

# Origin of the triads

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Although in modern times, the Triads are mostly associated with criminal activity, they originated as mutual support organizations for people at the bottom of the social hierarchy and to defend the common people from those of positions in power " to offer unacquainted people the kind of protection and mutual aid normally afforded by family members" (Murray 178). How they began has been agreed back and forth for many years and lots of theories have come up. However it is generally accepted that the Triads were established during the fall of the Ching dynasty, even though there are some that argue that the Triads date as back as the Han dynasty. It is also accepted that it was the Chinese who developed the Triads to rebel against the Manchus and foreign traders from Europe. The Mandate of Heaven is an important tradition that dates back to the Chou dynasty who established this concept to justify their hostile take over of the Shang dynasty. When all was at peace and China was prospering, the people recognized that the Emperor held the Mandate of Heaven, during this time secret societies like the Triads were not needed and dramatically lost power. However, as the dynasty progressed and the Emperor's rule lessened and corruption increased, support for the secret societies increased until it got so big that revolts occurred the eventually the former dynasty was ended and a new one formed in its place. Predominately, two theories have stuck out from the rest as the most likely theories of the rest. One theory is that they were secret organizations established by radical Chinese who recognized that the Ching was losing the Mandate of Heaven and so they organized rebellions against the Ching. The other theory states that it was the survivors of a massacre organized by the Ching Emperor, five disgruntled Shaolin monks that went

into hiding and established several secret societies to rebel against the Ching (Liu 20). As Manchuria was not part of China, when they took over the Ming dynasty and established the Ching dynasty, many Chinese resented them because they were foreign and also because their standard of living is higher than that of a common Chinese family (wReflexes). Another reason that the Ching rulers were looked down upon was because during Ching rule, a lot of foreign powers came into China and because China wasn't as technologically advanced, the Europeans easily took over parts of China including Guangzhou and Hong Kong. This caused many Chinese to hate the Ching and look down on them as being weak and making the rest of China weak. Many of the men that established the Triads were once soldiers for the Imperial Army of the Ming Dynasty, but when the Ming surrendered to the Manchurian invaders, the survivors of the wars "formed small pockets of armed resistance" (Liu 21). However they were forced to go underground because the newly established Ching rulers were really harsh and stated that those not loyal to the Ching will be executed (Liu 22). On the other hand, after the Emperor to set "300 of his Imperial Guards" (Liu 23) on the monastery and were also ordered to kill the monks (Liu 23). The monks that survived also had to go into hiding in order to found secret societies dedicated to overthrowing the Ching dynasty (wReflexes). The cause for the establishment of the Triads is different for each theory, one is out of personal gain and the other is for the country. The underground rebellions founded by the monks were out of revenge. They were rebelling against the Ching for the death of their brothers and for the burning of the monastery. Their motives were very personal, whereas according to the first theory, the

people established the secret societies for the good of China, thinking that the Ching rulers, being foreign, should not rule China and thus set up the rebellions and upheaval as to drive the foreign power out. The two theories were all aiming to vanquish a common enemy but their cause for setting it up was different. As the focus has shifted from a patriotic cause to a criminal organization, the triads became muscles to hire, being part of almost every uprising. In 1796, a rebellion lasting eight years broke out. What started as a tax protest led by the White Lotus Society amongst some poor settlers on the border between Sichuan province and Shaanxi province, eventually made the Ching administration intervene. At first they sent inadequate soldiers for battle and failed to suppress the rebels (White Lotus Rebellion). However, in 1799, the Ching returned with sufficient troops to eliminate the rebels. Eventually that particular rebellion was finally crushed but it was not a total loss, this was the stepping stone for other societies and Ming loyalists, as it the icebreaker for the rebellions to come. However, after the fall of the Ching dynasty, the Triads suddenly found themselves without a purpose. Unable to revert to normal civilian lives, after spending years living under grave danger and extreme violence, also having lost the usual donations and support from the public. Members of the Triads resorted to money extortion from the unwilling public through all possible and even illegal means. From then on, the word, Triad, gets dirtied from being a patriotic cause to a criminal organization, which leads to other forms of money making, both legal and illegal such as drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal gambling, prostitution, car theft and forms of racketeering. However, after the Communist Party of China took power in 1949, Mainland China was put under

strict law enforcement and organized crime diminished. This is why the Triad migrated south to the British colony of Hong Kong for the continuation of their business. (wReflexes) Of the two theories, the one that most people agree with is the first theory that radical Chinese, who recognized the Ching ruler's faults, are the ones responsible for the establishment of the Triads. This is basically because in the second theory there suffers a flaw in it. The monks had originally volunteered to serve the Ching and helped the Ching suppress the rebellion in the Fukien province and only turned against the Ching when they had fallen victim to a scheme devised within the Imperial Court. Evidently this would contradict with the Triad's traditional motto of overthrowing Ching and restoring Ming. In conclusion, the emergence of the Triads is mainly set around two theories, one was that the triads were established by angry Chinese who were unhappy with the Manchurian rulers and wanted to restore the Ming rulers. The second theory was that the surviving monks from the Shaolin monastery were betrayed by the Ching, who had their monastery destroyed and fellow monks killed. Between the two theories there are some similarities such as their development and time period. After considering all the data, it is evident that the more popular theory is the radical Chinese theory as the Shaolin theory suffers a flaw, in that they had once volunteered to help the Ching and only went against them when the Ching killed their brothers and burned down the monastery. It was purely retaliation not spite for the Mancus rulers, in which the first theory had plenty of. WORKS CITED Chinese history - mandate of heaven. -1 2003. About. com. 16 May 2005. . Liu, Benjamin. The Hong Kong Triad Society. Hong Kong: Net e-Publishing Ltd, 2001. Murray, Dian H. and Baoqi

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