THE EIGHT TRIGRAM leaders failed in their attempt to respond to the kalpa and make known the Way. Lin Ch'ing's attack on the Forbidden City in Peking had been swiftly and decisively halted, and in a matter of days he and his pupils had been killed or seized. Li Wen-ch'eng and the Eight Trigram leaders from southwestern Shantung, southern Chihli, and northern Honan had been more successful in carrying out their plans. They created a public challenge to the Ch'ing regime and backed their challenge with the recruitment of more than one hundred thousand followers, but in the end Ch'ing strength and their own weaknesses brought them to the same fate as their comrades near Peking.

Like the palace guards taken by surprise in Peking, the Ch'ing civil and military establishments in the provinces were slow to respond to the crisis posed by the rebel uprisings. It was a matter of months before large numbers of soldiers could be brought in, and during this time the Eight Trigrams were able to grow, consolidate, and test their strength against generally weaker opponents. Yet even before a large army could be assembled, the Ch'ing government was able to turn to members and would-be members of the local elite—men and families who looked to the state for power and prestige and protection—and demand their assistance. Well-developed gentry and merchant networks were tapped and used to encourage the "good people" to remain loyal, to defend the urban centers, and to check the expansion of the rebels on a limited basis. When trained soldiers finally arrived to relieve beleaguered cities and villages, the rebels were no match for them. The Ch'ing court was furthermore able to draw on the experiences of the campaigns against the Shensi-Szechwan-Hupei White Lotus rebels a decade earlier, using generals who had gained expertise in that fighting, following its administrative precedents, and remaining alert to the dangers of mistakes they had made in the past. For the Chia-ch'ing Emperor and many of his officials, those campaigns were a fresh and vivid memory on which they all could draw.

The Eight Trigram rebels, on the other hand, had had no such valuable experience. They were men of diverse backgrounds, and though a few were bannermen or had military degrees and others
vaunted their swordsmanship, the rebel rank-and-file—and most leaders—had absolutely no experience in basic military tactics. Moreover, many of those sect leaders who planned the rebellion did not live to direct its progress, and in the end Li Wen-ch’eng alone, ill and without the ideas, good judgment, and companionship of his closest colleagues, bore the weight of this responsibility. Unlike the Ch’ing bureaucracy, which was designed to deal with logistics and decision making, the Eight Trigram sects were normally intended to serve very different purposes; converting a diffuse secret religious network into the core of an aggressive armed rebellion presented many difficulties for sect leaders. It is in fact rather remarkable that the Eight Trigrams succeeded as well as they did with the military and administrative tasks of rebellion. They relied on teacher-pupil bonds to provide links between the leaders and used other simple organizational systems to produce a decentralized structure that was still quite responsive to orders given at the top. Individual leaders were willing to do as instructed by Li Wen-ch’eng, quick to come to the assistance of their comrades—even when the prospects for success were doubtful—but were also able to shoulder the responsibility for dealing with their own bands’ particular problems. The relationship between lower level leaders who were sect members and their followers, most of whom were new recruits, posed more serious difficulties. Those who made up this mass following were not well integrated ideologically or organizationally, and some had been coerced into joining in the first place. As a result, many recruits stayed with the rebels while they were winning but quickly abandoned them when government victory seemed likely.

In short, the Ch’ing government knew what it had to do to suppress this rebellion, and it had the civil bureaucracy, military apparatus, local support, access to funds, and ready propaganda necessary to do it. The Eight Trigrams had no such sophisticated appreciation of the nature of their enemy and were comparatively naive about the task they had undertaken. They had ideas with which to rally supporters, but they lacked an efficient system for propagandizing among new followers. They had some resources accumulated in advance, but once in rebellion they were dependent on what they could forcibly seize to feed, finance, and arm their movement. They had a pool of leaders committed to the cause and loyal to one another, but these leaders lacked the military expertise necessary for battle against a vastly stronger opponent, and only a small percentage of these men had the administrative skills needed
to organize the movement not simply at the center but in all its decentralized components.

For the followers of the Eternal Mother, both personally and as a group, the Eight Trigrams rebellion was a catastrophe. In areas affected by the uprising, those believers lucky enough to survive remained in constant danger of arrest—even if their sect had had no contact with the Trigrams. For the next ten years Ch'ing officials searched for criminals on the lists of wanted rebels issued frequently by the emperor. Many sect networks were uncovered and uprooted and others chose to disband temporarily in order to avoid a similar fate. In addition to the death of many believers and the scattering of sect congregations, the failure of the Eight Trigrams could not help but result in the discrediting of White Lotus teachings. Although the uprising itself could be seen as evidence of the potential Tightness of sect doctrine, its failure was a powerful reminder that the prophecies of sect teachers could be disastrously wrong.

Although the Eight Trigram leaders prepared for rebellion with a surprising ease and lack of secrecy and could not be prevented from making their initial strikes on government offices, the picture of a decrepit and collapsing dynasty painted by those who see the late Ch'ien-lung reign as the beginning of the end of traditional China is not corroborated by the events of 1813. Furthermore, the suppression of this uprising was an acknowledged triumph for the Chia-ch'ing Emperor, his family, and his officials. The campaigns were tainted by no major scandals and the expense does not appear to have been considered excessive. Bannermen, Green Standard soldiers, and local militia carried out their responsibilities without major difficulties. Provincial bureaucrats became—at least temporarily—more conscientious, and for the next decade White Lotus sects throughout north China were brought under closer scrutiny. Nonetheless, although the suppression of the Eight Trigrams does indicate a certain vigor in the Ch'ing government, the fact of an uprising of this scale also suggests some degree of dynastic weakness. Other research on the Chia-ch'ing reign could indicate the true extent of dynastic decline and the extent to which this rebellion and its pacification were typical of the period.

This study has described the life style and social milieu of the men and women who became the Eight Trigrams and of the bonds made and cemented between them; as such it is simply one case study, a sample of White Lotus sect organization and membership. During
the Ch’ing dynasty the networks of people bound together by the ideas and practices of this religion constituted one of the few social institutions not dominated by the orthodox elite that existed on a regional scale in north China. Although normally diffuse and unobtrusive, these sects were an important element in the competition for power and influence in village and urban communities, and as such they were the rivals of those groups whose position derived from other socially sanctioned sources—landholding, governmental office, profitable commercial business, or examination degrees. Studies of Ch’ing society should not ignore the money-making and prestige-conferring alternative presented by these sects, though it is obvious that much research will be required before their place in the Ch’ing social structure can be fully understood.

A cursory comparison of these White Lotus sects with another "secret society" network, that of the Triad societies of sub-Yangtze China, is perhaps instructive. Like the White Lotus sects, the Triads appeared as a group of autonomous assemblies sharing common ideas and organizational features but only loosely associated in normal times. The Triad brotherhoods transmitted to their members a tradition of ongoing resistance to the authority of the Manchu dynasty. The societies attracted small merchants, yamen workers, professional gamblers and gangsters, pirates and smugglers, and gave them a certain mystique, organization, and a source of mutual protection against more powerful social groups. White Lotus sect members, on the other hand, did not as a rule live by either violence or crime. They congregated for religious purposes, were linked to one another in vertical chains of teachers and pupils, and judged both membership and authority within the sect in terms of mastery of certain secretly transmitted religious ideas and practices. In normal times believers accepted the authority of the Ch’ing state; it was only in the new kalpa era—whenever it arrived—that this authority would be rejected. Their strong vertical ties and persuasive historical vision gave the White Lotus sects a greater capacity for unified action, however poorly sustained, than the south China Triads.

As this study presents only one example of White Lotus sect organization, so it describes only a portion of the diverse and changing body of White Lotus teachings and illustrates but one instance of a sect-led rebellion. Further investigation into the beliefs and practices of this religion can reveal how it originated and then grew and changed in reaction first to the Ch’ing conquest and then to the years of peace and prosperity, the upheavals of the nineteenth cen-
tury, the arrival of foreigners and foreign religions, and the disorders and new orthodoxies of the twentieth century.

Similarly, the Eight Trigrams uprising in 1813 must be placed in the context of a long series of sect-inspired rebellions. As rebels, the Trigrams were relatively successful and managed to mount and sustain their challenge to the Ch'ing state for nearly one hundred days. Nevertheless, the preliminary reorganization, mobilization, and transformation of small scattered sects into a united rebel movement followed a pattern that was repeated in many less successful sectarian uprisings during the dynasty. The Ch'ing government, engaged in an almost perpetual if sometimes muted contest with these sects, usually interrupted at earlier stages the complete (or nearly complete) mobilization so well illustrated in 1813. While the formation of the Eight Trigrams can stand as an example of the potential inherent in other aborted sect uprisings, comparison with equally successful risings—such as those of Hsu Hung-ju (1622), Wang Lun (1774), or the three-province White Lotus rebels (1796-1803)—could, on the other hand, suggest the different factors that made possible the effective transformation of these sects. The Taiping rebels of the mid-nineteenth century illustrate yet another set of possibilities for a well-integrated movement inspired by a millenarian vision though their rebellion was founded in the solidarity of the Hakka minority community and their vision strongly influenced by Christianity.

White Lotus rebels, like the Taiping but unlike the Triads, were *hsieh-fei* 邪匪, "heretical rebels." The belief in the Eternal Mother and her promise of protection and salvation for her followers, the predictions of an approaching apocalypse, visions of a future millennium, and the anticipation of a divine leader who would save all believers were ideas justly considered inflammatory, defiant, and subversive by the state. The existence of this religion in premodern China and the history of repeated contests between government and believers suggest that the Ch'ing elite was not entirely unfamiliar with fundamental challenges to its political and social system. The hostility of the elite toward this subversive religion is perhaps some indication of the danger it posed. The continued hostility of both the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China toward most of these sects today is evidence that the long battle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in China, of which the events of 1813 were only a minor skirmish, is still being waged.

Finally, the Eight Trigrams may be considered from a wider com-
parative perspective. Most of the millenarian movements now being studied with increasing interest by historians and social scientists were generated as a response to the ideas and technology of modern Western civilization. The Eight Trigrams uprising and the White Lotus sects that produced it illustrate a different phenomenon, that of a millenarian alternative existing within and in partial reaction against a great religious tradition. White Lotus sects, considered in the context of Ch'ing orthodox thinking, may be comparable to the heretical sects of medieval Christianity, to the Mahdist movement or the Sufi orders of Islam, or to the various messianic traditions within the Hindu and Buddhist cultures of India and southeast Asia. These popular sectarian religions, often ruled heterodox or illegal, were usually long-lived but only briefly institutionalized; the social movements they generated were repeated and ever hopeful, oblivious to their history of defeat and disappointment. The tensions between each of these great traditions and their many little traditions will require further scrutiny if we are to understand this type of powerful and persistent millenarianism.