. It effectively facilitated the emergence of a public sphere. Non-state actors flourished in local governance and voluntarily responded to various social problems, including, as we have seen, bandits and lineage conflicts.

With China being reunited under the rule of the Nationalist Government in 1927, although more nominal than actual in many cases, the Nationalist Government pushed forward various democratic reforms and called for the active participation of local actors in all levels of elections. Although at first glance these reform plans could officially incorporate local elites into state power and, ideally, return power to the people as Sun Yat-sen had proposed, elections finally turned out to be the detonator of serious local conflicts.

In the case of Poyang County, elections turned the local elites into clear-cut political factions, all believing that victory in the election would guarantee the prosperity of specific interest groups against their potential “enemies.” In many cases, competition between factions over elections became life and death struggles that involved the frequent use of force and violence. Similar to the *xiedou* we have discussed before, some of the local self-defense associations inevitably engaged in the factional competition. In other cases, political factions created new voluntary associations to maintain, expand their power, or to defend themselves

from other factions. All these existing and new voluntary associations were all suppressed by the CCP in the 1950s under the label of “huidaomen.” The elections did not turn out to democratize the Chinese society, but instead significantly worsened the harmony of the local communities and further split the county.

Political Factions in Poyang

Three major political factions in Poyang that competed with one another for a series of elections at different levels from 1936 to 1948. These factions were the Jiang Faction under the leadership of Jiang Bozhang, Zhou Faction under the guidance of Zhou Yongneng, and the Hu Faction under the direction of Hu Puqing. Involved in both local politics and national politics, these men all became high-ranking officials in the Nationalist Government. They all moved to Taiwan after the CCP took over the mainland in 1949. The initial stage of the factional competition in Poyang began with Jiang and Zhou. Hu later joined the game and became an unstable factor who sometimes allied with one of the existing two factions and sometimes on his own.

Born in Poyang County in 1885, Jiang Bozhang was the founder of the local KMT and enjoyed high social prestige among the local elites. He was one of Sun Yat-sen’s earliest followers who joined Sun’s Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui*) before the 1911 Revolution.⁵⁹ In 1922, Jiang was involved in the early preparation for the Northern Expedition in Jiangxi Province. He secretly purchased guns and developed a small-size army in the Poyang region.⁶⁰ In 1924, the KMT’s Central Committee in Canton reorganized its structure and sent Jiang back to Poyang again to build the KMT network in Poyang. Jiang arrived in Poyang in April of 1924 and secretly developed his KMT networks in several schools. During July of 1924,

the underground KMT Poyang branch was officially established under the leadership of Jiang. During the same year, Jiang was elected as one of the three representatives from Poyang, who attended the First KMT Jiangxi Provincial Representative Assembly. By the end of 1925, the KMT's Poyang branch had 153 party members. The number went up to 387 by the end of 1926. The KMT's Northern Expedition Army reached Poyang during November of 1926. The KMT Poyang branch then began to function publicly.⁶¹ The Republican-era *Poyang County Gazetteer* speaks highly of Jiang's contribution to the establishment of the Nationalist Government in Poyang. It specifically points out it was Jiang who prepared everything for the Northern Expedition's success in Poyang.⁶² Jiang was then appointed as the County Magistrate of Poyang from 1929 to 1932.⁶³

In contrast to Jiang's success as a local godfather figure in Poyang, Zhou Yongneng played a more active role in national and international politics. Zhou was born to a large gentry family in Poyang in 1895. Zhou participated in the 1911 Revolution as a teenager and then was involved in several failed small-scale assassination and rebellion attempts. In 1916, Zhou met Sun Yat-sen in Tokyo and joined the Chinese Revolutionary Party (*Zhonghua gemingdang*).⁶⁴ After a failed revolution in Canton, he studied at the Huiwen University in Beijing.⁶⁵ In 1920, Zhou went to Shanghai and worked at the General Affairs Department of the KMT's central headquarters. During the same year, Sun Yat-sen sent Zhou to Cuba to establish the KMT's Cuban branch and develop oversea KMT networks in the Americas. Zhou returned to China in 1922 and received several appointments in the military. In 1926, Zhou was appointed as the secretary of the Northern Expedition Army's Command Headquarters and returned to Jiangxi with the army.⁶⁶ Zhou was then appointed as the Minister of the Department of Finance in Northern Jiangxi and the Supervisor of the Customs Services of the City of Jiujiang.⁶⁷ During his

appointment, he successfully retrieved foreign concessions in Jiujiang from the British. In 1937, when the KMT Jiangxi Provincial Government was established, Zhou became the first head of the Department of Finance in Jiangxi. Then he also received several important appointments in the Central Government, Anhui Province, and Shanghai until 1949 when he moved to Taiwan.⁶⁸

Hu Puqing's fame and experience in Poyang was not comparable to Jiang Bozhang and Zhou Yongneng, but it does not suggest that Hu's faction was necessarily weaker than the other two. Hu was born in Poyang in 1908. Hu was well-educated and held a master's degree from the University of Michigan. One of Hu's most significant contributions in Poyang was to education. In 1944, Hu established the Zhengfeng High School in Poyang.⁶⁹ He invited many local elites as either the teachers or the staff of the Zhengfeng High School and built a solid foundation of his faction in Poyang.⁷⁰ Hu was not a KMT member, but ran in elections as a nominee of the relatively small Democratic Socialist Party (*Minshedang*).⁷¹ Hu's participation in various elections were all nominated by the Democratic Socialist Party. Hu also served in the Municipal Government in Nanchang (Jiangxi's provincial capital) during the late 1940s.⁷²

While the Hu Faction mainly relied on local power in Poyang, the competition between the Jiang Faction and the Zhou Faction also had its roots in the national factional conflicts among highest-ranking KMT officials. Jiang Bozhang was a firm anti-communist figure in the KMT. His power heavily rested on the Anti-Bolshevik League (AB League) in Jiangxi. The AB League was later absorbed into the Central Club Clique (CC Clique) under the leadership of the brothers Chen Guofu and Chen Lifu. Zhou Yongneng initially relied heavily on the early KMT leader Tan Yankai. After Tan's death in 1930, Zhou gradually turned to the Political Study Clique (*Zhengxuexi*).⁷³ The CC Clique and the Political Study Clique were two of the three dominant political factions within the KMT (the other one was the Whampoa Clique mainly representing

the military). The CC Clique dominated the KMT party affairs, while the Political Study Clique was the primary authority in social administration. These two factions competed with each other severely for the bureaucratic offices at all levels of the government.⁷⁴ The competition between the Jiang Faction and the Zhou Faction in Poyang was also a sign of the factional conflicts between the CC Clique and the Political Study Clique at the local level.

At the local level in Poyang, the three factions also represented the interests of elites from different geographical locations. The Jiang Faction was also known as the “Rural Faction (*xiangpai*),” mainly representing the elites outside the county seat in Poyang. In the same way, the Zhou Faction was also called the “Urban Faction (*chengpai*),” standing for the interest groups in the county seat. Jiang had an absolute advantage in the KMT party organizations in Poyang, while Zhou gained the support from the merchants and bankers in the financial sectors.⁷⁵ But the labels of “rural” and “urban” were ambiguous and had changed dramatically over time. The splits between the county seat and the surrounding rural area in Poyang had existed for centuries before the KMT factional competition emerged. Everybody in Poyang, regardless of occupation and social class, always had a clear consciousness of rural or urban identity.⁷⁶ William Rowe’s case study on Macheng County in Hubei Province shows the same pattern of tension between the rural and the urban.⁷⁷

Exchange of human resources between urban and rural Poyang was constant, especially after the Northern Expedition’s arrival and Jiang Bozhang’s becoming the county magistrate in 1929 that ended warlordism. Jiang and Zhou’s factional competition officially began in the mid-1930s. The Zhou Faction labeled themselves as the Urban Faction in the 1936 National Assembly Election, with Jiang as the Rural Faction. During the same period, there was also an independent Anti-Jiang Faction. It later joined the Zhou Faction during the Second Sino-

Japanese War. During the 1940s, Hu Puqing began his campaign for the 1947 National Assembly Election. The Hu Faction was also based in Poyang county seat. In order to expand their power in the county seat as well, the Jiang Faction allied with the Hu Faction. The new Jiang-Hu Alliance absorbed a large number of government officials in the county seat.

Competition among political factions in Poyang was intense. In Zhou Yongneng's recollection about elections in Poyang after he moved to Taiwan, he acknowledged that Poyang had a tradition of *xiedou*, and factional competition may sometimes become violent. During a 1948 election campaign, Zhou recalls, he and Jiang Bozhang all agreed not to canvass in Poyang to avoid potential violent conflict. But, blaming Jiang for breaking his promise, Zhou says, Jiang continued canvassing in Poyang and competed with him.⁷⁸

Although the three big political factions in Poyang were all named after specific individuals, it does not necessarily mean Jiang Bozhang, Zhou Yongneng, and Hu Puqing directly participated in the factional competition all the time. What associated with each political faction in Poyang were complex interest groups, including local politicians, big merchants, *baojia* groups, educational institutions, religious groups, and powerful lineages. All of these interest groups clearly labeled their own factional affiliations and chose their representatives in all levels of elections, ranging from the county elections to national elections.

Elections in Poyang

According to Sun Yat-sen's *Outline of National Reconstruction (jianguo dagang)* in 1924, the state building process in China is divided into three periods: Military State (*junzheng*) Period, Political Tutelage (*xunzheng*) Period, and Constitutional State (*xianzheng*) Period. The Political Tutelage Period began in 1928 after the KMT's reunification of China. The Party State

agenda was interrupted by the Mukden Incident in 1931. During the KMT Central Executive Committee meeting in December of 1931, the Central Executive Committee decided to organize the First National Constituent Assembly and initiate the process of the Constitutional State Period. During the 1935 Central Executive Committee meeting, the Central Executive Committee finalized the dates of the First National Constituent Assembly – November 12 of 1936. Although the First National Constituent Assembly Election did take place in 1936, the meeting was indefinitely postponed because of the war between China and Japan. After being postponed six times, the First National Constituent Assembly eventually took place on November 15 of 1946. On January 1 of 1947, the Nationalist Government officially issued the Constitution of the Republic of China. In 1948, the Nationalist Government initiated the First National Legislative Election.⁷⁹ During the same year, the Nationalist Government reelected the National Constituent Assembly.⁸⁰

The factional competition in Poyang began with the preparation for the 1936 National Constituent Assembly Election between the Jiang Faction and the Zhou Faction. Other major elections from 1936 onward included the 1944 Jiangxi Provincial Political Council Election, the 1945 Poyang County Representative Assembly Election, the 1945 Jiangxi Provincial Representative Assembly Election, the 1946 National Constituent Assembly Election, the 1948 National Legislative Election, and the 1948 Reelection of the National Constituent Assembly.⁸¹

Many lower-level elections and elections over specific governmental positions also took place during the same period from 1936 to 1948. Local elites in Poyang were widely involved in all these elections and clearly labeled their factional affiliations. An integral part of the election preparation and factional competition during this period was the participation of several

influential local voluntary associations, including the self-defense associations such as the Yellow Crane Society, and a few new voluntary associations.

Table 4: Major Elections Poyang Politicians Participated in Since 1936

Election	Year	Results
National Constituent Assembly Election	1936	Zhou Yongneng (Zhou)
Jiangxi Provincial Political Council Election	1944	Jiang Bozhang (Jiang)
Poyang County Representative Assembly Election	1945	Jiang Dajian (Jiang) – head of the Poyang Representative Assembly
Jiangxi Provincial Representative Assembly Election	1945	Hu Puqing (Hu) – Provincial Representative, Lu Guoqiang (Zhou) – Alternate Representative
National Constituent Assembly Election	1946	Zhou Yongneng (Zhou)
National Legislative Election	1948	Jiang Bozhang (Jiang), Zhou Yongneng (Zhou)
National Constituent Assembly Reelection	1948	Hu Puqing (Hu)

Self-Defense Associations in Factional Competition

Similar to the local self-defense associations' participation in *xiedou*, factional competition in Poyang did not only rely on verbal persuasion but also the use of collective violence and hiring martial arts specialists. The Yellow Crane Society directly participated in some of these factional conflicts.

In Peng Shouzu's case, his village learned the Yellow Crane Society in 1948 to protect themselves from the revenge of factional conflicts. Peng Shouzu was born in a landlord family in 1916.⁸² Peng's family background made him well-educated. From eight to fourteen, he went to a private school (*sishu*) in his village for six years. After that, he received a two-year elementary

school education and entered the No. 10 Provincial High School in Poyang. Then Peng transferred to the No. 1 Provincial High School in Nanchang in 1932. After his graduation from high school in 1937, he served in the Nanchang Municipal Government for one month and then the Jiangxi Provincial Government for five months. Because Nanchang was constantly under threat from Japanese air raids, Peng returned home to Poyang. In 1942, both the Jiang Faction and the Zhou Faction were competing for the Tianbanjie Central Elementary School. The position of the elementary school principal had been vacant for months. The school was even not able to start the new school year in September. During the same month, the district government decided to appoint a new principal with no clear factional affiliation to appease the conflicts between the two factions. Peng Shouzu became the chosen one. Peng accepted the job and tried to remain neutral to both sides.

Peng was enthusiastic about his new job and soon began raising funds to rebuild the school buildings that were destroyed during Japan's air raid. Peng's enthusiasm did not last long, however, because he met with serious problems in raising money for the school. Because of Peng's neutrality to factional competition, local interest groups did not find it beneficial to invest in the Central Elementary School at all. When a provincial inspection team arrived in the Central Elementary School, Peng was reported as having embezzled the school funds so that the reconstruction project in the school could no longer be completed. Peng was fined a large amount of money and soon resigned from the position of the school principal. But the story of factional competition in Peng's life did not end here.⁸³

Competition over elections between the Jiang Faction and Zhou Faction was very intense in the town of Taxi where Peng lived. The leader of Zhou Faction was Hu Gui, while the Jiang Faction was led by Wang Datong. Local people in the Town of Taxi all hated them. During one

of the unspecified local elections in 1948, Peng Shouzu and other elites in his village decided to be neutral again and abstained from voting for any of them. Such a decision eventually led to the revenge of Hu Gui. During May of 1948, a relative of Hu Gui, who was married to a man in Peng's village, died when she was giving birth to a child. Hu Gui accused Peng's village of having tortured the lady to death and led a large group of armed men to punish Peng's village. Hu Gui and more than one hundred armed men raided Peng's village for a whole day and killed and stole a lot of livestock in Peng's village. While they were departing, Hu Gui warned Peng that he would come again and bring more people.

In such a desperate situation, Peng Shouzu and other village leaders decided to invite outside martial arts teachers and develop their own self-defense association. Finally, they went to Hongjiatan where the xiedou between the Peng and Hong lineages took place in 1937 and invited the Peng lineage Yellow Crane Society for help. Peng Jiamao, the leader of the Peng lineage Yellow Crane Society in Hongjiagang, came to Peng Shouzu's village and trained twenty students. The conflict between Peng Shouzu's village and Hu Gui was eventually resolved peacefully through negotiation without further use of violence. The newly established Yellow Crane Society then helped Peng Shouzu's village ward off bandits in 1949.⁸⁴ Although Peng Guixiang's Yellow Crane Society did not ultimately participate in the xiedou with the Zhou Faction leader Hu Gui, it is clear that factional conflicts did add a new layer of insecurity to Poyang. Similar to the xiedou conflicts before, once the use of violence had dominated the channel of conflict resolution, the participation of local self-defense associations seemed natural and inevitable.

In Peng Guixiang's case, the participation of the Yellow Crane Society was protective in the face of possible revenge from the local Zhou Faction. In the following example, the Yellow

Crane Society's role was more predatory. In the Matian Village of the Town of Liangtian in Poyang's No. 5 District, the competition between the Jiang and Zhou Factions was extremely intense and bloody. In 1948, the local Jiang Faction leaders in the Town of Liangtian were Li Chimei and Xu Weihuang; the Zhou Faction leader was Xu Haipeng. Xu Weihuang and Xu Haipeng hated each other to the extent that both of them wanted to kill the other. During May of 1948, the Jiang Faction leaders Li Chimei and Xu Weihuang held two big banquets and invited many influential Jiang Faction people to meet. The banquets also attracted the attention of many local jobless people who wanted to work for the Jiang Faction simply to feed themselves. At that time, the local Police Station on the Tianban Road was also under the control of the Jiang Faction. The head of the Police Station, Zhou Xinghuo, was the nephew of a key Jiang Faction leader in the town of Liangtian. During August of 1948, Xu Weihuang and his younger brother Xu Qinhu asked Zhou Xinghuo if he could help them disarm all the firearms that Xu Haitian possessed and then kill him. Zhou Xinghuo took the job and led his police force to Xu Haipeng's power base in Matian Village. Unfortunately for the Jiang Faction, Xu Haipeng was aware of their plan beforehand and escaped. Zhou Xinghuo caught a few Zhou Faction followers and killed two of them. Xu Haipeng then sued the Jiang Faction in the local court (without outcome). The blood debts between the two factions elevated the existing conflict to a new level. During March of 1949, a xiedou between the two factions broke out. Even though the PLA arrived in Poyang in April and officially announced the "liberation" on May 1, the preparation for xiedou continued. Both sides hid some guns. Neither Xu Weihuang nor Xu Haipeng dared to leave their houses, fearing the opponent side may kill them. The new government detained Xu Weihuang and Xu Haipeng for their possession of firearms in May. Although both of them surrendered and gave away their guns (then they were both released), the story was not over.⁸⁵

During June and July of 1949, although the KMT military forces were all defeated by the PLA in Poyang, the local Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society fought against the PLA continuously (See Chapter 3). Xu Weihuang then decided to use the power of the Yellow Crane Society to kill Xu Haipeng. Xu Weihuang also wanted to kill Zhou Xinghuo through the power of the Yellow Crane because Zhou Xinghuo and his men turned to predatory banditry and raided the Matian Village several times for food in 1949. In early July, Xu Weihuang invited a few Yellow Crane teachers and more than one hundred Yellow Crane members to Matian Village. They successfully drove Zhou Xinghuo away from the region. Xu Haipeng escaped again before the Yellow Crane Society reached his home. Then he made a smart choice – using the power of the PLA against the Yellow Crane Society. He left the Matian Village and directly went to the PLA’s Poyang headquarters in Fuliang and reported Xu Weihuang’s Yellow Crane activities to the PLA headquarters. On July 15, the PLA arrived in Matian and suppressed Xu Weihuang’s Yellow Crane Society.⁸⁶

In the two Yellow Crane Society cases, their participation in the factional competition was fundamentally the same as the local self-defense associations’ involvement in the xiedou cases. Joining the self-defense association and teaching others the use of martial arts and violence was a good career. More importantly, there was a lucrative market that needed the professional application of force and violence. The self-defense associations in Poyang responded to that specific demand of the market. Moreover, although not all the self-defense associations directly participated in the factional competition, a number of their leaders had clear factional affiliations. Among my sample of twenty-eight Yellow Crane Society leaders from the Poyang Public Security Bureau, three belonged to the Jiang Faction, three to the Zhou Faction. Among the twenty-seven Big Sword Society leaders, five were from the Jiang Faction, two from

the Zhou Faction. Having a clear factional affiliation seems to be necessary for many local elites who wanted to expand their power and climb up the social ladder.

Table 5: Martial Arts Leaders and Their Political Factions in Poyang

	Yellow Crane Society	Big Sword Society
Total	28	27
Jiang Faction	3	5
Zhou Faction	3	2

New Local Voluntary Associations in Factional Competition

Self-defense associations were not the only group of local voluntary associations that participated in factional conflicts. In the two cases above, the Yellow Crane Society remained neutral to the factional competition *per se*. Their job was merely fighting, no matter against whom. The Yellow Crane’s involvement was usually from an outsider’s position, and possibly with high return of material benefits. The Yellow Crane’s role was quite similar to a group of professional mercenaries. In contrast to the Yellow Crane Society’s neutrality in the story, there was another group of local voluntary associations that were directly organized for the purpose of factional competition.

The first type of new voluntary associations that involved in the factional competition was merchant associations. From the very beginning, the Zhou Faction had won support from the merchants, bankers, and many other local elites in the financial sector. In order to compete with the Zhou Faction, the Jiang Faction also began to expand its power within the merchant class. The merchant class that the Jiang Faction was trying to ally with were mostly the new generation

of young merchants in Poyang. Some of them were the children of the old merchants or who had just started their businesses in Poyang. Zhou Yangfeng, a leader of the merchants within the Jiang Faction, organized a new merchant association called the Society of the God of Wealth (*Caishenhui*). In response to Zhou Yangfeng's expansion in the merchant class, the Zhou Faction leader Wang Zuqi established the Society of the Thirteen *Taibao* (*Shisan taibao*).⁸⁷ The participants in the Society of the Thirteen Taibao were mostly owners of big businesses in Poyang and the heads of other local merchant associations. In 1948, the two new associations competed with one another for the election of the mayor of the Poyang County Seat. With the support of prominent businessmen and powerful merchant associations affiliated with the Society of the Thirteen Taibao, Zhou Faction leader Wang Zuqi won the election and became the new mayor.⁸⁸

The "Thirteen Taibao" actually refers to thirteen powerful local elites in the Zhou Faction. Most of them were big merchants in Poyang. Chang Fengchun, who was known as the head of the Society of the Thirteen Taibao, is an ideal example of who was behind the Zhou Faction in the county seat. Chang was the fourth child and second oldest son from one of the biggest merchant families in Poyang. Chang's father ran the Futairen Department Store in Poyang. Chang used to be a playboy who left Poyang and spent all his money on opium and other luxuries. His father even disowned him. Chang was "lucky" because his father and his elder brother all died soon. Chang took over the business of his family and decided to change himself. He worked diligently and was extremely good at managing loans with the local banks. His business grew even bigger than in his father's time. He was also good at networking with local officials and prominent lineages. He was eager to donate money to the local government whenever there was a need. He also treated the poor generously, providing the homeless with

food and money. All these activities built him good fame in Poyang. When Wang Zuqi was running the campaign for the mayor election, Chang was his biggest supporter. The other twelve leaders of the Thirteen Taibao were also local big names who were in control of some of the critical industries in Poyang.⁸⁹

Table 6: Members of the Thirteen *Taibao*

Name	Occupation
Chen Binghui	Owner of Chendingxiang Company
Chang Fengchun	Owner of Futairen Department Store, Chairman of National Product Labor Union, Committee Member of Poyang Merchant Association
Wang Zuqi	Unknown, later elected as the Mayor of Poyang County Seat
Shi Fangxin	Owner of a cloth store
Wang Yuanzhong	Owner of Wangmacheng Pot Store
Liu Xi	Unknown
Yao Hongjun ⁹⁰	Owner of Yaobenzhao Fishery Store
Yan Fuhua	Owner of Yanshantai Company
Zhang Yuxuan	Unknown
Chen Risheng	Owner of a rice factory
Huang Shi	Owner of a cloth store
Hu Yushu	Principal of Shixing High School
Dong Zhifan	Owner of a Paint Store
Wu Liangxiang	Owner of Wushengtai Rice Company

While the Society of the Thirteen Taibao mostly represented the merchant class' support of the Zhou Faction, the Zhou Faction had an even bigger voluntary association known as the Society of Chrysanthemum. With the rise of the Hu Faction in the 1940s, the Jiang Faction eagerly cooperated with the Hu Faction in the county seat in order to expand its power outside the rural area. The Zhou Faction was undoubtedly aware of the new tension and worried about the growing influence of the Jiang-Hu Alliance in the county seat. In 1947, in preparation for the next year's elections for both mayor and the People's assembly chairmanship, the Zhou Faction established the Chrysanthemum Society. The Zhou Faction's original power base was in the county seat of Poyang. The Hu Faction's emerging power in the county seat posed a significant threat to the Zhou Faction. The predominant reason behind the founding of the Society of Chrysanthemum was to reunify the major interest groups in the county seat under the Zhou Faction's control and make specific plans for the upcoming elections. On September 15 of 1947, most Zhou Faction supporters from the county seat attended a big banquet at the home of their leader, Li Hezhi. Because the fall season was the time in traditional Chinese culture when people enjoy the beauty of the chrysanthemum flowers while having a good time with their friends and family members, they called this meeting the Society of Chrysanthemum.

People who joined the Society of Chrysanthemum came from various social backgrounds. There were in total sixty-four people at the first meeting at Li Hezhi's home. All the members within the Society of the Thirteen Taibao participated in the Society of Chrysanthemum. Besides them, other participants were mostly local merchants, high school principals and teachers, and local officials. There were five main targets in the Society of Chrysanthemum: 1. Reunite the county seat elites and organize banquets to maintain their connection; 2. Reach out to the local baojia leaders and absorb their power into the faction; 3.

Make specific plans for the upcoming local elections in 1948; 4. Resist the penetration of the Hu Faction into the county seat; 5. Brainstorm for Zhou Yongneng's campaign for the 1948 National Legislative Election. Unfortunately, the plan for establishing and maintaining the Society of the Chrysanthemum turned out to be nothing but a one-off banquet. With people from various backgrounds representing divergent interest groups, it was impossible to maintain unity within the Society of Chrysanthemum.⁹¹

Both the Society of the Thirteen Taibao and the Society of Chrysanthemum were elite voluntary associations that avoided violence, but other forms of voluntary associations in the factional competition showed a similar pattern as the self-defense associations. This was the confrontation between the Guangong Society (Zhou Faction) and the Yue Fei Society (Hu Faction).⁹²

Very little is known about the origin of the Guangong Society. The locals of Poyang said that the Guangong Society was like the Zhou Faction's private militia, and was closely related to the activities of the Big Sword Society.⁹³ Zheng Jinpei, who was the leader of Zheng lineage Yellow Crane Society that fought against the Xiong lineage Big Sword Society in the xiedou caused by baojia conflicts, was also a member of the Guangong Society in 1946 and coerced several men within the Zheng lineage to join.⁹⁴

Although the locals say the Yue Fei Society was like Hu Puqing's private militia, the Yue Fei Society was originally the private militia of a powerful local boss Yu Haicai. Yu Haicai was a doctor. He came from a big gentry family in Poyang. Most of the men in Yu's family were highly educated. In 1946, as a local gentry leader, Yu Haicai was very concerned about the problem of gambling and prostitution in rural Poyang. He invited his friend Lei Daocai, who was good at martial arts, to establish a self-defense association called the "Society of Yue Fei." Yu

Haicai's plan was about transforming those who were addicted to gambling and prostitution to martial arts. Martial arts would help them get rid of the bad habits. Moreover, the self-defense association could also help ban gambling and prostitution in the local area using force. Yu Lun, one of Yu Haicai's sons, was sickly and unhealthy. Yu Haicai told Yu Lun that he was too old to lead the Society of Yue Fei, and he expected Yu Lun could practice some martial arts to improve his health. Therefore, Yu Haicai gave the leadership of the Society of Yue Fei to Yu Lun and Lei Daocai. The Society of Yue Fei successfully drew the attention of many local men. Then Yu Lun also set up a Buddhist altar within the Society of Yue Fei so that the sect members could also practice religious worship in the sect.⁹⁵

Yu Lun was Hu Puqing's close friend and sworn brother. In 1944, when Hu Puqing was setting up the Zhengfeng High School in Poyang, Yu Lun was the co-founder of the school. Then Yu Lun became a teacher at the Zhengfeng High School. In 1947, Hu Puqing received the nomination from the Democratic Socialist Party to run his campaign for the 1948 National Constituent Assembly Reelection. Then Hu was relocated to Nanchang as a committee member within the Jiangxi Provincial Government. Hu brought Yu Lun together with him as his secretary for the election campaign. Hu then helped Yu Lun find a job in the Ministry of Examination in the Jiangxi Provincial Government. Yu Lun was also a friend of Jiang Dajian, a relative of Jiang Bozhang and one of the most influential leaders within the Jiang Faction in Poyang, when Yu was a teacher at the Zhiyang Normal College (Jiang Dajian was the principal at that time).⁹⁶ Such social connections made Yu Lun a key figure in the Jiang-Hu Alliance.

As Yu Lun's sworn brother and closest friend, Hu Puqing was able to manipulate the resources Yu Lun had for his own use. The Yue Fei Society was a big helper to Hu's Zhengfeng High School. Whenever there was an imminent need for labor in the Zhengfeng High School, the

Yue Fei Society was always there to help. When Hu Puqing was elected as the representative of the 1948 National Constituent Assembly, the Yue Fei Society prepared a fancy banquet when Hu Puqing arrived at his home in Poyang. In 1949, when the Nationalist Government was retreating from Poyang, it was also the Yue Fei Society who helped Hu Puqing pack everything and accompanied him out of Poyang (then Hu Puqing moved to Taiwan). More importantly, for Hu Puqing, the Yue Fei Society directly participated in the factional competition with the Zhou Faction.⁹⁷

In Hu Puqing's campaign for the 1948 National Constituent Assembly Reelection, his opponent was Yu Hua from the Zhou Faction. Yu Hua was also the head of the Guangong Society.⁹⁸ The competition between Hu Puqing and Yu Hua eventually elevated to the confrontation between Yu Lun's Yue Fei Society and Yu Hua's Guangong Society. During the fall of 1947, Yu Hua's men quarreled with Yu Lun's men because of some issues related to cutting firewood. Yu Lun first arrived and was trying to stop the quarrel. Yu Lun then lost his temper, however, and slapped one of Yu Hua's men in the face. Such an incident almost led to a xiedou between the two sides.⁹⁹ Although no direct xiedou broke out between the Yue Fei Society and the Guangong Society, the atmosphere in Poyang between the two parties was agitated and sensitive. Yu Ximing, a participant in the Yue Fei Society, recalls later that people within both the Yue Fei Society and the Guangong Society were trained hard in case a direct conflict broke out between the two sides.¹⁰⁰ The local people were all anxious about the potential violent confrontation between them.¹⁰¹ The tension between Yu Lun and Yu Hua even continued in the new regime after the CCP established the new order in Poyang. Both Yu Lun and Yu Hua often voluntarily went to the new government denouncing the opposing side's wrongdoings in

the old regime. Yu Hua also reported to the new government multiple times that Yu Lun was hiding firearms secretly at his home.¹⁰²

Factional competition in Poyang penetrated almost every aspect of society. Even people within the local religious associations had clear factional affiliations too. Xiedou cases did take place between different lineages and baojia affiliations because of factional conflicts.¹⁰³ In some extreme cases, two assassination attempts against Poyang County Magistrates also took place because of factional conflicts. In 1944, the County Magistrate Ding Guoping was killed in an assassination.¹⁰⁴ Although the KMT's plan of a constitutional state reform attracted local elites' active participation in all levels of elections, it also promoted the use of illegal violence outside the outlawed sphere. Campaigns for elections and the subsequent factional competition completely divided Poyang into a state of chaos.

¹ The translation is from Lamley, "*Hsieh-tou: The Pathology of Violence in Southeastern China*," 3.

² See Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*, Index.

³ Ibid, 8.

⁴ Ibid, 5 and 105.

⁵ Lamley, "*Hsieh-tou: The Pathology of Violence in Southeastern China*," 1.

⁶ Ibid, 6.

⁷ The authorities also viewed *xiedou* as a sign of moral degeneration, see Lamley "Lineage Feuding in Southern Fujian and Eastern Guangdong Under Qing Rule," 36.

⁸ Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party*, 180.

⁹ Lamley "Lineage Feuding in Southern Fujian and Eastern Guangdong Under Qing Rule," 49.

¹⁰ Lamley, "*Hsieh-tou: The Pathology of Violence in Southeastern China*," 7.

¹¹ Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party*, 183.

¹² I will leave the discussion of factional competition over elections to the second part of this chapter.

¹³ See Wu, "Nong jin yu tui:" mingqing yilai poyanghu shengtai yu shehui bianqian ["The Shrinking of Fishery and the Development of Agriculture:" Ecological and Social Changes of the Poyang Lake Since the Ming and Qing Dynasties].

¹⁴ Wu, "Ershi shiji xiabanye poyanghuqu de 'nongjin yutui' ["The Shrinking of Fishery and the Development of Agriculture' of the Poyang Lake during the Second Half of the Twentieth Century]," 105. One *li* equals half a kilometer.

¹⁵ Liu, Shigu, "'Xiguan' yu 'yequan:' mingzhongye yixiang poyanghuqu de yutian kaifa yu caozhou shiyong jiufen ["Habits' and 'Property Rights:' Conflicts of Polders and Grasslands on the Poyang Lake Since Mid-Ming Dynasty]," 3.

¹⁶ Wu, "Ershi shiji xiabanye poyanghuqu de 'nongjin yutui' ["The Shrinking of Fishery and the Development of Agriculture' of the Poyang Lake during the Second Half of the Twentieth Century]," 105.

- ¹⁷ Wu, “‘Nongjin yutui:’ mingqing yilai poyanghuqu jingji, shengtai yu shehui bianqian de lishi neihan [‘The Shrinking of Fishery and the Development of Agriculture:’ A Historical Interpretation of Economic, Ecological, and Social Changes in the Poyang Lake Area],” 122. One *mu* approximately equals 666.67 square meters.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 123.
- ¹⁹ NPYXZ, vol.2, 630.
- ²⁰ Wu, “‘Nongjin yutui:’ mingqing yilai poyanghuqu jingji, shengtai yu shehui bianqian de lishi neihan [‘The Shrinking of Fishery and the Development of Agriculture:’ A Historical Interpretation of Economic, Ecological, and Social Changes in the Poyang Lake Area],” 123.
- ²¹ Liu, Shigu, “‘Xiguan’ yu ‘yequan:’ mingzhongye yixiang poyanghuqu de yutian kaifa yu caozhou shiyong jiufen [‘Habits’ and ‘Property Rights:’ Conflicts of Polders and Grasslands on the Poyang Lake Since Mid-Ming Dynasty],” 1.
- ²² *Ibid*, 1-12.
- ²³ Wan, “Qing yilai poyanghu qu minjian jiufen chuli de lishi guanxing – yi Duchang, Poyang liang xian wei zhongxin [The Way How People Handled Local Disputes in the Poyang Lake Area – A Case Study from Duchang and Poyang Counties],” 111.
- ²⁴ Perdue, *Exhausting the Earth*, 96 and 130.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, 145.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, 211.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 211.
- ²⁸ “Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-53.
- ²⁹ Z1-4-233
- ³⁰ “Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-53.
- ³¹ “Peng Jiamao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Peng Jiamao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-233.
- ³² “Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-53.
- ³³ “Peng Jiamao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Peng Jiamao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-233.
- ³⁴ “Peng Jiawang fandong daoshou an [Peng Jiawang Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-234.
- ³⁵ “Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-53.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*.
- ³⁷ *Ibid*. In the original document, Peng says he participated the *xiedou* between the Zheng lineage and the Xiong lineage in 1946, but it might be a typo. All other documents indicate that the *xiedou* took place in 1948. See Z1-2-162, Z1-9-105.
- ³⁸ Wang, *Geming yu fangeming: shehui wenhua shiye xia de minguo zhengzhi* [Revolutionaries and Counterrevolutionaries: Republican Politics in Socio-Cultural Perspectives], 395.
- ³⁹ *Ibid*, 398.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 406-407.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, 406-408.
- ⁴² Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*, 42-43.
- ⁴³ Wang, *Geming yu fangeming: shehui wenhua shiye xia de minguo zhengzhi* [Revolutionaries and Counterrevolutionaries: Republican Politics in Socio-Cultural Perspectives], 433-438.
- ⁴⁴ “Zheng Laichao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Laichao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-105.
- ⁴⁵ “Zheng Jinpei fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Jinpei Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-162.
- ⁴⁶ “Zheng Laichao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Laichao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-105.
- ⁴⁷ “Zheng Laichao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Laichao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-105; “Zheng Jinpei fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Jinpei Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-162.
- ⁴⁸ The local people considered assassination as a form of *xiedou* as well.

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- ⁴⁹ “Zheng Laichao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Laichao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-105.
- ⁵⁰ “Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-53.
- ⁵¹ “Yu Peiyuan fandong huangquehui fuxuezhang an [Yu Peiyuan Counterrevolutionary Yellow Crane Society Vice-School Master Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-347.
- ⁵² This is when the Zheng lineage invited the Yellow Crane Society to help them in the *xiedou* against the Xiong Lineage. The correct year should be 1948 instead of 1947.
- ⁵³ “Zheng Laichao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Laichao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-9-105.
- ⁵⁴ “Dong Bakui fandong huidaomen an [Dong Bakui Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-6-463.
- ⁵⁵ The other two were conflicts over water resources and *baojia* affiliations. Although it was the Nationalist Government who reinvented the *baojia* system in the 1930s, the old *baojia* had existed in China for centuries until the end of the Qing Dynasty. It was not new to the rural society.
- ⁵⁶ See Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China*, Chapter 3.
- ⁵⁷ Schoppa, *Chinese Elites and Political Change*, 6.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 6-9.
- ⁵⁹ “Xinhai geming [The 1911 Revolution],” PYZX, Vol. 14.
- ⁶⁰ “Beifa zhi yi [The Northern Expedition],” PYZX, Vol. 14. The KMT officially launched the Northern Expedition in 1926.
- ⁶¹ NPYXZ, Vol.1, 372.
- ⁶² “Beifa zhi yi [The Northern Expedition],” PYZX, Vol. 14.
- ⁶³ NPYXZ, Vol.1, 424.
- ⁶⁴ The Chinese Revolutionary Party became the KMT in 1919.
- ⁶⁵ Huiwen University was incorporated into Yenching University in 1926.
- ⁶⁶ Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, ed., Zhou Yongneng xiansheng fangwen jilu [The Reminiscences of Mr. Chou Yung-Neng], the Preface.
- ⁶⁷ “Beifa zhi yi [The Northern Expedition],” PYZX, Vol. 14.
- ⁶⁸ Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, ed., Zhou Yongneng xiansheng fangwen jilu [The Reminiscences of Mr. Chou Yung-Neng], the Preface.
- ⁶⁹ NPYXZ, Vol.2, 959.
- ⁷⁰ “Yu Lun huimen shouling an [Yu Lun *Huimen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1087.
- ⁷¹ The Democratic Socialist Party was established in 1934. The DSP participated in the 1947 National Assembly election.
- ⁷² “Yu Lun huimen shouling an [Yu Lun *Huimen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1087.
- ⁷³ NPYXZ, Vol.1, 373.
- ⁷⁴ See Jin, “Jiang Jieshi yu zhengxuexi [Chiang Kai-shek and the Political Study Clique],”; Eastman, “Nationalist China during the Nanking decade 1927-1937,” pp. 116-167.
- ⁷⁵ NPYXZ, Vol.1, 373.
- ⁷⁶ “Fandong huidaomen zuzhi ji mingdan [The Structure of Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and Their Name Lists],” PYGADA Z2-1-11.
- ⁷⁷ Rowe, *Crimson Rain*, 27-29.
- ⁷⁸ Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, ed., Zhou Yongneng xiansheng fangwen jilu [The Reminiscences of Mr. Chou Yung-Neng], 166-167.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 158-167.
- ⁸⁰ NPYXZ, Vol.1, 403.
- ⁸¹ NPYXZ, Vol.1, 402-403; Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, ed., Zhou Yongneng xiansheng fangwen jilu [The Reminiscences of Mr. Chou Yung-Neng], 158-167.
- ⁸² The “landlord” label was from the social classification during the Land Reform in the early 1950s.
- ⁸³ “Peng Shouzu fandong daoshou an [Peng Shouzu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-230.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid*.
- ⁸⁵ “Yu Guodong fandong huidaomen an [Yu Guodong Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-321.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid*.
- ⁸⁷ “*Taibao*” was the name of the officials who worked in the imperial palace as the teachers of the young emperors.

⁸⁸ “Fandong huidaomen zuzhi ji mingdan [The Structure of Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and Their Name Lists],” PYGADA Z2-1-11.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Yao Hongjun later withdrew from the Society of the Thirteen Taibao, Wu Liangxiang was his replacement.

⁹¹ “Fandong huidaomen zuzhi ji mingdan [The Structure of Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and Their Name Lists],” PYGADA Z2-1-11.

⁹² Guangong, who was also known as Guanyu, was a leading character in the Ming Dynasty Chinese novel *Three Kingdoms*. Guangong was the symbol of loyalty and righteous in Chinese culture and became the figure of the God of Martial Arts in China. Yue Fei was a leading military commander during the early Southern Song Dynasty resisting the invasion of the Jurchen Jin Empire. Yue Fei was also a symbol of loyalty in traditional culture and became a key figure in popular literature and theater.

⁹³ “Fandong huidaomen zuzhi ji mingdan [The Structure of Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and Their Name Lists],” PYGADA Z2-1-11.

⁹⁴ “Zheng Jinpei fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zheng Jinpei Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-162.

⁹⁵ “Yu Lun huimen shouling an [Yu Lun *Huimen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1087.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “Fandong huidaomen zuzhi ji mingdan [The Structure of Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and Their Name Lists],” PYGADA Z2-1-11.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ “Yu Lun huimen shouling an [Yu Lun *Huimen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1087.

¹⁰⁰ “Yu Ximing fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yu Ximing Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-720.

¹⁰¹ “Fandong huidaomen zuzhi ji mingdan [The Structure of Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and Their Name Lists],” PYGADA Z2-1-11.

¹⁰² “Yu Lun huimen shouling an [Yu Lun *Huimen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1087.

¹⁰³ See “Lianhu xiang zhou jiang liangpai jingxuan chouwen [Scandals of the Zhou and Jiang Factions in Lianhu Town]” and “Qingzhu xiang xuanju naoju [Elections as Farce in Qingzhu Town],” Boyang wenshi ziliao [Boyang Historical Materials], vol. 3. Poyang: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi boyangxian weiyuanhui, 1988.

¹⁰⁴ NPYXZ, Vol.1, 373.

Chapter 3: Resisting the Intruders: Self-Defense Associations and the CCP in 1949

Self-defense associations played significant and contradictory roles in the local power structure in Poyang. On the one hand, they were the main protective force against bandits which attracted many people's voluntary participation. On the other hand, the self-defense associations' intervention in local politics and the competition for natural resources brought violence into people's life and significantly worsened societal order. When the PLA arrived in Poyang in 1949, the arrival of the CCP added another important player to the power game. The relationship between the CCP and the self-defense associations was not a pleasant one.

CCP Activities in Poyang

In contrast to the mountainous southern part of the Jiangxi Province where the CCP established some of its most important bases such as the Jingganshan Communist Base by Mao Zedong in 1927; northeastern Jiangxi, where Poyang was located, was not a hot spot of communist movement. The limited communist movement in Poyang went almost concurrently with the KMT's party building. The KMT-CCP Alliance and the Northern Expedition all played significant role in the early history of the Communists in Poyang.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the KMT leader Jiang Bozhang came back to Poyang from Canton and established the first underground KMT branch in July of 1924. In 1926, two years after Jiang's party building activity, the CCP Jiangxi Provincial Committee sent Zheng Yumin and Wang Chenshou to Poyang in charge of party building. Following the arrival of the Northern Expedition Army in Poyang in November of 1926, Zheng and Wang established the first CCP

branch in Poyang during late November. The honeymoon period of the KMT-CCP Alliance came to an end in 1927 as a consequence of the April Twelfth Incident in Shanghai. In late April, CCP's special commissioner Zeng Tianyu established the CCP Poyang County Committee. It was the first CCP County Committee in northeastern Jiangxi. On July 15 of 1927, the KMT officially declared the dissolution of the KMT-CCP Alliance. From then on, all CCP activities went underground.¹

During mid-September of 1927, the CCP Jiangxi Provincial Committee appointed Liu Shiqi as the special commissioner and organized the first Poyang County Party Congress. With more than one hundred Party members present, this first CCP County Congress appointed new leaders in Poyang and required all participants to reregister their CCP memberships. After this meeting, the main task of the CCP Poyang Branch turned to organizing peasant riots against landlords and the Nationalist Government.² At the beginning of 1928, the CCP Poyang Branch had 293 party members in total.³ On November 18 of 1927, under the leadership of Jiang Bozhang, the Nationalist military police attacked the CCP Poyang County Committee and executed two of the CCP leaders. The County Party Committee was restored in December.

From 1929 to 1941, communist activities in Poyang were suppressed by the KMT multiple times.⁴ In 1932, the CCP membership decreased from 293 in 1928 to less than 70.⁵ Several local CCP cadres in Poyang were arrested or executed during this period. After the New Fourth Army Incident in southern Anhui Province in January of 1941, the Nationalist Government further tightened its suppression against communism. During the same month, the CCP Poyang County Committee was permanently destroyed by KMT forces (until 1949 when the Nationalist Government was defeated). Key CCP leaders who had survived the suppression crossed the Yangtze River and were relocated to Northern China. Some of the remnant CCP

members in Poyang continued underground activities. But there were no CCP Party organs in Poyang until 1949. There was no statistics of CCP membership during this period either.⁶

KMT's preparation for the Civil War in Poyang began in 1946. Under the leadership of the county magistrate Zhang Ruocheng, the Nationalist Government established a few self-protection leagues against potential communist threats in Poyang. During April of 1949, the People's Liberation Army's Second Field Army crossed the Yangtze River and soon arrived in Poyang. With the support of local underground CCP forces, the Second Field Army defeated the KMT's 61 Division Army and entered the Poyang County Seat on April 29.⁷

On May 1 of 1949, the PLA officially declared the "liberation" of Poyang and the end of the KMT's rule. The CCP's Southward Mobilization Team sent over 90 cadres to Poyang and restored the CCP Poyang County Committee. Poyang was then divided into seven rural districts with their own district Party Committees and three urban districts in the county seat.⁸ Each rural district had around ten Party cadres, including one director of the Military Committee who was in charge of local militias and weapon registration and management. After the power transition, the CCP Poyang County Committee's first set of primary agenda had four goals. First, take over the existing KMT bureaucratic organs and assign the existing Nationalist Governmental personnel with new tasks and maintain social stability. Second, organize socialist propaganda meetings and explain the policies of the new government. Third, in order to support the ongoing Civil War, accomplish the grain levy and borrowing plan (especially to landlords and rich peasants) on time. Four, seize illicit weapons from the former Nationalist Government officials and local powers.⁹ Instead of establishing the new Poyang County People's Government in the Poyang County Seat, the CCP set up the temporary county government in the Town of Modaoshi. In late August of 1949, the Poyang County Government was relocated to the Poyang

County Seat. During the same period, the Second Field Army left Poyang and marched west. The Fourth Field Army then stationed in Poyang.¹⁰

Table 7: Rural Districts in Poyang

Name	Location
District 1	Sanmiaoqian
District 2	Tianbanjie
District 3	Fenggang
District 4	Guxiandu
District 5	Xiejiatan
District 6	Hengxi
District 7	Sishilijie

As one of the most important strategic point on the Yangtze River and the Poyang Lake, power transition in Poyang did not go smoothly. Although the KMT's regular military forces retreated from Poyang in late April of 1949, the underground KMT activists and military forces never ceased their attempts to recapture Poyang during the first few months after the CCP's takeover. During such a period of turbulence and instability, local self-defense associations in Poyang became one of the most powerful anti-CCP forces.

CCP and Self-Defense Associations in History

By the time of 1949 when the PLA entered Poyang, the CCP had been very familiar with the existence of self-defense associations in rural China. As one of the most widespread local

military forces and voluntary associations, the self-defense associations' relationship with the CCP had experienced both close cooperation and antagonism depending on the changing interests of both sides.

The encounter between the PLA and the local self-defense associations in Poyang came relatively late in comparison to many other rural areas in China. As early as the 1920s, the interaction between the two sides had already begun. In her *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945*, Elizabeth Perry gives an overview of the changing relationship between the CCP and the local voluntary military forces in the Northern China Plain. To Perry, the CCP's various endeavor to mobilize the peasants by absorbing the local voluntary military forces were in general a failure. Although during the early phase of the communist movement, the CCP was enthusiastic about the possibility that the peasantry could be reorganized into potential political units through allying with existing local military powers, the interaction between the two sides eventually turned out to be more antagonistic than cooperative. The existence of local peasant military forces was simply a choice of survival strategy instead of a social movement aiming at changing the power structure in rural China with clear political consciousness. Perry concludes that "precisely because these modes of collective violence were strategies, whose form and level of activity corresponded to ecological and political circumstances, they became less attractive as the CCP proved capable of changing the ground rules. Ultimately, peasants were less committed to a strategy *per se* than to the need to secure livelihood."¹¹

Lucien Bianco shares the same perspective. "Group defense or protection is inherently limited, both in scope and in the kinds of things it will attempt. It can react vigorously, but it rarely takes the initiative."¹² In the end, the CCP chose the path of complete reorganization of rural power structure in which the local self-defense associations were only a part.

During the initial stage of the CCP's rural penetration, the CCP saw the local self-defense associations in Northern China, such as the Red Spear Society (See Chapter one), as a promising revolutionary force. In 1925, the CCP invited thirty-five delegates of the Red Spear Society from Henan, Jiangsu, Anhui, and Southern Shandong for a meeting. A few early CCP leaders, including Li Dazhao, were very optimistic about the revolutionary potential within the Red Spear Society. During 1926 and 1927, CCP media published several articles promoting the role of the Red Spear in rural communist movement. The CCP believed that the Red Spear Society could be a milestone in facilitating the establishment of peasant associations in Northern China.¹³ In Li Dazhao's article published on the journal *Political Life* in 1926, he points out that "this phenomenon (the proliferation of local self-defense associations in Northern China) has proven that the peasants in China are awakening, knowing that they can only rely on self-alliance to liberate themselves from the disturbance of imperialism, warlordism, and banditry. Such a peasant movement will be a great revolutionary force."¹⁴ In September of 1926, one month after Li Dazhao's article, a resolution produced by the Third Enlarged Meeting of the CCP Central Commission concludes that "the Red Spear Society is a true military force of the people, and has become an important force targeting at breaking down the warlord system in national revolution. We must do our best to lead this force and prevent this force from being manipulated by warlords and landlords. The Red Spear Society is not only an important force in the national revolution but also an important component of developing peasant associations."¹⁵

The CCP was also quite aware of the fact that the local self-defense associations were usually led not by poor peasants, but by the gentry class. In a 1927 report on the peasant movement in Henan, the Party cadres realized that their previous work had focused too much on allying with the leaders of the local self-defense associations and failed to lead the peasants.

“Our next step in Henan is that we must obtain the leadership of the Spear Societies.”¹⁶ During the CCP’s Sixth National Congress in Moscow in the summer of 1928, the Party leaders made a clear declaration on the nature of local self-defense associations and CCP’s approach to them.

“Among the religious and superstitious peasant military associations (the Red Spear Society and many others), we should approach them and absorb the people (people who are being exploited) under the slogan of democratization. Meanwhile, we also need to disclose the wrongdoings of their leaders, isolate them, and separate them from the people. We must stick to the way we transform these local military forces and incorporate them into our regular Red Army. If they can be self-disciplined and remain loyal to our leadership in the war, we can keep them.”¹⁷ In some extreme cases like the CCP in Henan during 1927, for instance, the Party even planned to usurp the leadership of the Red Spear.¹⁸ Such radical move undoubtedly led to serious repercussion from the peasants.

During this period, a large number of local self-defense associations in rural China got involved in violent struggle against exploitation and warlordism. Some of these resistant activities were led by the Communists, some were spontaneous. Among the most powerful self-defense associations in Northern China, the Heavenly Gate Society (*Tianmenhui*) was one of the most active and influential. Born in 1923 as a local self-defense association against bandits in Linxian County, Henan Province, the Heavenly Gate was almost identical to the Red Spear Society. The Heavenly Gate Society organized the peasants to fight against taxation and banditry. In 1924, the Heavenly Gate defeated both the warlord army in Henan and powerful local bandits. Within a few months, it expanded into Hebei Province and Shanxi Province with thousands of followers. In 1925, the Heavenly Gate Society fought against both the Jin Army and the Feng Army, two powerful warlord armies in Northern China. In the same year, the

Heavenly Gate Society took over the Linxian County Seat and established its base there. The Heavenly Gate Society in Linxian was eventually suppressed by Feng Yuxiang in 1931.¹⁹

In Henan, the Red Spear Society also participated in the Queshan Riot led by the CCP. In 1925, the CCP in Henan absorbed a large number of local Red Spear Societies and established the “Peasant Self-Defense Army.” Having successfully mobilized many leaders of the local Red Spear Society near Queshan County in Zhumadian, Henan Province, the CCP cadres in Henan established the Queshan Peasant Association in January of 1927. In early April, over 40,000 peasant soldiers, including many Red Spear Society members, gathered outside the County Seat of Queshan and finally defeated the 200 Wu Peifu’s regular warlord army in the city. The Queshan Riot remains one of the most well-known peasant riots under the CCP’s leadership in Henan.²⁰

The Red Spear Society’s anti-warlordism activities in Henan then ignited a series of military confrontations between the Red Spear and the warlord Wu Peifu. In the Qixian County near Kaifeng along, for instance, Wu Peifu’s warlord army killed a few thousands of Red Spear Society participants in 1926.²¹

Although some of these local self-defense associations showed a “progressive” tendency against warlordism, their primary concern was reducing the tax burden and improving their livelihood rather than committing to specific revolutionary ideologies. The CCP soon found them unreliable allies. On the other hand, many of these self-defense associations regarded the Communists not as friendly allies but as outside intruders who were breaking the existing social norms. “Communist dreams of mobilizing the rebellious Red Spears were dashed by the harsh reality of encounter with an entrenched protective movement anxious to defend its parochial interests against all forms of outside intervention.”²² The result was the CCP’s abandonment of

allying with many local protective associations. Instead, the CCP turned to the local predatory associations that were primarily composed of poor peasants, including powerful bandit forces. Such was the case of the notorious predatory force the Bare Egg Society (*Guangdanhui*) in Southern Henan. The CCP responded to the Bare Egg eagerly:

We should send military personnel to organize and train them. Right now they may be in the style of Liang-shan-po [mountain lair of the bandit heroes of *Water Margin*], recruiting soldiers and purchasing horses in the locality, looting the rich relieve the poor, raiding trains and seizing rifles. We can use the name “Honan Subcommittee of the Revolutionary Committee of China” to issue bulletins ... to organize peasant associations, to execute confiscation of the land in adjacent areas.²³

The predatory forces aligned more with the CCP’s goal of total reorganization of rural power structure. Such an intention was completely against the protective forces’ will of defending the local communities from outside intruders.

During the Second Sino-Japanese War period, the CCP’s relationship with the local peasant military forces changed multiple times due to the shifting needs of both sides. In order to build the United Front against the Japanese, the CCP allied with many local bandit gangs and absorbed them into the Red Army. While developing its rural bases, the CCP also had to cooperate with the protective self-defense associations to win the support of the local communities. The choices of both sides were pragmatic and temporary.

As the end of the Sino-Japanese War drew near, the CCP’s attitude towards both local protective and predatory forces became less patient and cooperative. Elizabeth Perry notices that in 1944, the CCP adopted a new style of mobilization in rural Northern China Plain. The CCP labeled the participants in rural associations as “traitors” that deserved the same reprisals as bandits. It was called the “Weed out Traitors Campaign.”²⁴ During the Civil War period, while the CCP was expanding its power in both rural and urban China, the CCP’s plan of complete

restructuring rural society met significant resistance from various local peasant military forces. In 1947, the CCP's Public Security Bureau of Shandong Province required all local governments to investigate local voluntary associations. There are twelve items in the investigation, including the names of the leaders and their class backgrounds, their influence in the local communities, how they cheated the people, and the motivations of the participants.²⁵

Direct military confrontations between the CCP and the local peasant military forces occurred frequently almost everywhere in China during the Civil War period and the months immediately after the founding of the PRC in 1949 and 1950. The CCP never denied that many local self-defense associations used to be progressive peasant forces against oppression and exploitation; but in 1949 and beyond, the CCP labeled many of these participants in local associations as counterrevolutionaries or bandits that were manipulated by the KMT remnant forces who planned to make a comeback.

There were many instances of direct confrontation between the two sides in the late 1940s. In August of 1947, just four months after the PLA "liberated" Jingjin County, Hubei Province, more than 450 people led by the Red Spear Society rebelled against the new government. Over sixty people were killed in the battle.²⁶ In Jiangsu Province, a Big Sword Society riot with more than 2,000 participants broke out in 1946 resulted in the death of five CCP cadres and over twenty innocent people.²⁷ In Xinyang of Henan Province, with the cooperation of remnant KMT forces, a Red Spear riot of more than 5,000 participants injured and killed more than 400 people in March of 1949.²⁸ In Sichuan Province, local military forces led by the Gowned Brothers, the most powerful secret society in Sichuan, fought against the CCP bravely in various "riots" in 1950.²⁹

Thousands of local riots against the arrival of the CCP similar to the above cases had occurred from 1945 to the early 1950s. The local self-defense associations played a dominant role in these “counterrevolutionary” activities. After a 1949 riot against the CCP led by the Big Sword Society and a few other local self-defense associations in Gucheng County, Hubei Province, the Public Security Bureau in Hubei wrote a detailed investigation about the incident. The report concludes that the riot was deliberately organized by the KMT’s special agents with the cooperation from local landlords, baojia leaders, bandits, through the channel of local voluntary associations. Ordinary people were cheated and coerced to follow them. The report also points out the key factor that had led to the riot was food shortage. “The KMT special agents seized the opportunity that many peasants were starved. At that particular time, they created the slogan of ‘anti-grain levies,’ ‘anti-military conscription,’ as well as ‘rob the CCP for food.’ Then they organized the riot aiming at destroying our military progress in the frontline.”³⁰

The interaction between the CCP and the local self-defense associations in Poyang was not an exception from the cases above. In 1949, after the PLA’s “liberation” of Poyang, both the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society actively participated in the military confrontation against the CCP. 1949 was one of the bloodiest years in Poyang’s history.

Origin of the Clash in Poyang

Initial Clash before 1949

The Republican Era was a period of constant social changes and insecurity. A number of players were involved in local politics and violent power competition, including the KMT, the CCP, bandits, and local self-defense associations. Unlike many large communist bases in China, the CCP’s power in Poyang was weak. While the KMT and powerful local elites were capable of

dominating the political sphere, local self-defense associations in Poyang had no intention of challenging the existing power structure. As we have seen in Chapter one, one of the Big Sword Society's rules in Poyang specifically states the Big Sword would not resist the state and taxation. As a direct consequence of the self-defense associations' obedience to the current regime, the close interaction between the CCP and the Red Spear Society we see in the case of Henan had never taken place in Poyang. Moreover, even before the PLA defeated the KMT in 1949, some of the self-defense associations in Poyang had already shown a clear anti-communism stance, although direct confrontation between the two sides was rare.

The Yellow Crane Society in Poyang was involved in two minor clashes with the underground CCP cadres during the 1930s. Details about the two cases are hardly available in the archives. Although detached from specific political parties, the Yellow Crane Society under Jin Deshan's leadership was compliant with the KMT's military power. Jin had good relationship with the KMT's Appeasement Working Team in Poyang.³¹ With the acquiescence of the Appeasement Working Team, in 1934, the very first year of the Yellow Crane's arrival in Poyang, Jin Deshan's Yellow Crane Society discovered a group of underground Red Army in Poyang and attacked them. The Yellow Crane killed ten Red Army soldiers and stole six rifles from the Communists. Two years later in 1936, Jin's Yellow Crane Society attacked another group of underground Red Army and killed five of them. Jin also captured six rifles and one light machine gun.³² These two incidents had left the CCP an unpleasant impression about the Yellow Crane Society before the Civil War.

The Big Sword Society did not directly participate in anti-communist movement before 1949. Poyang Public Security Bureau's 1953 investigation report on the Big Sword Society clearly concludes that "we have not discovered any Big Sword's pre-1949 counterrevolutionary

activities.” The wrongdoings of the Big Sword, according to the same documents, were mostly about cheating the people for money, practicing superstitious invulnerability rituals, and participating in xiedou conflicts (see chapter two).³³ Although the Big Sword Society did not participate in anti-communist activities before 1949, some of its leaders were anti-communist figures in Poyang. Cheng Hong, who joined the Big Sword Society and became its core leader after Poyang’s “liberation,” was involved in arresting and executing CCP cadres in 1943. As a KMT member and xiangzhang within the Nationalist Government in Poyang, Cheng Hong was responsible for wiping out local bandits. Anti-bandit campaigns under Cheng’s leadership were very successful, but the underground CCP networks were also labeled as “bandits” or “red bandits.”³⁴ Consequently, Cheng’s anti-communism stance seems inevitable.

Although direct clash between the CCP and self-defense associations in Poyang before 1949 was rare, the relationship between the two sides was not pleasant either. As a protective strategy against outside threats such as bandits, when the PLA arrived in Poyang and began to reorganize the rural society and break down the existing power equilibrium, the self-defense associations became anti-communist forces.

The Devastating Flood of 1949

By 1949 when the PLA entered arrived, Poyang had remained largely an agrarian society. Most rural residents in Poyang not only relied on their hard work in the fields, but even more on the environment. During years of extreme weather and the subsequent reduction in agricultural output, the harsh environment often led to severe social unrest, including rampant bandit activities and intense competition for food among various social groups. The year of 1949 was such a case.

Neighboring the Poyang Lake, flood was the single most threatening natural disaster in Poyang. According to the 2010 version of *Poyang County Gazetteer*, there were thirty-eight major floods during the Ming Dynasty, fifty-two during the Qing Dynasty.³⁵ The high intensity of flood continued in the Republican Era. From 1912 to 1949, major floods caused by the Poyang Lake broke out thirteen times, resulting in huge human and capital loss (see table below). During some of these floods, many dikes were completely destroyed and the polder lands next to them eliminated by water. During July of 1931, for example, heavy rain lasted for over twenty days and the Yangtze River flowed backward into the Poyang Lake. A large number of dikes were destroyed. 11,000 people were killed in the flood. During July of 1935, the flood destroyed eighty-one dikes and submerged 27,433.4 hectares of farmland. Over 267,500 people were heavily impacted by the flood.³⁶

Table 8: Years of Major Flood in Poyang from 1912 to 1949

1912	1914	1915	1920	1926	1929	1931
1934	1935	1937	1942	1948	1949	

After a major flood occurred in Poyang during June of 1942, no major flood had taken place until 1948 when the civil war between the CCP and the KMT was well under way. The *Poyang County Gazetteer* records that on July 17, 1948, the flood water level reached 19.96 meters and most of the dikes in Poyang were destroyed. The situation got even worse in 1949. During June of 1949, the highest record of flood water level reached 20.46 meters.³⁷ The flood submerged or destroyed eighty-two dikes in Poyang County.³⁸ In the Poyang County Seat, a few of the main streets, including the Liberation Street, the River Street, and the West Gate Road were all submerged by water. The water on these streets were even deep enough to carry boats.

The flood had significantly threatened people's livelihood and led to serious consequences: 26,467 hectares of farmland was submerged, while over 170,000 people were affected.³⁹

The self-recollection of rural residents in Poyang also confirms the existence of severe flooding in the summer of 1949. Cheng Hong, an anti-communist leader of the Big Sword Society, recalls that many bridges in Poyang were destroyed by flood in early June of 1949. Many of his Big Sword connections were cut off during this period due to the paralyzed traffic system.⁴⁰ During roughly the same period, Yellow Crane Society member Cao Zhaosong and all his fellow villagers were rebuilding the dikes that had been destroyed by the flood.⁴¹ Zhang Yuncheng, who was a member of the Fellowship of Goodness (see Chapter four and Chapter five) recalls that one of their gathering points in Poyang County Seat had to be relocated to Zhang's home because the original site inside the Zhonghe Alley was submerged by water during the summer of 1949.⁴²

A direct consequence of the flood disaster was famine and social unrest. Peng Shouzu, who invited the Yellow Crane Society to protect his village from the revenge of factional conflicts in 1948 (see Chapter two), recalls that his entire village suffered from famine caused by flood during the summer of 1949. Peng points out that refugees came from many places because of the famine had turned the local society into complete chaos. Many people turned to banditry for survival, and bandits were everywhere. Peng also honestly admits that the new government was unable to control the situation and maintain stability. Peng's fellow villagers organized a Field Protection Team (*kanqingdui*) and resumed the Yellow Crane Society they learned in 1948. During a night in July of 1949, Peng's fellow villagers mistakenly identified a CCP Working Team as refugees who had become bandits and attacked the CCP cadres. Two people from each side were killed in the conflict.⁴³ The CCP's official document also confirms the turbulent

consequences of the flood in 1949. “The flood disaster (in Jiangxi Province) this year (1949) is so severe that it has driven people into extreme poverty, especially those who live right next to the Poyang Lake. In order to survive, many people have turned to collective bandit activities or are being manipulated by other bandits.”⁴⁴

Grain Levy and Borrowing

Although the flood in 1949 was one of the most serious natural disasters during the first half of the twentieth century, rural residents in Poyang were not unfamiliar with it. What had fundamentally intensified the negative consequences of the flood was the PLA’s arrival in Poyang and its subsequent grain levy policies for military provision. As Kathryn Bernhardt shows, natural calamities were a leading factor that led to popular resistance and collective violence to rents.⁴⁵ The PLA’s grain levy policies literally became the equivalent of “evil” landlords who exploited the poor for scarce resources, especially food.⁴⁶

After the official announcement of Poyang’s “liberation” on May 1 of 1949, the PLA established its Poyang Military Sub-District on May 15. The new CCP government and the PLA’s military sub-district in Poyang immediately initiated five major political tasks:

1. Propagate the new policies, initiate the takeover process;
2. Control the flood and provide disaster relief, develop agriculture;
3. Initiate grain levies, support the PLA’s frontline;
4. Suppress bandits and local powers, protect the new regime;
5. Train the cadres, adapt to the new jobs.⁴⁷

Among these five tasks, the grain levy played an extremely important role to the CCP’s strategic outlook into the future. The liberation of Poyang was a part of the PLA’s Yangtze River Crossing Campaign (*dujiang zhanyi*) whose target was mainly the lower Yangtze region, including Shanghai and China’s capital Nanjing. By occupying the Yangtze River basin region,

the PLA would be able to control China's most prosperous region and prepare for the PLA's further march into Southern China, especially the Fujian Province and Guangdong Province.

Jiangxi Province was a major source of the PLA's military provision to the frontline. Yingtan, another city in Jiangxi, for instance, was responsible for the military provision of Shanghai. Yingtan's Guixi County alone provided 5,000,000 *jin* of rice to Shanghai in 1949. And a large portion of Yingtan's military provision to Shanghai was shipped by water from Poyang County into the Poyang Lake and then the Yangtze River.⁴⁸ In Poyang, grain was also levied and sent to the frontlines in the Lower Yangtze River Delta and Southern China. In order to accomplish the grain levy plan and fulfill the needs of military provision in the frontline, the CCP's Northeast Jiangxi Committee required the Poyang branch to clear all the KMT's granaries and send the grain to the frontline, then borrow grain from landlords and rich peasants. During the grain borrowing process, the guideline was "reasonable burden," which basically means borrowing according to the actual production of the year. The grain levy process lasted for three months in Poyang from May to July of 1949.⁴⁹ These three months of grain levies took place concurrently with the flood.

The grain levy process in Poyang was obviously easier said than done. When it came to borrowing grain from landlords and rich peasants, the situation got even worse. On June 20 of 1949, right in the middle of grain levy and borrowing campaign, the new CCP Poyang District Committee issued an internal notification about the situation of grain levy and borrowing in Poyang County and the neighboring Wannian County.⁵⁰ The tone of the document was gloomy and disgruntled.

The first section of the document is titled "How Landlords are Sabotaging the Grain Levy and Borrowing." Many landlords, according to the document, tried hard to minimize the amount

of grain the government could borrow from them or intentionally delayed the borrowing process. The son of Jiang Dajian, who was a key figure in the Jiang Faction (see Chapter 2), complained to the new government that 80% of the population in Poyang were poor peasants, 20% were middle peasants: there were no landlords at all. Consequently, Jiang argues, the government should not put too much pressure on them. It was also common that former baojia leaders encouraged ordinary rural residents to rob the new government for food, saying that all the landlords' food had been robbed by the new government. Li Pu, one of the landlords in Poyang, joined a bandit gang and resisted the grain borrowing policy violently. The document then concludes that "(the landlords) are trying to stir up discontent against the new government among the peasants and turn the society into chaos (The grain levy and borrowing process) is a long-term and complicated political struggle, and a concrete form of class struggle. We must stay alert and destroy their conspiracies completely We should ceaselessly expose the landlords' sabotage to the masses and isolate the landlords from the masses Those who break social stability, or ally with the bandits and huidaomen, or voice their disobedience publicly deserve severe punishment."⁵¹

The second part of the document discusses a few problems in the grain levy and borrowing movement. According to a survey of seven villages in Poyang County, the new government levied about 18.8% of each household's total storage of grain on average. The ratio in Wannian County was much higher than Poyang with an average of 30%. Most of these grain levies were conducted by former baojia leaders of the Nationalist Government (the CCP did not abandon the Baojia System immediately). The document suggests that the local government should not evaluate the current situation from the perspective of a fixed ratio. If the government levied or borrowed too much from the landlords, the document points out, the landlords might

flee or even become rebellious forces. The last paragraph of the document says “the government cannot only assign a deadline and rely on propaganda.” Instead, “the success of the grain levy depends on whether the government can actually extract grain from the big landlords.” Grain levy is essentially a process of “bitter struggle.”⁵²

One month later on July 17 of 1949, the CCP Poyang District Committee produced another notification regarding resistance against the new regime in Poyang. The document concludes that the grain levy task was inappropriately handled and became one of the major sources of discontent among ordinary people. The document admits that flood in Poyang had lasted for a few years and the rural residents were in a desperate situation. Grain levy personnel did not respond to the situation in Poyang correctly and simply assigned the quotas of grain levies forcibly. As a result, “the grain levy policy gave the people a false impression that whenever the PLA comes, people will starve to death.” Moreover, when the grain levy personnel could not meet the goals of the levies, they simply detained the people and beat them. All these inappropriate handling of grain levies have become an excuse of the KMT spies’ counterrevolutionary activities.⁵³

Recollection from the self-defense association participants who were involved in violent resistance against the new regime confirms the CCP cadres’ inappropriate handling of grain levy and borrowing, and provide us with vivid details of how grain levy and borrowing was carried out. Grain levy and borrowing for the PLA’s military provision was the primary source of rural residents’ discontent against the new government and directly led to the self-defense associations’ violent resistance against the CCP.

The CCP’s grain policy led to tremendous dissatisfaction among the locals. According to Cheng Hong, a former KMT member and a Big Sword Society leader, even before the PLA

crossed the Yangtze River, rumor had already begun circulating that the PLA always steal the rural residents' food for military provision. During May of 1949, less than a month after the PLA's arrival in Poyang, reality confirmed that the rumor was true. Although the CCP had already established new governmental organs in Poyang, the grain levy was carried out in the same way that the old Baojia System worked. Baojia leaders assigned quotas of grain to each household, regardless of how much grain each household possessed. Many of the poor peasants were already starved during the flood, but they were still levied for grain relentlessly.

Besides the heavy burden of grain levies to the peasants, cadres in the new government did not treat people friendly either. Cheng Tusheng, a local of Poyang, joined the new government right after the liberation. During the grain levy period, he was extremely rude to the locals and randomly labeled people as landlords or bullies. People all hated him. Cheng Hong concludes that discontent about the cadres and grain levies was the driving force why they grabbed their weapons and resisted the new government violently.⁵⁴ Peng Shouzu, a leader of the Yellow Crane Society, shared a similar version of the grain levy and borrowing experience. The flood had already turned Peng's village into chaos because of food shortage and rampant bandit activities. "In order to meet the grain levy quota to support the PLA's frontline," Peng recalls, "a famine broke out in my village."⁵⁵

Wang Di's microhistory of the Gowned Brothers in Sichuan shows the same pattern of resistance against the new regime because of unbearable grain levy burdens. After the PLA's arrival in Chengdu on December 27 of 1949, the CCP started the grain levies immediately on January 2 of 1950 to ensure the PLA's food supply in Sichuan. Wang argues that "a primary cause of riots in general was the resistance to such levies."⁵⁶ The landlord and rich peasant classes faced even heavier levy burdens. Wang points out that these two classes were enforced an

extra 80% of grain levies.⁵⁷ Those who were unable to pay the levies sometimes had to sell their houses. Some who were unwilling to pay the levies were detained or even tortured by the government; in other cases, the levy collector would stay at the peasants' home until they paid the levies. Even poor peasants were harshly pressured to pay for the levies when shortfall of military provision occurred. The grain levies had significantly shaken the regular livelihood of the entire rural population. The resistance from the peasants was essentially "against losing one's critical output of grain."⁵⁸ An anti-grain levies insurrection in Xinfan County of Sichuan Province during February of 1950 resulted in the death of thirty grain-levy team members.⁵⁹

People's discontent towards the grain levy policy could be easily manipulated by the underground KMT activists who remained in Poyang. Ye Fen, a KMT military official and a secret agent of the KMT's Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (*juntong*) who remained in Poyang, mobilized the Peng lineage's Yellow Crane Society to attack the newly established government by disseminating the message that "now the PLA levies your grain for military provision, the PLA will soon 'levy the people' (forcible conscription) and send them to the frontline."⁶⁰ Whenever food shortage occurred or people complained about the grain levies, Ye Fen always encouraged people to rob the new government or the PLA for food.

The 1949 Clash

The Underground KMT Remnants

Although the PLA defeated the KMT's regular armies in Poyang in April of 1949, the KMT's power base in the Poyang Lake region was not completely eliminated. A large number of KMT military officials and soldiers remained in the area and continued their underground anti-communist movements.

In the mountainous region bordering the counties of Pengze, Hukou, Poyang, Duchang, and Fuliang, according to the PLA's investigation, there were over 1,300 remnant KMT soldiers under the leadership of Li Fengchun. Li named this remnant force the "NO. 5 Column of the Youth Nation-Salvation Army." In the Poyang Region, there was another "Youth Nation-Salvation Army" under the leadership of Li Yunhui with over 2,000 soldiers. The KMT's remnant forces' general principle was the localization of military actions. The underground leaders recruited new military forces from the locals and developed secondary battlegrounds of guerrilla warfare. One of the major targets that these remnant KMT forces allied with was local self-defense associations, including both the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society.⁶¹ In the PLA's military campaign against the remaining KMT forces in the Poyang Lake area, Li Fengchun and his army was the primary target.⁶²

Li Fengchun, a local of Poyang County, was a secret agent of the KMT's Bureau of Investigation and Statistics. Before 1949, he used to be an army chief in the military and an advisor to the Major Generals in the Ministry of National Defense. In March of 1949, Li returned to Poyang County from Nanchang and began building his underground KMT military force – the NO.5 Column of the Youth Nation-Salvation Army. Li was appointed as the commander. Li's army was based in the Poyang Lake area and constantly raided the PLA in the neighboring counties of the lake. Li swore that he would fight the PLA to the end.⁶³ Under Li Fengchun's leadership was a number of minor KMT military commanders and secret agents. Among them was Ye Fen, another secret agent of the KMT's Bureau of Investigation and Statistics. While Li was the highest regional commander in the entire Poyang Lake area, Ye's main duty was the Poyang County. In 1949, Ye traveled to many gathering points of the Yellow Crane Society in Poyang and encouraged the local Yellow Crane leaders to grab their weapons and organize riots

against the new regime.⁶⁴ Ye was the most important intermediary between the underground KMT networks and the Yellow Crane Society in Poyang. Wang Zhenhai, who used to be a baojia leader in charge of public security and organized several suppressions against communist bases in Jiangxi in 1934, was actively involved in mobilizing the Big Sword Society against the new government in 1949 as well.⁶⁵

The Yellow Crane Society Riots

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Peng lineage in Hongjiatan invited the Yellow Crane masters Jin Deshan and the lame to teach their lineage members the Yellow Crane techniques as a response to xiedou conflicts caused by polder land disputes. The Peng lineage then became the center of Yellow Crane Society activities in Poyang.

In April of 1949, Peng Jiawang, a vice schoolmaster of the Peng lineage Yellow Crane Society, invited Ye Fen to join the Yellow Crane Society. The lame taught Ye the Yellow Crane techniques, and Ye stayed at Peng Jiawang's home during the learning period. On May 18, Ye Fen and the lame invited about twenty Yellow Crane Society members for a meeting. During the meeting, Ye Fen warned the Peng lineage people of the dangers in the current period that "this is a disastrous time when none of us have enough food, but the new government is now doing grain levies and conscriptions." "If you have nothing to eat at the moment," Ye continued, "you can steal the new government for rice because the new government has lots of rice. This is our only choice. We must rely on the power of the Yellow Crane Society." Ye also told the people that Chiang Kai-shek would return and reward them if they could drive the CCP out of Poyang. The Peng lineage people were hesitant about Ye's plan because they were afraid of the new government. On May 22, Ye Fen organized another meeting with around fifty people warning

the Peng lineage people that there were several KMT underground armies stationed in Poyang. The food would be robbed by others if the Peng lineage Yellow Crane Society decided not to take action competing with other military forces. Immediately after Ye's speech, Peng Jiamao, Peng Guirong, Peng Jiawang, and Peng Wanggui, known as the "Four Bodhisattvas" in the Yellow Crane Society (see Chapter one) became spirit-possessed and confirmed that everything Ye had said was true.

Ye and the Lama decided to connect with other Yellow Crane networks in Poyang and rob the government on May 26. During the same period, Xu Kezheng, a local of Poyang, reported Ye's plan of riot to the new government. Ye and his fellows decided to postpone the plan and wait to confirm whether Xu Kezheng had really notified the government. On May 29, Ye held the third meeting. Ye confirmed that Xu Kezheng had already notified the government of their activities. "Therefore," Ye said, "we must take action as soon as we can before the government sent people to arrest us." Ye also told the people that another KMT underground force led by Zhang Wei had just arrived at the Poyang Lake as well. They would help with Ye's plan. Then Ye decided to attack the new government immediately on May 29.⁶⁶

Before Ye officially initiated the riot, Ye renamed the Peng lineage Yellow Crane Society the "Central Nation-Salvation Army" and made stamp marks for each unit.⁶⁷ On May 30, over 400 Yellow Crane Society participants from nine Yellow Crane assembly halls of eleven villages gathered together in preparation for the riot, including the Zheng lineage Yellow Crane Society who participated in the xiedou caused by baojia conflict (see Chapter two). The first target of the Yellow Crane Society was the government in the Gaojia Town. The town government was very vulnerable to the attackers. In the afternoon of May 30, Ye Fen and only seven or eight Yellow Crane members arrived at the Gaojia Town by boat with two pistols. They successfully occupied

the town government. They took over 2,000 *jin* of grain, one pistol, some clothes, and captured the director of the town government as hostage (he was released the next day). Ye Fen did not stop here. During the early evening of the same day, Ye and the lame led all the over 400 Yellow Crane members in attacking the Government of Poyang's District I in Sanmiaoqian. The outcome was extremely fruitful: Ye and his people got over forty rifles and a large amount of food, clothes, quilts, and many other military provisions. They also killed one man working in the government. With the new weapons in hand, Ye, the lame, and their men continued.

During the late evening of the same day, they directly went by boat to the town of Modaoshi where the new Poyang County Government was located. Their attempt to capture the county government turned out to be a disaster. The PLA in defense of the county government surrounded the Yellow Crane Society and opened fire. Seven Yellow Crane members were killed, over ten injured. The rest of the Yellow Crane Society all fled away in fear.⁶⁸

Morale among the Yellow Crane Society participants in the riot was very low. Many people felt they were coerced by Ye Fen and a few core leaders from the Peng lineage to attack the government. Zheng Jinbao, who was a vice schoolmaster in the Zheng lineage Yellow Crane Society, was forced by Ye Fen and a few Peng lineage leaders to rob the new county government in Modaoshi on May 29. Zheng agreed and left home with them. But on their way to Modaoshi, Zheng left the team secretly and went back home. He was afraid of the new government.⁶⁹ Peng Jiawang, who joined the Yellow Crane Society because his father was killed in the *xiedou* against the Hong lineage, participated in the riot against the new government. Ye Fen threatened that Ye would kill him if Peng Jiawang refused to join Ye's riot. Peng Jiawang was one of the most tragic figures in the story. He lost two of his younger brothers in the attack of the county government in Modaoshi. In 1953, Peng Jiawang was then sentenced to death by the new

government because of his participation in the riot.⁷⁰ Peng Bingnan, a charismatic Yellow Crane leader who was good at spirit possession (see Chapter one), also coerced his fellows to participate in the riot through spirit-possession. Most people were reluctant to rebel against the new government, but Peng Bingnan insisted that the spirit had told him to take action and rebel. Moreover, he also promised that the spirit will protect those who rebel and make them invulnerable. Those who refuse to go would be killed.⁷¹ Except for Ye Fen and the lame, most people in the Yellow Crane Society were simply equipped with swords and spears. When the PLA opened fire at them, the Yellow Crane's failure was unavoidable.

The Big Sword Society Riots

In late May of 1949, Wang Zhenhai met the Big Sword Society leader Cheng Hong multiple times to discuss the political situation in Poyang. Wang told Cheng that the PLA did not really have much power at the moment. The main purpose of the PLA's crossing the Yangtze River was robbing the rural areas for food. "Now the (KMT) central government has sent several armies to the PLA's base in Northeast China. You must organize your Big Sword forces and cut off the Communists' route to prevent them from marching further South." Due to the famine caused by food shortage and the CCP's grain levies, Cheng Hong and his fellow Big Sword Society members were discontented about the new regime. Wang's words certainly won the hearts of Cheng and many others. On May 28, under Wang's instruction, Cheng wrote several letters to his Big Sword networks at the bao level asking them for a meeting to be held on June 6. Cheng was very straightforward about the purpose of the meeting: organizing the Big Sword Society to resist grain levies violently. Because the flood had destroyed many bridges and roads in Poyang, only very few Big Sword leaders attended the meeting. Instead of making preparation

for violent resistance against the new regime, the meeting reached an agreement that all the bao attended would reject grain levies after June 9. On June 9, Wang and Cheng organized the second meeting with over twenty former bao leaders and Big Sword leaders. Wang declared that the KMT forces had defeated the PLA in many places and Li Fengchun's army had already reached the neighboring Zhide County in Anhui Province. Wang argued that it was the best opportunity to reorganize the Big Sword Society and rebel against the new regime. Wang reorganized all the Big Sword units into one big league. Then he divided the league into sub-units by baojia affiliations. Wang then appointed different tasks to each sub-unit.⁷²

In the evening of June 9, Wang Zhenhai initiated the first wave of attack against the CCP's working team in Cheng Hong's NO. 5 Bao of Hengyongju. Cheng strongly recommended Wang that they should wait for other Big Sword units and attack the working team together the next day. But Wang was confident that the CCP's working team in the NO. 5 Bao was weak. Under Wang's leadership, the Big Sword Society of about thirty people in the NO. 5 Bao soon surrounded the building of the CCP's working team. The CCP cadres refused to open door for the Big Sword Society, Wang used a grenade and bombed out the door. The Big Sword Society then tortured and killed a few cadres of the CCP's working team. They cut off the ears of a cadre Mr. Liu and beat him violently, because Mr. Liu reported many of the local landlords' names to the new government. The Big Sword Society also acquired many pistols and rifles.⁷³

On June 10, over 300 Big Sword Society members gathered at Cheng's NO. 5 Bao and prepared to attack the Town Government of Shimenjie. On their way to Shimenjie, Wang received notice from other Big Sword units that a PLA group of 200 to 300 soldiers was seen in the Town of Chuanwan not far from Shimenjie. Wang decided to retreat and went back to Cheng's home base in Hengyongju. In the evening, Wang received a notice from his bandit

friends under the leadership of Xie Laoqi and Zhu Laoliu that they had defeated a PLA grain levy team near Chuanwan and were on their way to capture Chuanwan. The bandit forces asked for help from Wang's Big Sword Society. Then Wang led his Big Sword Society towards Chuanwan in the Shimenjie direction again. When they were about 7 km from Chuanwan, Wang's Big Sword Society unexpectedly encountered a group of Big Sword members that were fleeing. These people warned Wang's Big Sword Society that the PLA had arrived in Chuanwan and killed a few Big Sword members. They also said that the invulnerability rituals were completely useless in face of the PLA's guns. Wang's Big Sword Society began to panic too. All of Wang's Big Sword members then fled away.⁷⁴

Wang Zhenhai's Big Sword Society network was certainly not the only active group in Poyang. Another Big Sword network under the leadership of Huang Shaoqiu was also involved in several riots against the new regime. In early June of 1949, Huang's Big Sword Society robbed and killed a CCP cadre they randomly ran into and then attacked the government in the Town of Jiantianjie. CCP cadres in Jiantianjie killed one Big Sword member and all rest of the Big Sword fled away. On June 15, Huang's Big Sword Society was suppressed by the PLA.⁷⁵ On June 7, another Big Sword group of more than 400 people under a martial arts master Zan Xiangong's leadership cooperated with the local bandit forces and attacked the government in the Town of Zhuzuishan. The PLA intervened in the defense of Zhuzuishan. In the end, eight PLA soldiers and fourteen Big Sword members were killed. The death of the Big Sword participants led to huge anxiety among the Big Sword Society and all the participants fled.⁷⁶

Testimonies from former Big Sword Society participants indicate that the year 1949 witnessed unprecedentedly high intensity of Big Sword activities, possibly as a response to uncertainly and insecurity in Poyang. Zhang Yintang's case gives us a vivid picture of ordinary

rural residents' mentality in face of the new regime and the following power struggle. Born in a landlord family in 1921, Zhang was familiar with most of the local political powers and voluntary associations. Zhang was a KMT member, a member of the Fellowship of Goodness (*Tongshanshe*, see Part II), a member of the most widespread secret society in China – the Green Gang (*Qingbang*), as well as a member of the Big Sword Society. In 1944, a local martial arts teacher told Zhang that the rituals in the Big Sword could make him invulnerable and protect him from bandits and robbers. Zhang immediately joined the Big Sword Society. Zhang's enthusiasm in 1944 was relatively low. The Big Sword network in Zhang's neighborhood was soon smashed by a KMT military force, possibly because some of its members turned to predatory activities. Zhang spent most of the next four years at home farming. Banditry was rampant in 1945 and 1946, but Zhang chose to join the Green Gang as protection instead of local self-defense associations. In 1949, however, the situation changed dramatically.⁷⁷

After the PLA's initial takeover of Poyang in April and May, the PLA's principal force soon left Poyang and went further South. The sudden power vacuum, as well as the flood, turned Poyang into chaos that every major power holder in Poyang wanted to take advantage of. In May, Li Fengchun's Youth Nation-Salvation Army (also known as the "NO. 9 Route Army to the locals) was very active in the Poyang Lake region and the neighboring Zhide County of Anhui Province. Zhang said that some of his friends joined the NO. 9 Route Army and encouraged him to join as well. In June, Big Sword units were seen everywhere in Poyang. People told Zhang that the Big Sword had defeated many bandit gangs without any injury. A Mr. Ye, who was a martial arts teacher in the Big Sword Society, persuaded Zhang to join the Big Sword again, "Look, the Big Sword Societies are everywhere now. All the people have submitted themselves to the Big Sword. An emperor will soon be born in the Big Sword Society

(see Chapter five for the new emperor in the Big Sword Society). You shall have no chance to regret if you do not join us now.” Having seen how widespread the Big Sword activities were during that period, Zhang learned all the Big Sword techniques again from the martial arts teachers. In order to show his loyalty to the Big Sword and accumulate merits, Zhang was also very enthusiastic about introducing new people into the Big Sword Society. Zhang introduced more than ten people in total during a very short period.⁷⁸

A 1959 investigation report from the Public Security unit in Poyang’s District NO. 5 (Xiejiatan) gives us an overall picture of the Big Sword Society’s development in the area. In 1959, there were 21 villages and 635 households in Xiejiatan. The population was 2,357. In 1949, people from 11 different villages joined the Big Sword Society and established 4 Big Sword assembly halls. The total participants were 112, accounting for roughly 4.6% of the entire district’s population in 1949 (the 1949 population should be around 2,435). All the participants were male. Except for only a few Big Sword leaders who were from the landlord class, most of the participants were poor peasants. Among the 112 Big Sword participants, 5 of them were CCP members, 2 were Communist Youth League members, 12 were cadres working in the new government. The report points out that bandit activities were unprecedentedly rampant during the early months of the CCP’s takeover in 1949. Then the report concludes that the proliferation of Big Sword Societies was simply a response to the bandit problem, without mentioning the grain levy and borrowing policy. The Big Sword Societies in Xiejiatan also attacked the new District Government. The report blames the remnant KMT spies as the agitators who manipulated the power of the Big Sword Society.⁷⁹

The CCP’s Anti-Bandit Campaign in 1949

After Ye Fen's failed attempt to capture the County Government in Modaoshi, Ye fled away. But Ye did not give up his anti-communist agenda. A few days after the Modaoshi incident, Ye and about ten leaders of the Peng lineage Yellow Crane Society arrived at Peng Shouzu's village. Peng Shouzu's village was about thirty-five km away from Modaoshi and was completely unaware of the Modaoshi incident. Ye and the Peng lineage leaders pretended that they left the Peng lineage in Hongjiatan because of a famine caused by the flood. Because the Peng lineage Yellow Crane Society helped Peng Shouzu's village in the factional conflict in 1948 (see Chapter two), Peng Shouzu's village agreed to give them food and allowed them to stay in their village, although Peng Shouzu's village was also suffering from famine. During Ye Fen's stay there, Ye began mobilizing Peng Shouzu to attack the District III Government in Fenggang and steal food there to alleviate the famine. Ye also suggested that maybe the Yellow Crane Society in Peng Shouzu's village could help them accomplish the job. Unfortunately, Peng Shouzu rejected. Ye Fen and his fellows then left Peng Shouzu's village.⁸⁰ Ye then cooperated with a few local bandit gangs and launched a strike in Fenggang, but the riot also failed.⁸¹ During the same period of June and July, the Big Sword Societies in Poyang attacked as least seven CCP working teams or governments below the county level.⁸²

Under such pressure of intense anti-government activities immediately after the "liberation," the CCP certainly would not wait to die. In Sichuan Province, according to Wang Di's case study of the Gowned Brothers, secret society chiefs who openly encouraged the peasants to resist the CCP's grain levies were labeled as "bandit chiefs" by the CCP, although these people had never robbed others' properties. "Later, this account categorized all men who participated in or organized riots as 'bandits' and called the crackdown on the resistance a 'suppression of bandits.' (*jiaofei*)"⁸³ In Poyang County and the entire Jiangxi Province, all anti-

CCP actors who were active in the initial months after the takeover were also labeled as “bandits,” including all the Yellow Crane and Big Sword activities. From early July to the end of 1949, the PLA in Jiangxi initiated three waves of Anti-Bandits Campaigns.

At the Poyang County level, on July 17, CCP Poyang District Committee produced a document reviewing all the major violent anti-government activities that had occurred recently. These events include riots organized by the Big Sword Society, underground KMT secret agent Li Fengchun, and other bandit forces. The document calls all these participants “secret societies and bandits” (*huimen tufei*). Huimen, in this case, refers to part of all the local voluntary associations (*huidaomen*). Huimen only includes secret societies and local self-defense associations and completely excludes redemptive societies (see Introduction for how the meaning of *huidaomen* evolved over time). In this document, the local government in Poyang was trying to distinguish the local self-defense associations from regular bandits, although they all engaged in anti-communist activities. The document then points out that the KMT had a solid foundation in the Poyang area. Many of the landlord class, secret societies, government officials, elites in the education sector, as well as lineage leaders were anti-communist during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The document recommends that the CCP cadres could “ally with the majority while isolate the minority” and tighten ideological control. The PLA did not establish local military forces and eliminate all counterrevolutionary powers in time. During June, the county Party committee focused too much on grain levies and overlooked the need of building local military forces. The document also admits that all the CCP governmental units were too far away from one another and the connection between them were weak.⁸⁴

While the county government was reflecting on the weaknesses of the new-born order in Poyang, the PLA Jiangxi Provincial Headquarters’ main concern was how to eliminate all anti-

CCP military forces in rural society. Instead of distinguishing local self-defense associations from regular bandit activities, the PLA Jiangxi Provincial Headquarters called all anti-CCP military forces uniformly “bandits.” The PLA’s target was the elimination of all unauthorized local military powers in Jiangxi.

The first phase of the PLA’s Anti-Bandit Campaign began on July 7 and ended in late August.⁸⁵ The PLA divided all bandits into four major categories. (1) Local Puppet Government Organizations, mainly refers to former police forces and self-protection militias under the leadership of previous KMT officials; (2) KMT Secret Agent Forces, predominantly refers to underground KMT secret agents remaining in Jiangxi and the new military powers they were organizing, including Li Fengchun’s Youth Nation-Salvation Army; (3) Armed Feudal Lineage Xiedou Forces and Armed Secret Societies, include all the self-defense associations and private militias organized by lineage leaders; (4) Economic Bandit, who could hardly survive the harsh environment in rural China and had no choice but to join bandit gangs for survival. Among all the four categories of bandits, only the fourth category refers to the regular banditry we see in Chapter one. The document also intentionally emphasizes that people turned to banditry because “the Nationalist Government in Jiangxi imposed unbearable exorbitant taxes and levies” to the people. People turned to bandit because of the evil Nationalist Government. The document also adds that the flood in 1949 had further worsened the situation. Finally, the document points out that actually only a very tiny parts of bandits in category four were professional bandits.⁸⁶ From the categorization of “bandits” in this document we can infer that the target of the first Anti-Bandit Campaign was not primarily “real bandits,” but the existing power holders in rural Jiangxi: former KMT officials, KMT underground secret agents, lineage leaders, and self-defense associations.

During the same day on July 7, Chen Qihan, the Chief Commander of the PLA's Jiangxi Military Region, delivered a report to his fellow military officials on correctly handling all types of military forces. In this report, Chen specifically talked about the Big Sword Society as a representative of all local self-defense associations. "The Big Sword Society is being cheated. We should not suppress it militarily before we show them respect and educate them. If we have injured or killed any of the participants by any chance, we must cure the injured and send the captives back home in order to isolate the leaders. Our primary method is, however, dissolve their organization politically. We won't deal with it militarily unless an emergency happens. If we have to fight, however, we must let them feel the pain."⁸⁷

Poyang County was the center of the first phase of Anti-Bandit Campaign in Jiangxi. Located in northeast Jiangxi and neighboring the Poyang Lake, Poyang County was a major grain production area and a transportation center in Jiangxi. "In the next month to forty-five days, we must strengthen our bases in northeast Jiangxi, assure the safety of ground and water transportation, and protect the main grain production area, so that the PLA's main force can go further into west and south Jiangxi Province." The target of the first phase was the politically most counterrevolutionary bandit such like Li Fengchun's army. The Big Sword Society and other self-defense associations were not considered as the most counterrevolutionary force. Consequently, the PLA's policy towards the self-defense associations was seizing their weapons and dissolving their organizations through both political education and military suppression.⁸⁸ On July 22, a document from the Central China Military Region estimates that there were over 10,000 active Big Sword Society participants in the Poyang and Nanchang region in Northeast Jiangxi. The same document also urges the PLA in Jiangxi to prioritize Poyang as the center of the Anti-Bandit Campaign.⁸⁹

The second phase of the Anti-Bandit Campaign in Jiangxi began August 17 and ended in late September.⁹⁰ The second phase saw barely any emphasis on self-defense associations, probably due to the fact that most self-defense associations were already wiped out or dissolved by the end of the first phase. The PLA Jiangxi Military Region's plan for the second phase indicates that there were around 27,900 bandits remaining in Jiangxi, in which the majority were "political bandits," namely, bandits that had a clear anti-communist agenda, such like Li Fengchun's Youth Nation-Salvation Army. The Poyang Lake region and the Poyang County remained the center of phase two, but there was no specific mention of any self-defense associations in the PLA's plan.⁹¹ The second phase explicitly emphasizes the importance of the campaign as a propaganda war rather than physical war. A concluding document of the second phase shows that the majority of the bandits surrendered to the PLA after political persuasion from the government. The document also emphasizes that the PLA began to get involved in ordinary people's daily agricultural work.⁹² The participation of PLA in people's everyday life significantly reduced the amount of political rumors and possibly alleviated the tension that was caused by the grain levy policy. The stabilization of rural resident's routine agricultural work and the retreat of the flood had significantly shaken the need of the self-defense associations' existence.

The third phase of the Anti-Bandit Campaign in Jiangxi began on October 19 and ended in late December.⁹³ Although the remaining number of active bandits in Jiangxi decreased from 27,900 at the beginning of phase two to 13,700 at the beginning of phase three, phase three saw a revival of self-defense associations' activities. The PLA's document does not include many details about the revived self-defense associations. It only gives two examples of Big Sword Societies attacking new governments. One took place in Guangze County of West Fujian

Province, the other took place in Lichuan County of East Jiangxi Province.⁹⁴ It is interesting that both cases were located in the border region between Jiangxi and Fujian, possibly suggesting that these were the regions that were newly “liberated” by the PLA without powerful CCP strongholds.

After the first two phases of the Anti-Bandit Campaign, major bandit bases led by KMT remnant forces were already wiped out. Li Fengchun was arrested during the second phase on September 9.⁹⁵ Most anti-CCP organizations were dispersed and underground.⁹⁶ Some of these remaining small-size anti-CCP groups joined the local *huidaomen* associations as disguise. The feudal powers in rural China, according to the plan of the third phase, remain strong. The plan then suggests the primary goal of the third phase should be a combination of anti-bandit campaign and anti-bully campaign.⁹⁷ The target the CCP’s political campaign then gradually shifted from opposing the remaining KMT forces to opposing the existing power structure of the rural society. In the CCP’s terminology, bully (*ba*) primarily refers to the landlord class, lineage bosses, gentry class, and any other power holders in the traditional society. Among these existing powers, *huidaomen* was certainly a major player in rural China. The end of the Anti-Bandit Campaign signifies the rise of the Anti-Huidaomen Campaign that would soon take place in 1950.

¹ NPYXZ, Vol. 1, 341.

² Ibid, 338 and 341.

³ Ibid, 351.

⁴ Ibid, 341-342, and 372-373.

⁵ Ibid, 351.

⁶ Ibid, 342.

⁷ Ibid, 554.

⁸ Zhonggong poyang defang shi [Poyang Communist Party’s Local History], Vol. 1. Poyang: Zhonggong poyangxian dangwei dangshiban, 2005. 215-216.

⁹ Boyang wenshi ziliao [Boyang Historical Materials], Vol. 1. Boyang: Jiangxisheng boyangxian weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiuwei, 1986. 54-55.

¹⁰ Boyang wenshi ziliao [Boyang Historical Materials], Vol. 5. Boyang: Jiangxisheng boyangxian weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiuwei, 1989. 1-2.

¹¹ Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China*, 246.

- ¹² Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party*, 12.
- ¹³ Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China*, 213-216.
- ¹⁴ Li, Dazhao. “Luyushan deng sheng de hongqianghui [The Red Spear Society in Shandong, Henan, and Shaanxi Provinces],” in Li Dazhao xuanji [Selected Works of Li Dazhao]. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1959, 546.
- ¹⁵ “Duiyu hongqianghui yundong jueyi’an – zhongguo gongchandang disanci zhongyang kuada zhixing weiyuanhui huiyi juean [The Resolution Concerning the Red Spear Society – A Resolution Produced in the Third Enlargement Meeting of the Chinese Communist Party], in Henan shizhi ziliao [Henan Historical Materials],” Vol. 6. Zhengzhou: Henansheng defang shizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 1984, 9.
- ¹⁶ “Henan nongyun baogao – dui qianghui yundong zhi fenxi [A Report on Peasant Movement in Henan – An Analysis on the Spear Societies],” in Yizhan shiqi henan nongmin yundong [Peasant Movements in Henan during the First National Revolution], Zhengzhou: Zhonggong henan shengwei dangshi gongzuo weiyuanhui, 1987, 122.
- ¹⁷ “Dui mixin yu ban mixin de nongmin wuzhuang zuzhi zhi guanxi – zhongguo guochandang diliuci daibiao dahui de jueyi’an [On the Relationship with Superstitious and Semi-Superstitious Peasant Militarized Organizations – A Resolution Produced during the Sixty National CCP Congress],” in Henan shizhi ziliao [Henan Historical Materials],” Vol. 6. Zhengzhou: Henansheng defang shizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 1984, 14.
- ¹⁸ Takashi, Mimi jieshe yu zhongguo geming [Secret Societies in the Chinese Revolution], chapter 4.
- ¹⁹ Bainian jiyi – henan wenshi ziliao daxi [Memory of A Century – A Comprehensive Collection of Henan Historical Materials], Military, Vol. 1. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 2014, 96-107.
- ²⁰ Geming shi ziliao [Sources on Revolutionary History], Vol. 6, Beijing: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1982, 168-182.
- ²¹ “Henan hongqianghui bei Wu Peifu jundui tusha canzhuang [The Violent Massacre of Red Spear Members by Wu Peifu’s Army in Henan], in Yizhan shiqi henan nongmin yundong [Peasant Movements in Henan during the First National Revolution], Zhengzhou: Zhonggong henan shengwei dangshi gongzuo weiyuanhui, 1987, 179-181.
- ²² Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China*, 224.
- ²³ Ibid, 221.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 235.
- ²⁵ “Shandong sheng gongan zongju guanyu diaocha huimen zuzhi de tongzhi [Shandong Provincial PSB’s Notice on the Investigation of *Huimen* Organizations],” Shandong Provincial Archives G010-01-0053-005.
- ²⁶ ZGHDMSLJC, Vol. 1, 51-52.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 338.
- ²⁸ ZGHDMSLJC, Vol. 2, 687.
- ²⁹ See Wang, *Violence and Order on the Chengdu Plain*, Chapter 10.
- ³⁰ “Gucheng huimen baodong shijian chubu diaocha [A Preliminary Investigation on the Gucheng *Huimen* Riot],” Hubei Provincial Archives GM4-1-169-010.
- ³¹ The Appeasement Working Team, a subunit of the General Administration of Appeasement, was a local military organ in charge of local military affairs, including the management of local military forces such as the Yellow Crane Society.
- ³² “Huanghehui zuzhi jigou renmin deng qingkuang [Information on the Organizational Structure and Personnel within the Yellow Crane Society],” PYGADA Z2-1-87.
- ³³ “Guanyu tingjin silingbu, dadaohui ji Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying deng diaocha [Investigations on Marching into the Command Headquarters, the Big Sword Society, Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying, and Others],” PYGADA Z2-1-93.
- ³⁴ “Cheng Hong fandong huimen an [Cheng Hong Counterrevolutionary *Huimen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-105.
- ³⁵ NPYXZ, Vol. 1, 136-138.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 138-139.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 139.
- ³⁸ Zhongguo Poyang didangshi [CCP’s Local History of Poyang], Vol. 1, Beijing: Guojia xingzhengxueyuan dangshiban, 2005, 204.
- ³⁹ NPYXZ, Vol. 1, 139.
- ⁴⁰ “Cheng Hong fandong huimen an [Cheng Hong Counterrevolutionary *Huimen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-105.
- ⁴¹ “Cao Zhaosong fandong huidaomen touzi an [Cao Zhaosong Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-66.
- ⁴² “Zhang Yuncheng fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Yuncheng Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-312.
- ⁴³ “Peng Shouzu fandong daoshou an [Peng Shouzu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-230.
- ⁴⁴ “Jiangxi junqu gaogan huiyi dui diyi qi jiaofei feiqing gaikuang de fenxi [An Analysis on the First-Phase Crackdown on Bandits Produced during Jiangxi Military Division’s Meeting of High-Ranking Officials],” in Jiangxi

dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 23-25.

⁴⁵ See Bernhardt, *Rents, Taxes, and Peasant Resistance*, Chapter 6.

⁴⁶ Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party*, Chapter 8.

⁴⁷ Zhonggong Poyang difangshi [CCP's Local History of Poyang], Vol. 1, Beijing: Guojia xingzhengxueyuan dangshiban, 2005, 203-206.

⁴⁸ Zhonggong Yingtan difangshi [CCP's Local History of Yingtan], Vol. 1, Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2009, 364.

⁴⁹ Zhongguo Poyang didangshi [CCP's Local History of Poyang], Vol. 1, Beijing: Guojia xingzhengxueyuan dangshiban, 2005, 205.

⁵⁰ "Zhonggong Poyang diwei guanyu liangshi zhengjie de wenti dierhao tongbao [The CCP Poyang Committee's NO.2 Notification on Grain Purchase and Borrowing]," in Zhonggong Boyang dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the CCP in Boyang], Shangrao: Zhonggong Shangrao diwei dangshi gongzuo bangongshi, 1990, 103-105.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 103-104.

⁵² *Ibid*, 104-105.

⁵³ "Zhonggong Boyang diwei tongbao diqihao [The CCP Boyang Committee's NO.7 Notification]," in Zhonggong Boyang dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the CCP in Boyang], Shangrao: Zhonggong Shangrao diwei dangshi gongzuo bangongshi, 1990, 106-108.

⁵⁴ "Cheng Hong fandong huimen an [Cheng Hong Counterrevolutionary *Huimen* Case]," PYGADA Z1-1-105.

⁵⁵ "Peng Shouzu fandong daoshou an [Peng Shouzu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case]," PYGADA Z1-4-230.

⁵⁶ Wang, *Violence and Order on the Chengdu Plain*, 149.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 151.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 149.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 152.

⁶⁰ "Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case]," PYGADA Z1-1-53.

⁶¹ Jiangxi junqu gaogan huiyi dui diyi qi jiaofei feiqing gaikuang de fenxi [An Analysis on the First-Phase Crackdown on Bandits Produced during Jiangxi Military Division's Meeting of High-Ranking Officials]," in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 23-25.

⁶² "Jiangxi junqu guanyu diyi qi jiaofei fangzhen he bushu de mingling [Jiangxi Military District's Command on the Goals and Strategy of the First-Phase Crackdown on Bandits]," in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Vol. 26, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 28.

⁶³ Jiangxi sheng junshi zhi [Jiangxi Provincial Military Gazetteer], Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1997, 267.

⁶⁴ Poyang wenshi huibian [A Selected Collection of Poyang Historical Sources], Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2009, 5 and 16.

⁶⁵ Zhonggong Poyang difangshi [CCP's Local History of Poyang], Vol. 1, Beijing: Guojia xingzhengxueyuan dangshiban, 2005, 142-143.

⁶⁶ "Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case]," PYGADA Z1-1-53.

⁶⁷ "Peng Jiawang fandong daoshou an [Peng Jiawang Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case]," PYGADA Z1-4-234.

⁶⁸ "Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu fandong daoshou an [Peng Guixiang, Peng Linshu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leaders Case]," PYGADA Z1-1-53.

⁶⁹ Poyang Public Security Archives, Shanghai Jiaotong University, Z1-1-13

⁷⁰ "Peng Jiawang fandong daoshou an [Peng Jiawang Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case]," PYGADA Z1-4-234.

⁷¹ "Peng Bingnan fandong huidaomen an [Peng Bingnan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case]," PYGADA Z3-1-376.

⁷² "Cheng Hong fandong huimen an [Cheng Hong Counterrevolutionary *Huimen* Case]," PYGADA Z1-1-105.

⁷³ "Cheng Hong fandong huimen an [Cheng Hong Counterrevolutionary *Huimen* Case]," PYGADA Z1-1-105;

"Huang Haizhou fandong huidaomen an [Huang Haizhou Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case]," PYGADA Z1-2-908.

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- ⁷⁴ “Cheng Hong fandong huimen an [Cheng Hong Counterrevolutionary *Huimen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-1-105; “Huang Haizhou fandong huidaomen an [Huang Haizhou Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-908.
- ⁷⁵ “Li Changgen fandong huidaomen an [Li Changgen Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-388.
- ⁷⁶ “He Xikui fandong huidaomen touzi an [He Xikui Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-6-381.
- ⁷⁷ “Zhang Yintang fandong daoshou an [Zhang Yintang Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z3-1-180.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ “Xietan xiang huamin dadui dadaohui daji qingkuang baogao [Report on Huamin Brigade’s Suppression of the Big Sword Society in the Xietan Xiang],” PYGADA W10-3-3.
- ⁸⁰ “Peng Shouzu fandong daoshou an [Peng Shouzu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-230.
- ⁸¹ “Huanghehui zuzhi jigou renmin deng qingkuang [Information on the Organizational Structure and Personnel within the Yellow Crane Society],” PYGADA Z2-1-87.
- ⁸² “Guanyu tingjin silingbu, dadaohui ji Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying deng diaocha [Investigations on Marching into the Command Headquarters, the Big Sword Society, Jiang Longzhou, Liu Ying, and Others],” PYGADA Z2-1-93.
- ⁸³ Wang, *Violence and Order on the Chengdu Plain*, 151.
- ⁸⁴ “Zhonggong Boyang diwei tongbao diqihao [The CCP Boyang Committee’s NO.7 Notification],” in Zhonggong Boyang dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the CCP in Boyang], Shangrao: Zhonggong Shangrao diwei dangshi gongzuo bangongshi, 1990, 106-108.
- ⁸⁵ Jiangxi sheng junshi zhi [Jiangxi Provincial Military Gazetteer], Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1997, 267-268.
- ⁸⁶ Jiangxi junqu gaogan huiyi dui diyiqi jiaofei feiqing gaikuang de fenxi [An Analysis on the First-Phase Crackdown on Bandits Produced during Jiangxi Military Division’s Meeting of High-Ranking Officials],” in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 23-25.
- ⁸⁷ “Chen Qihan zai junqu shouzhang huiyi shang guanyu chuli gezhong leixing wuzhuang fang’an de baogao [Chen Qihan’s Report on Handling Various Types of Militarized Groups during Jiangxi Military District’s High-Ranking Officials’ Meeting],” in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Vol. 26, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 15-26.
- ⁸⁸ “Jiangxi junqu guanyu diyiqi jiaofei fangzhen he bushu de mingling [Jiangxi Military District’s Command on the Goals and Strategy of the First-Phase Crackdown on Bandits],” in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Vol. 26, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 27-30.
- ⁸⁹ “Huazhong junqu guanyu gedi feiqing ji xiabannian jiaofei bushu zhi zhongyang junwei dian [A Telegram from Mid-China Military District to the Central Military Committee on Bandit Activities and the Plan for Suppressing Bandits in the Second Half of the Year],” in Jiaofei douzheng zhongnan diqu [Crackdown on Bandits in Mid-South China],” Vol. 1, Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2001, 161-163.
- ⁹⁰ Jiangxi sheng junshi zhi [Jiangxi Provincial Military Gazetteer], Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1997, 268-271.
- ⁹¹ “Jiangxi junqu guanyu di’erqi jiaofei fangzhen he bushu de mingling [Jiangxi Military District’s Command on the Goals and Strategy of the Second-Phase Crackdown on Bandits],” in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Vol. 26, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 40-42.
- ⁹² “Jiangxi junqu zhengzhibu guanyu di’erqi jiaofei zhengzhi gongzuo zongjie [Jiangxi Military District Political Department’s Summary of Political Propaganda during the Second-Phase Crackdown on Bandits],” in Jiaofei douzheng zhongnan diqu [Crackdown on Bandits in Mid-South China],” Vol. 1, Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2001, 242-247.
- ⁹³ Jiangxi sheng junshi zhi [Jiangxi Provincial Military Gazetteer], Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1997, 271-272.
- ⁹⁴ “Jiangxi junqu silingbu guanyu disanqi jiaofei feiqing tongbao [Jiangxi Military District Headquarters’ Notification on Bandit Activities during the Third-Phase Crackdown on Bandits],” in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Vol. 26, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 51-52.
- ⁹⁵ Jiangxi sheng junshi zhi [Jiangxi Provincial Military Gazetteer], Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1997, 258.
- ⁹⁶ “Jiangxi junqu guanyu disanqi jiaofei de buchong zhishi [Jiangxi Military District’s Additional Instructions on the Third-Phase Crackdown on Bandits],” in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Vol. 26, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 54-55.

⁹⁷ “Jiangxi junqu guanyu disanqi jiaofei fangzhen he bushu de mingling [Jiangxi Military District’s Command on the Goals and Strategy of the Third-Phase Crackdown on Bandits],” in Jiangxi dangshi ziliao [Historical Materials on the History of CCP in Jiangxi], Vol. 26, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 52-54.

Chapter 4: Outsiders, Class Differentiation, Illness, and Gender: Origin and Rise of Tongshanshe and Yiguandao in Poyang

Although neither the Yellow Crane Society nor the Big Sword Society originated from Poyang County, these self-defense associations show no clear pattern of a unified nation-wide network of leadership and institution. These two major self-defense associations in Poyang usually developed independently from outside influences. Participants in these associations had no sense of cross-regional institutionalization either. As discussed in chapter one, the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword were more like two martial arts schools than organized institutions. Self-defense associations were primarily rural self-governing associations.

In contrast, most redemptive societies that were categorized as *huidaomen* in the twentieth century show a clear pattern of institutionalized regional or even national networks of leadership and personnel, a coherent genealogy of history, and clear organizational structures. Both the Fellowship of Goodness and the Way of Pervading Unity in Poyang shared these commonalities.

C. K. Yang's *Religion in Chinese Society* categorizes sectarian societies as institutionalized religion, in contrast to diffused religion. According to Yang, institutionalized religion is defined as a system of religion that has an independent theology, an independent form of worship, and an independent organizational structure.¹ Yang clearly points out that syncretic religious societies that have continuously been suppressed by political powers belong to one of the three major forms of institutionalized religion.² Yang's emphasis on independence in defining institutionalized religion accurately captures the nature of redemptive societies as

separate religious institutions that are not diffused into other secular social institutions. Both Tongshanshe and Yiguandao have their independent organizations and personnel that are not open to outsiders. But redemptive societies in the 20th century also differed from Yang's model. Redemptive societies, including both Tongshanshe and Yiguandao, lack independent theological teachings. Their teachings are mostly borrowed from other institutionalized religions such as Buddhism and Daoism. They also lack professional religious personnel who are specifically trained as religious specialists. As we will see in this chapter, religious leaders in both sects come from lay-member backgrounds with very limited professional training. Lastly, despite the fact that redemptive societies have independent organizational structures, it does not exclude the fact that their organizations are deeply diffused into the secular realm. Tongshanshe, in particular, goes far beyond its religious functions and becomes a significant channel of elite merchant networks in Poyang and many other places.

Origin of the Tongshanshe and the Yiguandao

Tongshanshe

The Fellowship of Goodness (Tongshanshe, hereafter TSS) was one of the largest nationwide redemptive societies in China during the Republican Era. During the late Qing period, Peng Ruzun (1868-1950) of Yongchuan County in Sichuan Province (now Chongqing) who was a former follower of the Way of Anterior Heaven (Xiantian dao) established TSS. Peng advocated a secular way of religious practice that participants in the TSS could become immortals through self-cultivation without fasting or becoming monks. Such secularized and simplified religious practice was widely welcomed. In 1910, Peng left Sichuan and went to Beijing to preach. Peng's trip to Beijing gained tremendous support from former aristocrats of the Qing Dynasty and the

leading warlords, including Duan Qirui and Cao Kun. In 1917, during the warlord period, TSS officially registered at the Northern Warlords Government in Beijing. TSS also established its central headquarters in Beijing. The government then provided TSS with formal support in developing branches across China. By 1923, TSS had already established provincial-level organizations in all provinces in China.³ In Beijing, TSS ran a publishing house that published a number of religious books on self-cultivation and morality. TSS also functioned as a charity organization providing support for funerals of ordinary people and mass education.⁴ In 1925, Peng built another TSS headquarters in Wuhan and claimed that TSS had a membership of over one million people. The name “Tongshanshe” even became a “free-floating signifier” of similar self-cultivation groups which shows the exceptional popularity of TSS in China.⁵

TSS had a clear organizational structure. In the administrative sphere, TSS followed a hierarchical order from the national level to the sub-county level. At the national level, TSS had one central headquarters (*zonghao*) and a central office of administration (*zong shiwusuo*). The central headquarters was originally established by Peng Ruzun in Beijing. Peng then relocated the central headquarters to his hometown in Sichuan Province. The central office of administration refers to the new headquarters built in Wuhan in 1925, assisting the old headquarters with administrative affairs in each province. Peng Ruzun was the single highest leader in the TSS known as the “venerable master (*shizun*).” At the provincial level, there was a provincial headquarters in each province. Peng Ruzun directly appointed leaders of each provincial headquarters. Under the provincial level, the TSS network was further divided into county branches. The heads of the county branches were called the master of goodness (*shanzhang*) and the vice-master of goodness (*fu shanzhang*). Both the masters and vice-masters

were elected from the local TSS leaders. Below the county level were local offices of administrative affairs (*shiwusuo*).⁶

Table 9: Hierarchical Organization of Tongshanshe

Level 1	众生 Zhongsheng
Level 2	众生 Zhongsheng
Level 3	众生 Zhongsheng
Level 4	天恩 Tian'en
Level 5	证恩 Zheng'em
Level 6	引恩 Yin'en
Level 7	保恩 Bao'en
Level 8	顶恩 Ding'en
Level 9	十地 Shidi
Level 10	五引 Wuyin
Level 11	四象 Sixiang
Level 12	三才 Sancai
Level 13	两仪 Liangyi
Level 14	太极 Taiji
Level 15	皇极 Huangji
Level 16	无极 Wuji

In the religious sphere, TSS was even more meticulously divided into sixteen hierarchical levels. Level one to level three referred to lay believers in the TSS without any administrative or religious authority. People from level four above were given the authority to preach and introduce new people into TSS. Level five to level seven were appointed by people above level ten. All the people above level eight were appointed by Peng Ruzun himself. People above level nine were considered high-level religious leaders in the TSS, and their number was very small. Level sixteen was the highest in TSS. Only Peng Ruzun himself belonged to this class.⁷

Newcomers to the TSS were required to follow a strict set of rules and ceremonies. New members must be introduced by old members (above level four). TSS used the ritual of spirit writing during the new membership ceremony. When the deities permitted newcomers to join the TSS through spirit writing, level four leaders would officially introduce them to the TSS and asked them to fill out the new membership forms. After paying the membership fee, the new members would burn their new membership forms in front of the altar of the deities. Then the level four leaders would teach them how to recite the scriptures of the TSS.⁸

TSS in Poyang was just a tiny part of TSS' nationwide expansion. According to the Republican-era Poyang County Gazetteer, TSS was originally known as a charity organization with religious characteristics under the category of Daoism. TSS arrived in Poyang in 1919, two years after its official registration at the Beijing Government. The Poyang headquarters was located on the Zhonghe Alley in the Poyang County Seat. TSS also had its small gathering points scattered around in the rural areas in Poyang. As a charity organization, TSS had a Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic and offered free coffins to the poor.⁹ The Poyang Public Security Bureau's 1959 report suggests that TSS reached Jiangxi Province and established its first Jiangxi headquarters in Nanchang in 1917. The Nanchang branch then sent out evangelists to Poyang in

1919. In 1920, TSS had already penetrated the rural areas and set up a few small gathering points in the rural area of Poyang.¹⁰

Constructing a coherent and nuanced narrative of TSS' spread in Poyang is daunting and difficult. A 1959 report on the origin and development of one TSS branch from the Poyang Public Security Bureau gives us a glimpse of how TSS rooted and flourished in Poyang. In 1921, Yu Zhupeng, who was from a gentry family in the Yuban Village of the Xiejiatan area in Poyang, visited the City of Jiujiang in Jiangxi. In order to cure Yu's diseases and improve his health condition, Yu came to know two local TSS leaders Xiao Renchang and Zhang Ketai in Jiujiang and invited them to his home in Poyang. At Yu's home, Xiao and Zhang officially performed the new membership ceremony and introduced Yu into TSS. Yu Zhupeng then organized the meeting of his elder brother Yu Weixian with the two Jiujiang visitors. Yu Weixian also joined the TSS at Yu Zhupeng's home. In 1922, Yu Weixian took Xiao and Zhang to his son-in-law Guan Bingyuan's house in the Wujia Village. Guan was also from a local gentry family. Guan also joined the TSS and then introduced more than twenty influential local people to Xiao and Zhang. They also joined the TSS. They officially established a TSS office of administrative affairs in a teahouse near Guan's home. The new TSS branch held three Dragon Flower Festival (*longhuahui*) per year on the March 15, May 15, and September 15. A former degree holder Guan Anlin was elected as the master of goodness.¹¹

Even though some local elites joined the TSS at the very beginning, this TSS branch did not grow bigger. In 1936, Guan Anlin gave up his leadership as the master of goodness. From 1936 to 1938, the TSS office was relocated multiple times due to the changes in leadership roles. In 1938, Liu Changkai from a Poyang gentry family who was also a *quzhang* (head of the district) at the time joined the TSS. Based on Liu's political network, he was very ambitious

about the future of TSS. In just half a year, Liu was elected as the new master of goodness. Liu connected with a number of local gentry families and politicians, including Liu Jihu, who was a *xiangzhang*. The TSS branch under Liu's leadership became very active again until 1949 when the PLA arrived at Poyang.¹²

In this case, the development of TSS in Poyang mainly relied on elite networks. The early members of this TSS branch in Poyang all came from the gentry class, and some were influential local politicians. In contrast to the self-defense associations in Poyang whose primary purpose was defending local communities from bandits by absorbing as many people as possible, we barely see any participation of ordinary people in the development of TSS. As we will see in the next section, TSS' role went far beyond the religious realm *per se* and became a space of socializing for the local elites who came from similar social and economic backgrounds.

Yiguandao

Although TSS played a crucial role in the development of sectarian groups in China during the late Qing and Republican era, TSS disappeared in China after the CCP's crackdown on *huidaomen* in the early 1950s. The story of the Way of Pervading Unity (*Yiguandao*, hereafter YGD) was different. YGD was the single most well-known redemptive society in China during the first half of the twentieth century. During the CCP's Anti-Huidaomen Campaign in the 1950s, YGD was the primary target as well. The Party propagandists made a number of propaganda movies and exhibitions about the "crimes" of YGD. YGD became a symbol of illegal counterrevolutionary religious groups in the new regime. All these facts have shown how deeply the name of YGD was rooted in ordinary people's everyday life.¹³

Similar to the TSS, YGD was also born as a sub-branch of the Way of Anterior Heaven and was heavily influenced by the structure and teachings of the TSS.¹⁴ The genealogy of YGD involves the mystification of its history and founders, especially before the Republican era. YGD might originate from a charismatic religious leader Wang Jueyi and his close disciple Liu Qingxu during the Guangxu Emperor's reign in the late Qing Dynasty. Liu started to use the name "Yiguandao." After Liu's death, one of his disciples, Lu Zhongyi from Jining of Shandong Province, took over the leadership and claimed himself to be the incarnation of the Maitreya Buddha. In 1915, Zhang Guangbi (also known as Zhang Tianran), another local of Jining, joined the YGD and became Lu's disciple. After Lu's death in 1925, an internal factional competition broke out between Zhang and Lu's younger sister Lu Zhongjie. Zhang eventually defeated Lu Zhongjie and became the YGD's highest leader in 1928.

It was under Zhang Guangbi's leadership that the YGD gradually developed into the largest sectarian group in China. In 1929, Zhang founded the central altar (of China) in Jinan, the capital city of Shandong Province. The next year, Zhang moved to Tianjin and established a new central altar in Tianjin. Jinan and Tianjin became the YGD's two capitals in China. In 1938, Zhang built the Beijing central altar. Each of the three central altars was responsible for a number of lower-level altars, and the three as a whole covered most areas in Northern China. By 1941, Zhang had started to build YGD networks in Southern China, Northwest China, as well as oversea Chinese communities. YGD, under Zhang's leadership, became the largest sectarian group in China with a global-expansion agenda.¹⁵

The hierarchical order of YGD's leadership and personnel had changed multiple times before 1950 from the Lu Zhongyi period to the Zhang Guangbi period.¹⁶ The Poyang Public Security Bureau's report divides YGD personnel into eight hierarchical levels. At the top two

levels were Zhang Guangbi and his wife Sun Suzhen. Below them was the level of “master of the Dao” (*dao Zhang*) who was responsible for nation-wide religious affairs within the YGD assisting Zhang and his wife. Each *dao Zhang* was free to develop his YGD branch and appoint personnel below his level. Such a linear-structure model had actually turned each *dao Zhang* into the real leader of religious affairs within the YGD. In contrast to TSS’ structure that was predominantly defined by geographical location, YGD’s development relied on the vision and needs of the *dao Zhang*. Such an arrangement might lead to overlap and competition between more than one *dao Zhang* networks within the same region. At level 3 were the “evangelists” (*dian chuanshi*) who went out to preach and introduce new members into the YGD. Below *dian chuanshi* were the leaders of each local YGD gathering point called the “master of the altar” (*tanzhu*). *Tanzhu* and below could not introduce new members to the YGD. At the lowest level of the YGD structure was the level of “relatives of the Dao” (*dao qin*) who were lay believers.¹⁷

Table 10: Hierarchical Organization of Yiguandao

Level 1	道亲 Daoqin
Level 2	坛主 Tanzhu
Level 3	点传师 Dianchuanshi
Level 4	前人 Qianren
Level 5	老前人 Laoqianren
Level 6	道长 Daozhang
Level 7	师母 Shimu
Level 8	师尊 Shizun

A few scholars, including Prasenjit Duara and Steve Smith, categorize YGD into a “redemptive society” because YGD embraces a salvationist agenda. Participants in the YGD believe in three cycles of creation and destruction (*kalpa*). One Buddha was in charge of each *kalpa*. Consequently, world history is made of three periods known as the Green Sun Period (*qingyang qi*), Red Sun Period (*hongyang qi*), and White Sun Period (*baiyang qi*). The three Buddhas in charge of each period are the Lamplighter Buddha (*randeng fo*), the *Sakyamuni* Buddha, and the *Maitreya* Buddha.¹⁸ At the end of each *kalpa*, great calamities happen. Only those who maintain their beliefs firmly would be rescued and delivered by the Buddha and survive.

With Zhang Guangbi’s ambitious expansion of YGD networks beyond northern China starting from 1941, YGD reached Poyang in 1943. In 1942, a YGD elder Wang Shuzhang from the city of Anqing in Anhui Province established the first Jiangxi Province altar in the city of Jingdezhen. In 1943, Wang sent a YGD evangelist Jiang Dachun to the Poyang County Seat and set up the very first YGD altar in Poyang. Then Jiang returned to Jingdezhen. In 1946, Wang sent another evangelist He Lingchun to Poyang to convert more people. Both Jiang and He only stayed in Poyang for a short period and left after their work was done. In July of 1948, Wang sent a small team of YGD personnel to Zhu Yuanzhang’s (Zhu was a local resident in Poyang) home in the Poyang County seat and established a new altar there. They turned this new altar into the central altar of Poyang. In December of 1948, they opened three new altars in the Poyang County Seat. From the beginning of 1949 to May of 1950, they built another ten new altars in the Poyang County Seat. They appointed fourteen new YGD leaders from the locals. The YGD membership in the Poyang County Seat in 1950 was over 500. During roughly the

same period from 1948 to 1950, the YGD's Jingdezhen branch also sent several evangelists to rural Poyang. They established twenty-one altars and absorbed around 900 members.¹⁹

Unlike the TSS' development in Poyang, which was primarily based on local elite networks without active outside intervention, the YGD's development shows a pattern of a more organized religious institution. Preaching and establishing new religious gathering points were mostly done by clearly designated YGD personnel from the outside. The YGD branch in Poyang had a clear genealogy: Jingdezhen was the mother branch of the YGD network in Poyang. As a consequence of such an institutionalized development of religious networks, YGD was open to a broader spectrum of social composition, especially the urban lower classes.

Redemptive societies and Class Differentiation in Poyang

As discussed in the previous section, TSS and YGD reached Poyang and flourished through totally different channels in the two cases recorded by the Public Security Bureau in Poyang. Possibly due to the differences in their organizational structures, TSS relied on elite networks for its development, while YGD mainly developed through its own religious personnel from the outside. Reconstructing a complete picture of TSS and YGD's expansion in Poyang is impossible, but statistics of the participants' backgrounds in TSS and YGD from the Public Security Bureau help us discover a clear pattern of who joined which religious sects. Unlike many religious institutions whose participants come from all social classes, TSS and YGD in Poyang had a clear pattern of class differentiation.

An undated document from the Poyang Public Security Bureau contains detailed information about 283 former TSS participants and 453 former YGD participants' backgrounds.²⁰ The last activity recorded in this document with a date was 1960, indicating this

file must come from a post-1960 socialist movement that was not very far from the year of 1960, possibly the Socialist Education Movement, which is also known as the Four Cleanups Movement in rural China from 1963 to 1966. Liu Buyun, a leader in the TSS who was fifty-eight in 1951, became seventy-two in this document, indicating that this document was probably produced in the year 1963 or 1964.²¹ There is no precise data on the total membership of TSS and YGD in Poyang. One file in the last section indicates that there were around 500 YGD members in the Poyang County Seat and 900 YGD members in the rural area.²² No specific number is recorded about the TSS.

Among the 283 former TSS members and the 453 former YGD members in this statistical document, the majority of them lived in the Poyang County Seat and big towns in the rural area during the time the file was produced. Personal documents from the Public Security Bureau also indicate that most TSS and YGD members lived in the County Seat or big towns in the rural area. It is plausible that redemptive societies such as TSS and YGD barely reached to the lower agricultural population in rural Poyang.²³ It was largely an urban or market-town phenomenon. Unlike the self-defense associations that flourished mostly in rural areas because of the bandit threat, the longevity of religious gathering points relied on population aggregation and market development. All these hypotheses could be further confirmed by the statistics.

Table 11: Social Composition of Tongshanshe Members

Total Tongshanshe Membership: 283		
	Number	Percentage
Female	36	13%
Male	247	87%
Merchants	174	61%
Artisans	25	9%
Urban Poor ²⁴	7	2%
Free Occupation	1	
Students	9	3%
Doctors	13	5%
Housewives	29	10%
Teachers	1	
Landlords	7	2%
KMT Officials	7	2%
Peddlers	4	
Ferryman	2	
Fishermen	2	

According to this official document of statistics, TSS members in Poyang were mostly male, merchants, and educated. In other words, the statistics prove the story in the last section that TTS developed through elite networks. Among the 283 former TSS members, 247 were

male, accounting for 87% of the total membership. Only 36 were female. 174 of the 283 TSS members were merchants, which was 61% of the total membership. 10% of the former members were housewives (all female), 9% were artisans, 5% doctors, 3% students, 2% the urban poor, 2% KMT military or civil officials, 2% landlords. Only the seven landlords and two fishermen can be categorized into the agricultural population (many landlords actually resided in the Poyang County Seat without doing any agricultural work). Among the 36 female members, 29 were housewives, accounting for 81% of the female membership.²⁵ Taiwanese scholar Shieh Chieh Lo's case study of Wenzhou also indicates that over half of the TSS members came from the upper-class, such as intellectuals and civil and military officials.²⁶

Statistics about the YGD show a completely different pattern. Among the 443 former YGD members, 190 (43%) were female, 253 (57%) were male. YGD was basically equally attractive to both females and males. The largest group of participants in the YGD was the urban poor, with 244 out of the 443, accounting for 55% of the total membership. There were 110 merchants and 72 artisans, accounting for 25% and 16% of the total membership, respectively. The total number of other groups of people was only sixteen. Among the sixteen were only two fishermen and two landlords who can be directly categorized as agricultural population.²⁷

Table 12: Social Composition of Yiguandao Members

Total Yiguandao Membership: 443		
	Number	Percentage
Female	190	43%
Male	253	57%
Merchants	110	25%
Artisans	72	16%
Urban Poor	244	55%
Fishermen	2	
Merchants and Landlords ²⁸	2	
Peddlers	5	
Landlords	3	
Ferryman	1	
Petty Merchants ²⁹	1	
Workers	2	

The differences between the social background of TSS members and YGD members show a clear pattern of gender and class differentiation. While YGD had a fairly balanced female and male membership, TSS was fundamentally a male-dominant religious sect. most of the small number of female TSS members were housewives who worked only at home. By contrast, none of the 190 female YGD members was a housewife. The TSS female members were possibly from wealthy families who did not need to have a stable job outside their homes. TSS

membership was predominantly composed of the merchant class. The class composition of TSS outside Poyang shows the same pattern. In the neighboring Leping County, for instance, the merchant class made up 75% of the TSS membership.³⁰ The percentage of the merchant class in the YGD was much lower. The urban poor dominated YGD membership with 55%, while the urban poor only made up 2% of the TSS membership. YGD also had a higher percentage of the artisan class.

All these data indicate that TSS was most attractive to the urban elite merchant class, while YGD offered more incentives to the middle and lower classes of the urban population in Poyang. Although classes outside merchants, artisans, and the urban poor only made up a very tiny portion of both the TSS and YGD membership, they also help illustrate the differences of class composition in the two sects. Among the peripheral groups in the TSS, a relatively large portion were students, doctors, and former KMT military or civil officials. In the YGD, however, none of these social classes appeared at all. Such a difference might be related to the level of education people had received. TSS members had received a higher level of education than the YGD members. At last, neither TSS nor YGD showed any interest in expanding in the agricultural population.

While statistical data might not be complete and precise at all times, individual accounts from the former TSS and YGD members generally confirm the pattern behind the data.

Tongshanshe and Elite Merchant Network in Poyang

Personal accounts from the archives confirm the fact that most members in the TSS were from the merchant class. Some of these people were not only ordinary merchants but also held positions in the government or other influential local associations.

Liu Buyun, who was fifty-eight in 1951, joined the TSS in 1928. Liu was an early TSS member in Poyang. Liu started his own business with his elder brother as a peddler when he was ten after a two-year education in a private school. When Liu was twenty-six, he opened a rice store in the Poyang County Seat. Twelve years later, when he was thirty-eight, he became the owner of a tea store. When Liu joined the TSS in 1928, Liu recalls, that the two leaders in his TSS branch were two big merchants Zhang Shiyuan and Gong Jiajun. Zhang and Gong were both the heads of the Poyang Merchant Association at the time. Liu's close friends in the TSS, including but not limited to Hu Hanchen, Yang Jichun, Shu Daqi, Liu Cangsong, and a few others were all local merchants and members of the Merchant Association (*shanghui*) in Poyang. Liu even further pointed out that “the TSS was run by the Merchant Association.”³¹

Liu Buyun's close friends in the TSS all came from a similar background. Xu Chunen, one of Liu Buyun's close friends in the TSS, was also a merchant. Xu was fifty-three in 1952 from a carpenter family. After a three-year education in a private school when he was eleven, Xu became a carpenter too and then ran a carpenter store with his father. After the death of Xu's father, Xu also opened a rice store. When Xu joined the TSS very early in the year of 1921, Xu recalls that there were already more than 100 members. Xu emphasizes that all the members at the time were “big names” (*da xiansheng*) in Poyang.³²

Shu Daqi, who was a close friend of both Liu Buyun and Xu Chunen, came from a stronger merchant background. Shu was sixty-eight in 1951. Shu received a good education in a few private schools from the age of nine to twenty-one. Shu started his own business as an owner of a candle store from twenty-one to twenty-five; then he went back to school again in a normal school. Three years later, Shu became a teacher in an elementary school in Poyang. Besides Shu's job as a teacher, he also did some businesses of his own, including a grocery store and a

cloth store. Shu joined the TSS in 1920 and became a KMT member in 1925. Shu joined the TSS in the Guild Hall of Nanchang in Poyang, which was originally used for people from Nanchang to meet and socialize. Such a fact confirms that TSS first arrived in Nanchang in Jiangxi Province and then spread to Poyang. The membership ceremony was held by a Mr. Gong, who was an elderly merchant in Poyang. Although Shu does not intentionally mention any specific connections he made with the merchants in the TSS, Shu became a member of the Poyang Merchant Association in the same year that he joined the TSS.³³

The Poyang County Merchant Association had a clear connection with TSS. Many of the association members were also core TSS members. Liu Cangsong, fifty-eight in 1951, was born into a merchant family. Liu's father was the owner of a cloth store. Liu went to a private school at the age of eight and stayed there for four years. Since thirteen, Liu started to work in his father's cloth store. When Liu was twenty, he relocated the cloth store and expanded the space of the store. In 1929, Wang Jianqing and Zan Jingshan, who were both owners of cloth business, introduced Liu into TSS. Liu came to know many people in the TSS, including Liu Buyun, Xu Chunen, and Shu Daqi. Liu was also a member of the Poyang Merchant Association. In 1943 when Liu was fifty, he was elected as the president of the Merchant Association. In 1944, all the Merchant Association members joined the KMT together. Liu was reelected the president in 1945 until his two-year term ended in 1947.³⁴

The Poyang Merchant Association has a long history that can be traced back to the Self-Strengthening Movement in Late Qing. During the reign of the Guangxu Emperor, in order to develop trade and save China through modern industry, the Qing Court encouraged each province to establish its own merchant associations from the provincial level to the county level. The Poyang Merchant Association was part of that initiative. In 1875, Cheng Boliang of Anhui

Province, who was a rice merchant, became the first president of the Poyang Merchant Association. Instead of functioning purely as a trading organization, the Poyang Merchant Association also played an essential role during the warlord period in paying the salaries of the soldiers and providing disaster reliefs to the refugees in Jiangxi Province. In 1926, the KMT officially incorporated the Poyang Merchant Association into part of its Ministry of Party Affairs. Under the leadership of the Poyang Merchant Association, there were forty-three guilds of different industries by 1949. The Poyang Merchant Association basically monopolized the regulation of all commercial activities and was also in charge of resolving most commercial disputes.³⁵

Several TSS members were leaders of the Merchant Association. Within the Merchant Association, below the level of the president were a few council members. The president was the head of the council. A few of the council members were involved in TSS as well. Zhang Yuncheng, fifty-five in 1951, was also both a merchant and a TSS member. Zhang went to a private school from eight to twelve; then he started his own business trading cloth. He was then the owner of a cloth store and a tea store. In 1921, the owner of a tea store next to Zhang's cloth store introduced Zhang into TSS. Zhang was elected as the representative of the tea industry in the Merchant Association and became a council member. Zhang was also a KMT member.³⁶

Similar to Zhang Yuncheng's role in the Merchant Association as a council member, Zhang Yuxuan was also both a merchant and a TSS member. Zhang Yuxuan, fifty-one in 1952, was born into a merchant family of Nanchang. Zhang Yuxuan went to a private school from ten to eighteen. He began working in the Merchant Association as a secretary when he was only nineteen.³⁷ During his years in the Merchant Association, Zhang came to know several TSS members who were also active in the Merchant Association, including Shu Daqi and Liu

Cangsong.³⁸ Zhang Yuncheng left the Merchant Association when he was forty and went back home in the town of Jianfu, running his own paint business. While it is unknown how successful Zhang Yuncheng's paint business was, he was undoubtedly an influential merchant. Soon after Zhang Yuncheng returned home, Zhang's bao chose him as the chairman of the council in the town Business Cooperative. When Zhang was forty-three, his bao also appointed him as the treasurer of Pojiang Town Business Cooperative. When Zhang was forty-seven in 1948, his fellow paint merchants elected him as the president of the Poyang Paint Industry Association (under the Poyang Merchant Association). During the same year, Zhang Yuxuan joined the TSS. In 1949 when Zhang was forty-eight, he returned and was elected as a council member of the Poyang Merchant Association and the representative of the Labor Union.³⁹

The close connection between the Merchant Association and TSS can be further proved through Xie Yiluan's recollection about the early history of TSS in Poyang. Xie Yiluan was also a merchant and a TSS member. Xie's version of the TSS history differs a little from the Poyang County Gazetteer. Xie recalls that TSS reached Poyang in 1917 when Peng Ruzun officially registered TSS in Beijing. The earliest TSS preached was Gong Kai from Nanchang. Despite the differences in the starting point of the TSS' history in Poyang, Xie confirms that TSS flourished because of the merchant network. During the time when Gong Kai was in Poyang, he rented a room from a prominent local merchant named Gong Dayun. Gong Kai introduced Gong Dayun into the TSS. At that time, Gong Dayun was among the core leaders in the Merchant Association. Gong Dayun introduced many Merchant Association members into the TSS during this period, including Liu Buyun and Liu Cangsong.⁴⁰ Xie's recollection basically confirms Liu Buyun and Liu Cangsong's stories. They both joined the TSS in the 1920s, and both were

members of the Merchant Association. All these details indicate clearly that the Merchant Association and the TSS in Poyang were largely two overlapping elite networks.

The Merchant Association's influence on the TSS not only lies within the number of merchants who participated in the TSS simultaneously, but also the leadership roles they held in the TSS. In Liu Buyun's case, the two TSS leaders he met when he joined the TSS, Zhang Shiyuan and Gong Jiajun, were both members of the Merchant Association.⁴¹ Xie Yiluan recalls that the merchant Gong Dayun, who was one of the earliest converts in the TSS, soon became the vice-master of goodness in the TSS branch in the Poyang County Seat. Yang Jichun, one of Gong Dayun's early employees who became a merchant later himself, was also a member of the Merchant Association. Yang even joined the TSS before Gong Dayun. Yang later became one of the most influential figures in the TSS in Poyang and was actively involved in the militarization of the TSS against the new regime (see Chapter five). Zhang Yuncheng established his own TSS gathering point at his home in the Poyang County Seat. According to Xie Yiluan, Yang Jichun held the highest leadership in the TSS during the 1940s as a level seven *baoen* leader. Yang was the only TSS leader who was above level 5 during that time. Liu Buyun, Zhang Yuncheng, and Hu Shouyi held level 4 *tianen* leadership in the TSS. They were all members of the Merchant Association. Meanwhile, in the administrative sphere, Zhang Yuncheng held the position of master of goodness because he had his own TSS gathering point at his home. Yang Jichun and Liu Buyun were vice-masters of goodness.⁴² Although TSS was purely a religious association, the TSS network in Poyang was predominantly run by the merchants and the Merchant Association.

Due to the dominance of elite merchant class in the TSS, members of the lower social strata possibly suffered from the exploitation of the higher class. In other words, there might be a

clear hierarchical order of membership within the TSS because of the class differentiation. Wu Yizheng, thirty-four in 1951, was a poor peasant living in rural Poyang.⁴³ Wu joined the TSS in the Poyang County Seat in 1939. Wu's exact leadership within the TSS is not known, but he was at least a level 4 leader. Yang Jichun appointed Wu to preach in rural Poyang and introduce more people into the TSS. Even though Wu was indeed a leader of TSS, Wu's role was quite marginal. "My main responsibility in the TSS (of the county seat) was carrying water and arranging the chairs in the assembly hall." Wu called the TSS leaders in the county seat "bosses" (*xiansheng*). In the early 1940s, "bosses" within the TSS decided to organize a Dragon Flower Assembly in Wu Yizheng's village. They wrote a letter to Wu and asked him to carry them on a sedan chair to his village. In the end, Wu went back and forth from the county seat to his own village twice, carrying Yang Jichun and Liu Rongqing (Liu died before 1949) all by himself.⁴⁴ Wu Yizheng was simply a servant to the bosses within the TSS.

Tongshanshe and the Politician Network in Poyang

What was interesting in Zhang Yuxuan's case was not only his TSS membership and his role in the Poyang Merchant Association but also his involvement in another small merchant circle known as the "Thirteen Brotherhood (*shisan xiongdihui*)."

In 1945, in order to facilitate business loans among credible merchants, Zhang Yuxuan and other twelve local merchants in Poyang set up a small new business association called the Thirteen Brotherhood. One of the thirteen founding members was Huang Shi, a local cloth and cotton merchant, as well as a TSS member. In 1946, it was Huang Shi and Zhang Yuncheng together who introduced Zhang Yuxuan into TSS.⁴⁵ We know nothing about the financial activities of the Thirteen Brotherhood, however, the Thirteen Brotherhood directly intervened in the factional competition between the

Jiang Faction and the Zhou Faction that we have discussed in Chapter 2. Nine out of the thirteen members of the 1945 Thirteen Brotherhood became the members of the Thirteen Taibao who participated in the 1948 County Seat Mayor Election, including both Zhang Yuxuan and Huang Shi.⁴⁶

Zhang Yuxuan was not only a merchant but also an active political elite who directly participated in the factional competition and many other political events. From 1921 to 1922, when Zhang was simply around twenty working as a secretary in the Merchant Association, he was also a jiazhang. From 1924 to 1925, Zhang was the treasurer of the Poyang Anti-Opium Office, Butchery Office, and Ship License Office run by the Merchant Association and the gentry families in Poyang. In 1940, Zhang became a member of Poyang's 23rd bao economic committee. In 1945, Zhang assisted his friend Zhou Jinxue in the Poyang County Senate Election. Zhang was a loyalist of the Zhou Faction. In 1946, Zhang joined the Thirteen Taibao helping the Zhou Faction leader Wang Zuqi running for the Poyang County Seat Mayor. Zhang also participated in the Zhou Faction's Society of Chrysanthemum against the Hu Faction's expansion in the Poyang County Seat (see Chapter two).⁴⁷

Zhang Yuxuan was not the only active political elite in the TSS. As we have seen, Shu Daqi, Liu Cangsong, and Zhang Yuncheng were all KMT members as well. It was not rare for KMT members to join the TSS. As Liu Cangsong indicates that all the Merchant Associations members joined the KMT in 1944, it is highly possible that Zhang Yuxuan was also a KMT member. Being a KMT member and participating in factional conflicts such as Zhang Yuxuan's case was not the only connection between TSS and politics in Poyang. In fact, a number of TSS members also held positions in the government. Zhang Yuxuan was a jiazhang as well in his early twenties. In Xie Yiluan's recollection of the early history of TSS, he suggests that TSS

arrived in Poyang in 1917, but it did not begin to become popular until 1924. Around the year of 1924, a big name in the TSS was a Mr. Song, who was the County Magistrate of Poyang at the time.⁴⁸ Mr. Song not only participated in the TSS but also wrote a pair of couplets for the TSS.⁴⁹ Using a famous person's writing as an advertisement was very popular in China.

Influential politicians or officials in the TSS could certainly attract the attention of those who were good at flattery. Cheng Richu, who was one of the very rare TSS members from a poor urban family in Poyang, served in the Poyang Police Department for a number of years as a police inspector. Cheng joined the TSS in 1938. According to Cheng's recollection, the Poyang County Police Chief Zhao Songli was a member of TSS. In 1938, Zhao encouraged Cheng to join the TSS. Cheng agreed simply for the purpose of winning the support of his boss. During the 1940s after Cheng left the Police Department, he also served in the Poyang County Government as a captain in the Military Training Office, director of the Upbringing Center for the Homeless, as well as a xiangzhang in the Town of Shuanggang.⁵⁰ The involvement of local officials in the TSS further consolidated the elite network within the TSS.

The elite dominance in TSS echoes with David Ownby's argument that "sociologically, redemptive societies have been chiefly an urban phenomenon, appealing largely to the middle classes of China's burgeoning cities."⁵¹ The rapid development of TSS was a significant new religious movement in China that relied heavily on elite networks and the emergence of a modern economy and political parties. TSS' case, however, does not shadow the fact that redemptive societies were also appealing to the lower classes. YGD tells a different story,

Yiguandao and the Lower Classes

The social composition of YGD shows a clearly distinct pattern. In contrast to TSS' close relationship with elite merchant class and local politicians, YGD's class composition was more complicated. While statistics indicate that the merchant class was also an important part of the YGD membership, the urban middle and lower classes participated in the YGD more passionately.

Similar to many sectarian movements in China that had attracted the interests of the marginalized groups, a major function of sectarian groups such as the YGD was that it offered a sense of dignity and an expectation for better livelihood in the future. In contrast to the case of TSS where elite merchant classes dominated the leadership of the sect, being an active member of the YGD did not really require an elite class identity. The lower class could gain respect and material benefits from devoting more time and energy into the sect. In the meantime, as a sect with a salvationist millenarian perspective into the future, many members within the YGD had fervent anticipation towards reorganizing the society. Such was the case of Xie Yulin.

Xie Yulin, around forty in the early 1950s, came from a poor family in Poyang. Xie's father worked in a mill in the Poyang County Seat. Starting from a very early age, Xie Yulin became an apprentice in the same mill with his father. Xie spent almost all his years before 1950 in the milling industry. After working in the mill with his father for a number of years, Xie was relocated to another mill in Poyang in 1939. In 1942, Xie opened his own mill in the town of Leping, but he soon went back to Poyang. It seems that his own business did not work out well. After Xie's return, he continued working in a mill as a worker making noodles. Xie was very unsatisfied with his life. "I suffered a lot from the pain of losing my job. Life in the old days was always miserable."

Xie joined the YGD in early 1949. His life was completely changed. Xie complains that before joining the YGD, people often despised him because he was poor. In the YGD, however, people showed him great respect. As Xie recalls, every time when he visited his friends in the YGD, people always welcomed him and gave him food. As a consequence, whenever people in the YGD asked him to send letters, make copies of the scriptures, or attend the confession meetings, Xie always did as they said without hesitation. To Xie Yulin, his biggest anticipation lay in the future when the whole world would be reconstructed. He became a vegetarian to accumulate his merit until 1951 when he was discovered by the government as a YGD member.⁵²

A similar story also happened to Wu Jinhui. Wu Jinhui, forty-eight in 1953, was born into a poor family. Wu's parents died when Wu was still a child. Wu followed his elder brother as a farmer until the age of twelve, when he could no longer feed himself. Wu then became an apprentice in an umbrella store. When Wu was fifteen, he learned the technique of making hemp rope from his uncle and became an apprentice working for his uncle. A few years later, Wu borrowed money from his relatives and finally opened a small rope shop of his own. His business could barely support his family. As an ordinary poor urban resident, Wu began his fervent belief in "Buddha worship" at a very early age, praying that the Buddhas could bless his family and provide him with the most basic needs. In 1948 when Wu discovered the YGD as a sect worshipping the Buddha, he joyfully joined YGD.⁵³

Another potential incentive for the poor in the YGD was collecting admission fees by introducing new members. Yu Shengtai, forty-eight in 1953, was originally from a poor peasant family in the City of Jingdezhen. Because Jingdezhen is famous for its porcelain and also known as "China's capital of Porcelain," Yu worked as a worker in a Porcelain factory in Jingdezhen.

Yu's job in the factory could hardly feed his family. During the spring of 1949, Yu and his family moved to his mother-in-law's home in rural Poyang where they did not need to pay the rent. Hoping to start his small business in Poyang, however, Yu eventually joined the YGD and became an evangelist. From 1949 to 1950, Yu traveled all over places in Poyang preaching YGD and established three altars in rural Poyang. Yu introduced, in total, around 170 new members into the YGD. According to Yu, the admission fee for a new member into the YGD was RMB 3,000, which equaled a few kilograms of rice in Poyang. Yu admits that he had received over seventy-five kilograms of rice from introducing people into YGD.⁵⁴ Little is known about exactly how much each new member paid for the new membership. Yu suggests that many of the new converts did not pay him the admission fee or simply paid partially. When the Land Reform began in 1950, many people in Poyang still owed Yu the admission fees.⁵⁵

While elite merchants dominated the leadership of TSS in the Poyang County Seat, the leadership of YGD shows a pattern of mixed classes. Both the lower classes and the elite classes participated in leadership roles.

Although YGD arrived in Poyang in the early 1940s, according to the republic security bureau report, personal accounts of their experiences in the YGD indicate that YGD mainly thrived in Poyang after 1948. According to both the public security report and Xie Yulin's recollection, Zhu Yuanzhang, a local of Poyang, hosted a group of YGD evangelists from Jingdezhen in late 1947 and became a YGD member himself later. Zhu Yuanzhang was introduced to the YGD people through his friend Zhu Houxuan, who was an artisan in a cloth store. Similar to the development of TSS that relied mainly on the merchant network, merchant network also played an important role in YGD's early development. One of the two evangelists

from Jingdezhen, a Mr. Li, was also a merchant. He Zongjing, who ran a small shop in Poyang, used to have business with Mr. Li and joined the YGD after Mr. Li came to Poyang.⁵⁶

He Zongjing soon became an active member of YGD, who introduced around 200 people in the Poyang County Seat instantly. Zhu Houxuan then introduced Wu Jinhui, who did small business in Poyang, into He Zongjing's group. Zhu Houxuan, He Zongjing, and Wu Jinhui cooperated successfully and expanded the YGD network ambitiously in Poyang. They established several YGD altars in the County Seat. Zhu Changzai, a YGD evangelist from Jingdezhen, was happy with the situation. In order to keep the pace and continue the rapid development of YGD in Poyang, Zhu Changzai encouraged Zhu Houxuan, He Zongjing, and Wu Jinhui to train new members and select competent people into leadership roles. A large number of people were elevated to the level 2 leadership of *tanzhu*. Each YGD altar in the County Seat had around ten *tanzhu*, including a few people like Xie Yulin, who were from poor urban families. Women were also encouraged to lead and become *tanzhu* in 1948 and 1949.⁵⁷

Among the most active members of the YGD in 1948 and 1949 that include Zhu Houxuan, He Zongjing, Wu Jinhui, and Zhu Yuanzhang, only Zhu Yuanzhang was from an elite merchant background. Although Zhu Yuanzhang, fifty-nine in 1950, was born into a tenant farmer family, he was ambitious and competent in his own businesses. Zhu grew from an apprentice in a thread store to the owner of his thread store from the age of twenty-two to forty. In 1933, merchants in the thread industry established the Poyang Thread Industry Association. Zhu was elected as a member of the standing committee of the Labor Union in the Thread Industry Association. Because all the labor unions were directly under the leadership of the Nationalist Government, Zhu came to know Jiang Bozhang and became a loyal follower in the Jiang Faction. In 1935, Zhu joined the KMT and was promoted to work in the Central Labor

Union in Poyang under Jiang's direct leadership. Besides Zhu's active involvement in the political sphere, he was also a leader in the Green Gang with over fifty disciples in the 1930s.⁵⁸

Despite Zhu's role as an elite merchant, his business and political networks did not overlap with the YGD network, as we see in the case of TSS. Other active leaders in the YGD were mostly from the lower urban classes. Zhu Houxuan, a level three evangelist, was a poor artisan working in a cloth store.⁵⁹ He Zongjing, also a level three evangelist, was from a poor urban family. He's father's business failed, and He dropped out of school at a very early age. He then became an apprentice and finally opened a small store selling religious products such as candles and yellow papers. Nevertheless, his business went badly in the 1940s.⁶⁰

Zhu Houxuan, He Zongjing, and Wu Jinhui were all from the poor urban classes. While the YGD network under their leadership was expanding rapidly in 1948 and 1949, as we have mentioned, many new members were promoted to the position of tanzhu. Without a stable merchant network like the Merchant Association in the TSS, personal and family background was not a determinant consideration behind YGD's expansion. YGD's development in Poyang was more typically a popular religious network that was open to everybody. Although the urban poor made up the largest group of members in the YGD, the number of merchants like Zhu Yuanzhang was not little either. In comparison, TSS' development in Poyang was more like a club with people from the similar financial and occupational backgrounds.

In explaining YGD's spectacular growth, David Ownby asserts that lowering the entry barrier was the most significant reason how YGD became suddenly attractive to ordinary people during the period of social chaos and turbulence. Besides the realm of economic and political background, Ownby also indicates that YGD offers a salvationist agenda to all initiatives, regardless of the participants' spiritual development.⁶¹ This more egalitarian promise of

participation and salvation had made YGD the most successful redemptive society in China during the late Republican Era.

Incentives behind Joining Tongshanshe and Yiguandao

Although the membership of TSS and YGD shows a clear pattern of class differentiation, it is wrong to argue that people joined TSS or YGD simply to socialize with people from the similar socio-economic backgrounds. Members of the two sects were, in most cases, faithful believers of the religious teachings of the TSS and YGD. Among the most significant incentives of people's joining the religious sects, health-related issues were unsurprisingly the dominant ones. Women's role in the TSS and YGD also reflects gender differentiation and varying needs between men and the rest of the family.

Health and Illness

Praying for good health and healing was a dominant motivation behind the proliferation of many religious movements. In the case of both TSS and YGD, seeking a religious solution to illness and health issues was the single most widespread reason behind people's joining the sects.

The history of TSS in Poyang began not only as a religious sect, as mentioned in the County Gazetteer, but also as a charity organization with a Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic (*zhongyiju*, hereafter TCMC). The TCMC had its own name as the "Hall of Early Enlightenment" (*Xianjueci*).⁶² Around the years of 1932 and 1933, TSS established the TCMC. The TCMC offered free medicine to people, regardless of whether the requesters were TSS members or not. The TCMC lasted for seven to eight years until around 1940.⁶³ The financial shortfall was the primary factor that led to the disappearance of the TCMC.⁶⁴ Yang Jichun points

out that the TCMC was among the three most massive expenditures in the TSS.⁶⁵ Hu Hanchen, a merchant and the owner of a restaurant, recalls that local merchant invited him to join the TSS in 1939, and he was asked for donations to support the TCMC and other charity activities in the TSS. Offering money and medicine to the poor, according to Hu, was considered great merit in the TSS. It doesn't really matter how much one donates as long as one gives sincerely. Hu also recalls that a few members from the Merchant Association were passionate about the charity functions of the TSS and offered money without hesitation.⁶⁶

The establishment of the TCMC certainly reflects the real needs of people who were interested in the TSS. Although the merchant network within TSS might offer strong incentives for elite merchants who wanted to connect with other merchants and expand their interests, the direct motivation behind the merchants' joining the TSS was still predominantly related to health and healing.

In the case of Yang Jichun, he admits that he joined the TSS solely for the reason of improving his health. The TSS members practiced meditation in stillness, which, according to Yang, would effectively improve his health and lead to longevity.⁶⁷ Yang Taoyuan, a landlord in Poyang, joined the TSS in 1949. One of Yang's friends introduced Yang to TSS and promised him that "worshipping Buddhas" in the TSS would protect him from illness. "I joined TSS because I was attracted by such Bodhisattva superstition."⁶⁸

For people who suffered directly from illness, joining the TSS offered them strong hope for being healed. Since around twenty, Xu Chunen had been suffering from the symptom of hematemesis. Xu believed that practicing sitting in meditation could eliminate the symptom and heal his illness. As one of the earliest members who joined the TSS in the early 1920s, Xu also worked as a leader in the TCMC during the 1930s.⁶⁹ Shu Daqi had also suffered from

hematemesis since he was around twenty. He went to the TSS because his friend told him that “worshipping the Buddha” in the TSS would heal his illness and improve his health. Shu learned the technique of meditation in the TSS. Shu continued practicing meditation even after he went back home from the TSS.⁷⁰ Zhang Yintang, who was a member of the Big Sword Society (see Chapter one, Chapter three), also participated in TSS. Right after Zhang got married in 1940, he was seriously ill and almost died. His brother-in-law then introduced him to TSS and told him that the Buddhas in the TSS would bless him good health. Zhang joined the TSS and participated in the TSS activities multiple times with his wife. Zhang recovered miraculously half a year later.⁷¹

Healing and hopes for good health were also the primary incentives driving people to join the YGD, although YGD did not run a charity organization like the TCMC within the TSS. Peng Bofa, who came from a poor family in Poyang, fell ill in January of 1949. After visiting the hospital and receiving treatment from the doctors, his health condition did not improve. Instead of seeking more help from the doctors, Peng decided to “worship the Buddhas.” One of his friends introduced Peng to a religious gathering point where lots of people “worshipped the Buddhas” together. It turned out to be a YGD altar in Wu Jinhui’s home. Peng’s testimony shows that he was instantly fully healed after he “worshipped the Buddhas” only twice. Peng then became a YGD evangelist.⁷²

Zhu Houxuan, who was one of the most active YGD leaders in Poyang, joined the YGD in order to cure his illness too. In 1948, Zhu suffered severely from hemorrhoids and edema in the belly. Zhu joined the YGD to “worship the Buddhas,” and his symptoms all disappeared.⁷³ Yu Shengtai, who came to Poyang from Jingdezhen, joined the YGD also because of his illness. In 1949, Yu discovered a tumor under his neck. Yu could not afford to see the doctors; instead,

he decided to worship the Eternal Venerable Mother in the YGD. “As long as you worship the Eternal Venerable Mother sincerely, men will have good fortune; the childless will bear children. All the disasters will be eliminated. You will always have peace.”⁷⁴

People in the YGD sometimes also turned to vegetarianism to improve their health. Cheng Deyuan, who joined the YGD in 1949, constantly suffered from spitting blood and hematochezia. Every time when the symptoms occurred, Cheng would turn to vegetarian food. Cheng continued until 1955 when he was arrested because of his participation in the YGD.⁷⁵

For people who did not directly suffer from any illness, joining the YGD was believed to equip them with the protection from the Buddhas. If one participates actively in the YGD, one’s family and even the broader community will be blessed and protected. According to the investigation on Peng Bofa, the slogan they used to preach the YGD was that “if you join the YGD, the YGD will protect you alone; if your entire family join the YGD, the YGD will protect your entire family; if you can mobilize more than ten people to join the YGD, the YGD will protect your entire village.”⁷⁶ In Cheng Deyuan’s case, the most direct reason he joined the YGD was the death of a few of his family members. Before Cheng joined the YGD, some of his friends had already encouraged him to “worship the Buddhas.” Cheng admits that he did not believe in it. In 1949, however, Cheng’s parents and his son all died within a few months. Cheng started to believe that he had an unfortunate fate and began worrying about his own health. The solution was to join the YGD.⁷⁷

Although the structures of TSS and YGD differed fundamentally from traditional Chinese religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, and local cults, most people cared little about the changes in the organizational structure and theological teachings. In many cases, people simply called themselves “Buddha worshippers” or “Bodhisattva worshippers” rather members of the

TTS or YGD. What really matters to them was the possibility of fulfilling their practical needs, especially concerns regarding health and healing.

Women in Tongshanshe and Yiguandao

The sharpest contrast between the TSS and YGD lies in the role of women. In contrast to YGD's enthusiastic acceptance of female membership, TSS hardly had any female members. Due to the minimal cases of female TSS members, women's role in the TSS remains like a myth.

The only female TSS member with detailed archival documents is Liu Meijiao. Liu Meijiao, thirty-four in 1952, was the daughter of the merchant TSS member Liu Buyun. In Liu Meijiao's case, she never acknowledged that she was a TSS member. There is no doubt that Liu Meijiao was indeed a "superstitious" person. Liu Meijiao was married to a merchant in Poyang with the last name, "Xiong." Liu's personal recollection confirms her class labeling as a "housewife" that she basically stayed at home without doing any outdoor jobs. Liu was childless for quite a few years after her wedding. Liu's mother-in-law thus encouraged her to worship the Guanyin Bodhisattva for a son. Liu took the advice and possibly went to a TSS gathering point to worship the Bodhisattva. The name "Tongshanshe" was simply a place where people could worship the deities, according to Liu Meijiao. She did not hold any role in the TSS, nor did she know anything about her father Liu Buyun's leadership in the TSS. To Liu Meijiao, she was simply a Bodhisattva worshiper and a superstitious person.⁷⁸ In another case, Shang Qingyun's story was nearly identical to Liu Meijiao's. Although official documents categorize Shang as a TSS member, she never admits that. According to Shang, she was simply a Bodhisattva worshiper. She held no role in the TSS, nor did she know anything about the TSS. Shang started

to worship the Bodhisattva simply because she wanted good health and sometimes prayed for medicine and healing.⁷⁹

The two female TSS cases possibly suggest that women were very marginal to TSS in general without taking any responsibility in the sect. Instead of joining the sect based on elite merchant network, they joined (if they indeed worshiped the deities through the TSS gathering points) only for practical purposes such as health concerns or being childless. On the contrary, female members in the YGD played a significantly more active role.

Xu Guijiao, forty-three in 1955, was not only a “Bodhisattva worshipper” in the YGD, but also an evangelist in YGD. Xu was born into a peasant family. When she was eleven, she was sold as a child bride to another family and left her own home. Xu’s new family sent her to school for a year. Then Xu worked at her husband’s home just as a regular housewife until she was around seventeen when her husband died. Xu returned her own home and got remarried to a Mr. Li when she was twenty. When Xu was twenty-three, due to some insolvable conflicts between Xu and her husband’s family, Xu left their home and got remarried again. Xu was then involved in selling child brides while working at her own home. Xu’s new husband was a local *jiazhang* for some years. Her husband died in 1947, and Xu inherited his appointment as the new *jiazhang* for a year. During her appointment as a *jiazhang*, unsurprisingly, Xu cooperated with the *baozhang* and made some money from bribery of the conscription (see Chapter one). In 1948, Xu followed many locals who worshiped the deities in the YGD and became a member of YGD.⁸⁰

Xu’s experiences indicate that she was a strong woman, as the locals called her a “female boss” (*nü laoban*). Xu joined the YGD during a period when YGD was expanding its networks ambitiously and progressively. According to Xie Yulin, Xu Guijiao was an evangelist working

closely with Zhu Houxuan in Zhu's YGD altar.⁸¹ Xu Guijiao also admits that she traveled to rural Poyang multiple times preaching. It seems that Xu specifically targeted women when she was preaching. One of Xu's advertisements of the YGD says that "(after you join the YGD) the YGD will first protect your husband, then your children, finally yourself when you get old."⁸² Such a strategy was undoubtedly appealing to those women in the rural society who continued following the traditional Confucian family order.

Xu Guijiao's case was certainly not unique in YGD. Yuan Cuijiao, forty-two in 1953, played a similar role in the YGD. Yuan was also sold as a child bride to the Yi family in the Poyang County Seat at the age of six. The Yi family was possibly an artisan family or a family doing small business. From eight to sixteen, Yuan worked for a few local small businesses making paper or socks in order to feed her family. She was officially married at the age of sixteen. After her marriage, she continued working part-time for a few small businesses while taking care of house works. Yuan gave birth to three sons and two daughters, but only one daughter survived. She also had an adopted son. Yuan admits that she was a very "superstitious" person and always worshiped the Bodhisattvas. In 1947, Zhu Yuanzhang introduced Yuan Cuijiao into the YGD in the YGD altar located in Zhu's home. Yuan came to the gatherings regularly and started to teach women within the YGD to follow the "three obediences and the four virtues" (*sancong side*). In 1948, Yuan was elevated to the position of *tanzhu* under the YGD altar in Zhu Houxuan's place.⁸³ According to Xie Yulin's recollection, Yuan was among the group of new YGD leaders in 1948 and 1949 that significantly expanded the influence of YGD in Poyang.⁸⁴ In late 1948, Yuan was further elevated to an evangelist. Yuan traveled to a few different YGD locations within Poyang. During the first half of 1949, Yuan also formally performed the new member ceremony a few times. Yuan recalls that people who newly entered

the YGD often offered one *jin* of oil. Yuan often shared these gifts with other leaders in the YGD, such as Zhu Houxuan.⁸⁵

In Xu Guijiao and Yuan Cuijiao's cases, we see no clear barrier that pushes women away from participating in the YGD, or even becoming leaders within the YGD. Both Xu and Yuan were YGD evangelists who actively involved in introducing new members into the YGD. There is no evidence showing that Xu and Yuan were subject to the manipulation of their male peer YGD colleagues. The way Xu and Yuan preached YGD was especially attractive to women of the traditional society. The Confucian family values that were built upon the dominant roles of husbands and sons remain the central message of the YGD. Within the YGD, however, we see no clear pattern of gender hierarchy. This partly explains why women made up almost half of the YGD membership in Poyang, in contrast to men's dominance in the TSS. The TSS leadership was basically composed of the elite male merchants' network and clearly overlapped with the Merchant Association. Women could hardly get involved within such a network dominated by wealthy male elites.

As two of the largest redemptive societies in China during the Republican period, TSS and YGD show clearly distinct patterns of growth and expansion in Poyang. While TSS was a more exclusive sect due to the dominant role of elite merchants and politicians, YGD was a more egalitarian religious society that was not only open to the elite class but also the poor and women. Material incentives also played an essential role in absorbing new members into redemptive societies. Although many scholars emphasize the point that redemptive societies belonged to a new religious movement that differs fundamentally from traditional institutionalized religions, the emphasis of pure spiritual salvationism overlooks ordinary

people's daily religious needs. Interestingly, to many ordinary people, especially women, they could not tell the difference between new redemptive societies and "Buddha worshippers." Although both TSS and YGD were religious organizations, their role in the local society also went far beyond the religious realm. As we will see in the next chapter, both TSS and YGD coexisted with the government in an unhappy relationship. When the CCP came into power after 1949, a nation-wide anti-redemptive society campaign began.

¹ Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 294-295.

² *Ibid.*, 301.

³ ZGHDSLJC, Vol. 1, 4-5; ZGHDSLJC, Vol. 2, 939.

⁴ Goossaert, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 100.

⁵ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 32-33.

⁶ "Zhenya fangeming huidaomen touzi dengjibiao [Registration Forms of *Huidaomen* Leaders during the Anti-Counterrevolutionaries Campaign]," PYGADA Z2-1-87; "Dadaohui, Huanghehui, Tonghshanshe, Yaomenjiao deng zuzhi jieshao, renyuanmingdan [Introduction and Name Lists of the Big Sword Society, the Yellow Crane Society, the Society of Goodness, the Yao Sect, and Other Organizations]," PYGADA Z2-1-134.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ PYXZ, Vol. 11.

¹⁰ "Zhenya fangeming huidaomen touzi dengjibiao [Registration Forms of *Huidaomen* Leaders during the Anti-Counterrevolutionaries Campaign]," PYGADA Z2-1-87; "Dadaohui, Huanghehui, Tonghshanshe, Yaomenjiao deng zuzhi jieshao, renyuanmingdan [Introduction and Name Lists of the Big Sword Society, the Yellow Crane Society, the Society of Goodness, the Yao Sect, and Other Organizations]," PYGADA Z2-1-134.

¹¹ "Xietan xiang huamin dadui dadaohui daji qingkuang baogao [Report on Huamin Brigade's Suppression of the Big Sword Society in the Xietan Xiang]," PYGADA W10-3-3.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ With the defeat of the Nationalist Government in the mainland, YGD also moved to Taiwan. In Taiwan, YGD also developed underground and illegally until 1988 when the YGD was officially legalized.

¹⁴ Goossaert, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 99.

¹⁵ ZGHDSLJC, Vol. 1, 1-4.

¹⁶ See ZGHDSLJC, Vol. 1, 2.

¹⁷ "Fandong huidaomen, yiguandao zuzhi gaikuang, ziliao huibian [A Selected Collection of Materials on Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and YGD]," PYGADA Z2-1-130.

¹⁸ Li, *Xiandai huabei mimi zongjiao* [Contemporary Secret Religions in Northern China], 32-33 and 48.

¹⁹ "Fandong huidaomen, yiguandao zuzhi gaikuang, ziliao huibian [A Selected Collection of Materials on Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and YGD]," PYGADA Z2-1-130.

²⁰ "Daojiao banghuimen, yiguandao, guangonghui mingce [Name Lists of Daoist Organizations, Secret Societies, *Huimen*, YGD, The Guangong Society]," PYGADA Z2-1-32.

²¹ *Ibid.*; Z1-1-94

²² "Fandong huidaomen, yiguandao zuzhi gaikuang, ziliao huibian [A Selected Collection of Materials on Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* and YGD]," PYGADA Z2-1-130.

²³ David Own also argues that redemptive societies were largely urban religious organizations. See Ownby, "Redemptive Societies in the Twentieth Century."

²⁴ The urban poor was a big category in the early PRC. It is broadly defined as "those who rely on their own labor or little means of production without stable jobs, and thus, live in poverty." The urban poor could include the minor categories of peddlers, petty merchants, freelancers, and a few more. See "Zhengwuyuan guanyu huafen nongcun

jieji chengfen de guiding [The State Council's Regulations on Classifying Rural Class Elements],” *People's Daily*, August 4th, 1950.

²⁵ “Daojiao banghuimen, yiguandao, guangonghui mingce [Name Lists of Daoist Organizations, Secret Societies, *Huimen*, YGD, The Guangong Society],” PYGADA Z2-1-32.

²⁶ Lo, “Kangzhan wanqi de minbian yu defang shehui – yi Pingyang de daodaohui yu tongshanshe wei taolun zhongxin [The Daodaohui and Tongshanshe: A Case Study of Popular Uprising and Local Society in the Latter Part of the Second Sino-Japanese War],” 224.

²⁷ “Daojiao banghuimen, yiguandao, guangonghui mingce [Name Lists of Daoist Organizations, Secret Societies, *Huimen*, YGD, The Guangong Society],” PYGADA Z2-1-32.

²⁸ “Merchant landlords” (gongshanye jian dizhu) is defined as those who were both merchants and landlords. The majority of them resided in the urban area and made their business in the urban area as well. See Cao, *Zhongguo diquan jiegou de yanbian* [The Transformation of China's Land Ownership], Chapter 12.

²⁹ According to “The State Council's Decision on Classifying Rural Class Composition” issued on August 4 of 1950, “petty merchant and petty peddler” (xiaoshang xiaofan) is defined as “those with little or even no capital who purchase commodities from other merchants and sell them to the customers. The income of petty merchants comes from their own labor through the circulation of commodities without hiring other workers. Petty peddlers are those petty merchants without stable locality of commercial activities.” See Jiao, Yupeng, “The People's Living Guanyin Bodhisattva: Superstition, Entrepreneurship, Healthcare, Rural Economic Control, and *Huidaomen* in the Early PRC,” *The Chinese Historical Review*, May 2020, 7-8.

³⁰ “Leping xianzhi [Leping County Gazetteer],” Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987, 119.

³¹ “Liu Buyun fandong huidaomen an [Liu Buyun Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-94.

³² “Xu Chun'en fandong huidaomen an [Xu Chun'en Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1155.

³³ “Shu Daqi fandong huidaomen touzi an [Shu Daqi Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case], PYGADA Z1-2-1168.

³⁴ “Liu Cangsong fandong huimen an [Liu Cangsong Counterrevolutionary *Huimen* Case], PYGADA Z1-3-52. The Poyang County Gazetteer records that Liu Congsong was elected as the president of the Merchant Association as early as 1938. See NPYXZ, Vol. 1, 390.

³⁵ NPYXZ, Vol. 1, 389-390.

³⁶ “Zhang Yuncheng fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Yuncheng Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-312.

³⁷ “Zhang Yuxuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Yuxuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-320.

³⁸ “1952 Zhang Yuxuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Yuxuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case in 1952], PYGADA Z1-3-948.

³⁹ “Zhang Yuxuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Yuxuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-320.

⁴⁰ “Xie Yiluan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yiluan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-158.

⁴¹ “Liu Buyun fandong huidaomen an [Liu Buyun's Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-94.

⁴² “Xie Yiluan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yiluan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-158.

⁴³ Wu Yizheng's name does not appear on the statistical document of TSS, probably due to the fact that the document is mainly about people in the county seat and big towns.

⁴⁴ “Wu Yizheng fandong huidaomen touzi an [Wu Yizheng Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-668.

⁴⁵ “Zhang Yuxuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Yuxuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-320.

⁴⁶ Z2-1-11; “Zhang Yuxuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Yuxuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-320.

⁴⁷ “1952 Zhang Yuxuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Yuxuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case in 1952], PYGADA Z1-3-948.

⁴⁸ The name of the 1924 Poyang County Magistrate is missing in the Poyang County Gazetteer. Song Dexin, who was originally from Yunnan, became the Poyang County Magistrate in 1927. It is unknown whether this Mr. Song refers to Song Dexin or not. See NPYXZ, Vol. 1, 424.

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- ⁴⁹ “Xie Yiluan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yiluan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-158.
- ⁵⁰ “Cheng Richu fandong huidaomen touzi an [Cheng Richu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-855.
- ⁵¹ Ownby, “Redemptive Societies in the Twentieth Century,” 690.
- ⁵² “Xie Yulin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yulin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-62.
- ⁵³ “Wu Jinhui fandong daoshou an [Wu Jinhui Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-252.
- ⁵⁴ The amount of rice Yu had gained tripled in the final verdict. Because the public security personnel might try to exaggerate the amount while Yu tried to minimize the number, the real amount he had received is probably somewhere in between 75 kg and 225 kg.
- ⁵⁵ “Yu Shengtai fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yu Shengtai Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-350.
- ⁵⁶ He Zongjing was categorized as a “petty merchant” in the land reform.
- ⁵⁷ “Xie Yulin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yulin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-62.
- ⁵⁸ “Zhu Yuanzhang fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhu Yuanzhang Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-961.
- ⁵⁹ “Zhu Houxuan yiguandao an [Zhu Houxuan YGD Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-298.
- ⁶⁰ “He Jianting fandong huidaomen touzi an [He Jianting Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-332.
- ⁶¹ Ownby, “Redemptive Societies in the Twentieth Century,” 703.
- ⁶² “Yang Jichun fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yang Jichun Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-581.
- ⁶³ “Liu Buyun fandong huidaomen an [Liu Buyun’s Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-94.
- ⁶⁴ “Xu Chun’en fandong huidaomen an [Xu Chun’en Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1155.
- ⁶⁵ The other two were infrastructure maintenance and expenditures on religious affairs. Z1-2-581
- ⁶⁶ “Hu Hanchen fandong huidaomen touzi an [Hu Hanchen Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-487.
- ⁶⁷ “Yang Jichun fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yang Jichun Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-581.
- ⁶⁸ “Yang Taoyuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yang Taoyuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-477.
- ⁶⁹ “Xu Chun’en fandong huidaomen an [Xu Chun’en Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1155.
- ⁷⁰ “Shu Daqi fandong huidaomen touzi an [Shu Daqi Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1168.
- ⁷¹ “Zhang Yintang fandong daoshou an [Zhang Yintang Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z3-1-180.
- ⁷² “Peng Bofa fandong huidaomen touzi an [Peng Bofa Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-225.
- ⁷³ “Zhu Houxuan yiguandao an [Zhu Houxuan YGD Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-298.
- ⁷⁴ “Yu Shengtai fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yu Shengtai Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-350.
- ⁷⁵ “Cheng Deyuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Cheng Deyuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-7-158.
- ⁷⁶ “Peng Bofa fandong huidaomen touzi an [Peng Bofa Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-225.
- ⁷⁷ “Cheng Deyuan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Cheng Deyuan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-7-158.
- ⁷⁸ “Liu Meijiao fandong huidaomen an [Liu Meijiao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-59.
- ⁷⁹ “Xiao Qingyun fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xiao Qingyun Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-633.

⁸⁰ “Xu Guijiao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xu Guijiao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],”
PYGADA Z1-6-410.

⁸¹ “Xie Yulin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yulin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA
Z1-4-62.

⁸² “Xu Guijiao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xu Guijiao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],”
PYGADA Z1-6-410.

⁸³ “Yuan Cuijiao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yuan Cuijiao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],”
PYGADA Z1-4-219.

⁸⁴ “Xie Yulin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yulin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA
Z1-4-62.

⁸⁵ “Yuan Cuijiao fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yuan Cuijiao Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],”
PYGADA Z1-4-219.

Chapter 5: Anticipating the Apocalypse: Rumors and Militarization of Redemptive Societies

The Militarization of the Tongshanshe

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, TSS was a nation-wide redemptive society with a clear hierarchical and organizational structure. Although membership of the TSS in Poyang shows a pattern of male elite merchant dominance, it does not dampen the fact that TSS was a redemptive society that specifically offered assistance and comfort to those with health issues. It seems natural, in every sense, that TSS was a peaceful and devotional religious gathering point that would never bring instability to the local society. But the real history of TSS does not always match the anticipation of outsiders, such as scholars. During the Republican era, despite the fact that the early warlord government in Beijing officially sponsored the TSS' expansion throughout China, both the Nationalist Government and then the Communists after 1949 all banned TSS and labeled it as "counterrevolutionary." Moreover, TSS's activities often went beyond the realm of religious meditation and became one of the most militarized religious sects that confronted directly with both the KMT and the CCP.

The KMT's First Ban on Tongshanshe, 1927

In 1917, TSS gained the official approval from the Northern Warlords Government in Beijing, as one of the first licit new religions that won official approval from the government. In 1927, however, due to the dramatic changes in Chinese politics, the religious freedom that TSS had gained was rejected by the new Nationalist Government.

According to Rebecca Nedostup, the KMT's ban on TSS in 1927 was a crucial moment to religion in China during the 20th century. 1927 was a special year to the KMT because of the internal competition between Chiang Kai-shek's Nanjing Government and Wang Jingwei's Wuhan Government. Meanwhile, the growing Communist threat eventually led to Chiang's relentless suppression against the CCP members within the KMT. During this year, a KMT Special Central Committee whose aim was to reconcile the two centers of the KMT was created. In November of 1927, the two political rivalries finally sat at the same table for the alleged reconciliation. It was during this meeting that the question of religious freedom was intensely discussed. The meeting concluded that the Nationalist Government would continue granting religious freedom to the Chinese people if only the premise that TSS must be eliminated could be fulfilled. Such instruction was then sent to the Nanjing Government. Internal discussion within the central government approved the instruction and officially ordered each governmental unit to carry out the ban against TSS.¹

Nedostup provides the readers with three possible explanations on why the Nationalist Government banned the TSS in 1927. First of all, TSS' official tie with the warlord government in Beijing had apparently left an unpleasant impression to the KMT, who defeated the warlords and declared alleged national unification. Many of the former warlords and their allies were indeed TSS members. Secondly, many leading intellectuals, including Chen Duxiu, labeled TSS as a corrupt remnant of the old feudal society. The use of spirit writing was understood as a symbol of mysticism and backwardness. Chen claimed that TSS could not attract college students and working classes who represent the new spirit of China (which is not really true as the previous chapter shows). Lastly, as many KMT military officials noticed, that TSS organizations in the countryside showed a clear pattern of local elite domination, which was

viewed as an obstacle for class mobilization (a view shared by both the CCP and some KMT leaders).² Nedostup concludes that:

I argue that a crucial decision in 1927 to deny that freedom to members of Tongshanshe and certain other redemptive societies launched a policy of arbitrary denial of free exercise of religious rights to particular groups based more on the needs of the developmental state than on any sense of heterodoxy and orthodoxy. The constitutional caveat that religious freedom could be curtailed 'in accordance with law' developed into a governmental gray zone wherein distasteful groups could *ex post facto* be deemed threats to public order or superstitious and therefore unworthy of protection.³

Nedostup correctly points out that the goal of the Nationalist Government was to build a modern state which highlights social order and the notion of "modern citizenship." But the stories at the local level were much more complicated. The 1927 ban did not eradicate the organization of TSS in China at all.

Nedostup already notices in her book that TSS continued operating after the 1927 ban. Some of the TSS organizations changed their names, while others went entirely underground.⁴ In Poyang County, official documents produced by the CCP and personal accounts of former TSS members show hardly any influence of the 1927 ban on TSS. As discussed in the last chapter, the year 1927 and the 1920s, in general, was a period of TSS' rapid development in Poyang. Many of the Merchant Association members joined the TSS in the late 1920s, and none of them specifically mentioned the ban of 1927. Recollection about the KMT's ban on TSS from former TSS members is scarce. And it seems nobody knows exactly when the KMT banned the TSS. Liu Buyun mentioned in 1951 that the Nationalist Government banned the TSS more than a decade before. But Liu did not recall any changes as consequences of the ban.⁵ Huang Tianxi, a former TSS member, recalled in 1952 that the old regime (Nationalist Government) did not allow people to participate in the TSS. But Huang did not mention any direct consequences of the KMT's ban on TSS. Huang also pointed out that TSS was very popular in Poyang during the

Sino-Japanese War, which was undoubtedly after the 1927 ban.⁶ There is little doubt that some TSS members in Poyang were aware of the fact that TSS was on the government's blacklist. The effect of the 1927 ban on TSS, however, was almost null. People joined the TSS freely and publicly.

While the Poyang case might not tell the whole story of the KMT's 1927 ban on TSS, TSS undoubtedly remained a thorn in the side of the Nationalist Government. During the 1940s, at the national level, the Nationalist Government tightened its suppression against the TSS. The KMT's new wave of suppression was primarily a consequence of TSS' militarization and some self-defense associations' being absorbed into local TSS organizations.

The Tongshanshe – Big Sword Society Alliance

Nedostup's argument that the KMT's 1927 ban on TSS was aiming at making China modern as opposed to a superstitious and backward regime is correct from the perspective of labeling the TSS simply as a religious sect. As time moved on, what really troubled both the KMT and the CCP in the 1940s and the early 1950s was not only TSS as a religious organization but TSS as a quasi-military organization as well. At first glance, TSS as a redemptive society should have nothing to do with self-defense associations such as the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society; but what happened in reality, surprisingly, was a new form of TSS when TSS and the Big Sword Society merged together in many places in Southern China.

As shall discuss later, the TSS in Poyang transformed into a quasi-military organization after the CCP came into power, and potentially threatened the new regime. While any revolt potentials were all suppressed before it had developed into a full scale, it is weird how a redemptive society grew into a militarized organization without direct outside threats such as

banditry. But the case of TSS' militarization in Poyang was not new. As early as the early 1940s, the Nationalist Government was well aware of TSS' militarization tendency, and some alleged revolts did take place. In many cases, including Poyang, the Big Sword Society joined the TSS and developed a new self-defense association under cover of TSS.

Drawing a complete picture of the formation process of the TSS-Big Sword Society alliance is impossible. Still, it is plausible that the alliance began in Anhui Province, Jiangxi Province's neighbor to the north. Stories from local gazetteers in Anhui and Jiangxi help depict a rough picture of how the two unrelated associations merged together.

As discussed in Chapter one, the Big Sword Society was not a unified nation-wide self-defense association. Although the history of the Big Sword might be traced back to the White Lotus and the Boxers, the Big Sword Societies we see at the local level were not necessarily the offspring of the earliest ones. During the Republican Era, there was a self-defense association known as the "Big Sword Society" in the Huoshan County of Anhui Province. The grand master in this Big Sword Society was Chai Guobin, a locally well-known martial arts master. Chai taught his disciples how to use big swords when fighting. That is why his self-defense association was called the "Big Sword Society" by the locals. The story possibly suggests that Chai's Big Sword school might have nothing to do with the Big Sword Society we see in the Boxer Uprising. Chai's martial arts school was also called the "Chai School Sect" (*Chaimendao*) because of the grand master's family name. In 1941, a TSS leader Xia Zeyong from the Lujiang County of Anhui Province, visited Chai Guobin in Huoshan. Xia successfully converted Chai and a few of his disciples into TSS members. Consequently, Chai's Big Sword Society was absorbed into the TSS. After Chai's death in the 1940s (unknown date), the leadership of his Big Sword Society was officially transferred to the TSS.⁷

Shih-Chieh Lo's study on the Big Sword-TSS Alliance shows a slightly different version of the story. Lo's version of the origin of the Chai School Sect is more mythical. According to this version, a woodman from Anhui Province with the family name "Chai" fell asleep one day when he was working in the woods. He dreamed that a Bodhisattva had taught him the invulnerability rituals. When he woke up, he found himself full of strength and immediately established the Chai School of Martial Arts. Chen Zhengwu, who was one of Chai's disciples, joined the TSS in 1943. He eventually incorporated the Chai School Sect into the TSS' military organization.⁸ Although the two stories are not exactly the same, they both share the vital plot that a martial arts school from Anhui was incorporated into the TSS in the early 1940s. Lo also points out that the popularity of TSS in the Wenzhou area is not only attributed to TSS' providing people with healthcare but also the phenomenon that TSS taught people martial arts to protect oneself.⁹

The story of TSS' absorbing Chai Guobin's self-defense association is rarely mentioned in most primary sources, but the name "Chai School Sect" did frequently appear in both primary and secondary sources in the Anhui and Jiangxi region in the 1940s and 1950s. In many cases, the "Chai School Sect" became an equivalent of both TSS and the Big Sword Society. In other cases, it refers explicitly to the self-defense association under TSS' leadership. The terms "Tongshanshe," "Big Sword Society," and the "Chaimendao" become interchangeable in many local gazetteers. The Qianshan County of Anhui Province records in its gazetteer that the Chai School Sect entered the Qianshan County in 1923, it was also known as the Big Sword Society.¹⁰ In the Guixi County of Jiangxi Province, the TSS organization was divided into two separate sects known as the "Civil Branch (*wenban*)" and the "Martial Branch (*wuban*)."¹¹ The Civil Branch was called the Chai School Sect, while the Martial Branch was called the Big Sword Society. In

this case, the Chai School Sect no longer refers to the martial school, but TSS as a religious organization.¹¹ In the case of Guangfeng County in Jiangxi Province, the TSS was generally called the Chai School Sect as well.¹²

Local gazetteers seem to confirm the fact that the TSS was clearly divided into the Civil Branch and the Martial Branch, but there is no agreement upon when the division took place. In Anhui Province, the split plausibly took place in the early 1940s, because the alliance originally started there. As discussed, Chai Guobin of Qianshan County joined the TSS and brought his disciples into the TSS around the year of 1941. The local gazetteer of Wangjiang County of Anhui Province suggests that as early as 1943, TSS and the local Big Sword Society already cooperated under the same disguise.¹³

Although both TSS and the Big Sword Society coexisted in Jiangxi Province during the 1940s, it seems they did not ally with one another until the CCP came into power. In the Fengxin County of Jiangxi, according to the county gazetteer, the Chai School Sect of Anhui Province reached the City of Nanchang during the fall of 1949. Then the Chai School Sect penetrated the neighboring Fengxin County and was later incorporated into the TSS. From then on, TSS developed into the Civil Branch and the Martial Branch. The Chai School Sect was called the Martial Branch.¹⁴ In the Guixi County, which is located to the Southeast of Fengxin, the county gazetteer claims that the remnant KMT spies divided the TSS into the Civil Sect and the Martial Sect in 1950. The Civil Branch was called the Chai School Sect, while the Martial Branch was known as the Big Sword Society.¹⁵ In the City of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi, local historical sources also confirm that the TSS-Big Sword alliance took place after the “liberation” in the early 1950s.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the absorption of Chai's Big Sword Society also possibly went parallel with TSS highest leader Peng Ruzun's ambitious plan of turning himself into the emperor of China. According to the Poyang Public Security Bureau's report, Peng Ruzun dreamed himself to be the future emperor of China. Peng turned the history of TSS into three periods: Period one is called "Universal Deliverance (*pudu*)" when the TSS organization develops and absorbs people into the sect, preparing for the future. Period two is called "Close the Door (*shouyuan*)", when warriors and heroes join the TSS, and organize violent revolts against the secular regime. During this period, the TSS will defeat the secular power. Period three is known as the "Realization of the Way (*liaodao*)."¹⁷ During this period, the earthly power is already under the control of TSS. All the TSS members will enjoy great happiness and transform into immortals. Peng Ruzun claimed that his son Peng Baoshan would be the future emperor of China.¹⁷ Chinese scholar Qin Baoqi notes that Peng Ruzun already declared himself as the future emperor of China in 1929. Peng claimed that the end of the world was near, and the new emperor would be born in Sichuan soon.¹⁸ CCP's propaganda identifies the Chai School Sect as a key tool in TSS' plan of turning Peng Ruzun into the emperor.¹⁹

The TSS' militarization process might have also received patronage from Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese War. As early as 1933, Peng Ruzun sent his second son Peng Baoshan to Manchukuo and met Puyi secretly. Peng Baoshan promised Puyi that he would train a million "sacred soldiers (*shenbing*)" and return the throne of the Qing Empire to Puyi. Peng Baoshan's activity was discovered by the Nationalist Government. The KMT responded by labeling Peng Ruzun as a wanted criminal and further tightened its ban on TSS. From then on, TSS became more and more passionate about absorbing local militias, including the Big Sword Society, to

defeat the Nationalist Government and fulfill Peng Ruzun's dream of becoming China's new emperor.²⁰

Redemptive societies' relationship with Japan left unpleasant memories to both the Nationalist Government and the CCP after 1949. In fact, although both the KMT and the CCP claimed that redemptive societies allied with the Japanese and became patrons of the puppet government, especially in Manchukuo, Japan's relationship with redemptive societies was very complicated. Similar to the difficulty that the Nationalist Government was facing in regards to defining religion, the emergence of new religious organizations also posed problems to the Japanese Government.

Starting from 1919, the Japanese Government began using the term "similar religion" (*leisi zongjiao*) when categorizing unregistered religions. The Japanese colonial government extended the use of "similar religion" in China starting from 1930. Such a term includes most *huidaomen* groups we have discussed so far, including both self-defense associations and redemptive societies.²¹ Prasenjit Duara's study on redemptive societies in Manchukuo suggests that the Japanese puppet government patronized many redemptive societies as an ideological tool to promote the notion of a broader civilizational discourse that emphasizes the value of the East or Asia in contrast to the western modernity. This was the foundation of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." Many of the redemptive societies, including but not limited to the Red Swastika Society (*Hongwanzihui*), Society of the Way (*Daoyuan*), as well as TSS and YGD, did embrace the idea of universal salvation in opposition to a strict sense of national salvation.²² As a consequence of Japan's pro-redemptive society policy, most redemptive societies became thorns in the side of the Nationalist Government.

The TSS' militarization did not stop at the verbal level. During the 1940s, TSS organized several of local riots whose targets include both the KMT and the CCP. The TSS' riots against the CCP were mostly small in their scale until the post-1949 era when the CCP defeated the KMT. But some of the TSS' anti-KMT riots gained national influence and left tremendous impacts on the KMT's religious policy.

*The Shishou TSS Riot and other TSS Riots in Republican China*²³

Shishou County is located in Southwest Hubei Province, on the border of Hunan Province. The TSS organization in Shishou was a focal point of TSS' networks in the border region of these two provinces. The alleged Shishou Tongshanshe Riot took place in 1942. Although the riot was suppressed very early before the main participants actually revolted, the riot was regarded as a dangerous sign of widespread voluntary sectarian groups.

As discussed already, TSS, as a religious organization, was officially banned by the Nationalist Government in 1927. The TSS networks in Hubei Province continued their activities, however, in disguises. In Hubei Province, the TSS organization changed its name to a trading name known as the "Great Common Auspiciousness" (*datongxiang hao*). At the provincial level, the Great Common Auspiciousness had its provincial headquarters; at the local level, it had its county networks across many places in Hubei. Sometimes the county-level network was also called the "Hall of Goodness" (*tongshantang*) or the "Hall of Early Enlightenment" (see Chapter four). The KMT's anti-TSS policy was certainly not carried not persistently and resulted in the continuing development of TSS network throughout the entire Hubei Province. Similar to the class composition of TSS in Poyang, the KMT's report of the Shishou TSS Riot suggests that most participants in the Shishou County TSS organizations were also elite families and wealthy

merchants who had huge social impacts in their communities. While the local government was aware of the 1927 ban against the TSS, the local officials did not intervene in the development of TSS networks, possibly due to the fact that TSS members were mostly local elites. The local government was trying to avoid dissatisfaction from the local people. The calendar that TSS used in Shishou was not the Gregorian Calendar that was routinized by the Nationalist Government, but a TSS calendar known as the “*Tianfeng*.”²⁴

On March 1 of 1942, a local governmental official reported to the county government that some local elites had gathered together and organized big banquets frequently. During these banquets, they discussed the government’s policies and intended to “give the government a hard time.” The local police department then began its investigation. Two of the police officers joined them and realized that these banquets were all organized by the TSS members in Shishou. On March 5, the police officers reported to the local government that:

The local Hall of Goodness under the leadership of Cai Zhengfu, Jin Fangming, and a few others, is secretly preaching that the true emperor of China is going to be born soon and the Nationalist Government will not last long. The TSS is planning to revolt in Shishou County, Rongnan County, and a few other counties. The TSS has already mobilized the local self-defense militias. On March 7, they will attack both the Shishou County Government and the KMT armies stationed in the region at the same time.²⁵

The county government reacted quickly in response to the clandestine meetings. The county magistrate declared martial law during the evening of March 5. The local armies instantly took action and arrested more than twenty people involved in the planning, including both Cai Zhengfu and Jin Fangming. The government then shut down the Hall of Goodness in Shishou and arrested another forty-three people from the TSS in the neighboring counties.²⁶

The Shishou County magistrate personally led the investigation of the TSS riot. Because most people arrested were local big names, the county magistrate also invited some

governmental and KMT party organs to participate. The investigation lasted from March 6 to March 22. The county magistrate concludes in the report that the TSS riot was secretly led by a traitor from Huarong County named Liu Hai, who had spread the rumor that the Japanese were arriving in Shishou soon. “When the Japanese arrive, the KMT will be defeated.” By that time, a real emperor of China would be born, and the Japanese army would retreat. Liu also claimed that the apocalypse would appear on March 7. Many people would die because of the great calamities during the apocalypse. Liu Hai made talismans and gave them to Cai Zhengfu. Only those who received the talismans from Cai could survive during the end of time. Although the Big Sword Society did not get involved in the Shishou TSS Riot, the report suggests that many local self-defense militias were mobilized by the TSS. Self-defense militias in Shishou also connected with similar networks in other counties. They divided their responsibilities clearly: some would attack the local governments, while others would attack the stationed armies. They believed that they had a nation-wide military network under TSS’ leadership that would defeat the Nationalist Government.²⁷

The Shishou TSS Riot did not grow into a real “riot.” The alleged riot was suppressed even before it started. To the Nationalist Government, however, it became a good lesson that can be taught to each level of government throughout the country. After the incident, the KMT Central Government sent a number of directives to each level of government, informing them of the incident. In Sichuan Province, for instance, the Provincial Government issued several orders in November of 1942 warning lower-level governmental units of the potential threats of TSS.²⁸ On November 18, the Sichuan Provincial Government issued an order saying that TSS organizations under the leadership of traitors mobilized peasants in rural Sichuan resisting taxation and conscription. Moreover, some of them even planned to revolt against the KMT

violently and attack local governments. The order warns local officials of the TSS activities and encourages them to monitor the TSS' development closely. On November 25, the Sichuan Provincial Government issued another order reminding all the governmental units of the potential threats of TSS. The order reiterates the devastating consequences of the Shishou TSS Riot and attaches the order with a detailed investigatory report written by the Shishou County Magistrate. The order commands all the local officials to be aware of the existence of the TSS and ban all TSS activities.²⁹

In the Shishou TSS Riot, the KMT highlighted that the riot was organized by the “traitors,” although the documents do not specify who the traitors were. In January of 1943, the Sichuan Provincial Government issued an order about the new trend of traitors' activities in Sichuan. The documents state that now the traitors are penetrating the rural area through participating in all kinds of local voluntary associations. The Sichuan Provincial Government requires each baojia unit that they must appoint one commissioner in charge of cultural affairs and labor movement. In April of the same year, the Sichuan Provincial government issued another order concerning the widespread TSS activities in rural China. The document first reminds the local officials of the negative influences of the Shishou TSS Riot. Then, the document goes on arguing that the local elites are widely involved in TSS activities, and the impacts of TSS has reached to Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan, and a few other provinces. During June of 1942, for instance, the document points out that the TSS allied with the local Big Sword Society in the Fangxian County and the Zhushan County of the western part of Hubei Province. These “mobs” shouted the slogan that “the government drives the people to revolt; we will rob the rich for the poor.” They also declared that “we will not offer grains, nor taxation, nor conscription. We will defeat the Nationalist Government and support Chairman Wang Jingwei.”

The document concludes that these incidents are similar to the Shishou TSS Riot that was led and organized by the traitors. Again, the central government sent the investigatory report of the Shishou TSS Riot to each local government once more and asked all the officials to study these materials.³⁰

The Shishou TSS Riot attracted the attention of the Communists as well. On June 21 of 1943, Zhou Enlai addressed the issue of anti-KMT riots in one of his telegraphs to the CCP's Central Intelligence Department. In Zhou's telegraph, he mentions several TSS riots that have taken place recently, including the Shishou TSS Riot. The rhetoric Zhou Enlai uses in the telegraph was similar to the KMT that Zhou labeled the incident as a riot led by the traitors as well. In the second half of the telegraph, Zhou expresses the CCP's official stance towards all these local riots: the CCP is completely against all social unrest. Zhou emphasizes that the central task during the time is winning the war against Japan. Zhou also expresses anxiety that the traitors would use people's superstitious ideas for their malicious purposes through local voluntary associations, including the TSS. Moreover, Zhou also reminds the Communists that whenever social unrest breaks out, the KMT would certainly label the Communists as the leaders of the incident and disseminate the fake message that the CCP does not cooperate in the anti-Japanese war.³¹

Another TSS riot that had a similar national influence during the same period was the Qianshan TSS Riot in Anhui Province. Unlike the aftermath of the Shishou TSS Riot that the Nationalist Government sent a detailed investigatory report to various levels of government throughout China so that we still get a chance to know the details today, little is known about the details of the Qianshan TSS Riot. For sure, the Qianshan TSS Riot was led by both the local TSS organizations and the Big Sword Societies. The Big Sword Society first appeared in Qianshan in

1923.³² In 1942, the TSS leaders cooperated with the Big Sword leaders in Qianshan and established the TSS-Big Sword Alliance there.³³ During August of 1942, according to the Qianshan County gazetteer, the TSS-Big Sword Alliance in Qianshan revolted against the Nationalist Government and the revolt was suppressed.³⁴

Although little detail is known in the Qianshan case, the KMT used the Qianshan TSS Riot, in the same manner, it treated the Shishou TSS Riot. The Qianshan Incident became the equivalent of the TSS and local self-defense association alliance, specifically the Big Sword Societies. The Qianshan incident appears in many KMT's official documents warning civil officials of the danger behind the TSS network. In Sichuan Province, for instance, the provincial government issued an order in December of 1942 that local officials must report any TSS-Big Sword activities they identify to the provincial government. The document mentions the TSS-Big Sword Riot in Qianshan briefly.³⁵

In February of 1943, the Sichuan Provincial Government issued a new order naming the TSS highest leader Peng Ruzun as a wanted criminal. The document identifies Peng as the highest leader behind the Qianshan TSS Riot and claims that Peng resides in the Dazu County in Sichuan. The police in Sichuan searched the places where Peng lived but could not find him. The document then also includes a photo of Peng as a wanted criminal.³⁶ During June of 1944, the KMT Ministry of Home Affairs and the Chongqing Municipal Government jointly issued an order reaffirming the ban on both the TSS and the Big Sword Society. The document also argues that the Big Sword Society was launched by the TSS.³⁷ In Zhou Enlai's telegraph to the Central Intelligence Department, he labeled the Qianshan incident as a Big Sword Society riot. But Zhou puts it into the same list of anti-KMT riots together with the Shishou TSS Riot.³⁸

Both the Shishou and Qianshan TSS Riots sent an important alert to the Nationalist Government concerning the existence of TSS – local military force alliance. The TSS – Big Sword Society alliance was certainly not the only one. On September 20 of 1942, one month after the Queshan Riot, another TSS riot took place in Shucheng County of Anhui Province. The Shucheng TSS Riot was led by the TSS – Red Spear Society Alliance. Official archives in both Chongqing and Sichuan Province include a detailed investigatory report on the Shucheng TSS Riot.³⁹ The report is even more thorough than the Shishou TSS Riot.

Shucheng County is located right next to Qianshan County in the north. Connections between the Qianshan TSS Riot and the Shucheng TSS Riot is possible but without any direct evidence. Chen Zhongxi, the leader of the Shucheng TSS Riot, received his Bachelor's Degree in Economics from Peking University. Chen joined the TSS very early in 1919. Chen then worked in the banking sector and became a dean of academic affairs in a college. After that, he went back home to Shucheng and became a full-time TSS leader and cut off all his relationships with the outside world. In 1941, Chen disappeared from the public for a few months. It turns out he was actually appointed by his higher TSS unit as a evangelist and founded a few new TSS networks in Anhui. During May of 1942, the Wuhu TSS unit sent Huang Deshan to Shucheng and notified Chen Zhongxi of the TSS' future plan. Huang told Chen that the only way that China can defeat Japan in the war must be through de-mechanization (of all weapons). De-mechanization, meaning the abandonment of all modern weapons, was the key to control and lead the world. Accompanied by Huang was a Red Spear martial arts teacher called Chen Jingwu. The solution to the de-mechanization agenda was to teach the Red Spear technique and organize the TSS' Red Spear Societies.⁴⁰

Although the Red Spear Society was fundamentally a self-defense association similar to the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society, the purpose of establishing and joining the organization through TSS differs significantly from what we see in chapters one and two. As discussed in chapters one and two, people joined the self-defense associations for self-protection against bandits or for resolving local conflicts violently through *xiedou*. The militarization of the TSS, however, turned out to be more ideological and transcendental. The absorption of the Big Sword Society was meant to fulfill Peng Ruzun's goal of turning himself or his son into the future emperor of China. Similarly, de-mechanization was a direct response to the moral degeneration in modern society. As Huang Deshan pointed out, to regain control of the world was to reverse the degeneration of humanity through de-mechanization in warfare by learning traditional Chinese martial arts.

Joining the TSS – Martial Arts alliance was not simply aiming at material interests in the short run; instead, it builds the channel towards an entirely new world or new humanity that transcends the current world. The emphasis on de-mechanization and the use of traditional Chinese martial arts explicitly shows an alternative version of modernity that goes directly against the West's promotion of science and technology, which Duara discusses repeatedly in his works on redemptive societies and the discourse on civilization.⁴¹ To members in TSS and the Red Spear Society (similar to what we see in the Boxer Uprising), everything western was understood as unfavorable.

Chen Zhongxi accepted the offer from Huang Desha willingly. Within the next two months, a few more Red Spear teachers arrived in Shucheng and began building Red Spear networks under the leadership of the TSS. A few new Red Spear martial arts halls were established. The TSS organization in Shucheng then also divided itself into a Civil Branch and a

Martial Branch, which is exactly the same with what we see in the case of the TSS – Big Sword Society alliance. The Red Spear teachers taught the new members the technique of invulnerability. In order to attract more people, Chen Jingwu also used spirit-possession (see Chapter one). Meanwhile, besides teaching people about TSS' agenda of reforming the modern society, the Red Spear leaders also promised that the Red Spear will ensure the safety of all the members and their families, as well as defend people from ruthless exploitation of the Nationalist Government, including forced conscription, taxation, and levies for military provisions. These new goals of the TSS – Red Spear alliance signaled a complete split with the existing political order.⁴²

The Red Spear Society had widespread networks in rural areas in Anhui Province. The Shucheng TSS – Red Spear Society under Chen Zhongxi's leadership even connected with the Red Spear networks in Northern Anhui (Shucheng is in Southern Anhui). Some of the Red Spear leaders claimed that a new Son of Heaven would be born in Tongcheng County, which is one of Shucheng's neighboring counties. The Son of Heaven was believed to save humans from this corrupted world and would appoint Chen Zhongxi as the new Provincial Governor of Anhui. A lot of people believed this and joined the Red Spear Society. During the night of September 20 of 1942, TSS and Red Spear members of a few hundred gathered in Shucheng County and began attacking the government buildings and local officials. The self-protection militias led by the government defended their communities from the attacks of the TSS – Red Spear Society. Realizing that it was hardly possible to capture the government, the participants in the TSS – Red Spear Society all fled.

On September 23, another TSS – Red Spear Riot broke out in the Town of Luzhen, but it was not successful either. The government then began a thorough investigation of the

participants in the TSS – Red Spear Society alliance and soon arrested a number of its key leaders, including Chen Zhongxi. The report concludes that the TSS' highest leaders in Anhui were Du Xuetan and Huang Xiancheng. Chen Zhongxi was a regional leader who was responsible for a few TSS networks in Southern Anhui, including both Shucheng County and Qianshan County. It is unknown whether Chen also participated in the planning of the Qianshan TSS Riot.⁴³

The Shucheng TSS Riot once again confirmed that the KMT's suspicion on TSS was necessary. At the end of the Shucheng TSS Riot report, the document reminds the local officials again of the occurrence of the Shishou TSS Riot in Hubei and concludes that the Shucheng case was of the same kind. The report briefly reviews the history of TSS and reminds the officials that TSS was a banned religious organization. The report continues, however, that TSS had made a comeback when the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out. The TSS activities were mostly seen in the Japan-occupied regions and the mountainous regions. The report also clearly senses the new development of TSS' militarization during the past two years. The motivation behind people's participation in the TSS – Red Spear Alliance was, according to the report, mainly three points. Firstly, local elites and TSS core leaders, like Chen Zhongxi, who felt unsatisfied with the society, wanted to revolt against the government and restore traditional imperial order. Secondly, TSS' middle-level leaders like the martial arts teacher Chen Jingwu were mostly interested in making money through teaching martial arts and got involved in the TSS administration. This confirms our discussion in chapters one and two that wandering martial arts teachers were a robust workforce in rural China. Thirdly, the poor and ignorant people in TSS were cheated because they wanted to protect themselves and avoid taxation and conscription. They thought

that learning the invulnerability rituals could equip them with the power to rebel against the government.⁴⁴

All these TSS riots in the late Republican Era suggest that the boundary between self-defense associations and redemptive societies in rural China was very vague and ambiguous. Religious ideals concerning the end of time or a new world order can often result in the absorption of secular military forces into the religious organization. TSS was certainly not the only case.

Suppressing the Militarized Xiantian dao in Beijing, 1944

During the 1940s, the Nationalist Government was quite aware of the danger behind the militarization of redemptive societies. Although all the TSS riots we have discussed so far took place in Southern China, local officials in Northern China did stay alert of all the potential rebellious activities led by religious sectarianism and tried hard to suppress any danger before it became uncontrollable. Such was the case of the Beijing Police Department's suppression against Xiantian dao (The Way of Anterior Heaven, hereafter XTD) in 1944.

From January to March of 1944, the XTD's Beijing organization established its subunits in the villages of Zhenguosi, Xihongmen, Guogongzhuang, and Majiapu in Southern Beijing. Beyond merely building religious networks, these XTD organizations also established their self-defense associations and taught people fighting techniques. The Beijing Police Department's Southern Suburban District became aware of the XTD's development of self-defense associations and labeled them as illegal organizations because these new self-defense associations were not registered at the government. The Police Department began its first investigation on March 21 and concluded that the XTD teachings were made unavailable to

outsiders, and they also made their own weapons for *qigong* practice. On April 17, the Southern Suburban District of the Police Department received a command from their higher authority that the possession of weapons in the XTD might lead to unnecessary security problems. The higher authority ordered the local police officers to confiscate all the weapons and dissolve the XTD organizations in Southern Beijing.

The next day, local officials led a group of police force to several villages with XTD's networks. In the Village of Majiapu, they confiscated twenty big swords; in the Village of Xihongmen, they confiscated twenty-seven big swords and four spears. During an attempt to search the home of XTD Southern Beijing Subunit leader Zhang Shoutian, more than ten XTD members armed with big swords came out from Zhang's house and refused to hand over their weapons. Meanwhile, more than one hundred XTD members also gathered outside the Southern Suburban District of the Police Department. The police officers negotiated with the XTD members, and they finally reached a deal that the Police Department would keep these weapons only temporarily. The Southern Suburban District of the Police Department soon called reinforcing police forces and local militias of more than 200 men. They searched the houses of XTD leaders in a few nearby villages and confiscated a large number of weapons, including six rifles, one horse-pistol, four muskets, as well as 435 bullets. The reinforcing police force and some local militias then stationed in the area for surveillance purposes.⁴⁵

On September 1 of 1944, a XTD group of forty to fifty people from the Town of Langfa in the County of Wanping robbed the town government of two guns. Ma Shijun, a *baozhang* who legally owned a gun, was robbed by the same XDT group in the Town of Guogongzhuang of the gun he had. Another XTD group of forty to fifty people then joined them in Guogongzhuang and searched all the households for weapons used for self-protection. They got seven guns in total.

The local police called the army for help. The police force and the military then cooperated and searched the entire area for weapons and XTD organizations. They confiscated a large number of weapons from the XTD members, including firearms. Finally, on September 9, the XTD members compromised to the local police force and made five promises to the local government. “First, XTD will never possess any weapon. Second, XTD members are forbidden to search the surrounding villages for any purposes. Third, XTD cannot intervene in the police’s work. Fourth, XTD cannot force local villagers to join its organization. Fifth, XTD is not allowed to kidnap local people and hijack them for money.” Subsequent resistance from the XTD did resume during September. But the police department was able to control the situation with help from the army. All XTD networks were finally banned in this area in late September.⁴⁶

Little is known about the motivation behind the XTD’s militarization in Southern Beijing. Yet the agreement between the XTD and the Police Department seems to suggest that XTD had already become a predatory force in the area. XTD must have involved in quasi-bandit activities such as kidnapping and robbery. Indeed, as the document records clearly, XTD did search the local communities forcefully for weapons. XTD also robbed the local officials and government units for weapons too. The XTD case in Beijing also shows a great resemblance to the militarization of TSS. Both XTD and TSS were widely known as pure religious organizations. During the 1940s, however, both religious organizations developed their own self-defense associations and showed significant rebellious potential towards the current regime.

According to Chinese scholar Sun Jiang, XTD’s organization shows exactly the same pattern of separating the religious unit and the martial unit. Sun points out that XTD in the Lower Yangtze Delta region absorbed many former TSS members into its organization during the 1940s. Meanwhile, XTD also attracted the participation of many local self-defense groups.

Possibly because Japan granted XTD legit status during the war, many local religious groups and self-defense groups chose to operate under cover of XTD. Some of these alleged XTD groups resisted taxation against the Japanese, while others might also turn to predatory activities. It is almost impossible to judge which groups were indeed affiliated with the real XTD organization.⁴⁷

On the other hand, although the Nationalist Government seemed to be concerned about the existence of TSS and XTD, as well as their connections to local self-defense associations, the KMT's policy towards these redemptive societies was in general mild and tolerant. Neither TSS nor XTD was banned entirely, although the government announced its ban clearly. Both TSS and XTD continued their activities without much interference from the government. As we have seen in the case of TSS in Poyang, the 1940s saw no manifestation of governmental intervention at all. Leaders in these alleged riots were arrested and interrogated, but the official documents never explicitly state how harshly they were punished. In the XTD case in Beijing, the conflict was resolved peacefully. The XTD network was simply asked to be dissolved. All these local conflicts and riots did not lead to a nation-wide campaign against the huidaomen. Instead, huidaomen organizations like TSS continued flourishing everywhere throughout China. It was in the new China under the CCP's rule that TSS' fate came to its end.

The Militarization of the Tongshanshe in Poyang

Although the activities of TSS showed a clear pattern of militarization, especially with the alliance of the Big Sword Society, and produced a series of unrests in Anhui Province, Hubei Province, and Sichuan Province, TSS activities before the CCP came into power in Poyang showed barely any influences of these tendencies. After the PLA "liberated" Poyang on May 1 of

1949, however, TSS' militarization process in Poyang began as well. It went exactly parallel with the riots led by the local self-defense associations against the new regime (see Chapter three).

The militarization process of TSS in Poyang adopted the name of the Chai School Sect. Moreover, it was TSS leaders from Anhui Province, where the Chai School Sect originated, who led the militarization of TSS in Poyang. According to Yang Jichun, the highest-level Poyang TSS leader during the 1940s, a TSS master named Wu Qifeng of Anhui Province introduced the Chai School Sect into Poyang. During June of 1949, Wu Qifeng arrived in Poyang County from the neighboring Fuliang County under the jurisdiction of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi Province. Wu visited Hu Shouyi, who was a level-four *tianen* TSS leader in Poyang, the same level as Liu Buyun and Zhang Yuncheng (see Chapter four). Wu told Hu Shouyi that he had learned the invulnerability rituals of the Chai School Sect and could protect people and their families from injuries and death in warfare. Wu then persuaded Hu and his TSS fellows to learn the Chai School technique in Fuliang County, where Wu had just come from. Wu then went back to Fuliang.⁴⁸

Almost three months later, in August, Wu Qifeng wrote a letter to Hu Shouyi saying that he had prepared everything for Hu's visit. Hu then went to Fuliang with Yang Jichun. At Wu Qifeng's home in Fuliang, Wu appointed Hu Shouyi as the leader of the Chai School Sect in Poyang. The next day, Wu asked Qiu Fogen, who was a martial arts master of the Chai School Sect, to teach the techniques to Hu Shouyi. Wu Qifeng told Yang Jichun that Yang was too old to learn the fighting techniques so that it was better for Yang to lead religious worship alone. Here we see a clear breakdown of the TSS into the Civil Branch and the Martial Branch, although Wu did not use these words directly. After Hu Shouyi and Yang Jichun returned to

Poyang, they shared what they had learned in Fuliang with several TSS leaders, including Liu Buyun and Zhang Yuncheng. Then they officially established the Martial Branch of TSS of Poyang in August of 1949.⁴⁹

Instead of using the term “Tongshanshe,” those who joined TSS after the PLA took over Poyang directly substituted TSS with the Chai School Sect. Cheng Riqing, who joined the TSS in August of 1949, said Hu Shouyi introduced him to the Chai School Sect instead of TSS. Cheng stressed that they “worshiped the Buddhas” in the Chai School Sect, and the Chai School Sect was in nature not different from the Big Sword Society. During September of 1949, Cheng and a number of his fellow Chai School members went to Fuliang together and received training from Wu Qifeng and other Chai School masters. When asked about the relationship between TSS and the Chai School Sect, Cheng answered that the Chai School Sect originated from the TSS. The TSS was the Civil Branch, while the Chai School Sect was the Martial Branch.⁵⁰

To ordinary TSS members in Poyang, the prophecy regarding the apocalypse played a central role in introducing people into the new Chai School Sect. Huang Chunen recalled that Yang Jichun visited Huang’s store multiple times after the liberation warning him that huge disasters will take place on earth. During August of 1950, Yang Jichun specifically pointed out that the disaster would be a new World War. In order to protect the TSS members from the planes and cannons, they must learn the new techniques (of the Chai School Sect). Huang says that a few core leaders in the Poyang TSS, including Liu Buyun, Zhang Yuncheng, Hu Shouyi, and Yang Jichun, all actively participated in advocating the techniques of the Chai School Sect. They claimed that the Chai School techniques were invented by Peng Ruzun, the founder and highest leader of TSS in Sichuan Province. They also encouraged the young people to join the Martial Branch and the old people to join the Civil Branch. The Martial Branch can protect them

from the weapons in warfare, while the Civil Branch can help people resist the demons and vile spirits. They concluded that only the power of Peng Ruzun could save people from the disasters in the apocalypse. And an emperor would be born in China as predicted by Peng Ruzun.⁵¹

Cheng Riqing also recalls that when they went to Fuliang for training, Wu Qifeng and other Chai School leaders told them their purpose was to save people from the final calamity during the end of days. The world would soon be ruled by the leaders of the Chai School Sect, and the techniques they had learned would protect them from all the weapons because a world war would break out. Wu Qifeng also told them that all these teachings were received from the highest leader in Sichuan Province (Peng Ruzun). A new emperor would soon be born, and there would be a new title of a dynasty when their sect eventually conquers the world.⁵²

The teachings of the Chai School Sect in Poyang echo TSS' emphasis that modern society was a society of moral degeneration. One of the TSS' main agenda was the demechanization of modern technology. Both Huang Chunen and Cheng Riqing's recollection highlights the coming world war as a historical period dominated by modern weapons such as guns and planes. The key to protecting oneself and surviving the final apocalypse was through destroying the power of modern technology using the practice of traditional martial arts.

The Chai School Sect had a clear anti-Communist agenda. During Wu Qifeng's first visit to Poyang, Wu had dinner with Yang Jichun and Xie Yiluan and told them that "the CCP is not good. There will be a new emperor. Keep worshipping the Bodhisattvas faithfully, and they will bring peace to the world."⁵³ In May of 1950, another Chai School Sect master Hu Zhengyuan of Anhui Province visited Hu Shouyi and Yang Jichun from Fuliang and gave them four flags: People's Salvation Army (*renmin jiuguojun*), Liberating the People Army (*jiefang renminjun*), People's Self-Protection Army (*renmin ziweijun*), and People's Eradicating of the Communists

Army (*renmin changongjun*). Hu Zhengyuan encouraged both Hu Shouyi and Yang Jichun to organize military operations against the new regime. Besides the names mentioned above, during 1949 and 1950, a number of Chai School Sect members visited Poyang and facilitated the militarization of TSS. Wu Qifeng was familiar with all these people, and they all came from Anhui Province. They used Fuliang County as their base in the Poyang Lake region. During this period, Wu Qifeng also organized three big meetings in Poyang with most of the leaders of the Poyang TSS network.⁵⁴

Some of the TSS members were quite aware of the TSS' anti-communist tendency as the CCP strengthened its power in Poyang. Xie Yiluan indicates that Wu Qifeng's colleagues continued their visitation to Poyang in January of 1951. By that time, Xie had already read articles on the newspaper, which specifically stress the TSS' counterrevolutionary activities. Xie refused their visits, saying that the Land Reform was almost complete so that it was inappropriate to plan any actions against the new regime. In order to avoid being detected by the government, Xie also burnt all the Buddha statues and scriptures at his home.⁵⁵

Although the militarized TSS showed an apparent anti-communist attitude, it does not suggest that the TSS was the KMT's ally. On the contrary, similarly to the previous TSS riots against the Nationalist Government, TSS was against all political regimes. TSS' main agenda was to build its own new world. Xie Yiluan points out that the teachings he had received in the TSS after 1949 emphasize that they were near the end of the *kalpa*. As a consequence, great calamities would occur on earth. Both the KMT and the CCP had been putting enormous pressures on the TSS. The new emperor, however, would be born within the TSS, and the TSS would eventually rule the world.⁵⁶ Wu Shiwu, another TSS member who participated in the Chai School Sect, also confirms that neither the KMT nor the CCP would be in power permanently. It

is TSS who would rule the world. The current mission of the TSS was “Close the Door,” a confirmation of the TSS’ agenda to rule the world through defeating all secular regimes.⁵⁷ TSS’ political agenda did not change dramatically from the late Republican era to the early PRC.

Organized violent riots did not break out in Poyang, but the TSS members learned many invulnerability rituals from the Chai School Sect masters. Among all the invulnerability rituals of the Chai School Sect, the Three-Finger Spell (*sanzhifa*) was the most popular. In the ritual of Three-Finger Spell, three hand fingers will be turned into three swords. The first finger could disable thousands of soldiers and horses; the second finger will turn all the guns, cannons, and bullets into mud; the third finger could destroy planes, bombs, and poison gases. The Chai School members need to practice the spell for at least one hundred days and cannot reveal it to people outside the sect.⁵⁸ Other widespread invulnerability rituals include the Small Gun Spell (*xiaoqiangfa*), the Big Cannon Spell (*dapaofa*), and the Disabling Firearm Spell (*bihuomenfa*).⁵⁹ All these three invulnerability rituals target directly at modern weaponry, which reconfirms the TSS’ ideology of de-mechanization and its rejection of modern technology.

Rumors and Millenarianism in the Yiguandao

In contrast to TSS’ absorption of self-defense associations, especially the Big Sword Societies, into its organization and developed a dual-track system of religious sectarianism and martial arts practice, YGD’s history does not manifest any clear tendency towards militarization. Although anticipation about the apocalypse played an important role in TSS’ view about the current political system and the future, TSS’ militarization emphasizes more the practice of improving one’s physical strength through invulnerability rituals and the tension between modern warfare as moral degeneration and traditional martial arts. But YGD’s evaluation of the

current regime had been more profoundly influenced by its millenarian beliefs. YGD believers considered the future world seriously from a strong apocalyptic perspective. Therefore, apocalyptic “rumors” regarding the future of China became a defining character of YGD during a period of social unrest and regime change and consequently led to the CCP’s harsh suppression against the YGD.

Unpleasant Coexistence: Yiguandao and KMT

The fate of YGD saw very little resemblance to TSS before 1949. As discussed in the last chapter, when the Nationalist Government officially announced its nation-wide ban against TSS in 1927, YGD was experiencing its internal factional competition between Zhang Guangbi and Lu Zhongjie. When Zhang Guangbi established its first national YGD center in Jinan in 1929, YGD received barely any direct intervention from the KMT. Such religious “freedom” granted to the YGD effectively facilitated YGD’s unprecedentedly rapid development in northern China during the 1930s and then southern China during the 1940s.

After Sino-Japanese relations gradually deteriorated throughout the 1930s, Zhang Guangbi and his YGD chose to cooperate with the Japanese. According to the CCP’s sources, Zhang Guangbi became a counselor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Wang Jingwei’s Nationalist Government. Zhang’s son Zhang Xiaoqian also joined the Wang Government as a military advisor. During this period, Zhang Guangbi went to Shanghai and established the Chong Hua Charity House (*Chonghua Shantang*) as its base in Shanghai. YGD proliferated during the 1930s in all the Japan-occupied region and began to penetrate southern China since 1941.⁶⁰

Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Government in Chongqing was well aware of Zhang Guangbi and the YGD’s pro-Japan attitudes. In 1942, the police intercepted some YGD

pamphlets in Hua County of Shaanxi Province. According to the report from the Chongqing Police Department, “these pamphlets advocate the restoration of the imperial system, tell lies about the final apocalypse, and undermine our war preparation against Japan.” The report concludes that YGD is undoubtedly a counterrevolutionary organization.⁶¹ On August 23 of 1944, Chiang Kai-shek signed the order from the Executive Court that banned all YGD activities and activities under Zhang Guangbi’s leadership. YGD finally received the same treatment as TSS had experienced in 1927. In this order, the Nationalist Government states that “the enemies have manipulated YGD as a tool for spying.” According to this document, YGD’s activities had spread from Shanxi Province and Inner Mongolia into northwestern China. One branch of YGD penetrated from Shanghai into Hong Kong, Yunnan Province, and Guizhou Province; another branch of YGD in Beijing reached Sichuan Province. The document also argues that YGD’s highest leader Zhang Guangbi was manipulated by the enemies collecting information about KMT’s civil and military activities through the YGD network. At the end of the document, the government demands that all those who have joined YGD blindly must withdraw within days. Those who decline to follow this order will be punished relentlessly.⁶²

Although this document claims that Zhang Guangbi and the YGD were manipulated by the enemies, it does not specify who the enemies were. Given the context of World War II in 1944, Japan was certainly the biggest enemy. What was interesting, however, on September 20, one month after Chiang signed this document, the same document was sent to the Ministry of Communications under a new title – “Investigate Seriously about the Communists’ Manipulation of Yiguandao for Espionage Activities.”⁶³ In our discussion on TSS riots in the previous section, Zhou Enlai’s telegraph about the Shishou TSS Riot on June 21 of 1943 had already expressed the

anxiety that the KMT might label the CCP as the leader behind counterrevolutionary activities. Zhou Enlai's anxiety was completely justified by the reality.

After the end of World War II, the Nationalist Government did not loosen its policy against YGD. In late 1945, various levels of the Nationalist Government all reiterated the 1944 ban against YGD. The Chongqing Municipal Government's secret order on November 23 of 1945 states that "YGD as an illegal organization that had become a tool of the enemies' espionage activities during the war continues its espionage activities collecting information everywhere secretly and cheats people for money." Therefore, YGD must be banned strictly.⁶⁴ During December of 1945, the Sichuan Provincial Government also sent the same document to its subunits, even including labor unions of the banking industry in order to freeze all YGD's accounts in Sichuan completely.⁶⁵ In 1946, the Nationalist Government continued its ban against YGD but began to change its emphasis to the "backward" elements. On June 2 of 1946, the Chongqing Municipal Government issued a new prohibition against YGD. The focus of this document, however, became that YGD relies on bad habits such as spirit writing.⁶⁶ Such change shows the KMT's continuous efforts in modernizing China against backward social values, as discussed by Nedostup.

As the civil war between the KMT and the CCP continued after 1945, the Nationalist Government became more and more sensitive to the YGD's potential counterrevolutionary tendency. During September of 1947, the Ministry of Social Affairs in Sichuan Province issued a secret order about YGD's recent development and the danger behind it. The document first points out that YGD was manipulated by the Japanese and grew most rapidly during the war because of Japan's support. Similar to my argument in the last chapter that YGD was most attractive to the lower social classes in Poyang, the document also suggests that YGD attracted a

large number of followers from the lower social classes and gradually penetrated the merchant class and local elites' circles.

In this document, the Nationalist Government specifically mentions that YGD was spreading rumors in China. One of the most dangerous rumors, according to this order, was that a new emperor would be born in northern Shaanxi Province. The document does not clarify whether it was referring to the Communists. The document, however, also discusses how local officials handled the YGD problem and their major concerns about YGD. The document actually blames local officials for not paying enough attention to the dangers behind YGD's expansion. Most officials only cared if there were any Communists involved in the YGD activities. If not, they usually ignored YGD activities.⁶⁷ Such a fact reflects the local officials' primary concern behind YGD and other similar voluntary associations: they cared about potential Communist threats more than any other issues. Their biggest goal was to suppress the potential Communist movement before it becomes out of control.

In the following order issued by the same Ministry of Social Affairs warns the KMT officials that the YGD was developing in border regions of China rapidly under a new name called "The Way of Empty Dreams" (*Kongmengdao*, possibly referring to Confucius and Mencius).⁶⁸ The Nationalist Government also became more and more concerned about the rumors from YGD. On March 18, 1949, the Chongqing Municipal Government issued a new order reiterating the ban against YGD. This document specifies the millenarian teachings of YGD: the world is divided into three periods known as the Green Sun Period, White Sun Period, and the Red Sun Period. The document points out that YGD claims that the year 1933 was the divide between the Green Sun and the White Sun. The year 1949 in the White Sun Period would witness great calamities on earth. Moreover, the rumors of YGD even reinterpreted the modern

history of China. “Premier Sun Yat-sen was the reincarnation of Shunzhi Emperor’s military advisor. It was the Shunzhi Emperor who designed the Chinese Revolution (two centuries ago). The purpose of the revolution was to ask Premier Sun to establish the Republic of China. Huge social unrest will appear during the year of 1951. At that time, a true emperor will appear and be in charge of China. At this particular time, we should spread the truth under heaven’s name and save people.”⁶⁹

This document not only banned the organization of YGD but also labeled YGD as an “evil cult” (xiejiao). The prophecy about a new emperor in the YGD in the 1940s was quite similar to the TSS after CCP took power. Both regimes considered such prophecies as highly counterrevolutionary and a direct challenge to the existing political system. As we have seen in the case of TSS, too, the apocalyptic rumors of both YGD and TSS were not necessarily only against the Communists. Redemptive societies considered all secular powers to be temporary and against the mandate of heaven.

Although official documents from the Nationalist Government depicted YGD as a highly counterrevolutionary religious association against the current regime, the reality was far different from the official rhetoric. Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer argue that due to fearing that the atheist CCP may come into power and become more hostile towards all religious activities, many religious organizations openly undertook anti-communist activities. “The redemptive societies also had a tendency to side with the KMT.”⁷⁰ Their argument is basically correct. The ban against YGD at the rhetoric level did not lead to the disappearance of YGD at all.

Right after the war against Japan, during the winter of 1945, YGD’s central Buddha altar in Nanjing was confiscated by the Nationalist Government. In early 1946, Zhang Guangbi officially registered a new organization at the Ministry of Social Affairs under the name of the

Chinese Society of Morality and Charity (Zhonghua daode cishan hui). Under the new name, Zhang regained the property that was confiscated in 1945. All YGD activities resumed under the new disguise. In 1946, due to the intensification of the civil war in northern China, Zhang had a meeting with his core YGD leaders and decided to move the center of YGD activities to southern China. During December of 1946, Zhang Guangbi and his wife moved to Chengdu in southwest China. Zhang Guangbi died in 1947, and YGD was split again into factional competitions. The followers of Zhang and the followers of Zhang's wife Sun Suzhen established two separate YGD branches.⁷¹

The KMT's ban against YGD remained at the nominal level in most cases. The two YGD networks continued multiplying during the civil war period. In the city of Hangzhou, which was the center of Zhang Guangbi's followers, for instance, there were 1,454 YGD altars with 114,990 members in the early PRC. YGD had 1409 altars outside Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province, with more than 100,000 members.⁷² In Beijing in 1951, YGD had 5,500 clergy and 173,407 members.⁷³ In the case of Poyang County, YGD developed rapidly during the year of 1948 and 1949 without any sign of intervention from the Nationalist Government. Although the relationship between the KMT and YGD was certainly not pleasant, they coexisted.

CCP Confronting YGD

Although KMT's official documents suggest that local officials were anxious about the potential participation of CCP members behind YGD activities, there is no direct evidence that the CCP had interacted with YGD networks. The CCP local cadres, however, were certainly quite aware of YGD's millenarian beliefs, as well as the existence of many other similar huidaomen associations. Political scientist Richard Solomon has pointed out that the communist

movement in rural China during the 1920s met great difficulties in trying to overcome “the traditional peasant resistance to political involvement,” and Mao was quite aware of this fact.⁷⁴ “Millennial attitudes,” Solomon continues, “rationalized their passive acceptance of a miserable life, and justified a turning of aggression against what was seen as a politically ineffective self.”⁷⁵

After the CCP secured its power near the end of the civil war, the relationship between the CCP and YGD became one of the most pressing issues that the CCP needed to address. The relationship between the CCP and YGD was, unsurprisingly, hostile. Political scientist Kenneth Liberthal’s case study of Tianjin in the early PRC reveals that rural migrants in urban China remained strongly tied to millenarian societies such as the Yiguandao.⁷⁶ Such persistence represented many immigrants’ “fatalistic response to their urban milieu.”⁷⁷ Liberthal argues that anyone who believed in the theology of Yiguandao could not readily embrace the CCP’s world view.⁷⁸ CCP cadres had a hard time during the Withdraw-from-the-Sect Movement (*tuidao yundong*) mobilizing members of Yiguandao in Tianjin.⁷⁹

The CCP’s investigations on YGD in Shandong Province from the late civil war period to the early PRC give us a vivid picture of CCP’s attitude and rhetoric on YGD and other similar huidaomen associations. Shandong was the home to several “liberated zones” occupied by the CCP during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the early civil war. As early as 1948, some areas within Shandong Province was already profoundly concerned with YGD’s threats. In the Huang County of northern Shandong under the jurisdiction of Beihai District, the CCP’s Public Security personnel were worried about the CCP and PLA’s participation in YGD. One 1948 document says that the new members that YGD was recruiting during that period were mainly the retired soldiers in the army. In one of the sub-districts in Huang County, seven CCP members joined the

YGD. According to this document, the YGD's slogan was mainly about "anti-Soviet and anti-CCP." There was a painting in the YGD's hall where Mao Zedong and Stalin were surrounded by a group of children. The document interpreted it as "the people will beat Mao and Stalin to death." YGD also told people that "In the past, you participated in the CCP. We will not care about it as long as you believe in our religion faithfully."⁸⁰ The document does not directly comment on these activities within YGD, but certainly it was meant to give a warning to the local cadres.

In 1949, the rhetoric of the CCP in Shandong turned harsher than it was in 1948. Similar to the discontent that resulted from the grain levy and borrowing policy in Jiangxi, which had led to a violent confrontation between the PLA and the local self-defense associations, the YGD activities in Shandong further confirm the existence of widespread dissatisfaction with the PLA's wartime policies. A report from the Jinan Public Security Department on May 25 of 1949 summarizes a few important YGD activities against the CCP. At the beginning of the document, the document directly labels YGD's activities as counterrevolutionary. During early April, when the PLA was busy at the Crossing Yangtze-River Campaign, YGD leaders in Shandong were preparing for their sabotaging activities. During the YGD's meetings, YGD leaders emphasized that people were feeling extremely unhappy with the PLA's grain levy and conscription policies.

They also claimed that YGD had established its networks in more than forty counties in Shandong. As soon as the PLA leaves, YGD will thrive. The Public Security organs in Shandong responded to YGD's clandestine meetings immediately and arrested a number of YGD leaders in different areas within Shandong. According to this document, a few key YGD leaders turned out to be prominent KMT figures in Shandong. Among these key KMT names were a colonel (unnamed) of the KMT's Route 29 Army; Gu Ruiyun, the advisor of the Route 29 Army; Song

Ziyu, a captain of the Shandong Provincial Security Group; and Yue Zhiqian, the secretary of the lieutenant colonel of the Zibo Garrison Headquarters. Most of these key YGD leaders were rich peasants and evil merchants, which foreshadows the rhetoric of the coming Land Reform. Their main activities, according to this document, was spreading rumors and opposing the PLA's grain levy and conscription policies, which might lead to dissatisfaction of the people.⁸¹

The rumors within YGD were not necessarily against the CCP or the new regime. Yet, CCP's local cadres usually interpreted them as counterrevolutionary. Teachings within the YGD express many people's anxieties against warfare and social unrest; but to the CCP, these anxieties were directly against the new regime. One of YGD's poems in 1949 says that:

Smoke can be seen everywhere in Shandong,
The lower Yangtze Delta region is full of dead bodies,
Old men, don't talk about your country,
The country will always be the country.

This poem was clearly talking about warfare and social unrest in China, and probably reflects many people's discontent and anxiety about their sufferings and the future of the country. It does not, however, imply anything directly against the CCP. But the CCP cadres interpreted it as "The poem has specifically pointed out that Shandong Province will be chaotic. The final apocalypse has already arrived. Only through joining the YGD could people be saved from the end of the world. And it says that our PLA will be defeated when they enter the lower Yangtze delta region. The country will be Chiang Kai-shek's country in the future."⁸² The tone of the original poem was neutral to both the KMT and the CCP without any apparent political inclination. But the CCP cadres tended to believe that feeling disgusted about warfare is a straight sign of anti-CCP mentality.

The CCP's public security personnel had a clear strategy in collecting information about YGD's internal activities before taking any direct suppressive actions. The first strategy was penetrating the YGD community by joining the YGD. In the Jiao County of Shandong Province, three public security personnel were introduced to the YGD. The difficulty of this strategy, however, was that the CCP's public security organs lacked financial support. In Jiao County, each new YGD member in 1949 needed to offer 60,000 *yuan* as a new membership fee. The public security department refused to provide such funding. As a result, the three did not successfully penetrate YGD's network.

The second strategy was converting current YGD members into informers. In Jiao County, the public security department chose Chen Bochuan, who ran a bicycle shop. They selected Chen because one of his close friends, Zhang Xingnan, who was also a merchant, was already working for the CCP as a secret informer. During late night of March 29 of 1949, Zhang Xingnan went to Chen Bochuan's home and faked the news that the police were searching for Chen because Chen participated in the YGD illegally. Zhang pretended to be anxious about Chen's situation. Zhang's suggestion to Chen, finally, was that Chen could choose to talk to the head of the police department of Jiao County, who was Zhang's good friend. If Chen worked for the government, the government would forgive him. Consequently, Chen was successfully converted into an informer of the public security organs. The public security personnel educated Chen through thought reform and showed him the wrongdoings of the YGD. Then Chen went back to participate in YGD as usual while Chen shared everything he had heard from YGD to the public security personnel.⁸³

YGD Encountering CCP in Poyang

Without an alliance with local groups that had military power, such as the case of TSS and the Big Sword Society, YGD's threat to the new communist regime was more of an ideological one. In the case of Poyang, YGD's teachings and organizational structure did not change much after the CCP's "liberation" in May of 1949. Constant warfare and regime change strengthened the millenarian view of YGD members. The CCP, however, identified YGD as a significant threat to the new government.

YGD leaders in Poyang were well aware of the CCP's hostility towards the YGD. In March of 1949, the YGD leader in Jingdezhen sent a letter to Poyang warning that the atheist CCP was on their way to Poyang.⁸⁴ During May of 1949, when PLA officially liberated Poyang, YGD networks stopped their public activities to protect themselves. YGD leaders in Poyang, such as Zhang Jixu, also instructed their fellow believers that whenever the cadres ask about whether you are a YGD member, you must disguise your real identity. Zhang also warned the people that it was a time of danger and temptation. The deities will distinguish the good from the bad and test the good (if they are faithful).⁸⁵ But key YGD leaders did not stop meeting secretly. They continued an optimistic view regarding the future of their sect and were planning to expand their power when the situation improved⁸⁶

YGD's activities after the takeover were mainly led by Chu Daoming from Jingdezhen. Although Chu rarely participated in Poyang's YGD activities directly, he was the man who gave orders and trained YGD leaders in Poyang. Chu began coming to Poyang and built the connections between Poyang's YGD and other YGD networks in the City of Jingdezhen and the County of Leping. Chu visited Poyang twice in 1949. The first visit was right before the takeover in April, and the second one was in May, right after the takeover. Poyang's YGD leader Zhang Jixu was Chu's chief assistant in Poyang in the new regime.

Zhang Jixu was originally from Leping County. As a follower of Chu Daoming, Zhang preached together with Chu in Leping, Jingdezhen, and Poyang in 1948. Then Zhang stayed in Poyang as Chu's primary contact. Right after the liberation, Chu invited Zhang and many key leaders in Poyang for a training session in Jingdezhen. Zhang went there with Zhu Houxuan, Wu Jinhui, He Zongjing, and Yuan Cuijiao. After Zhang's return, he stayed at He Zongjing's home as a full-time YGD specialist and became the highest leader of Poyang's central altar. Although YGD stopped operating publicly in the new regime, Zhang remained active. After the liberation, he continued introducing many new members into the YGD. The YGD network remained functioning. In 1950, for instance, Chu Daoming organized another training session in Leping where several people from Poyang attended. From 1948 to 1950, attending training sessions outside Poyang was very common for YGD members. YGD leaders in Jiangxi, especially Chu Daoming, frequently organized training programs in Jingdezhen, Jiujiang, Leping, and Fuliang. The number of YGD members who attended these programs ranged from less than ten to sixty.⁸⁷ The YGD network did not disappear right after the liberation until the new government took further action (see Postface).

YGD's millenarian interpretation of the world after the communist takeover was a mixture of anticipating apocalyptical disaster and resisting the new communist regime. Xie Yulin, a tanzhu in Poyang, heard from a YGD evangelist Wu Jinhui in 1950 that there would be a dark time when there was no light in this world. The darkness, however, would not last forever, according to Wu. "When the light comes, it will be the time when we 'kill the pig and pick its hair (*shazhu, bamao*).' The hair of the pig is white, signifying the coming of the white sun period. We faithful YGD believers will be having a good time in the new world."⁸⁸ In this piece of rumor (according to the CCP), the pig and its hair specifically refer to Marshal Zhu De and

Chairman Mao Zedong. It is indeed highly possible that such teaching within the YGD was explicitly against the CCP. It was certain that YGD members believed that the rule of CCP would soon fade away and a new *kalpa* would be born soon. The prelude of the new world is accompanied by disasters and calamities. Mountain spirits and sea monsters would come out in China. Interestingly, Xie Yulin interpreted the *yangge* dance as a monstrous activity for unknown reasons.⁸⁹ But the *yangge* dance is certainly another reference to the communists. Xie Yulin also clearly pointed out that the communists would not stay in power any longer.⁹⁰

It is plausible that Chu Daoming was a major source of these anti-communist and millenarian teachings. Chu came to Poyang once in 1950 when he preached to the YGD members there that “now comes the most dangerous time, so YGD must operate secretly. The great calamity is soon to come. Those of you in the YGD must practice the *dao* harder.” Chu also strengthened the faith of the YGD member that the world will belong to those in the “*dao*.” A new emperor, whose name is Li Jianguo, according to Chu, had been born and would rule the world. “Whenever the police investigate the YGD, you must tell them you know nothing.”⁹¹

Similar to the TSS, YGD also claimed that a new emperor would or had been born by the time that CCP came to power. In Xie Yulin’s case, he believed that the new emperor with the last name Li would soon be born. This new emperor would be the reincarnation of the Maitreya Buddha, which is a typical millenarian belief inherited from the White Lotus movement.⁹² Wu Jinhui and many other YGD members were all aware of the would-be-born emperor, whose last name is Li.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 demonstrates that the social composition of redemptive societies in Poyang parallels with the members' classes. While TSS was dominated by elite merchants and politicians, YGD shows a significantly more blended class composition, although the urban poor made up the most substantial proportion of its membership. In both cases, the merchant class played an important role in the development of redemptive societies. This finding partially confirms David Ownby's conclusion that the rise of redemptive societies was "chiefly an urban phenomenon, appealing largely to the middle classes of China's burgeoning cities."⁹³ During the TSS riots we see in this chapter, the local elites also played a central role in expanding TSS' networks and organizing violent resistance against the state. The dominance of elite classes was not only carried out through economic and political power but also their leadership in non-state social organizations such as redemptive societies and local self-defense associations.

As Prasenjit Duara shows in his study on redemptive societies in the Manchukuo, redemptive societies in China showed a clear transnational salvationist agenda. Both TSS and YGD embraced a millenarian view of human history. Millenarianism in both societies led to their ideological confrontation with the secular state powers. While scholars are familiar with the CCP's rhetoric of labeling redemptive societies as counterrevolutionary elements, redemptive societies challenged the nationalist narrative of both the Nationalist Government and the PRC after 1949.

Although Duara's pioneering works on redemptive societies and transnational salvationism correctly reminds us of the alternative narratives of modern Chinese history (his works are well received and welcomed by many scholars in the studies of state making and religious studies), we must add limits to the conclusion of viewing redemptive societies merely as being actively conscious of an counter-nationalist trend in modern China.⁹⁴ While elite

intellectuals within redemptive societies did have a highly philosophical understanding of the limitations of Western modernity, it is too farfetched to argue that the majority of redemptive societies' members were capable of digesting such teachings. As we see in the cases of YGD and TSS in this chapters that are far from China's cosmopolitan centers, millenarianism and salvationist agenda within redemptive societies remained chiefly grounded on people's basic material needs, such as resistance against taxation and forced conscription, as well as people's longing for a better livelihood in a recreated world. The end of the world was usually associated with the coming of a new world war and new waves of physical sufferings. The incentives behind ordinary people's participation in redemptive societies hardly went beyond the categories we see in the White Lotus and the Boxer Uprising.

TSS' militarization process suggests the boundary between traditional self-defense groups and new religious organizations was unclear and elusive. Redemptive societies, similar to the White Lotus groups, could easily become the origin of organized resistance against the state. What a religious organization added to self-defense groups is a transcendental interpretation of people's existence in this society. In the case of "de-mechanization," it could be interpreted as, as Duara shows, a counter-argument against the Western modernization that emphasizes the importance of technological advancement and societal progress. However, I tend to interpret it as the traditional Chinese society's incapability of understanding the modern in the Western sense. The "de-mechanization" mentality remained fundamentally a primitive form of nationalism or even anti-foreignism. There were no fundamental changes from what we see in the case of the Boxer Uprising. All the uneasiness between redemptive societies and the secular states arose from ideological conflicts between a traditionalist society that remained deeply rooted in the beliefs of dynastic changes (such as a new emperor) built upon agrarian social order and a

modernist agenda in building a nationalist state that aims at emulating the Western political models. Redemptive societies offered little alternative interpretation of being modern; on the contrary, it represents the continuation of the traditional Chinese moralist ideals.

¹ Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, 29-30.

² *Ibid*, 31-33.

³ *Ibid*, 29.

⁴ *Ibid*, 33-34.

⁵ “Liu Buyun fandong huidaoemen an [Liu Buyun’s Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-94.

⁶ Z1-6-460

⁷ “Anhui shengzhi, gong’an zhi [Anhui Province Gazetteer, Public Security Volume], Hefei: Anhui remin chubanshe, 1990, 188.

⁸ Lo, “Kangzhan wanqi de minbian yu defang shehui – yi Pingyang de daodaohui yu tongshanshe wei taolun zhongxin [The Daodaohui and Tongshanshe: A Case Study of Popular Uprising and Local Society in the Latter Part of the Second Sino-Japanese War],” 225.

⁹ *Ibid*, 224.

¹⁰ Qianshan xianzhi [Qianshan County Gazetteer], Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 258.

¹¹ Guixi xianzhi [Guixi County Gazetteer], Beijing: Zhongguo kexue jishu chubanshe, 1996, 717.

¹² Gungfeng xianzhi [Guangfeng County Gazetteer], Beijing: Fanzhi chubanshe, 2005, 632.

¹³ Wangjiang wenshi ziliao [Wangjing Historical Materials], Vol. 1, Hefei: Anhuisheng chubanjū, 1985, 49.

¹⁴ Fengxin xianzhi [Fengxin County Gazetteer], Fengxin: Fengxin xianzhi bianji weiyuanhui, 1960, 95.

¹⁵ Guixixian wenshi ziliao [Guixi County Historical Materials], Vol. 2, Guixi: Zhengxie Guixixian wenshiwei, 1987, 112; Yingtan shizhi [Yingtai City Gazetteer], Vol. 2, Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 2003, 1917.

¹⁶ Jingdezhen wenshi ziliao [Jingdehen Historical Materials], Jingdezhen: Zhengxie Jingdezhen wenshi weiyuanhui, 1989, 49; Jingdezhen shizhi [Jingdezhen City Gazetteer], Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1991, 390.

¹⁷ “Dadaohui, Huanghehui, Tongshanshe, Yaomenjiao deng zuzhi jieshao, renyuanmingdan [Introduction and Name Lists of the Big Sword Society, the Yellow Crane Society, the Society of Goodness, the Yao Sect, and Other Organizations],” PYGADA Z2-1-134.

¹⁸ Qin, Qingmo minchu mimi shehui de tuibian [The Transformation of Secret Societies in Late Qing and Early Republican China], 296.

¹⁹ ZGHDMSLJC, Vol. 1, 5.

²⁰ Zheng, Jindai yilai de huidaoemen [Huidaomen Since Modern China], 188; Qin, Qingmo minchu mimi shehui de tuibian [The Transformation of Secret Societies in Late Qing and Early Republican China], 296.

²¹ Sun, Jiang, “Jiushu zongjiao de kunjing – Manzhouguo tongshi xiade hongwanzihui [The dilemma of Redemptive Societies – The Red Swastika Society under Manchukuo’s Rule],” in Sun, Zuowei tazhe de zongjiao – jindai zhongguo de zhengzhi yu zongjiao [Religion as Otherness – Politics and Religion in Modern China], 148-167. The term “similar religion” is Sun’s translation.

²² See Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, Chap 3.

²³ The term “riot” is a direct translation from the Nationalist Government’s use “*baodong*” in the archives.

²⁴ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013; “Guanyu pohuo Shishou, Nanxian dengdi tongshanshe zuzhi anqing jiyao [A Summary on Uncovering TSS Riots in Shoushi, Nanxian, and Other Places],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003770000198000; “Hubeisheng zhengfu guanyu shishouxian pohuo tongshanshe jiantu mimou baodong an de daidian [Hubei Provincial Government’s Telegram on Discovering TSS Evil Members’ Planning for Revolt in Shishou County],” Hubei Provincial Archives LS31-1-0000993-002.

²⁵ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013; “Guanyu pohuo Shishou, Nanxian dengdi tongshanshe zuzhi anqing jiyao [A Summary on Uncovering TSS Riots in Shoushi, Nanxian, and Other Places],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003770000198000; “Hubeisheng zhengfu guanyu shishouxian pohuo tongshanshe jiantu mimou baodong an de daidian [Hubei Provincial Government’s Telegram on Discovering TSS Evil Members’ Planning for Revolt in Shishou County],” Hubei Provincial Archives LS31-1-0000993-002.

- ²⁶ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013; “Guanyu pohuo Shishou, Nanxian dengdi tongshanshe zuzhi anqing jiyao [A Summary on Uncovering TSS Riots in Shoushi, Nanxian, and Other Places],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003770000198000; “Hubeisheng zhengfu guanyu shishouxian pohuo tongshanshe jiantu mimou baodong an de daidian [Hubei Provincial Government’s Telegram on Discovering TSS Evil Members’ Planning for Revolt in Shishou County],” Hubei Provincial Archives LS31-1-0000993-002.
- ²⁷ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013.
- ²⁸ The Nationalist Government moved to Chongqing, and Chongqing became China’s capital in 1936. The Sichuan region then became the center of national politics.
- ²⁹ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013. Lo’s study in Wenzhou also confirms that forced conscription and levy was the main driving force behind the Big Sword Society – TSS alliance’s revolt against the Nationalist Government. See Lo, “Kangzhan wanqi de minbian yu defang shehui – yi Pingyang de daodaohui yu tongshanshe wei taolun zhongxin [The Daodaohui and Tongshanshe: A Case Study of Popular Uprising and Local Society in the Latter Part of the Second Sino-Japanese War].”
- ³⁰ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013
- ³¹ Zhou, Enlai, “Guanyu dahoufang minbian wenti zhi zhongyang qingbaobu de dianbao [Zhou Enlai’s Telegram to the Central Intelligence Bureau on Civil Riots in the Home Front],” in Xiangxi wenshi ziliao [Xiangxi Historical Materials], Xiangxizhou: Zhengxie Xiangxizhou weiyuanhui, 1996, 224-226.
- ³² Qianshan xianzhi [Qianshan County Gazetteer], Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 258.
- ³³ Anhui wenshi ziliao quanshu, Anqing juan [Anhui Historical Encyclopedia, Volume on Anqing], Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 2007, 797.
- ³⁴ Qianshan xianzhi [Qianshan County Gazetteer], Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1993, 258.
- ³⁵ “Sichuansheng zizong xinjian deng xian guanyu chajing dadaohui, tongshanshe feifa zuzhi bali qingkuang [Zizhong, Xinjiang, and Other Counties’ Reports on Investigating the Big Sword Society and TSS Illegal Organizations to the Sichuan Provincial Government],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 186-01-1390.
- ³⁶ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu jinan tongshanshe shouling Peng Huilong de xunling [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Order on Arresting TSS’ Leader Peng Huilong],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003350000008000.
- ³⁷ “Chongqingshi zhengfu guanyu qudi tongshanshe dadaohui mixintuan de xunling [Chongqing Municipal Government’s Order on Banning TSS and Big Sword Society Superstitious Organizations],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00530016000770300517000.
- ³⁸ Zhou, Enlai, “Guanyu dahoufang minbian wenti zhi zhongyang qingbaobu de dianbao [Zhou Enlai’s Telegram to the Central Intelligence Bureau on Civil Riots in the Home Front],” in Xiangxi wenshi ziliao [Xiangxi Historical Materials], Xiangxizhou: Zhengxie Xiangxizhou weiyuanhui, 1996, 224-226.
- ³⁹ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013; “Sichuansheng zhengfu chajin tongshanshe de zhiling [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Order on Banning TSS],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 147-02-2766; “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu gedi chahuo tongshanshe de xunling [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Order on Banning TSS],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003770000214000.
- ⁴⁰ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013; “Sichuansheng zhengfu chajin tongshanshe de zhiling [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Order on Banning TSS],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 147-02-2766; “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu gedi chahuo tongshanshe de xunling [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Order on Banning TSS],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003770000214000.
- ⁴¹ See Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*; Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*; Duara, “The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism;” Duara, “Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900-1945.”
- ⁴² “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013; “Sichuansheng zhengfu chajin tongshanshe de zhiling [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Order on Banning TSS],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 147-02-2766; “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu gedi chahuo tongshanshe de xunling [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Order on Banning TSS],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003770000214000.
- ⁴³ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013; “Sichuansheng zhengfu chajin tongshanshe de

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- zhiling [Sichuan Provincial Government's Order on Banning TSS],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 147-02-2766; “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu gedi chahuo tongshanshe de xunling [Sichuan Provincial Government's Order on Banning TSS],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003770000214000.
- ⁴⁴ “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu pohuo tongshanshe baoluan [Sichuan Provincial Government's Documents on Discovering TSS Riots],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 059-01-0013; “Sichuansheng zhengfu chajin tongshanshe de zhiling [Sichuan Provincial Government's Order on Banning TSS],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 147-02-2766; “Sichuansheng zhengfu guanyu gedi chahuo tongshanshe de xunling [Sichuan Provincial Government's Order on Banning TSS],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00550002003770000214000.
- ⁴⁵ “Beipingshi jingchaju nanjiao fenju guanyu xiantiandaohui zai nanjiao sheli wuzhuang huiyuan xieliang suo bingwei bei'an, jingchaju xialing qudi bing jiaochu wuqi ji wenjian [On the Southern Suburban Branch of the Beijing Municipal Police Department's Confiscation of XTD's Weapons and Documents Because XTD's Establishment of Military Training Center without Notifying the Government],” Beijing Municipal Archives J181-014-00203.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Sun, Jiang, “Meiyou baodong de shijian – guanyu kangri zhanzheng shiqi xiantiandao shijian de biaoshu wenti [Incidents without Riots – On the Narrative of the Way of Former Heaven during the Anti-Japanese War],” in Sun, Zuowei tazhe de zongjiao – jindai zhongguo de zhengzhi yu zongjiao [Religion as Otherness – Politics and Religion in Modern China], 336-356.
- ⁴⁸ “Yang Jichun fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yang Jichun Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-581.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ “Cheng Riqing fandong huidaomen touzi an [Cheng Riqing Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1197.
- ⁵¹ “Shu Daqi fandong huidaomen touzi an [Shu Daqi Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1168.
- ⁵² “Cheng Riqing fandong huidaomen touzi an [Cheng Riqing Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-1197.
- ⁵³ “Xie Yiluan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yiluan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-158.
- ⁵⁴ “Yang Jichun fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yang Jichun Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-581.
- ⁵⁵ “Xie Yiluan fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yiluan Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-158.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ “Wu Shiwu fandong huidaomen touzi an [Wu Shiwu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-3-679.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ “Yang Jichun fandong huidaomen touzi an [Yang Jichun Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-2-581.
- ⁶⁰ ZGHDMSLJC, Vol. 1, 3; Qin, Qingmo minchu mimi shehui de tuibian [The Transformation of Secret Societies in Late Qing and Early Republican China], Chapter 7.
- ⁶¹ “Chongqingshi jingchaju xunling guanyu zhuyi fangfan huaxian yiguandao zuzhi gei chongqingshi jingchaju di shierfenju xunling [Chongqing Municipal Police Department's Order to Its Thirteenth Branch on Paying Attention to YGD Organization from Hua County],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00610015029360000042000.
- ⁶² “Xingzhengyuan xunling chajin diren liyong yiguandao shouling Zhang Tianran huodong xingwei [National Executive's Order on Banning All Manipulative Activities Related to YGD Leader Zhang Tianran],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 0053001600077030055000.
- ⁶³ “Guanyu chajin gongjun liyong ‘yiguandao’ wei jiandie huodong gongju zhi jiaotongbu Chongqing dianxinju de daidian [The Telegram on Banning the Communist's Manipulation of YGD for Espionage Activities],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 03440002000720200031.
- ⁶⁴ “Chongqingshi zhengfu miling [Chongqing Municipal Government's Secret Order], Chongqing Municipal Archives 00570012001200000061000.
- ⁶⁵ “Zhongguo yinhang chengdu zhihang chajing yiguandao [Bank of China's Chengdu Branch's Ban on YGD],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 068-01-0975.
- ⁶⁶ “Chongqingshi zhengfu guanyu chajin yiguandao xiantiandao deng xiejiao [Chongqing Municipal Government's Order on Banning YGD and XTD Evil Cults],” Chongqing Municipal Archives 00570012001360000062000.

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- ⁶⁷ “Sichuan shengzhengfu chajin yiguandao xiejiao [Sichuan Provincial Government’s Ban on YGD Evil Cult],” Sichuan Provincial Archives 186-02-2386.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ “Xingzhengyuan xunling chajin diren liyong yiguandao shouling Zhang Tianran huodong xingwei [National Executive’s Order on Banning All Manipulative Activities Related to YGD Leader Zhang Tianran],” Chongqing Municipal Government 00530016000770300555000.
- ⁷⁰ Goossaert, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 147.
- ⁷¹ ZGHDMSLJC, Vol. 1, 3.
- ⁷² Ibid, 4.
- ⁷³ Beijingshi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian 1951 [Selected Collection of Important Documents of Beijing, 1951], Beijing: Zhongguo dangan chubanshe, 2001, 92.
- ⁷⁴ Solomon, “On Activism and Activists: Maoist Conceptions of Motivation and Political Role Linking State to Society”, 76-114.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Liberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, 14-15.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, 14-15.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid, 109.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, 111.
- ⁸⁰ “Beihai gonganju guanyu huangxian huangshuiqu yiguandao de huodong qingkuang [Beihai PSB’s Report on YGD Activities in the Huangshui District of Huang County],” Shandong Provincial Archives G042-01-0069-033.
- ⁸¹ “Chahuo yiguandao fangeming huodong an qingkuang tongbao [A Notification on Suppressed YGD Counterrevolutionary Activities],” Shandong Provincial Archives G010-01-0183-004.
- ⁸² “Jiaocheng huimen yiguandao de zhencha qingkuang [On Huimen and YGD Activities in Jiaocheng County],” Shandong Provincial Archives G042-01-0126-016.
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ “Zhang Jixu fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Jixu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-7-87.
- ⁸⁵ “Wu Jinhui fandong daoshou an [Wu Jinhui Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-252.
- ⁸⁶ “Xie Yulin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yulin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-62.
- ⁸⁷ “Zhang Jixu fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Jixu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-7-87.
- ⁸⁸ “Xie Yulin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yulin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-62; “Wu Jinhui fandong daoshou an [Wu Jinhui Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-252.
- ⁸⁹ “Xie Yulin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yulin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-62; “Wu Jinhui fandong daoshou an [Wu Jinhui Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-252.
- ⁹⁰ “Wu Jinhui fandong daoshou an [Wu Jinhui Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-252.
- ⁹¹ “Zhang Jixu fandong huidaomen touzi an [Zhang Jixu Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-7-87.
- ⁹² “Xie Yulin fandong huidaomen touzi an [Xie Yulin Counterrevolutionary *Huidaomen* Leader Case],” PYGADA Z1-4-62.
- ⁹³ See endnote 51 of Chapter 4. Ownby, “Redemptive Societies in the Twentieth Century,” 690.
- ⁹⁴ See Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*.

Postface: End of the Old Society: CCP's Anti-Huidaomen Campaigns

CCP's Views on Huidaomen

As discussed in previous chapters, the CCP came to know many self-defense associations in rural China as early as the Northern Expedition in the 1920s. CCP indeed allied with many of them from the 1920s to the end of WWII. In general, CCP's attitude towards huidaomen became increasingly intolerant, beginning from the Civil War period. As we have seen in both Chapter three and Chapter five, conflicts between the CCP and both self-defense associations and redemptive societies were pervasive when the PLA had controlled a large portion of the former-KMT territories.

Although the CCP spoke highly of revolutionary activities led by huidaomen groups in late imperial China, such as the White Lotus and the Boxers, the CCP undoubtedly believed that huidaomen groups were so huge a threat to the new regime on the eve of the new republic. In both Shandong and Hubei Provinces, for instance, the Public Security organs began thorough investigations on huidaomen activities throughout both provinces as early as 1947, probably due to the fact that the CCP had strong bases in both provinces.

Huidaomen was considered a fundamental threat most obviously due to its large membership at every level of society. One author estimates that there were approximately 820,000 clergy and 13,000,000 lay members in China when the PRC was founded.¹ In Shanghai, during the campaign against huidaomen in 1953, 10,600 clergy registered, and 300,000 lay members promised to withdraw publicly from their organizations.² In Beijing, within the Yiguandao alone, more than 5,500 clergy registered, and 173,407 lay members withdrew

publicly by February 1951.³ In Guangzhou, 547 clergy registered at the department of public security voluntarily, and there were at least 14,774 lay members.⁴ In Xi'an, more than 1,000 clergy registered, and 37,703 lay members withdrew publicly in early 1951.⁵ In Shandong province, more than 39,000 clergy and 1,160,000 lay members registered according to the 1953 statistics.⁶ In Hebei province, more than 1,500,000 lay members withdrew voluntarily by early 1951; and thousands of clergy and lay members were detected periodically during different campaigns from the early 1950s throughout the late 1980s.⁷ In Gansu province, when the CCP was established in October 1949, there were 59,600 clergy and more than 960,000 lay members.⁸ In Guangxi province, the 1953 survey indicates that there were 45,820 huidaomen members, including 3,715 clergy.⁹ In Guangdong province, there were more than 4,000 clergy and more than 186,000 lay members in the early PRC.¹⁰ In Jiangsu province, during the first-wave campaign against huidaomen from November 1949 to February 1952, more than 6,000 clergy and 75,978 lay members registered.¹¹

Certainly, such data are not complete, and there were also substantial regional disparities in the population involved. Nevertheless, the samples do demonstrate clearly that the huidaomen activities were not limited to certain parts of China. Instead, they had penetrated every province and major city in China by the time the PRC was founded. The vast membership proves that huidaomen were closely connected with people's daily life.

Table 13: Huidaomen Membership in Selected Cities and Provinces

Region	Time	Category	Clergy	Lay Members
PRC	1949	All huidaomen	820,000	13,000,000
City of Shanghai	1953	All huidaomen	10,600	300,000
City of Beijing	1951	Yiguandao	5,500	173,407
City of Guangzhou	Early PRC	All huidaomen	547	14,774
City of Xi'an	1951	All huidaomen	More than 1,000	13,703
Shandong Province	1953	All huidaomen	39,000	1,160,000
Hebei Province	1951	All huidaomen	unknown	1,500,000
Gansu Province	1949	All huidaomen	59,600	960,000
Guangxi Province	1953	All huidaomen	3,715	45,820
Guangdong Province	Early PRC	All huidaomen	4,000	186,000
Jiangsu Province	1949-1952	All huidaomen	6,000	75,978

Huidaomen were popular not only among the non-CCP population; indeed, a huge number of party members were huidaomen participants or patrons. Since people from different social backgrounds were accepted as party members during the period of the United Front, it is not surprising that huidaomen members also joined the CCP. On November 20, 1949, the Shanxi CCP Provincial Committee issued the “Working Instructions Concerning Party Members Participating in Huidaomen Organizations.”¹² The working instructions warned that huidaomen were one of three major potential threats at the moment, and it was necessary to suppress them harshly. Especially in rural Shanxi, however, many party members participated in huidaomen

activities. Worst of all, all party members of a few rural Shanxi branches were huidaomen members. They burned incense (*bai xiangtang*) while holding meetings. Such party members certainly could not participate fully in the Anti-Huidaomen Campaign. The CCP's tone, in this case, was flexible and pragmatic. Former huidaomen members were allowed to maintain their party membership and receive no punishment as long as they withdrew voluntarily and publicly.

It was not unusual for party members to have a huidaomen background in other regions as well. According to the personal files on party members in Huailai county, Hebei province, several were huidaomen members before or during the early years of the PRC.¹³ During the Four Clean-Ups Movement in the 1960s, none of them received criticism or punishment for their former participation in huidaomen. Most interestingly, some party members with a high level of self-awareness (*you juewu*) were allowed to stay in the huidaomen organizations to spy on their activities and gather information.¹⁴ In the worst case, when the majority of branch members were huidaomen participants, the branch was to be dismissed. There are no data on the exact numbers of party members who had connections with huidaomen. But due to the pervasiveness of huidaomen ties and the peasant background of many party members, it could not have been easy for the CCP to completely rid itself of the influence of the huidaomen.

Even after the campaign against counterrevolutionaries in the early 1950s, many local party leaders or branches continued to be the patrons or political protectors of huidaomen. In Dongliangzhuang village, Shanxi province, thirteen CCP members within two party branches of the Industrial and Agricultural Society joined the Yiguandao between 1950 and 1957. The chairmen of the two branches were both devout believers.¹⁵ Female huidaomen members in Yanshou county of Heilongjiang province bribed Hou Futian, the leader of the local public

security department, by having sex with him. Hou protected the sect from detection for years until caught in September 1954.¹⁶

Since 1951, party building became an increasingly important task for the CCP to maintain its internal unity. In February of 1951, the Management Department of the Northern China Bureau issued its instruction on handling CCP members' participation in huidaomen based on the experience of Hebei Province. The CCP's policy in 1951 was, in general, very mild. As long as the CCP members who formerly had a huidaomen connection terminated their huidaomen membership publicly, they would be forgiven and maintain their CCP membership. For those who had intentionally hidden their huidaomen identities, they would be dismissed from the CCP.¹⁷ During the CCP's First National Management Conference in March 1951, Liu Shaoqi specifically listed ten categories that must be kicked out the Party. The second among them was those Party members who formerly participated in huidaomen and refused to cut off its connection. Liu also points out that new Party membership would not be open to these categories either.¹⁸ Liu's points officially became the CCP's policy for new Party membership in the following month.¹⁹

During the Third National Public Security Conference in May 1951, Luo Ruiqing warned the CCP cadres that former huidaomen members also made up a large portion of public security personnel. Among the 387 new members in the Central Public Security Bureau, 32.3% had a background of former huidaomen members or other counterrevolutionary organizations.²⁰ Three months later, the CCP issued another document requiring further investigation on the Party members' background. For those who had been hiding their former huidaomen identities, they were given another chance to confess and maintain their Party membership.²¹

Socio-politically, the CCP knew precisely that the huidaomen associations were not merely religious organizations or local militias. Similar to our analysis in Parts I and II, the CCP was aware that huidaomen was a significant channel where local powerholders in rural China could exert their power and maintain their dominance over ordinary people. An investigation written by the Department of Organization of Jiangxi Province in June 1950 analyzed the class conflicts and frequent occurrence of xiedou problems in rural Jiangxi. According to this document, Jiangxi Province had a strong feudal gentry class and landlord class. Many poor people joined the huidaomen in order to resist taxation and exploitation from the corrupt KMT officials. The reality, however, turned out to be entirely against their expectation. Huidaomen had indeed become the primary channel by which the local gentries manipulated and controlled the ordinary peasants. Huidaomen was full of class antagonism too. This document also suggests that a substantial portion of the rural population were huidaomen members. Statistics from two counties show that 50% to 90% of male adults were huidaomen members.²² Therefore, destroying existing huidaomen associations was a crucial process in mobilizing the local peasants joining the Land Reform in Jiangxi.²³

Destroying huidaomen and preventing the landlord class's penetration into huidaomen had actually become a slogan in Jiangxi's Land Reform.²⁴ Deng Zihui, who was in charge of Land Reform in South Central China, labeled huidaomen as landlord-class organizations. In Deng's instructions on the Land Reform, KMT and spying organizations were the landlord class' political organizations. Huidaomen associations were the landlords' ordinary feudal organizations. To carry out the Land Reform successfully, all the landlords' organizations had to be eliminated.²⁵

Distinguishing huidaomen from superstition was another central but difficult task for the CCP. Although the CCP suppressed organized popular religious activities harshly in the early PRC, superstition was not an open target of any political movement. The CCP launched the Anti-Huidaomen Campaign in early 1949. The CCP legitimized its campaign against huidaomen by claiming that leaders in these sects cooperated with the Japanese and then the KMT.²⁶ The Anti-Huidaomen Campaign was essentially a part of the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign. On October 19, 1950, Liu Shaoqi, the Vice-Chairman of the central government, wrote a letter about the Anti-Huidaomen Campaign, reminding local officials not to intervene in people's superstitious behavior.²⁷ Liu admits that many huidaomen organizations resulted from superstition that "personal superstitious behavior" was triggered by people's miserable life and lack of education in the old society. Peng Zhen, who was the head of the National Land Reform Committee in 1950, shared Liu Shaoqi's view. Peng gave a talk at the Second National Public Security Conference on October 21, 1950, two days later after Liu Shaoqi's letter. Peng commented that:

We dare not deal with the huidaomen problem at this moment. The problem is that it is difficult to deal with it without making mistakes because the counterrevolutionaries are with the superstitious, spies are with the Bodhisattvas You must distinguish between the counterrevolutionary problems and the superstitious problems. Tell the masses that it is totally fine to burn incenses and worship the gods. Go home to burn the incenses but do not fall into the traps of the huidaomen leaders that are being manipulated by the Japanese and KMT spies.²⁸

A report produced during the same National Public Security Conference concludes that the Anti-Huidaomen Campaign must be carried out cautiously because huidaomen were usually intertwined with people's superstitious ideas.²⁹

The Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign reached its zenith in 1951 and 1952, but superstition remained an untouched issue. Moreover, the national leaders remained very cautious about dealing with superstitious problems. On February 9, 1951, the State Council approved the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Punishing Counterrevolutionaries.³⁰ Although huidaomen activities were listed as a primary target on the regulations, superstition was not, indicating that superstition was not a counterrevolutionary problem. During March 1953, a report from the Southwest China Land Reform Committee suggests that Land Reform must not target religion and superstition, otherwise the peasants would not be eager to cooperate with the government.³¹ An Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign instruction from the Public Security Bureau of Southwest China in April of 1951 also warns the public security personnel to “avoid and prevent turning the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Movement into an Anti-Superstition Movement.”³²

Mass superstitious activities did not attract the attention of the Party until 1953. Mass superstitious activities were usually the consequences of natural disasters and the lack of healthcare resources. On May 14, 1953, the Propaganda Department of the CCP (now the Publicity Department) published an article on its official internal journal *Propaganda and Communication* titled “Be Cautious on Handling Mass Superstitious Activities.”³³ The article says that many mass superstitious activities have occurred since the spring, and most of these activities were about mass healing. The article concludes that most of these incidents resulted from natural disasters, diseases, and famine. The government should pay more attention to people's livelihood to avoid such incidents from happening again. Half a month later, on May 31, another article appeared on *Propaganda and Communication*.³⁴ This article warns all the propaganda personnel that mass superstitious activities were widespread in several provinces due

to natural disasters and famines that followed. The central government urged the local government to prioritize disaster relief and maintain social stability. Both articles also emphasize that the class enemies could take advantage of the mass superstitious activities and make a comeback.

Former huidaomen leaders were considered the most dangerous hidden enemies. Historian Steve Smith has commented that mass superstitious activities took place more frequently in the years of 1953–54, 1957, 1963–64.³⁵ While it remains unknown what factors might have contributed to the high intensity of such incidents during these specific years, mass superstition itself was not a significant threat to the Party. The biggest fear behind mass superstition, as Steve Smith points out, lies in the possibility that these incidents were organized by former huidaomen leaders.³⁶

The Anti-Huidaomen Campaigns in the PRC

Despite the fact that the early communists in China generally agreed with the May-Fourth thinkers that religion was a feudal and outdated component of Chinese society, the CCP “became more aware of the depth of religious sentiment among farmers” after 1927 when they started to organize the peasants in the rural area.³⁷ In 1926, Mao’s writing made no clear distinction between brotherhood associations, armed militias, and redemptive societies, but regarded them all as mutual-aid associations of the peasants’ struggling for survival.³⁸ After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, in order to unify all the potential anti-Japanese forces and establish the United Front, the CCP made alliances with many sectarian groups, secret societies, and local militia, while “reeducating” them.³⁹

When the United Front came to an end during the civil war period, many religious communities also faced the choice of being pro- or anti-Communist. Fearing that the Communist atheist rhetoric might lead to suppression of all religious activities, many religious communities became pro-KMT and got involved in anti-communist resistance.⁴⁰ At the same time, as the Communists gradually took over mainland China, they faced the question of how to handle the religious groups. A report written by the department of public security of the Communist controlled Jiangsu-Anhui region on December 15, 1945 stated that the Communists had failed to pay enough attention to the huidaomen problem in the region in time. Many local sects had therefore become hostile toward communism. The report also claimed that the CCP had always respected religious freedom, but would never tolerate spies who penetrated local religious communities.⁴¹ Clearly, the CCP's rhetoric on huidaomen began to change on the eve of the civil war.

The First Stage

The CCP officially launched its campaign against huidaomen in early 1949. On January 4 of that year, almost ten months before the founding of the PRC, the Municipal Government of Northern China (*Huabei renmin zhengfu*) published a circular ordering the disbanding of all huidaomen organizations. Huidaomen participants were described as having played a bad role during the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War.⁴² The document was signed by a few of the highest-level leaders, including Dong Biwu and Bo Yibo. Huidaomen participants in this document, however, were not labeled as counterrevolutionaries. The early 1949 document was only the beginning of CCP's formal implementation of anti-huidaomen policies. Immediately after the founding of the PRC, on Oct 15 of 1949, the new Public Security Bureau had its first

national conference in Beijing. Luo Ruiqing, the head of the Public Security Bureau, delivered a speech at the opening ceremony. In Luo's speech, he argued that the CCP had defeated the visible enemies on the mainland, but the "invisible enemies" still existed. The purpose of the public security works, according to Luo, was to lead the warfare and defeat the invisible enemies, including huidaomen. At this point, huidaomen was not a central goal of the public security works. Luo commended the public security personnel to investigate and learn how to deal with the huidaomen problem.⁴³

It was evident that huidaomen did not immediately become the main target of the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign at this time. At the end of the First National Public Security Conference, Luo Ruiqing confidently claimed that some regions, especially Northern and central China, had already destroyed huidaomen organizations. Regarding counterrevolutionary elements in rural China, Luo labeled bandits and former KMT members as two primary targets. Huidaomen was only ranked as the third most serious problem.⁴⁴ Luo's optimistic estimation would soon prove to be wrong.

Among all the huidaomen organizations, the Yiguandao was the largest when the CCP came to power. Consequently, it soon became the main target of the campaign. On September 25, 1950, the Northwest Bureau (*Xibei ju*) issued working instructions on suppressing the Yiguandao.⁴⁵ According to the document, the ultimate goal was to eliminate the group completely. On October 19, 1950, Liu Shaoqi wrote a letter to the Northwest Bureau concerning the working instructions published one month earlier.⁴⁶ Liu commented that the working instructions were necessary, and his approval became the catalyst of further actions against the Yiguandao. On December 3, 1950, the Beijing Municipal Government sent a plan to the Northwest Bureau concerning arresting the core leaders of Yiguandao.⁴⁷ On December 19, 1950,

Yiguandao was officially banned in Beijing.⁴⁸ On the subsequent day, the People's Daily also published an editorial title "Suppressing Yiguandao without Hesitation."⁴⁹

Instead of employing the same "anti-superstition" rhetoric as the KMT, the CCP labeled its campaign against the huidaomen an anti-counterrevolutionary movement. The shift of the rhetoric indicates that the campaign was no longer focusing on modernizing the state. In the Instructions on the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign issued by the CCP's Northern China Bureau in October 1950, the document clearly states that "suppressing Yiguandao ... and other huidaomen organizations ... are important parts of the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign."⁵⁰

The working instructions issued by the Northwest Bureau on suppressing Yiguandao on September 25, 1950 imply that Yiguandao originated from superstitious religious organizations in the old society.⁵¹ Liu Shaoqi's letter to the Northwest Bureau on October 19, 1950, pointed out clearly that the government should not intervene in "personal superstitious behavior" because it had been triggered by people's miserable life and lack of education in the old society.⁵² A report on the campaign against Yiguandao written by the CCP Beijing Municipal Committee to the Central Government and the Northwest Bureau on February 13, 1951 claimed that the successful experiences of suppressing the sect included "distinguishing this campaign from the anti-superstition one."⁵³

Instead of criticizing the "feudal" and "superstitious" elements within the huidaomen, during the later campaign against huidaomen, the government actually praised their legacy as a primitive revolutionary force. In *The Introduction to Counterrevolutionary Huidaomen* published by the First Bureau of the Department of Police (*Gonganju yiju*) in 1985, the book praised huidaomen that "they have played a progressive role in fighting against imperialism and the corrupt Qing government."⁵⁴ The book even went on to portray the Boxer Uprising as a patriotic

movement organized through the White Lotus tradition and the “Red Sun Sect” (*Hongyangjiao*).⁵⁵ According to Liu Shaoqi, the fact that huidaomen went astray was only a recent phenomenon caused by the activities of the landlord class, spies, and other counterrevolutionaries.⁵⁶ Liu also criticized the party for failing to properly guide the huidaomen in the right direction.

Historian Chang-tai Hung points out that the earliest campaign against Yiguandao was mainly based on two accusations: first, it was portrayed as a politically subversive force; second, it was associated with the exploitative classes.⁵⁷ The first accusation referred to the alliance with the KMT and the Japanese, the second mainly to the landlord class. Liu Shaoqi made this point clear in his letter, saying “you should highlight that Yiguandao was used by the landlords, spies, and counterrevolutionaries to organize counterrevolutionary activities in their public propaganda.”⁵⁸ In this way, the campaign against huidaomen was fundamentally not about religion. It was to be categorized solely as part of the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries. A report published on March 16, 1951 by the Beijing Department of Public Security on the suppression of Yiguandao claims that one key characteristic distinguished Yiguandao from all other counterrevolutionary organizations was that it combined the counterrevolutionary activities with the superstitious ideas of the masses. Accordingly, the campaign must be carried out cautiously so that the superstitious could be distinguished from the counterrevolutionary.⁵⁹

The dominant strategy of the campaign was, according to the working instructions published by the Northwest Bureau, punishing the counterrevolutionaries, while forgiving and reeducating the innocent clergy and lay believers.⁶⁰ The campaign against the huidaomen was also transformed into a mass movement. Other than the harsh suppression of

“counterrevolutionary” leaders, various other strategies were also employed, including organizing exhibitions on huidaomen crimes, producing *yangge* dramas (*yangge ju*) and films, and holding public trials.⁶¹

As the general Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign moved forward, violent anti-CCP forces were basically eliminated. Under such context, the CCP gradually realized that huidaomen was the most important source of resistance against the new regime now. Peng Zhen, the leader of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, instructed the public security officials in October 1950 that the CCP had basically removed all the political capital of the KMT. Consequently, huidaomen had become the strongest weapon of the counterrevolutionaries because of people’s existing superstitious ideas.⁶² While acknowledging the importance of suppressing huidaomen activities, huidaomen remained a minor target of Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign in late 1950. During October of 1950, the CCP held its Second National Public Security Conference. Luo Ruiqing emphasized the necessity of killing counterrevolutionaries, but he did not target huidaomen as a leading counterrevolutionary force.⁶³

Starting from the Fourth National Public Security Conference in September 1951, the Public Security Bureau began realizing the urgency of suppressing huidaomen organizations. In Luo Ruiqing’s report, he listed five major targets of the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign, including bandits, bullies, spies, counterrevolutionary political parties, and counterrevolutionary huidaomen. While admitting that the first four were severely suppressed during the early phases of the campaign, Luo specifically emphasized that the current stage was far from completely eliminating huidaomen as counterrevolutionary organizations. In the next stage of the campaign, from November 1951 to April 1952, Luo commanded, these five enemies would remain the main

targets of the ongoing anti-counterrevolutionary campaign.⁶⁴ One month later, in October, Zhou Enlai reconfirmed that five targets of the anti-counterrevolutionary campaign in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.⁶⁵

During the Fifth National Public Security Conference in October of 1952, Luo Ruiqing evaluated the outcome of the anti-counterrevolutionary campaign after the Fourth Conference. While over 69% of all the first four enemies were suppressed during this wave of campaign, the percentage of huidaomen was less than 50%, which was the lowest among the five. Luo concluded that the goal of the anti-huidaomen campaign was not completed. "The suppression against core huidaomen leaders was not thorough at all." Therefore, Luo suggested that successfully suppressing huidaomen activities would be the symbol of the new round of anti-counterrevolutionary campaign's success. Instead of merely crushing huidaomen as part of the anti-counterrevolutionary campaign, Luo points out that huidaomen must be a separate issue that requires centralized leadership and collaboration.⁶⁶ It was not until this point that the public security bureau realized the seriousness of suppressing huidaomen activities. At the end of the conference, Luo concluded that suppressing huidaomen and counterrevolutionary activities on the water would be the two main targets of the new round of the campaign.⁶⁷

Following the spirit of the Fifth National Public Security Conference, each local organ of the public security system clearly felt the urgency of suppressing huidaomen. The Southern Central China Public Security Bureau made a detailed plan for containing huidaomen in December 1952. Among all the huidaomen associations, Yiguandao, Tongshanshe, and the Big Sword Society were clearly labeled as the three most dangerous ones. The plan treated the anti-huidaomen campaign as the last battle of social reform in rural China. The plan also reemphasized the necessity of singling out huidaomen participants within the Party organs. This

plan was reviewed and approved by the Central Public Security Bureau and sent out to each subunit of the public security system.⁶⁸

The period immediately following the Fifth National Public Security Conference was the peak of nationwide anti-huidaomen campaigns. From December 1952 to May 1953, Luo Ruiqing submitted several reports regarding the progress of suppressing huidaomen to the CCP's Central Committee. During February of 1953, Luo Ruiqing submitted a report on suppressing huidaomen nationwide to the CCP's Central Committee. In this report, Luo made it clear that the PSB had previously underestimated the power of huidaomen. The actual number of huidaomen participants was much larger than the original estimation. Luo warned the Party cadres again that many former huidaomen members had penetrated the Party. He also pointed out that many of the huidaomen counterrevolutionaries had other identities, such as landlords or spies at the same time.⁶⁹ Two months later, the Central Public Security Bureau sent a notice to all the provincial public security organs, saying that as many areas have already entered the stage of full-scale suppression, each provincial organ should send a report on the progress and statistics of each county's campaign to the center.⁷⁰

By the Sixth National Public Security Conference in May 1954, the intense suppression against huidaomen basically came to an end. In Luo Ruiqing's speech during the conference, he reviewed the progress of the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign in the past four years. Similar to the previous conferences, huidaomen was still listed among the top five main targets of counterrevolutionary activities. The tone about huidaomen in Luo's speech and the subsequent documents regarding huidaomen, however, became much easier. Luo reemphasized the necessity of continuing suppressing huidaomen leaders, but huidaomen was not included in the plan for the next stage of public security's new agenda.⁷¹

The Second Stage

The relaxed environment for huidaomen only lasted for a year, when starting from the summer of 1955, huidaomen began to draw the attention of the public security organs again. This signifies the second stage of suppressing huidaomen campaigns. During June of 1955, the Third Public Security Bureau wrote a report to Luo Ruiqing and the Central Public Security Bureau, reminding the center of the reemerging huidaomen activities as a nationwide threat. The term that were used to describe huidaomen activities now became “restoration” (*fubi*). According to this report, over thirty huidaomen organizations in fourteen provinces had organized 193 restoration cases. The huidaomen leaders were currently hiding deeper and deeper. More seriously, different huidaomen networks began connecting with one another in order to manipulate people’s dissatisfaction against the government. Huidaomen also continued their penetration into the Party cadres and hid their identities under cover of mutual-assistance associations.⁷²

During the same month, Luo Ruiqing delivered a speech to the conference with national public security leaders. Luo reconfirmed the urgent situation that the restoration of huidaomen activities had become a severe issue. With the launch of the full-scale state monopoly on grain purchase, counterrevolutionary sabotaging activities in rural China were intense. The huidaomen activities went concurrently with the widespread of political rumors and other sabotaging activities against rural economic reforms.⁷³

While Yiguandao was picked by the CCP as the main target of the first wave of anti-huidaomen campaign, the second wave picked Xiantiandao as the representative of huidaomen. On July 12 of 1955, the Anhui Provincial Public Security Bureau wrote a letter to the Central

PSB, asking how to handle the Xiantiandao sect, which had never been suppressed before. In the central's response to Anhui, the central ordered Anhui to follow the spirit of the Sixth National Public Security Conference.⁷⁴ In fact, Xiantiandao was never a huidaomen association unknown to the PSB. Even during the Republican era, as I have shown in Chapter five, the militarization of XTD had already attracted the attention of the Peking Municipal Government. During the early phase of anti-huidaomen campaign in the PRC, XTD was already recognized as a huidaomen association. But in many areas, such as Anhui and Jiangxi, XTD did not draw the attention of the PSB until 1955.

During the Seventh National Public Security Conference in December of 1955, Luo Ruiqing summarized the new discoveries of huidaomen counterrevolutionary activities. Luo said that there were around 600,000 counterrevolutionaries nationwide by the conference. The number of huidaomen members was 174,000, ranked the second among the five. Counterrevolutionary political parties had the largest number of 235,000 members. Huidaomen remained an urgent problem in the war against counterrevolutionaries.⁷⁵

This second wave of anti-huidaomen campaign was certainly not the only political movement going on at the time. The emphasis on intra-Party censorship clearly shows its connection with the purge of hidden counterrevolutionaries (*Suqing fangeming yundong*) within the CCP that began in 1955. On July 1 of 1955, the CCP issued the document on launching the struggle of thoroughly suppressing hidden counterrevolutionaries. While the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign mainly targeted at former KMT members and class enemies from the old society such as bandits, landlords, and huidaomen leaders, this new movement aimed at cleansing the enemies within the CCP and the PLA.

Huidaomen's penetration into Party organs was obviously a serious issue within the Sufan Movement. On July 16 of 1955, the *People's Daily* published an editorial titled "Preventing Class Enemies' Penetration into the Party." In this article, huidaomen was listed as the main source of class enemies who had a negative effect on Party affairs.⁷⁶ Huidaomen's penetration into the PLA was also a serious problem. During August of 1955, the PLA's General Political Department also issued a document regarding censoring the identities of PLA cadres. Under Section three, the document discusses explicitly the necessity of punishing high-ranking huidaomen leaders within the PLA while forgiving the lay believers.⁷⁷

During January of 1956, the Central Supervisory Committee issued a clear guideline about Party disciplines regarding CCP members who had former connections with counterrevolutionary activities. Huidaomen was listed as the second category together with those who served in the KMT government or the puppet governments under the Japanese. The CCP Center's tone was, in general, very mild. As long as former huidaomen members withdraw and acknowledge their mistakes, they were allowed to remain in the Party.⁷⁸

As the Sufan Movement went forward, the CCP defined the political language it used more clearly. In March of 1956, the CCP clearly distinguished between "counterrevolutionary" and "bad element." Eleven categories were labeled as counterrevolutionaries, including huidaomen members as the second one on the list. Other counterrevolutionary groups include bandits, spies, traitors, Hu Feng Counterrevolutionary Party members, Trotskyists, and a few others. All the counterrevolutionaries are bad elements, but there are other bad elements who had committed only minor crimes, such as hooligans, are not counterrevolutionaries.⁷⁹

Although huidaomen remained a central target of counterrevolutionary enemies during this period, the intensity of suppression was significantly milder than the first stage. In Luo

Quiqing's speech to a high-ranking PSB leaders meeting during March of 1956, Luo specifically mentioned that huidaomen associations without political agenda were allowed to operate. He only warned the local cadres to distinguish them carefully. Similarly, Luo also allowed the huidaomen members to continue their religious pursuits as long as there are no political purposes.⁸⁰ In another document produced by the same meeting, Luo agreed not to punish those huidaomen members who are only superstitious but not political. "Proper education is enough for them."⁸¹ During the Eighth National Public Security Conference in December of 1956, the PSB was still cautious about the existence of huidaomen, although huidaomen's threats were not the most urgent issues. In Luo Ruiqing's speech, huidaomen remained one of the two primary categories of counterrevolutionaries that had not been sufficiently suppressed. Luo also reminded the PSB cadres that as long as huidaomen cases are discovered, they must investigate thoroughly.⁸²

During this second wave of anti-huidaomen campaign, the PSB also began reflecting the way the huidaomen problem was handled. During August of 1956, the PSB's second bureau had a forum on handling huidaomen's restoration problems. During this forum, the PSB first praised the development of suppressing huidaomen during the past years. Most huidaomen networks had been successfully eliminated. The PSB was undoubtedly also aware of the fact that the huidaomen's remaining strength in rural China was strong. During the first half of 1956, over 600 huidaomen cases occurred in China. Over 50% of the counterrevolutionary cases in rural China were huidaomen cases. In Jiangxi Province along, 61 counties still had huidaomen activities. The document points out that rural residents remained superstitious and found it difficult to distinguish between huidaomen and superstition. Huidaomen leaders were also hiding deeper and deeper. The forum concludes that to defeat huidaomen completely in rural China, the

PSB must rely on the power of the masses and educate the masses properly.⁸³ The discussion during this forum was approved by the central PSB in October. The central PSB encouraged the local PSB organs to continue their prevention of huidaomen activities and strengthen the collaboration between different regions.⁸⁴

In parallel with Luo Ruiqing's speeches during this period, the suppression against huidaomen was, in general, very mild. While the PSB continued its crackdown and thought reform at the local level, radical language was rarely used in PSB's discussion of huidaomen.

The Third Stage

With the complete abolishment of private ownership in rural China and the launching of the Great Leap Forward in 1958, the remaining huidaomen's fate entered a new era of radical changes. The Great Leap Forward was not only a drastic move in rural economic reform but it had also influenced many other parts of the society, including the public security system.

During the Ninth National Public Security Conference in September of 1958, the PSB's Vice Minister Xu Zirong evoked the need for suppressing counterrevolutionaries harshly. During the first half of 1958, according to Xu, the PSB also launched the Great Leap Forward within the public security system. In many places, all the unresolved counterrevolutionary cases were processed in just a few days. The people arrested were publicly trialed or humiliated by the masses, just like what happened during the early 1950s. Xu concluded that the public security works had made a great leap during this period and created a new lively environment. Regarding the goal for the next stage of public security work, Xu said that the PSB must continue strengthening its suppression against counterrevolutionaries and eliminate all of them. Suppressing counterrevolutionaries was once again elevated to the most urgent task of the PSB.

Unsurprisingly, huidaomen was also added to one of the three primary counterrevolutionary targets. Xu commanded that the new anti-huidaomen campaign must be carried out as a massive movement in the grand scale, which was clearly in sharp contrast to the tone of the PSB during the previous period.⁸⁵

Xu's speech was easily approved by the central PSB. During another PSB conference in November, Luo Ruiqing reemphasized the spirit of the Ninth National Public Security Conference. To protect the People's Communes, the PSB must strengthen its control over public security and suppress remaining counterrevolutionaries. In Luo's speech, huidaomen was listed as a top threat to security, together with wandering criminals and other counterrevolutionaries that were hiding deeply. Luo also ordered that new public security movements during this period must be carried out in the grand scale and require mass participation.⁸⁶ This period witnessed another peak of discovering huidaomen activities.

The devastating consequences of the Great Leap Forward aroused the intensity of huidaomen activities, especially in places that were severely influenced by the famine. In a document produced by the PSB in January of 1961, the PSB found over 900 huidaomen cases in the year of 1960, which was a significant increase. The document also concludes that the areas impacted by the famine had higher intensity of huidaomen activities.⁸⁷ During the spring of 1961, the PSB issued a similar document reminding the PSB personnel of the intense huidaomen restoration activities during the famine of spring.⁸⁸

Although huidaomen were never completely eliminated from rural China, the PSB no longer organized any new nationwide suppression movement against huidaomen after the end of the Great Leap Forward.

¹ Shao, *Zhongguo huidaomen* [Huidaomen in China], 452.

² *Shanghai tongzhi* [Shanghai Municipal Gazetteer], Vol. 2, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005, 1075.

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- ³ Beijingshi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian 1951 [Selected Collection of Important Documents of Beijing, 1951], 92.
- ⁴ Guangzhoushi zhi [Guangzhou Municipal Gazetteer], Vol. 12, Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe, 1998, 27.
- ⁵ Xi'an shi zhi [Xi'an Municipal Gazetteer], vol. 12, Xi'an: Xi'an chubanshe, 2000, 681.
- ⁶ Shandongsheng zhi, gong'an zhi [Shandong Provincial Gazetteer, PSB], Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 2000, 192.
- ⁷ Hebeisheng zhi, gong'an zhi [Hebei Provincial Gazetteer, PSB], Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993, 33-36.
- ⁸ Gansusheng zhi, gong'an zhi [Guangsu Provincial Gazetteer, PSB], Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1995, 149.
- ⁹ Guangxi tongzhi, gong'an zhi, [Guangxi Provincial Gazetteer, PSB], Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 2002, 273.
- ¹⁰ Guangdong shengzhi, gong'an zhi [Guangdong Provincial Gazetteer], Guangzhou: Guangzhou renmin chubanshe, 2001, 96.
- ¹¹ Jiangsu shengzhi, gong'an zhi [Jiangsu Provincial Gazetteer, PSB], Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 2000, 122.
- ¹² Dangdai shanxi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian, [Collection of Important Documents of Contemporary Shanxi Province], Vol. 1, Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2004, 62-64.
- ¹³ Box #54 "Personal files of CCP members during the 'Four Clean-Up' Movement," Contemporary China Archival Collection 1949-1990s, East Asia Library Special Collections, Stanford University.
- ¹⁴ Dangdai shanxi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian, [Collection of Important Documents of Contemporary Shanxi Province], 62-64.
- ¹⁵ ZGHDMSLJC, Vol. 1, 169.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 301.
- ¹⁷ "Huabeiju zuzhibu guanyu Hebei dangyuan canjia huidaomen chuli banfa [The Organization Department of the Northern China Bureau's Notification on 'Handling CCP Members' Participation in *Huidaomen* in Hebei Province]," 02/1951, CCPM.
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Glossary of Chinese Terms

Anti-Bandit Campaign 剿匪运动

Anti-Counterrevolutionary Campaign 镇压反革命运动

Assembly Hall 堂

Baifo 拜佛

Bandit 土匪

Baojia 保甲

Bare Egg Society 光蛋会

Big Sword Society 大刀会

Boxers 义和团

Boyang County 波阳县

Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (KMT) 军统

Cao Mapi 曹麻皮

Chai Guobin 柴国斌

Chai School Sect 柴门道

Chinese Society of Morality and Charity 中华道德慈善会

Chu Daoming 储道明

Civil Branch (TSS) 文班

Counterrevolutionary 反革命

Daohuimen 道会门

Daomen 道门

De-Mechanization 去机械化

Democratic Socialist Party 民社党

Economic Bandit 经济土匪

Evangelist (YGD) 点传师

Evil Cult 邪教

Filed Protection Team 看青队

Final Apocalypse 末劫

Flower Basket Society 花篮会

Four Clean-Ups Movement 四清运动

Fellowship of Goodness 同善社

Fuliang County 浮梁县

Gowned Brother 袍哥

Grain Levy 征粮

Green Gang 青帮

Green Sun 青阳

Guangong Society 关公会

Hall of Early Enlightenment 先觉祠

Heaven and Earth Society 天地会

Heavenly Gate Society 天门会

Heterodoxy 异端

Hongjiatan 洪家滩

Hu Faction 胡派

Hu Puqing 胡浦清

Huidaomen 会道门

Huimen 会门

Invulnerability 刀枪不入

Jiang Bozhang 姜伯彰

Jiang Faction 姜派

Jin Deshan 金德山

Jingdezhen 景德镇

Jiujiang 九江

Kalpa 期

Leping County 乐平县

Li Fengchun 李逢春

Liu Qingxu 刘清虚

Luo Ruiqing 罗瑞卿

Lu Zhongjie 路中节

Lu Zhongyi 路中一

Maitreya Buddha 弥勒佛

Martial Branch (TSS) 武班

Merchant Association 商会

(Town of) Modaoshi 磨刀石

Nanchang 南昌

National Public Security Conference 全国公安会议

NO. 9 Route Army 九路军

Peasant Association 农会

Peng Baoshan 彭宝善

Peng Ruzun 彭汝尊

Poyang County 鄱阳县

Poyang Lake 鄱阳湖

Qianshan Xian 潜山县

Queshan Riot 确山暴动

Quzhang 区长

Rectification Campaign (Sufan) 肃清反革命运动

Red Spear Society 红枪会

Red Sun 红阳

Red Swastika Society 红卍字会

Restoration 复辟

Shishou County 石首县

Shucheng County 舒城县

Similar Religion 类似宗教

Society of Chrysanthemum 菊花会

Society of the Way 道源

Spirit Possession 降神/降菩萨/马脚

Spirit Writing 扶乩

Superstition 迷信

Sun Suzhen 孙素珍

“The Lame,” Mr. Xiong Xinzhai’s Nephew 熊拐子

The Way of Anterior Heaven 先天道

The Way of Pervading Unity 一贯道

Thirteen Brotherhood 十三兄弟会

Thirteen Taibao 十三太保

Three Obediences and the Four Virtues 三从四德

Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic 中医局

Wang Jueyi 王觉一

Wang Zhenhai 王珍海

White Lotus Sects 白莲教

White Sun 白阳

Winter Protection Team 冬防队

Wu Qifeng 吴起凤

Xiangzhang 乡长

Xiedou 械斗

Xiejiao 邪教

Yangge 秧歌

Yangtze River Crossing Campaign 渡江战役

Ye Fen 叶芬

Yellow Crane Society 黄鹤会

Yue Fei Society 岳飞会

Zhang Guangbi (Zhang Tianran) 张光壁 (张天然)

Zhide County 至德县

Zhou Faction 周派

Zhou Yongneng 周雍能