



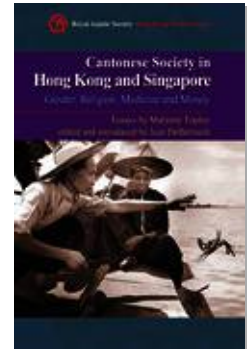
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

Published by Hong Kong University Press, HKU



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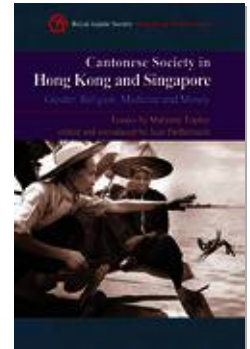
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### *Introduction*

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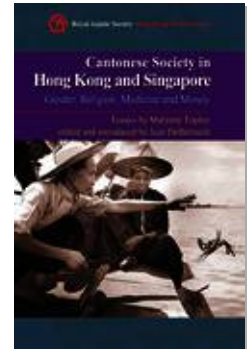
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## Foreword

Many anthologies of academic and intellectual study can appear quite dry to the uninitiated. Sometimes the very title prompts the casual reader to reach for his or her dictionary in order to get an idea of what the book or article is about, or to select another book altogether. Not so in the case of this large and informative collection of essays. The topics of gender, religion, medicine and money were the main areas of focus for Marjorie Topley during her many years of research, and remain undisputedly four of the main pillars of society today.

Arriving in Singapore as a young and enthusiastic twenty-something lady in 1951, Topley was a classic case of being the right person in the right place at the right time. It is to our lasting benefit she did not pursue her initial interests of geography and sociology. Instead, her hard-won academic training in anthropology was put to immediate use in the very foreign society that was post-war Singapore. Very often it is the case that it takes an outsider to study and record what has been general knowledge and standard practice for generations for an indigenous population. And this is Topley's lasting achievement. Topics such as "The Buddhist view of nature and the cosmos" are so much a part of the make-up of Chinese people that they would probably be hard pushed to explain it themselves.

What is the relevance of Topley's writing today, given that much of it first appeared 40 and 50 years ago? I would suggest that it is of tremendous relevance. Much of the "hardware" that she describes in both Singapore and Hong Kong has long gone – the temples, vegetarian halls and other institutions. However, scratch the surface of any Chinese society and the "software" is usually there, alive and well – the attitudes and beliefs of the people, and other aspects of what is often referred to as "collective memory". Chinese society is to be envied by much of the so-called developed world, in that not only is much of the old traditional way of life still visible in people's behaviour but it is also so deeply instilled from parent to child that it is difficult to see it totally disappearing. This collection of essays therefore needs to be read whilst at the same time raising the veil of our modern surroundings. In this way, Topley's writing is as meaningful and insightful today as it was when it first appeared.

It is a particular pleasure to welcome this volume as the latest in the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Studies Series. Marjorie Topley played

a pivotal role in the resuscitation of the Society's Hong Kong Branch in 1959 and came to be a Vice-President and later President. She shaped the organization that still flourishes, over 50 years later, and lives up to the standards that she and her co-founders set for us back then.

The Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch and Hong Kong University Press are very proud of what they have achieved so far with the Studies Series. More and more people, both here and abroad, are finding that Hong Kong and its unique history and culture provides a rich and fascinating field of study. An increasing number of schools are including the history of our city and its surroundings in their curricula, for which we should be able to take some credit. We will continue to bring to the public original works that will enhance this area even further.

The publications in the Studies Series have been made possible initially by the very generous donation of seeding capital by the Trustees of the Clague Trust Fund, representing the estate of the late Sir Douglas Clague. This donation enabled us to establish a trust fund in the name of Sir Lindsay and Lady Ride, in memory of our first Vice President and his wife. The Society itself added to this fund, as have a number of other generous donors.

The result is that we now have funding to bring to students of Hong Kong's history, culture and society a number of books that might otherwise not have seen the light of day. Furthermore, we continue to be delighted with the agreement established with Hong Kong University Press, which sets out the basis on which the Press will partner our efforts.

Robert Nield  
President  
Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch



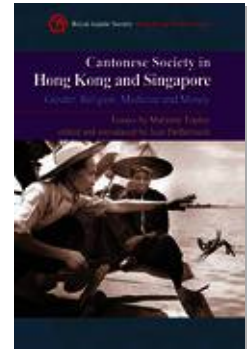
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## *Introduction*

# **Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore: Gender, Religion, Medicine and Money**

**Essays by Marjorie Topley**

Jean DeBernardi<sup>1</sup>

This book collects the published articles of Dr. Marjorie Topley, who was a pioneer in the field of social anthropology in the postwar period. Her ethnographic research in Singapore and Hong Kong sets a high standard for urban anthropology, focusing on topics that remain current and important in the discipline.

Dr. Topley's publications reflect her training in British social anthropology, with its focus on fieldwork and detailed empirical observation. She was among the first to refine and extend those methods in the 1950s, adapting them to the study of modernizing urban settings like Singapore and Hong Kong. Her ethnographic research on the Great

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1 For support for this project in its initial stage, thanks are due to Paul Kratoska of National University of Singapore Press and Colin Day of Hong Kong University Press. The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada provided funding for a short period of research in Hong Kong in 2006 that allowed me to consult archival sources and to interview longtime members of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (HKBRAS). Jenny Day, the Secretary of HKBRAS, assisted me in gaining access to their records at the Hong Kong Public Records Office. Hugh Baker, Colin Day, James Hayes, and Dan Waters shared knowledge and reminiscences that guided me in preparation of the Introduction, as did Prof. Wang Gungwu, whom Dr. Topley first met in Singapore in the 1950s while he was still a student. Thanks are also due to Michael Duckworth and Dennis Cheung for guiding the manuscript through the final publication process. Last but not least, Dr. Marjorie Topley shared reminiscences, reprints, and photographs, and offered advice as the volume was being prepared.

For their assistance in preparing the chapters for publication, special thanks are due to Paul Harms, Cathy Kmita, and Hsu Yu-tsuen, all of the Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta. Prof. Hugh Baker generously spent many hours refining Cantonese entries in the Chinese glossary and also scanned original photographs in Marjorie Topley's private collection for inclusion in this publication. For careful work in copyediting the manuscript Yat-kong Fung is due special thanks, as is Moira Calder for preparing the index.

Way of Former Heaven sectarian movement and Cantonese women's vegetarian halls in Singapore in the 1950s is an early contribution to the study of sub-cultural groups in a complex urban society, and she asks insightful questions about the relationship between religion, secularism, and modernity. Because of extensive social change in Singapore and Hong Kong, many of the temples and religious organizations that she describes have disappeared or experienced radical transformation. Consequently, her work on these topics also has added value as historical documentation of the recent past.

Dr. Topley was a pioneer in several areas of scholarship. She conducted important early research on Chinese women's organizations, and her article on "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung" (1978) is a classic in the fields of Chinese anthropology and women's studies. She also broke new ground in the field of Chinese medical anthropology, exploring the interface between Chinese and Western medicine and medical practitioners in Hong Kong, and also investigating Chinese women's use of traditional and modern remedies especially in the treatment of their children's illnesses. Her 1974 article, "Cosmic Antagonisms: A Mother-Child Syndrome", which appeared in a volume on *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* that Arthur Wolf edited, is widely known and cited. A student of Raymond Firth's, she also focused a number of articles on economic issues, including the collective management of property and wealth.

Dr. Topley never held a full-time academic appointment, but until her return to England in 1983 took full advantage of residence in Singapore and Hong Kong to conduct research, teach, and participate in international conferences. In 1959, she helped to revive the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, creating a vibrant organization that organizes public lectures and symposia, publishes a journal and monographs, and invites members on popular expert-led field trips and tours.

## Training in England<sup>2</sup>

When I interviewed Dr. Topley in 2005, she recalled her early life and training in anthropology. Marjorie Topley (née Wills) was born in Hendon, London, in 1927. As a girl she attended Church of England schools that she describes as "ordinary". She was fascinated by Egyptology and wanted to become an archaeologist. When she was about

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2 While doing archival research in London in May 2005, I visited Dr. Topley at her home and interviewed her about her life and career. The following account is based on that interview.

12 years old she wrote to Sir Flinders Petrie (1853–1942), one of the founders of modern Egyptology. She got a letter back, “You’ve got to be well-off and a man to be an archaeologist.” She resigned herself “to give that one up”.

She was a teenager during World War II:

Of course, you know, I grew up during the war. We were bombed at one point. We used to sleep in an air raid shelter. I was allowed to stay up until 9:30. I stayed up and a German plane dropped two bombs, one behind and one in front. I was calling “Mother, mother”, and she was calling “Mother, mother” too. We were lucky; we weren’t injured.

Because she failed to pass a crucial scholarship examination, for a time she went to a technical college that taught skills like shorthand and typing. She was deeply unhappy there, and the headmaster offered to help her enter the City of London College. She succeeded in winning an award to support her studies, prepared for the London School of Economics (LSE) entrance exam, and passed it.

In her first year she studied geography, but she became bored with it and switched to sociology. But she again lost interest, concluding that sociology was based too much on common sense. Initially anthropology was not an option since Raymond Firth, who was head of department, had concluded that undergraduates should not study anthropology since the subject was morally relative and potentially disturbing. When he changed his mind, she switched her major from sociology to anthropology. Consequently Topley was the first undergraduate student in anthropology at the London School of Economics.

While still an undergraduate Topley attended the famous LSE seminar that Malinowski had initiated during his term as Professor of Anthropology, and which Firth had continued when he assumed the position of Professor. Her fellow students were all postgraduates coming back from the field, and she could only write “little essays from books”. After she read one of these essays out loud to the seminar group, Austrian-born Siegfried Nadel, then a lecturer at the LSE, asked, “Was your journey *really* necessary?” quoting the words on a government war-time poster. She was devastated by his sarcasm. But she also met more congenial anthropology postgraduates, including Barbara Ward, Maurice Freedman, and Judith Djamour Freedman. Before she was 21 years old, she also did a summer course at the University of Chicago. She found the M.A. students at Chicago to be no more advanced than the undergraduate majors at the LSE, who had specialized in their subject earlier in their careers.

At the LSE Marjorie met her husband, Kenneth Wallis Joseph Topley (1922–2007), who had entered the LSE to study political science after leaving the air force at the end of World War II. There he studied government under Harold Laski (Topley 1969: xviii), a controversial political theorist who also was Chairman of the British Labour Party from 1945–46 and contributed to shaping the party’s policies.<sup>3</sup>

At that time, anthropology students went directly into the Ph.D. programme without doing an M.A. Marjorie did not think that she could do any further degree since she would have had to do fieldwork. Her formal training in anthropology ended and her work as an ethnographic researcher began when her husband joined the colonial service. In preparation, they studied Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and in 1951 they went to Singapore.

### Singapore (1951–55)

During World War II, the British lost control of Malaya and the Straits Settlements to Japan. On their return to Singapore after World War II, they faced armed opposition to the restoration of colonial rule. From 1948–60, the Malayan Communist Party’s Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) fought a guerrilla war in which they sought to overthrow the British colonial administration. In Malaya, the British forced over 500,000 people — most of them ethnic Chinese — to relocate from isolated areas, seeking to prevent them from providing the insurgents with food. The policy of resettlement, which caused great hardship, only intensified support for the Communists. By the time the Topleys arrived in Singapore in 1951, a number of violent clashes had occurred (see Stubbs 2008). The “Malayan Emergency” was the British colonial government’s name for this conflict.

In April 1951 Topley took a post at the Raffles Museum as curator of anthropology since “they couldn’t get a man to come out during [the] bandit troubles”, i.e., the Emergency. In 1952, a *Straits Times* reporter interviewed Topley for an article entitled “She Spent a Night in a Death House: Portrait of a Pretty Anthropologist” (Hall 1952). As Topley described it, when she first entered the huge, dusty rooms at the back of the Museum, she found piles of unsorted specimens and exhibits, some of which had been hurriedly stored before the Japanese occupation. Although she would have liked to travel to Malaya to collect items for the museum collection, the “Communist war” made that impractical.

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3 For further details on Harold Laski, see the LSE website: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/resources/LSEHistory/laski.htm> (consulted on 3 August 2008).

Consequently, she focused her attention on Singapore. The reporter commented “This young English girl is now as familiar with the inside and the occupants of Buddhist temples, vegetarian halls, Sago lane death-houses, Waterloo Streets’s fertility temple and Chinese cemeteries as she is with Raffles Place.” (Hall 1952)

The Museum expected her to conduct research into subjects of her choice, and her first research focused on occasional rites performed by Cantonese women acting on their own (see Topley 1951; 1952; 1953 [Chapters 1–3 in this book]). When she decided to complete a doctoral degree at the LSE as an external student she launched more intensive research on Cantonese vegetarian halls (or *zhaitang*), focusing on the economic role of these organizations. She began the research in 1951–52 and continued it in 1954–55.

Topley chose to study the vegetarian halls on the advice of Alan Elliott, who was then working on a doctoral thesis on Chinese spirit medium cults that he published in 1955. In the course of that research, he came across a vegetarian house and suggested that she study it: “Marjorie, I think this would be an excellent thing for you to study, you are a woman and they are women; it would be difficult for a man to do it in any case.” As she described it, “I barged along, and introduced myself. Sometimes I stayed the night, and once they gave me toffees for breakfast.” There were many such vegetarian houses, and she got to know the women living in them, whom she described as very kind to her, and also intrigued that a *guailo* knew Cantonese.

When they went to Singapore, the Topleys studied both Hokkien and Cantonese with language tutors.<sup>4</sup> In 1953 the government sent them to Macau where they studied Cantonese intensively, spending three to four hours a day with a team of four tutors in preparation for government exams. There, she recalled, she made fairly rapid progress, and started to think in Chinese. As an aid to language learning she also volunteered as tutor for poor children who didn’t speak any English, which forced her to speak Cantonese

She began research on the vegetarian halls in 1951–52, and on her return to Singapore from Macau decided that it would be possible for her to conduct a more detailed study. In 1954–55, she focused on the religious role of the vegetarian halls and the kind of “social satisfactions that attracted” participants (Topley 1958: 22). She also examined more closely the relationship of the *zhaitang* to ideas of religious authority and leadership. She discovered by chance that some of the vegetarian halls that she was studying were part of the Great Way of Former Heaven

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4 Cantonese was Topley’s primary research language in Singapore and Hong Kong, but when I met her she could still speak some Hokkien with impressive precision.



Fig. 1. Marjorie Topley examining paper charm at a ritual goods store at Pagoda Street, Singapore. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)



Fig. 2. Ritual goods store at Pagoda Street, Singapore. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)



Fig. 3. A team of *Nam-mo-lo* “chanting fellows”, Singapore. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley.)



Fig. 4. *Nam-mo-lo* performing the funeral ritual to “break hell” to escort the soul of the deceased through the courts of hell. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)



Fig. 5. *Nam-mo-lo* performing the ritual to “break hell”. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)



Fig. 6 Altar to *Tianhou Shengmu*, the Queen of Heaven, at Wak Hai Cheng Bio (est. 1850), Singapore. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)



Fig. 7 Marjorie Topley interviewing a Chinese mourner in Singapore. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)



Fig. 8. Singaporean spirit medium possessed by the Great Saint (popularly known as the Monkey God). (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)



Fig. 9. Women performing an offering ritual. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)



Fig. 10. Women throwing a live crab to sea as an act of merit-making. (Private collection of Marjorie Topley)

(*Xiantian Dadao*), a sectarian group that traced its descent through a line of patriarchs, and her richly detailed doctoral thesis also investigated this group's history, organization, and ideology.

She also recalls that she collaborated with friends to photograph some of the rituals that she observed in Singapore, including death rituals and other occasional rites. Sago Lane had "dying houses", and she used to go along there to observe "these fantastic Taoist funeral rites where the Taoist priest leaped over flames." One time she took a friend, Ivor Polunin, a medical doctor who was keen on doing photography. She obtained permission to photograph and the Taoist priests agreed, but the event was disastrous. Dr. Polunin showed up dressed in bright red shorts, and when he plugged in his flash unit, he blew out all the lights.

Fortunately the priests were forgiving. Another time one of the Taoist priests rang her up at the museum to invite her to a ghost marriage. This time she invited her co-worker at the museum, Carl A. Gibson-Hill, a naturalist and skilled photographer who often accompanied her, taking photographs as she took notes and observed. The woman who had arranged to have the ghost marriage performed was having bad luck, and had trouble getting pregnant. Seeking to diagnose the source of her misfortune, she learned that her husband had been engaged before and that the girl had died before the wedding. Consequently, they arranged a ceremony to marry off the spirit. But Topley and Gibson-Hill's efforts were again intrusive to the point of being disastrous. The woman did not speak much English, but she looked at Gibson-Hill's camera and said, "Very, very, very not good." As Dr. Topley recalls it, "we both felt terribly ashamed."

Meanwhile, she did her doctoral research externally and had no assigned supervisor. Fortunately she knew Maurice Freedman, who by then was a lecturer at the LSE and had conducted research in Singapore on Chinese kinship from 1949–51 while his wife Judith Djamour studied a Malay village (Skinner 1976: 871). Freedman informally supervised Topley, who wrote to him and sent him sections of her thesis for comments.

### Hong Kong (1955–83)

After their intensive language study in Macau, the Topleys decided that they wanted to be in Hong Kong where the majority of the population spoke Cantonese, and in 1955 they transferred there. In 1958 Marjorie completed her doctoral thesis (entitled *The Organisation and Social Function of Chinese Women's Chai T'ang in Singapore*). She took her viva (the oral examination that North American academics call a thesis

defense) while they were on leave in England, and Freedman was one of her examiners. Her other examiner — a Sinologist at Cambridge University — was sceptical of her research, but nonetheless passed the thesis.

In Hong Kong, Kenneth Topley served in a variety of government departments, including Labour, Resettlement, University Grants Committee, Social Welfare, and Census and Statistics, finally serving as Director of Education (Waters 2008). Although she did not seek full-time academic employment,<sup>5</sup> Marjorie maintained a high profile internationally through her research and publications. Through participation in international conferences and in the activities of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, she was widely networked with scholars involved in the growing fields of Sinology and Chinese anthropology. When Mr. Topley retired in 1983, she returned with him to England. But he soon returned to Macau, where he took an administrative position at the University of East Asia in Macau before moving to the Open University in Hong Kong (Waters 2006: 212). In this period, the Topleys divorced.

One factor promoting the prominence of Dr. Topley's work was the growth of social science research focusing on the Asian region in the so-called Cold War period. After World War II, the Communist party took control of the Chinese mainland, forming the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Because the PRC was part of the Cold War Communist bloc, Western-trained social scientists were not able to enter the country to conduct research. For this reason, Topley's thesis examiner at the LSE, Maurice Freedman and American anthropologist and Sinologist, G. William Skinner collaborated to promote research on Chinese communities in Taiwan and Hong Kong. As a full-time resident of Hong Kong, Topley was well-positioned to take advantage of this development.

As Freedman noted in a 1962 article, as a research site Hong Kong was not just a "listening post" for China (1962: 113). He viewed the fishing and farming communities of the New Territories as still being representative of many aspects of life in rural south-eastern China before Communist rule. Hong Kong he described as a large urban centre undergoing an industrial revolution, and noted the research of Barbara E. Ward, Jean Pratt, and Marjorie Topley. Topley and others were aware that they were seeking to adapt the micro-sociological methods (as Freedman

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5 Topley did some teaching of sociology at Hong Kong universities, including Chung Chi College and United College at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and held a Postgraduate Research Fellowship at the Centre of Asian Studies at The University of Hong Kong where she became involved in medical anthropology research.

described them) to the study of complex, urban environments (Freedman 1963; Topley 1969).

In 1962 Freedman and Skinner organized the London-Cornell Project to consolidate funding resources for social research. Three institutions collaborated in the project: Cornell University in New York state, where Skinner taught, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and the London School of Economics, where Freedman taught (Skinner 1976: 876). From 1962–72, the London-Cornell Project funded a number of researchers in East and Southeast Asia. Because Topley was well-networked with these scholars, she knew when they were planning to visit Hong Kong and recruited them to give public lectures at the meetings of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch and to publish their work in the society's journal.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the growth of support for foreign area studies in the United States meant funding not only for research but also for international conferences. In those decades Topley received invitations to participate in a number of these prestigious events, including a 1960 symposium that Raymond Firth and Bert Hoselitz organized on the theme of Economics and Anthropology. The symposium was held at the Wenner-Gren Foundation's European Conference Center at Burg Wartenstein, an eleventh-century castle in Austria that the foundation purchased in 1957. Between 1958 and 1980, Burg Wartenstein was the site of a number of week-long symposia that shaped the development of anthropology as a discipline, and anthropologists highly coveted invitations to these events (Silverman 2002). Reportedly participants tended to be senior males in the discipline; Topley's inclusion as a new doctorate suggests that Firth highly regarded her scholarly work and promise.

Topley also attended the 1971 Burg Wartenstein symposium that Charles Leslie organized, which was the first major research conference on Asian medical systems (Leslie 1976). Contributors undertook the ethnographic study of classical Asian medical traditions like Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine as well as investigating the interrelationships between professional and popular medical traditions (see Castro and Farmer 2007: 46).

The Subcommittee on Research on Chinese Society of the Joint Committee on Contemporary China of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council sponsored a series of international events that drew together top scholars in the China field. The subcommittee provided funding for a 1962 seminar on micro-social organization at Cornell University that Topley attended, to which she contributed a paper on "Chinese Religion and Rural Cohesion in the Nineteenth Century" (Topley 1968a: 40 [see Chapter 10, p. 242 in this

book]). Topley also attended a 1971 international conference on Chinese religion that Arthur P. Wolf organized at Asilomar, California, which was the fifth of six major conferences funded by them.

Although China was beginning to open up to foreign visitors at this time, extended fieldwork on the mainland was still not possible. Consequently the ethnographic researchers who participated in this event focused their papers on Hong Kong and Taiwan. In his preface to the book that resulted from this conference, *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, Wolf defended this focus, noting that even though the contributors could only document a small part of a vast and complex society, they could provide detailed, long-term studies of the areas studied (Wolf 1974: v–vi).

### **The Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch**

One of the pillars of Topley's intellectual life and contribution in Hong Kong was her involvement in the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. She played a major role in the revival of the society, serving as the group's Vice-President from 1966–1972 and as its President from 1972 until her return to England in 1983.

This society is one of ten Asian branches of the Royal Asiatic Society, which was founded in London in 1823 “for the investigation of subjects connected with and for the encouragement of science, literature and the arts, in relation to Asia.” The society formed branches in Bombay and Madras (1838), in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1845, and in Malaya in 1877. A branch was formed in Hong Kong in 1847, but had ceased to exist in 1859 when the Governor who had supported it, Sir John Bowring, left the colony. During those twelve years, the society published six volumes of its *Transactions*, which primarily included contributions from missionaries and members of the British consular service (Cranmer-Byng 1962: 1). In 1857, a North China Branch of the RAS was formed in Shanghai and thrived until political circumstances led to its dissolution in 1949.

On a visit to London in 1958 (during which time she also defended her thesis), Topley wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society to ask if the RAS would be interested in a revival of the China branch in Hong Kong. On her return to Hong Kong, Topley and Jack Cranmer-Byng circulated a memo to assess local interest in which they proposed that the main focus of the branch would be publication of a journal that would be of interest both to specialists and to the educated

layman.<sup>6</sup> Topley and Cranmer-Byng recruited the assistance of J. R. Jones, who had been a council member of the now defunct North China Branch of the RAS, and at that time was a legal advisor to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. He agreed to help them canvass support among business firms in Hong Kong and to draft a constitution. A group of thirty met at the British Council Centre on 18 December 1959 and adopted a constitution that was quickly approved by the parent society in London. Jones was the society's first elected president, and Cranmer-Byng served as the editor of the journal, which produced its first volume in 1961. Topley was the driving force behind the revival of the group, but because she was young and a woman, she initially served as councillor together with James Liu, Holmes Welch, and G. B. Endacott, only later stepping into the roles of vice-president and president ("The Royal Asiatic Society" 1963; Hayes 1983).

From the start the Society formed a bridge between scholarly researchers and a wider public that includes policy makers and members of Hong Kong's business community. The list of members as on April 1960, for example, includes a number of scholars based at The University of Hong Kong and other academic institutions, but also government servants from a variety of departments (Census, Social Welfare, Education, Chinese Affairs), employees from the American, Canadian, German, and Italian consulates and the British Council, and members of the business community affiliated with prominent Hong Kong companies and financial institutions.<sup>7</sup> The HKBRAS almost immediately started publishing a journal, the first issue of which appeared in 1961, and took steps to establish a library. They also organized educational and social events for members, including a regular speaker series.

Hong Kong was a major intellectual hub for Asian studies in this period. Scholars like Chinese poetry expert, James Liu, and Holmes Welch, who published extensively on Chinese religions, lived and worked in Hong Kong, and they often addressed the society, as did Topley. The society also screened the ethnographic films of Hugh Gibb, a Hong Kong resident whose seven-part series *The Borneo Story* had won a Grand Prix award at the Cannes Film festival.

The growth of air travel after World War II and Hong Kong's situation as a transportation hub for the region also meant that they were

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6 Both the letter and the memo are deposited in the society's records at the Hong Kong Public Records Office. "RAS: Founding of the Society 1959-60", HKMS 169-1-5.

7 "The Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society List of Members" (April 1960). Hong Kong Public Records Office, HKMS 169-1-6. One member observed in an interview that typically there are two classes of members: Europeans who come to Hong Kong for a few years and want to learn something about Chinese society, and scholars who find the Society useful to them for making contacts.

able to schedule a remarkable roster of prominent scholars to give lectures to the society. The society's officers kept themselves well-informed of the travel plans of major scholars and invited them to speak in their public lecture series. The list of lectures held between January 1960 and May 1963, for example, includes lectures by a number of leading scholars in the growing field of Chinese studies. These included Prof. John K. Fairbank of Harvard University, who spoke on Chinese studies in the United States, Luther Carrington Goodrich of Columbia University, who lectured on the development of printing in China, and Maurice Freedman of the London School of Economics, who discussed "Social Anthropology and the Study of China" ("The Royal Asiatic Society" 1963).

Because Topley was centrally involved in the organization of these events, anthropologists often addressed the society. Between 1967 and 1970, for example, Barbara E. Ward discussed her research on "Social and Economic Changes among the Boat People of Hong Kong" (1967); Hugh Baker presented a lecture on "The Chinese Lineage Village: A Pyramid of Kinship" (1969); and Graham Johnson gave a talk entitled "From Rural Committee to Spirit Medium Cult" (1969). In addition, anthropologists associated with the HKBRAS sometimes led outings to places of ethnographic interest, including Chinese vegetarian halls (led by Marjorie Topley and James Hayes; see Chapter 15 below), and temples and shrines of the Tai Ping Shan Street area (Topley and Hayes 1967d).<sup>8</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Society organized a number of weekend symposia for its members and sometimes published the proceedings. Topley organized several of these well-attended events and edited three volumes of proceedings: *Aspects of Social Organization in the New Territories* (1964b), *Some Traditional Chinese Ideas and Conceptions in Hong Kong Social Life Today: Week-end Symposium, October 1966* (1967a), and *Hong Kong: The Interaction of Traditions and Life in the Towns* (1972). In 1969, Topley also organized a weekend symposium on "Anthropology and Sociology in Hong Kong" on behalf of The University of Hong Kong (Topley 1969). Participants included both Hong Kong residents (both academics and administrators in the Hong Kong government) and graduate students from Cornell University (Graham and Elizabeth Johnson), Columbia University (Frank Kehl), and Stanford University (John A. Young).<sup>9</sup>

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8 Topley and Hayes' 1967 report on temples in the Tai Ping Shan Street area of Hong Kong is not reprinted in this book, but the book in which it was published (Topley 1967a) is available from the HKBRAS and also in electronic format through the Hong Kong University Library catalog.

9 Topley's two publications (1967a, 1972) are still available from the HKBRAS. See [http://www.royalasiaticsociety.org.hk/publications/symposium\\_proceedings.htm](http://www.royalasiaticsociety.org.hk/publications/symposium_proceedings.htm)

The papers and discussions recorded in the 1969 symposium offer a revealing snapshot of the research climate in Hong Kong at that time. In particular, the participants explored sensitive issues surrounding the relationship between the Hong Kong government and their academic scholarship. The graduate student researchers note that they depended on British district officers for advice and access, and also made extensive use of government documents and records in their research. These novice researchers in turn encountered the expectation that they would in turn give something back that would help guide the government as it made policy decisions.<sup>10</sup> This symposium took place in 1969 — the height of the Vietnam War era — and contributors thoughtfully considered the ways in which they could make a useful contribution without compromising their scholarly goals or the confidentiality of individuals who had provided them with information (Topley 1969).

### Intellectual Contribution

When the authors of works focusing on the history of anthropology treat the post-war period, they typically focus on the work of scholars like Claude Levi-Strauss, who promoted structuralism to a wide readership, or E. E. Evans-Pritchard, whose contributions to kinship studies and the anthropology of religion are highly regarded. Although contemporary readers may find much to appreciate in widely-anthologized excerpts from these scholars' works, nonetheless those who seek to better understand the present era of globalization, migration, and social change will not find much in the way of illumination in their contributions. Indeed, in *The Savage Mind* (1966) Levi-Strauss famously contrasted "cold societies" that had not undergone change (a euphemism for primitive societies) with modern, progressive societies, regarding the former (and also the "primitive" in universal human mentality) as the appropriate object of anthropological analysis. In the same period, however, a small number of scholars were developing new forms of

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10 In a paper entitled "Anthropology, Practicality and Policy in Hong Kong: A Governmental Point of View", for example, Kenneth Topley proposed that academic anthropologists could be useful in providing government with "guiding rules on the planning of urban development: what peoples might be expected to live harmoniously side by side with other peoples" (Kenneth Topley 1969: 56). He suggested that rather than investigating highly charged conflicts in which sides had been drawn, scholars should investigate topics that might have implications for Hong Kong's future development, proposing as an example that they study class and status in Hong Kong (Kenneth Topley 1969).

anthropological theory and practice in urban centres like Singapore and Hong Kong.

Topley's publications make contributions in three major areas of scholarly research: anthropology of religion, economic anthropology, and medical anthropology, and this anthology organizes her articles under those major headings. But other themes are threaded throughout her work. In both Singapore and Hong Kong, her ethnographic focus was on Cantonese speakers, and her research contributes to the anthropology of that important linguistic and cultural sub-ethnic group. Her research undoubtedly marks a major contribution to urban history and sociology, and her most important and influential articles are based on research done with and about women.

Perhaps her most famous work is her 1978 article on marriage resistance (Chapter 16), which scholars working in the field of gender studies still cite, and which set a standard for ethnographic research on Chinese religion and gender (see ter Haar 1992: 375). With this research Topley distinguished herself from colleagues working in the British functionalist tradition, who tended to focus on the workings of the highly normative patrilineal kinship system (see, for example, Freedman 1958; 1966). Her article examines instead an unusual group of women who appeared to defy that system by choosing not to marry, seeking autonomy from its demands. The article also touched briefly on lesbian practices among these women, which undoubtedly accounts for its ability to astonish anthropology undergraduate students decades after its first publication.

Topley's work in the field of anthropology of religion perhaps stays closest to the British functionalist agenda, with its focus on social organization and institutional life. But there too she broke new ground. In her unpublished dissertation and also in a 1963 publication (1963a [see Chapter 9 in this book]), she documented the Great Way of Former Heaven's organization and ideology in impressive detail. In her analysis, she combined knowledge that she derived from her observations and interviews with information that she culled from the society's own publications, which presented a detailed historical account of their provenance. She blended information gathered through her ethnographic research in Singapore with the deft use of these rare textual sources, setting a high standard for research on Chinese religion.

In Hong Kong, Topley made original scholarly contributions to the fields of economic and urban anthropology. Her teacher at the LSE, Raymond Firth, undoubtedly instilled an appreciation for the economic dimension of social life, and in an unpublished chapter of her thesis she had investigated the economic organization of Chinese women's vegetarian halls in impressive detail. In two articles on Hong Kong that she

published in the 1960s, she provided a macro-ethnographic analysis that contrasts with her micro-sociological work, but which showed a similar erudition and facility with detail.

In an article (1964a) published in a volume that Firth edited together with B. S. Yamey (see Chapter 12 in this book), she analyzed master farmers in the New Territories, and contrasted the practices of indigenous rice farmers with those of more recent immigrants specialized in vegetable farming in light of their social organization, economic opportunity and political status. Although she attended to traditional forms of social organization like ancestral associations, she also explored the farmers' interactions with governmental and philanthropic organizations. In her contribution to a book that I. C. Jarvie edited, *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition* (1969a), she provided an even broader perspective, describing Hong Kong as a society in the midst of an industrial revolution, and proposing ways to adapt the methods of social anthropology to the study of this heterogeneous, complicated urban setting (see Chapter 11). Although published more than forty years ago, these articles have a modern flavour and provide a detailed ethnographic record of a society in transition.

As a postgraduate fellow at the Centre of Asian Studies at The University of Hong Kong from 1971 to 1974, Topley shifted her focus to the new field of medical anthropology. Together with a research assistant, she interviewed Chinese and Western doctors to investigate how the two medical systems worked, seeking to learn whether they complemented each other or were opposed. She grounded her discussion in detailed empirical consideration of how people make medical choices in light of traditional interpretations of the causes and treatments of disease, but also in light of the options available to them in a complex urban environment. The approach that she adopted in this research addresses many issues that scholars still seek to address, including the issue of contact and competition between Western and Chinese medical practices.

Topley also collaborated on a research project with Dr. Constance Elaine Field, a well-known medical practitioner who founded the Department of Paediatrics at The University of Hong Kong in 1962, and who did field studies of various aspects of child rearing. One of Topley's articles from this period focuses on the traditional Cantonese treatment for measles, a topic that she stumbled upon when her Chinese amah insisted on treating her youngest son the Chinese way when he fell ill with the disease (Topley 1970 [see Chapter 17 in this book]).

Topley's well-known 1974 article "Cosmic Antagonisms: A Mother-Child Syndrome" was based on interviews that she conducted with women who lived in high-rise flats in Kowloon (see Chapter 18). Topley focused the paper on widely shared everyday practices and cosmological

explanations that Cantonese mothers invoked when they encountered difficulties in child-rearing. Although she did not seek to promote a new theoretical or methodological agenda with this paper, nonetheless her treatment of the subject resonates with that of Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory. In a period in which the influence of structuralism and of Lévi-Strausian style analysis was widespread, Bourdieu recommended that anthropologists focus their analysis not on structures or rules but rather on *habitus*, a term he used to describe the everyday habits of thought and action that guide people's choices (see [1972] 1977).

Topley contributed this paper to a book in which Freedman addressed the larger question of whether a Chinese religion exists. In a formulation that resonates with a structuralist approach, he proposed that there were "ruling principles of ideas across a vast field of apparently heterogeneous beliefs" and "ruling principles of form and organization" across a similarly varied terrain. He further concluded that scholars seek to analyse what he termed transformations (a term that also evokes the structuralist agenda), including for example relationship between elite and popular forms (Freedman 1974: 20, 39). By contrast, Topley closely documented habits and explanations that some Western scholars label religious or cosmological but others regard as medical, focusing (like Bourdieu) on everyday practices and choice rather than principles, rules, and structures. Consequently her analysis easily accommodates the fact that the Christian women whom she interviewed offered the same explanation and remedies for difficulties in child-rearing as the non-Christians, and she goes beyond the details of her case study to convincingly identify similarities between Cantonese and Taiwanese explanations and remedies.

In her publications, Marjorie Topley proposed innovative strategies for the investigation of modern urban society. At the same time that she broke new ground for anthropology as a discipline, she also documented Chinese society in Singapore and Hong Kong in the decades leading up to the end of the British colonial period. Her essays deserve to be republished and read.

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### A Note on Chinese Romanization

In her publications Marjorie Topley used Wade-Giles romanization, which is no longer commonly used, and also supplied Cantonese and Hokkien terms using diverse systems of romanization. She often supplemented the romanized words with Chinese characters in the text or in a glossary.

To simplify the production process of this book, Hong Kong University Press has elected not to reproduce the original diacritic marks on Cantonese terms used in Topley's publications, which will be unfamiliar to most readers. Instead, the editor has added *pinyin* to the text and also supplied a Chinese glossary that includes the romanization together with characters and *pinyin*, which should clarify the meaning of terms cited in the text.



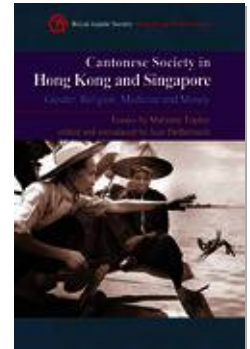
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

Published by Hong Kong University Press, HKU



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## *Chapter 1*

# **Some Occasional Rites Performed by the Singapore Cantonese**

(1951)\*

This paper deals with some of the rites performed by the Cantonese in Singapore with the object of overcoming illness and misfortune. The rites selected for description are in all cases specific to the sufferer, and are enacted only when help is required. The term occasional is used here in this sense, to distinguish them from festival rites and the type of performances of a spirit medium which take place regularly and are attended by many people. They also differ from other rites in that they can be performed alone by the person who hopes to benefit from them, or who wishes to benefit some other person in whose welfare they are interested. Even when the rites to be described are performed by a priest, the person paying for the rite is an active participant.

In most cases, the association of ideas in the objects used in the rites is straight forward, and the body of esoteric knowledge needed is limited. The cost of the material apparatus is low, and can easily be met by a fairly poor person: no article costs more than 50 cents, and the majority as little as 5 cents. This kind of ritual is as one woman told this writer, “Old women’s business.” “Men,” she said, “and younger women, are usually sceptical, or they haven’t the time and patience to do such things. Since the paper things necessary are very cheap, the younger members of a family don’t usually mind their old grandmother and aunts practising the rites.” Younger women may, however be persuaded to take part in them, usually by their mother or mother-in-law, especially when the health of a grand-child is at stake.

In Kwangtung [Guangdong] Province, these performances are carried out in people’s homes, at the village altar or at a road junction. In Singapore, where Chinese villages have a somewhat different lay-out, they are more often associated with temple worship, usually temple

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\* Published in *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)*, 24(3)(1951): 120–44. Reprinted by permission of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

worship with a Taoist bias,<sup>1</sup> but occasionally road junctions and the space in front of a house are used here.

In Singapore a temple is a more suitable place for a ceremony than a house. In China, the house occupied by a family or group of related families consists usually of several courtyards and apartments and it therefore affords ample space for ritual. Here however, many people live in a single small room in a house containing many unrelated families. More often than not the room is in fact a cubicle, that is, a part of a room which has been divided by wooden partitions, and so does not afford much space for religious activities. A temple has the added convenience of containing a store of the articles necessary for all kinds of rites. It also has authorities on ritual to whom a woman may apply for information on how a rite is to be performed. Food offerings may be borrowed for the occasion, and the keeper will send out for the temple's regular attending priest if so desired. He and his assistants will then assemble and arrange everything needed for the ceremony while the worshipper waits for the priests to arrive.

When a rite is performed in front of a house or at a road junction, a more limited form is usually carried out, and it is performed in the early part of the night in the semi-privacy of the dark.

The material for this paper was drawn from conversations with women from both the "big 'pore'" (from "Singapore") 大坡, that is, the area adjoining New Bridge Road, and from the "small 'pore'" 小坡, between Beach Road and Selegie Road. Questions were asked at several Chinese temples and at shops selling joss and paper images. Some of the rites were witnessed by the present writer, and additional information on them was supplied by the Cantonese Taoist priest who performed them, and by the temple keeper.

In all cases, in reply to the question "Which dialect groups perform these rites?", the answer was that it was mostly the Cantonese. A few Hakka women do so, but nobody questioned had heard of any other group performing them. It is possible, of course, that some Hokkiens and Teochews do perform them, especially if they mix with Cantonese women.

An interpreter was used when talking with the owners of shops selling joss and paper charms, and on initial visits to the temples. Conversations were conducted in Cantonese on all occasions when interpreters were not used.

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1 Chinese temples usually display aspects of both Buddhist and Taoist faith, in external appearance and in the form of prayer used, but generally there is a noticeable bias in one or the other direction.

## Passing through the Gate 過關

*Kwoh Kwaan [Guoguan]*<sup>2</sup>

The period in which an individual is considered by the Chinese to be most vulnerable to evil influences is from the second month after birth until the sixteenth year, that is during childhood. Any serious illness occurring in this period is likely to be due to these influences. This is particularly true of certain “peak” periods such as one month, a hundred days and one year after birth. At these times the infant must go through the relevant gate or barrier in order to ward off or cure illness. Which gate it should be, and the form of illness from which the child is most likely to be suffering, will be determined by the child’s eight characters of birth and its consequent horoscope.

When a child is approaching a peak period, or is suffering from some sickness, its mother, grandmother or amah may go to a fortune-teller or to a Taoist priest equipped with the characters governing the child’s life, as determined by the year, week, day and two hourly period in which it was born. The fortune-teller will consult an Almanac — the book which gives all the influences operating on a man’s life during any one year — and from it learn what particular evil is effecting the child, and which barrier it is encountering. When this has been discovered, the woman, if she wishes to perform the required rite herself, buys the articles listed below. A propitious day will be picked from the Chinese calendar for the ceremony. On it she will take the articles to a temple, road junction or the road in front of her house and there perform the rite.

### Material Apparatus<sup>3</sup>

Human substitute or scapegoat<sup>4</sup> to which the illness is transferred (Fig. 1-d).

A red<sup>5</sup> paper boat for the evil spirits to sail away in (Fig. 1-f).

Dry rice, beans and tea as food for the boat crew (Fig. 1-g).

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2 O’Melia’s romanization has been followed throughout this paper except for the terms *Yin* and *Yang* and the name *Kuan Yin* [*Guanyin*], which are sufficiently known in the West in these, their Mandarin forms.

3 All the lists of material apparatus given in this paper, excepting those used in rites witnessed by the writer, are “ideal lists”. A woman will seldom use all of the items, but will consider some to be more efficacious than others, or, more often, not know the complete set.

4 This may be used in cases of sickness in adults without any more elaborate rite. In such cases the scapegoat is wrapped in a “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper (see below), and then used to stroke the clothes (usually the shirt) of the sick person, thus effecting a transfer of the sickness from the clothes to the scapegoat.

5 Red is considered to be particularly efficacious in dealing with evil spirits.

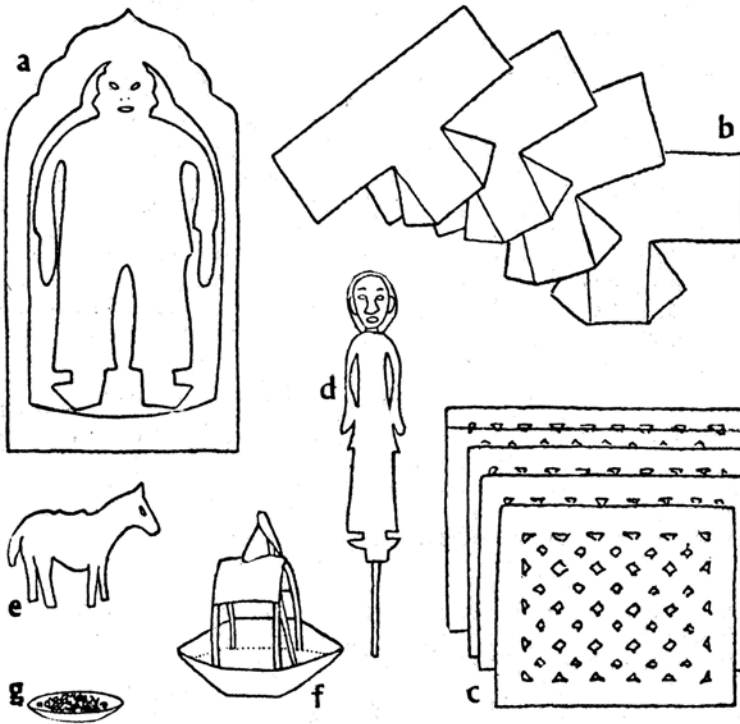


Fig. 1. Material apparatus used in the *Kwoh Kwaan* rite.

A paper horse as an alternative means of transport for the offending spirits (Fig. 1-e).

Lengths of paper “cloth” for the spirits. These are squares of coloured paper tied in bundles.

Paper coats for the spirits (Fig. 1-b).

The *Song Moon Tiu Haak* 喪門吊客 [*Sangmen Diaoke*] (The visitor to the dead): the priests and fortune-tellers all knew it by this name, but women questioned knew it only as “the gate through which the child passes from sickness to health” (Fig. 1-a).

A Tiger Head gate (Fig. 2-f).

Five coloured cash (Fig. 1-c).

The following paper money<sup>6</sup> is common to all the rites described:

Gold bullion.

6 Gold and silver money is rolled into “ingots” before the start of a ceremony. Gold bullion is arranged to form a shallow “bowl” in which the other items are placed.

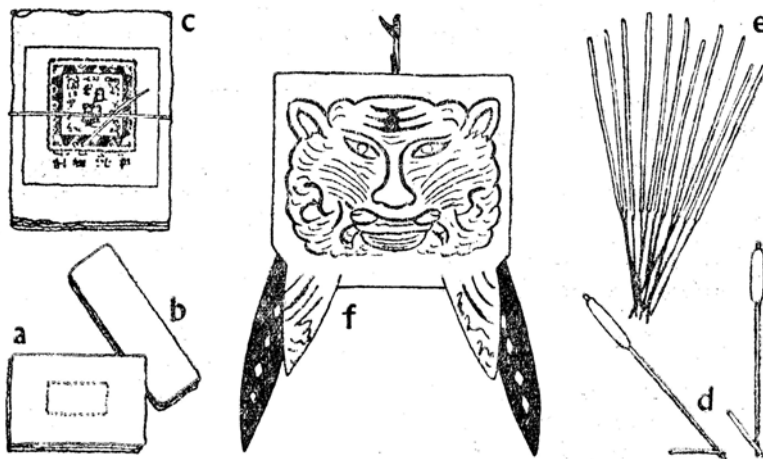


Fig. 2. Paper money: (a) gold and silver money, (b) small cash and (c) gold bullion, (d) candles and (e) joss sticks, as used in all the rites described in this article. (f) is a paper “gate” with a picture of a tiger’s head on it: it is used in the *Hoi Kwaan To Kiu* rite, and sometimes in the *Kwoh Kwaan* rite.

Small cash (Fig. 2-b).

Gold and silver cash (Fig. 2-a).

Candles (Fig. 2-d) and joss (Fig. 2-e).

Paper charm sheets:

“Good Omen” paper on which are printed pictures of discomfort and scenes from legends (Fig. 13).

One of the following:

*Kwoh Kwaan* paper, on which all the gates and barriers are recorded. This seems to be used rarely and the present writer has been able to obtain one at one shop only out of over twenty visited in Singapore (Fig. 15).

Paper charms offering long life, protection and prosperity to the burner (Figs. 16 and 17).

“Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper, on which the evil stars of the four seasons, the sickness of the current year, and such worries as fear of being summonsed, fear of gossip, prison sentence, floods and fires are listed (Fig. 9).

Whenever possible, the child should be brought to the ceremony, but when this cannot be done, its shirt is brought instead.

## The rite without a priest

After the joss and candles have been lit, prayers are chanted in which are included the name of the child, its date of birth and the nature of its illness. The child or its shirt are then stroked with the scapegoat wrapped in a *Kwoh Kwaan* paper or one of the other charm papers given above. The scapegoat is then burnt together with the other paper objects.

The tiger gate may be used in one of two ways. It may be held at each end by the mother and father, or mother and paternal or maternal grandmother: it would then be torn in two by them, and the child handed from the father to the mother. Alternatively it may be waved several times over the child's head and then smashed.

## One type of the rite as performed by an individual at a temple

This rite was witnessed by the writer at the Temple of the Golden Flower, and was performed by an old woman on behalf of a grandchild.

### Material Apparatus

A bowl containing rice balls and pieces of an omelette.

A bowl containing *Ikan Bilis* (Malay; a small Clupied fish resembling Whitebait) and prawns stewed in water.

Paper cloth — one bundle.

Human substitute.

A Tiger Head gate (Fig. 2-f).

Paper charms:

“Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper.

“Good Omen” paper.

The usual paper money and joss.

The paper money was arranged inside the “bowl” of bullion, and the bowls of food set on the main altar. The substitute was stuck in the bowl of incense ash. The woman, chanting prayers all the time, then took the “Good Omen” paper and pin-pointed it at the picture of a child going through a tiger gate (see Fig. 6) with a burning incense stick. After this she did the same with the eyes of the tiger on the gate in order to “open” them for the ceremony.

The substitute was then wrapped in the charms of A Hundred Catastrophes and Good Omens and the child's shirt, held in one hand, was stroked several times with this bundle. The gate was shaken over the shirt. After this she smashed a hole in the gate with her fist.

When this part of the ceremony had been completed, all the articles were put into the "bowl" of bullion. Some ash was taken from the incense burning in front of the Mistress of the Golden Flower, and put into a piece of paper to be taken home and worn as an amulet by the child. An invitation was made to the goddess to eat the food, by dipping the bowls several times towards her image. Then the bowl of fish was carried to each side of the temple in turn, and a little of the water from it spilt in front of the twelve attendants of the goddess which are ranged six on each side of the temple.

After this the "bowl" of paper objects was lit at the altar candle and carried outside to the temple incinerator — the stone receptacle which is found outside all Chinese temples and in which all articles of prayer are put after they have been set alight. The child's shirt was waved several times in a circular motion over the opening of the incinerator and then taken back into the temple. The woman then took this home, together with her dishes, leaving the food arranged on a piece of newspaper in front of the goddess's image.

### **The rite with a priest: Type 1**

For a child who has reached a peak period but is not ill. The cost of this ceremony when performed by a Taoist priest is approximately \$10, and the time taken to perform it about twenty minutes. According to Doolittle's account, in Foochow [Fuzhou], capital of Fukien [Fujian] Province, a whole day was usually taken for a "Going through the Gate" ceremony, and it was generally performed in the child's home. The gate used in the ceremony was made specially for the occasion and was destroyed afterwards.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Material Apparatus**

A Tiger Head gate.

A round tray containing raw rice, packets of tea, *Kwoh Kwaan*, "Prosperity" or "Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes" paper and charms to the goddess of the temple where the rite is to be performed.

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7 Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*, Vol. I, p. 118. London: Sampson Low, Son & Marston, 1866.

### *Stage 1*

This rite, as witnessed at the *Kam Mieu* [*Jin Miao*] (the Temple of the Golden Flower), opened with prayers chanted by the Taoist priest at the main altar. In these prayers the child's name and address and its time of birth were given, and details of the peak period which had been reached. In this case the child, a boy, was 2 years old and therefore due to pass through one of the gates. During this part of the rite, the child's maternal grandmother, who had ordered the rite, knelt next to its mother in front of the altar with joss in one hand and the tray of articles in the other.

### *Stage 2*

After the prayers the priest proceeded to "open" the gate, which stood in front of the altar at the entrance to the temple, facing the main altar. This was done by waving burning small cash in front of it. The women then got up and followed the priest through and round the gate eight times, walking in a figure of eight pattern while he chanted the names of all the twenty-six gates as they did so. (Fig. 6).

### *Stage 3*

After this the gate was taken away and the bowl of articles and the "bowl" of paper money placed on the altar. The priest then took up the clothes and proceeded to purify them by waving a burning "Hundred Catastrophes" paper and small cash over them. When this had been done, he picked up the divining blocks, the *Yin* and the *Yang*, two blocks of wood shaped like oyster shells and hollowed on one side, and threw them on the ground three times. The blocks are thrown to see whether or not a rite has been successful. If they fall with both flat surfaces facing upwards, the answer is in the negative or *Yin* 陰, and if both convex sides are uppermost the answer is affirmative or *Yang* 陽. If the flat surface of one is uppermost and that of the other facing downwards the answer is said to be "superior" and constitute a stronger affirmative than if both come to rest their convex surfaces upwards. The blocks are usually thrown three times, and the reply, negative or affirmative, occurring more than once in the three throws accepted as the verdict.<sup>8</sup> As "superior" is also an affirmative, the chances are clearly in favour of a satisfactory answer.

After the answer had been obtained — in this case a favourable one — the ceremony was over. The grandmother paid the temple keeper

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8 Henry Dore, S.J., *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. by M. Kennelly, S.J. Shanghai: T'uswei Printing Press, 1922. See Vol. 4.

for the rite and a charm was placed behind the image of the god governing the child's year of birth. She also paid a further \$8 for the charm to remain in the temple for twelve days, and joss and oil to be lit during this time.

### **The rite with a priest: Type 2**

The ceremony performed by a priest when a child is ill at a peak period.

This ceremony is in two parts. Altogether it takes about forty-five minutes. The first is called *Kai Sai* 解洗 [*jiexi*] (Untying and washing away the illness); the second is the actual *Kwoh Kwaan* ceremony. The total cost for the performance as witnessed by the present writer was \$18. According to the keeper of the Temple of the Golden Flower, where it took place, this is the fixed price there, \$10 going to the priest and \$8 to the temple for supplying the material apparatus and staging the ceremony.

The ceremony was ordered by the maternal grandmother of a two month old baby boy. The present writer was fortunate in being in the temple when the woman came in to order the rite and was thus able to witness all the stages.<sup>9</sup> The grandmother said that the child had been ill since birth, and was suffering from boils and a severe cough. Various Chinese doctors had been consulted and several prescriptions had been tried. These had all proved unsuccessful, though no one prescription had been tried for more than two days. The grandmother had then visited a *Kuan Yin* [*Guanyin*] temple to throw divining blocks. The blocks were thrown until the "superior" answer was obtained, that is, one block lay with its convex surface uppermost and the other with it downwards. When this point had been reached she had then taken a cylindrical box containing spills with numbers at one end. Holding the box in both hands the woman shook it until one spill fell to the ground. The number marked on it was noted and the charm corresponding to it obtained from the temple-keeper. This charm was sufficiently ominous to warrant the performance of the *Kwoh Kwaan* rite, and the woman had accordingly persuaded her daughter to bring the child to the Temple of the Golden Flower to have it performed. The charm which the *Kuan Yin* temple had given her was also brought to the temple.

### ***Stage 1: Preparation for the ceremony***

The price was agreed upon and the priest was summoned. While the women were waiting for him to arrive, the temple keeper obtained the

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9 A Cantonese who accompanied me interpreted the prayers chanted by the priest during this ceremony.

details of the child's birth, his name, and address (the house and cubicle numbers) and the nature of the sickness. This information was written by the temple keeper on two "Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes" papers, one for use in each part of the ceremony.

A young girl assistant in the temple was set to roll paper gold and silver money into "ingots", and these were placed in a "bowl" of gold bullion. Joss and candles were added to the pile. Meanwhile, the senior temple assistant, who acts as advisor on matters of ritual, went to the temple kitchen and fetched three small cups of *samsu* (a Chinese spirit distilled from wine), a piece of cooked pork and three duck eggs. Ideally, the food should be used once only as an offering, as the gods consume its spiritual essence. Afterwards, any adult may eat it, but no child, for children need the spiritual essence as well as the material substance. On this occasion, it appeared as if the food must have been devoid of spiritual essence for a considerable time. A tray was prepared containing raw rice, packets of tea and paper money, thirty-six Straits Settlements one-cent pieces, two Mistress of the Golden Flower charms and the charm from the *Kuan Yin* temple. A scapegoat was made from a cut-out paper figure and a bamboo sliver, and a bowl of water was brought with a wooden stick across the top. The food was placed on a tray with three pairs of chopsticks, a pair each for the White Tiger, the Heavenly Dog and the Golden Cock. By this time the priest had arrived.

### ***Stage 2: Consultation***

A consultation then took place at the White Tiger altar, between the priest and the mother of the child. She was asked about the nature of the illness, its symptoms and the behaviour of the child. She told the priest that the child's sickness was making it very stubborn.

### ***Stage 3: The "Untying and Washing Away"***

This also took place at the White Tiger altar. The mother knelt in front of the altar with three sticks of lighted joss in one hand and the child in her other arm. Her mother sat behind her. The priest sat on a low stool on the right of the altar. The child-substitute was stuck in the bowl of ash in which joss sticks are placed, and the trays of food and charms placed on the ground in front of it (see Fig. 4).

The priest began by chanting prayers in which the Mistress of the Golden Flower was asked to cure the child and make it intelligent and obedient. She was then asked to reveal the cause of the illness. Next a piece of small cash was lit and placed in the bowl of water by the priest while he asked the devil that might be responsible for the illness what it

was that he wanted, whether it was clothing, money or food — and if the earth spirits living in the child's home were offended by anything.

At this point the senior female assistant came and poured the *samsu* on the ground. The child-substitute was then placed on the tray with the food. The priest stroked it with the “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper. A coin and more paper cash were then placed in the bowl of water; this was repeated. Next the priest shook his “rattle”<sup>10</sup> — a metal loop with metal rings attached (see Fig. 4) — over the child-substitute, and twice more burning money and coins were placed in the bowl of water. After this the figure was stroked again.

The priest asked the White Tiger if it coveted the boy, and said that if it did he would give it food instead. An egg was placed in its mouth. After this the transfer of paper money and coins to the bowl of water was repeated and the figure, stroked again with the “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper. Then the paper was put on the pile of paper bullion. Next the scapegoat was then taken up by the priest and the name and symptoms of the child's sickness repeated; the boy was then stroked with it. After he had done this he again addressed the Mistress of the Golden Flower, telling her the nature and import of his actions. The image, he said, had no mother or father and no other relatives: it was all right, therefore, to transfer the illness to it. The image was put on the pile of bullion.

After this the priest took the pile of paper things outside and burnt them in the incinerator attached to the temple; the women remained seated while he did so. Outside, the priest told the devil that “money, a child and all the things you want” were being burnt for him.

#### ***Stage 4: Kwoh Kwaan***

This takes place at the main altar. The ceremony is similar to that described in Type 1 up to the end of the procession in and out of the gate.

After going through the gate, the priest went up to the main altar and burned the “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper. Then he took a piece of small cash which he lit and dropped on the ground. The mother was then asked to step over it carrying the child. After this the priest threw the divining blocks as before, and obtained a successful answer.

The rite was now over and the grandmother went to the temple “office” to pay for the ceremony. In addition to the sum given above, a

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10 This kind of rattle was originally used by Buddhist priests to warn animals of their approach, so that they should not step on them and injure them. Later it was assumed that the noise of the rattle would also frighten evil spirits away from the path or vicinity of the priest.



Fig. 3. A woman performing the “Prayer against the Little Man” rite: the paper figure of the little man is laid on a small “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper and beaten with a paper hand.



Fig. 4. Prayers to “wash away” sickness: this rite is being performed by a Taoist priest on behalf of the child shown in the picture. Afterwards he will perform the “Going through the Gate” ceremony. Note the child-substitute standing in the incense holder, and the exorcising rattle at the priest’s foot; sacerdotal robes are not worn for this ceremony.



Fig. 5. Procession round the altar at the entrance to a temple during a “Changing Fate” rite. The women are holding “Fate Money”.



Fig. 6. Procession of priest and mother through the Tiger Gate during a “Going through the Gate” ceremony.



Fig. 7. Raising up one of the gods of the year. These gods and *Tai Seou* [*Taisui*], the Minister of Time, are raised up when bad luck is encountered.

further \$6 were paid. For this the temple would burn incense and oil every day for twelve days, and a paper charm supplied by the priest would remain behind the god controlling the child's year of birth, where the priest put it, for the same length of time. On the twelfth day, the woman had to fetch it and stick it up outside the entrance to her house. In addition, two charm slips were given her to take away: one was to be pasted above the door of her house, the other to be burnt, its ashes mixed with tea and drunk by the child. A third charm was folded into a triangular packet for the child to wear round its neck. A *Hung paau* 紅包 (red packet, [*hongbao*]) containing eleven cents<sup>11</sup> was also obtained, this was to be spent on sweets only which were then to be distributed to the youthful relatives of the child. Finally, the senior temple assistant stamped the child's shirt, at the back of its neck, with the temple's seal.

**To Pray (against) the Little Man**<sup>12</sup> 拜小人  
*Paai Siu Yan* [*Bai Xiaoren*]

**To Pray Away (To Get Rid of)** 拜除  
*Paai Cheoe* [*Bai Chu*]

Both names are used for the same rite and all its variations. Certain days are described in the Chinese calendar as being *Cheoe Yat* 除日 [*chu ri*], good days for getting rid of bad influences. Since a *Cheoe Yat* is a good day therefore for *Paai Siu Yan*, the rite is often called *Paai Cheoe*.

The little man is the person or devil who is responsible for much of the damage to personal affairs. He is the thief, the burglar, the pickpocket or the neighbourhood gossip, rumour-monger and, more rarely, the performer of black-magic.

This rite<sup>13</sup> is usually performed without the advice of a priest or fortune-teller. A priest may be called in to perform at a more serious case or a woman practised in ritual may be paid to perform it for someone. It may be performed at the cross-roads, and the images used in the rite may be seen stuck up on trees, bridges and lamp posts in many parts of the town. A more popular place for its performance is at the altar of the White

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11 At new year, money wrapped in red paper is given to children who have not passed through all the "gates". It is supposed to bring good luck and riches.

12 The use of the word *Siu* in this context is to denote small mindedness or, stronger, evil intent.

13 The rite described in Mrs. Sim's paper, "The White Tiger in Penang", appears to be a *Paai Siu Yan*. See *JMBRAS*, 23(1): 142-44.

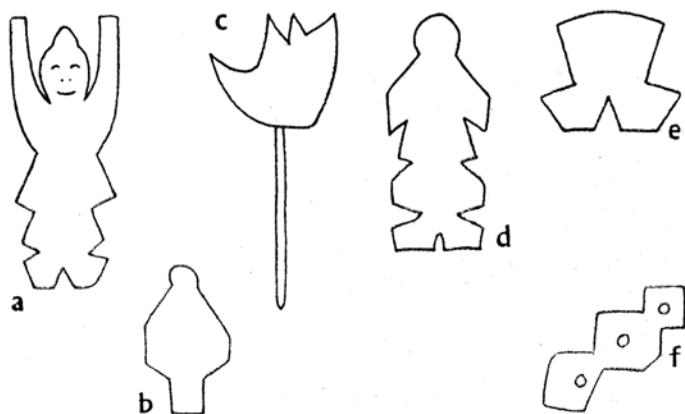


Fig. 8. Material apparatus used in the *Paai Siu Yan* rite (Prayers against the “Little” Man).



Fig. 9. The “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper as used in the *Paai Siu Yan* rite: from an original 18.5 cm by 13 cm, printed in red on yellow paper, price 5 cts. A larger version of this paper is shown in Fig. 14. The charm papers used in these rites are printed by hand with wood blocks, and the work is invariably done very carelessly. One rarely encounters a paper in which the whole impression is full and clean — usually at least part is over-inked and smudged or under-inked and too pale — but this does not diminish their efficacy. The users can seldom read, and it is taken for granted that the spirits for whom the papers are burnt are well aware of the texts which should be printed on them.

Tiger,<sup>14</sup> but if it is to be done at the White Tiger altar, a few cents must be paid for oil to be burnt there. Sometimes one person pays for the oil and others wait for her to finish so that they can perform their own rites, without payment, while the oil is still burning. Frequently, temples fix a day and hour in the month when oil is lit and anybody can come and perform the rite. The result is a considerable jostling for position at the altar and an overcrowding which makes close observation difficult.

### Material Apparatus

A little man (Fig. 8-d).

A paper chain with which to chain him (Fig. 8-f).

A paper palm of a hand with which to hit him (Fig. 8-c), or alternatively,

Two paper forks with which to catch him. Since the sex of the offender may not be known, two are used, one for a male and one of a different colour for a female.

A paper boot with which to kick him (Fig. 8-e). Enthusiasts may take off one of their own shoes for this purpose.

A *kwai yan* 貴人 [*guiren*] (honourable man): the protector and friend of those suffering from misfortune.

A paper horse for the honourable man (Fig. 1-e).

A paper mirror for the chained little man to look in and see his evil image. According to the owner of one paper image shop, this is supposed to act as a deterrent against further sinning, but it might be noted that in Chinese folklore, the mirror is an absorber of evil and a powerful exorcising agent. A house facing a road junction may have a mirror fixed above its door to absorb devils. Devils cannot turn corners and without the mirror they would run straight into the house.

Five paper coats for the little man who has to be placated as well as punished (Fig. 1-b).

Paper charms:

Certificate or coupon for the devil<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 10).

A “White Tiger, Snake and Eagle” paper, “the three creatures most evil to man” (Fig. 12).

14 The White Tiger is often found at the same altar as the Golden Cock, Heavenly Dog, Rotan Snake (Pit Viper) and Blue Dragon. All except the Blue Dragon are considered to be very bad, and women pray to them when any ill luck occurs in a family, and they are held to be vaguely responsible. The altar devoted to some or all of them is placed on the ground, usually under that of the major god.

15 If an adult is suffering from delirium, *Paai Siu Yan* may be performed. In this case the coupon for the devil is used. This is to entitle the particular devil, who is causing the delirium, to the paper coats which are being burnt.

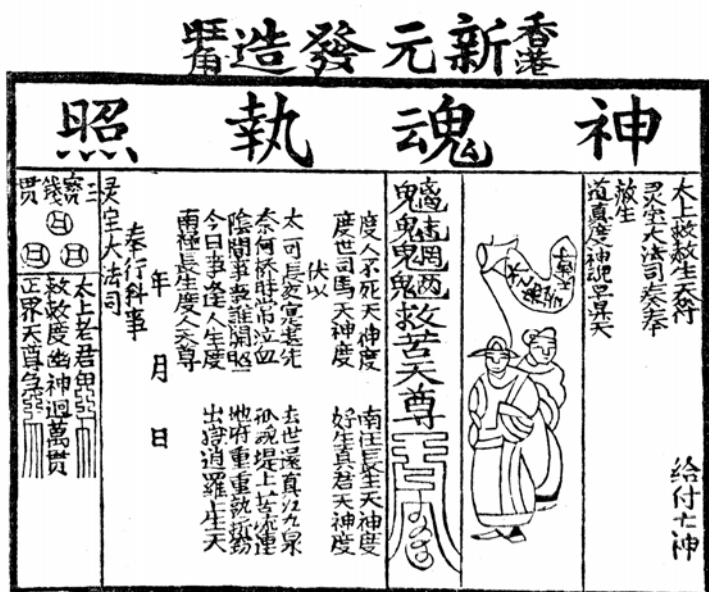


Fig. 10. Coupon for use by the spirits: from an original 19.5 cm by 16 cm, printed in black on white paper, price 5 cts. There appears to be little variation in the design of this paper.



Fig. 11. A Kwai Yan Lok Ma [*guiren luma*] (honourable man, lucky horse) paper used to promote good luck: from an original 22 cm by 14.5 cm, printed in black on red-faced paper, price 5 cts. The treatment of the horse and rider on this paper varies with the printer, but as here six figures are always shown, arranged in two rows of three.

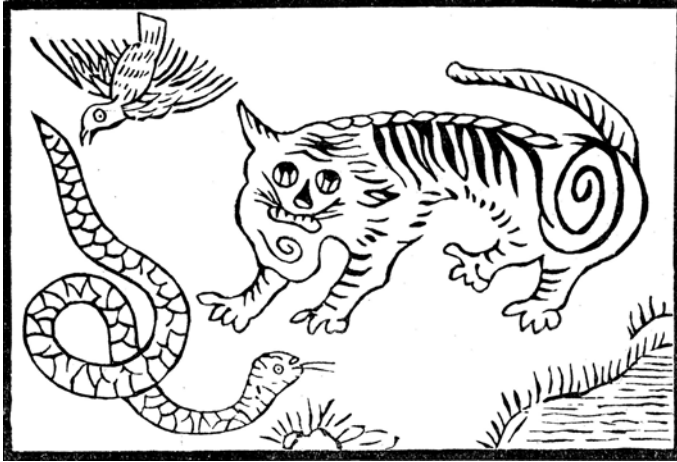


Fig. 12. A charm paper portraying the tiger, snake and eagle, “the three creatures most evil to man”, used in the *Paai Siu Yan* rites: from an original 20 cm by 13.5 cm, printed in black on white paper. The essential features of this paper appear to be constant, but the details of treatment vary considerably from printer to printer, and yellow paper may be used instead of white.

A *Kwai yan lok ma* (Honourable man lucky<sup>16</sup> horse) paper. The use of this is optional. It is used also without further ceremony to promote good luck (Fig. 11).

“Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper (Fig. 9).

Performances of two types of this rite have been witnessed by the present writer. Both took place at the White Tiger altar.

### *Type 1*

After joss and candles had been lit and placed on the altar, prayers were said giving the name and age of the affected person. The honourable man was then stuck to the wall seated on the horse. This was followed by more prayers after which the “Honourable man lucky horse” paper was stuck on the wall. After still more prayers, the little man was laid on the altar and beaten with the paper hand (see Fig. 8), then he was chained. Finally he was wrapped up together with the hand and a “Tiger, Eagle and Snake” paper in a “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper and set alight at the altar. The bundle was then carried, burning, to the incinerator outside

<sup>16</sup> In the sense of money-bringing.

the temple. This concluded the ceremony except for the throwing of the divining blocks.

On one occasion at this point, a woman took a piece of raw fish<sup>17</sup> from her basket, rubbed the White Tiger's legs and chest with it, and then put it in his mouth. This was done to influence him in her favour. In China opium is used for this purpose so that he will be in a soporific state when he reaches the gods and makes his report on the proceedings. Occasionally white wax is used in Singapore. The Chinese have an expression "to be oily mouthed", that is, to talk smoothly and gently. In all performances of the rite witnessed the hand, little man and tiger paper were burnt, but they can also be stuck on the wall, the little man and tiger paper upside down.

## **Type 2**

This version of the rite is carried out when a person has fallen ill and some form of sorcery is suspected. The following additional apparatus may be used.

A scapegoat (Fig. 1-d).

"Good Omen" paper (Fig. 13).

Red thread.

Pork.

*Samsu*.

Chickens' eggs.

Vegetarian dishes.

A large pink paper flower.

Clothes of the sick person.

The joss and candles were lit and placed on the altar. Then prayers were said giving the name and age of the sick person, together with his or her address and the nature of the sickness. Next the red thread was taken in the right hand and wound round the finger to loop off a series of slip knots at equal intervals. Passing the thread to the left hand, the woman pulled out each knot in turn, praying as she did so that the sickness might be taken away. When she reached the end of the thread it was thrown on the pile of paper money ready for burning.

After this, the scapegoat was folded in a "Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes" paper and held in the left hand. Then the shirt of the sick

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17 Fish is the symbol of wealth and good fortune.

person was stroked three times with the wrapped figure, and the figure finally dropped on the pile of money. The shirt was wrapped up and put away and the paper things lit and carried out to the incinerator. Finally the dishes of food were put into a basket and taken away.

### **Prayers to Change Fate 拜轉運** ***Paai Chuen Wan* [Bai Zhuan Yun]**

This rite is always performed by a priest.

#### **Material Apparatus**

Fate money (See Fig. 5).

The usual paper money and joss (Fig. 2-a–e)

A tray containing a “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper (Fig. 14), raw rice, packets of tea, the charms invoking the major god or goddess of the temple in which the rite is to be performed, paper money and the shirt of the beneficiary.

The shirt of the person suffering bad luck.

The rite as witnessed by this writer was performed on behalf of a young woman: she was accompanied by her mother who had persuaded her to have it done.

The plate of articles was placed on the main altar of the temple. After burning some small cash the priest chanted prayers giving the name, address and age of the woman. During this period, the two women knelt in front of the altar with fate money in one hand and lighted joss in the other. After the prayers, the priest, followed by the women, the mother holding the tray of articles, walked round the entrance altar eight times. After each two or three circuits all three bowed to the main altar. Then the “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper was lit by the priest at the altar and waved over the shirt as it burnt. Finally the gold bullion and fate money were lit and carried, burning, to the incinerator in front of the temple.

### **Clearing the Way on Reaching the Bridge 開關到橋** ***Hoi Kwaan To K'iu* [Kaiguan Daoqiao]**

This rite is performed when a child is suffering from a mild illness.



Fig. 13. The larger form of the “Good Omen” papers from an original 43.5 cm by 20.5 cm, printed in black on white paper. The three pictures at the left of the top row are the most essential for *Kwoh Kwaan* and *Paai Siu Yan*, and this part may be cut out and sold without the remainder for use in these rites.

### Material Apparatus

A paper gate (Fig. 2-f) .

A paper bridge

The usual paper money and joss (Fig. 2-a-e).

In this ceremony the gate is passed over the sick child’s head while suitable prayers are being said. As in the performance of *Kwoh Kwaan*, if the child is not in a fit state to be brought to the ceremony, its clothing may be used as a substitute.

According to a fortune-teller, in another version of this rite the priest stands at one end of the paper bridge with the sick child. After he has passed the gate over its head he hands the child back to its mother, who is standing at the other end of the bridge. Then the paper things are burnt. No other women questioned had heard of this version of the ceremony. It may be a local form, or one which started from an initial confusion with the *Kwoh Kwaan*.

### Calling Back the Soul 叫驚 *Kiu Keng* [*Jiao Jing*]

When a child is excited its superior soul may disappear, the outward sign being a fever or nightmare. Not all fevers are considered to be due to this



Fig. 14. An example of the larger version of the “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper, from an original 44 cm by 22 cm, printed in red on yellow paper. There are several minor variations of this paper in use in Singapore, differing principally in the posture and details of the costume of the three figures, according to the whim of the printer. An example of the smaller version of this paper is shown in Fig. 9.

disappearance of the soul, but if there is no improvement after a doctor has been consulted the following ceremony may be performed.

### Material Apparatus

A mirror.

A ruler.

A pair of scissors.

A “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper (Fig. 14).

The usual paper money and joss.

The mirror is held in the air by the performer in order that the child’s lost soul may be caught in it and reflected back to the child. The ruler is

Figs. 15–17. Most commonly, in Singapore, the “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” paper (see Fig. 14) is used in performing the *Kwoh Kwaan* or Gate rite. Alternatively the papers shown in Figs. 15 and 16 or variants of them may be employed, in that order of preference. Fig. 17 shows a version of the correct form of the paper for this rite, with the Tiger Gate portrayed on it. Figs. 15 and 16 are from originals 42 cm by 21 cm, Fig. 17 from an original 42.5 cm by 22 cm; all three are printed in red on yellow paper, price 10 cts each. The inscriptions at the heads of the papers are invocations to bring riches and a long and tranquil life.



Fig. 15. See foot of opposite page.



Fig. 16. See foot of opposite page.



Fig. 17. See foot of opposite page.

used to measure the evil that is causing the fever while the soul is absent. The way this is done is somewhat obscure, but can be determined by a priest with the aid of the characters governing the child's date of birth. The evil is then "cut off" with the scissors. The cost of this ceremony as performed by a priest is \$8.00. According to one temple keeper, the pre-war price was \$1.50.

### **Lifting off the Offence 起犯**

*Hei Faan [Qi Fan]*

This ceremony is performed when a person is suffering from a mild infection or pain, e.g. a headache, stomach ache or skin complaint, the nature of which is not considered to be very serious, and when no foul play is suspected. It is usually performed inside the house of the sick person, and may be done by him personally.

#### **Material Apparatus**

Seven paper coats.

Pomelo leaves.

Water.

Paper charm sheets:

"Reliever of Hundred Catastrophes" paper (Fig. 14).

"Good Omen" paper (Fig. 13).

The usual paper money and joss (Fig. 2-a-e).

The joss and candles are lit and placed on the family altar. Then a prayer is said asking that the complaint may be removed. Pomelo leaves are dipped in water and sprinkled about the room, or, alternatively, the leaves are mixed with water and the resultant liquid taken in the mouth and spat out round the room. After this the paper things are burnt.

### **Surrounding the Garden 圍花園**

*Wai Fa Uen [Wei Hua Yuan]*

This rite is performed by childless women. In the Chinese spirit world, every woman is represented by a plant. The health of a woman is indicated by the condition of this plant, and fortune-tellers and priests claim to be able to look into this world of the spirits and see if a woman's

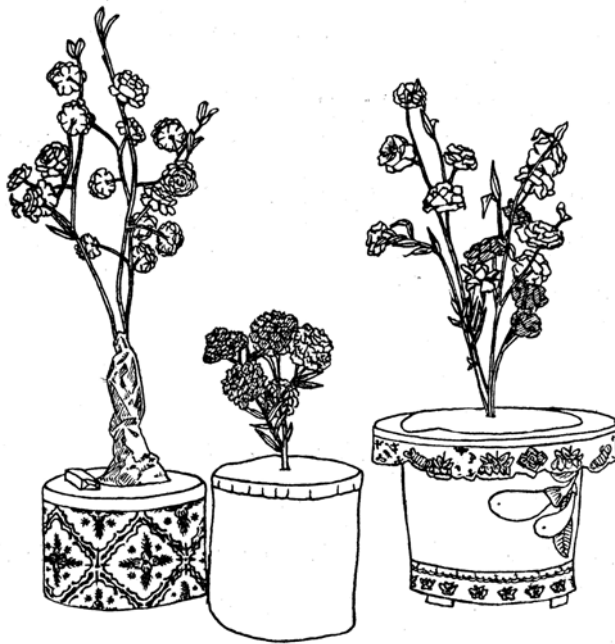


Fig. 18. Pots of paper flowers used in the *Wai Fa Uen* rite (Surrounding the Garden). The overall height of the pot and flowers is about thirty inches.

plant is healthy or not. The number of children a woman will have is also shown on the plant, in the form of flowers, red for girls and white for boys.

#### Material Apparatus

A paper flower pot (Fig. 18) with white flowers symbolizing boys,  
 with red flowers symbolizing girls,  
 with mixed coloured flowers symbolizing both boys and girls.

A woman wishing for children buys a pot of flowers of the appropriate colour and brings it to the temple. She places it on the altar in front of the Mistress of the Golden Flower or “mother” (Fertility) goddess and says a relevant prayer. After praying she burns the pot or takes it home to put on the family altar. When a child is born to her, the woman must buy another pot of flowers and place it on the temple altar in gratitude to the goddess.

There is another version of this rite in which a priest or a medium officiates. The priest prays to a goddess of fertility — The Mistress of the Golden Flower, or *Kuan Yin* — asking that the woman concerned may become fertile. He then takes water and flour and fashions figures of children showing the sexual organs. Figures representing both sexes will be made, with a majority of the one desired. As one woman explained: “It is not good to have a family all the same sex, a woman must have sons and daughters.” The figures will be taken home and placed in the bed for three days. When a child is born, as in the other version, a pot of flowers must be purchased and placed on the temple altar.

In a ceremony described by Doolittle<sup>18</sup> as performed in Fukien [Fujian] Province, a woman desiring children employs a woman adept in the art of magic to make paper flowers in vases. The relative position of these vases is then changed and this is supposed to represent a changing of the earth in the flower pots in the spirit world. This change of earth will give the flowers more chance of flourishing.

This form of the ceremony has not been seen by the present writer and women questioned had no knowledge of it. We were told, merely, that the flowers used in this ceremony represented the fruits of the womb and if they were burnt in front of the image of a fertility goddess the womb would thereby become fertile.

### **Raising up *Tai Seou* 攝太歲 *Sip Tai Seou* [She Taisui]**

*Tai Seou* [Taisui] is the President of the Ministry of Time. He is also the Ministry of Time itself. Whoever offends against this god will meet with great misfortune. We have mentioned above the god governing the year in which a child was born. There are twelve such gods corresponding to the twelve earthly branches, which when combined with the ten heavenly stems form the Chinese sixty-year cycle. These twelve gods are governed by *Tai Seou*. One can, through one's horoscope, offend against one of these twelve gods and therefore offend against *Tai Seou*. Everyone's horoscope is permanently opposed to certain other horoscopes. To understand how this occurs involves a knowledge of the Chinese cyclical calendar. There is not space here to give a detailed explanation of the working of this complex system and a brief account will have to suffice. The ten heavenly stems combine with the twelve earthly branches in such a way that the first stem combines with the first branch, the second with

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18 Doolittle, *The Social Life of the Chinese*, Vol. I, p. 155.

the second branch and so on until we reach the tenth stem. Then the first stem combines with the eleventh branch, the second with the twelfth, and so on. The reader will see that there will be sixty such combinations before we come back to the original combination of the first stem with the first branch. Each one of the twelve earthly branches represents an animal and every person is born in the year of one of these animals. Certain animals are opposed to others; for example the horse is obnoxious to the cow, the rat to the dog, and so on. These animals also govern the days, and the two hourly watches. A person born in the horse hour, for example, should not, therefore, carry out important business in the hour of the cow, a man born in the year of the rat should not marry a woman born in the year of the dog. The ten heavenly stems are governed by five elements, certain of which are also in opposition to others. By combining these elements and animals in different ways, fortune-tellers can work out various oppositions of more or less serious degrees between two persons, or one person and a period of time. Others may write the sixty-year cycle round a circle and, drawing a line through the centre, underneath the two characters — earthly branch and heavenly stem of the year in which the consulter is born — find out the year to which he is in opposition. This will be the year on the opposite side of the circle.

If a person feels that a spell of bad luck has been due to such an “offence” he must do something to placate either the god of that year or *Tai Seou* himself. The offender must go to a temple, or send a friend or relative. He must take with him joss and paper money, and as many coins as he has years of age. After the money and joss have been burnt, the coins and a wad of gold and silver money must be placed under the image of *Tai Seou* in order to “raise him up”.<sup>19</sup> A further sums of money will be paid to the temple to keep the coins and paper money under *Tai Seou*, the amount varying with the length of time the effected person wishes it to remain there.

### Rites using Red Packets

This kind of rite is very simple and takes from five to ten minutes to perform.

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19 A picture showing one of the gods of the year “raised up” appears in Fig. 7: He is shown supported by about twenty-four coins and a wad of paper representing gold and silver money.



Fig. 19. A “Flower Tower” paper, from an original printed in black on white paper, with parts of the pictorial panel picked out in red and green.

1. This rite has no name: it may be performed when a child is sick.

#### Material Apparatus

A Flowerly Coats Packet 花衣包 *Fa Yi Paa* [*Hua yi bao*]. This consists of five paper coats wrapped in red paper and covered with a “Flower Tower” charm paper (Fig. 19).

Joss and paper money (Fig. 2-a–e).

The packet is taken to the front of the house on a day favourable for “Sending away” bad influences. Candles and joss are lit, and the packet burnt together with the paper money.



Fig. 20. A “Joyful Affairs” paper, from an original 12 cm by 12.5 cm printed in red on white paper.

## 2. Getting rid of a cold 送傷風 *Sung Sheung Fung* [Song Shangfeng]

Mucus and two one-cent pieces are put into a red paper packet. After joss and candles have been lit and paper money burnt, the packet is thrown out into the street.

## A Rite Performed by a Woman Wanting a Child

## Material Apparatus

A “Flowery Tower” paper (Fig. 19).

A “Joyful Affairs” paper (Fig. 20).

The papers are taken to a temple which has an image of a fertility goddess, and a relevant prayer is said. Joss and paper money are burnt, and possibly a paper coat for the goddess. The charms are taken home and the “Flowery Tower” paper is stuck under the bed. The “Joyful Affairs”

paper is burnt after the top left hand picture has been cut out, and its ashes mixed with tea. This mixture is drunk to ensure an easy pregnancy and quick delivery.

The ashes of a “Joyful Affairs” paper are also taken with tea during an attack of acute indigestion, or any other mild disorder.



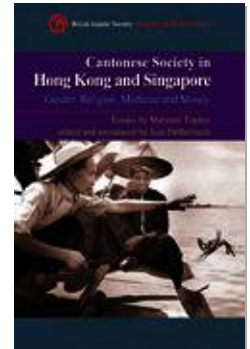
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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## Chapter 2

# Chinese Rites for the Repose of the Soul, with Special Reference to Cantonese Custom

(1952)\*

To the Chinese, the adaptation of the soul to its new and complex environment in hell is a matter of the prime importance. This hell is, in its administrative aspects, rather like another China “ploughed under”,<sup>1</sup> with a similarly complicated system of rewards, punishments and financial obligations on the part of the soul. Ransom payments must be made to the ruler of Hades to procure rebirth under circumstances most favourable for a successful and prosperous life; “squeeze” money must be given to judges, “*pour boire*” to hungry ghosts, and certificates owned (burnt for one by one’s relatives) to enable one to pass any barrier encountered on one’s wanderings there. A soul in hell without the financial support of the living would be in an unenviable position. Paper houses, sedan chairs and automobiles, trunks of clothes and other adjuncts to good living, together with quantities of mock money of various kinds must be burnt for its comfort,<sup>2</sup> or what little comfort it can find between the almost continuous tortures suffered in the Chinese Hades. Everything burnt must be of the best possible quality: a poor quality paper house, as one paper image maker told us, would scarcely last out to the end of the hundred days of mourning activities. So the expense involved in settlement in the new land is often considerable.

All the major expenses of a Chinese funeral are born by the male relatives of the deceased. When a man or a woman dies, the chief mourner and the one who, ideally, bears most of the expenses, is the eldest son, *chang tzu*<sup>3</sup> 長子 [*zhangzi*] or his appropriate substitute. He will, throughout the various ceremonies which take place during and after the

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\* First published in *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25(1)(1952): 149-60. Reprinted by permission of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

1 DuBose, *The Dragon Image and Demon*, p. 358.

2 De Groot, *The Religious Systems of China*, Vol. I., p. 78. Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1892.

3 Wade’s ‘Mandarin’ Romanization is followed throughout the text.

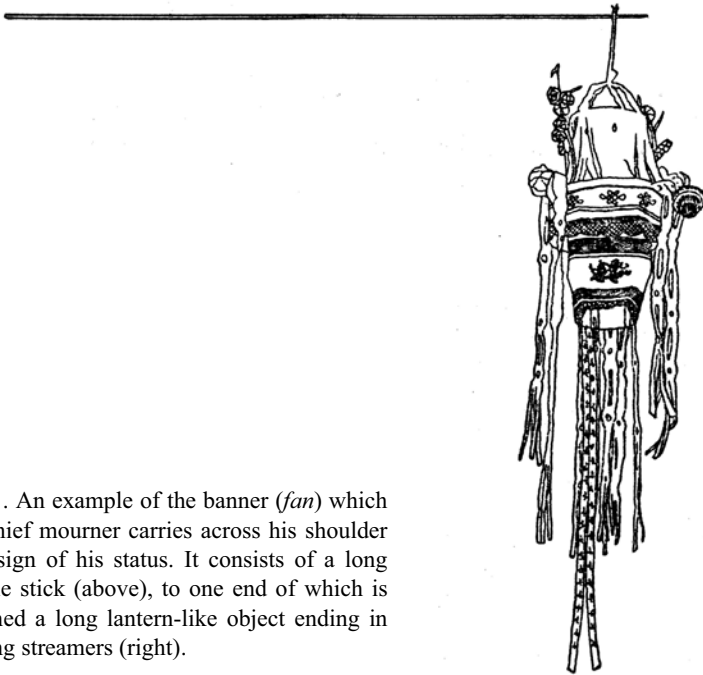


Fig. 1. An example of the banner (*fan*) which the chief mourner carries across his shoulder as a sign of his status. It consists of a long pliable stick (above), to one end of which is attached a long lantern-like object ending in trailing streamers (right).

funeral, carry as a sign of his status as mourner in chief for the dead, a long, lantern-like object with streamers attached, which is fixed to a long pliable stick (see Fig. 1). This is called the banner *fan* 幡 and the chief mourner must carry it across his shoulder, the act of thus carrying it being known as *tan fan* 担幡 [*danfan*]. If there should be no elder son and no substitute considered appropriate by existing Chinese custom, a man might in rare cases, be hired to carry the *fan*. For a person related to the deceased to carry the *fan* or wear mourning garments, is tantamount to showing his claim to part of the dead man's estate. We were told by the only remaining Taoist priest in Malacca, that there is one man who is well known for his services as a carrier of the *fan*. Chinese custom, however, has allowed so generously for substitute mourners from among existing relatives that it is seldom necessary to resort to the practice of hiring a chief, or secondary mourners. In Singapore, many people cannot afford the long series of ceremonies which tradition demands should be performed for a deceased person. Since the war, the prices of paper things for the dead have risen and a first quality house, which before cost about \$300, now costs about \$1,000. For the Cantonese, who often prefer to have the rites for their dead performed away from the home, the rent for a

room in which to perform such rites has also increased. There is a tendency for people of this dialect group in Singapore to pay more attention to the performance of elaborate rites for the dead, and less to the actual burning of paper things, whereas among the Hokkien and Teochews the articles burnt are usually more elaborate.

In spite of the expense of burial and ceremonies for the dead, even the poorer people try to afford at least one evening's ritual for the repose of the soul of a deceased relative (in some cases this may extend to relatives dying in China), and many contribute to a benefit society to make this possible. A great loss of face is involved if a Chinese who is, or whose deceased relative is, a firm believer in the traditional hell, fails to arrange for rites of "rescue" to be performed. If the relatives of a dead man cannot afford a ceremony on each of the "sevenths" after death, as prescribed by custom, that is at the end of each week, up to the seventh seventh, they will try at least to have one on one of the sevenths, usually the third and sometimes also the fifth. Ideally a corpse should not be buried until one hundred days after death, and so these rites would be pre-burial rites, but in actual fact about four or five days is the longest period for leaving the dead unburied for the majority of Chinese in Singapore. After one hundred days, there should be a big burning of paper things, but this also may be forgone, the things being burnt at the end of the one big ceremony instead. Although the Chinese are a patrilocal people, a woman on marriage joining her husband's clan and living with his people, certain rights and duties in respect of her parents continue to operate, and new ones come into existence. If one of her parents dies it is her duty, together with that of her sisters, to pay for the ceremony to be performed on the fifth seventh, if it is decided to have this ceremony.

Although the most relevant time for performing such ceremonies is after the death of a relative, they can be performed on anniversaries of death or of birth of the deceased. If a man wins a sweep-stake, he may decide to hold a *ta chai* 打齋 [*dazhai*] or "Paying of Respects" for a dead relative and for the many Hungry Ghosts who care to benefit from it. These souls, who through an unlucky horoscope or some crime committed while on earth, are perpetually hungry, due to their large mouths and tiny throats which make eating difficult. The Chinese are very generous to these distressed spirits and they, together with all the ancestors, are included in any rite for the dead, the latter, however, remaining guest of honour.

For the occasion of a *ta chai* many Cantonese rent a large room in one of the "Death Houses" in Sago Lane, in the Cantonese quarter of the big Chinese section of Singapore. These homes serve as a sort of nursing home for fatalists and those afraid of hospitals, or, occasionally, for those people who wish to receive visitors to their sick bed more often than a

hospital will allow. Besides their functions as houses for the dying, an equally important part of their services is for the dead. In their downstairs rooms they have a mortuary, and a small room for housing temporary soul tablets placed there after the rites are over, and until the end of the hundred days. In the front downstairs room and opening out into the street is a room arranged for all the ritual surrounding death. These houses will handle the funeral and act as agents for employing funeral bands, hearses, priests and all the paraphernalia of death. Buddhist nuns and monks may be employed, but perhaps more popular are the *Nam-mo-lo*<sup>4</sup> 喃嚨佬 “chanting fellows”, as they are somewhat irreverently called. These priests are the equivalent in Malaya of the type of Taoist priest described by Doolittle.<sup>5</sup> They do not shave their heads, they eat meat, marry and live among the common people, earning their living as performers of rites for the sick and dying and by designing paper charms and images. In Kwang-Tung [Guangdong], this type of priest would be called in for the funeral only, and another type, living in monasteries under more ascetic conditions would perform the subsequent rites. In Singapore and Malaya, however, the *Nam-mo-lo* are in great demand at all mortuary rites and at others performed in cases of sickness and misfortune.

The *Nam-mo-lo* are greatly respected by the older women, and on several occasions we were permitted to take photographs only because the priest had persuaded them that no harm would come from it. The *Nam-mo-lo* themselves are fond of being photographed and usually possess a strong histrionic sense. They perform ceremonies with great enthusiasm, although their enthusiasm on these occasions may have been influenced by the promise of enlarged photographs of their performances. One priest we know had been an actor in the Chinese drama when a young man, but had given the profession up for one which, besides the obvious attraction of a large income, gave him, as he told us, more chance to exercise his talents in a more dramatic “role”.

The Buddhist ritual for the dead and sick is of a far more standardized kind, whereas for the Taoist, inside a loose framework of traditional ritual, there is great scope for individual variation.

## The Mortuary Rites

For the Cantonese, there are normally six rites to be performed for the

4 *Nam-mo-lo* is a Cantonese idiom which does not translate into other dialects, and is used by the Cantonese only in reference to their priests.

5 Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*, Vol. I. London: Sampson Low, Son & Marston 1866.

dead. In China, and in Singapore too, when a family is sufficiently rich, each rite will take one night to perform. The form which these rites take when performed by other dialect groups differ somewhat, and for this paper the type of rite performed by the Cantonese only is described.

# 1. Opening the Ceremony 開壇 *K'ai t'an* [*Kaitan*]

2. Breaking Hell 破地獄 *Po ti-yu* [*Bo diyu*]. This ceremony is one considered to be important by those who embrace the three religions of China generously, but may be omitted by the more orthodox Buddhist, or relegated to simple chanting. The *raison d'être* for this rite is based on a Buddhist legend which tells how one Loh Pok saved his mother from the miseries of hell and transferred her to the Buddhist paradise — the Pure Land. The version of the story as recorded in the *Records of Mu Lien* (Loh Pok's name on his becoming a Buddhist monk) tells how Mu Lien's mother renounced vegetarianism after her husband's death and killed animals in such a cruel way as to warrant her sufferings in hell to be severe ones. Mu Lien, according to this story, was unsuccessful in his attempt to save his mother, who was destined to become a dog in her next life and so went to see Buddha. He was told that he could never by his own strength rescue his mother, but that by spiritual devotions on the part of himself and the monks of the ten corners, together with the sacrifice of food and articles of household comfort on the fifteenth day of the seventh moon (a day now devoted to worship of the Hungry Ghosts), ancestors in hell for seven generations would be rescued. Muh-Lien [sic] followed the instructions and his mother was saved.<sup>6</sup>

An interesting version of the story of Muh-Lien's mother as believed by some of the Chinese in Singapore is as follows:<sup>7</sup>

Loh Pok's mother had been a *mui-tsai* — a semi-slave girl adopted by a family to do menial work, but with whom rests the responsibility of getting her a husband when she should reach marriageable age. She was a devout believer in the Buddhist doctrines and a faithful servant.

One day she went to a temple to pray, taking with her a small bottle of oil which she had saved for the temple lamp. The temple keeper, however, despised her offering and refused to pour it. Having lost so much face before the other worshippers the girl dashed it to the ground, whereupon it suddenly flooded the floor with oil, the quantity amounting to more than three jarfuls. The damage was done, however, the girl had

6 For a longer account of this legend, see Henry Dore, S.J., *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. by M. Kennelly, S.J., Vol. VII, pp. 240–46. Shanghai: T'ussewei Printing Press 1922.

7 This story was told to us by a Straits-born Cantonese.

committed sacrilege in a temple and from that day on she was changed. She became greedy and cruel, killed her mistress, and when later she married she ill-treated her husband and son.

As was inevitable, when she died, Loh Pok's mother went to hell where she underwent all kinds of tortures as a hungry ghost. In her agonies, she reported her sufferings to her son in a dream and he went down to rescue her. The tellers of this story are somewhat vague about the efficacy of the rescue but such a tale is sufficient justification for the *Nam-mo-lo* to insist on the virtue of performing a "breaking Hell" for ones' deceased relatives.

3. Crossing the Bridge 過仙橋 *Kwoh hsin ch'iao* [*Guo xianqiao*]. The dead, his soul residing in the temporary soul tablet,<sup>8</sup> is helped over two paper bridges by the mourners, on his journey to the Pure Land.

4. The Universal Helping over of the Wandering Spirits 普渡孤魂 *Pu t'u ku yuan* [*Pudu gu yuan*]. A rite in which the priest assumes the role of a Buddha and offers food and prayers for the spirits in hell.

5. Distributing Flowers 散花 *San hua* [*Sanhua*]. Recitation by the priest and his troupe of classical Chinese poems about man's impermanence — "comfortable words" for the bereaved mourners.

6. The Burning of the Paper Things.

### Plan of the scene of performance in a Dying House<sup>9</sup>

The five foot way outside the house is packed with tables and chairs which sometimes extend out into the street. Inside, chairs are ranged round the edge of the room with a table immediately inside on the left for holding pots of tea, coffee, and various snacks and crates of aerated water for the mourners. Farther inside the room on the left is a large table on which stand paper effigies of the deceased, and possibly, if the dead person was a wife, of previously deceased wives, and perhaps the living husband as well. On either side of these effigies are paper figures of male

8 The temporary soul tablet — resting place for one of the many souls of man, known in Chinese as a "dragon tablet" *lung p'ai* 龍牌 [*longpai*]. It is made of coloured paper and bamboo, and is one of the means by which the soul of the deceased takes part in mourning rites performed for him. The permanent soul tablet (the ancestral tablet, *Shen chu p'ai* 神主牌 [*Shen zhupai*]) on the other hand, is made of wood.

9 The following arrangement of objects seems to be fairly standardized. It has been the same in all respects on all of the six times we visited a particular Dying House.

and female servants, who will accompany the dead on his journey. All figures are garlanded with paper money, representing advanced wages for the servants, and ready cash for the journey for the deceased. In front of the figures is a temporary soul tablet for the deceased, and possibly two or three for other relatives who have already died and who are also to benefit from the evening's activities. Round the figures are ranged various sacrificial foods and fruits and on the floor nearby are piled the trunks of clothes to be despatched to the dead by flame at the end of the evening's activities. A small paper and bamboo hut representing a bathroom stands next to this and houses a live duck to be used in one of the rites.

About half way down the room on the right is an altar with offerings to the administrators of hell, of joss and candles. A bowl of cold-water and a wad of gold and silver paper money stand on the table also, ready for use in the rite of "Breaking Hell". A small collapsible table is provided for the priest and his troupe to sit round when they chant from their books. This can easily be moved about to different parts of the room, depending on the rite to be performed. At the back of the room on the right, a large gong is hung from the wall with a seat under it provided for the accompanist.

Outside the house, against the wall, stand the paper images to be burnt at the end of the evening. Essential is a paper house and an image of the Spirit Who Clears the Way, also two paper bridges to be used in one of the rites. Other paper things vary according to the taste and finances of the relatives.

### The "Paying Respects"

The following is an account of a fairly typical *ta chai* [*dazhai*] as performed in a Dying House in Sago Lane. The actual ceremony cost approximately \$200, this payment included the fee of the priest and his troupe and the cost of the paper things used in the rites, which the priest provided. Additional paper things, burnt at the end, and the cost of food and drink and transport for the mourners, were calculated separately.

The ceremony opened at about 7.30 p.m. when the priest and troupe arrived, set up the paper things and altar, and arranged the room. The first part of the *ta chai* consisted of chanting by the priests seated at the small table, interspersed with rest periods. This continued until just before 10 p.m. when the *Nam-mo-lo* set the "hell" structure up in the centre of the room.

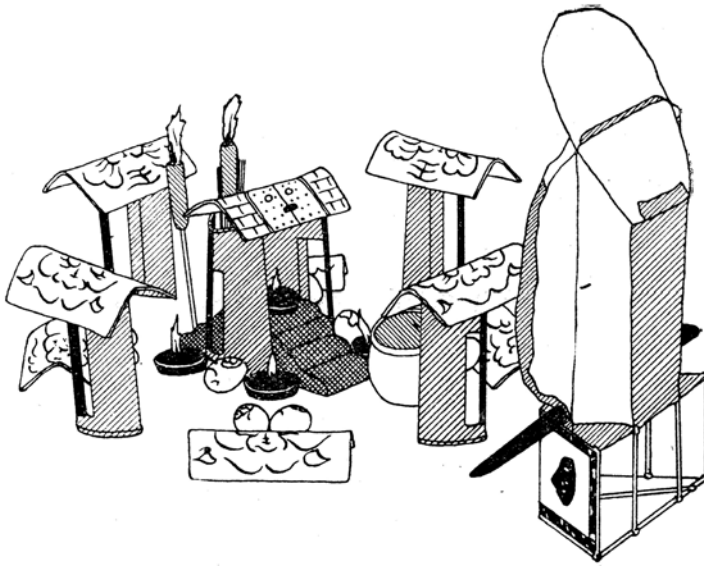


Fig. 2. "Hell" (see text and Fig. 3). The paper soul tablet is seen from behind on the right of the sketch, with the "sword" used in breaking the tiles resting on it.

### Breaking Hell (see Figs. 3 and 4<sup>10</sup>)

"Hell" consists of nine unfired tiles, corresponding to the nine courts of the underworld which a soul must pass through before it reaches the final court where its future is decided. The tiles are arranged in a circle, four lying on the ground and four supported on structures standing about a foot high and made of sheet metal (see Fig. 2). A tiger's head is painted on each tile to represent the guardians of the gate of each hell. In the centre is the main "gate", a tile with an iron studded door painted on it which is supported by two of the metal structures one at each end. Underneath this "gate" is a small bridge with steps cut in its sides; this is made of fire clay. The more durable elements in the structure are owned by the priests who are responsible for obtaining the necessary articles for this rite. On the bridge is placed a saucer of oil with a lighted wick floating in it, and similar saucers are placed one at each corner of the bridge. In front of the bridge, on the street side, is a large bowl of hot oil, and at each tile resting on the ground are usually placed a few eggs with tiger heads painted on their shells; these are removed before the rite commences. Two candles

10 The photographs in Figs. 3-6 were taken for me by C. A. Gibson-Hill.



Fig. 3. Cantonese funeral rites in Singapore — “Breaking Hell”. One of the *Nam-mo-lo*, carrying the paper soul table, is jumping over “Hell”. As he does, so he spits out a mouthful of water to make the oil in the burners flare up, and on reaching the other side breaks one of the tiles with the “sword” seen in his right hand.

burn in the far side of the circle and outside the structure with its back to the door is placed the soul tablet of the deceased, with a double edged sword used in the rite placed on its stand. The chief mourners sit on a mat behind the soul tablet, wearing their mourning clothes which, for the Cantonese, are of white cotton and sack-cloth, with hoods for the women and head bands for the men.<sup>11</sup>

The rite opened when the priest who was officiating for this ceremony went across to the altar and donned his “crown”, a strip of embroidered cloth tied at the back of his mortar-board. This priest is not necessarily the head of the troupe, and may be an apprentice who is younger and more agile than his superiors, as was so in the case of the rite to be described here.

The priest then picked up the soul tablet and the sword, giving the tablet to the chief mourner. Returning to the altar he stuck the sword into the pile of mock money and lit that which adhered to its point. The flaming sword he uses as a baton, twirling it round him and under his legs,

11 These white clothes are worn during every rite and removed during the intervals.

as he performs a stately dance round “Hell”. On this particular occasion, a troupe of five were employed, the other four following the chief performer round on his dance, running in and out of “Hell”, clashing their cymbals and generally harassing the devils. The chief mourner carrying his *fan* followed the priest round. After about five minutes of this, the four supplementary priests took off their sacerdotal robes and returned to the table where they accompanied the dance with their cymbals and drums. One man however, a musician, leaped up and danced round with the priest, jumping over the fire and generally holding the stage for a short while. Then he too retired and the priest danced alone.

The four tiles on the ground were broken one by one, each after four successive rounds of dancing. This was done by the priest who brings down the flaming sword onto them, replenishing it after each breakage.

The priest then took the soul tablet from the chief mourner and the mourners returned to the mat. The dance became quicker and wilder as the deeper strata of the underworld were reached, until, laying the sword aside, the priest returned to the altar where he took a mouthful of water. This was retained in his mouth for a while, until, leaping over the altar, he expelled it, the effect of the cold water on the hot oil causing the structure to flare up in a sheet of flame. This was repeated until each remaining tile, simultaneously shattered by the leap was broken, each leap being followed by a series of fast twirls round “Hell”.

The chief mourner then handed the priest the *fan* with which he proceeded to dance, talking to the soul tablet all the time, telling it that it had nothing to fear now and that it was being rescued to be born in the Pure Land.

An old man seated at the gong at the far corner of the room then sent up a wail for everybody to pray for the dead and the rite ended with the priest snatching hold of the chief mourner’s hand and dragging him round the ruined Hell structure.

After “Breaking Hell” there was an interval for two hours until 12 p.m., when the next rite began.

### **Offering food and prayers to the spirits in Hell — The Universal Helping over of the Wandering Spirits (see Fig. 4)**

For this rite a large table was set up in the centre of the room and covered with a silk cloth. Various ornaments of jade and porcelain were placed on the table on small stands together with the usual joss and candles, an incense bolder on a long stem, an image of *Kuan Yin* [*Guanyin*] (the Buddhist goddess of mercy), a small bowl of rice and a small sceptre for “defeating the spirits”. The latter article was the only significant



Fig. 4. Offering food and prayers to the spirits in Hell. Note the empty chair, the sixth place, at the head of the table, in the foreground, with the crown in front of it.

indication that this ceremony was being performed by Taoists. The actual ceremony was Buddhist in form but when performed by nuns or monks the sceptre is not used, any outward show of aggression towards spirits being contrary to Buddhist teachings.

The five priests sat round the table, two on each side with the head priest, officiating this time, standing at one end of the table. At the other end was an empty chair on a raised platform which was covered with cloth.

The first part of the ceremony consisted of chanting, during which the chief priest held the incense holder, bowing with it towards the room and then towards the door. He then picked up a puce coloured robe with green trimmings and put it on. Ideally, wielding of the incense holder should be done by a different priest known as the “master of the incense”, but on this occasion, the head priest performed this part of the rite as well as the following part in which he assumed the role of the Buddha. After more chanting the troupe got up and walked outside sticking lighted joss sticks at the left and right of the entrance. Then they bowed and returned to the room bowing to the image of the deceased.

The chief priest then moves to the chair on the platform and began to make the sign of a Buddha *ch'ieh yin* 結印 [*jie yin*]. This consists of a

series of gestures with the hands called “twist knot” *niu ch’ieh* 扭結 [*niu jie*], each one being symbolic of a different saint. After this he covered his face with his wide sleeve, through which he is supposed to see the spirits who have come to be fed at this rite.

Two long strips of embroidered cloth were added to the priest’s crown at this point and while he continued the hand gestures, his apprentice read some prayers. The puce coloured robe was then removed. The chief priest brandished the “defeating spirits sceptre” after which rice was thrown over the length of the table to the ground to feed the deceased and any hungry ghosts who were attending the ceremony.

There was then a break from 1 a.m. until about 2.30 a.m. during which the women mourners were busy rolling paper gold and silver money into ingots. The latter were then carried to the front of the house and burnt from time to time during the rest of the activities. The chief priest had now gone home and the apprentice who officiated during the subsequent ceremonies busied himself writing out the labels to be stuck on the paper and bamboo trunks filled with paper garments and money for the use of the deceased. The name of the deceased was filled in together with the name and address of the donor of the trunk. Altogether fourteen trunks were packed on this occasion.

### Crossing the Bridge (see Fig. 5)

The rite started when the priests sat round the small table at the side of the room. The two paper bridges, one decorated with gold and one with silver paper were brought in and placed one after the other on the floor. The live duck was taken out of the paper and bamboo “bathroom” and placed, with its legs bound together, on the floor in front of the priests’ table. The chief mourner placed the *fan* on the table and this was picked up and waved by one of the priests while they all chanted for about five minutes. After this, the apprentice picked up the duck and, after dipping its beak in a cup of water mixed with pomelo leaves,<sup>12</sup> pulled out a few of its feathers which he scattered over the altar to the deceased. There seemed to be some uncertainty regarding the exact purpose of the duck. One mourner described it as the spirit of the deceased, another as the guide for the spirit to follow on its way out of hell, while a third said that it was for washing the dead man’s spirit. This latter explanation seemed to be possible, since the duck was kept in the “bathroom” up to this time, but the only explanation volunteered for this was from a man who, after thinking for a few moments, suggested that the *Nam-mo-lo* might prefer duck to chicken!

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12 Pomelo leaves mixed with water is a purifying agent used in many Chinese rites.



Fig. 5. Cantonese funeral rites in Singapore — Crossing the Bridge. The chief mourner is carrying a *fan*, only the stick of which is visible over his left shoulder.

After the purifying of the altar, the duck was tied under one of the bridges and then the soul tablet of the deceased, followed by the additional three for other deceased relatives, were stood on the first steps of the first bridge. The mourners lined up at the side of the bridge, the chief mourner leading, carrying the *fan*, and others carrying lanterns bearing the names of the deceased relatives. One by one, the soul tablets were helped over the two bridges, the priest preceding and purifying each part of the bridges with burning paper money and the *fan*. When all the soul tablets had been helped over the bridges, they were picked up by the mourners and carried round and between the bridges in a figure of eight pattern several times. At the priest's instruction, all the mourners then knelt at the small altar to the administrators of the underworld, with the soul tablets in front of them, and prayed.

There was a break from 3 a.m. until 4 a.m. during which the female mourners sat on a mat in front of the deceased's altar and wailed.

### Distributing Flowers

The priests sat round their small table on which was placed a dish of flower heads and one-cent pieces. Classical Chinese poems were recited



Fig. 6. Burning paper objects at the conclusion of the ceremony. The photograph shows an attendant at one of the “Death Houses” in Sago Lane making a pile of the paper things (including a paper house, on the left, and a paper car, with boxes of paper clothes under it and a chauffeur inside at the steering wheel), preparatory to their being set on fire. The mourners, at the right side of the picture, are watching in the background.

to the accompaniment of a guitar, the music being melodies from the traditional Chinese theatre. These poems, whose general theme was the frailty of man, and the brevity and hardships of life, were recited in turn by each priest. The whole recitation lasted for about 45 minutes, after which the flowers and coins were thrown into the air by the apprentice and eagerly sought by the women, who told us that they brought great luck.

After this rite the “servants” were carried to the small table, and the “chauffeur” lifted out of his paper car standing outside and sat on a chair at the table. The apprentice then sat in front of them and lectured them on their duties to the deceased, giving them names and telling the chauffeur that he must learn to drive well. This part of the evening’s ceremonies was treated with some hilarity by the women mourners, who added remarks of their own and taunted the priest until he became angry and told them to sit down and be quiet. There was then a break until 5 a.m.

### **Burning the Paper Things** (see Fig. 6)

All the paper things, including the servants and the image of the deceased, were now taken out to the back of the house and put in a huge pile. The dead person's image was seated in the car and the whole lot then set alight by the priest.

Since the deceased was in her sixties when she died, a short ceremony followed which is known as:

### **Cooking Longevity Rice** 煮壽飯 *Chu show fan* [*Zhu shoufan*]

This ceremony is performed only when the person who has died is well advanced in years, and it is considered to be very lucky.

A fire was built by the priest on the stone floor of the small room at the back of the house in which temporary soul tablets are kept. On the fire was placed a Chinese frying pan (semi-circular) filled with water and rice and some Chinese cash. On top of the lid were placed some pink dough cakes and a full packet of twelve pairs of chop sticks. A little of the rice was offered to the deceased in a dish in front of the soul tablet which had now been removed to this small room; the remainder was taken home by the mourners to be used in general worship. The "Paying Respects" was now over and the priest and his troupe were left behind to clean up while everybody else went home.





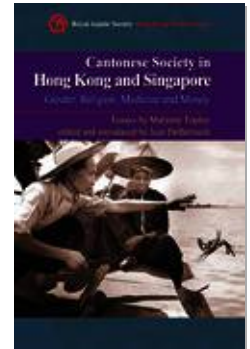
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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### Chapter 3

## Paper Charms, and Prayer Sheets as Adjuncts to Chinese Worship

(1953)\*

There are few Chinese rites for which some kind of paper charm or prayer sheet is not necessary. Some of these papers are specific to a particular rite but many may be used in a general way to cover most of the misfortunes which man may encounter wherever he lives. Ill-health, bad luck and poverty, barrenness, quarrels with mothers-in law or husbands, protection sought from evil spirits or people and the need to remove “uncleanness” from a house after sickness or death are all frequent occasions for ritual involving the use of these paper sheets. They are also used widely in seeking the pardon of the gods and in general temple worship, at festivals and at mortuary rites. Some charms can be used for several or all of these purposes, but an individual may prefer, or by trial and error come to regard as more potent, a particular one of the many varieties available.

Charms generally carry religious texts, sometimes in Sanskrit or Pali translated phonetically into Chinese characters, and some have a drawing of the god or saint appealed to. Mystic symbols are used to denote constellations, and archaic writing (which needs specialist knowledge in execution and interpretation) adds power to a charm.<sup>1</sup>

Paper charms are of various kinds, usually with the functions they claim to perform printed on them in bold letters. One of the commonest kinds is the *fu*<sup>2</sup> 符 [*fu*] amulet. This is usually written on a long strip of paper and is composed of mystic writing and symbols. The hand-made variety of these are obtained from priests living in temples or in “private practice”, but copies made from wooden blocks may be purchased from

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\* First published in *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)*, 26(1)(1953): 63–84. Reprinted by permission of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

1 De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, Vol. VI, pp. 1024–61. Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1910.

2 Wade’s Chinese romanization is used throughout this paper.

temples and shops. Another type is the *ch'ien* 錢 [*qian*], literally “cash”, used in seeking the pardon of the gods. These are drawings of coins, often printed in a square frame at one end of a long folded strip of yellow paper. Other kinds are *tsien* 牋 [*jian*], edicts, and the tablets of pardon, mandates or injunctions which copy the style of those of the emperor and high officials of dynastic China. The yellow-faced paper which is most popular for charm printing is in imitation of the imperial yellow paper used also by officers of state for writing their orders. A vermillion substance in imitation of that used by such officers is employed for printing the charms. All these devices are used to make charm sheets very “official”, and therefore powerful.

The potency of a charm is in the strength of its pronouncements, but it is greatly enhanced by the use of a seal which gives it, as it gives an official order, greater validity and importance. These seals are usually those of popular and powerful gods and exorcisers (see Fig. 26 for a picture of a seal block). Another form of added potency consists of a blood smear made by a medium of a powerful god. Such mediums, when in a trance, sometimes cut their tongue with swords and are given, by their assistants, a basket of charms issued in the name of their temple with their god's seal attached to lick (Fig. 30). These charms are called *hsueh fu* 血符 [*xuefu*], blood charms, and can be obtained from most spirit medium temples. Blood-marked *fu* can be purchased for wearing as amulets and for fixing above the front door of the house. More durable varieties are made of coloured silk. Besides *fu* with blood marks, there are those written with the blood of the medium, or with a small quantity of his blood spat into the vermillion mixture. The entry of one's name on some charms — or the “opening” of them with a small hole made with a lighted joss stick, may give the final degree of potency.

The nature and import of the more general charms are known widely by the older generation of Chinese and little or no guidance is needed in purchasing them. The use of a more specific charm may call for advice, but this can be obtained very easily for a “red packet” of a few cents from a temple keeper, priest, fortune-teller — or an elderly female relative who has become well versed in charm lore.

In most Chinese households, one will find a copy of that book of esoteric information, invaluable in matters of worship, the almanac. This book is really a series of smaller books bound together, with sections on character analysis, fortune telling by various methods, a calendar giving the influences on each day of the year and other occult subjects. Perhaps the most dog-eared section of the almanac in most homes will be that at the end, where by reference to the eight characters of birth (two each for the year, month, day and two hourly watch at the time of birth) the cause of an illness can be ascertained. The rite to be performed will be described

and, according to the influences which are at work, the charm to be used can be selected.

The most frequent users of charm papers are the women, especially those of the older generation. They will purchase and use charms on behalf of themselves and of any members of their family they think need ritual assistance, and for a little money they will perform rites for friends not familiar with religious practices of this nature.

The different dialect groups show a certain degree of conservatism in their use of charm papers, each, within broad limits, keeping to their own kind, as made popular in their province or district in China. The *ch'ien* described above are used particularly by the Hokkiens and Teochews. Sections of the Chinese areas in Singapore are inhabited more extensively by one dialect group than another, and sellers of articles of worship in any one area cater more for their own group. The more popular charms are stocked by all; but some of the more specific ones are not only not stocked, but quite often are not even known, by shop-keepers of differing dialect groups. Some women are fairly venturesome, however, and we remember one occasion when visiting a Cantonese shop to buy charms when two women of another dialect group came in. The charm we were buying was unknown to them but on being told its uses they decided to try it out.

Some charms specific to certain rites have been practically forgotten and many have fallen into disuse. A certain specific charm is obtainable at one shop only in the urban part of Singapore. Other shop-keepers to whom we showed it expressed curiosity and one wanted to buy it from us, but the general feeling was that one of the more popular charms would do equally well.

Charm papers can be divided roughly into five categories, although these overlap to a certain extent, owing to the many uses to which certain of them can be put.

1. *For burning*

These charms, usually incantations and prayers with the god worshipped depicted on them, are burnt at the end of ceremonies, the name and address of the person to whom benefit is to accrue first being written on them if they are to be burnt for a special purpose. Among this group are the prayer sheets used by Buddhists to record the number of times a sutra has been said by a devotee.

2. *As medicine*

These *fu* are smaller than most, being about one and a half to two inches wide and between six and eight inches long, as opposed to others which vary a great deal in size but are invariably larger. They may be reduced to pellets and swallowed, or they may be burnt and

their ash added to water or tea and the resultant mixture drunk. For these purposes they are usually printed on paper of finer texture to ensure digestibility. They may also be used to wash the part of the body affected.

3. *For wearing as amulets*

The charm is usually folded into a triangular shape or rolled into a strip and tied in a bow. These charms are obtained from temples on feast days or after the performance of a rite.

4. *For fastening to wall* (see Fig. 27)

Charms of this type are stuck to a wall of a temple or on to a building, lamp-post or tree at a road junction, at the commencement or after the performance of a rite.

5. *For fastening above the door of a house*

These are all *fu* and are stuck up to ensure protection from evil spirits and influences. They will be obtained at the New Year and last throughout the current year, or be sought after there has been sickness or death in the house. Some more durable varieties are made of wood.

Many charm sheets in use in Malaya are made in China and imported via Hong Kong where many more are made. According to one informant (the owner of a shop selling articles for worship), original copies are obtained from Swatow [Shantou] and these are then copied in small factory houses in Hong Kong, but most Buddhist praying sheets come from Fatshan [Foshan] in Kwangtung [Guangdong].

Some charms are made in Singapore; so also are the Buddhist prayer sheets which are printed mechanically or made like other charm sheets from crude wooden blocks which have seasoned and cracked after cutting. Some sundry goods shops act as importers on a small scale and several of the shop-houses round North Boat Quay on the Singapore River have stocks. Small quantities are imported at a time and sold in packets of about twenty to temples, priests and small retailers, and sent up to various parts of Malaya. They are also sold to sundry goods merchants and bakers who do a small trade in mock money, joss sticks and red candles used in worship. Charms are sold in these shops as a result of the anomalous linked demand of the customer. Sundry goods shops sell to the housewife and the housewife is the most frequent user of candles and paper charms. Bakers sell cakes for festivals, occasions when articles of worship are also in demand. Many shops are divided in the centre, one side selling groceries and odds and ends, and the other selling articles of worship. It can safely be said, we think, that no Chinese sundry goods seller in urban Singapore is without a small stock of the basic elements of Chinese ritual, although for more specific articles one must seek out a special dealer.

The most common charm made in Singapore is the strip charm seen above the doors of houses. The blocks for these are cut here, usually from the design of a *Nam-mo-lo*<sup>3</sup> 喃嗎佬, literally “chanting fellow” (a Taoist priest), or from that of the head teacher of a women’s or men’s “Vegetarian Hall”.

The shops in the Sago Lane area, which is in the Cantonese section of the Chinese part of Singapore, make their own charm sheets and blocks, and about thirty different kinds were shown to us in one shop. The *Nam-mo-lo*, however, write their *fu* and hold in disdain the block-made mass-produced kind.

Charms are made by cutting sheets of paper faced with the requisite colour — usually yellow — to the size of the blocks. A vermilion substance used widely in Chinese medicine, or Chinese ink mixed with water in a bowl, is used to form the imprint, the paper being rubbed on to the block, not the block applied to the paper (see Figs. 24, 25, 26). A popular paper is one that is very absorbent, made by hand, and 100% bamboo fibres. This is imported from Amoy [Xiamen]. Cheap papers of bamboo and wood pulp mixed are also used. A woollen glove serves to prevent the ink from staining the hand used to rub the imprint on to the paper. The resultant charm is usually somewhat illegible and over-inked, but this does not diminish its efficacy, the message it carries being perfectly comprehensible to the gods if not to the people who buy it.

### A Selected List of Some of the Charm Papers in Common Use in Singapore.

The following is a list, by no means complete, of some of the more general paper charms used commonly in Singapore and other parts of Malaya and obtainable from joss shops and temples. Charms obtainable but used rarely have not been listed; similarly examples of those made by hand have been omitted except for Fig. 14; this last can also, however, be obtained block-made. In most cases the charms described are illustrated here, or have been illustrated in my previous paper.<sup>4</sup>

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3 This is a Cantonese expression and one not used by other dialect groups except when referring to the Cantonese priests. They live like other men marrying but earning their living by making paper funeral articles and by performing rites at funerals and in cases of sickness or bad luck.

4 “Some Occasional Rites Performed by the Singapore Cantonese”, *JMBRAS*, 24(3)(1951): 120–44. [See Chapter 1 of this book.]



Fig. 1. A “Mammoth” charm paper featuring five varieties of charms (four of which are shown here), printed in red on yellow-faced paper. Original sheet approximately 48 by 22 inches. The full sheet contains a fifth charm, the “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophies”, at the bottom, below the *Chin P'ai* [*Jinpai*] or Golden Tablet; prints of this fifth charm have already appeared in an earlier paper by the present writer (*JMBRAS*, 24(3)(1951): 136). [See Figs. 14 and 15 in Chapter 1, pp. 48–49.]

1. *A Mammoth paper* printed with many charms (Fig. 1).

*Top left:* A *fu* which protects the user from evil spirits and fearsome creatures half animal half man. Portrayed on this charm is Chang T'ien Shih [Zhang Tianshi],<sup>5</sup> the so called Taoist pope and the first exorcist. This powerful person, who claimed to perform miracles with his amulets, was the real founder of modern Taoism and is very popular among the Chinese as a reliable protector and exorcist. He is usually shown seated on a tiger and brandishing a sword. Wooden plaques painted and depicting Chang T'ien Shih are hung above windows and door mantels to protect the house and its inmates (see Fig. 21). The example of this charm illustrated here in Fig. 1 gives a brief history of Chang T'ien Shih's life and attainments.

*Top Right:* A drawing of the Eight Diagrams 八卦 *Pa Kua* [*Bagua*],<sup>6</sup> used widely by Chinese fortune-tellers and occultists. The Eight Diagrams are represented by an arrangement of short horizontal parallel lines; broken lines are *Yin*, the female principle, and unbroken *Yang*, the male principle, and eight groups of three are arranged in a circle. These lines denote the evolution of nature and its cyclic changes. In the centre are small circles jointed by straight lines which represent the various astral constellations and mystic symbols. On each side of the Diagram is a column of writing announcing that the Fire Official and Water God work together to protect people from these elements. Wooden representations of the Eight Diagrams with a small piece of mirror in the centre are powerful charms for protecting houses and are to be seen quite frequently in Singapore.

*Underneath this charm:* A document of pardon and acquittal. Long life and riches are promised to the burner. This charm depicting a minor saint can be obtained separately.

*A Document of Pardon:* This charm, to give it extra validity, is called a Golden Tablet 金牌 *Chin P'ai* [*Jinpai*], after the Imperial edicts of the same name. It portrays five saints who promise blessings and protection of life and property. It also can be obtained separately.

*Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophies:*<sup>7</sup> This charm, which is at the bottom of the sheet, speaks for itself and is used separately for practically all cases of misfortune. It promises blessings, absolution,

5 See "Chang Tao-Ling" or "Chang T'ien Shih" in E. T. C. Werner, *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*, pp. 37–42. Shanghai, 1932.

6 See C. A. S. Williams, *Outline of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs*, pp. 146–49. Shanghai, 1932.

7 As this charm has already been depicted in the *JMBRAS*, 24(3): 136, it was cut off from the present figure to facilitate reproduction here. [See Chapter 1, Fig. 14, p. 48.]

children and the transformation of bad luck into good fortune and happiness to anybody who burns it.

The last three charms are very popular in Singapore among the Cantonese who use them for all manner of rites and at festivals as a general prevention or cure of misfortune. The only time on which the writer was present when the whole sheet was used was on the rather singular occasion of the performance of a rite known as a “ghost marriage”,<sup>8</sup> when several sheets of this mammoth charm were pasted to the walls of the temple and suspended from a number of altars before the rite began (see Figs. 27 and 28).

2. *Credentials for various domestic troubles.* These are usually sold in sets of five but can be purchased separately. They are of different colours, but which colour any one shall be is not fixed.

*Honourable man (or high official) Credentials* 貴人牒 *Kuei Jen Tieh* [Guiren Die] (Fig. 2). This charm depicts star gods, saints and minor deities of the various parts of heaven and earth and is burnt to ensure good and trustworthy friends.

*Declaration of Peace* 安穩牒 *An Wen Tieh* [Anwen Die]. This is similar to Fig. 2 in all respects except for some of the characters.

*Long Life Credential* 保壽牒 *Pao Shou Tieh* [Baoshou Die] (Fig. 3). This credential is particularly popular for burning on the occasion of a birthday or anniversary. It portrays a god of wealth and longevity.

*Wealth Bringing Credential* 招財牒 *Chao Ts'ai Tieh* [Zhaocai Die] (Fig. 4). For prosperity and promotion. This charm depicts an Eight Diagrams with the life giving symbol of the *Yang* and *Yin* in the centre. The “Nine Skies” goddess of the elements is also depicted on it.

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8 The usual occasion for this rite is when a girl, or, more rarely, a man, promised in marriage, dies. When a girl dies under these circumstances, her fiancé may be required to go through a “marriage” with the deceased if her parents insist, due to their concern over her state of spinsterhood in hell, or if the decease of the affianced person is followed by some misfortune to the remaining party’s family or affairs. It seems as if, judging from enquiries made, the Cantonese indulge in this rite more frequently than other groups and there is one Cantonese temple in Singapore which is noted for its ghost marriages. Years after the death of an affianced man or woman, a great misfortune to the remaining party may be traced to a grievance held by the dead person. In the case witnessed, the person having the rite was a woman; it was said that since the death of her fiancé twenty years before, she had been very ill and children born of a subsequent marriage had all died. As she was now ineligible for the ghost marriage, being bound by this subsequent marriage, a substitute was found, an unmarried girl who had been dead for several years.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

Figs. 2-4. "Credentials". These can be printed in black on yellow- or green-faced paper, or in mauve on pink paper. Original sheets approximately 29 by 17 inches.

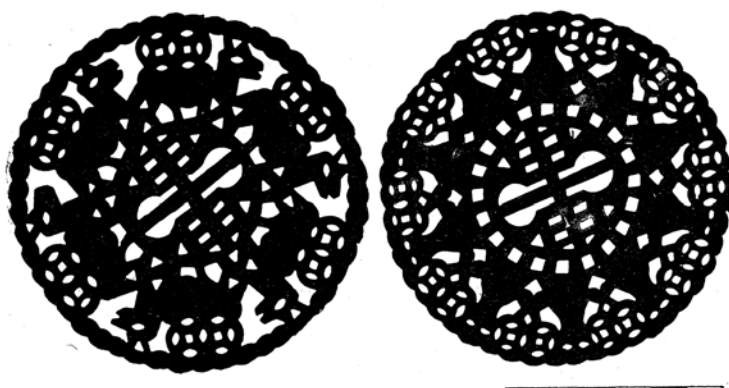


Fig. 5. "Lucky Horses" and "Honourable Men" Charms. They are made of green-faced and red-faced paper respectively. Original pieces approximately 9 inches in diameter.



Fig. 6. A Charm to the Western Royal Mother and the Royal Lord of the East, printed in pink on white paper; original sheet approximately 14 by 9 inches.

*Peace Loving Couple Credential* 姻緣牒 *Yin Yuan Tieh* [Yinyuan Die]. To prevent all kinds of matrimonial disturbances. It is similar to Fig. 4 except for some differences in the characters used.

These credentials come in elaborately, but somewhat crudely, patterned envelopes covered with silver spangles. All five of these credentials and their envelopes were used in the ghost marriage described in the above footnote 8.

Fig. 7. A Certificate to the Heavenly Gods, printed in black on orange-faced paper, with the figures picked out in red and green; original sheet approximately 21 by 8 inches.



3. *Certificate to the Heavenly Gods* (Fig. 7), depicting the long-life, prosperity and fertility triad. A blank space is left in the centre for writing the name and address of the user, and any particular message to the gods that it is desired to give.

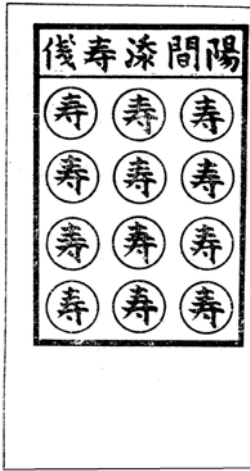


Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.

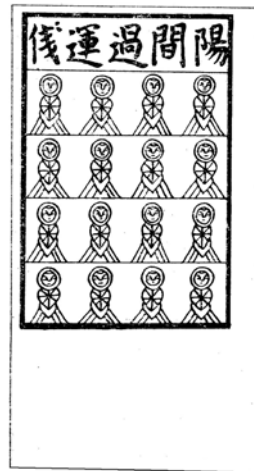


Fig. 10.

Fig. 8. A *Ch'ien*, printed in black on yellow-faced paper; original sheet 16 by 4 inches, part reproduced approximately 7 by 4 inches.

Fig. 9. A Charm to the Gods of the Twelve Constellations, printed in black on yellow-faced paper; original sheet 16 by 4 inches, part reproduced approximately 7 by 4 inches.

Fig. 10. A Charm used by Travellers, printed in black on yellow-faced paper; original sheet 16 by 4 inches, part reproduced approximately 7 by 4 inches.

4. Paper cut-outs of "Honourable Men and Lucky Horses" (Fig. 5). These are for burning at festivals and in individual rites to bring good luck, and are used by all dialect groups. There are several charms featuring this "honourable" man and his horse<sup>9</sup>, all of them are used to check evil influences and promote good luck. One form is a large sheet of red paper with rows of "Honourable Men" printed on it, and with small holes cut in at regular intervals so that the green paper with which it is backed shows through. Green is the colour of the "lucky" horse, possibly from a pun on the word *lu* [*lu*] meaning both lucky and green.<sup>10</sup> This latter charm is known as the "Honourable Men from Everywhere" paper, or *Ssu Fang Kuei Jen* 四方貴人 [*Sifang Guiren*].

9 *JMBRAS*, 24(3): 132, Fig. 6, gives another version of this kind of charm. [See Fig. 11 in Chapter 1, p. 43.]

10 Lucky (in a pecuniary sense) 祿 *lu*; green 綠 *lu*.

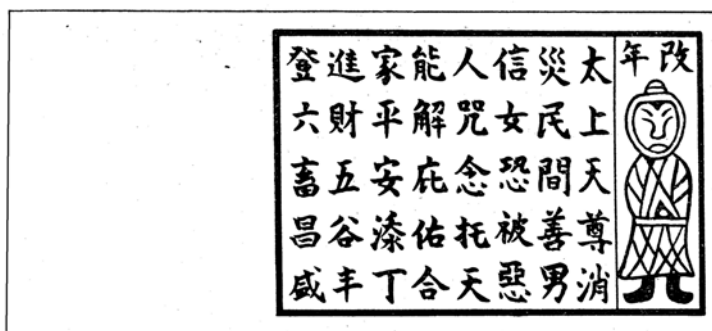


Fig. 11. A charm paper for worshipping the God-who-protects-the-Family, printed in black on yellow-faced paper, approximately 16 by 4 inches, part reproduced here 7 by 4 inches.



Fig. 12. Paper to burn at Hsia Yuan [Xiayuan], printed in black on yellow-faced paper, approximately 16 by 4 inches, part reproduced here 7 by 4 inches.



Fig. 13. Armour-and-Horse Paper, printed in black on coarse, unbleached bamboo paper, approximately 16 by 4 inches, part reproduced here 7 by 4 inches.



Fig. 14. A hand-written *Fu*, written in black ink on white tissue paper, original size approximately 8 by 3 1/2 inches.



Fig. 15. A block-made *Fu*, printed in black on orange-faced paper, original size approximately 5 by 1 1/2 inches.

## Charms popular among the Hokkiens and Teochews

1. Charm to *Hsi Wang Mu* [西王母 *Xi Wangmu*], the Western Royal Mother, and *Tung Wang Kung* [東王宮 *Dong Wangkung*], the Royal Lord of the East,<sup>11</sup> embodiments of the passive female principle (*Yin*) and the active male principle (*Yang*), the two principles of life. This charm portrays the Jade Maidens 玉女 [*Yu Nü*], who are Hsi Wang Mu's principal handmaidens, together with a crane by which the goddess is usually accompanied. At the other end of the charm is the Immortal Youth 童仙 [*Tong Xian*], the principal attendant of the Royal Lord of the East. This charm can be used in general worship of the two deities or burnt at funerals to convey spirits to the other world (Fig. 6).
2. Charm paper for worshipping the god who protects the family, gives it wealth, and adds to its numbers. It guarantees a good harvest and protection for the six kinds of animals on the farm (Fig. 11).
3. A paper to burn at *Hsia Yuan* 下元 [*Xiayuan*], the last of three *Yuans*. These are festivals in honour of each of the three Taoist principles although in Singapore at least the particularly Taoist nature of the festivals has been lost. *Hsia Yuan* is held on the 15th of the 11th moon (Fig. 12).
4. A ch'ien [*qian*] to be burnt to ensure a happy and prosperous year (Fig. 8).
5. A charm to be used in cases of illness, which depicts the gods of the twelve constellations (Fig. 9).
6. A charm used for travellers (Fig. 10).
7. "Armour and Horse" Charm 甲馬 *Chia ma* [*Jiama*]. To guard against danger (Fig. 13).

## Two *fus*

1. A *fu* to clear away evil influences (Fig. 14). This kind is pasted above

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11 C. A. S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives*, pp. 224–26. Shanghai, 1932. See also E. T. C. Werner, *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*, pp. 163–64. Shanghai: 1932.

the door or drunk as medicine. Fig. 14 is made by hand, but Fig. 26 shows a block for this kind of *fu*.

2. A small block-made *fu* for drinking as medicine, obtained from a *Kuan Yin* [觀音 *Guanyin*] (Goddess of Mercy) temple (Fig. 15).

## Festivals.

A charm to be burnt at Chinese New Year (round about February 1st) to influence the Kitchen God in one's favour. On the 23rd of the twelfth moon this god returns to the Pearly Emperor to report on the family's activities for the past year. This paper guarantees a favourable report, offers additions to the family numbers, together with money, long life and good health (Fig. 16).

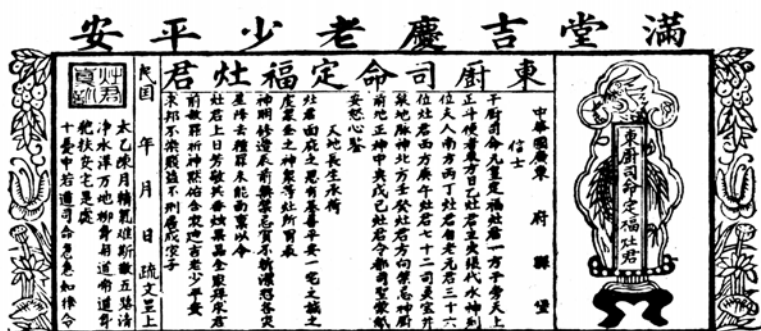


Fig. 16. Paper for worshipping the Kitchen God, printed in red on yellow-faced paper, original sheet approximately 20 by 12 inches.



Fig. 17. An example of Buddha's Pagoda, printed in black on white paper, original sheet approximately 21 by 10 inches.

# 開通冥途引路



**靈寶大法司** 小司敬奉

大闡門下諸神  
元始度人科典其錄廣濟度生無量

諸神引度魂超昇

合春人等上十

天恩同賜家為七敬

引路破迷掌

月 日 時 分 秒

正魂陽命 年 月 日 時 分 秒

歲自與世下入泉臺魂隨以何伴往生方而並提惟免後

天上道君在大羅天上高會諸天仙眾諸神法授授衆生故大光明照次下萬國九洲之地江河湖海之內關津世界之中世間男女生於塵世造孽無邊不修善果廣結冤孽多造惡道多入邪宗多積惡根多行巧詐多忘源教多奸詐情一但拘繫冥司受罰極苦無有出期今體

太上好生之德故密嚴法為兒長緣發給路引每張附送若有春人等度魂太乙救苦天尊四萬聲罪 恩願濟苦冥途引一張給付亡魂隨身佩帶所遇冥關幽地府冥司不難上清黃袍院秘勅功龍聖帝起并頒金引者 前請

冥中執照

三天扶教輔元體道天師張

年 月 日 時 分 秒

白引給付亡魂

香港 造榮福

Fig. 18. A Passport for the Spirits, printed in black on white paper, original sheet approximately 44 by 22 inches.

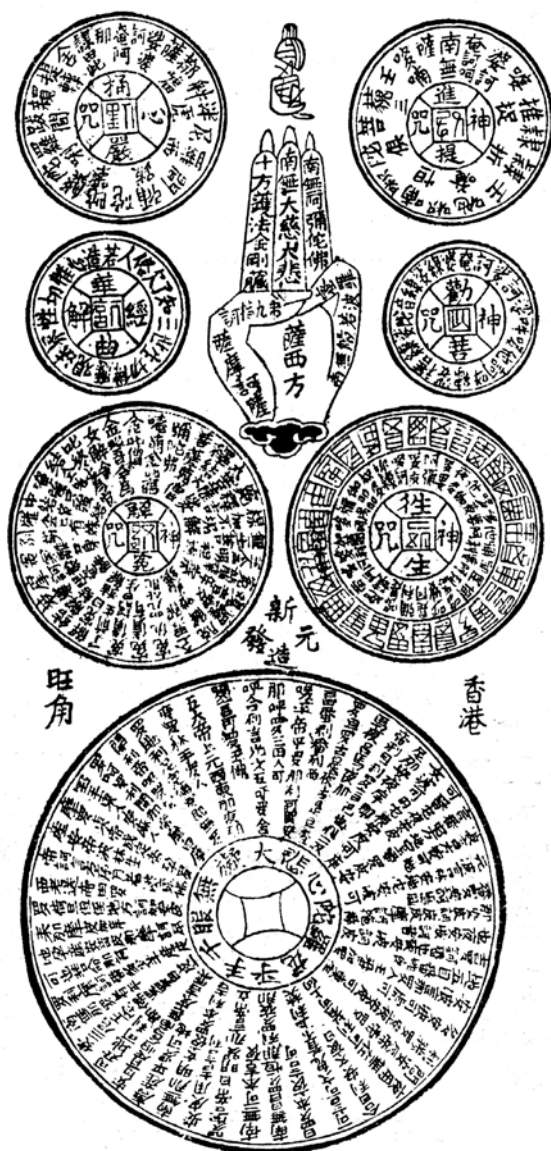


Fig. 19. Money for rebirth, printed in red on yellow-faced paper, original sheet approximately 20 by 12 inches.

## Buddhist prayer sheets

These are usually printed in black or red on white paper and are representations of popular Buddhist saints. A common kind is the “Buddha’s Pagoda” (Fig. 17). The one in the illustration depicts *Chun T’i* [準提 *Zhunti*], the Goddess of Light. Another popular kind is the “Buddha’s Ship of Salvation”, which portrays a ship in full sail going to the Western Heaven.

These prayer sheets are used in home and temple devotion, and some worshippers own their own blocks for running off sheets as they wish to use them. A record is kept on them of the number of sutras and prayers recited. This is done by filling in the small circles which make up part of the design. Red dots or holes made with a burning joss stick are put in each circle at the completion of one or a requisite number of prayers. This may be done on behalf of the dead as well as the living. The completion of a sheet will be noted in a temple to which the person to benefit belongs or belonged, and credit is thereby stored up for him or her in the Buddhist paradise. When a sheet is completed, it is taken down to the shore, burnt and the ashes sent out to sea. Alternatively it is taken to a temple where it is burnt with those brought by other worshippers. The ash is then stored until an appropriate time when it will be scattered out to sea.

## For the dead

1. A “passport” to clear a way out of hell. It is burnt to enable the soul of the deceased to go anywhere in hell and pass quickly through all its courts of administration. This charm (Fig. 18) portrays *Ti-Ts’ang Wang* [地藏王 *Dizang Wang*] — the Buddha Saviour of Hell—and is made officially valid by his seal mark in the bottom left hand corner.
2. Money for rebirth and relief from the clutches of ghostly debtors 往生錢 *Wang Sheng Ch’ien* [*Wang Sheng Qian*]. This charm is made up of “coins” with Buddhist sutras inscribed on them in Sanskrit words translated phonetically into Chinese characters. In the centre at the top is Buddha’s hand, which leads souls to the Western Paradise. These sheets are bought in great quantities for funerals, at *Ching Ming* [*Qingming*] (the cleaning of the graves) and during the seventh moon — the month devoted to the worship of Hungry Ghosts (Buddhist Pretas). They are sometimes “opened” by a small hole made with a burning joss stick above the fingers of the hand (Fig. 19).
3. One of a set of six small *ch’ien*. It depicts three cash and is similar to

the *Wang Sheng Ch'ien* described above, being cash to save the wandering or "hungry" ghosts and enable them to be reborn in Paradise. Used by the Teochews (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20. A *Ch'ien* for deceased ancestors and Hungry Ghosts, printed in green on white paper. The design shown here is printed six times on one sheet of paper; the whole sheet is approximately 10 by 8 inches, the unit reproduced here, approximately 4 by 2 inches.



Fig. 21. A brightly coloured wood panel depicting Chang T'ien Shih [Zhang Tianshi], hung above windows and door mantels to keep away evil spirits.



Fig. 22.



Fig. 23.

The spirit medium of the Monkey God at a temple in T'iong Bahru, Singapore. Once a week he goes into a trance, "eating" the smoke of burning incense to the sound of a beating drum; then he parades the environs of the temple with stilted steps; finally on returning to it he cuts his tongue with a ceremonial sword (Fig. 22) and then fortifies a batch of charm papers by licking them, leaving on each a faint blood stain (Fig. 23). (Courtesy of the Raffles Museum, Singapore)



Fig. 24.



Fig. 25.

Charm blocks: inking the block (Fig. 24); and the method of printing (Fig. 25). (Courtesy of the Raffles Museum, Singapore)



Fig. 26. Three charm blocks: the one in the middle is for preparing a charm similar to the hand-written one shown in Fig. 14. (Courtesy of the Raffles Museum, Singapore)

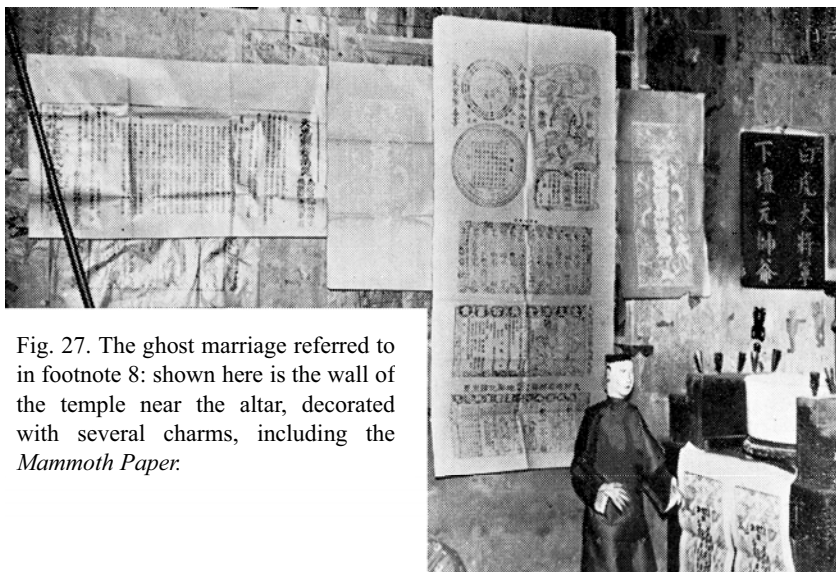


Fig. 27. The ghost marriage referred to in footnote 8: shown here is the wall of the temple near the altar, decorated with several charms, including the *Mammoth Paper*.



Fig. 28. A scene during the ghost marriage ceremony, showing another charm paper on the altar. (Courtesy of the Raffles Museum, Singapore)

Fig. 29. Part of the wall in a temple in Waterloo Street, Singapore, with numerous printed sheets and cut-outs of the *Honourable Man and Lucky Horse* Charm left on it (see *JMBRAS*, 24(3)(1951)). (Courtesy of the Raffles Museum, Singapore)

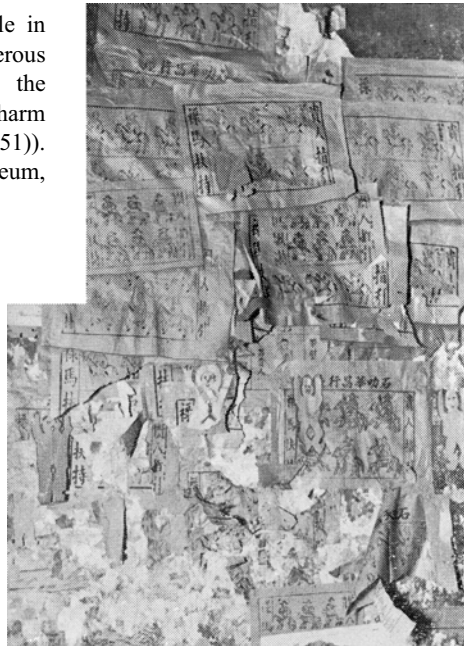




Fig. 30. The spirit medium of the Monkey God at a temple in Tiong Bahru, Singapore. On special occasions a white cockerel is sacrificed to fortify additional charm papers. After incantations the bird's head is sliced off with the ceremonial sword, and the blood squeezed from its body over the papers (see also Fig. 22, above, for the more usual way of strengthening the charms). (Courtesy of the Raffles Museum, Singapore)



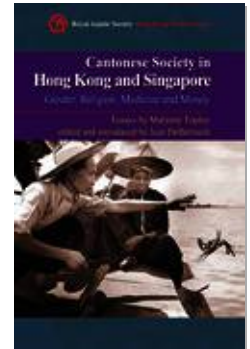
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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## Chapter 4

# Ghost Marriages among the Singapore Chinese

(1955)\*

There is a form of ghost marriage which exists among the Singapore Chinese and is known as *Yin Ch'u (Ts'u)[Yinqu]*.<sup>1</sup> This takes place at a ceremony or group of ceremonies at which two deceased persons, or more rarely, one living and one deceased person are married. Such forms of marriage appear to be more common among the Cantonese than other dialect groups, although I have heard of marriages being arranged for members of Straits-born Hokkien families. However, the Cantonese are certainly quite open about the fact that they perform them, whereas the Hokkiens I have questioned have been most reluctant to admit it.

In the Cantonese section of that part of Singapore known as the *Ta P'o*<sup>2</sup> [*Dapo*] there is in fact a ghost marriage broker's sign hung up in a doorway of a Taoist priest's home. The broker announces that he is willing to undertake the search for a family which has a suitable deceased member with a favourable horoscope whom it would be willing to give in marriage. Such marriages usually take place in the home of the family arranging for the ceremonies regardless of whether the deceased relative is male or female, but sometimes a temple is used. I have witnessed part of such a marriage in the temple of the City God in Singapore, and was told by the caretaker that nowadays temples are used increasingly for many of the rites that were traditionally performed in the home. This is partly as a result of the crowded conditions of urban life, and partly due to the modern prejudices of younger members of many Chinese families.

Ghost marriages appear to take place for any of the following reasons: to acquire a grandson after the death of the son of the family; to acquire a living daughter-in-law after the death of an unmarried son, when a

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\* First published in *Man*, 55(Feb. 1955): 29–30. Reprinted by permission of Wiley-Blackwell

1 Literally: *yin*, shade, dark, mysterious; *ch'u*, to take a wife.

2 *Ta* meaning big, great; and *p'o*, the sound of the third of the three characters given by the Chinese for the three syllables “Sing-a-pore”.

younger son wishes to marry and his elder brother has died before taking a wife (according to Chinese custom a younger son should not marry before his elder brothers; a ghost marriage is, therefore, sometimes arranged for an elder brother so that the younger may then proceed with his own nuptials without fear of incurring the disfavour of his brother's ghost); to prevent any catastrophe that might take place as a result of the unhappiness of the ghost of a deceased son, daughter or betrothed who, finding itself without a spouse in the other world, decides to take its vengeance on its own or its betrothed's family; and to cement a bond of friendship between two families.

If the son of a family dies before marriage, and therefore, presumably, without issue, his parents may desire to adopt a grandson, in order to ensure continuance of the family line. It is usually possible for a family in this position to adopt a son, ideally from a relative of the same surname, or, as sometimes happens in Singapore, from a stranger, without further ceremony. However, they may resort to the practice of adopting a grandson, giving the deceased a mate first, arranging for the match to be made with some suitable young girl who had died recently. The proposition will be made by the usual go-between of traditional Chinese marriage, and if it is accepted there will be a combination of wedding and funeral rites, during part of which the deceased bride will be removed from her own grave and taken to that of her new "husband", perhaps in another cemetery. Her spirit will be "led" by a medium or priest to the scene of the ceremony. After the ceremonies have been completed, the grandson is adopted and from then onwards he will worship the woman as if she were his own mother. Occasionally a live girl is taken as wife for the dead man, but I am told that this is rare and the family must be suitably rich to tempt the girl or her family to accept. Chinese friends have told me however, that they have come across cases where a girl, already betrothed to the deceased, has gone through a ghost marriage after his death. When such marriages take place the new daughter-in-law is expected to take a vow of celibacy. During the marriage ceremony a white cock is substituted for the dead groom. It is taken for a ride in the bridal car and accompanies the bride on her formal visits to relatives after the ceremony. I have come across one woman, a Cantonese from the Shun Te district of Kwangtung [Guangdong], who, terming herself a widow, after some time confessed that she was married to the "ghost" of her betrothed in this way in China. Afterwards, she came to Singapore to work, and was expected to remit money to her "husband's" family regularly.

Cases where a betrothed man marries his deceased fiancée seem to be not unknown, and a young Cantonese, who worked with me once, told me that his elder brother was married in this manner. It was pointed out however, that such a marriage could be no handicap, because although the

dead woman would remain his first wife, there was nothing to prevent him marrying again. In this case, the dead girl's parents had insisted on the marriage, although his own parents had not been keen. The girl's parents had paid all the expenses.

Cases of ghost marriages for elder brothers appear to be quite common in Singapore, and one Taoist priest told me that this type and ghost marriages to avert bad luck are the most usual. I have come across several instances of the latter kind, of which two of the more interesting are given below.

The first case was recounted to me by a Chinese man who has a Cantonese mother and Hokkien father; the second was in part witnessed personally. In the first case, the marriage took place when my informant was six years old. His mother had borne another son, who after a week or so had suddenly died. The mother had been very distressed and so the family had adopted another son for her. Not long afterwards, the adopted son became seriously ill. Western and Chinese medicines were tried but with no effect. A Cantonese female medium was called in. In a trance the first dead son spoke to his mother through the medium, saying that he was angry because he had no wife in the other world and wanted a marriage to be arranged for him. Against the father's wishes the mother had a ghost marriage performed in their home. The adopted son's illness, however, became worse, and the medium was recalled. The son then said that he was grateful for his first wife but would now like a concubine. However, apparently even this did not satisfy him for the adopted boy died soon after this second ceremony was performed.

The ceremony that I witnessed took place at the City God Temple, a temple popular with Cantonese women. It was performed on behalf of a woman of about 45, married with four children. She told me that she was suffering from some kind of malignant growth in the womb and had been to both Western and Chinese-style doctors, who had said that they could do nothing for her. One of her children had then become ill, and soon after her husband lost his job. This string of calamities led her mother-in-law to insist that she see an itinerant Taoist priest. He inquired in detail into her past history and discovered that when about 16 years of age she had been betrothed to a man who had subsequently died. The priest then announced that the various troubles that had befallen her were being caused by this man. As she was already married she was told that a dead woman must be found for him. This was arranged by the priest who also conducted the ceremony. Ceremonies of different kinds lasted from 7.30 p.m. to 4 a.m. at a total cost of \$200 (about £23); the necessary ritual paraphernalia being provided by the priest. Unfortunately I was not allowed to stay to the end of the performance. The priest had especially invited me along on the understanding that I took photographs for him, but the woman was

against it, saying quite justifiably that as she had spent so much money she did not want any spectators. However, during the part that I witnessed, various preliminary purification rites took place, paper and bamboo houses, furniture, cars and servants were burned for the couple, and locks of the dead girl's hair and her nail clippings were laid on the altar for the dead man. I was told by the priest that the initial rites of purification to remove evil influences were usual and always the same, but that he varied the later ceremony according to how much he charged. The key part however, involved the calling down of the dead man's ghost and the announcing to it that these things were being done for its benefit.

Marriages of deceased persons in order to cement a social bond between two families appear to have been more common in the earlier days of immigration and I have come across no recent cases. However, in a Straits Chinese magazine, now defunct (*circa* 1908), I came across a note criticizing this practice as being "old-fashioned" and a waste of money.



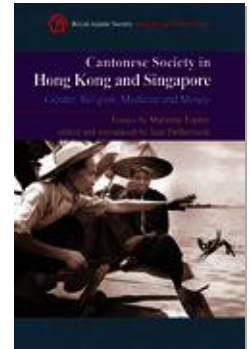
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Jean DeBernardi

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## Chapter 5

# Ghost Marriages among the Singapore Chinese: A Further Note

(1956)\*

Since writing on Chinese ghost marriages last year (*Man*, 1955: 35), I have had a further opportunity to be present at such a marriage and this time to obtain a photograph of effigies of the bridal pair seated together at a table round which the ceremonies on their behalf took place. I was unfortunately not able to be present for the actual “wedding” which was carried out in the City God’s temple, but witnessed the associated ceremonies which took place in a Dying House<sup>1</sup> in which I happened to be at the time. The circumstances were as follows.

A Cantonese boy aged about fourteen had been sent back to China by his family to continue his studies and while there had died under somewhat obscure circumstances. About a month after receiving news of his death, his mother had a dream in which her dead son appeared and told her that he wished to marry a Hakka girl who had just died somewhere in Ipoh, Perak. Since, the mother told me, he had given no precise details in her dream, the next day she called in a Cantonese female spirit medium and through her the boy gave the name of the girl together with her place of birth and age, and details of her horoscope which were subsequently found to be compatible with his.<sup>2</sup> The mother said that since the boy was obviously anxious to marry and his marriage would make things easier when her younger son came to take a wife,<sup>3</sup> she had taken the advice of the medium and decided to arrange a ghost marriage. At no

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1 Dying Houses, or less harshly in Chinese, *Ta nan kuan* [*Danan Guan*], Houses of Big Difficulties, are institutions catering for the needs of the dead and dying. Upstairs there is usually a sick room where people may die, and, occasionally, recover. Downstairs there is a mortuary and a room which is rented out by the day for post-mortuary rites.

2 Horoscopes of those intending to marry are compared for compatibility before betrothal.

3 Sons in a Chinese family should be married according to seniority, cf. *Man*, (1955): 35. [See Chapter 4, p. 98.]

time was any attempt made to check the information about the girl given through the medium.

The total cost of the marriage was approximately \$200 Straits (about £23) and a priest was engaged to see to the necessary arrangements. He was one of a small group of professionals belonging to a Cantonese branch of the *Cheng I* [Zhengyi] school of Taoism who earn their living in Singapore by performing at funeral ceremonies and at Cantonese occasional rites.<sup>4</sup> The priest arranged for the “wedding” ceremony to be held in the temple, hired a room at the Dying House, bought or made all the necessary paraphernalia and together with his troupe of colleagues and disciples performed all the appropriate ceremonies.

The ceremonies in the Dying House started at 8.30 a.m. and throughout the day consisted in the chanting of Taoist sutras. At 11.30 a.m. the effigies of the bride and groom were put into a trishaw and transported to the temple for the “wedding” from which they returned an hour later. In the evening post-mortuary ceremonies of the usual Cantonese kind were held for the pair.<sup>5</sup> All the ceremonies were attended by the boy’s parents and a brother and two sisters who were attending English schools in the Colony.

The photograph (Fig. 1) shows the effigies seated side by side before a table on which a marriage feast has been laid. Both effigies and food are similar to those used in ceremonies associated with the dead. The heads of the figures are made of *papier mâché* and the bodies of paper stretched over bamboo frames. The couple are dressed in real clothing, only the bridal headdress and the groom’s hat and bowtie are made of paper. A wad of “hell bank notes”, imitation money notes of large denominations, is stuffed into the groom’s top pocket. On each side of the pair are bamboo and paper servants, the bride’s bearing a cup and the groom’s (out of the picture) a real packet of cigarettes of a popular brand. In front of the servants stand *ling* or *lung p’ai* [longpai], temporary bamboo and paper soul tablets which are burnt after the ceremonies. In front of the groom is a photograph of the boy taken just before his return to China. Ranged round the room were various life-sized objects of bamboo and paper made for the use of the couple in their new spirit-world home. Notable among them were a dressing table complete with silver-paper mirror, a set of an “aluminium” table and six stools, a large money safe, a

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4 “Some Occasional Rites Performed by the Singapore Cantonese”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JMBRAS), 24(3)(1951). [See Chapter 1 in this book.]

5 “Chinese Rites for the Repose of the Soul”, *JMBRAS*, 25(1)(1952). [See Chapter 2 in this book.]

refrigerator and several trunks of paper clothes and rolls of cloth. Outside the door in the street stood a large American-type bamboo-and-paper car.



Fig. 1. Ghost marriage feast in Singapore.

At dawn, after the ceremonies were over, all the paper articles, including the bride and groom, were taken outside into the back yard. The couple were placed inside their car and everything was then dispatched to the other world by flame.

According to the Taoist priest in charge of the day's activities, Cantonese ghost marriages are still by no means rare in Singapore and he has been engaged to perform them by people, mainly women, of various occupations and income.





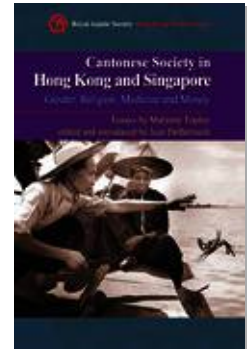
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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## Chapter 6

# Chinese Women's Vegetarian Houses in Singapore

(1954)\*

This article describes the Chinese woman's vegetarian house (齋堂 [zhaitang], *lit.*, vegetarian hall) as it is in Singapore at the present time, and attempts to analyse the reasons for its existence. These organizations of vegetarians are formed with the object of providing board and lodging for unattached women who worship Buddha. Many of these women are without immediate family connections in Malaya, are unmarried and have nobody to care for them and nowhere else to go in their old age. The majority of these houses are formed to meet the needs of Chinese immigrant women workers. In addition there are those which have grown up to cater for the needs of local born women; those who have no wish to marry, or who are lonely widows with nobody to support them, or, for various reasons, prefer not to inflict themselves on their relatives and friends. These houses also cater for married women and concubines who have been deserted by their husbands, or are separated from them, and for actresses, prostitutes and dancing girls who, unable to marry while young, find themselves alone in their old age.

The material used in describing these organizations and their activities was collected during a period of one and a half years' residence in Singapore, and was obtained by interview, eavesdropping and observation while visiting vegetarian houses. In all some thirty to forty houses were visited, each one on several occasions. Interviews were conducted in the Cantonese dialect; or, when this was not understood, with the aid of interpreters speaking the dialect of the person to be interviewed.

## The Family Background

It is often said of the Chinese that they can do without any form of

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\* First published in *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27(1)(1954): 51–67. Reprinted by permission of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

institutional help since their family system itself affords the most efficient kind of social insurance that one could have. This ideal situation, whereby people are helped by relatives, brothers and children, however, can only obtain properly when members of a joint family live near enough to one another or can easily get in touch with one another. True, financial aid can be rendered by people living great distances from each other, as is evidenced by the frequency with which sums of money were, and to some extent still are, sent back to China by immigrants living in Malaya. However, it is only in the large joint family, consisting of husband and wife and their married sons and wives and the unmarried daughters all living in one house that there is the real security of always having a home to go back to. This kind of joint family has been described and discussed many times in various books on the Chinese social organization. Unfortunately, however, most of the literature we have on the Chinese family is deficient in one respect, in that the type of family organization usually described is that found among the upper classes only. The family life of the peasants, tucked away in their isolated villages has been almost unknown to students of anthropology until up to the last few decades. One reason for this has been the remoteness itself, the difficulty of communication with these almost autonomous villages, and the suspicion with which peasants have regarded outsiders, European and Chinese. Another reason has been the barrier set up by language differences. Even the Chinese themselves have found this so, especially in south China where there is a great variety of local dialects with wide divergences even between adjacent villages.

Recent studies, however, carried out mainly by Chinese on the areas from which their own clans originated have shown that the ideal family with its all-embracing mutual assistance is actually rare among the peasant classes. This has been seen to be due partly to the effect of the Chinese laws of inheritance which worked against the maintenance of the large joint family. On the death of the male head of a family, all sons, irrespective of whether they were born of the wife or the concubine, inherited equally in their father's estate. In a poor family with very little land this could have led to the land being broken up into units which became uneconomical to work. To avoid this happening younger sons often sold out to the eldest son who was the new head of the family, and went away to the towns in search of work. Again there is the reason that extremely poor families may be very small in any case, older people dying sooner than in rich families, and children not always living to adulthood due to illness and malnutrition.<sup>1</sup>

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1 See Olga Lang, *The Chinese Family and Society*, pp. 140–41. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

In the joint family, the position of the woman according to traditional custom was briefly as follows: women stayed at home until the time when their parents thought fit to arrange for their marriage. Marriages were arranged by a go-between and a betrothed couple never met before the beginning of the marriage ceremony. A woman's world was her home and she had no property rights. Even if she should earn some money by weaving, spinning or embroidery it went to the head of the family — her father if she were not yet married and her father-in-law if she were married — and only he could dispose of it. After marriage a woman came under the authority of her mother-in-law in all domestic matters and was often harshly treated by her. A husband might even side with his mother against his wife if he was a filial son, and the only consolation of the wife was in the fact that she would herself one day be a mother-in-law and would have similar powers over her own sons' wives.

It is not surprising then, that many women of all classes feared marriage, particularly the peasant woman, who, since her husband's family would not be likely to have servants, would have to work much harder under her mother-in-law's stern eye. In some parts of Kwangtung [Guangdong] Province young girls before they are married all sleep together in a girls' village dormitory, and we have been told by women from these areas that when a girl left at her marriage she was mourned by the other girls in the dormitory as if she were going to her funeral. Ideally speaking, the only courses open to a woman as an alternative to marriage were to become a prostitute, a matchmaker, procuress or midwife, all considered to be low status occupations, or she might become a Buddhist or Taoist nun.

However, we have already seen that in peasant families the number of persons living in one unit was often smaller than obtained among the upper classes. A woman's position as a worker and a supplementer of the family income would be expected to be higher than in a large family with more male members and more money and land. In South China this in fact was the case, especially in Kwangtung and Fukien [Fujian] Provinces where women from time immemorial have worked in the fields and as coolies and have done other manual tasks. There they have never accepted foot binding on such a large scale as in the north and their protests against the old marriage system have been louder. As they were with the men, providers of the family income, the parents of these women often found it more profitable to keep them at home as long as they wished to stay rather than to marry them off and lose a valuable source of income, as well as having to expend a considerable amount of money on their dowry.

Although these Southern Chinese women's protest against the marriage system has always been more vocal than that of the women in the North, until recent years it never took the form of any attack on the

basis of the system or any attempt to change it. They merely refused to marry, preferring to support themselves at home or elsewhere with their own incomes. In the nineteenth century in the Sun Tak [Shunde] district of Kwangtung, a protest against marriage was organized. Many girls joined a movement called the “Girls who do not go to the family” (不萊家). These girls refused to live with their husbands after marriage, remaining virgins and living together in girls’ homes. Often they had to pay a considerable sum of money in compensation to the husband’s family in order to prevent trouble arising when they refused to enter their husband’s home. The Kwangtung authorities eventually were forced to establish special homes for these unattached women because many of them had lost all contact with their fathers and husbands by the time that they reached old age. Most of these girls were workers in the silk factories and had their own earnings to live on. In other districts too, where women worked for their living, even after marriage, many left home to work as servants in the towns. Others, unmarried, became what is known as “Women who put their own hair up” (自梳女), that is, they had their hair coiled up into a bun like a married woman, invited their friends and relatives to a large banquet and announced that they were now as if married and could not be forced into a real marriage. Some women banded together and bought land, cultivating it communally on a profit sharing basis. In order to be able to be so independent of custom, money was needed, and so it was only among the women of the south who could easily earn an income from working in the fields and mills that such practices were found. Later, with the growth of industrial organization in China, women who did not want to be married were able to maintain themselves by working in the factories that developed. Although the new marriage code brought in by the Republic did away with many of the evils of the marriage system, the fears and the prejudices against marriage remained. Many of the women who preferred to remain single or to leave their husbands eventually found their way to Malaya where they obtained work as servants or in the rubber estates and tin mines.

### **The Emigration of Women from China**

In 1933 the Aliens Ordinance of Malaya was passed, to regulate the admission of aliens. One of its objects was to make possible the selection, to some extent, of immigrants on a qualitative basis. Under the ordinance, a system of a monthly quota for alien deck passengers, to be fixed by the Governor in Council, was established. One immediate result of this was the increase in the cost of passages due to the competition among would-be immigrants. Since women were outside the quota there was no

lessening in the number of women entering Malaya. Women's emigration was in fact stimulated by ticket brokers at China ports who refused to sell quota tickets to lodging houses where emigrants waited to embark, until three or four non-quota tickets were bought. Thus, lodging-house owners encouraged women to emigrate. A large number of these women were the very women who in China had been disinclined to marry, or were unhappily married, and who saw, in going to the South Seas, a chance to get right away from relatives or in-laws who might cause trouble if they were merely to break away from their families and stay in their own district and work. From 1933 until May 1938, when a monthly quota of 500 was introduced for women, ship-loads of Cantonese women, mostly from the Sun Tak and Dun Kwan [Dongguan] districts, came to Malaya. Their ages ranged from 18–40. Some came instead of their men-folk (who could not come because of the quota restrictions), to earn money for their families, but a large number never returned to China. Between 1934 and 1938 there was a migrational gain of 190,000 female Chinese deck passengers, the majority of whom were peasant women.

Women workers coming to Singapore to work as servants organize themselves into associations, [and] hire a room to provide a place where temporarily unemployed members can sleep and space for lockers in which they can store their personal belongings. These workers' associations are usually organized on a very small scale, often on a village basis, that is, all the members come from the same village in China, new members being introduced by fellow villagers. There still remains the question of support in old age, however, and where these women can go to when they can no longer work for a living. In the past a certain number of these women returned to China; but nowadays, several women have told us, owing to the political changes those who left China under happy circumstances have even less incentive to return, and many prefer to remain in Malaya. Some women adopt a young girl and bring her up to look after them in their old age.

In Malaya itself, a considerable number of local born Chinese women whom we have interviewed, like the immigrants, do not wish to get married. Here, not only fear of harsh treatment from a prospective mother-in-law and of the pains of child-birth disincline them to marriage, but also some women fear the possibility of being tricked into a marriage as a concubine and not a first wife. Such cases do occur and sometimes it is not until after marriage that a girl finds out that her husband already has a wife in China or living in another part of Singapore or Malaya. Many also fear the possibility of their husband taking a concubine after marriage. In Singapore, unlike China before concubinage was made illegal there, it is not necessary to get the wife's consent before the taking of a concubine, nor is it necessary for the concubine to enter the man's home and formally

recognize the superior rights of the first wife. Even if a man merely takes a mistress, as he considers, such a woman might be able on the man's death intestate to prove a secondary marriage and claim part of his estate.<sup>2</sup> Marriage laws may have changed in China, but many women we have interviewed still feel that marriage according to Chinese custom in Singapore is not very satisfactory or secure from their point of view.

We have seen above that it is to satisfy the needs of security in old age of both local born and immigrant Chinese women that the institution known as the vegetarian house has come into existence in Malaya: these houses exist in all the towns here where there are large numbers of unattached women who worship Buddha and they are in most respects similar in organization and activities. These houses are of a religious character and supply to the outsider many of the amenities of the temple. They are not Buddhist nunneries in the strict sense of the term, however, although in appearance, and in the life the women in them lead, they are similar.<sup>3</sup> Before the advent of the Communist government nunneries were found all over China and they also exist in Singapore in fairly large numbers. Women who join them, however, are expected to live a much stricter and more ascetic life than women joining vegetarian houses. Once a woman becomes a nun she never returns home or to secular life, and life for the *chai ku* [zhaigu],<sup>4</sup> vegetarian, as opposed to that of the *ni ku* [nigu], nun, is much more free and easy. A vegetarian house although closely resembling a nunnery in appearance can really be considered as a home for women run on religious lines. Vegetarian houses offer "care while alive and a funeral at death"<sup>5</sup> in return for work in the house or a sum of money paid in instalments by working women who have not yet entered the house to live there permanently, or a lump sum from those entering for good. Some vegetarian houses manage death benefit societies<sup>6</sup> for private persons living in their own homes, as well as for residents. Contributions to this kind of benefit scheme usually consist in monthly payments in return for a showy funeral with a band at death, and the guarantee of a body of mourners, consisting of the other members of the benefit society; for immigrants who have left their family behind in China and have no relatives living in Malaya, the latter consideration is very important.

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2 See M. Freedman., "Colonial Law and Chinese Society", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 80.

3 The term 齋堂 is a general one used for such institutions as Buddhist monasteries and nunneries as well as the particular kind of organization we describe. In this article, however, we use the term for the latter kind of organization only.

4 齋姑 vegetarian, 尼姑 nun. Wade's romanization is used above.

5 生養死葬 [sheng yang si zang].

6 人壽會 [Ren Shou Hui].

Members of vegetarian houses are free to come and go as they please as long as they get their allotted work done and attend religious observances. The only other limits imposed on members are that they lead a pious life, learn the sutras and follow a vegetarian diet while living in the house. If married they should have severed all connection with their husbands, or received their permission to live in the house.

Some women who initially become vegetarians later become nuns, that is they shave their heads and go through ceremonies in which they are required to take certain binding vows. In this case they then have a series of burns made on their heads denoting their rank; three symbolizing the Buddhist triad for first rank, nine for the nine kinds of lotus for second rank and twelve for the disciples of Buddha for the third and highest rank. Vegetarians who become nuns may continue to live in the same house afterwards or may enter a nunnery as they please; most vegetarian houses in fact have a mixture of nun and vegetarian residents. In one house of our acquaintance, which is run mainly for women still working as amahs who live there on and off, the resident members are two very old nuns. One nun was previously married, a rather rare circumstance, but she and her husband did not like their arranged marriage and both decided to take the vows of nun and monk respectively. The husband now runs a nearby monastery which has considerable controlling power over the vegetarian house. By virtue of his power, his ex-wife also has a lot of influence over the women members of the house although she is a comparative newcomer.

The majority of the women joining vegetarian houses prefer not to become nuns, however, because apart from the expense usually involved at initiation — banquets are given for friends and their teacher and also for the members of the organization to which they belong — becoming a nun is considered by many women to be a step unnecessary and too binding for people who merely want to lead a good life and live in a vegetarian house. Younger vegetarians have told us that for a woman to become a nun and cut herself off entirely from her family is an insult to that family. According to what one woman said, “Becoming a nun makes people think your family are very bad people to have caused you to take such a step.” Another said, “It is not worth becoming a nun unless one wishes to take it up as a profession (i.e. taking part in funerals and other ceremonies for which people hire nuns). By becoming a vegetarian, I will not find it so difficult to return to secular life if conditions in the world make it necessary. Also a shaved head is very ugly.” This woman was about thirty years of age and had come to the house after working for several years in a factory. She had separated from her husband and completely lost touch with him.

Women living in vegetarian houses live a fairly free and easy life; they wear their own clothes, smoke if they wish and entertain visitors quite frequently. Their diet is strictly vegetarian however, although even this is no hardship, for the food is usually very good and made more enticing by being prepared in such a way that it resembles various kinds of meat and fish dishes. Their main foods consist in vegetables, salted and fresh, mushrooms of all kinds, peanut oil, rice and *mee* [*mian*, noodles]. When away visiting, some women will eat a little meat occasionally and women who are still working and are only casual boarders in the house will eat meat while away at work. The children reared in some houses too, are given meat and milk because it is considered that they need them for their growth.

The amount of work done by a woman in a vegetarian house depends largely on her financial position. Those who pay their way do very little apart from helping to keep the altars clean and arranging the various fruit and flower offerings on them and keeping their own sleeping quarters clean. These women are able to spend more time on their devotions than the non-paying members and usually employ a teacher in order to learn to chant and understand the sutras. Women who cannot afford to pay their way must do the heavier work of the house such as the general cleaning, chopping of firewood, cooking and washing and marketing. Many houses have their own plot of land where they grow fruit trees and vegetables and are fairly self-sufficient. Members may engage in business ventures if they wish and those who are well acquainted with the sutras sometimes accept engagements to conduct funeral ceremonies as the nuns do. We know some vegetarians who have shares in a vegetarian restaurant, and in another house we know there is a young vegetarian whom the elder members have had trained as an acupuncturist; she has a small surgery-consulting room attached to the house where she sees people two or three times a week.

### What Vegetarians Believe

Nearly all vegetarian houses are Buddhist and we have only come across one which called itself Taoist. It is the Pure Land Sect of the "Greater Vehicle" Buddhism which is most popular with the ordinary people of China, being more comprehensible to them in its form of worship and belief. It is this sect which is found in the main in Malaya and many originally Taoist gods and goddesses have become incorporated in its belief and its type of worship. The major tenet of the Pure Land Sect is the belief in a Western Paradise, a country composed of precious stones and everything to delight the eye. Those who reach there after death need have

no fear of becoming a hungry ghost (*preta*) or an animal by transmigration. *Amida* Buddha (*0-mi-t'o-fuh* [*Amitufo*]) rules over this paradise and admits all who trust in his power and repeat his name; no amount of virtue will ensure rebirth in this happy land if unaccompanied by invocations of *Amida*. *Kuan Yin* [*Guanyin*] (*Avalokitesvara*), known to the West as the "Goddess of Mercy" is another of the major deities of the sect. The journey to the Pure Land is often represented on Buddhist paper prayer charms as a boat-load of worshippers sailing over the sea of sorrow under the guidance of *Kuan Yin*. The Pure Land originally was supposed to be a preparatory step towards Nirvana, but among the ordinary people, the concept of Nirvana was never really understood and this Western Paradise is supposed by most to be the ultimate goal. *Amida* was "born of a lotus in the Western Paradise", and became a Buddha by devoting his life to benevolence. *Kuan Yin*, when about to enter Buddhahood, turned back and listened to the cry of suffering from the earth and decided to postpone Buddhahood until all living creatures should be saved. The worship of *Kuan Yin* is extremely popular among all Chinese women and not only among vegetarians. There exists a Chinese legend about a princess, the third daughter of a king, which is commonly supposed to be the life story of *Kuan Yin*. This princess successfully repelled all efforts on her father's part to get her married off and became a Buddhist nun in spite of great opposition from her family.<sup>7</sup> We have had this story quoted to us several times by vegetarians as a justification for their own single state.

According to the Pure Land Sect teaching, salvation is promised to all who can repeat the name of *Amida* when they are dying: they are guaranteed rebirth in paradise where they are assured of being men for there are no women in this perfect land. It is in anticipation of this state that communities of vegetarians call each other "brother". As there is a certain danger that at the moment of death people are likely to forget to repeat the name of *Amida*, vegetarians are encouraged to learn to repeat his name constantly so that the repetition becomes almost automatic after a time and less likely to be forgotten.

### **The Appearance of the Vegetarian Houses and the Method of Joining Them**

There is no definite layout for a vegetarian house in Malaya. Houses are of all kinds ranging from those which are little more than workers'

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7 Henry Dore, S.J., *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. by M. Kennelly, S.J., Vol. VI, pp. 134–96. Shanghai, T'uswei Press, 1922.

association houses with a small altar somewhere, to those which are hardly distinguishable in appearance from nunneries. Names of vegetarian houses and nunneries are also similar, using all kinds of propitious and virtuous words. Many nunneries are, like vegetarian houses, called *T'ang* ([*Tang*], hall) but the more strict ones will be called *An* ([*An*], 庵) and becoming a nun is sometimes called entering an *An*. In most vegetarian houses there is one room devoted to the images of *Amida* and *Kuan Yin*, with subsidiary altars arranged in different parts of the room to other members of the Pure Land pantheon and some of the Taoist pantheon. These rooms are quite small and on festival days it is almost impossible to get in without a great deal of discomfort. Another room is set aside for the housing of the soul tablets of the deceased members, both residents and those living outside the house. Many houses also use this room as a sick room for residents and small houses may use it as a dining room as well. These rooms then, together with a kitchen, sleeping quarters, and possibly an extra shrine room comprise the vegetarian house.

Houses are often organized on a tribal basis, or even according to the districts or villages in China from which their members originally came. This is especially true of those originated by and comprised of immigrant working women members, owing to language difficulties and group prejudices. When the members of a house are mainly local women, the tribal composition tends to be more varied. Locally born Chinese usually speak a smattering of the several dialects found in Malaya even if they are not fluent in them, and the tribal barrier is thereby weakened. We have visited houses run by, and mainly for, Straits Chinese where Hakka, Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese women all live together harmoniously.

Women join vegetarian houses as we have seen, because they do not want to get married or because they are widowed or separated from their husbands. In interviews with members of various vegetarian houses we put the question: "Why did you join?" and the following reasons are typical of the replies we were given. From a married woman: "My husband is dead and I cannot burden friends and relatives with the trouble and expense of keeping an old woman and providing her with a funeral." From another: "I have eight sons. Four were sent to Siam by the Japanese, I don't know what happened to them. The other four took it in turn to look after me but I became tired of this and joined this house paying \$300 as entrance fee." By an unmarried member we were told: "Men are bad. Why marry? If one does not marry one can save up for one's old age and join a vegetarian house or live with a friend. Or one can buy a child and have everything that marriage has to offer and one's own money too." Another answered: "It is easier to get to the happy land if one does not marry." Again we were told: "If I get married and my husband becomes rich, he takes a concubine. If he becomes poor, I have to go out to work.

Better to work for myself and when I am old come here and live permanently." Another young unmarried girl said: "I did not get on with my stepmother very well. When I saw my father always quarrelling with her, it made me decide not to marry, so when I left school at the age of sixteen I entered this vegetarian house." Another: "I came to Singapore from China when I was sixteen. When my father died I worked as a baby amah, joining this house at the same time. I worked for eight years and now live here permanently. Marriage is no good, men cannot be trusted. If I got married how would I know that the man would not have a wife already in China; that happened to a friend of mine."

A woman wishing to join a house will usually pick one in which she already has friends or acquaintances from her own village. If she is a working woman, she may join a house recommended to her by the members of her association. Sometimes whole workers' associations join the same house in a body. After prospective member has enquired carefully into the financial condition and the reputation of the house, her next step is to go to see the head controlling vegetarian, accompanied by the person who is introducing her, in order to discuss financial terms, etc. If she is not working, she will state her reason for wishing to join, and after her case has been investigated and enquiries made about her character and personality, she will, if considered suitable, be allowed to enter after signing a document to the effect that she will be a good Buddhist and devote her life to worship. Women joining on a permanent boarding basis may pay anything between \$300–\$700 depending on the standing of the house. A completely destitute woman who is still physically capable of work may be taken in, and given her food and lodging and possibly occasional lessons in reciting the sutras, in return for her services. She may also go outside the house from time to time to do odd jobs such as sewing and cleaning in order to earn a little pocket money and something towards her keep. Women still in their youth and working — usually as amahs — but who wish to plan ahead for their old age may join a vegetarian house, paying a monthly rate of anything up to \$20, depending on how many years they will be contributing before they retire. In return they get the use of sleeping accommodation while their employers are away or when they are out of a job; some women join a vegetarian house instead of a workers' association. Other working women join a house on a more casual basis, perhaps attending for a vegetarian meal twice a month and on festival days, and occasionally paying for a night or two's board and lodging.

Houses occupied mainly by local born women occasionally have arrangements for working women to join them but this practice is not so common as it is in immigrant houses. Instead, they seem to specialize more in taking in young children who are brought up to be Buddhists and

recite the sutras. The rearing of children is not so common in houses run for workers because these have fewer permanent residents to look after them and most of the women who live in such houses all the time will be very elderly. Girl children are given to houses by their parents for several reasons but most of them are given by poor families with many daughters. Girls are not usually valued as highly as boys by the Malayan Chinese, and, also, worry over the expense of the dowry that custom requires to be given by the parents at their daughters' marriages, may prompt families to sell girls or give them away to vegetarian houses. Others are given because they are born with an "unlucky" horoscope, that is, one believed to bring bad luck on the child's parents or which causes it to be considered unsuitable for marriage. Poor parents may be given a present of a red packet of money for a child, or, in cases where the parents are better off, they may be charged by the head vegetarian something towards the child's keep.

Most Chinese women, married or single, are very fond of children and the women living in vegetarian houses usually look after them very well. We have never seen any such children looking starved or badly treated, but, on the contrary they seemed to be well fed and happy. Such children are frequently sent to school, taught sewing and cooking, and how to chant the sutras and help in the religious observances on festival days. All money given by the children's relatives at Chinese New Year or on any other occasions is kept by the head vegetarian, who, after giving a few coins to the child for pocket money, will put the remainder towards its keep.

In one house of our acquaintance, the girls when they reach sixteen years of age, are asked whether they wish to remain in the house as vegetarians or leave to look for work. If they decide to stay, they must sign a declaration of their intention and burn it before the image of *Kuan Yin* after which they are looked upon as formal members. We were told by one informant that nowadays more girls leave the house on coming of age than in former years, they see more people than they used to, and also there are now more jobs open to women in the outside world. She also said that more old people have entered since the war owing to the number of women who lost their husbands during the fighting and occupations, and now have nobody else to care for them.

Local born women's vegetarian houses tend to be more permanent than those run for the benefit of immigrant workers because they have a constant influx of children and are open to women of all tribes. Immigrant houses catering for the needs of women from one village alone or one small area of a province in China tend to grow old and die with their members rather than throw membership open to a larger variety of women. The ban on the immigration of Chinese which has cut off their original

supply of members will undoubtedly strengthen this tendency unless they enlarge the scope of their operations or membership. We know of several houses in Singapore where this is happening. In each case the house is run on a village basis, the villages being ones from which in the past large numbers of immigrants came to Malaya to work.

### **Ownership of Houses**

The controlling rights in houses are usually of a very complicated nature and it is not always easy to find out who really has the rights of disposal of money and property and of carrying on the business end of things in general. However the following kinds of ownership seem to be the most common in Singapore. A house may be opened by a group of women members themselves who run it on a committee basis with a president elected yearly or it may be owned by one woman, acting herself as head vegetarian and controlling all the activities of the house. Other bigger ones sometimes have several committees, one to manage the ordinary everyday activities of the house, decide the rota of work, etc., another one for festival management and another perhaps to run a death society. If the money for building such a house was put up by one or two persons, they will occupy a controlling position in each of the committees. Other vegetarian houses are started by nunneries or monasteries which sometimes build them in their own grounds. In such cases, the head nun or abbot will then officiate at all important festival observances and may be able to influence the activities of the house considerably. Still other houses are built with the capital of business men who are keen Buddhists. After the house has been built they hand over the management of it to one or several women vegetarians who, from long experience of living in vegetarian houses, are well versed in the sutras and in the every day management of such a house.

A woman who wishes to start a house on her own will first of all join an existing one and live there for some months or even years during which time she learns all that she considers necessary for running a place of her own. She will also engage a teacher, almost certainly one recommended by the head vegetarian and who is the teacher to the rest of the women living in the house. Such teachers often have a considerable influence over women's houses; they are respected for their learning and women are usually anxious to accept any advice they may have to offer on general questions of business management or on personal matters. Such a teacher also quite often has a financial interest in his pupil's house, but even when the teacher's functions are merely to teach and advise the members his influence is fairly strong.

After a prospective owner has finished her term of study and has selected a plot of land, she builds her house and moves in, sometimes taking with her residents of the house in which she had been living as her first members. This will be arranged with the head vegetarian and such residents will come with her either because they did not get on very well with their companions in the first house or because the first house was getting overcrowded. The house she builds may be a simple *attap* [a kind of palm] hut to begin with, or if she is a rich widow or an amah who has saved a lot of money it may be more elaborate. She may also look for a guarantor as to her piety and honesty, often her teacher. If she is not very well off she may ask her teacher or a relative or friend to back her financially. Often such new houses retain a social bond with the house to which the owner first belonged and with the teacher. Sometimes loose “federations” of sister houses grow up, all united under the same teacher from whom members have received their religious instruction, and, by virtue of their head’s residence while still learning, in one or other of the sister houses in the group. In this way a teacher, usually a learned and important member of a monastery, perhaps the abbot himself, may have as many as twenty or so houses recognizing him as their teacher and business adviser. Sometimes these social bonds weaken when the teacher dies but often they continue and a great amount of visiting back and forth goes on as we have seen for ourselves and incidentally probably helped to encourage. Some of these houses are rather out of the way of public transport and we were frequently persuaded to take in our car visiting women going from one house to another.

To become an owner of a vegetarian house one has either to be able to command respect by virtue of esoteric knowledge of Buddhism or by virtue of one’s capital and good business ability. In one group of sister houses we know, a high standard of knowledge of the sutras is demanded of a head woman: she must be unmarried and have reached the top grade, or the grade second to the top, before she is eligible. She has also to give a series of expensive dinners for the teacher of the group and the heads of all the houses in the group, but this grading of members, and insistence on virginity, is not common, especially among immigrant organizations.

Groups of sister houses all with strong social ties binding them offer an excellent opportunity to the women of keeping harmony among their members. When the atmosphere becomes too tense, women just move out to another house. One lady we know has been the whole round of the houses in the group and when we left Singapore, it looked as if she was about to start on a second circuit of the course.

## **Death Benefit Societies**

A number of the more highly organized and wealthier houses run outside organizations such as schemes for paying in for festival celebrations and, like other Chinese organizations and clubs, death benefit societies. Most of these death benefit schemes have a membership limited to Chinese women and the small scale ones are limited to people coming from the same village in China. They arrange funerals, supply the nuns or vegetarians to take part in the various funeral ceremonies, people to mourn, and a plot of burial ground as well. The soul tablets of their members, on death, will be placed in the tablet hall of the vegetarian house running the society. To give an example of the kind of rules and regulations which such societies draw up, we quote the following list which is that of a benefit society run by the owner and committee of a particularly wealthy house we know. We are not cognisant of the exact number of members belonging to this benefit society but have been told that it runs into hundreds. Membership is open to all Chinese women and their male relatives and the society's object is registered as being "to hold commemorative services to Buddha, to hold penitential prayers, to chant sutras, to liberate caged animals and to exhort the practice of good will and charity, and to encourage mutual help among members." Members shall be introduced and seconded by another, and if the application is approved by a committee, an entrance fee and monthly subscription shall be paid. The monthly subscription is \$3.00 for a period of ten years, after which only an annual "oil and incense" subscription of \$3.00 need be paid. Commemorative services on the occasion of the birthday of Buddha are \$10.00 per head (the cost of the vegetarian meal given to all members on festival days). A death benefit of \$500 will be paid, but a member must have been paying in for four months previously. \$15.00 is deductible for transport, oil and incense expenses. A member who has subscribed for a period of five years to monthly subscriptions is entitled to \$250 on return to China, after 10 years this will be increased to \$500. Penitential prayers and fasting are held on the 15th of the first moon and the 24th of the sixth moon, according to the lunar calendar.

The owner of this temple is a wealthy widow of particularly shrewd business ability. She has gradually extended the scope of her activities until now, she, together with one or two fellow members of the house, owns a share in a dying house, and she herself owns a religious paper goods shop, a joss factory and an old people's home, to which members of the original house together with outsiders can go when they are very old and unable to work at all. In addition in common with vegetarians from other houses and also some private persons she has a share in a vegetarian restaurant which does the catering for large dinners given by

temples and nunneries and private persons. She has the singular custom of adopting sons and daughters who are likely to prove useful to her and includes among her “family” men and women fluent in English and good at business. When the old people’s home was opened, about a thousand guests, including the owners of all the wealthy temples and vegetarian houses in Singapore, were present at one or other of the two vegetarian meals given in honour of the opening. The cost of this meal we were told proudly by her, worked out at about \$4.00 per table for lunch and at about \$15.00 per table for dinner; the meals were, of course, provided by the restaurant in which she had a share. Brandy and whisky were on every dinner table, and we gathered that her reputation was greatly enhanced by the whole day’s celebrations.

Vegetarian houses usually own a plot of land in a cemetery for the burial of their deceased residents and outside members, in a way similar to clan associations; the exception being the strict Buddhist houses who do not believe in burial and have their members cremated in proper accordance with Buddhist belief, although this is more common among the nunneries. At *Ching Ming* [*sic.*, *Qingming*], the sweeping of the graves and season for sacrifice to the dead, the members of a vegetarian house, or group of sister houses, will go out in a party to perform their religious tasks, selecting a day well before or after the actual day of *Ching Ming* so as to avoid the crowds. Groups of sister houses often own common burial plots in the same cemetery, while if their members are of different tribes, they will own plots in the corresponding tribal cemeteries. In 1952 we accompanied a body of members belonging to a group of sister houses together with monks from their original teacher’s monastery on their excursion to the graves. The whole project took a day, as many different plots had to be visited, ending up finally at the grave of their teacher. Fruit, vegetarian dishes, tea and Chinese wine were placed in turn on each grave and on the altar to the spirit of the earth which is at the side of each grave. Large quantities of paper money and coats were also burnt for the deceased. On another day a sacrificial meal was prepared for the deceased members in the biggest house of the group, the meal, after the soul substance of the food had been consumed by the deceased, being divided up and eaten by their living friends.

Nearly all houses, whether they manage a death benefit club or not, have arrangements whereby people can pay in for festival celebrations, the most important ones being for the three *Kuan Yin* festivals, *Amida*’s birthday and the birthday of *Sakyamuni*, the founder of the Buddhist faith. Some houses also organize expeditions to Pulau Kusu at the festival of *Tua Peck Kong* [*Dabo Gong*], a god whose origin is not clear, but who is very popular in Malaya. In return for their money, people paying in for festivals get a vegetarian lunch to eat and various paper charms to take

home. Other small scale business activities of vegetarian houses include fortune telling, the sale of Buddhist prayer books, pictures of saints and prayer papers and the sale of bottled holy water which is supposed to have medicinal properties.

We have had an opportunity recently of obtaining comparative material on vegetarian houses as they exist in Hong Kong at the present time and were interested to note that they appear to be fewer in number and more limited in scope than those of Singapore. A possible reason for this may be that since Hong Kong is closer to China than Malaya is, women coming from the mainland have been able to maintain closer contact with their own homes and in their old age return more easily to their villages to be looked after and are, therefore, less in need of local help. It is the immigrant women's vegetarian houses at the present time which are more in evidence in Malaya but, as we have seen, unless these widen the scope of their membership, owing to the ban on immigration, they will eventually die out until only houses made up of local born women will remain. The future of these vegetarian houses depends largely on the continuance among the Chinese of belief in the Buddhist faith. Much also depends on the future of Chinese marriage customs and women's prejudice against marriage. Even if there is a decrease in the number of spinsters seeking a life in a vegetarian house, however, there will always be women who find themselves without support in their old age. While such women continue to seek help and sanctuary in a religious institution, vegetarian houses will continue to flourish.





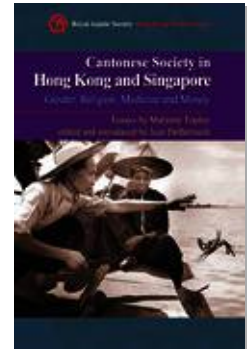
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## Chapter 7

# Chinese Religion and Religious Institutions in Singapore

(1956)\*

The word temple is used somewhat vaguely in Singapore and Malaya to refer to a wide variety of places of Chinese worship, all with differing functions and organization and ranging from the small attap hut erected for the worship of some specific deity or *shen*,<sup>1</sup> *Fu* [*Fo*],<sup>2</sup> Buddha or *P'u Sa* [*Pusat*], Bodhisattva, to the larger places where Buddhist monks live and ordination ceremonies are able to take place; buildings for which, in fact, the word monastery is more suitable. The Chinese themselves when talking about their places of worship in English do not always distinguish them, by name, for English has a notable lack of terms with which to describe such places.

One of the main distinctions however, is that between residential and non-residential places of worship, the latter kind having probably only one permanent inhabitant, the caretaker or perhaps a controlling monk. We prefer to reserve the use of the word “temple” for these non-residential places only. Of the residential category, there are those that we might call Buddhist monasteries or nunneries, where, men or women with shaven heads and wearing some kind of habit live and earn their living as

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- 1 We use this word throughout the text to refer to any spirit, or any deified hero or emperor that is embodied in image form for worship, and excluding Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The word *shen* does in fact have a wider meaning but it is in the above sense that it is used widely in Singapore to refer to objects of worship.
- 2 The Wade system for romanizing Chinese words has been adopted in this paper. It is regretted however, that diacritical marks are not available. When an expression is used that is peculiar to a locally spoken dialect, the commonly accepted romanized form of that dialect is given. That is, for Cantonese, the form used by Meyer and Wempe (*The Student's Cantonese-English Dictionary*) and for Hokkien, Douglas's romanization (*Chinese-English Dictionary of the Vernacular or Spoken Language of Amoy*).

religious specialists, conducting rites of various kinds on request, and officiating at masses for the dead. The women's house, the "nunnery", where only full nuns, *ni ku* [*nigu*] with shaven heads and fully ordained status live, is in fact very rare in Singapore. Even in "nunneries" where the majority of the inmates are *ni ku* very few of them will be found to have been fully ordained according to correct Buddhist procedure. Most of the nuns of Singapore are "unofficially" ordained into the lower ranks and have their heads shaved by their own "master" or teacher. This type of ordination is known as "spoken ordination", *shuo chieh* [*shuojie*] and is much quicker and cheaper than the full ordination ceremony performed in a monastery possessing the right to ordain. Full ordination involves a journey to Penang or Hong Kong where there are monasteries which periodically hold large ordination ceremonies for monks and nuns coming from all parts of the Nan Yang [Nanyang].

More often in Singapore, Buddhist "nunneries" contain a mixture of occupants, *ni ku* and *chai ku* [*zhaigu*]. The latter are a form of lay nun. These women do not shave their heads but merely enter the Buddhist faith *kuei i* [*guiyi*], taking a teacher or "master" and pledging allegiance to the Buddha, the Buddhist law and the priesthood. They are given a new Buddhist name by their master which indicates their new membership of the Buddhist family.<sup>3</sup> Some of these women take the first five vows of the Buddhist priesthood which consist of promises not to kill any living creature, steal, commit adultery, lie or drink intoxicating liquor. Taking the five vows is considered by women who live in these houses to be a serious step and one which involves permanent vegetarianism and, for married women, the breaking off of sexual relations with their husbands. Generally speaking older women take these vows more than younger women.

The *ni ku* and the male *ho shang* [*heshang*], monks, are said to have "left the family", this term is a synonym in Chinese for becoming a nun or monk. The lay monk or nun however, may return to his or her family whenever they please. Many lay men and women take these vows and never enter a monastery or nunnery, or they may enter for short periods at a time only. Such people are known as *chu shih* and there are institutions called *chu shih lin* [*zhushi lin*] where these lay devotees meet occasionally for the chanting of Buddhist sutras. There is one in Kim Yam Road, Singapore.

Buddhist monasteries are of two kinds; the larger kind is the *shih fang ts'ung lin* [*shifang conglin*], the "monastery for all the world", open to any ordained monk who wishes to stay in it, for as long as he pleases. The ordination of monks and nuns may be performed only in this kind of

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3 See pp. 167–68 for more about these names and "families" of monks and nuns.

monastery, and they are naturally very large for the numbers of persons they may be called upon to house at one time are often considerable. The only monastery of this kind in Singapore is the *Shuang Lin Ch'an Ssu* [*Shuang Lin Chan Si*] in Kiam Kiat Road. However, no ordinations are in fact held there, owing, we were told, to a shortage of the staff that such occasions would necessitate. The biggest *shih fang ts'ung lin* in Malaya, and the only one here where ordinations are held, is the *Chi Lo Ssu* [*Jile Si*] (Hokkien: *Kek Lok Si*), "Ayer-Hitam temple" in Penang. The other kind of Buddhist monastery, and incidentally, all nunneries are also of this kind, is the *tzu sun ts'ung lin* [*zisun conglin*], monastery or nunnery for "sons and grandsons"; institutions in which the residents consist of one "family" of monks or nuns; a master and his or her disciples.

In Malaya, however, monasteries or nunneries consisting of a whole family are seldom if ever found. Monk families have been fragmented by immigration to Malaya and have rarely reassembled here. Although a teacher and his or her disciples, usually adopted children, are found in Singapore Buddhist houses, some of the inmates will be of different "families", and their relationship with the head monk or nun may be based on nothing more than a territorial link. One does, however, find that heads of nunneries who have the same teacher maintain friendly relations and members of friendly houses attend each others' festivals and other functions.

Another kind of residential place of worship is the *chai t'ang* [*zhaitang*], the vegetarian hall or house. In fact nunneries and monasteries are also known somewhat vaguely as *chai t'ang* in Singapore, but we prefer to reserve this term for those houses where mainly vegetarians are found. Some of these houses are Buddhist and may be put up by monks on a piece of land belonging to their monastery or in the back of a temple that they control. The *Yu Huang Tien* [*Yuhuang Dian*], a temple in Havelock Road, has *chai t'ang* quarters for about ten women put up by the controlling monk in the back premises. They provide accommodation usually for women who have no one to support them, or for some reason or other prefer to live away from their relatives and who undertake to eat only vegetarian food. There are one or two male *chai t'ang* in Singapore with a few old immigrant Chinese, unmarried, or with a wife in China who live in them, but the majority of these houses are for women. A large number of these houses in Singapore belong to a religious sect with a theology based on a synthesis of Chinese religious ideas which is named *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao* [*Xiantian Dadao*],<sup>4</sup> the Great Way of Before Heaven.

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4 When our paper on "Chinese Women's Vegetarian Houses in Singapore" was submitted (see *JMBRAS*, 27(1)(May 1954) [see Chapter 5 in this book], we unfortunately did not know that this sect had branches in Malaya and that in fact many of the *chai t'ang* from which we

The chief object of worship of this sect is *Chin Mu* [*Jinmu*], Golden Mother, a *shen* which some of the women who belong to this sect identify with *Kuan Yin* [*Guanyin*], the Bodhisattva known to the West as the Goddess of Mercy. Those who belong to this sect differ from the Buddhists in that they do not shave their heads however many vows they take or whatever rank they obtain in the sect, and the controlling members of *Hsien T'ien Tao* have sometimes been married, although to hold rank in the sect a member must foreswear sexual relations. The leaders do not necessarily live in a *chai t'ang* and many of them have their own outside businesses or professions. However, all who live in the houses of the sect are bound to eat vegetarian food only. Like the Buddhists they have their "family" system, and an elaborate hierarchy of ranks to be obtained, but the discipline within their houses tends to be less strict than in those of the Buddhists, and for this reason a large number of women are attracted towards the sect.

Half way between the residential and non-residential places of worship are temples with accommodation for a few monks who may live there permanently, conducting rites for outside worshippers, who may be invited by the manager of the temple to stay for a few days during the conducting of festival celebrations. The *T'ien Fu Kung* [*Tianfu Gong*; commonly known by its Hokkien name, *Thian Hock Keng*], called by the Cantonese the *Kuan Yin Miao* [*Guanyin Miao*] and by the Hokkiens the *Ma Tzu Kung* [*Mazu Gong*], in Telok Ayer Street is of the former kind.

Of non-residential places of worship, one may distinguish the clan or territorial or dialect group association temple where the soul tablets of deceased members may be kept for a specified fee, and where they can be assured of the continued correct ritual attention which custom demands and which is not always possible to achieve in the private home. These temples differ from others also in that they are not open to the public as general places of worship. In the homeland of China, soul tablets are of two different kinds and are worshipped by two different sets of people. Those of the less distant class of ancestors are kept in the home, while those of more remote generations are kept in the temple or hall of the lineage or sub-lineage to which their owners belonged. Here such distinctions are not maintained, and ancestral temples have soul tablets for worship which, like the members of the many "kin" associations themselves, are recruited from a variety of different levels, and include the nearly deceased as well as the more remote ancestors. The *Ch'en*

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obtained material belonged to this sect. This was due partly to the ignorance many women inmates of houses of this sect display about the sect, and partly to a certain reluctance on the part of those who do know to divulge knowledge about which there is a general air of secrecy.

(Hokkien: *Tan*) Clan temple in Magazine Road for example, belongs to an association which has members of the surname *Ch'en* [*Chen*] from all dialect groups.

Other non-residential places of worship are dedicated to the worship of one *shen*, or are pantheistic but with various *shen* claiming popularity as objects of worship for different purposes; others are concerned primarily with medium practices. Such kinds of temples are all open to the public. There are in addition, a number of places of worship of a more exclusive nature, perhaps worshipping a particular deity or *shen* and being open to members only. The Nanyang Sacred Union<sup>5</sup> in River Valley Road is a syncretic sect worshipping Confucius, Lao Tzu [*Laozi*] and Buddha and making their premises available to members only.

Although when speaking in English a Chinese may refer to all places of worship described above loosely as “temples”, in fact in Chinese there are many terms by which they may be distinguished. The use of certain terms makes it possible for the investigator to know in advance with a fair degree of certainty what kind of place of worship one would find, whereas with others, whatever distinctions they once implied have become blurred when used in the *Nan Yang*, and are not a very accurate guide to the type of building in which worship takes place and to the religious practices associated with it. From the list of places of worship which are enrolled as members of the Buddhist Federation in Singapore, we have extracted the following terms which are common in Malaya; this collection of terms however, is far from being an exhaustive one, there are many others.

There is the *ssu* [*si*] which can be used to refer to a hall, public office or court, but in the religious sense almost invariably refers to a Buddhist monastery or nunnery and tends in Malaya to be used more for the former. In nearly all cases buildings called *ssu* will be found to be monasteries here. However although they are places where monks live and worship together, in the urban areas the temptation to earn money by installing for worship the more obscure *shen* of the Taoist and folk traditions, more popular perhaps, among the people of the area, has often, judging from what we have seen, proved too much for the monks. The *P'u T'o Ssu* [*Putuo Si*] in Narcis Street is an example. This *ssu* is indeed a residence for monks but its main worshipping activities appear to be carried on in the outer part of its shrine room, where one may look in vain for images of the Buddhist pantheon. The room is divided into two as far as the images for worship are concerned, and although in the inner part are found the various Bodhisattvas and Buddhas of the Buddhist religion, in the outer part a multitude of *shen* of all kinds are found and provision is made for the performance of the kind of occasional rites more usually

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5 In fact a sect called *Tung Shan She* [*Tongshan She*], an off-shoot of *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao*.

associated with non-Buddhist ideas. A flourishing religious business is carried on here, administered by a lay man no doubt appointed by the monk in charge. Another Buddhist place of worship is the *an*, a term which again can be used to refer to a monastery or nunnery; it has however, come to be used more for nunneries. The word *t'ang* [*tang*], hall or house, is used to describe temples for the worship of ancestral soul tablets, and is also popular with the *Hsien T'ien Tao* sect to describe their vegetarian houses. The term *she*, which means among other things to lodge, to reside at, to stop at, is also used by this sect, an example being the *Fei Hsia Tsing She* [*Feixia Qingshe*] in Jalan Ampas off Balestier Road, a large house popular with Cantonese women. *Yuan* which really means a park or place for rearing animals is a term used quite commonly here for Buddhist nunneries. The terms *Kung* [*gong*] and *Tien* [*dian*] both mean a palace, the former once meaning any kind of dwelling house but coming later to mean only the imperial palaces. *Shen* who are deified emperors or famous historical characters posthumously given a rank such as duke or prince are often housed in "palaces". The *Yu Huang Temple* in Havelock Road is appropriately called *tien* [*dian*], a fitting residence for the Jade or Pearly Emperor. Some temples are called *miao* on their name board, but in fact the word *miao* is a general term for non-residential places of worship and can be used to refer to any temple. Finally, we might mention the *Yuan*.<sup>6</sup> Any building with a surrounding wall is technically a *yuan* and it is a word used of hospitals and other institutions. In the religious sense it is a *ssu yuan* [*siyuan*], a Buddhist monk's dwelling, or *tao yuan* [*daoyuan*], the residence of a *Nam-mo-lo* (C[antonese]), or *sai kong* (H[okkien]) [*shigong*], a Taoist priest. These *tao yuan* are often just one room in a shop house where such priests live and perhaps carry on a small cottage industry in paper charms and paper funeral houses and furniture. There is one in Upper Cross Street where the *Nam-mo-lo*, apart from engaging in the usual run of priestly pursuits, also acts in the singular capacity of marriage broker for the ghostly nuptials of the dead.

Apart from these quasi-descriptive terms given to places of Chinese worship, there are also their names which are of a number of kinds. Sometimes the name of a temple is taken from the name of the *shen* to which it is dedicated, such places as the many *Kuan Yin miao* found in Singapore for example. Others make use of characters of lofty moral content such as *Shan Te T'ang* [*Shande Tang*], Hall or House of Good Virtue. Others are propitious, such as the *Fu Shou T'ang* [*Fushou Tang*], House of Happiness and Longevity in Race Course Road. Propitious characters were similarly used in China for the naming of family houses

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6 Distinguish from *yuan* above, see Chinese glossary at the end of this paper.

and ancestral halls; their use in residential places of worship, particularly vegetarian houses is probably in imitation of this. Some *chai t'ang* owners try to choose a name that is aesthetically pleasing such as the *Fei Hsia Tsing She*, the “lodge” of Flying Roseate Clouds. Finally, we have come across one example of a vegetarian house being named after its founder. This is the *Ch'en Tso Mien T'ang* [*Chen Zuo Mian Tang*] in Mandalay Road, the women inmates of which, mainly Cantonese women from the Shun Te district, hold their *lao shih* [*laoshi*] “master” and first patriarch, Mr. Ch'en an incarnation of a Buddha as their sole object of worship. Vegetarian houses often get their names from the name of the house wherein their owner received his or her own religious training. Thus the *Fei Hsia Tsing She* is named after the *Fei Hsia Tung* [*Feixia Dong*] (cave or grotto) in Kwangtung. Similarly, an owner of a vegetarian house may select one of the characters in the name of the house wherein they received their own training to appear in the name of any subsequent ones that they may own or control. Thus the *lao shih* of the *T'ung Shan T'ang* in Devonshire Road, has control over many vegetarian houses, most of which have either the word *t'ung* [*tong*], together, all, shared in, or *shan*, good, as part of their name.

We have seen then, that the term “temple” in English is used to cover many kinds of places of Chinese worship, and that it might therefore, be advisable to restrict its use to at least the non-residential kind. The Chinese themselves have many terms descriptive of the kind of building where worship is carried on, and although many of these are not a very accurate guide to the type of worship carried on in them, some have come to be identified with places where particular kinds of *shen* are worshipped or special kinds of people live. Some terms moreover, should be, and in most cases are, used only in describing Buddhist residential institutions and others for the non-residential kind. We have seen also that names for places of worship are selected on various principles, and are quite often chosen by the master after the name of his own “parent” establishment. It is necessary for us now to say something about the Chinese religious background, for without some knowledge of this, it is difficult to understand the differences in organization and function of the places of worship that we find in Malaya.

### The Religious Tradition

The popular religion of the Chinese people is characterized by its syncretic and catholic nature. It is an amorphous mass of beliefs and practices from various sources including the greater systems of religion and philosophy, notably Taoism. It is however, essentially anonymous

and lacking in any attempted synthesis. Various writers about the Chinese have labelled this religion “mass”, “folk” and “peasant”. A more recent name coined by a writer about the Singapore Chinese is shenism,<sup>7</sup> after one large category of spiritual beings, the *shen* which are included in its worship. In contrast to popular religion are the systems which possess names; they are called such and such a *chiao* (*jiao*, teaching), or *tao* (*dao*, way); “way” being used here in the sense of a set of principles or doctrine. The systems are also syncretic but within them some attempt at synthesis has been made, and they possess some central core of belief. Anonymous religion has an unwritten tradition and lacks any specific organization for the handing down of its practices and beliefs. They are passed down rather, by word of mouth, imitation and observation. In the systems, doctrine is expressed in writings in which their form of organization is often justified. In this process of justification religious texts are often forged to give greater authenticity. Religious systems essentially involve membership of some kind; it is necessary to *ju tao* or *chiao* [*rudao* or *rujiao*], enter the teaching. Anonymous religion requires no entry, it is rather, there for anybody to believe in or use. Although religious systems have certain structural implications for the religious organization of Singapore it is largely the practices and beliefs of anonymous religion which claim the attention of the Chinese here.

One Chinese friend once even went as far as to say to us that the Chinese have religious practices, not beliefs. In the words of a Chinese who has made the religion of his people a study:<sup>8</sup>

The majority of China's millions...follow a religion which combines and overshadows Buddhism, Taoism and the ancient cult. They do not follow three separate, parallel and conflicting religions at the same time but a syncretic religion embracing the ancient cult as its basis and Buddhist and Taoist elements as secondary features. Even when they visit a strictly Buddhist or Taoist temple, they do so not as Buddhists or Taoists, but as followers of the religion of the masses.

There has, in fact, throughout the history of religion in China been such a process of borrowing and lending and even plagiarising between Buddhism and Taoism; such an invention of stories to account for the common origin of both,<sup>9</sup> and such a frequent dipping into the common

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7 Cf. A. J. A. Elliot, *Chinese Spirit-medium Cults in Singapore*, pp. 27–29. London, 1955.

8 Chan Wing-tsit, *Religious Trends in Modern China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1953. See p. 141.

9 Both Buddhists and Taoists forged holy canons to prove their claim to offering the best. A Taoist priest Wang Fu of the Western Chin (A.D. 265–317) fabricated a story that

stock of folk religion by both, that although the tracing of the historical development of this process might prove interesting, to try now to disentangle the various foreign elements in any one system would prove a difficult task. Better perhaps to say that some people in their worship have a Taoist bias and some a Buddhist. Proverbs like, "Flowers, leaves and seeds, they all come from the same root" — the Taoist alchemy, the Buddhist relic and the Confucian ethic are identical,<sup>10</sup> perhaps sums up the Chinese attitude towards their religion. To take an example, there is an organization in Singapore which has homes for the curing of opium addicts and people suffering from serious diseases which was founded a hundred and twenty-eight years ago in China. Members do in fact call themselves Taoist and worship what might be called a concept rather than a *shen* the "true empty patriarch" (*Chen K'ung Tsu [Zhenkong zu]*), this emptiness being symbolized by a mirror before which they pray. However, on closer investigation, we discovered that Buddhist sutras were used in prayer. On the wall of the main hall hangs a plan which attempts to depict diagrammatically the entire ancient system of the cosmos, each stage in the development of the system being represented by a circle. Out of the Nothingness arises Vapour; out of Vapour comes the Primordial Cell containing the *Yin* and *Yang* dualistic elements from which everything in the universe springs; from Nothingness also rises the Realm of the Spirits, and Hell; from all of this also springs Complete Virtue, from this the founders of the great religions and then Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, represented as circles linked together; they have the same heaven and same hell and all arise from the same original Nothingness, the Fount of all Religions.

It would be a difficult if not impossible task to trace in entirety the historical processes which have resulted in the mass of religious practices and multitude of *shen* offered for worship to the Chinese in Singapore. However, it might be worth while at this point to give a summary of the contributions of the major systems of Chinese religion.

## Taoism and Buddhism

Taoism as we know it today, has undergone some considerable changes

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Sakyamuni was a reincarnation of Lao Tsu [Laozi] and we have come across Buddhist nuns who believe this to be true. In a history of *Hsien T'ien Tao* as given by the leader of one of the branches here, it is stated that because of the tyranny of King Yao of the Chou Dynasty (B.C. 781–771), Lao Tsu fled to the extreme boundary of China and there taught the *Tao* to Yin Hsi who then travelled to India and "put his life force" into Sakyamuni.

10 Chan, op. cit., p. 181.

since it first started out under that name as a highly metaphysical system of philosophy. The original objective of the Taoist thinker, was the realization of the Three Original Principles; Essence, Vital Force and Spirit, and the various ways to realization of this end were crystallized through a series of philosophical developments. The major developments in this philosophical system were attributed to Lao Tzu [Laozi] and his contemporary Chuang Tzu [Zhuangzi]. According to Professor Chan Wing-tsit,<sup>11</sup> in the third century A.D. a Taoist Wei Po-Yang unified and harmonized Taoist philosophy with the doctrines of the priest-magician, the philosophy of the book of Changes, the ancient *I-Ching* [*Yijing*], and the *Yin* and *Yang* philosophy. The ultimate objective had now become that of prolonging life through alchemy. In the fourth century, the techniques of alchemy were further elaborated and Confucian ethics were incorporated into the system. Taoism, the philosophy had begun gradually to associate itself more and more with many of the then flourishing magico-religious cults practising alchemy and this process accelerated during the Eastern Han Dynasty when there was a craving for religious novelty. Seeing analogies between its own mystical language and the various magical formulae and incantations then fashionable, the philosophers of Tao were already modifying their system into a popular religion. According to Hughes,<sup>12</sup> it was a materialistic age and the professional philosophers had failed to understand the earlier transcendent metaphysic of their philosophical system and unconsciously began to interpret it in material terms.

Perhaps the cult having the greatest influence of all on the development of the newly emerging Taoist religion, was the Taoism of Chang Ling [Zhang Ling]. This cult of the same name, was sometimes known as Five Bushel Taoism, because the many followers of its founder had to contribute five bushels of rice in order to obtain membership. The same quantity of rice was also demanded by Chang Ling from each of his medical patients in return for the various amulets and charm remedies with which he claimed to be able to cure them. Chang Ling, also called Chang Tao Ling [Zhang Daoling], had originally been a district magistrate and during the reign of Ming Ti [Ming Di] of the Eastern Han, he resigned from his post in order to propagate his religion. Dubs<sup>13</sup> says, that this religion was in fact Mazdaism having its roots in Persian Zoroastrianism but in which Zoroaster had become relatively unimportant. Like the followers of Lao Tzu, its followers took Tao as the name for the

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11 Chan, op. cit., p. 147.

12 E. R. and K. Hughes, *Religion in China*. London: Hutchinson.

13 H. H. Dubs, "Taoism", in *China*, ed. by N. F. MacNair, Chapter XVII, p. 287. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946.

supreme power in the universe; the monotheistic god of Mazdaism, Ahara Mazda, commonly called the Creator in Persia being identified by Chang Ling with this "Tao". Chang Ling claimed to be able to cure diseases by the confession of sins to Heaven, Earth and Water, the three divine high officials. The title *T'ien Shih* [*Tianshi*], teacher (about) heaven, was invented by him since he claimed to be custodian of all knowledge. Such power did the leader of the cult command that when later, Mazdaism was crushed in the fifth century after its association with a rebellious movement, the new Taoist religion which absorbed it took over the same title of rank and later it was conferred legally upon the leader of the Taoist religion by the emperor. Subsequently, the title was abolished but followers of Taoism continued to use it, the title passing theoretically, exclusively in the male line of the Chang lineage. The present *T'ien Shih* however, has fallen from ancient splendour and is living quietly, a refugee from China, in Hong Kong, commanding, as far as we can gather, little or no support or respect from the religiously minded Chinese of Hong Kong.

During its heyday, however, Five Bushel Taoism enjoyed wide popularity and Chang Ling about A.D. 160 even succeeded in organizing a clerical state in Sze-chuen [Sichuan], claiming tribute from its members.<sup>14</sup> His grandson spread the cult to S. W. Shensi and later it moved with the court to Nanking [Nanjing] when the Hun invaders were attacking China. It became the dominant religion of the Yangtze [Yangzi] delta and spread to Hupeh [Hubei], Kwangtung [Guangdong], Kwangsi [Guangxi] and further south. Later, when it finally became amalgamated with Taoism its influence on the latter was considerable. The Jade Emperor, highest *shen* of the Taoist pantheon probably originated from Chang Ling's supreme deity.<sup>15</sup> However, the philosophers made their contributions too, and one of them eventually selected Lao Tzu, long after his death, to be the first patriarch of the Taoist religion. Taoism as a religion took part of its pantheon and many of its practices from Five Bushel Taoism, others it obtained from the various smaller cults and objects of popular folk worship that it absorbed. For its system of beliefs and cosmological ideas, it took the, by then somewhat corrupted, philosophical Taoist ideas of the age.

Religious Taoism eventually split up into a number of schools and branches of schools, some of which have continued to the present day. Some demand celibacy of their priesthood, while others allow their priests to marry, sons often being taught the profession by their fathers. In the north of China there are found the followers of the *Ch'uen Chen*

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14 Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garment*, trans. by Tetlie, Vol. I, p. 87. New York: Philosophical Library, 1951.

15 Dubs, op. cit., p. 287.

[*Quanzhen*], Complete Purity School, who are celibates practicing ascetism and depending on medicine and diet for the prolongation of life. Followers of this school are priests living in monasteries. In the south is found the *Cheng I* [*Zhengyi*], True Unity School. This school is concerned with preserving man's "original nature", and relies on charms and magical formulae to achieve this purpose. Followers marry and live in their own homes. They may wear Taoist robes only occasionally, they fast at intervals, recite scriptures and perform ceremonies. It is from this school, that one group of Cantonese *Nam-mo-lo* in Singapore is derived. Another Cantonese group belongs to a school called *T'ung T'ien Chiao Chu Chiao* [*Tungtian Jiao Zhujiang*]. A mild form of rivalry exists between the members of the two schools. At one time there were living in Sago lane a few adherents of another non-celibate school, but now they have joined up with the *Cheng I* priests and work together as a troupe at funeral ceremonies. The majority of the Hokkien Taoist priests, the *Sai Kong* [*Shigong*], belong to other schools which are mainly celibate.

This then is the position of present day Taoism; a system of practices and a pantheon of *shen* derived from various sources, with only its rather pieced-together theology owing anything to the philosophical ideas of Lao Tzu. There have continued to be lay people interested in and practicing the older form of Taoism, but the aspirations of such people and those of the priest and worshipper are so different that one can almost consider them as followers of different systems, alike in name only.

One of the reasons that Taoism was so stimulated into religious development in its early days was the appearance on the scene of a new rival, Buddhism. It is thought to-day, as a result of recent research, that Buddhism had its beginning in China at a much earlier age than was for long imagined, and that long before Emperor Ming of the Han Dynasty had his dream of a golden image from the West, the Chinese people had been familiar with Buddhist concepts and objects of worship. Even if this be so however, it was the dream of the emperor and the subsequent deputation which he sent off for further information<sup>16</sup> which started the influx of Buddhist priests into China and the beginning of a real knowledge of Buddhism from the many translations of its writings. Even if prior to this time Buddhist practices had been popular, it had been as elements absorbed in the various forms of folk religion, and not as the expression of an individual system.

Buddhism in China was tolerant to local religious practices and gradually absorbed many other elements, until it became a very definitely Chinese system of religion, eventually giving places in its pantheon to

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16 Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism*, trans. by K. Bugge, pp. 9–10. Shanghai: Commercial Press, Ltd, 1934.

Chinese heroes like *Kwan Ti* [*Guandi*]. Although both Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism were introduced into China, it was the Mahayana, known by its adherents as the “greater vehicle” in contrast to the “smaller vehicle”, Hinayana,<sup>17</sup> that attained greatest popularity. It differs from Hinayana, the Southern School, and claims to transcend it in fact, by preaching that it is not enough to seek one’s own enlightenment but that the enlightenment of all sentient beings should be the aim of the true Buddhist. Mahayana monks and nuns take the Bodhisattva’s vow whereby they promise not to seek their own entry into Buddhahood until all are brought to a state of awareness wherein they are capable of becoming Buddhas too. Some of the ideas that Chinese Buddhism incorporates are Indian in origin, including the doctrines of transmigration and rebirth so spectacularly portrayed in the gardens of Aw Boon Haw at Pasir Panjang. The life of monasticism is another contribution made by Buddhism to Chinese religious life; although the idea that meditation and isolation could help towards the revelation of one’s true self was already accepted by the philosophical Taoist. However, the congregation of the faithful into monasteries and nunneries was a direct result of the influence of this new religion from the West.

Buddhism continued to develop in the direction of a purely Chinese form once it struck root in China and one of its most influential schools and that most popular with the mass of the ordinary people was of purely Chinese origin. This is the Pure Land School, developed and made popular by Hui Yuan (Huiyuan, A.D. 333–416). Hui Yuan was a Taoist from Shansi who introduced many Taoist ideas and terms into his school. Finding satisfaction in Buddhist teachings which he was able to harmonize with Taoist lore, he was able to influence many Taoists into joining his school. The major doctrine of the Pure Land is that of salvation through faith in Amitabha, the Chinese *0-mi-t’o Fu*, a Buddha of somewhat obscure origin. The Amitabha sutra appeared in North China in the middle of the 2nd century and was brought, as far as it is known, by priests from Nepal, Kashmir or Tokhara, but it was not until the development of the Pure Land School that it obtained such popularity. The Western or “Happy” *Chi Lo* [*Jile*] Paradise after which the Ayer Hitam “temple” is named, which is the happy land superseding the more abstract Nirvana of Southern Buddhism and probably based on the ideas of the Taoist land of the immortals, is another important concept in the Pure Land doctrine. Those reborn in this land of costly and precious objects, of gates of precious stones and gardens of rare flowers, are assured of happiness. The sexless state of its inhabitants is of special

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17 These distinctions, “great” and “small” are not however, accepted by adherents of the Hinayana School.

appeal to women whose position in traditional Chinese society was of rather a low order. Buddhist nuns have continually emphasized this attraction to us, some, however, insisting that it is as males that all are reborn in the Pure Land and in anticipation of this they call each other brothers. All who call on *O mi t'o* and repeat his name constantly will be reborn in this happy land. The sutra to this Buddha says that a man who calls upon his name for a week or even a single day may face death without fear and rest assured of his rebirth. Thus, for redemption and future happiness, it was no longer necessary to be a religious specialist and know much theology, even the stupid and dull could get to the happy land. The journey to the Happy, or Pure Land is often depicted on praying sheets offered for sale in shops and temples in Singapore,<sup>18</sup> and boat-loads of worshippers are portrayed sailing over the bitter seas of human sorrow under the guidance of *Kuan Yin*, a Bodhisattva who also plays a major role in the worship of this school. Those who leave their families and dedicate their lives to religious devotions are said to enjoy instantly the happiness of this paradise. Others such as those who eat vegetarian food once or twice a month only, are excluded for a time from the sight of *O mi t'o*, and others, who have devoted less time to religion but who repeat the name constantly will be reborn there, but during a period of expiation will live imprisoned in the closed calyx of a lotus flower awaiting its opening after unspecified years, whereupon they will see the Buddha. No other school of Buddhism lays such emphasis on masses for the dead as the Pure Land School or has such a well defined and simple method of salvation.

The other school that has had considerable influence on Chinese religious development and particularly on such sects as *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao*, is the *Ch'an* [*Chan*] (Japanese *Zen*) Meditation School brought to China by an Indian monk Bodhidharma in A.D. 520. He was the twenty-eighth patriarch in direct line from Sakyamuni and was India's last one. He became China's first patriarch and stands at the beginning of generations of patriarchs of the many related syncretic sects of Chinese religion. Bodhidharma had many disciples and *Ch'an* developed into one of the most widespread and influential schools. *Ch'an* Buddhism acknowledges only five patriarchs, after, and in a direct line from Bodhidharma. Patriarchs had no ruling power<sup>19</sup> but they were the chief defenders of Buddhism against heretics; they were teachers, wise men, and examples of the doctrine. In later years, Taoists and those belonging to the syncretic sects chose their patriarchs as men likely, by their learning

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18 See "Paper Charms and Prayer Sheets as Adjuncts to Chinese Worship", *JMBRAS*, 26(1): 78. [See Chapter 3, p. 91.]

19 E. T. C. Werner, *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*. Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1932.

and religious knowledge to enhance the reputation of the sect and attract more members; they were not necessarily members of the sect and might be chosen long after their death as was Lao Tzu. We know of one Chinese gentleman in Singapore, possessing extensive knowledge of Buddhist doctrine, who was approached by a group of women to be their patriarch. He declined the invitation however. The patriarchs of the Ch'an School of Buddhism were, each one in line, selected by the preceding patriarch from his crowd of common disciples, sometimes tests being set to ensure the selection of the best man. The insignia of rank was then passed on to the new patriarch; a begging bowl and cloak. The sixth patriarch did not appoint a successor and thereafter the *Ch'an*, Meditation School split into Northern and Southern Schools. The Northern School soon disappeared and the Southern School developed into many sub-branches each with its own line of great teachers or deified monks as they are called by Werner.<sup>20</sup> Since the 11th century only the *Lin-chi* and *Ts'ao tung* sects of this school have continued to have separate existences, and Buddhist monks in Singapore who claim to be *Ch'an* Buddhists, are adherents of one or other of these sects. *Ch'an* Buddhism developed almost as a distinct religion in China; it opposed study and dependence on sutras, the discipline was strict, and the life ascetic, but it emphasized true enlightenment by "seeing one's own nature".

There are still other schools and their branches that developed in China, but today they are not independent, much less mutually exclusive, and their differences are largely academic. Division, amalgamation and interpenetration have been constantly at work and *Ch'an* particularly has absorbed many schools. In doctrine and meditation methods a monk might follow the ideas of one school and in practices those of another. Certainly in the many rituals and ceremonies performed by Buddhist nuns and monks in Singapore, elements of different schools can be detected, although as far as beliefs are concerned the influence of the Pure Land doctrines has been by far the greatest here. Many monks and leaders even in China defend both the ways of the Meditation the school of the lay devotee in Singapore would not prove very fruitful. If he has a master, then his beliefs and practices will be those of this master.

Monks and nuns in China never lived by the begging bowl as they did largely in the countries of Hinayana Buddhism, but their main source of income was from performing funeral masses and chanting sutras for private individuals, and from property owned by their monasteries.<sup>21</sup> The administration of monastic affairs in China, was divided into a religious

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20 Ibid.

21 J. Blofeld, *The Jewel in the Lotus*, p. 54. Published for the Buddhist Society, London, by Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1948.

and a business section and a good business head was a necessity. The importance given to business affairs by monks in Malaya is considered by some Chinese to have been responsible for the deterioration of monastic standards. In China during the last five decades, the monastic community has been subject to many set-backs and curtailments of its resources; taxes or "contributions" had to be paid, and temples and monasteries were converted by the government and by warlords into schools, barracks and so on, without compensation.

In modern times Buddhism in China has undergone a renaissance and efforts at reform have been made. There has been a growing interest by laymen in the Buddhist religion and some conscientious monks have attempted to make their religion more "this-worldly" and provide educational and social services. There was, however, no national organization of Buddhists until 1912 when the question of a state religion arose, and laymen organized the China Buddhist Association with the object of criticism and reformation of the clergy. The latter then formed the Buddhist Association of China, the first national organization of Chinese priests, to protect temple properties and promote education. Both eventually petered out, but in 1929 the Chinese Buddhist Society was formed and enjoyed a steady growth. The laity has played a large part in reform, providing leadership and money. They took teachers and the first five vows formerly restricted to the clergy. The shifting of the centre of gravity from monastery to society, from prayer to a practical benefit has to a certain extent penetrated to Malaya and there are here various Buddhist organizations with an emphasis on charity and welfare. It has also resulted in the founding of a "forest of laymen", and has been responsible for the development of the *chai t'ang* [*zhaitang*] in Buddhism. However, the clergy here, on the whole have been little moved by the spirit of religious reform. The Buddhist Federation has so far managed little in this direction; perhaps the fact that a large percentage of its organization members are not actually Buddhist institutions but vegetarian houses of the *Hsien T'ien Tao* sect may have something to do with this. Many monks with whom we have spoken expressed dissatisfaction with the way nuns and locally born monks without adequate training in Buddhist principles have distorted ritual practices, but there has been little effort to reform them. The financial separateness of monasteries and nunneries here make reform by an organization of Buddhists difficult to achieve. And as many of the monks expressing dissatisfaction are also the controllers or "chief tenants" of many non-Buddhist temples it is easy to see that their position in a reform movement would be rather equivocal.

## Confucianism

The writings of Confucius and the classics associated with his name need not detain us here. There are many adequate books on the subject.<sup>22</sup> In its contribution to the religious system however, it is probably in its acceptance of ancestor worship as having a moral force buttressing the Confucian ethical code with its emphasis on family relationship and particularly filial piety, that Confucianism has made its greatest contribution; thus providing for a cult which has acted as a pivot around which various Buddhist and Taoist rituals and ceremonies have developed. However, the state cult also condoned and at times was even responsible for the deification of China's heroes; people considered by the state as worthy of emulation. Thus it has contributed to the general Chinese pantheon at various times in its history. The worship of Kuan Yu [Guan Yu], hero of the Three Kingdoms, sometimes called the god of war by non-Chinese writers, is an example. Kuan Yu was born in A.D. 162 and long after his death was ennobled as Faithful and Loyal Duke (A.D. 1120). Eight years later, he was made Magnificent Prince and during the Yuan Dynasty in Emperor Wen's reign, the title Warrior Prince was added. In 1454 Emperor Shen T'sung of the Ming Dynasty conferred on him the title *Ti* [*Di*], after which time he was known as *Kuan Ti* [*Guandi*], Faithful and Loyal Great Supporter of Heaven and Protector of the Kingdom. He has ever since received worship under this name. There were, at one time in China, 1,600 state temples to his honour and his fame increased even more during the last half of the Manchu period, when in 1856 he was purported to have appeared in the heavens and turned the tide of battle in favour of the imperialists. Emperor Hsien Feng [Xian Feng] then raised him to the rank of Confucius himself. In 1916 it was decreed that official worship would be rendered to him.<sup>23</sup>

## Other Elements

From the examination of ancient oracle bones it is clear that religious practices existed in China before Confucianism. The personification and deification of spiritual influences and the deification of heroes, together with early local cults involving divination and shamanistic practices probably formed the basis of this early religion. Apart from the state encouragement given to the worship of certain heroes, the Chinese have had a great many divinities which strictly speaking do not belong to any

22 See, for example, J. K. Shrycock, "Confucianism", in *China*, op. cit., Chapter XV.

23 Werner, op. cit. See "Kuan Yu".

one of the three major systems, although with the Chinese generous acceptance of new *shen* they may be taken in by any one of them. Some are of purely native origin, others according to Latourette,<sup>24</sup> “may be importations, and still others probably were originally local gods in non-Chinese territories but were adopted by the Chinese as the latter extended their domains. Many had only a local vogue and stories about others vary from place to place.”

The process of deification still continues in this century in Malaya. One of the popular *shen* of the Malaya or Singapore born Chinese is *Toa Peh Kong* (H[okkien]) [*Dabo Gong*], Big Paternal Great-Uncle.<sup>25</sup> There are many temples in Malaya devoted to the worship of *Toa Peh Kong*, and many have selected a dead local worthy to be their particular Big Paternal Great-Uncle. Most *Toa Peh Kong* were early immigrants who, when life was hard in the early days of immigration, performed deeds of merit or generosity which greatly aided the lives of their contemporaries and made immigration seem less bitter. *Toa Peh Kong* is vaguely associated by many Chinese with *Tu Ti Kung* [*Tudi Gong*], the earth *shen*, though in appearance his image resembles another *shen*, *Fu Te Cheng Shen* [*Fude Zhengshen*]. Some say he was, at one stage of his history, the water *shen* worshipped by seafarers.<sup>26</sup> According to Chen Ta,<sup>27</sup> *Toa Peh Kong* has even been taken back to China by returning immigrants, and the explanation for the worship of this *shen* as given to him by members of the Teochew community fits in with much that we have been told about *Toa Peh Kong* here. According to these homeland Teochews “In earlier times, it was considered a great fortune by any family when its first immigrant to the *Nan Yang* survived. Such men were affectionately called *Kai Shan Ta Pai* [*Kaishan Dabo*], or pioneers. The title *Kung* [*Gong*] was later added to show them respect...shrines were built in their [the immigrants'] homes [in Malaya] for the fact that they survived early vicissitudes, gave them in the eyes of other immigrants, possession of unusual powers and they were subsequently revered as saints.”

Another case of deification occurred ten years ago in Singapore and was quoted in the *Straits Times* (21 August 1953). A Singapore Hainanese boy was electrocuted near a temple. Since then several remarkable events have been attributed to his spirit and hundreds of Hainanese worship him

24 K. S. Latourette, *The Chinese, Their History and Culture*, Vol. II. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1949.

25 The origin of this appellation is somewhat obscure. For a discussion of its origin see *Chinese Temples of Singapore* (in Chinese), Section 2, pp. 8–14. Nan Fong Commercial Publishing Bureau.

26 Ibid., pp. 8–14, and p. 4, “a. ‘Confucian Gods’, 1. *Toa Peh Kong*”.

27 Chen Ta, *Emigrant Communities in South China*. New York: Secretariat Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940.

as their local *shen*. The article describes how, the day before the first anniversary of his “elevation as a deity”, many Hainanese worshipped in a shrine near a Chinese cemetery in Holland Road. Hainanese workers took time off to attend the rituals and pay homage to the deity who is known as Leong Tai Yeah. Worshippers, according to the article, said that the deity helped them win at *chap-ji-kee*.<sup>28</sup>

## Syncretic Sects

Perhaps nowhere is the Chinese ability to accept more than one system of religion better expressed than in the various syncretic sects that have arisen at various times in China's history. Many of these sects have euphonic names, or names taken from various tracts in their religious writings. Sometimes several names describe one and the same widely ramifying society. Some sects have disappeared in face of state persecution and proscription by edict only to re-appear later under another name. Others continued underground until the present day, and are now harassing the Communist government in China. The history of many such sects is probably lost forever. Such histories were often kept only in manuscript form and they had frequently to be destroyed when raids were expected. *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao*, which we have already mentioned is the general name for one of the widest ramifying syncretic sects found in the *Nan Yang* today and we have found it difficult to get detailed intelligible information about its history and organization. However, something of its history and development can be inferred from records of the line of succession of its leaders which are kept in the *chai t'ang* of the different branches in Singapore.

Chinese secret sects range from the mainly political to those that are mainly religious; in between are those politico-religious sects that seem to adapt themselves to changing conditions, being at one time more political in interest and at others more religious according to the demands of the people they attract. The often militant messianic beliefs of many of the sects lend themselves very easily to more immediate, political interpretations by the ambitious and frustrated intellectual or minor civil or military official who so often is associated with sectarianism. Although the *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao* and its offshoots might be a purely religious organization at the present time in Malaya, and certainly provides a very useful function in building homes for elderly unattached women, there is

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28 A gambling game.

strong reason to believe<sup>29</sup> that during the latter part of the Ch'ing [Qing] Dynasty it was at least sympathetic, if not actively involved in the various rebellions that arose during that period. Unfortunately so many pseudonyms were used by its leaders that it is difficult to find direct connections.

Any Chinese can become a member of the *Hsien T'ien Tao* sects providing he, or she, is not found, after careful investigation, to be a potential danger or to be unable to keep secret the mysteries that are explained at the various initiations into different ranks. The sect has taken as its principle object of worship a mother *shen* and also worships *Chun Ti* [*Zhundi*], said by members to be one of the six forms of *Kuan Yin*. Chun Ti's image is found on the ground floor of *chai t'ang* of some branches of the sect in Singapore, and holds in one hand a disc on which is painted the Chinese character for the sun. In the other hand is a similar disc with the character for moon. Our attention was recently drawn to the fact that the Chinese characters for sun and moon when put together make the character for *Ming*, brightness. This is also the *Ming* of Ming Dynasty. This is particularly interesting in the light of our knowledge of the political aspirations of many sects regarding the overthrow of the Ch'ing Dynasty and the reinstatement of the Ming. The sect is quite distinct from the notorious Triad, but its former leaders may have had similar loyalist aspirations.

The supreme *shen*, *Chin Mu* [*Jinmu*], Golden Mother; also known as *Wu Chi Sheng Mu* [*Wuji Shengmu*], Limitless, Void Holy Mother or *Yao Ch'ih Chin Mu* [*Yaochi Jinmu*], Golden Mother of the *Yao* Pool by some offshoots, is worshipped at an altar containing her image and placed in a special room in an upper storey of the vegetarian houses of the sect. This room is considered to be very sacred and non-members are not allowed into it during prayer time. It was explained to us by members that since she is the supreme *shen*, Golden Mother must be placed in an upper storey, for no other *shen* may be placed above her, but a leader of one branch of *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao* told us that the real reason is that during the Ch'ing Dynasty when the sect came in for a great deal of persecution, this Golden Mother *shen* was a means by which the sect could be identified and so her image was placed well away from the prying eye of the investigator, either in a back room or better still, upstairs if the house contained more than one storey.

The three major precepts of *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao* and its offshoots are: "from Buddhism, to liberate the soul and become a Buddha; from Taoism, to practice meditation as invented by Lao Tzu and live on earth for

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29 From conversations with one leader and from accounts in the records of the fate of some of the past leaders.

anything from 100–1,000 years after which the soul will ascend to heaven and become a Buddha; from Confucianism, to live virtuously in this world.”<sup>30</sup> Esoteric knowledge about the methods of becoming a Buddha and of achieving longevity are revealed at initiation into one of the various ranks of the sect. An oath is taken not to reveal this knowledge to anybody of inferior rank under pain of having one’s eyes drop out.

Some of the names of various off-shoots of the *Hsien T’ien Ta Tao* found in Malaya and Singapore are: *T’ung Shan She* [*Tongshan She*], the Fellowship of Goodness;<sup>31</sup> *P’u Tu Men* [*Pudu Men*], also known as *Hsien T’ien Men* [*Xiantian Men*], Sect of Salvation; *Kuei Ken Men* [*Guigen Men*], Sect of the Way of Reverting to the First Principle, a reformed sect which, among other things, has set itself the task of trying to bring all other related sects into its fold and under its leader; and the *Lung Hua* [*Longhua*]<sup>32</sup> sect. The *Lung Hua* sect maintains great secrecy, members meet in an upper storey room in Queen’s Street. Most of its members are Hokkien manual labourers.

To become a member of one of the *Hsien T’ien Ta Tao* sects and live in one of its vegetarian houses, it is not necessary to “leave the family” but one must practice a certain degree of asceticism in one’s daily life. The sects are under the guidance of priesthoods, the members of which live in the world so to speak; its leaders often conduct their own businesses and do not wear any special clerical dress or shave their heads.

Some sects are widely ramifying and have vegetarian houses throughout Malaya, Borneo, Sarawak, Siam [Thailand], Indo-China and Indonesia. The head men of many of the Singapore branches live in Hong Kong. They have final authority in all matters of importance and there is a certain amount of travelling back and forth between Hong Kong and Singapore by the leading members. However, we were told by different branch leaders that the immigration restrictions are making it difficult to maintain the close contact with their head men that existed before the war.

The breaking of branches of *Hsien T’ien Ta Tao* to become completely self sufficient and independent sub-sects with new names has often happened as a result of either the increasing financial independence of a leader controlling a group of vegetarian houses or political intrigue and the ambitions of members of high rank when quarrels arise over the succession to the office of patriarch. It was during the latter part of the Ch’ing Dynasty when the sudden, often violent, end of many a leader of the sect led to disagreements over succession, that *Tung Shan She*, *Kuei*

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30 As related by one leader.

31 See John C. De Korne, *The Fellowship of Goodness*. Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1941.

32 This sect was described by De Groot in his *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China*, Vol. 1. Amsterdam, 1903.

*Ken Men* and *P'u Tu Men* broke away to become separate sects. In an introduction in English to a book about *Kuei Ken Men*<sup>33</sup> a leader of the sub-sect in Malaya protests that other sects have taken the wrong way and followed the wrong patriarch:<sup>34</sup>

Those who practice asceticism may be divided into two classes. One is to anticipate welfare in the future life; the other is to be able to restore life and escape death. The latter's ultimate aim is to escape earthly woes. They must revere the founder of the sect and obey Heaven's decree. Only the orthodox founder armed with Heaven's decree<sup>35</sup> should be revered. Those who follow the real founder will be able to restore life and escape death, but those who follow the bogus founder will only follow the blind into the pit of life. I repeat, that the founder with Heaven's decree is the orthodox cult but not otherwise. But to a mortal being it is difficult to distinguish between real and bogus. It is a universal fact that there is only one sun in the sky and the people have only one ruler. It follows that there is only one Buddha as you have only one father and mother. Since common people possess genealogy, Buddhists possess genealogical tables too. Real founders are armed with Heaven's decree whereas bogus founders are not. But how to find out the real ancestry...founders and teachers armed with Heaven's decree are as follows: [he here gives the names of the six patriarch of *Ch'an* [*Chan*], the Meditation School of Buddhism]. After these six saints, the preaching of Buddhist teachings was discontinued, and was superseded by Confucianism...after the six saints, only spiritualism<sup>36</sup> was emphasized...the so-called *San Pau* [*San Bao*] sect [Buddhist schools] was not armed with Heaven's decree and was founded after the six saints. [He here appends a list of patriarchs from this time until the present day and ends by saying] I have already traced the successive founders and teachers from various books. It is hoped that those who practise ascetism will carefully study this treatise...I will not argue with those who say that practising of ascetism does not have to revere founders as they anticipate welfare in the future life only [!].

33 Tsai Chao Yun, *San Lung Chi Lu Pei* (in Chinese). Penang, 1948.

34 We have corrected the spelling in this introductory passage in English but left it otherwise unchanged.

35 Emperors of China were similarly supposed to have been decreed by Heaven to rule. When, by misrule, they "lost Heaven's decree", this was considered a good reason by rebelling forces for deposing them.

36 He means spirituality.

This man had been sent down to Malaya from China to start several vegetarian houses here and had already, by the time at which he wrote, established seven in various parts of Malaya. It is interesting to note that in his book, he is solely content to emphasize the validity of his line of patriarchs and that no questions of orthodoxy of doctrines are raised. In fact orthodoxy in the *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao* sects depends mainly on having the "correct" leader, a man who, similar to the leaders of the notorious White Lotus Society<sup>37</sup> is often an "incarnate Buddha", usually *Meitraya* [Maitreya], the Buddha who will come one day and seated under a *Lung Hua* [Longhua] tree will save the world.

We have seen then, that when the ordinary Chinese worships, he prays to a multitude of deities and heroes who owe their origins to many different cults, some having been incorporated into the systems of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, and some belonging to an older religion still. Other *shen* are of very recent origin. In Malaya, Chinese religion has, so far, hardly been effected by the religions of other local communities, although perhaps owing to the contributions to the general Chinese religious pool made by groups of people immigrating from different parts of the homeland, the range of *shen* offered for worship here, and the range of festivals to celebrate, are wider and more varied than in any one part of China. Out of the common pool of Chinese religion various sects have emerged at different times in China's history, but rather than having anything new to offer theologically, they have largely been built up on reshuffled elements in the already existing religious tradition.

Buddhism has managed, to a certain degree, to retain its separateness from the general mass of religious practices and pantheon, but it too has incorporated many foreign elements throughout its history in China, and unless some real effort at reform is made it is likely to become more and more absorbed into the general mass of Chinese religion, and suffer the same fate as that of Taoism. The latter has absorbed so many different rites and religions that today in Malaya it is hardly more than a handy term for non-Buddhist religion; for all the elements, in fact, that are not specifically claimed by the Buddhists. To the Buddhist any non-Buddhist practises, including the rites of the *Nam-mo-lo* and *sai kong*, medium practices and the many personal rites performed by women without the aid of a priest, are "Taoism". To the Chinese worshipper who is not a particularly strong Buddhist they are just "religion"; a mass of tradition handed down mainly by word of mouth, and of practices learnt in childhood by observation and imitation. That some of the things he or she does are derived from a religion coming originally from India; that others

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37 One leader told us that the sect was called White Lotus Society at various times in its history but some branches changed its name during the Ming Dynasty.

may have existed long before Confucius lived; that some of the *shen* now worshipped have been dead less than a century, and others mythical beings worshipped for centuries, and still others highly mystical philosophical concepts clothed in material form in the early days of history, means little or nothing at all to the worshipper; they are all just part of the pantheon and practices that are provided when supernatural aid is needed.

## Organization of Places of Worship

It is difficult to estimate the number of monasteries, nunneries, vegetarian houses and temples in Singapore; there is no complete record of any kind. Some declare themselves obviously to the eye of the observer; the large building with its many roofs with turned up corners, its surrounding wall and court-yard reminiscent of the architectural style associated with traditional China, its altars visible from the road and its miniature “Pagoda” for burning paper charms and mock money, is obviously a “temple” of some kind. However, there are many more which are less obvious. Apart from the considerable number of places of worship that are tucked away up an almost inaccessible lane and invisible from the main road, there are many, particularly of the non-residential kind, that consist of small unprepossessing attap and wood houses, or one downstairs room of a shop-house; there are many of the latter kind in that part of Singapore known as the big “*p’o*”.<sup>38</sup> There are also, vegetarian houses consisting of one floor only of a private residence; the home of some pious lady who originally set up an altar perhaps for her own use. Later she may invite others, female friends or relatives who are lonely and have nowhere to live, to come in with her and share the expenses. One vegetarian house known to us in Neil Road, on the second floor of a shop house, started in this way and now has seven or eight women living in it, mainly retired amahs.

Although no complete record of places of worship in Singapore exists, we have been able to find recorded evidence of the existence of at least 122 of the residential kind, mainly inhabited by women. This number was arrived at after an examination of lists provided for us by Buddhist monks of those houses known to them personally; others were taken from names in the list of member institutions published by the Buddhist Federation.

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38 *P’o* [*po*]; the sound of the third of the three Chinese characters used for rendering the syllables for “Sing-a-pore” into Chinese. The *ta p’o* [*dapo*], big “*p’o*” consists roughly, of the urban area south of the Singapore River. The *hsiao p’o* [*xiaopo*], small “*p’o*” is the area north of this river.

There are most probably many others, run independently by a few women on a small scale and which are not members of the Buddhist Federation and not known to the monks who provided us with lists.

Besides being difficult to estimate numbers, it is also not easy to estimate, by looking at an even easily recognizable place of worship, the role it plays in the religious life of the Chinese in Singapore. Some fine old buildings are infrequently visited by worshippers, and other little huts are swarming with activity on popular festival days. The popular reputation enjoyed by a particular *shen* in a place of worship, or even one particular image of a *shen*, in degree of efficacy in dealing with personal problems; the reputation of the manager, owner, or resident priest, and the ease of access to the building are all important determinants of the frequency of its visitors. Some residential institutions, especially the more specifically monastic ones, although open to the public for worship, do not primarily provide for outside worshippers. They may, in the quest for quietness and solitude, be built in places difficult of access; cut off from public transport and lying at the end of a long and muddy lane. In a climate where heavy falls of rain can make dirt roads almost impassible, such places may enjoy only a local popularity.

The impressiveness or modesty of the building, then, is no real criterion for judging popularity. The more durable brick and cement temple or monastery often comes into being as a result of a large donation by a wealthy person who has the building erected in order to show gratitude for recovery from a serious illness or bad accident, or for some unforeseen benefit. Such buildings are not usually erected with the primary aim of encouraging a large body of worshippers and the subsequent profit to be gained, although some monk who is at back of the wealthy donor's gesture may have such an idea in mind. Such buildings are made durable usually so that they may remain a demonstration of gratitude and generosity for generations of religiously minded people to come. The impressive and modern *Pao En Ssu* [*Baoen Si*] built recently on a hill at Pasir Panjang is an example of a monastery put up in gratitude for divine favour. It is purported to have been erected at the instigation of a wealthy rubber merchant who, it is said, had a lucky escape during the Japanese occupation when a car in which he was travelling was attacked by resistance forces, and all the occupants killed except himself. Although the building is fine and roomy, it is occupied by only two monks at present, and has infrequent visitors.

On the other hand, temples put up to the memory a local worthy, who, it is hoped, will give spiritual aid and benefit to the people of the locality in which he lived may come into being as a result of local effort and subscription alone, and be run by a committee of men of the vicinity. Such buildings are likely to be smaller and are usually made of wood and

attap. Since they are not residential moreover, considerations of comfort and congeniality are of less importance. Outside worshippers are not influenced by such considerations, and we were told on one occasion — a festival at which we were packed like sardines in one small temple — that the overcrowding actually added to the conviviality of the proceedings. Places put up specifically for the use of outside worshippers are less likely to have money spent on them for embellishments than the residential kind, for they are not trying to attract residents or to provide aesthetically pleasing surroundings for a contemplative life.

## Temples

**1. Ancestral temples** are owned and run by associations of Chinese recruited at different territorial or kinship levels. In this they differ from similar temples in the homeland. Such associations may recruit people from one particular village, district, prefecture or province in China, or they may comprise members of one particular surname, cutting across territorial demarcations. Not all such associations provide temples for the worship of ancestors, although most of those of early formation in Singapore do.

In the temple, wooden soul tablets of ancestors and the more recently dead are placed for worship in perpetuity. They are ranged in tier formation on decorative shrines in front of which often hang boards on which are inscribed the honours bestowed on ancient members of the surname or area. Members pay money for the service of assured and continued ritual attention to these tablets and different amounts are paid according to whether the position given the tablet is important or insignificant. Some associations burn incense before the tablets in the temple twice daily and put out plates of food, flowers and wine on the table in front of the tablet altar on the 1st and 15th of every lunar month. The spring and autumn festivals are the most important times for ritual attention to soul tablets however. One of the smaller associations charges a flat rate of \$20.00 (Straits) for worship in perpetuity; another charges as much as \$1,000 for an ancestor tablet or “longevity” tablet<sup>39</sup> to be set up in the centre of the shrine, \$500 for it to be placed on the left side of the altar, \$300 for the left corner, \$400 for the right side and \$200 for the right corner. Rites performed in front of tablet shrines are a responsibility of the association which usually appoints certain persons for this duty;

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39 Tablets set up by living persons for themselves. These tablets are shrouded in red cloth until their owner's death, whereupon the cloth is removed and the tablet becomes the soul tablet of the deceased.

they never involve the participation of a large proportion of the total membership of the association.

**2. Medium temples.** Mediumship, that is the temporary possession by a *shen* of a man or women,<sup>40</sup> is not uncommon in Singapore, and is found particularly among people of the Hokkien dialect group. People so possessed are called *tang ki* (H[okkien]) [*tongji*]; they are not necessarily full-time priests and are often in fact, people having ordinary employment outside the hours set for medium performances. A description of mediumship in Singapore would alone fill a book, and indeed, a lengthy report has already been written on the subject which, it is hoped, will one day be made available to the public.<sup>41</sup> However a brief description of medium temples and cults in Singapore is relevant to our subject here. Temples in which medium performances take place are not necessarily specific to these performances; however, such temples can usually be recognized by the special equipment of the medium which will be housed therein. Another indication that a temple has a medium cult attached is a black flag, which hangs outside the temple when cult activities are in progress, and on which is embroidered or painted the eight triagram design, a symbol used in divination and associated with occult practices. Inside the temple can be seen the range of spikes and knives used by the medium for cutting himself during the period in which he is in a trance; the full range being used usually on festival occasions only. Over the table in front of the altar often hangs a spiked ball which at festivals is used by the *tang ki* for swinging on a length of cord against himself, particularly on to his back. In addition to such kinds of equipment, there will also be the spiked chairs used by the medium when he is carried in procession. Other smaller chairs without spikes or knife blades are used for carrying the *shen* of the cult. In Malacca several old temples with such equipment can be seen, although the medium cult associated with the temple is often found to be defunct. In front of temples where medium performances take place, there is usually a piece of open land on which the medium can emerge in order to perform such parts of his ritual for which there is no room in the temple. He is usually on these occasions followed by a line of people who have come to consult him on various personal matters ranging from illness to financial problems. The tongue cutting and the licking of paper charms<sup>42</sup>

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40 There are also mediums who become possessed by deceased persons and hold private seances for relatives of the deceased. Such seances, however, usually take place in private homes.

41 Since this paper was completed, a book has been published by the author of the report: Alan Elliot, *Chinese Spirit Medium Cults*. London, 1955.

42 See *JMBRAS*, 26(1): 64, and pl. 3. [See Chapter 3, p. 74 and Fig. 30, p. 96.]

for the use of “patients” together with the consultations take place inside the temple. Apart from these additions of equipment for the needs of the cult then, medium temples are in other ways similar to other temples in their range of paraphernalia for worship. Not only the image of the possessing *shen* will be contained in the temple but there will also be those of any others that are popular among the worshippers of the area.

It is interesting to see the variety of people that go to a medium performance. Nearly all are Chinese, although we have seen an old Malay present on infrequent occasions, but the range of different sorts of Chinese present to consult the medium is often considerable. Although very few Cantonese become mediums, medium performances are popular with Cantonese working women of the non-marrying group. Straits Chinese “Nonya” women form a large proportion of the consulting attenders but also one may find many English speaking women dressed in Western fashion and wearing cosmetics, who have come to consult the medium. There are also many more men present at medium performances than are usually seen at festivals in ordinary temples. On festival occasions, the crowds attending a medium temple can be considerable and we remember three years ago, when we attended a festival at the Nine Kings, *Chiu Huang* [Jiuhuang], Temple in Serangoon Road, that the police were needed to direct the car parking. This is a festival that takes place every year starting on the 1st of the ninth lunar month and continuing until the 9th. Another festival popular with medium temples is that of the Heavenly Monkey, naughty hero of the Chinese *Hsi Yu Chi* [Xiyou Ji], *Record of the Western Journey*, and a *shen* often possessing mediums in their trances. His birthday is usually held on the 16th of the eighth lunar month and celebrated in a small way in ordinary temples and vegetarian houses also. *Shen* possessing mediums are of all kinds and even Bodhisattvas of Buddhism are not beyond this practice. Elliot came across cults in Singapore, at which Muslim saints were believed to take control of the medium.

For a medium cult to come into being, it is first necessary to find a *tang ki*, and then a suitable temple. If the would-be promoters are already members of a temple committee the matter is easily arranged; otherwise, arrangements must be made for the use of a conveniently placed temple or the building of a new one. An alternative is to use an ordinary room in a private house at first; this requires little new capital outlay, and grateful consulters of the medium may contribute articles of equipment and money for the cult’s development. Applications for membership of a temple committee might be made with accompanying “donations” and successful consultations and a lively festival with perhaps a theatrical show, will help to promote popularity for the cult.

An example of the way in which a new cult may be initiated was

provided for me recently by a friend. A devout Chinese villager had brought a new image from a god factory<sup>43</sup> and he took it home to his village where he installed it in his house and proceeded to pay considerable attention to the devotion of the *shen* it represented. One day, without warning, according to the villagers, a *tang ki* arrived, walking into the village in a trance-like state. He entered the house of the purchaser of the image, picked it up and proceeded to half walk, half dance with it, followed by the astonished villagers, until he reached an adjacent hill. There he set down the image and declared that a temple for the *shen* it represented should be built on the spot, he himself presumably expecting to be the medium associated with it; this however, was not stated openly. The villagers were very impressed by this performance and one of them told my friend, an Englishman who speaks Hokkien, that "Undoubtedly this *shen* is very powerful. X is well-known for his devotions to it. How could this be faked by the medium? He doesn't know X." The village decided to take the medium's instructions seriously and to build a temple as soon as funds could be raised.

**3. Other Temples.** Temples are usually dedicated to one *shen* or popular trinity, but they may have images of hosts of other popular ones available for worship. As far as we have been able to ascertain, the strictly Buddhist type temple is a rare thing in Singapore, although one room of a temple may be set aside specifically for housing images, representative of some of the more popular members of the Buddhist pantheon. An example of this practice is found in the Jade Emperor Temple in Havelock Road. This is a fairly old temple built in 1888<sup>44</sup> at the instigation of a rich and charitably inclined Hokkien property owner and controlled at present by a Buddhist monk of abbot rank.<sup>45</sup> The large outer chamber contains images of various deified heroes and *shen* of the Taoist pantheon. In the back chamber however, members of the Buddhist pantheon only are found. In this chamber also are shrines with glass fronts in which soul tablets of the dead of neighbouring families are kept for worship. Most of these families are Straits Chinese and some of the tablets are old and elaborately carved. Behind this room again, is a large fairly new quarter in which about ten Hokkien vegetarian women live, "disciples" of the controlling monk. In the main chamber, occasional rites<sup>46</sup> are held and *Nam-mo-lo* are called in

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43 "Factories" where *shen* are made exist in the big *P'o*, and in Club Street there is a popular one. Images are carved to individual specification and judging from the bustling activity we have encountered on our visits, they do not go short of customers.

44 See "Chinese Temples in Singapore", op. cit., section 2, p. 40. All dates given for the erection of temples described in this paper are taken from this source unless otherwise stated.

45 Fang Chang.

46 See *JMBRAS*, 24(3): 120-44.

to conduct them. The 18th of each moon is set aside for such practices, and people with ailing children and other personal troubles are invited to attend on that day. The *T'ien Fu Kung* [*Tianfu Gong*] in Telok Ayer Street is a temple with a mixed pantheon, but with the *Shang Mu Shen* [*sic.*] [*Shengmu Shen*], Saintly Mother, as the chief *shen* of worship there. Other objects for worship are the images of *Kuan Ti*, *P'ao Shang Ta Ti* [*sic.*] [*Baosheng Dadi*], the Emperor who Protects Life, and *Kuan Yin*. The date given for the erection of this temple is 1841, but another source<sup>47</sup> states that a "joss house" was established on the site of the present temple in 1821–22, which grew wealthy on the thank-offerings of new immigrants arriving from China. Once a month rites are held in this temple in honour of the Saintly Mother and Buddhist priests assist with the chanting of sutras. Accommodation is provided for priests and vegetarian food is served to worshippers on this day. Monks from different monasteries also came to join in the monthly rite and we have seen a monk performing there from the *Pao En Ssu* at Pasir Panjang. The temple is owned by the Hokkien *Hui Kuan* [*huiguan*] (association) and let out to the highest tender; the present lessee is a monk who is controller of several temples in Singapore. Temple property is administered in one of several ways. Some temples as we have seen, are in the hands of a committee made up of prominent local men. Such committees usually hire a caretaker to look after the day to day running of the temple and sell articles of worship to the people coming there to pray, and to collect "oil and incense" money.<sup>48</sup> Caretakers either receive a fixed wage or retain a percentage of their takings. The president of a temple committee is known as the *lu chu* [*luzhu*], "stove master" and committee and president are, theoretically at any rate, chosen each year after the annual festival, from a selection of names of people professing their willingness to stand for election. The "election" technique consists in the throwing of divining blocks<sup>49</sup> in front of the altar for each name submitted. The names against which there is the greatest number of "positive" falls for a specified number of throws becoming committee members, with the one with the greatest number of all becoming the president. Some temples also have various sub-

47 See *Singapore Street Directory and Guide*, historical notes supplied by C. A. Gibson-Hill, Raffles Museum, p. 11, No. 43. Singapore: Survey Dept., 1954.

48 "Oil and incense" money is the euphemous term for donations to a temple by members of the public. On receiving a sum of money from a worshipper, the priest will put a little oil in the lamp which hangs in front of the altar of the *shen* being worshipped.

49 *Pei* [*bei*], divining blocks consist of two blocks of wood or bamboo roughly kidney shaped, and meant to represent the *Yin* and *Yang* symbols of positive and negative; good and bad. They have one side flat and one rounded. A negative answer is implied when both blocks fall, when thrown on the ground, with either the flat or the rounded side up, the answer is positive when one falls with rounded side uppermost and one with the flat side uppermost.

committees, the main committee to administer the spending of profit and other committees to arrange festivals and ritual matters. The rent or part of profit paid over to a committee by a caretaker or controlling monk of a temple may be used in a number of ways, some charitable. For example, the *Shun T'ien Kung* [*Shuntian Gong*] in Malabar Street, a Hokkien temple first established in an attap shed near the present site in 1821<sup>50</sup> is controlled by a Buddhist monk, the "uncle" of the monk who controls the Jade Emperor Temple. However, part of the proceeds from "oil and incense" money is used by the temple committee to support two schools, one for boys and one for girls. The story of how this temple came to be erected is quite an interesting one. Shun T'ien was an early immigrant to Singapore, and he worked as a sampan man in the area. So kind and generous was Shun T'ien in his work of rowing people back and forth across the river, that he only charged one cent for the journey and, it is said, that if a man could not even afford that, then Shun T'ien would let him ride free. He was in the habit of sleeping during the night in his sampan, moored to one bank of the river. One day, at noon, somebody called to him to be rowed across the Rochor River but there was no reply from the sampan. When people went to investigate, Shun T'ien was found to have died. It is said that the people of the district, out of gratitude for the generosity of the sampan man, bought him a coffin and buried him by the side of the river. A shrine was erected to his memory which was later enlarged into a temple. He became the local *Toa Peh Kong*, and earth god.<sup>51</sup> Most *Toa Peh Kong* temples are erected principally for the use of local residents and are managed by a committee or board of trustees. When a person in the district dies, it is believed, he is brought before the local earth god who is the first official the deceased must meet, in a hierarchy of spiritual overlords and judges to whom the dead must answer for their conduct on earth.

Temples then are usually administered by committees, trustees or associations, and let out, sometimes on tender, to a caretaker or controlling monk who will be responsible for the daily management and income. Temples built for wealthy donors who give money in return for some supernatural favour are usually run by a board of trustees. This is to ensure that the building will continue to be used for the purpose for which it was built. The success of the management of temple affairs depends largely on the co-operation of the committee or board of trustees, on the reputation of the controlling monk or layman renting the place on tender, or on the honesty and business sense of the caretaker. *Ad hoc* committees are sometimes formed by worshippers at a temple, the temple forming

50 *Singapore Directory*, op. cit., p. 9, No. 30.

51 An account of this story is given in "Chinese temples in Singapore". op. cit., p. 36.

their head-quarters, and the purpose being to raise money for private celebrations at festivals, for the hiring of a theatrical troupe, etc. They may be organized by temple owners, or by groups of neighbours, usually women, who pray regularly in the temple. Money for the celebrations of one of the *Kuan Yin* festival days<sup>52</sup> is often collected in this way.

The income of temples is derived from many sources. A regular source is the “oil and incense” money contributed by worshippers, but it is only at festivals that a temple can hope to make much in this way. A small profit may be made from the sale of paper charms, mock money, incense sticks, candles, and even from the renting of food offerings; and further income can be derived from the writing of specific charms on individual request when the manager of a temple is himself a priest. Occasional rites performed in time of trouble or sickness may be conducted by the manager-priest, or a special arrangement may be made with particular monks or *Nam-mo-lo* to come when needed, the temple taking a percentage of their fee. This sort of rite, originally held in the home, is gradually becoming transplanted to the temple particularly in urban areas where housing is somewhat cramped. Another reason for holding these rites in the home less frequently, is that some members of a family, who have received a modern education, resent such practices as superstitious.

Another regular source of income for temples is from fortune-telling and divination. Specialist advice may be sought on the probability of success of certain courses of action in the light of a reading of the eight characters of the horoscope. For advice on matters needing only a brief consultation a small fee of \$2–\$5 may be charged, but for more serious matters such as a betrothal requiring more detailed investigation of the horoscopes of the two parties to the contract and a comparison of one with the other, considerable fees can be charged. There are other varieties of fortune-telling popular in Malaya and found in the temples here, many of which have been described in various books on Chinese customs.<sup>53</sup> There is however, one very popular method of seeking advice on the future offered to the public in all temples and this is by use of the divining blocks and cylindrical boxes of wooden or bamboo spills. On altars in all temples, boxes of these spills will be found ready for use. The person

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52 There are three *Kuan Yin* festivals; the first, her birthday is on the 19th of the 2nd lunar month, the second, the day on which her attainment to Bodhisattvahood is celebrated is the 19th of the 6th lunar month and the third, the supposed date of her death is on the 19th of the 9th lunar month.

53 See especially, H. S. J. Dore, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, Vol. IV, trans. by M. S. J. Kennely. Shanghai: T'ussewei Press, 1922. Preface, pp. x–xvi and Chapter VII, pp. 321–68. Also see, E. D. Harvey, *The Mind of China*, pp. 193–97. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933, and J. Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*, Vol. 2, pp. 331–48. New York: Harper & Bros., 1865.

seeking advice will pick up one of these boxes, and by a shaking movement, similar to that used when trying to extract a cigarette from a tin, cause one of the spills to fall to the ground. Only one should fall; if there are more the process must be restarted. Each spill is numbered — there are usually about a hundred in all — and the one that falls to the ground will be taken to the priest or caretaker who, from a box of pigeon holes hung on the wall behind his counter, extracts a slip of paper of the same number as that on the spill. On this slip of paper will be found some poetically written sentences of vague meaning that can usually be interpreted in several ways to fit any situation on which advice may be sought. Occasionally boxes of spills will be provided for specialist needs, for instance, one for family troubles, another for illness. In the latter case, medical prescriptions will take the place of the usual vague words of wisdom. Divining blocks may be thrown after the box has been shaken and a spill fallen out. This is to see whether or not that particular spill meets with Heaven's approval; when the blocks fall one up and one down a positive, or, in this case, approving answer is obtained. The fee for this form of divination is very small, quite often depending more on what the person seeking advice thinks the information he receives is worth, satisfactory answers perhaps resulting in greater generosity.

Temples also receive soul tablets brought in by outside worshippers, and for a fee often amounting to as much as that charged by a "clan" association the tablets are arranged on altars behind glass doors and worshipped on the appropriate occasions.

The busiest time for temple managers or committee members is when the annual festival of the major *shen* of the temple comes round; this is the time when income from "oil and incense" money and donations of money wrapped in red paper<sup>54</sup> is greatest. If a list were made of every festival available for celebration by the Chinese, including traditional China festivals and the ones of new *shen* of the *Nan Yang*, there would be hardly a day in the year on which there was nothing available for celebration. In Singapore, the birthday anniversaries of all the most popular *shen* are celebrated in temples of all dialect groups; the birthday of the *shen* to which the temple is dedicated being made the occasion for the most elaborate celebration. Among the most popular festivals here, we have already mentioned that of the Nine Kings. The birthday of the Jade Emperor is also popular and takes place on the 9th of the first lunar month. In the temple to this *shen* in Havelock Road, worship is made by members

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54 Red paper packets, or *hung pao* [*hongbao*], containing money, are given in payment for various transactions by the Chinese, e.g., payments to the Chinese physician are made in this way. Small ceremonial gifts of money at funeral rites, festivals, etc., are also given in red packets.

of the Hokkien community on the eve of the 8th. On the 15th of the first lunar month, *Shang Yuan Tan* [*Shangyuan Dan*], the festival for the first of the Taoist “principles” is celebrated particularly by the Cantonese, even Buddhist nunneries taking part in the celebrations. Among the festivals that Buddhism has contributed to the religious life of the Chinese, that which is most widely celebrated, and entirely by women, is the second of the three *Kuan Yin* festivals, on the 19th of the sixth lunar month. A popular place for celebrating this festival is the *Kuan Yin T’ang* [*Guanyin Tang*], a *Hsien T’ien Tao* vegetarian house in Waterloo Street. A very popular festival, especially with second or more generation Malaya or Singapore born Chinese, is that of the *Toa Peh Kong* of Pulau Kusu, a small island not far from Singapore. Celebrations on the island continue throughout the entire Chinese ninth month and expeditions are made individually and in groups from different temples and vegetarian houses. On the island there is a small *Toa Peh Kong* temple at one end and a Malay *keramat* or sacred grave situated on a hill at the other end. It is said that the *Toa Peh Kong* of this temple is the water *shen* and that early immigrants coming to Malaya used to pass this island on their way in to port. As they were passing, they would offer prayers of thanksgiving for their safe arrival in the *Nan Yang*. During this month the sea between Singapore and Pulau Kusu is crowded with sampans carrying worshippers to the island, particularly at the week-ends, and temple and other associations often hire sampans for carrying their members, flying their association flag on the stern of the boat and sometimes conducting religious ceremonies on the way. People release small red paper “Buddha” boats when out at sea and these are supposed to be for the use of the souls of those who have been drowned. Buddhists buy up quantities of live fish and crabs and even large turtles, the latter often being caught especially for sale to the pious. They are also released and committed to the sea en route. On arrival, the entire island will be found to be swarming with people, and souvenir sellers, hawkers’ stalls and eating places are in abundance during this month. Some temples hire awnings to be put up as shelters under which members may eat their picnic lunch. The members of a vegetarian house, the *T’ao Yuan Fu T’ang* [*Taoyuan Fotang*], Peach Garden Buddha Hall, in Duxton Hill, Singapore, are charged \$10 per head for the outing, which includes the boat journey, various sea creatures for releasing and a vegetarian lunch. Last year we were invited to accompany the members of this house on their trip to Pulau Kusu and it was interesting to compare the arrangements made with those of four years previously when we first went with them. Since that first time, the woman owner has become wealthier and this time a launch was laid on as well as the usual two sampans in which sea livestock was carried for releasing. The ordinary members of the death benefit section of the vegetarian house,

together with the inmates of the home, travelled in the sampans, but the privileged — the owner's relatives, many "adopted" children<sup>55</sup> and guests—went in the launch. On arrival at the island, our party dispersed, some people to go to the temple only, to pray, and others to continue afterwards up the hill to worship at the Malay *keramat*, for, it was explained to us, "this Malayan *Toa Peh Kong* is a great *shen* here so we must worship him, but this is the home of the Malays too, so we must worship their 'shen' as well". The temple did a roaring trade in strips of yellow cloth amulets, which we had tied round our wrists for good luck, and *Toa Peh Kong* flags, to be taken back and kept on altars in temples, vegetarian houses and homes for another year, after which time, they should be brought back and new ones purchased.

At all festivals the social aspect is in greater evidence than the religious. Respects are paid by visitors at the altar, and food set up for the use of the *shen*. After the "soul substance" of these offerings has been consumed by the *shen* it is taken down and packed away again. Worship over, people wander round with friends, buy small snacks and cold drinks from the many hawkers that flock to festivals to sell their wares, perhaps have their fortunes told, and, if a theatrical show or puppet performance is to be given,<sup>56</sup> settle down in their seats to wait for the play to begin. Festivals then, are occasions for spending money. The temple itself must spend, especially if a Chinese opera company has been hired. It is also hoped by the controllers of the temple that those that come will be generous in "oil and incense" money. A good festival gives a temple popularity and the goodwill gained thereby may help to increase its number of regular patrons in the year to come.

## Residential Places of Worship

### 1. Vegetarian houses of the sect of *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao*

A large number of the *chai t'ang* in Singapore belong to branches of the sect of *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao*. In this sect they have resulted, not as in

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55 Children are often nominally "adopted" by Chinese, when for some reason they are thought to be bringing bad luck on their own parents, or when somebody merely takes a liking to a child. This kind of adoptive parent exercises a general benevolence over his or her adopted child. The child visits its adoptive parent on all ceremonial occasions and gives and receives presents from time to time. The relationship is in fact more like the Christian god-parent god-child relationship. The owner of this vegetarian house has several adopted daughters and granddaughters. One lives with her in her *chai t'ang*.

56 Temples without a permanent stage, or enough land to erect a temporary one, often hire puppet shows instead of a theatrical company.

Buddhism from a movement of the laity, but this form of monastic organization in what started as a lay religion, was to a certain extent inevitable once conditions were favourable; following from the requirements of asceticism for rank-holders of the sect. The majority of houses are for women and we know only a few which are for men. One is the *Tung Shan T'ang* in Devonshire Road, built in 1894, another is the *Kuan Yin T'ang* [*Guanyin Tang*] in Waterloo Street, built in 1884, a third is at Pasir Panjang, the *Wan Shou Shan* (*Wanshou Shan*, Ten Thousand Longevity Mountain) *Kuan Yin T'ang*, built in 1880, and there is a small one at Katong, the *Kuan Yin T'ang* in Tembeling Road, built about 1920. The majority of the women in houses of the sect are amahs, some retired and others working women, of the Cantonese dialect group; some houses are owned independently by women who recognize the most senior man in a branch as having ultimate control over religious affairs, and one of his female disciples, the owner perhaps of the house in which apprenticeship was served, as master.<sup>57</sup> Other houses are put up as a result of contributions from the public or a wealthy donor, collected by the senior man in a branch, and controlled by him. There are houses in which the majority of the inmates are locally born women, often entering as children, given to the house by their parents.<sup>58</sup> These houses are predominantly Hakka and Teochew.

In Singapore there are at least six main branches of the *P'u Tu Men* [*Pudu Men*] or *Hsien T'ien Men* division of the *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao*; there may be others. These six branches between them control some sixty or more vegetarian houses. The branches divided in China some time during the Ch'ing Dynasty, until which time they had all acknowledged the same line of patriarchs. The first six patriarchs of *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao* are the same as those of the Meditation, *Ch'an*, School of Buddhism. After the sixth and last *Ch'an* patriarch, the sect acknowledges a joint patriarchate held by *Pai Yu*, a farmer who opened 108 "meditation halls" in the Lusan mountains, and one *Ma Tao I*, a grand-disciple of the last Buddhist patriarch. After these two men there is a gap in the succession until 1488, during the Ming Dynasty, when one *Lo Wei Ch'un* became patriarch. It is possible that the sect really started with this man, one of the earlier two men, *Ma Tao I*, being chosen after his death as a suitable person from whom to count religious descent, in the same way as the Taoist religious specialists chose Lao Tzu. In the history of the patriarchate given to us by

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57 Women owners of vegetarian houses in the sect usually spend a year or so in some other house of the sect first, in order to obtain sufficient rank and learn about the running of such houses.

58 Either because they are too poor to support them or because their horoscopes predict that they will bring their parents, and later, if they should marry, their husbands, bad luck.

one of the branches, it is stated that *Lo Wei* [*Ch'un*] was the 49th incarnation of a Buddhist saint. After attaining enlightenment which made it possible for him to enter Nirvana, he declined and chose to be reborn in order to help others to reach enlightenment in true Mahayana tradition. He chose Shantung [Shandong] as his birth place,<sup>59</sup> and when he grew up and later gained recognition as a great religious teacher, the jealousy of the Confucianists was aroused, (a situation familiar in the history of Chinese religious sects) and *Lo Wei* [*Ch'un*] was thrown into prison. After a considerable time he won his freedom by demonstrating spiritual superiority in discussions with a monk Shio Yin from Tibet. *Lo Wei* [*Ch'un*], was, apparently the only person in Peking who could bring this monk to silence. He is greatly admired by members of the sect for his gifts as a religious leader and his virtuous qualities.

After *Lo Wei* [*Ch'un*] there was no further patriarch until 1662. Then there was one who was the leader of the sect in Szechuan; he was followed in succession by a leader from Kuangsi [Guangxi] and then a leader from Kweichow [Guizhou] succeeded. This period of Chinese history is marked by rebellions, particularly in the south part of China where many local little resistance movements against the Ch'ing rose up, only to be smashed eventually by the Manchu troops. The records of the patriarchate as held by Singapore branches of the sect show that during this period a number of the leaders were put to death, imprisoned or banished. One group of adherents of the sect claimed that their leader was secretly appointed to be patriarch by the previous one while the latter was in prison; another group denied this and eventually split off. It was a time of pretenders, intrigue and breakup for the sect. Dissension led to branching off; the thirteenth patriarch or patriarchs — it was a joint succession — started another sect, and of five regional heads of the sect, known as the *wu lao* [*wulao*], five elders, three were sentenced to death by martial law.<sup>60</sup> The different main branches found in Malaya were all derived from different vegetarian houses in China, as, in the early days of Buddhism in China, the various schools grew up in different powerful monasteries. High ranking members of the sect were eventually sent to various parts of the *Nan Yang* by the leaders of different branches and about the turn of the middle nineteenth century, *Hsien T'ien Tao* began to find followers in Singapore and build vegetarian houses here.

The majority of the vegetarian houses of the *Hsien T'ien Tao* religious sect are grouped under one or other of the six main branches in

59 Another branch claims that *Lo Wei* [*Ch'un*] was born in Chili.

60 This is borne out by De Groot. In Vol. II of his *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China*, Amsterdam, 1903, some of the patriarchs given in local records are mentioned by name as having been sought or captured by the government authorities.

Singapore; there are also sub-branches of these in other parts of Malaya and in Sarawak, headed by men who belong to the same “family” (see pp. 167–68 below, monk families) as leaders of the branches in Singapore. Friendly relations exist between the members of Singapore branches and their sub-branches elsewhere, and there is a certain amount of visiting back and forth between women living in vegetarian houses in Singapore and those living elsewhere. Leaders of sub-branches in other places are sometimes associated in the management or trusteeship of vegetarian houses in Singapore, an example being the *Kuan Yin T’ang* [*Guanyin Tang*] in Waterloo Street which has one vegetarian or managing trustee from Malacca, and one from Muar as well as three from the *Kuan Yin T’ang* itself. There is also a body of ordinary trustees who have properties vested in them and provisions are also made for the acquisition or reservation of pieces of land to be used for the building of further *chai t’ang* of the sect. Also, donations can be made out of income to other vegetarian houses of the branch here or of sub-branches elsewhere.

The main expression of branch membership solidarity is in the festival celebrations held in the various *chai t’ang* of a branch. When anniversary celebrations such as the birthday of the *lao shih* [*laoshi*] (teacher) are held in the “parent” house of one branch (the *Tung Shan T’ang* in Devonshire Road) women from the various houses grouped under the control of the head of this house send along their best cooks to help in the preparation of the vegetarian meals provided. When a new house is opened members of other houses of the branch similarly rally round to help with the opening celebrations. We were invited to such an opening celebration recently.<sup>61</sup> About one thousand people attended in all and people sat down in relays to a fourteen course vegetarian meal.<sup>62</sup> The *ku t’ai* [*gutai*],<sup>63</sup> head women of three *chai t’ang*, together with lesser members of several other houses were busy the whole time in the kitchen preparing food and the chief of the branch to which the new house belongs, the *lao shih* of the *Tung Shan T’ang*, was seated behind a desk, fitted unobtrusively into a corner, collecting red packets from all the guests. The actual reception of guests was undertaken by a devout Chinese gentleman, a friend of the two ladies who run the new *chai t’ang* who is also acting in the capacity of financial advisor to them. There is

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61 February 1955.

62 Chinese vegetarian food, we might add, is far from being the often tasteless fare that it is in the West. It is possible to dine very sumptuously indeed on completely vegetarian Chinese food, which, incidentally does not include any strongly smelling flavoursome vegetables like onions, garlic, etc.

63 *Ku T’ai* is the term of address for a woman who has attained the highest rank open to women of the sect. The term of address for the second in rank, one also enabling its holder to run a vegetarian house, is *T’ai Ku*.

practically no social intercourse between members of houses of this branch and those of others, but on this day we saw among the guests the *ku t'ai* of one of the more prominent vegetarian houses of the Waterloo Road branch. Of all the houses under the paternal control of the *lao shih* of the Devonshire Road branch, there are two with which particularly close relations are maintained. These are the next oldest houses of the branch and were built from money from subscription to a fund started for this purpose by the previous head of the *Tung Shan T'ang*. Members of the three houses worship jointly at *Ching Ming* at the grave of their founder, and for Chinese New Year, a definite pattern of visiting is laid down, members of the two women's houses visiting their *lao shih* on the 1st of the 1st lunar month, and the *lao shih* returning this call on the 4th. Members of other houses of the branch may also visit their *lao shih* on the 1st, but will receive no return visit. Whenever there is any great celebration at the *Tung Shan T'ang* women from these two houses have the greatest responsibility in organization. At minor festivals, women from smaller vegetarian houses of the branch go to the *Shan Te T'ang*, in Clemenceau Avenue, one of the oldest *chai t'ang* mentioned above. It is to the *Shan Te T'ang* that would-be owners of vegetarian houses usually go and live while undergoing religious training. Women training in the *Shan Te T'ang* also call the *ku t'ai* of this house, *shih fu*. One woman who owns a vegetarian house in Clementi Road, bought the land on which it is built from the *Shan Te T'ang*, the land having been donated to the latter by a wealthy worshipper. She has now rented out part of it to people who have built houses on it; she thus derives some income from the rent. The relationship between this *ku t'ai* and that of the *Shan Te T'ang* are very close and they visit each other a good deal. They had taken rank at the same time and consider themselves to be "sisters".

The women living in the two older houses of this Devonshire Road branch are mostly second generation or more Malaya or Indonesian born Hakka women; "nonya" who wear sarong and baju most of the time, whereas most of the inmates of the privately owned houses are Cantonese working women. Many wealthy "nonya" women support various *chai t'ang* of this branch and they are popular with elderly women who, although not necessarily taking a *shih fu*, teacher, rent a room in one of the houses of the branch to which they retire when family affairs become too tiring. Women from houses in other parts of Malaya usually stay at the *Shan Te T'ang* when they come to Singapore, and the head woman of this house exercises a nominal headship over a women's house in Malacca. Other women heads of houses here are similarly the heads of houses in other parts of the country and in Sarawak, and all business matters must be referred to them for action.

Another branch derived from a different part of Kwangtung Province consists of three *chai t'ang* owned by a Cantonese businessman who has rank in the sect. He also claims to have been initially concerned with the beginning of another house owned independently by a woman.<sup>64</sup> The biggest *chai t'ang* belonging to this man, and probably that with the largest membership of any *chai t'ang* in Singapore, is the *Fei Hsia Tsing She*. All the members of this house are Cantonese working women, the majority being amahs, and many use the house as a *pied à terre* while in employment and as a place of retirement when too old to seek further work.<sup>65</sup> Recently the owner of this house built a new modern style house opposite the older wood and attap one, and the opening was described in a leading Chinese newspaper in Singapore. There were reported to have been over six thousand guests at the opening, and no less than six hundred meals served (each meal consisting of food for about eight people). Food was served throughout one day and night. The old building could only accommodate a few dozen women, and as applications for admittance continued to come in, a new house had to be built. We spent a night in the new building and can say that it certainly rivals many hotels for comfort and convenience. The *lao shih* who is the owner of the *Fei Hsia Tsing Sheh*, had succeeded his paternal uncle in the ownership of a vegetarian house belonging to one branch of *Hsien T'ien Tao* in the Shan Shui district of Kwangtung Province. Profits from book shops he owns in Hong Kong, and from his café in Singapore have made it possible to erect this new building here, and, according to what this *lao shih* has told us, it can now accommodate two hundred persons. The building cost about \$200,000 to erect, and furnish. The cost of entry to this rest home is a minimum of \$1,200, women providing their own bed and other personal belongings, but for this sum, women are provided with accommodation and food for the rest of their lives and with a funeral at death. The house also accepts disabled persons. Members of the house take care of their own rooms and do their own washing and ironing. They earn their pocket money by performing ceremonies at funerals and by providing vegetarian food for outside consumption. The *Fei Hsia Tsing She* provides vegetarian meals for worshippers at the *Pi Shan T'ing* [*Bishan Ting*] Cantonese cemetery for several days at the *Ching Ming* festival of the tombs. Other lucrative occupations of inmates of vegetarian houses, are fortune telling, sewing, cake-baking and the performing of various odd

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64 The *T'ao Yuan Fu T'ang*; the inmates of which, we accompanied to Pulau Kusu (see p. 158 above).

65 Members sleep in dormitories containing up to twenty beds. There are some smaller rooms containing about six or eight beds, but these are allocated to those of equal rank who must perform their religious observances in secret.

jobs for outsiders. One woman attached to the *Shan Te T'ang* in Clemenceau Avenue, is a Chinese style physician specialising in acupuncture. The houses of the various branches of the sect are all similar in organization and activities, and the rules and regulations are usually few and non-arduous. Many houses allow women to have friends in to stay with them. We quote the rules of one *chai t'ang* here as a fairly typical example of rules and regulations:

1. Men may enter the women's side (there is an adjacent men's house) only during the hours of 8 a.m.–4 p.m.
2. One man and one woman may not sit and talk alone together.<sup>66</sup>
3. Members must not go out at night without the permission of the person in charge.
4. When any problem arises, there must be no arguing but the matter must be taken to the head woman, or the assistant head, for decision.
5. Public money must not be used for private purposes (i.e. money gained from professional praying).

There are also various ritual rules such as the number of days that must elapse before a woman who has been in the same room as a birth can enter the *chai t'ang*, and the number of days before a woman who has been in the presence of a death may enter.

Festival celebrations in vegetarian houses are similar to those of temples with the exception that the eating together by worshippers of a vegetarian meal provides the main attraction; also theatrical performances are less usual as added entertainment. The majority of those attending a festival at a vegetarian house are either members of other houses in a branch or relatives and friends of inmates; festival celebrations provide the occasions when branch membership ties are reinforced and when members and their families meet together.

These *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao* vegetarian houses are, today, far from moribund institutions and new houses are continually being opened and old ones enlarged. In the *Straits Times* in 1950 there was a paragraph on the erection of a new "temple", in fact a *chai t'ang* in Ipoh. Special China-trained craftsmen were recruited from Singapore and Penang for work on the building, which was described as one of the most up-to-date and costliest in the country.

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66 Really no hardship. Most of the women inmates are well over fifty and do not appear to be particularly well disposed towards men.

## 2. Buddhist vegetarian houses, nunneries and monasteries

Enough has been said on *chai t'ang* in Singapore, both in a previous article<sup>67</sup> and above to indicate something of the life lead by the women who enter them, and their reasons for entering.<sup>68</sup> Apart from discipline which is possibly slightly stricter in houses run by Buddhists, and a tendency to emphasize the more purely Buddhist kind of festival, the life of women in Buddhist vegetarian houses is in most respects similar to that of the inmates of the *Hsien T'ien Ta Tao* houses. There are however, a number of what one might call quasi-nunneries in Singapore, where a group of *ni ku*, nuns who shave their heads and wear some kind of habit, and *chai ku*, vegetarian women, live and work together; most of these are Cantonese. There are also a few monasteries in Singapore, mostly inhabited by Fukienese monks coming from Amoy [Xiamen] or from Foochow [Fuzhou]. Some of the China-born nuns were already nuns when they came to Singapore, but others became nuns after working here first as amahs or in other employment. Most of the locally born nuns do not appear to enter nunneries as a result of any vocational urge, but are given to a nunnery by parents too poor to keep them. Much criticism has been levelled against these young nuns and their lack of devotion to their religion. Their comprehension of Buddhist theology and morality have also been questioned. However, when it is realized that many of them do not take up their profession from any personal choice, it is perhaps easier to understand their lapses from the high standard of discipline which they are expected to maintain. On the whole, however, it is probably true to say that the nuns who live in nunneries or quasi-nunneries, maintain a higher level of religious discipline than those sometimes called “wild” nuns (also applied to monks), who have their own room somewhere and hire themselves out to perform funeral and post-funeral rites. There are such nuns living in Sago Lane, a street in which the inhabitants are, commercially, largely taken up with the cult of death, supplying coffins and various religious paraphernalia to the death houses there, where so many funeral rites are held. Apart from the children given to nunneries, who often have their heads shaved at the tender age of six or seven, nuns sometimes adopt little girls of their own who help them in the performance of ceremonies, laying out their praying apparatus and fanning their “mothers” to keep them cool during the performance of long and arduous rites. One young nun of our acquaintance who is in her middle twenties, was given to a nunnery when she was a few years old,

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67 See “Chinese Women’s Vegetarian Houses in Singapore”, *JMBRAS*, 27(1)(1954): 51–67. [See Chapter 6.]

68 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61. [See Chapter 6, pp. 116–17.]

and now earns her living by performing ceremonies at funerals. She told us that nowadays the nun's profession was not a good one because not many people believe anymore and the ones that do are not very rich. She said that Hong Kong was a much better place to earn one's living as a nun, because there are more wealthy businessmen there who are devout Buddhists and can pay well for services to be performed. Her own adopted daughter, a child whom she adopted when three years old, goes to school, and later she intends sending her out to work "where she can earn more money". This decision was not reached entirely on promptings of generosity for the child's future welfare however, for adopted daughters are expected to support their nun "mothers" when the latter become too old to work.

Although not many nuns came to Malaya before the 1920's, Buddhist monks started to come to Malaya some time during the latter part of the nineteenth century. As we have seen, they often control temples, sometimes of a distinctly un-Buddhist nature, and some make a large proportion of their income in this way. They are constantly at work looking for new disciples,<sup>69</sup> and rich patrons to build monasteries and temples for them. We have not, so far, come across any nuns who control temples (although some vegetarian women do) and the major part of their income appears to be derived from their functions in funeral worship. They too, however, take disciples and seek out pious women of the Chinese community in order to gain contributions for their nunneries or for their own personal needs. We have alluded several times in this paper to monk families and we shall now describe them in more detail. These "families" can consist of both men and women, although there is a tendency for women to take only women disciples. A "lineage" comprises a teacher, his or her disciples, their disciples' disciples and so on, each set of disciples, although perhaps of differing ages, constitutes one generation. Members of a family can consist of members of the laity as well as the clergy and family members refer to each other by such terms as elder and younger brother, uncle and great-uncle, etc.; such ties of "kinship" are often important in the controlling of various temples and monasteries and principles of nepotism apply also in the religious business. Religious practitioners also often unite for professional purposes on a basis of "family" relationship. Often an affectionate relationship is established between master and disciple, particularly when the disciple is a boy, or in the case of nuns, a girl, adopted by the master; although the relationship with adult disciples, particularly when the taking of the *shih fu* is a purely

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69 A Chinese friend, a *Ch'an* Buddhist, had a monk approach him and ask him if he could be his *shih fu*. My friend assented, but, as he explained to us, the monk's learning was not very great, and he himself was perhaps more qualified to be the *shih fu*.

nominal act, may not involve any great reciprocal obligations or social intercourse. When the disciple is adopted into the nunnery or monastery as a child, the master is in charge of the child's schooling and preliminary instruction leading to ordination, or, important among nuns in Singapore, qualifications for work at funerals and other ceremonies. We have met several nuns with *shih fu* in China, who have expressed considerable anxiety about their welfare, and have tried to get them into Singapore to live in their nunneries here. Families keep genealogical records in the manner of the traditional Chinese family, and Reichelt<sup>70</sup> refers to a situation when representatives of monk families in Japan were sent to China to worship at the seat of the old "family" head. Also like Chinese families, members of monk families are given generation names. Chinese names comprise three characters, the first standing for the surname, the last is the person's personal name and the middle character is the generation name. Monks and nuns are supposed to give up their own surnames on taking vows, and often a new surname *Shih* (from *Shih chia mou ni*, Sakyamuni Buddha) is taken. A master will give a new personal name to his disciples too. There is a monk family in Singapore which has the generation names *Chuen*, *Tuen* and *Kwang*, in that order in a series. Of the monks in this family of the eldest generation *Chuen*, at least four monasteries and temples in Singapore are controlled by different "brothers"; of the next senior generation, about five or more are controlled by different "brothers" and the youngest generation between them control at least two.<sup>71</sup> Generation names when strung together, often form a poem or, in the case of monk families, religious texts, each word representing one name. When, after several generations, the poem is completed, the senior disciple in the lineage composes another and thus starts off a new series of names.

Like vegetarian houses, nunneries are sometimes owned by one woman, usually the only fully ordained member of the nunnery. Others are those in which *shih fu* have some financial interest and so some administrative power. A fairly representative nunnery, or quasi-nunnery in Singapore and one of which the inmates are well known to us, is the *Tu Ming An*, an attap and wood building standing in its own grounds at the side of an avenue leading up to the Cantonese *Pi Shan T'ing* cemetery. This *an* is owned by a nun from the Shun Te district of Kwangtung and was built some twenty years ago. In it, live eight vegetarian women, one of which is the owner's father's second wife; apart from the latter they are

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70 Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism*, op. cit., p. 225.

71 Information extracted from the list of member associations of the Buddhist Federation and their controllers. There may be other temples and monasteries which are not members and which are controlled by members of this "family".

all *tze soh nui* [zishu nü],<sup>72</sup> women who have taken a vow not to marry. Also living in the nunnery are five children, girls, adopted by the nunnery and already little nuns with shaven heads, one child whose head has not yet been shaven, and three *ni ku*, nuns. All the inmates are Cantonese including the children, and all the adults are China-born and come from villages adjacent to that of the owner, in the Shun Te district. The head women told us that she had come to Malaya originally to work, eventually becoming a nun and returning to China for preliminary ordination. On her return to Singapore, she sent for her step-mother. The head woman returned from Hong Kong a few months ago where she had gone through final ordination, receiving twelve burns on the head, at a total cost of \$1,500 (Straits). This *an* has friendly relations with several others mostly of the same mixed type, and mostly related to the head woman through the same master. Nuns and vegetarians earn their living by praying only, being unlike the women of *Hsien T'ien Tao* houses who do other work. The *an* is very conveniently situated for professional praying being only a few hundred yards away from the cemetery and the head woman is on very friendly terms with the manager of the cemetery and committee members, all of whom were invited to the feast she gave on her return from ordination in Hong Kong. The nunnery celebrates all the major Buddhist festivals but of the three *Kuan Yin* festivals, the middle one is the most popularly attended. The birthdays of Amitabha, on the 17th of the 11th lunar month, and of Sakyamuni on the 8th of the 4th lunar month are also celebrated with a vegetarian meal being provided for attenders. Besides these "big days",<sup>73</sup> feasts are given on the birthday of the master of the head woman, and whenever an inmate "graduates" for work in funeral ceremonies. At various times during the year the *Tu Ming An* holds a graduation ceremony, at which one or other of the young nuns "comes out". A nun must be sixteen years old before she can graduate, and the attaching ceremony is an occasion of some social import in her life. We were fortunate enough to be present at a graduation of a nun of this *an*. The girl graduating as a young nun adopted into the nunnery when a small child, she had been studying for two years to perfect her performance of a rite known as *shang t'ai* [shangtai], mounting the platform, at which the dead are symbolically fed; this rite is performed at post-funeral rites and during the 7th lunar month when the "hungry ghosts" are let out of hell. The rite is quite a complicated one involving a series of hand movements of esoteric meaning similar in appearance to

72 Lit. women who "comb their own hair". They do not marry and leave their hair in a long plait hanging down their backs. They are almost entirely from the Shun-te district of Kwangtung Province.

73 Chinese *ta jih tzu* [da rizi].

those performed by Indian dancers, but which, we were told, are derived from the *mi tsung* [*mizong*], secret sect of Buddhism. For this occasion the graduating nun was to make the hand movements and act as leader in the rite; one nun told us that it is with these hand movements that, during this rite, the leader speaks to the wandering souls in hell. The leader in the rite is assisted at the table, which is laid out with various ritual objects associated with *Kuan Yin*, by other nuns who chant from books of sutras, but all the important features are performed by the leader.

For the occasion of this graduation, various members of other nunneries were invited including one or two monks, “brothers” of the head woman; also, the teacher of the graduating nun, a woman from another nunnery who, for the past two years had been initiating her in the esoteric knowledge of her profession. When we arrived, the other young nuns, all having previously been through a similar ceremony, were dressed in their special white cassocks and red silk cloaks of graduation. Later, when the rite began, they changed into their “working” cassocks, only the graduating nun wearing the white and red at the actual ceremony. The new costume is quite expensive and is, together with various gold ornaments, rings and the clasp to fasten the red cloak, paid for by the girl’s natural mother and other relatives and friends. As it was explained to us, “it is like her marriage, and these things are her trousseau.” After everybody had eaten the vegetarian feast provided, the ceremony began. A mat was unrolled at the main altar and the gown and cloak were placed on the altar together with a folded silk square of white edged with red. To an accompaniment of drum and flute music, the young nun ceremoniously donned her gown and cloak and spread the silk square on the ground before the altar. On this she prostrated herself three times before the altar to Sakyamuni, after which she chanted a sutra. Then, a long piece of red paper was unfolded and the characters written on it read out by the nun. These consisted of her name, the name of the nunnery, the nature of the occasion and the names of all those who had given her presents and money! After several more prostrations and another sutra, the square was rolled up and she put on a crown and proceeded, carrying a silver censor, first to the altar on the outside veranda, and then to the shrine containing the soul tablet of the oldest master in the line, and then to the altar where the ancestral tablets of outsiders and deceased inmates are kept. When obeisance had been made at all three, the rite of *shang t’ai* began. This was the real test of her learning and during the ceremony attenders commented on her dexterity in performance and her general manner and bearing. We remember one woman remarking that she looked tired, at which the teacher replied rather sharply that so would she if she had to perform such a complicated and skilled rite. After about half an hour, and before the rite was completed, the party began to break up and women

went home. They first however, presented their red packets to the head woman for the young nun, the young nun duly noting this out of the corner of her eye, and they were given presents of long life peach buns,<sup>74</sup> and fruit by the head woman.

The socio-religious life of these nuns, is full of all kinds of ritualistic and festive occasions which help to relieve the monotony of what would probably otherwise be rather a dull existence. Like the *chai t'ang* of *Hsien T'ien Tao*, these occasions are times when ties of friendship between houses are reinforced and they are times also when women from various houses worship together, chanting sutras together in a row before the altar. Friends and relatives meet to eat together at these times, and exchange presents, mostly of fruit and other things that vegetarians eat, and occasionally of money. Apart from these festival and ritual occasions however, the social life of women in nunneries is rather limited, more so, in fact than that of women in the houses of *Hsien T'ien Tao*. We once arranged to take a batch of old women from a certain nunnery out to the Au Boon Haw Gardens at Pasir Panjang, but when the day arrived, an important funeral was taking place, and work coming first, the outing had to be called off.

We have seen then, that in Singapore there are a great variety of places that provide facilities for the Chinese religious devotee, both for outsiders living in their own families, and for those who have no home or who wish to leave home occasionally and devote more time to religious observances. When the advice or services of a specialist is needed, there are a number of different varieties from which to choose, and for those who enjoy the bustle and spectacle of the festival, there are those of a number of *shen* which can be attended. The building of temples and residential places of worship, and the participation in their management is an accepted path to social and spiritual merit. So far, there has been little decline in the popularity of religious activities associated with temples of different kinds in Singapore, and with the number of working women reaching retirement age and reluctant to return to a China that has seen many social changes since the days when they left for the *Nan Yang*, the building of *chai t'ang* both *Hsien T'ien Tao* and Buddhist is, if anything, on the increase. The past few years has seen the establishment of several really large and elaborate buildings of this kind, and in the last two months alone, we have witnessed the opening of two of the best equipped in Singapore.<sup>75</sup>

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74 Buns coloured pink and shaped like peaches. The peach is a symbol of longevity among the Chinese and so "peach buns" are part of birthday fare.

75 The *Fei Hsia Tsing She* [*Feixia Qingshe*] in Jalan Ampas and the *Tung Te T'ang* [*Tongde Tang*] in Serangoon Road.

# Chinese Glossary

|                             |      |  |
|-----------------------------|------|--|
| <i>an</i>                   | 庵    | Nunnery of monastery   |
| <i>Chai ku</i>              | 齋姑   | Vegetarian woman   |
| <i>Chai t'ang</i>           | 齋堂   | Vegetarian house   |
| <i>Ch'an</i>                | 禪    | Meditation Sect of Buddhism  |
| <i>Chen K'ung Tsu</i>       | 真空祖  | True Empty or Void patriarch   |
| <i>Ch'en Tso Mien t'ang</i> | 陳佐勉堂 | Ch'en Tso Mien Vegetarian House  |
| <i>Cheng I</i>              | 正一   | True Unity (a Taoist sect)   |
| <i>Chi Lo Ssu</i>           | 極樂寺  | Chi Lo Monastery   |
| <i>Chin Mu</i>              | 金母   | Golden Mother  |
| <i>Chiu Huang</i>           | 九皇   | Nine Kings   |
| <i>Chu Shih</i>             | 居士   | Lay Buddhist devotee   |
| <i>Chu shih lin</i>         | 居士林  | "Forest" of lay devotees   |
| <i>Ch'uan Chen</i>          | 全真   | Complete Purity of Truth (a Taoist sect)                               |
| <i>Fei Hsia Tsing Sheh</i>  | 飛霞精舍 | Fei Hsia Vegetarian House  |
| <i>Fu</i>                   | 佛    | Buddha   |
| <i>Fu Shou T'ang</i>        | 福壽堂  | Fu Shou Vegetarian House   |
| <i>Fu Te Cheng Shen</i>     | 福德正神 | Name of a <i>shen</i>  |
| <i>Ho shang</i>             | 和尚   | Buddhist monk  |
| <i>Hsi Yu Chi</i>           | 西遊紀  | <i>Record of the Western Journey</i>                                   |
| <i>Hsiao p'o</i>            | 小坡   | Section of Singapore north of the Singapore River                      |
| <i>Hsien T'ien Tao</i>      | 先天道  | The Way of Before Heaven (a religious sect)                            |
| <i>Hui kuan</i>             | 會館   | Association or guild   |
| <i>Hung pao</i>             | 紅包   | Red packet   |
| <i>Ku t'ai</i>              | 姑太   | Term of address for women of a certain rank in the Hsien T'en Tao sect |
| <i>Kuan Yin</i>             | 觀音   | Kuan Yin   |
| <i>Kuei Ken Men</i>         | 皈根門  | The Way of Reverting to the First Principle Sect                       |
| <i>Kung</i>                 | 宮    | A palace; used of temples  |
| <i>Lao shih</i>             | 老師   | A term of address for male rank in the Hsien T'en Tao Sect             |

|                             |       |  |
|-----------------------------|-------|--|
| <i>Lo Wei Ch'un</i>         | 羅蔚群   | Name of a patriarch                                |
| <i>Lung Hua</i>             | 龍華    | Dragon Flower (a religious sect)                   |
| <i>Ma Tao I</i>             | 馬道一   | Name of a patriarch                                |
| <i>Ma Tzu Kung</i>          | 媽祖宮   | Name of a temple                                   |
| <i>Mi Tsung</i>             | 密宗    | Secret or Esoteric Buddhist Sect                   |
| <i>Miao</i>                 | 廟     | Temple   |
| <i>Nam-mo-lo (C)</i>        | 喃嘸佬   | Taoist priest                                      |
| <i>Ni ku</i>                | 尼姑    | Buddhist nun                                       |
| <i>Pai Yu</i>               | 白玉    | Name of a patriarch                                |
| <i>Pao En Ssu</i>           | 報恩寺   | Name of a monastery                                |
| <i>Pi Shan T'ing</i>        | 碧山亭   | Name of a Cantonese cemetery                       |
| <i>P'u T'o Ssu</i>          | 普陀寺   | Name of a monastery                                |
| <i>P'u Tu Men</i>           | 普度門   | Salvation Sect                                     |
| <i>Sai Kong (H)</i>         | 師公    | Taoist priest                                      |
| <i>San Lung Chi Lu Pei</i>  | 三龍指路碑 | Name of a book                                     |
| <i>Shan Te T'ang</i>        | 善德堂   | Name of a vegetarian house                         |
| <i>Shang Yuan Tan</i>       | 上元誕   | Festival of the First Taoist Principle Sect        |
| <i>Shen</i>                 | 神     | Shen   |
| <i>Sheng Mu Shen</i>        | 聖母神   | Holy Mother <i>shen</i>                            |
| <i>Shih chai</i>            | 食齋    | To eat vegetarian food                             |
| <i>Shih chia mou ni</i>     | 釋迦牟尼  | Sakyamuni Buddha                                   |
| <i>Shih fang ts'ung lin</i> | 十方叢林  | Monastery for "all the world"                      |
| <i>Shih fu</i>              | 師父    | Master or teacher                                  |
| <i>Shou wu chieh ti</i>     | 受五戒的  | To take the five vows                              |
| <i>Shuang Lin Ch'an Ssu</i> | 雙林禪寺  | Name of a monastery                                |
| <i>Shun T'ien Kong</i>      | 順天宮   | Name of a temple                                   |
| <i>Ta jih tzu</i>           | 大日子   | "Big day"; used of festivals                       |
| <i>Ta p'o</i>               | 大坡    | Section of Singapore south of the Singapore River  |
| <i>Tang ki (H)</i>          | 童乩    | Divining youth; medium                             |
| <i>T'ai Ku</i>              | 太姑    | Term of rank for women in the Hsien T'ien Tao Sect |

|                           |      |   |
|---------------------------|------|---|
| <i>T'ao Yuan Fu T'ang</i> | 桃園佛堂 | Name of a vegetarian house                              |
| <i>Ti</i>                 | 帝    | A ruler; defied being                                   |
| <i>Tien</i>               | 殿    | Palace; used of temples                                 |
| <i>T'ien Fu Kung</i>      | 天福宮  | Name of a temple  |
| <i>T'ien shih</i>         | 天師   | “Head” of Taoism  |
| <i>Toa Peh Kong (H)</i>   | 大伯公  | A name of a <i>shen</i>                                 |
| <i>Tu Ming An</i>         | 度明庵  | Name of a nunnery                                       |
| <i>Tu Ti Kung</i>         | 土地公  | Earth <i>shen</i>                                       |
| <i>Tung Shan She</i>      | 同善舍  | Fellowship of Goodness, a religious sect                |
| <i>Tung Shan T'ang</i>    | 同善堂  | Name of a vegetarian house                              |
| <i>Tung Te T'ang</i>      | 同德堂  | Name of a vegetarian house                              |
| <i>Tsu shih</i>           | 祖師   | Term of the highest rank in the Hsien<br>T'ien Tao Sect |
| <i>Tsu sun t'sung lin</i> | 子孫叢林 | A monastery for “sons and grand-sons”                   |
| <i>Wu Chi Sheng Mu</i>    | 無極聖母 | Void Sainted Mother                                     |
| <i>Wu lao</i>             | 五老   | Five Elders   |
| <i>Yao Ch'ih Chin Mu</i>  | 瑤池金母 | Golden Mother of the <i>Yao</i> Pool                    |
| <i>Yuan</i>               | 苑    | Park; used for temples                                  |
| <i>Yuan</i>               | 院    | Building surrounded by a wall; used for<br>temples      |
| <i>Yu Huang Tien</i>      | 玉皇殿  | Jade Emperor Temple                                     |



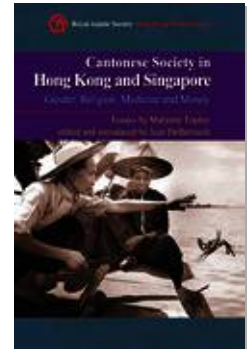
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## Chapter 8

# **The Emergence and Social Function of Chinese Religious Associations in Singapore**

(1961)\*

The majority of Singapore Chinese originate from the rural areas of Kwangtung [Guangdong] and Fukien [Fujian] Provinces. They had already started to immigrate in relatively large numbers by the late nineteenth century, that is before the traditional society of the countryside had been greatly disturbed by new political events and ideas. The social systems Chinese developed in Singapore therefore have been considerably influenced by those existing in “traditional” times in the homeland. Yet they have also been very much modified by the new social environment of Singapore. Overseas Chinese have been free to associate according to a number of principles not open to them in their home villages. New alignments have resulted from the immigration of a body of people of diverse origins and from the heterogeneous structure of urban occupations. They become manifest in organizations set up for a number of different kinds of activity.

In the Chinese countryside systems of cooperation were controlled largely by social relationships determined by the (patrilineal) lineage system. To a lesser degree they were controlled by the system of local territorial organization.<sup>1</sup> However economic and political forces differentiated lineage members and in rural society some organizations existed which recruited according to principles cutting across agnatic community and village unit and which catered for specialized interests not served

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\* A sequel to Maurice Freedman's “Immigrants and Associations: Chinese in 19th Century Singapore”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History (CSSH)*, 3: 25–48. Further comparative discussion will follow in the next issue.

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1 In parts of Kwangtung and Fukien the local lineage or a branch of it sometimes coincided with the village unit.

elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> It was nevertheless essentially when individuals were separated from the lineage and territorial systems of the countryside that they set up large-scale organizations based on freer forms of association to act as agencies for their interests and to regulate their social life. Such separation existed for migrants to the towns of China and also exists in the largely urban society of Singapore. A noteworthy feature of life in both places has been a large variety of voluntary associations. In these individuals cooperate according to like interests connected with their new economic and social roles, or according to cultural characteristics determined by their common origins.<sup>3</sup> Kinship and territory are still important determinants of cooperation but in both cases they are terms used to include a wider group of persons.

One of the ways in which associations in Singapore differ from those in urban China is in their greater freedom to make use of religious symbols and to engage in religious activities. Chinese associations which are not directly oriented to religion have been characterized until their more recent history by the interweaving of a number of religious elements with more secular elements: by the use of symbols derived from religious sources, by the use of religious ritual in their ceremonial, and sometimes by group worship. In China the political system dictated the broad limits of permitted belief as well as the approved forms of organization for religion. Economic and friendly associations in towns often made use of religious elements but limits were set to this, and the same was true of a number of associations that had more directly religious purposes.

In the countryside too there were limits to the degree individuals in different social positions might cooperate in religious tasks, and to the religious roles for which they were eligible. Permitted and encouraged were those activities conducive to the maintenance of approved social groupings based on kinship and territory: the ancestor cult, worship of domestic and agricultural gods, and worship of spirits protecting the local region.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Maurice Freedman discusses the evidence for voluntary organizations in village life in *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*, (London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology, No. 18), Chapter 12. London, 1958.

3 H. B. Morse distinguishes craft and trade associations in Chinese towns from "provincial clubs". Only a few of the former appear to have recruited from "aliens" whereas the latter did so exclusively. See *The Gilds of China*. Shanghai, 1932.

4 What has been called "state religion" included worship of gods associated with territorial units. They were arranged in a hierarchy of importance rather like government officials in the administrative hierarchy. Government officials were expected to participate in their worship. Cf. Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*, Vol. I, Chapter 14. New York: 1865.

Religious recruiting on an associational basis existed; that is to say there were organizations which in membership cut across “traditional” systems of relationship, as in Buddhism, Taoism and certain syncretic systems. There were also societies with religious interests which recruited across lineage and village boundaries. But Buddhist and Taoist organizations were closely supervised and other organizations that tended to operate in secret, as in the case of some syncretic religions and some societies, and could not therefore be supervised, were proscribed.<sup>5</sup>

The relative indifference of the Singapore government to Chinese religion allowed forms of religious organization to develop which in China would have been proscribed because of their secret and unorthodox nature. The material available for institutionalization is particularly varied in Singapore because Chinese from different regions have brought with them the ideas that were popular in their home area and with their social group at the time of immigration. Certain forms of organization and ritual, such as Buddhist and Taoist schools, sects of syncretic religions, and religious cults, had a regional popularity in China and tended also to attract people of one social class or sex rather than another. In Singapore many voluntary associations engaging in religious activity select material that is appropriate to the homeland origin of their members or to their sex and status.

Although no one form of Chinese religious organization has attracted enough followers to provide a means to social identity and a rallying point for all the various interests of the Singapore Chinese, religion has sometimes performed this function for members of associations of different kinds. The territorial, dialect, and surname societies that Dr. Freedman has described,<sup>6</sup> were in some sense “religious”. Secret society initiation leans heavily on religious ideas, and some of the other kinds of association were originally dedicated to the ritual care of the deceased. The degree to which religious elements in associations provide such identity however varies with the degree of participation expected of members or with the emphasis placed on ritual acts or ideological questions in relation to other activities and ideas.

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5 The Manchu had good reason to proscribe some secret societies and some sects, for they had as their object the overthrow of the dynasty.

6 M. Freedman and M. Topley, “Religion and Social Realignment Among the Chinese in Singapore”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 21(1)(1961): 2–23. Reprinted in *Studies in Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman*, edited by George William Skinner, pp. 161–85. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979.

## Some Major Trends in Religious Development

The beliefs and practices of folk religion, which is essentially concerned with material success, still have obvious popularity in Singapore. In the early days of immigration, when most Chinese were of peasant or artisan background they constituted the major form of religion on the island. Folk religion, or “shenism” as it has been termed by a recent writer on Singapore religion,<sup>7</sup> offers personal advantages to its practitioners through the placating and bribing of those spiritual beings most concerned with the material wellbeing of mortals: the *shen*. The ideals of this religion were particularly in keeping with the aims of the majority of early immigrants, which were to make their fortune and stay alive long enough to return to China and enjoy it. In the homeland Shenist practices took place within the household, in the fields and in temples associated with territorial units. In Singapore the setting is different. Temples in which such practices are carried on no longer act as religious foci for local groups, but some rites have been transferred from the home, which for many is only a cubicle or a bed-space, to a temple. Rites connected with the agricultural cycle are greatly attenuated or have disappeared in the urban areas. The organization of cults for promoting “luck” has become largely a matter for private enterprise, since there is in Shenism no formal method for entering the religion or for determining religious authority.

Sometimes a group promoting a spirit-medium cult bases it upon a guild or neighbourhood association to give it a solid reputation.<sup>8</sup> Shenist practices and ideas occur also in institutionalized form in associations with a strong economic interest, such as loan associations, death benefit societies and guilds. When these are attached to a temple devoted to Shenist practice such religious activities are more readily institutionalized. The religious cults of associations are occasionally, as for example in medium-cults, open to outsiders. Cult activities may involve a separate section of the association, thus creating problems of expansion.

Besides Shenism there are the more systematic forms of religion — Buddhism, Taoism and certain syncretic religions. Prominent among the latter in Singapore is *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao* (Great Way of Former Heaven [*Xiantian Dadao*]), which exists as a number of separate sects each with its own leader. The systematic religions have formal methods of entry and recognize qualifications for religious authority within their ranks. Taoism in Singapore is however little more than a series of associations of professional priests attached to different schools and performing rites of

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7 A. J. A. Elliott, *Chinese Spirit Medium Cults in Singapore* (London School of Economics Monographs on Anthropology, No. 14). London, 1955.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

many kinds for the public. The other formal systems aim at their members' spiritual advancement and salvation. Neither Buddhism nor the *Hsien-t'ien* sects were well institutionalized in Singapore until after 1900 and even then Buddhist institutions were strongly infused with Shenist tradition. The main period of expansion was in the 1930s, when unattached Chinese women were migrating in search of work. They were attracted to salvationist religion by reason of their unattached status and because of the value assigned to this in such religion.<sup>9</sup> Several associations that developed between 1900 and 1940 were connected with a salvationist system, some taking their organizational structure from their religion. At the same time, like most of the older Singapore associations until they were affected by modernization, they provided economic benefits.

Modernization of religious organization had started in China by 1900, producing new kinds of association in which interest in ritual reform, study of doctrine, social welfare and cultural projects replaced the former emphasis on economic benefits. Their influence was felt in Singapore by the 1920s, although the new types of movement do not appear to have got really under way there until the late 1930s and during the post-war period. This modernization may be linked with increasing social and economic differentiation, with consequent differentiation in levels of education. Singapore society has now assumed a more settled nature,<sup>10</sup> and Chinese indigenous to Singapore are more strongly represented in the professions and other white-collar occupations.<sup>11</sup> Those educated in English-language schools with Western-type curricula<sup>12</sup> tend to be attracted to secular forms of cultural organization. The new religious associations have to compete with these for membership, and like them have developed cultural interests of a Chinese nationalist character.

The immigrants brought ancestor worship into Singapore, but with changes in kinship and territorial organization it has altered in structure.<sup>13</sup> Many of the activities connected with ritual care of the dead are now carried out in associations of various kinds. Neither the "ancestors" served

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9 I hope to discuss more thoroughly the spiritual and social attractions of salvationist religion for unattached Chinese women in a further publication.

10 The disruptions of war kept Chinese in Singapore when they might have preferred to return to China. Today there is movement in and out of Singapore but few newcomers, and few immigrants returning to China for good. Cf. M. Freedman, *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore*, p. 26. London, 1957.

11 *Social Survey of Singapore (1947)*, p. 51 and table on p. 52.

12 More school children of all "races" attending English schools belong to higher professional or big business families and those in clerical occupations than to working class families. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

13 This is fully discussed in Freedman, *Chinese Family and Marriage*.

in these nor the grouping of individuals for worship are the same as they were in the local agnatic society of rural China.

There has been very little incorporation of cultural and structural elements from the religions of other groups into Chinese religious organization in Singapore. Chinese form the largest ethnic group<sup>14</sup> and their relationships with other groups are largely economic and political. They rarely meet in circumstances likely to lead to any significant exchange of religious ideas. It is only in the last few years that Hinayana Buddhism has begun to interest some of the more educated Singapore Buddhists.<sup>15</sup> Relatively few have adopted other Asian religions or Christianity, even though conversion to the latter entails fewer adjustments today in the social life of the individual than might be imagined.<sup>16</sup>

### **Classification and Recruitment of Religious Associations<sup>17</sup>**

It is obviously difficult to make a clear classification of Chinese associations by reference solely to religious factors. One may reasonably speak of "Buddhist" associations when Buddhist ideas form an obvious connecting link between a set of interests, or of "death-cult" associations when the ritual surrounding the dead is the main theme. But even though religious interests in associations usually form a logical nexus it is not always possible to put a name to the group of interests represented except in rather general terms. The emphasis on certain elements may shift at different times. Religious interests may also be combined with secular concerns that may be more attractive to members than the religious purposes for which the association was founded. On the other hand, an association busy with religious activities may have been formed ostensibly for a purely secular purpose such as sport or study of drama. The professed or major aims are constantly changing because the nature of Singapore is changing. The declared objectives and names of associations are thus often misleading. To understand how religious interests become dominant one must have intimate knowledge of the

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14 At the time of the 1947 census there were 730,133 Chinese out of a total population of 940,824. Two other major groups were Malaysians, 115,735, and Indians, 68,978.

15 Elliott estimates that there were probably no more than 25,000 Chinese Christians and two or three hundred Chinese Muslims in 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

16 Chinese Christians may move in circles determined by their faith, but they also participate in ordinary social life and join associations where they can opt out of religious activities of which they disapprove.

17 This and the following sections are based so far as possible on my own observations during my period of field work in Singapore: 1951–52 and 1954–55.

working of an association at a particular time in relation to current trends in Singapore. Moreover, although recent years have seen the rise of more secular movements, particularly in the political field, separation of the religious and the secular in Chinese life is still by no means complete. This is reflected in associations, even those founded recently. They may have no purely religious activities, yet various association symbols, and elements of ceremonial, may still be based on religious ideas.<sup>18</sup>

Many associations, then, have a range of interests, religious and secular, and if the nature of the group served is to be understood the relation between the two sets of interests, the way in which they are combined, and the emphasis on particular elements, has to be considered. On the basis of our present knowledge two broad groups of organizations can be distinguished today. In one group, membership is based exclusively on personal identity. In other words, the associations are “particularist”. They are also multi-purpose, covering a wide range of interests, mainly economic. In religious matters the emphasis is on ritual activities. These tend to be secondary to their more secular concerns (except in some cases in regard to “ancestor” rites), and they may be delegated to a special group of office-holders. Associations of the other group are open to “all Chinese”, that is to say, they tend towards universalism in membership. As main qualifications for entry they stress common interests in religious matters and belief in a particular ideology. Religion is of primary concern and common worship may be an important activity. Whereas the particularist associations are not attached to any formal system of religion and in leadership do not seek people with religious qualifications, the universalist ideological associations may stress religious rank or knowledge of doctrine as essential for official position. As secondary interests they pursue philanthropic and cultural activities.

The particularist multi-purpose associations may in turn be divided into two groups: the secret societies, which have declined in influence and membership since they were banned in 1890, and the voluntary associations which arose after this suppression.<sup>19</sup> Recruitment has been based usually on two or more of the four principles of territorial origin, dialect spoken, surname (indicative of either traceable or putative descent from a common patrilineal ancestor), and occupation. Often there is regional specialization in occupation, or language and territory coincide, or a particular surname has been dominant in one area, perhaps representing a single widely ramifying lineage in a number of scattered villages in a single locality (*hsiang* [*xiang*]) or district.

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18 Cf. n. 6.

19 See Freedman, “Immigrants and Associations”, *CSSH*, 3: 25–48.

In the secret societies dialect and occupation have been important in recruitment,<sup>20</sup> but the surname principle does not appear to have been used. Similarly in the homeland there is no convincing evidence that membership of such societies was connected with lineage membership although cases of complete village (male) membership have been described. Today, secret societies divide the town into districts in order to carry out their protectionist activities. Since those enjoying protection are compelled to be members it follows that membership is largely confined to people living and working in one part of the island, and since outside “Chinatown” Chinese today do not generally live in neighbourhoods marked out by their place of origin, dialect or surname, membership must include people of various origins and occupations.

In the secret societies the main religious activity is the initiation ritual. After the societies were banned this was trimmed to its bare essentials. It is oriented not to the group served but to the original purpose and ideals of the organization in the homeland, that is, to political change. Despite the fact that overseas the anti-dynastic and later the pro-Sun Yat-sen activities of the societies have been of less importance than their other functions, the ritual has not been adapted to the Malayan situation.

The voluntary associations tend to be oriented in their ritual activities to the social group they serve. Their ritual may have a regional bias, consisting in ceremonies and worship of beings popular in one area of the homeland. When they serve members of an occupational group they usually have a patron *shen* as they did in China, whose festivals they celebrate. Many also engage in ancestor worship providing death benefits as a logical corollary. This is particularly true of the surname (clan) associations for when localized lineage organization, with which ancestor worship was originally connected, failed to re-establish itself, they formed the natural setting for such worship in Singapore. Indeed the focus of such associations on ancestor worship is often the main reason for restriction of membership to those of like surname. The emphasis is however usually on “ancestors” of members who died in Malaya or in Singapore, and on deceased members of the association, rather than on commemoration of the homeland ancestors. Perhaps because the ancestors commemorated at their rites are not common to all members, full attendance is not usually

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20 Uniformity in dialect may sometimes have been due to the circumstance that a society recruited from a certain area in Singapore where people of the same dialect group lived together; there are still dialect concentrations in parts of the old Chinatown. Newcomers live there on arrival. Cantonese go to an area known as the Water Cart, and to their Hong Kong relatives this name stands for Singapore. In the early days, dialect or regional bias in membership may have been due to connections between some societies as originally formed in Singapore and parent lodges with jurisdiction over certain regions of the homeland.

demand. Surname associations are therefore not such a religious focus as are certain specialist groupings which place more emphasis on ritual attention to the deceased immediately after death.

The universalist ideological associations are concerned with the spiritual progress and ultimate salvation of all members of society. In ritual they stress purity of form through elimination of "superstitious" or non-orthodox elements, which often have a regional origin. Thus in religion they are not oriented to any particular group of Chinese except perhaps to the more highly educated. Their philanthropic and cultural activities are consistent with their salvationist beliefs and are held to create "merit" that is transferable to society at large. They often show a keen interest in the elimination of language differences among Chinese from different regions.

In addition to the particularist and the universalist types there are many associations with a fairly narrow range of interests, among which ritual specialization is of major concern. Whereas in multi-purpose voluntary associations and in secret societies only one section of members may be activated for ritual, in these group worship often figures. Recruitment is on a number of principles. Like origins may be stressed as a qualification yet recruitment is often in fact on a narrower basis. The qualifications may be religious belief perhaps linked with interest in certain cultural activities, or there may be limitation to one sex. Like the ideological associations they may theoretically be open to all Chinese yet in practice reveal narrower alignments. Again, emphasis may be on treating certain rituals in a particular way, which has the effect of restricting membership to people of like origins. Concern with certain rites and the worship of certain beings may again have the effect of making one sex dominant in the membership.<sup>21</sup> Moreover common worship demands a common means of communication and this again leads to a dialect bias in membership.<sup>22</sup>

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21 In part for similar reasons there was also a sex bias in the early ideological associations. See below, p. 195.

22 The main dialect groups in Singapore are: Hokkien, the largest, Hokchiu, Hinghoa, and Hokchhian, from Fukien province; Tiuchiu, Cantonese, and Hainanese, from Kwangtung; Hakka, from both Fukien and Kwangtung. Hokkien and Tiuchiu are inter-intelligible. The other dialects are distinct from each other. Within some, for example in Cantonese, there are sub-dialects based on particular areas. These may form a further basis of alignment in associations.

## Religious Aspects of Particularist Multi-purpose Associations

### 1. Voluntary associations

During the last few decades there has been a tendency among the Chinese towards increasing specialization at the associational level in religious matters. Some of the religious activities of the large particularist associations which emerged in the nineteenth century have disappeared or declined in importance. For example in the nineteenth century an association for Hokkien people was centred on one large temple and divided the town into five sections for festival celebrations. The Tiuchiu [Chaozhou] and Hainanese were both similarly organized for some ritual purposes. The Cantonese and Hakka were divided into several groups<sup>23</sup> possibly because of differences in ritual and belief based on narrower territorial divisions. When dialect groups showed clearer residential patterns, some of these temples were in the areas where people who formed the majority of members had their homes. Such temples were then religious foci for members of associations and also centres of worship for members of dialect and of local groupings. Even today they still maintain a strong regionalism in ritual and tend to have as their main “congregation” those of the same origins. However although some are still run by associations indirectly,<sup>24</sup> they are no longer the regular religious centres for such bodies. Attendance is not compulsory for members and they are open to anybody wishing to worship.

The large territorial-dialect associations still run the main cemeteries in Singapore.<sup>25</sup> Such associations are federations of smaller bodies based on regional and surname requirements, and also of ritual associations showing similar alignments in membership. The regions these smaller bodies represent are within the wider territory covered by the associations running the cemeteries. The latter allocate plots to their member-associations and provide a temple near the graves for ritual purposes. This appears to be one of the main facilities offered by the larger units.

Occupational associations, at least those for more traditional occupations such as hawkers, goldsmiths, etc., still celebrate festivals of their chosen patrons. Other more common Chinese festivals also appear to be more popular with some occupational groups than others. For example

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23 A Straits Chinese, “Local Chinese Organisations”, *The Straits Chinese Magazine* (Singapore), III(10)(June, 1899): 43ff.

24 See below, p. 201.

25 As did the provincial associations of urban immigrants in China. Cf. Morse, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

*Chung Yuan Chieh* [*Zhongyuan Jie*], the festival of the second Taoist Principle, is popular with market hawkers. New *shen* have been added to the pantheon in Malaya and many associations honour the *Toa Peh Kong* (Hokkien “Great Patrilineal Great Uncle(s)”) or deified early immigrants who because of their ability to survive hardship and succeed economically, also because of their charitable dispositions when alive, are assumed to have great powers.<sup>26</sup>

The most important religious activity of multi-purpose associations today however is the arrangement of funerals and ritual care of soul-tablets of the deceased. The funerals provided are usually elaborate affairs.<sup>27</sup> Members are expected to attend, usually wearing some sort of uniform and perhaps a badge, and carrying an umbrella in association colours. They may also be expected to attend “night visits” to the corpse lying in state although this duty is sometimes delegated to selected members. Theoretically members are liable to fine for non-attendance and failure to wear appropriate dress, but it is becoming less usual for such fines to be exacted.

Soul-tablets are kept at association premises or in a special place provided by cemeteries; some clan associations keep them in temples resembling architecturally those of lineage groupings in the rural homeland. We have seen that the “ancestors” served by associations are different from those of the lineage group. The arrangement of tablets also differs. In China soul-tablets or paper substitutes of the immediate dead were attended ritually in the home. After a few generations they were removed, buried near the grave, or destroyed. Alternatively they were installed in the hall of the lineage or lineage segment. In the halls the rites held were of a more formal nature than in the home; they were performed by male agnates and expressed the kinship solidarity of the group.<sup>28</sup> In halls of Singapore surname associations, and also in shrines of other bodies caring for soul-tablets, the distinction between the newly dead and more distant ancestors is not maintained. Since the “ancestors” are often members and their friends and relatives, Singapore shrines may include tablets of individuals who in China would not have been eligible for worship: unmarried men and women, and those without male issue. The position in the shrine is determined largely by the fee paid. In China although kinsmen had usually to pay for the installing of an ancestor’s tablet in the lineage hall (unless he had brought great honour on the whole group), principles of generation and age were also important in

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26 Chen Ta, *Emigrant Communities in South China*. New York, 1940.

27 Freedman, *Family and Marriage*, Chapter 7.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 212ff.

determining position in the shrine.<sup>29</sup> Again, grouping of individuals for worship in the associations differs from the arrangements of the lineage. Principles of generation and age are not important, nor are they in the hierarchical arrangements of officials and in the selecting of individuals for office.

## 2. Secret societies

In Singapore secret societies which are today engaged in nefarious activities, and which appear to have a similar religious ritual at the initiation of their members and a similar type of organization, are usually referred to collectively as “Triad” societies, although individually they have different names. Many of them, perhaps all, owe their origins to the Triad society of China, yet the connection between this society and some of the Singapore bodies of most recent foundation must be very indirect.<sup>30</sup> The Triad, also known as the *Hung* [Society] (or “Heaven and Earth” League [*Hong Men*]), was engaged in anti-Manchu activities, particularly in the provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung from which the majority of immigrants came. Its myth-history names Fukien as its place of origin.

The exact process of ramification of the Triad society in Malaya and Singapore into sub-groupings which today are organizationally independent is not known, although rivalry among leaders must have played its part. Some, such as the *Toa Peh Kong* Society of Penang, point in name at least to local origin, but even this organization named after a local

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29 In China there were two kinds of tablets, *shen chup'ai*, which belonged to the eldest son (younger sons had a kind of collective tablet of all ancestors), and *shen weip'ai*, which could be tablets with the character *wei* substituted for *chu*, or photographs or paper strips. The *chup'ai* rested usually in the ancestral village, but *weip'ai* could be made by anyone, including friends or relatives of the deceased living elsewhere. In Hong Kong villages when lineages are segmented the segment to which an ancestor was most important has his *chup'ai*; the others use a *weip'ai* to fill in gaps in their tablet records. In Singapore it is often *weip'ai* that one finds in tablet shrines, sometimes as photographs or even identity cards. One reason for the less orthodox treatment of tablets may be the fact that they are not original soul-tablets (which may be set up in the homeland), but such substitute *wei* type tablets put in by overseas friends and relatives.

30 The late W. L. Wynne held that there were two distinct sources of the Malayan Chinese secret society — the Triad and the Han League. I have not had the opportunity to examine his unpublished work *Triad and Tabut, A Survey of the Origin and Diffusion of Chinese and Mohammedan Secret Societies in the Malay Peninsula, A.D. 1800–1935* (1941) to see if his theory is based on evidence of marked differences in ritual and organization.

*shen* has much of the symbolism of the “classical” type Triad society.<sup>31</sup> Some societies might have been originally overseas branches of local lodges in the homeland. Connected secret and semi-secret organizations in China often had different names not because they diverged in their main purpose or in organization but because they referred to different branches, and perhaps to specialized local interests. Again they altered their name when their main work was directed to some new purpose. Sometimes there was one name for the initiated and another as a front for their secret activities, and of course rival off-shoots would often re-name themselves even if in all essentials they followed the same pattern of organization and activities as their society of origin.

Triad initiation ritual has been looked upon by some observers as signifying a mystical process of spiritual rebirth.<sup>32</sup> Some of the oaths the candidate is required to take have also a moral content like that found in the declarations required of members joining Buddhist institutions and certain syncretic organizations. On another level, the ritual recalls in symbolic form some of the incidents in the myth-history of the society during which its founders were pursued and hounded by forces of the Manchu. It was thus likely to instill into a new member anti-Ch’ing [Qing] sentiments appropriate to the purpose of the society in China. These sentiments were not inconsistent with the political feelings of the immigrants, some of whom must have been members of similar societies in the homeland, or even political refugees. Some of the Singapore societies continued to help the mainland cause with money if not with action.

The ritual was also oriented to the restoration of a full Chinese culture, on which the Manchu had made several inroads. In the days when males still wore their hair long and braided, the candidate was required to unbraid his queue to show his opposition to this Manchu mode of hairdressing. The societies did not turn against the foreign government of Singapore, which allowed the Chinese fairly free play with their cultural activities. In any case, their religious sanctions clearly could not operate in their relations with the government or as a means of control over other ethnic groups who did not share the same religious tradition.<sup>33</sup> But the societies did turn against other Chinese who adopted a foreign religion. The feeling against this influence of foreign culture was strong enough to

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31 For the rules and secret signs of this society, see L. Comber, *Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, Appendix 3. New York, 1959. Another name for this society appears to be the *Kian Tek*.

32 See J. S. M. Ward and W. C. Stirling, *The Hung Society or the Society of Heaven and Earth*, Vol. I. London, 1925.

33 In some Malay off-shoots of the Triad the initiation ritual was modified to make it compatible with Malay religious beliefs. *Ibid.*, pp. 136–37.

cause the banding together of mutually hostile societies for attacks upon Chinese Roman Catholics in the interior. The fact that Catholicism forbade membership in a secret society and had been drawing converts away was a major common concern.<sup>34</sup>

Although feelings of common hostility to outside cultural influences could thus draw rival gangs together, the similarities in their own religious ritual has not provided a bond strong enough to hold the societies together permanently. Religion is not their main driving force. They do not aim to teach religious principles. Indeed there is evidence that neither members nor lodge masters fully understood the mystical aspects of ritual even during the heyday of the societies.<sup>35</sup> Such religious ideas as the latter stood for appear to have had little effect on the beliefs and attitudes of members in their life outside the societies' sphere of interest. Although the societies organized funerals of members, I have seen no evidence of special ritual identifying the deceased as an initiate, as there is for members of certain semi-secret sects in Singapore. The rules of the *Toa Peh Kong* Society of Penang, however, provide for special inscriptions to be carved on the tombstones of members.<sup>36</sup> Although identity in ritual must have resulted in some uniformity in basic religious practices in the days when most Chinese immigrants joined such societies, religious conviction was not a motive for joining. They are not attached to any formal religious system as are their sometime-supporters in political activities, the religious "sects". Their chief officiators are not priests and rivalry between off-shoots has not been based, as it was sometimes in the sects, on the supernatural qualifications and proof of Heaven's appointment of a particular leader.

A minor religious function of some societies may have been the organizing of temples dedicated to particular *shen*, as for example to *Kuan-kung* [*Guangong*] the god of war.<sup>37</sup> It has been said that some societies promote and run spirit medium cults in Singapore at the present time.<sup>38</sup> Here the interest is more likely to be in the lucrative aspects of this occupation and the opportunity it offers for extending influence than in genuine desire to promote religious activities.

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34 Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 82ff. London, 1923.

35 W.A. Pickering, "Chinese Secret Societies and Their Origin", *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1(1)(1878): 63–84.

36 Comber, op. cit., p. 282. This society's rules state that the *shen* known as *Toa Peh-kong* has the power of granting favours. Ibid., p. 284.

37 Secret societies in Siam founded temples for this *shen*. See G. W. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, p. 141. New York, 1957.

38 Elliott, op. cit., p. 69.

## Associations Specializing in Religious Ritual

### 1. Long life associations

These somewhat euphemistically named associations exist in order to raise money for funerals and for the use of dependents or other beneficiaries named by the deceased.<sup>39</sup> They may be sections of wider associations, and are sometimes the only functioning section of an association with other ostensible aims. A few offer cash benefits only. The majority however make ritual provisions for the deceased, providing a body of mourners for a funeral and occasional music. They are attached to loan clubs, festival clubs and medium-cults operating through temples. Although multi-purpose associations provide similar services, the specialist associations are more deeply concerned with the fate of the soul in the underworld. They arrange post-mortuary rites for releasing souls from purgatory and conveying them across a bridge to paradise, souls being housed for the purpose in temporary paper soul-tablets. These rites may be repeated at anniversaries of birth and death.<sup>40</sup> Masses for the dead are performed and repeated. The association organizes the buying of the necessary ritual paraphernalia and the hiring of troupes of priests. Many Chinese in Singapore want such rites performed for their dead and join a specialist association for the purpose.

In the homeland, the bulk of these duties, until the soul-tablet was destroyed or entered the lineage hall, fell on the immediate descendants and wives in the family group.<sup>41</sup> The larger kinship segment in worship in lineage halls did not concern itself with personal anniversaries of the deceased. The rites they performed arose not out of personal attachment but out of kinship solidarity, and they had a classical form.

In Singapore therefore the Long Life associations specializing in ritual appear to have taken over the kind of ritual interests with which in China the immediate intimate group of kinsmen were concerned, while the duties formerly devolving on a wider more impersonal group of kinsmen are performed by clan and territorial associations. The specialist associations create a more intimate relationship among their members than do either of the latter. They provide various occasions for members to join in common worship, sometimes at a particular temple. They are usually small, some having fewer than ten members. Qualification for

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39 For methods of payment, see Freedman, *Family and Marriage*, pp. 191–94.

40 For post-mortuary ritual, see my “Chinese Rites for the Repose of the Soul, with Special Reference to Cantonese Custom”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25(1)(1952): 149–60. [See Chapter 2 in this book.]

41 See Freedman, *Lineage Organisation*, p. 87.

membership is correspondingly narrow, and cooperation is intense. Relationships between members, although of course not as close as family relationships, are of an intimacy appropriate to the rites of death to be performed.<sup>42</sup>

In the homeland rites for the release of the soul varied according to religious affiliations and also by region. In Singapore specialist associations tend to provide either Shenist rites with a regional bias usually performed by Taoist priests, or Buddhist rites, or rites of syncretic systems. Those claiming to perform Buddhist rites often engage in other Buddhist activities. They hold dinners and joint worship on the festivals for Buddha and the chief Bodhisattva, animal-releasing festivals (releasing fish, birds and other creatures is a method used by Buddhists to gain merit), and masses for the anonymous dead in the seventh moon. This is the month when the dead with no relatives to care for them ritually, and those condemned to perpetual torment in hell (*preta*) for some sin, are released to roam the earth in search of ritual nourishment. Some associations invite the deceased friends and relatives of members to share in the benefits of these general masses.

Besides alternative and more elaborate ritual forms, specialist associations offer alternative methods of taking up membership, sometimes within the limits of territory or dialect. Qualifications may also be according to religion and sex. Many small organizations are run by unattached women working in the same occupation.<sup>43</sup> Some are attached to hostels (*kongsi* in Hokkien dialect [*gongsí*]) which the women run. These consist usually of a cubicle or a room in a tenement building, where the women keep their belongings while at work and where they live for short periods when not working. Many are for Cantonese servants in living-in jobs. The majority of immigrant Chinese working women were accustomed to work for pay at a time when in other parts of China independent working women were a rarity. Many had taken vows in the homeland to remain unwed or to live apart from their husbands,<sup>44</sup> and in Singapore they tend to mix chiefly with other women of similar status in their social life. Although many women of this kind are numerically prominent in their appropriate clan and district associations, from which

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42 Some of these associations are attached to establishments belonging to religions in which membership takes a kinship form. See below, n. 46.

43 Only those associations with more than ten members have to be registered with the Registrar of Societies, and it is not possible to estimate the number that are smaller than this.

44 On the anti-marriage movement, see my "Chinese Women's Vegetarian Houses in Singapore", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27(1)(1954): 51-67. [See Chapter 6 in this book.]

they obtain funeral benefits,<sup>45</sup> they form their own small societies for ritual purposes. Most of those with whom I have discussed ritual matters express some preference for female mourners, especially at the post-mortuary rites held, in Singapore, after the funeral. In China unattached women would not have been entitled to much in the way of post-mortuary ritual, or to have a soul-tablet installed in their parents' home for worship (although some anti-marriage societies provided these services). In the hired premises in which many Cantonese conduct funeral rites, I have never seen male associational members attending rites for unmarried Cantonese female servants.

My observations incline me to believe that associations specializing in ritual for progress of the soul are particularly popular with immigrants. Local-born Chinese may belong to a clan or territorial association for its funeral cash benefits, to ensure a large crowd at their funerals, and to ensure care of the soul-tablets (for convenience and because of modern ideas many Chinese do not like to keep tablets in their homes). But their immediate families tend to arrange for ritual care of the soul themselves. Yet some local-born Chinese join specialist associations when the kind of ritual their elderly relatives demand at their deaths is not congenial to them personally. Then they can transfer the task of hiring priests and buying ritual paraphernalia which they feel bound to provide in deference to the wishes of their relatives. One Long Life association in Singapore run by Straits Chinese provides cash benefits only. The secretary told me that most members if they are local-born provide ritual themselves and that immigrant members belong to another association for ritual purposes. Many immigrant members were in fact female residents of places of worship which provide ritual but no cash benefits.

Most Long life associations specializing in ritual appear to be based partly on territorial and dialect qualifications, or these at least underlie other principles of membership. This is partly due to the circumstance that so many members are immigrants speaking their own dialect and mixing socially with other immigrants of like origins. There are also other reasons. When ritual is of the popular Shenist type there is bound to be regional specialization. For example, Hokkiens differ from Cantonese not only in

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45 Maurice Freedman's research for *Family and Marriage* in 75 associations of the territorial and clan type showed that 14 of these had women members; 10 of the 14 were Cantonese associations. The proportion of women was high in half the Cantonese associations, but in the 4 others it was low. Miss Kwok Swee Soo, who investigated 26 clan and district associations, found that the majority of the 800 members of one Cantonese district organization were single women employed as labourers or domestic servants. In two other Cantonese cases women formed about 50% of the membership. See her *An Account of the Sources of Benevolent Assistance which are Asian in Origin and Organisation*. Singapore: University of Malaya, 1954. (Available in microfilm)

the ritual elements of their post-mortuary ceremonies but also in the choice of ceremonies. Cantonese nuns or professional practitioners belonging to a syncretic religion, and Cantonese Taoist priests, know only those forms of ritual which emanate from their province; Hokkien practitioners know only those of their region. Since members of different dialect groups have their own cemeteries, which may be some distance apart, and since visiting the graves at appropriate times is one of the activities of most specialist associations, mixed membership would be inconvenient. The one association known to me personally which recruits across divisions by like origins in China has no ritual activities and thus avoids such problems.

The organizing body of such associations may elect officials according to their standing in Chinese society or in the particular social group they serve; for example, the officials of women's associations may be the oldest and most experienced workers in the group. One Buddhist association which is not linked to a religious establishment describes its chairman as "a giant in commercial circles". In the case of associations attached to religious establishments there may however be religious prerequisites for office.

Several kinds of religious establishments run specialist Long Life associations for outside worshippers and for residents. The Buddhist layman's *chai-t'ang* ("vegetarian halls" [*zhaitang*]) do so, also similar halls of various sects of the syncretic religion of *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao* in which inmates are both laity and clergy, and Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. Most vegetarian halls are occupied by women, usually unattached working women. But they may be controlled by males. In the Buddhist religion they may be controlled by monks who act as recruiters to the religion and teachers of their disciples, each teacher having his own group of disciples. In the sects they are controlled by high officials, among whom the highest ranks are open only to males.<sup>46</sup>

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46 Buddhist organization has come to consist of a network of groupings of disciples (lay and cleric) and masters attached to monastic houses and vegetarian halls. These groupings have patterned themselves on Chinese family organization. Disciples of the same master use terms of address to each other which are borrowed from the kinship system. All disciples, however, both male and female, are treated terminologically as male. Kinship terms extend to disciples of other masters who are fellow-disciples of one's own master. Groupings trace their genealogy from "ancestor" masters. Within religious "lineages" generation names, a feature of the kinship system, are introduced into the new personal names given on entry to the religion. Houses whose inmates are disciples of the same master cooperate with each other for both ritual and economic purposes. The *Hsien-t'ien* sects have a similar system for the grouping of *chai t'ang*, but they group also according to rank. High ranking officials control whole groups of halls, each hall being some segment of the religious "kinship" group. A group of halls

Associations attached to religious establishments usually provide for worship of their members' soul-tablets. Non-attached associations if they have such worship usually keep the tablets on their premises or at the appropriate cemetery. The religious establishments keep them in a special shrine, or in two shrines, one for members of the religion (the religious "family") and one for ordinary members of the public. In "family" shrines the tablets are often arranged by principles of generation and seniority rather than by wealth and status in secular life. In sectarian shrines principles of family grouping are combined with those of religious rank.

Like origins underlie the membership even of associations attached to religious establishments. This is partly for the same reason as in non-attached associations and partly because sects of *Hsien-t'ien* religion, and their branches, originated in different parts of the homeland and were brought to Singapore by people from those regions. In Singapore Buddhist "lineages" tend to be segmented along dialect lines, only those members who speak a common dialect using principles of "common descent" for purposes of cooperation.

A number of Long Life associations, then, with various methods of recruitment, are able to flourish in Singapore because they cater for special needs in ritual and for special categories of persons who wish to associate on a basis narrower than territory, clan and dialect. Chinese may belong to several, selecting one perhaps for cash benefits, another for ritual, and perhaps a third for its housing of soul-tablets. Generally speaking they join each one as a different social person, wishing to associate in different ways for different interests: in one perhaps as a kinsmen, in another as a religious believer or religious "kinsmen", in a third as a member of a sex group or of an occupation.

## 2. Festival and "Shrine" associations

A large number of these are run by women and again may have a small death benefit and ritual sections. The object stated is usually "to perpetuate the religious memory" of a particular spiritual being, often one

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cooperates in certain rituals and various segments of the group cooperate also, usually at "family" anniversaries of some kind.

Buddhist Long Life associations may be run by the head inmates of a hall or nunnery or monastery, or by the controlling master. Membership may be drawn from several establishments that are connected by "family" relationships, and from disciples in ascending and descending generations. Buddhist associations may also include "ordinary" members who have not joined the religion formally. In sectarian associations this is rare, because members need to understand secret elements of the rituals. Ritual of death, for example, depends on certain esoteric ideas, and only a member of the religion could witness the more secret activities.

with a regional popularity. Members tend to be recruited on a regional basis. These associations are popular with unattached women who in their social life are cut off from many celebrations which normally occur in a family setting. Like men in the early days of immigration they have to rely largely on outside organizations for their social contacts and amusements. When married women are recruited, a “gift” at the birth of a child is sometimes offered as an additional benefit.

The festival clubs most popular with Cantonese women are those for the “Seven Sisters Festival”,<sup>47</sup> which is considered in Singapore to be a Cantonese unmarried woman’s festival and is largely for women under 45, and those for the three main festivals of *Kuan-yin* (“goddess of mercy,” [*Guanyin*]), which are for older women. A Seven Sisters club may become a *Kuan-yin* sisterhood as its members get older. Festival clubs may be *ad hoc* or attached to loan societies or to women’s hostels.

Shrine associations also are formed for the worship of a particular spiritual being, whose image will be kept by the president. On its festival the image is taken to a temple dedicated to its devotions, placed on the altar for worship by all members, and then conveyed back to its resting-place. A dinner is held on this occasion. New presidents and vice presidents are chosen each year.

### ***Shan T’ang* [*Shantang*] (“Benevolence” or “Goodness” Halls)**

These engage in ritual but they also share something of the character of the ideological associations. So far as I am aware, they are not attached to any formal system of religion and in beliefs appear to be syncretic. Their secular interests are in philanthropy among the poor in Singapore, mainly among the Chinese but without regard to their place of origin. Most of the halls give food to the needy, and some form of medical care, and they bury paupers. For their members they provide only ritual ceremonies and the prestige of having their names recorded in semi-religious magazines as charitable and generous members of the community.<sup>48</sup> I have no direct knowledge of their rituals, but one *t’ang* [*tang*] known to me conducts medium seances using the planchette to receive messages from spiritual beings. The officials are mostly prominent Singapore businessmen.

This form of organization is especially popular among the Tiuchiu section of the Chinese community. Five out of six halls were listed in

47 The Seven Sisters Festival is based on a legend related by the philosopher Huai-nan.

48 Two such magazines published in Chinese are entitled: [*Chinese*] *Temples in Singapore* (1951), and *Buddhism in Singapore* (c. 1953).

1951 as mainly Tiuchiu.<sup>49</sup> They have from 150 to 500 members. One was founded in 1916, one in the 1920s, and three in the 1940s. The halls were expanded at this time in response to the prevailing economic distress. The Tiuchiu bias in membership appears also in Bangkok.<sup>50</sup>

## Ideological Associations

### 1. Early forms

Most of the early ideological associations known to me personally were formed around 1900 or shortly after and are connected with some kind of syncretic religion. Among these are fraternities and sisterhoods of various sects of *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao*, which are based on residential places of worship. These halls, the first of which in a *Hsien-t'ien* sect was founded in 1880, offer their inmates certain economic benefits under a scheme known as *sheng-yang szu-tsang* [*shengyang sizang*] (nourish while alive, bury at death). Inmates get board and lodging, a funeral, and perpetual care of their soul-tablet. They pay for these services in cash or manual labour at the hall, or in both. A few Buddhist halls founded around 1900, and some nunneries, follow a similar plan. The halls were not however popular and did not expand numerically until working women began to immigrate in large numbers. Male immigrants had no great enthusiasm for salvationist ideas. The status offered by rank in the halls was therefore less attractive than that offered by the multi-purpose associations. The economic benefits were also less, and were conditional on sexual abstinence and vegetarianism.<sup>51</sup> The halls were much more attractive to unattached women. Status multi-purpose associations has never been easily available to women, and the religious ranking and the religious "family" found in the halls attracted them.

Like the secret societies, the sects in Singapore reserved their political interests for the homeland. But whereas it seems that secret societies were founded for political purposes the sects saw political reform as a means to spiritual reform. An "unorthodox" political regime, one believed to be

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49 See *Temples in Singapore*.

50 I cannot account completely for the Tiuchiu bias. Skinner remarks that although such organizations were found all over China they were particularly well developed in Ch'ao Chou (the Tiuchiu area), op.cit., p. 257.

51 The vegetarian halls of one *Hsien-t'ien* sect in China were popular with men and provided them with adequate economic benefits. They were the Hankow "sailors' homes". See N. Susuki, "Lo Religion — One of the Religious Sects of the Chinese Ch'ing Dynasty", *Memoirs of the Institute of Oriental Culture*, (1)(1943): 1-16 (in Japanese).

without Heaven's mandate, was held responsible for all manner of natural calamities for it disrupted the harmony between Man and Heaven. Whereas the secret societies became important agents for regulating social relationships, the sects developed only through their halls, which as well as being homes for the faithful are centres for propagating the faith. They have had much more religious influence on their members than any of the non-residential associations. They give facilities for learning doctrine, they have professionals to supervise ceremonies, and they can enforce attendance at them.

Another syncretic religion that appeared in Singapore, around 1900, is the Religion of the Void.<sup>52</sup> This is a non-vegetarian religion organized through residential lodges. The parent lodge of the Singapore branch was in Fukien Province and the majority of the members today are still from that province. The main function of the lodges is the cure of opium addiction. Religious ritual is adapted to this end, being based on Taoist ideas of bodily hygiene. Since addiction occurs mostly among Chinese labourers there is a working-class bias in membership.

## 2. Modern ideological associations

Some of these are attached to new religions or to new "reformed" sects of old religions, which in recent years have ramified. Others are "Buddhist" associations based on new interpretations of doctrine and new ideas of the function of laymen vis-à-vis clerics. The following are typical of their ideas: Chinese religion needs to be rid of its "superstitious" elements. There should be more research into "pure" religious doctrine.<sup>53</sup> (Buddhist laymen and reforming priests set themselves this task, feeling that the clergy in general is intellectually unprepared for doctrinal reform and that the laity should have greater say in affairs.) China needs a religion with a more international spiritual foundation. (Some modern syncretic movements brought in ideas from Christianity and Islam and include Christ and Mohammed among their objects of worship.) Religion should be more concerned with social reform. China needs a national religion.

New religious associations of Buddhist laymen, or of laymen and reforming priests, and of syncretists, appeared in China, particularly in towns, which are more open to change than the countryside, and in seaports where foreign influences were more marked. They organized study groups and charitable and cultural activities. Buddhists organized

52 See Hsu Yun-Ts'iao, "The Religion of the Void", *Journal of the South Seas Society*, 10(2)(20) (in English).

53 Cf. Wing-tsit Chan, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, Chapters 3 and 4. New York, 1953.

international conferences in various countries where some form of Buddhism was practised.

In Singapore new religious ideas began to exert some influence in the late 1920s. Some Buddhist organizations developed then as a result of visits by reforming priests,<sup>54</sup> but they tended to slip back into the pattern of the specialist ritual association.<sup>55</sup> A new branch of *Hsien-t'ien* religion (the *T'ung-shan She* [*Tongshan She*]), active in the immediate post-revolutionary period in China, was brought to Singapore in 1927. Another new syncretic religion with an association open to non-members for conducting charitable activities (the *Tao-yuan* [*Daoyuan*]) arrived in 1936. In the post-war years two large Buddhist associations recruiting from all Chinese and concerned mainly with religious policy have been founded.

The first of these aspired to control and reform all Buddhist organizations in Singapore — a formidable task. It recruits mainly from religious groups but has some individual members. In 1951 it had 82 member-organizations in Singapore and 18 in Malaya. The major difficulty in imposing reform on such groups is the lack of any central authority in Buddhist organization. Buddhist establishments are owned independently. Any coherence they may have tends to be based on the monastic “family” system. Moreover the dominance of economic values in Singapore society has meant that the association has tended to embrace economically flourishing institutions owned by wealthy individuals. Included are temples of all kinds, vegetarian restaurants, schools, monastic establishments and vegetarian halls including those of the sectarians. Since all are interested in their own advancement many conflicts arise. Again, many economically and managerially prominent priests sit on the association’s committees, some of whom stand for precisely those things which it claims should be reformed. The association has aimed also to “raise the economic status of the clergy”.

Sectarian religions are represented in the association and have a more dignified status in Singapore than they had in China. This is because the government made no effort to proscribe them and because there was no Confucian elite to dictate formally on matters of religious orthodoxy. Many immigrants are unaware of the sectarian basis of certain places of worship. A number of sectarian organizations in fact refer to their members as “Buddhist” laymen, a habit probably dating from experience

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54 The records of one association relate the rise of genuine interest in Buddhism with the visit to Singapore of Tai Hsu, a great reforming priest from China, in 1921.

55 The rules of one association require members to practise “pure basic Buddhist” funeral rites in place of “expensive sophisticated unbuddhist rituals”. Its manifesto says that many Singapore temples “are managed by inexperienced persons, and some...by unscrupulous persons...we need a body to give guidance and check abuses.”

in China where they did not dare manifest their true beliefs. Sectarians and Buddhists often sit together on boards of so-called Buddhist associations in Singapore and to some extent professional practitioners of both forms of religion compete in performing ritual of the more Shenist kind for members of the public. The association has vowed to reform such practices “where necessary”, but has made little movement to do so.

Some of the more active members have intellectual interests and are eager to promote Chinese culture and education. One or two extremists favour study of Hinayana Buddhism and the inclusion of other ethnic groups in the association. Internationalism did not appear to be popular with other intellectuals in the organization when I was in Singapore. The main stress culturally was on promotion of schools,<sup>56</sup> and on the fact that Chinese were in early times “emissaries of culture and religion” in Singapore.<sup>57</sup> The major conflicts in 1955 were between the priests and the intellectuals, who want different things of the association, and between intellectuals who stress “things Chinese” and those whose outlook is broader.

A second association, founded in 1953, is more international in outlook. Among its aims as set out for a conference of Buddhists in Ceylon were the promotion of Buddhist schools, orphanages and homes for the aged “in different parts of the world”. But it seems likely that it will concentrate for the present on local reform specifically affecting the Chinese.

The syncretic religion of *Tao-yuan* with its “outer works” philanthropic association for non-members, the Red Swastika society, again stresses internationalism as well as promotion of “things Chinese”.<sup>58</sup> It includes Christ and Mohammed among its objects of veneration and claims to have had some European members in China (possibly of the Red Swastika only). So far as I am aware only Chinese are members in Singapore, and most of the office-holders are Cantonese and Hainanese. This is due to the circumstance that the Singapore branch was founded by a group of Cantonese gentlemen formerly connected with

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56 It contributed to the founding of Nan Yang University, a comparatively new Chinese University in Singapore.

57 It stressed the value of the Chinese contribution to the building up of Singapore, and urged that this be remembered.

58 It provides both Chinese and Western medicine for the poor, but is particularly interested in promoting the former. In a magazine celebrating its 12th anniversary the Singapore branch said: “Much right and privileges have gone abroad in the past because of using mostly Western medicine.” A writer in the same magazine stressed the relation between education and spiritual advancement: “As the cultural standards of our overseas compatriots becomes higher, the influences of the *Tao* will be much more strongly felt. Singapore will then become a cultural region”.

an older syncretic religion, who returned from a visit to China full of enthusiasm for the new *Tao-yuan* movement. The *Tao-yuan* holds regular meetings at the headquarters of the Red Swastika association, and members of the latter, who are mostly middle-class Chinese of diverse origins and dialects, may attend.<sup>59</sup> The meetings generally consist of a séance, a planchette producing automatic messages about policy. At one meeting I attended the message came through that I should start a branch in London.

*T'ung-shan She* [*Tongshan She*] (Fellowship of Goodness), which is universalistic in membership, again attracts mainly middle-class Chinese. It is more conservative than *Tao-yuan*. It currently offers lectures on the classics, and is more concerned with improving the status of old Chinese religion than with laying a more international spiritual foundation. It has made the Confucian element central in its syncretic ideology. In the common worship that it conducts it maintains a division of the sexes in Confucian fashion. (Mixed worship, in the older vegetarian sects, was one of the activities which brought down the wrath of the Chinese government on syncretic religion.) Having abandoned the requirement of sexual abstinence and vegetarianism for office-holders it tends to attract more men than do the older vegetarian associations based on residential places of worship.

Most of the new movements have emerged as a result of concern with modern reform, with intellectual invigoration, a desire for a more dignified status for Chinese religion and culture, and with philanthropic activity replacing economic benefits for members. In China these movements flourished in towns where contact with the outside world was most marked. Singapore had therefore a suitable environment. Chinese society there is becoming more settled and Chinese are tending to associate on a basis of social equality rather than according to like origins in a traditional sub-culture. The large "Buddhist" associations recruiting organizations rather than individuals could not have developed until Buddhism became more firmly institutionalized.

The strongly economic values of Singapore society have however weakened the solidarity of the intellectual members of associations that are mainly concerned with religious policy. Since the economically prominent in religious "business" were often the conservative and superstitious members of their respective religions, reform has been a hope rather than a reality. Official status in the new Buddhist associations

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59 The fact that *Tao-yuan* proceedings are conducted in Cantonese may however inhibit non-Cantonese from joining. The Red Swastika on the other hand provides a means for cooperation in philanthropy among all Chinese who believe in at least one of the religions that *Tao-yuan* incorporates syncretically.

engaging in philanthropy carries more prestige in society at large than is the case with office in the older associations specialising in ritual. The committee structure of the former has elaborated ranks and status-giving positions.<sup>60</sup>

### Summary: The Trend to Secularization

The place of religion in the changing associational context of Singapore may thus be summed up as follows. The general trend has been for ideology to supersede ritual as the predominant interest, with membership moving from a particularist to a universalist basis. This movement has taken place against a background of increasing educational differentiation in Singapore Chinese society. Associations are formed more and more on a basis of like educational and cultural background. People see new functions, especially a wider philanthropy, as appropriate to religious organization. Some have attempted to give Chinese religion a broader spiritual foundation and to make contact with other ethnic groups in regard to religion.

At the same time the gradual trend towards secularization in social life has brought with it increasing specialization in the religious interests of associations. While the strongly ideological associations show no signs of decreasing interest in religion, secularization is apparent in the more ritualistic associations. In multi-purpose associations for which religion was always more of a buttress for other interests than a *raison d'être*, and even in those associations specialising in ritual care of the deceased, there is a movement to provide more for the living and less for the dead. Many Chinese now make large gifts to charity on the death of a relative rather than hold expensive rites. Younger members demand that such associations find employment for members<sup>61</sup> and that they take over some of the economic duties once performed by families, for example support of the aged. I know of two associations attached to religious establishments which have now opened old people's annexes in their grounds.

Another sign of secularization is in the decline of compulsory attendance at ritual even in the large specialist associations. This means that a wealthy individual whose education and way of life make ritual

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60 One large body has 2 directors, 25 executive committee members, 7 reserve members of that committee, 7 supervisory committee members, 3 reserve members, a standing executive committee and 7 departments for special interests. A Buddhist "lay" association, which includes priests on its committees, has 6 instructors, 4 honorary chairmen, 12 honorary directors, 45 directors, 6 reserve directors, as well as a chairman, vice-chairman, assistant manager, and various departments for special affairs.

61 Miss Kwok, *op. cit.*

attendance distasteful to him may still become an officer. Still another sign of secularization is the custom of turning over the temples belonging to regional-dialect associations, for day-to-day running purposes, to special managers. The temples are let out on tender to the highest bidder, the association obtaining an income from the property and retaining ultimate control.

We have seen that the secret societies' initiation ritual was curtailed by the necessity of going underground after 1890. Recently some secret societies have appeared which seem to be quite separate from the Triad group. They are formed by gangs of youths, and from their names, such as "The Tarzan Gang", "The Tigers", "The Robin Hood Gang",<sup>62</sup> which show the influence of the Western cinema, one would not suppose that religious ritual plays any part in their activities.

Chinese multi-purpose associations rarely crossed ethnic boundaries and the secret societies did so only when religious ritual was modified to make it consistent with the new group to be served. As the movement for Singapore independence emerged, Chinese interests and social goals have drawn closer to those of other groups. Certain secular associations are developing which recruit members from various ethnic groups. Among these are associations of employees of Western firms which hire workers regardless of ethnic affiliations, community organizations, and one mutual benefit association, giving only cash, which was formed in 1952. Political parties with no ritual elements certainly cross ethnic boundaries. There is a political party reserved for Malays, however, which is a federation of Malay associations including religious ones.<sup>63</sup> Since religion and social life are more coincidental for the Malay than for the Chinese, it is possible for Malay associations with religious functions to identify themselves with the political ideals of the Malays as a whole in a way that Chinese associations with religious elements could not follow. Yet a recent article suggests that the Chinese secret societies are attempting to enter the local political scene.<sup>64</sup> One would not expect that in the secular atmosphere of Chinese political life the traditional ritual elements in these societies would long survive.

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62 B. W. F. Goodrich, Asst. Commissioner C.I.D., Singapore, "Decline and Rise of Secret Societies in Singapore", *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 22 January 1959.

63 The United Malay Front comprises 46 political, social, religious and welfare associations in Singapore. Reported in *South China Morning Post*, 3 March 1959.

64 L. Comber, "Chinese Secret Societies and Merdeka", *Eastern World*, 11(8)(August 1958), suggests that during the 1955 elections certain political parties were not against using the ready-made organization of Chinese secret societies to "persuade people to vote", the societies allegedly being paid so much per vote. Comber also cites a Singapore newspaper as stating that one society offered to double the membership of a certain party within a year if it was given a say in running the party.

## Appendix of Chinese [Fujian] Terms and Names

### *Mandarin (kuo-yu) form*<sup>65</sup>

K'o-chia [Kejia]

Hsing-hua [Xinghua]

Fu-ch'ing [Fuqing]

Fu-chou [Fuzhou] (after Foochow: area of origin)

Fu-chian [Fujian] (after Fukien: province of origin)

(The term Hokkien is used only for those people  
originating from the part of Fukien lying round  
the port of Amoy)

Chien-te [Jiande] Society

Kung-szu [Gongsi]

Ch'ao-chou [Chaozhou]

Ta-po-kung [Dabogong]

### *Dialect form*

Hakka

Hinghoa

Hokchhian

Hokchiu

Hokkien

Kian Tek Society

Kongsi

Tiuchiu

Toa-peh-kong

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<sup>65</sup> Transcription follows the modified Wade-Giles system as found in "List of Syllabic Headings" in the American edition of Mathew's *Chinese-English Dictionary*, pp. xviii-xxi.



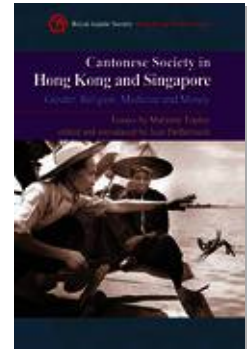
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## Chapter 9

# The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects

(1963)\*

### Introduction

This paper discusses certain aspects of an esoteric, secretly organized, religion in China called *Hsien-t'ien Ta-tao* [*Xiantian Dadao*] (or *Hsien-t'ien Tao* [*Xiantian Dao*])<sup>1</sup> “The Great Way of Former Heaven” (or “The Way of Former Heaven”). It is based mainly on material discovered in Singapore during 1954–55.

The name *Hsien-t'ien Tao* has been recorded elsewhere as that of a Chinese “sect”. Evidence suggested that it might have links with several other groupings but the exact nature of connexion was obscure.<sup>2</sup> I will show that the Great Way of Former Heaven (which I will refer to as the Great Way) is in fact a name used by a number of schismatic sects for the religious system from which they have ramified. These sects themselves have a number of different names, some using *Hsien-t'ien Men* (“door” or sect) as an alternative. Great Way is also the term used by them for describing the ideology which they share and which, although syncretic, is independent of any of the traditional Chinese ideologies in its development, and has some unique features.

The material does not enable me to give a complete description of the system in all its aspects. The sects from which I gathered material still operate partly in secret overseas, and the documents to which I had access are incomplete. Nevertheless despite gaps the new facts obtained do, I

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\* First published in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 26(2): 362–92. Reprinted by permission of the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* and Cambridge University Press.

1 Chinese characters are incorporated into the text only when they are book-titles, connected with the argument, or when romanization makes for ambiguity. Other characters for terms which may be unfamiliar, are given in a list at the end.

2 See J. J. M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China*, 2 vols., Vol. I, pp. 195ff., 197, 199. Amsterdam, 1903–04.

think, cast some light on the ideological and structural connexions of a number of Chinese esoteric groupings.

First I will describe the descent of a group of Great Way sects with which I had personal contact. Second, I will discuss the ideology of the religion, and then describe the organization of the group of sects contacted which share a common form. Finally I will examine how far, in the light of the material, we can now identify some other groups which have had some features described in the literature on Chinese sectarianism, as offshoots of the Great Way system.

### Sources of Material

I first made contact with Great Way religion while making an anthropological study in Singapore of *chai-t'ang* [*zhaitang*]: "vegetarian halls". These are residential religious establishments in which inmates practise sexual abstinence and follow a vegetarian diet. They are occupied and run largely by Chinese unattached immigrant women and my main interest was in the social satisfactions they provided for them. This meant an investigation of the relationship of the halls to the wider religious organization of the overseas Chinese.<sup>3</sup> I discovered that while some were part of the Buddhist part of this organization, the majority were attached to groupings which claimed to be "the only true followers" of Great Way religion.<sup>4</sup>

The material on esoteric religions in China is very uneven and systematic first-hand investigation of them presented a number of difficulties. Not only were such religions usually organized wholly or partly in secret, but contact with them was hampered by their illegal status.<sup>5</sup> They have continually been subject to suppression partly on account of their unorthodoxy and partly because they have tended to be politically militant. To-day such suppression is particularly intense and it

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3 The results of this study appear in an unpublished Ph.D. thesis: *The Organization and Social Function of Chinese Women's Chai-t'ang in Singapore*. London: University of London, 1958.

4 A preliminary investigation in 1952 led me to believe that all vegetarian halls in Singapore were Buddhist. See my "Chinese Women's Vegetarian Houses in Singapore", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27(1)(1954). The external appearance of both Buddhist and sectarian halls is similar and at this stage of contact members did not reveal their true affiliations.

5 The experience of de Groot provides a notable exception. The heightened campaign against sects in Fukien actually aided him in documentary investigation. A leader of one sect gave him documents for safe-keeping at this time having previously denied that any such material existed; op. cit., Vol. I, p. 173.

is unlikely that much new material will be forthcoming on esoteric groups from China itself.<sup>6</sup>

Many of China's secret religions, like the Great Way sects, have been taken to South-east Asia by Chinese immigrants and continue to flourish there, although in modified form. South-east Asian governments have not been interested in Chinese religious orthodoxy. Within overseas Chinese communities, moreover, there has been nothing resembling the Confucian elite of the homeland to lead public opinion against them (most overseas Chinese are of peasant or artisan background). Consequently, it is often possible to uncover new information not only on their overseas operation but also, from their documents, and informants who are immigrants, how they were organized and sometimes how they operated in the homeland.

My original sources for this paper consisted of a number of sectarian documents and statements of informants. Informants included several leaders and officials of the sects in Singapore, and in one case in Malaya. Most of them had joined their organizations in China. Some of the documents on historical descent were hand-written records, others were copies made for my benefit (and from which some details may have been omitted). Several private sectarian publications were used: handbooks for religious administration, critical works on ideology and orthodox leadership used in campaigns to draw members away from rival sects, and religious texts used in proselytizing.<sup>7</sup>

The halls providing material for this paper belonged to four independent vegetarian (*chai* [zhai]) sects: that is, to groupings in which those aspiring to high rank have to take vows of sexual abstinence and vegetarianism. They were four subdivisions, each called *P'u-tu Men* [*Pudu Men*] "Salvation Sect"<sup>8</sup> (also known as *Hsien t'ien Men*<sup>9</sup>).

Information was also provided by its local leader on another vegetarian sect, *Kuei-ken Men* [*Guigen Men*] "Sect of Reverting to the

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6 With the exception of newspaper reports. See below, pp. 238–39.

7 These are cited as relevant. All interviews were conducted by me in Cantonese and translations from documents are my own.

8 The name of this sect has been recorded. For example, de Groot, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 563. There is an additional *P'u-tu* sect in Singapore which I contacted but it provided no information relevant to this paper.

9 They are differently organized from the sect of this name described by de Groot, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 176–96. There is another vegetarian sect of the religion in Singapore which provided no material for this paper. It is named after its nineteenth-century founder, Ch'en Tso-mien and claims to be reformed. It has abandoned ranks and degrees, while still retaining administrative positions and titles of address originally going with these ranks. Those positions and titles of address are used by other sects in Singapore which retain ranks.

Root (of Things)",<sup>10</sup> found in Malaya but not yet established in Singapore. He provided additional information on a further, non-vegetarian, sect in Singapore going under the name of "Nanyang Sacred Union". It is in fact the *T'ung-shan She* "Fellowship of Goodness" [*Tongshan She*].<sup>11</sup> Before joining the *Kuei-ken Men*, its leader had been in the *T'ung-shan She* in China and Singapore and had in fact brought it to Singapore and established it there. I made little personal contact with this sect largely because its lodges are not open for public worship as are the halls of vegetarian sects.<sup>12</sup> I lived for short periods in two vegetarian halls, each belonging to a different *P'u-tu* sect.

All the above groupings regard themselves as Inner sects of the Great Way because they have a similar form of organization. They claim to be related to other independent Inner sects in China which have no overseas branches.<sup>13</sup> Other Great Way groupings are regarded by them as Outer sects. The leader of *Kuei-ken Men* was at the time of this study conducting a real amalgamation campaign among Inner sects.

### Patriarchal Descent and Division into Some of the Inner Sects

Sects in Malaya and Singapore keep records of past leaders of their divisions. The original system of leadership of the religion was by *tsu* [zu], which might be translated as "patriarchs". They are said to hold office by virtue of Heaven's Mandate<sup>14</sup> obtained directly from the religion's highest deity.<sup>15</sup> They pass on office personally to their successors, or they are supposed to do so, and succession is determined in accordance with certain cosmological factors which will be discussed below. Orthodoxy depends principally on a sect having the "correct" leader. Only one man

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10 Karl Ludvig Reichelt gives the name of this sect in *Religion in Chinese Garment*, trans. by Joseph Tetlie, p. 165. New York, 1951.

11 This sect has been described for China by John C. De Korne in a privately published full-length work, *The Fellowship of Goodness (T'ung Shan She): A Study of Contemporary Chinese Religion* (mimeo.). Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1941. He regarded it as a new religion and was unaware of certain structural and ideological details which now enable identification with the Great Way.

12 Another sect said by informants to exist in Singapore is *Lung-hua Men* "Dragon Flower Sect". Unlike the sect of this name described by de Groot, it is said to be non-vegetarian. De Groot, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 196–241.

13 See below, p. 236, for evidence on one China sect supporting this claim.

14 See below, pp. 234–35.

15 See below, p. 214.

(or occasionally two working together) may hold the Heavenly Mandate at one time.<sup>16</sup>

I have combined information in the patriarchal records and other documents on descent made available to me and from it have constructed Charts 1–3.<sup>17</sup> The information recorded gives some idea of the possible length of existence of the religion. The names of past leaders may also aid investigation of further esoteric groupings and provide a means of identification with the Great Way.

## Comments on the charts

### 1. Leadership up to the nineteenth century

The records of most Inner sects begin with the names of two men said to have held office jointly.<sup>18</sup> They are reckoned seventh in line because sects believe Great Way derives from the *Ch'an* [*Chan*] school of Buddhism and that their descent follows on directly from the sixth *Ch'an* patriarch in

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16 Some sects abandoned the patriarchal system after division. See below, p. 211.

17 Patriarchal records are kept in head vegetarian halls of sect branches in Singapore. My sources on *P'u-tu* sects were either these original records or copies of them. Generally copies had less details than original records: for example, they did not give alternative names of leaders, their fate (original records show that many came to a violent end), and the divine status which some were believed to have had (see below, pp. 221–22). I have in all cases included the fullest material. Leaders with divine status are listed in a later note. Considerable time-gaps exist between some patriarchs. It may be in some areas campaigns against sects were stronger and some records were kept verbally for periods during which details were forgotten, or that minor leaders have been omitted. I am told that some leaders' names were struck from records because they engaged in activities disapproved by the sects. It is possible some newly formed groups of independent origin wished later to claim connexion with Great Way and faked records of descent omitting some leaders through lack of information. My main source on descent of *Kuei-ken Men* and *T'ung-shan She* was a book written by the leader of the former sect, Ts'ai Chao-yün (writing under the name of Ts'ai Fei), *San Lung chih lu-pei* (三龍指路碑 "Three Dragon [Flowers] point out the road". Penang, reprint 1951). The title relates to Great Way cosmology, see below, p. 217. The book was written in connexion with the campaign of reamalgamation of inner sects he was conducting at the time of the study.

18 *Kuei-ken* sect also records a mythological line of descent up to the *Ch'an* patriarchs in China. Teaching, like that of traditional Chinese systems of thought, is traced through a line of sage-kings. A deluge is then recorded after which teaching temporarily stops. This is the Hsien-T'ien "Former Heaven" period. Teaching resumes again with the Chung-t'ien "Middle Heaven" period, and continues through a line of philosophers down to Mencius. It ends temporarily in China. Meanwhile, the records state, it had been taught in India by a line of Buddhas and afterwards passed to the *Ch'an* school. It was brought back to China by Bodhidharma. See below, p. 217, for meaning of terms Former and Middle Heavens in the religion.

## Chart 1. To Early Nineteenth Century

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| 713?    | VII (a) 馬端陽 [號：道一] <sup>1</sup>  |
|         | (b) 白懷讓 [號：白衣居士, alternative name 白玉蟾]   |
| 1488-?  | VIII 羅蔚羣 (executed)  |
| 1662-?  | IX 黃德輝 [from K'iang-si] (executed)   |
| 1723-?  | X 吳紫祥 [號：靜林] (imprisoned)  |
| 1736    | XI 何子若 [號：若道, alternative name 何慧明][from Kweichow]                                   |
|         | XII 袁志謙 [alternative name 袁退安][from Kweichow]  |
|         | [XIII 張公 [from Szechuan][struck from record for supposed rebellion]                  |
| 1826-28 | [ XIII <sup>2</sup> (a) 楊守一 [號：還虛, alternative name 楊敬修][Ch'eng-tu, Szechuan]        |
|         | (b) 徐吉南 [號：還無]   |
| 1829-31 | [Acting Head] 陳彬 (banished)  |
| 1832-34 | XII Patriarch resumed office   |
| 1834    | [Acting Head] 萬依玄 (Hunan) [周億倫 (Shensi) struck from record;<br>accused of rebellion] |
| 1837    | [Acting Head] 陳依精 [號：玉賢]   |

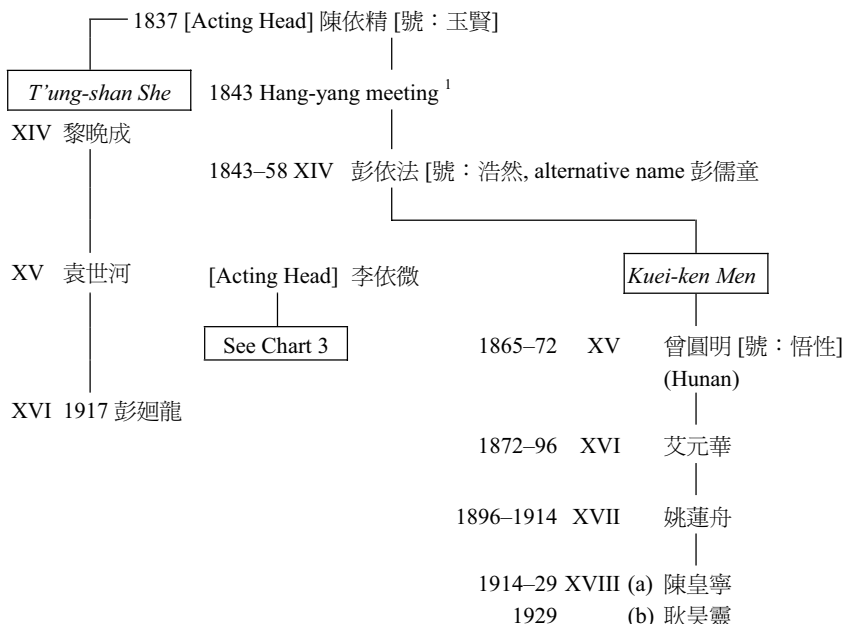
Notes: 1 Ma was a monk. In the *T'ung-shan She* only, the seventh patriarch's name is given as 孫敷仁.

2 Yang Shou-i and Hsu Chi-nan were appointed jointly in place of Chang Kung by the XII patriarch. Both were executed.

China, Hui Neng.<sup>19</sup> *Ch'an*, it is claimed, became unorthodox when it failed to recognize the seventh patriarchal office.<sup>20</sup> Several sects record

19 *T'ung-shan She* is the only Inner sect claiming no connexion with Ch'an. It gives another name for the seventh patriarch, recording *Pai-ma* [*Baima*] "White Horse" as the name of a religious establishment with which he is supposedly connected. This is of course the name of the Loyang monastery said to have housed sutras brought from India on the back of a white horse.

20 The two seventh patriarchs are identified with a layman and monk mentioned in the Hui Neng sutra. Hui Neng is supposed to have said that seventy years after his death they would preach contemporaneously, transmitting doctrine to numerous "prominent

Chart 2. Division into *T'ung-shan She* and *Kuei-ken Men*

Notes: 1 The five leaders at the Han-yang meeting were: 安依成 [木公], 陳依精 [火公], 宋依道 [土公], (all of whom were executed within 2 years), 蘭 (林) 依秘 [金公], and 彭依法 [水公].

2 This sect was known by various names, *Shou-yuan* 1865-72, *Kwei-ken* 1872-96, *Fu-ming* 1896-1914, *Kwei-ken* 1914 onward.

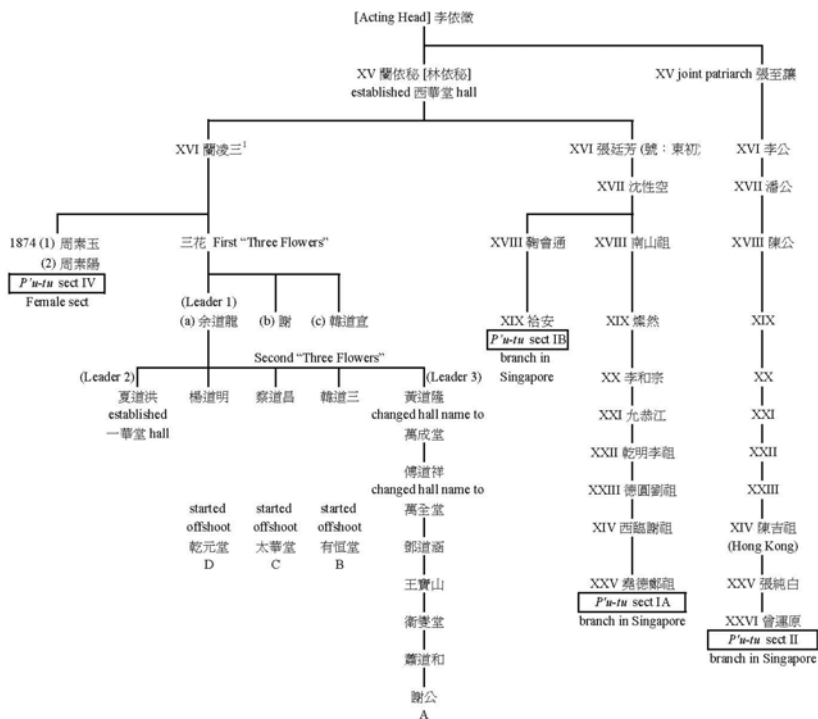
that: “after the sixth patriarch, the Great Way passed to those dwelling in the fire (*huo-chu*, clergy living in their own homes). Buddhism closed.”

The two patriarchs reorganized the religion. At this time membership consisted of individuals living in their own homes and meeting for worship either in each other’s houses or in non-residential vegetarian halls. The religion was entirely vegetarian.

The eighth patriarch, Lo Wei-ch’un, is already known in the literature on Chinese sectarianism as a founder of sects.<sup>21</sup> He has a special place in

successors”. See Wong Mou-lam, *The sutra of Wei Lang (or Hui Neng)*, rev. and ed. by Christmas Humphreys, p. 119. London, 1953. The sects say Pai, the layman, received the insignia from Hui Neng when he saved his life.

21 Details of his life are given by de Groot, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 179ff., and Vol. II, pp. 193ff., also by J. Edkins, *Chinese Buddhism*, Chapter XXIII. London, 1890.

Chart 3. Nineteenth Century and After: Division into *P'u-tu* Sects

Note: 1. After Lan Leng-san, there were no further patriarchs, only Family Heads.

the religion and is said to have been a great reformer. He is supposed to have written a Mahayana sutra in which he laid down new principles for religious organization.<sup>22</sup> The religion was to have two sections: a department of lay helpers (*hu-tao* [*hudao*]) known as the "outer" department, and a department of rank-holders who take religious degrees, known as the "inner" department.

Lay members were to be entitled to one-third of the merit accumulated by rank-holders through their esoteric work for spiritual

22 The sutra is referred to in a work of criticism written by a *P'u-tu* sect leader in Singapore, *T'ung teng chueh lu* 同登覺路 "Advancing together on the road to perception". He writes under the pseudonym Chung-ho T'ang (this in fact is the name of a branch Triad society but it may be coincidence). The book was privately published in Singapore, 1953, and privately circulated. I have not seen the Mahayana sutra.

progress.<sup>23</sup> Lo also changed the existing system of ranks, “abolishing five major titles” called the “Five Lords” (*Wu-kung* [*Wugong*]).<sup>24</sup> This information from the sects themselves is paralleled by a Buddhist tradition: that after the Yuan Dynasty there was an offshoot of the White Lotus called the *Wu-kung Tao* [*Wugong Dao*] “Way of the Five Lords”, which “wanted to rebel” and which was organized into five sections each under a leader. This Buddhist account also claims that Lo Wei-ch’un was a religious leader who broke away from the White Lotus sect.<sup>25</sup> The leader of one *P’u-tu* sect writes that Lo was eventually tortured to death for writing his Mahayana sutra which incited people to rebellion.<sup>26</sup>

The sectarian records state that many sects appeared after Lo Wei-ch’un. The ninth patriarch is said to have named the religion Great Way of Former Heaven. Only sects descended from him are considered “true” Great Way sects.

It appears then that Great Way religion possibly derived from the *Wu-kung Tao* offshoot of the White Lotus; that it stems from a reform movement started by Lo Wei-ch’un, being itself an offshoot of Lo’s religion founded by the leader recorded as ninth patriarch.<sup>27</sup> Later I will show that in certain circumstances some Great Way sects take the name “White Lotus” secretly.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. The nineteenth century period of leadership

The nineteenth century is said to have been a period of great fragmentation of sects, a result of vigorous campaigns of suppression.<sup>29</sup> To check division an attempt was made to strengthen leadership and five senior dignitaries met in Han-yang to reorganize administration.<sup>30</sup> One was made fourteenth patriarch and new rules for membership were fixed.

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23 See below, p. 220.

24 See below, pp. 221–24, for discussion of *Wu-kung* rank which was later reintroduced.

25 Yung-hsi, *Ko-t’eng chi* 葛藤集 “Collected problems”. Singapore, 1955. His sources are not disclosed.

26 Chung-ho T’ang, op. cit.

27 The gap between dates for the eighth and ninth patriarchs is explained in terms of Lo’s immortality. When he left earth he is said to have made frequent visits and continued to head the religion from above until a suitable successor was found.

28 See below p. 232.

29 Internal division was largely a result of the state’s vigorous attempt to destroy unorthodox religions and capture their leaders. Leadership problems arose as a result of capture of head men and those in line for office, and quarrels among contenders for position. It is believed that at the same time a battle over leadership took place among divine beings in heaven (affairs of heaven and earth are believed to parallel each other: a disturbance on one plane affects events on the other).

30 *Wu-kung* rank had by now been reintroduced.

*T'ung-shan She*, or the sect from which it developed, did not accept these innovations and split off at this point.<sup>31</sup> The *Kuei-ken Men* group would not accept the fourteenth patriarch's acting successor.<sup>32</sup> The remaining body was led by the sole surviving member of the Han-yang meeting who they accepted as fifteenth patriarch. He built a vegetarian hall in which he lived and from which he directed affairs.<sup>33</sup> After his death dissension led to the formation of further sects including the group known as *P'u-tu Men* [*Pudu Men*].<sup>34</sup> The name *P'u-tu* is taken from a type of religious work being performed at the time of division.<sup>35</sup>

From records and other information it appears that there have been at least eight independent groupings calling themselves *P'u-tu Men*.<sup>36</sup> These divisions are numbered on Chart 3: I A-B, II, III A-B-C-D, IV.

Sect II amalgamated with I after a period of independent leadership but divided again later. No dates are given by I and II for their patriarchs since division but from the number of leaders recorded it would appear that the terms of office of many must have been short.

Sect III was a group which took the brother of the fifteenth patriarch as their sixteenth in line. After his death, unlike the other *P'u-tu* groups, it replaced the patriarchal system with a system of leadership by three men responsible for certain religious work and known as the "Three Flowers".<sup>37</sup> They selected five men to take charge after their death. One was to be leader, *Chia-chang* [*jiazhang*] "Family Head", and was to establish a vegetarian hall. The second was to live with him in this hall and eventually become his successor. The other three were to succeed the Three Flowers in directing spiritual work, and were known as the "Latter Three Flowers". They were also each placed directly in charge of a

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31 *T'ung-shan She* is said to have been founded in Peking [Beijing] in 1917; De Korne, op. cit. It based its teaching on that of a Szechuanese named P'eng. According to Ts'ai Chao-yun, Kuei-ken sect's leader in Malaya, P'eng is recognized as sixteenth (and present) patriarch of *T'ung-shan She*. It may be that P'eng was originally head of another group which merged with, and perhaps became overshadowed by *T'ung-shan She*. P'eng is hardly mentioned by De Korne and was not among the list of main organizers he gives. The man thought by De Korne to be main organizer is Yao Chit-sang. Ts'ai Chao-yun names this man as one of the five top rank-holders (*Wu-kung*) in the sect at present. There is a further possibility. P'eng claimed incarnate Buddha status. It may be that he was in fact an important organizer but owing to his divinity he kept in the background for safety.

32 Its present patriarch is said to be "somewhere in China".

33 See below, pp. 229–30, for discussion of vegetarian halls in administration.

34 One appears to have been *Yao-ch'ih Men*. See Below, pp. 236–37.

35 See below, p. 235.

36 Information on *P'u-tu* sub-sects without branches overseas comes from Ts'ai Chao-yun, op. cit. and in interview.

37 See also p. 231.

territorial division for which they were ultimately responsible to the *Chia-chang*.<sup>38</sup>

The Latter Three Flowers eventually broke away to form independent subjects. Each was named *P'u-tu Men* like its parent body but took as alternative title the name of the vegetarian hall from which its founder had directed divisional affairs before breaking away. The rest of the original group administered by the successor to the *Chia-chang* was also known alternatively by the name of its founding vegetarian hall. *T'ang* [*Tang*] is in fact the term used when referring to a *P'u-tu* subdivision in group III.<sup>39</sup>

Sect IV broke away after the death of the sixteenth patriarch of sect III and was founded by two of his female disciples.<sup>40</sup> Again, it operated through founding vegetarian halls (all hall names are given in the chart) and became entirely female in membership.

### Ideology of Great Way Religion<sup>41</sup>

Before the existence of the Universe there was air (*ch'i* [*qi*]) which filled a Void. There was also energy consisting of two opposing forces, *Yin* and *Yang*, by whose friction air became condensed into matter. From matter, all worlds of the Universe, its heavens and everything in them were made. Air is continually being turned into matter, while matter continually dissolves into air and "Returns to the Void".

*Tao*, the Way, or *Ta-tao*, the Great Way as it is termed by the sects, is Order, by which the Universe is governed. It includes natural laws governing physical processes, laws governing the relations between Heaven and Earth (made of the same cosmic materials, they are intimately connected), and True Moral Order, known as Ultimate Truth. Ultimate Truth should be the basis of government for men in their relations with each other, the physical world, and Heaven. If mankind could grasp this

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38 The Three Flowers were in charge of administration in:

- (i) Yunnan and Kweichow;
- (ii) Kiangsu and Kiangsi;
- (iii) Chekiang and Szechuan.

The Latter Three Flowers worked in:

- (i) Szechuan, Kansi, and Shensi;
- (ii) Kiangsu, Kiangsi, Chekiang, Hunan, Kwangsi, Kwangtung;
- (iii) Yunnan, Kweichow.

The sect then appears to have operated on a fairly wide scale.

39 Not to be confused with the "*tongs*" [*t'ang*] of secret societies of the Triad type.

40 The master-disciple system is discussed on pp. 228–29.

41 Obtained partly from Ts'ai Chao-yun, op. cit., and partly in interviews with various sect leaders.

Truth and act in accordance with it, harmony of all things would be achieved. The process by which matter is eternally created and recreated could be checked and all things could Return to the Void, or Root (*Kuei-ken* [*Guigen*]).<sup>42</sup>

Great Way religion attempts to rediscover the Truth which has been lost, and teach it. Part of its religious work is teaching individuals how to achieve personal harmony with the Moral Order. Personal instruction is given only to members who have proved their ability to understand it. All members of the religion regardless of ability may benefit from this teaching, however, for the self-cultivation (*hsiu-hsing* [*xiuxing*]) of the chosen few creates merit, which spreads its influence to all men, helping to open their eyes, so that eventually they too may learn Truth. This indirect method of spreading Truth is a lengthy process but there is a series of short cuts. In certain ages great spiritual teachers and divine beings are born who are able to save people directly.

The Void appears in human form to make Truth known among men and takes the form of a female known as "Mother",<sup>43</sup> who is the highest deity of the religion. Mother has many other titles of address which change as a result of her instructions and in order to prevent unorthodox sects petitioning her aid.<sup>44</sup> The materials created by friction of *Yin* and *Yang* were shaped into the Universe and its worlds by P'an-ku<sup>45</sup> at Mother's orders. *Ta-tao*, brought into existence at this time, has in certain periods been known perfectly and taught by great men who did not need organized religion to support them. Only after they Returned to the Void were religions organized. Such bodies teach but distorted versions of Truth and their very presence is a sign of corruption.<sup>46</sup>

42 *Kuei-ken* sect takes its name from the concept of "Returning to the Void".

43 It might be noted that in Taoism, *Tao* "the Way" is sometimes referred to as "Mother". See, for example, *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter XX, in Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, p. 169. London, 1949.

44 Petitions asking for instructions must be correctly addressed or they cannot reach Mother. Each sect claims its rivals' activities are in vain because they use wrong titles. The name change thus prevents unorthodox sects from drawing on Mother's power. According to Ts'ai Chao-yun, Mother was originally simply called Lao-mu "Venerable Mother"; after the twelfth patriarch her title changed to Lao-sheng mu "Venerable Sainted Mother"; after the thirteenth, to Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu [Yaochi Jinmu] "Golden Mother of the Yao Pool". P'u-tu sects still use this name. After the fourteenth, Kuei-ken sect says, she became Wu-sheng Lao-mu "Unbegotten Venerable Mother". This sect also claims its own fifteenth patriarch received a message to change the name to Wu-chih Sheng mu "Sainted Mother of the Void", the title it uses today.

45 The legendary Chinese hero is given this role also in popular mythology.

46 Compare with a Taoist theory that rules only came into existence when men lost "the Way", in A. C. Graham, *The book of Lieh-tzū*, p. 4. London, 1961; the sects say that Ch'an only came into existence as "organized" Buddhism, when Sakyamuni left the earth and Truth became distorted. See below, pp. 215-16.

Since Truth has become distorted Great Way religion must search widely for it and embrace its elements wherever they are found to-day. Hence it must be a syncretic faith.

## Cycles of earthly development and spiritual teaching

There are cyclical periods in which Truth is first taught and then becomes distorted. There are three major cycles and many minor cycles, each dominated by different divine and semi-divine teachers. The phases in each cycle coincide with phases of world-development.<sup>47</sup>

### 1. Major cycles

Each of the major cycles of Truth-teaching is dominated by important Buddhas who are of the Past, Present, and Future. The Past cycle was dominated by Dipamkara (*Jan-teng Fo* [*Randeng Fo*]): “Buddha of the Burning Lamp”.<sup>48</sup> He was assisted by various Chinese deities and was reincarnated in China as Fu-hsi, inventor of the Eight Diagrams system of divination. The second cycle was dominated by Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. He was reincarnated in China in the form of numbers of popular deities. The third and last cycle is dominated by Maitreya, “the Buddha to Come” and chief salvatory figure of the religion. In this final cycle all men will be saved if they join the correct Great Way sect.

Each major Truth cycle divides into three phases for teaching Truth. First comes an advent: various wise men predict the imminent appearance of the Buddha and teach some of the general ideas he will propound. Then the Buddha himself appears and teaches. Afterwards teaching is handed on to sages, Truth gradually becomes distorted, and organized religions appear based on the Buddha’s teaching.

The major Truth cycles are fitted to major creational cycles as follows: the whole period in which our world is created and will eventually be destroyed unless men accept Truth is seen as a major aeon (*maka-kalpa*). A Buddha cycle conjures up physical energy and three phases of physical development are distinguished which coincide with the three phases of Truth. They are Formation, Existence, and Destruction. Thus Formation

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47 Great Way theory of teaching-cum-world-development periods is based on a synchronization of two Mahayana Buddhist concepts: cycles of teachings, and kalpa. A convenient reference for the Buddhist theories is W. E. Soothill and L. Hodous, *The Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*. London, 1937.

48 Not to be confused with Amitabha: the Light Buddha.

coincides with advent, Existence with Buddha teaching, and Destruction with truth-distortion. This whole cycle is a *kalpa*.

At the end of each cycle there is a catastrophe (*chieh [jie]*) which comes as a punishment from Mother because Truth has been allowed to disappear from the world. There are three kinds of catastrophe which follow each other: first a Deluge, after the Dipamkara cycle; a Fire, after the Sakyamuni cycle; and after the Maitreya cycle, if teaching reaches the point of distortion, there will be a Wind which will destroy the world.

## 2. Minor cycles

Each of the three major cycles of teaching-cum-world-development subdivide into minor cycles in which minor Buddhas and divine beings, and teachers who have some of their characteristics,<sup>49</sup> preach a version of Truth. Like major cycles, they divide into phases of world development and have their advents, periods of teaching, and periods of distortion. They are minor *kalpa* and end in catastrophes which are not, like those of major cycles, on a world scale, but confined to the locality in which the teacher is operating. For example a flood or fire, or a typhoon in a particular province of China might be taken as an indication that teaching of a minor divine in the area has been repressed, or distorted as a result of local corruption. One of the tasks of members of Great Way sects is to protect divine teachers of Truth of both major and minor cycles when they appear, and prevent Truth from becoming distorted thus preventing catastrophes. Members of the faith say they are able to avoid catastrophes that do take place by retiring to a magical “cloud city” (*yun-ch’eng [yun cheng]*) conjured up with incantations and use of paper charms.<sup>50</sup>

*Kuei-ken* sect believes the third major cycle, that of Maitreya, has already begun and that its own present patriarch is Maitreya incarnate. Furthermore, it believes that soon now, unless there is a change in spiritual outlook, the world will end with the Wind Catastrophe in the form of a hydrogen bomb. To avoid this, the patriarch must be given opportunity for reaching the masses to teach them Truth. This can be achieved only if there is a return to the dynastic system and the patriarch sits on the Dragon Throne as emperor.<sup>51</sup> The political implications of this belief are obvious. Presently I will consider the possibility of connexion between Great Way sects and other politically militant groups.<sup>52</sup>

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49 See below, pp. 221–22.

50 Those who have developed strong magical powers can build their own Cloud Cities rather as Buddhas in Pure Land Buddhism built their own Pure Lands.

51 Told to me by the leader of the sect in Malaya, in interviews.

52 See pp. 234–35, below.

### 3. Cyclical names and colour symbolism

Three openly used and most popular names for the three major cycles are: *Hsien-t'ien* [*Xiantian*] "Former Heaven", *Chung-t'ien* "Middle Heaven", and *Hou-t'ien* [*Houtian*] "Latter Heaven". The religion is named after the first cycle for this is when Truth came into existence.<sup>53</sup> Other names which are used secretly to describe both the three major cycles and minor cycles (which progress in series of three) are *Hsiang* [*Xiang*] or *Yang* "Good Omen" periods (using the character 羊), *Lung-hua* [*Longhua*] "Dragon Flower" periods, and *Lien* [*Lian*] "Lotus" periods. These are alternative names which only some sects use. The *P'u-tu* sects for example use only the secret name of *Lung-hua*.

Each cycle or period is associated with a particular colour. The colours are *Ch'ing* [*Qing*] "Azure," *Hung* [*Hong*] "Red," and *Pai* [*Bai*] "White" following one another in that order. Sometimes *Hwang* [*Huang*] "Yellow" is used additionally to describe the period of catastrophe following each cycle. Thus then, the cycles in sequence are known as *Ch'ing Yang Ch'i* ([*Qi*], Period), *Hung Yang Ch'i*, and *Pai Yang Ch'i*; *Ch'ing Lien Ch'i*, *Hung Lien Ch'i*, and *Pai Lien Ch'i*. "White Lotus", then, is one of the terms for the cycle of Maitreya.

The term *lung-hua* is taken from the name of the bodhi tree of Maitreya whose flowers are said to resemble dragons' heads. Buddhists believe he will hold three meetings (*lung-hua hui*) under this tree, at which he will save all sentient beings. Great Way sectarians believe that each of the major Buddhas holds three meetings during his Truth cycle, and they use the term *lung-hua hui* [*longhua hui*] for all such meetings. Among those saved so far at the meetings of Dipamkara and Sakyamuni are a number of beings termed *yuan-tsu* [*yuanzu*] "original elements". They are spiritual beings sent down by Mother in the *Hsien-t'ien* period to teach Truth. There were 9,000,000 of them, including most of the heroes of Chinese popular mythology. They became corrupted by men and could not return to the Void.<sup>54</sup> But some have already been saved.<sup>55</sup>

53 The Great Way concepts of Former, Middle, and Latter Heavens, then, differ from the traditional concepts which are connected with the divinations of Fu-hsi, Shen Nung, and the Yellow Emperor. See Kan Pao in his "Commentary on the *Chou Li*" 周禮注.

54 There is a similar myth of Buddhist derivation. Cf. "Devas repeople the Earth". In *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, ed. by Edward Conze and others, pp. 283-85. Oxford, 1954.

55 Dipamkara is said to have saved 200,000 in the first cycle; Sakyamuni saved another 200,000. Maitreya will save the rest.

#### 4. The cycles and number symbolism

Each Buddha teaching on earth is linked symbolically to the colour scheme of his cycle and to a certain number. Buddhas are visualized as sitting on "Lotus Thrones" and the number to which each is linked is determined by the number of petals of his throne. Thus Dipamkara (and his incarnations including beings with one of his characteristics incarnate in them) sits on a three-petalled Azure Lotus, Sakyamuni on a five-petalled Red Lotus, and Maitreya on a nine-petalled White Lotus.

These numbers have further significance in the sects. Besides the three *lung-hua hui* of the Buddhas there are the *lung-hua hui* of the sects. Three *lung-hua hui* take place annually at which major religious policy is decided. All Inner sects and perhaps others, hold them on the same days. The first is on the fifteenth of the third lunar month, the others on the fifteenth of the fifth and ninth lunar months. The fifteenth is the day of the full moon and therefore propitious. The months are determined by the number of petals of the lotus thrones of the three major Buddhas. Earthly meetings are paralleled by heavenly ones each conducted by one of the three Buddhas.<sup>56</sup> At the earthly meetings messages are obtained from the heavenly ones by use of the planchette. These may give instructions on sectarian affairs for the coming session. Attempts are also made to discover when Maitreya will arrive on earth and how he should be recognized. Policy meetings are held at headquarters, and branch and sub-branch lodges or vegetarian halls hold religious services at the same time.<sup>57</sup> On the day of the first meeting, halls and lodges (also business premises of lay-members) are given a thorough spring-cleaning. Images in the shrines are washed.<sup>58</sup> The Han-yang meeting to reorganize the religion and select a fourteenth patriarch, as recorded in the history of the sects, was in fact a *lung-hua* meeting.

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56 Dipamkara presides at the first, assisted by T'ai-shang Lao-chun [Taishang Laojun], a Taoist deity; at the second Sakyamuni is assisted by Amitabha; at the third Maitreya is assisted by Confucius. Maitreya is chief organizer of all meetings.

57 A *lung-hua* meeting I attended in a female hall in Singapore consisted of a mass for the dead held in the Mother shrine-room. Cooked rice was offered up and secret sutras were read silently by certain rank-holders. Members came up in turn to place incense sticks in a bowl on the altar. Each member of the Great Way pantheon (which apart from Mother consists of a number of generally popular Chinese deities, Buddhas, and Bodhisattva) is worshipped in the sects with a particular number of incense sticks.

58 In the sixth century A.D. Buddhist monasteries in China apparently also washed images and formed "*lung-hua* congregations" to prognosticate the advent and birth of Maitreya. The dates for holding these congregations differed from those of the *lung-hua* meetings of the sects. Cf. de Groot, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 108.

## Organization of Inner Sects

### 1. Rank and its functions

#### (a) *Qualifications for rank*

Instruction in self-cultivation for spiritual progress is given within a system of grades or ranks. These ranks, their Chinese names and English equivalents, are set out in Chart 4 which is compiled from information given me by leaders of various sects. The information on *T'ung-shan She* comes from the leader of *Kuei-ken Men*.

To reach each rank the candidate must pass an examination which shows he has reached the appropriate degree of self-cultivation. He may then continue his training to the next stage. The highest ranks are open to male members only and examinations for these used to be taken at the headquarters of the sects in China. Now some headquarters are in Hong Kong and overseas members either travel there to take examinations or wait until the head of the sect visits their branch. Examinations for lower ranks, up to *Pao-en* [*Baoen*], may be taken in local halls and lodges of the sects. A fee is chargeable for each rank conferred and the successful candidate is expected to give an elaborate dinner to all of equal and higher grades. In the vegetarian sects sexual abstinence and a permanent vegetarian diet are required of all those aspiring to ranks above *T'ien-en* [*Tianen*]. Married members are eligible for higher ranks providing they terminate sexual relations. The *T'ien-en* is expected to spend occasional periods of residence in a vegetarian hall, when he applies himself intensively to the self-cultivation work of his grade. Today, those with higher ranks in sect branches overseas are required to live permanently in a vegetarian hall. Usually such persons are unmarried or are separated from their marriage partners.

It is said that at one time Great Way religion was entirely vegetarian and that sexual and dietary restrictions were abandoned by new sects appearing late in the nineteenth century, including *T'ung-shan She*, as part of a programme of modernization. The aim was to attract a different type of member: those of social prominence and education who might reinvigorate the organization, which appears from my limited information to have been based mainly on peasant and artisan membership until late in the nineteenth century. It was felt that sexual restrictions might be offensive to a Confucian trained scholar because of the value placed on the family in Confucian ideology. Vegetarianism also, would be inconvenient in the everyday life of a man busy in public affairs.

Chart 4. The Hierarchy of Inner Sects

| Kuei-ken Men  |   |                 | T'ung-shan She                  |                           |                 | P'u-tu Men (Hsien-t'ian Men) |                           |                 |                 |
|---|---|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Name of rank  | Maximum number of holders                   | Sex eligible    | Name of rank                    | Maximum number of holders | Sex eligible    | Name of rank                 | Maximum number of holders | Sex eligible    |                 |
| Wu-kung (or hsing)<br>五公 (行)<br>Five Lords (Elements) | 5   | Male            | 五公 (行)                          | 5                         | Male            | —                            | —                         | —               |                 |
| Shih-ti<br>十地<br>Ten Places                           | 10  | Male            | 十地                              | 10                        | Male            | 十地                           | 10                        | Male            |                 |
| Ssu-pa<br>四八<br>Forty-eight                           | 48  | Male            | —                               | —                         | —               | —                            | —                         | —               |                 |
| Ting-hang<br>頂航<br>Chief Navigators                   | 54  | Male            | 頂航                              | 54                        | Male            | 頂航                           | 54                        | Male            |                 |
| Pao-en<br>保恩<br>Protecting Grace                      | 54  | Male and female | 保恩                              | 54                        | Male and female | 保恩                           | 54                        | Male and female |                 |
| Yin-en<br>引恩<br>Conducting (or Guiding) Grace         | Unlimited                                   | Male and female | 引恩                              | Unlimited                 | Male and female | 引恩                           | 420                       | Male and female |                 |
| Ch'eng-en<br>證恩<br>Certifying Grace                   | Unlimited                                   | Male and female | 證恩                              | Unlimited                 | Male and female | 證恩                           | 480                       | Male and female |                 |
| T'ien-en<br>天恩<br>Heavenly Grace                      | Unlimited                                   | Male and female | 天恩                              | Unlimited                 | Male and female | 天恩                           | 1,000                     | Male and female |                 |
| —   | —   | —               | 3 minor ranks (names not known) | —                         | Male and female | —                            | —                         | —               |                 |
| Chih-shih<br>執事<br>Manager                            |   | Male and female | —                               | —                         | —               | —                            | —                         | —               |                 |
| Hu-tao (male)<br>護道<br>Helper of the Way              | Chu-tao (female)<br>助道<br>Helper of the Way | Unlimited       | Male and female                 | 護道                        | Unlimited       | Male and female              | 護道                        | Unlimited       | Male and female |

**(b) Rank and spiritual work**

Laymen, as we saw, are entitled to one-third of the merit accumulated by rank-holders. In return they are expected to make donations and help the organization in any way possible through their employment or social standing.<sup>59</sup>

59 When a new member wants to join a sect a petition is burnt to Mother informing her of the name, age, sex, and place of birth of the candidate. In *T'ung-shan She* two pieces of paper are placed on the altar for the candidate to choose from. One is blank and

The first work for spiritual development begins at the lay level, and is to “develop the soul”, referred to in Taoist fashion as the “Heavenly Foetus”. It begins as the first breath taken by the new-born infant which is believed to be retained in the body. The layman is taught to circulate the breath by means of breath control exercises. Later he is taught meditation in order to realize his “Buddha Nature”.<sup>60</sup>

At death the soul can become a Buddha if it leaves by the space between the eyes, called the *Hsuan-kuan* [*Xuanguan*] “Dark Pass”. If it leaves by other openings of the body it is destined for rebirth; the type of being it will occupy is determined by the opening from which it escapes. Concentration on the Dark Pass, known as “Guarding”, enables the soul to be familiar with its location. Initiation into a sect includes dotting the “Dark Pass” with Chinese ink.<sup>61</sup>

For the lower ranks, reading of various esoteric sutras is important.<sup>62</sup> Above the *Ting-hang* [*Dinghang*] rank, repetition of sutras becomes less important and greater attention is paid to meditation and Taoist hygiene.

Part of the work associated with the rank of *Shih-ti* [*Shidi*]<sup>63</sup> is concerned with achieving longevity. Even greater rewards are offered

“permission” is written on the other. Selection of the blank paper means permission to join is refused. The candidate gets another chance at a later date. The paper must be selected with the left hand.

60 An idea from *Ch'an* Buddhism.

61 The preliminary methods for soul-cultivation described for the “Golden elixir of Life religion” (*Chin-tan Chiao* “Golden Pill Sect”) by Richard Wilhelm and C. G. Jung appear to be similar in important respects to those for members of Inner sects. See *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, trans. by Cary F. Baynes, pp. 34ff. London, 1947. See also below, p. 237.

62 Some of the sutras studied and used in worship are of Buddhist and Taoist origin. Among the esoteric sutras, those held in common by Inner sects are “Golden Mother sutra”, “Mahayana sutra”, and another whose name I do not know which lists all spiritual beings attending heavenly *lung-hua* meetings. Additionally sects have their own independent sutras. *Kuei-ken* sect has “Ten Commandments”, “The Patriarch and the Common People are One”, “Return to Rurality”, and the “Secret True Occult”. The latter is written in a code style in which parts of characters have to be removed in reading to reveal a hidden meaning. The “Occult” is said to give all names of patriarchs of the past and future. Since so many characters are surnames, different interpretations of this work are possible. It is said to have been written by Bodhidharma and “made public” to members by the twelfth patriarch. It also contains some code poems by the fourteenth patriarch. Other sects are said to have their own versions of the “Occult” but I have seen only that of *Kuei-ken Men*. Other works which may be held in common and are certainly used by *Kuei-ken Men* are “The Thousand Lotuses of the Same Origin” (by the twelfth patriarch), “The Revelation of *Ch'ien Lung*”, “The Orthodox Doctrine”, “The North Pole’s Occultness”, “The Sutra Cycle” (written by one of the patriarchs) and “Patriarch Liu’s Instructions”. I have copies of some of these sutras published by *Kuei-ken* sect. They are mostly in very esoteric language and still await translation.

those attaining the rank of *Wu-kung* (or *Wu-hsing* [*Wuxing*]). The five men holding this rank can achieve great supernatural powers: they can fly like Taoist sages of ancient times,<sup>64</sup> and it is they who can build the “Cloud Cities” as refuges from catastrophes following the major and minor Buddha cycles. More important, they can become incarnate Buddhas or gods (*shen*), or acquire some characteristic (*fen-hsing*) of a divine being. For example one might have the eyes of *Kuan-yin*, the speech of Maitreya, the ears of Dipamkara. When they are incarnate Buddhas or gods, these rank-holders are said to be *hua-shen*: to have the “Transformation Body” of such beings. In Great Way ideology the Transformation Body, a concept borrowed from Buddhism, is that in which the Buddha manifests himself to sentient beings. When one of the *Wu-kung* becomes a spiritual being during his lifetime this is achieved, I am told, by absorption of merit from the being of his choice. “Absorption” is said to take place by contemplation of the being desired to be “absorbed”, repetition of certain *mantra* (magical formulae), and performance of *mudra* (hand movements) associated with the particular being.<sup>65</sup> I was unable to obtain further details on the process of becoming a divine being but was told that some individuals can change their “incarnate” status, becoming first one Buddha and then another.

The rank of *Wu-kung* (or *hsing*) was reintroduced by the twelfth patriarch, after, as we saw, being abandoned earlier by the eighth, Lo Wei-ch’un.<sup>66</sup> I was told that the rank had been abandoned by Lo because there had been “too many incarnate Buddhas” in the religion. However, this does not appear consistent with the historical records. Several patriarchs between the eighth and twelfth are recorded as having had incarnate status.<sup>67</sup> It is said that claims of incarnate status by persons of *Wu-kung* rank had been one of the main causes of political suppression of the religion, since such claims gave these rank-holders too great a

63 The rank-name *Shih-ti* derives from Buddhism in which it refers to one of the sets of ten stages of progress of the Bodhisattva (*bhumi*).

64 The Malayan leader of the *Kuei-ken* claimed this ability but did not demonstrate.

65 This might be compared with the method of the Esoteric Sect of Buddhism in which a special connexion may be established between an individual and a particular Bodhisattva resulting in temporary identification. See, for example, John Blofeld, *The Jewel in the Lotus*, pp. 154ff. London, 1948.

66 Above, p. 211.

67 Patriarchs recorded as having incarnate status are: the tenth, incarnation of the Bushel Mother (a Taoist deity); Yang Shou-I, one of the thirteenth patriarchs, incarnation of *Kuan-yin*; Hsu Chi-nan, the other thirteenth patriarch, incarnation of Maitreya; Chou I-lun, who was struck from the records for starting a rebellion, incarnation of Maitreya; T’ung-shan She’s sixteenth patriarch, incarnation of Dipamkara; *Kuei-ken* sect’s sixteenth possessed an element of Maitreya; its seventeenth possessed an element of Dipamkara. Its present patriarch as we saw is incarnate Maitreya.

personal power. The *P'u-tu* sects abandoned the rank after division and those subdivisions still headed by patriarchs no longer believe them to have been divine.

### **(c) Rank and administration**

#### **1. The *Wu-kung* (or *Wu-hsing*) and the patriarch**

An ancient Chinese theory states that there are five basic elements (*hsing* [*xing*]): wood, earth, metal, water, and fire. In early Chinese history the elements were popularly believed to have controlled different dynasties.<sup>68</sup> They were also associated with five directions: water with centre, earth with north, wood with east, metal with west, and fire with south.

In the sects retaining this rank, men holding it are known and addressed as Wood, Earth, Metal, Water, or Fire “Lord” (*kung*). One of them normally becomes the patriarch. As the various elements governed different dynasties, so also are they believed to govern various ruling periods for the religion. The choice of patriarch for any period should ideally be determined by the element believed to be dominating the religion at the time. If for example water is dominant, the most suitable successor as patriarch, other things being equal, is the man with the title and rank of Water Lord. The man chosen as fourteenth patriarch at the Han-yang meeting was the Water Lord, as water was believed to be dominant at the time.

In sects retaining the *Wu-kung* rank, China was divided into five major sections for administration. These sections were the five directions over which the various elements are thought to dominate. Theoretically the rank-holder corresponding in title to the element dominating a particular direction was in charge of affairs there. The seat of the patriarch then, was determined by the element he represented. The patriarch is human representative of Mother, the Void. It was from her that *Yin* and *Yang* originated. The work under the patriarch’s direct supervision is likewise divided into “*Yin* and *Yang* affairs”. The nature of these kinds of work is somewhat obscure but they take place concurrently and one kind divides into three major categories which are given special secret names. When there is a joint office, each patriarch conducts one type of work, either *Yin* or *Yang*. I will discuss these work categories in a later section.

Although theoretically each of the *Wu-kung* was in charge of one major section of China, not every sect covered the whole country. It

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68 An account of the five elements and their relation to history is given in Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy: The Period of Philosophers (From the Beginnings to circa 100 B.C.)*, trans. by Derk Bodde, pp. 159ff. Peiping, 1937.

sometimes happened that in one of the five areas many branches existed, and in another, no branches were found. In that case in accordance with the theory of administration, one Lord would have a great deal to do and another very little. I am told that when this happened a sect might appoint four or even less Lords, each of those appointed then being responsible for a wider region. Imprisonment and banishment of Lords also complicated the administration. It sometimes resulted in a man of lower rank being left in charge of the area of a former Lord.<sup>69</sup>

The five departments of the sects were each governed from a vegetarian hall in the vegetarian sects and from a (non-residential) lodge in the non-vegetarian bodies. In each of the five regions the sects had an alternative name which was, as I have shown, the name of the administrative hall in vegetarian sects, and the name of the lodge in the others. *T'ung-shan She* for example was called *Ta-jen Hsiang* [*Daren Xiang*] "Great Virtue Omen" in Kwangtung, and in Kwangsi, *Ta-i Hsiang* [*Da-i Xiang*] "Great Righteousness Omen".

## 2. The *Shih-ti*

The *Shih-ti* were each in charge of daily administration in a half of one area governed by a Lord. The system of Five Lords and Ten Places (*Wu-hsing, Shih-ti*) was known as the "Ten Leaves and Five Petals". It is said to have been the original system of religious administration. In *Kuei-ken Men* and *T'ung-shan She* the system continues. In *P'u-tu* sects with patriarchs, the total area of administration is divided into ten regions each under a *Shih-ti* and the patriarch himself holds this rank. In subdivisions operating under *Chia-chang* "Family Heads", this type of leader also has *Shih-ti* rank. Again administration by *Shih-ti* in all sects is carried out through vegetarian halls or lodges and the sects in the sub-sectors are known alternatively by the name of these establishments. The term of address for those of *Shih-ti* rank is *T'ai Lao-shih* [*Tai Laoshi*] "Great Venerable Teacher".<sup>70</sup>

## 3. The *Ting-hang*

This is a rank said to have been introduced into the hierarchy by the two thirteenth patriarchs. These 54 men are each in charge of a division within

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69 *Kuei-ken* sect has incorporated South-east Asia into its administration. It has not fitted it under the administration of the Fire Lord of the South but under that of the Water Lord of the Centre. The man with this rank is living in Malaya and it was apparently more convenient that administration there should come under his control. With arrests and exiling of leaders, it is unlikely that the theory of Elements and their areas of control worked very effectively.

70 De Korne in discussing rank in *T'ung-shan She* confuses it with titles of address, giving only the latter; op. cit.

the territory governed by a *Shih-ti*. Each again operates through branch halls and lodges whose names again give an alternative name for the religion in the area. *Ting-hang* are addressed as *Lao-shih* "Venerable Teacher".

#### 4. *Szu-pa* [*Siba*]

This rank introduced into the hierarchy of *Kuei-ken Men* is said to be named after the 48 patriarchs the sect recognizes: it numbers them from the first patriarch in the Indian line of *Ch'an* Buddhism. I have no information on their appointment or title of address.

Appointments for those holding the above ranks are automatic on assumption of rank. Below them different rank-holders are appointed to various posts according to ability and the scale on which the sect is operating.

#### 5. *Pao-en* — *T'ien-en*

*Pao-en* is the highest rank attainable by women in the Inner sects, and female halls in vegetarian sects are normally in charge of women of this rank or of *Yin-en*. I have no information on how ranks below *Ting-hang* relate to territorial appointment in *T'ung-shan She*. Minor male vegetarian halls may also be in charge of holders of *Pao-en* and *Yin-en* rank of male sex. In some areas the sect might be particularly active, operating through large numbers of halls (as in Singapore). There might not then be sufficient numbers of higher rank-holders to manage them directly. In this case lower rank-holders, even *T'ien-en*, might be put in charge of the day-to-day administration. They will then be subject to supervision, particularly in religious affairs, by higher rank-holders who visit them periodically.<sup>71</sup>

Besides management of minor halls, those of rank from *Pao-en* to *T'ien-en* might alternatively be put in charge of one department of administration within a major hall and might officiate at certain rituals. Those of *Chih-shih* rank in *Kuei-ken Men* have clerical duties in halls of that sect.

Members with ranks discussed above are for all religious purposes addressed as follows:

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71 This happens in *P'u-tu* sects in Malaya and to an even greater degree in Borneo which comes under supervision from Singapore. Restrictions on travel to Malaya and in some cases a complete break in communications with the head of the sect has meant few high ranks have been bestowed in recent years overseas. Many halls, therefore, are run by persons of lower rank, even those of *T'ien-en*.

| <i>Rank</i>     | <i>Term of address</i>                                     |                      |
|-----------------|--|----------------------|
| <i>Pao-en</i>   |  |                      |
| male            | <i>T'ai-lao Hsien-sheng</i><br>[ <i>Tailao Xiansheng</i> ] | Great Venerable Sir  |
| female          | <i>Ku-t'ai</i> [ <i>Gutai</i> ]                            | Greatest Lady        |
| <i>Yin-en</i>   |  |                      |
| male            | <i>Lao Hsien-sheng</i><br>[ <i>Lao Xiansheng</i> ]         | Venerable Sir        |
| female          | <i>Lao T'ai-ku</i> [ <i>Lao Taigu</i> ]                    | Venerable Great Lady |
| <i>Cheng-en</i> |  |                      |
| male            | <i>Ta Hsien-sheng</i><br>[ <i>Da Xiansheng</i> ]           | Great Sir            |
| female          | <i>Ta-ku</i> [ <i>Dagu</i> ]                               | Great Lady           |
| <i>T'ien-en</i> |  |                      |
| male            | <i>Hsien-sheng</i> [ <i>Xiansheng</i> ]                    | Sir                  |
| female          | <i>Ku-niang</i> [ <i>Guniang</i> ]                         | Miss                 |

I have no information on the term of address for those of *Chih-shih* rank.

#### **(d) Rank and proselytization**

Holders of the rank *Ting-hang* may be given the duty of spreading the sect's organization to new areas. Expanding sectarian organization is known as *li Lung-hua k'ai-chih* [*li Longhua kaiji*] "laying the foundations of the *Lung-hua* (salvation meetings of the Buddhas)". In a work printed in the Ch'ing Dynasty giving instructions on sect expansion, attention is drawn to the dangers of this work:<sup>72</sup>

"When you go away to spread the doctrine, remember if you are to attract members you must be virtuous, alert, brave, meticulous, and able to protect yourself. Then only can you live long in another place. Do not tell anything to anybody who is not absolutely trustworthy. You should stay a half to one year in a place before opening up the doctrine and choose only good people on whom to bestow *T'ien-en*. Then if it is a good area for the *Tao*, you may return. Do not grab converts because you are

72 Kuang Yeh lao-jen, *Kuei-yuan pao-fa* 歸原寶筏: "Reverting to the precious raft". First published in the 1860s.

greedy for the master's praise. A person who just gives out his name and does not bother to conceal himself, loses his few bits of silver. You must amass good contacts."

Holders of the three ranks of *Pao-en*, *Yin-en*, and *Cheng-en* also have a function at the initiation of candidates for rank of *T'ien-en*. The *Pao-en* guarantees the integrity of the candidate; the *Yin-en* introduces him at the ceremony, and the *Cheng-en* produces evidence of his eligibility. Any holder of these ranks who knows the candidate may perform these duties.

Persons of *Yin-en* and higher ranks are expected to work at the conversion of new members in their area but all rank-holders are encouraged to seek for candidates. The book quoted above has this to say on conversion:

"All who try to save the masses do good work. However...you must distinguish between genuine and false people. When you talk to them listen to what they say and study their actions and behaviour. It is important to get the right people.

"All who have not started to practise vegetarianism but have made themselves open to doctrine should first be told to read the scriptures, to settle all differences (of opinion), pay attention to the exposition of doctrine, eat vegetarian food, and practise sexual abstinence for several months. If they are in earnest and of no harm to the Buddha, pick an auspicious day and ask them to be initiated. However this must be discussed first with a [person of] *Yin-en* [rank]. Then their three masters *Cheng-en*, *Yin-en*, and *Pao-en* may be decided [for the initiation ceremony] and you may explain the doctrine or get an educated person to do so [a reflexion on the intellectual status of rank-holders, perhaps]. Some people dare not expose the doctrine for fear of something [bad] happening after death, but you can simply give a general idea. If the person learning should be very keen for you to reveal doctrine you must pass this duty to the *Yin-en* and this will prevent envy arising in the hall..."

### ***(e) Rank and naming principles***

An additional and alternative religious name is given recruits each time they obtain a new rank in the sect. It is for this reason that patriarchs often have so many alternative names. Ideally the new names should be given to recruits by the patriarch. They may be used in address only by those of higher or equal rank. Sometimes the names of all holders of a particular rank make up a quotation. For example the names given to members of

one group of *Wu-kung* in the mid-nineteenth century were: (1) 成, (2) 精, (3) 道, (4) 秘, (5) 法.<sup>73</sup> When put together in the order (3), (2), (1), (4), (5), the sentence reads: “When the Way has been perfected it becomes a secret method”.

There is a further method of naming used by some sects. The *P’u-tu* sects give additional middle names to all male members taking rank above *T’ien-en*. They are: *Tao* (道) for *Shih-ti*; *Yun* (運) for *Ting-hang*; *Yung* (永) for *Pao-en*; *Ch’ang* (昌) for *Yin-en*; and *Ming* (明) for *Cheng-en*. It is said by the *P’u-tu* sects that originally all sects gave these rank-names. It may be noted, from the record of patriarchal descent that the *Wu-kung* attending the Han-yang meeting all have the middle name of *I* (依).<sup>74</sup> It may be then, that *I* was originally the name for persons of this rank.

## 2. Pseudo-kinship as an organizational principle

This system of organization cuts across the system of rank and has a somewhat different purpose from it. It is a less formal method of grouping and concerned mainly with bringing members together for a number of social and ceremonial purposes which are not specifically sectarian but rather part of the general traditional ceremonial life of the Chinese. The system is particularly important to inmates of vegetarian halls.<sup>75</sup>

We saw above that members of Great Way sects are initiated into the religion through three “masters” holding certain ranks. The first person to convert the new member, however, providing he has some rank, remains his most intimate contact with the religion. All members converted by a particular master (*shih-fu* [*shifu*]) are then grouped according to their relationship to him and he is regarded as spiritual father to his “family” of disciples. Such groups trace descent back to ancestor-masters and keep genealogies (not to be confused with patriarchal genealogies). The bonds between members are expressed in kinship terms. Thus, other masters are (paternal) “uncles”. Disciples of uncles are reckoned as “brothers”, as are sons of paternal uncles in the Chinese kinship system. The Chinese kinship term is used in each case prefaced by the term *shih*, from *shih-fu*. Females are given male terms of address, probably because there is no difference in roles of males and females in this system.

73 See Chart 2, n. 1.

74 See Chart 2, n. 1. It will also be noted that the organizers of *P’u-tu* sect III (Chart 3) all had the middle name of *Tao*.

75 This principle in Chinese religious organization is referred to also in my “The Emergence and Social Function of Chinese Religious Associations in Singapore”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, III(3)(1961): 289–314. [See Chapter 8 in this book.]

The “kinship” group also makes use of the generation-name system of Chinese kinship organization. Each member of a generation of disciples is given an identical character for one of his names: or more rarely, an identical radical is used for one of the names of each member. It is usually the first personal name, which comes of course after the surname in Chinese. This name distinguishes disciples from members of the senior generation, that is from their own master, his fellow-disciples, and disciples of the master’s own “uncles” on the one hand, and from members of the junior generation, that is from their own disciples and those converted by their own fellow-disciples on the other.

The generation-name series is kept in the form of a quotation (like rank-names) sometimes taken from a sectarian sutra or text. Thus a master gives his own disciples one character. They in turn give their disciples the next character, and so on, until the quotation is completed. At this point the most senior disciple in the generation (this is the first converted by a master in a group of masters who are fellow-disciples) selects a new quotation to continue the line. A disciple might break with the series if he wishes to start his own “descent group”; if, for example, he moves to another territory, or if after internal division within his sect he chooses to join an offshoot not favoured by other members of his “kin-group”.

Members are also given a new personal name by their personal master on entry into the sect. As we have seen when they take rank they are given new personal names by the patriarch. Sometimes the personal names given to a group of disciples by their master on initiation make up a further quotation. Alternatively the most senior disciple of a generation is given as his personal name the next character in the generation series.

A result of this dual system of organization — rank and “kinship” — is that halls become grouped together in two ways. Firstly they are grouped within a sect round senior halls in various localities. Secondly within this grouping, they are further grouped round halls of religious masters. Members of different halls come together according to the former type of grouping for sectarian religious ceremonies. Members of halls come together according to the latter type of grouping for social celebrations, for example anniversaries of birth and death of “family” members, and sometimes to render each other economic assistance.

### **3. Residential and non-residential vegetarian halls**

Several writers on Chinese sectarianism have mentioned the existence of vegetarian halls or what appear to have been vegetarian halls in the organization of esoteric groups. In discussing the *Lung-hua* sect in Fukien Province de Groot writes: “...for their religious meetings..., the sectaries

use the principal apartment or hall...in ordinary dwelling-houses.... Such places they call at Amoy *ts'ai-tng*...‘vegetarian halls’...”.<sup>76</sup> One might assume that if the hall was part of an ordinary dwelling-house it was probably not residential.<sup>77</sup> De Groot also writes of the leader of the *Lung-hua* sect living in a special institution: “...his abode may be something like a Buddhist convent.... But its real character has remained a mystery to me.”<sup>78</sup> It is probable that this was a residential vegetarian hall. A writer on the *Yao-ch'ih* sect, which later I will show was a Great Way sect, writes that members had vegetarian halls where men and women were found in constant residence.<sup>79</sup>

My information from leaders of sects is that originally all members of the religion lived in their own homes. This included ordinary laymen and also the priesthood, the *huo-chu* which has been mentioned earlier. Members met for a vegetarian meal and for ritual practices in each other's homes, and a local branch of a sect had a “*t'ang*” name: it was called such and such a *chai-t'ang*, although in fact it had no permanent premises. There is nothing unusual in a Chinese organization having a *t'ang* name without any permanent *t'ang*. Various non-residential Chinese associations overseas, including *ad hoc* associations for raising money for festivals, give themselves a *t'ang* name. But in its emphasis on sexual abstinence and vegetarianism for rank, the religion already contained seeds of monasticism. Members must have found it difficult to practise asceticism in their own homes. In fact these abstinences were borrowed from Buddhism, a monastic religion. According to the records of patriarchal descent, by the late nineteenth century some sects were beginning to establish residential vegetarian halls. Inmates consisted of those of high rank who lived in permanently, those of lower rank who went in for occasional residence, and numbers of the laity who were destitute or who had no one to care for them in old age. In one sect in China which can be identified as Great Way, some halls became homes for destitute and unattached seamen.<sup>80</sup>

The residential halls were built in remote mountainous regions where they could pass themselves off as retreats of Taoist or Buddhist recluses. I

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76 Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 200.

77 It might be noted, however, that in urban Singapore and Hong Kong vegetarian halls which are residential sometimes consist of rooms in private residential-type accommodation or even a section of a private house. Members rent premises from the owner who is often also a member. It is possible that sometimes this was also done at Amoy.

78 Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 201.

79 George Miles, “Vegetarian Sects”, *Chinese Recorder*, XXXIII(1902): 1–10.

80 Lo Religion. See below. In Singapore and Malaya many female halls take in outsiders who are destitute or elderly. I am told this would not have happened in China owing to the risk that outsiders might inform on the sects.

have seen photographs of such places and they appear extremely isolated and difficult of access. This no doubt helped to protect them from campaigns against unorthodox religions. In urban areas, I am told, a proportion of halls were non-residential and passed themselves off as Buddhist shrines. Others were residential and passed as Buddhist vegetarian halls: Buddhist laymen were beginning to establish such halls for the practice of self-cultivation at this time.<sup>81</sup>

## Identification of Other Groupings with Great Way Religion

De Groot in his general index lists 55 names of religious communities, but he believed the sects of China were in fact few: only their names were many.<sup>82</sup> I also think it probable that their religious affiliations were few. We have already seen that one Great Way Inner sect might have a number of names according to the territory in which it was operating. It is possible that many unorthodox groupings ramified in different periods from the Great Way system, or the system from which it derives. In this section I will examine various types of evidence which suggest relationship between certain groupings and the Great Way.

### 1. Additional alternative names of Great Way sects and religious work

#### (a) "Work-names"

Great Way sects use a number of alternative "work-names". I spoke earlier of certain kinds of work called *Yin* and *Yang* affairs and said that one of these kinds of work (I have no information on which kind it is) divides into three major categories. Each of the three categories is known by two names: one which is secret and changes from time to time, and another which is used openly and which remains constant.

Sects either perform only one major category of work during a particular period, or divide into three sections, each performing one category. In the *P'u-tu* sect which abandoned patriarchs, the "Three Flowers" who reorganized the group were three men each in charge of one category of work, the sect being divided into three sections for work purposes.

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81 In Malaya and Singapore, where there is no suppression of religions, all halls are residential.

82 Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 308.

Originally when performing a particular type of work Great Way sects took as alternative names both the secret and open names for that category of work. When they divided into three sections for work management, each section took two names, open and secret, for that type of work.<sup>83</sup>

Mother is said to have changed the secret work-names after every schism in the religion. Only work having the correct name is valid and the name-change prevents the work of unorthodox sects from being successful.

### **(b) Secret work-names**

Each of the three work categories is under the direction of one of the Buddhas of the three major cycles. That is, they are directed by Dipamkara, Sakyamuni, and Maitreya. For this reason the secret work-names are those of the three cycles of Truth. They are either Azure, Red, and White *Hsiang* (or *Yang*) Affairs, Azure, Red, and White *Lung-hua* Affairs, or Azure, Red and White *Lien* (Lotus) Affairs, according to the terms dictated by Mother. The work to be performed is determined by which Buddha, or minor divine being with characteristics of one of the three Buddhas, is teaching Truth at the time. Sometimes yellow is the colour applied to special work performed during a catastrophe.<sup>84</sup> Another set of terms used by some sects for secret work-names is, according to informants, Azure, Red, and White *Yang* (陽) Affairs.

There might then be at any time a number of Great Way sects operating under various secret alternative names. That is there might be several White, Red, or Azure Lotus, *Hsiang* (*Yang*), *Lung*, or *Yang* sects, or divisions of sects, operating under such names.

De Groot records a "society" in north-east Hupeh [Hubei] in the early nineteenth century which was divided into Red, White, and Blue (*ch'ing*) Lotus sections. Its leader was an incarnate Maitreya.<sup>85</sup> He also records in south Hupeh about the same time, a headman of a Blue Lotus "society" who was a disciple of one P'eng I-fa.<sup>86</sup> This was the name of the fourteenth patriarch of the Inner sects. Again de Groot describes how from confessions of sectaries arrested in Shensi [Shaanxi] it was discovered that Yuen Chi-khien (Yuan Chih-ch'ien) living in Kweichow

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83 Work to be performed at any time and its secret name are both decided by Mother who reveals it to the patriarch either during his meditations or in seances conducted with a planchette (characters are drawn in sand spread out in a tray), at *lung-hua* meetings.

84 See above, p. 217.

85 Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 472.

86 Ibid., p. 540.

[Guizhou] was their religious master in a Blue Lotus sect; and that this man, hearing that persecutions had broken out in Szechuan [Sichuan] against the sect and that one Yang Sheu-yih (Yang Shou-i) had been arrested, escaped to Hankow [Hankou].<sup>87</sup> Yuan, as we saw, is recorded as twelfth patriarch by the Inner sects, and Yang as one of the two holding office as thirteenth. It appears then that Great Way religion in the line from which the Inner sects descend, was at that time using the Lotus terms for religious work.

De Groot also records a White Dragon (*Lung*) sect,<sup>88</sup> a White *Yang* (陽) society,<sup>89</sup> and a Red *Yang* society.<sup>90</sup> Again he records a set of sects called Red, Blue, and White *Yang*, using the character 洋 “Ocean” for *Yang*.<sup>91</sup> Evidence in de Groot suggests that “Ocean” might also have been used as a work-name by a Great Way sect. In a passage referring to a religious leader named Lin Ts’ing he says this man “consulted the stars” and learnt there were three religions of Maitreya: blue, red, and white ocean, and at that time the sect of the White Ocean “would prosper”.<sup>92</sup> It may be that “ocean” was used as a substitute for the other character pronounced “yang”, for de Groot further shows that in a state decree the names White Yang (洋) and White Yang (陽) are given for a single sect.<sup>93</sup> He also states that Lin Ts’ing belonged to the White *Yang* sect but in a rebellion in 1813 of which he appeared to be the leading light, he also drew the Red *Yang* into activities. This suggests that the two “sects” may have been sections of a single sect performing different kinds of religious work. Lin was known significantly as the incarnation of the patriarch of *Sien-t’ien* (*Hsien-t’ien*), and was therefore also called *Hou-t’ien* patriarch.<sup>94</sup>

Another sect recorded by de Groot is the Yellow Lotus religion. Members arrested were found to have papers bearing drawings of the “three epochs”,<sup>95</sup> which as we saw are important in Great Way ideology. De Groot also suggests the possibility that the White *Yang* religion was the same as the White Lotus religion. His sources were a Ming historian and a decree of 1772 but he does not state the evidence on which this supposed connexion is based.<sup>96</sup>

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87 Ibid., p. 504.

88 Ibid., p. 507.

89 Ibid., p. 443.

90 See general index, *ibid.*, pp. 586ff.

91 Ibid., p. 419.

92 Ibid., p. 541.

93 Ibid., p. 443.

94 Ibid., p. 419.

95 Ibid., p. 541.

96 Ibid., p. 290.

***(c) Great Way religion and its possible relation to the White Lotus society***

The existence of the sect or society of the White Lotus and its role in Chinese rebellions has long been known. Whether or not this organization is structurally related to Great Way religion and if so in precisely what manner may never be known for certain, for there is little information on its organization and development to compare with that on the Great Way. However, such a connexion now seems very probable. We know that in both religions Maitreya plays an important role and is symbolically connected with a White Lotus. We also know that leaders of both kinds of group have sometimes laid claim to be incarnations of this Buddha.

From what has been said about Great Way religion so far it appears that the White Lotus sect or society, and Great Way religion might be related in one of three possible ways. Firstly White Lotus might be a name for the religion from which Great Way itself ramified. This was suggested earlier. The second possibility is that the White Lotus is not one organization but consists of many independent groups: that White Lotus sects are Great Way sects performing the third category of “work” and using the name “White Lotus” either as an alternative (secret) name for the whole sect, or of one section specializing in this work. The third possibility is that both may be true: White Lotus “sects” consist of organizations related to Great Way religion in both ways. Firstly there may be one body permanently called White Lotus and ramifying in the early days of the religion. Secondly, and side by side with this body (itself, perhaps, splintered into many divisions and branches), may then be the other type of White Lotus sects: Great Way sects operating at certain periods under the secret work-name of White Lotus.

Further evidence suggests that Great Way sects using the White Lotus work-name have been identical with White Lotus sects of recorded history. Whenever we hear of White Lotus, we hear also of its association with an incarnate Maitreya, and also usually hear that it is engaged in rebellion. Firstly, in the Great Way sects, the third kind of work they perform may only be started when Maitreya or a being with one of his characteristics, is incarnate among men: his arrival is the signal to begin the third work. Secondly, there is a strong suggestion that this third type of work implies a very militant attitude to social affairs and possibly involves actual rebellion. Although I was unable to obtain a detailed description of the three kinds of work, I was told this about the coming of Maitreya: Maitreya has the task of teaching Truth to all men. To make this possible certain conditions are necessary in the world. One is that all mankind must be converted to Great Way religion, all sectarian must be sorted out and various bodies within the fold must be amalgamated. Maitreya will

head the orthodox sect and therefore this is the only way he can reach all people. Another is that complete harmony between heaven and earth must be established. Men cannot learn Truth if they are in physical misery, and Truth cannot reach the people moreover, if the head of state does not hold Heaven's Mandate to rule. Ideally Maitreya himself should head the earthly State as the Buddhas did in Tibet. Then he could easily reach all people.

The open names for the three categories of work seem to provide further evidence that the third type of work, when Maitreya comes, might involve changing the leadership of the country.

#### *(d) Open work-names*

The thirteenth patriarch is said to have abandoned the use of secret work-names because they became "too notorious". Inner sects to-day use only open work-names therefore. These names are *P'u-tu*, *Shou-yuan*, and *Fu-ming*, in that order. *P'u-tu*, as we saw in connexion with the sect of that name, means "salvation". The *P'u-tu* sects get their name from this work which was being performed by the religion when they divided off. The term for a convert in the sects is *tu-jen*. *P'u-tu* work, then, which is equivalent to Azure Lotus work, might be an all-out campaign to get new recruits for the religion. *Shou-yuan* in the sects means to "gather to completion": to bring everybody to the state where they might learn the Truth and enter the Void. This work, which is equivalent to Red Lotus, might then be a campaign to consolidate the religion: to bring all the sects together. *Fu-ming* means to "restore the Mandate". This work, equivalent to White Lotus, might be restoring the orthodox line of patriarchal descent: getting all other sects to accept the same leadership. It might also mean, however, to restore the Heavenly Mandate to the "rightful" leader of the country if disharmonious physical and social conditions indicate that the present leader does not possess such a Mandate. The rightful leader might be conceived of as being the leader of a sect, if he is Maitreya incarnate. We saw that this was so in the case of *Kuei-ken Men*.

These open names appear as sect names in certain records. The *Kuei-ken* sect records that in 1865 it was itself called the *Shou-yuan* sect; in 1908 it was called *Fu-ming* sect. The leader of the sect in Malaya claims that *T'ung-shan She* is now performing *P'u-tu* and *Shou-yuan* work simultaneously. De Groot records a *Sheu-yuen* (*Shou-yuan*) sect.<sup>97</sup>

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97 In 1748; *ibid.*, p. 285.

## 2. Other evidence of group-connexions with Great Way

1. A sect clearly related to the system is *I-kwan Tao* “The Way of Pervading Unity”.<sup>98</sup> No published information on this group existed prior to 1948. The fullest account now available to the West seems to be by Kubo Noritada 窪徳忠.<sup>99</sup> Its cosmology is identical with that of the Inner sects in most respects but its ideology is more expansive, including elements from Islam and Christianity. The sect uses the terms Azure, Red, and White *Yang* (陽) to describe the three major cycles, and claims the White *Yang* period started in the 1920s. It worships Mother. The sect follows the same line of patriarchs as the Inner sects up to the thirteenth and records the mythological period also.<sup>100</sup> The sect is said to have been anti-Japanese and pro-Chiang Kai-shek during the Sino-Japanese War, and in 1943 a few members were arrested by the Japanese as spies. No details of the organization of this sect are recorded by Kubo although it is said to be non-vegetarian.

2. The *Yao-ch'ih Men* “Sect of the Yao Pool” has been mentioned. Its name already suggests possibility of connexion with Great Way for as we saw *Yao-chih Chin-mu* is a term for Mother used by the *P'u-tu* sects.<sup>101</sup> From details given by the writer on this sect<sup>102</sup> it appears to be not only related to Great Way but in fact an Inner sect of the religion. Its titles of rank are nearly all the same as those of the *P'u-tu* sects. The only exceptions are that the rank *Shih-ti* is given the characters 實抵 and *Ting-hang* becomes *Ting-k'ang* 頂抗. This gives the two ranks a more aggressive meaning: “Authentic Resister”, and “Chief Resister”. This may indicate the greater militancy of the sect. Its leader was reported to have been in prison when information on this sect was recorded. *Yao-ch'ih* sect

98 The term *I-kwan* is probably taken from the Confucian *Analects*, Book IV, no. 15: *Wu tao I. I-kwan chih* “My doctrine is that of all-pervading unity.” All-pervading unity being, in the religion, syncretism.

99 “*I-kwan-tao ni tsuite*” 一貫道について *Toyo Bunka Kenkyujo Kiyo* (Tokyo), 4(1953): 173–249. *I-kwan Tao* here, is referred to as a secret society. The terms “sect” and “society” are often used interchangeably in the literature. I think it less confusing if the term sect is reserved for groupings which attempt their own ideological synthesis, which are oriented directly to spiritual ends (although they may have intermediary ends which are secular), and have their own priesthood, and the term society is reserved for other types of groupings which may use religious elements, but do not attempt a new synthesis of ideas, have no priesthood, and are not directly orientated to religious ends. These differences are brought out clearly if we compare the Triad society with Great Way sects.

100 It worships Mother, using the term *Wu-sheng Lao-mu*. We saw (see f.n. 44) that this is the term said by *Kuei-ken Men* to have been introduced after the fourteenth patriarch.

101 See p. 214, n. 44, on the names of Mother.

102 George Miles, op. cit.

is vegetarian and follows the same line of descent as the *P'u-tu* sects up to the fifteenth after which it had had two independent leaders when the information on it was written down.

3. Other groupings which have been recorded are shown to have worshipped a Mother goddess, and to have used as a title of address for her one of those in use during some period of the religion's history. Thus, the *Pa-k'ua* "Eight Diagrams" worshipped *Wu-sheng Lao-mu* "Unbegotten Mother".<sup>103</sup> De Groot in fact suggests that this sect was identical with the White *Yang*.<sup>104</sup> The *Wu-wei* "Sect of Inactivity" (a Taoist term) worshipped a *Chin-mu* "Golden Mother".<sup>105</sup> De Groot identifies this sect with the *Hsien-t'ien* sect he himself describes.<sup>106</sup> *Kuei-i Tao* "The Way of Following the One" worshipped a "Mother of No-birth" and claims to be an offshoot of *Hsien-t'ien Tao*, founded between 1640 and 1660. Its history is described as "vague".<sup>107</sup> The *Chin-tan Chiao* "Golden Pill Religion", according to de Groot, worshipped an Unbegotten Mother.<sup>108</sup>

4. Several religious groups have claimed to be founded by, or have shown a relationship with, Lo Wei-ch'un, the eighth patriarch. Among them are *Lung-hua* and *Hsien-t'ien* sects described by de Groot and already referred to.<sup>109</sup> Another sect, *Lo-chiao* "Lo Religion", is named after the eighth patriarch. It is described in some detail by Suzuki Chusei 鈴木中正.<sup>110</sup> The sect worships an image of Lo, its cosmology is similar to the Inner sects, and it is vegetarian.<sup>111</sup>

5. Another sect possibly connected with Great Way is *Tso-kung Tao* "The Way of Sitting and Practising" mentioned in a sociological study of a district in North China.<sup>112</sup> The author writes that the group held meetings in its leader's home on the fifteenth of the first, fifth, and ninth

103 See D. H. Porter, "Secret Sects in Shantung", *Chinese Recorder*, XVII(I)(1886): 3.

104 Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 419.

105 Described in part by Edkins and romanized by him as *Kin-mu*; *Chinese Buddhism*, pp. 377ff.

106 Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 184. See also pp. 192–95.

107 See Wing-tsit Chan, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, pp. 158–61. New York, 1953.

108 Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 543.

109 The former had an elaborate system of ranks different from that of the Inner sects I have described. The latter, according to de Groot, was a domestic religion with no rank hierarchy. It claimed to be reformed but had teachers referred to as *Hsien-sheng*. There is no mention in de Groot's description of these two sects of any "Mother" worship.

110 In "Rakyo ni tsuite" 羅教について *Toyo Bunka Kenkyujo Kiyo* (Tokyo), 1(1943): 441–501.

111 It does not appear to worship Mother.

112 See Sidney Gamble, "Ting Hsien", *A North China Rural Community*, pp. 414, 416ff. New York, 1954.

months. We saw that these are dates of the *lung-hua* meetings of Great Way sects.

6. The *Ta-cheng* “Mahayana” sect, found to-day in Hong Kong, is according to the leader of the *Kuei-ken* sect, an Outer sect of the Great Way, ramifying after Lo Wei-ch’un. It has been mentioned by de Groot.<sup>113</sup>

7. De Groot mentions also a *Lao-mu Chiao* “Venerable Mother Religion”. The name suggests strong possibility of connexion with the Great Way.<sup>114</sup>

### Great Way Sects in China To-day

From accounts in the Chinese mainland press in the mid-fifties it appears that a campaign was then being waged against sectarian organizations by the Communist government. As in former centuries, the accusations against them were: unorthodoxy, spreading political unrest, and planning rebellious activities. Two Great Way sects mentioned in the press were *I-kuan Tao* and *T’ung-shan She*, both of which also appear to have had political interests in this century prior to the Communist period.<sup>115</sup> In an article in *Tsu-kuo* “China Weekly” reports in the *Hankow-Yangtze Daily*, 17 July 1954, are discussed.<sup>116</sup> *I-kuan Tao* is said to have been involved in “anti-flood” campaigns in Hankow and the surrounding districts. While flood-fighting was in progress, it is said, leaders spread “propaganda of three stages of the world’s end”. This is consistent with what we now know of Great Way cosmology.<sup>117</sup> In the same article 20 secret meetings were reported to have been held by members of the same sect in Hankow. Two major shrines operated in the city and had four branches which they ran openly. From there, it is said, they “scattered their influences to the villages”. Further activities of *I-kuan Tao* are mentioned in another issue

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113 Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 153; Vol. II, p. 475. He identifies it with the White Lotus, White Yang, Pure Tea, and other sects.

114 Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 386. It had an incarnate Maitreya.

115 See p. 236 above, on *I-kuan Tao*. De Korne sees a possible link between the emergence of *T’ung-shan She* and the rise to political power of Tuan Ch’i-jui after the brief period in 1917 when the Manchus were reinstated. *T’ung-shan She* was opposed to Kuomintang ideals. It was proscribed in 1927 and went underground after the Nationalists moved north in 1926–28. De Korne, op. cit., pp. 18ff., 73ff. Now the Communists are in power, the Singapore branch of *T’ung-shan She* is pro-Kuomintang and anti-Communist in its homeland political interests.

116 *Tsu-kuo*, 106(9)(2) (in Chinese).

117 See above, p. 216.

of *Tsu-kuo*,<sup>118</sup> and in the *Peking People's Daily*, 7 July 1955. The former deals with matters in Szechuan and is based on the *Szechuan Daily*, 15 December 1954. *I-kuan Tao* is accused of sending a leader to Chengtu to start a "reactionary organization training class" and of gathering people together for "anti-Communist education". After training, it was reported, they were sent back to various places to engage in "anti-Communist work". It also says the leaders tried to bring remaining "heads" of the *Tao* together for reorganization, changed names, destroyed all documents, and abandoned the "orthodox way" of setting up public shrines. They also changed rank-titles. All leaders, it was said, combined together, and important ones hid in the mountains directing counter-revolutionary work. Another article in the same edition of *Tsu-kuo*, based on the *Chungking Daily*, 21 January 1955, mentions a public trial in Chungking of two leaders of *T'ung-shan She*. It said one of them made use of the sect to try to set up counter-revolutionary armed forces and later joined with another leader to organize an anti-revolutionary army in four counties of Szechuan.

These events took place comparatively recently. How long will the sects of China continue to exist in the face of what appears to be the most rigorous campaign against them yet? In the past, attempts at suppression resulted in internal division, changes in organization of the hierarchy and in names, just as to-day. But instead of being wiped out, in the nineteenth century the sects spread into the very areas to which leaders were exiled Kweichow, for example. But another question is, how long will there continue to be individuals in China who see social disharmonies in terms of a religious ideology, who seek metaphysical explanations for physical catastrophes and cosmological justifications for reformation of a political system they do not favour? How long will individuals exist who look for rank and status in an esoteric religion, and for the magical powers which such religions claim to offer, as substitutes for rank and power in secular society which they are denied? There are still such individuals living overseas to-day, but they are mostly elderly men steeped in the cultural values of old China and elderly unattached women. In Malaya to-day would-be leaders of society pattern their ideas of virtue and ideal government mainly on modern Western philosophies. It seems unlikely that in China the restless and potentially rebellious members of the younger generation will look to religious sects as a refuge from frustration or a weapon for gaining new political ends.

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118 *Tsu-kuo*, 117(9)(13).

## Chinese Glossary

|                              |       |                           |      |
|------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|------|
| <i>chai-t'ang</i>            | 齋堂    | <i>Fu-ming</i>            | 復命   |
| <i>Chia-chang</i>            | 家長    | <i>Hou-t'ien</i>          | 後天   |
| <i>chieh</i>                 | 劫     | <i>Hsien-t'ien Ta-tao</i> | 先天大道 |
| <i>Chin-tan Chiao</i>        | 金丹教   | <i>hsiu-ksing</i>         | 修行   |
| <i>fen-hsing</i>             | 分性    | <i>Hsuan-kuan</i>         | 玄關   |
| <i>hu-tao</i>                | 護道    | <i>Shou-yuan</i>          | 收圓   |
| <i>hua-shen</i>              | 化身    | <i>Ta-ch'eng</i>          | 大乘   |
| <i>huo-chu</i>               | 火炬    | <i>Ta-i Hsiang</i>        | 大義祥  |
| <i>I-kuan Tao</i>            | 一貫道   | <i>Ta-jen Hsiang</i>      | 大仁祥  |
| <i>Jan-teng Fo</i>           | 燃燈佛   | <i>Tso-kung Tao</i>       | 坐攻道  |
| <i>Kuei-I Tao</i>            | 皈一道   | <i>tsu</i>                | 祖    |
| <i>Kuei-ken Men</i>          | 歸根門   | <i>tu-jen</i>             | 度人   |
| <i>Lao-mu</i>                | 老母    | <i>T'ung-shan She</i>     | 同善社  |
| <i>Lao-mu Chiao</i>          | 老母教   | <i>Wu-chih Sheng-mu</i>   | 無極聖母 |
| <i>Lao-sheng Mu</i>          | 老聖母   | <i>Wu-kung Tao</i>        | 五公道  |
| <i>li Lung-hua k'ai-chih</i> | 立龍華開基 | <i>Wu-sheng Lao-mu</i>    | 無生老母 |
| <i>Lo-chiao</i>              | 羅教    | <i>Wu-wei</i>             | 無爲   |
| <i>Lung-hua Men</i>          | 龍華門   | <i>Yao-chi'ih Chin-mu</i> | 瑤池金母 |
| <i>Pa-k'ua</i>               | 八卦    | <i>Yao-chi'ih Men</i>     | 瑤池門  |
| <i>P'u-tu Men</i>            | 普渡門   | <i>yuan-tsu</i>           | 原子   |
| <i>shen</i>                  | 神     | <i>yun-ch'eng</i>         | 雲城   |
| <i>shih-fu</i>               | 師父    |                           |      |



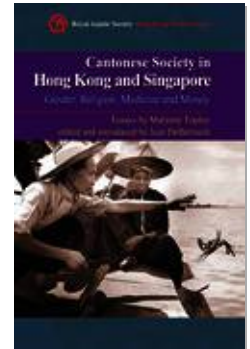
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## *Chapter 10*

# **Chinese Religion and Rural Cohesion in the Nineteenth Century**

(1968)\*

In China in the nineteenth century some of the most important ideas which were religious, or had religious implications, linked the destiny of individuals to their ancestors; to numerous gods and sanctified worthies; and to certain cosmic “ethers” and “elements” and their process. Such ideas were associated with organized groups of different kinds. Religious elements were found in a number of institutions of society not primarily religious in purpose and gave an underlying sanctity to secular aims. Religious aims were also the primary aims of other groups who in turn sometimes used secular activities to support their ultimate goals. The majority of China’s social institutions in fact contained, with differing emphases, a combination of religious and secular items.

Much of the discussion of all this: religion and its importance for social organization, has taken place either against a wide background, territorially speaking, or against the background of a particular local community. But we know not all areas and communities displayed the same amounts of religious activity and the same religious ideas were not everywhere of the same importance. Did the importance of religion as an integrating force vary then, in different local communities, because of variations in their social composition — the kinds of groups using religion? What other social factors affected such variation? If religion provided solidity for different kinds of groups in what circumstance could it work, in a particular community, for or against their integration one with another? Many of the religious ideas of traditional China were regarded by the majority of people as complementary rather than competitive but could they, or the values connected with them, become competitive when used by certain groups with different secular or even religious goals? And could religion ever provide a rallying point for a total community or set of neighbouring communities — under what conditions would this be

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possible? In this paper I want to see how far data available to me in the literature and sometimes my own research notes, enables examination of such questions for rural society a century ago.<sup>1</sup>

Rural China was by no means homogeneous in the nineteenth century. It was dotted with villages of different size and composition: some, particularly in the south-east, consisted of single lineages or “clans” — units with members tracing descent to a common ancestor; others comprised two or more lineages or branches of lineages perhaps being linked with similar units elsewhere. There were communities which were scarcely “villages” in the physical sense — in mountainous areas particularly, there were groups of scattered farmsteads — and there were some communities on the flatter plains which consisted of villages which had expanded and grown into each other forming large units of population. In many areas there were, also, numbers of dislocated peasants living outside villages and difficult to organize and control from village centres.

Religion entered into the organization of such communities everywhere to some extent. The nineteenth century was a time when villages had to provide a great deal in the way of their own control and often appealed to religious ideas to do so. The central administration was functioning less and less efficiently and itself used religious ideas in order to foster solidarities with the rural units.

Space does not permit me to deal with all known forms of religious and semi-religious association in rural life which are relevant to problems of cohesion. I will discuss four kinds here. Organized on a local basis were: cults operated by kin-groups and connecting individuals to their ancestors by virtue of their position in such groups; cults fostered by the State and connecting individuals to other kinds of dead, seeking thereby to inspire feelings of loyalty to its cause; and cults dedicated to popular gods of concern to man as member of a local community or of a grouping found at the local level. Cutting across local territorial units to some extent and connecting man to spiritual beings and cosmic processes, but as member of a wider community, were then other kinds of religious and semi-religious groups. Let me start my analysis with ancestral cults.

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1 This paper was prepared originally for a seminar on micro-social organization on China held at Cornell University in October 1962 and sponsored by the Sub-committee on Chinese Society of the Joint Committee on Contemporary China of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council. It has been slightly abridged and rearranged by me for publication here. I have been limited in my use of published material to works available to me in Hong Kong. The research notes to which I refer were collected during field studies in Singapore during the years 1951–52 and 1954–55, and during the early 1960s in Hong Kong.

## 1. The Ancestors and Integration of Local Communities

Popularly included in the term “ancestor worship” are: rites performed by certain close kinsmen in the post-mortuary period for the soul’s peaceful progress through an underworld, usually into rebirth, and performances at the grave-side; regular performances at graves and before tablets or other symbolic representations of the deceased, again by close kinsmen and for the remembered and “socially mature”, i.e., married with sons; and performances at similar centres by remoter kinsmen, again for the socially mature but not necessarily remembered, and usually after attentions to them by closer kinsmen have ceased. Such performances might activate different groups based on kinship by descent and marriage, and comprising persons in common households, separate households and even different villages.

I cannot consider all such groups and their worship here although several kinds of ancestral rites are relevant to problems of village cohesion. Those I will discuss and which are of most significance, however, are related to remoter kinsmen and oriented to tablets and other representations of the deceased. A full analysis of ancestral rites and kinship groups has been made very competently by the anthropologist Maurice Freedman and part of his analysis is most relevant to the discussion here.<sup>2</sup>

Worship of remote ancestors could be a force for integration and control of a community when numbers of members of a village were descended from them. Mono-lineage villages (having their main distribution in south-eastern and central China) engaged in common worship of their founder, but wealth was important to the expansion of such cults and their associated organization. A poor village might have only a simple shrine to its founding ancestor, while wealthy villages often had elaborately built halls in which both their founder and other important ancestors were represented.

While it was probably the desire of most mono-lineage villages to have a fine hall and elaborate cult they could only be achieved when wealth was available because property was needed, particularly land, for their economic support. The more extensive cult organizations might indeed own not only land but other property outside the village: irrigation works for example. With a hall-land (or other property) complex a village could not only engage in more elaborate rites but a community organization could be built round it. Halls often became centres for trying

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2 See his *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*. London: Athlone Press, 1958, and *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung*. London: Athlone Press, 1966.

village disputes, teaching the young, and conferring on matters regarding a village's external relations and those with the local government administration. Births and deaths were reported to the hall and genealogies constructed and kept there. Genealogies often contained rules and regulations for governing relations between members of villages based on kinship, some even stipulating measures of punishment. Others regulated use of common property.<sup>3</sup>

Members of a mono-lineage village could benefit considerably through the economic extensions of an ancestral hall organization. Lineage land dedicated to the ancestors might be allocated to poor farmers at low rent; used in rotation by branches of the lineage free of charge; or rented to outsiders, income being used to finance loans to needy members. Hall wealth could be used to finance education of villagers for the State examinations, potentially raising the number of scholars in the village and thus its status and power in the area.

Ideally lineage affairs, certainly the rituals of the ancestral cult round which the hall was built, were under the control of senior men of the lineage in terms of generation. But such men would not necessarily be rich or scholarly since no rule of primogeniture obtained. Those controlling were likely to be the wealthy and also the scholarly of the village. The importance of scholarship and good connexions to the emergence of a hall land complex is clearly emphasized in the literature. Managers would likely come from rich gentry families who promoted the organization and added to its property irrespective of generational position.

A complex ancestral hall association would require scholars who knew the correct rituals, could write genealogies, and draw up regulations. It would need them also to meet with locally-based officials and arrange that village interests were protected (etiquette forbade those unequal in education and other attainments to meet face to face to discuss matters of mutual concern). In the New Territories of Hong Kong many big lineage villages have ancestral halls containing boards or plaques which indicate the former official or scholarly status of the deceased whose tablets are housed therein.

The crowning ambition of the rich scholar or businessman in mono-lineage villages is said to have been the building of a large ancestral hall or endowing it with property. Hsiao Kung-chuan quotes a case of a rural businessman who purchased a fifth degree and then built a hall, calling

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3 See for example Hui-chen Wang Liu, "An Analysis of Chinese Clan Rules: Confucian Theories in Action", in *Confucianism in Action*, ed. by David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright, pp. 63-64. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959.

the gentry together to set up regulations for his kinsmen.<sup>4</sup> It appears the hall-land complex might develop at any stage of a mono-lineage village's history providing it contained such persons. Conversely cases are known of lineage villages declining, when wealth and scholarship were no longer there. Once coordinated kinship systems fragmented and people lived apart from their kinsmen.<sup>5</sup> In a poor lineage village the lineage head — most senior man in the most senior generation — might perform simple ancestral rites and try cases between villagers, but the organization of such a village was much less tight. It is noted from one poor area that there, the inhabitants did not pay attention to clan organization.<sup>6</sup>

With land available for use of the peasantry, and gentry to protect their interests, however, villagers were more likely to stay at home: the village would grow in numbers as well as wealth. The command of wealthy mono-lineage villages over economic resources of the countryside increased their influence outside the village too, of course. Poor villages and peasants living outside villages might be forced to place themselves under the protection of the powerful and rent their land from them. Families of other lineage origins might come and settle round the walls of powerful mono-lineages.<sup>7</sup>

A lineage's power might be further extended through branching. Branches of such units might be established in neighbouring villages and when established in multi-lineage villages, by virtue of their link with a powerful centre, their leaders might exert power in their new home. Branches also might settle new villages, such villages then becoming linked with the parent village through its founding ancestral hall.

But segmentation might occasionally lead to conflict also. When segments or branches built separate halls endowing them with property, counter-solidarities might emerge and quarrels arise between the different groups, each trying to undermine its rivals. And even if peace could be kept within the community<sup>8</sup> the very solidarity of the lineage group could enhance the possibilities of conflict with outside communities. Quarrels

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4 See his *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 335. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960.

5 For example, Hsiao, *ibid.*, pp. 329 and 359ff.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 329.

7 When carrying out research on lineage villages and communes in 1964 by interview of immigrants in Hong Kong, I questioned respondents on the surname composition of their village of origin. In many cases it was stated that people of a single surname lived in the central part of a village and those of other and various surnames lived beyond boundaries of old village walls, or beyond their previous location where they had been pulled down.

8 Freedman, *Lineage Organization...*, p. 105. But he adds that politically and ritually the lineage was a centralized unit within which the peace could usually be kept.

between persons in different villages could become quarrels between lineage groups themselves and feuds between such groups over property rights were sometimes intense in south-east China leading to considerable destruction of property. Feuding between lineage groups drew the attention of the State which, although originally supporting lineage organization as one means of regulating the rural area, attempted by the late Ch'ing [Qing] period to limit its development by dividing up lineage land over a certain size.<sup>9</sup>

The control over community affairs and the economic life of a village which a land-owning ancestral hall complex could exert in a multi-lineage village was more likely to be limited by rivalry with other kin-groups in the village, or to be resented by the other groups and lead to strife. A case illustrating this was described to me for a village in San-hsing, Kwangtung [Sanxing, Guangdong]. The village consisted of branches of two unconnected lineages occupying separate parts of the village. One was rich and had a hall association with land; the other was poor with no hall and members rented land from the first group. My informant, a woman from the village now living in Hong Kong, said that the two groups have been continually engaged in quarrels arising over matters of land rights and rent. As a result men went away to work elsewhere and even whole families (such as her own) left the village permanently.

## 2. State Cults and Rural Identity

The State recognized that with central administration ending at the district level and villages running many local affairs, interests of the rural people could run counter to its own. Local officials far from control of the centre might not always carry out duties in regard to the local population as intended. To encourage solidarity between rural areas and the wider polity a number of ideological controls were devised. One was the promotion and support of cults to deceased worthies of both national and local note, and local people were encouraged to recommend names of those deceased among them noted for loyalty and virtue.

The success of such cults depended on such things of course as the degree of participation in their rituals in an area; the efficiency in management of the rites and temples; and the spirit in which they were carried out. The main promoters from the non-official side were mostly the gentry. Villages were less likely to have flourishing cults if they lacked such persons to explain their purpose and organize them. They were less likely also to get their local worthies represented in them. The

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9 Hsiao, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

people the State wanted particularly to bring under ideological control by such means were those probably least able to participate in fact: those living in villages remote from the local seat of administration, and the dislocated peasantry living outside villages.

Although it was not the intended purpose of the cults, they brought varying degrees of power and prestige to their promoters and to the descendants of the deceased worthy. This was not without its effects on village cohesion as well as integration with the wider organization of the State. Gentry members would probably be attracted to the cults because of opportunities they offered for meeting with officials and furthering interests of their families as well as villages. Well-financed temples for the cults would also offer opportunities for personal gain.

The canonization of a local worthy could be important for community solidarity through the prestige and power it could bring. But it came to depend largely on recommendation and support of either socially prominent persons or a large number of neighbours or kinsmen. It came also to rest on payment of bribes to local officials putting the names forward, and sometimes connexion with a kinsman or locally born official working in the capital and who had control over local "appointments" of deceased worthies.<sup>10</sup>

A village without rich or socially prominent and well-connected members or where kinship did not play an important role in local affairs would be less likely to get the names of their local candidates accepted. But surrounding communities, jealous of a village's potential power, could sometimes act as a check to its ambitions through canonization. In one case brought to my attention by an informant in Hong Kong, a mono-lineage in Tun-kuan, Kwangtung [Dungan, Guangdong], built a large temple to a local hero in the nineteenth century who possessed their own surname, TAM. The village ran a lucrative cult to which outsiders were also admitted. Members of the village claimed the god as ancestor and wished him raised to the status of local worthy. But the kinship connexion was not accepted by outsiders and the village's attempts were also blocked by gentry members living in neighbouring communities and they failed.

But canonization could work against a community's cohesion as well as for it. It brought prestige first of all to the local worthy's immediate descendants: their offspring received official buttons in recognition and a tablet to the deceased was put in the local Temple of Worthies. It was

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10 Ibid., p. 227. As early as the eighteenth century it was found necessary to scrutinize names recommended carefully. It was suspected that officials serving in the imperial capital and who came from the same province as the persons under consideration were inclined to favouritism.

usually the immediate descendants who initiated campaigns to support a canonization case, families competing in putting forward their fathers, mothers and paternal grandparents for spiritual promotion, and quarrels could strike up among them.<sup>11</sup> The State eventually attempted to prevent such situations by disqualifying the recently dead. The attempts also of rich scholars with high degrees, and officials, to seek canonization for their own ancestors sometimes resulted in conflicts with low-ranking poorer scholars and also with rich merchants. A case is cited by Hsiao of a deserving father of a low-ranking scholar being denied canonization, another concerns promotion of a merchant's deceased father whose claim had been supported by the local gentry of his village. High-ranking scholars in the area had protested against his inclusion and petitioned the administration to rescind their authorization.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Local Gods, Their Cults and Village Cohesion

Standing in a sense between the State cults described above and cults of purely local significance, and of less direct interest to the State, were those dedicated to a group of gods who formed a celestial system of government. This system included ministries and local government and was considered to be interdependent in its workings with the system of government by man (the emperor however had ultimate control over the appointment and dismissal of celestial recruits). Gods serving in the territorial administration were in charge of the same kinds of unit as their earthly counterparts — provinces, districts, etc., and gods representing lower level units were under control of gods operating at higher levels. The State took great interest in these gods and both officials and people were encouraged to participate in the rites associated with them.

These god-officials, housed in temples in the chief cities of districts, counties and provinces, were often former government officials who had worked in the locality and people were encouraged to help in their selection. The gods were expected to report social misdeeds — evasion of taxes, for example — to higher gods who could punish offenders by bringing misfortune. It is said those not afraid to perjure themselves in court were often afraid to do so before the gods, and so such cults encouraged obedience to law and order.<sup>13</sup>

When these cults worked well they focused people's interests on the administrative area of which their village was part and at the same time

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11 *Ibid.*, pp. 228 and 229.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

emphasized the position of the local village unit in the larger territorial administration. But temple-keepers and *yamen* clerks are said to have embezzled funds set aside for the rites and performed them in a perfunctory manner. The influence of such cults over villages more remote from city centres would probably, as with the cults to local worthies described above, be less than over nearby villages.

But the village itself was usually more directly connected with another god, to some extent operating independently of this spiritual hierarchy and standing more for local interests. This was the earth god: protector, in some of his roles, of such places as graves, bridges, rivers and canals, but also protector of a village unit or sometimes a section of a village. It is said that the earth god was usually somebody who had rendered local public service in his former human life.<sup>14</sup> The earth god's cult was more usually associated with an open shrine than a temple, with his image being placed on the ground. His festival commonly generated a great deal of group activity: various occupational groups in a village would collect money to contribute to the festival's religious and social functions and would "elect" one of their number to serve on the committee formed to organize the festival.

While it appears unusual for the cult of the earth god to have become associated with a complex land owning organization with control over a village or village section as in the case of ancestral cults, cults to other popular gods sometimes did so. Temples built for gods who had special meaning in the life of a village were usually financed from donations.<sup>15</sup> According to Arthur Smith, a well-known writer about rural China in the nineteenth century, money was sometimes raised by making assessments on the land of different households.<sup>16</sup> A common practice was to inscribe the names of donors and the amounts donated on a tablet to be placed permanently in the temple built with the funds raised. This is still the practice in overseas Chinese society today.

The main finances for popular temples commonly came from a few wealthy individuals however. Donors of large sums were likely to be made members of a temple's board of trustees and would have a say in the running and management of some of its affairs: an attraction to those seeking influence in a community. The State despaired that people gave generously to funds for popular temples but were niggardly about funds

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14 On the earth god, see E. T. C. Werner, *A Dictionary of China Mythology*, pp. 527–28. Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1932.

15 Some of these were deified Sung and Ming figures of note and not all stood for solidarity with the Ch'ing Dynasty.

16 See his *Village Life in China: A Study in Sociology*, pp. 136–38. New York, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1899.

required for temples for Confucius.<sup>17</sup> Rich scholars were said to have much control of popular temples, and since they were largely outside State control they might have given more opportunities for personal power than the more directly politically-influenced State cults.

Management of temples to popular gods would be unlikely to involve scholars in ideological conflict. They did not usually, as in the ancestral cults, concern themselves with the strictly religious activities taking place inside and the cults themselves, and the gods they served, were not “owned”, so to speak, by any particular religious system. Worship of them was open to all and did not commit the individual to membership of a wider religious organization. The question of who organized the religious activities themselves will be considered presently.

The extent that organization of temples to popular gods was used by individuals of means to increase power and prestige would depend perhaps on the alternatives the community could offer in this respect. But there is much evidence that temple organization could become quite extensive and provide a means for regulating some aspects of a community's life. The most favourable conditions for such development were probably found in the multi-lineage. Some mono-lineages had temples to popular gods certainly, and the temple to the god surnamed TAM referred to earlier owned property. But it was, in fact, promoted by the ancestral hall association of the village, and since both temple and hall were run by the same people the two organizations were perhaps unlikely to compete for power. If however, a mono-lineage village had both an ancestral hall and a temple organization promoted and operated by different people, their competition in property accumulation and devices for controlling the community could mean much disharmony for the village.

One suspects that, generally speaking, ancestral hall and temple organizations must have been alternative forms for controlling village affairs — the one being based on mono-lineage villages and the other on multi-lineage villages. Although the literature does not always tell us the relationship of temple organization to the composition of villages in kinship terms it is clear that the two forms of organization often performed identical functions. A temple organization in one area has been compared, in fact, to an ancestral hall association by Hsiao: it had extensive property and maintained a school.<sup>18</sup> Births and deaths might be reported to the temple as they were to the ancestral hall and temples for popular gods sometimes drew up regulations for village control, including such economic arrangements as weights and measures and marketing days.

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17 Hsiao, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 278.

Those promoting popular temples usually did so by forming an association, or using an existing association in a village or part of a village. It has been noted that some temple associations (*she*) had headmen "from whom all villagers took orders".<sup>19</sup> It is said also that sometimes families with common ditches or paths, that is neighbouring groups, joined together to make up a *she*. One might find, perhaps, the *she* division by neighbourhood taking place in the larger villages, or perhaps in those sections of a village occupied by different kin-groups without an ancestral hall association. Arthur Smith notes that it was commonly said the local god at one end of a village had nothing to do with the affairs at the other.<sup>20</sup> Larger villages, then, might have been divided into several communities organized round different temples. Sometimes a *she* appears, however, to have crossed village boundaries with many villages supporting the "incense and fire" (term for temple contributions) of a temple: this would then foster inter-village solidarities. Fairs and festivals in temples situated in areas with many villages provided opportunities for inter-village trade and further associations.

But there might be factors connected with temple organization even in multi-lineage villages which could make for disruption. Where there were several wealthy individuals from different families competing for influence through the organization, quarrels over management of temple property might arise.<sup>21</sup> In villages with large populations or with much social differentiation a number of temples might be built also to gods specializing in their various interests. Where local gods, or rather their temples, had nothing to do with each other's affairs (Hsiao gives an example from Shantung [Shandong] of two temples, one patronized mainly by rural scholars and another by farmers) they need not compete.<sup>22</sup> A village might be divided into sections at least for some organizational purposes. But when temples offered gods and facilities appealing to the same sorts of persons rivalry and competition might occur over funds and members, unless they agreed to divide their areas of recruitment.

If promoters and managers were concerned with secular activities in the main, who organized the ritual affairs of such temples? Much of popular Chinese worship is of course performed alone, but in some areas, notably Fukien [Fujian], there were spirit-medium cults (the god offering advice through the medium), and everywhere there were festivals for gods, in some cases several in a year. People in trouble also sometimes engaged in occasional rites involving popular gods and goddesses and might need

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19 Ibid., p. 279.

20 Op. cit., p. 138.

21 For example, Hsiao, op. cit., p. 280.

22 Ibid., p. 279.

special arrangements and specialist attentions. Cult organizers are described in the literature as “predatory elements”: that is, not members of the regular peasantry.<sup>23</sup> Some might have been members of the dislocated peasantry living outside villages, who saw a chance to improve their economic position; others, Taoist priests of the kind who lived in their own homes and engaged in religion sometimes as a part-time occupation (see below); and still others the kind of persons associated with secret societies and religious sects. At any rate, we know such temples were sometimes borrowed as premises for secret societies, and temples just outside villages sometimes became meeting places for thieves and bandits.

The State believed that temple festivals offered opportunities for secret heretical groups to plan their insurrections and when evidence that this was the case came to light popular festivals were banned.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes those promoting religious activities organized pilgrimages to other places: distant towns or even provinces. These were watched anxiously by the State because they were believed to give rise to “heretical sects in the future”.<sup>25</sup> Let me now see what can be said about more directly religious organizations, including secret sects, and other bodies which potentially cut across village communities, and their implications for village and inter-village organization.

#### **4. Religious Systems, Sects, and Societies, and Rural Organization**

Unlike State cults and popular temple cults, some religious systems — the heretical ones particularly — and some societies using religious elements, might extend over wide areas tying people in allegiance to those living far beyond their village boundaries. Ancestral hall organizations, connected with a widely ramifying and spreading lineage, might do this too, and we have noted the State’s anxiety about such developments; but they were at least based on the most approved form of human association: kinship. Religious systems also offered elements in their ideologies and associated values which competed with ideas and values underlying some of the principles of ordinary secular life, particularly those of kinship. Religious sects also often used the cosmological notions widely accepted in China at that time and relating to man’s position as a “cosmic entity” in that society, to turn against the State — itself using such notions to justify its own existence.

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23 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 231.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Since some religious systems cut across village, even district and province boundaries, their promotion locally would not necessarily depend on support of the wealthy of the area. Much of the kind of organization discussed so far provided either a method for further integrating existing social institutions or for drawing on man's needs for mutual aid in rural life to create some form of allegiance among those with similar interests. Religious systems offered an alternative and sometimes comprehensive form of organization. However, the situation on the ground was probably quite complex. In certain instances they might themselves be modified or limited in operation by forces working at the village level, and by the interests and ambitions of rural personalities which sometimes made use of them. It is the so-called "sectarian" religions which were most likely to be made use of by such personalities rather than Buddhism and Taoism, the two other important indigenous religions operating in China in the nineteenth century.

### **Buddhism**

Buddhist monastic establishments were usually situated in the open country-side and members might be connected with a number of different villages in an area. A large proportion of the Buddhist clergy, particularly of the female contingent, consisted of persons joining at least partly for other than religious reasons: those who did not want, or could not afford to marry; those becoming unattached through death and separation, persons who found their lives unbearable; partners to unhappy marriages, and those with other family troubles.<sup>26</sup>

Buddhism offered a number of social as well as spiritual satisfactions for the unattached. The unattached adult was very much outside traditional society: there was no room for an unmarried daughter at home (custom even forbade she should die in her father's house), and there was little opportunity in most parts of China for outside remunerative work for women; the unmarried male and female and those without children could not be served in the ancestral cult.

Monastic institutions provided a home during life and undertook burial and the ritual needs of inmates at death. They also trained members for a religious profession and religion was regarded traditionally as a particularly suitable occupation for unattached women. The religion itself as presented at the popular level suggested both spiritual and social advantages to those who would become members of the clergy. Those

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26 Cf. Chan Wing-tsit, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, p. 81. New York: Columbia University Press, 1953.

practising abstinence were assured they would meet a better fate in the next life. The Lotus Sutra states that women who practice constant devotions will be born male in the Pure Land (a Buddhist paradise). And popular folk stories with a religious flavour and aimed mainly at women sometimes hint at possibilities for greater power and prestige. Cantonese “wooden fish” books (*mu-yü shu* [*muyü shu*]) tell of women taking high officials and their wives as lay-disciples, and enjoying the respect and deference thereby of formerly cruel and sceptical parents, mothers-in-law and even husbands; and of others who in their next lives became themselves high officials and even aided relatives who had previously mocked them for their religious devotions.

There was one other important social advantage of the monastic life. Buddhism entered its formally recruited members into a pseudo-kinship system which linked members in bonds of mutual obligation; it could connect members of the monastic order over a wide area, and connect them also to lay-members who might become formally recruited members although they did not, of course, take all the vows of the cleric.<sup>27</sup> In this system members are grouped according to their relationship to a master (*shih-fu* [*shifu*]) through whom they join the religion (*kuei-i* [*guiyi*], “take refuge”). He is regarded as their spiritual “father” and groups created round him trace descent in written genealogies to “ancestor” masters. Bonds between members are expressed in kinship terms: a master’s fellow disciples are “paternal uncles”; disciples of “uncles” are, following Chinese kinship terminology, “brothers”, and so on, with women having the same terms of address as men. The system also makes use of generation names as in the actual kinship system and such names are used to distinguish generations of disciples from one another.

Lay and cleric members of such pseudo-kinship groups might live in different kinds of establishments connected by such relationships. A majority of members of the monastic order lived in monasteries and nunneries consisting of “families” of disciples with their master, and known as “sons and grandsons monasteries and nunneries” (*t’su-sun ts’ung-lin* [*zisun conglin*]). Sometimes a few lay disciples lived with them. Numbers of such establishments might then be tied together, each housing a “branch” of a “kin-group”. There might be a further tie with another kind of monastery where ordinations took place (*shih-fang ts’ung-lin*

27 Some aspects of Buddhist “kinship” are discussed in Holmes Welch, “Dharma Scrolls and the Succession of Abbots in Chinese Monasteries”, *T’oung Pao*, Vol. L, Livr. 1–3 (1963): 93–149. At the time of writing this paper little else was available on this form of organization in the published literature and I rely largely on my own research notes and documents shown to me during this research. Since that time Welch has also published *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900–1950*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967, and Chapter IX particularly has additional relevance.

[*shifang conglin*]). This kind of monastery was not itself organized by “kinship” principles, but some members of a “sons and grandsons” establishment might stay on after ordination and eventually take administrative office there, and a tie of mutual help might be created between the two monasteries. There might also be ties between “sons and grandsons” establishments and numbers of vegetarian halls (*chai-t’ang* [*zhaitang*]) which were institutions available for permanent or occasional residence by laymen, or more usually women. Members of the vegetarian halls might have “kinship” connexions with members of such monastic establishments. Finally there might be ties between such institutions and villages with lay-disciples who were “kinsmen” and lived in their own homes.

From Buddhist genealogies I have seen, and from information gained from their owners in Singapore who were members of the Buddhist organization in China before emigrating, it seems that members of “kinship” groups might be dotted over a large area.

The numbers and kinds of institution found in an area would probably depend partly on economic circumstances in a region. For example, in one district of Kwangtung, Shun-te, there was a particularly large number of vegetarian halls, according to my informants, and which catered for women who refused to marry or live with their husbands. They worked in the silk-mills for cash earnings and their strength to resist marriage undoubtedly stemmed from this fact (their reasons for not wanting to marry are more complex and I cannot go into them here). In old age such women often had nowhere to go and they sometimes financed the building of vegetarian halls themselves and became their managers.<sup>28</sup>

It seems unlikely however that Buddhist pseudo-kinship was a significant form of organization for ordinary kinds of peasants in the nineteenth century in most parts of China. Buddhism itself does not appear to have had a very strong structural position at that time. There are indications that it was not well endowed and the number of residents of their institutions small.<sup>29</sup> Generally speaking the kinds of persons wishing to make use of Buddhist organization were not very wealthy.

The general lower-classness of the Buddhist clergy would not attract the scholarly men of wealth as disciples. It is said a scholarly family would be despised by the community if it mixed with Buddhist (and

28 Information on the Shun-te anti-marriage movement is scattered and unsystematic, but for brief information on it and also its connexion with religion, see J. Dyer Ball, *Things Chinese; or Notes Connected with China*, 5th ed. rev. by E. Chalmers Werner, pp. 367–76, and section on marriage, p. 375. Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1925.

29 See C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*, Chapter XII. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961.

Taoist) priests frequently.<sup>30</sup> Any scholarly person genuinely interested in the Buddhist faith would not need the instruction of a priest in reading texts and would be unlikely to take instruction anyway from a person beneath him in education and other status. If he wished to “take refuge” in the religion he might take a master as a formality, but it is unlikely the “kinship” connexion thus established would play a significant role in the life of either person.

It was not in fact until the turn of the century that educated laymen took up the Buddhist cause with any vigour. At that time numbers of laymen interested in reform established study centres and even began to take the first five vows of the clergy, conducting some of the religious performances formerly reserved to the priesthood. But this lay-movement flourished mainly in the urban areas.<sup>31</sup>

One might expect Buddhism as an organization to be more active in towns perhaps. Communications among members would be easier and there would also be more unattached wishing to avail themselves of its facilities. Even today in Malaya the contrast between Buddhist activities in the towns and rural areas is quite marked. In towns the social life of “kinsmen” is very active and includes visits to different establishments on anniversaries of birth and death of “kinsmen”; visiting for “ancestor” worship (part of the rituals of “kinship”) and for popular Chinese festivals of the kind which demand family get-togethers. Not only are there many vegetarian halls but there are large numbers of inmates consisting of both those using them as a *pied-à-terre* during working life and those living in permanently in old age. In the rural areas the numbers attached to vegetarian halls and other establishments based on residence is small, as is the number of such establishments themselves, and the social life much less intense.

In providing a home and other social and economic benefits for those in need, however, Buddhist organization might perform a valuable function in the rural area. For a poor village without any other strong forms of aid for the poor and unattached — a strong kinship system, well-financed ancestral hall association or temple organization, for example — a monastic establishment in the area could draw off some at least of the individuals likely to be most troublesome in village life.

## Taoism

We know less of the religious activities and organization of monastic

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30 Ibid., p. 333.

31 Cf. John Blofeld, *The Jewel in the Lotus: An Outline of Present Day Buddhism in China*, p. 58. London: The Buddhist Society, 1948.

establishments of Taoism and their relation to rural communities in the nineteenth century than in the case of Buddhism, but again the religion is said to have been poorly financed. Where its establishments provided both residence and a professional training they might have recruited, partly at least, from among the poor and unattached as with Buddhist establishments; although some of Taoism's goals for the individual — increased physical vigour, superhuman skills, and long-life — appear from my knowledge of Hong Kong, to attract mainly men today (as lay members at least) and it may well have been a religion more popular with men as far as individual practices are concerned in traditional times also.

But there is one branch of Taoism not centred on monastic life: its members are (and were traditionally) professional priests living in their own homes, and not vegetarian or celibate. Like the Buddhist clerics, they are recruited through masters, have recorded genealogies (some of which I have seen in Singapore) and are grouped in pseudo-kinship relations with others, this relationship often forming the basis for teams performing rituals (as with the Buddhists). Such priests have often been part-time practitioners in the rural area, working when not acting in their priestly capacity, in generally poorly rewarded and low status occupations.

Some of the main activities of such priests in village life were the provision of rituals and ritual information for ordinary people and related to domestic affairs and problems in the main. They were also in demand from mutual aid associations using religious elements — those connected with trades and crafts for example — for conducting the periodic ballots for election of officers and participating in rituals during their festivals to patron gods; and they may have had a role also in promoting and organizing religious cults for villagers, perhaps some of those taking place in temples dedicated to popular gods. It seems unlikely, however, that they would figure significantly in any organization embracing both scholarly and non-scholarly members of rural society.

There were also certain Taoist societies having no connexion with priests of this kind and sometimes found at the village level. Some of those I have investigated overseas show in their records a line of descent through leaders going back to some Taoist sage, and they have their own preachers and organizers. Some concentrate on improving health and curing disease and drug addiction.<sup>32</sup> The term Taoist and also Buddhist “society” or sect is often used rather loosely in the literature, however, to

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32 The Religion of the Void was brought to Singapore from China and specializes in cure of drug addiction. On this religion see Hsu Yuntsiao, “The Religion of the Void”, *Journal of the South Seas Society*, X(2)(No. 20) (in Chinese). English version in the same issue, trans. by Chiang Liu. In Hong Kong the Green Pine Religion aims to cure disease.

cover organizations using elements from such religions, but which were in fact syncretic. Some of these bodies were regarded as highly heretical by the State and known as “left doors”. They occasionally called themselves Taoist or Buddhist to escape attention.

### Sectarian Religion and the Rural Area

Some of the organizations referred to as sects in the literature were in fact religions in their own right. Their ideas were taken from both Buddhism and Taoism certainly, and they also used cosmological notions accepted by the State and the more scholarly members of society; but they often combined such elements in a way forming a distinct ideology of their own. Many were strongly messianic, looked forward to a millennium, and sometimes had secular, even political aims, connected with their ultimate religious goals.

The literature on such organizations suggests they had a regional distribution, although the evidence is not entirely clear because various names were used by one and the same body at different times or in different places, and some of them themselves ramified into sects.<sup>33</sup>

Speaking generally, they appear to have been most active in the poorer parts of the rural area especially in regions with large dislocated populations. Szechuan [Sichuan] was birth-place to several and was not only an area of scattered settlement but the land of much of the province was poor (perhaps a factor contributing to absence of nucleated settlement). They also operated a great deal in Anhwei [Anhui], and on the borders of Honan [Henan], Shantung [Shandong] and Hopei [Hebei]. Exile appears sometimes to have been a factor in their extension to new areas. Some groups I studied in Singapore in the 1950s were brought down to village areas in Kwangtung [Guangdong], Kwangsi [Guangxi] and Fukien [Fujian] by leaders exiled from Honan in the mid-nineteenth century.

But when trying to visualize their operations at the rural level one realizes how thin information in the literature is on their activities in relation to communities of different type and size. Where were their lodges, what did they look like? Were their bases in villages, towns or the

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33 The most factually detailed work on sects is by J. J. M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China: A Page in the History of Religions*, 2 vols. Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1903–04, reprinted by Literature House, Ltd., Taipei, Taiwan, 1963. For discussion of alternative names of sects and evidence of sectarian connexions through names, see my “The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, XXVI(2)(1963): 362–92, at pp. 384–86. [See Chapter 9 in this book.]

open country-side? If one of the more militant, the *Nien* [*Nian*], said to be an off-shoot of the White Lotus is any example, it appears they might change their base. At one phase in its development it operated from nests in the mountains and at another based itself on earthwall communities in Anhwei for strategic reasons.<sup>34</sup> The *Nien*, however, might in fact have been a secret society type organization and not a religious sect. I will return to the question of secret societies presently.

The following short description of how some sects related to territorial units comes mainly from my own investigations and examination of sectarian documents in Singapore and Hong Kong. The groups I studied are off-shoots of a widely ramifying system sometimes called *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao* [*Xiantian Dadao*], "The Great Way of Former Heaven". It contains many sects going under different names. The sects of this religion were found in many parts of China and copied the State system of territorial administration in dividing up areas for administration with lodges descending to the level of the district. Below the district, however, the groups had other centres for members and based, as in Buddhism and Taoism, on pseudo-kinship organization. Provision was thus made for China-wide organization, although it is doubtful whether any sect extended over the entire country at any time.

The system appears to have worked as follows: administrative lodges existed usually, and where feasible in the face of campaigns of suppression which were waged from time to time against them, in the chief towns of provinces, counties and districts. The "capital", however, was not necessarily the same as the imperial capital but might be the town where the sect developed originally or to which it had been forced to remove its head office because of State activity against it. Until the late 50s of the nineteenth century sects were headed by a patriarch who ideally resided in the main lodge but sometimes lived in another remoter place to escape attention by the State. In the records of some of the sects the patriarch is compared to an emperor. It is often claimed he was an incarnate Buddha. Under the patriarch there were various officers administering the branch lodges. All administrators had to hold degrees — known as "lotus degrees" — to be eligible for such posts, although not all "degree" holders were administrators. Examinations for these degrees were in religious knowledge and techniques, which included knowledge of their own sutras (sometimes written in code) and Taoist type "hygiene" and *Ch'an* [*Chan*] Buddhist type meditation. Degrees have elaborate titles in many of the sects and are likened in their literature to degrees for State examinations. Administrative posts are sometimes

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34 See Chiang Siang-Tseh, *The Nien Rebellion*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1954. The preface by Renville Lund contains reference to White Lotus connexions.

compared to those occupied in the State administration by governors, judges and magistrates.

Many sects are “vegetarian”, that is to say they require degree-holders to practice permanent vegetarianism and also sexual abstinence. The administrative lodges of such sects are called vegetarian halls like the lay institutions of Buddhism and whenever possible were residential. Sectarrians I know overseas reckon some sort of monastic institution with supervision to be necessary for members practicing the abstinences at least, and for work for religious examinations. Members might live in such halls on an occasional basis however, until they reach higher rank, and it is said this was the practice whenever possible in China also.

Below the lowest administrative centre members were organized round masters who recruited them to the religion and who possessed at least the lowest degree in the examination system. For vegetarian sects there were whenever possible vegetarian halls for “families” in the sect. Such halls appear to have existed occasionally in towns, where they sometimes passed as Buddhist establishments of the same name, and in the rural areas dotted round the countryside. Photographs of “ancestral” vegetarian halls I have seen in present day premises of sects in Singapore and Hong Kong often show them situated in lonely mountain regions. Their position, together with the secrecy with which sects had to operate, must have made communication with administrative centres difficult and infrequent. There were some non-vegetarian sects of this same religion of *Hsien-t’ien Ta Tao* in the nineteenth century (and in this century more non-vegetarian groups appeared, to attract more “modern” persons), which claim to have had lodges for members below the lowest administrative level but I have little information on their location and organization in the rural area. Members and organizational centres of the sects then appear to have been grouped in several ways: within an administrative area all members and the “family” organizations to which they belonged were grouped round an administrative lodge or hall; and within the area also, “kinsmen” were grouped round “family” halls wherever possible, the halls themselves being further grouped round “ancestral” vegetarian halls or lodges. The former type of grouping was activated for sectarian observances of various kinds, and the latter type of groupings for social celebrations and other activities of a “family” kind.

As a result largely of suppressive activities by the State, however, many of the vegetarian sects of *Hsien-t’ien Ta Tao* had, by the latter part of the nineteenth century, broken down to “family” organization as their only method for organizing members. There are certainly some overseas today which still retain the patriarch type of organization but several are run only by “family heads” (*chia-chang* [*jiazhang*]): Such “family” groups have also fragmented to form separate off-shoots of the religion.

There is evidence also that for at least some of the vegetarian sects of China the dangers of running their organization through vegetarian halls was well recognized: that although sometimes such halls existed as centres for administration, for ordinary members meetings were more normally conducted in their own homes. De Groot writing on the *Lung-hua* [*Longhua*] sect in the town of Amoy (this sect is also an off-shoot of *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao* as I discovered from my researches) talks of sectaries meeting in each other's homes. Their vegetarian halls were rooms in private dwellings (this is still true of some of the "halls" in urban Hong Kong today but not all of them). He says, however, a patriarch lived in a residence which "may be something like a Buddhist convent."<sup>35</sup>

To what extent were ordinary members operating in their own homes residents of villages? Sects certainly appear to have operated in villages in this century. Several organizations found in villages of Ting-hsien [*Dingxian*], a district of Hopei and described as "Taoist societies", listed meeting days which are special meeting days for the Singapore sects I worked with and not celebrated by any other religious group I know of. Nine of these societies reported sixty-eight village organizations and one was represented in twenty-two villages. It was said probably half, possibly two-thirds, of the villages had one or more of the groups represented among their inhabitants.<sup>36</sup>

But was villager membership likely to have been common? And what about the leaders — what sort of men were they and where did they come from? A look at the sort of qualifications some sects demanded for rank-holders and satisfactions they offered to members might give us an idea.

Leadership was not for the busy, first of all. Much study and practice of religious tasks was necessary for passing the required examinations and vegetarian sects required leaders to practice abstinence. Sometimes, when for example a proselytizing campaign was underway (sectarian records in Singapore show there were often such campaigns, and also campaigns aimed at reamalgamating divided sects, in the nineteenth century), leaders were required to travel about the country recruiting members and raising money.

Leaders had to have some education, not only to pass examinations but also to write scriptures and sutras encouraging members to join and explaining the purpose of religious practices. Literacy was needed for

35 De Groot, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 210. George Miles writing of the *Yao-ch'ih* [*Yaochi*] sect (my evidence shows it to be an off-shoot of *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao*) states that members had vegetarian halls but he says they were usually in isolated villages where men and women were found in constant residence. See his "Vegetarian Sects", in *The Chinese Recorder*, XXXIII(1)(1902): 1–10.

36 See Sidney D. Gamble, *Ting Hsien, A North China Rural Community*, pp. 414ff. New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1954.

reading and writing messages (sometimes sent even today in elaborate codes) to leaders in other areas. In some sects degrees could be purchased but a leader would have little power unless he were at least literate.

The sects however offered various attractions. Some offered to bestow degrees on ancestors of members bringing money or honour or power to the sect (*T'ung-shan She* [*Tongshan She*], a non-vegetarian sect existing in Singapore today, still does this). And it was expected that leaders would take a percentage of moneys they collected. Sectarian ideologies were sometimes likely to appeal to scholars. Although syncretic they could be quite sophisticated. Sometimes items of ideology were revealed by gods during seances using automatic writing — a type of seance popular as a pastime with elderly educated gentlemen in traditional China. A common Chinese notion was that social and natural disorders were the result of earth being out of phase with heaven. Sectarrians often emphasized that this came about when leaders of the country lacked virtue and failed to teach the Truth stemming from Heaven. When the emperor lacked virtue there were national disasters; when local officials were corrupt local catastrophes — floods and droughts — were a result.

Ideology provided, then, an explanation and even suggested action when the conditions of life deteriorated which might be attractive to both scholar and the ordinary man experiencing hardship. Vegetarian halls like those of the Buddhists provided a home for the unattached — there was one in Hankow [Hankou] which provided for destitute and unattached seamen in their old age.<sup>37</sup>

One might expect the leaders of sects to be, then, individuals with some education and time on their hands; perhaps those with frustrated ambitions, looking for ways for compensating for their lot in secular society — who desired degrees and administrative power; those feeling they had better qualities and more virtue than local officials; persons sensitive to wrongs and injuries and not tied too closely to gentry codes of behaviour and not too respectful of State authority in some cases (one sect I studied states in its rules first published in the nineteenth century that leaders should not bow to official power).

The evidence suggests in fact that leaders were low-ranking, failed, or would-be scholars; scholars not taking the official examinations for patriotic reasons; merchants with some education but no degree; individuals with some education but no permanent or permanent well-rewarded occupation — herbalists, geomancers, tutors and clerks, story-

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37 Belonging to *Lo Chiao* ([*Lojiao*], Lo Religion) — a sect named after one of its important early patriarchs (and related to *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao*), described by Suzuki Chusei in “Rakyo ni Tsuite”, *Toyo Bunka Kenkyujo Kiyo* (Tokyo), 1(1943): 441–501.

tellers and petty traders; and occasionally retired military or civil officials unable to exert much influence in local society. Several leaders in China of sects with off-shoots in Singapore are recorded as herbalists in the lists of patriarchs; one was a school-teacher, another a merchant, and a present-day leader in Malaya joining his sect in China was a retired military official who previously studied Economics in Japan. The rural area must have included a number of persons of such kinds. In Ting Hsien members of esoteric "societies" are said to have included old-type school-masters and men without regular occupations.<sup>38</sup>

For an ordinary peasant living in a village, membership of a sect however might involve difficulties and dangers. The "kinship" system and its obligations might conflict with obligations of actual kinship and membership of the village community. Sectarianism in its ritual aspects, too, would tend to clash with ritual aspects of ordinary social institutions more than in the case of Buddhism. Whereas it was common for people to have Buddhist rituals performed at funerals for example (although sometimes by teams of Taoist priests) the sectarians often had their own special rites.<sup>39</sup> The sectarian who had them performed would risk revealing his membership. This might be dangerous unless a large percentage of village members were in the sect. Many sectarian religions were also more demanding than Buddhism both in cash contributions and time to be devoted to religious tasks. Farming would not leave much time for religious practices and ordinary home-life was not conducive to their performance. Some sectarian customs conflicted with Chinese custom to which the majority of peasants ascribed moreover: men and women met together for worship for example.

The literature suggests that in village communities it was again the unattached, particularly the elderly who joined such sects and did so sometimes to avail themselves of residential facilities rather than continue to live on in their own homes. In Ting Hsien many are said to have joined the "societies" because they were old and had no sons. Widows and women along in years became members.<sup>40</sup>

But it seems probable that in normal times ordinary membership consisted more of the dislocated peasantry living outside village communities rather than the common peasantry. Although early in the nineteenth century State policy was to punish only sects actually rebelling, the severe punishments metered out to members later in the century must have tended to restrict membership to the really desperate on the whole.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Gamble, *op. cit.*

39 See de Groot, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 231–41 on funeral rites of the *Lung-hua* sect.

40 Gamble, *op. cit.*

41 See for example Hsiao, *op. cit.*, pp. 231ff. and 233.

For those outside villages, without extensive kinship organization and strong forms of mutual aid, the pseudo-kinship system could provide a better means for mutual cooperation, and sectarian ideology provided an explanation of the misfortunes leading to their unsatisfactory position in life. We hear of sects for grass-cutters, and firewood gatherers: occupations likely to be followed by persons outside village communities.<sup>42</sup>

It is difficult to assess the actual strength of sectarian organization territorially but there may have been factors preventing very wide scale integration of the various units it comprised. In Singapore where main membership is of unattached working immigrant women who are generally illiterate, there is said to be a shortage of persons capable of taking rank and administrative position. The "family" system tends to overshadow that of the administrative hierarchy even in sects retaining patriarchs, with resulting conflicts between the interests of the locally organized groups and central leadership. This might well have been the case also in some rural areas of the homeland.

Loyalties to the "family" then, and also linguistic and cultural differences between the various areas, may have provided problems for sectarian central administration, as they did indeed for the State's own central administration. Not only was it probably difficult for most sects to keep the various rural groups of followers together but the imprisonment and death of leaders at the hands of the State had a serious effect on central control, as sectarian records show. Records I have seen show that removal of top leadership led sometimes to a splintering of the organization into further sects often becoming rivals.

Under what circumstances might sects expand and include numbers of the ordinary peasantry? Did they ever include members of the local gentry or enjoy support of a whole village? The *Nien* is said to have recruited whole communities when getting ready to rebel.<sup>43</sup> De Groot notes that when all villagers were members of a sect a piece of white cloth was used by the village as a mark of distinction.<sup>44</sup>

Rebellions and local disturbances initiated by sects appear to have taken place when economic conditions in the countryside worsened and local officials were at their most oppressive. Some sects clearly aimed mainly at the poor. One I know provided charms which when eaten were supposed to have overcome hunger for several months. In times of extreme poverty and oppression the organization of villages might have been weakened. The interests of village leaders and ordinary peasants

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42 Yang, op. cit., p. 226.

43 Chiang, op. cit., p. 37.

44 De Groot, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 308.

might draw closer to each other in such conditions and also to those of the dislocated peasantry.

The objects of most religious rebellions was not to change the social order but purge the government of unvirtuous elements and sometimes change the ruling dynasty. Local village leaders in times of stress might also have desired this object. It seems that some organizations even attracted leaders of large mono-lineage villages. In times of disaster it must have been difficult to maintain a strong lineage organization — to support the ancestral hall association with wealth. And other villages seeing their powerful landlords weakened might have taken advantage of the situation to resist their control. The *Nien* and the Eight Diagrams Sect are both said to have aided villages in inter-village fights (ultimately increasing their dominance over the villages concerned).<sup>45</sup> The Eight Diagrams sect is said in fact to have risen as a result of antagonisms among village communities. Leaders of large lineage villages were made leaders of some organizations.<sup>46</sup>

One *Nien* head is said to have been leader of a “clan” composed of a thousand families, allying his village with more than ten others (his exact “leadership” status in the kin-group is not very clear, however).<sup>47</sup> But the *Nien* was careful to preserve village leaders in its organization and this brought its own problems of expansion. The interests of various communities and local village heads inhibited the build up of centralized control over large areas by the *Nien*.

Although religious sects are said to have been involved at times in political rebellion one wonders how efficient they were in military operations. They certainly encouraged excessive bravery. Members of the White Lotus were said to be morbidly unafraid of death, but this would not necessarily make for efficiency of course.<sup>48</sup> Presumably in selecting leaders for military manoeuvres less emphasis would have to be placed on religious qualifications — “degrees” — and more on war-like skills. This might sometimes have led to rivalry within the sect; the type of person attracted by sectarian ideology and religious skills would not necessarily be an efficient military leader (unless he were himself a retired military leader), and might have to take a back-seat. A strong ideology, although knitting people together, encouraging bravery and sanctioning militant action, might bring its own problems for military success. The records I have seen show there were sometimes conflicts over ideological interpretations: the “work” to be undertaken by a sect at a particular time.

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45 According to Chiang the *Nien* emerged as community defence groups.

46 Chiang, *ibid.*, p. 17.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 45–47.

48 Hsiao, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

Some local leaders planning rebellion in the name of Heaven were declared unorthodox by others and the action was not supported by all divisions of the sect.

The *Nien* was certainly militarily successful for parts of its career but little evidence is given that it was in fact a sect: an organization with an ideology and rituals. Although it is said to be an off-shoot of the White Lotus there is no information on religious meetings or ritual materials. It may be that the *Nien* in fact was a secret society rather than sect: an organization using religious elements to support an ultimate secular aim rather than one taking up a secular cause to support an aim ultimately religion.<sup>49</sup>

### Secret Societies

Secret societies have a form of organization which might have been more efficient, or less inefficient, for rebellious purposes than the majority of religious sects. The group usually known in English as Triad societies, which have a similar form of organization and ritual, and were strong in Fukien and Kwangtung, had in the nineteenth century, rebellion as their major goal; their motto was "Overthrow Ch'ing, restore Ming". Religion appears to have always been confined largely to their rituals of initiation, and a century ago, used for the purpose of making rebellion into a sacred task.

Secret societies have not had independent and systematic ideologies or any system of religious qualifications for membership, or priestly hierarchy for leading them in their tasks. Their ritual brotherhood among members has often involved exacting obligations but they have had no extensive "kinship" system as have many of the sects.

More is known about the rituals and organization of the Triad societies than the majority of sects in the nineteenth century and I do not propose to deal with such matters in detail here.<sup>50</sup> It should be pointed out however that they also organized themselves under lodges in different areas (often symbolized by different colours) and appear also to have had difficulties in maintaining integration of their organization in various parts of the country. The evidence suggests that, on the whole, secret societies

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49 The White Lotus certainly appears to have been a sect, or rather the name taken by certain sects of *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao* at times when they engaged in militant activities, rather than a secret society. See "The Great Way...", op. cit., pp. 386ff. for evidence connecting the White Lotus with *Hsien-t'ien* sects. [See Chapter 9 in this book.]

50 See for example G. Schlegel, *Thian Ti Hwui, The Hung League or Heaven-Earth-League*. Batavia: Lange & Co., 1866.

cut across the organization of lineages and also drew in mainly the poor and weak members of lineages which were differentiated.<sup>51</sup> They did not offer salvation in the next world and do not appear to have, looked forward to a millennium in this and they did not offer residence for the unattached, at least in village life in China. They drew in more men than women. Membership not only offered an opportunity to participate in a movement for changing the dynasty but the societies also, when not rebelling, often offered facilities for mutual aid in ordinary life.

One might imagine that even these groupings would need leaders with some education when organizing rebellion, however, and it may be that their more successful efforts involved some pooling of efforts with sects; sects perhaps providing leaders of education and with “magical” powers, and societies, leaders with more practical skills and with a larger contingent of ordinary peasants.<sup>52</sup>

### Inter-village Defence against Societies and Sects

It is said that creating conditions of poverty and disruption in rural life was one of the methods used by militant groups to get members. At any rate a form of inter-village organization to resist sects and societies has been noted in the literature. Hsiao reports that twenty-four villages near Canton joined together to build a large house for “general consultations”

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51 Freedman, *Lineage Organization...*, op. cit., p. 121.

52 It might be noted here, and also in respect of the discussion on p. 35, on religious qualifications and military efficiency that some *Hsien-t'ien* sects were organized into what they termed *Yin* and *Yang* affairs. The nature of these “affairs” is somewhat obscure but sects often changed names when performing activities under one or other of these terms, this being one reason for the multiplication of sect names (see “The Great Way...”, op. cit., pp. 378 and 384). The introduction of such divisions may have been an attempt by sects to organize themselves for practical affairs, including rebellion, as well as religious matters. *Yin* “affairs” might perhaps have dealt with esoteric religious matters (*Yin* = dark, obscure) and *Yang* with secular matters, and perhaps they had more practical men to organize them. It is interesting to note that the main organizers listed by De Korne for *T'ung-shan She* in his *The Fellowship of Goodness (T'ung Shun She): A Study of Contemporary Chinese Religion* (mimeo). Grand Rapids, Michigan: private publication, 1941, does not include the patriarch himself who is hardly mentioned by him. Organizers were all practical men of affairs. The man given by De Korne as main organizer appears, in fact, on records of this sect (which is actually an off-shoot of *Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao*) in Singapore, as only one of the five top-ranking administrators. It may well be then that in seeking to engage in practical affairs (*T'ung-shun She* was involved in political machinations in this century although not actual rebellion) the religious leaders were sometimes kept in the background and other kinds of persons were in de facto charge.

because of the increase of crime in the area, especially from the Triad society. The inter-organization of the villages was “fairly comprehensive in its scope of activities.”<sup>53</sup> Again when the *Taiping* threatened in North Kiangsu [Jiangsu] in 1859, villages in five districts built walls round themselves and set up defence organizations, many of which operated on an inter-village basis. Eleven villages in Shensi [Shaanxi] had a common defence system, and while other communities were punished for not deterring the Boxers, they were spared, because they regarded the Boxers as enemies and killed them.

### Summary and Discussion

The relative strength of organizations based on religious ideology or using religious elements at the village level, and their contribution to community stability and integration, appear to have depended on a number of factors and their relation to each other in turn. Important among them were: the degree of social differentiation in the community; differences in kinship affiliations; differences in wealth and education; also the numerical size of the village; its relation to other communities in the area and to those living outside communities; its proximity to town centres; the general economic conditions obtaining in the area at a particular time; and to some extent the virtue and competence of locally-based officials. Such factors also helped determine which type of organization would become the most important for a community.

State cults were probably more successful in their aim with villages possessing gentry members and nearer to centres of government, but would be limited in their intended effect by other interests of persons able to use them. The cults were made use of by the already influential (and usually rich) on the whole in order to realize aims connected with their roles as local leaders and members of kin-groups. They could, however, through helping to realize such personal ambitions, aid in village integration: canonization of ancestors of village leaders, especially those of lineage villages, could bring prestige to a village and give it an additional symbol of solidarity. It could also, however, lead to competition and disharmonies between influential persons when their numbers were large.

Ancestor worship in lineage villages could be built into an extended and extensive organization making for more efficient control for the village unit. The mono-lineage village with a strong ancestral organi-

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53 Hsiao, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

zation was probably the best regulated in China, but there were built-in limitations. Promotion of the cult depended on wealth and scholarship, and both worship and management tended to be gentry affairs. This left ordinary peasants open to form other associations and join religious groups cutting across village boundaries. The power generated by an ancestral hall association could also effect village stability in another way. It could lead to conflict with other communities coveting or opposing its control over land and property and also to State intervention.

Organizations associated with temples to popular deities with significance for a whole community could provide some control over village affairs also. Mono-lineages could use them to back up their own ancestral cult but they probably exercised a greater control in villages with no competitive community-scale religious organizations: multi-lineage villages without extended ancestral hall associations. Similar kinds of persons — the rich and educated — tended to be involved in matters of promotion and management as those in ancestral hall associations. Again, as with the halls, because such temples depended much on the wealthy and educated (but not for ritual affairs as with the halls) conflicts could arise between different families involved in a temple's more secular affairs — management of property for example. In highly differentiated villages, moreover, social differences might be mirrored in multiple temple organizations providing cohesion for special groups rather than whole communities. Divisions could take place in differentiated mono-lineage villages also, with the wealthy starting their own branch hall association; but they tended to preserve some common interests and activities nevertheless: worship of the founding ancestor for example.

The ideological and other satisfactions provided by Buddhism and Taoism tended to attract particular types of persons as fulltime members: in Buddhism those not fully integrated into other social institutions of the village — particularly widows, and the unhappily married or unmarried. Buddhism might discourage such persons from becoming a problem for a village by providing them with special residential institutions, and the satisfactions of a "pseudo-kinship" system. Taoism had a monastic organization which might again have drawn off some of the dissatisfied in normal society. It might have attracted more men than women. It also provided teams of professionals who catered for the customary ritual needs of villagers and also possibly promoted the ritual activities of popular temples. A popular temple organization might become a means for community control, but it required religious activities of course in order to be popular with the ordinary people. Taoism also produced a number of societies specializing to some extent in problems of poverty: drug addiction and sickness for example.

The role of sects and secret societies at the village level was probably most complex. The local bonds of sectarians and possibly members of secret societies tended to conflict with those tying them to the wider organization of such bodies. In both cases organization tended to cut across village organization, however. Whether the bonds among members were on the whole disruptive or conducive to community order would depend largely on their activities at particular times which might vary with economic circumstances. The power and support sects sometimes gave to local communities might tend to reduce their control over an area ultimately, however.

When actually rebelling, sects might be expected to be less efficient than secret societies unless they made special organizational arrangements. The latter placed fewer religious restrictions on members and would attract ordinary peasants more as members and leaders. One of the main dangers of secret groupings which were religious, or used religion, to a village community, was that they tended to draw off the desperate and discontented into organizations cutting across such units as I have said, and thus divided the poor from the rich who usually controlled community affairs. While organizations like the sects provided other-world satisfactions and also housed unattached members outside the community they might be doing a village a service; but when members of such sects, and particularly of secret societies lived in their own homes they would create dual allegiances which could be dangerous. This was particularly so of the societies, of course, which did not provide outside accommodation away from the villages. Nevertheless such dangers themselves — and also those from dislocated peasants for which they might provide a tighter organization — sometimes helped to integrate groups of neighbouring communities who would be encouraged to form associations to resist their disruptive activities.

Religion, then, was often a means of fortifying existing groups of people with common interests or roles in the community. It also sometimes brought organized groups into being among those already having common interests but no other form of organization. In certain circumstances it gave rise to organizations contributing to the integration of whole communities: when all individual members of a community had a status or interest in common. Ancestor worship did so when all villagers were kinsmen; temple organization might do so when it could appeal to all members of the community as residents, for whom a particular god had significance. In both cases wealth and education were needed to bring such organization to its highest development and were themselves factors limiting control. In certain circumstances secret organizations might provide some form of village cohesion: either through a common interest in resisting them, or, when economic and social conditions reduced the

differences among members of a community, through common membership of such bodies. This kind of integration would probably last only as long as the conditions reducing differences among the community members lasted.





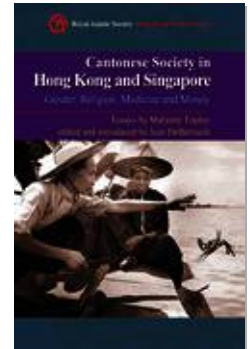
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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## Chapter 11

# The Role of Savings and Wealth among Hong Kong Chinese

([1963] 1969)\*

### 1. Field, Methods and Sources

#### (a) The field of inquiry

The sociologist or anthropologist working in Hong Kong is first confronted with the problem of how to define and limit his field of inquiry. Hong Kong society is highly heterogeneous. There are a number of other small-sized ethnic groups besides the Chinese.<sup>1</sup> The latter, who are in the majority,<sup>2</sup> are then divided into groups speaking different dialects and possessing some distinct cultural features. They are also believed to possess temperamental differences by the Chinese themselves. The Cantonese from the neighbouring province of Kwangtung [Guangdong] predominate and again divide into groups possessing some (generally relatively minor) sub-dialectal differences. Again they are believed to exhibit temperamental differences and minor cultural variations and this belief can affect their social relationships.

Besides the Cantonese are a number of Tiuchew [Chaozhou] from the Swatow [Shantou] region of Kwangtung. They live mainly in the urban area and are among the poorest in the community. There are also numbers

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1 Including Portuguese who are descendants of early colonizers of Macau, the nearby Portuguese settlement (they are mainly of mixed Portuguese and Chinese ancestry), Jews who were also established in Macau prior to the foundation of Hong Kong, a number of groups from India and Pakistan, English and other European groups, and Americans. The Western groups consist mainly of sojourners.

2 A housing survey carried out in 1957–58 and covering a stratified wide-scale sample of the population gave the Chinese as 98.64 percent of the surveyed sector.

of Hakka people: a group whose origin is not clear.<sup>3</sup> Those living in the urban area come either directly from Kwangtung or from villages in the New Territories, a largely rural area situated on the mainland behind urban Kowloon. Two groups of people live in boat-dwelling communities and engage principally in fishing. They are based on both urban and coastal areas. One is Cantonese-speaking. The other speaks a Min dialect rather similar to Tiuchew. There are numbers of people of other dialect groups, the majority having come to Hong Kong since the war. Cantonese usually class them all as “northerners” since the majority speak dialects closer to the *kuo-yu* (Mandarin; *guoyu*) tongue than is Cantonese. People from the far north are often amused when Shanghainese are included in this category, since their language is incomprehensible to the true *kuo-yu* speaker and in the north they are regarded as “southerners”. Cantonese is the lingua franca of Hong Kong and has acquired some local characteristics, particularly in vocabulary. Most newcomers acquire a rudimentary knowledge of the dialect after about a year.

Further complexity is provided by the differences between urban and rural social structure. The New Territories were already settled when the British leased the area from China in 1898 (Hong Kong was ceded in 1841). Today the people live mainly as they did then, in village communities consisting of Cantonese or Hakka inhabitants or sometimes a mixture of both. Many villages are single surname units consisting of a lineage or part of a lineage tracing descent to a common ancestor. There are some immigrants in the area. Many are refugees from Kwangtung and the north and the majority work as vegetable-growers, renting their land from the villagers and living scattered over the fertile valley regions. The social organization, cultural activities and economic basis of life of the villagers, who are the majority, however, still exhibit a number of “traditional” features.

In contrast to the rural area the population of Kowloon and urban Victoria situated on the island is almost entirely immigrant. Urban society grew up piecemeal. It is particularly heterogeneous because the people are in different stages of settlement and social and cultural change. People speak of “Hong Kong families” and “old Hong Kong” (*lo heung kong*)<sup>4</sup> referring to long-established members of the community — the former are born in Hong Kong and the latter have lived there for many years — but length of settlement is not always an indication of the degree to which

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3 They have contradictory traditions pointing to both a northern and a southern origin and today the greatest numbers of them are found in eastern Kwangtung. They are also found in Fukien, Kiangshi and Szechuan Provinces.

4 Cantonese romanization. All romanizations are in the Mandarin (*kuo-yu*) dialect unless otherwise specified.

social life has changed. Immigrants have not been uniform in their reaction to change and some long-settled families have clung to traditional ways longer than comparative newcomers. While immigration has affected all Chinese institutions in the Colony to some extent, individual reaction to change depends on a number of factors including type of education received, knowledge of English, contact with Westerners and Western ideas and changes taking place in China before migration.

The heterogeneity of the urban area places great strain on techniques for a study of the present kind. Yet it is to that area that we need to go for our material since it has been the focal point of economic development. In order to cut down the number of variables I have largely omitted discussion of the New Territories except for the purposes of comparison at certain points: when it seemed useful to point up differences in attitude and behaviour arising from differences in social organization.<sup>5</sup>

## **(b) Method**

The size and heterogeneity of the population make the use of normal anthropological methods of research impossible for a study of this kind. The number of variables together with the nature of some of the facts to be determined, the time factor, and assistance available, also made it necessary to rule out the use of questionnaires aimed at obtaining statistically significant results. Limited use was in fact made of questionnaires but they were confined to particular informants from whom data were obtained. These informants were drawn from as wide a cross-section of the population as possible and included persons from various educational and economic levels, both sexes, and various ethnic, and (Chinese) dialect groups. English and non-English-speaking Chinese were interviewed (I should perhaps add that I speak Cantonese reasonably well and read Chinese, and that all interviews with non-English-speaking people were carried out directly in the Cantonese dialect). A number of persons whose jobs are concerned with Chinese economic and social problems were also consulted.

Data from informants were supplemented by my own observations and impressions based on five years residence in Hong Kong. Although I

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5 But see my paper "Capital, Saving and Credit Among Indigenous Rice Farmers and Immigrant Vegetable Farmers in Hong Kong's New Territories", in *Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies: Studies from Asia, Oceania, The Caribbean and Middled America*, essays ed. by Raymond Firth and B. S. Yamey. London, 1964, pp. 157-86. [See Chapter 12 in this book.]

was fortunate in having also a number of excellent documentary sources the results are still largely impressionistic. I do not perhaps need to emphasize at length that what I say in this paper is meant to apply to the Hong Kong Chinese generally. Of course exceptions can be found to many of the generalizations I make. It may be that a more detailed study would show that in certain cases the exceptions form a significant number. Nevertheless I should say that I have not met with wide disagreement concerning the general conclusions from any of the individuals with whom I have discussed the project.

### (c) Documentary sources

No field studies using techniques of direct observation have been carried out in the urban area of Hong Kong.<sup>6</sup> However, various surveys mainly of an economic nature have provided useful data. The lack of a recent census — the last was in 1931 — has proved a handicap, as it has to several kinds of research in the Colony. The influx of migrants after the war made such a census impracticable and although one is now being conducted, the results will come in too late for inclusion in this paper.

The Hong Kong housing survey carried out by the university in 1957–58 has provided various demographic, social and economic data,<sup>7</sup> and material from a similar survey conducted among residents of an estate in which squatters have been resettled has also been used.<sup>8</sup> A recently published analysis of Hong Kong's economic development has proved useful,<sup>9</sup> as have also various papers produced in connection with a course on industrial relations at the university this year. Use was also made of a report by a committee set up in 1948 to determine the extent to which Chinese law and custom still applied in the Colony.<sup>10</sup> It supplied information on inheritance of land and other properties. In addition, use has been made of a number of miscellaneous government reports and scholarly papers produced in the Colony, and a number of works on Chinese in the homeland were consulted.

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6 This is still true of the urban area. See the Introduction to *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition* (Editor's note in original publication).

7 Awaiting publication. It covered most of the regular housing of the urban area occupied by 1,265,000 persons in 267,000 households.

8 *Report on the Hong Kong University and the Hong Kong Council of Social Services Resettlement Estates Survey, June–September 1957* (unpublished).

9 Edward Szczepanik, *The Economic Growth of Hong Kong*. London, 1958.

10 *Chinese Law and Custom in Hong Kong*, Report of a Committee appointed by the Governor in October 1948. Hong Kong, 1953.

A particularly valuable source on attitudes and values in regard to economic life have been the local Chinese and English-language newspapers and other periodicals, and the journals of various Chinese associations have given interesting details indicating the role of wealth in status determination.

## **2. The Hong Kong Economy**

Hong Kong is in the middle of an industrial revolution. Before the war its economy was based on *entrepôt* trade. As this dwindled after the Japanese occupation more and more people turned to industry and in only fifteen years the Colony has passed through the initial stages of industrialization with which many Asian countries are still struggling and is approaching the status of a mature economy. Hong Kong industry employs one-third of the labour force and some 50 per cent of its people are directly or indirectly dependent on it for their livelihood. A significant proportion of the labour absorbed by new industry is refugee labour coming to the Colony in recent years.

The entrepreneurial *élite* includes an increasing number of Westerners and "local" Chinese previously devoting themselves to trade. Others were engaged in industry in pre-war years. The more important older industries include rattan ware, ginger preserving and flashlight production. Much capital and entrepreneurial skill, however, has come from China in recent years and Hong Kong has obtained some of the best of the mainland's industrial brains, particularly in textiles which is now the leading industry in Hong Kong. It is largely to new refugee entrepreneurs, particularly from the Shanghai region which was not traditionally a centre for emigration, that we owe leadership in the Colony's industrial development. This in spite of the fact that this group forms such an insignificant proportion of the population numerically. Newcomer entrepreneurs, particularly, are ready to assume new risks, explore new markets and experiment with new products and by their example they encourage others to do the same. Not all of Hong Kong's new entrepreneurs had been industrialists in the homeland. Some have made drastic changes in their mode of livelihood and in coming to Hong Kong, using their savings as capital and applying their skill and imagination to new ventures.

The speed with which the industrial economy has grown up suggests that significant modifications in the traditional outlook to economic pursuits have taken place. Some of the difficulties which industrialization appears to have encountered in pre-Communist China and which have

been ascribed to social factors<sup>11</sup> appear to be absent, or of far less importance in Hong Kong.

Many people coming to Hong Kong and who were acquainted with Chinese society in the homeland have remarked on the “materialist” outlook of the Chinese in the Colony. Although it must be remembered that there are numbers whose extreme poverty makes it necessary for them to devote much time to thinking of ways and means of improving their material lot and meeting their various commitments, the desire for increased wealth is manifest in the behaviour and conversation of people of all economic levels.

Some people, both Western and Chinese, try to explain this phenomena in terms of the southern origins of the majority of the people. The main protagonists of this line of thought are those who have lived in the north of China. One often hears people say: “In the north, Chinese are more modest and less self-seeking. They are more cultivated.” I have met northerners who still express the traditional point of view that southerners are “barbarian”: not “real” Chinese. It is amusing to see how Westerners who are learning *kuo-yu* and mixing socially with northern people pick up this line of ethnocentrism.

Observers, however, are often guilty of contrasting experience of gentry patterns in China with their experience of contacts with people of more humble origin in Hong Kong. In China it was more likely that a foreigner would mix with members of the gentry classes whereas in the Colony the majority of Chinese are of lower-class origins. The position is not made easier by the writings of various Chinese authors who undertake to explain their people to the West and again tend to represent gentry patterns as those of “typical” Chinese people.

### 3. Chinese Society and Values Relating to Gain

In looking now at social life in China we must see how far the different Chinese values regarding wealth had meaning in the peasant way of life. The situation most important for us to consider is that obtaining in the “traditional” countryside. The effects of “modernization” on Chinese organization and values were greater in the towns than in the countryside and it is in rural regions that most Hong Kong people have their origins. Since so many of Hong Kong’s industrial leaders come from Shanghai,

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11 See, for example, Marion J. Levy, Jr., *The Family Revolution in Modern China*. Cambridge, Mass.: 1949, especially Chapter 10.

however, we should also see how the development of this area by Westerners may have affected attitudes towards the role of wealth.

I do not think we need to include discussion of the effects of Communist ideology on values in the homeland. People arriving since the Communist era left China mainly because they had either directly rejected the ideology or the way of life which Communist parties had created. There are of course Communists in Hong Kong, but I think it is true to say that their influence on economic attitudes is very limited.

If a major characteristic of Western society is the diffusion of economic values through non-economic areas of society as has been suggested,<sup>12</sup> it would seem when we look at China that the reverse process has been at work. Values connected with the family system, class system, the State and closely related education system, and to some extent also religious institutions, have made their influence felt in the economic sector.

The anthropologist Francis Hsu puts great importance on the primary group for an understanding of Chinese economic attitudes and behaviour. In a paper concerned with cultural factors and economic development,<sup>13</sup> he describes the Chinese culture pattern as having a basic motif of "mutual dependence among men" with the relationship between father and sons in the family group at the centre. He then tries to demonstrate how this motif tends to direct the individual away from activities aiming to maximize gain, interpreting sometimes at the cultural, and sometimes the psychological level. Mostly he leans towards psychological explanation. Central to his argument is the assertion that mutual dependence makes for greater personal security than does a system of relationships where this motif is absent. This greater security mitigates the need of individuals to seek security in material possessions. In contrast, the chief motif of Western culture is described as individualism. Because the Westerner's "anchorage among men" is weak, men seek their security in things and try to "conquer the universe".

Although mutual dependence as a cultural motif may make for greater personal security as a whole than individualism, Hsu's attempts to demonstrate a direct relationship between general psychological states and general types of economic behaviour do not appear to me to be very satisfactory. They are based purely on cultural observation. The

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12 See Bert F. Hoselitz and Richard D. Lambert, "Western Societies", in *The Role of Savings and Wealth in Southern Asia and the West*, ed. by Lambert and Hoselitz, pp. 9–43, on p. 11. UNESCO, 1963.

13 Francis L. K. Hsu, "Cultural Factors", in *Economic Development: Principles and Patterns*, ed. by Harold F. Williamson and John A. Buttrick, pp. 318–64. New York, 1954.

explanations he attempts at this level are sometimes inclined to be far-fetched and fail to explain the particular quality of different types of behaviour.

When Hsu interprets at the level of cultural institutions he appears on firmer ground. Here we can see how the central motif is spun out in a number of institutionalized relationships with mutual dependence among kinsmen as the organizing principle and how they lead to various checks on activity aiming at economic gain.

Even here, however, the explanations are often incomplete. Hsu tries to make his primary group do too much for him and ignores the effects of other institutional arrangements of society which are not directly related to the mutual dependence motif — for example, those of the class structure.

It is the overall cultural arrangements of society that we must examine if we wish to see, for example, how individuals behave when the institutions of the primary group break down. Unfortunately Hsu not only ignores the possibility that not all Chinese were psychologically “secure”, but also the possibility that a weakening in primary group solidarity could be brought about by poverty and other causes, forcing the individual to make his own decisions about his future: that the individual could be put in a position of “individualism by default” as one sociologist puts it.<sup>14</sup> When describing the organization of family institutions and the personal security which they provide, Hsu very largely gives us the gentry patterns as before.

Now, overseas Chinese family organization is often unstable and the interest in gain of overseas Chinese is considerable. Their “insecurity” may indeed contribute to this interest but it by no means provides the total answer. The Singapore Malays have unstable marriages but are not economically aggressive. An important factor permitting such interests on the part of the overseas Chinese is the absence of checks not only from the institutions of the family which are weaker in the Colony, but also from various other institutions which as we shall see are either totally absent or very much modified.

We shall see also that there were circumstances in China in which individuals (including the psychologically secure) could be more interested in gain and more likely to be motivated by gain in their social relationships than was ideally approved. We shall examine these circumstances later. Hsu cites the Chinese maxim: “Wealth is treasure for the nation. Every family can keep it for only a period of time. It must be kept circulating.” He does so apparently to illustrate the Chinese lack of acquisitiveness. However, it also indicates the possibilities of obtaining a

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14 Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

greater share of wealth for one's own family, which in turn could enable socially approved ambitions to be realized. It was for this reason, as we shall see, that the disadvantages of professions carrying low social status were often outweighed by the advantages they offered for quick economic return.

Let us now consider some of the main economic effects of Chinese social institutions.

### **(a) The family**

The Chinese family was a multi-purpose organization possessing a high degree of political independence. It was under the control of a family head, usually the father, and it was his responsibility to see that the male members of the family should stay together at least while he was alive. China's economy was basically agricultural and this enabled a high degree of economic self-sufficiency of family units, which helped to reinforce family solidarity in other spheres. Self-sufficiency was an ideal and goal of the very poor. The peasants who constituted over 80 per cent of the population carried economic self-sufficiency to a high degree.

The ideal that the family should achieve maximum solidarity and recognition that economic self-sufficiency was important to the achieving of this ideal were partly responsible for the desire of peasant families for land. Only with land could they act as a unit. Other reasons for this desire for land will be discussed later.

Since methods of acquiring wealth that were likely to take the individual outside the sphere of family control could disrupt family solidarity or conflict with its system of authority, there was a tendency for work outside or work in which sons could "better" their elders to be discouraged. Bad communications, relative lack of economic opportunities elsewhere and government policies discouraging migration inside and outside the country tended to preserve the *status quo*.

The gentry families were not economically self-sufficient. Ideals associated with gentry status worked against such self-sufficiency and their consumption and production patterns brought individuals more in contact with the outside world. Even though members of gentry families often had independent sources of wealth they did not usually seek economic independence. The power they exercised in local village and lineage affairs tended to keep them from going far from their homes except in the course of official duties.

The very poor could not always achieve self-sufficiency. In their case members of the family might be forced away in search of work and to

take up new occupations. In Kwangtung, one-third of peasant families had less than 5 *mow* of land, nearly half were landless, and nearly 60 per cent of all land cultivated was rented.<sup>15</sup> Exploitation of tenants by landlords and usurers drove people annually from the area. For those with little land, moreover, the Chinese system of equal inheritance among male heirs could lead to fragmentation into uneconomic units, and could drive younger sons away in search of work elsewhere. The maxim “wealth does not cross three generations” recognizes the effects of this system against wealth accumulation.

In the south, families were often concentrated in villages consisting of a single lineage. This type of organization had certain advantages for individuals forced to leave their homes in search of work. It provided a wide range of kinsmen from whom help could be obtained for the family in their absence, and wealth accruing from property owned communally by the lineage could help finance their journeys to places where economic prospects seemed brighter.

Within the family various tasks were allocated on the basis of age, generation and sex under the general supervision of the family head who also had considerable control over the income and expenditure of members. When the family was economically self-sufficient, productive tasks were distributed according to the above principles. Males were dominant in productive work, women engaged primarily in domestic tasks and when they did work outside, for example, at harvest time, their tasks were clearly defined.

A peculiarity of Kwangtung economic organization was the role of women in productive roles. Cantonese women worked in agricultural pursuits sometimes taking over their tasks from the men-folk who had emigrated. They also worked in silk mills when the silk industry began to develop on a modern basis in the province. These factors help to explain the attitude towards female production roles in Hong Kong. Again, in the New Territories there are numbers of villages from which male emigration to other countries has taken place. There, women have now almost entirely superseded men in agriculture. Even men who do not emigrate look for work outside the agricultural field. While women stay in the villages, the men go to country towns and urban Hong Kong to earn their living. In the urban areas also, there has been little social disapproval of women working and considerable numbers of them are found in industry. In Singapore incidentally, more Cantonese females are found in productive occupations outside their own homes than are females from other dialect groups.

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15 Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

We saw that the Chinese system of inheritance could adversely affect the accumulation of wealth. Another factor working against accumulation and tending to canalize wealth into non-productive uses was the need to spend considerable sums on family commitments, particularly birthdays, weddings and funerals. Hsu cites J. L. Buck as showing that many farmers went into debt to meet the cost of such occasions, the average cost of a wedding being about four months' income and of a customary funeral about three months' net family income.<sup>16</sup> The mutual dependence motif is also expressed in a strong obligation to help neighbours and friends as well as kinsmen.

Financial needs arising out of these kinds of commitments led, however, to a lively credit system. While for large sums of money Chinese tended to go to the landlord, pawnbroker and trader, for smaller sums they frequently borrowed and lent among themselves. Chinese were sometimes capable of high objectivity in their credit relations and of charging large rates of interest. High interest might be paid by neighbours and even kinsmen.<sup>17</sup> Arguments about money between kinsmen were also not unknown. Arthur Smith, writing in the late nineteenth century, says that interest rates ranged from 24 to 48 per cent per annum.<sup>18</sup> Such high rates were not approved of by the government and in K'ang-hsi's Sacred Edict people are exhorted to be more lenient in their credit relations.<sup>19</sup> Although this impersonal aspect of credit relations appears to conflict with ideals of mutual dependence it finds social approval in the Cantonese maxim: "friendly feelings have their place but let us be clear in reckoning accounts."

One result of a constant need for cash was the development of loan associations particularly among the poor. To avoid risks of swindle such associations were usually formed among people with some prior knowledge of each other. Their workings were complex and varied slightly in different areas.<sup>20</sup> The kinds that were popular in Kwangtung have been transplanted to Hong Kong. They are also found in Singapore among various dialect groups. Again, to avoid swindle, they usually recruit among those whom the organizer is most inclined to trust: this means, in the overseas urban context, clansmen — people of the same surname, friends, and those of similar homeland origins.

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16 J. L. Buck, *Land Utilization in China*, pp. 466 and 468. Chicago, 1937.

17 See Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*, p. 18. London, 1958.

18 Arthur Smith, *Village Life in China; A Study in Sociology*, p. 210. New York, 1899.

19 See Freedman, *op. cit.*

20 Various observers have described their organization. See, for example, Arthur Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–60.

In a note on economic sophistication among overseas Chinese, Dr. Freedman draws attention to the importance of the entrepreneurial, managerial and financial skills which such associations taught and their contribution to economic success in Singapore.<sup>21</sup> He points out that success is not due to business training in China because the commercial class played an insignificant role in emigration. Although in Hong Kong a larger proportion of immigrants may be drawn from this class such associations may well perform a similar function for those of peasant background.<sup>22</sup>

Saving for old age undoubtedly played a minor role in China because of the institutionalization of filial piety. However, it could be important in towns among individuals separated from their families. In some areas religious organizations provided old-age homes which accepted contributions from would-be entrants while they were still young and working.

The importance of the family in China to economic activity can be seen in the application of whole families to the running of economic enterprises in the towns as well as in the countryside; again it can be seen in the extension of the kinship principle to the organization of certain non-family enterprises, particularly those connected with manual crafts. The father-son relationship was often a model for relationship between employer and employee, and master and apprentice. The system of mutual obligations among kinsmen, friends and neighbours gave rise to a system of economic recruitment in which personal considerations were of considerable importance, and this system was carried into modern industrial organization as it developed. Levy, writing about industrialization in China, discusses the harmful effects of such particularism to economic progress at some length.<sup>23</sup>

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21 Maurice Freedman, "The Handling of Money: A Note on the Background to the Economic Sophistication of Overseas Chinese", *Shorter Notes* 89. *Man*, LIX(April 1959): 64–65.

22 According to information from a Jesuit Father active in setting up Credit Unions on a Western model in Hong Kong, traditional type loan associations do not work well in the urban area. Members often do not know each other well and frequent cases of fraud are reported with the head of an association making off with the joint savings of members. Since 1963, 13 Credit Unions have been established using various bases for association from residential and parish boundaries to place of work. Total savings since establishment have been HK \$90,000 and they have loaned out HK \$132,000. The Government is in the process of drafting a Credit Union Ordinance at present which will legalize them [*sic*].

23 Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

**(b) Class and education**

The characteristics of the gentry who formed the highest social class have been summed up as “owning land but not themselves working it; pursuing a gentlemanly way of life, of which classical scholarship was an important ingredient; forming a ‘natural’ category of leaders in any community in which they lived....” The gentry was not only closely identified with scholarship but its members also largely monopolized entrance to the State examinations.

To become one of the gentry class or approximate as closely as possible to gentry ways was the ambition of many Chinese. No alternative way of life was held in such high esteem. A role of the gentleman was to be a leader in his society and teach its social values. His qualifications for this role were mainly knowledge of the classics which formed the “charter” for many institutions and virtuous qualities which knowledge of the classics was believed to develop.

The role of the gentry in society makes their attitudes towards the worthwhileness of the various forms of economic behaviour important. The emphasis in education on development of personal qualities rather than expertise tended to lead many scholars to disdain technical ability and interest in practical affairs. Smith, writing on village life, describes the unworldliness of village scholars.<sup>24</sup> This in turn tended to inhibit development of the kind of skills necessary for entrepreneurship: those most qualified by intellectual training, wealth and leisure to develop such skills were those who most despised them. Merchants had low status in Chinese society, being reckoned below peasants in the class hierarchy.

On the importance of wealth in the life of the individual, scholars maintained two somewhat conflicting attitudes. On the one hand acquisitiveness was seen as harmful. It affected personal harmony and therefore intellectual efficiency and social poise. Confucius emphasizes that “A virtuous man makes his principles his worry, not money.” Another proverb points out “When wealth is unjustly offered to the virtuous man he does not accept; when poverty is unjustly thrust upon him he does not refuse.” Yet another: “When a basket of rice is offered without ceremony you refuse; when ten thousand bushels are offered in the same way why should you accept?” Although too great a concern with gain was discouraged, it was recognized that without a material competence it was difficult to achieve the personal harmony necessary for the development of qualities of mind. Mencius reasons that without a permanent income the educated man can be of constant mind only with

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24 Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–97.

difficulty; the people not at all.<sup>25</sup> The relation of material security to social conduct also is emphasized by Kwan Tzu [Guanzi] of the Law and Economy School who points out: "When the granaries are full you can teach the people manners and restraints; when food and clothing are not wanting you can teach the people notions of honour and disgrace." In both these sayings recognition is given to the fact that the poor must be expected to have greater concern with matters of material welfare. While both rich and poor were exhorted to be frugal, greater acquisitiveness was more likely to be tolerated from those at the margin of subsistence than it was from individuals who had ample for their daily needs.

The ordinary people fully recognized the economic basis of gentry status. We have this illustrated in one of the rather terse folk-adages in which Cantonese seem to specialize: "Have money have status; have status have money." In other words wealth is necessary to achieve high status and once achieved, the economic possessions which are enjoyed bring in still greater wealth.

Trade and commerce provided one of the quickest roads to wealth accumulation even though they carried with them low social status. To check the entry of tradesmen into the gentry class they and their sons were often barred from the public examinations. However, this ban does not appear to have worked efficiently. "Money reaches the gods" as one proverb has it, and merchants certainly appear to have been able to use their financial position to persuade the authorities to accept their sons for examinations in spite of the exclusion laws.

Trade was seen then as a means to more socially approved ends. Levy discusses the bias of wealthy merchants in China against the training of their sons to take over their commercial functions.<sup>26</sup> Their ambition on retirement was usually to buy land, a symbol of gentry status, and live in the socially approved manner. Thus there was a constant drain away of individuals from commercial pursuits once success was achieved. Chen Ta discussing the return of emigrants from Fukien and Kwangtung provinces in the thirties—that is, men who had made their money from commercial pursuits abroad—says that they often made desirable husbands. The gentry were not above forming liaisons with such people by marrying their daughters to them when there was a shortage of prospective sons-in-law of good family in the district.<sup>27</sup>

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25 See Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, trans. and ed. by Hans H. Gerth, p. 160. Glencoe, IL, 1951.

26 Levy, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–97.

27 Chen Ta, *Emigrant Communities in South China: A Study of Overseas Migration and its Influence on Standards of Living and Social Change*, p. 134. London and New York, 1939.

A further attraction of wealth accumulation and the investment of wealth in land holdings in the south particularly was its role in the improvement of family position in the lineage organization. It allowed a family to exercise greater power in lineage affairs, or to endow its own separate ancestor cult and set up as a semi-independent segment. The question of wealth in its relation to both lineage leadership and the segmentary system is fully discussed in a recent work on lineage organization.<sup>28</sup> The power which rich lineages could exercise over neighbouring communities was considerable. Before the arrival of the British in the New Territories the area was dominated by a wealthy group which appears to have had more power over neighbouring communities than did the government in Canton. The basis of its power is said to have been certain economic privileges which it obtained during the Sung Dynasty.

### (c) The religious system

Chinese religion expresses a number of attitudes towards wealth. Let us first consider those of religious organizations possessing well-formulated ideologies. Buddhism, Taoism, and various syncretic systems owing much to the former two in their religious ideas, express two major attitudes towards the importance of wealth. They are related to the two methods open to individuals for achieving spiritual progress: personal cultivation and mutual help.

A concern with personal cultivation is found to a greater or lesser degree in all three kinds of religious system enumerated above. The term which such religions use for personal cultivation is *hsiu-hsing* [*xiuxing*]. It is the same term as that used by the Confucianists who were concerned with developing certain personal qualities. Although the concern of the former is with spiritual ends and the latter with social ends, both recognized the danger of acquisitiveness to the achieving of desired goals. The seeker after spiritual powers and high spiritual status in the next world is urged to rid himself first of the desire for material possessions. Only then is he free to devote himself to the task in hand.

For those unable to follow this path to spiritual achievement, salvationist religions offer an alternative method. This is to build up "merit" by performance of virtuous acts. Such merit is then seen as "available" for transfer to all sentient beings and can thus be used for the spiritual progress of all. Whereas the personal cultivation method of progress achieved its greatest popularity perhaps among more intellectual

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28 Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*, p. 18. London, 1958.

members of society, the mutual-help method was that adopted by the devout of all classes, particularly lay members of the religions. The individual should perform those virtuous acts for which he was most suited by ability and station in life. The rich man was induced to give generously to charity. In this century, as laymen have become more prominent in the Buddhist religion, and with the emphasis in secular life on the value of social welfare activities, charitable works have become a prominent feature of Buddhist activities. A number of religious associations have been formed in China and in overseas communities for the purpose of handling charitable donations. A number of secular Chinese associations are also devoted to this task. The duty of the rich to give to charity was also emphasized by more secular philosophies and was considered a function of the gentleman.

Salvationist religion, then, viewed wealth from two angles. While wealth might prove disadvantageous to those seeking spiritual progress by individual methods, it was an advantage to those seeking such progress by the method of mutual help. The importance of the latter thus mitigated the disapproval which this type of religion might otherwise have expressed for rich members of society.

The need of the poor to devote much of their attention to the material conditions of life is reflected clearly in folk-religion. Its gods specialize in the problems of material welfare and many of its cults are devoted to the achievement of economic success. Even here, however, there is the underlying attitude that concern with economic advancement should be restricted to the achievement of basic material needs.

Religion affected the use of wealth by developing a number of ceremonies for which it was necessary to pay practitioners. They not only included rituals connected with the religion itself and of which the member might avail himself, but also a number of alternative ways of performing rituals required by other institutions of society. Many people would invite Buddhist priests to perform ceremonies as part of the funeral rites of individuals who were not necessarily devout Buddhists during their lives. Taoist priests might also be invited to perform their own type of rituals for the occasion. The more "orthodox" Buddhist funeral rites are generally more austere and less costly than the type of rituals performed by Taoists. It is interesting to note that in Singapore, where wealth is most important to social success, the more costly type of Taoist ritual is often preferred by Cantonese to the simpler Buddhist ceremonies. The wealth of the individual is indicated by the employment of great numbers of practitioners and the use of elaborate paraphernalia. Thus both mourner and deceased gain status, the former is also satisfied that he has performed his duty to the deceased, and the latter is more assured of a comfortable time in the other world.

One belief affecting economic values in China is in *feng-shui* (geomancy). Land and constructions of various kinds are believed to be governed by good and evil influences because of their relationship to certain features of the surrounding terrain. These influences in turn can affect people owning or using these resources. They are not constant, however. The pulling down of a tree or building of a house in the neighbourhood of a particular building or piece of land can be enough to turn a former good influence into an evil one and result in the resource being abandoned.

#### (d) The State

The relation of the State to economic activity can of course affect the attitude of people towards the worthwhileness of various economic pursuits. Writers on the State in nineteenth-century China have observed that it was not always conducive to economic development. Weber says the rational and calculable administration and law enforcement necessary for industrial development did not exist; that because capital investment in industry is sensitive to “irrational” rule and dependent on the possibility of calculating steady and rational operation of the State machinery it failed to emerge under the Chinese type administration.<sup>29</sup> Levy describes how the system of decentralization left the local resident at the mercy of robbers, warlords and corrupt officials.<sup>30</sup> Vulnerability to unauthorized force placed limits on investment in physical goods and plant and supported the attitude that land was the best form of investment. It is difficult to destroy land.

The relatively greater public security and emphasis on economic development in the early colonies of Singapore and Hong Kong were factors encouraging labour and capital to the area. One of the reasons for the development of Shanghai was that extra-territoriality increased the security of investments. Moreover, Western banks afforded a secure form of local investment as an alternative to land.

Shanghai has fostered the rise of several important industrial families. Sons in such families remained in industry rather than turning to land-owning and the traditional gentry way of life which their wealth made possible. It is the sons and even sometimes grandsons of the founders of such industrial families who have come down to swell Hong Kong's industrial *elite*.

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29 Weber, *op. cit.*, pp. 100 and 103.

30 Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

We would need to know more of the social organization of Shanghai and the surrounding area to fully appreciate the speed with which modern economic development was achieved — Shanghai was thrown open in 1843 and developed from a small unimportant town to an important industrial centre with extraordinary rapidity. The Shanghainese attitude towards the worthwhileness of industrial pursuits must also have been affected to some extent by contact with Westerners and Western economic attitudes. Another important factor must have been the separation of Shanghai from the Chinese bureaucratic and closely allied gentry structure. Something of the same kinds of modifications must have taken place in Chinese social institutions and values in the city as a result of migration there and of the impact of Western institutions, as have taken place in Hong Kong. Before we discuss the effects of migration to Hong Kong, however, let us summarize the main points discussed in this section.

In the homeland certain institutional arrangements and values worked together to discourage a number of activities aimed at maximizing gain. The family system put checks on the means of acquiring greater wealth. It discouraged movement into occupations bringing greater income but placing the individual outside family control. The system of inheritance led to continual division of family fortunes. The idea of mutual dependence was institutionalized in a way which tended to inhibit economic efficiency because it continually introduced personal considerations into economic relationships. The class system allotted a low social status to the tradesman and tended to discourage individuals from entering commerce on a permanent basis. External factors such as poor communications, lack of opportunities elsewhere and sometimes absence of law and order again tended to inhibit emigration into more productive forms of employment.

Acquisitiveness was discouraged by Confucianism and the religious system although it was recognized that at the margin of subsistence a greater interest in material advancement was to be expected. Extremes of poverty could lead to a disruption of family unity and force individuals to act more in accordance with their best economic interests. Folk-religion reflects the greater interest of the peasant in material gain as do also a number of folk-adages. Since the peasant was often denied opportunities for education his knowledge of values contained in the classics was obtained largely by indirect means, through the example of the gentry.

Saving was greatly approved but there was a tendency to disapprove of the use of wealth for mainly productive purposes. More approved uses were directed to fulfilment of social obligations and charitable purposes. Land was an approved form of wealth because it enabled the family to increase its solidarity. External factors also inhibited investment in commodities other than land. Since law and order were often lacking land

was attractive because it was relatively indestructible. Large land holdings were associated with the gentry whose status was admired.

Among the factors favouring interest in gain on the other hand was the constant need for cash and goods for fulfilment of social obligations. This encouraged a lively credit system in which the idea of social co-operation was often outweighed by that of maximum gain. Methods for manipulating credit also taught various economic skills.

It was recognized that the poor needed to have greater interest in gain than was the ideal. Rich people were not despised if they used their wealth in approved fashion, for example, scholarship and a gentry way of life, and charitable activities. Although trade was despised it was often taken up as a quick route to riches.

#### **4. Society and Values Relating to Gain in Hong Kong**

We have already indicated that wealth and maximization of gain are of more importance among Chinese in Hong Kong than in the homeland. Of major importance in determining attitudes to wealth have been the class composition of immigrant society, changes in Hong Kong in Chinese institutions, and replacement of some by those of Western character. Contacts with other Western institutions and ideas, and with Westerners themselves have also played a part.

The majority of Hong Kong's immigrants came to the Colony to improve themselves economically. Most of them, particularly the Cantonese, had been peasants, small traders or artisans in the homeland. The gentry played a negligible role in migration. In recent years numbers of educated individuals have been coming to Hong Kong. However, they came from an industrial society in which principles of gain played an important part in the ordering of economic relations. The Communist difficulties with the "capitalist" attitudes of Shanghai are well known. Resistance to Communist ideology appears to have been considerable in the former settlement. People in Hong Kong frequently remark on the apparent absence of effects of Communist doctrines on recent newcomers from the area and the ease with which they fit themselves again into a capitalist type economy.

Chinese homeland society was also predominately peasant and working class. However, in Hong Kong many of the Chinese institutional arrangements for checking motives of gain are absent. Not only were few members of the gentry class among the immigrants but within the Colony such a class has failed to develop. There has been, then, an absence of the kind of leader found in traditional society whose function it was to teach

the approved anti-materialist values of society. The main reasons why a traditional type gentry class failed to emerge are probably: first, the commercial atmosphere — Hong Kong was created for mainly economic reasons — and the urban residential conditions do not encourage gentry patterns of living; and second, political leadership in the Colony no longer rests on classical education. The importance of traditional qualifications for leadership has also declined in the homeland during this century. Recruitment to the administrative ranks of the Hong Kong Colonial Government is based on Western educational qualifications. Hong Kong government is run almost entirely by a civil service and most of the administrative posts in this service are filled by those of expatriate status.

Classical education has declined in importance with the absence of a group to continue its traditions. There has been an increasing desire moreover for the type of education which equips individuals for urban living and occupations and this in effect means either a Western or modern Chinese type education. This is not to say that classical values have no place in Chinese life. Western-type education is regarded as important because it can earn a greater income for the individual. Few are concerned with the moral or intellectual qualities which it might help to develop. The classics are still largely regarded as the main source of virtue. Serious study of classical works, however, has become mostly a hobby for the rich with time on their hands. For the majority the proverb is probably the main source of classical knowledge and its position is to some extent challenged by that of the popular folk-adage which places emphasis on material advancement.

The above factors combine to create a situation in which economic gain is regarded as a major social end. As Chinese themselves sometimes cynically remark: “Most things are decided in Hong Kong on the basis of whether or not the abacus<sup>31</sup> makes a satisfying click.”

In the absence of traditional methods for acquiring status and leadership they have come to rest largely on wealth and the ability to command wealth. Other qualities of leadership may be important, but without wealth it is difficult to attract the public eye. Government provides for a number of non-salaried positions to which Chinese can aspire and which carry with them considerable power and prestige. At first sight they might appear to compete with position through wealth. In fact, however, they tend to set the final seal of approval on wealth as a means to power. Many individuals singled out for such honours are those enjoying in Chinese organizations positions of leadership which they gained through their command over wealth. At the higher levels of leadership the relationship between wealth and status is more complex,

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31 A beaded frame for making numerical calculations.

however. The form of wealth can be important and there has until recently been a tendency first, for older wealth to count for more than new — partly because it carries more guarantee of permanency, and second, for those in traditional Hong Kong economic pursuits to get most of the honours. However, the value to the economy of the new industrialists is increasingly recognized today. This is beginning to be reflected in leadership of Chinese organizations and in the system of government non-salaried appointments. The position is somewhat complicated, however, by the fact that more important Chinese associations have recruited mainly from the Cantonese, whereas many of the new industrialists are of other dialect groups. The question of how the wealthy obtain public recognition will be taken up in more detail in a later section.

In China, the terms *kao-chi* [*gaoji*] and *hsia-chi* [*xiaji*] (upper and lower levels) were used to refer to class groupings. In Hong Kong they are more often than not used to distinguish rich and poor. The rich do not form a self-conscious class group. Since opportunities for making and losing money in speculative activities are considerable, the ranks of the rich can change. There is one group, however, who exhibit some degree of class consciousness and are partially defined in terms of wealth. This is the group of “Hong Kong families”. Their wealth is “old”, being made by their forebears. Their residence in Hong Kong is well established. Family connections by marriage and relationship to founding members is of some importance to this group, although the importance of wealth to their status in the eyes of the community can be seen in the fact that they tend to lose their position of prestige if their wealth does decline. In the past, governmental honours went largely to this group and in fact it would probably be true to say that their “class consciousness” is largely fostered by the British community in Hong Kong. An important factor in the development of these families was of course the decision made by their forebears to settle permanently in Hong Kong. This was usually a conscious decision and not merely a force of circumstance. The decision to settle might in some cases be connected with the fact that the founders of some of these families were of mixed Chinese and European blood. The family organization they built up, however, was essentially modelled on the Chinese pattern. It is in such families that we see some attempt to build up corporate group organization, to practice ancestor worship in special places reserved for the purpose and to conform with gentry patterns of behaviour as far as urban structure permits. Female descendants and their offspring, however, are often included in group activities, and the soul-tablets of unmarried females are found in their halls. Since such groups have transferred their main allegiances to the Colony, they tend to ignore questions of family origins and status in China and often do not know their village of origin. Family importance

dates from immigration and their groupings exist independently of the homeland.

Those Chinese who did not intend to settle had no incentive to build up in Hong Kong a new segment of their lineage of origin or to gather together the representatives of their home lineage into a residential community. The shortage of land to provide a basis for extended settlement, and the lack of means to purchase such land acted as further deterrents. In the New Territories, in contrast, I know of at least one rump lineage of recent immigrant foundation. There the availability of land and the arable basis of society are more conducive to development of this type of organization. The importance of a decision to settle *vis-a-vis* lineage development can again be illustrated from a group in the New Territories. The development of this group stems from the action of an individual who decided to retire in the district of Kam T'in of the New Territories. He brought down his ancestors' bones for reburial there. Although his sons did not stay permanently in the area, certain property rights in Kam T'in appear to have accrued to the family because of the presence of the ancestral graves. A later descendant succeeding to this property moved in and built up a permanent settlement.<sup>32</sup>

For the greater part of the community genealogical background in China or within Hong Kong is of little importance in the determination of status or class. While some positions have in the past tended to be reserved for members of "Hong Kong families" it is possible for individuals to obtain considerable status on the basis of their own ability to amass wealth. Since it is also recognized that wealth can pass quickly from one group to another, the humble background of a rich second-generation Hong Kong Chinese is not likely to stand in his way to social success. Opportunities for the accumulation of wealth are further enhanced by government measures: taxation is low, public security is good and there are few legal restrictions to impede the development of business and industry. There are certain difficulties in obtaining capital, however, which will be considered later.

Housing and the structure of occupations have put considerable strain on family organization and helped to weaken some of the restraints on economic activity which were set up by traditional family organization in China. Many households do not include all members of an elementary family. Children who work may live away from home. Fathers often positively encourage their sons to take up new occupations if they can bring in greater income, although the situation may be different when the family owns its own business.

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32 See S. F. Balfour, "Hong Kong before the British". *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, XI(5)(April-May 1941): 440-64, especially 445-49.

While the economic interests of individuals still come into conflict with obligations towards kinsmen, friends, and, in Hong Kong, people of the same territorial origins, urban conditions provide for a number of situations in which Chinese are dealing with strangers. In dealings with such people Chinese feel free to put their own interest first and usually do so with alacrity. Many Chinese have told me that they “do not like to make friends”. By this they usually mean that they do not want to have their own interests and those of their family thwarted by the economic obligations which such friendships still imply.

Ethics governing impersonal relationships in China were largely the province of religion. While religion had a certain amount of influence on acquisitiveness it is doubtful whether religious ideas in this respect have much influence on the conduct of impersonal business relationships in Hong Kong. In contrast to Singapore, and for reasons we cannot discuss here, Chinese religious organization has not flourished in the Colony and the importance of spending for ritual purposes is not very considerable. One Buddhist attitude which is still of significance, however, is that relating to the importance of charity. There are several devout Buddhist laymen in the business community who give generously to charitable projects. There are non-Buddhists who give equally generously, however. It is not always easy to assess the motive of those who donate to worthy causes. However, we shall see later that there is a tendency for people to give to those organizations which have worked out ways of rewarding their benefactors in terms of prestige.

Chinese contact with Christianity has increased in recent years. As the ban on missionary activities in China has become more stringent, many missionary organizations have settled in the Colony, and there are a bewildering number of sects. The main contact is probably with Christian organized welfare projects. The number of converts is also increasing but I have heard Christian leaders bewail the fact that there is little attempt by Chinese Christians to conduct their business lives in accordance with principles they learn in church. It is pointed out, however, that Christians from the West do not always set a good example of Christian standards of conduct in their commercial relations.

## **5. Contact with Westerners**

The main economic consequence of Western contact is probably that it opens up a new range of goods for potential demand and possibilities of a higher standard of living. It may also lead to a greater familiarity and desire to use Western-type economic institutions such as banks and the stock exchange. Many Chinese have no direct contacts with Westerners,

but some of the same results might be obtained through personal observation, particularly of rich Europeans with high status in the community, and through contact with the radio and cinema. Western cultural institutions also try to improve standards of economic efficiency by offering courses to the public on Western business techniques.

Although the demand schedule of Chinese may be enriched by Western contact, it is not of the same pattern as that of Westerners at different levels of income and wealth. Chinese orders of preference are determined by a number of social factors including the role of certain commodities in conferring prestige and helping to make public the wealth of the individual. For this reason, goods made in countries enjoying a high level of prosperity may be preferred to those of others even if they are not of the highest quality available on the market. The demand for different standards of housing is an example of difference between Western and Chinese outlook. It would be wrong to assume, as some people do in Hong Kong, that Chinese live in crowded circumstances entirely because they like to. However, there is certainly less demand for space and also privacy than there is generally among Westerners. Moderately well-off Chinese often express surprise at the amount of space Westerners appear to need and ask why they do not let out part of their accommodation. Chinese often imagine that the Westerner with an expensive home must already have the other items of wealth which they themselves would put first on their demand schedule, and are therefore richer than they might be in fact. Although Westerners as a group are richer than the Chinese, a comparison of housing standards is by no means a certain indication of differences in overall wealth.

There is one type of individual, however, who is recognized by Chinese as following more closely the Western patterns of demand. He is referred to somewhat disrespectfully as the *wong-min kwai-lo*<sup>33</sup> (*wong-min* means “yellow faced”, that is, “Chinese”; *kwai-lo* means devil, that is “Westerner”). Such individuals usually have many social contacts with Westerners and have often lived abroad where they have obtained their differences in demand pattern. They are sometimes despised by other Chinese because it is believed that like Westerners they put their own comfort before social obligations. In fact this may not be so — of either group — and the desire to conform with social requirements and satisfy their new level of preference can put a severe strain on such individuals.

Social contact with Westerners is broadly speaking on two levels. In Hong Kong, unlike in some British colonies and ex-colonies, two social classes of Westerners are recognized. Chinese divide Westerners into the *taai-paan* (bosses) and *pong-paan* (help-manage). The latter category

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33 Cantonese romanization.

includes most people who are in uniformed supervisory jobs. The former term has been romanized by Westerners in Hong Kong as “Taipan” and is used commonly in conversation and in the English press to refer to wealthy Westerners. The Western *pong-paan* is often born in Hong Kong and married to a Chinese wife. He frequently speaks good colloquial Chinese. A number of Portuguese are also of *pong-paan* status. Taipans do not usually speak Chinese; in fact, Westerners who speak Chinese will usually be addressed as *pong-paan* when their status is unknown. The Taipan’s social contact with Chinese is usually confined to those who speak English — this is not so of many government officials who learn Chinese as part of their job — and are wealthy. Generally speaking, friendships between Taipans and Chinese are likely to be carried on in a Western context and open up opportunities for learning Western habits of behaviour; those between *pong-paan* and Chinese, on the contrary, are likely to be carried on in a Chinese context and it is probably the *pong-paan* who benefits most from the cultural contact.

## 6. Concepts of Wealth

### (a) Major forms of wealth

Most people keep part of their wealth in a non-productive form. Some follow the traditional practice of keeping some wealth in a form storable in the home. Cash may be kept at home, although today the value of bank deposit accounts which provide both an income and greater security is increasingly recognized. Gold bars are still demanded although there is a growing tendency to convert wealth into this form only during emergencies. The demand for gold bars increased, for example, during the Formosa [Taiwan] Straits bombardment.

Wealth is put into a number of kinds of durable consumer goods. The object of choice will be determined by such considerations as: (a) the prestige they confer; (b) their convertibility into cash and ability to retain their original value; (c) their use and the pleasure they afford. Some goods combine all these characteristics. In buying expensive goods there is a tendency to regard purely pleasurable goods as an extravagance. There is a reluctance to spend more than is absolutely necessary on goods which are only for use. In seeking goods for prestige, the types of goods desired are generally those giving status in the eyes of the Chinese community. They do not necessarily give such status in the eyes of the Western community. Even when this fact is recognized, it is usually not regarded as important. Prestige goods are, in a sense, a form of investment because by adding to status and conveying the idea of wealth they inspire

confidence in others. They can thus enhance business opportunities. Prestige goods might be purchased when business is bad for as a Chinese saying emphasizes: "When business is bad, paint the counter."

Gold jewellery is prized because it combines all three of the above characteristics. The quality of workmanship may be of minor consideration in purchase, however, because its price is usually lost in resale. Most Chinese, particularly Chinese women, are very familiar with changes in the price of gold and bargaining is confined to the price of workmanship alone. Many women, particularly those of the lower income groups, confine their purchase of gold ornaments to the plainest of items. Heavy gold chains which can be worn round the waist next to the skin are frequently purchased by unattached female servants and are regarded almost entirely as a form of investment. Chinese gold which has a high gold content is preferred because of its value, but its softness makes it impracticable for many forms of jewellery. Chinese always demand a written guarantee from jewellery shops which states the gold content of the item purchased. This will be preserved and brought out in evidence by the owner of the gold if it is offered for resale.

It is not usual for Chinese in either urban or rural areas to keep wealth in the form of food stocks although rice, like gold bars, will be accumulated by certain people during the initial stages of a crisis for personal consumption or possibly for speculative purposes.

We saw that Western education is demanded for its income-earning qualities. For this reason parents often regard the education of their children as a form of investment. I have come across many poor Chinese who have denied themselves necessities in order to send their children to school. The investment, however, is for their own future as well as that of their children. A Chinese whose parents have struggled to send him to school is likely to feel strongly his economic obligations towards them. This tends to cause Chinese to use their educational qualifications in the most financially productive way possible. The economic value of daughters is increasing as the demand for female labour, particularly between the ages of 18 and 30, grows. Even Chinese of modest income are beginning to invest in the education of daughters.

Among the durable consumption goods which give prestige to Chinese is a large car. This is as true of traditional individuals as it is of the more Westernized. Such cars are frequently decked out with large cushions — seldom in use, antimacassars, dangling dolls and even vases of artificial flowers. We noted that the demand for housing does not usually come as high on the list of preference goods of the Chinese as on that of the Westerner. The Chinese home does not provide the same opportunities for prestige as does that of the Westerner and in Hong Kong this fact can be of importance. Chinese entertainment for guests is usually

in the form of costly and elaborate banquets which need complicated preparation and organization. For this reason, Chinese social life is carried on largely in restaurants. It is not usual for any but the closest friends of Chinese to be invited to the home for entertainment; even when entertaining friends at home the dinner preparations are usually undertaken by caterers. Individuals whom a Chinese wishes to impress with his wealth will therefore rarely see the place in which he lives. Foreigners, who after long acquaintance with Chinese of comfortable income eventually see their homes, are frequently surprised at the poor quality of housing, lack of space and of good quality furniture and fittings. A story told me recently by a friend who was flat-hunting indicates the relative lack of interest in housing *vis-a-vis* other items of wealth. On looking over a new block of flats in which he desired to live, my friend found they were all occupied. The owner himself lived on the top floor. The friend indicated his regret that the owner was unable to accommodate him as he was willing to pay a good rent for a flat in the block. After a moment's consideration, the owner offered his own flat at a rent higher than the others in the block and moved out. He is now living in a wooden shack on the hillside.

As the higher rungs of the economic ladder are reached, Chinese may begin to build themselves expensive homes. Often they will be more elaborate outside than inside, since the outside can be seen by more people. Some Chinese, particularly the more traditional individuals, may begin to accumulate the kind of goods which in China were associated with members of the gentry class — valuable scrolls, antiques and old Chinese books. The desire to appear a gentleman is often the cause of such purchase, although, of course, many Chinese genuinely enjoy such objects. A desire to appear a gentleman, however, can conflict with the desire to obtain further prestige through wealth and the cost of such items is often emphasized when they are displayed to people. More Westernized Chinese, as they advance economically, might order expensive pictures, even statuary, from overseas and have their houses decorated by professional interior decorators. In the early part of the century a very rich Chinese built several houses for himself in Hong Kong which were all designed in Scottish baronial style.

Chinese increasingly use banks for storing valuables, but clearly from the prestige point of view such storage represents a loss. I am told by a member of the banking profession in the Colony, however, that there comes a point in an individual's wealth accumulation at which his desire to show his riches and gain prestige is outweighed by desire that certain people should not know the extent of his fortune. This desire is motivated partly by fear of robbery and kidnapping and partly by the fear of attracting unwelcome attention from the taxation authorities.

Most wealthy Chinese will convert a proportion into producer goods. As in traditional China, land is still a popular form of investment although in the urban area it is not acquired for use in agriculture and seldom for the direct use of a family group. Real-estate, particularly blocks of flats, is a popular form of investment for Chinese of various income levels. Sometimes an attraction of investment in property is that it can be used partly to accommodate relatives towards whom some obligation is felt. They in turn can act as caretakers and help protect the property.

Unattached working women invest in flats and small houses. They rent them out while they are working — this is particularly true of servants in living-in jobs — and live in them in their old age. Many people now save for their old age in Hong Kong. As one Hong Kong psychologist recently observed “...urbanization, industrialization and the increase in social mobility and weakening of the sentiment of filial piety have helped place the aged in a less happy and secure position.”<sup>34</sup> In view of the somewhat uncertain future of Hong Kong — the lease of the New Territories ends in 1997 — the attraction of investment in various forms of construction is enhanced. It is reckoned to be possible, even common, to get capital in this kind of investment back in from three to five years.

Investment in plant and machinery is growing in importance. A large proportion of such investment, however, is probably undertaken by entrepreneurs themselves. A committee which sat recently to determine the need or otherwise of an industrial bank in Hong Kong<sup>35</sup> produced some approximate figures on investment in land, buildings and plant and machinery in their report. It stated, however, that its figures were subject to a fairly wide margin of error (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Investments (in millions of Hong Kong dollars)\***

|                     | 1957      | 1958       | 1959       |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Land                | 5         | 14         | 9          |
| Buildings           | 11        | 29         | 19         |
| Plant and machinery | 70        | 60         | 85         |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>86</b> | <b>103</b> | <b>115</b> |

\*The data include only monetized investments. HK \$6 = US \$1.

34 P. M. Yap, “Ageing and Mental Health in Hong Kong”. Paper for the Seminar for International Research on Psychological and Social Aspects of Mental Health in Relation to Ageing, University of Michigan.

35 Appointed by the Governor in January 1959 (report unpublished).

For sake of comparison, the figure estimated by the government statistician for all private fixed investment (excluding land) in 1958 was given at Hong Kong \$400 million. The boom in 1958 in land is no doubt partly connected with the trade recess during that year which affected industrial expansion. There are no unbroken series of figures available for the period to show increases in the number of industrial undertakings resulting from this investment but during 1959 the number of registered factories increased from 4,906 to 5,023.

One of the biggest drains on capital available for industrial investment is said to be the high price of land. Although the figures given above show the relative importance of plant and machinery as items of wealth over land and buildings, I think it would be wrong to underestimate the desire for the latter among many small investors not directly concerned with industry. The Industrial Bank Committee was of the opinion that a large amount of investment in industry at risk was through investment of profits earned in other enterprises. Initial investment in real estate appears to be a common way of financing an industrial enterprise in Hong Kong. The normal security for loans for industrial investment is a mortgage on land. Money-lenders and even some banks are ready to grant loans with land as a security at the rate of interest fluctuating from 5 to 6 per cent per annum for the latter and 12 to 18 per cent per annum for the former.

There is a tendency for many Chinese of wealth, particularly those of new wealth, to put it into speculative enterprises. This is largely responsible for the high social mobility in the Colony although the Chinese system of inheritance also does not favour capital accumulation. "Hong Kong families" have tended to invest in more stable enterprises on the whole and this is largely the reason for the relative age of their wealth.

### **(b) Wealth and market values**

Most forms of wealth enter into the market and their value is determined largely by market calculations. Other factors may, however, sometimes enter into the determination of price. Although the system of fixed prices is growing in all economic sectors there is still bargaining for a considerable number of consumer goods. Price discrepancies are due in part to imperfect knowledge of the market but also to the lack of impersonality in many Chinese economic relationships. It is commonly said that two price standards exist in Hong Kong: that for foreigners and that for Chinese living in Hong Kong. Some maintain there is a treble standard: for Chinese, "local" Europeans — Portuguese of mixed blood and other Eurasians — and Westerners; or even a quadruple standard with

Americans paying more than English. Such differences are connected with conceptions of the varying levels of wealth among the various groups. Malayan Chinese — distinguished by their Malayanized form of Chinese speech — are believed to be a wealthy group and are charged at the same level as other foreigners in the Colony.

The price of cars on the second-hand market is often influenced by other than market considerations. One type of car fetches a low price because it is believed to resemble a Chinese coffin in shape. European-owned cars fetch more than Chinese-owned because Chinese believe that they are better-cared for, although, in fact, this is not always the case. I am told that proximity to cemeteries can affect the price of land and buildings adversely, although I personally know of no examples in which *feng-shui* considerations have affected market values in the urban area. In the process of Hong Kong's development, hills have been razed and land extended into the sea. This has considerably altered the terrain but does not appear to have called forth any audible protest from the Chinese. In the New Territories *feng-shui* is still important. Buildings are sometimes abandoned for *feng-shui* reasons. One of the reasons for this may be that people do not move around so much as they do in the town. Good *feng-shui* there can be a valuable item of wealth. The government sometimes pays higher compensation to villagers with good *feng-shui* when they are being moved to make way for new development. I came across one case of grave-land being sold by villagers to a group of missionaries. A high price was exacted because it was claimed that many ancestors were buried there. Later there was some suspicion as to whether it was in fact a burial plot, at least for human beings. Some of the bones were found to bear strong resemblance to those of the domestic pig.

I am told that at public auctions of land leases, prices might be forced up by Chinese bidders when it is known that the land offered is desired by a European. The reason is that it is believed that if a Westerner wants it, he has probably gone to the trouble of having it thoroughly surveyed and it must therefore be worth having.

Communally owned lineage ("clan") land does not usually enter into the market in the New Territories and cannot be alienated without the consent of the representatives and elders of the whole group. About one-third of land in the New Territories is held in trust for ancestral worship and is not normally sold.<sup>36</sup> It is not totally inalienable although in practice it would become so if a strict interpretation was given to the term "trust". Sales have been made when in the general interest of beneficiaries though

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36 See *Chinese Law and Custom in Hong Kong*, op. cit., p. 62. But see my paper "Capital, Saving and Credit...", op. cit., pp. 168ff. for further comment. [See Chapter 12 in this book.]

it is doubtful if this is in accordance with strict custom which is supposed to be adhered to in case of such trusts. Certain tools associated with traditional crafts are not normally bought and sold but as in China are passed on from master to apprentice. This system of training is declining in importance in Hong Kong. There are few religious goods that would not be sold if the price offered were sufficiently attractive. I bought a soul-tablet from a public temple and found out afterwards that it had been placed there for worship in perpetuity.

### **(c) Services as a form of wealth**

Most services are evaluated in accordance with market calculations. There are still some, however, which stand outside the operation of the market. They are broadly: (a) Services performed by friends and others to whom Chinese feel social obligations and which may be legitimate or illegitimate. (b) Illegal services performed between individuals with no prior personal knowledge of each other. They may involve a third person who knows both parties and acts as a go-between. Some people make their living as brokers for illegal deals. Payment may even be made, or an individual might try to make payment, for perfectly legitimate services performed by a government official as part of his normal operations of work. This happens sometimes when an individual imagines that he was being given some priority to which he was not legally entitled. Certain occupations are reckoned to be worth much more than their salary because of their potentiality for earning money on the side. (c) Services of a traditional type, for example, those of a doctor practising Chinese medical skills, and those of Chinese religious practitioners.

The first type of service may be paid for by presents other than cash: food, expensive liquor, or even gold ornaments and other valuables according to the importance of the service. Chinese often try to build up an advanced fund of credit by presenting gifts against some future possible need. The time for making such gifts is normally Chinese New Year. It is for this reason that government servants are forbidden to take presents even from Chinese friends or from individuals for whom it appears at the moment that they can render no possible service. The problem of acceptance of gifts is one affecting many Westerners with Chinese friends. The second kind of service is more likely to be paid in cash but the method of payment may be highly involved. It is said that payment for a driving licence obtained illegally is by putting the agreed sum into a cigarette tin which is then passed to the recipient. In such illegal deals the payment may be clearly stated and the more common illegal services may have a fixed price. Payment for the third kind of

service is by “red packet”. The amount to be paid is not — or ideally should not be — fixed and the person rendering the service does not know how much he is getting until he opens the packet. Many traditional practitioners, however, are now pricing their services in accordance with market calculations, although a red packet may still be used to contain the sum agreed upon.

#### **(d) Wealth held by groups**

Various kinds of groups own property. Chinese associations which manage charities own schools, hospitals, clinics and welfare centres. Some are particularist groups recruiting according to principles of surname — all Chinese of the same surname are believed to be descended from the same original ancestor although they may come from different lineage groups and their relationship is not traceable; territorial origins; occupation or a combination of such principles. Others, including most of the important charitable organizations are universalist in principle, although they may in fact tend to recruit only from among Cantonese. The value of their holdings is sometimes considerable. One recently raised a total of more than \$1 million for charitable purposes. The assets of one group amounted to \$1.5 million in 1959 and in the same year it handled income and expenditures totalling \$500,000. Nearly all welfare institutions are privately owned although many belong to missionary groups obtaining their major finances from abroad.

In the Territories, certain associations buy land or landed property and use rents for burial of members and to assist members to emigrate to other countries.<sup>37</sup> The government owns a considerable amount of housing, mainly in the form of flats and cottages in which squatters are settled. By the end of 1959 it had built 103 domestic multi-storey resettlement blocks in nine estates and housed 229,956 individuals. Additional housing for refugees and other squatters is owned by voluntary agencies. The Housing Authority — a non-profit-making enterprise — was set up in 1954 to meet the needs of middle-income earners, and many other domestic premises are owned by investment companies.

Chinese businesses are largely owned by families and other private companies of which the shareholders are recruited according to particularist principles. One Chinese textile concern with a number of subsidiaries has a spinning mill with a paid up capital of \$5 million subscribed by Shanghainese residents; one of its subsidiaries has a paid up capital of \$2 million, another was capitalized at \$1.2 million and yet

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37 See *Chinese Law and Custom in Hong Kong*, op. cit., p.208

another at \$1 million. This latter is one of the few enterprises with a trained managerial staff. Most of the public companies are Western-owned concerns.

## **7. Methods of Acquisition of Wealth**

### **(a) Socially disapproved methods of accumulation**

The individual who devotes a large part of his time to wealth accumulation is not regarded with disapproval, particularly if he is prepared to discharge various social obligations and become a public benefactor. There are, however, occupations in which a concern with gain is not considered the appropriate attitude. Certain business methods are also frowned upon, and a few occupations which bring wealth are positively disapproved at least by certain sections of the community. The overall pattern of disapproval is not always identical to that in the West.

Probably most people regard a sense of vocation as necessary for the educator and member of both Christian and Chinese religious priesthoods. The widespread contempt for Buddhist priests in Hong Kong is associated with the great concern they are said to have with financial reward for their services. The attitude that medicine should be a vocation is not so strong as in the West. Doctors practicing Western medicine are among the richest men in the Colony and many take up medicine for its financial prospects. A number make money out of the dispensing side of their practice and engage in the pharmaceutical business as a side-line. One doctor known as "Injection Lee" (I have given him a fictitious surname) is said to be worth a million dollars and one informant said it was commonly believed that one year his income tax was greater than the taxes paid by a particular bank. It was dryly remarked by another informant, however, that this might be because of the tendency of this bank to evade its taxes. Although abortion is illegal, there does not appear to be widespread disapproval of doctors who engage in this practice. Similarly there is not much disapproval of those who demand this service.

Chinese do not generally disapprove of businessmen who charge different prices to different types of customer but believe it is up to the customer to get the best price he can. There is a growing feeling, however, that price discrimination in regard to Westerners is ruining the tourist industry. I have come across shops that refuse to sell goods to Westerners at the same price as they sell to Chinese even when it has been pointed out that the customer is fully aware of the "Chinese price". It is not uncommon for goods or services supplied in accordance with prior agreement to be found to be of inferior quality on delivery. Sometimes the

salesman was not happy about the agreed price but did not like to pass up business and turn away customers. Many businessmen have a short-range point of view which ultimately can affect their business adversely. One American observer recently remarked that Chinese wish to make \$6 tomorrow for \$5 spent today and will sacrifice future reputation for immediate gain. This problem will be discussed further in a later section.

Many businessmen hate to admit they cannot provide what is demanded. Shopkeepers will rarely admit that they do not sell a certain item, but will say they have "just sold out". They will accept business and then look round for somebody who sells the required item taking a commission for their service as a go-between and helping to raise the price. Inadequate marketing methods are partly to blame for this situation.

The passing off of inferior goods along with products appropriate to the agreed price is widespread in food sales and disapproved of by all customers. Dishonest methods are more likely to be followed when the relationship between customer and salesman is impersonal. It is a not, of course, that all businessmen are dishonest with people they do not know. If this were so, Hong Kong could not have reached its present level of prosperity. The concept of business goodwill, however, is still not widely appreciated in all sectors of the commercial and industrial communities.

Copying of products and trademarks which have an established reputation is sometimes engaged in and does not appear to meet with widespread disapproval. The general attitude of indifference may have some basis in historical China where it was not considered unworthy to copy something which was good or admired. A recent correspondence in the press indicates that some people regard the practice of book pirating as entirely honourable, even if illegal, since it makes books available to poor students and their authors and publishers must already have been well compensated financially if they are regarded as worthy of pirating.

Smuggling and those occupations connected with the manufacture, sale and distribution of narcotics are generally regarded with disapproval. However, the grounds for disapproval of the latter are not always connected with the greater good of society at large. Several working-class Chinese expressed the attitude that people engaging in such activities were bad because they ran the risk of being caught and punished and thus bringing calamity on their families.

It is not easy to assess the extent to which bribery is regarded with disapproval in the Colony. Attitudes towards this practice appear to be somewhat mixed. There is fairly widespread disapproval of those who accept bribes and particularly of those who solicit them, but the role of those offering bribes in helping to perpetuate the system is not fully appreciated and there is a tendency to judge such cases on their merits. There is not much disapproval of those who offer bribes in order to obtain

speedier performance of legitimate services. Indeed, many Chinese have expressed the opinion that it is difficult for the uninfluential to obtain many types of service without bribery. To report an individual requesting a bribe for providing a speedy service is often thought foolhardy. It causes considerable trouble and does not necessarily aid in obtaining the service desired. There is probably more widespread disapproval of those who offer bribes for illegal services or unfair priorities or who act as "brokers" in such deals. Even here, however, the attitude is not clear-cut. An anecdote circulating in Hong Kong's business community recently indicates that the power of those able to command illegitimate services by influence and money may sometimes impress more than disgust. This story, which may or may not be true, concerns an architect who designed a structure which fell down. Rather than losing his reputation or even business, it is said, the event gave him considerable face. It was felt that a person who was able to get away with building such a structure must have influence with the department concerned with building permits in Hong Kong, and was therefore a useful man to know.

Gambling was common in traditional China and did not meet with great disapproval. It is very common in Hong Kong and takes many forms. On the other hand, a recent proposal to introduce football pools into the Colony met with strong opposition from certain prominent citizens, including those who are nominated members of the Legislative Council, and had to be abandoned. Letters to the press indicated that there is a growing feeling among Chinese that gambling is a social evil and that there are already adequate opportunities for this practice without resorting to a new and alien form.

There are a number of secret societies devoted largely to making money from "protection" and promotion of illegitimate forms of business. Although a great many people, particularly among the lower income groups, are forced to join such organizations, the latter are regarded with almost unanimous disapproval.

It is common knowledge in influential circles that certain fortunes have been amassed by methods not entirely "above board". The Chinese "mosquito" press specializing in scandal sometimes puts people in touch with such information. One individual making his money through smuggling is still known as the "smuggling king" although he has now put his fleet of smuggling vessels to legitimate commercial use and is a respected member of the community. Some people made money during the Japanese occupation — trade with Japan was highly disapproved before the war. It is said that public disapproval of such individuals was weakened because the government took no action against them.

Generally speaking rich people who made money by socially disapproved means can gain status and respect if they are accepted by the

influential members of the community. Most people like to associate with the wealthy in Hong Kong and they are likely to be accepted if they later transfer to respectable business and use their money in ways approved by Chinese society. There will usually be people, however, who continue to hold them in contempt behind their backs. Those whose fortunes are based on dubious activities of forebears operating when there was greater legal laxity are not likely to meet with any social disadvantages. I have even heard Chinese boasting about the known or suspected illegal practices of their ancestors.

### **(b) Acquisition of wealth and the customary and official law**

Certain aspects of Chinese law and custom of the Ch'ing Dynasty still apply in the case of Chinese domiciled in Hong Kong. We have already referred to a Committee set up in 1948 to investigate the problem. The main issues with which it was concerned were: the full extent of application of such law and custom; whether it should, with or without modification, be incorporated by Ordinance into the law of the Colony; or whether it should be superseded by the law applicable to persons to whom Chinese law and custom does not apply or by any other law. In carrying out its task, it approached various groups in the community in order to try to ascertain public opinion on the questions in hand.

Of most relevance to this study is the situation regarding inheritance. As in China, all sons and their male descendants of Chinese domiciled in the Colony divide the estate equally between themselves, the elder son getting the personal and household effects of the deceased and therefore a slightly larger share. Daughters and wives are not entitled to any share, although the former, if unmarried, has a sum normally set aside for marriage expenses, and the latter is entitled to support. The widow can also refuse to consent to division of the estate and so get practical control over the inheritance. She can also be custodian of a deceased husband's share in an estate. Only if the male line becomes extinct and no successor has been appointed can daughters inherit.

In strict custom a father could not by deed or will alter the succession, although he could give verbal or written instructions in matters of detail. In Hong Kong, however, the English doctrine of freedom of alienation appears to have been accepted and acted upon in the urban area. Some Chinese now make wills to determine the distribution of their property and include daughters among their successors. So far this applies mainly to the wealthy group who have more at stake. There appears to be a growing desire in the Chinese community, however, to allow daughters to inherit in cases of intestacy.

In the New Territories individuals are not allowed to will land as they see fit. The committee found a growing desire for change in this respect, although there was still a feeling in the rural community that no changes should be made in the system of inheritance in cases of intestacy. This is no doubt connected with the greater importance of land to social organization in the Territories. Since daughters still normally marry out into other villages — the Chinese practise surname exogamy — their inheritance of land could introduce complications regarding management of their estates. In the town, on the contrary, daughters continue to have close relations with parents after marriage and may live in close proximity to them.

The customary division of property in the homeland tended to work against capital accumulation. One of the arguments of Chinese in Hong Kong against the retention of the Ch'ing Dynasty system is that it has already been abandoned in China. The fact that rich people often make wills in Hong Kong might tend to mitigate capital dissipation. The belief that wealth is dissipated in three generations still holds among the wealthy in Hong Kong, but it is interpreted in terms of the attitudes of sons and grandsons towards their inherited wealth. Informants have given examples of rich families which have declined because sons have eaten into their capital in order to live luxuriously, and grandsons "have not even known how to earn their living". On the other hand, I am told that when a man dies intestate leaving a family business there is a tendency for male heirs to attempt to stay together and work the enterprise jointly and that some private companies evolve in this manner.

A popular belief among Cantonese is that wealth passes quickly to this group from the Shanghainese. Although Cantonese will usually concede reluctantly that Shanghainese industrial organization tends to be run more efficiently than that of most other Chinese they insist that in a number of small enterprises, particularly those concerned with eating and other entertainment, Shanghainese spend unwisely on expensive decor and staff and are unable to compete with Cantonese in this respect. Cantonese certainly appear to use their capital more cautiously in this kind of business. They claim that Shanghainese often lose heavily in such ventures and have to sell out to the Cantonese.

### **(c) Credit and borrowing**

Chinese borrow to finance business, for their children's education, to fulfil social and ceremonial obligations and for a number of emergencies. There are, however, a number of associations which cater for funeral expenses and which accept periodic payments from those anticipating such commitments.

For smaller sums of money, loan associations exist which are of the kind referred to in discussion of the China background. In addition, as in China, people borrow from friends and kinsmen, those of the same surname and territorial origins: They also resort to impersonal sources particularly for large sums of money. In the survey of a resettlement estate conducted in 1957, it was found that 22 percent of 445 households sharing their income and expenses were in debt to “relatives“, friends, or members of their “clan“ for sums ranging from less than \$10 to over \$1,000. The largest single group of these debtors (30 percent) had loans of \$201 to \$500. The rate of interest charged on loans varied from 1 per cent to over 30 percent, 16 to 20 per cent being most common. Most loans were for an indefinite period. Forty-two percent of households had a total expenditure exceeding net income, and 37 per cent of these were in debt to friends, relatives or “clan“ members; 12 percent were in debt to money-lenders—some to both—and the rest covered the difference from savings and through requests for gifts.

Gifts are sometimes given by parents to sons starting up in business, and money might pass between families on the occasion of marriage of a son or daughter. As marriages in Hong Kong are becoming increasingly individualized — in China they were arranged and sons brought wives in to the parental household — the significance of bride-price is decreasing. Rich families will often give a daughter a sum of money, investment shares, or even a block of flats when she marries and which remain her own property. Bride-price is still important in the New Territories and among boat-dwelling people. A few years ago a group of boat-dwellers tried to fix bride-price for all members of the group.

It is difficult to obtain information on sources of finance to industry. A significant proportion appears to come from such private sources as personal savings of entrepreneurs, friends and relatives. Expansion of established industry is often effected by ploughing back profits but again no precise information is available. The stock market has played a minor role in financing industry. Foreign capital and overseas Chinese capital has been invested in property although it is again difficult to find out how much capital enters with the direct intention of investment in industry. Foreign long-term credits are increasingly available for the purchase of machinery. Banks normally give short-term commercial loans, but medium and even long-term industrial loans are now being given as the importance and profitableness of industry is increasingly recognized. A substantial proportion of bank loans have been outstanding for five years and some have continued for ten or more years. A new type of bank is developing which is orientated to financing local activities rather than foreign commerce, although the main interest so far has been in real estate.

Funds of banks are available from the expanding deposits. The level and stability of deposits are said to justify longer-termed loans than in the past. Outstanding bank loans identified as being for industrial investment totaled \$170 million. Sixty-two banks out of 83, including all banks of importance, supplied information to the Industrial Bank Committee although they could not always identify the use to which loans were put. Total deposits, loans and advances were approximately as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Deposits, Loans and Advances (in millions of Hong Kong dollars)**

|                               | As at<br>31 December 1957 | As at<br>31 December 1958 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Deposits                      | 1,485                     | 1,680                     |
| Loans and advances            | 940                       | 980                       |
| Industrial loans and advances | 170                       | 205                       |

By December 1959 deposits had increased to \$2,075 and loans and advances to \$1,390. Indications are that significant development in lending policy to industry took place during 1959.<sup>38</sup>

#### **(d) Savings**

Most Chinese try to save some of their earnings, sometimes even at the expense of necessary consumption. Some of their savings will be put to use in providing loans to others. Many comparatively poor Chinese are both borrowers and lenders at the same time and their financial interests can be highly involved. Chinese save for many of the reasons that they borrow. I have heard Cantonese express the opinion that Shanghainese tend to spend more on their food requirements than do members of the former group. I have not been able to check the truth or otherwise of this opinion. We have mentioned that Chinese in Hong Kong may save for their old age.

The resettlement survey noted that although the net income of the 455 households sharing income was generally low, 49 per cent managed to

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38 In 1967 deposits were \$8,405, loans and advances \$5,380 (*Editor of original publication*).

save something each month. Of those, 69 percent saved up to \$50 a month while 32 percent saved over this amount.<sup>39</sup>

Saving is still a strongly approved activity at all income levels. Spending for ceremonials, however, is also still approved. An informant who expressed contempt for an acquaintance with an income of \$300 a month who spent \$50 a month on his own food — excluding rice — also expressed contempt for another who, with an income of over \$1,000, never gave parties to his friends.

### **(e) Wealth and status**

Most forms of wealth are admired, although there is possibly a tendency to admire most those who have wealth in landed property and those who earn large incomes from professional services. The individual who is rich but has no other claim to high social status will, as I have indicated elsewhere, attempt to use his wealth in a way most likely to catch the public eye and secure him a position of importance. A step in this direction which is most commonly taken is to make one or more large donation to charity through associations which give maximum publicity in return. The main charitable concerns of Chinese are organizations which promote various institutions for public benefit. It has been remarked by informants that it is difficult to keep such organizations from putting into bricks and mortar money which should be put into increasing the efficiency of their organization. In return for money donated for building, such organizations guarantee to place the photographs of donors and inscriptions bearing their names and details of the sum donated in a prominent part of the building. A recent method is to imprint photographs on tiles used in building interiors. One association listed their method for rewarding donors in detail. Under a heading “Ways of commemorating donors who helped complete phase I construction of an important building”, an article appeared in their yearly journal indicating the sections of the building in which donors could have their photographs and names, graded them by the size of the donation. In connection with another charitable project in Hong Kong, a donor of \$3,000 was entitled to have a room dedicated to his memory. An architect who had the job of designing a building for charitable purpose described his despair at the number of times alterations had to be made to his plans as the number of individuals desiring a room dedicated to them increased.

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39 The largest single group of households (121) were within the income range of \$101 to \$150 per month. Ninety had less than \$100.

When an individual has received sufficient prominence from his gifts he may be invited to be a member of the staff of honorary officials, although he might have to spend additional time and money persuading the board that he is worthy of such honour. A method for selecting officials alleged to exist in respect of one prominent organization might be mentioned. A common method of organizing friendly entertainment in Hong Kong is by the "birthday" association. It is an informal grouping usually organized spontaneously by individuals fond of wining and dining. For example, one might be formed on the spur of the moment by people who happen to be seated at the same table at a banquet. They will then arrange for a party to be held on the occasion of each member's birthday, the person whose birthday it is abstaining from payment for the occasion. One such association, then, is said to exist among members of a permanent board of directors of a charitable organization in Hong Kong. It is said that it is at their birthday dinners that future appointments to the yearly board of the association in question are made.

Official position will not be taken lightly, for financial obligations do not end at that point. The official will be expected to continue his gifts, to persuade his rich friends to make donations, and when he retires from the board to continue his generosity. As one association has it: "Each succeeding board not only gives of its best in service to the community welfare but also devises ways and means to overcome financial difficulties met in order to provide ... facilities to the public at large." To become an official of one large organization, it is said, requires a readiness to donate at least \$50,000 a year.

Many associations, certainly all the important ones, have two types of boards of officials: those holding office for one year, and those holding office permanently. It is not uncommon for those elected to the yearly board, however, to be re-elected, particularly if their wealth appears to be stable and they have shown their social contacts to be of value to the association. Many will be content to have stood for office once. They continue to get prestige from having held positions of importance in the past. Chinese inscribe on their visiting cards not only the present positions they hold in such organizations but also those of importance held in the past.

The demand for offices and the desire of associations to get as many wealthy people into their circle as possible has led to the development of many large and cumbersome organizations. One territorial group has a president, 3 vice-presidents, 1 managing director, 2 assistant managing directors, 36 honorary directors, 4 legal advisers, 21 honorary advisers, 45 managers of various charitable sections and other miscellaneous officials. This multiplicity of offices can make for inefficiency in administration. It is partly mitigated, however, by employment of salaried staff for routine

work, leaving expansion of finances and decisions regarding their most appropriate use to the honorary officials.

The next step for those seeking further social advancement and power is often to seek membership on a permanent board of directors of a prominent group. Such boards are the policy-forming bodies. Permanent directors because of their length of office ideally should be of unsullied reputation, their wealth should be guaranteed stable, and they should be able to meet with prominent citizens and members of the government in social life with perfect confidence and conduct themselves with refinement. Education and knowledge of the ways of Westerners are important. Members of well-known Hong Kong families have been prominent on such boards. Government honours go largely to this type of director, making attainment of such positions even more desirable. The Executive Council which, together with various government departments, helps the Governor to rule the Colony, consists of 5 *ex-officio* and 7 nominated members. There is one nominated official member. During the period 1946–60, 16 different members of the Hong Kong community were nominated to office for periods of varying length — that is, some were re-appointed several times — and 5 were Chinese. All five are on the permanent board of directors of the most prominent charity organization in Hong Kong. There is a Legislative Council which advises on, and consents to the passing of the Colony's laws. The same 5 *ex-officio* members of the Executive Council serve on this council and in addition there are 4 other official members and 8 unofficial members nominated by the Governor. During the 1946–60 period, out of 21 nominated members holding office, 9 were Chinese. Six of them are again members of this same charitable group's permanent board of directors. The 15 members of this board are all non-official Justices of the Peace. This is a position which is greatly prized by the Chinese community and brings considerable prestige. It is not a position of great power; the main duties are visiting various welfare institutions and commenting on their efficiency. However, Justices of the Peace thereby have considerable contact with important government officials since visits are made in pairs: one official and one non-official J.P. going together. There is also an annual Justices of the Peace dinner at Government House. Examination of the lists of past annual directors of two important associations shows the close relationship between these posts and J.P. appointments. During the 10 periods of office covering the years 1951 to 1960, 7 chairmen of one received badges of honour and 4 were made J.P.s. In the other, 4 obtained badges of honour and 3 were made J.P.s. In the past the majority of directors and chairmen of prominent associations were in occupations associated with the traditional Hong Kong economy: real estate, construction and import and export. Lately, however, they have included

many factory owners and for the first time one important association has included a Shanghainese member. There is now one Shanghainese J.P. in Hong Kong — J.P.s have to be British subjects.

Some individuals are members of the boards of various associations recruiting according to different principles. Further, prestige is obtained by participation in a number of social activities organized by associations throughout the year, particularly those connected with fund-raising campaigns. Prominent members of society and the government are invited to such functions and association reports and journals which are distributed to important members of the public give accounts of these activities and publish photographs of their officials meeting socially prominent citizens and giving speeches. Members who become J.P.s are fêted by their associations at lavish banquets which are again given publicity, and biographical details of officials including a list of their public achievements and contributions to charity, are published in annual journals.

Associations then are a major mechanism for turning wealth into status in Hong Kong. There are other organizations which give status but do not require their officials to be so wealthy: for example, technical and cultural associations, and various New Territory rural committees. Here personal integrity, intelligence and agreeable personality might count for much more than money and in the New Territories, family and lineage connections might be important.

Education confers status but we have seen that it is often synonymous with wealth since it is acquired largely for entrance into the high income occupations. Some educationalists, however, have prestige because of their former official positions in China, and the standing of their families on the mainland may command respect among the more recent immigrants, particularly the intellectual refugees. We have seen that "Hong Kong families" usually enjoy high status, but this is partly connected with the positions they usually hold in various Chinese organizations. Teachers in Chinese colleges and government schools enjoy considerable status, although those in the numerous small private schools enjoy less on the whole, mainly because their educational qualifications are usually more limited and their salaries are considerably lower. Professional men — doctors and architects, for example — in government service do not perhaps enjoy the same status as those in private practice because their command over income is generally lower. However, there are numbers of positions in government service which are prized partly because they are regarded as "iron ships" (secure positions) and partly because members of the bureaucracy enjoy prestige in Hong Kong as they did in China.

It is not easy to estimate the extent of some of the largest fortunes in Hong Kong with any exactness. Taxes paid on wealth are not a sure indication because of the possibility of tax evasion. When trying to estimate the fortune of a deceased wealthy man in Hong Kong recently I received widely differing figures from informants. One Chinese estimated "several tens of millions" while a European businessman was of the opinion that it must be a good deal less than that. He observed, however, that the figure at probate which was in the region of \$800,000 was probably less than the real figure, since some of his wealth was undoubtedly handed over in gifts to kinsmen and others during his lifetime. Chinese are fond of discussing the wealth of the socially prominent and the ways it has been amassed. It is very likely that in the telling of stories about prominent men, the extent of their fortunes often becomes exaggerated.

The responsibilities of the wealthy increase with their riches. Not only does the number of kinsmen and friends who reckon they have a claim to financial help grow in size but the amount of help expected also increases. An association to which a man belongs will expect to be given financial assistance from him if he becomes wealthy.

There is little resentment of wealthy people among the poorer sections of the community unless they fail to use their money in approved ways. Men will resent a rich kinsman who does not help them; rich landlords will be resented if they charge rents considered unreasonably high in view of their fortunes. Members of the public will resent those who do not give to charity. In fact Chinese society has few misers. It also probably has few rich men who give money without any desire for prestige in return. Few give their money anonymously, although there are some important exceptions, of course.

While there is more desire on the part of the majority of people to attain similar wealth and status to the rich than to see them lose their position, there are certain people who disapprove of the financial basis of power in the community. They believe that if greater use were made of election processes, this would help bring forward individuals, whose qualifications for leadership were superior, to help the government in running the Colony. Others argue that in the immigrant society of Hong Kong, which includes numbers of people who do not think of the Colony as their permanent home, it is the wealthy who stand out as having the greatest stake in the community. While maximization of gain continues to be the guide to action of the majority, a poor man in a position of power, it is said, is more likely to be tempted to use such position to improve his fortunes at the expense of the community's interest. We cannot, however, discuss further the validity of such arguments here.

Perhaps if the role of taxation in providing social services was better understood there would be more desire to see the rich pay out more of their income in this form. Most uneducated people do not understand the function of taxation and imagine taxes are used as they were in traditional China — to increase the fortunes of government servants. There is some resentment of the fact, which is regrettably true, that Westerners can usually get certain services with a speed which without bribery is not possible for the majority of Chinese.

## 8. Distribution of Wealth

### (a) Social class

We have seen that status and power rest mainly on wealth from almost any source, and wealth and position can change from generation to generation. Conditions therefore have not been favourable to the emergence of social classes: stable groups consisting of individuals who are marked off from others by a combination of such factors as wealth, occupation, ways of dress, education, speech, antecedents and nature of their possessions. We suggested, however, that a possible minor exception to this rule is found in the existence of the “Hong Kong family” group who define themselves by characteristics in addition to wealth. Besides the importance of ancestry and length of residence to their self-consciousness there is also education. There is a tendency to send sons to British universities. Occupations tend to be in the professions and in traditional pre-war economic pursuits. Due to the overall importance of wealth in the community, however, their position of superiority is by no means unchallengeable. Such families tend to lose position as they lose wealth even though they continue to gain respect from the Western community. The future may see their position of leadership usurped more and more by the industrial *nouveau riche* as the latter obtain more positions in the Chinese associational network.

A general characteristic of the “families” regarding material possession is that they tend to place less emphasis on the importance of conspicuous consumption and prestige goods than do the majority of Chinese. This is no doubt due to their more secure status position. We saw that their money tends to be in more secure forms of investment, whereas the desire of the majority of Chinese for maximum gain tends to lead to a strong attraction for speculative enterprise. The desire for different goods, however, is affected by many factors. There may be a difference between traditional and Westernized individuals and we saw that Chinese term as “yellow-faced devils” those individuals who are closest to Westerners in

their patterns of preference. Differences exist again between individuals in the urban and rural areas.

### **(b) Urban and rural differences**

The bulk of the rich live in the urban areas and rural society offers far less opportunities for amassing wealth than does that of the industrial, urban area. There are rich country-folk who make money out of rents from their land, but many of them live in the town area. The better-off villager is more likely to spend money on a house for his family than is the town-dweller because his residence and position in his family is more secure. Travelling through the New Territories one can see the modern structures of the richer villagers standing up in their reinforced concrete splendour above the level of the traditional one-storey houses of the others. The villager spends more on ceremonial consumption than his opposite number in the town because his stronger and more traditional family organization makes such expenditure more important. When investing in production goods he will turn first to agricultural land for the use of his family as would the rich peasant in traditional China. He might also, however, invest in a shop in the local market town and put a kinsman in charge of business activities.

Country families with members working overseas tend to be richer than their neighbours and much of the money earned by the emigrant will be sent home for use of his family: for housing, education and land purchase.

Due to changes in government, the gentry class has declined in the country as it has in the towns. Some of the traditional prestige symbols found in poor New Territory villages — certain roof designs permitted only to those the emperor wished to honour, and wooden banners listing government honours obtained by ancestors — suggests that such villages once contained members of gentry status. This is borne out by examination of lineage records. Today, even in rural society, wealth may be of considerable importance to status. However, there are indications that the relationship between the two is not as clear-cut as in the urban area. I recently heard of a case in which a father working in England reversed the decision made by a village wife to send their daughter out to work. He argued that “everybody” knew he provided enough for the family’s needs. They would “lose face” because the neighbours would scorn them for putting extra money before the reputation of their daughter. Working in the city would ruin her marriage chances in her home area; the family would no longer be able to vouch for her virginity, but she would also forget the agricultural skills demanded of

wives in village life (particularly in emigrant villages as we saw). In the urban area, neighbourhood opinion may play little role in determining conduct, and those living close by may be completely unknown.

### **(c) Traditional individuals and wealth**

The extent to which a traditional outlook and way of life will affect an individual's economic position will depend on where the traditional emphasis lies. A Chinese may be very traditional in etiquette, dress and other material habits but have a non-traditional attitude towards the importance of gain. He may conduct his business with a degree of impersonality not possible in traditional society. On the other hand a man holding strongly to traditional social values might be less efficient in wealth accumulation. He might, for example, spend more on ceremonial, save in non-productive forms — in jewellery and gold bars — and leave cash idle. He might run his business in accordance with principles not making for maximum profit and invest only with enterprises where he has personal knowledge of the organizers. However, he might also be less inclined to speculative types of investment and therefore run less risk of losing his money in risky projects.

There is no correlation between degree of traditionalism and level of income. Certain occupations tend to attract traditional individuals, for example, those connected with making and selling of gold and jade jewellery, Chinese medical practice, the selling of herbal medicines, and running of tea-houses. Some of these demand, of course, traditional type knowledge and attitudes but can also be highly profitable. Traditional individuals are also found, however, in various kinds of "modern" occupations.

### **(d) The Western community and wealth**

We observed that Westerners as a group are richer than the Chinese although some of the latter are among the richer members of the community of Hong Kong. The level of incomes for Westerners tends to be higher than that of the Chinese and their standard of living is also higher. The levels of income at which Chinese and Westerners consider people to be poor, comfortably off, or rich usually diverge widely even among Chinese and Westerners of the same education and occupation. This difference in attitude is of course linked with differences in opinion as to what constitutes a minimum wage and living standard, and different expectations of what income is possible for people of the same qualifications in the two groups. Generally speaking, a Chinese can command a

lower income for a particular job than can a Westerner. This is particularly noticeable in managerial work. Chinese tend to be reluctant to pay well for managerial staff.

The way in which Westerners hold their wealth is partly conditioned by attitudes towards their length of residence. Few Westerners own their own housing. The majority of Western-run business firms and other enterprises house their expatriate staff free or at a nominal rent. Those who are able to save will usually hold part of their money in their home country and in investments in enterprises abroad. When investing locally they tend to put their money in Western-run public companies. Government servants are forbidden to invest on the local stock exchange.<sup>40</sup> An increasing number of Westerners, however, are coming to Hong Kong to start industries, a big attraction being the cheapness of labour. A shortage of various kinds of industrial labour is beginning to be felt in Hong Kong and competition for workers is starting to force the price up.

## **9. Uses of Wealth and Income**

### **(a) Roles in the family regulating use of wealth**

Decisions regarding allocation of wealth between different uses usually rest with the father. Here his contribution to family income, which is usually the most significant, backs up his traditional position in this respect. Sometimes there is an adult son who is able to command a greater income than his father and who wishes to make his own plans for allocating his income: Such plans can conflict with those of his father, although such conflict is usually resolved in favour of the latter.

A man controlling a family business in which his sons work will have greater control over the use to which income is put. His sons — and daughters — may not receive a regular wage but be given pocket-money which varies in amount with business prosperity. This is most likely when the business is a small shop or restaurant. The influence of family heads over their children's income may be weakened when housing conditions and transport problems force the latter to live and work away from home.

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40 In fact forbidden unless prior permission has been obtained from the Colonial Secretary. The position of government servants and local investment has been taken up in various General Orders. In 1965 more liberal arrangements were made: local investments have to be reported to the Government after they have been made but prior permission is no longer necessary.

However, we saw above an example of an emigrant father continuing to exercise control over the economic decisions for his family. It may be that such control is stronger in the rural areas where there is greater family solidarity.

### **(b) Decisions concerning the use of wealth**

The question of what factors can influence decisions on the use of wealth and income between consumption, saving or investment, has been taken up in various parts of this paper. Factors of importance are immediate and anticipated family needs, the needs of relatives in the homeland, feelings about the future security of Hong Kong, degree of permanency of residence, ambitions for status and power and familiarity and trust in banking institutions and knowledge of the market. Generally speaking townsmen are more adventurous in new types of investment than are rural dwellers. For example, although vegetable production can bring in high profits the village dweller clings to rice production which is something he understands. Most vegetable farmers are immigrants from areas where vegetable production formed a traditional occupation and they are often experts in this field. The greatest experts are reckoned to be immigrants from the district of Kwangtung.<sup>41</sup>

### **(c) Acquisition and use of wealth under industrialization**

There is a tendency for Chinese investors in all fields to look for the maximum gain in the shortest period. A reluctance of certain people, who are not themselves entrepreneurs, to invest in industry is due partly to the fact that profits may be slow in coming. Many Chinese still prefer to invest in non-industrial property and trade because of the relatively quicker return of capital and profits.

When investing in industry, the overwhelming desire of investors is to look for quick profits by whatever means present themselves as attractive in the short run rather than to look for opportunities for starting long-term investment. The financing of industries which offer quick profits may be purely speculative and undertaken by financiers who might otherwise be in the property market and have no real intention of long-term support of the industry. During a boom there may be considerable speculation, although banks tend to discourage this by raising interest rates to those wishing to borrow for such purpose. In the late forties a boom in the film industry led to formation of a number of companies. The

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41 See also "Capital, Saving and Credit...", *op. cit.*, at various pages.

bad quality of films, small investment and hope for quick returns with good profits led most companies to go out of business by 1950. Today only four companies which have their own studios exist, with 30 others using the facilities and even actors of these four.

Entrepreneurs in Hong Kong industry still largely supply their own capital from personal savings and by investment elsewhere. Some supply their own labour, at least in the early days of production. The next step is usually to establish a partnership, and the final step, a private company. Many newly created industrial enterprises are family concerns. The bigger concerns, some owning subsidiary companies, are nearly all Shanghainese, many having brought down their capital and technicians from Shanghai. There are few public industrial companies and little industrial activity on the local stock exchange.

One of the weaknesses of Chinese industry is a common failure to recognize and face the problems of expansion. Most Chinese hate to employ managerial staff — this is true also in farming enterprises run by immigrants in the New Territories — and often the man in charge next to the owner is only a foreman. Many neglect the training of workers. They also fail to make long-term cost calculations and assess the most efficient methods of allocating costs. It is difficult to get information, but it appears that generally speaking Shanghainese industrialists tend to be more advanced in such matters. They make some attempt to train workers within the industry and send technical and managerial staff on courses abroad. One Shanghainese factory spends about \$780,000 yearly on welfare services which include free medical services and tuition in English. It was largely as a result of differences in the running and organization of Shanghainese and Cantonese factories that they were until recently classified separately by the Government Labour Department.

One factor inhibiting industrialists from training workers is fear of competition. The view is that the trained worker, particularly the worker who is taught the various manufacturing processes, will break away and set up a rival concern. One factory brings its technical experts in from abroad for this reason and many employ kinsmen as managers to prevent business secrets leaking out. As in the early days of Western industrialization, the role of more efficient marketing methods and sales promotion techniques in affording an industry advantages over its competitors is not widely recognized in Hong Kong.

Particularism in recruitment is still found in certain enterprises. It is common in the retail trade and in concerns where sub-contractors are involved, for example in the construction industry. One advantageous effect is said to be that it tends to mitigate industrial disputes since a foreman will be held responsible for the good conduct and efficiency of the people he produces. With a growing shortage of industrial labour the

role of particularism in recruitment, however, appears to be diminishing in importance in Hong Kong.

Industrialists, generally, appear to fail to appreciate the gain in efficiency from better working conditions and higher wages, but Shanghainese large-scale concerns do seem to demand greater efficiency from their staff and recognize that to obtain such efficiency might mean a greater financial outlay in wages and machinery. A Shanghainese industrialist interviewed recently by an economic journal in Hong Kong is reported as saying: "Machinery and techniques are never too new, and investment is never too much." He has established a technical department in his factory to increase production and improve quality. Some of the older industries are now suffering from miserliness in wage policy and are losing workers to the new textile concerns. For the past six years a handful of leading manufacturers in the flashlight industry have been trying to persuade their fellow industrialists to form a trade association to introduce consistency, improve production techniques and raise wages, but nothing has been achieved so far.

Industrialists are now protesting that they are short of finance, particularly the smaller concerns. Failure of many entrepreneurs to give sufficient details of their venture, of the people running it, and the market in which they expect to sell products no doubt inhibits many investors. Although banks now play a considerable role in financing industry they are reluctant to finance individuals who have not proved their productive efficiency, managerial skill and knowledge of raw material prices and trends. The commonly known sources of finance to medium and small factories are the Chinese banks and private financiers. Commercial banks supply a limited amount. It seems, however, that many industrialists have to turn to "black-market" sources: "hot" money which moves around in time with economic and political changes in surrounding areas and for which interest rates up to 30 percent a month are charged.<sup>42</sup> It appears, however, that there is beginning to be greater confidence among local financiers in the future of local industry and an increasing interest of American capital in local enterprises.

Many difficulties in the acquisition of wealth for industry then are connected with the deleterious results of a desire for quick and greatest possible profits. The feeling of the Industrial Bank Committee appeared to be that industry does not need a new source of capital in the form of a special bank but it does need to increase its efficiency and think out its organization and intentions carefully with a long-term view in order that more of the available wealth will be canalized in its direction.

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42 Report of the Industrial Bank Committee. It appears that it is these sources which industrialists were unwilling to reveal to the committee

Some of the conditions which fostered Hong Kong's industrial expansion bear strong comparison with those fostering England's industrial revolution. The local entrepreneur accumulated capital from trade and commerce in the pre-war trading years; and industrialization is to a large extent based on trade as it was in England of the eighteenth century. One might even stretch a parallel and say that the labour which helped to build Hong Kong's industry came also as a result of land-reform in the countryside — of mainland China. There are also the same sort of inequalities of income and *laissez-faire* capitalism as fostered British industrialization.

In Hong Kong neither trade unions nor government enforce the socially acceptable minimum of wages. Until recently the influx of people from China has tended to extend the perfectly elastic stretch of the labour supply curve and lower the socially acceptable minimum to the level prevailing on the mainland. Entrepreneurs are primarily interested in profitable export markets with the result that they want to preserve a low level of wages to ensure their competitive position abroad. They tend to neglect the home market and the possibility of higher internal demand following from higher level of wages.<sup>43</sup> Several observers have remarked on the resemblance in social conditions resulting from the two industrial expansions: of England and Hong Kong. We must remember of course that it has taken the West a long time to reach its present attitude towards both the justice and economic value of better working and living conditions. There are signs that at least the second of these values is becoming more widely realized and that some of Hong Kong's community leaders are also beginning to concern themselves with the first. Perhaps as the population becomes more stable and Hong Kong becomes a community in the real sense of the word this former value will become more widely acclaimed.<sup>44</sup>

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43 This problem is discussed by Dr. Szczepanik in a paper entitled "A Rational Wages Policy for Hong Kong", read at the course in Industrial Relations for Top Management, held at the University of Hong Kong, 7–11 March 1960.

44 Since completing the manuscript I have had opportunity to read Robert M. Marsh, *The Mandarins: The Circulation of Elites in China, 1600-1900*. Glencoe, Ill., 1961, and Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Shen Hsuan-Huai (1844-1916) and Mandarin Enterprise*. Cambridge, Mass., 1958. Prior knowledge of the contents of these works might have led me to either amplify or modify certain passages, although it would not have affected my general analysis of the China background.

### Concluding Note (1967)

This analysis was first published in 1963 and it is now 1967. I have not made any radical attempts to bring the text up-to-date although I have appended a few additional notes mainly dealing with revisions of detail.

Very recently, however, and I write in October 1967, a desire has been expressed in Hong Kong by various responsible persons to see the Colony's economic boat rocked about a bit and set on a new course: to subject it to fresh winds and not worry so much as in the past about the delicacy of its structure. This changing attitude can I think be linked with certain events taking place in the last few years and a brief comment on them is in order here.

In April 1966 rioting by young people took place in Kowloon. It was triggered off by a hunger strike conducted by a young man in protest against an extremely small fares increase on a cross harbour ferry (this ferry is used by considerable numbers of workers in getting to and from their place of work each day). The young man was subsequently arrested. The attitude of some of the rioters towards the hunger striker is of some interest. At the Commission of Inquiry into the disturbances witnesses states that they "followed" the youth because they felt he was not out for personal gain — to better his own lot. His motives were unselfish. There seemed, that is, to be some indication that young people today are capable of being inspired by a leader who is not wealthy but expresses community virtues. This hunger striker interestingly enough bridges the gap between East and West in a certain sense. He claimed to be an incarnate messiah (a common claim of traditional reformist leaders in pre-modern China) but he was Western educated and had scholarly interests of a Western kind (one being a desire to translate T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* into Chinese while in prison).

Investigations into the possible causes of the rioting considered the economic conditions prior to the outbreak. It was noted in the *Report of Commission of Inquiry* (Hong Kong, 1967) that earnings from exports and tourism continued to expand and bank deposits in general continued to increase; that the increase in the average cost of living had been approximately 2 per cent per annum over the past eight years which had been "more than compensated" by an average increase of 8 per cent per annum in wage rates in the manufacturing industries where records are kept. No statistics were available to show wage rates or earnings in other jobs, and those relating to manufacturing reflect only approximately 55 per cent of all industries. But, the Commission noted, it appeared many wage earners had been able to improve their position and standard of living (but then uprisings occur as a rule when conditions are improving rather than not).

The Inquiry also considered the possible effects of a bank crisis in 1965 in which there were runs on certain banks. The strength of the banking system was said to be little affected by the runs, and total deposits at the end of February were only 2 per cent below January 1st; but the runs did affect a large number of people, both depositors who incurred direct loss through banks being able to meet only a percentage of their deposits — there were 114,000 accounts in one of the failing banks — and those who queued up outside other banks to withdraw money owing to loss of confidence. An anxiety about certain aspects of the banking system and the publicity given to rumours was demonstrated again in April and November of that year when runs on other banks were only averted by swift government action and strong support from major banks.

The crisis revealed that certain banks had tended to maintain insufficient liquidity — too many of their investments were long-term. Many Hong Kong banks are family concerns and some have grown out of money-changing establishments with perhaps less sophisticated knowledge of banking than others. Many learnt a bitter lesson. Stricter lending practices than before this crisis have resulted, however. This led to a tightening of credit in many spheres.

I think it true to say that the 1966 riots left many people — including some of the social scientists and social workers giving evidence at the Inquiry — feeling that there was some economic and social discontent in the Colony. Also that there seemed to be now a generation of young people emerging who identify themselves more with Hong Kong and its economic and social future than did their parents. This generation is more interested in Hong Kong and more apt to protest at situations which their parents might tacitly accept. The material and other aspirations of this generation have probably been rising with the betterment of conditions but with visible results not keeping pace. Material aspirations themselves may have been affected by the rapid expansion of tourism referred to and increased opportunities for seeing comparatively wealthy people. In 1966 there were 505,733 tourists visiting Hong Kong with 458,238 of these from Europe or the U.S.A. (figures from the Hong Kong Tourist Association).

This year Hong Kong has seen disturbances of a different nature and cause — relating to political events here and on the mainland. I cannot here go into the complex political factors involved although it is clear that the majority of demonstrations were of a different kind than in the 1966 riots. Nevertheless the original dispute triggering the situation was economic — between factory management and workers. The cost of living has also seen a rise as a result of the disturbances generally. Support of the people for the government and police in this new situation

has been remarkable but there is a growing feeling that something must be done to justify this support: in labour reform, local government and better housing to give some examples. A Housing Board was in fact appointed by the Governor in 1965 with the assessing of housing needs for people of different income levels as one of its important tasks. Clearly this is a very complex task and much more quantitative as well as qualitative information is needed. The need in fact for more social surveys and other types of investigations is increasingly realized by Government and other institutions relating to the people of Hong Kong. At present an urban families study is underway; a study of the needs of Hong Kong industry for higher level manpower has just been completed (not yet available for comment); new research units have been formed at the two universities in the Colony, and smaller units exist in individual colleges which might be expected to add to our knowledge of economic and other problems.

In 1966 the economist's view was that there was nothing in the situation which would have led one to expect a riot but the Commission itself felt that worries about the general economic situation and uncertainty as to the future, together with "psychological fears" of inflation arising were a source of public concern and created an atmosphere in which demonstrations could find support. Hong Kong today may well be on the brink of social and economic change. How much change there will be remains to be seen. But many people feel that we will never have quite the same society again.





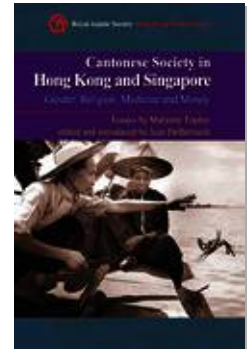
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## *Chapter 12*

# **Capital, Saving and Credit among Indigenous Rice Farmers and Immigrant Vegetable Farmers in Hong Kong's New Territories**

([1964] 2007)\*

## **Introduction**

### **Field of enquiry**

This essay discusses master farmers growing rice or vegetables as principal crops. Specialization in vegetable-growing is largely the concern of immigrants, while indigenous farmers, that is people whose ancestors settled in the area generations (sometimes centuries) ago, still specialize mainly in rice production. Rice was formerly the traditional crop of the New Territories, but has declined in importance in the last decade, giving way to market gardening. Increased vegetable production has been carried out mainly on former paddy land. The encouragement to change in farming patterns has been provided by the growth of the urban areas since the war, and has been almost entirely due to efforts of immigrants from the vegetable-specializing areas of Kwangtung [Guangdong] province. The first large influx of these farmers was about 1937 when the Japanese invaded South China. Since the establishment of the present regime in China, their numbers have increased so considerably that on census day in 1961, indigenous people were in the majority in only one district.

A large proportion of all master farmers in the New Territories are either rice or vegetable specialists, and rear pigs as their main secondary agricultural activity. In 1961 some 24,000 master farmers were working in the area; about 8,000 grew principally rice, and a slightly larger number principally vegetables. Some 1,500 grew rice exclusively and 2,500

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vegetables exclusively (based on [Barnett], *Hong Kong Report on the 1961 Census*, Vol. III, Table 423). Both groups are essentially peasant producers operating on a small scale with simple technology, low level of capital and little hired labour. (There are also farmers principally concerned with other forms of production which are more highly capitalized, notably pigs, poultry and eggs, and fruit. They are relatively small in number, and, unlike rice farmers and most vegetable farmers, were originally city dwellers.)

Most immigrant and indigenous farmers are distinguishable not only by the difference in crop-specialization, but also by differences in certain aspects of social organization, economic opportunity and political status. A comparison of the arrangements and attitudes of the two groups in relation to capital, savings and credit helps point up the relevance of social factors for economic problems. Discussion is confined to the New Territories because it is the main agricultural region of Hong Kong, and it also has certain economic and legal peculiarities.

At present information on either social or economic organization in the area is extremely limited. Few studies have been carried out to date.<sup>1</sup> My observations here are not based on field-work but on seven years' residence in Hong Kong, two spent in the New Territories, together with some data obtained from documents and verbal communications largely from Government sources.<sup>2</sup> My object is largely exploratory: to see what kind of outline of the situation can be built up on the existing information, and the kind of information which might be needed for a more detailed picture to emerge.

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1 A trial survey into the economic conditions of some families in the New Territories was conducted in 1950 by Dr D. Y. Lin. The results are unpublished and available locally only in mimeographed form. A Hakka village was studied during 1957–58 by Miss Jean Pratt, an anthropologist of Cambridge University; a study of the “boat people”, a socially distinct group engaged in fishing, has been carried out by Miss Barbara Ward (Mrs. Stephen Morris), an anthropologist of London University; Mr. Potter, an anthropologist of Berkeley, California, is now making a general study of a Cantonese lineage village community; a geography graduate, Mr. Ronald Ng of Hong Kong University, is conducting a study on Lantau [Lantau] Island in the New Territories, of several village and immigrant groups with a view to discovering ways of improving their economic conditions; and a national income survey of the whole colony is being conducted by an economist, Mr. Roy Chang, of the University of the West Indies. The results of these various investigations are not yet available.

2 I am particularly grateful to a number of past and present District Officers for discussion and opinions on farmers' economic and social problems, and to members of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and members of the Co-operative Development Department for additional opinions and information.

### **Some Facts about the New Territories**

The British Crown Colony of Hong Kong adjoins Kwangtung Province on the south-east coast of China. It consists on the one hand of the principal island giving its name to the Colony, and of Kowloon on the mainland, both of which were obtained by cession from China; and on the other, of the New Territories, an area north of Kowloon, bordering China, together with 200-odd islands. Hong Kong and Kowloon are principally urban areas with populations almost entirely immigrant in origin. The New Territories are held on lease of which there is only another thirty-five years to run. Although principally rural with a population which was mainly indigenous until recent years, the New Territories have several sizable market towns and a planned industrial town built since the last war on a site once occupied by villages.

The area is hilly and in many places transport and communications are poor. Arable land exploited amounts to only 13 per cent of the total area; an additional 82 per cent of the area consists of marginal land of sub-grade character, and the remaining 5 per cent comprises expanding urban areas which tend to encroach on arable rather than marginal land.

When the British took over, the indigenous people were living in village communities. Today there is said to be some thousand villages still occupied mainly by indigenous people, with immigrants living scattered between villages in fertile valley regions. The majority of villages are essentially "private" communities consisting of family dwellings (see below) with no shops or industries. Many villagers from certain areas go abroad to work for periods from about three to twelve years. All persons born in the area are British subjects and can obtain British passports. Immigrants generally have no passports. Many came in illegally and cannot migrate further. Like villagers, however, they can work in the urban areas.

Administration is through districts. Below District Officers are Rural Committees and a Consultative Council. The former consist of Village Representatives, and the latter partly of such Representatives and partly of local people who are well-known New Territories residents, usually wealthy, and Justices of the Peace. Village Representatives are elected or appointed according to what is described in annual reports as "clan custom". Elections are informal affairs and not supervised by the Government. Village Representatives are rarely peasant farmers. They appear to be generally the wealthier members of their village and mainly live only part of the time in villages. This is so even in lineage villages (see below). As in traditional China, village leaders by no means always obtain their position in lineage villages by virtue of generational seniority, which would happen if strict custom was observed (cf. Freedman 1958).

Wealth alone, however, as in traditional China, is probably not enough to qualify a man as leader and Village Representative. He has to be, as in China, a man able to meet Government Officials and discuss village problems clearly and with confidence: that is, he should be an educated individual (although educated according to the modern rather than the traditional system). Again, a knowledge of local custom is likely to be an important qualification, not however in order to organize and lead rituals in which the Representative may take only a minor part, but in order to interpret custom to Government. Chinese custom is still adhered to in a number of local situations, particularly in regard to land, and there are many customary procedures on which Government has little systematic knowledge (see below, pp. 335–36). We need to know much more about the type of individuals who become Village Representatives and the nature of their wealth. Superficial investigation suggests that such men may play an important role in the village economy lending out money, organizing land deals and sometimes managing corporate lineage property (see below). Their economic functions may indeed provide a main sanction in their election, and their election in turn enables them to exercise such functions with more authority. Much reliance is placed on Village Representatives in interpreting custom in cases of disputes. The principal task of both Rural Committees and the Consultative Council is to arbitrate between District Officers and villagers in cases of disputes. Their main concern tends to be with problems affecting villagers — for example, land-ownership and geomancy (*fung-shui* [*fengshui*]) disputes (see below, pp. 345–46) — rather than with problems of immigrants, who are not fully incorporated into the system.

There are a number of additional organizations, both governmental and philanthropic, which are concerned with economic problems of farmers. They tend in the main to be concerned with either indigenous or immigrant farmers respectively, partly because of their economic specialization. Some of the more important are the Agricultural and Forestry Department, the Department of Co-operative Development, including the Vegetable Marketing Organization (VMO), on the Government side; and the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association, the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund, and the Joseph Trust Fund, on the philanthropic side. They have all been established since the last war.

The indigenous population consists of two speech-groups: Cantonese and Hakka. The latter were migrants to the area in historical times and originally lived outside villages like the present-day immigrants. Today the two groups are on peaceable terms and sometimes occupy the same villages. There are also many exclusively Hakka or Cantonese villages. Cantonese generally “own” (see below) the best land and Hakka tend to live in the hilly regions. Generally speaking, Hakka women appear more

prominent in agriculture and other outside pursuits than do Cantonese women, although the situation is complicated by migration of males from some Cantonese villages leading to a greater role of their women-folk in agriculture. Many villages of both speech-groups are occupied by single surname patrilineal kin-groups: collections of families with a common surname and descended in the male line from a founding ancestor (or ancestors). Some large patrilineages cover several villages; other smaller units occupy sections of villages in which several surnames are found. Thus the potential for economic co-operation on a kinship basis at the village level varies. It is also affected by ownership or otherwise of corporate land-holdings by lineage groups and lineage segments.

No comprehensive survey of land tenure has been undertaken to date, and there is little published material on the operation of the system. A brief statement of the situation as it appears to be must be attempted, however, because of its relevance to questions of access to agricultural land and the ability of groups and individuals to accumulate it or vary its uses.

The general position, with a few important exceptions introduced by ordinance, is that Chinese custom and customary right are supposed to be enforced in regard to land matters in the New Territories. Because of this it is held that the Rule Against Perpetuities does not apply as it is held to apply in Hong Kong and Kowloon, and, again, that the English doctrine of Freedom of Alienation by Will does not apply as it does in the latter areas. A number of points relating to custom in regard to land remain obscure, particularly in relation to the constitution of certain traditional groups permitted to alienate land in perpetuity and their customary methods of management. There are even some doubts as to the actual dating of custom which is meant to apply in the area, although it is generally taken as being that of the Ch'ing [Qing] Dynasty which operated when the British took over. Few cases regarding land matters have come before the courts or are referred to in land reports. Most disputes have been settled by private arbitration between District Officers and representatives of the parties concerned (for example Rural Committees). The situation tends to be self-perpetuating: because so little knowledge has been accumulated on the workings of customary law the majority of lawyers prefer not to touch land cases and usually advise clients to settle disputes privately. Much of the data accumulated in the District Offices cannot provide a basis for generalization because custom is said to vary considerably from district to district and even between lineage groups.

A major departure from the traditional situation is that all land in the New Territories became the property of the Crown. Soon after British occupation a land court was set up to hear claims in the area and leases for

agricultural land were granted, largely in accordance with what appeared to be customary rights held by individuals and groups at the time. These leases were for ninety-nine years less three days. Land held on these leases is known as “private land”. Additional Crown land has been leased also since this date, particularly for development purposes.

Several groups were found to own land when the British arrived. The main types were lineages (“clans”) and lineage segments, temple associations, residential religious institutions (“nunneries”), and *ooi* [*hui*] “associations”. Lineages and segments owned land in the name of ancestors, and it was nearly always leased to members who cultivated it sometimes rent-free and sometimes with an annual rent according to their economic circumstances. Members could not sub-let such land. Sometimes lineage land was allocated to segments in rotation. While using such land a segment paid for the expenses of the ancestral rites. Some lineages also claimed rights over additional land which they did not themselves cultivate. Members of other lineages often cultivated such land, paying its so-called “protectors” a “tax” for its use. In return they also received protection from bandits and pirates. Income from lineage land was supposed to be used for the benefit of lineage members, especially the poor. Land was held by temple associations in the name of the deity worshipped, and again appears to have been rented out mainly to members, income being used for the benefits of the group and the upkeep of the temple and its rites. Associations used income for burial of members, for financing overseas migration of members, and for other purposes beneficial to the group.

These kinds of traditional groups were allowed to operate as trusts and continue to alienate land in perpetuity. No limit was placed on the size of membership of such trusts and individuals were permitted to make bequests of land to them. Today several lineages own much of the fertile valley land. Some have additional land, usually poor and hilly, allocated in compensation for “tax” income on land they formerly had protected and which was allocated to the farmers who had cultivated it. A number of associations and temples and nunneries also own land. Membership of some is on an inter-village basis, and some temple associations are based on several adjacent lineage groups. About one-third of the arable land is said to be held by ancestral trusts at present, although the desire to bequeath land in this way is also said to be less strong than formerly. However, departing from custom, no group, traditional or otherwise, which did not own land in 1910 can set up a new land trust if it consists of more than twenty members. If this ruling is strictly followed, it would appear virtually to prevent any lineage group not previously owning land from starting an ancestral trust.

A further departure from custom is that managers of land held by traditional groups, including lineages, may now (at least in theory) dispose of it as if they were sole owners. In fact, objections by members to its sale or conversion to other uses (for example, renting it to vegetable farmers) are heard by the Land Officer and the validity of such objections is supposed to be determined in accordance with "custom". Two further factors which might inhibit more economic use of "private" land by leaseholders, both groups and individuals, are, firstly, that Government may resume land itself for development purposes by paying for it in terms of the agricultural value of the land plus, usually, an inducement fee, and, secondly, that land leased for arable purposes may not be converted by leaseholders themselves without payment of a conversion fee. This fee is worked out in terms of the increased value of the land on conversion, and might be considerable. Conflicts and disputes between rural dwellers — both groups and individuals — and Government on the one hand, and between individuals and managers of group-held land on the other, regarding land, customary right, and rights in terms of agricultural leases, appear to be a growing problem in some areas, particularly those close to urban centres where land-values are rising. Some of the implications of these factors will be examined later in respect to capital accumulation.

In addition to land-owning groups, about 40 per cent of rice farmers work their "own" land, another 12 per cent use ancestral land without rent, and 6 per cent cultivate a combination of own and ancestral land. Others pay rent to landlords according to various kinds of leases (*Census Report*, Vol. II, Table 408). Holdings are generally small, a fairly common size for a family of five being about one acre. This of course has a further effect on a family's ability to convert land to other, non-arable, uses.

Land was traditionally calculated by rice farmers in terms of the measure of grain (*tau*) required to plant (*chung*) a field. The *tau-chung* [*douzhong*] measure is now commonly used in official calculations in the New Territories and is standardized at six *tau-chung* to an acre. Crown rent is collected in money and has progressively declined in value in relation to the value of agricultural land. Other rents were originally paid in grain when rice was the principal crop of the area and because the value of grain was more stable than the value of money. Today rents for vegetable land are still reckoned in paddy, but are convertible into money at the market rate of the best quality rice. (Rice grown in the New Territories is of high quality.) Many rice farmers still pay rent in grain grown on their fields. A common rent for rice land is about one or two piculs of rice per *tau-chung* annually (1 picul = 133 lb.). Fertile, well-irrigated land when rented out to vegetable farmers might cost as much as seven piculs per *tau-chung*, this rent being equal to the yield obtainable if

rice is grown on it. Much rice land yields only about four piculs per *tau-chung*.

The smallness of rice farmers' holdings results partly from the system of land inheritance whereby, following Chinese custom, sons inherit land equally (daughters and wives having no share). Few indigenous farmers have holdings large enough to support their families by growing rice, and most would be able to handle larger holdings with the amount of labour available from household members. This is not because they have large households as a rule but because rice does not need much labour. The size of households returned at the 1961 census does not suggest that the large joint family is a typical form of social organization for indigenous farmers, and this may relate to smallness of land-holdings. The greatest number of households of farmers growing principally rice were of five members, the second greatest was of four, and third was of six members (Census Report, Vol. III, Table 404).

In addition to the land they cultivate, villagers often have prescriptive rights over uncultivated Crown land for grazing cattle, cutting grass and burying their dead. Disputes sometimes arise between them and Government when it is planned to use such land for development purposes, or with immigrants who wish to rent it for vegetable growing. There are certain religious sanctions which villagers additionally apply in such cases (see below, pp. 345–46).

Immigrants rent land from individuals, lineages and other traditional groups occasionally, and from the Crown direct. A few may squat illegally. Absentee landlordism is not a problem: most landlords are villagers who continue to live in the area. Very few immigrants own the land they cultivate. The Census Report (Table 408) shows 66 per cent of vegetable farmers renting land. Of the 22 per cent shown owning land, 5 per cent using ancestral land without rent, and 2 per cent using a combination of their own and ancestral land, the majority are likely to be indigenous farmers now growing vegetables. Settlement of immigrants has generally been on a regional basis: those from a single area of the homeland have tended to settle in a particular district. They generally live on the plot of land they cultivate. Regionalism can sometimes provide a basis for economic co-operation.

Vegetables, unlike rice, can be grown profitably on quite small areas of land. An average size holding for an unattached male is about two *tau-chung*, and for a family of four or five about four *tau-chung*. With two *tau-chung* an unattached man would be fairly fully employed (vegetables need more labour than rice) and could earn enough to support himself. The same applies to a family of four or five with four *tau-chung*. The size of immigrant households tends to be smaller than that of indigenous people. This is probably partly related to difficulties in entering the

Colony. The Census Report (Vol. III, Table 404) shows that the greatest number of households of vegetable farmers were of two members, the second greatest of three, and third greatest of one member only. The optimum size of vegetable farms with present methods of cultivation tends to be determined primarily by the number of persons in a household available to work the land. Little hired agricultural labour is available in the New Territories partly due to competition from town occupations, and partly (in the case of vegetable farming) to a reluctance of workers to handle night-soil — still an important fertilizer — unless they are working for themselves. For reasons of status most farmers prefer to work for themselves even when the income they can gain thereby is lower than that obtainable by hiring out their services, provided the former is sufficient to cover the cost of daily necessities.

## **Capital, Saving and Credit**

### **Capital: Rice farmers**

The main equipment of the rice farmer is land, a few tools, a plough, and preferably a buffalo for ploughing. Poor farmers may own only their tools, renting land and hiring a plough which they work by hand. In many areas a bicycle is also an important piece of equipment. Fields often lie quite a distance from villages and bicycles are used to reach the area of cultivation and to carry equipment. Probably most farmers who need a bicycle own one. Many villagers have access to the ancestral hall of their kin-group for storing grain, and share with the rest of the village in the use of a communal winnowing machine, threshing floor, a water well, and a night-soil well. Many rice farmers rear a few pigs for both breeding and sale for meat. Pig rearing is more highly capitalized than rice production. Sties are usually owned by individual households, and some of the feed is obtained from the husk of their own rice crops. Most indigenous farmers also own their own houses.

Much of the indigenous farmer's equipment, including land, is inherited patrilineally, brothers taking equal shares. Sometimes lots are drawn to decide which items and which parcels of land each will take. Sometimes quarrels arise over division of property. I was told of a case where some family land has been left idle for five years because a group of brothers could not agree among themselves on its allocation. In view of the general shortage of arable land, however, such cases are probably rare.

Equipment is often purchased on credit or partially on credit. However, purchase of additional land is often difficult. The Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association provides certain capital equipment free to

both individuals and to villages jointly, if they can make out a deserving case. It has supplied such items as buffaloes to poorer farmers, buffaloes, pigs, pig sties and poultry to widows (who are one of its special concerns); also village paths, irrigation canals, and improved wells, sometimes using village labour. Much more information is needed on capital needs and preferences of indigenous farmers in both rice farming and secondary occupations. A few of the capital aid schemes to date appear to have been less successful than was hoped: some widows, for example, sold their pigs and cows shortly after receiving them. More and more villagers are joining pig-raising co-operatives which are supervised by the Co-operative Development Department. They join partly because of the functions of these societies as bulk purchasers of pig-feed, and also because they act as vehicles for loans from outside impersonal sources (see below, p. 356). They are not producers' co-operatives. Out of forty-five societies operating at present, thirty-two appear to be based on villages. The New Territories Administration also has a local public works self-help scheme whereby it supplies materials to enable villages to undertake minor construction works with their own labour or labour paid for by themselves.

Specialist advice is provided by the Agricultural and Forestry Department on improved techniques in farming, welfare and breeding of animals, and control of crop and animal diseases. The operation and care of buffalo in Hakka society are specifically women's work, and a woman's eligibility for marriage is said to depend partly on her skill in these tasks, and may affect the bride-price offered. Conversely, a man's chance of acquiring a wife might be affected by whether he owns a buffalo, which in turn may be connected with the level of his income, and in some cases with a change in emphasis to other occupations, where buffaloes are less important. There is little conscious budgeting for replacement of durable assets, and few farmers keep systematic accounts of income and expenditure. The Agricultural and Forestry Department is planning a campaign to teach farmers simple methods of accounting. (Some co-operatives at present use adolescent schoolboys as their accountants because of the general scarcity of persons in the rural area who know how to keep accounts). It has also been considering the possibility of encouraging a system of outside contracts whereby farmers can hire from private firms certain capital equipment such as ploughs or insecticide sprayers, together with labour to work them, for periods when they are most needed.

For the landless farmer rent occupies a high proportion of gross product — as much as 50 percent in some areas. Most farmers for this reason alone wish to acquire their own land. They could in fact in some areas increase their income by growing vegetables; rent would be a lower

proportion of costs, and less land is needed to grow them profitably. Some of the reasons why they do not generally change to vegetable specialization will be taken up presently. Labour does not usually present a problem in the expansion of rice production. One man can look after as much as ten *tau-chung*. Extra labour used at harvest and planting-out time is usually supplied either free, with villagers helping each other in turn, or in return for food or for favours rendered by the farmer during the year. The main problems are having the means to purchase land, and of land being available for purchase.

Traditionally, individuals wishing to sell land were supposed to offer it first to members of their lineage. Deeds of transfer were traditionally worded as if they were mortgages and no period for redemption was fixed. The transferor or his descendants had a chance to redeem the property at the original price even after several generations. This kind of transference is no longer permitted, but in the more remote parts of the New Territories there is still a marked reluctance to make outright sales of land to strangers. I have seen no indication in any area that farmers are selling land because of the uncertain political future of Hong Kong in view of the short period left on the lease of the Territories. In remoter areas farmers may be compelled to sell land if their incomes fall below the margin of subsistence (most farmers operate within very narrow margins), or in some places to finance a male kinsman's trip abroad in search of work. Many men go to England from areas with poor land and small holdings (especially from Hakka villages) to work in Chinese restaurants and remit money back to their households. It is probably more usual, however, to mortgage a portion of the land or obtain a loan to finance the trip than to sell land outright for the purpose. In many areas Crown land not already under cultivation is of poor quality and there may be little incentive to purchase it. It might also be used by the village as a whole for grazing cattle and grass-cutting. The kinship nature of Chinese villages might also make it difficult or less attractive for a farmer to move to a district where more land might be available for sale or low rent. By moving he would lose advantages in the use of labour and credit facilities which kinship offers.

A man with large holdings and farming rice exclusively probably enjoys most prestige in the remoter rural areas such as the islands. He can provide work on the land for a large joint family of several married sons with their wives and children. He does not need his sons to go away to seek cash income and his control over them and their income is therefore greater (see below, p. 350). The highest status in the New Territories generally is probably enjoyed by the farmer who becomes a landlord and does not work further for his living. In areas with land suitable for vegetable growing many farmers rent their land and appear to try to live

on income from rent, perhaps supplementing this income with the cash earnings of a son in the town. Tea-houses in one market town near a vegetable area can be seen crowded with such small landlords sitting about chatting for hours of the day (a favourite occupation of landlords in traditional China). The value of landlord status thus sometimes acts as a disincentive to further capital accumulation.

In areas where land values have risen because of the suitability of the land for vegetable production a rice farmer would find it difficult to acquire additional land by purchase or rent. Rent from such land might be equivalent to the whole gross product obtained by growing rice. Disputes sometimes occur between managers and members of lineages with joint property over the renting of land to vegetable-farming immigrants. Although the benefit to the whole lineage from such rents might be greater than if the land were used by lineage members themselves in rice growing, it appears that members usually see only the immediate effect which the alternative use of the land would have on them: less would be available for their personal use in rice growing. This attitude is also found when managers desire to convert lineage land to other uses when the land lies near an urban area. Moreover, it is sometimes felt that the managers would be able more easily to swindle members out of their share of benefits from the land if it were used mainly or entirely to obtain income from outsiders. In some areas there is a tendency for the usually illiterate members to distrust managers, who are usually educated men with business experience. Sometimes there appears to be cause for such distrust.

In areas with rising land values due to development and the spread of the urban sector farmers are often aware of the benefits of converting their land to other uses if they are able to do so. Attitudes towards traditional uses of land are changing under the influence of urban ways of life. In one district near a market town some small-holders belonging to the same kin-group have formed syndicates, pooling their land for conversion and paying the conversion fee jointly. In other areas where co-operation among kinsmen is not so strong and where few members of the group have modern business experience, particularly in those areas with small-holdings of a size not suitable for conversion, some farmers have sold their land to speculators. This is sometimes left idle by the speculators, who wait for a good price for further sale for development. They are usually townsmen with no intimate connections with the farmers of the area, and their practice of leaving land idle is often bitterly resented by the local inhabitants. In areas planned by Government for development farmers may be further inhibited from converting the land themselves by the fact that in addition to the payment of a conversion fee they also have to relinquish three-fifths of their land for use by Government in road

construction and so on. They might therefore prefer to sell their land to others. Managers of joint-owned land may be prevented from converting the land to urban uses because such conversion may be regarded by the authorities as inconsistent with the terms of the trust on which they hold it. A recent case in point concerned a temple association. Its temple had burned down and the managers wished to erect on the site a block of tenement flats rather than another temple (an indication of changes in attitudes). Such a conversion was thought by the authorities to be against the whole purpose of the trust: without the temple it had no *raison d'être*. (A committee to investigate Chinese law and custom in Hong Kong — see Bibliography — recommended in 1948 that in order to facilitate alienation of land dedicated to ancestor worship which might be required for development the Land Officer should be given express power to sanction any transaction which he considered in the interest of beneficiaries as a whole even though such transaction might not be justified by customary law. So far this recommendation has not been acted upon.)

Near to the urban areas, particularly near to the industrial town in the New Territories, farmers are becoming increasingly eager to sell their land because of the considerable rise in land values in the past few years. Disputes sometimes arise between fathers and sons over land sale. Traditionally a man only held family land on trust for his descendants and was not supposed to dispose of it without the consent of his sons.

A system of brokerage has arisen whereby an outsider wishing to acquire land for industrial and commercial purposes (these developers are often recent immigrants from Shanghai) gets in touch with somebody known to and respected by farmers who own a group of small-holdings, who then negotiates its sale to the developer, usually taking a commission from the farmers. The majority of such brokers are lineage elders and members of Rural Committees. Such sales do not always turn out to be in the farmers' interest; often the proceeds of the sale are dissipated rather than reinvested (see below, p. 349).

Little appears to be known of investment by farmers generally, although my impression is that landed property such as flats and shops is usually preferred, with the investor perhaps placing his money in the enterprise jointly with other kinsmen. Hong Kong has few public companies and the Chinese generally in Hong Kong prefer to invest in private companies or small enterprises run by individuals known to them personally. In one case coming to my notice a wealthy village elder started a factory near his village, recruiting labour almost exclusively from among village women.

Many farmers invest in their children's education, including that of daughters. Girls were traditionally reckoned and referred to as "goods on which one loses one's investment" because they moved away on marriage.

But many families in emigrant areas give girls some education and the age of marriage appears to be rising there. Such girls handle remittances from male members of the household abroad and read letters concerning the use to which money is to be put. Farming families with members abroad do not like outsiders to know their income from this source and prefer not to let even outside kinsmen handle their papers. To do so might increase the risk of theft and pressure for financial assistance.

Money is also put into pig-breeding; also some spare cash will usually be put into jewellery, particularly gold items which are easily sold when money is needed unexpectedly. Gold jewellery is always sold with a paper guaranteeing the gold content, and stating the price of the workmanship separately. This is produced on resale. It is usual to buy jewellery with the minimum amount of workmanship. Farmers usually spend little on other durable consumption goods. Cars and refrigerators, which are signs of wealth for urban dwellers, are useless in villages far from the main roads and electricity supply, and are not — as in some societies — acquired for prestige alone when they cannot be used. Most villagers own transistor radios which are important not only for the amusement they provide but also for obtaining weather forecasts. Returned emigrants will often construct a new house in their village. Most farmers probably prefer to put money into goods which either help to keep the family together (a house, more land and farming equipment) or which are easily realizable if disaster strikes and cash is needed quickly.

The farmer with extra cash has a number of calls on it alternative to capital accumulation. He may prefer or have pressure put on him to loan it out or make gifts to relatives and friends. In return however he can usually call on them for similar services or for use of labour in busy seasons. Gambling during the slack season by farmers, and more continuously by landlords, probably leads to considerable circulation of small amounts of spare cash. However, in some cases money used in gambling appears to concentrate in the hands of gambling-house proprietors, who may have leadership positions in the village, and who take it out of the area for investment in towns. Gambling is an important social activity and associated with all festivals. A farmer who never gambled would probably not gain much approval in his community. Weddings and funerals require considerable cash outlay. It does not appear usual for farmers to budget for these occasions and to do so may be regarded as inauspicious; but many farmers join traditional associations, paying in monthly to receive a lump sum when such events occur (see below, p. 352).

In some areas indigenous farmers could increase their income by switching to vegetable growing. There are several reasons why few do so at present. One is that rice needs less labour, and they are in a better position than immigrants to send sons to work abroad where greater

income can be earned than in Hong Kong's urban areas by unskilled workers. Emigration is largely confined to particular areas, however, and depends largely on contacts established over the years with jobs overseas. Again, many rice farmers feel they lack the skill of the immigrants in vegetable growing and cannot compete with them commercially. Further, vegetable crops are more readily stolen than rice crops; immigrants live on their plots of land while villagers often live out of sight of their fields. In one area members of a large lineage have taken up vegetable farming and it has been possible to start a marketing co-operative based on lineage organization (each segment providing one committee member). There, it is said, the crops are relatively secure: "kinsmen would not steal from each other." Another reason is that some farmers hold that rice growing is more honourable than vegetable cultivation. But religious and social activities do not appear to be as closely connected with rice growing in the New Territories as in some Eastern countries (Japan, for example, where such a connection can provide a disincentive to change of crop), and it is difficult to assess the importance of this attitude. However, it is one which has been remarked upon by several observers in the area (see also Pratt 1960: 150).

Although farmers want to increase their income and recognize the value of capital accumulation, there is one item in their religious ideology which can have a deleterious effect on capital formation and also on the most efficient use of some of their fixed assets. This is the belief in *fung-shui* (C[antonese]; [*fengshui*]): literally, "wind and water". *Fung-shui* is the effect which arrangements of land, buildings, trees, graves and other developments on land are believed to have on the destiny and fortune of individuals and groups. *Fung-shui* can be improved by planting trees and constructing ponds. But farmers might also abandon fields, houses and buildings used in farming if an alteration in their *fung-shui* takes place through construction of buildings in the locality. Villagers have successfully prevented the building of a new post office badly needed to handle remittances, and have delayed the construction of new paths, irrigation schemes and petrol stations. At the time of writing (1962) one group is demanding the demolition of quarters built to house staff of a large foreign bank's rural branch (established mainly to handle loans to farmers). Sometimes farmers gain financially from such objections: compensation is paid to overcome the objections, and the project which is of direct or indirect use to them is completed (although the farmers may abandon some of their fixed assets). In other cases projects are abandoned or another site is chosen. Each district has its own fixed scale of compensation for *fung-shui* disturbed by removal of graves. In one area the District Officer is empowered to spend up to HK \$500 (HK \$16 = £1 sterling) to compensate for removal of the more expensive kind of grave.

It is not of course irrational of farmers to desire compensation for changes which they believe will have a bad effect on their livelihood. It may be, however, that the relatively low prices paid for land resumed by Government for development purposes, and the difficulties encountered by farmers who wish to convert land themselves, sometimes encourage them to use a religious sanction which they know from experience can be effective with foreigners and Chinese alike. The question of *fung-shui* beliefs, and the way they function as an economic and political weapon in Hong Kong generally, appear to justify fuller investigation.

### **Capital: Immigrant vegetable farmers**

According to an estimate by the Co-operative Development Department, in 1959 an immigrant farming family of six needed about \$2,130 to start cultivating four *tau-chung* with vegetables. Equipment essential for the first crop are land, seeds, fertilizers (a common saying in the New Territories is that the soil holds the vegetables up while the fertilizers grow them), a few tools, and bamboo sticks for certain types of vegetables. A hut to live in is also essential. The farmer would probably not start until he was able to build a hut because of difficulties of finding accommodation elsewhere nearby. His land would almost certainly be rented. Few vegetable farmers can afford to buy land. The best vegetable areas are near urban areas. Indigenous farmers who wish to sell land will usually seek out those who want it for development and can offer higher prices. Although there are fairly plentiful supplies of short-term credit now available in the Territories (see below, pp. 351–56), long-term credit facilities, such as would be necessary for purchase of land by most vegetable farmers, are not so plentiful. Moreover, high rents do not provide as strong an incentive to purchase land as they do for the rice farmer, since they represent a smaller proportion of the value of the output. It may be that many immigrant farmers think in terms of returning eventually to China, which might further reduce the incentive to purchase land.

The immigrant would probably need a long-term loan to build his house unless he had brought savings with him, or articles he could sell — jewellery, for example. Some immigrants might work as hired labourers until they had saved enough to set up on their own; others might obtain a loan from a kinsman living in Hong Kong. Many immigrants have some kinsman or relative by marriage in Hong Kong. Those coming from areas near the border sometimes have marriage connections with villages in the New Territories.

It might be possible for the new farmer straight away to buy seeds, chemical fertilizers and insecticides on credit from shops in the local market town; he could almost certainly do so after harvesting his first crop successfully (about two months after planting). In the early days of migration some farmers brought seeds from their home farms and produced further seeds from the vegetables they grew. This meant that they tended to specialize in those particular vegetables they had grown in their homeland. Today better strains of seeds are available in shops and most farmers grow a variety of vegetables.

The question of initial finances of immigrants is one on which little information is available at present. Certainly once the immigrants are established, a number of short-term credit facilities are open to them. Little equipment is needed by vegetable farmers for marketing their produce. Transport and baskets are supplied by the Vegetable Marketing Organization (set up in 1946) which has a monopoly of the transport and wholesale marketing of vegetables (see also below, *passim*). The VMO charges individual farmers a 10 per cent commission on sales for its services. It has now handed over the bulk of operations to twenty-six marketing co-operatives which between them handle about 75 per cent of vegetables grown in Hong Kong. (The monopoly does not extend to Hong Kong island.) The VMO also takes 10 per cent commission from these societies, but returns 3 per cent for their handling expenses and provision of other facilities. The majority of vegetable farmers, certainly the majority of immigrants, belong to these co-operatives. For his small membership fee, the farmer obtains credit facilities and cheap fertilizer (night-soil) purchased in bulk by co-operatives from the VMO which has a night-soil maturation and distribution scheme. The Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association also supplies individual farmers cultivating from three to seven *tau-chung* with free insecticide sprayers and additional interest-free loans to replace them when worn out. Those with more than seven *tau-chung* can obtain interest-free loans for the purchase of sprayers, and those farming less than three *tau-chung* may have the use of sprayers supplied by this association to co-operative societies. Water-pumps may also be available to co-operative members through joint purchase by societies.

Vegetable farmers obtain advice on the use of fertilizers, machinery and insecticides and are said to be more open to new ideas about the handling of equipment and new farming methods than are indigenous rice farmers. Nevertheless, they appear to be somewhat reluctant to expand their scale of operations even when conditions make this feasible. A farming family can live on four *tau-chung*, but it might increase its net income in some instances by the cultivation of more land using either more capital equipment and less labour per unit of land, or more hired

labour. This might also release some members of the household for work in more lucrative pursuits elsewhere. In some areas hired labour is more readily available than in others: unfortunately they generally are remote places with poor communications and poor soil. There are some vegetable farms of up to twenty *tau-chung* run with hired labour; they are usually managed by former city dwellers rather than by traditional farmers. It is said that traditional vegetable farmers who go into larger-scale cultivation with hired labour are generally poor managers who do not pay their labourers sufficiently and are unwilling to hire supervisory staff, so that large-scale ventures often fail. Today many immigrants are educating their children for non-farming occupations. This will probably mean that in the future they will have to reorganize their methods of farming if they themselves are to remain in vegetable cultivation.

One of the difficulties of increased capitalization in vegetable farming is that most farmers operate within narrow margins and, like indigenous farmers, wish to keep their assets in liquid form. They tend to operate with a minimum of both producer and consumer durables, and rarely, for example, build more than a cheap wooden hut for themselves. Like rice farmers, they have other calls on their resources, of which their obligations to family and other kinsmen in China are the most significant. These obligations are usually greater than in the case of indigenous farmers. They send money and food home fairly regularly, with extra amounts at the Chinese New Year, and, unlike the rice farmers who help their kin, they receive no services or goods in return for these gifts. They also lend money to other farmers coming from the same area in the homeland in return for labour for planting and harvesting of crops, and join a number of loan associations providing social as well as financial benefits.

## **Saving**

It is my impression that farmers do not generally budget for capital expenditures out of current income, putting away small sums of money, say, monthly or yearly, for the purpose. Most farmers operate within narrow margins, and this method of providing for capital expenditure would be very protracted for most of them. When indigenous or immigrant farmers think in terms of acquiring capital goods or of putting money into some external investment, they tend to think in terms of having a lump sum of money available for the purpose there and then: perhaps through gambling, an unexpectedly large remittance from a kinsman abroad, sale of land, or the receipt of a long-term loan.

Many farmers find themselves in difficulties through selling their land and then using the proceeds in gambling, entertaining friends and relatives to expensive dinners, or gifts to relatives. A man who does not use for such purposes some part of a suddenly-acquired large sum of money would not meet with approval in his community. However, a man who lets all his money go in this way would also probably be despised, particularly if he had a family to support. His kinsmen would then have to help him out in various ways such as by finding him a job or lending him money. But it might be difficult for an indigenous farmer, in particular, to keep a suddenly-acquired large sum of money to himself. Pressure might be brought to bear on him by relatives and friends to make loans or gifts. In this respect the immigrant farmer might be slightly more fortunate, although he would probably send part of a sudden windfall to relatives in China, for which he could expect little in return.

Many farmers have small sums in excess of living expenses when they harvest their crops or sell their pigs. Both indigenous and immigrant farmers sell their crops for cash. Indigenous farmers also generally have an additional cash income from part of the wages of a household member working in one of the towns. Many also receive remittances from abroad. The main regular expenses of farmers are food (no farmers are completely self-sufficient) including cooking oil, pork, fish, soy bean, and rice. Rice farmers do not eat the rice they produce but buy or exchange it for lower quality rice. Small sums of money may be put into jewellery (occasionally gold bars), or may be lent out to friends and relatives, or put into traditional associations, many of which provide both short-term credit and periodic goods or services. Money is invested in this way for weddings, funerals, education expenses, New Year festival food, and clothes. Some associations specialize in items of this kind. Farmers sometimes lend out cash which is not exactly "spare": that is, they are at the same time both lenders and borrowers.

The Co-operative Development Department has been trying to persuade co-operative societies to build up revolving loan funds and to start associated savings schemes. The system for vegetable cooperatives is for the VMO to deduct an additional percentage — about 5 per cent — from total proceeds from members' sales of vegetables. This is returned to the society, partly for its revolving fund, the remainder to be put into individual savings accounts when there is an associated savings scheme. Most societies now have revolving funds in operation, but few have savings schemes. The more successful savings schemes are run by small-scale societies in which administration works more efficiently. In some societies members may withdraw savings at will, and in others for specific purposes only. In one, for example, they may be withdrawn for education expenses, for marriage of a family member, and for medical or funeral

expenses. It appears that in general savings schemes of this kind are not popular, possibly because farmers prefer the social benefits of membership of traditional associations which “save” for such purposes, and also the use of spare cash for making loans to kinsmen and friends.

Banking facilities have increased greatly in the rural areas in recent years. It is difficult to obtain much information on their use by farmers, as distinct from their use by co-operative societies. Some banks handle remittances from emigrants, and sometimes part of a remittance is kept in a bank until the emigrant returns. Banks also provide loans for those wishing to emigrate, often with land given as security.

In Chinese traditional peasant society control over household income and decisions regarding its use were in the hands of the male head who was the most senior in generation. Today in the New Territories this system probably still continues in the main among immigrant vegetable growers. The vegetable-growing household operates as a single production unit, and cash income goes directly to the head of the family. His children who work on the family plot are given pocket-money and his wife housekeeping money by the household head who will also decide how the rest of the income is to be allocated among various uses. For the indigenous household, however, opportunities in the urban areas and abroad for earning cash incomes appear to have brought changes in command over income and in decision-making. It might be difficult for a family head to know how much is earned by a son working away, particularly if he is working abroad, and difficult for the head of household to dictate to outside earners how their income should be spent. Certainly most sons help to support their households, but it is unlikely that the household head has complete command over their incomes. For the first few months of working abroad, especially in restaurants in England, it is said that little can be sent back to the village. This is particularly so when, as is sometimes the case, the employer initially lends money for the employee's fare, which must usually be repaid within the first few months of employment. One farmer told the Agricultural and Forestry Department that he received annually about \$1,500 from two sons working in England. (He was supporting a household consisting of eight persons.) This is much less than can be gained by one man cultivating vegetables on two *tau-chung* of land. I have been told that many emigrants in London spend a great deal of their earnings there. Some spend a large proportion of their wages in gambling. Others, however, appear to save part of their earnings, and groups of restaurant workers coming from the same area of the Territories start a restaurant of their own.

It is often the father of a young family which has set up as a separate household who emigrates. In some areas it is more common for a man to go soon after the birth of his first son, leaving his wife and child in his

parents' home. In many cases wives appear to have greater say in the handling of the remittances at the village end than do the fathers-in-law with whom they are living. I am told that the majority of remittances go towards the household's daily expenses, and that it is the man's wife who usually decides on their allocation among various needs. When a larger sum is sent, it may be accompanied by a letter giving instructions how it is to be used. It seems unlikely that many men would leave to their women-folk vital negotiations over capital investments they might wish to make with their overseas earnings, for example the purchase of land or the building of a new house. It is more likely that they would give instructions for large sums to be left in the bank until their return. Some men who emigrate for longer periods return about every three years for short visits during which they are able to handle any savings they have sent back for investment purposes. The question of the handling and use of remittances in the Territories is one, however, on which little information is available.

## Credit

There are a number of sources of credit open to both indigenous and immigrant farmers. Loans may be obtained from relatives and friends, more particularly in the case of indigenous farmers. They may not be entirely serviced, but the debtor may be required to provide labour or credit in return when needed by the creditor. Credit, in the form of either money or goods, may be obtained by both kinds of farmer from agencies connected with trade and marketing. Shops giving goods on credit may require a guarantor or *taam-po-yan* (Cantonese; [*danbao ren*]). He will be a person known to both creditor and debtor, and it is usual for the debtor to give him a gift for his services. The *taam-po* system enables a small creditor to have a circle of debtors much wider than if operations were restricted only to those known to him personally. Money is usually lent in small amounts for relatively short periods, from, say, a few weeks to six months. This again allows the circle of debtors to be fairly wide. The practice does mean, however, that loans from such sources can in general be used only for meeting short-term production costs or unexpected commitments calling for relatively small amounts of cash. Other short-term credit sources are traditional associations and impersonal organizations. The latter usually require that the loan be used only for production purposes, although checks to see whether the farmer complies with this condition are not usually made. Longer-term loans can be obtained from "money-lenders", religious organizations with landed

property and sometimes lineages owning property. “Money-lenders” are not a special class, but individuals, perhaps themselves farmers, who are prepared to lend to strangers without *taam-po-yan*. (Sometimes they are Village Representatives.) Usually, however, they require the loan to be secured in other ways. They charge about 10 per cent interest per month.

There are some traditional associations which are purely credit associations, and some provide additional benefits. Some save for a specific purpose — a festival or annual dinner, for example — and lend the money to members in the interim period. Members are usually known to one another personally, although outsiders may be permitted to join if guaranteed by a member who is known to the group. Indigenous associations usually operate within a village or group of adjacent villages, while immigrant bodies are usually based in membership on regional origins. Because of the regional nature of immigrant settlement they tend also to be restricted to a particular locality.

Rules for both kinds of association varied regionally in China. Those operating in the New Territories are similar to some of the forms described for traditional China (see for example, Fei Hsiao-Tung 1943: 267–74, and Arthur Smith 1899: 152–60). Such types of association have also been noted for other peasant groups (Firth 1964[2007]: 31–32). In credit associations members make fixed monthly payments, and each member on one occasion gets the use of the total collected. The association thus exists for as many months as there are members, but it might be renewed at the end of the period and so operate on a semi-permanent basis. Often it consists of “life” members (those individuals known to one another personally) and “occasional” members (outsiders guaranteed by a member).

Loan associations at present may handle from about \$300–\$1,000 a month. When a member defaults on his monthly contributions, the amount is customarily borne by the head of the association (if he is receiving a commission for his services as leader), by the other members, or by his guarantor if the defaulter is an occasional member. Festival associations may accumulate as much as \$15,000–\$20,000. (Their outlays include expenditures on a Chinese opera, dinner, wine and pork distribution as well as on ritual paraphernalia and services of priests.) A few festivals are held at intervals of two years or longer. The sums available for lending may then be considerable, and occasionally loans are made for relatively long periods. In the semi-religious associations an important sanction for the repayment is said to be fear of punishment from the god for whom the festival is held. Another popular type of association is the “pork society”. Each member contributes \$2–\$3 a month and the money is used to buy pigs for slaughter at the Chinese New Year. (Pigs are cheaper when bought in bulk.) The meat is usually

distributed in equal weight among members, the best cuts apparently going to those reckoned to have the highest social standing in the group. In lineage-based associations the allocation of the various cuts may be according to kinship status. Loans from funds of pork societies may be available to members for from two to ten months. Amounts lent are said to vary from about \$50–\$200 per member, with interest working out at about 5 per cent a month.

Buddhist nunneries and halls of residence for laywomen and those for members of other Chinese religions are a popular source of longer-term loans. They often have considerable funds for lending, derived from income from landed property and arable land, from the accumulated life-savings of inmates, many of whom are retired domestic servants, and from regular contributions of outside members for their ritual services. Some also run funeral benefit schemes, and lend part of their accumulated funds. These organizations are prepared to lend to strangers, and arrangements are often fairly sophisticated. A credit document is often drawn up and endorsed in the District Office. Property is usually required as security. This may in fact make it difficult for immigrants to get loans from this source. Interest rates are said to be about 3 per cent to 5 per cent a month.

Immigrants may be able to get long-term loans from ancestral associations, interest payments being settled at the Chinese New Year. Lineage members have first claim on funds, however, and may not be required to pay interest. Temple associations and land-owning *ooi* ([*hui*], associations) also lend money, mainly to members but occasionally to strangers.

Both rice and vegetable farmers obtain credit from feed and fertilizer dealers. Material may be obtained on credit to the value of \$100–\$2,000 for one to six months, 15–20 per cent being added to the market prices of the materials when payment is made. Repayment usually takes place after the farmer's produce has been marketed. Food-stuffs, of the dried variety, for the household, are also obtainable on credit, prices being a little higher than those to cash customers. Payment is usually made monthly.

For those vegetable farmers who do not belong to co-operatives, loans may be available from middlemen who collect their crops, take them to the wholesale market in Kowloon and arrange their sale. (Prices arrived at in middlemen transactions in the market are subject to approval of a market salesman.) A commission of 2–3 per cent is charged for this service, but loans are usually made free of interest as an inducement to farmers to use the services of such middlemen. Middlemen may be personal friends of the farmers, marketing their own crops at the same time; or in certain districts they may be vegetable farmers who have performed this kind of service regularly since the establishment of the

VMO. Such middlemen lend out from about \$50–\$500 for from three to twelve months.

Before the establishment of the wholesale market in Kowloon, vegetable farmers marketed through wholesale middlemen, termed *laan* [*lan*]. (The term *laan* also referred to their place of operation.) There was no central wholesale market, and each *laan* had his own centre and his own circle of retail clients. The farmer, it is said, did not then have easy access to knowledge of current retail prices in the town where most of the vegetables were sold, and was often cheated heavily on prices. The VMO was established to eliminate the *laan* system in Kowloon and the New Territories, although it still operates on Hong Kong island with Government-provided wholesale markets as the centre of operations. Under the old system, *laan* often made loans to farmers. Today the VMO has taken over their credit functions (see below). A brief outline of the old system may be of interest.

*Laan* operated with their own *godowns* (warehouses), lorries — some had fleets of lorries — and baskets for transporting vegetables. Sometimes regular retailing clients had shares in a *laan* enterprise. Some *laan* had agents or brokers operating in collecting stations in market towns. *Laan* and brokers were usually townsmen. They charged about 10 per cent for transporting vegetables and an extra 1 per cent per picul for handling charges. Sometimes brokers charged an extra commission. Brokers were more numerous in the post-war period when there was a shortage of *laan* transport, and some of them operated privately, selling their services to a *laan*. It is common to accuse middlemen in peasant societies of sharp practice; in the case of Hong Kong *laan* such accusations appear often to have been justified. But the farmers needed their services. They lacked transport facilities; baskets were expensive unless bought in bulk; many farmers could not spare the time to bring their crop to market; they lacked contacts with retailers in town; and they needed the credit provided by *laan*. Sometimes farmers were paid in advance for their standing crops: this of course involved risk on the part of the *laan*, but the prices paid were usually very low. Sometimes a group of farmers sent a representative to accompany their vegetables on the *laan* lorry; but he could do little to get better prices for the farmers. A common practice in selling to retailers was known as “silent dealing”: bargaining between the *laan* and the retailer was conducted by use of an abacus (a beaded frame for arithmetical calculations), and the representative of the farmers could not see the agreed price as the abacus was hidden from his view. If the price offered by the *laan* to the farmers was refused, they still had to pay the transport costs. Since vegetables are highly perishable, few farmers could risk taking their crop away from the *laan* centre and trying to sell it elsewhere. The majority of *laan* also are said to have been members of

*laan* associations which fixed the prices to be paid to farmers. Farmers might be able to hawk their vegetables themselves; but they could not easily compete with regular retailers established in particular areas, who could cause trouble for the hawkers.

A few groups of farmers set up marketing associations among themselves to break the *laan* system. Farmers got together and bought a lorry and baskets to bring in their crops themselves. A representative would retail them in town or sell them to retailers with whom they established connections. I have no information as to how they managed to establish such connections. When they themselves retailed, they presumably had to operate in less advantageous parts of the town than the *laan*.

The VMO has been able to destroy the *laan* system. After the war there was a general shortage of transport, and because of this the *laan* were weakened in their operations. The majority had also lost their *godowns*, were short of money for making loans to farmers and for providing some of the other services traditionally offered to farmers or their representatives. These services had included the provision of free meals and the supply of dried foods on credit. The loans and services of the pre-war period had probably inhibited farmers from protesting more forcibly against the *laan* system. Prices received in the new wholesale market were also considerably higher than those obtained through *laan*. The VMO was able to extend its monopoly over sales because of its control of the transport of vegetables (comparatively few vegetables were sold in the New Territories themselves). It had the lorries, and was, additionally, given exclusive right by Ordinance to transport vegetables or issue permits to private lorries for transportation. The police are supposed to stop all lorries carrying vegetables to market without permit.

The VMO received from the Government an initial loan of \$50,000 to finance operations, and the commission charged on sales was to cover the rest of its expenses. Today profits from sale of night-soil from its maturation scheme are an additional source of revenue. Co-operatives were later started under its leadership at a number of collecting stations set up for transporting vegetables. The more successful have been those in which membership is based on regional origins. Some with "mixed" membership have been less successful.

The original purpose of the formation of marketing co-operatives was to organize farmers to withstand pressure from *laan* who wished to crush the wholesale market and to build up groupings which could ultimately take over the operation of the market. One of their most important functions today, in addition to that of marketing, is handling loans for members. They act as members' guarantors and, in principle at least, they scrutinize members' production records before recommending them for

loans. When loans are not serviced by the debtor, the co-operative has to meet obligations on his behalf. Usually loan obligations are in fact honoured by the member. The paid-up share capital of the co-operative acts as security for loans to members. Co-operatives usually charge a commission for handling members' loans.

Loans are made from the VMO Loan Fund, which provides credit, usually for periods of less than a year, at interest rates of 0.25 per cent a month (which is lower than in traditional societies). Outsiders can obtain loans at 0.5 per cent interest, but in fact most are taken up by co-operative society members. The Co-operative Development Department (which now incorporates the VMO) also handles loans from the Joseph Trust Fund, which are used mainly for purchase of seeds, fertilizers and bamboo poles. The considerable use to which both funds have been put so far suggests that traditional sources of credit are far from adequate. In 1961, 1,600 members of co-operative societies received loans totalling \$770,000. The VMO Fund was recently increased to almost double its original size to meet growing demands as the number of societies and members increased. Cooperatives are being persuaded to operate their own loan schemes to relieve strain on the two funds.

Provision of credit is the main function of pig-raising co-operatives, and funds are also obtainable by members from the Joseph Fund. The Kadoorie Agricultural Loan Fund is handled by the Agricultural and Forestry Department. It charges no interest and its policy is to operate directly through individuals rather than groups. Debts may be cancelled if the recipient can prove hardship.

Indigenous rice farmers market their produce through millers operating in market towns. They either charge about \$1.50 a picul for milling, returning bran to the farmer for pig feed; or keep the bran (most millers own pig-feed shops) and make no milling charge; or, when rice is wanted for consumption, mill free, returning one katty [catty] of lower grade rice for one of home-grown produce. Millers also provide credit. Farmers have few complaints against this system and have shown no desire to establish or join rice-marketing cooperatives. Prices of rice do not fluctuate to the same extent as vegetable prices; farmers can easily find out what the current price is; they can store their crop against better prices; and transport is not a problem since they sell within the New Territories. Millers are usually country people who are known personally to the farmers.

## Summary and Conclusions

With existing economic patterns, probably neither indigenous rice-

farming households, nor immigrant vegetable-fanning households generally can play a very significant role in capital formation in the New Territories. Most farmers of both groups operate within extremely narrow margins. Although vegetable farmers are the more successful of the two in agriculture and able to exist by farming alone, few have much income in excess of the requirements of daily necessities. The indigenous farmer's total income from non-agricultural sources and from rice and pig-rearing also is generally not large. Both groups of farmers, and particularly vegetable farmers, rely greatly on short-term credit to cover production costs; the latter probably have slightly better supplies of credit from co-operative and impersonal sources, and the former from traditional sources. The vagaries of the weather and of imports of vegetables and pigs from China, both of which are largely unpredictable, tend to inhibit farmers from investment in items not easily convertible into cash and from saving over long periods for the acquisition of capital assets. There are also a number of factors, not directly "economic", which affect particularly the uses to which any "spare" money is put, the type of assets acquired, and use of existing assets. At present it is possible to make only a few general observations regarding some of these factors. Field research would probably show up considerable variations in circumstances in different localities — depending for example on such differences as kinship and village organization, land tenure practices, proximity to towns, patterns of regional settlement of immigrants and their relationships with indigenous people, and patterns of emigration among the latter.

There are a number of uses for available cash which may have priority over saving for eventual investment. This may be particularly so for farmers living in well-integrated village communities. The farmer may have to meet constant demands for gifts and loans from kinsmen and neighbours. He may simultaneously be both a borrower and lender in regard to a number of individuals. There is a tendency to lend out cash in small sums for short periods so as to maintain a wide circle of debtors on which the farmer can call for similar loans and for other forms of aid which may be received in lieu of full servicing of debts. Such small amounts are usually used for meeting production costs or for ceremonial expenses. There appears to be an acute scarcity of funds for long-term loans in the region. Loans from traditional associations and institutions also tend to be short-term.

Villagers who wish to acquire greater status in their communities probably spend as lavishly as possible on ceremonials, and part of any sudden windfall on "throwing" dinners. The desire to spend well on such ceremonials as weddings and funerals encourages the formation of special clubs, and there are also clubs for religious festivals.

It is possible that for immigrant farmers some of the uses of “spare” cash described above are of lesser significance, partly because of differences in their patterns of residence, and partly perhaps because they are less traditionalist. However, the majority are under pressure to send cash and commodities to relatives in China, for which they may expect little material return. It is difficult to assess the drain of resources from immigrant households in this way. My impression is that at present it might be considerable.

Calls on money of the type outlined above add to the difficulties which peasant farmers have in building up wealth. Yet wealth is probably an important qualification for those aspiring to political leadership in most areas in the New Territories, certainly for membership of Rural Committees and the Consultative Council. (Most members of Rural Committees are elected from among Village Representatives, and all by them.) Members will also need considerable spare time in order to attend to their tasks of office. Most Rural Committee members and a good proportion of all Village Representatives appear to be individuals whose main income comes from investments in local towns, the industrial town or the main urban areas of Hong Kong and Kowloon. They usually have some investments in projects which they do not manage themselves: shops, land investment companies and schools, for example. It may be significant for their ability to build up wealth that few of them spend much time in residence in their villages of origin and of which they are representatives. They may thus have been able to avoid some of the pressures on their finances which permanent village residents have to meet. I have been told by a Hong Kong University research worker on one of the islands (see footnote 1) that in his area such men, once their wealth is established, become the money-lenders and gambling-shop proprietors of their locality, and that income obtained from their gambling businesses (gambling-shops are in fact illegal) tends to be drained away to the towns. The fact that a section of a village may be in the debt of wealthy individuals aspiring to local leadership may form a sanction for their election. We need to know much more of the methods of wealth accumulation of such people and their economic role generally in the countryside. But it is not my impression that they are usually big landlords or that absentee landlordism with its usual concomitant of the drain of wealth from the rural area is a serious problem in the New Territories, although it may be so in one or two areas (D. Y. Lin 1951). Rather, there tends to be a number of small landlords who live and use their income mainly in the area.

Managers of lineage and other corporately owned land are usually men with business experience and education. Such men may be in a position to help their community to increase in prosperity by converting

such land to more profitable uses. However, there are problems in doing so connected with the terms of trust on which such land is held. Objections to new uses may come from Government, or from other members of the trust who may see only the immediate effect of such conversion on them — a reduction in the amount of land available to them for rice cultivation.

Near the expanding urban and industrial areas villagers can often sell their land on favourable terms. A common problem of smallness of holdings (partly due to rules of inheritance) and therefore unsuitability for development is often overcome by the emergence of land brokers, sometimes village leaders themselves, who arrange for a group of farmers to sell a block of holdings to a developer. Farmers usually lack advice, however, on how best to invest their profits from land sales, and such money is often quickly used up in financing dinners, gifts, gambling and small loans to friends and relatives. The desire to sell land sometimes causes conflicts within the household, especially between sons and fathers. In some areas land can alternatively be rented out for greater income to vegetable farmers or pig- and poultry-raisers (although members of corporate land-holding groups may sometimes prevent managers from doing this with joint owned land). The high regard for landlord status in the rural areas often encourages farmers to try to live off such income rather than to invest all or part of it and work in other occupations to increase income further. A study of rising land values in the New Territories and their effects on social organization would clearly be of value at the present time. My general impression is that changes in land values may be having a considerable effect on the traditional social organization of a number of parts of the New Territories.

In emigrant areas, particularly those remote from urban developments, villagers may sometimes receive remittances large enough to yield cash in excess of immediate needs. Returned emigrants may return with savings, or have them accumulating in a bank for their return. Often there is a lack of knowledge of investment opportunities in such communities, and there is a tendency for the money to be used in first financing a new house, and then in meeting the various types of social commitments already described. It may be difficult for households with members working abroad to control the amounts of money which are sent back; but it is my general impression that more might be sent back if there were better knowledge of investment outlets. In one case coming to my notice the District Office offered materials to a village for building local improvements. Villagers are supposed to supply the labour in building local projects with materials provided in this way. Since there was a shortage of labour in the village itself, it was necessary to hire paid workers. At first the village said they were unable to afford this. After

several months, however, they indicated their willingness to pay for the labour: the money had been obtained by writing to relatives abroad.

The development of capital projects (including public works projects) in the area may have to meet the problem of *fung-shui* objections from villagers, particularly perhaps when villagers cannot see great and immediate benefit to themselves from such projects. Land policy may also aggravate demand for *fung-shui* compensation when public works are carried out on land previously used by villagers. *Fung-shui* beliefs can also lead to the abandoning of assets by villagers themselves.

Probably the greatest contribution to capital development in the area generally must come from outsiders with greater resources — from both Government and private investors. Nevertheless, something might be done to increase the prosperity of rural inhabitants by working through local leaders to bring about the more economic use of land. It might also be possible to start village investment companies through which rural people might use part of their income in investments in town areas. It must be remembered, however, that any plan to help villagers to use their land more profitably may adversely affect the livelihood of immigrant farmers who at present rent land from them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In this essay, romanizations follow the Cantonese dialect pronunciation and are according to the system used in B. F. Meyer and T. F. Wempe, *The Student's Cantonese-English Dictionary*. New York, 1947.

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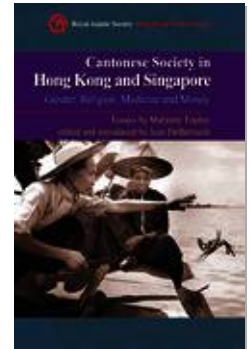
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## Chapter 13

# Some Basic Conceptions and Their Traditional Relationship to Society

(1967)\*

### Ideas, Situations and People

In the two afternoons of this symposium you will hear different readers referring to similar terms and concepts. You will hear about some rather sophisticated Chinese notions, scarcely meant for the ordinary folk, and involving the concepts of *Yin* (陰) and *Yang* (陽)<sup>1</sup> — impersonal forces or ethers; you will hear of the connected concept of the Five Elements (五行), and the relation of all these to Heaven and Earth; and you will also hear of notions concerning the importance of harmony or disharmony between Heaven, Earth and Man. They will appear in connection with such varied kinds of situation as, for example, siting graves, telling fortunes, diagnosing physical illness and explaining mental conditions.

In some of the papers however, you will also hear about other sorts of notions: notions which seem less sophisticated and which involve gods, and spirits or demons. Again they enter into a wide range of activities. Sometimes you will hear of them in different situations from those listed

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\* This introductory talk has been expanded for publication and some of the material has been rearranged. M.T.

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1 Expressions or phrases which are of China-wide use are romanized here according to the Wade system and those which are peculiar to the Cantonese are romanized according to the system in use in Bernard F. Meyer and Theodore F. Wempe, *The Student's Cantonese-English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. New York: Field Afar Press, 1947. Cantonese romanizations are followed by the symbol (C). These two forms of romanization are followed throughout the brochure also, with the exception of Mr. Barnett's paper. Mr. Barnett uses the system of romanizing Cantonese of the London School of Oriental and African Studies.

above — temple worship and organization for example — but sometimes they appear in the very same contexts.

All this suggests, perhaps, some rather complex relationships between the ideas people use on the one hand, and the people who use them on the other: one would like to know more of the conceptual framework or frameworks in which these ideas might be placed and the sort of social framework in which they might operate.

I want in this introductory paper to see what might be said then, about these matters: to what extent are abstract ideas like *Yin* and *Yang*, and ideas of non-material beings, two different sets of ideas, and to what extent have Chinese people been divided or united in their use of ideas? At the same time I will look briefly at the problem of using the terms nature and supernatural — which appeared in the original title of this symposium — to mean anything very precise when dealing with Chinese ideas: a problem which appear to me to emerge when we start to think about the ideas we will find in our papers and the way they are regarded by the people using them.

In one sense all these matters might be tackled more appropriately at the end of our sessions: when we have heard what our readers have had to say. But to be forewarned is sometimes to be forearmed and I hope a preliminary look at all this might prepare us more for the ideas we are going to meet and to provide something of a chart, so to speak, on which we can place the various topics.

I should say here that I approach this rather ambitious task with a certain trepidation. I am not a Chinese, I am not a philosopher, and I am not an historian. Indeed I cannot go into matters of the development over time — the historical perspective in all this — here, and such matters are doubtless of a certain relevance. The kind of person perhaps we really need for this task is the scholar who stands astride the cultures of the West and of China; who is both familiar “through the skin”, as one might say, with the ideas themselves, and also the question of how to explain them to people like many of us here today, who have different backgrounds. We have fortunately been able to capture for you a number of experts well-acquainted with, or working in their fields of discussion, but somehow or other the kind of expert we needed here managed to escape our net.

Let me start my examination now by considering first the *Yin* and the *Yang* and related notions: how they come to form the basis for many kinds of action, and who traditionally in the population of China was involved in their use. I will then go on to consider ideas about gods and demons from a similar point of view, at the same time examining the relationship the two sets of notions have to each other and the question of natural and supernatural in all this. Finally, I will consider briefly and generally the

question of use of these ideas in Hong Kong and what they might mean for the people here.

The concepts of *Yin* and *Yang*, Five Elements, Heaven and Earth, and so on, are in fact systematically related one to another within a total framework of cosmological ideas. They relate, that is to say, to a total theory about the workings of the universe. The theory is something like this:

Try to imagine that in the beginning, there was a huge sphere containing ether. Imagine then this ether (*ch'i*: 氣 [*qi*]) churned up by a gigantic force. This force is *Tao* (道) [*Dao*] — often translated into English as “The Way”. *Tao* is really “Way” in the sense of Principle: unlike the sphere or Void, it has no beginning or end, and it operates only when there is something to operate on.

I have found it difficult to find a clear explanation of how the whole of this got started — this is perhaps one of the points where we need our Chinese scholar — but at any rate as a result of the action of *Tao*, the ether begins to separate out, or differentiate into two basic types, and the tension arising within the sphere as a result of this process, rends it apart.<sup>2</sup>

The two kinds of ether are *Yin* and *Yang*. *Yang* is light and rises to form the heavens. *Yin* is heavy and descends to form earth. Respectively *Yang* and *Yin* are bright and dark, male and female — they can only be described in terms of each other and are complementary. The different spheres of Heaven and Earth are equally real — they reflect one another — and what applies here applies also there.

The ethers have five characteristics known as the Elements of Fire, Metal, Earth, Water and Wood. What does this mean? It does not mean they are actually composed of these things. The terms are analogies. Mystics in describing something they “know” intuitively, have used the analogy of a classroom of congenitally blind children hearing a lecture on water colours. The lecturer cannot tell them how colours look or prove colours exist. The best he can do is translate colour into terms of other senses.<sup>3</sup>

And so here, the person who “knows” this system exists, translates what he knows in terms of something which is communicable: something we have all seen or felt. For essentially this system of ideas is one which

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2 Some works of reference containing material on *Yin-Yang* cosmology are given in the bibliography in this brochure.

3 Mr. Holmes Welch, a former Council member of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society refers to this analogy and deals very competently with the problem of mysticism and obscurities in Chinese cosmological ideas in his book *The Parting of the Way; Lao Tzu and the Taoist Movement*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957. See especially pp. 51ff. and 59, and Part Two generally.

can be known to exist only by intuitive experience — attempts at communication inevitably involve obscurity.

How then can man intuitively know this system is real? Here is something important: *man is a microcosm of the whole*. He is of both Heaven and Earth: contains both heavenly (*Yang*) and earthly (*Yin*) elements. He can know this system then because his inner structure is that of the universe generally. He knows it by knowing his own nature which is the nature of all.

At death man separates out into the components of which he was formed — known also now as *shen* (神) (*Yang*) and *kuei* (鬼) [*gui*] (*Yin*). I do not want to burden you with terms here but keep these two in mind as they will come up again later in relation to ideas concerning gods and demons. Man then at death “Returns to the Void”: he is disassembled. And new men are reassembled from the same materials. And not only men. All phenomena are formed in this way: contain the same elements but in different proportions.

We have then a picture of a universe divided into complementary halves: Heaven and Earth, *Yang* and *Yin*, with man a microcosm of the whole. The ideal is for balance between these to be preserved — for harmony to exist — and perfect harmony results from each acting according to its nature. For Earth and Heaven are equally real and interdependent and disbalance in one causes disbalance in the other.

But a problem exists for man. How to act until one achieves the realization of true nature? One has to take the lead from the words of the sages: those who have had the intuitive experience. And this brings us to a further complication in the system. There are basically two points of view about the way it works. One is that it is an amoral system: this is the view of the Taoist. The other is that it is essentially moral: the Confucian point of view. And so there are two kinds of sages offering somewhat different advice.

In both Taoism and Confucianism the character of *Tao* is known as *te* (德) [*de*]. It is translated as “virtue” which is an apposite term for, as with virtue, *te* has two possible meanings. It is power — amoral force, or morality — ethical force. In Taoism the virtue of *Tao* then is amoral and in Confucianism moral.

Moreover, in Taoism, Heaven and Earth are equally important and man like a tiny figure in a mountain-water painting, as one sinologist puts it<sup>4</sup> — no more significant than other phenomena. The Taoist ideal is “peace in closed completeness”: in the microcosms of man, village, town

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4 A. C. Graham in the introduction to his work *The Book of Lieh-tzu: A New Translation*. London: John Murray, 1966. A brief comparison of some of the differences between Taoism and Confucianism on matters of cosmology is also found in this introduction.

and so on. It stands on the whole for a lack of curiosity and communication: one might hear the cock crow in the next village and never feel any desire to investigate.

In Confucianism, Heaven assumes an importance almost overshadowing that of Tao itself: for it is the fount of moral order and controls the workings of the Tao. Heaven in fact had a moral importance before the historical development of the *Yin-Yang* theory. Heaven is contrasted with Earth which is seen by the Confucian view as working according to amoral principles but ones always ultimately corrected by the moral workings of Heaven. Man occupies an important place in the Confucian interpretation for by following the moral order of Heaven in organizing his personal and social, including political, life he provides the harmony necessary for world order.

Confucianism is not so individualistic as Taoism and in the cosmology its scholars adhered to, and which was the version followed by the State in traditional China, places stress on the importance of connections among things — interdependence and harmony in the relationships between men, and the other microcosms of family, village and town.

These then are, as I have suggested earlier, sophisticated notions indeed. As one might expect they are ones which have concerned the scholar more than the ordinary man. Confucianism, with its moral interpretations and emphasis on the metaphysical importance of order in human affairs has provided the dominant influence in social life and activities.

But Taoism has not been without influence as a parallel, more “off-beat” tradition. It has probably enjoyed most popularity as a total way of life however among the elderly. Perhaps this is because the elderly, like the very young, tend to have narrow horizons — are more inwards turned — and Taoism standing as it does for lack of curiosity and also placing particular emphasis on the microcosm of the body and the pursuit moreover of health and longevity might be expected to have particular appeal to such persons. And one might understand the State’s greater toleration, in fact, of such a non-social philosophy among those approaching senility: such a restriction of interests might have positive advantages from its point of view.

We see these ideas at work then in a number of activities in which scholars have participated — as explanations and techniques for dealing with a number of life’s situations. Confucianism with its emphasis on the morality of Heaven frequently steps in to prevent the wicked and unscrupulous gaining in the long run from their knowledge of such techniques.



Fig. 1. Table shows geomancer's equipment. Board illustrates a geomancer at Work: chart of geomancy of a grave; "Chinese Boxing"; and map of Chinese temples.

This is well illustrated in geomancy. For the scholar geomancy or *feng-shui* [*fengshui*] (i.e., "wind and water") is concerned with the harmony of forces and their relation to such groups as the family and clan (through ancestors' graves) and the village community (through adjacent buildings, roads, etc.) One arranges oneself in relation to the forces of nature in the physical world in order to obtain maximum benefits — wealth and social position, for example. The principle of Earth is at work and benefit — or the opposite — does not depend on the moral state of those who use the correct techniques. Mr. Hayes will tell us how a geomancer might even be thought to deliberately cause people bad geomantic conditions. But there are stories to show that the wicked cannot gain any permanent satisfactions. Sooner or later Heaven will correct the balance.<sup>5</sup>

Predicting future events is another legitimate activity for the scholar as one of our scholars here today, Dr. Tseung, will show us. Use may be

<sup>5</sup> See Maurice Freedman, an anthropologist who talked to the Society in 1963, in his *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung*, Chapter 5. London: The Athlone Press, 1966, for a detailed discussion of geomancy and burial of the dead.

made of knowledge of nature and man's relation to the cosmos to plot his destiny. We will hear of man's Eight Characters of Birth and their complex relationship to the forces of *Yin* and *Yang*, the Elements, and other divisions. The forces of nature effect everyday life and its events, and the almanac, discussed by Mr. Barnett, will show you the most appropriate days for doing many things.

Chinese medicine, different in assumptions from modern Western medicine, although as you will hear strikingly similar in some ways to the mediaeval theory of the Humours, again relies on "facts" about nature to effect a cure. Cure is the bringing back into harmony of the individual's physical structure with the universe. But again one sometimes detects a moral element. Illness may result from the dissipation of one's vital forces — disharmonious activities — or through the disbalance of *Yin* and *Yang* brought about by external causes (traditionally epidemics were sometimes traced to the immorality of local officials).

Now most intellectuals adhering to this tradition would deny there was anything supernatural about such ideas and might even use the term "scientific" when speaking English. But when judging any notion to be concerned with the supernatural we in the West usually assert that it is concerned with influences conflicting with principles of empirical enquiry and verification — or empirical knowledge and scientific enquiry.<sup>6</sup>

If we look at this body of ideas in this light and then contrast them with other ideas about gods and spirits which we will come to presently, it is difficult to see how the terms supernatural and natural can in fact have precise meaning. In the system described knowledge relies on intuitive experience. We can only "prove" by effect. And are ideas about gods and spirits any less capable of proof? What does the scholar think about this question himself? And what is his attitude towards such ideas?

### **The Little Tradition and the Great**

The picture which has been drawn traditionally is of the scholar — the enlightened — on one side of the fence, rejecting pretty well everything but highly abstract ideas; and of the masses on the other, wallowing in superstition and believing in gods and spirits exclusively: of two separate — even never-to-meet traditions. I think this gives us a wrong idea of the situation. Perhaps the best approach to the problem of what

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6 In considering the problem of natural and supernatural in alien cultures, I found the discussion useful in S. F. Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, Chapter I. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1954.

ideas of gods and spirits are about, and the scholar's relationship to them, is to first examine the limitations of the traditionally drawn picture and then see what other more realistic picture might be drawn, using some tools which have been used by anthropologists in recent years for the examination of complex cultures.

The traditional picture, firstly, tends to be based on ideals rather than facts: it is not objective and not always accurate. One contemporary Confucian writer contrasts the masses for example who "worship thousands of idols" with the enlightened who "honour only Heaven, ancestors, and sometimes also Confucius, Buddha, Lao Tzu, and a few great historical beings, but not other spirits." He claims "The masses believe in ... almanacs ... geomancy...fortune-telling...The enlightened *are seldom contaminated by these diseases.*" (*italics added*)<sup>7</sup>

This obscures the fact, I think, that scholars as officials were sometimes expected to take part in temple ceremonies in connection with local gods, and that some new Chinese religions have started, moreover, as a result of scholars experimenting with automatic writing and receiving messages from non-material beings who sometimes claim to have once been men. The wealthy land-owners who were mostly scholars were also the main employers of the geomancer: geomancy was an expensive skill. The scholar too, as I have said, does engage in fortune-telling and uses the almanac as well.

This dichotomy tends, secondly, to obscure the distinction between class and education. The enlightened, true, were scholars and usually officials and gentry land-owners. But what of their women-folk? They were seldom of the "masses", but also seldom fully literate or able to follow abstract ideas well perhaps. Women *of all classes* in fact played an important role in perpetuating ideas and practices associated with gods and spirits. Popular cults must have sometimes rubbed shoulders with intellectual ceremonies in the scholar's household.

But the low position given to popular activities by traditional writers on Chinese ideas led to a reluctance to investigate them. Local gazetteers are practically silent on local religious cults. This makes the task of discovering how far popular practices and ideas have been preserved and how far changed in Hong Kong extremely difficult, of course.

But, thirdly, and most important, this sort of division not only obscures matters of real participation — the relationship between different kinds of people — but the relationship between the different kinds of ideas themselves. For in fact ideas about impersonal forces and ideas about gods and spirits in China were related.

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7 Chan Wing-tsit, , p. 142. New York: Columbia University Press, 1953.

Many Chinese scholars would be likely I think to regard ideas about gods and spirits as different representations of the true “facts” rather than untrue, because the latter represent, in a sense, an “animated” version of the more abstract system. In fact, in order to examine the nature of Chinese ideas of gods and spirits we should look at such ideas in relation to the ideas we have already discussed.

It might help us to look at these relationships more clearly if we now take up a set of concepts which was first proposed by an American anthropologist, Robert Redfield, for the examination of cultures where we find a sharp division between the educated and non-educated — as in peasant societies like India, for example.<sup>8</sup> Redfield suggests that in such kinds of societies you might find in fact two linked traditions. He calls them the Great and the Little Traditions.

The Great Tradition in a culture belongs to the reflective minority. It is consciously cultivated and handed down through schools or temples by philosophers and literary men. It is a Tradition respected by all, but one in which it is not possible for all to share equally. The Little Tradition, on the other hand, develops and keeps itself going in the lives of the majority of unlettered people who take it for granted in the main, and make no conscious effort to refine it.

The Great Tradition is passed on largely in formal texts; the Little Tradition relies for its literature on folk stories but is particularly dependent on an oral form of transmission. The two traditions are interdependent: they act on one another and bring about modifications. There are channels of communication between them and points of common ground. As I have said, one finds this kind of culture in peasant societies: what I have just said is perhaps reminiscent of what one finds in countries like Spain and Italy with their great churches and their small local shrines and local saints.

In the Chinese case then, we find the *Yin-Yang* system of ideas passed on in formal texts by literary men: the Great Tradition. Ideas about gods and spirits and knowledge of these entities have been carried largely by verbal means: by the unlettered who have made little conscious effort at refinement. They are mainly of the Little Tradition. There are written tales about gods and about human beings encountering members of the spirit worlds which are also of this Tradition. They are usually illustrated, and often written in simple style, with many mistakes in the characters. Sometimes they appear in a local vernacular — for example there are several in the Cantonese dialect.

I think it is true to say that it is the Little Tradition that we are concerned with by and large in Hong Kong. Let me hastily add that I do

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8 In, for example, his *Peasant Society and Culture*. 1956.

not mean to imply we have no scholars here who read formal texts and engage in some practices of the traditional scholarly kind. Of course we do. But the bulk of ideas and practices brought to Hong Kong have undoubtedly been of the kind we would call Little Tradition — with women again playing an important role as participants, and as I will show in my other paper, also as “experts”.

One qualifying remark needs to be made here however in connection with the use of Redfield’s terms and our two versions of the *Yin-Yang* system. I said that this system was “Great” in the sense that it involved formal texts and exercised literary men. But we saw that a further characteristic of such a Tradition is its enjoyment of universal respect. The Confucian cosmology was Great Tradition par excellence but from what I have said it would seem Taoism occupied a more equivocal position. Nevertheless, both versions have contributed to the character of the Little Tradition. Let us see now what the essentials of this contribution have been.

### **The World of the Gods and the Theory of *Yin* and *Yang***

Gods and spirits and their cults are of very ancient origin. But under the influence of the cosmological ideas we have discussed they became organised into the sort of system I have described as an “animated” version of *Yin-Yang* cosmology. Gods came to correspond to the Heavenly ethers — the *Yang* principle — and are commonly known, as a category, as *shen* (see p. 368 for first use of this term). And in the Little Tradition spiritual beings originating in other system of ideas become popularly known also as *shen* — the Buddhas and Bodhisattva of popular Buddhism for example (at a more philosophic — Great Tradition — level of Buddhism these entities are not regarded as spiritual beings). Spirits traditionally associated more closely with earth came to correspond to the Earthly forces — the *Yin* principles — and are commonly known as *kuei* [*gui*] (again see p. 368 above).

We saw that in Confucianism Heaven is reckoned superior to Earth, as the fount of morality, and in the Little Tradition *shen* are seen on the whole as more powerful and more moral beings than the *kuei*. *Kuei* tend to be amoral: they may occasionally be evil but often they are merely greedy, mischievous — very “earthy” in character. The term demon for such spiritual beings is perhaps more appropriate than the common one “devil”.

Man is seen as superior to the *kuei* — spirits which have nothing of Heaven, and inferior to the *shen* — gods. At death man is still seen as



Fig. 2. Some of the sixty *T'ai Sui* (C) [*Taisui*] Gods in the *Sui Tsing Paak/T'in Hau* (C) [*Sui Jing Bai/Tinhau*] Temple.

separating into his *shen* and *kuei* elements. But these now survive as separate souls, and this has further implications. Man is potentially both god and demon, and many gods and demons of fame in China began their careers as human beings.

The ordinary man may never achieve such elevated status after his death — the fame or notoriety in the spirit world which leads to public worship or placation. He may remain of importance only in a “private” capacity, so to speak — cared for and perhaps bringing benefits to his descendants in the ancestor cult, or if his death were sudden or tragic, as a ghost of local notoriety.

Factors of sudden or tragic death often seem to have played an important role in the making of mortals into popular gods and demons in China.<sup>9</sup> Men and women dying unexpectedly — before their time — with remaining vital forces may become powerful beings of the spirit world,

9 I am grateful here to Mr. Kristopher Schipper for bringing out this significant fact about the creation of the Chinese pantheon. His interesting paper on Chinese folk religion, presented at a seminar in Chinese Art, Culture and Society, at Taiwan, Summer 1966 is still unpublished.

particularly if they showed themselves to have unusual powers during their lives. One sees this in the stories about the previous human careers of certain locally popular *shen* (see notes on temple visit: *Kam Fa* (C) [*Jin Hua*] (“Golden Flower” Goddess)).

But not all gods and demons enjoyed China-wide fame. Several of the *shen* housed in the temples to be visited by us were worshipped locally in Kwangtung [Guangdong] Province — place of origin of the majority of Hong Kong’s inhabitants — or in a particular village or county in the province. Associated with this system of deification then is regionalism. The Little Tradition, carried largely by word of mouth and locally written folk tales, contains much regional variation both in the *shen* worshipped, some of whom were notable persons in one area, and in the cults and rituals associated with such worship.

And gods may be of regional importance in another sense too. We saw that for the scholar Heaven and Earth are equally real and interdependent. For the follower of the Little Tradition however the worlds of the gods and demons are real in a more literal sense. They are reflections of the world or some aspect of the world of the living: gods for example have a governmental system. They rule over provinces, counties and villages. Gods at the county level are superior to those at the village level and there are those, like the Jade Emperor, who are more elevated still. The various gods and demons, moreover, may have needs and desires similar to some of those of the living — and this has some implications which will be discussed in my other paper.

Just now we saw that gods and demons are made by the living, and here we come to the matter of dependence of this Tradition on the Great. Both Confucianism and Taoism have contributed to the general pantheon. Confucianism encouraged the “canonization” as it is usually termed, of local persons of outstanding morality in official or family life. Taoism contributed its sages and other approved personages.

Members of the Great Tradition contributed to the “Little” also in other ways. Scholars have sometimes sought to explain the mysteries of *Yin* and *Yang* to the uneducated by allegory: by using anthropomorphic ideas. Some of the religious sects existing in China for centuries might be considered one type of vehicle for “translating” Great into Little Tradition here. Both scholars (often those failing examinations) and ordinary folk, particularly women, participated in such sects. In some such sects the Void is represented as a female *shen*: “Heavenly Mother”.<sup>10</sup>

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10 She is worshipped by a number of sects of *Hsien-t’ien Ta Tao* [*Xiantian Dadao*] “The Great Way of Former Heaven”, which are discussed in my “The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, XXVI (2): 370. [See Chapter 9 in this book.]

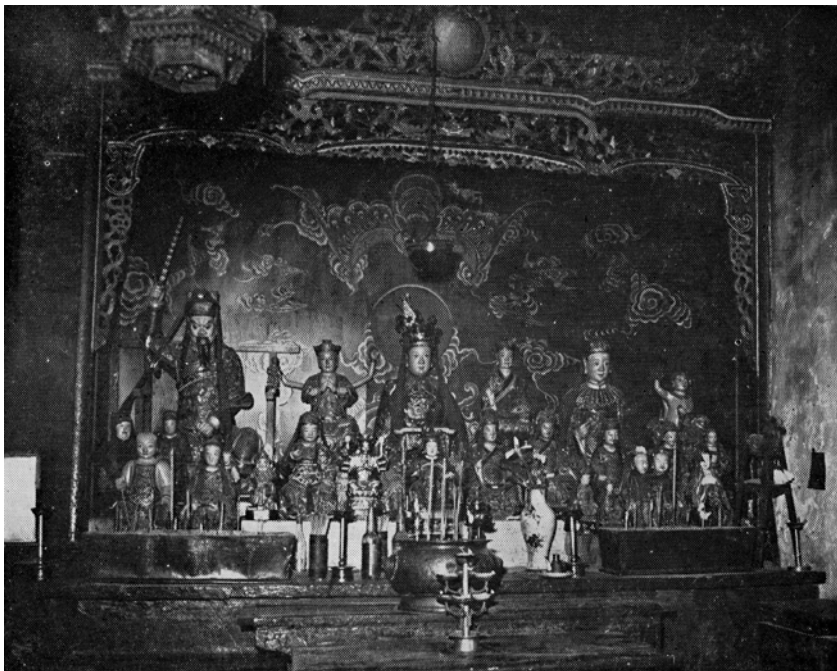


Fig. 3. Altar to *Kam Fa* (C) in the *Shui Uei Kung* (C) [*Shui Yue Gong*] Temple.

But not only has the scholar's tradition acted on that of the ordinary man: the latter's tradition reflected back on him. As a child he would have been familiarized with its ideas at his mother's knee: some of the first stories he would hear would be of adventures in the spirit worlds. As an adult he might participate in institutions of the Little Tradition, and might practice divination as a past-time and find new gods. Perhaps the scholar might see the Little Tradition as containing much he could not accept himself, but as a system, then, which is the ordinary man or woman's way of seeing a similarly structured universe.

Different versions, different traditions. Sometimes the same context of activity and sometimes different. The scholar brings himself into harmony mainly with the forces of the universe, and for the ordinary man, the gods, demons — even the dead — and men and their worlds, interact and balance one another: harmony among them all must be preserved. The follower of the Little Tradition has many cults — many in which the scholar does not participate — but like the educated man, in sickness, determining fate and the future, siting houses and so on, he must reckon with the things of the universe.

## People in Hong Kong: The Nature of Their Involvement

As I have said before, we do not know precisely who and how many in Hong Kong's population today follow these traditions and practices. But one might ask finally: what is the nature of involvement for people who do follow either of them here? People sometimes ask whether Chinese in Hong Kong move in a more metaphysical world than their urban Western counterparts; and whether Western ideas are driving out the traditional ones.

It is extremely difficult to get information on people's attitudes — their more intimate relationship to the ideas they use: what they in fact know about and believe about the ideas behind the things they do. One's impression however is that the average person leaves detailed knowledge to the expert: he knows enough to be aware of the type of person he should consult on matters concerning his fate and that is enough. Another impression — born out by material in some of the papers — is that people do not usually turn to Western ideas because they come to believe them more "true" than the traditional ones. Rather, they follow some Western practices because they find them effective in some circumstances and some Chinese practices for similar reasons. People may move in and out of Chinese and Western traditions, at least at the present time: the effect is the proof — if it works it is true.

But how important is comprehension or belief for people of any culture using the ideas of that culture for social action? What is the relationship in fact of the average Englishman, say, to the body of ideas on which the doctor he consults bases his treatment? He may do what the doctor tells him because he, like the people we have been talking about, believes what the doctor does is effective.

But he might also use "folk" remedies for some conditions too — for example a hot toddy when he has "caught a cold". Here the action, and also the term "cold" are based on a set of ideas very different from those underlying contemporary Western medicine. But our Englishman may be unaware of this: he believes what he does to be effective — and he "believes" in "colds".

And what of the man who takes a patent medicine because the actor advertising it looks not only healthy but prosperous? What does he believe? The role of belief in all this is, I think, very difficult to pin-point. Let me leave you with an observation and comment which I think might be relevant to some of this. It concerns the attitude of some people in England towards television programmes which depict family and other social dramas.

The adventures of the characters in some of these dramas appear to be so real to certain people that they act as though the characters exist.

Arthur Koestler who is interested in the psychological value of illusion to creative activity in literature and other arts gives “Coronation Street” — a series about the life of people living in a street in the North of England — as a prime example: a female actress playing a character who is being “taken-in” by a married sailor receives scores of letters warning her of her danger; the actor playing the sailor is threatened outside the studio by a mechanic; and when another character is sacked on the screen, the actress playing the role receives offers of jobs from people all over the country.<sup>11</sup>

Do these letter-writers believe the characters exist in fact? Koester thinks the answer is both yes and no — they live in a “bisociated world”. But perhaps sociologically speaking they believe in another sense: that they are “a good thing” — they represent values, act out situations which are socially approved or disapproved, and confirm that certain social institutions or goals are worth having.

Perhaps something like this may be found in the relationship of some of the followers of the Chinese tradition — particularly the Little Tradition — to ideas. Perhaps, for example, the gods and demons with their needs similar to those of men and their social life which is again somewhat similar, explain or confirm the value or give meaning to some of the things of which they have more concrete evidence in everyday life. And perhaps then, they do not question their beliefs and what they know of such matters too closely — because they get certain satisfactions from them. This is a question I will return to later, in my other paper.

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11 See his *The Act of Creation*, pp. 302ff. London, 1964.





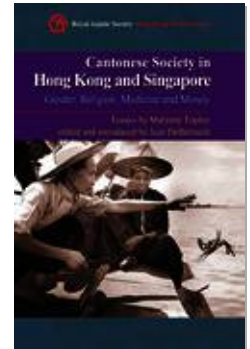
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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## Chapter 14

# Chinese Occasional Rites in Hong Kong

(1967)\*

### Introduction

Some of you have visited Chinese temples in Hong Kong, and you may have noticed that many rites are performed by people acting on their own — not, that is to say, as members of religious congregations. A good deal of “popular” religious activity — performances of the kind I would call “Little Tradition” [see Chapter 13 above] — is in fact individual. People act singly, or with the aid of a companion or sometimes a ritual expert, to change circumstances in their lives.

My interest here is in the role of such rites in the religion of the Cantonese in urban Hong Kong today.<sup>1</sup> I want first to distinguish two kinds of individual performances for the purpose of my analysis: they are what I term “regular” and “occasional” rites.

Regular rites have broad objectives: to offer thanks to gods or other spirits for good fortune encountered, or request general benefits or aid from them in avoiding troubles in the future. They take place at annual festivals or other dates recurring in the lunar calendar and propitious for religious activities (the first and fifteen of the moon for example). Performers do not need very profound knowledge of religious matters — they can be used in several different performances.

Occasional rites deal with more specific problems and are performed as such problems arise. The more specific the circumstances, the more

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\* This paper has been slightly expanded for publication. M.T.

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1 I deal with the urban area because I have more experience of such rituals and their performers in the city, and not because they do not exist in the countryside. It may be in fact that certain rites and materials are more popular in the urban rather than rural areas owing to the different way of life, but this is another subject and further investigations would be required before a comparison could be made.

knowledge of spiritual matters may be needed. Material adjuncts are tailored more to particular needs and are sometimes “custom made” for individual needs. It is with this kind of rite then, as the title of my paper indicates, that I am concerned.

I shall not give very detailed descriptions of the rites themselves; indeed there are many occasional rites and much variation in what might be done at any one of them.<sup>2</sup> I shall give brief descriptions of some ritual materials in common use and outline some of the most popular rites in urban Hong Kong, but my main discussion will be of the meaning and purpose of such ritual: what puts it “into motion” so to speak, and what it is meant to “do” for the performer. This is what I mean by the role of such ritual in the religion. I would like to be able to tell you more about the social role of such ritual also, in contemporary Hong Kong — what occasional rites *really* “do” for the performer. It would be interesting to know more precisely, for example, what prompts certain people to accept ritual solutions for their troubles rather than others and how far such rituals and the conceptions on which they rest control the individual and his behaviour in society. Unfortunately I do not have this kind of data at present. In a final discussion, however, I suggest some questions or hypotheses which might be worth considering as starting points for anybody interested in undertaking such a study, and which seem to me to be thrown up by the material I deal with here.

### **The Individual, Cosmic Forces, and Spirit Worlds**

In my introductory paper [Chapter 13 in this book] I focused on the position of man as an entity sharing certain cosmic elements and also his true nature with other entities. I did not say very much then about man as an individual — about his own “private”, so to speak, relationship to the cosmic forces, or to the spirit world.

But as we have seen from other papers, the combination of factors surrounding an individual’s birth determine that his fate, even personality, physical make-up and talents, should never be quite the same as somebody else’s, even though he shares much with his fellow men. We heard of the eight characters associated with an individual’s date of birth; their relationship to the working of heaven and earth, and how they might be used in divination. We also heard that man might use knowledge of his

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2 Some more detail is given in my “Some Occasional Rites Performed by the Singapore Cantonese”, *Journal of Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, XXIV(III)(October 1951). Rites by Cantonese in Singapore are similar in essentials and performed for similar reasons to those in Hong Kong. [See Chapter 1 in this book.]

individual relationship to cosmic forces in understanding his physical constitution, curing sickness and guiding his diet; that he might also sometimes explain psychological states in terms of individual relationships to cosmic forces and spiritual beings, and indeed that such conceptions may even occasionally induce such states themselves. Let me now look at matters of individual fate and impersonal forces, and see their relevance to some individual problems and ritual solutions.

Firstly, a “weak” fate might be suggested by constant ill-health and a failure to gain those things in life which are desired: children, a good job, and good social relationships. In children, bad temper, poor appetite, and a failure to progress physically or mentally, or some physical blemish, or chronic affliction might similarly indicate a fate “weakness”. An examination of the eight characters of birth by an expert might then confirm one’s suspicions.

A remedy might then be sought by placing the sufferer under the protection of a deity or another human being. This is done most commonly in infancy — such fate weaknesses being more easily corrected in youth.<sup>3</sup> Children are most commonly adopted “spiritually” (*k’ai-kwoh* (C) [*qiguo*]) by the goddess *Kam Fa* (C) [*Jin Hua*] who specializes in problems of those under sixteen. There is a simple rite at which the situation is explained to the deity concerned and the child makes obeisances to the image of the deity — or somebody does so on its behalf. The name of the child might then be written on a list of names of children who have been so “adopted” by the goddess, and which is kept in the temple, and an amulet of the goddess given to it to take home and wear (see p. 394). Such relationships commonly end when the individual reaches maturity but during the time they are in effect, the child or a parent will perform regular rites at the deity’s festival.

When seeking a human “adopter” one looks for somebody with a “strong” fate, indicated by good health and prosperity, or somebody to whom the gods might be thought well-disposed: a vegetarian or regular worshipper. There is no religious ritual to mark the occasion but a dinner is usually held and some gifts exchanged. Women are in greatest demand as “adopters” and referred to as “spiritual mothers” (*k’ai-ma* (C) [*qima*]). They should be visited regularly: at times when people usually pay ceremonial visits to kinsmen. In contemporary Hong Kong such a relationship is sometimes viewed more materialistically than ritually — more practical advantages are sought from it particularly if the “adopter” is influential or wealthy.

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3 Certain fate “weaknesses” may have positive advantages however. Females with weak *Yin*, or males with weak *Yang* “elements” make the best spirit mediums. They are more easily “possessed” by *Yin* or *Yang* spirits respectively.

Sometimes however an individual's fate is temporarily weak. Because of factors surrounding his birth he may clash with forces operating at certain times, and sickness or other undesirable consequences may follow from attending particular functions (e.g. funerals), or encountering certain people (e.g. priests). One may handle the problem by avoidance however — the almanac conveniently lists those things to be avoided by people born at various times.

Deities may help with such temporary problems also. In the spirit world (of which more presently) there is a Ministry of Time staffed by sixty gods in charge of the years of the Chinese cycle and known as *T'aai Sui* (C). To gain protection from the *T'aai Sui* of the year in which danger is expected one simply places a wad of mock money under his image (*Sip T'aai Sui* (C) [*She Taisui*]: "Elevating *T'aai Sui*"). Many temples have images of these gods. Fig. 1 shows a set in the *Sui Tsing Paak/T'in Hau* (C) Temple at Taipingshan. Some images can be seen to have been slightly elevated.

There are also dangerous times or "barriers" (*kwaan* (C) [*guan*]) which children must encounter sometimes during their first sixteen years. Details of them are listed in the almanac and a simple rite called "Going Through the Barrier (*kwoh-kwaan* (C) [*guoguan*]) may be performed to prevent trouble when a pass is expected. Non-performance however may lead to difficulties arising and for which more elaborate ritual may be needed (see below p. 395).

These then, are troubles resulting from impersonal influences: although gods may be brought in to aid in their solution, they are "technical problems" so to speak — one has committed no offence.<sup>4</sup> But in going about the ordinary business of living, any individual whatever his characters of birth, might encounter troubles more directly connected with spiritual beings one might offend. Ideas about the spirits provide us with alternative explanations for particular problems — and problems connected directly with spirits are less predictable.

Important in understanding such problems, first of all, is the type of relationship seen as existing between spiritual entities of certain kinds,

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4 Some particular influences effecting man adversely and not related to time of birth are also mentioned by Dr. Yap in his paper in this brochure. See P. M. Yap, "Ideas of Mental Disorder in Hong Kong and Their Practical Influence". In: *Some Traditional Ideas and Conceptions in Hong Kong Social Life Today*, ed. by Marjorie Topley, pp. 73–85. Hong Kong: Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch. [Editor's note: Dr. Yap was born in Malacca and educated at Cambridge University. At the time that this book was published, he was a Senior Specialist in Psychiatry of the Medical Department of the Hong Kong Government. He has published a number of influential articles focused on "culture bound syndromes" in different societies.]



Fig. 1. Some of the sixty *T'ai Sui* (C) Gods in the *Sui Tsing Paak/T'in Hau* (C) Temple.



Fig. 2. Altar to *Kam Fa* (C) in the *Shui Uei Kung* (C) Temple.

and mortal beings. It is one of interdependence. Gods, demons, and some spirits of the dead are not only interested in the doings of mortals but look to them also for the satisfaction of various needs or desires. Man's life and happiness, then, may be effected by such factors.

But the interests, needs, and desires, of different types of being are not all the same, and so man's relationship with them all — the way his fate is effected by different classes of spirits — varies further. To see how this can be we must now look more closely at popular conceptions of the spirit world — or rather worlds — and the first thing that strikes one about them perhaps, is that these worlds are not only all different, but the amount and type of detail available to ordinary folk about them varies.

Take the demons first: we know they are all around us — they occupy our dwellings, villages, and cities. We know they have keen material interests. Demons want many of the same sort of things men want — children, clothes, and money, for example. All this presupposes some sort of “demon” social and economic organization, but we know little of their “social life” — how and when they interact with one another if at all. There are methods of controlling them but as we will see controls are exercised from *outside* their world — by gods and by men.

Demons are in fact rather like children: unpredictable in their demands, and easily offended. They may be malicious also, causing accidents and sometimes they are “little men” (*siu-yan* (C) [*xiaoren*]) who spread unpleasant gossip. Some precautions can be taken to avoid trouble: care should be taken in sweeping out rooms — house demons do not like disturbances; possessions and good fortune should not be carelessly flaunted — you may give a baby son a girl's name or one indicating he has no value. But if trouble is encountered — a child's sickness might indicate an attempt by a demon to take him from you — ritual correction and control may be necessary.

Ritual consists partly in giving demons what they want — or rather substitutes for the real thing — mock money, clothes, even “children” made of paper and bamboo — and partly in admonition. One does not want to destroy all demons however. They sometimes bring benefits as well as troubles — benevolent house demons for example bring a household peace and prosperity.<sup>5</sup>

Less appears to be known of the material wants of gods than of demons. Paper coats, mock money and food are usually offered them for favours but not usually in response to demands. But more is known of their social organization than in the case of the demons. They have a

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5 I am told of a house with benevolent demons in a Kwangtung village which is now occupied by local cadres. They have taken over the “luck”, it is said, which these demons brought to their past owners.

bureaucratic structure for governing both themselves and men: they also symbolize public morality. As I have indicated elsewhere [see Chapter 13 above] the structure is similar to that of dynastic China. As well as possessing ministries (we have mentioned the Ministry of Time) there is a regional hierarchy with the Jade Emperor at the top. Under him are gods in charge of provinces, districts, cities and villages, and to some extent gods and their temples in Hong Kong are still associated with local populations. At the bottom of the hierarchy are a host of nameless officials, or “honourable men” (*kwai-yan* (C) [*guiren*]). As with the Chinese traditional system of official etiquette, god-officials may normally be approached only by those immediately above them in the hierarchy, and mortals are also involved in the system.

Ordinary people acting alone, often approach the “honourable men” in seeking aid from higher gods. They may also approach another god of uncertain official status — the White Tiger — at the same time (see p. 400).

Certain types of mortals however are considered to be on a level with higher gods generally. Taoists of the kind known as *Nam-mo-lo* (C) “chanting fellows” take the rank of god when they are initiated. They may approach gods of importance direct, and it is sometimes an advantage, thus, to seek their aid in ritual performance at least for more serious troubles. They also specialize in subduing demons, drawing for their power on a group of beings called *T’ien-chun* [*Tianjun*] “Heavenly Worthies” who are non-accessible to ordinary mortals. Although calling themselves Taoist, these priests cater mainly for the needs of the Little Tradition. They not only perform occasional rites but others in the Tradition, particularly those associated with death and the post-mortuary period.<sup>6</sup>

Gods play a role in admonishing troublesome demons but they themselves may also bring about some of man’s troubles. They may be offended by ingratitude or disrespect shown by mortals.<sup>7</sup> They may also be offended by the failure of man to fulfil his social — particularly kinship — obligations. A ritual remedy here may not be enough: rites of propitiation and expiation may be performed — food and “clothing” offered the offended deity — but it may also be necessary to promise a change in future behaviour.

The spirits of the dead may also cause trouble to one offending against them or against the living. What ideas about the dead and their

6 Mandarins are reported also to have been able to approach certain of the higher gods more freely in worship, when participating in temple rites in traditional China.

7 Maurice Freedman gives a case in point in a discussion of *feng-shui* and morality in his *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung*, pp. 127ff.

“world” are involved here then? The Chinese have several conceptions of the soul and there is more than one possible after-life and relationship with the living. But when one tries to see more precisely which souls are most interested in living man and what needs they have, to be met, one comes up against a problem: there has been considerable syncretism; different conceptions are run together and the result is an imprecise and sometimes inconsistent picture, difficult to describe.

Perhaps the most detailed although not most consistent set of ideas to emerge at the Little Tradition level however is that relating to the underworld. The underworld is on one hand a purgatory (Buddhist influence) where souls are punished for religious “crimes” — eating meat for example — and on the other it is a place where the dead can enjoy an existence somewhat similar to that of their mortal counterparts. Purgatory and the “social underworld” however, are not seen as separate sections of the same place — nor are they clearly associated with different types of souls (as they were originally) in people’s minds. A person may, rather, hold the two conceptions separately — sometimes thinking of the soul in purgatory and sometimes in the “social underworld”. He is not worried about inconsistencies (any more than is the average Christian worried, after all, about conflicting conceptions of the after-life in his own eschatology).

The sociological implications of all this are very interesting but I cannot deal with them fully here.<sup>8</sup> I confine myself to pointing up the relevance of such concepts for occasional rites and their performance.

The soul needs the assistance of the living to equip it with the means to pass quickly and as painlessly as possible through purgatory, and also to provide the means for enjoyment of a comfortable material existence in the “social” underworld. Purgatory is conceptualized in term of *Ch’ing Dynasty* public punitive institutions: there are courts, judges — the Buddhas and gods of popular religion — places of punishment, and demons to carry out sentences. Most important, this system can be manipulated. Judges are bribed with money, and passports burnt for the easy exit of the dead. The social world however is very much *contemporary society* “ploughed under”. The soul there needs material goods similar to those used by modern man — houses, money, clothes, and cars, for example.

But the dead in the underworld do not only have material needs. They are also interested in the moral behaviour of the living: ancestors, particularly, being interested in behaviour of descendants. They may be humiliated by a failure of their kinsmen to live a sober life or care for

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8 I explore them further in an article “The Fate of the Soul: Syncretism and Some Popular Conceptions of the Underworld” (unpublished manuscript).

their families. Troubles may arise then from a failure either to provide material comforts or live in accordance with the wishes of ancestors or other dead. But those people, other than kinsmen, who die with a grievance against the living generally, or against a particular person, may also cause misfortunes — demand restitution for wrongs performed or thought to have been performed against them. One may sometimes compensate them also by ritual means — supply them with goods, and arrange for other social satisfactions (see below p. 402).

### **Performers of Rites**

With so many possible alternative explanations for troubles — so many different conceptions of man's connection with the non-material plane — how should one act in difficulties? Who possesses all the necessary knowledge and ability to identify the correct sources of trouble? Most ordinary folk, in my experience, have very limited knowledge of such matters. But one often finds that women, particularly those past middle years, know more than men and are also more apt to turn to spiritual explanations and solutions to problems. This does not necessarily mean that all men and young people are sceptical today (or that some women are not sceptical). As I have said elsewhere, women traditionally performed a key role in many religious matters at the Little Tradition level and in Hong Kong they are often seen acting on behalf of other members of their family — thus a larger sector of the population is in fact brought into the sphere of ritual cure.

Rituals which women perform alone and without any advice are of a fairly limited range however. They may act independently when troubles are relatively small, when purely “technical” factors are thought to be involved (perhaps after consultation with the almanac), and when demons, rather than gods or spirits of the dead, are suspected to be the cause of trouble. There is no hard and fast rule about what one might do without expert advice but I have witnessed rites, for example, performed alone by women to help children through “barriers”, cure minor sickness (again particularly in children); to deal with such things as nightmares, and feelings of depression; and to counter social problems believed caused by malicious gossip. Some of these rites and the ritual materials associated with them will be dealt with later.

The performer who acts alone usually visits a shop selling ritual goods and buys some well-known “household” remedy, rather as a sufferer from a minor physical complaint seeking a medical cure, goes to a chemist shop to obtain some patent medicine. Many ritual goods are sold already made up into sets for such purposes.

## Experts and Their Role

When ritual performed alone fails to have the desired effect; in cases of more serious illness, and serious mental disturbances — for example the type of hysteria which as Dr. Yap points out may be presenting as spirit possession; and when it is suspected a god, or spirit of the dead, may be responsible for one's afflictions, an expert might be consulted.

Some elderly women — often domestic servants or housewives — act as general consultants (for a small fee) and will perform ritual on behalf of clients. In fact many women one sees performing rites in Hong Kong are acting for payment on behalf of others. They usually have a broad general knowledge of occult matters — knowing for example the names and interests of various gods and habits of demons.

Spirit-mediums specializing in communication with the dead might also be consulted. They majority are women: women being essentially *Yin* in character are thought more easily able to contact all *Yin* spirits and the dead are included in this category (see Chapter 13, pp. 374–77). Some mediums work through spirit-possession. They first search the underworld for a soul likely to be the source of trouble — usually a kinsman — often working with the assistance of a *shen* (goddess), known as “Third Lady”. They identify her with *Kuan-yin*, the Goddess of Mercy, who has an important role in caring for souls in the underworld. There are often one or two false starts — the wrong soul appears at first — but eventually a soul with a grievance is usually found and the client questions it. Speaking through the medium it explains its problem and what the client must do to rectify the situation. A different method of communication used by some women also is by getting souls to answer questions put to them through Third Lady. Third Lady gives the answers by rapping on a night-soil bucket.<sup>9</sup> The amount of detail which can be obtained this way is of course more limited than with the other method.

Traditionally other mediums specialized in contact with gods. They were usually men: men being *Yang* are thought more easily able to contact deities, which we saw are *Yang* in character. They again practiced spirit possession but the beings called upon were not sources of man's problems but deities specializing in helping man with his troubles. This

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9 According to one source, Third Lady was a concubine murdered by a jealous wife. The Supreme God took pity on her and conferred on her the title of “Spirit of Latrines”. In China, women made request and asked questions of her spirit by holding a dung-basket. The spirit answered by rapping the bucket. See E. T. C. Werner, *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*, p. 535 under Tzu-ku Shen. Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1932.

kind of mediumship is rare in Hong Kong and more usually found among the Chiu Chou people there.<sup>10</sup>

Blind men represent another type of expert. They are thought to have a particular ability to see onto the non-material plane, sometimes being helped by bone fragments taken from dead children and which they carry in their pockets. The bones of the dead are thought to possess a spiritual power known as *ling*, those of the young being especially powerful. What they see on the non-material plane is one's fate in a special form: a flowering shrub (a sort of "plant of life"). On such plants are flowers representing the children one is destined to have, but also as with the portrait of Dorian Gray, the plant might show the effects of dissipations — with withered leaves and flowers — which are not yet visible, perhaps, on the face of the client himself. One corrects this situation, with the expert's advice, by having a representation of a new plant, made of bamboo and paper, by a ritual goods shop, and which shows the state of health and perhaps number of children one desires. Fig. 3 shows a plant made up for a private order. I was unable to discover precisely what troubles it was made to correct, but the seed pod which you can see lying on the pot itself suggests a connection with desired fertility. The plant was sold to me by a shop in Taipingshan but I was assured another would be made to take the place of my purchase.

Perhaps the type of expert most commonly resorted to in Hong Kong is the *Nam-mo-lo* (C) "chanting fellow" or Taoist priest already mentioned. A consultation with one is something like a consultation with a doctor. He must first ascertain the nature of the trouble experienced and what, if anything, has been done so far to deal with the situation. Details of age, birth place and eight characters, and life history are then taken. Such priests specialize in identifying demons and other spirits causing trouble (although more rarely spirits of the dead) and often themselves prepare the ritual materials they recommend. They also as I have said, may perform ritual on behalf of clients specializing in subduing demons.

### Perpetuation of Ritual: The Ritual "Industry"

All those engaged in the religion business rely ultimately on the client's

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10 I have observed a Chiu Chou and Hokkien (people from Amoy) speciality in such medium practices also in Singapore. Alan Elliot in his *Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults in Singapore*. London: London School of Economics, 1955, thinks there is little reason to believe such practices were not found in other provinces and that the Hokkien and Chiu Chou popularity relates to early immigrant factors in Singapore. But he does also mention the "relative lack of interest...among the Cantonese" in such mediumship. See p. 165 of his book.



Fig. 3. "Plant of life".

belief in, or willingness to be convinced of the existence of gods and demons and the *Yin-Yang* processes of the universe, and the role they play in troublesome situations. The role of experts in perpetuating such ideas and associated ritual practices in Hong Kong appears a vital one: their skill in handling clients, ability to draw them out, perhaps discover details of some incident of which the client is ashamed and which he might be able to associate with the trouble, and the ring of conviction in their voices when describing what is wrong and why it is important to perform a particular rite — all are important in determining whether or not ritual takes place.

Generally, experts work closely with certain ritual goods shops and also temples. Often an expert deals exclusively with a particular shop, always sending his clients there. The Taoist priest's inventive ability also, might be important to a shop's business. He not only stimulates demand for traditional materials but suggests the manufacture of new ones. Such priests, moreover, usually patronize a particular temple, or group of temples, and recommend them also to clients who perform individually. Sometimes there is an overlap in functions and personnel, further integrating the "economics" of religion: the proprietor of a shop may himself be an expert — perhaps a part-time Taoist priest, or the keeper of a temple may be an expert, and also sell ritual goods for clients' use.

I want to say something now about ritual materials and their use in urban Hong Kong. I will deal with those most commonly available and

used by the Cantonese, first outlining the main types of goods used and then describing a few items and their use.

### Main Types of Ritual Goods

Incense, red candles and food offerings of various kinds (the latter sometimes “rented” from a temple where rites are conducted) are used in nearly all Chinese rituals of the Little Tradition.

For occasional rites some kind of paper “charm” (*fu*) is also necessary. Some charms purport to be written by the gods and direct the powers that be to bring benefits or remove troubles for the performer, or admonish the demons. A few of these may also be used in some of the more regular rites aiming at general matters.

The names of many of these charms clearly reflect Chinese notions of the bureaucratic structure of the pantheon. They include *tsien* [*jian*] and *p'ai* [*pai*]: “edicts”, “tablets”, “mandates” and “injunctions”; and *tieh*, “credentials”. A popular type of *p'ai* is the *chin p'ai* [*jin pai*], “golden tablet”, named after the imperial edict. Such charms are after printed on yellow-faced paper in imitation of imperial yellow paper used traditionally by officials in writing orders, and a vermillion substance, imitating that also used by officials, is used for printing the characters. The potency of the charm is in the strength of its pronouncements, but it is greatly enhanced by use of a god’s seal. Such charms usually have spaces left in the text for inserting the place of origin of the person the charm is intended to aid: the county, district and so on (the province Kwangtung is often already printed on them thus indicating their express intention for use by Cantonese). There is also a space for the person’s name, and the date on which the rite is performed.

Other charms are referred to simply by the general term *fu*. Some of these are also directions of gods or Buddhas, and others request aid from them. Again spaces are usually left for personal details. There are, additionally, charms indicating the benefits to be enjoyed or troubles avoided in crude pictorial form. Sometimes visual puns are used on them: the picture is of an object whose name is a homophone of the name of the benefit or trouble. The homophone often exists only in the Cantonese pronunciation of the character: again indicating the charm is meant for people speaking this dialect. Another kind of charm does not enlist the aid of spirits directly but contains diagrams and formulae believed to have direct power in overcoming demons. Some are hand-made and obtained from Taoist priests.

Functionally speaking charms divide roughly — there is some overlap — into several main types also. There are those meant for burning

at the end of the rite — all “official” documents are of this kind; those meant for medicine — they may be reduced to pellets and swallowed, or burnt and their ashes mixed with tea and drunk (they are usually smaller and written on thinner, more “digestible” paper); charms for wearing as amulets — usually folded into triangular shape, and those for fastening to walls, or under beds (for fertility), usually in the form of long strips. Many charms of all kinds are made in Hong Kong but considerable numbers are also imported from China each year.<sup>11</sup>

Various kinds of paper mock money (*ch'ien [qian]*) are also used in occasional rites. There is gold and silver bullion — thick squares of rough paper bent into a bowl shape — used in many rites and which act as a sort of tray at the end of rites for placing all the objects used which are now to be burnt; there are gold and silver ingots — square of paper with a small square of gold or silver substance stamped in the centre and which are folded before use into a shape representing the Chinese ingot; small cash — usually meant as offerings to any other spirits who might be near during a ritual performance and look with covetous eyes at the richer offerings presented; and there are other forms of “money” which are really charm papers on which cash are printed containing magical formulae or Buddhist writings. They are meant to aid souls in rebirth (an exit from purgatory).

Other paper items used include cut-out “coats” and figures representing demons and other spirits involved in particular rituals; and of course the “custom made” structures — spirit plants, etc. which are usually built onto bamboo frames.

### **Some Items Commonly Used in Hong Kong and Some of Their Uses**

Many charms and cut-outs are connected with appeal to the “honourable men” (*Kwai-yan* (C)) which as we saw are minor officials most easily approached by mortals acting alone. They are coloured red or printed on red paper and often used in conjunction with other papers representing their horses and coloured green (*luk ma* (C) [*luma*]) — *luk* here being a homophone for “lucky”.

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11 In the period Jan.–Nov. 1966 imports of “joss papers” from China totalled HK \$10,996,842 in value, out of a total value of \$11,178,598 of such imports from all areas. Only \$4,262,004 of the imports were re-exported. “Joss sticks” and “joss powder” from China in the same period totalled \$2,081,491 (from Hong Kong Government, *Import and Export Statistics*).

Illustrated here (see Fig. 4) is a paper bridge charm with “honourable men” attached to it and used in restoring health to a child who has encountered a dangerous pass in a rite called *Hoi Kwaan To K’iu* (C) [*Kaiguan Daoqiao*] “Opening the Barrier on Reaching the Bridge”. First the child (or an item of clothing if it too sick to be present) is taken through the barrier either by the simple method of passing a small tiger-faced “gate” (see Fig. 5) over its head and then tearing the gate in two while it is held aloft, or by having a Taoist priest carry it in and out of a tall paper and bamboo gate structure which many temples keep for such purposes. The sickness may also be transferred to a paper boat (see Fig. 6). The child is then handed across the bridge by the person bringing him to either a Taoist priest, or somebody else available, perhaps the temple keeper. Food is then offered to a deity, usually *Kam Fa*, the protector of children, and a charm paper depicting the gate the child has passed through is burnt together with some paper “coats”.

Sometimes an extra rite called *kaai sai* (C) [*jiexi*] “Untying and Washing away (the illness)” is performed at this time. A small cash is lit and placed in a bowl of water and a priest asks the demons what they want: whether it is clothing, money or food, and whether the earth demons living in the child’s home have been offended by anything. Chinese wine is poured out on the ground and a paper and bamboo “child substitute” and other paper offerings are burnt together with a charm called a “Reliever of a Hundred Catastrophes” (see Fig. 8). Food is also offered the White Tiger.

When adults are sick and the trouble is thought to be caused by some unknown malevolent influence a rite called *hei faan* (C) [*qifan*] “Lifting the Influence” may be performed. A paper charm depicting either a man or woman — whichever is appropriate — is used. The sickness is transferred to it and it is then burnt together with a “Hundred Catastrophes” paper and another charm called “Good Omen Paper” (not shown). When sickness is thought to be the result of offending a god, the same rite is sometimes performed but it is then termed *hei faan* (C) “Lifting the Offence” (different character) and the patient is additionally cleansed with pomelo leaves dipped in water — a common method of purification in Chinese ritual, at least in the South.

Other “honourable men” and “green horse” papers shown here are cut-outs and charms. The long streamer cut-outs (Fig. 9) are used in requesting general benefits and removal of troubles. The separate cut-outs (Fig. 8 centre) are part of a set of materials used in the rite called *paai siu-yan* (C) “Worship (against) the Little Man”, as is also the charm depicting an “honourable man” on his horse (Fig. 8 top left). Other items in the set are a paper (bottom left) on which is printed a chain (at top), various creatures dangerous to man (below chain), a broom (bottom left on



Fig. 4. Bridge of paper and bamboo with "Honourable Men" fixed to the rail, used in rituals.

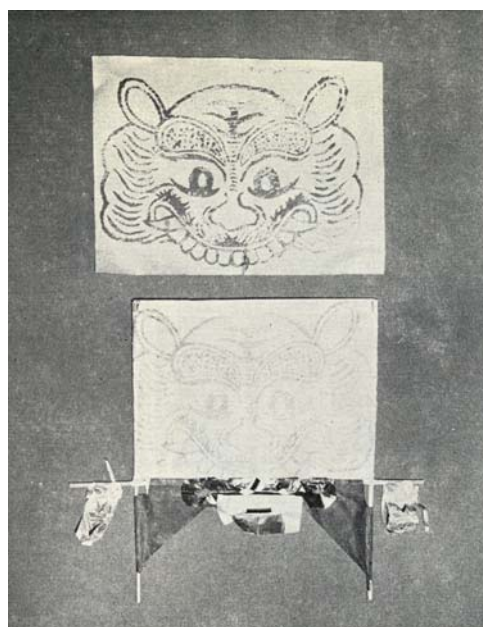


Fig. 5. "Tiger Gates" used in the *Kwoh Kwaan* (C) rite.

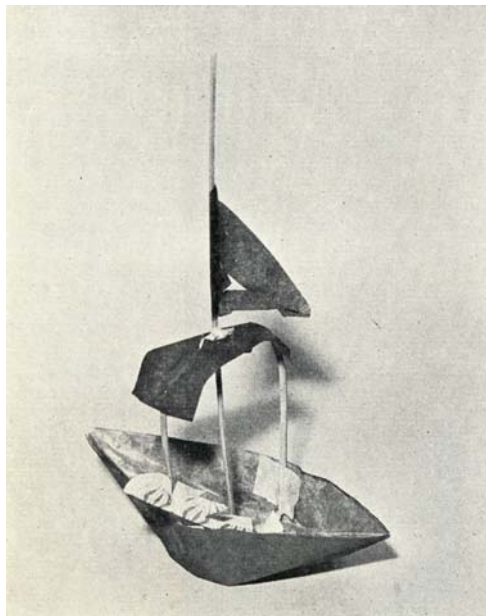


Fig. 6. Boat of paper and bamboo used in ritual for transporting sickness away.

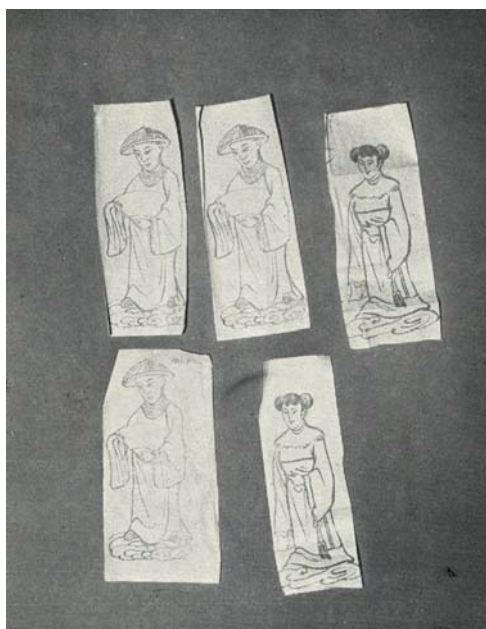


Fig. 7. Human figure prints used in rites for sickness.



Fig. 8. Set of materials used for the performance of *Paai Siu Yan* (C): “Praying (against) the Little Man”.

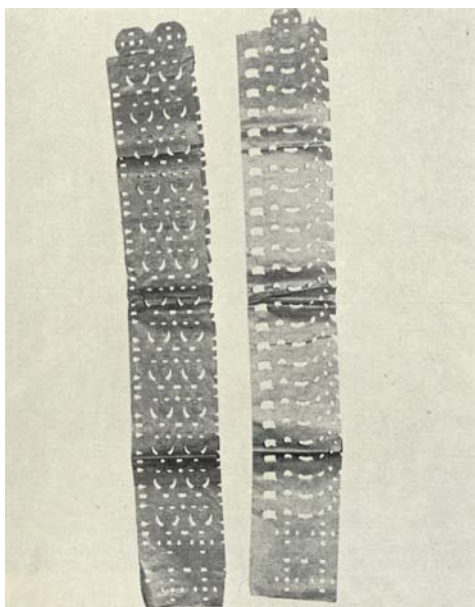


Fig. 9. Paper cut-outs for ritual performance: *Kwai Yan* (C) “Honourable Men” and *Luk Ma* (C) “Green Horses”,



Fig. 10. Rite at a *T'o Tai* (C) shrine. Note the "Honourable Men" and "Green Horses" fixed to the shrine roof and wall behind.

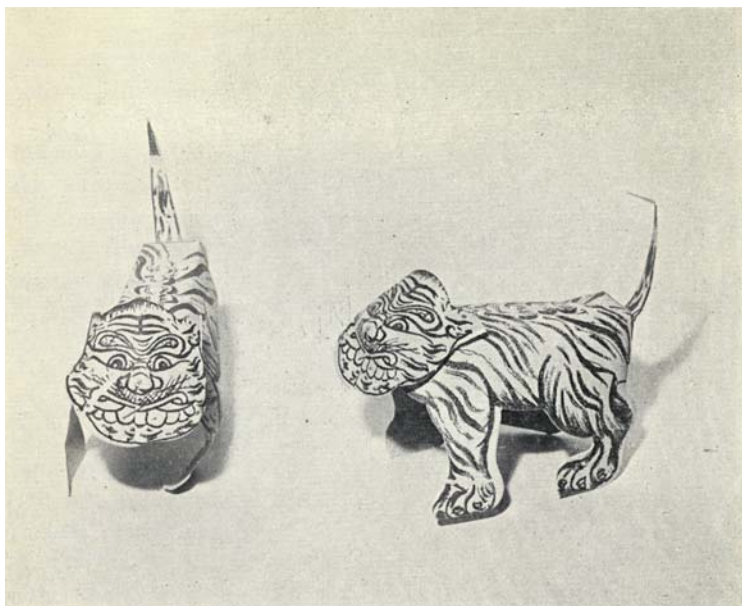


Fig. 11. "Paper Tigers" used in rituals related to the White Tiger God.

paper) — brooms being used traditionally in defeating evil spirits — and a row of “little men” (looking very much like an aboriginal tribe!). Right of this paper is a “Hundred Catastrophes” paper, and top right are small paper cash, incense, a paper “hand” for punishing the “little men”, and two candles. This set is for somebody wanting a quick performance. The honourable man and horse are stuck on to the wall where the rite is performed (see Fig. 10) and their aid is asked in defeating the Little men — gossips causing trouble. The other papers are burnt and an offering is made to the White Tiger.

More detailed sets are available also, which contain separate cut-outs of a “little man”, chain, and sometimes paper shoes for kicking the little man. A more aggressive version of the rite may then be performed at which the “little man” is laid on the altar firstly, and “beaten” with the hand, “kicked” with the shoe (sometimes women take off their own shoe for the purpose) and “chained”. He may then also be stuck to the wall (sometimes upside down) with the chain across him, or burnt in the usual way. The “honourable man” and “horse” are stuck up as before.

The rites outlined here are usually performed at a White Tiger altar or Earth God altar, but the latter rite might also be performed at a cross-road or under a bridge where demons are thought to congregate. Images of the White Tiger are usually made of stone and found *under* altars to other gods, in temples. Sometimes at the Earth God shrine no separate image of the Tiger is found but in the spring and autumn, popular times for all rites involving the White Tiger, “paper tigers” (see Fig. 11) may be bought in ritual goods shops. A performer then takes her own image alone to the shrine, or cross-road, or bridge, where she is to perform.

## Discussion

In this paper we have seen that various problems may be thought to arise from invisible “powers” in the universe. But there are multiple conceptions involved: there are mechanical forces and spiritual beings. Spiritual beings are conceptualized in terms of various experiences of life and society of the living.

Ritual itself then, may involve a number of processes: there are those which are partly mechanical in operation, and others resting on the idea of interdependence between man and the spirits and in which various beings are admonished, punished or propitiated, and in which acts of expiation may be performed. The performer may regard her trouble as arising from technical factors or she may not: she may act out situations in which greater or lesser degrees of anger — “aggression” — may be expressed.

What then is “accomplished” by such ideas and rites? It would seem that purely technical explanations and methods of control are not enough — there is a desire to blame and receive blame in certain situations. All this suggests some queries which might be made, regarding the type of control such ideas and rites may have over the individual *qua* individual and *qua* member of society.

One set of questions I would raise concerns the significance of the fact that Chinese hold different kinds of knowledge about the different spirit worlds and their inhabitants. Demons are, we saw, inferior to man, very materialistic, and unpredictable in their demands. Does such a view then allow people to explain the arbitrariness of life — particularly poor people who form the bulk of the followers of the Little Tradition; whose control over their environment and material necessities is minimal, and who meet, perhaps, with many frustrations which they find difficult to explain rationally? Do the more “Dionysian” rites, so to speak, relating to demons, allowing as they do for more aggression to be released, have a therapeutic function in relation to such frustrations? Do ideas about demons perhaps teach one useful lessons — not to flaunt one’s possessions, place too high a value on the material things of life? Do they also perhaps occasionally help the individual to deal with feelings of guilt or shame — indicating as they do that if a child falls sick, or people dislike one, it is not really one’s own fault but that of the “little men”? And how about the gods? They protect one’s interests when they are moral interests on the whole, and provide control over social situations because they are “high officials” (interestingly, Taoist priests who also perform such functions in ritual but also help one with less lofty interests are not given high social status in Chinese society). Ideas about the status of gods perhaps both reflected socio-political values and also helped buttress them. The “political” society of gods is now of course “out of date” in Hong Kong, and may have little meaning for the living (except that people here still tend to think high officials not directly approachable) but the moral role of gods should not perhaps be discounted — the check they provide on anti-social behaviour.

The popular conception of the world of the dead suggests some particularly interesting questions I think. With the popular conception of purgatory the original Buddhist retribution theory is considerably weakened, and so is the Buddhist idea that a personal relationship — kinship relationship for example — is of no particular relevance in helping such souls (by Buddhist lights the living may help the dead though cosmic — not social — connexions between them). The “popular” purgatory is a copy of a man-made system which is manipulatable. When in trouble with law during life one expected one’s kinsmen to offer most help. Why not at death also?

The “social underworld” would seem to perform valuable functions in terms of man and society also. It gives the dead a world where they can conveniently continue their interests in the living and also “live” in a manner which would make their continued interests rational. The dead then stand between the demons and gods in having both material and moral interests, consistent with their manner of living. And the social world would seem to have another function also: to provide a situation in which it is possible to set things right with certain people after it is *too late to do so on this earth*. Let me give a case in point. In this underworld the dead may marry if they die unmarried — but they need the ritual of the living in order to do so. A woman I know had such a rite — a “ghost marriage” — performed after experiencing serious troubles. Her husband died suddenly, she developed a serious illness and her two children were also mysteriously ill. An expert discovered she had once been engaged to a man who died before their marriage could be finalized. The expert — himself acting, perhaps, in a therapist’s role — brought out her concealed feelings of being in the wrong here — that it had been her fault the marriage was delayed: she had failed to fulfil an obligation. And he also provided a solution to her problem.

And this brings me to another set of questions which must be the last one here. It concerns the cost of ritual and role of “giving up” in all this. How far is expense a reflexion of serious intent — how far does it again perform a therapeutic function (the whole complexity of gift-giving and the spirits perhaps needs further detailed investigation)? The woman I mentioned had paid a lot for the “ghost wedding” she had performed. But many rites are cheap. One anthropologist remarked that it is not the thing itself but the spirit of the gift that matters. One may serve the gods without losing touch with Mammon. There are elements of rational calculation of matching material loss against command of material resources as well as against immaterial or spiritual gain.<sup>12</sup> And so with the Chinese case we have surrogates — paper “children” — and mock “clothes”, and mock “money” — all of which can be bought at very little cost.

Money runs throughout the ritual theme — it is used in rites for gods, demons and the dead. Could it be that the poor trace their major frustrations to lack of money: that a plentiful supply of cheap money enables them then to act in a way in the spirit world impossible in this one — in controlling situations? One may care for one’s dead kinsmen in a style not possible during their lives; one can provide the wherewithal to

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12 See Raymond Firth in “Offering and Sacrifice: Problems of Organization” in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 93(1)(1963): 22 and 23.

gain favours from “high officials” — thought to be impossible with those on this plane; and one can pay off nuisances who threaten one’s happiness.

We would have, of course, to find ways of framing our questions to elicit meaningful answers or answers which could be tested. But we need also to find out much more about the users of such explanations and methods themselves. As I have said not everybody uses them. We need then to know what people in what circumstances are most likely to have recourse to them — do we have here an outline of ideas which can be filled in in more detail as circumstances dictate (we can know more or less about the social life of the dead for example as necessity dictates), and do people use them as a first line of defence or something to try when all else fails?





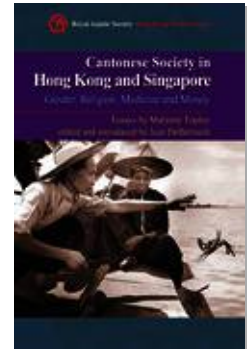
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

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## Chapter 15

### **Notes on Some Vegetarian Halls in Hong Kong Belonging to the Sect of *Hsien-T'ien Tao* (The Way of Former Heaven)**

(1968)\*

On Saturday, 16 March 1968, members of the Society visited four vegetarian halls at Ngau Chi Wan, Kowloon, belonging to a religious sect called *Hsien-t'ien Tao* [*Xiantian Dao*]. These notes are based on materials provided for the visit, which we have rearranged and expanded slightly, and they include also a brief account of the visit itself.

We chose vegetarian halls for our visit because they are, to many members of the public in Hong Kong, less known places of worship than the more popular temples, and the monasteries and nunneries of Buddhism. When we first came across these particular halls in Kowloon and discovered they were of the *Hsien-t'ien Tao* sect they seemed to us to be an obvious choice for another reason: they follow an ideology standing outside Buddhist and Taoist religion and again far less known to most people in Hong Kong than these faiths.

A field study will have to be made before a full account can be written up of either vegetarian halls or of the *Hsien-t'ien Tao* and its operation in Hong Kong today. These notes are intended to provide the reader with some general outline information and are based on information already obtained by Marjorie Topley here, and in research elsewhere, and by James Hayes in interview with members of these Kowloon halls prior to the visit. The short bibliography of works which we have appended provide more detailed material on the background of this and similar religious groups, and their vegetarian halls in China in traditional times. We refer the reader also to an article by Marjorie Topley elsewhere in this volume on matters of religion in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Co-authored with James Hayes. First published in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, "Notes and Queries", 8(1968):135–51. Reprinted by permission of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch.

1 See Chapter 10 in this book.

## I. The Vegetarian Hall and Its Purpose

Vegetarian halls (*chai-t'ang* [zhaitang]) form part of the organization of more than one Chinese religion. They are found, for example, in Buddhism, and are perhaps better known to the general reader in this context; and they are found in connexion with a number of esoteric sects with mixed beliefs of which *Hsien-t'ien Tao* is one of the most popular in the region of Hong Kong. Their main purpose is to provide members of the connected faith with a place where they can meet and engage in common worship and also practise certain individual religious tasks, especially in the sect. They are usually residential today.

The diet provided in such halls, is, as one would expect from their name, entirely vegetarian. Many halls today welcome members of the public who wish either to worship one of their deities, some of which are generally popular with the Chinese, or to take vegetarian food. Vegetarian meals are often provided, for example on such popular festivals as those of *Kuan-yin* [*Guanyin*]: "Goddess of Mercy".

The halls of all faiths are particularly popular in Hong Kong with unattached women especially working and retired domestic servants (*amahs*). They provide a home in old age and a *pied-à-terre* for the working woman. Many of the residents of the halls visited were retired *amahs* and several of their occasional inmates were said to be working *amahs* and factory girls. Halls also provide funeral benefits and house the soul-tablets of deceased members. It is usual for women to make regular payments during their working life for permanent residence and funeral arrangements later on.

Another attraction of the halls, both Buddhist and sectarian, is that they recruit members through what one might term a pseudo-kinship system. One joins through a master who is regarded as something like a father; the fellow disciples of this man are termed (paternal) "uncles" and one's own fellow disciples "brothers". Halls normally house "family" households, and one hall may be connected with others through extended "family" relationships, and, in the case of the Buddhist halls, with monasteries and nunneries occupied by monk and nun "brothers" in the "family". Genealogies may be constructed and kept.

Such "families" practise "ancestor" worship (unmarried persons may receive such ritual attentions and have tablets placed for them in the hall: not customary in the traditional Chinese actual kinship system). They also engage in many social activities of the kind in which members of the actual family participate: members attend each other's birthdays, anniversaries of death, and so on, and visit back and forth among the various vegetarian halls in the "family" group on such occasions. Membership, then, provides real social satisfactions as well as security.

But a further attraction of vegetarian halls, which is offered by the sect only, is rank. The inmates of halls of *Hsien-t'ien Tao* differ in one important sense from those of the Buddhist faith. Buddhist halls are a fairly late development in the religion and were built to house lay-members of the faith: individuals not wishing to take the full vows of the clergy but wishing to live a life of abstinence. Halls of *Hsien-t'ien Tao*, however, exist not only for lay-members, although many of the inmates hold no office or rank in the religion; they exist also, and more importantly, for those who have taken religious degrees and hold rank. It is for such rank that special religious tasks are necessary and they include *Ch'an* [*Chan*] Buddhist type meditationary activities and Taoist exercises for breath circulation and control. It is reckoned that such persons need special living facilities for their purpose and the majority of the sect's rank-holders live in vegetarian halls at least on an occasional basis: men as well as women.

Rank in the sect is undoubtedly an attraction to many of the unattached women residents of the halls of *Hsien-t'ien Tao*. Rank-holders do not shave their heads as do the Buddhist clergy, or wear special robes, except for certain ceremonials, and like the lower members of the sect they refer to themselves as "laymen". They do, however, distinguish non-rank-holders, using the term *hu-tao* [*hudao*]: "helpers of the way (sect)" for them. Rank-holders may have a good deal of responsibility for teaching and spreading the religion. You may be surprised to know that there are *amahs*, occupying a humble position in secular society, who are, in their religious life, rank-holders enjoying not only the respect, but also the obedience of many other women, to whom they might be religious "masters". This brings us to the question of the religious beliefs of *Hsien-t'ien Tao* and what, more precisely, it is a sect of.

## II. Affiliations and Beliefs of *Hsien-T'ien Tao*

*Hsien-t'ien Tao* is one of a large group of sects tracing themselves either to a common pair of founders, a monk and layman said to have been of the Buddhist faith and to have lived in China in the early part of the eighth century; or to one of their patriarch-successors. These sects share a common ideology, have the same goals, and some have a similar system of rank and appointments, even possessing the same rank-names and terms of address. Some of these sects are, like *Hsien-t'ien Tao*, vegetarian, that is to say they demand a permanent vegetarian diet (and also sexual abstinence) from their rank-holders; and some, generally speaking the more recent off-shoots, are non-vegetarian. It is only the vegetarian sects which are organized through vegetarian halls.

Some of the other sects operating in Hong Kong today and recognized by *Hsien-t'ien Tao* to be related to it are *P'u-tu Men* [*Pudu Men*]: "The Salvation Sect" and *Kuei-ken Men* [*Guigen Men*]: "The Sect of Reverting to the Root [of Things]", which are both vegetarian; and *T'ungshan She* [*Tungshan She*]: "The Fellowship of Goodness", which is non-vegetarian and was particularly active in the period leading up to the founding of the Chinese Republic and immediately afterwards.

The ideology of these sects is known by *Hsien-t'ien Tao* rather confusingly as *Hsien-t'ien Ta-tao* [*Xiantian Dadao*]: "The Great Way of Former Heaven". It is syncretic, incorporating elements from a number of sources but most importantly from Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism, and from Taoism, and the *Yin-Yang* cosmology which received general acceptance by the Chinese in traditional times. In combining all these elements, however, the Great Way ideology, as we will refer to it here, produces an original synthesis: a system of ideas distinct from any other. The religion divides time into three major epochs, or cyclical periods, during each of which it is supposed that Absolute Truth comes into the world, is taught by a major Buddha and other distinguished sages, and then, unless men have made efforts to prevent it, becomes distorted and finally disappears. The disappearance of Truth from the world is followed by a major catastrophe (there might also be minor, localized disasters during each period due to minor Truth distortions). All sects in the group believe we have already passed through the first of these periods which was followed by a great flood; some believe we are in the second period now (dominated by *Sakyamuni* Buddha) which will be followed by a great fire unless we act to prevent it; and a few believe we are actually in the third period which will be followed by a wind catastrophe (interpreted by the sect *Kuei-ken Men* as an atomic war). It is in this final period that the Buddha *Maitreya*: "The Buddha to Come", will appear, and the catastrophe can be avoided if men help him to set the world to rights.

### III. The Chinese Government and the Sects

Esoteric sects were regarded with the greatest suspicion in traditional times. They clothed much of their religious activity in secrecy; men and women met together for worship in their halls, even sometimes residing in the same premises (although in separate apartments); leaders did not wear clerical dress, they sometimes lived in their own homes and were not easily recognized as sectarians, and therefore could not be controlled like Buddhist monks; and such men wrote their own sutras. All these things were considered highly unorthodox.

But worse still, organizations of the group to which the *Hsien-t'ien* sect belongs believed strongly in a millennium. When *Maitreya* appears, it was believed, he will attempt to set things right by organizing (with man's help) an ideal form of government and preventing the spread of distorted doctrines and the catastrophes they lead to. During the last century the sects were under the control of patriarchs and it was commonly believed by members that *Maitreya*, when he appeared, would be incarnate in the body of one of these leaders (such men engaged in special religious practices similar to those of tantric Buddhism, to "absorb" Buddhas of their choice and take on their powers). When undertaking work for the millennium the sects took special secret names, one being, significantly, the White Lotus (from the symbol associated with *Maitreya* Buddha).

When the State, in the nineteenth century, heightened its campaigns to stamp out sects, it was particularly those of the *Hsien-t'ien* group which took its attention. Marjorie Topley has been able to examine the patriarchal records of several of these sects for the period, and they tell a violent tale: many of their top leaders were, at this time, banished, imprisoned or executed, often after torture. The campaign against the sects has continued into this century and in the 1950s mainland newspapers carried news of further punishment for sectarians for their interpretation of local floods and other natural disasters as signs of the distortion of Truth and bad leadership of the country.

#### IV. Effects of Suppression on Sect Organization

One effect of campaigns against the *Hsien-t'ien* sects was to create leadership problems. Patriarchs were sometimes put to death before any successor could be appointed, sometimes several of those likely to succeed to office were put to death simultaneously too, and there was no precedent for electing a leader from among the remaining rank-holders. This led to further splintering into sub-sects: new off-shoots appeared headed by various of the remaining men of top rank.

An effect of all this on the sect which concerns us here was to cause it to abandon the patriarchate entirely and also do away with the next highest places which were occupied by five men known as the "Five Elements". Leadership was handed over to men of the rank immediately below these five who became known as "family heads" (*chia-chang, jiazhang*), and were placed in charge of groups of vegetarian halls occupied by his "kinsmen".

Another effect was on the establishment of vegetarian halls themselves. In some cases members met in their own homes when

campaigns against the sects were at their highest, or non-residential halls were established in the towns where they could pass as shop-houses. Sometimes only the “family head” and other top rank-holders lived in residential halls and these were built in lonely places difficult of access.

But the banishment of leaders also brought the sects down to the south of China: to places where they were exiled. Previously their strongholds appear to have been Szechuan [Sichuan] and Anwei [Anhui] Provinces. They were strong also in the Hanyang region. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they began to spread into Hong Kong and to other places overseas: Singapore and Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia, and Borneo. For instance, during our visit we were told that there are currently 100 halls of the *Hsien-T'ien Tao* sect in Thailand and on the walls of several of the halls visited we were shown photographs said to be those of halls there and in Singapore.

## V. Vegetarian Halls and the *Hsien-T'ien* Sect in Hong Kong

At the present time we have only fragmentary information on the *Hsien-t'ien* sect in Hong Kong. The sect appears to have reached here, however, sometime in the late nineteenth century: it will be noted below that one of the halls visited was established in the period 1912–13 (No. 3) and another about 1910 (see under No. 2).

The expansion of vegetarian halls in the second decade of this century is referred to, though with specific reference to the New Territories, in the *Administrative Report* for 1920 of the District Officer, North. He wrote:

One of the most remarkable features of the year has been the rapid growth of “*chai t'ong*”<sup>2</sup> or “vegetarian halls”. Five years ago these religious or quasi-religious establishments had practically no foothold in this district: now they are everywhere in parts within reasonable reach of the railway and main roads, Sha Tin, Tai Po, Fan Ling and Pat Heung, each have several and are asking for more. Their promoters or managers are extremely secretive as to the objects of these enterprises, but it is sufficiently clear that they are designed chiefly to attract the well-to-do of Hongkong, particularly the womenfolk and that the believer is not expected to come empty-handed. Pending a straightforward explanation of the sudden “boom” in these “halls” permission is being refused for all new establishments as well as for extensions to existing ones.

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2 Cantonese romanization

There is another entry in his 1921 *Report*:

The embargo on “*chai t'ong*” continues in force. The revelations in a “*fung shui* [*fengshui*]” case...coupled with certain vague statements from the “*T'ongs*” regarded funerals of members seem to indicate that one of the objects of these institutions is to find good “*fung shui's*” [*sic*] for their supporters.

The same District Officer commented to his superiors:

Nominally they are places of retreat where the earnest-minded withdrawn from their fellowmen and living on the simplest of food can meditate upon “the most Excellent ‘Way’”. But in practice they come nearer to a Thames-side hotel.

An unfavourable opinion was also expressed by the District Watch Committee, a statutory body of leading Chinese citizens in Hong Kong to whom the matter was referred for advice. It was also asserted that the then Government of Kwangtung had an equally unfavourable opinion and had in fact expelled them from its territory “which, if true, would at once account for their phenomenal growth in ours,” he wrote.

It is clear from these comments that the Government of Hong Kong at that time was uncertain of the religious affiliations of these halls and it is not possible therefore to say with certainty whether or not they were all sectarian or how many were of the *Hsien-t'ien* sect. Nevertheless from the remarks made about the secretiveness of the promoters and managers as to their objects, one must assume that some at least belonged to the sects. It is particularly interesting to note the reference to the opinion of the Government of Kwangtung and one may wonder how far traditional Chinese ideas of unorthodoxy influenced the ideas not only of the Chinese citizens commenting and who may have known more of their true nature, but also, more subtly, those of the British officer in charge of the District in which the vegetarian hall boom was being experienced. One can of course appreciate Kwangtung's feelings about this boom. Expulsion of sects from its territory would be of little avail if they were planning to set up establishments not far away and from where they hoped to conduct work for the millennium!

It is interesting, perhaps, to compare the situation here with that in Singapore about the same time, where it is clear from evidence collected by Marjorie Topley there was a similar boom in development. The Singapore Government was clearly unaware of the sectarian connexions of halls built at that time, and indeed is still unaware, as far as she knows, of such connexions with halls built also in the 'thirties when there was another boom associated with the influx of unattached working women from Kwangtung at that time. Presumably these developments were too

far away to concern the Government of China or perhaps they were unaware of them also.

Today, in Hong Kong, the *Hsien-t'ien* sect of concern is a registered company, going under the name of the Sin Tin Taoism Association Ltd. ("Taoism" as used here comes from the term *Tao* [*Dao*] used in the sect's name: *Hsien-t'ien Tao*, and should not be confused, as in fact it sometimes is, with the religious system of this name). It does not appear to be militant today in its search for its religious goals but, on the contrary, does much valuable charitable work. In 1943, during the Japanese Occupation the Sin Tin Taoism Association raised money to provide a home for the aged, which it established at Tung Choi Street, Kowloon. In 1945, as the landlord claimed back these premises, the home moved temporarily to the Pun Har Tung *chai-t'ang* at Ngau Chi Wan. In 1946 the Association again raised money to build a home for the aged at Shatin and in the same year the home moved into these new premises. In 1955 Sir Alexander Grantham, then Governor of Hong Kong, visited the Home at Shatin.

The sect today appears to attract business men, mainly in traditional-type pursuits and of middle years, and a few school teachers; but its largest contingent is undoubtedly female. Although the District Officer in his comments above talks of vegetarian halls being designed to attract chiefly the well-to-do, the majority of inmates of the halls are certainly in the lower income brackets. One is not certain where the money raised for charity comes from but one might assume, perhaps, that it is largely from lay-members in business and living in their own homes. It is hard to believe that the vegetarian halls make large profits.

There are said to be something like 70 halls of this sect in Hong Kong (including the New Territories) today. Those we visited were said to have from about 30–40 permanent inmates and some 20–30 casual residents each, although we have not been able to check these figures to date. One of the spiritual advisors of the ladies living in the halls we visited told Marjorie Topley that the various sects of the religion represented in Hong Kong (excluding the non-vegetarian) had recently been coming together again. Previously they had regarded each other as mutually unorthodox as they sprung from different leaders, but they had decided to sink their differences and work together in their common beliefs. This, interestingly, coincides with a similar campaign for amalgamation underway in Singapore.

## VI. Visit to the Halls in Ngau Chi Wan

The following background information was obtained by James Hayes on

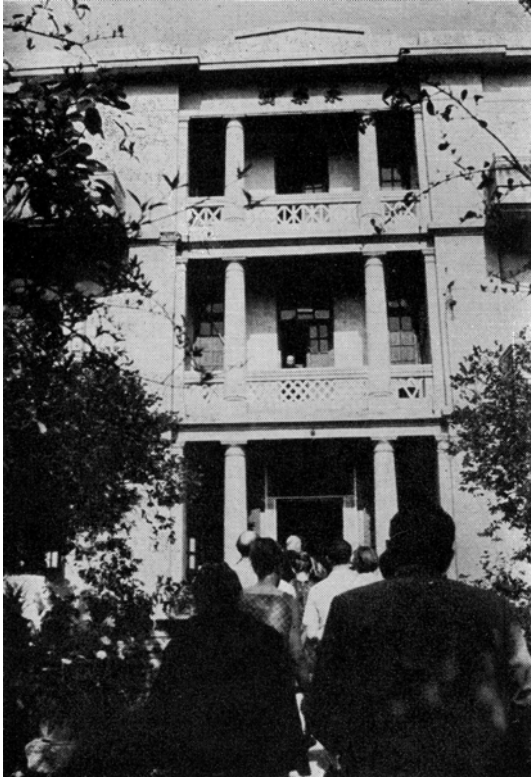


Fig. 1. The front of the *Wing Lok Tung* vegetarian hall. (Photograph: Miss P.E. Wortley-Talbot)

three of the halls visited by the Society. Our visit to the fourth hall was not on our original itinerary and was in the nature of a surprise. We therefore have no information, unfortunately, on this hall at present.

### 1. *Wing Lok Tung* 永樂洞

This hall was built in the 20th year of the Chinese Republic (1931–32). It was founded by a female member of the sect who held the third highest of six ranks which may be taken by members of the sect (the two highest are reserved for men only). This rank is known as *Yin-en* (引|恩) “Conducting (or Guiding) Grace” and entitles the holder to the middle name of *Ch’ang* ([*Chang*] 昌). For a full list of ranks in various of the sects see “The Great Way of Former Heaven....” by Marjorie Topley, cited below. [See Chapter 9 in this book.]

This lady's father, said to have been an ordinary tenant farmer, and a native of Fa Yuan district, Kwangtung, had held the *Cheng-en* rank in the sect, one below his daughter's. He died in the second year of the Republic (1913–14) and the daughter, his only child, followed him into the religion. Photographs of both these persons can be seen at the hall.

The founder of this hall was also said to have been in charge of the Yee Woh Hall (怡和堂) in Canton, but on the Japanese occupation of South China in 1937–39 she and a body of her followers removed permanently to the Wing Lok T'ung in Ngau Chi Wan.

One of the present inmates of this hall was previously with the founder in Canton, having followed her into the sect at the age of 9 (she is now over 60 years of age). Her mother was said to be a cousin of the founder.

## 2. *Kam Ha Ching She* (金霞精舍)

This hall was built in the 16th year of the Chinese Republic (1927–28). The founding lady was of the same rank as the founder of the above hall and like her had previously been in charge of a vegetarian hall in Canton, the Shui Woh T'ong (瑞和堂) before coming to Hong Kong.

The Shui Woh T'ong and the Yee Woh T'ong above, form part of a group of halls of the sect known to members as the "Woh groups", because they each have Woh as part of their name. They are not to be confused with the secret society of this name.

The establishment of the Kam Ha Ching She was said to have been a result of an increasing following among women from Hong Kong who visited the founder in Canton. Deciding to establish a hall in the Colony she set up the Man Yuan T'ong (萬緣堂) on a floor in rented premises in Third Street, Hong Kong island, probably about the year 1910. The growing number of followers and would-be subscribers encouraged her then to build a new hall and she was able to purchase a private plot with a small house on it at Ngau Chi Wan, formerly occupied by a Buddhist nun. The house was pulled down and replaced then by the present hall. This hall belongs to the same sect as a group of halls studied by Marjorie Topley in Singapore and the founder of one of these halls, the Fei Ha Ching She (飛霞精舍), there, was not only well known to the inmates of this hall in Hong Kong, but his photograph was observed by us to hang on its wall in a place of honour.

## 3. *Man Fat Tong* (萬佛堂)

This hall was established in the first year of the Chinese Republic (1912–

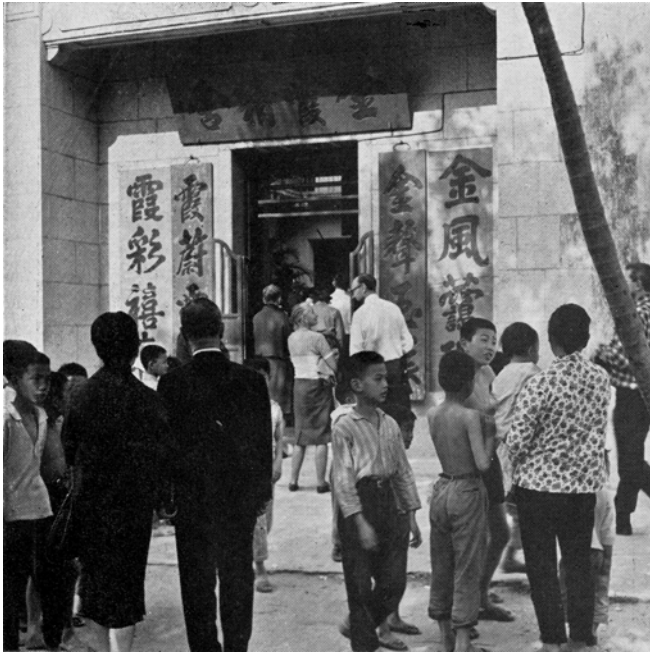


Fig. 2. Members of the Society and children of the area, outside the *Kam Ha Ching She* vegetarian hall. (Photograph: Miss P.E. Wortley-Talbot)

13). The founder was a native of Sai Chiu, Kwangtung and was at some time a domestic servant in Hong Kong. She held the same rank as the founders of the above halls and cooperated in financing the hall with three or four other former domestic servants. They begun by building the main shrine room, the rest of the main structure being added some years later (about 1923). Gradually she bought more land and enlarged the structure as funds came in from co-religionists and would-be inmates.

One of the present inmates of the hall, now 67 years old, was brought here by the founder from Canton when she was 20 and she worked two years in Hong Kong as an *amah* before returning to the hall, where she has been ever since. Another lady, now 58, was brought here when 14 years old and has never been employed outside the hall.

### **Appearance and layout of the halls, and deities worshipped**

The founders of these halls said there was no particular reason why they had chosen Ngau Chi Wan for their halls apart from the fact that the land was cheap and had good *feng-shui* (geomantic properties) and the

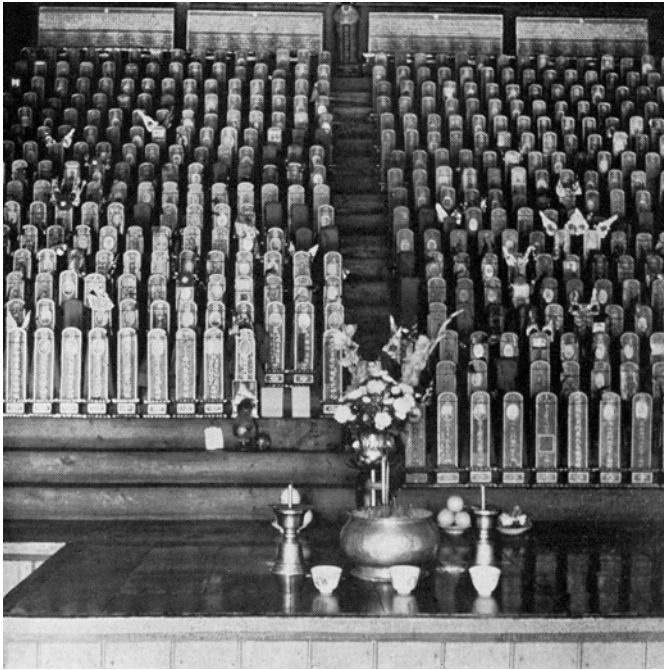


Fig. 3. Soul-tablets of deceased inmates and other members. Decorations attaching to some tablets were said to have been placed there by close associates. (Photograph: Miss P.E. Wortley-Talbot)

environment quiet. The surroundings of these halls must undoubtedly have been conducive to the contemplative and religious life in those early years. Although they are now bordered by a busy and noisy market and adjacent to the big housing estate of Choi Hung, the noise does not appear to penetrate into the halls and their small gardens in which they grow some of their vegetables even today.

The halls are all substantial buildings, somewhat simpler in style than the usual run of Chinese temples and they do not declare themselves obviously as religious institutions. Once inside, however, their religious nature is obvious from the images one sees immediately in the main downstairs shrine room where one enters.

A few words are in order here on the deities worshipped by members of the sect and particularly in the vegetarian halls, for one of these deities effects the layout of the hall itself.

Women inmates may worship any god or goddess popular with them in a private capacity, and some have pictures and small images of such deities in their own sleeping quarters. *Hsien-t'ien* religion has itself



Fig. 4. An altar in one of the halls visited. At top left is a portrait of a female “master” in the sect. (Photograph: Miss P.E. Wortley-Talbot)

incorporated, however, a number of gods and goddesses and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas into its worship. *Kuan-yin* [*Guanyin*] is commonly found in halls of the sect and was in fact found in the halls in Ngau Chi Wan. Popular Chinese triads such as Sakyamuni, Lao Tzu and Confucius (Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism) are also common and appeared in the lower shrine room of the Wing Lok T’ung. The sects relate various gods and Buddhas to each other by the theory of reincarnation: one god is the reincarnation of another, or of a Buddha in a different age. They are also related to each other by their cooperation in the work for Truth in a particular “Truth” epoch.

A goddess peculiar to the sects of the religion exists, however. In this sect she is known as “Golden Mother of the Yao Pool” (*Yao-ch’ih Chin-mu* [*Yaochi Jinmu*]). In other sects she is known by different names: several simply call her “Venerable Mother” (*Lao-mu* [*Laomu*]), while *Kuei-ken Men* [*Guigen Men*] “The Sect of Reverting to the Root [of Things]” calls her “Unbegotten Venerable Mother” (*Wu-sheng Lao-mu* [*Wusheng Laomu*]). Some sectarian leaders have told Marjorie Topley that they can tell when a particular sect split off from others in the religion by the term of address they use for “Mother”. Mother is supposed to change her name every few years or so in order to prevent the unorthodox off-shoots from obtaining access to her. Any message sent to her under

the incorrect name will fail to arrive. More sophisticated members say, however, that this goddess is in fact a symbolic representation of the Void: out of which the cosmos, and with it, Absolute Truth, emerged. But to most ordinary members, particularly female members, she is a goddess of great compassion and power and they sometimes identify her with *Kuan-yin*.

It is in connexion with worship of “Mother” that the layout of the shrine rooms in vegetarian halls of the sect is important. Mother must be placed higher than any other deity and should occupy a room to herself (or occasionally shared with *Kuan-yin* with whom, as we have said, she is sometimes identified). This means that halls of the sect should whenever possible be built on two storeys, with “Mother’s” room on the upper storey. This was so in the case of all the halls visited. Usually, one of the popular triads is housed in the main downstairs shrine-room (occasionally one finds an image downstairs of the many armed *Chun-t’i* [*Zhunti*]: “Goddess of Dawn”, supposedly of Buddhist origin, but she was not present in the halls visited).

Upstairs besides the room dedicated to “Mother” there is often a shrine also for the soul-tablets of past members.

Members of the Society were fortunately permitted to visit all shrine rooms (some halls do not permit outsiders to enter the “Mother” room).

### **Relations between the halls and the Ngau Chi Wan Village**

There is a certain amount of interaction between the halls at Ngau Chi Wan and the village of this name which, though on the fringe of urban Kowloon and augmented by neighbouring squatter huts and factions, is still largely inhabited by the descendants of founding Hakka families who came to this spot in the mid-eighteenth century and after. The annual festival of the god of the main village temple (said to be a Ch’iu Ch’au deity whose image was brought up from the sea off Ngau Chi Wan by village fishermen a long time ago) occurs on the 25th of the 2nd lunar month. At this time the inmates of the halls visit the opera performance that is held in a mat-shed on open ground in front of the Kam Ha Ching She and worship at the portable shrine that is brought on these occasions from the temple half a mile away. Our visit took place just before this festival and already the bamboo structure on which the mat-shed for the opera was to be built, was being erected. A large temporary cooking stove had also been constructed for the occasion for serving vegetarian food (which Marjorie Topley gathered in conversation with some of the inmates was contracted for by the village temple association from the vegetarian halls).



Fig. 5. The Ngau Chi Wan village temple with which inmates of the halls maintain a friendly connection. (Photograph: Miss P.E. Wortley-Talbot)

Again, at the Festival of Hungry Ghosts on the 7th of the 7th moon, it is “traditional” practice for about 100 students from the village to visit the Kam Ha Ching She to be given a bowl of rice and other food. This is supposed to “help make them stronger and more diligent”. (The sects hold masses at which cooked rice is used and which, in Singapore, is certainly handed out to the poor of the area round a vegetarian hall after the service. It may be that the rice handed out in this case is similarly treated to religious rituals and that it is this which gives it its ability to make students “strong” and “diligent”).

It is also reported that leaders of the Village Affairs Office of Ngau Chi Wan Village are invited to dinner on the 15th day of the 1st lunar month, no doubt to keep up friendly relations between close neighbours.

The vegetarian halls certainly went to great effort to entertain members of the Society on our visit. Each hall provided us with plentiful,



Fig. 6. Vegetarian refreshments are offered by an elderly inmate of the *Tsing Shat* vegetarian hall (the fourth visited, see p. 413). (Photograph: Miss. P. E. Wortley-Talbot)

and extremely tasty, vegetarian snacks, fruit, cold drinks and Chinese tea. We would like to record our gratitude to them for their generosity. We would also like to record our gratitude to those in charge of the halls for permitting this visit and in letting us wander at will, and to the spiritual advisor of the inmates and to other male members of the sect who came along to answer our many questions; also to Mr. Tsang Sum of the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs, Hong Kong Government for much assistance with the visit.

### Some Works of Reference

1. The most comprehensive work on sects in general in the nineteenth century and of campaigns against them is J. J. M. de Groot's *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China: A Page in the History of Religions*, 2 vols. Amsterdam, Johannes Muller, 1903–04. It has now been reprinted (legally!) by Literature

House Ltd., Taipei, Taiwan, 1963. Many of the sects he mentions are members of the *Hsien-t'ien* group. For evidence of this, see:

2. Marjorie Topley, "The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, XXVI(2)(1963): 362–92. "Great Way" ideology is described in more detail in this article, and also the system of ranks and appointments used by several of the sects. The evidence for linking these sects with the well-known White Lotus organization is also discussed.
3. Further details of several sects of the group are provided in articles appearing in the *Chinese Recorder*. See for example:
  - J. Edkins, "Religious Sects in North China", XVII(1886).
  - D. H. Porter, "Secret Sects in Shangtung", XVII(1886).
  - George Miles, "Vegetarian Sects", XXXIII(1)(1902).

The relationship among the sects discussed was not however known to these writers at the time.

Hong Kong 1968

MARJORIE TOPLEY and JAMES HAYES





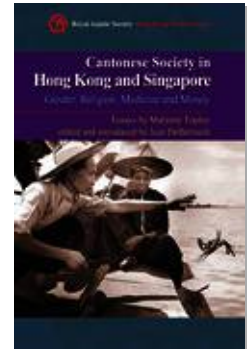
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## Chapter 16

### Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung

(1978)\*

For approximately one hundred years, from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth century, numbers of women in a rural area of the Canton Delta either refused to marry or, having married, refused to live with their husbands. Their resistance to marriage took regular forms. Typically they organized themselves into sisterhoods. The women remaining spinsters took vows before a deity, in front of witnesses, never to wed. Their vows were preceded by a hairdressing ritual resembling the one traditionally performed before marriage to signal a girl's arrival at social maturity. This earned them the title "women who dress their own hair", *tzu-shu nü* [*zishu nü*]. The others, who were formally married but did not live with their husbands, were known as *pu lo-chia* [*bu luojia*], "women who do not go down to the family", i.e., women who refuse to join their husband's family. Such women took herbal medicines to suppress micturition and set off for their wedding ceremonies with strips of cloth wrapped, mummy fashion, under their bridal gown to prevent consummation. Three days after the wedding ceremonies they returned to their natal villages for the traditional home visit, which they prolonged for several years. Some women subsequently returned to their husbands, presumably to consummate their marriage and bear children. Others took the further decision to stay away until they were past childbearing age, and never consummated their marriage.

Most Cantonese grew up knowing something of this resistance, but were it not for a few brief, mostly anecdotal references, chiefly by Westerners, it might have passed unnoted by the outside world. The reasons for this are not difficult to guess. These were not the sort of customs traditional Confucianists would be inclined to write about. The customs arose at a time when marriage and childbearing constituted the only socially valued way of life for a woman; they thus incurred the

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\* First published in *Studies in Chinese Society*, ed. by Arthur P. Wolf, pp. 247–268. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Reprinted by permission of Stanford University Press.

displeasure, sometimes active displeasure, of the State. Nor were they the sort of customs that would commend themselves to modern reformists. The women who eschewed marriage or cohabitation were not interested in marriage reform or in converting women elsewhere to their cause. Throughout the hundred years of the resistance, these practices never spread beyond a relatively small area. They were confined to those parts of the Canton Delta engaged in sericulture: Shun-te Hsien, particularly the eastern part; a small part of Nan-hai Hsien, adjoining northern Shunde and including the Hsi-ch'iao foothills; and a small part of P'an-yü, to the east of Shun-te.

Under what conditions did this unorthodox but non-reformist resistance emerge? How did it manage to persist for a century? And why did it eventually decline? Most sources stress fear of marriage as the women's principal impetus. A few refer to their unusual economic status: women in the area had worked outside the house in the domestic sericulture for centuries, and by the first third of the nineteenth century they were earning cash in filatures and other industrial establishments connected with silk production. These factors must have been very important, but we must bear in mind that women all over Kwangtung [Guangdong] traditionally worked outside their home, and by this century women in other provinces were also working in cash-earning occupations. Yet marriage resistance remained unique to one small area. Was there, then, something special about the area itself, something that might have made the status of unattached women relatively more attractive than it was elsewhere, or the status of married women relatively less attractive? Was there anything particularly favouring female solidarity, or the obvious local acceptance of such heterodox behaviour? Why was it that some members of the resistance married while some did not, and what implications did the two forms of resistance have for the women, their natal families, and their in-laws?

Unfortunately, though the few published accounts we have provide us with some insights into the area that occasionally can be followed up in the wider literature, questions of the kind I have raised are neither asked nor answered by these accounts. And none of them seem to be based on first-hand evidence from the women involved. In the last twenty years, however, a few social scientists have interviewed women from the resistance area who had emigrated to Hong Kong and Singapore. The interviews conducted by Ho It Chong, a former social work student at the University of Singapore, have been of particular value in this study. These first-hand data do not permit firm answers to the questions raised earlier, or allow us to make wide generalizations. First, like the earlier material, it comes almost exclusively from Shun-te and Hsi-ch'iao. Second, it comes from only a small fraction of the women involved and is derived in most

cases from interviews that were not specifically oriented around the marriage resistance.<sup>1</sup> Third, the immense task of researching the Canton Delta has just begun,<sup>2</sup> and many as yet undiscovered facts about the area will affect our ultimate assessment of the evidence gathered so far. Nevertheless, significant variables may emerge if all material now available is assembled and analyzed.

Was there anything unique about the area? I will begin by describing the physical environment and its effect on the local economy and culture. I will then try to isolate local factors that helped generate the resistance, encouraged the particular forms it took, and perpetuated its existence. Finally, I will look at changes in the area and elsewhere that may have contributed to the movement's decline, and see briefly if the local ecology and the resistance itself have left any visible mark on the status of women living in the area today.

### Environment, Society, and Culture

P'an-yü is the largest of the three *hsien* [*xian*] involved, occupying about 1,800 square kilometers; Nan-hai and Shun-te are some 1,360 and 750 square kilometers. Nan-hai has the largest population (about 680,000 in 1947), and Shun-te the smallest (417,000 in 1947). But population densities have been highest in Shun-te; indeed, they are the highest in all Kwangtung Province.

Much of the land is flat and criss-crossed by rivers. Shun-te, in the heart of the Pearl River Delta, is mostly flood-plain. The numerous waterways intersect in a spider-web pattern, making communications relatively easy, but numerous hills rise up from the plain throughout much of the area. On the hills' outer rims — the highest are in Hsi-ch'iao — lie the large villages and market towns. Outside the hilly area, settlement was relatively dispersed.<sup>3</sup>

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1 My own interviews were conducted in the early 1950s in connection with a study of women and religious institutions in Singapore, and in Hong Kong in 1973 for this essay. Ho It Chong's interviews were part of a study of domestic servants' organizations undertaken in Singapore in the late 1950s.

2 The multidisciplinary Canton Delta Project is headed by Winston Hsieh, of the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

3 Wu Shang-shih and Tseng Chao-hsuan, "Chu-chiang San-chiao-chou" (The Pearl River Delta), *Ling-nan Hsueh Pao*, 8.1 (Dec. 1947): 105–22. Translated into English by Winston Hsieh and P. Buell in "Metaphysics Involved in Defining a Region: The Case of the Canton River Delta". Background paper for the Canton Delta Conference, held at the University of Washington, Seattle, 13–15 June 1971.

The wet, sandy soil, often affected by tides, is not everywhere suitable for rice. But it is suitable for both fish breeding and mulberry raising. These activities, together with other phases of sericulture, were the economic mainstays of the area. Fish ponds and mulberry groves went together. Fish were fed on night-soil and cocoon waste, and mulberry groves were fertilized with silt from the fish ponds. When pits were dug to form ponds, the excavated earth was heaped over the rest of the farmer's land to raise it sufficiently above water level for the mulberry groves. A farmer wishing to increase his output would install additional ponds and groves; the characteristic scene was one of densely planted fields of mulberry shrubs, intersected by narrow canals and dotted with ponds scattered irregularly over the fields.<sup>4</sup>

In 1939 approximately 70 percent of Shun-te's land area was devoted to this economy, and about 90 percent of the population was engaged in one or another aspect of sericulture. Nan-hai had close to one-half the mulberry acreage of Shun-te; a little less than half its population was engaged in sericulture.<sup>5</sup> I have no figures for P'an-yü. I was told that much of the land in Shun-te had been reclaimed by wealthy lineage groups, who in many cases lived elsewhere and rented their land to tenant farmers. Some relatively large lineage villages flourished in the area, alongside many smaller multi-surname villages, which were inhabited by tenant farmers. Some of these farmers were described as newcomers by informants, although by the nineteenth century they had been living in the area some time.

Because of the area's subtropical climate, everything grows rapidly. Silkworms produce six or seven broods a year, in contrast to the usual two broods of the Yangtze Valley — another area dissected by waterways. Indeed, throughout Central China, mulberry trees yield at most two pickings a year, which will support only one large brood of worms in spring and another in summer. In this delta area, six to eight leaves could be picked from a plant each month, thus feeding more abundant broods.<sup>6</sup>

Much labour was needed in every phase of sericulture, and a considerable proportion of it was performed by women. Women in Kwangtung did not have bound feet, and female infanticide in the silk area reportedly was relatively rare. B. C. Henry, a nineteenth-century traveller in Hsi-ch'iao, described the scene when the first crop of leaves was ready: "thousands of boys, women, and girls are employed to strip them and pack them in baskets. Hundreds of men in little boats propelled

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4 Glen T. Trewartha, "Field Observations on the Canon Delta of South-China", *Economic Geography*, 15.1(Jan. 1939): 9–10.

5 Ibid., p. 8.

6 Ibid., p. 6.

by paddles dart back and forth along the canals carrying these baskets...to the market-places, where they are...purchased by the owners of silk worms.<sup>7</sup>

There appears to have been a distinct division of labour between men and women. Men and boys were the exclusive rearers of fish: boys helped with the breeding and feeding, men took charge of the fully grown specimens. Catching the fish meant standing in waist-deep water and manipulating heavy nets. This, I was told, was too heavy a task for boys or women. Women cultivated the mulberry groves and together with young boys and girls picked the leaves. Adult men took charge of what was described to me by informants as the first “inside” phases of silkworm raising: the hatching and early care. Later the worms were transferred to mat-sheds, and this “outside” aspect of rearing was entrusted exclusively to women. Finally the worms were brought inside again, when they formed cocoons and needed extra warmth; women took charge of this phase. When the cocoons were ready, women plunged them into hot water to loosen their silk threads. Reeling and spinning were exclusively women’s work, although in some places men wove all the cloth.

Married women were less likely to be involved in sericulture than unmarried women. This was due in part to the time they expended on other household tasks, and in part to notions of pollution and female physiology. Women were considered unclean at certain times, notably during pregnancy and childbirth, when, it was believed, they could harm immature living things, such as young children and silkworms. (According to Winston Hsieh, a similar notion prevailed among silk growers near Shanghai.) In Shun-te, married women were usually excluded from worm rearing and the care of cocoons. They were also excluded from the thread-loosening process because, my informants explained, this was “wet work”: constant association with water was believed to interfere with menstruation and hence fertility.

There seems also to have been a spatial division of labour. Farmhouses were built not near the villages, but near groves and ponds. Glenn Trewartha, writing in 1939, observed that “nowhere else in Kwangtung...do most of the farm houses stand alone and isolated outside the villages.” He describes the farmhouses as being made of mud plaster mixed with straw, contrasting these obviously more impermanent dwellings with the tile-roofed brick houses in the village.<sup>8</sup> According to informants, men spent much of their time at the farms, looking after the fish and the worms in their initial inside phases, but women usually lived

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7 Benjamin Henry, *Ling-Nam: or, Interior Views of South China*, p. 66. London, 1886.

8 Trewartha, pp. 9–10.

in the villages. The married men visited their wives in their village, where they usually had a more permanent abode, and the women went out to the farms to pick mulberries and care for the worms in the mat-sheds. Reeling and spinning were done in the village; Henry observed hundreds of Hsi-ch'iao women sitting by their doors winding the gossamer threads from the cocoons.<sup>9</sup>

By the second third of the nineteenth century, however, the picture was beginning to change. Industrialization had gained a foothold, largely in response to outside competition. Large cocoonaries, some of them owned by lineages, were built in the bigger mulberry plantations. Filatures were set up, the first ones using foot-driven machinery. These industrial concerns employed women because women traditionally had worked with cocoons and at reeling and spinning. They used mainly unmarried women because unattached women had fewer family commitments and were believed to be more reliable in their attendance. By 1904, eleven market towns in the Hsi-Ch'iao-Shun-te part of the area had filatures, some employing 500–1,000 women.<sup>10</sup> Weaving factories were also established, and at first they employed both men and women (men, we saw, had traditionally done the domestic weaving in some localities).

Steam-driven machinery was first introduced in the mid-nineteenth century. It was bitterly resented by the local population because it supplanted human labour. Henry reports that when machinery was introduced into one of the silk factories near Hsi-ch'iao, the place was twice mobbed and the owners were compelled to remove the machines. Steam machinery was associated with foreign influence, and as Henry remarks, “turbulent and bitterly anti-foreign” feelings were prevalent in the silk areas.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there was no turning back.

One of the first effects of steam-driven machinery was to eliminate male labour in the silk-works. Some of the men may have joined the local militia, which the gentry was then organizing to fight British troops. Others may have returned to their farms. But the domestic economy had been seriously affected by the mechanization of industry. The labour supply necessary to some phases of sericulture was depleted by the exodus of unattached women to the towns. Both the scale and the range of occupations decreased, and in the rural areas both married women living at home with their husbands and married and unmarried men had a harder time finding gainful employment. Agnes Smedley, writing in the 1930s,

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9 Henry, p. 67.

10 John Kerr, *A Guide to the City and Suburbs of Canton*, Rev. ed., p. 66. Hong Kong, 1904.

11 Henry, p. 67.

contrasts the local weaving factories, which employed only women, with silk-weaving factories in other parts of China. She speculates that men were scarce because of heavy farming duties or because of emigration. As the domestic economy declined, men had begun to emigrate in large numbers to Singapore, Malaya, and Hong Kong. Smedley observed that “thousands of peasant homes depended for a large part of their livelihood upon the modest earnings of a wife or daughter.”<sup>12</sup>

As a result of industrialization, village populations began to consist largely of women and children. But nubile girls formed a separate group, for another distinctive feature of the area was the “girls’ house” or “girls’ room,” *nü-wu* [*nümu*] or *nü-chien* [*nüjian*]. From my own evidence, and that of Mr. Ho in Singapore, it appears that many parts of Kwangtung had such houses and rooms, as well as similar houses for unmarried boys. There is only one publication on these houses — on boys’ houses in a village in Chungshan Hsien, Kwangtung.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, such establishments differed from one another in important ways, but several features of the boys’ houses, as described in the article on Chung-shan and by the informants of Mr. Ho and myself, seem to me directly relevant to our subject.

The bachelor houses of the Chung-shan village were owned by the ancestors, i.e., were part of the ancestral trust. Each lineage in the village had such a house, adjacent to its ancestral hall or shrine. Their functions were to provide (a) a sleeping place and recreational centre for unmarried men, (b) temporary quarters for married men, (c) a guest house for visiting men, and (d) relief of household congestion. Residence was not compulsory, although it proved on careful investigation that if a household included daughters or other nubile young women, adolescent boys invariably slept in the bachelor house. Married men stayed there from the fifth month of their wives’ pregnancies until 100 days after their child’s birth<sup>14</sup> — the traditional Chinese period of childbearing pollution. In the Chung-shan village there were no girls’ houses. But their function in villages where they were found in conjunction with boys’ houses has been described by informants as follows: to provide (a) a sleeping place and recreational centre for unmarried women, (b) a guest house for visiting women, (c) relief from household congestion, and (d) “modesty”. Night-soil buckets were kept in the sleeping quarters, where they could be used at night and also secured against theft (a valuable fertilizer, night-soil was used in Shun-te to feed fish). I was told that it would be

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12 Agnes Smedley, *Chinese Destinies*, p. 178. New York, 1933.

13 Robert F. Spencer and S. A. Barnett, “Notes on a Bachelor House in the South China Area”, *American Anthropologist*, n.s., 50.3(July–Sept. 1948): 463–78.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 474.

“inconvenient” for boys and girls to use the same bucket, in full view of members of the opposite sex.

It is not easy to see why, in that case, *both* boys’ and girls’ houses were necessary. However, a further explanation I was given for Tung-kuan Hsien was that girls’ houses were needed because girls could not be married straight from home: a girl who married from home made the house inauspicious; it became “empty”, which affected the luck of her brothers who would later bring wives into the household, making it “full”. According to informants, the girls’ house in Shun-te served the same purpose. Separate houses for boys were not needed, my informants said, because they already lived apart — with the men on the farm. The girls’ houses were found in the village, where again they were sometimes part of an ancestral trust. They were organized entirely by women, and in contrast to such houses elsewhere, were separated by some distance from the sleeping abode of the men.

Girls lived in these houses in Shun-te until they married or took their vows of spinsterhood. The older girls there, my informants said, were fond of visiting temples and other religious establishments and attending theatrical performances. Henry also observes that the women of Hsi-ch’iao “show their independence” by going “in large numbers” to theatrical performances associated with large religious festivals, with a separate gallery reserved for their use.<sup>15</sup> The hills of Hsi-ch’iao, which, as he noted, had been “peopled...with spirits and deities of various kinds” by the inhabitants, provided an ideal environment for temples and monastic institutions, as did the other hills that dotted the area. The hilly area around Ta-liang, the *hsien* capital of Shun-te and a filature centre, was noted for both its Buddhist nunneries and its other celibate institutions, which allowed members not to shave their heads and to live in their own homes.<sup>16</sup> The latter type of institution was a vegetarian hall, or *chai-t’ang* [*zhaitang*].

Vegetarian halls were residential establishments for lay members of the Buddhist faith, and for both lay and clerical members of several semi-secret sects fragmenting from a syncretic religion called *Hsien-t’ien Ta-tao* [*Xiantian Dadao*]: The Great Way of Former Heaven. These sects appear to have had connections with the famous White Lotus rebels.<sup>17</sup> According to leaders of these sects living in Singapore and Hong Kong, the sects entered Kwangtung from the north in the mid-nineteenth century,

15 Henry, *Ling-Nam*, p. 68

16 *Shun-te Hsien-chih* (Shun-te county gazetteer), 1853, Vol. 3: *Feng-ssu* (Customs), p. 39.

17 Marjorie Topley, “The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 26.2(June, 1963): 386–87. [See Chapter 9 in this book.]

as a result of their suppression by the government in more populous areas and the exiling of their leaders.<sup>18</sup> Tucked away in the hills girding the delta, the sectarian halls escaped hostile attention by disguising themselves as Buddhist establishments.<sup>19</sup>

The syncretic *Hsien-t'ien* religion is messianic and millennial. Its sects stress the Chinese notion that natural and social disorders arise when earth is out of phase with Heaven; this happens when the country's leaders lack virtue. The sects thus appealed to people who felt threatened either by the social disorder resulting from the introduction of steam machinery, by foreign influences, or by the constant possibility of flooding in high-water-level areas. Several informants said their fathers and mothers had belonged to a *Hsien-t'ien* sect. The sects held a particular appeal for women. The highest deity is a "mother goddess" to whom many local children who had "bad fates" reportedly were bonded. Moreover, the religion stressed sexual equality, and men and women sat together in prayer (a practice earning it official displeasure). One local sect was run entirely by women.<sup>20</sup>

Both temples and monastic establishments printed and sold religious literature, including "good books" (*shan-shu* [*shanshu*]) written to convert people to the religious life. Aimed expressly at women was the "precious volume" (*pao-chuan* [*baojuan*]), which contained biographies of model women, usually recounted in ballad form. One such story, about *Kuan Yin* [*Guanyin*], the Goddess of Mercy, who is popularly believed to have been a princess who became a nun over her parents' objections, points out that she had no husband to claim her devotion, no mother-in-law to control her, and no children to hamper her movements.<sup>21</sup> Many of my informants had "precious volumes" they acquired in their homeland which further emphasize that refusing to marry is not morally wrong and even that religion can help those brave enough to resist; that men cannot be trusted; and that suicide is a virtue when committed to preserve one's purity.

The need for purity and chastity is explained in terms of pollution. Childbirth is a sin, for which women are punished after death by being sent to a "bloody pond", filled with birth fluids, from which they can be rescued only by ritual.<sup>22</sup> One *pao-chuan* says that women "taint Heaven

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18 Marjorie Topley, "Chinese Religion and Rural Cohesion in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch*, 8(1968): 27. [See Chapter 10 in this book.]

19 Ibid., p. 29.

20 Topley, "The Great Way", pp. 369–71.

21 Mrs. Edward Thomas Williams, "Some Popular Religious Literature of the Chinese", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, China Branch*, n.s., 33(1899–1900): 11–29.

22 Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*, 2 vols., Vol. 1, pp. 196–97. New York, 1865.

and Earth when [they] give birth to children...When you are a man's wife...you cannot avoid the blood-stained water...and the sin of offending the Sun, Moon, and Stars (*san-kuang* [*sanguang*]).<sup>23</sup> The only way a woman can improve her fate in life — after death she can go to the Happy Land (the Buddhist paradise) or be reborn as a man in another existence — is to remain celibate. Some of Ho's informants suggested that a person marries the same partner over and over again in many incarnations.<sup>24</sup> Occasionally, my own informants explained, a woman is born with a "blind" or "non-marrying" fate: her predestined partner is not alive at the same time, not of suitable marriage age, or not of the appropriate sex. In these circumstances, a woman should remain unwed.

Many women in the Shun-te area were able to read this kind of literature. Dyer Ball observes that Shun-te women were considered "more intelligent than others", and "notwithstanding the want of schools for their instruction, those of the middle classes are generally able to read ballads."<sup>25</sup> My informants said numerous local women from farming families received instruction in reading from a tutor who called at the girls' house; also that they read *pao-chuan* stories in groups in the girls' houses. Ho talks of such women reading the classics.<sup>26</sup>

Tracts were distributed that pointed to more immediate incentives for a celibate woman who joined a *Hsien-t'ien* sect: an administrative appointment in a vegetarian hall, possibly even complete authority over a hall; permanent residence if desired (some halls were residential), but more freedom to come and go than Buddhist nunneries allowed; no requirement that members shave their heads or, except for ceremonies, wear religious garments; and the opportunity to be worshiped as an "ancestor" by religious "families" (a "master" and her or his disciples), a privilege not granted to unmarried or childless women in secular society.<sup>27</sup>

Women visited religious establishments in groups. Members were often sworn sisters (*shuang chieh-pai* [*shuang jiebai*], "mutually tied by oath"). Several features of the local ecology encouraged the formation of such sisterhoods: teamwork in various phases of silk production; residence in girls' houses; membership in the same sectarian "family"; and the ties between girls who were bonded to the same deity because of

23 I am grateful to Emily Ahern for this reference.

24 Ho It Chong, "The Cantonese Domestic Amah: A Study of a Small Occupahome Group of Chinese Women", p. 135. Research paper, University of Malaya [Singapore], 1958.

25 James Dyer Ball, *The Shun-Tak Dialect*, p. 6. Hong Kong, 1901.

26 Cf. Ho It Chong, p. 47.

27 Marjorie Topley, "The Organisation and Social Function of Chinese Women's Chai T'ang in Singapore". Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1958.

their “bad” (often non-marrying) fates and who worshiped the deity together on ceremonial occasions.

The term used by both my own and Mr. Ho’s informants for sworn friendship between pairs of individuals or groups was *Chin-lan Hui* [*Jinlan Hui*], Golden Orchid Association. An 1853 edition of the Shun-te gazetteer notes in its volume on customs that women’s Golden Orchid Associations had long been a feature of the district.<sup>28</sup> Informants were not certain why this term was used, and the gazetteer does not enlighten us. James Liu of Stanford University has suggested to me that it may be derived from the following passage in the *I-ching* [*Yijing*]: ‘When two persons have the same heart its sharpness can cut gold; words from the same heart have a fragrance like the orchid.’ Winston Hsieh has suggested that the term may be a metaphor referring to structure — i.e., that such associations may “bud” or divide into subgroups as they enlarge, just as orchids bud into several flowers on one stem. Certainly Cantonese sometimes refer to societies as budding (rather than branching), although my informants said this happened to their sisterhoods only when members went elsewhere to work. Golden Orchid implies a semi-secret association; it is used by the Triads for the name of a branch.<sup>29</sup> The women’s sisterhoods were indeed semi-secret; Dyer Ball talks of groups of girls in the area who used “an emblematical, or enigmatical, method of communication with each other.”<sup>30</sup>

Several sources refer to lesbian practices in connection with sisterhoods in Shun-te and P’an-yü.<sup>31</sup> My own informants agreed that they sometimes occurred. One woman gave me a religious explanation. As we saw, a woman may be predestined to marry a certain man over and over again in different incarnations; even if her predestined husband should in one incarnation be born a female, she is nonetheless attracted to her predestined partner. Informants called lesbian practices “grinding bean curd” (*mo tou-fu* [*mo doufu*]);<sup>32</sup> they also referred to the use of a dildo made of fine silk threads and filled with bean curd. A Hong Kong doctor of forensic medicine told me in the late 1950s of a similar type of dildo, filled with expandable raw silk.

28 *Shun-te Hsien-chih*, 1853, Vol. 3, p. 35.

29 W. P. Morgan, *Triad Societies in Hong Kong*, p. 284. Hong Kong, 1960.

30 James Dyer Ball, *Things Chinese*, 5th ed., p. 6. Shanghai, 1925.

31 Ch’en Tung-yuan, *Chung-kuo Fu-nu Sheng-huo Shih* (*History of Women’s Life in China*), Chapter 8. Shanghai, 1928; Chung-hua Ch’uan-kuo Feng-ssu Chih (*Gazetteer of Chinese customs*), Vol. 7: Kuang-tung (Kwangtung), Book 4, Hsia chieh, pp. 30–33. n.p., n.d.; S. H. Peplow and M. Barker, *Hong Kong Round and About*, p. 118. Hong Kong, 1931; Agnes Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China*, p. 87. New York, 1943.

32 Cf. *Chung-hua Ch’uan-kuo Feng-ssu Chih*, loc. cit.

Ho, writing about domestic servants in Singapore, says that some of his informants from the Shun-te area discussed sisterhoods that originated with married women who banded together to stop their husbands from taking concubines, promising to tell one another anything “not in order” they heard about the other women’s husbands.<sup>33</sup> Concubinage was part of the system of marriage in many parts of China, and marriage for a woman in the Shun-te area had much in common with marriage for a Chinese woman elsewhere. Yet some features of the Chinese marriage system received particular emphasis in the resistance area; some found elsewhere were missing; and some local practices were peculiar to the area. Concubinage appears to have been widespread among tenant farmers as well as wealthier landowners. Children were wanted in large numbers because of the labour requirements of the domestic economy, and even when a wife had borne both sons and daughters (here daughters, too, were wanted for their labour), a concubine might nonetheless be taken to produce still more. In contrast to other parts of China, it was not the practice locally to adopt “little daughters-in-law”, i.e., very young girls adopted into other families to be brought up as future brides for their foster-brothers. But girls might be adopted before a married couple had any children of their own, to “lead in” or encourage the birth of sons.<sup>34</sup>

In some parts of the area, as in many other parts of China, it was the custom for the eldest son to be married first. In some villages, I am told, the girls then had to marry before the rest of their brothers. By the beginning of this century it had become customary to marry girls to younger bridegrooms: the girl was typically about sixteen years old, the boy thirteen or fourteen. Concubines were usually recruited from the contingent of “bonded servants” (*mei-tsai* [*meizi*]) who were daughters of poor, usually landless peasants, sold to families needing extra labour. Poor peasants took such girls as wives, but matchmakers specializing in concubines would inquire of families with mature bonded servants about the girls’ availability for secondary unions (families taking *mei-tsai* were obliged to see them married at maturity).

It was not uncommon in the resistance area for girls to be married off to grooms who were on the point of death, or even already dead. The original object of these kinds of marriages was to ensure the continuance of the groom’s family line; a son would be adopted for the posthumous

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33 Ho It Chong, “Cantonese Domestic Amahs”, p. 36.

34 On this practice see Arthur P. Wolf, “The Women of Hai-shan”, in *Women in Chinese Society*, ed. by Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975.

husband, and his living spouse would rear the child.<sup>35</sup> Girls were also married to men who were working overseas. In a proxy ceremony, the absent husband was represented by a white cock.<sup>36</sup>

### Local Culture and the Resistance

Arthur Smith believed that the marriage resistance movement demonstrated “the reality of the evils of the Chinese system of marriage”.<sup>37</sup> From both his own vivid nineteenth-century descriptions and Margery Wolf’s descriptions of rural Taiwan in recent times, we can see that many women indeed bitterly resented the system.<sup>38</sup> But in many parts of traditional China, the life of a married woman was not so very much grimmer than the life of an unmarried daughter. As Smith and others observe, a Chinese girl was likely to be unwelcome from the moment of her first appearance in the world. She was “goods on which one loses” (*she-pen huo* [*shiben huo*]), of little value to her natal family except perhaps as a partner to a marriage contract aimed at binding two kinship groups. The inferiority of women was supported by an ideological superstructure that equated them with the *yin* cosmic element: dark, empty, negative, and, in Confucian interpretations, inauspicious.<sup>39</sup> This idea seems to underlie the notion already observed that girls cannot be married from home because that makes it empty and inauspicious. In the silk area, however, a girl was relatively more welcome: because of her labour potential, she was not “goods on which one loses”. Girls did not have their feet bound, and infanticide was rare.

In many other parts of China, as Smith remarks, girls “never go anywhere to speak of, and live...the existence of a frog in a well.”<sup>40</sup> Again there was an ideological justification: it was appropriate for girls, as “inner” beings, to stay inside. But in the silk area girls travelled freely around the countryside; they visited temples, vegetarian halls, and theatres. And, as we have seen, they even did “outside” work. Like other girls in Kwangtung, they had the companionship of other residents in the girls’ houses. In addition, however, they had the companionship of other girls in

35 Such practices were harshly condemned in the marriage-reform propaganda for South China put out by the People’s Republic. *Hsin-chiu Hun-yin Tui-pi T’u* (Chart comparing old and new marriage). Canton, 1952.

36 Arthur H. Smith, *Village Life in China*, p. 287. New York, 1899.

37 Ibid., pp. 258–311; Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford, CA, 1972.

38 Ibid.; Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford, CA, 1972.

39 Cf. Olga Lang, *Chinese Family and Society*, reissue, p.43. New Haven, CT, 1968.

40 Smith, p. 262.

their economic tasks, and they had sisterhoods. Unlike other peasant girls, they were taught to read. Together they read ballads that stressed the unpleasant aspects of marriage and even the equality of the sexes. By contrast, the local married woman who lived with her husband was of less economic value — after the establishment of filatures her value as a home spinner declined — she went out much less, had fewer opportunities for female companionship, and, doing only “inside” work, was kept busy producing and rearing children. In many cases she had also to accept a concubine into her home.

In discussing marriage in general, informants of mine who participated in both the marrying and the non-marrying forms of resistance contrasted the status of married women unfavourably with that of single women. Many of them stressed the independence of an unmarried woman — her freedom from control by parents-in-law and her ability to move about and do what she liked. Ho’s informants stressed their fear of becoming a “slave of man”, of being a “human machine of propagation”, and of marrying the “wrong type” of man.<sup>41</sup> Several of my own informants were daughters of concubines; they stressed the domestic disharmony arising out of quarrels between different consorts and their children. Many of them also stressed the loneliness of marriage and the lack of economic independence.

Several informants expressed a distaste for heterosexual relations and childbirth. Smith observed that women in the resistance believed “that their married lives would be miserable and unholy”.<sup>42</sup> Informants talked of the pollution of childbirth, the punishment in purgatory awaiting women who had children, and the limitations that pregnancy and childbirth, because of their polluting effects, imposed on women in the domestic economy. Some of my informants belonged to *Hsien-t’ien* sects; a few of them managed vegetarian halls in Hong Kong. These women emphasized the religious advantages of celibacy: a celibate woman could assume a high rank in a sect and have many disciples; she could learn esoteric practices to protect her in her journeys about the countryside (e.g. against rape); and she could assure herself of a better fate in the next life. In other areas Buddhist nunneries provided one socially acceptable alternative to marriage, but our informants contrasted the restricted movements of a nun with the freedom of a vegetarian who was not obliged to reside in a religious institution.

Some women said their fears of sexual relations with men were exacerbated by tales visiting married women told in the girls’ houses. One woman Ho interviewed said she had heard “weird stories about

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41 Ho It Chong, pp. 24, 235.

42 Smith, p. 287.

childbirth". She married at seventeen and became a *pu lo-chia*.<sup>43</sup> Some spoke of the frigidity that sometimes marred the wedding night and might last for several months, the consequent anger of the mother-in-law, and the bitter medicines a "stone girl" or frigid woman was forced to swallow. Other women said they had formed close friendships with girls in the girls' house or their work group and did not want any man's "affections". Some pointed to the very real possibility of dying in childbirth, which, they believed, brought even greater punishment after death. Several women said they had non-marrying fates. They had learned this either from fortune-tellers or from their own parents. This brings us to the question of local acceptance of the resistance, including the role of parents.

The local economic system was clearly a major factor in the development of the resistance. We saw how it led to striking contrasts in status between married and unmarried women. The local economy also provided an unmarried woman with a means of supporting herself — a rare option in traditional society. Elsewhere the only alternatives to marriage were religious orders or occupations connected with sex and procreation: prostitution, matchmaking, midwifery.<sup>44</sup> A married woman could sometimes supplement the family income and improve her status by engaging in cottage industry,<sup>45</sup> but it was unlikely that a separated wife could earn enough to support herself by such means. An unhappily married woman who returned to her natal home was not entitled to her parents' support.<sup>46</sup> Finally, an unmarried daughter could not live at home and take in work because of the Chinese conviction that "mature girls cannot be kept in the midst" of the family: *nü-ta pu chung-liu* [*nüda bu zhongliu*].

As the silk economy industrialized, there were further inducements for women in the resistance area to remain single. As we have seen, unattached women were preferred by employers of female labour because of their freedom from family ties. And since an unmarried girl working in a silk factory could support not only herself but also her younger siblings and parents, the latter also had an incentive to keep her unwed. Of the women Ho interviewed in Singapore, not all, he notes, remained unmarried "because of a wish to abstain. Some felt they had a duty to provide extra income for their natal families."<sup>47</sup> What if they did not wish to abstain?

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43 Ho It Chong, "Cantonese Domestic Amah", p. 28.

44 Lang, p. 42.

45 Cf. Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*, Vol. 1, p. 28.

46 Smith, *Village Life*, p. 289.

47 Ho It Chong, p. 29.

One Chinese description of unmarried girls in P'an-yü mentions their "sexual freedom" and "debauchery among the mulberry trees", adding that "they will neither marry the man chosen [by their parents] nor practice proper celibacy; they merely use the concept of celibacy as a pretext for promiscuity." The source goes on to moralize about the dangers of free love, saying that if an unmarried girl becomes pregnant, she has no recourse but the "inhuman device of abortion". It then describes the case of a girl who had been having an affair in the fields for whom a marriage was arranged by her parents; as it turned out, they had arranged for the girl to marry her lover.<sup>48</sup>

One cannot of course rule out the possibility that a girl who formally renounced heterosexual relationships might have done so not out of a positive commitment to celibacy, but out of economic necessity or out of resentment of the traditional marriage arrangements rather than of men as such. But my informants considered it most unlikely that a girl who had taken *tzu-shu* vows would enter into a forbidden relationship with a man. These vows were said to be absolutely binding — they were made before gods — and in violating them both the girl and her lover would risk terrible punishment from Heaven. I was also told that a girl who had gone through the hairdressing ritual could not be married off by her parents. The ritual meant that her parents had no further rights over her person, i.e., that she was socially mature. Indeed, it was added, it was precisely to avoid the risk that a daughter who did not want an arranged marriage might form a liaison with a man that parents made her take *tzu-shu* vows. If she did form such a liaison, particularly while away working in a town, her parents might lose an important source of income. The hairdressing ritual gave them further security: once the ritual had been performed, the girl had no further claim to parental support. Whether, as the Chinese source suggests, many *tzu-shu nü* risked Heaven's "terrible punishment" is difficult to say; no other available source mentions "free love". Moreover, Ho comments that a girl who becomes a *tzu-shu nü* in Shun-te "is respected...; her parents may gain prestige through having [such a] daughter."<sup>49</sup> This seems unlikely to have been the case if illicit relations were common.

### The Decision to Marry or Not

Some parents did not want their daughters to take vows of celibacy. Often betrothals were kept secret from the daughter to forestall objections and

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48 *Chung-hua Ch'uan-kuo Feng-ssu Chih*, loc. cit.

49 Ho It Chong, p. 25

even suicide. We have seen that religious literature emphasized the merit of suicide committed to preserve chastity. Several sources mention mass suicides in which sisters of a betrothed girl who did not wish to wed joined her in death.<sup>50</sup> Some girls are said to have obtained magical charms from religious groups that they used to dissuade the other party to a marriage contract. According to Dyer Ball, "they were taught by the nuns" and vegetarian women "to kill their husbands by saying certain charms or incantations."<sup>51</sup> My informants said that a woman who intended to leave her husband without consummating the marriage tucked charms in her under-wrappings to ward off his advances. Why were some girls encouraged by their parents to remain single and others married off against their will?

According to my informants, by the beginning of the century most families in the area tried to keep one daughter as a *tzu-shu nü*. Early signs of an aversion to marriage or of marked intelligence might be interpreted as indications of a "non-marrying fate". If a horoscope-reader confirmed this view, the daughter's future was set. Daughters adopted to "lead in" sons might also be selected; they would be older than their oldest brother when his time came to marry, and possibly too old to make a good match when their turn came.<sup>52</sup> A girl might even be adopted with this purpose in mind. So-called daughters who were really *mei-tsai* might also be selected.

Some girls had to marry against their will, I am told, because it was believed that a family who sent out no daughters in marriage would get no wives in return. Once a girl had been betrothed, she could usually not withdraw, betrothal being actually the first step of the marriage ritual. The only course open to her was to refuse to cohabit. Just as not all girls became *tzu-shu nü* out of a positive desire for celibacy, not all *pu lo-chia* opposed eventual cohabitation. A girl might object to marrying a stranger or a very young boy, or to having many children. Some girls followed the custom of staying away three years, which gave them time to get to know their husbands (they returned for ceremonial visits) and very young husbands time to mature. In-laws often accepted this arrangement and in some cases even encouraged it, because during her time away the girl worked to support her husband and his family. Indeed, I was told, families began to find brides for younger and younger sons so they could be supported by their daughters-in-law.<sup>53</sup> A girl might, however, strike a

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50 Smith, p. 287; Dyer Ball, *Things Chinese*, p. 375; and Peplow and Barker, *Hong Kong Round and About*, p. 117.

51 Dyer Ball, *Shun-Tak Dialect*, p. 7; cf. his *Things Chinese*, p. 375.

52 Cf. Ho It Chong, "Cantonese Domestic Amah", p. 30.

53 Cf. *Hsin-chiu Hun-yin Tui-pi T'u* (Chart comparing old and new marriage). Canton, 1952.

bargain with her in-laws: when she returned, she would bear no more than two or three children, afterward being free to abstain from sexual relations.

During their time away, such women did not usually live in their natal homes, but in the cockloft of the girls' house (girls also slept in the cockloft for four days before they married). Usually they worked locally as hired labour. If after a few years they further decided not to return until past childbearing age — perhaps they found their husband or in-laws uncongenial or had resolved to remain celibate — they had to leave the village and buy a *mei-tsai* to act as their husband's concubine. They then had additionally to support the concubine and her children. According to Ho, "to maintain chastity and support a husband and his children...were acts admired and respected."<sup>54</sup>

Both the *tzu-shu nü* and the *pu lo-chia* who did not intend returning until old age usually had long-term economic obligations to their natal or conjugal families. Moreover, unattached women of either category could not stay in their natal homes, but had to find somewhere else to live. Let us now see what arrangements they made.

### **The tzu-shu nü**

The non-marrying woman's hairdressing ceremony, like the bride's, was a prerequisite to leaving home. As for the marriage ceremonies, an auspicious day was chosen for the ritual.<sup>55</sup> Whereas the bride was assisted at the hairdressing ceremony by an elderly woman with many sons, the non-marrying woman was assisted by an elderly celibate female. Like wedding ceremonies, the *tzu-shu* ceremonies were followed by a banquet, and like the bride, the non-marrying woman received red packets of money from her relatives, as well as from her "sisters" and friends. If she was lucky she also received money saved for her dowry, or against her departure if her parents had decided earlier that she would not wed. The peasant woman would eventually use the money she was given on this occasion to pay for residence in a special house for *tzu-shu nü*, known as a "spinsters" house" (*ku-p'o wu* [*gupo wu*]) or "sisters' house" (*tzu-mei wu* [*zimei wu*]), when she grew too old to work.

Spinsters' houses were found throughout the Shun-te area, usually adjoining a plot of farmland with which the elderly inmates helped support themselves.<sup>56</sup> Like some of the girls' houses, some of the spinsters' houses appear to have been built by lineages as retirement

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54 Ho It Chong, p. 36.

55 Maurice Freedman, "Ritual Aspects of Chinese Kinship and Marriage", in *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society*, ed. by Freedman, pp. 181, 183. Stanford, CA, 1970.

56 Cf. Ho It Chong, p. 115.

homes for their unmarried women, and perhaps also as residences for unattached women working in an economic operation of the lineage. Some gentry families allowed a daughter to remain unwed without requiring her to work, which enhanced the family's prestige, and in many instances built a house for the girl to live in.

Many women, however, had to finance their own house, or alternatively pay into a vegetarian hall when they retired. Spinsters' houses were in many cases practically indistinguishable from vegetarian halls. They had an altar for a patron deity, usually *Kuan Yin*, and on festival days they invited priests to officiate at religious ceremonies. But vegetarian food was not required at the spinsters' houses, and there was far less focus on religious activities in general.

During her active years the *tzu-shu nü* usually shared a rented room with her "sisters" in a town near the filature that employed them. Such residential groups often had elaborate arrangements for saving money. They ran death-benefit clubs, to which members made monthly payments against funeral expenses of one of their number or a parent's post-mortuary ceremonies; in some groups women put a fixed percentage of their monthly earnings into a fund for festival celebrations; they contributed to funds for emergency assistance to the families of the "sisters"; and they saved for the retirement home they eventually would build. If they could save enough, they retired early — around forty — and adopted a *mei-tsai*, whom they brought up in their "faith".

### **The pu lo-chia**

The *pu lo-chia* who did not return to her husband until old age usually had greater economic burdens than a *tzu-shu nü*. The non-marrying woman supported her siblings and parents, but the separated wife had to support not only her in-laws and husband, but also her husband's concubine (for whom she paid) and their children. Expected to return eventually, she did not save for a retirement home. While she was working, however, her life followed much the same pattern as that of the non-marrying woman. She, too, rented a room with other separated wives — her "sisters" — and with young widows and grass widows whose husbands were overseas, for they, too, in many cases left home to work for their in-laws. Whether the separated wife ever returned depended on many circumstances: whether she had made sufficient financial contributions to win acceptance by her husband's concubine and her children (who were technically the wife's); whether an overseas husband returned; or whether she was called back to care for an adopted child.

Many separated wives and young widows never returned. In the 1920s the silk industry began to decline, at first because of outside

competition and later because of the worldwide depression. Earnings decreased, and many a woman's hard-pressed conjugal family refused to take her back. Olga Lang describes her visit to women's residences in and around Canton in the late 1930s, which the Kwangtung authorities had had to erect for women who had no real contact with their husbands, thus becoming helpless in old age.<sup>57</sup> She also reports that some occupants were women who had lost all contact with their father's families — presumably *tzu-shu nü* who could not save enough money to build themselves a house or buy into a vegetarian hall.

### Decline of the Resistance

By 1935 the slump hit bottom. Writing during the period, Smedley reports that the collapse of industrial life had forced all the filatures in some areas to close down.<sup>58</sup> I am told that some *tzu-shu nü* and separated wives retired early to spinsters' houses and vegetarian halls; those still young enough to seek employment elsewhere found work as domestic servants in Canton and other cities.

Malaya and Singapore, similarly affected by the depression, began to restrict male immigration. The cost of a man's passage increased as a result of competition for the limited number of quota tickets available. At first there was no immigration quota for women, and their tickets were therefore cheaper. To fill their ships, ticket brokers would sell lodging houses and local ticket agents a quota ticket only if they bought three or four non-quota tickets at the same time. Parents, brothers, and in-laws therefore encouraged their daughters, sisters, and young daughters-in-law to emigrate. I am told that more girls were urged to become *tzu-shu nü* so they would not marry overseas, and it was impressed upon newly married women that non-cohabitation was an honourable practice. From 1933 to 1938, when a quota of 500 females a month was introduced, shiploads of Cantonese women entered Malaya and Singapore. A large contingent came from Shun-te.<sup>59</sup>

Some women left the area in anticipation of the Japanese occupation of Canton and the consequent social and economic dislocations. When the Japanese took Canton in 1938, many young unattached women escaped sexual exploitation by taking up residence in vegetarian halls. After the Japanese left, life scarcely had time to settle down again before the

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57 Lang, *Chinese Family*, p. 109.

58 Smedley, *Chinese Destinies*, p. 177.

59 W. L. Blythe, "Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malaya Branch*, 20(1947): 103.

Communists came to power. The People's Republic was sympathetic to the plight of these women who were described as suffering "terrible hardships...and [leading] sad and lonely lives."<sup>60</sup> But it considered their resistance essentially negative, and disapproved, I am told, of the "exploitative" custom of purchasing *mei-tsai* as concubines. The spinsters' houses were gradually phased out. Many women were forcibly removed to the homes of kinsmen. Only those with nobody to take them in were allowed to remain.<sup>61</sup>

Most of the unattached women who migrated to Singapore and Hong Kong from the Shun-te area worked as domestic servants. Many never returned to their homeland. While working they made arrangements similar to those of the silk-workers: they rented workers' rooms, or *kongsi* [*gongsì*] as they are called in Singapore, and ran several kinds of loan clubs.<sup>62</sup> Some are said eventually to have married and had children,<sup>63</sup> but it is noticeable that with the influx of unattached women in the 1930s, vegetarian halls, particularly sectarian ones, sprang up in large numbers. My own investigations in the 1950s showed that much of their membership was drawn from the non-marrying and non-cohabiting women of the resistance area.<sup>64</sup> Some of these women adopted daughters with the intention of having them follow in their footsteps, but such plans usually went awry. A film made for the female Cantonese audience in the early 1950s in Hong Kong, entitled *Tzu-shu nü*, tells the story of one such adopted daughter and her foster-mother. The girl refuses to take *tzu-shu* vows, telling her foster-mother that it is old-fashioned and superstitious to reject marriage, that nowadays marriage is much better for women than it was in the past, and that women should work to further improve their marital status.

In Hong Kong today, unmarried women are in demand in factories, offices, and commercial establishments. Demographic data show that many girls are postponing marriage, and one demographer, Janet Salaff, argues that this may reflect the significant contributions they make to their parents' and siblings' support and the higher status they enjoy as a result.<sup>65</sup> But most women in Hong Kong marry eventually. The resistance has not attracted women brought up in a society, economy, and culture that differ so markedly from those of pre-war Shun-te.

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60 *Hsin-chiu Hun-yin Tui-pi T'u*.

61 Cf. Ho It Chong, p. 120.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

64 Topley, "Organisation and Social Function of Chinese Women's *Chai T'ang*".

65 Janet Salaff, "Social and Demographic Determinants of Marital Age in Hong Kong", in *The Changing Family, East and West*, ed. by Henry E. White, pp. 72 et seq. Hong Kong, 1973.

## The Legacy of the Resistance

I have argued that a particular local economy and settlement pattern, tied to a particular physical environment, raised the status of the unmarried or unattached woman considerably above that of the conventionally married woman; and further, that with the industrialization of the economy, women wishing to remain unwed were financially able to act on their preferences. Although unmarried women apparently had already participated to a greater extent than their married sisters in the domestic economy, once industrialization took hold, unattached women were almost the only class of labour in demand. The emigration of thousands of men who could not find work at home made parents more dependent than ever on the earnings of their unattached daughters and their daughters-in-law, which gave them a strong incentive to encourage marriage resistance.

In other parts of China where unattached women were in demand as factory labour, the traditional marriage arrangements were undercut. Fei Hsiao-t'ung [Fei Xiaotong], for example, cites the case of an illicit union between a married but detached factory worker and a man in Wusih. The woman's parents-in-law eventually decided to treat her as before because of her earning capacity.<sup>66</sup> One source on P'an-yü also talks of disruptive effects — “debauchery”, free love, and abortion — but the overwhelming evidence is that in the resistance area, traditional values relating to premarital chastity and marital fidelity were preserved, and that the system of marriage, though modified, remained more or less intact. Many women remained celibate, but concubines, of whom there was a plentiful local supply, assumed the responsibility of bearing children. The women who chose celibacy were influenced by the high local valuation of chastity, which stemmed in large part from dissident religious groups with whom local inhabitants sympathized. These groups, driven from other parts of China but safely entrenched in the relatively isolated hilly regions around Shun-te, reached the relatively large numbers of literate or semi-literate women in the area with anti-marriage propaganda. In most of industrializing China, families had to balance the financial gain from an unmarried daughter or non-cohabiting daughter-in-law who worked away from home against the risk of losing her, and hence her earnings, to another man. In the resistance area, however, the system of sanctions and beliefs surrounding institutionalized celibacy made such defections unlikely. It is not surprising, then, that many parents supported the commitment to celibacy once it was made or even encouraged their daughters and daughters-in-law to make such a commitment.

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66 Fei Hsiao-t'ung, *Peasant Life in China*, p. 235. London, 1943.

None of the features I have discussed appears unique to the resistance area, but their combination does. The Yangtze Valley, for example, had a similar terrain, practiced sericulture, and apparently had similar notions of female pollution and silkworm production; but because the climate supported only two broods of silkworms a year, less domestic labour was needed and women played a less important role in the village economy than they did in the resistance area. In the Yangtze Valley, moreover, there were no girls' houses and no sisterhoods, and by the mid-nineteenth century the *Hsien-t'ien* sects had been driven out or effectively hamstrung. Elsewhere in Kwangtung Province there were girls' houses and girls working in the domestic economy; furthermore there was a significant male out-migration, as there was not in the Yangtze Valley. Outside the resistance area, however, women were seldom able to work for cash, at least cash enough to support themselves and their kinsmen, and nowhere else does sectarianism appear to have been so strong. Sectarianism also flourished in parts of Fukien Province,<sup>67</sup> but a higher proportion of girls there had bound feet, and they did not work outside. There were no girls' houses in Fukien, so far as I know, and educational opportunities for women were rarer.

Clearly we do not yet know enough either about village-to-village variation in the resistance area or about other superficially similar areas with no history of marriage resistance to assess the relative importance of the variables discussed in this paper.

What about the resistance area today? Has the resistance, or the ecology that produced it, left a legacy discernible even under the People's Republic? Graham Johnson, a sociologist who visited the delta region in 1973, writes that on the average women there participate in collective work only slightly less than men, and that they constitute slightly over 50 percent of the labour force. He contrasts this pattern with that of a village in Honan, described by a recent observer, where there is a low level of female involvement in many aspects of collective production and where few women are rated as fully able-bodied members of the workforce.<sup>68</sup> In Shun-te the silk-and-fish economy persists, although other crops have been introduced or brought under more intensive cultivation. As a result of collectivization, fishponds and mulberry groves have been enlarged, and isolated farms are less in evidence. According to my own informants, there are no active celibate establishments in Shun-te today, although recent interviews recorded by China specialists working in Hong Kong suggest that girls' houses may still exist in some villages, and that there

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67 Topley, "Organisation and Social Function of Chinese Women's *Chai T'ang*".

68 Graham Johnson, "Rural Chinese Social Organisation: Tradition and Change", *Pacific Affairs*, 46.4(Winter 1973-74): 562.

may still be women who do not join their husbands immediately after their wedding ceremonies. Women, moreover, are still the main workers in silk production. Unmarried girls are in exclusive charge of the outside phase of silkworm breeding and predominate in filatures. In a private report, Johnson says that one filature he visited employed nearly 1,300 workers, of whom 1,100 were women.

Johnson also contrasts Shun-te with Tung-kuan, another *hsien* in the Canton delta but outside the resistance area. In Shun-te there were, in 1973, 2,600 nurseries for workers' children, an average of one per work team. In Tung-kuan there were very few nurseries; instead, women work in the fields with young children on their backs. Family-planning propaganda appears to have been far more successful in Shun-te. Between 1965 and 1972 the birth-rate in Shun-te is said to have fallen from 3.4 percent to 1.8 percent (0.9 percent in Ta-liang, the *hsien* capital), whereas in Tung-kuan the birth-rate for the *hsien* as a whole remained at 2.2 percent, with higher rates in the rural areas. In Tung-kuan, though, abortion is widely practiced, whereas in Shun-te it is rare. As Johnson remarks, traditional notions concerning family and household are "presumably critical".<sup>69</sup> In a private report he writes that with respect to family planning, "it is openly admitted that the major problems stem not so much from parents as grandparents." In Shun-te many former members of the marriage resistance must now be members of the grandparent generation. One imagines that the high value they have always placed on freedom of movement for women — on their being unencumbered by children — and the low value they place on procreation might today find their expression in the distinctive work patterns and extraordinary population statistics of the former resistance area.

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69 Ibid., pp. 563–64.



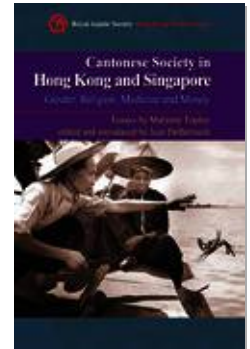
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## Chapter 17

# Chinese Traditional Ideas and the Treatment of Disease: Two Examples from Hong Kong

(1970)\*

A number of anthropologists working in Hong Kong in the last two decades have tackled problems concerning traditional China. The main interest has been in social structure but a few studies dealing with problems of cognition have been carried out since the early '60s. The published results, which are just beginning to appear, already indicate the value of Hong Kong for research in this field.<sup>1</sup>

This article is based on data obtained during a study of child-rearing in Hong Kong and deals with problems in the perception, conception, and treatment of two human disorders by Chinese traditional methods.<sup>2</sup> The disorders are measles, and an emotional complaint called *haak-ts'an* (C) [xiaoqin] [Cantonese idiom]: "injury by fright".<sup>3</sup> Data were obtained mainly by depth interviews with twenty women living in urban Kowloon, and all the women considered the disorders common in childhood and made use of traditional ideas and treatments.

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\* The analysis of ritual and medicine in this article was first presented at the annual conference of the Hong Kong Psychological Society, The University of Hong Kong, 12 December 1969. Here I have expanded the argument and added the sections on the medical tradition, and on the identification of the syndrome *haak-ts'an*.

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1 A description of some social science research projects undertaken in Hong Kong since 1950 is contained in Topley (1969). A bibliography contained in the proceedings has been updated and revised and is published in the *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 8, 219–25.

2 The study was requested by the Child Development Programme of the University of Hong Kong. The Programme is investigating the growth and development of a sample of the Chinese child population from birth and for the first five years of life. I am grateful to the organizers of the Programme for allowing me to include questions which are of only tangential relevance to their interests.

3 Many terms and expressions appearing in the article are peculiar to the Cantonese and I therefore use a Cantonese Romanization, following the system used by Meyer & Wempe (1947). Exceptions are *yin*, *yang* and *wu-hsing* which I have left in their more familiar Mandarin form.

I use the terms “disorder” and “complaint” rather than disease for semantic reasons. Measles, a disease by modern clinical definition and one with a high mortality rate in Hong Kong, was regarded as something rather different by many informants. *Haak-ts'an* on the other hand, was seen by all as a disease — a malfunctioning of the human system — but it can be given no precise diagnostic label in modern medicine. Both were treated by medical and by ritual means.

The more general aim of the article is to present new material on a subject much neglected by anthropology, and for this reason I say something about the relation of my findings to existing knowledge of the medical tradition. This has led me to look rather closely at current definitions and categories and the difficulties they raise for the fieldworker. My purpose, however, is analytical rather than descriptive. Part of the analysis concerns the relationship between medical and ritual treatments and its basis in terms of the conceptual material; and part deals with the ritual treatments themselves and their further relationship to a wider system of ritual and ceremony. There is a further problem which I cannot ignore. *Haak-ts'an* is not included in modern disease taxonomy so that I have to examine the nature of the syndrome in terms of certain assumptions of Chinese culture. Since I am not directly concerned with the contemporary scene I do not take up the question of “traditional” versus “modern” medicine and all that implies. In a socially heterogeneous and rapidly modernizing community like Hong Kong, this is a difficult issue and requires separate investigation and analysis.

All interviews were conducted in 1969, most information being supplied during sessions on childhood disorders, and informants' religious and other views of the world. The interviews were conducted personally in Cantonese. No informant spoke English; nineteen were Cantonese-belonging to Hong Kong's major dialect group and the remaining person was Hakka. All came from Kwangtung [Guangdong] Province; and, although the Hakka woman belonged to a different sub-culture, there was no indication of any major difference in her views on the subject studied. About half the women were illiterate, while a few of the remainder had been educated beyond the primary level. More than half the group was immigrant, and some women had been at schools in China. The ages of the women ranged between nineteen and forty-five years.

In the analysis and interpretation of these data I have relied as far as possible on informants' own explanations. Beyond that, I have turned to the anthropological theory of ritual and other social science material; my own additional knowledge and experience of Chinese culture and society; recent discussion of “culture-bound” syndromes; and such of the literature on Chinese medical and other systems of knowledge as is useful and available to me in Hong Kong.

## Traditional Medicine and the Hong Kong Data

In the literature on Chinese systems of thought and practice, including medicine, a distinction is commonly drawn between two traditions: “scholarly” and “folk”, or more recently “great” and “little”. The conceptions and treatments I deal with are “traditional”. But how do they relate to the distinction between scholarly and popular traditions, and, more important, how useful is this dichotomy in advancing our understanding of the phenomena and the disorders themselves? There are two things which must be said first. One is that the dichotomy itself is “traditional”, since it is based on the views of certain Chinese practitioners and their needs in isolating their own system of ideas and activities in the interests of orthodoxy. The other is that we need to look very briefly at some major historical developments if we are to understand what is meant by the two traditions.

Prior to the Chou [Zhou] Dynasty (1122–934 B.C.) healing was associated with religion and involved divination, incantations, sacrificial offerings and the propitiation of gods and other spiritual influences. The doctor was a priest. During the Chou Dynasty, however, people other than priests took up medicine and it became dominated by general ideas which were developing and which concerned the nature of the cosmos. Use was made of the concepts of *yin* and *yang* and the Five Elements (*wu-hsing* [*wuxing*]) — whose relationship to medicine will be explained in more detail later. Later, Buddhism introduced new ideas about man and the cosmos and therapeutic measures in the T’ang [Tang] Dynasty (A.D. 618–906); and Taoism, in its turn, began the use of charms and amulets in curing disease. Numerous forms of treatment were employed. But in the period between the eleventh and seventeenth century there was much intellectual controversy and a gradual systematization of ideas as schools of scholarly medicine began to take shape (cf. Wong & Wu 1936). Gradually there was a sloughing off of all elements which were inconsistent with, and not directly related to, the basic concepts developed in the Chou Dynasty. The use of various curative substances, which had been developed within the framework of Taoism (which also employed these concepts), and of Buddhism, which used different concepts, was retained, and subjected to further clinical experimentation. Schools of medicine consisted of lines or lineages (for they kept “genealogies”) of masters and disciples, any new discoveries and skills being transmitted secretly from one man to another. And so we come to the present day.

Today the scholarly tradition is still transmitted partly by masters. But, in recent years in Hong Kong (Choa 1967b), and elsewhere overseas, we see institutions founded for teaching scholarly ideas and techniques openly. On the mainland itself, a further effort at systematization and

reorganization of teaching methods has also taken place. Scholarly medicine is based partly on clinical observation, but it makes use of learned texts, dialogues between scholars, and monographs dealing with particular diseases and treatments. Its foundation is less religious than metaphysical. Thus the human body is seen as a microcosm of the universe which is ruled by complementary ethers — *yin* and *yang* — and contains phenomena whose basic characteristics are determined by particular combinations of the Five Elements. For health, the body depends then on the internal equilibrium of *yin* and *yang* and the correct proportion of the Elements. Disease is seen largely in terms of a disequilibrium or disproportion among the Elements, and is cured by a number of methods, but never by ritual. Ideas involving gods, demons and the invisible world of the spirits have no place in the system. Yet there is a further complication which is important if we are to understand some of the difficulties of working with the dichotomy between “scholarly” and “folk”. With the emergence of institutions for public teaching in Hong Kong and elsewhere, there has been further effort to refine methods of treatment. Some (but not all) of the herbal remedies previously considered part of scholarly medicine for example, have been abandoned by more “modern” traditional specialists, if such an expression can be applied, and these are now regarded by them as part of “folk” medicine. They also tend to de-emphasize the metaphysical basis of their profession in order to emphasize better the consistency of some of their techniques with those of modern medical practice.

What then is folk medicine? It is a miscellaneous collection of ideas and methods rejected by scholarly practice and by certain members of the scholarly tradition there is no unanimous agreement. It includes religious ideas as well as certain medical ideas of metaphysical origin, and ritual along with medical treatment. Some items are probably very ancient, pre-dating the theory of *yin* and *yang*; some are scholarly rejections of the later traditional period; and some recent rejections by some practitioners only. Folk tradition is thus a subjective category, although there are some objective statements that can be made about it. Part of what is traditional is transmitted orally (although not passed through lines of masters reckoned as “orthodox” by all); and much is passed on by persons other than doctors-priests for example, and old women knowledgeable in matters of diagnosis and cure (especially of childhood disorders). Part is written, being based on ancient and other books rejected by the scholarly, and some of this writing makes use of *yin* and *yang* and theory of Elements. Few studies of its scope have been made by Chinese scholars, and their attitude generally towards it, as a valid subject for investigation, is somewhat similar to the views about what is often termed “folk” religion. Western observers in the nineteenth century have frequently

emphasized the importance of religion in both ideas and cure; rites directed to gods and demons viewed as agents of disease, and to gods viewed as agents of cure (cf. Doolittle 1865); the use of charms and amulets (cf. Dore 1914; 1915); and the role of priests. Some attention has also been paid to a theory of resemblances — diet and medicine having symbolic significance in terms of disease (Choa 1967a) and there would seem to be regional differences or emphases. But existing descriptions are incomplete they do not, for instance, cover all the phenomena found in Hong Kong.

From observation in Hong Kong, it is clear moreover that the tradition is highly eclectic — its sources of knowledge are many. Priests, spirit-mediums, old women, and even people regarding themselves as scholarly practitioners may all have a part to play and may even combine different kinds of treatment — ritual and medical. In addition it even has its own diseases — conditions not recognized by orthodox practitioners but which may yet be taken seriously by people at all levels of society. Some of these have been listed recently by a psychiatrist interested in the implications of belief in such disorders for mental health practice (Yap 1967), and a few have been described (cf. Yap 1965, for example). A case in point — one I refer to again and which well illustrates some of the problems of understanding the relation of phenomena outside the orthodox tradition — is *so-lo* [[*sulao*], Cantonese idiom]. *So-lo* is a male disease supposed to result from intercourse with a woman within 100 days of childbirth. It is thought to be caused by “womb poison” (*t’oi-tuk* [*taidu*]), and those daring to seek a cure (it is regarded as fatal without immediate treatment) go to a Chinese (unorthodox?) doctor. Here, however, ideas about cause relate to ritual notions. The period of prohibition is not explained in terms of medicine. It is a period which is also important in measles, and in that context I will try to interpret its significance. *Haak-ts’an* is another disease which is “folk” as well as traditional. There are references to it in the literature but no systematic account of its meaning and treatment.

On the basis of present knowledge, then, we can say certain things about the folk tradition and its contents, but we cannot describe it as a system. We cannot even say there is a “system” at all. Most of the conceptions and treatments used in measles and by my informants would be regarded in Hong Kong, as “folk” (but not by informants themselves). This, however, takes us little distance in understanding the nature of their interrelationships. On the basis of my material I will argue that a “system” can certainly be discovered in respect of the disorders. We shall see that religion and metaphysics, and ritual and medicine, have their own frames of reference, but that they are nevertheless capable of logical combination, and can be employed in different phases of a disease by logical extension.

For not all ritual is religious and, while gods and demons may be important in diagnosis and cure, they are not necessarily seen as direct or sole causal agents — their role cannot be understood without reference to medical factors relating to *yin* and *yang* and the Elements.

More research is clearly necessary before we can extend this argument to other diseases and disorders viewed and treated outside the orthodox tradition. And time may be running out for such research, at least in Hong Kong. As I have said, I am not directly concerned with the contemporary scene here, but it should be noted that a great number of traditional practitioners are intensely interested in developments on the mainland, where efforts are being made to combine modern and traditional techniques. This interest is shared by many Chinese in modern practice in the Colony who believe that traditional medicine still has an important contribution to make. These people have been recently urging the scholarly doctors to form a professional association which would hold tests and pronounce on minimum standards and acceptable treatments and thus emphasize further the distinction between themselves and the folk practitioners or untrained “herbalists” who are regarded as positively dangerous. If this were done, it is argued, the government could introduce legislation to control the traditional profession, and folk medicine could be driven out of existence. While it is debatable whether this would actually happen in view of the support which folk medicine has from numbers of ordinary people, it might make it much more difficult to work in this field.

## Measles

In Cantonese measles is called *ma-ch'an* [*maqin*] or *ma-tsai* [*mazai*]. It is considered by informants to be extremely dangerous and as I have said, has a high mortality rate in Hong Kong. It is common knowledge that measles in Hong Kong is regarded as “something that has to come out” and so my first questions aimed to find out what “it” was. Here are some typical replies: “measles is ‘hot’”; “measles is a ‘hot poison’ [*it-tuk [redu]*].” One is born with it [the “hot poison”]; “measles is unclean [*la-taat [lata]*”]; “a person with measles is undergoing a change. He is ridding his system of ‘heat’ and ‘poison’ and this is weakening and dangerous”; “everybody must have measles at some time. One is much healthier afterwards.” When I asked if this meant that a person is born with measles the answer was “no, but he cannot be fully healthy until he has got rid of the poison.” Was it a disease? Most thought not. I pursued the question of “everybody having it.” Some said it should happen in childhood but, if not, one “would get it sooner or later.” One woman added that she had

heard that if a person died before measles, the pustules would break out on the bones of the corpse.

When I say these replies are “typical” I mean they cover all the ideas presented. I have reproduced here only some of the statements I collected. Some women were more articulate than others and added extra comments. These mostly had children who had experienced measles. All informants said that they had obtained their knowledge about its nature from others, mothers-in-law, older kinswomen, or friends and neighbours and had gone to them voluntarily for advice. All agreed that older women were reliable sources of information and expert at recognizing symptoms too. Some went to modern doctors for part of the treatment, but we will see that this was not because they had a different conception of the disease.

So far then, we can infer that ideas are involved here concerning the human system which are certainly different from those of modern medicine; measles is some sort of transition from a relatively sickly to a much more healthy state. Whether it is a “disease” is open to question, but at any rate it is inevitable.

My next task was to discover the meaning of “hot poison” and also what was “unclean” about measles. I already knew something about “heat” and its relation to the human constitution both from the literature (Choa 1967b) and from my informants. Let me say something about this because it explains my next question. All mothers saw well-being as depending in part on a balance between what they called “heat” (*it* [re]) and “cold” (*leung* [*liang*]). One of the causes of too much “heat” (*it-hei* [*rei*]) or “cold” is diet, and there is an elaborate system of food and drink classifications which relate to these categories. Food therapy also forms part of the treatment of the condition, and all mothers made use of it to a greater or lesser extent in treating their children. They also agreed that in pregnancy a woman should avoid “cold” foods because they tended to cause miscarriage, but that this resulted in a baby being born too “hot”. To counteract this, most mothers gave “cooling” medicines within a few days of birth — some said that they had been advised to do so in the modern hospitals where they had their babies.

I therefore asked if the “hot poison” of measles was connected with the “heat” of birth. Most thought the “heat” from a mother’s diet was a separate condition and needed its own treatment, and all said that though the “hot poison” was “hot” it came from the womb and was passed to the child. It was “unclean” because of its origin. One woman added that the same poison caused *so-lo*, a disease to which I have already referred. Subsequently, I found that most mothers knew of this and practised abstinence during the 100 day period mentioned in connexion with that disease. In measles, the poison erupts on the skin in pustules, and before the disease breaks out, reduces the health of the victim.

So we have a “poison” somehow due to contamination from the womb, probably not associated with the mother’s diet but still connected with the “heat-cold” theory of balance (as we will see further from treatments). The “hot-cold” theory is generally considered by Chinese scholars to be part of folk medicine. Yet it is based on some of the same assumptions as scholarly medicine. Choa (1967b), for example, writes as follows: “Diseases are...broadly...due to ‘emptiness’...or ‘fullness’...; ‘cold’ or ‘heat’...; or ‘air’ or ‘blood’ originating from either the *Yin* (solid) organs, or *Yang* (hollow) organs....” No informant referred to *yin* or *yang* in respect of measles — only “hot” and “cold” — and none was aware of any connexion with organs. But the poison at birth is clearly “womb poison” to which I have referred.

The popular theory of measles, then, is evidently based on metaphysical rather than on religious ideas. Measles corrects an imbalance of “heat” and “cold” and cleanses the system of poison. It is not only inevitable and natural but also necessary. Yet it is dangerous. The system must be cleared as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. The pustules must be prevented from going in again (*yap-hui* [*ruhui*]), or remaining permanently. All treatments described were directed to these ends.

It was explained first that measles would be prolonged if any further “heat” or “poison” were produced at this time, and so there are dietary observances. Lists of foods to be avoided were given, and these included items similar to those avoided in other “hot” conditions and described in the literature (Choa 1967a). Abstinence from further foods regarded as “poisonous” was also necessary and the lists I was given included, typically: goose, duck, carp and pheasant. A few informants recommended a full vegetarian diet (*chaai* [*zhai*]) generally recognized as “cool”, and similar to that followed by religious devotees of various kinds. A number of therapeutic and “cooling” substances are also usually given, some being specific to measles and others similar to those given in other “hot” states. For advice on diet and therapeutic substances, women relied either on their own knowledge or that of elderly relatives or neighbours, or went to a “herbal” chemist (one of the “specialists” in “folk” diseases), or to a type of traditional practitioner specializing in measles, chickenpox, and smallpox (the latter two diseases also require “cool” diets). Some informants had taken a child to a modern doctor at the onset of measles and a few children had received measles vaccine. Modern drugs, however, were sought only to “speed up” the process, and all mothers whose children had had vaccine were conscious that a small measles attack followed. This they treated in the same way as a full attack, i.e., by traditional methods. There were also further avoidances which related to a theory of resemblances. The child should not take sesame seeds, the

pustules being likened in appearance to such seeds — this is an avoidance found also in cases of smallpox. A mother should also refrain from frying any foods in hot oil at this time — this was explained in terms of “heat”: fried foods are “hot” and frying might encourage the child’s system to remain “hot”.

The last two avoidances are not of course “medical” in terms of the basic metaphysics on which Chinese scholarly medicine depends. This brings us to a set of practices which relate to certain aspects of the above treatments and attitudes to the patient for which again no medical explanation can be found. First, all treatments must last 100 days, that is longer than the normal period of the disease. During this time no pregnant woman, dog or cat — particularly pregnant dog or cat — or person in mourning may approach the child. To avoid accidental encounters, amulets might be worn consisting of grasses or pomelo leaves. Wet pomelo leaves might be used to “wash” the affected child. Other proscriptions applied to married couples in the house, particularly to parents. They must avoid sexual intercourse for the 100 day period, and a menstruating mother should avoid nursing the child (some informants sent a child to live with a grandmother or had a living-in grandmother to take care of it during such times). A breast-feeding mother should herself observe all the dietary and other proscriptions applying to a child taking the breast and who has measles.

I asked the purpose of all this. One explanation was that all these things might cause the pustules to go in. Another was that they would cause them to stay for ever. These are two different explanations; but they amount to the same thing; for in each case the process of change, i.e., measles, would be checked. It was also explained that the prohibited classes of persons were similarly in a “dangerous” state (informants were not clear about non-pregnant dogs and cats). The pregnant woman would fail to give birth and mourners would have to undergo rites to rid themselves of the effects of the encounter (including again washing with pomelo leaves). A further interesting observation made by three women was that the child was “like a god (*shan* [*shen*]) at this time”, one adding that “vegetarian food was appropriate to someone like this.”

What then is the meaning of all these acts, proscriptions and attitudes? One is immediately struck by similarities between how the measles patient is regarded and treated and the way certain other things and persons are regarded and treated. There are similarities first with certain persons who move either temporarily or permanently from a clear and unambiguous status to one which is ambiguous or anomalous. Vegetarianism for instance, is practised by Taoist priests, who are not permanent vegetarians, before they are to perform religious ceremonies in which the role of a god or Bodhisattva is assumed and in which the actor

is still a priest but at the same time regarded during the ceremonies as the god or Bodhisattva itself. (It is also regarded as dangerous to touch them at this time — dangerous for the actor and for the individual making contact who would both become sick.) A vegetarian diet is likewise observed permanently by Buddhist monks and nuns who, in accordance with the principles of Mahayana Buddhism, have taken vows to strive to become Bodhisattva — beings which are still human, but at the same time stand outside the chain of cause and effect to which the ordinary, “unrealized” human being is subject. And sexual intercourse is forbidden temporarily to the priest before and during his ceremonies, and permanently to the monk or nun. One also notes that pomelo leaves, used as we saw in washing a child with measles and for protection, are used widely by Chinese, or at any rate southern Chinese, to apply to persons and things about to enter, temporarily, some status or state apart from the common world-spirit mediums before entering trance, and altars and rooms before they are used for ritual performances.

But what are particularly striking, are the similarities between the sets of proscriptions or negative rites, and the period of 100 days in which they are applied to a child with measles on the one hand, and the similar proscriptions and time periods applied to people undergoing a change of social status. The latter involves people who may also be viewed as progressing from one position of equilibrium to another, but in this case an “external” equilibrium, which is seen in terms of social relationships rather than in term of components of the human body. At birth, for example, the mother is forbidden intercourse for 100 days as we saw (I shall have more to say about the child during this period when discussing *haak-ts'an*). Mourners must similarly abstain from sex at least during the 100 days of ritual treatment of the dead in Hong Kong. And looking at mourning again, and also at marriage (cf. Freedman 1967), we once more see the same classes of persons and things forbidden to the actors, as in measles. As with measles, to break such proscriptions at these times threatens all the parties. I do not know why dogs and cats are forbidden and informants did not know either, but it might be noted that both are thought occasionally to assume the form of demons (cf. Dore 1914: 9). Perhaps it is possible to view these also as classes of things whose status is at least ambiguous or anomalous.

The measles victim then is classified by the Chinese together with those persons and things which are in ambiguous or anomalous states and furthermore, those persons and things particularly which are moving from one unambiguous state to another in the social system. They are all, that is to say, in a state of transition.

In pointing out the wide use of ceremonies in helping individuals or groups through crises of change, van Gennep used the term *rites de*

*passage*. He distinguished three major phases in such rites: separation, transition, and incorporation (van Gennep 1960); and noted a tendency to concentrate on one or other of these phases. He also stressed the importance of what he called the “sacred” state in understanding the transitional process itself (1960: 12). Three of the mothers held a similar view, as we saw, when they referred to the child as “like a god”. Another point made by van Gennep was that the transitional state might sometimes acquire a certain autonomy (1960: 191–92). From what I have said then, it is possible to view the ritual of measles as autonomous, transitional, *rites de passage*.

Van Gennep was also concerned with the relationship between “sacred” and “profane” at this time, or what for the purposes of this discussion one might term “ambiguous” and “unambiguous” because of the theoretical disadvantages of using this dichotomy (cf. Stanner 1967). But, when viewing states which are not only ambiguous but also transitional, the Chinese appear particularly concerned with encounters between those in a similarly ambiguous state. They are not for example concerned with this problem in the case of *haak-ts’an* where as we will see an ambiguous state is involved but no progression.

Why the concern with sexual intercourse in such conditions? Van Gennep argued that “among peoples for whom coitus is regarded as impure the presence of the taboo is natural” (1960: 169). In fact in the Chinese case one often encounters non-ritual explanations for it. In the post-parturition period we saw it produces a deadly disease (*so-lo*), although the period in which it may be encountered is certainly ritually defined. In mourning some say it is “disrespectful to the dead”; and in measles one of my informants stated: “it is not natural that parents should be thinking of love at this time.” All further agreed that in measles it was also dangerous to the child. Can we view those in the act of intercourse as also in an “ambiguous” state: as human beings engaged in an activity also associated with other species?

At any rate, we have here a disease, or condition which may be viewed in popular thought as a transition: a process leading to the establishment of a new equilibrium based on a changed situation. The conception involves a dual frame of reference and parallel treatments. Measles is a “physical” condition and as such is treated by medical means. But it is also a special case of a transitional crisis this is borne out by my informants’ own statements — it is “ambiguous”: and it is this critical and ambiguous aspect that is treated ritually.

### *Haak-ts'an*: “Injury by Fright”

In the Cantonese dictionary *haak-ts'an* is given the meaning of “to frighten or terrify”. But *ts'an* means personal or intimate — the self — and appears in other compounds with the meaning of injury or affliction of the human body, e.g. *tit-ts'an* [*dieqin*]: “to fall and injure” and *laang-ts'an* [*lengqin*]: “to catch cold” (the English expression stemming as it does from notions of humours rather than scientific medicine is very close to the Chinese meaning here).

*Haak-ts'an* was described by my informants as an injury or disease having both mild and more serious forms. The two forms required different treatments and both were particularly common in children partly because they were more easily frightened — there were more things which children found strange or incomprehensible — and partly for reasons to be examined. Among the experiences listed by mothers as most likely to frighten a child were: the sight of a cockroach or other large insect, or a rat, or the feel of such creatures crawling over the body; seeing a dog, pig, foreigner, or even a demon (see also later); a sudden noise — a car back-firing, thunder, or heavy rain (beating on a tin roof), a door banging, an object falling; a fall from a bed (usually the bottom half of a double bunk arrangement often shared with the mother), or a fall as a result of being knocked over.

What then was supposed to happen as a result of the fright? Let me begin by saying that these descriptions threw some further light on other information I had been getting on child-rearing. Mothers had already expressed considerable anxiety about fright in children particularly in the first 100 days after birth. They were careful not to expose them to sudden noise, or new experiences, did not like having them examined by doctors who were Westerners, and seldom took them out before the end of this period if they could avoid it. I had already noticed also that many children wore jade bangles or silver chains with jade pendants and had been told they were to “settle fear” (*teng-king* [*dingjing*]), prevent irritability, and make the child more placid. I now asked if these “fear settling” devices had any connexion with *haak-ts'an*, and I was told that they were to lock in the “*wan*” (*sho-chue wan* [*suozhu hun*]). From the literature it can be seen that the *wan* is one of the animating forces which during life is associated with the mind and faculties, e.g., *saat-wan* [*shihun*] is “to lose one’s wits”. At death according to a popular view it becomes one of the souls. When, then, a child receives a fright this animating force becomes unbalanced, and if the fright is particularly severe, not immediately treated, or for some reason prolonged, e.g., if the object of fright remains, a serious condition follows in which the *wan* leaves the body and becomes a soul separated from the individual.

It was then explained that children were not only more easily frightened, but that their animating forces generally were less stable than those of adults. Mothers considered them particularly unstable during the 100 day period after birth. The view taken here, which clearly relates to certain Buddhist notions, was that the child's animating forces are not fully integrated with the physical body until this period is complete (it is a "transitional" period again), and this is because the forces had previously animated a different body. After the death of the latter they had passed through purgatory (as a soul) — had been purged of sins — before being born again. It is considered that the soul does not always take kindly to being reborn (Chinese mothers are sometimes angry with children who die early for this reason). Indeed the so-called Mongolian spot, "tache mongoloïde," a darkened area of skin at the base of the spine in new-born Chinese babies, is commonly explained as the mark made by an underworld official who has had to kick the reluctant soul into further existence. During this period then, the soul is particularly likely to vacate the body and one of the common precipitating causes is fright.

Bangles and chains are regarded as preventive treatment: they literally "kept body and soul together". Jade has a further significance however, being explained as not only having a settling and harmonizing effect, since it is the most perfectly balanced stone in the universe, but also absorbing all poisons. So the bracelets and pendants have other "medical" functions connected with general health.

We have then two forms of *haak-ts'an*, one mild and due to imbalance, and the other serious, and due to the animating force leaving the body as a soul. Sometimes in very serious cases all animating forces are said to leave the body and become separate souls. Although the disease is more prevalent during the 100 day period it might occur also at any time up to the age of approximately three years, according to informants. In older children a serious form was more likely to be associated with the presence of a demon in a way I will presently describe.

How are the conditions recognized? Various symptoms are described. In the case of milder *haak-ts'an* there might be constant crying, convulsive jerks, particularly during sleep, slightly raised temperature, irritability and refusal to be left alone or eat, and some mothers added that the hair on the head might "curl over" and eyelashes "curl inward". This I have not seen. The body was described as "cold" (*hon* [*han*]) as a result of being filled with "fear" (cf. also Yap 1967: 78) although this was more likely to be associated with the serious condition. *Hon* is not physical coldness but a condition relating to the "hot-cold" theory and involves dizziness. It is not exclusive to *haak-ts'an*. If several of these symptoms were present, a case of mild *haak-ts'an* might be suspected even if there were no witness to an actual fright. The only mild case I have seen so

identified concerned my own child. When he was eight months old a picture fell off the wall near his cot and he woke screaming and trembling. My Cantonese servant rushed with me to his assistance but he refused to drink the water she brought or let either of us hold him. He had, of course, had a fright. The next day he was rather irritable (not unusual) and my servant drew attention to this, and also to his slightly hot forehead (it was a hot day), and refusal to eat lunch (not uncommon). She diagnosed a case of *haak-ts'an* and recommended the use of one of the remedies commonly used.

Remedies for milder cases can be described broadly as medicinal. Most common specifics are crushed pearl powder, and "protect infant" pills (*po-ying taan* [*baoying dan*]). Both are easily obtained from a traditional Chinese chemist and are usually bought without any prior consultation with a doctor. A less common remedy among my informants was the liquor in which jade and metal have been boiled and this is administered orally. Jade, as we saw, is harmony-inducing, and while no informant knew why metal is used (it must be without alloy — pure gold or silver ornaments being commonly used) it might be noted that metal is one of the Five Elements and by popular account at least, an important ingredient of the human constitution affecting mental energy and intelligence. A few mothers used modern drugs: sedatives to "restore balance" and medicines to treat an accompanying fever. Some had taken children to modern doctors to obtain them.

How is the severe form of the disease recognized and treated? Few of the women claimed to have had personal experience of it with their own children, but several stated that its presence would be suspected if crying was incessant, if there were convulsions, or apathy (a failure to respond to any communication, or to recognize the mother, or to answer to its name — clearly involving older children). It would also be suspected if the patient was "*hon*", and also physically cold and clammy.

In serious cases, the soul (or as we saw sometimes several souls) is assumed to have left the body and treatment can no longer be by medicines applied internally. Treatment requires ritual means (although in one ritual, as we shall see, part of the action aims to treat the cold clammy state believed to be caused by the fear). Before we can discuss the meaning of *haak-ts'an* rituals we must examine what is thought to happen when souls leave the body. First of all, a soul might stay somewhere nearby and needs then to be persuaded to return. Secondly, it might be carried off by a demon. During this period the body may remain "empty" or may alternatively be occupied by a demon itself: that is, there is spirit possession. Mothers did not like talking about such demonic possibilities, but the relation of demons to the disease was explained as follows. First of all a demon cannot cause the disease itself: It may be a precipitating

factor — causing the fright which in turn causes imbalance and eventual soul-separation — and may do so deliberately in order to capture the soul or take its place inside the child's body (cf. Dawson 1964: 21). It was generally agreed that demons were attracted to children who were particular "favourites" in the family. If the demon itself has caused the initial fright it is almost certain that the soul will leave the body. It is argued that even if sight of a demon results in only a mild attack of *haak-ts'an*, medicines are unlikely to cure the disease because such a demon will keep up the fright, continue to reveal itself until soul-separation occurs. Some thought that the jade bangles and pendants might thwart this design but others felt that while they might help in preventing milder cases, they were unlikely to protect the body from a prolonged fright by a demon. Another possibility was that a fright caused by some other agent might be severe enough initially to cause soul-separation, particularly if the child had already shown signs of imbalance — crying, or irritability for example (which may be taken to indicate a general desire on the part of a soul to leave its body) — before the fright. It was also possible that soul separation might follow from neglect of a milder attack. In such a case, it was also possible for a demon — merely witnessing the situation — to take advantage of the condition and either make off with the soul or take its place. Some mothers had insured against demon interference by having their children nominally adopted (*k'ai-kwoh* [*qiguo*]) by a deity. Fear of demons is only one reason for such adoption, but among other things the deity is supposed to ward off demonic attack.

I then asked how one might distinguish a simple case of soul-separation from one involving demonic complications. This was generally considered impossible for ordinary people, but it was noted that certain Taoist priests (*Nam-mo-lo*) were able to do so because they could look into the invisible world of spirits and see what was happening. The alternative to consulting a priest, and this was said to be the only thing done by any of my informants in severe cases of *haak-ts'an*, was to try different kinds of rituals and incantations to see if they restored the child to its original state. Some of the rites take account of demonic complications and some aim simply to call back the soul, whatever has happened to it. Few of my informants claimed to have had ritual performed as a result of their own decisions, but some had done so after pressure from neighbours and kinsmen. The rite applied appeared to depend largely on what their neighbours and kinsmen, who usually performed them for the mothers, knew, and also from which district of Kwangtung they originated, for different districts have their own forms and variations. Since no mother knew any incantation or rite thoroughly, I collected some samples from elderly "experts" from two districts and asked informants for their comments.

All rites consist of both action and incantation directed towards the return of the soul (cf. also De Groot 1892: I, 243). In one, from the Chung Shan district, the child is rotated slowly over a hot stove and the words “let the fire dry out the fear” (*king-ts’an...t’aam ch’ut loi [jingqin...tanchulai]*) are repeated. The soul is admonished for leaving the body, and told to come back and “become a man” and “obey people’s instructions”. The rest of the incantation lists some of the things which might have disturbed the soul — pigs, dogs (but not demons) — and ends with a plea for it to “return to the bed”. The child’s shirt or other garment is waved in the air to “catch” the soul, and the bed on which the child is by then lying is patted to signify the return to the body. Another rite from the Tung Kwoon [Dongguan] district requires the scattering of rice, the speaker coaxing the soul to come with her to the house. It is entreated to recognise its mother’s name, and its own name, and again a list of things which might have frightened it — cats, rats, spiders, cockroaches, pigs, and dogs — is given, with an entreaty to become calm. The recitation ends with an announcement that the rice is all gone now and a plea to return to the bed. A garment is again waved, the bed patted, and spittle is put on the child’s brow—explained as “settling in” the soul. Another Tung Kwoon version deals with the possibility of spirit possession and the critical condition which ensues when all animating forces have left the body (*saam wan ts’at paat [sanhun qipo]*). As before, a garment is waved, the bed patted and spittle placed on the brow. Again pigs and dogs are mentioned, also thunder and rain, and “false gods and demons” (*tse-shan, kwai [xieshen, gui]*) are entreated to leave. The Jade Emperor (head of the popular pantheon) is asked for protection.

These three incantations are called *haam-king* [*hanjing*]: “calling out (against) fear”. The final one to be described is called “[for use of] cutting (off) the Little Man” and relates to the possibility of the soul’s forcible abduction. The Little Man is a general term for those entities — both human and non-human — which cause man misfortune and trouble, and he is the focus of a number of other rites not necessarily concerned with sickness or the soul, but with the effects of sinister influences which might possibly emanate from the spirit world (Topley 1951; 1967)[See Chapters 1 and 14 in this book]. The incantation deals with the ransom and capture of the soul (*shuk wan kwai [shu hun gui]*) from the spirit world where it may have been taken by a demon. The action is to cut the air with a pair of scissors while reciting “cutting the net” (*loh-mong [luowang]*), i.e. the barrier separating this world from the invisible sphere. The rite ends as with the *haam-king*, by garment-waving, bed-patting, and “settling in” or incorporating the soul by placing spittle on the child’s brow.

How often is such ritual thought to “work”? What happens to the child, or what else might be done, if it fails? There was no general agreement on such questions among my informants. Some said that as far as they knew it always did work, some that if it failed the child would die, others that it would never live a normal life. None had experience of such a situation, but in later interviews on religion I was able to take up these matters further with some women. A few suggested that the child might be taken at this point to a priest to find out more precisely what had happened to the soul. One possibility suggested was that the soul might not want to return, and this might be due to some misdemeanour on the part of the parents. This was indicated particularly if other children in the family had died in infancy. It meant “nobody wanted to be reborn there.” Another interesting possibility suggested was that the child might have received bad treatment because its horoscope clashed with those of its parents, and as a consequence the soul did not want to return. It is not uncommon in Hong Kong for family misfortune to be traced to a child with an incompatible horoscope. Nor is it unknown for such a child to be neglected or badly treated although a cultural solution exists in nominal adoption: an “adoption” of a child by its own biological mother (after appropriate rites of separation, transition and reincorporation), or an “adoption” by a god as we saw, or by another person with a compatible horoscope or such virtue that he is able to withstand the influences of the horoscope without ill-effects. The priest might try to contact the soul then, to find out if it was reluctant to return for such reasons; if this were indeed so further rituals might be demanded, e.g., a “rite of repentance” (*taai pei ch’aam* [*da beichan*]) or an “adoption” of the kind I have described.

What then is *haak-ts’an*? I have left this question until now because I think we can only understand the syndrome in terms of certain cultural assumptions. Clinically speaking it appears to be a bad or perhaps traumatic fright, in serious cases perhaps a “fright neurosis”. As far as I have been able to discover, nothing more is involved, although it is possible that a child who is neglected or ill-treated might be in a condition of anxiety making it more liable to severe reaction to fright. The cause of the fright is exposure to a stimulus not necessarily considered frightening in all cultures, but pointed up as fearsome and pathogenetic by the culture indoctrinating the handler of the patient, e.g., such stimuli as foreigners and demons. One might also note here that some of the frightening objects listed by informants are similarly listed in the incantations. That is to say, people knowing such incantations might be predisposed to see certain things as frightening. None of my informants knew any incantation but they had neighbours who did, and it was sometimes the neighbour who suggested a child had *haak-ts’an*. Following the fright then, certain symptoms are “recognized” and implanted in the minds of those handling

the patient. I demonstrated this in the case of my servant who “recognized” symptoms of milder *haak-ts’an* in my own child — in fact patterns of behaviour with which we were both already familiar. They might even be recognized as I have said when no fright was actually observed to take place. It is unlikely, I think, that in most cases the symptoms would be implanted in the mind of the patient who is usually very young, but in older children already aware of the disease there might be some psychosomatic accompaniments.<sup>4</sup>

What predisposes people to “recognize” symptoms? First we have a set of conceptions about the nature of the animating forces and their relationship to the body — a situation of potential instability. And we have conceptions about soul separation particularly during early infancy. The former conceptions stem from philosophical notions also shared with “scholarly” medicine, but the latter from notions of Buddhism — of reincarnation and the way rebirth is thought to be regarded by some souls — not shared with “scholarly” medicine. Any child who is highly strung, or delicate and whose condition is already associated by the mother with *wan* instability may then be thought to have *haak-ts’an* even in the absence of evidence of fright. In the case of my own child the fright was not witnessed but the “frightening” object was obvious and we had heard the noise of its fall. He had clearly had a fright. But I might note that he is rather a nervous child and suffers also from allergic bronchitis, and my servant had already bought him a jade bangle to wear because of this.

But there are additional ideas, accounting for “complications”. Some stem from the religious, and other aspects of the popular world-view. There is the possibility of demon-possession and capture particularly of “favourite” children; there is the possibility of children’s horoscopes clashing with those of their parents, and there is the theory of infant deaths in a family resulting from the wrongful actions of parents. Certain people then may, because of the view they hold of their relationships with children and of their own behaviour, be particularly predisposed to see a “serious” case, or think of demonic connexions; to continue to “see” *haak-ts’an* even after ritual has been performed, and seek a more detailed diagnosis from a priest. Moreover, a child receiving bad treatment because of its assumed metaphysical incompatibility might as I said, be more predisposed itself to a serious fright. *Haak-ts’an* then may be

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4 I am indebted to Dr. P. M. Yap, Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, Toronto, for suggestions as to clinical definitions, and also for putting me in touch with current discussion of “societal reaction” to deviancy. I am not here dealing with deviant behaviour except in the sense of a transient primary disorder, i.e., fright, but the discussion has given me many insights into the problem.

considered a culture-bound disorder or syndrome (cf. Yap 1969), although some of my suggestions about people in particular circumstances need further study in terms of actual cases.

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I return now to the question of the rituals themselves and their identification in terms of the Chinese socio-cultural system. There are several points to note. First that the disorder is treated ritually only after the animating forces have left the body and become “sods”: occupants of an invisible universe. Second, they are not regarded as “natural” inhabitants of this universe: they are in an ambiguous position, no longer functioning as forces which animate the living body, and yet not like souls which on the death of the body proceed to their inevitable fates.<sup>5</sup> Third, the approach to the inhabitants, temporary and permanent of this universe, is the specialism of religion and religious experts. In this universe, the soul is vulnerable to attack, subject to dangers, as an “unnatural” occupant. There may be demons to dispel and gods to call upon for protection. Some religious elements of ritual are used which are common to other conditions thought to involve possible connexion with this invisible universe. But others clearly relate to the sod’s ambiguous state: they are elements of rites of passage.

Rites of passage do not aim here at a transition however. It is not desired of course, that the soul should progress to its “natural” fate on leaving the body, i.e. that the child should die. What is desired on the contrary, is that it should be removed from this condition and rejoined with the body. The emphasis then is on rites of separation and incorporation or rather re-incorporation. We see typical symbols of separation: “cutting the net”, ransom and capture (cf. van Gennep 1960: 124–30, 160). And we see symbols of incorporation — placing spittle on the brow to “settle in” the soul. We see them also in preventive ritual: the wearing of bangles and chains (van Gennep 1960: 166). It is important here to note that ritual for calling back the soul can be used in other situations *after* death but in which again there is some ambiguity or uncertainty about its fate. In traditional and pre-traditional, i.e. feudal, China, it was used immediately after death, particularly sudden, unexpected death — that is in times when a clinical definition of death was not available (cf. De Groot 1892: I, 244–49). And it is still occasionally used in Hong Kong today, when dealing with hauntings by ghosts: that is when a soul is thought to be caught between destinations —

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5 Chinese multiple souls also have multiple fates. For discussion of the fate of the three major souls of social interest, see Freedman (1958: 86) for example.

it has left the world of the living but failed for some reason to arrive at its correct destination. In such cases, elderly women — the sort of women who commonly perform ritual for *haak-ts'an* — call back the soul, catch it similarly in a garment, of the deceased this time, and then carry the garment to either a soul-tablet or grave, or a place for the ritual treatment of purgatory according to the nature of the soul diagnosed (by a priest) as causing the haunting (see footnote 5). There it is incorporated into its appropriate dwelling.

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In this article I have been concerned with two disorders which are viewed and treated by the Chinese on the basis of ideas very different from those of modern medicine. They are also different from ideas accepted in Chinese scholarly traditional medicine, being far more eclectic. The disorders themselves are also very different from each other: one being “physical” and identifiable in modern medicine, the other emotional and, as I have argued, only understandable in terms of a very wide range of ideas. Yet, although different, they have two things in common. Both are viewed as constitutional disorders, they draw on medical theories of equilibrium and balance, and use medication considered appropriate to these theories. Both are viewed also at another level of abstraction, as anomalous, or ambiguous states, drawing on an order of ritual events appropriate to such states — the order “rites of passage”. In the case of measles, however, it is the patient who is in the ambiguous condition, the condition is transitory, the patient progressing from one “status” to another. Ritual then “aids” the progression and is parallel to medicine. In *haak-ts'an* the ambiguous condition is reached after a certain stage, and is not inevitable. It applies to the soul rather than body, but a soul treated as a social entity, subject as we saw to social sanctions (Chung Shan rite). Ritual then is not parallel to medicine, but is rather an extension of it. It is aimed here not at the soul’s transition, but at its separation from an ambiguous condition and reincorporation into the body where its position is clear.

I have shown that the Chinese may draw on the same order of ritual in treating the individual as a body, a soul or souls, and a social person. But I have also demonstrated that sometimes not only is the same order of events involved, but even the same ritual items. It is not perhaps difficult to see why the soul in *haak-ts'an* and the soul in certain similarly ambiguous conditions after death should receive somewhat similar treatment. But why should the body in measles be subject to the same sets of proscriptions, dietary observances, and ritual washings, as the individual when acting in certain social roles? I have explained why

measles should be seen as a state of both ambiguity and transition in terms of Chinese ideas of bodily equilibrium. Are there then any similar notions about social ambiguity and transition and social equilibrium? There are. The medical theory of equilibrium and balance, as exemplified in the case of measles, is but a single aspect of a more general theory of equilibrium and balance seeking to explain the nature of all phenomena including society. If man as a physical entity is seen as a microcosm of the universe, so then are other phenomena. The human body, and the body of society, so to speak, are, among other things, believed to contain the same metaphysical ingredients; to be governed by the same laws, and subject to the same processes. Equilibrium among the components of the body provides physical health, but among the “components” — the social persons — in society, it is also necessary for social health or harmony. And even more, physical and social health are seen as further connected. We know from the literature that epidemics have sometimes been explained in terms of social imbalance, or disharmony in social relationships, and for the individual as well as the group, incompatibilities in social relationships are seen at a metaphysical level of explanation, as causing sickness and other individual misfortunes. Herein lies the significance of horoscope comparisons, resentment of a horoscopically incompatible child, and attempts to alter its basic social relationships by adoption. But all this leads us on to another topic which I cannot consider here.

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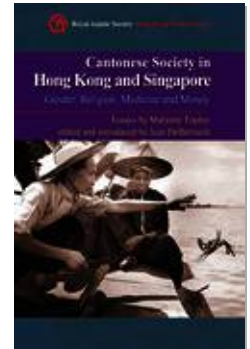
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## Chapter 18

### Cosmic Antagonisms: A Mother-Child Syndrome

(1974)\*

The period immediately following the birth of a baby is a time of biological and emotional adjustment for mother and child, when, in the Chinese view, a variety of difficulties can be anticipated. The child, for example, may refuse to nurse and gain little weight; it may have skin, bowel, or digestive disorders. It may be easily agitated and may respond poorly to the mother's management. The mother, too, may have difficulties: in establishing her milk, in dealing with her own weakness and depression, in developing affection for the child. But such difficulties are expected to be temporary; if they persist, they call for diagnosis and treatment. During an exploratory child-rearing study conducted in urban Hong Kong in 1969, I discovered that my informants — twenty illiterate and semi-literate mothers of small children — sought different explanations and treatments when any one or two such difficulties persisted.<sup>1</sup> But when they all persisted together, the women all thought that there must be a causal connection, that the difficulties of both mother and child formed a pattern, or syndrome. This syndrome is the subject of my essay.

Fifteen of the twenty women were immigrants from rural and semi-rural Kwangtung [Guangdong] Province; two others came from Hong Kong's rural New Territories. All lived in government-owned, low-cost, high-rise housing developments, mostly in one-room apartments, and were relatively poor, coming themselves from poor families.

Their explanations of the syndrome rest on cosmological assumptions. Although two of the women were Christians, they not only shared the others' belief that all the symptoms were connected, they suggested the

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1 The study was sponsored by the Hong Kong Child Development Project, which is supported by the Nuffield Foundation and other organizations. Nineteen of my informants were Cantonese; none spoke any English. The data were gathered during several in-depth interviews I held on a variety of topics, all conducted in Cantonese in the mother's home.

same immediate cosmological explanation for the syndrome itself, and the same ritual treatment, rejecting only certain underlying explanations and related treatments that by implication conflicted with their Christian beliefs.

### Postnatal Adjustment

To understand my informants' conceptions of maladjustment, we must first look at what they thought to be happening in the period of postnatal adjustment. Traditionally the period is one hundred days, the same span Chinese consider necessary for many biological and social adjustments — to measles, for example, to marriage, and to death. During the whole period mother and child should stay quietly at home; no visitor should call before the end of the first moon, the point when the child is accepted into the family.

My informants believed that during the hundred days, a woman is still polluted from her pregnancy and is gradually purifying herself. While polluted, she is “strange,” *k'ei [qi]*. Pregnancy and childbirth were classed with a group of disorders considered “poisonous” (*tuk [du]*) that fall into two phases, first incubation and then eruption or purging. To fall victim to such poisonous disorders a person must be *kwaai [guai]*, which also means “strange.” Indeed, *k'ei-kwaai [qiguai]* is a Cantonese compound for strange; one element complements the other. But the two words *k'ei* and *kwaai* have different definitional relations to disorder, and so to distinguish them in this essay, I use “strange” for *k'ei [qi]* and “queer” for *kwaai [guai]*.

Poisonous disorders include cholera, dysentery, smallpox, measles, bubonic plague, and epilepsy — all regarded as very dangerous and difficult to cure. One can get poisonous disorders by encountering things which are *kwaai* or queer, and which belong to either society, or the physical universe, or (for the non-Christians) the world of the spirits; to use Chinese classifications, to Man, Earth, or Heaven. Parts of the theory of what might be called “strangeness” are familiar to many other Chinese I have questioned, including traditional doctors. But Chinese medical theory in Hong Kong is in a complex state of transformation. Many concepts are shared by all traditional doctors, but applied and even described in varying ways. Thus the more Confucian-minded doctors do not talk about “strangeness” because “Confucius did not talk of strange things.” Where my informants spoke of queerness, these doctors spoke of “polarization”: some people or things were polarized either in the direction of *yeung* (Mandarin *yang*) or in the direction of *yam* (Mandarin *yin*). They also rejected the idea that the social or spiritual realm, as

opposed to the physical, could be a source of disease. Other traditional specialists, however, were willing to entertain the idea that social and spiritual phenomena might be relevant to disease, and that polarized conditions could be termed queer.

One other observer, writing about child-rearing among Hokkien-speaking villagers in Taiwan, refers to ideas that seem related to my own informants' theory of "strangeness", and I will touch on them presently. But there is no comprehensive account of the theory in the literature on popular traditional cosmology, and the finer points appear to derive from the esoteric knowledge of the diviners and priests my informants consulted. Thus I have an insufficient basis for understanding all the logic of "strangeness", but must say what my informants believed because of its relevance to parts of the following analysis. Some of my insights were obtained from traditional doctors.

I said just now that one gets a poisonous disorder from contact with things that are queer. My informants' examples of things that are queer included brides, mourners, striking features of the landscape, demons, and gods. A bride is queer because she has "double happiness". Mourners are queer because they are "empty" or "sad". Some things in the landscape are queer because, like funerals, they are inauspicious — a petrol station was queer because it looked "like a coffin". Other queer things are, like marriage, auspicious — e.g., a huge boulder in the New Territories, famous to tourists as Amah Rock, which looks like a woman and child. The examples accord with the Confucian doctors' examples of polarization toward *yin* or *yang*. Demons and gods are phenomena "of Earth and of Heaven", and Earth and Heaven are further classed in classical literature as *yin* and *yang*. Furthermore, demons are popularly termed *kwaai*, a *yin* characteristic in Chinese philosophy, and gods are *shan* [*shen*], which is a *yang* characteristic. Even the Confucian doctors' concept of polarization is also implicit in the concept queer. In popular Cantonese speech *kwaai* means "extremely", and queerness is an extreme condition: happiness is not balanced by sadness, *shan* is not balanced by *kwaai*, or *yang* by *yin*.

Being queer does not necessarily result in either poisonous or non-poisonous disease. Not in itself bad, and at times even necessary, queerness does, however, predispose an entity to disease. To contract a disease one has to meet (touching is not necessary) another entity that is also queer. Doctors say that a person polarized toward *yin* who meets an entity similarly polarized will get a *yin* disease, and a person polarized toward *yang* who encounters a similarly polarized entity will get a *yang* disease. My informants said that when two brides meet, each may give the other a similar disease; similarly two mourners at different funerals who met would catch similar diseases from each other. But these diseases are

not poisonous. Poisonous diseases result when two people polarized in opposite directions meet each other, or a polarized person encounters some social, physical or spiritual entity that is polarized in the opposite direction. Some women referred to this state as *k'ei-kwaai*.

A meeting between opposed polarized entities has a catalytic effect. The two entities emit a powerful “wind”. This is *ts'e-fung* [*xiefeng*], *ts'e* also meaning “extreme” in some dialects (cf. Mathews 1961: 390). When the two opposed entities clash, a poison is generated and a poisonous disorder incubated. During the erupting or purging phase of the disorder, the sufferer can give a normally balanced person a disease. Such diseases are known as *k'ei-peng* [*qibing*], “strange” diseases. Some doctors in Hong Kong specialize in curing these almost incurable diseases; one is leprosy.

In the situations described thus far, two separate entities are involved. But a poisonous state can exist within a single universe, as can an extreme state. As we have seen, some things are permanently polarized in a given direction (a demon or god, a feature of the landscape), whereas others (a mourner or bride) are polarized only temporarily. Still others, however, are polarized in two directions simultaneously. They are locked in eternal conflict, permanently *k'ei-kwaai*. An expression in popular speech in Hong Kong for something *k'ei-kwaai* is “not three, not four” (*m-saam, m-sz* [*busan busi*]) — that is, neither one thing nor another. Things like this are anomalous. Examples given me include eels (“scaleless fish”), which are both “fish” and “snake,” and a kind of spirit called *iu-kwaai* (*yaoguai*), *iu* being another term for strange, not common in Cantonese, but a homophone for agitated or disturbed. *Iu-kwaai* are something like a god, something like a demon. All such things are poisonous and dangerous to both normal and polarized people, but have curative properties for persons afflicted with poisonous disorders. The Cantonese say “poison drives out poison” (*i-tuk, kung-tuk* [*yidu gongdu*]). The poisonous entity drives a poisonous disorder into its eruptive stage. By contrast, a queer but not poisonous, i.e. *yin* or *yang*, disorder is cured by something of the opposite polarization, along with some ingredient that prevents a catalytic effect — a “pure” or balanced phenomenon. So *yin*, which in physical substances has the humoral characteristic of coldness, may be cured by *yang* foods or medicaments with the humoral characteristic of hotness, and vice versa, but always with something balanced added. My informants talked not of *yin* and *yang*, but of “cold” and “hot” foods and medicaments, and those that were of “peaceful ethers” (*tsing-hei* [*qingqi*]).

For poisonous conditions, however, one takes poisonous medicine. Traditional doctors differentiate between *yin* and *yang* medicaments as “noble” and poisonous medicaments as “ignoble”. The sufferer must at the same time avoid foods with the polarization he or she was

experiencing when the poisonous disease was contracted, and take foods with the opposite polarization, i.e., that of the entity which transmitted the disease. Thus a bride who encounters a mourner and becomes poisonous or *k'ei-kwaai* takes a poisonous cure. She must avoid hot or *yang* foods (marriage is a *yang* affair) but eat cold (*yin*) foods. I will return to these points in due course, but first let us look again at pregnancy and the postnatal period in the light of these explanations of strangeness and balance.

A pregnant woman is temporarily like a poisonous entity: forces pulling in opposite directions are contained in one body. She is described as “four-eyed” — having two eyes in the head, two in the belly. The whole entity, so to speak, is *k'ei-kwaai*. She herself is polarized in the direction of cold and the foetus in the direction of hot. The woman is considered cold because internally she is losing blood to the foetus. Each month women move from cold toward hot, which they reach in the middle of the month, and then back to cold when blood is passed as menstrual fluid. Because the woman and the foetus have opposite polarizations, “wind” is generated and poison condenses in the womb. Because of this condition, which is like the incubation phase of a strange disorder, the foetal soul (*t'oi-shan* [*taishen*]) wanders around outside the mother's body to avoid danger. The pregnant woman should avoid poisonous foods or her “disorder” will erupt, i.e. she will go into labour prematurely and lose the child. She should also avoid foods that are definitely either cold or hot, for they will polarize the two entities further, generating more poison and wind. Her ideal diet is very restricted: no vegetables, and little meat besides pork, which is regarded as neither hot nor cold but perfectly balanced. Chicken is barred because it is hot, and fish because it is either cold or poisonous. Some informants also believed that pregnant women should avoid all places of worship.

In the postnatal period the mother gradually returns to a normal balance. She is purified of poison and the wind subsides. Special medicines and diet assist the natural processes: wines to dry up the wind (which is “wet”); hot foods that now will help her move back to normal; and special soups to improve her milk. She should not wash her hair for the hundred days because this aggravates wind, and she should eschew poisonous foods because they will pollute the milk and irritate the vagina and womb. She should not have intercourse with her husband or he will catch a “contagious” disease (*k'ei-peng* [*qibing*]) of the lung. It is natural for her to be weak and depressed while these adjustments are in progress.

All infants are born *k'ei-kwaai*, but normally the condition is temporary. During the postnatal period a root medicine is given to reduce the baby's heat; the poison is not finally eliminated until it has measles (cf. Topley 1970: 425). Traditionally cow's dung was rubbed on the umbilicus

to reduce wind, and tranquilizing medicines are given to integrate the baby's soul and body.<sup>2</sup> The infant is agitated because its soul is reluctant to be born. The non-Christian women attributed the soul's reluctance to boredom with past lives in the world, the Christian women to its disappointment at leaving Heaven. The infant does not know why it is agitated, but the soul is seen as some sort of social, hence moral, entity. For example, in a ritual for curing "injury by fright", the soul is told to "be a man", i.e. a person, and "obey people's instructions" (Topley 1970: 432). During the first hundred days of life, until its soul settles, it is natural for a child to be nervous. It must be protected from further poisons (e.g., from its mother's milk) during this period or its own poison may erupt in a dangerous disease; it might, for example, contract measles too early. Anything polarized in the same ("hot") direction may keep it from getting measles, which it must have eventually to be purged of poisons.

For a particular infant, however, even polarizations toward cold may be harmful, for every person has a different constitution, i.e. a different natural balance of "elements" — Fire, Water, Metal, Earth, and Wood — as shown by his horoscope. The mother's horoscope also has an effect on a child, through her "flower fate" (*fa-meng* [*huaming*]), which relates to the element predominating in her own horoscopal blueprint. (The term relates to a belief that children are "flowers" on maternal "plants" growing in a garden tended by Mother and Father Gardener, *fa-wong foo-mo* [*huawang fumu*].) Elements are mutually destructive or creative. You add up and subtract (or hire a diviner to do so) to arrive at the element to which you basically "belong" (*shuk* [*shu*]). "Flower fates" are listed in the Chinese almanac for women belonging to each of the five elements. Each year the temperaments of all a woman's children change: one year, for example, "Fire" women's children are placid and "Metal" women's lively, and the next year the position may be reversed.

If, then, a mother and child experience prolonged maladjustment, many explanations are possible. An ailment might be explained by the mother's failure to observe all the correct food avoidances during pregnancy (few claimed to do so) or all the restrictions of the postnatal period. Only one of my informants claimed to have stayed in for the full hundred days; most women in urban Hong Kong have to go out because they have nobody to do their marketing for them. Such cases may be

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2 From the standpoint of the modern medical practitioner, many of the precautions taken to ensure the infant's health are tragically misdirected: the heat-reducing root medicine is now thought to cause jaundice and possible permanent liver damage; the past high mortality rate of measles is now attributed to the toxicity of the "curative" purge; cow dung applied to the navel can cause tetanus; and the tranquilizing medicines were recently discovered to have a toxic ingredient.

cured by medicine and diet. In other cases a diviner will ascertain that a woman's "plant" needs attention, a ritual watering, perhaps, or fertilizing. This may help in cases where the mother is unable to feel affection for the child; perhaps the father wanted a son and the child is a girl; perhaps there is no cash for another child, or not enough space; or perhaps the mother wants to go out to work but has nobody to care for the infant at home. It was thought that with the help of a diviner, such feelings of resentment or disappointment would soon fade away and natural affections be established.

The matter is more serious, however, if the horoscope shows the child to have a *kwaai* or queer fate (*meng* [ming]). All children have rather more hot in their balance until they are seven, and they have poison until they have had measles, so they are regarded as a little bit *kwaai* and a little bit *k'ei-kwaai*. After age seven they move toward a normal adult state, i.e. not hot or cold or poisonous. Their peculiar balance during the first seven years makes them prone to many disorders. Children with different horoscopes are predisposed to different diseases upon encountering different things at different periods. The almanac shows when children of different horoscopes are likely to get a particular disease if they encounter's particular entity, thus enabling them to avoid such encounters. A child born with a queer fate, however, is more severely polarized and hence likely to be fractious and susceptible to many diseases. Such children are usually intelligent, however, and if one can get them over this difficult period of seven years, it will have been worth the effort. Some of the factors determining their constitutions begin to adjust, and their queerness will probably subside. Margery Wolf describes a village in Taiwan where difficult, ailing children are spoken of as *kui khi* (Hokkien) [*guiqi*], and children continually ailing but likely to be prosperous and happy when they grow up, if they do, are spoken of as *kui mia* [*guiming*], having a *kui* fate (Wolf 1972: 63-64). Although Wolf translates *kui mia*: as "expensively fated" and *kui khi* as "expensive," i.e. difficult to raise, it may be noted that the sound of *kui khi* resembles the Cantonese *k'ei-kwaai* in reverse. I will have something to say about these linguistic differences later. According to my informants, children with queer fates sometimes continue to be queer even at maturity. Then their lives are shot through with restrictions. If, for example, they are basically hot, they should eat only cold and balanced foods, and preferably become a vegetarian, perhaps taking up a religious profession appropriate for a vegetarian, e.g. as a Buddhist nun.

The constitutional imbalance of a child with a queer fate may also involve other parties. First, the child may be polarized in the same direction as someone with whom it has a continuous relationship. Then both parties may suffer from continual illness. This may be corrected by

adding an element to the child's name so it is compatible with that of the other party; for example, a radical may be added to the character with which the name is written. Or, if child and mother are involved, something may be gained by attention to the latter's "plant". In such cases, because of the similarity of fates, the mother is likely to feel too much affection for the child rather than too little — i.e., to be over-anxious about it.

When mother and child have opposite polarizations in their fates, the consequences are more serious. Both parties will be *k'ei-kwaai*, they will always be getting poisonous diseases, and they will feel no affection for each other. Moreover, the trouble starts in the womb. In cases of polarization in the same direction during pregnancy, the mother will be too cold or not cold enough, but this can be corrected with medicine. But if the polarizations of mother and foetus are opposite, more poison will be created, and the mother may get toxæmia. Symptomatic of opposite polarizations are a complicated pregnancy, difficult labour (perhaps a breech birth), or some peculiarity surrounding the birth, such as the child's being born with a thick coating of vernex [vernix] (thought to protect the mother and child from each other), the waters' being discoloured when they break, or the child's having a bowel movement or urinating as it is born.

When mother and child are *k'ei-kwaai* in respect of each other, then they are antipathetic; both will suffer from a variety of poisonous ailments, and they will feel no affection for each other. Some cases described to me suggested that the child or mother in fact had some physical abnormality. One child could not move its arms and legs; another was always weak and eventually proved to have a hole in its heart, another had a large birthmark on its face, and one had frequent convulsions. In the last case the mother had suffered from a toxæmic condition during pregnancy.

If the syndrome deriving from antipathetic fates is suspected, one should first of all visit a diviner, for a problem related to the horoscopes of the two parties can affect the general luck of the whole family. Let us see how this cosmic clash is explained and treated.

### Unmatched Horoscopes and Methods of Adjustment

All the women said that a person's horoscope contained eight characters: two for the lunar year, two for the month, two the day, and two the period of the day (*shi-shan* [*shichen*]) that one is born. These characters determine one's fate. One woman explained that each pair of characters has something of Heaven, which affects one's social relationships, and something of Earth, which relates to material success (*wan* [*yun*]). Both

aspects are somehow related to health because they determine the four elements in one's constitution. But most of the women thought these four pairs of characters also related to four important relationships — with one's ancestors, parents, children, and spouses (most of the women knew their eight characters and those of their husbands and children). The pair relating to spouses differs from the others because one character stands for the person in question and one for his or her spouse; the spouse is one's "other half".

Now, except in the case of adopted children, the spouse is the only person of this group about whom one has any choice. But marriages are made in Heaven. This belief is symbolized in Cantonese marriage rituals by the red cord given as part of the gifts of the bride's side. The cord, which "ties" the couple together in Heaven, is called *t'in-shing* [*tiansheng*], "heavenly thread", a term closely related to *t'in-sing* [*tianxing*], "heavenly instincts". Such feelings are given people by Heaven to assure them of a harmonious relationship. As one informant said, "*t'in-sing* makes you know inside how to treat people. If there is no *t'in-sing*, there is no affection." One assures a compatible relationship by comparing the couple's horoscopes before betrothal. If the horoscopes are compatible, the parties will balance each other, flourish in health and wealth, and feel heavenly instincts. If this does not happen, then the horoscopes were not correctly matched by the diviner (Freedman 1970: 128–29).

With the other relationships, however, such assurances are not available. One cannot match the horoscopes of mother and child in advance and make sure the right child is born. Nor can one choose the time of a child's birth to ensure a horoscope compatible with its mother's. One of my informants said that sometimes a midwife was asked to either hasten or delay a birth so the child would arrive at an auspicious time (*shi-shun ho*). But this, she added, was useless as well as dangerous because a child decides its own time to arrive (cf. Tsay 1918: 535; Thompson 1890: 189). If the horoscopes of mother and child clash, the difficulties of early infancy will persist, the child as it grows up will be disobedient and unfilial, and the mother will find herself disliking it intensely. In the absence of *t'in-sing*, disaster (*ts'aam* [*can*]) will strike the family. One woman blamed the growing crime rate among young people in Hong Kong on the absence of *t'in-sing* between parents and children: the absence of *t'in-sing* means the absence of morality; people do not behave correctly toward one another. Yet how can you blame either mother or child if they have a horoscope clash? It is an intolerable situation. The mother finds it *ho-naan tso-yan* [*haonan zuoren*], "difficult to act as a person".

One solution, provided the child is not manifestly abnormal, is adoption. This is also the best way of handling the matter if the child is expendable, of the undesired sex, or an impossible financial burden on a poor family. Otherwise one can try bonding the child to another, a relationship known as *k'ai-kwoh* [*qiguo*]. What does this relation achieve? Let me remind the reader that only things that are *k'ei-kwaai* can purge *k'ei-kwaai* conditions: "poison drives out poison." And something *k'ei-kwaai* is neither one thing nor another, but anomalous. Second, we have a problem not only of health but also of morality — i.e. the absence of heavenly instincts. Finally, the clash involves one person who is supporting the other. I want to see how these three factors are acknowledged in the ritual symbolism of bonding, and then what the relationship itself is thought to achieve.

A child may be bonded to another person or to a god, stone, or tree. As my informants perceived, aspects of the bonding ritual resemble aspects of the marriage rituals. At betrothal, as we saw, a "heavenly cord" of red silk thread is given by the bride's side, along with a bolt of cloth and a pair of shoes. At bonding these gifts are given by the party to whom the child will be bonded, the bonder, although in this case the cord is referred to as a "trouser cord" (used in traditional dress to tie round the waist). At betrothal the man's side gives pork, beef, chicken, and wine. At bonding these gifts are given by the child's parents. If the child is being bonded not to a person but to a god or natural feature, the food is placed on an altar and the other gifts are made of paper and burnt.

The trouser cord may suggest "incorporation" (van Gennep 1960: 132) and the establishment of a new relationship. But the cord also suggests that the relationship will be a harmonious one. The child will flourish in health as a result, and feel affection for the bonding party; in short, *t'in-sing* will be established. But the fact that the gifts given by the bonder resemble those given by the family of the bride-to-be might also suggest that the bonder is allied with the family of the child, rather than the child with the bonder's. And in fact the child does not have to leave home and live with the bonding party, although as we shall see it may do so. In the latter case the bonding party may be seen as a parent rather than a bride. The parent aspect is further symbolized by the bonder's gifts to the child of a pair of chopsticks and a bowl, suggestive of support. Indeed, a person bonded to a child is known as *k'ai-ma* [*qima*] bonded mother, if a woman, or *k'ai-ye* [*qiye*], bonded paternal grandfather, if a man. The child is called *k'ai-tsai* [*qizi*] bonded son, or *k'ai-nü* [*qiniü*], bonded daughter. Moreover, the relationship lasts, theoretically at least, for the period that intimacy was traditionally expected to last with one's parents; for a daughter it terminates with her marriage (when she leaves home) and

for a son it lasts throughout life (he may continue to live with his parents).

The symbolism of bonding, then, is ambiguous; it includes both ideas about spouses and ideas about parents and other lineal kin, pulling in opposite directions. In popular speech the terms *k'ai-ye* and *k'ai-tsai* refer to another relationship that Chinese in Hong Kong certainly regard as ambiguous — that between homosexual lovers. The term *k'ai-tai* [*qidi*] (*tai* [*di*] meaning younger brother) may alternatively be used. The English word “queer”, also used for this relationship, has as a verb the meaning “to put out of order”, and thus appears to coincide with the Chinese meaning.

The ambiguity symbolically expressed in bonding ritual is paralleled by expectations of the relationship itself. Certainly a cosmic reaction is anticipated. It is hoped that mother and child will both improve in health and even in affections — that the bonder will drive out the *k'ei-kwaai* condition. Bonding is sometimes arranged for children with a *kwaai* fate resulting from internal imbalances or with some abnormality or unusual feature. In such cases it may be hoped not only that the child will feel affection for the bonder, and vice versa, but that other social and economic duties will be acknowledged between the bonder and the child's parents. Other things may be hoped of the relationship; the range of expectations varies with the nature of the parties.

A popular god for bonding in Hong Kong is Wong T'ai Sin [Huang Daxian], Great Sage Wong, whose temple gives its name to a large resettlement area in Kowloon where many of my informants lived. This god is noted both for improving health and curing “strange” diseases and for giving good tips at the races. He brings the family both material benefits and good luck. The stone most women mentioned as suitable for bonding is a prominent rock on Hong Kong Island known as Yan-uen Shek, Marriage Affinity Rock, because it is also appealed to when marriages do not work; it corrects any non-affinity diagnosed after the event. It is appealed to frequently when a child has a *kwaai* fate, particularly a *kwaai* fate that clashes with its mother's. The dual function of Affinity Rock underlies the parallel between cosmic affinity in marriage and cosmic affinity in other relationships. Trees selected for bonding are usually pines, said to be strong and to have long roots suggestive of long life. Children who clash with their mothers are not expected to live very long unless their fates are modified.

Two kinds of people were considered suitable for bonding relationships: rich people with many children, who are obviously lucky, and devout vegetarians, usually women. The latter are usually childless, and may be rich or poor. A rich person with many children is expected to bring good fortune (in a transcendental sense), and a devout person is said

to improve everyone's destiny. There seems to be nothing ambiguous about such persons. But it may be relevant that a lucky person can be seen as polarized in an auspicious direction, and that a religious profession is considered appropriate for a person with a queer fate. It may be that within the relationship of bonding, where ambiguities appear to be ritually underlined, the bonder is ideally someone also polarized in an appropriate direction — to prevent the neutralization of the “poisonous” (and hence for those with a queer fate, curative) effect of the relationship itself. Diviners were said to recommend the type of person or entity to which a particular child should be bonded; i.e., the choice is not a random one if an expert is consulted.

Not everyone consults a diviner, however, and other factors may influence the choice. Certain basic obligations are incurred, first by the mother and later the child. A god must be worshipped regularly, especially at its chief festival; a rock or tree must have regular offerings of paper money and food. If the bonder is a person, the child should visit him or her on all occasions when Chinese visit paternal kin and should come armed with gifts. The child should attend the person's funeral as a kinsman and the bonder the child's wedding. A rich person may additionally be expected to help the family in general and the child in particular by securing its admission to a good school, paying for schooling and medical care, and buying presents. If the child and mother are hopelessly at odds, the child may be brought up by the bonder. One of my informants said she had been brought up by her bonded mother and had emigrated with her from China. A childless, unmarried woman might be expected to treat the bonded child like a son or daughter, taking it out and buying it things. On the other hand, one woman told me her relative's son's bonded mother was poor and was always seeking financial help from the family. Because he feared such demands, one woman said, her husband did not like her to bond their children to people, only to gods.

Financially, then, the child's family may be either assisted or burdened by a bonding relationship. Socially, too, the relationship is an ambiguous one: beyond the ceremonial observances, the rights and duties are not stated very precisely, so many permutations are possible. Much depends, for example, on the precise socioeconomic status of the family, and on the particular difficulties experienced by mother and child.

### **Former Resentments and Role Adjustment**

Theoretically the bonding relationship will ameliorate the cosmic position of both mother and child; their health and emotional responses should improve. Sometimes this does happen, perhaps because the bonder pays

for medical care or removes the child to his or her own home. But suppose the syndrome persists and the relationship with the bonder does not take hold? A mother may ask why she has been saddled with such a child, why do their horoscopes clash? One of my two Christian informants, who belonged to a Protestant fundamentalist sect, thought it could be “the sins of the fathers visited on the children.” The other, a Catholic, said it was just fate, and all one could do was to pray for a miracle (she also suggested that bonding to the Virgin Mary might help). The non-Christian women suggested that, in the absence of any obvious cause, the syndrome might result from wrongs committed in a previous existence, *ts'in-shai* [*qianshi*], “former generations”. (Confusingly, this term was also used by the Christian woman who spoke of “sins of the fathers”, quite a different concept.) To demonstrate the effect of *ts'in-shai*, one woman described a rich but childless maternal aunt. The aunt had been told by an old woman specializing in knowledge of the past that in a former existence she had spent much money on Buddhist ceremonies and charity but had once stolen from her husband’s family. This explained why she was rich but childless: her social problem was caused by her former social failings.

Several women thought that if one had behaved very badly toward a particular person, his soul would come back in the body of one’s own child. The possibility that souls come back and work out their credits and debits with people they formerly knew — wreaking vengeance, for example, on their family — is fully explored in Cantonese folklore. This argument was used to explain why a woman might continue to produce difficult, even abnormal, children. And of course if there is a family history of congenital defects, a mother might be predisposed to see a particular child as having soul of a deceased relative who also had that defect and for that very reason had been badly treated. Such a child is a *loh-kwai tsai* [*liugui zi*] “child drawing a spirit of the dead”. This is suggestive of another expression, *loh-chaai tsai*, [*liuji zi*] meaning a child who dies before “repaying his parents”. Although it is accepted that a mother may deserve her fate, it is also considered very wrong of a soul to exact revenge in this way. So one does not have to accept all the blame for the situation.

A resentful soul may do many things to harm either the mother or its own infant body. For example, it may refuse to wander outside its mother’s body during gestation. This wandering around itself leaves the foetus susceptible to accidental injury, but the almanac shows where the soul is at different stages of pregnancy, so people can take care to avoid it. The soul’s failure to vacate the mother’s body can make the mother swell up (toxaemia?) during pregnancy and suffer dangerous difficulties during childbirth. Numerous peculiarities of childbirth were interpreted to me in

terms of a resentful foetal soul. A child with thick vernex is a “good child”, one woman said, because it is trying to protect both its mother and itself from any clash. But a bowel movement at birth shows a soul resentful of its father, and urination resentment of its mother. Such an infant might even cause the eventual death of the resented parent. I was told that in the past, a mother-in-law supervising the birth who diagnosed resentment would immediately dispose of the child: a boy would be given away, a girl “thrown on the rubbish heap”. But the baby must not be allowed to see its mother or father, or it will eventually seek them out and take its revenge. An ordinary adoption was not always a solution; if the child is not disposed of immediately and is indeed a *loh-kwai tsai*, it might later seek out its parents and exact revenge. Moreover, an obviously abnormal child might find no takers. If the child is expendable, one might consider giving it to a monastery or nunnery, where the atmosphere of continual prayer might help neutralize its aggression.

There is no real solution if such a child remains with its mother, but one could try to redefine the problem, adjusting the role to the behaviour rather than behaviour to the role. By changing the term of address, one suggests that the mother is not really the mother. The child is taught to call her either *a-tse* [*a jie*], “elder sister”, *a-so* [*a sao*], “brother’s wife”, or *a-naai* [*a nai*], “wet-nurse”.

What appears to be argued by the use of these terms? When I asked for other instances of such a switch in kinship terms, I was given the example of a young concubine (*ts’ip* [*qie*]) and children of her fellow-consort who were approximately the same age as she. The concubine should theoretically be addressed as “mother” and has some of a mother’s duties, but the children address her as “elder sister” because “it is difficult for children to treat people the same age as if they were senior” (in generation). The concubine’s generation is made to match her age. In the case of mother and child, of course, there is already a difference in both generation and age. Putting the mother into the same generation as the child (elder sister; brother’s wife) appears to anticipate a difficult relationship. I was told that when the term of address for mother was modified, the child should not really treat its mother as elder sister or brother’s wife, but the mother need not feel so bad if the child who did not call her mother was difficult to control.

What of the term wet-nurse? Informants said the term implies familiarity. It also suggests that the milk the child drinks is not the mother’s, and mothers with antipathetic children are believed to produce milk harmful to them. The term also evokes a deity who helps with children’s problems. Children are believed to be in the charge of a goddess called Golden Flower Mother, *Kam Fa Mo* [*Jinhua Mu*], whom informants likened further to Mother Gardener. Her attendant deities are

twelve “wet-nurses”, who appear in temples as smaller images than the mother goddess and are subject to her authority. The role of wet-nurse is also ambiguous. In one way she is superior to a mother — she performs one of her most important functions — but in another she is inferior, for she is subject to the mother’s authority.

A similar element of conflict is implicit in the other substituted role terms. Elder sister, for example, has an important role in the rearing of younger brothers and sisters in village society, which entitles her to respect and obedience. She plays an even greater role in urban Hong Kong, where in many cases she goes out to work and pays for her younger siblings’ education — an education often superior to her own. Though entitled to respect and obedience, however, she is ultimately subject to her mother’s authority, and her decisions may be countermanded; her authority is ambiguous. Like the wet-nurse and the concubine, an elder sister has substantial authority over another woman’s children, and, again like the concubine, is ultimately subject to the greater authority of the children’s mother. One can also infer potential conflict between a woman and her brother’s wife. If, for example, the sister is older than both brother and brother’s wife, and if the sister is unmarried and living at home, what is her relationship to the new daughter-in-law? She is senior in age, but in some ways socially inferior, at least in traditional society, where these terminological changes were worked out. She is supposed to leave the family, not contribute children to it, a role reserved precisely to the daughter-in-law. Because of this potential conflict, in some areas of Shun Tak, in Kwangtung Province, elder sisters had either to marry or to signal their intention of remaining unwed before younger brothers could take a wife.

More narrowly linguistic considerations are also important. I referred earlier to the suggestiveness of homophones, noting that Cantonese and Hokkien-speaking people have some of the same ideas about unusual fates and troublesome children, and used different terms with similar sounds. Such transformations can take place from one linguistic group to another, particularly among non-literate people.

## Conclusions

My informants were all poor and illiterate, and they lived in crowded conditions. Most came from poor families in rural areas, where there had been high rates of infant and maternal mortality. Poverty, customs affecting the pregnant woman and both mother and infant after childbirth, delivery by midwives who were sometimes trying either to hasten or to delay births — all these factors may have increased the number of

difficulties in childbirth, the incidence of birth defects among the newborn, and mortality rates among both mothers and children. Given these high mortality rates, and the importance of children in traditional society, one might anticipate considerable anxiety at any sign of abnormality. And strong resentment against an abnormal child.

For any family, a child who is sickly and fractious, particularly one who seems to suffer a serious abnormality, is a heavy burden. And a mother unable to cope because she herself is ailing from a complication of childbirth would be an additional burden. In crowded households harmony is essential, and a child who is hard to manage will create disharmony. A difficult or abnormal child would require special nurturing — a need perhaps reflected in the Hokkien term “expensive”. And at the end of the rearing one might have a son unable to marry and beget children or an unmarriageable daughter. For a family such an outcome could be disastrous. It is not surprising, then, that a mother-in-law might want to dispose of a sickly child immediately, before the mother has seen it. Heaven expects affections to develop between mothers and children, but it by no means ensures that this will happen. And supposing one resents a child, any child, because one cannot support it or it is of the undesired sex? One might be predisposed to perceive a syndrome that justifies such feelings, to see all the symptoms when only one or two — or even none — exists.

My informants, none of whom were committed exclusively to any one cosmological system, went for an explanation first to the theory of “strangeness”, “poisonous conditions”, and horoscope incompatibility. Poisonous conditions are usually dangerous, and sometimes difficult to cure. A horoscope clash that produces a poisonous condition helps justify one’s anxieties over the symptoms. Horoscope clashes also prevent natural affections from spontaneously developing, making an adoption an acceptable solution if somebody is willing to adopt. Bonding is another possible solution for horoscope clash. It can drive out the poisonous condition, and offers other potential benefits.

If all else fails, one can always fall back on the explanation that the syndrome is punishment for wrongs committed by the mother in an earlier existence. Even this explanation takes some of the sting out of a painful situation: it explains the absence of affection, and relieves the mother of responsibility for controlling the situation in the present. Moreover, it places some of the blame on the child: in exacting revenge for earlier wrongs, the child is acting in a blamably unfilial fashion. Perhaps now the child can be given to a monastery or nunnery. Or, if it is to remain in the family, a terminological device can be used that reflects the mother’s difficult role position by implying a difficult relationship and, by replacing the term mother, suggests that “this is no child of mine.”

I have not dealt here with all the possible problems of newborn children and their mothers. I have not touched upon the relationship queer people have with spirits — the possibilities of spirit possession or of antipathy to an ancestor. Nor have I considered the implications of a horoscope clash or lack of affinity between child and father. But when problems arise between a mother and her newborn child, they may well result from gestation or childbirth. I have discussed a set of beliefs that addresses itself to this possibility.

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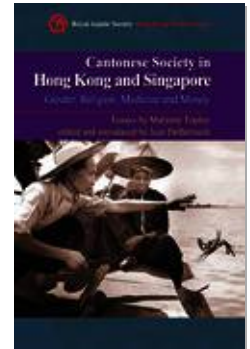
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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## Chapter 19

# **Chinese and Western Medicine in Hong Kong: Some Social and Cultural Determinants of Variation, Interaction and Change**

(1975)\*

Hong Kong is a British Crown Colony lying just inside the tropics, to the south-east of China adjoining the province of Kwangtung [Guangdong]. Its 400 square miles includes the island of “Hongkong”, and the peninsular Kowloon, ceded to Great Britain in 1841 and 1860 respectively; and the New Territories, a settled rural area, added by a 99-year lease in 1898.

Both traditional and modern, or “Chinese” and “Western” medicine, as they are commonly called, are officially recognized; they have always been officially regarded and administered as separate systems. Since the end of the Japanese Occupation however, although they continue to be clearly distinguished by legal and other officially sanctioned rules, changes have taken place. Western and Chinese therapy or drugs are combined; new categories of “Western” and “Chinese” practitioners have emerged, and they interact with each other. Many new practices and practitioners are illegal, but the innovations, legal and otherwise, add to the range of choice people exercise in seeking out and providing health care.

Anthropologists studying traditional medicine and assessing its role in health care, often focus on a particular set of beliefs and practices. But it is also important in modernizing societies, particularly when governed by a people culturally different from the majority, to understand the whole context within which traditional institutions operate — how far traditional, and traditional and modern, institutions, compete, complement, or interact

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with one another; what their official statuses are; and how different people use and evaluate the alternative services. Hong Kong is a modernizing industrial society where 98 percent of the population is Chinese, and the government consists of British expatriates and Westernized Chinese. It may be some time before we have detailed data on all its medical institutions; study of popular beliefs and practices is just beginning. Nevertheless it is possible to present a general picture on the basis of existing information, and in this essay I examine what I know of the medical system; the changes that have taken place, some major reasons for these changes, and their importance for the people. My material for analysis is derived from documentary and field research.<sup>1</sup>

I use the term “system”, which is a natural science metaphor commonly used by social scientists in the analysis of social and cultural behaviour. Here I take it to mean a set or assembly of phenomena connected, associated, or interdependent so as to form a complex unity (Onions 1955). Systems are governed by norms — rules and laws. They are the statics of the system, setting a precedent and representing the principle of continuity. But as the anthropologist Raymond Firth points out, the observer is faced with the problem of accounting not only for continuity but also change (Firth 1951: 35–40). Firth locates the principle of change in the dynamics of the system — the variety of ways relationships are ordered and events put together and which depend upon decisions and choice. “Structure” and “organization” are terms often used synonymously to describe the continuous aspect of a system; but Firth used “structure” for norms, reserving “organization” for this dynamic activity. He points out that while structural forms limit the range of alternatives possible, it is the possibility of alternatives that makes for variability.

I have adapted this conceptual framework for my analysis. Firth uses it for the analysis of social behaviour; but decisions and choices are cognitive events. People may be influenced in their decisions and choices by their perceptions of conditions outside the system, but they are also influenced by their conceptions and evaluations of the system itself. One might also talk of a cognitive system, and of cognitive structure and

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1 Data for this essay come principally from a study of the development and functioning of the Hong Kong medical system sponsored by the Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong. It began in 1971 and will be completed in 1974. In-depth interviews were conducted either in Cantonese by myself, or in Cantonese and Mandarin by my part-time research assistant. Additional data comes from a child-rearing study conducted by me personally in 1969 in resettlement and low-cost housing estates, and sponsored by a project on development and rearing of Chinese children in Hong Kong, undertaken by the Paediatric Department of the University of Hong Kong with a grant from the Nuffield Foundation and other organizations.

organization: the norms people use in classifying and ordering concepts, and the ideas they are able to form on the basis of these norms — the variations possible. I will look at some of these norms and variations in order to understand some aspects of social change and the importance of this change.

I begin my analysis by examining the official social structures devised for Chinese and Western medicine. Described in outline are the forms of social organization we find, pointing up the divergence between intended and actual. In the rest of the essay I will examine the main social and cultural factors which appear to have determined this divergence, and its significance for the people.

### **Social Structure and Organization of Medicine in Hong Kong**

Statutory provisions are made in the Medical Registration Ordinance for anybody of “Chinese race” to practice traditional medicine professionally, i.e. for gain (Hong Kong Government 1966a: 15). No qualifications or registration are necessary. Although traditional practitioners’ associations exist, none has ever been given the legal right to define standards or scales of efficiency, or to discipline members of the profession. Chinese medicine is not defined in law; it is any technique or belief that is “customary”.

Variations in Chinese medicine have always existed on the basis of the sub-cultural differences of dialect groups. Over 75 percent of Hong Kong’s Chinese originate from parts of Kwangtung where Cantonese is spoken; and some 90 percent (including the children of non-Cantonese speakers) at the census returned Cantonese as their usual language (Census and Statistics Department 1972: 9–17). Traditional practitioners’ associations, to which most of the physicians belong, list places of origin of their members. From them it would appear that Cantonese forms of medicine predominate.

Administratively, Chinese medicine comes under the Secretariat for Home (formerly “Chinese”) Affairs which deals with problems in the interpretation and protection of custom. Chinese traditional practitioners may be prosecuted for infringement of laws forbidding them the right to certain practices. Some medical customs, for example, are regarded as dangerous. Thus no traditional practitioner may treat eye diseases, although traditional treatments exist for such diseases (Hong Kong Government 1966a: 15), and no such practitioner may use opium — which is a traditional medicament (Hong Kong Government 1968a: 14ff.). All other medicaments in the Chinese pharmacopoeia are allowed. No

traditional practitioner may call himself “doctor” (*i-shaang* [*yisheng*]);<sup>2</sup> this privilege is restricted to qualified, registrable Western-trained physicians. He may call himself *chung-i* [*zhongyi*] in Chinese, which means “Chinese doctor”, but in its English translation, or the translation of any other Chinese term he uses, he must include the term “herbalist”. This is not to distinguish his specialty but to ensure that no member of the public is induced to believe he is a “Chinese person trained in Western medicine” (Hong Kong Government 1966a: 15). All traditional practitioners are thus “herbalists”.

No herbalist may do anything restricted as a privilege to qualified registrable Western-trained doctors or auxiliaries. Thus he may not issue birth, death, or international inoculation certificates; use drugs on the Part I list of the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Hong Kong Government 1969a: 1g); use antibiotics (Hong Kong Government 1966b) or other medicines which, like opium, are on the Part I list of the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Hong Kong Government 1968a: 14ff.). He may not perform Western-type surgery or use X-ray equipment. And an herbalist may not do anything forbidden to a legally recognized Western-trained doctor. Thus he may not advertise to the public (Hong Kong Government 1968b: 1ff.), or perform abortions, which evidence suggests was a traditional activity.

Herbalists are not required to report infectious diseases. Although the government permits Chinese medicine, it has always believed that “...traditional beliefs...as to the cause of diseases, the means of spread and factors affecting its course are so at variance with modern teaching that there is little chance of promoting voluntary cooperation...in... prevention and control...” (Directory of Medicine 1928: 6). The government protects Chinese medicine, but promotes Western medicine. It is concerned with its own medical services’ development, organized through a Department of Medicine and Health, and the provision of doctors in the private sector. Thus it subsidizes medical education at the colony’s only medical school in the University of Hong Kong. Because of increased medical costs due to advances in diagnoses and cure, and because Hong Kong’s industrial economy is vulnerable to foreign market — depending on them for raw materials and sale of manufactured goods — it was considered unrealistic, in the post-World War II period, to plan services to standards equivalent to those of developed countries (Hong Kong Government 1964: 9ff.). Estimates of requirements for doctors have been based on arbitrary ratios of 1:3000; 1:2500; or 1:2000,

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2 All terms connected with medicine in Hong Kong are usually Romanized in official documents in Cantonese. Here I follow this practice, using the Romanization method of Myer and Wempe (1947).

implying the colony lies between developed and undeveloped countries (Committee Appointed to Review the Doctor Problem 1969: 56ff.). The government gives high priority in its own services to health education and preventive measures, seeking to meet the “most urgent needs” in therapy and directing low-cost services at the poor (Medical Plan Standing Committee 1970: 1).

The government thus has an important stake in Western medicine, but it recognizes the right of the profession to set its own standards and measure efficiency against scales it devises itself. This right is exercised by a Medical Council of which the Director of Medicine and Health, himself a doctor, is ex-officio chairman (Hong Kong Government 1966a: 4ff.). The Council registers Western-trained doctors for private practice, issuing them with a code of practice. Qualifications for registration are those accepted by the General Medical Council of Great Britain and obtained from schools in the United Kingdom and parts of the Commonwealth, including Hong Kong, where instruction is in English.

All registered doctors must be experienced, and new graduates of Hong Kong's medical faculty work as interns for 12 months in government hospitals and clinics, being provisionally-registered while gaining this experience (Hong Kong Government 1953). Some persons are exempted from registration and are legally entitled to call themselves “Western doctor” (*sai-i* [xiyi]) along with the registered. They work on ships, in the British Forces, for foreign governments, in university teaching and government service (Hong Kong Government 1966: 14). Exempted doctors in government are unregistrable, and unregistrable doctors may not practice privately. The two major professional associations, the local British Medical Association (BMA) and the Hong Kong Medical Association (HKMA) (formerly Hong Kong Chinese Medical Association (HKCMA) do not accept unregistrable doctors for membership. One other class of unregistrable practitioners is legally recognized but may not take the title “Western doctor”, practice privately, or join the major associations — they work in charity clinics, themselves exempted from registration (Hong Kong Government 1966b: 6). Unlike the exempted and provisionally registered doctors, they may not use dangerous drugs, or issue birth, death and international inoculation certificates (Hong Kong Government 1963). Whereas the Medical Council disciplines private doctors, those in government services or the charity clinics are usually disciplined by the government itself.

Registered private doctors have the right to dispense medicines (Hong Kong Government 1969a). This is not favoured by the Pharmaceutical Society but considered necessary because there is no local training for registrable pharmacy qualifications, and a shortage of trained personnel (H.K.R.S. No. 49 D&S 1/15). While the Registration Ordinance states

who may practice Chinese medicine (anyone of “Chinese race”) it does not state who may not. To clarify the situation and because of growing interest among Western-trained doctors as a result of developments in China, the Medical Council issued a letter to the two major associations advising them that acupuncture therapy might be practiced by doctors of any ethnic affinity on their own responsibility. It did not advise acupuncture anesthesia, considering it “still in the experimental stages” (Chairman, Medical Council 1973).

For a population of about 4 million in 1971 there were 2,585 officially recognized Western-trained medical practitioners in Hong Kong. There were 2,041 registered doctors (although some with names on the register may have retired); 116 provisionally registered; 108 unregistrable and in government service; and 320 practitioners in exempted charity clinics (personal communication, Director of Medicine and Health Services). There were some 20 medical associations based on common specialties, ethnic identities or religious affiliations. Most belonged to a federation of societies formed by the two major associations to represent mutual interests. There were also two associations for Chinese working as recognized unregistrable doctors. At the end of 1972 the BMA had 500 members, mostly non-Chinese, and the HKMA 1,087 members, 90 percent of whom were Chinese.

Very few private doctors, and no government doctors so far, practice acupuncture. Those who do train with local acupuncturists, preferably those trained in both Western and Chinese medicine who came to Hong Kong as refugees in 1972 and 1973 and cannot return to their South-east Asian countries of birth (*South China Morning Post*, 11 November 1972). There were estimated to be some 200 in 1972, and they cannot be registered as Western doctors (*China Mail*, 29 May 1973). Apart from this training there is little contact between recognized Western trained doctors and practitioners of traditional medicine on the professional level, and they do not refer patients to one another (see Lee 1975). More than two-thirds of the registrable doctors were in private practice in 1974, and 100 vacancies existed in government hospitals and clinics. It is estimated that about 30 percent of the newly-qualifying doctors emigrate (*Hongkong Standard*, 14 April 1974). Most doctors dispense their own medicines and insist patients use them. They often require payment of additional consultation fees when prescriptions are refilled.

In addition to the number of recognized doctors listed, the police estimated there to be more than one thousand unqualified and unregistered people illegally practicing Western medicine exclusively in 1974. They said that these people freely dispense controlled medicines and poisonous drugs, and conduct surgical operations in their homes. Most of their clinics are well advertised by signboards and in the Chinese press, and

many specialize in gynaecology, abortion, and plastic surgery (*The Star*, 4 April 1974). Some “black-market doctors”, as they are known, include recent refugees, qualified and trained in Western and Chinese medicine but preferring to practice the former. Some have older qualifications and some no qualifications at all (see p. 503).

It would appear from a signboard count by the HKCMA that in 1969 there were some 4,000 herbalists practicing Chinese medicine. In fact there were probably more. Not all traditional therapists announce themselves on signboards — some own or work in pharmacies, in temples, and traditional charity organizations. Since 1973 they have been joined by some of the refugee doctors who usually practice acupuncture (*South China Morning Post*, 19 November 1973).

One finds in Hong Kong a variety of practices falling within the legal framework of Chinese customary medicine. There are spirit-healers, secular healers, those performing both types of healing; and there are people curing by secular means but diagnosing according to non-secular beliefs and vice versa. Traditional practitioners are commonly listed in association handbooks according to their therapeutic specialty or the particular diseases they treat. Thus there are, besides acupuncturists, “general” therapists using medicines derived from herbal, animal, and mineral compounds, and there are bone-setters. There are physicians specializing in the diseases of the sexes, and in paediatrics and gerontology. They include, although it is not mentioned in the handbooks, those using non-secular ideas and ritual cures. Some of the physicians are highly qualified, and although their qualifications are not legally recognized, they have degrees from Chinese universities and diplomas from schools of traditional medicine in China and Taiwan. Some have qualifications from locally run schools. Others — some authorities believe the majority — have no qualifications or training at all, although their practices are equally legal.

One also finds that despite restrictions placed on the traditional practitioner, many “herbalists” combine Chinese medicaments with antibiotics and other forbidden drugs, although usually diagnosing according to Chinese methods. There are bone-setters performing plastic surgery and using X-ray equipment, and “general” therapists performing abortions by both traditional and modern methods. Like illegal Western practitioners they charge their patients and get paid; and they advertise in the Chinese press.

All these practitioners — illegal Western doctors, qualified and unqualified practitioners of Chinese medicine, and traditional practitioners combining Western and Chinese therapy (and who may also use ritual remedies) — align themselves together through membership in a network of associations. Illegal Western doctors who, to add to the complexity,

also call themselves “herbalists”, associate with their fellows in some associations, but in others they associate with traditional physicians combining medicines; qualified and unqualified traditional practitioners associate together despite the formers’ occasional public attack on the latter (*South China Morning Post*, 2 October 1973; 8 October 1973). Secular and non-secular practitioners sometimes associate together; those combining medicines associate with strictly traditional practitioners (who are rare), and many of their associations are federated together.

So there is a recognizable system of official Western medicine in which physicians organize activities and form alignments in ways permitted by the official structural norms. Recognized Western doctors practicing acupuncture do not form a new category for they act “on their own responsibility” which means they are judged by the standards and scales of the Western profession. But there is no clearly recognizable system of Chinese medicine. Rather, there is a new system in which Western and Chinese activities combine — and new alignments are formed among a number of legal, illegal, qualified, and unqualified categories.

Several contributory factors have been suggested for this situation by government and community bodies — heavy demand for medical services; lack of a “realistic” policy in Western medicine; government indifference to controls over Chinese medicine; lack of integrity and the influence of economic factors tempting traditional practitioners to use Western therapy; the need for new alignments for mutual aid in the face of bureaucratic procedures, “protection” rackets, and legal restrictions; and public “ignorance, superstition and apathy” in participating in this unofficial system (*South China Morning Post*, 27 January 1972). I want to examine these social and cultural factors in terms of my conceptual framework.

### **Demand for Medical Services**

The emergence of illegal practitioners and the continued existence of traditional doctors, including those with no qualifications, are often linked with heavy demand for medical services. This demand is usually explained in demographic terms, so I will consider demography first. The population first began to expand as those leaving at the fall of the colony began to return. But around 1949 Hong Kong experienced the largest influx of people in its history. There was another significant influx in 1962 (*Hong Kong Government Annual Reports* 1949–63); and the influx of 1972–73, bringing in refugee doctors, also brought in many young people, and disabled and elderly persons.

Before the occupation, people were relatively mobile; many returned to China when seriously ill or when epidemics occurred. The age and sex pattern was that of a typical immigrant community, strongly influenced by young single men. In contrast, the age and sex pattern in 1971 was that of a settled population. Few newcomers left, and more than 50 percent of the population were returned at the last census as born in the colony (Census and Statistics Department 1972: 9–17). Hong Kong does not have particularly bad health. There have been consistently falling levels in the overall death rate, in infant and maternal mortality, and the incidence of infectious diseases (Maclehose 1973: 6). But the climate, geography, distribution of income groups, and population densities, make it vulnerable to epidemics and diseases associated with crowding and poverty, especially tuberculosis, which is a major problem. And changing, Westernizing, life-styles, make it vulnerable to hypertension, cerebrovascular lesions and other “modern” diseases.

Some people have become rich as a result of post-war industrialization, but many are relatively poor. The 1971 census indicated that 42.5 percent of all households earned under 600 Hong Kong dollars (approximately US\$98) (Hong Kong Government 1971: 2). In 1972 densities were high; in one part of Kowloon there were over 160,340 persons per square kilometre. More than 180,000 households shared accommodation with others at the end of 1971, and 275,000 persons were estimated to live in squatter structures. Large redistributions in population have taken place. Today 90 percent — not only people from China but also from the rural New Territories — are concentrated in urban areas (Census and Statistics Department 1972: 11ff.). The New Territories area, much of which is mountainous and cannot be developed, occupies about 90 percent of the total land, and little space is available for further urban expansion. Because of high rents in the private sector and the need to clear older buildings for improvements, vast “resettlement” and low-cost housing estates, some virtually townships, have been built, and the government has become landlord to nearly 43 percent of the population. It does not follow that only the poor live as squatters or in resettlement and low-cost housing. Chinese in Hong Kong tend to allocate less resources to superior housing as their incomes improve than do people in modern Western societies (Topley 1969: 195ff.), but certainly few wealthy persons are found in some residential areas and few poor in others.

In 1971, 74.55 percent of those over the age of 10, and whose usual language was not English, were unable to speak any English at all (Census and Statistics Department 1972: 72). Many people demanding medical services must do so through speakers of their own language. Women, moreover, tend to make major decisions about family health, and many are without any education. In 1971, of the 42 percent people aged 5

and over with no schooling, 30.5 percent were women (Census and Statistics Department 1972: 63). Probably the majority of people without English, and without education, have ideas about constitutional disorder and the values of health care having their roots in traditional theories of health and morality. It does not follow however that those with education, who speak English, and who are men, do not have such ideas as well. But they tend to have a more secular approach, going to spiritual beliefs when secular therapy fails. I do not examine here the attitudes towards medical services these ideas and values engendered; this is taken up later. But I must write something about the ideas themselves because they tend to encourage heavy uses of medical services.

Concern for the health of the family is seen as a prime duty of mothers and filial sons, although just as mothers care for the health of their children, daughters-in-law usually care for the health of their husband's parents, even if they live separately as is common in modernizing Hong Kong. In a 1969 child-rearing study conducted with 20 non-English speaking, illiterate and semi-literate mothers, I found informants tended to use the evidence of money and time spent on children's health as a sign of their love and affection. But they spent much time and money because they held certain ideas of ill health.

It is widely believed that the old and the young, and certain other classes of people, have constitutions particularly prone to minor illnesses and that these are not self-limiting — they must be cured to prevent serious disease. Some informants, comparing the attitudes of Western and Chinese mothers, remarked that the former, who do not take children to doctors for minor symptoms like cough or cold, showed a disregard both for their duties and their children's health. There is a further belief that the serious diseases which may follow are caused by additional external agents.

Man as an individual — and I distinguish individual from “social person” for reasons we will see — is conceptualized as a psycho-physical entity. The constitution is *huet-hei* [*xueqi*]: “blood and ether”. These flow continuously between various vital organs of the body. Some additionally believe the flow to be regulated by “five elements” (*ng-hang* [*wuxing*]) and/or two souls, which, in the life of the individual, interact with the five elements — which in turn interact with one another — to control balance. The constitution may be imbalanced because of natural conditions, and this manifests itself in humours: “hot air” (*it-hei* [*reqi*]), “cold” (*leung* [*leng*]) — also associated with “emptiness” — “dryness” (*ts'o* [*zao*]), “wetness” (*shap* [*shi*]), “fire” (*foh* [*huo*]), and “wind” (*fung* [*feng*]). Many believe that the young are not yet emotionally or physically stabilized. They are prone to “hot air” and “dryness”, and physical symptoms like fever, rashes, coughs and colds (in the Western sense of “colds”). They

also are prone to emotional disturbance indicating “wetness” manifest in “chestiness”, insomnia, trembling and crying. Old people have weakened constitutions. They are subject to “cold”, “wetness” and “wind”, and “not enough blood” (*m-kau huet* [*bugou xue*]), with physical symptoms such as dizziness, rheumatism, and general weakness; and emotional symptoms such as “strange talk”. Menstruating women are prone to “cold” and “not enough blood”. People with certain horoscopes, which indicate the constitutional pattern, may also be inclined to some particular imbalance. Those over-indulgent in food and drink are prone to “hot air”, while those over-indulgent in sex are “cold” with “not enough blood”. Those emotionally over-indulgent are prone to imbalances relating to different emotions, for example fear and grief are “wet” and “cold”; anger is “fire” and happiness “hot”.

Prevention of imbalance symptoms is brought about by living a regular life, and for children, a quiet environment; and by taking regular brews appropriate to the constitution — for example, “purifying-cool” (*ts’ing-leung* [*qingleng*]) teas for “hot” constitutions and tonics to build the blood (*po-huet* [*buxue*]), or strengthen the ether (*po-hei* [*buqi*]). Many people, irrespective of their backgrounds, know of these remedies and use them regularly. If symptoms do arise the more traditional person will usually treat them himself; this was common custom. But in Hong Kong they may use traditional or modern medicines — including antibiotics for fevers (bought from illegal pharmacists), and Western as well as Chinese tranquilizers. Others visit therapists and expect some sort of treatment (not merely to be told to go home and rest).

Various external agents may exacerbate the situation in those suffering humoral conditions. These are imbalanced phenomena: foods — which are also “hot”, “cold” and so forth — malevolent spirits (*kwai* [*gui*]; *iu-kwaai* [*yaogui*]; *ts’e-shan* [*xieshen*]); miasmata (*ts’e-hei* [*xieqi*]; *ts’e-mung* [*xiemen*]) ; and weather conditions, literally hot, cold, damp or humid, and windy. If the agent has an imbalance similar to that of the sufferer, an imbalanced disease will result — “hot” “cold”, etc. If it has the opposite imbalance however, there is a sort of catalytic effect: “blood” and “ether” rush together to form “poison” (*tuk* [*du*]) — for example, pus or phlegm. Many incurable diseases or very serious diseases are “poisonous” — cancer, leprosy, and tuberculosis. Sex with an “imbalanced” person gives a disease; for example, an elderly man having intercourse with a young woman may become very ill; as may a man having sex with a woman in the puerperal period when she is regarded as polluted.

Disease may also be “caught” from particular social categories of people. If the horoscope is at odds, for example, with a yearly cycle (detectable by a diviner) a person must avoid brides (socially “hot”) and

mourners (socially “cold”). Immoral persons weaken their constitutions and are prone to “infection” from agitated spirits, for example an ancestor whose worship has been neglected.

Thus a person may be predisposed to disease by his constitution and get minor symptoms. He may then get a serious disease through the action of external agents. Western-trained doctors (especially those who are Westerners) often say the Chinese are hypochondriacs. Certainly, people may be very anxious about disease if they see themselves as in a state engendering imbalance; or if they think they might have been in contact with some external disease-causing agent. And for similar reasons they may worry about their children or parents; they may frequently visit health specialists.

### Western Medical Policy

Those talking of an “unrealistic” policy in Western medicine commonly complain of two things; one is the permissiveness of the structure, the other its restrictiveness — and they blame the government for not exercising more control over the profession which largely determines this structure.

By permissiveness they mean lack of control over where registered doctors may work, and how much they may charge. Complaints about the cost of private medicine are common in Hong Kong (*South China Morning Post*, 26 December 1971; 1 November 1972).

Doctors tend to cluster in the central areas more accessible to the rich; and they charge what the market will bear. Private practice has been condemned by a group of concerned medical students. In their official publication, *Caduceus*, one student claimed that “building one’s fortune on the physical mishaps of others permits greater scope of malpractice...” (Ng 1973: lff.). It was claimed there should be fixed scales of charges and compulsory refresher courses on new medical developments. Some Western-trained and recognized doctors also complain of actual malpractice and insufficient vigilance on the part of the Medical Council, which spends most of its time on the more easily detected advertising offenses. In malpractice these doctors include wrong diagnosis, abortion, and conspiring with pharmacists to provide forbidden drugs to illegal practitioners (signing the poisons book for more than they require for a financial consideration). They complain that “Western ethics” are not learned along with Western “science” (one wonders if they always are in the West), and that such behaviour makes it difficult for the public to distinguish the legal from the illegal doctor.

One prominent Western-trained registered doctor, who is Chinese, claims there is not really a shortage of doctors, only bad distribution between private and public sectors (*Hongkong Standard* (Sunday ed.) 21 October 1973). Public service salaries cannot compete with private practice (Committee Appointed to Review the Doctor Problem 1969: 16). A British Medical Association spokesman, responding to the *Caduceus* articles, said a ban on private practice would lead to "wholesale migration of doctors...." (*China Mail*, 9 October 1973). The government finds it difficult not only to get recruits, but to keep them. Nevertheless, the Director of Medical and Health Services defended doctors leaving government to work in private practice as "benefiting the community" (*South China Morning Post*, 30 November 1973). The government's own registrable doctors are disinclined to work in the poorer, more remote areas, and it is notable that it is there that its unregistrable recruits (who cannot go into private practice) are usually found. Besides the government's own unregistrable doctors, most of the "practitioners in charge" of exempted clinics are in the poorer areas, as are also the illegal Western doctors and unqualified traditional doctors, and those combining medicines. For example, a survey of Kwun Tong, a new industrial town, made in connection with building a United Christian Hospital, revealed that with a total population of almost half a million there were in 1970 only 53 registered doctors and 16 unregistrable recognized physicians. There also were some 230 unregistered doctors, of which about 31 manifestly were illegal Western practitioners, the rest describing themselves as some sort of "Chinese practitioner" (Sub-Committee of Task Force on Community Health 1970).

A newspaper article stated that "A hungry man finds a bowl of rice but refuses to eat. He wants to plant own (*sic*) paddy field." The hungry man is the Medical and Health Department, "diseased" by a shortage of doctors; the "rice bowl" is the supply of unregistrable doctors from China it cannot use (*Hongkong Standard*, 14 April 1974). It cannot use them because it does not control registration.

After the Occupation, when the population began to expand, registrable doctors were in short supply. Numbers could not easily be made up by enlisting doctors from overseas, because necessary in Hong Kong are doctors speaking Chinese. Qualifications from China and Taiwan do not render their holders registrable because either they are from unknown schools, or the schools teach in Chinese. The main criterion for recognition is that the school should be open to inspection by the General Medical Council in Great Britain, and this means that it should have right of access to the school, and that the school should teach in a language the council understands.

The year 1949 brought a large influx of people to Hong Kong, but many persons entering claimed to be trained in Western medicine in China. In his annual report the Director of Medical Services (as he was then called) remarked that it was "...an ill wind that blows nobody any good." The government began to take on numbers of these physicians when they had evidence of qualifications, commenting that many were "leaders in their profession". They were accommodated within the "exempted" category. The two major professional associations viewed this policy with dismay, but recognized that the government could not have met its commitments without drawing on this "reserve".

To sort out problems of status, the government proposed amendments to the law; but at a meeting with the associations "many cogent arguments were brought forward why...(they)...should not be admitted to the Register." The associations proposed an alternative scheme for private doctors to help out in government clinics; but it was not successful. In 1958–60 the Society of Apothecaries — the oldest examining body in Britain — sent out examiners to help refugee doctors obtain registrable qualifications. But only graduates from 12 known Chinese medical schools, qualifying before 1953, were accepted. Although many claimed to be qualified doctors, only 177 sat the examinations and only 126 passed (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 40).

However, owing to a legal loop-hole many unregistrable doctors not in government service were beginning to practice in "charity" clinics. The law said they could not practice for gain, but that anyone could practice without gain. It was not said, for example, that such physicians could not receive a "donation" — a method of payment sanctioned by custom. During the 1950s charity clinics mushroomed, and since, as the Director of Medicine and Health stated in his annual report (1957: 7), "hundreds of patients...(had)...literally to be turned away daily from Government outpatient clinics in the urban areas," there clearly was a need for this type of clinic.

In 1958 the government attempted to introduce a Roll of Licensed Medical Practitioners to control these doctors (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 41). A Board would hold examinations for admission and once completed the roll would be closed. The professional associations objected to the scheme although it was not proposed to admit the "licensees" to private practice; so did unregistrable practitioners, who had started their own associations.

For a short time the problem was shelved; but in 1962 a second influx of people exacerbated the situation. An investigation in 1964 showed that 60 percent of practitioners in charity clinics had been practicing for 2 years or less (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 41). The qualified profession demanded control, and an ordinance was enacted, coming into

effect in 1964, which in essence required all clinics to apply for registration, and enabled the Director of Medical and Health Services to reject them if the clinic, or its services or practitioners, were unacceptable. Clinics already in existence might continue to employ unregistrable doctors if they passed an interview and could be classified as “exempted”, but new ones had to employ registered doctors. The legal loop-hole was also closed.

Launching the new legislation was a delicate matter. Many physicians were interviewed and charities investigated. Eight-hundred-and-twelve persons claimed to be unregistrable qualified practitioners but only 482 were reckoned sufficiently competent to practice (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 6). Seven-hundred-and-eleven clinics applied for registration but only 387 were granted exemption and only 79 employing registered medical practitioners were fully registered (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 7ff.). The interviewing panel claimed standards set were low: “...medical students, and...nurses and dressers, could quite easily have passed....” Many instances were claimed of candidates being “without any knowledge...of medicine...” and some had forged diplomas (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 6).

Several clinics were discovered to be run by pseudo “charities” — bodies claiming to be community or church organizations but having nothing to do with either. The practice was for physicians to pay for the use of the clinics’ names and to give them a percentage of “donations”. In fact the clinics were usually family businesses run by a man and his wife in their home. A few pseudo-charities ran large chains of clinics, some specializing in clinic-vans, un-roadworthy but set-up permanently in resettlement estates to avoid high rents (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 8; also personal communication from government officials).

The Medical and Health Department had to convince the two associations of the need to retain some clinics, even if they were not up to standard; and the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs had to convince the public that some must be closed. The sponsoring bodies and unregistrable doctors’ associations vehemently opposed the legislation, organizing protest meetings and press conferences in which they tried to involve trade unions, clan associations and other community institutions. They complained that in the prior 8 years nothing had been heard of “mistakes done to patients”, nor were the clinics criticized by the public (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* (Chinese): 22 January 1964).

The legislation was not withdrawn, however. The Director’s power of exemption was to end in 1966 and a committee was set up to look into the workings of the ordinance. It showed that exempted clinics accounted for some 37 percent of all clinic attendances (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 27); but it also showed that some clinics did not come up to

professional standards — they were short on space and privacy, and attendances were low. Some saw as few as 10 people a day and rarely as many as 40 (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 36), but a small clientele is traditional. Medical professionals often have additional jobs. The author's investigations of traditional physicians show that many have as few as five or six patients a day. This means that one has to be cautious in placing too much significance on numbers, but it also means that if some practitioners are eliminated, others in exempted clinics would not necessarily want to increase their scale of operations.

The law was tightened further. Exempted clinics were required to register annually, and new clinics were required to be managed by registered doctors only. Mobile clinics were outlawed; and a further recommendation was that unregistrable doctors be placed on a Roll, if they wished, after a compulsory examination (which also covered exempted unregistrable doctors in government). They would then have the status of Medical Assistant Practitioner (Advisory Committee on Clinics 1966: 47–55). This was opposed by the two major professional associations and the two associations of unregistrable doctors. The former were against a “double register” for rich and poor; the latter claimed holding examinations of a high standard (that of medical students taking finals) would be discriminatory. They accused the committee of wanting to keep them in poorer areas — which undoubtedly was true. The recommendation was dropped and the unregistrable physician in a limited number of charity clinics remains to this day.

The government then attempted to meet the problems of shortages, in its own services and in private services aimed at the poor, by accommodating unregistrable doctors in the medical structure. The profession, judging these practitioners and their charity clinics according to standards and scales developed in the West, thwarted any attempt to allow a person or clinics not complying with them to practice and offer services privately. But it was not able to prevent the government from taking on some unregistrable practitioners itself, or force them to be examined by the profession.

After the clinics legislation, numbers of illegal Western practitioners began to appear. We saw that they call themselves “herbalists”. One reason is that traditional doctors are relatively free from control — there is no regular system of inspection; there is a shortage of pharmacy inspectors; the Medical Council has no jurisdiction over them; they themselves are unlikely to inform the authorities of their “colleagues” activities, particularly if they are combining medicine; and, as will be seen, they are “protected” by racketeers. This leads to the question of government “indifference” and traditional medicine.

## **Lack of Control Over Chinese Medicine**

When Hong Kong was founded the British announced to the population that they would not interfere with Chinese customs unless they were unjust or dangerous (Committee Appointed by the Governor 1948: 96, 121). From time to time there has been debate as to what precisely this meant: whether customs should apply in some interim period, until full colonial government was established; or whether British law should be inapplicable to institutions that had their own customary rules. Essentially the latter explanation has been favoured, and the general rule is to allow Chinese institutions to operate according to custom as long as that custom exists; but to introduce legislation when it is found no longer to apply.

One question sometimes besetting the authorities is precisely what customs should be followed: those of the Ch'ing [Qing] Dynasty during which Hong Kong was founded, or some possible modifications emerging in the changing and developing climate of the colony? This issue has not thus far been raised directly in respect of customary medicine, although certainly the view is taken that modern scientific medicine is not traditional custom. An additional question, however, concerns the possible dangers of customary practice.

The authorities appear reluctant to legislate against customs the Western profession may regard as dangerous — if they have a long history and are accepted by a majority. We saw that they did legislate (in the post-war period) against treatment of eye diseases and uses of opium where there had been considerable evidence of dangers — but in fact the practices were forbidden to all unregistrable, non-exempted practitioners, of which traditional physicians were only one category. Indeed, in 1949 a committee set up to investigate infant mortality mentioned the “belief in aged and harmful customs...and Chinese medicine” as contributory factors. But it did not think it “advisable, at this stage, to speak directly of the errors of...belief...,” adding: “...we could achieve our aim by making known to the Chinese...the recent advances of Western medicine.” (Director of Medicine 1949: 76) Essentially the aim has been to entice people away from traditional medicine by education, including health education. Along with this is a reluctance to give publicity to Chinese medicine: by talking publicly about “errors” people might be induced to think there are “accuracies”. It is this policy which is attacked as “indifferent”.

Some argue that even if customary medicine itself remains officially undefined, those practicing should be qualified and/or registered. In 1970 one writer to the editor of a major local newspaper said “...there is no control board, it is not possible for the public to distinguish the true herbalists from the charlatans. It is a discredit to the herbalists to be

grouped together with...(charlatans)....” (*South China Morning Post*, 3 March 1970). A leader in another paper states that “the astonishing lack of proper safeguards and controls...(is)...a serious flaw in the Colony’s laws...any Chinese, trained or untrained, ethical or unethical... (can)... practice....” (*Hongkong Standard*, April 11, 1974). The local Reform Club argued, “...in officially recognizing herbalists, the authorities should...establish an official register of all...now practising to give better control in future...new recruits...should undergo a recognized apprenticeship....” (*China Mail*, 12 March 1974).

But who will sit on the control board, who will recognize the apprenticeship? One official said to me: The first step is for the profession to separate the “sheep” from the “goats”. The Western profession can do this because it has uniform standards and scales of measurements and monopolies over knowledge. How far is this so in the Chinese case?

It is generally agreed that ethical standards are important. A therapist must be virtuous before his therapy can work: as with the Greeks, virtue is power, but “virtue” itself is vaguely defined. Certainly it includes personal restraints — the therapist’s character should be without taint; some say he should not demand payment — it is up to the patient to decide what he will “donate” — although standard payments are now more common in Hong Kong. Others include a courteous and attentive manner and willingness to listen to the patient’s description of his symptoms.

There is no agreement on qualifications because there is such a variety of theoretical approaches, and all, as we will see, may be considered equally valid. Ritual specialists say certain powers are needed, but are not necessary for the secular doctor. They usually are derived from a special fate determined by complex conditions and often revealed to the possessor in dreams along with specialist knowledge. However, it is not that people without such powers should not practice; it is simply that it would be dangerous for them to do so and their practice would be non-efficacious. Taoist priests practicing therapy also have qualifications, a hierarchy of ranks determines what they may do, and they have esoteric texts. But Taoist priests view ill-health as only one category of individual “imbalance” — the same conditions causing ill-health may cause other misfortunes (see pp. 509–10). Thus both the qualifications and the texts relate to matters other than medicine. Qualifications for healing are necessary in China and Taiwan but apply only in secular medicine, and they rarely are exclusive requirements for membership of an “herbalist” association, as we will see. Qualifications are also obtained from local “schools” usually consisting of a master and his medical disciples. Some of their texts are exoteric, but attempts are made at exclusion by special interpretations within the school and by using additional texts based on

the clinical experiences of the line of masters. This works against the development of a uniform body of knowledge in the profession, and because basic texts are exoteric they are open to all who can read and comprehend them. This would not prevent any literate person using them for practice, indeed if he is virtuous he would likely be successful.

Counter to the trend of exclusiveness is a trend towards inclusiveness — a virtue to make medical knowledge widely known. Some doctors publish glosses on difficult texts and books of prescriptions describing disease symptoms and aetiology. Aimed at the masses, who also have an oral tradition, they give depth to the basis of practice of ordinary people treating their families, and to the basis of practice of unqualified persons who also share an oral tradition.

If scholarly and ordinary people can share knowledge, and the latter also have an oral tradition, one might suppose some common theoretical ground. But sinologists usually study scholarly texts, not popular “folk” ideas; and anthropologists usually study popular ideas, and not scholarly texts; and their respective writings have suggested more differences than similarities. A conceptual framework was developed for studying all folk and scholarly thinking as separate traditions. Scholarly ideas formed the “great tradition” — that of the reflective minority, consciously cultivated and handed down. Popular or “folk” ideas formed the “little tradition” — that of the majority who take it for granted, making no conscious effort to analyse or refine (Hui-chen Wang Liu 1959: 95). Croizier (1970), influenced by this dichotomy, talks of a great tradition in medicine as a theoretically articulated body of ideas; and the little tradition as a generally empirical set of remedies. Although he warns against thinking of folk medicine as a grab bag, without any system, he says that the first requirement in sketching-in the main features of traditional medicine is “to distinguish traditional...medicine from the ‘folk’....” Traditional medicine thus *is* the great tradition. Such a narrow definition would take us but a little way in understanding traditional medicine in Hong Kong, and would tend to thwart our attempts to look for connections.

In fact, Croizier himself suggests that the great tradition may be influenced by cosmological ideas shared by folk medicine — cosmology here being used as one of the intermediaries of communication sought by the “great/little” adherents to explain why China did not fall apart culturally with such differing traditions (for further differences are supposed between secular and non-secular, equated with the “scholarly” and “folk” as we will see). The author’s experience, however, suggests something more: scholarly and folk are united by a common cosmology providing them both with their concepts of medicine. The situation is very different from the West where a more-or-less broken tradition exists —

folk medicine being based on galenical ideas, and scholarly on modern scientific theory.

Outside the study of medicine, and in other aspects of Chinese thought, the great/little dichotomy is being abandoned as more evidence is unturned that scholarly and folk are transformations of each other. The writer's own work suggests a similar state of affairs for medicine. More precisely, that here is a series of transformations, a conceptual continuum rather than a dichotomy, and at the level of social reality a continuum of practitioners using similar categories but with different terms for root concepts; working with overt and covert root concepts; or exploring different categories in terms of an identical concept. A great number of accommodations appear possible. The author's studies are not yet at a stage at which a comprehensive account can be given but a few examples are here included.

All doctors and most people use the categories "hot", "cold", and suchlike, but scholarly physicians subsume them under the concepts *yang* (*yeung*) and *yin* (*yam*) — the binary principles of polarization accounting for entire existence. Many ordinary people either do not know these terms, or how to use them in medicine. Some have no generic term at all for these humours, while other use a single term: *kwaai* [*guai*] which means "extreme" (i.e. polarized state) or "strange". And the connotation "strangeness" allows further categories to be explored. Again, ordinary people use the concepts *shan* [*shen*] and *kwai* [*gui*] to represent spiritual beings or human souls after death. Secular scholarly professionals use them to represent abstract principles of "spirituality", aspects of *yang* and *yin*, respectively. Physicians practicing both secular and non-secular medicine may use them in both senses at different times. Explanations of the efficacy of drugs may also involve transformations. Thus the rationale for avoiding chicken in diet while taking a medicine made from scorpions for cancer, a "poisonous" disease, is, according to one scholarly physician, that poisonous diseases are driven out by "poisonous" medicines (*i-tuk kung-tuk* [*yidu gongdu*]) and scorpions are "poisonous". But chicken is a *yang* substance and *yang* phenomena neutralize poisons — the medicine would be ineffective. The popular explanation is that "as everybody knows" chickens and scorpions are antipathetic; chickens may frequently be observed attacking and killing scorpions. Chinese scholarly practitioners, popular practitioners and also ordinary patients use, then, variant forms of the same theoretical language. This is why they may communicate with each other. Why they should associate together is taken up below.

Secular and non-secular physicians are also able to communicate, and able to view each other's services as complementary. This does not accord with what we learn of the great and little traditions in medicine, for

“great” is usually defined as secular and rational (Croizier 1970: 4ff.); “little” as non-rational, religious or magical. Both the Kuomintang [Guomindang] and the PRC have made similar distinctions — scholarly secular medicine is Chinese medicine, and this is the common view of Western-trained doctors (although not necessarily all Westernized people) in Hong Kong.

Governments in China have been guided by the existence of a self-conscious full-time practicing group of physicians who use only secular texts and would disassociate themselves from non-secular “folk” practices (Croizier 1968). And this in turn, at least partly, was because of a self-conscious effort by those doctors to have Chinese medicine seen as “modern” in the eyes of the world. But what about situations where such sentiments did not, or do not, exist? In the Ch’ing Dynasty, or modern Hong Kong?

Certain assumptions implicit in the great/little dichotomy are that rational secular beliefs about sickness are incompatible with non-secular beliefs, and that since the latter are “folk”, and folk as a social category are illiterate and semi-literate people, they cannot be believed by a scholar. But first, non-secular beliefs are not necessarily “folk” — some Taoist priests are scholars using scholarly texts. And secondly, if we look at the theoretical structure — the cosmology within which the concepts and categories referred to developed — we see that secular and non-secular are compatible. There need be no competition between them because they relate to universes which are not only homologous — identical in structure, obeying the same laws — but also intersecting. To use Chinese concepts: the phenomena of “Heaven” (the universe of spiritual beings, invisible vapours, stars and plants); the phenomena of “Earth” (the universe of physical tangible things); and the phenomena of “Man” (the universe of social entities, individuals, part spirit, and part physical), all have similar properties of balance and propensities to imbalance and disturbance. And because the universes intersect, imbalance and disturbance in one may cause similar conditions in another. Thus it is possible to believe that an immoral or emotional man may not only weaken his own constitution, predisposing himself to disease, he may weaken the “constitutions” of other phenomena with which he shares Heaven or Earth characteristics. This may cause disturbances or imbalances in nature, or in the realm of the spirits; external agents arise to cause serious disease to all those who are predisposed. This is how ideas were organized in Hong Kong to explain the bubonic plague epidemic of 1894 (Col. Surgeon 1896: SS-58).

So, “religion”, “chemistry”, “geography” and so on, to use Western concepts, may be regarded as complementary disciplines. Different in kind but not order, they all contribute to the understanding of imbalanced

conditions and their treatment. To the Taoist who engages in therapy, illness is just one type of imbalance or disturbance resulting from human and universal processes. It has to be treated, as does all misfortune, by rebalancing activities. Therapy may include ritual to rebalance the external agents, for example; charms to rebalance spiritual beings, and medicine and diet to deal with the constitution. Secular doctors focus on the individual's symptoms and internal state of balance, using therapy relating to "Earth" — medicine and diet, acupuncture and bone-setting. But they may not deny the value of the non-secular approach if the illness persists and the predisposing cause cannot be found. A few secular physicians trained in China may discount the value of priests and ritual specialists, but the author has interviewed some who started their careers with ritual healing, moving later to secular medicine because they felt they had no real calling for the former. There are also members of what one might term "paramedics" and "auxiliaries": persons who deal only with emotional disturbance; persons who deal only with socially caused diseases, for example breaking moral proscriptions; persons specializing in diagnosis from the horoscope; and geomancers diagnosing in terms of miasmata — environmental disturbance — and performing activities aimed at rebalancing the external features causing the patient's disease.

Thus a variety of persons concerned with therapy speak "the same language" and share the same knowledge. The Chinese profession does not fix its own standards, decide its own criteria for skills, or have a monopoly over knowledge in Hong Kong; it also does not, in the majority of cases, regard with hostility the existing wide variety of practitioners. Whether one can call them all "professionals", of course, depends on one's definitions. Certainly many traditional therapists do not practice full-time, or wish to do so — and this must add to their acceptance of many "competitors". While the many kinds of therapists in Chinese medicine accept one another, how are traditional physicians able to accept Western medicine, and why should they do so?

### **Traditional Physicians and Western Medicine**

Explanations commonly given for traditional physicians combining medicine are as we saw, lack of integrity and economic necessity. I start with "integrity". Those claiming lack of integrity usually suppose that Western medicine is inconsistent with the theories of the traditional physician (one may of course ask whether acupuncture is consistent with the theoretical premises of modern scientific medicine). They also argue that traditional physicians do not understand the properties of the Western medicines they use, and are unscrupulous to use them.

Traditional physicians argue that Western medicine is not inconsistent with Chinese theory. There is only one natural law of the universe, and if Western medicines work, they are “true”. Even in the nineteenth century, when a hospital for traditional medicine was flourishing (now fully Westernized), the directors stated that “Chinese and European medicines each have their own use, and we should not have different views of... (them)...if a cure can be effected all the same.” (Board of Director’s Tung Wah Group of Hospitals 1970: 27) At the time the hospital hoped its physicians might be trained in Western medicine by the government, but they did not come up to the standards required for medical students and it was felt by the authorities their existing ideas about medicine would prevent them from absorbing Western knowledge.

If Western medicine works according to the basic law of the universe, it follows that medicaments can be classified by Chinese methods. Some Chinese drugs are “noble” — they are *yin* and *yang* in property; some are perfectly balanced (*tsing-hei* [*zhengqi*]); some are “poisonous”; and others are *po* [*bu*]: “tonic” in property (what Martin (1975) calls “patching”). Western medicines began to be similarly classified. Antibiotics, for example, are generally regarded as “poisonous” although some say they “scatter the vital forces”. When taking them diets are needed to prevent side-effects. Some traditional physicians claim that Western science has discovered important and powerful medicines, but that it does not understand their true properties, and how to prescribe them with other medicines and diet to offset their unwanted effects. Western-trained doctors claim that physicians do not understand the importance of limiting antibiotics to serious conditions, and not prescribing them for undue lengths of time.

After the war and with the increasing popularity of Western medicines among the Chinese, traditional doctors started to experiment, combining all sorts of medicines for “greater efficacy”. Bone-setters started to use X-rays to improve their diagnosis. They claimed they were “no longer identifiable with Western medicine alone, but with “the science of bone setting” (personal communication on letter sent to Radiation Board by 40 bone-setters). Abortions traditionally performed by the use of “poisons” to drive out “poisons” (pregnancy is a “poisonous” state) began to be performed also with modern scientific instruments. (People are wanting to limit their families but family planning does not yet affect all people in all circumstances.) The demand for plastic surgery to which bone-setters also turned, is comparatively new. It seems connected with the greater preoccupation people have with their image as individuals in Hong Kong’s individualizing society, and the requirements of women servicing the “entertainment” industry, itself in great demand.

A demand for certain services then tempted traditional practitioners to some innovations, and existing ideas and attitudes in many cases justified innovations in their eyes — but what about “economic necessity”? In 1962 the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs, the protector of Chinese customs, said that while there was still an enormous demand for “herbal” treatment, the herbalists were up against (1) increased costs of herbs and other traditional ingredients, most of which have to be imported; (2) sharpening competition as the result of the influx of immigrants including people ready, if not experienced, to try to make a living by traditional medicine; (3) a growing belief in the unbounded efficacy of Western antibiotics and the “miracle” of the “inoculating needle”; and (4) hard-selling techniques by commercial interests relating to Western patent medicines (personal communication). Another factor may now be added: the combining of Western and Chinese ingredients in relatively cheap Chinese patent medicines imported into the colony. These are heavily advertised and in demand by both physicians and people for their relative convenience over herbal concoctions, which often have to be distilled or brewed. Some physicians and people are unaware that these medicines often contain poisons listed in Part I.

### Professional Alignments

Various kinds of traditional doctors have always associated together for mutual advantage, some social, some professional. If one looks at the records of registered societies (kept by the Registrars of Societies, and of Companies) it is seen that some societies of herbalists demand qualifications for entrance, such as diplomas from local or outside schools. One society claims to have been accepted by the Kuomintang as the “sole legal Chinese doctors” association in Hong Kong (established 1928); but most associations also accept anybody who is “experienced”, introduced, or willing to pay for life membership. Such groups often run funeral benefit clubs like other traditional Chinese associations; many offer assistance to members dealing with the government, even a translation service; and they provide members with very official-looking certificates to hang in their surgeries.

Secular doctors such as acupuncturists and bone-setters also belong to specialist associations. Bone-setters’ societies are sometimes interwoven with secret societies, the link being Chinese *kung fu* [*gongfu*] (martial arts) which the latter often control. Bone-setters get their knowledge of anatomy from practicing *kung fu*, for part of the instruction is in how the bones and muscles work. Secular and non-secular physicians join charity associations providing medicine and ritual therapy to the poor.

Membership is seen as an act of merit, part of the physician's "virtue". But for some associations mutual aid has a special meaning. It is also traditional in Hong Kong for anybody acting illegally to seek "protection" from prosecution. Two groups provide this protection: one is the secret society of the "triad" variety: "Heaven, Earth and Man" (Morgan 1960); another, allegedly, is corrupt policemen. Illegal practitioners may be required to join a secret society for their protection, and for payment of protection "fees". If one examines the prosecutions for triad society membership one sometimes finds people who are members of herbalist associations, or even association office-bearers. Other societies of illegal doctors, I am told, are formed to pay one another's fines when they are prosecuted.

One factor bringing many practitioners together was the common threat of tightening legislation after the war, which began with the forbidding of eye treatments in the late 'fifties. Through their associations they mobilized public opinion and held press interviews (as did charity associations when the Clinics Ordinance was introduced). They were unable to prevent the new law, but on the day it was passed they formed a federation, declaring it "Integration Festival Day" (1958). "Herbalists'" associations also combined to face another threat — the banning of Chinese medicines containing Part I poisons. This was in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties, before the new patent medicines appeared in large quantities, and related to traditional ingredients which sometimes contain natural traces of such poisons.

The cause of the threat was the death of children with diphtheria who had had a traditional medicine, *hung-wong* [*xionghuang*], blown down their throats. It was found to contain arsenic disulphide, normally inert but when in contact with air, especially when breathed down the throat, capable of turning into white arsenic. Soon afterward a Western-trained registered doctor was censured by a coroner, after a child who had ingested cinnamon oil (a traditional medicine meant to be used externally) before visiting his surgery, died under his subsequent treatment. The oil was found to contain a dangerous proportion of eugenol. The HKCMA took up the case, demanding a complete list of Chinese medicaments with their components and antidotes in the case of poisons. The Secretariat of Chinese Affairs retorted that this was an impossible task, and the HKCMA then called for a ban upon all Chinese preparations (personal communication based on correspondence).

The Secretariat of Chinese Affairs also argued that it was unrealistic and unwise to control herbal medicines; and the herbalists' associations argued that Chinese prescriptions — which according to the British Pharmacopoeia would prove fatal — had been used for thousands of years without killing off the race. The process of combination in prescription

techniques, they argued, eliminates fatalities (personal communication, secretaries of herbalists' association). The outcome was that arsenic disulphide was put on the Part II poisons list (permitted to traditional practitioners) and other Chinese medicaments were exempted by the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance.

Chinese medical associations originally emerged, then, to deal with common social and professional matters; but further alignments emerged, as did further associations, to deal with protection rackets controlling illegal activities and new legal controls from the government.

### **Public Support for the “New System” of Medicine**

We saw it suggested that “ignorance, apathy and superstition” made people use the services outside the official Western system; and that people commonly move about between Chinese and Western medicine is well known to the medical authorities. In 1970 it was stated in a Government Information Service handout that “although Western medicine...is entirely acceptable...many still consult practitioners of Chinese...medicine....That...(it)...still retains a popular appeal is evidenced by the fact that 74 percent of patients other than emergencies, admitted to...(a government hospital)...had been treated at some stage of their illness by practitioners of traditional medicine”. (Government Information Services 1970). The author has tried in vain to trace the source of this apparent survey.

Personal investigations have shown that Westernized Chinese also use Chinese medicine. In a small survey that the author conducted among the more cooperative medical students in Hong Kong University in 1973, it was discovered that 150 out of a total 241 respondents (the full force of medical students was 722) said that they consulted Chinese physicians at some time or other. Sixty-five did not specify the complaint, but out of 85 who did, 31 went to traditional practitioners for fever; 22 for “colds”; 12 for cough; 10 for dislocation and fracture; 9 for influenza; 6 for headache; and 43 for miscellaneous complaints including insomnia, “nerves” and measles.

In the above-cited handout the medical authorities also stated that the “most frequent practice...is to have recourse to traditional medicine first and then if...ineffective...to turn to Western medicine. Sometimes... (it)...works in reverse.” In fact, however, the situation might be much more complex. Some diseases are not classified according to Western taxonomy, and those that are may be given a different aetiology. Thus there are “culture-bound” syndromes” — conditions from which people suffer because they believe certain things about health-predisposition,

external agents and so forth. One of these, “injury by fear”, I have described elsewhere (Topley 1970: 429–35); and diseases with different aetiologies includes measles (Topley 1970: 425–529), tuberculosis, leprosy, influenza, insomnia and various psychoses. In organizing their diseases people may therefore sometimes ignore as irrelevant certain important symptoms. By the time their condition is diagnosed by modern scientific methods their condition may be very serious, if not terminal. Then a Chinese “miracle” cure will be tried, and stories abound in Hong Kong concerning remarkable cures of cancer through traditional medicines.

In organizing his disease and his treatment, a Chinese patient has an enormous variety of choices (Topley 1971). He may choose to see only a simple malaise, ignoring the possibility of a predisposition. He may then try some traditional or modern remedy himself. If this fails he may visit a Chinese or Western type physician, and by now he may consider also the question of predisposition and visit a horoscope reader, or priest, for a full explanation of what is happening to him. At the same time he may go again to a Chinese or Western type doctor or, as a result of his interview with the priest, to an “auxiliary” such as a geomancer. If he gets as far as a “miracle” cure and it does not work, this does not necessarily mean others lose faith in the cure. One example the writer was given was of a man taking the scorpion remedy, who died. It was explained that he stopped taking it at Chinese New Year, which is a time when popular tradition says one should not take medicines. The doctor had told him not to stop until the prescribed 10-day treatment was over. The doctor explained that he had omitted to tell him that “poisonous” medicines could be taken at Chinese New Year; it was only “noble” medicines that one must stop. The doctor was in error, but not the medicine.

A person’s decision about what to do when he is ill is influenced also by a variety of external factors: how much doctors charge; where they live; what their mothers or neighbours recommend; what they have read in the papers, or heard on the television; whether or not a doctor has a reputation for honesty; and whether or not one can expect an explanation from him as to why the particular person is ill. Registered doctors sometimes complain that in Hong Kong there are “4 million people and 4 million doctors” — people are always telling one what they think is the cause of their disease. People argue that many Western doctors do not listen to their explanations concerning their predispositions, what external agent they may have encountered, and so on — factors they consider important in describing their symptoms. They are not content with an explanation that they have something “going around”, and if they are told they have some germ or virus they want to know why they in particular. Many people have learned to accept the existence of germs and viruses, but

many also do not think they will get them unless predisposed. Perhaps for this reason they do not overly worry about the cleanliness of clinics. If they want an explanation they prefer to go to physicians who have plenty of time to explain. Thus they prefer one of the physicians who takes only a few patients a day. Many people use several doctors, for each member of the family, because they believe one may be good for one person and one for another — they have an affinity. Others prefer doctors combining medicines (few know this is illegal) because they can then treat different members of the family. Some people believe that a young person, being stronger, can take antibiotics, but an older person needs Chinese medicine. Some people know their doctor is illegal and even defend him on the grounds that he is less arrogant, has more time, and is more inclined to give explanations. Many do not understand the subtle distinctions between titles, however, or they do not understand why a physician claiming to be qualified in China, and sometimes having a diploma hung on the wall of his surgery to prove it, should be considered “unqualified” to practice.

People, then, are often “superstitious” and sometimes “ignorant”, but they are seldom “apathetic”. They do have standards and scales of measurement and can recognize if a therapist has “knowledge”, but their standard, scales, and notions of knowledge, are not the same as those of the Western medical profession.

## Discussion

Some sectors of the community would like to see the “new system” of medicine dissolved. They suggest different ways of achieving this aim. The government relies on general and health education on the one hand, and the economic laws of supply and demand on the other.

The government anticipates that education will make people accept Western standards enabling them at the same time to differentiate by title the legal from illegal Western practitioner. Although it is hoped that education will also entice people away from Chinese medicine it is beginning to be recognized that new developments in China are complicating the situation — registered doctors react to them positively. In a way, the government would like to keep traditional medicine alive, because it is recognized that traditional physicians take some of the strain off Western doctors in dealing with self-limiting diseases (Committee Appointed to Review the Doctor Problem 1969: 7). But the government is concerned by the fact that they also treat more serious diseases.

People outside the government, including Western-trained registered doctors interested in developments in China, would like to see Chinese

medicine absorbed in the officially recognized Western system. But so far such doctors are only interested in acupuncture, which incidentally does not enjoy such popularity with ordinary people. Most people want medicine. But it is difficult to envisage registered doctors learning the art of combination in Chinese prescriptions, which, I am told, needs long training and a knowledge of Chinese theory. Acupuncture is accepted as a technique which somehow or other works; other Chinese therapeutic measures cannot be accepted as readily; certainly not the religious therapy given for emotional disturbances. There is a shortage of psychiatrists in Hong Kong; many parents of qualifying doctors do not like to see them enter this field, considering it "not very nice". And many people do not agree with modern diagnoses of mental afflictions (see Yap 1967: 73–85 on popular notions of mental affliction).

The other reliance of the government, on the economic laws of supply and demand, is linked with a new policy to supply more qualified doctors. The idea is that more doctors will mean that they will be driven into the poorer areas by competition, where they will perforce have to charge lower fees. In a recent speech by the Governor it was said that by the end of the decade Hong Kong will need 100 more doctors a year than currently are being supplied (Maclehose 1974), and there is talk of a second medical school. However, it takes 6 years to train doctors, and there is no guarantee that they would stay in Hong Kong if competition sharpens, and there is no control over the number of patients a recognized doctor sees. Doctors may prefer to take fewer patients and stay in the richer areas.

Other people want the China-trained doctors to be recognized and brought into the official system (*China Mail*, 24 December 1973; *South China Morning Post*, 17 April 1974). Experience, however, suggests that many "China-trained" doctors are in fact unqualified and untrained, and therefore unacceptable to the profession. Qualifications are based on what is accepted in Great Britain, where the public has learned to accept professional standards.

There are those wanting herbalists to continue, but to be controlled. One suggestion made by a prominent doctor (a Chinese), is to have a school of traditional medicine similar to those in Taiwan (Ding 1972: 1ff.). Such training would undoubtedly be based on secular theories and methods. Where would other specialists stand; filling as they do a demand for "spiritual" therapy? Another suggestion is to tighten the laws governing uses and the import of pharmaceutical products (*South China Morning Post*, 16 February 1974). But one wonders what would happen if all Chinese patent medicines were banned, as is currently suggested.

At present there is a system, illegal from one point of view, useful from another. It does not accord with Western ideals concerning justice,

standards of efficiency and competence, or morality; but it works reasonably well. A stronger arm of the law might bring problems of social and political disturbance, and deny people the services they have come to accept. This system allows people, who are changing and accommodating to new ideas, a flexibility of choice. As one lawyer remarked to the author, the more one legislates to create either “fairer” or more efficient conditions, the more one creates illegalities, and helps to further support those in Hong Kong who have traditionally profited by the distances between Western and Chinese viewpoints and theories.

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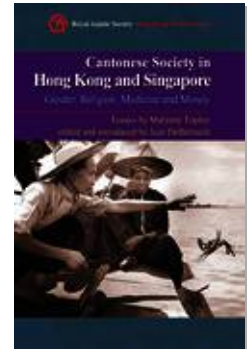
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

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## Chapter 20

# Chinese Traditional Aetiology and Methods of Cure in Hong Kong

(1976)\*

The position of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong and the problems of official recognition are complex. When in 1841 a certain Captain Elliott negotiated the preliminaries for a Sino-British treaty for the cession of Hong Kong island, one of his proclamations stated that the Chinese were “secured in the free exercise of their religious rites, ceremonies, and social interests....” Many local inhabitants regard this statement as meaning that Chinese customs insofar as they are not harmful or contrary to natural justice should be protected: that no law which would interfere with their integrity should be applied to them. By and large this has also been the official attitude. But what is custom in the traditional medical profession? And what is or is not harmful in traditional methods of cure? As society changes, so does custom: new ways of training traditional doctors exist, as we will see, and many persons now practicing medicine have no medical training.<sup>1</sup>

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\* First published in *Asian Medical Systems: A Comparative Study*, edited by Charles Leslie, pp. 243–65. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. Reprinted by permission of University of California Press.

1 The version of the paper for the Burg Wartenstein Symposium was based entirely on data collected in 1969. For this published version, the statistical information has been updated and augmented, and material from specialists in traditional medicine and other sources replaces or expands some of the sections. This new material was acquired late in 1971. The individual sources are indicated as they appear, but the overall source is a two-year project on which I am currently engaged at the Centre of Asian Studies which is specifically concerned with the operation of dual systems of medicine — modern and traditional — in the Colony. The study began in September 1971 and the data is, therefore, very preliminary. But since it will be some time before a report on the study can be written, it seemed worthwhile to include it here.

The inclusion of the new material does not shift the original emphasis of the paper, which is on differentiation within the traditional system itself, but enables more attention to be given to organization and structural features of the traditional system than was possible in the earlier paper.

It is difficult to say among contemporary practitioners who should be officially recognized as a traditional doctor, and sometimes even what constitutes a customary cure. Eventually such problems may have to be faced, but at present most of the controls which are exercised over traditional medicine have emerged as the indirect effect of pharmaceutical laws, food hygiene regulations, or other measures aiming to prevent hardships or dangers to the public. Thus, no traditional doctor is required to register, except as owner of a business, but no doctor without legally valid modern medical training may use certain listed poisons or treat any eye diseases. Largely as a result of this situation, there is not only no official information readily available to the public on Chinese medicine, but little in government files, either, except as it arises through encounters with the law or in connection with the registration of medical associations. No specific research concerned with the sociology of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong had been undertaken before 1971.

A number of official sources indicate that modern medicine is a popular profession. The University of Hong Kong had a medical faculty with almost 700 students in 1971. Early in that year, more than 2,000 doctors were on the medical register (although some may not be active in the Colony), with more than 600 government medical officers. There were also more than 400 unregistrable doctors, mostly working in government services and exempted from registration, or in charity clinics themselves having exempted status. There were nearly 200 registered and government pharmacists. In addition, an unknown number of unregistrable doctors, occasionally without any qualifications from anywhere, practice illegally in the Colony under the guise of "Chinese practitioners" or "herbalists".

How popular does the traditional profession appear to be? "Schools" operate in Hong Kong as new kinds of institutions for training students of traditional medicine; located for the most part in small apartment buildings, their number is probably increasing. At least 16 associations of traditional doctors exist, 4 of which appear to be very active and alert to any new government measure that might have implications for traditional practice. Looking at the membership lists of such associations, I estimate that among them they have approximately 3,000 members. There may in fact be more, since this is the same estimate as was made several years ago by the present director of Medical and Health Services (Choa 1967: 31). Some members do not keep strictly to Chinese medicine. A large number of "herbalists" with no medical training, some combining modern and Chinese medicine, join these associations. They are a concern to the government and also to a comparatively small elitist group of traditionally trained secular doctors.

At least 12 associations exist for selling or manufacturing Chinese medicines, 3 of which are for employees in medical shops. There is also

an association for herb gatherers. In 1966 approximately 4,000 shops, stores, or other premises were in the business of selling or dealing with Chinese herbs and medicines. More than 2,000 were said to be herb shops that sold prescriptions to the public, employing more than 10,000 people. These figures may be exaggerated, since they come from a petition to the governor and a letter to the Secretary for Chinese Affairs by medical associations, to protest a proposed ordinance restricting the uses of poison.<sup>2</sup>

There appear to be nevertheless at least as many doctors and pharmacists in the traditional sector of the medical system as in the modern. It is too early to say with any assurance whether this is a function of direct and popular demand for traditional services, or conceals a demand for modern services which is not yet satisfied. In general, however, public health specialists in Hong Kong believe that Chinese laymen use traditional and modern medical services as complements rather than alternatives.

In 1966 Dr. G. H. Choa, who was then Senior Specialist, tried to find out what prompted patients to go to traditional practitioners. He asked his general-ward patients if they had consulted a traditional practitioner at any time in connection with their current illness, and if so, for what reason. He asked these questions of 100 male and 50 female patients, of whom 42 males and 19 females had consulted a Chinese doctor at some time for their illness — 24 males and 4 females at the onset of illness, and 18 males and 15 females between modern treatments. As for the reason, 18 males and 4 females gave “faith”, 4 males and 2 females gave “economy”, 4 males “convenience”, and 16 males and 13 females “no improvement” (Choa 1967: 32).

Chinese medicines are often more expensive than the modern medicines that might be used for approximately equivalent complaints. While a modern doctor in private practice may earn on an average HK\$10 to \$15 per consultation (HK\$6 = approximately US\$1), usually including medication, a traditional doctor may charge an average of HK\$5 for consultation and an extra HK\$5 for prescription. Chinese medicine is one traditional profession which seems to be lucrative. Consulting a Chinese doctor is probably more convenient for the poor than joining the queues and crowded waiting rooms at government and government-subsidized

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2 The ordinance was passed. I am grateful to the Secretariat for Home Affairs for information about this petition and letter, and for much of the information later in this paper on problems between the government and medical associations about the operation of laws and ordinances. The Secretariat for Chinese Affairs was reorganized in early 1969 and became the present Secretariat for Home Affairs.

clinics. But what about the layman's faith in Chinese medicine? Faith in what? This is one of the main questions I deal with in this paper.

In a study of child-rearing in 1969, I held four approximately 1½-hour depth interviews with 20 non-English-speaking mothers (19 were Cantonese and 1 was a Hakka married to a Cantonese) in the Cantonese dialect.<sup>3</sup> They lived in government high-rise housing estates in the urban district of Kowloon. Many of the questions I asked at each session related directly or indirectly to matters of health, particularly in children. I found that when their children were sick, the mothers sometimes took them to modern doctors. They also sometimes treated them themselves, on the basis of knowledge acquired from kinsmen and neighbours, usually elderly persons. Additionally, they sought advice from shops that sell Chinese medicines, and from traditional doctors. And they went to a range of other specialists for advice and treatment: diviners (horoscope readers); Taoist, Buddhist, and other priests; women experts in ritual performances; and even spirit-mediums.

I subsequently discovered in follow-up interviews that these specialists sometimes combine medical (usually herbal) treatment with ritual treatments; that not all traditional doctors would assert that ritual treatment was without value, although none regarded ritual as their own province; and that some modern Chinese doctors would not say there was nothing in Chinese traditional medicine. One physician I interviewed used a combination of Chinese and modern medicine in his practice, and a few thought ritual, although not a true method of cure, might have value for certain kinds of patients.

The present analysis was prompted largely by these discoveries. The data obtained in 1969 have been augmented with information from additional specialists. Nevertheless, I do not generalize for the whole of Hong Kong. My study has been limited, and my informants mainly Cantonese. While the Cantonese are Hong Kong's major dialect group, dialect differences often go with other sub-cultural differences, and it is possible that some things I say, particularly about ritual practices, have no relevance to other groups. None of the conceptual and behavioural data is oriented to any specific social strata, however. The oldest mother interviewed in the childrearing sample was 45, and most came from rural areas; 5 mothers had no formal education, 8 had incomplete and 3 had complete modern primary education, and 4 had incomplete secondary schooling. The husbands' monthly incomes ranged from HK\$200 to \$800.

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3 This nine-month study was a part of a project on child development in Hong Kong which is being undertaken by the Paediatrics Department of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Hong Kong, with a grant from the Nuffield Foundation and other organizations.

The traditional doctors I have interviewed recently came from educated middle-income families, and most of them were born in China. The herb-sellers and other related specialists were from poorer, less educated families, and most of them were also born in China.

### The Differentiation of Concepts

Chinese medicine has not stood still over the centuries. Its progress appears to be marked by increasing abstraction in the handling of concepts and the sloughing off of religious ideas and ritual practices once associated with the physician's profession. How these and other changes came about is a matter currently occupying some specialists in the history of Chinese scientific development, as we can see from the work of Needham (cf. 1970), and in the papers by Otsuka and Porkert in this volume [*Asian Medical Systems: A Comparative Study* (Leslie 1976)]. Traditional medicine continues to change in China today, where dialectical materialism is being used to attempt a synthesis of the Chinese and modern systems. According to an article in *Red Flag* magazine, this is in accordance with the "law of the unity of opposites" which is "the basic law of the universe" (Hon 1970). In the present volume such matters are Dr. Croizier's special concern. The upshot of all this is, however, that much of what appears in the T'ang [Tang] Dynasty to have been part of the scholarly tradition in Chinese medicine now exists in parallel systems with their own specialists in Hong Kong. This is a matter which will concern us.

I have analyzed the traditional conceptions of two childhood diseases in an essay showing that disease concepts and therapy involved *rites de passage*, the ritual handling of transition and change (Topley 1970). While I looked at these diseases (measles and a syndrome called *haak ts'an* [xiaqin]<sup>4</sup>) as *internal* problems, I pointed out that metaphysical notions about *external* connections between the individual and the world around him were relevant to understanding ritual treatments. We shall now have to look briefly at a Chinese theory of internal and external balances in order to understand the kinds of specialists and cures in contemporary Hong Kong.

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4 Nearly all technical and other terms and expressions used by informants or in the literature are Romanized in Cantonese, following the system used by Meyer and Wempe (1947). The exceptions are the philosophical concepts: *yin*, *yang*, and *wu-hsing*, and the *Nei-ching* and *Wai-ching* (*Internal* and *External Classics*), which I leave in their more familiar Mandarin form.

The cosmos is composed of ethers of heaven and earth, which are *yang* — having the attributes bright, light, and male — and *yin*, with the attributes dark, heavy, and female. It contains phenomena created by the dynamic action upon these ethers of Five Agents (*wu-hsing* [*wuxing*]): the elements water, fire, metal, earth, and wood. They mutually create and destroy each other: water puts out fire, fire burns wood, and so on. These attributes and elements are symbolic representations of aspects of nature, and have functioned widely within Chinese culture to think about complex sets of relationships between people, between mankind and the physical environment, and between man and chronological processes. Rather like numbers, they have been used to work out correlations among phenomena. This has sometimes led to the discovery of meaningful causal connections, and has involved a degree of rational experimentation (Levi-Strauss 1962: 9ff. and 11ff.). But they have also been used in a mystical manner. Again like numbers, they are used to describe the indescribable, or metaphorically, as one uses the sensations of hot and cold to describe colours to a class of blind children (Welch 1957: 51ff. and 59). They have been cloaked in allegory, and used in iconography.

According to this theory, an individual's physical and psychical character is determined by the movement of cosmic ingredients — the elements acting on the ethers, which have the additional attributes hot (*yang*) and cold (*yin*) with reference to the human constitution. In their natural state, the relationship among phenomena is one of balance or harmony. This is the so-called Will of Heaven; and when man is in harmony with things of the cosmos, he can be said to comply with Heaven's will. The approximate position is depicted in Fig. 1.

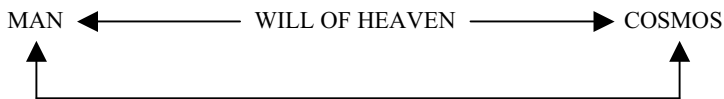


Fig. 1. Man in harmony with the cosmos.

Imbalances occur for a number of reasons. Some are inevitable. The cosmos is in flux, and relationships change with the years and the seasons. Human society is in flux as people are being born, marrying, and dying, and these transitions create metaphysical instabilities. These instabilities in turn affect internal balance in the human body. Inevitable external instabilities are amoral, although to avoid imbalance as far as possible is a moral duty. Individuals with a particular combination of cosmically

interacting elements should avoid unstable situations such as weddings and funerals, and the persons in these events who are undergoing transitions. One knows when to observe these avoidances by consulting the astrological tables in an almanac. Some people have cosmic balances that clash with those of people with whom they have a continuous relationship. In marriage, traditionally this state of affairs was avoided by comparing the horoscopes of the prospective bride and groom (Freedman 1967; 1970). But it can also happen with mother and child. One cannot choose the time of birth of one's children — yet. This results in both parties having difficulties in getting along, suffering constantly from sickness, and a mother feeling little or no affection for her child (*mo sam-ts'ing* [wu xinqing]) (Topley 1974).

Here, then, we have a “physiomorphism” of man and a “naturalization of human actions”. Systems of action based on such concepts have been called *magic* (Levi-Strauss 1962: 221). But a number of extremely subtle and complex relationships exist among the techniques which have developed in Chinese culture for handling problems of imbalance. For their examination I prefer to talk about the mystical and non-mystical applications of the cosmic theory.

Chinese medicine has come to focus on the *internal* problems of homeostasis, regarding the problems of *external* balance as the province of others. I propose to use the term *quasi-science* for the treatment of internal problems and the term *mystical science* for the treatment of external problems by rebalancing the individual with outer phenomena. Chinese medicine has largely given up the treatment of the external imbalances, but the body of knowledge on which treatment is based has continued as a separate and parallel — even, for some people, a complementary — system. Its specialists are diviners who deal with the horoscope, priests who perform transitional and rebalancing rites, old women of the family, and other women who are acquainted with the almanac and problems of working out the external causes of sickness. At one step removed is the geomancer, who sees that people erect buildings in a way that will not disturb the balance of nature (Freedman 1968).

Mystical science consists of literal and ritual rearrangements, and quasi-science of the literal, non-ritual treatment of imbalance and disease. But quasi-science has its symbolic counterpart in acts which are directed to internal rearrangements, and which are not performed by doctors. These categories will be clear when I give examples of treatments and discuss their connections with each other. But I should first make several points about the terminology I am using.

I am aware of the hazards of developing an observer language from Western science for the analysis of non-Western systems. But I am also conscious of the analytical hazards of using participant language, and of

the need to establish a universal-observer discourse as new comparative studies are undertaken.<sup>5</sup> The use of language developed within the terminological and conceptual framework of the system itself is dangerous, in my opinion, when the type of analysis for which the language is employed has not been attempted by users of that language. But whatever language one uses needs to be justified.

I used the terms *internal* and *external*, and so do the Chinese, but our meanings differ. According to Professor Needham, “internal” in Chinese medicine means “everything...rational, practical, concrete, ...in a word, scientific.” “External”, or outside, means “everything...to do with gods and spirits, ...everything...miraculous, ...unearthly....” “He demonstrates this distinction from the titles of the Yellow Emperor’s classics of medicine. The so-called *Internal Classic* (*Nei-ching* [*Neijing*]) deals with disease taxonomy, classification of parts of the body, and the internal workings of the human being. Needham claims that the *External Classic* (*Wai-ching* [*Waijing*]), now lost, must certainly have included “cures effected by charms, cantraps, and invocations.” His assertion that the fact that this classic was lost at an early period emphasizes the secondary character of the magico-religious aspect of medicine in China seems doubtful to me (1970: 271ff.). But the point I would make is that, as it is used in China, external includes religion, as well as what I would call mystical science. In my usage they are not the same. Both quasi-science and mystical science are concerned with matter-of-fact relationships among phenomena, while religion is concerned with matter of principle.

But why do I use the terms quasi-science and mystical science? We know of course that Chinese medicine is not scientific in all senses of the term. It does not include a full understanding and use of the experimental method, or a full application of mathematical hypotheses to nature (Needham 1969: 15). But some experiment was certainly there, and structures of considerable sophistication were developed to categorize and analyze various aspects of the natural world: If “the whole aim of theoretical science is to carry to the highest possible and conscious degree the perceptual reduction of chaos” (Simpson 1961: 5), then China has had theoretical science.

I have to distinguish the literal and symbolic aspects of the internal approach. Some of the things that patients do to effect treatment are based on symbolic associations between cause and effect, and generally traditional doctors self-consciously disassociate themselves from such

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5 On the question of “observer language” and problems of the comparability of cultural material, I am grateful for discussion with Professor W. T. Jones of the California Institute of Technology. He is not, however, responsible for the terms that I use, or for the form in which I express the problem.

actions. However, the literal and symbolic approaches are not completely differentiated, and the efficacy of many medicants that doctors use is based on symbolic connection (cf. Anderson and Anderson 1968). For this reason I use the term *quasi-science* with reference to the internal approach in medicine. In employing the term *mystical science* I follow Freedman, who used it to refer to geomancy (1968). Geomancy deals with external imbalance and its correction, but the geomancer is not a priest, and geomancy is not a religion.

I turn now to a religious view of disease which contrasts with the amoral conceptions we have dealt with so far. This view involves the anthropomorphism of nature and the humanization of natural laws. It deals with problems of morality, and it complements the other systems. In Chinese thought, man's nature is part of a universal order, but culture teaches him how to comply with this order by preserving inner and outer harmony. If he is aggressive, angry, or envious, he creates disharmonies in the universe and within himself.

Discussion with ritual experts indicates that certain entities in popular religion may be related to man's immoral actions in two ways. Five demons (*ng-kwai* [*wu gui*]) are portrayed as non-civilized men (wearing loin cloths) on commonly used charm-papers. This kind of demon may be seen as a metaphorical counterpart of man acting in an uncivilized, i.e. disturbing, manner, the five as a group being a metonym for all kinds of disturbing activity. On the other hand, the demon itself may be thought of as activated or conjured up by disturbing human activity and itself an independent agent of disease and misfortune. On the charms are also portrayed a tiger, eagle, wild pig, and snake. They are termed "improper" (*ts'e* [*xie*]). Again they are metaphorical counterparts, this time of disturbed forces of nature and as a group a metonym for all such disturbed forces. At the same time they are also malevolent entities activated by these forces, and have an independent role. But gods defend men from them. The White Tiger, Cock, and Dog (the tiger in this context has been tamed by a Taoist Immortal) quell the demons, and the killing and improper creatures. Other gods, symbolizing culture and its values, are dressed as officials. They do for man as part of nature what literal officials do for him as a member of society.

Buddhism introduced to China another conception of man and nature different from the cosmic theory we have discussed so far. According to formal Buddhism, man is part of a natural order governed by moral law. If he complies with this law, he works out his fate in this life and dies a completed individual. But if he acts unnaturally, he activates principles inherent in the law of nature (*karma*) which cause him to be reborn. One important difference between the Buddhist and Chinese cosmic view is that in Buddhism natural law may sometimes be in opposition to the

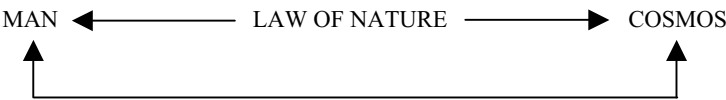
customs and laws of society. It is unnatural to kill pigs for ritual purposes, for example, although it may be demanded by Chinese custom (e.g., ancestral rites). A Chinese view, and one certainly accepted by the politically dominant Confucian philosophy, is that culture and nature can never be in opposition, since one is the morally correct method for approaching and understanding the other. The conflict of nature and culture is resolved to some extent in popular Buddhism by introducing sins against society and culture as additional causes for rebirth (cf. Eberhard 1967). Approximately, the Buddhist position may be depicted as in Fig. 2.

The Buddhist theory of rebirth affects ideas about health and sickness in several ways. Some souls are antipathetic to their mothers or fathers because of some bad relationship in a former life. In the eyes of my informants, an antipathetic soul in a child, and an incompatible horoscope between mother and child, are directly correlated. A moral conception is added to the amoral one of cosmic clash by the notion that an infant with an antipathetic soul may urinate or have a bowel movement on leaving the womb “to show contempt”. I was told that in former times when this happened boys would be given away and girls “thrown on the rubbish heap.” Nowadays children are born in hospitals and “it is difficult to know of such things.” Some souls are so resentful they go on being born in the bodies of successive children in a family, only to die soon after birth. This is a *loh-kwai tsai* [*luogui zai*], “child drawing after it spirits of the dead.” Traditionally, it was said, mothers would beat the corpses of children in anger at them for dying for this reason.

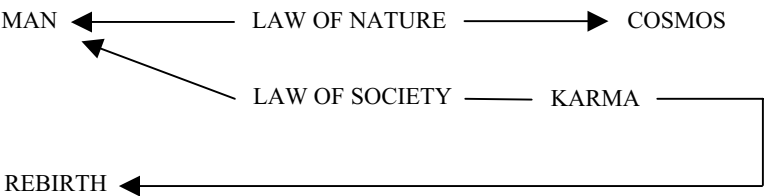
Buddhism also contributes to the theory of homeostasis. Souls, whatever their previous connections, do not take kindly to birth, and the mongolian spot (*tache mongoloid*) on the infant’s lower back was said to be the mark where a reluctant soul was kicked into new life by the authorities of the Buddhist underworld. Any disturbance in the family or immediate environment, any aggressive activity on the part of the mother or a demon, and it might depart, or the whole constitution may become disbalanced. This syndrome is known as “injury by fright” (Topley 1970).

We have then two major subsystems. One is amoral and matter of fact. It includes quasi-science, both literal (medical) and non-literal (symbolic) activities, and mystical science — again, as we will see, with literal and non-literal activities. Quasi-science deals with problems of internal balance directly, and mystical science with internal balance through external adjustments. The other subsystem is religion, which is moral and matter of principle. The specialist in literal quasi-science is the “orthodox” Chinese physician. The specialist in symbolic quasi-science is the diviner and priest, who also specialize in mystical science and in ritual acts of religion.

*What should happen:*



*What usually happens (formal view):*



*What usually happens (popular view):*

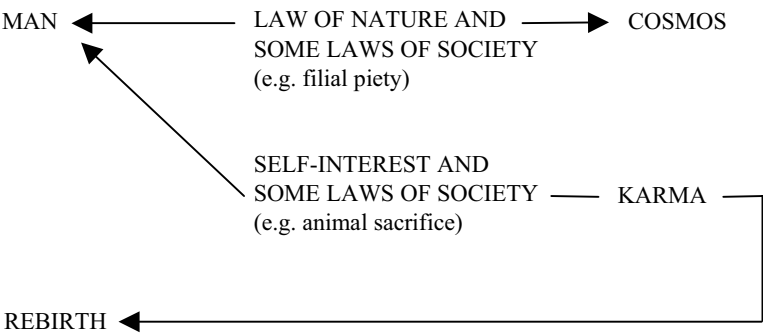


Fig. 2. The Buddhist view of nature and the cosmos.

**The Integration of Practices**

People in Hong Kong may wander in and out of these idea systems or sub-systems, using different specialists and techniques for handling problems of health. Some techniques may be alternatives to each other, but many are used as complementary ways for coping with a problem from different points of view. I will give hypothetical examples of the

relationships among these activities (see also Fig. 3). My examples are children's problems, but part of the pattern I describe would also apply to an adult's illness.

A child becomes sick after attending a wedding feast or a funeral. The mother decides it has a medical symptom, "hot air" (*it hei [reqi]*), an imbalance of the hot and cold ethers in the body. "Hot air" is not serious in itself, but it may be regarded as an initial stage in a more serious disease. Its symptoms are a sore throat, an ulcerated tongue, and a slight temperature. It is often attributed to the patient's having eaten too much "hot" food. Mothers usually treat "hot air" themselves with cooling herbal teas and other brews. If they are anxious, they may also consult a traditional doctor. They may even consult a modern doctor if the child has a fever. Modern doctors remark on the frequency with which mothers bring children with common "colds" to see them.

The mother might consult a horoscope reader if she associates the "hot air" illness of her child with having attended the transitional rite. Comparing the child's horoscope with the almanac, he may find that it is indeed "out of phase" with events that year (*lau-nin [liunian]*). This means that the child is in an unbalanced relationship with the universe for one whole year, and is likely to ail. Events that are out of balance are more likely to aggravate internal imbalance during this time. Having failed to avoid this danger, the child has developed "hot air". The external imbalance cannot be treated, since there is no technique for rebalancing weddings and funerals. If the mother consults a traditional doctor for the internal correction of her child's illness, he will usually recommend a cooling diet and no fried foods. As part of her own traditional knowledge, she will avoid frying food in the presence of the child. This is a metonymical act — frying standing for fried foods, which are metaphysically heating substances. These are actions of literal and symbolic quasi-science.

Suppose the child continues to be sick, and becomes fractious. The mother will then consider other possibilities. Perhaps she had a difficult pregnancy. She may suspect a mutual incompatibility. Her horoscope may be compared to the child's, and her diagnosis confirmed. She may then perform an act of mystical science to neutralize the unhealthy effects of this clash. She might literally have the child adopted by another, thus directing its incompatible forces away from her; or she might become the child's adoptive mother herself, through the performance of a *rite de passage*. For this ritual the child is wrapped in a blanket and taken to the fishing people whose homes are their boats. They take the child on a journey by rowing around the harbour. It is brought back in a new status position, this ritual adoption similarly neutralizing the cosmic incompatibility revealed by the horoscopes.

| MYSTICAL SCIENCE  |  |   | QUASI-SCIENCE                                       |                                |   | RELIGION    |  | SYMPTOM  |
|---|--|---|---|--------------------------------|---|-------------|--|--|
| Literat-<br>Social Act                                    | Ritual   | Literat-<br>Mystical<br>Science<br>Act            | Diagnosis   | Synbolic<br>Act                | Literat<br>Act  | Diagnosis   | Ritual   |  |
| —   | —  | comparing<br>horoscopes<br>with<br>almanac        | <i>lau-nin</i>                                      | avoidance<br>of frying<br>food | avoidance<br>of fried<br>food<br>cooling<br>diet                          | "hot-air"   | —  | ulcerated<br>tongue; sore<br>throat; slight<br>fever   |
| adoption of<br>child by<br>another<br>(altern-<br>atives) | adoption of<br>child by its<br>own<br>mother<br>( <i>rite de<br/>passage</i> ) | comparing<br>horoscopes<br>of mother<br>and child | mutual<br>incompati-<br>bility of<br>horoscopes     | —                              | —   | —           | <i>Sip T'ant-<br/>Sui</i><br>("propping<br>up")  | non-affinity<br>of souls plus<br>irritability<br>(mother also<br>ailing)<br>refusal to<br>feed |
| —   | child<br>wearing<br>jade bangle<br>or pendant<br>on chain                      | —   | "injury by<br>fright"<br><i>taun</i> ,<br>imbalance | —                              | medicine:<br><i>po-ying</i><br><i>taun</i> ,<br>crushed<br>pearl<br>power | instability | <i>haam-king</i><br>rites to lift<br>(parent's)<br>offence - if<br>syndrome<br>prolonged | crying; slight<br>fever;<br>irritability;<br>convulsive<br>jerking;<br>refusal to<br>feed      |

Fig. 3. Diagnoses of symptoms of ill health seen in terms of various aetiological explanations, and showing the different classes of activity associated with these explanations.

In addition, the mother may use quasi-science by continuing to consult practitioners of Chinese medicine for remedies for particular symptoms, or she might consult a modern doctor for “quicker results”, as it was explained to me. In this case she will usually ask for an injection. If the mother is inclined to seek a moral explanation for her child’s illness, she may consult a priest who will explain it as the consequence of past lives and antipathy between souls. She might consult a Buddhist or a Taoist priest, or even a spirit medium. All of these religious specialists deal with souls and the problems of rebirth. As a consequence of these consultations, the mother may perform a religious ritual. A God called *T’aaí Sui* [*Taisui*] is believed to control time. Since he is the “Minister of Time” who decides when one is to be reborn, he determines one’s horoscope. Because he makes his decision on the basis of performances in other lives, the cosmic processes at the time of birth and the karmic processes — that is to say, Chinese cosmology and Buddhist cosmology — are unified. The rite which might be performed is called *Síp T’aaí Sui* [*She Taisui*] (propping up *T’aaí Sui*). His image is raised by placing a large wad of mock money under it.

I will give a final example. If a child cries and jerks convulsively, particularly during sleep, has a slight temperature, is irritable, and refuses to eat or to be left alone, a mother will suspect that it is suffering from *haak-ts’an* [*xiaqin*] (“injury by fright”). This illness is caused by an imbalance among the animating forces, including the Buddhist soul. In severe cases these forces may be separated from the body. The mother might consult a modern doctor for a sedative to “restore balance” and medicines to treat the accompanying fever. She might alternatively, or additionally, take it to a Chinese doctor for some rebalancing medicine. Or she may purchase a medicine herself from a Chinese chemist shop without any consultation. The most common remedies in Hong Kong are crushed pearl powder and “protect infant pills” (*po-ying taan* [*baoying dan*]). The mother may also give the child a jade bangle or pendant on a chain to wear, since jade is regarded as a perfectly balanced stone. These objects are believed to “incorporate” the constitution or lock in the animating forces, but their potency is questioned by orthodox practitioners of Chinese medicine.

The mother might perform a ritual called a *haam-king* [*hanjing*], “calling out against fear”, particularly if she suspects the animating forces have left the body. Notions of immorality and symbols for dealing with it are involved. It is immoral of the soul to wish to leave the body of the child, and it may be reprimanded. Leaving may cause the child’s death. The soul will be told to come back and “obey people’s instructions”, and the Jade Emperor may be evoked to aid in this task. He is the head of the Chinese pantheon and the ultimate religious symbol of cosmic harmony.



Fig. 4. Taoist priest performing a ritual to cure a sick infant, with the mother and paternal grandmother in attendance.

The soul and other animating forces may have been disturbed by a demon, or one of the “improper” creatures referred to. Or one of these demons or creatures may have taken advantage of the situation to make away with

the soul, or to take its place in the child's body. *Haam-king* rites to expel these malevolent spirits may be performed by Taoist priests, by female ritual experts, or by the mother or another female member of the family. They generally take place at an altar to the White Tiger, Cock God, and Stone Dog God, who protect people from immoral disturbances.

If these rituals are not successful, additional consultations may be necessary to discover other causes of the fright. Perhaps the soul does not want to return because of some misdemeanour on the part of one or both of their parents. If further complications are diagnosed by a priest, additional rites are necessary: propitiations of *T'aai Sui* again, or rites to lift the offence of the parents. I have discussed *haak-ts'an* in detail in another paper (1970), but we can see from this brief account that many causes of the condition may be uncovered, and treatments used. Some of the treatments are quasi-science, some are mystical science, and some are religious in the sense that they seek to fix moral responsibility for the illness.

We have then an aetiology of disease related to a theory of internal and external balance. Its core is the Chinese theory of *yin*, *yang*, and the Five Elements. Buddhism, incorporated into this aetiology, explains why children might die prematurely or be sick, and helps explain difficulties in maintaining homeostasis. It relates the individual to one law of nature, while Chinese cosmology relates him to the Will of Heaven. Buddhism introduces moral attitudes toward sickness in the concept of *loh-kwai*, "children drawing spirits of the dead", and in the concept of souls reluctant to assume a relationship with a parent who has "behaved badly". In contrast, the Chinese theory of balance and imbalance provides a view of sickness as an amoral, matter-of-fact event. This allows for therapy that does not consider morality. Such activities are notably restrained. They do not deal with the anger a mother may feel when a child dies, or is sick, or the frustration and guilt she feels when she fails to get on with her child. No blame is defined by these therapeutic activities. They dramatize no benevolence or forgiveness, and evoke little moral and emotional catharsis.

However, nature humanized by values and symbolized by gods and demons provides a moral explanation of sickness. In the amoral universe, people maintain stability by avoiding incompatible relationships, and therapy corrects instability by acts of quasi-science and mystical science. In the moral universe, sickness is caused by immoral changes in man and nature, and ritual therapy propitiates the gods, or treats demons and souls in a hortatory manner. These rites deal with anger, frustration, and guilt; they define responsibilities, appeal to benevolent forces, and seek forgiveness; and they provide a degree of catharsis. In Fig. 3 I plot the activities I have described so far in a diagram.

## Patients and Specialists

### Patients

To what extent do people explain health problems in moral ways, seeking to blame themselves or someone else for illness, and to use emotional non-sacramental rites for therapy? And to what extent do they look for amoral explanations? The people I talked to said that they were prepared to consider all possibilities, although some said they usually went first to a doctor while others went first to a diviner or priest.

Clearly such decisions depend on economic and other social circumstances, and on individual temperament. The situation is complicated by the fact that modern and traditional medical knowledge may come from advertisements in newspapers and magazines, or on radio and television programmes. Television has a half-hour programme each morning with a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine.

I found many mothers in my sample were using modern medicines in response to advertising, and sometimes for categories of illness peculiar to Chinese culture. Several modern patent medicines are advertised in Hong Kong as cures for conditions such as “hot air”, or as having traditional properties such as “nourishing the blood” (*po-huet* [*buxue*]). Education fosters the development of modern attitudes toward health, and many of my informants were aware of modern methods of treating children’s complaints. They had learned about them in the hospitals where they gave birth, in the clinics they attended with their infants, from their older children who were more modern in outlook than themselves, and, occasionally, through being urged by their husbands to seek advice from a modern specialist. But what Yap (1969) called a “culture-bound syndrome”, or, in the present volume [Leslie 1976] Obeyesekere calls “cultural disease”, was important in the health concepts of these women. The reality of the two I have discussed, “mutual incompatibility” and “injury by fright”, is often confirmed by kinsmen and neighbours. Though they were exposed to modern knowledge, they expressed a very strong feeling that old people know about children’s complaints, and they indicated willingness to take advice from them.

While the mothers recognized the association of symptoms in culture-bound illnesses, their major concern in scientifically recognized diseases was often with single symptoms. When I asked them to list common childhood diseases, four listed chickenpox, two listed mumps, but all listed high temperature and sore throat (which are also “hot air” symptoms), diarrhoea, and runny nose. For high temperature, diarrhoea, and runny nose, they went to either modern or Chinese doctors. Members of a family often consult different modern and traditional doctors, on the

ground that one doctor suits one member and one another. In addition, an ill person may consult several cures. Of the 20 mothers interviewed, 12 claimed to consult more than one doctor in the modern or traditional field, and one regularly consulted as many as 8 modern doctors.

The division between medical and ritual specialists is sometimes difficult to draw, and so is the distinction between doctor and patient. Many families claim to be specialists in the cure of certain diseases, particularly those of childhood. The more educated families own prescription books passed down over the generations, which are only available to family members and friends. A recent movement in China has been to persuade families to give up their secrets to the “barefoot doctors” who now practice at the village or commune level. These family traditions are partly a heritage from the distribution of doctors in the homeland. And here is another territorial factor influencing choice of specialist: Most doctors practiced in towns. At the village level people often had to be content with the medical-*cum*-ritual services of priests and other religious specialists, or develop their own family expertise. Anthropologists working in Hong Kong’s rural areas have also observed that people make much use of ritual specialists (Potter 1974). This may be partly due to “faith”; but again, one should note the rarity of doctors of either modern or traditional medicine in the villages.

Ordinary people in urban Hong Kong know the names and properties of many medicines and have considerable knowledge of therapeutic practices and rituals of cure. I recorded the contents of the medicine chests (usually a tin or cardboard box) of the women I interviewed, and they had four kinds of items. The first was traditional drugs. Only 4 mothers had none of these, and one said she lived near a chemist and could buy them at any time. The most common was *po-ying taan*, “protect infant pills” used for “injury by fright”. One mother had crushed pearl powder, which is used for the same malady. Other common traditional medicines were for diarrhoea and vomiting, and medications for boils or other skin complaints. The second category of items in the medicine chests one might call modern traditional medications. It includes oils and ointments for skin trouble, stomach ache, headache, and toothache. Many of these preparations are produced by a Burmese Chinese whose medicines are popular throughout South-east Asia. All but two mothers had at least one of these. The third category was modern medicine, including penicillin ointment, iodine, and other preparations for wounds, aspirins, and cold cures; 14 mothers had at least one of these.

Finally, 6 mothers had an interesting intermediary category of drug: traditional substances packaged to look like modern medicine, with the formula printed on the outside like a modern drug, or a modern drug named and packaged like a traditional medicine. Numerous modernized

traditional medicines produced in China are sold in Hong Kong, including herbal remedies now manufactured in pill form. This makes them more convenient than traditional medicines, which are usually brewed for several hours; but traditional doctors in Hong Kong claim that their efficacy is reduced by the preservatives which are added. Other modernized traditional medicines and traditionalized modern medicines are made in Singapore, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Many of them are panaceas.

### **Formal and informal ritual-*cum*-medical specialists**

Between the ordinary housewife and formal specialist is the female ritual expert who often knows a lot about herbs. These experts are usually widowed or unmarried, and take up their specialty as they get older. They perform rites for payment, and their performances include not only rites of sickness, but those connected with misfortunes and with death. Thus, they cut across the system, providing a degree of continuity. This is also true of Taoist priests, and occasionally of Buddhist priests, though the latter specialize more in rites of repentance and placation. Priests may play several curing roles, performing acts of mystical science, administering herbs of quasi-science, and performing religious rites.

One kind of specialist is often both priest and doctor. This is the high-ranking member of one of the flourishing syncretic sects of Hong Kong. These sects, often politically militant in nineteenth-century China, claim to combine the ethics of Confucianism, the hygiene and meditation of Taoism, and the prayers and self-cultivation of the Buddhist monk. Today in Hong Kong they are often concerned with charity and care of the aged (Topley 1963). Those who reach the top levels of administration are often traditional scholars, and some have studied Chinese medicine seriously under masters.

### **Formal medical specialists**

The traditional doctor may be a general herbal practitioner or a specialist in acupuncture or bone-setting. He is often attached to a Chinese chemist shop, and may be the proprietor. But some doctors are well-known throughout Hong Kong. They have their own consulting rooms hung with mirrors upon which messages have been written by grateful patients. Some doctors have two practices: one where they see patients without charge, and another in which patients pay high fees. Even so, it is said that their paying patients outnumber their charity patients, and a successful

traditional doctor may earn HK\$18,000 per month if he has a medicine shop attached to his practice.

Many doctors were trained by their fathers or by masters to whom they were apprenticed, but a movement is emerging in Hong Kong to train traditional doctors in schools. Little is yet known about these schools, but more than 20 of them existed in 1966 (Choa 1967). A few only taught acupuncture, and several claimed to be postgraduate institutes.

The calendar of one school stated that it offered a two-year course, and that anybody over 18 who had attended senior middle school could enrol. The fee was HK\$240 in 1966, plus \$60 for notes and another \$60 for accommodations. Classes were held from 8 to 10 p.m., which indicates that the students worked in other occupations during the day. Every summer the school ran free clinics where practical clinical instruction was given. Apparently this was the only way that students received clinical instruction.

The post-graduate “institutes” offer one-year courses in various specialties. The fees are about the same as those for undergraduate courses. Anyone who has completed undergraduate studies, or practiced traditional medicine for three years, is eligible to enrol.

In 1971 I visited an acupuncture night school in an office suite in Kowloon, and met a group of students. Some of them were physiotherapy students during the day at a nearby government hospital, and they intended to combine physiotherapy with knowledge of acupuncture. Others intended to use their knowledge within their families. Several were office workers, who noted the convenience of part-time study and said that they would take up practice when they retired from their present occupations. They regarded medicine as a profession that would increase the security of old age. These students believed that Chinese medicine would continue in popularity in Hong Kong. A herbalist student I met elsewhere explained that modern medicine was good for critical conditions, but that traditional medicine was essential to strengthen the constitution of people who were subject to frequent illness. He maintained that modern medicine was often debilitating, and one needed to follow its use with revitalizing medicine from a traditional practitioner. He explained the tendency for northerners to go to northern doctors and southerners to those from the south by differences in body types and in the regional use of herbs.

A pharmacist may sometimes fill almost the role of a doctor, recommending prescriptions as well as filling them, and even having his own private remedies. The training of a pharmacist or dispenser is by apprenticeship and takes many years. For three years he works as cook and cleaner in a medicine shop, also drying herbs. He learns to prepare herbal prescriptions for another two or three years, meanwhile looking

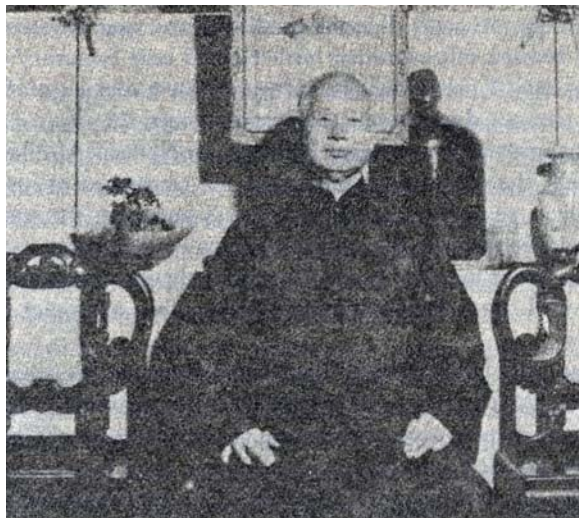


Fig. 5. Portrait of a Chinese bone-setter, with his certificate to practice issued by the government of Taiwan in the background.

after the bottles, boxes, and storage areas. He then becomes a counter-helper. During these occupational grades he earns no more, usually, than \$400 a month. By the time he reaches the next status, that of counter-server and pharmacist, he may be middle-aged. By then he is supposed to know all the properties of medicines, and be able to dispense prescriptions with speed. Dispensing a prescription is highly skilled work: the pharmacist's hands move rapidly, opening and shutting the many drawers in the cabinet where the ingredients are stored and a mistake could be serious. Yet he earns only \$500–\$600 a month for this skilled performance.

Because the Chinese medical profession has not been subject to governmental control, many newcomers have set up as doctors, particularly since the war. They include not only traditional pharmacists seeking a better reward for their years of training, but others with no training at all. Properly trained practitioners often criticize the lack of supervision. More recently, a concern for status has caused them to break away from other associations which include doctors with dubious qualifications, and organize their own. Several have branch offices, along with elected and honorary sections — for example, one has 14 permanent honorary advisors and a great many other positions for various departments and committees. In this, of course, they follow a typical pattern for overseas Chinese associations. Unlike the medical profession

itself, the use of medicants and the treatment of certain diseases has been subject to increasing restrictions. Sometimes the more orthodox associations cooperate with those of the unqualified doctors, as well as with dealers and sellers of medical herbs, to protest the new restrictions. This has happened several times during the last decade. Two examples will illustrate their methods.

One protest took place in 1958 over restrictions on the treatment of eye diseases. Representatives from ten associations of traditional practitioners and of medicine-shop owners sent a delegation to the Secretary of Chinese Affairs. The Secretary pointed out that the restriction was introduced to control untrained doctors, and not to “wipe out Chinese medicine.” The effect would be felt, nevertheless, by all traditional practitioners. The doctors tried to mobilize public support through press conferences and talks to trade unions, clansman’s associations, and other groups. But it could not be disputed that blindness was caused by unqualified persons who called themselves traditional doctors, and nothing came of these protests. However, an outcome of this effort was a loose federation of medical associations, and the date of the protest was annually celebrated as the “integration festival” for Chinese doctors in Hong Kong.

Another issue arose in 1960 concerning a Chinese medicant containing arsenic pentasulphide. This medicant, called *hung-wong* [*xionghuang*], is put on children’s heads at the Dragon Boat festival, when epidemics caused by seasonal disbalance and demons are likely to occur. And it is used on many other occasions. It is not generally absorbed, but when breathed down the throat it may be transformed into white arsenic, which can be lethal. Following deaths from its usage, the government proposed to ban *hung-wong*. The association got together and composed a letter on the long and proud history of *hung-wong*, and again met with the Secretary for Chinese Affairs. As a result of their protest, and because the medication was only dangerous if used in a particular way, *hung-wong* was not made illegal.

Qualified Chinese doctors are anxious to have their associations recognized as legitimate bodies for setting legally enforced standards. The constitution of one association gives its aims as “concern with integrating Chinese doctors, research into Chinese medicine, improving the efficacy of Chinese medicine, helping the poor, helping to maintain public health and sanitation, and working for the betterment of the members’ welfare.” Although the associations are divided by the medical qualifications and ethnic differences of their members, many are registered with the Overseas Chinese Commission of the Nationalist Government in Taiwan and claim official recognition from that body. As a result, most traditional doctors in Hong Kong are rightist in sympathy.

It is generally recognized that without official enforcement of standards, and official definition of status of *bona fide* doctors, malpractice and misuse of herbs and other medical substances will continue. For this reason, some Chinese practitioners of modern medicine support the traditional doctors' desire for an official association similar to their own British Medical Association and the Hong Kong Medical Association. These modern doctors believe that traditional medicine has an important role in the Colony's medical system, even though some treatments are dangerous.

Among the traditional medical treatments modern physicians consider to be dangerous is the ritual of measles. The Chinese have traditionally believed that everyone must have measles, and that it is necessary for future health. It is therefore treated as a transition from one equilibrium of the body to another, and the occasion for a *rite de passage*. I have described measles rituals elsewhere (1970). The point is that the mortality rate has been high, in part because of the way it is treated in traditional Chinese health culture. Some of the herbal treatments administered by traditional doctors are also considered harmful by physicians of modern medicine. One of these is called *ch'uen-lin* [*chuanlian*]. Mothers who follow traditional medical ideas avoid cooling foods during pregnancy. But this is believed to cause the baby to be born hot. *Ch'uen-lin* is given to cool the infant, but its use seems to cause jaundice.

Modern doctors who urge traditional physicians to press for governmental recognition may be influenced by the favour shown to Chinese medicine on the mainland. However, I find that traditional doctors are often cynical about mainland policy. Many modern doctors, whatever their convictions, recognize the placebo effect of traditional consultations, and in some cases also the use of ritual in treating traditionally-minded patients. Some feel that a course in Chinese medicine should be taught at the university medical school, so that modern doctors will understand their patient's conceptions and the supplementary therapy they are inclined to use.

A former leading psychiatrist in Hong Kong was convinced that it is essential to understand traditional views of illness to deal with mental disturbances involving notions of spirit possession, or anxieties about physiological changes such as *kuro*, penis shrinking. He pointed out that culture-bound syndromes cause very real problems of clinical practice and should be subjects for extended cross-cultural epidemiological research (Yap 1969: 219). It is fallacious to think, as some people apparently do, that culture-bound syndromes are rare (Yap 1969: 223). In this essay I have shown that "injury by fright" and the metaphysical notion of mutual incompatibility of mother and child were taken quite seriously by my informants.

## Conclusion

I have suggested that a process of conceptual differentiation in medical thinking started in early times in China and continues in present-day Hong Kong. Different contemporary approaches and methods of cure may centuries ago have formed a unitary system. I distinguished quasi-science, which deals with internal cure, from mystical science, where internal imbalance is related to external cure. And I have distinguished these categories from religion. While these distinctions suggest processes of specialization, the actual situation is ambiguous. Patients use different methods of cure in complementary and supplementary fashion, and specialists themselves do not adhere to a single specialty.

Hong Kong is undergoing rapid change, and large numbers of young people have received a modern education and pay little attention to Chinese customs. A superficial glimpse may incline the visitor to believe that Hong Kong is a thoroughly cosmopolitan city. But at festival times the entire pattern of life is rearranged to expose its Chinese nature. We have come a long way from the belief that science, rationalism, and empiricism would drive out "superstitions". When the pressures of urban life and new ways place intolerable burdens on individuals, they seek comfort in practices and ideas that are centuries old.

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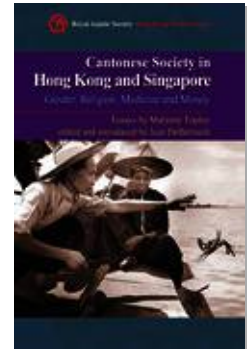
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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## Appendix

### Glossary of Chinese Terms

Editor's note: This glossary supplies terms used in the articles, followed by characters, *pinyin* equivalents, and English meaning. Mandarin terms are unmarked, while Cantonese and Hokkien terms are identified by a (C) and (H) respectively following individual entries.

| <u>Text</u>                  | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>    | <u>English meaning</u>                |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>A</b>                     |                   |                  |                                       |
| <i>a-naai</i> (C)            | 阿奶                | <i>a-nai</i>     | wet-nurse                             |
| <i>a-sou</i> (C)             | 阿嫂                | <i>a-sao</i>     | brother's wife                        |
| <i>a-tse</i> (C)             | 阿姐                | <i>a-jie</i>     | elder sister                          |
| Amoy                         | 廈門                | Xiamen           | a city in Fujian                      |
| <i>an</i>                    | 庵                 | <i>an</i>        | nunnery                               |
| <i>An Wen Tieh</i>           | 安穩牒               | <i>Anwen Die</i> | Declaration of Peace<br>(paper charm) |
| <b>B</b>                     |                   |                  |                                       |
| <i>bu ci jia</i>             | 不茨家               | <i>bu ci jia</i> | girls who do not go to the<br>family  |
| <i>bu luojia</i>             | 不落家               | <i>bu luojia</i> | girls who do not go to the<br>family  |
| <b>C</b>                     |                   |                  |                                       |
| <i>chaai</i> (C)             | 齋                 | <i>zhai</i>      | vegetarian diet                       |
| <i>chai ku</i>               | 齋姑                | <i>zhaigu</i>    | vegetarian nun/woman                  |
| <i>chai t'ang/chai-t'ang</i> | 齋堂                | <i>zhaitang</i>  | vegetarian hall or house              |
| <i>Ch'an</i>                 | 禪                 | <i>Chan</i>      | Meditation School of<br>Buddhism      |
| Chang Tao Ling               | 張道陵               | Zhang Daoling    | founder of Five Bushel<br>Daoism      |

| <u>Text</u>                      | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>             | <u>English meaning</u>                            |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Chang T'ien Shih                 | 張天師               | Zhang Tianshi             | Daoist pope and exorcist                          |
| <i>chang tzu</i>                 | 長子                | <i>zhangzi</i>            | eldest son (chief mourner at a funeral)           |
| Ch'ao Chou                       | 潮州                | Chaozhou                  | a district in Guangdong                           |
| <i>Chao Ts'ai Tieh</i>           | 招財牒               | <i>Zhaocai Die</i>        | Wealth Bringing Credential (paper charm)          |
| <i>Chen K'ung Tsu</i>            | 真空祖               | <i>Zhenkong Zu</i>        | True Empty or Void Patriarch                      |
| <i>Ch'en Tso Mien T'ang</i>      | 陳佐勉堂              | <i>Chen Zuo Mian Tang</i> | a vegetarian house in Singapore                   |
| <i>Cheng I</i>                   | 正一                | <i>Zhengyi</i>            | True Unity School of Taoism                       |
| <i>Cheng-en</i>                  | 證恩                | <i>Zhengen</i>            | "Certifying Grace"; title                         |
| <i>Cheoe Yat (C)</i>             | 除日                | <i>Chu Ri</i>             | auspicious days for getting rid of bad influences |
| <i>ch'i</i>                      | 氣                 | <i>qi</i>                 | ether   |
| <i>Chi Lo</i>                    | 極樂                | <i>Jile</i>               | Extreme Happiness                                 |
| <i>Chi Lo Ssu/Kek Lok Si (H)</i> | 極樂寺               | <i>Jile Si</i>            | a Mahayana Buddhist temple in Penang              |
| <i>Chia Ma</i>                   | 甲馬                | <i>Jiama</i>              | Armour and Horse (paper charm)                    |
| <i>Chia-chang</i>                | 家長                | <i>Jiazhang</i>           | family head of the sect                           |
| <i>chiao</i>                     | 教                 | <i>jiao</i>               | teachings   |
| <i>chieh</i>                     | 劫                 | <i>jie</i>                | catastrophe                                       |
| <i>ch'ieh yin (sic.)</i>         | 結印                | <i>jie yin</i>            | sign of a Buddha                                  |
| <i>ch'ien</i>                    | 錢                 | <i>qian</i>               | paper charms depicting coins; cash                |
| <i>Chih-shih</i>                 | 執事                | <i>Zhishi</i>             | Manager (a rank in the sect)                      |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>                | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u> | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>  |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--|
| <i>Chin-lan Hui</i>               | 金蘭會                      | <i>Jinlan Hui</i>    | Golden Orchid Association  |
| <i>Chin Mu</i>                    | 金母                       | <i>Jinmu</i>         | Golden Mother (deity)  |
| <i>Chin P'ai</i>                  | 金牌                       | <i>Jinpai</i>        | Golden Tablet (paper charm)  |
| <i>Chin-tan Chiao</i>             | 金丹教                      | <i>Jindan Jiao</i>   | Golden Pill Sect   |
| <i>Ch'ing</i>                     | 清                        | <i>Qing</i>          | name of a Chinese dynasty  |
| <i>ch'ing</i>                     | 青                        | <i>qing</i>          | azure  |
| <i>Ch'ing Lien</i><br><i>Ch'i</i> | 青蓮期                      | <i>Qinglian Qi</i>   | Period of the Azure Lotus  |
| <i>Ching Ming</i>                 | 清明                       | <i>Qingming</i>      | Spring cleaning of the graves  |
| <i>Ch'ing Yang</i><br><i>Ch'i</i> | 青羊期                      | <i>Qingyang Qi</i>   | Period of the Azure Omen   |
| <i>Chiu Huang</i>                 | 九皇                       | <i>Jiu Huang</i>     | Nine Kings   |
| <i>chu shih</i>                   | 居士                       | <i>jushi</i>         | lay Buddhist devotees  |
| <i>chu shih lin</i>               | 居士林                      | <i>jushi lin</i>     | meeting place for lay Buddhist devotees  |
| <i>Chu Show Fan</i>               | 煮壽飯                      | <i>Zhu Shoufan</i>   | cooking longevity rice   |
| <i>Chuang Tzu</i>                 | 莊子                       | <i>Zhuangzi</i>      | Chinese philosopher  |
| <i>Ch'uen Chen</i>                | 全真                       | <i>Quanzhen</i>      | Complete Perfection School of Taoism; Complete Purity of Truth (a Taoist sect) |
| <i>ch'uen-lin</i>                 | 川連                       | <i>chuanlian</i>     | a medical herb   |
| <i>Chun T'i</i>                   | 準提                       | <i>Zhunti</i>        | Goddess of Dawn or Light   |
| <i>chung</i>                      | 種                        | <i>zhong</i>         | to plant   |
| <i>Chung Yuan</i><br><i>Chieh</i> | 中元節                      | <i>Zhongyuan Jie</i> | festival of the second Daoist principle  |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>         | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u>  | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>        |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>chung-i</i>             | 中醫                       | <i>zhong-yi</i>       | Chinese doctor                       |
| <i>Chung-t'ien</i>         | 中天                       | <i>Zhongtian</i>      | Middle Heaven (major time cycle)     |
| <b>F</b>                   |                          |                       |                                      |
| <i>Fa Yi Paau</i> (C)      | 花衣包                      | <i>Huayi Pao</i>      | Flowery Coats Packet (paper charm)   |
| <i>fa-meng</i> (C)         | 花命                       | <i>huaming</i>        | “flower fate”                        |
| <i>Fa-wong Foo-mu</i> (C)  | 花王父母                     | <i>Huawang Fumu</i>   | Mother and Father Gardener           |
| <i>fan</i> (C)             | 幡                        | <i>fan</i>            | banner                               |
| <i>Fei Hsia Tsing Sheh</i> | 飛霞精社                     | <i>Feixia Jingshe</i> | vegetarian hall in Singapore         |
| <i>Fei Hsia Tung</i>       | 飛霞洞                      | <i>Feixia Dong</i>    | a cave or grotto in Guangdong, China |
| <i>fen-hsing</i>           | 分性                       | <i>fenxing</i>        | characterics                         |
| <i>foh</i> (C)             | 火                        | <i>huo</i>            | fire                                 |
| <i>foh</i> (C)             | 符                        | <i>fu</i>             | amulet                               |
| Foochow                    | 福州                       | Fuzhou                | an area in Fujian, China             |
| <i>fu</i>                  | 符                        | <i>fu</i>             | amulet                               |
| <i>Fu</i>                  | 佛                        | <i>Fo</i>             | Buddha                               |
| <i>Fu Shou T'ang</i>       | 福壽堂                      | <i>Fushou Tang</i>    | a vegetarian house in Singapore      |
| <i>Fu Te Cheng Shen</i>    | 福德正神                     | <i>Fude Zhengshen</i> | Earth God of Wealth and Merit        |
| <i>fu-ming</i>             | 復命                       | <i>fuming</i>         | “restore the mandate”                |
| <i>Fu-ming</i>             | 復命                       | <i>Fuming</i>         | a Daoist sect                        |
| <i>fung</i> (C)            | 風                        | <i>feng</i>           | wind                                 |
| <i>fung-shui</i>           | 風水                       | <i>fengshui</i>       | geomancy; literally “wind and water” |

| <u>Text</u>                  | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>          | <u>English meaning</u>   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|--|
| <b>G</b>                     |                   |                        |  |
| <i>guailao</i>               | 鬼佬                | <i>guilao</i>          | Westerners   |
| <b>H</b>                     |                   |                        |  |
| <i>haak-ts 'an</i> (C)       | 嚇親                | <i>xiaqin</i>          | Cantonese idiom meaning “injury by fright”                           |
| <i>haam-king</i> (C)         | 喊驚                | <i>hanjing</i>         | calling out (against) fear   |
| <i>Hakka</i>                 | 客家                | <i>Kejia</i>           | a people of China  |
| <i>Hei Faan</i> (C)          | 起犯                | <i>Qi Fan</i>          | Lifting off the Offence/Influence (ritual)                           |
| <i>ho shang</i>              | 和尚                | <i>heshang</i>         | monks  |
| <i>ho-naan tso-yan</i> (C)   | 好難做人              | <i>haonan zuoren</i>   | difficult to act as a person   |
| <i>Hoi Kwaan To K'iu</i> (C) | 開關到橋              | <i>Kaiguan Daoqiao</i> | Clearing the Way/Opening the Barrier on Reaching the Bridge (ritual) |
| <i>Hokkien</i> (H)           | 福建[人]             | <i>Fujian</i>          | Fujian people  |
| <i>hon</i> (C)               | 寒                 | <i>han</i>             | cold   |
| <i>Hou-t'ien</i>             | 後天                | <i>Houtian</i>         | Latter Heaven; name for major time cycle                             |
| <i>Hsi Wang Mu</i>           | 西王母               | <i>Xi Wangmu</i>       | Western Royal Mother (deity)   |
| <i>Hsi Yu Chi</i>            | 西游記               | <i>Xiyou Ji</i>        | <i>Journey to the West</i> (novel)                                   |
| <i>Hsia Yuan</i>             | 下元                | <i>Xiayuan</i>         | last of the three Daoist festivals                                   |
| <i>hsia-chi</i>              | 下級                | <i>xiaji</i>           | lower levels   |
| <i>hsiang</i>                | 鄉                 | <i>xiang</i>           | countryside; a district or single locality                           |
| <i>Hsiang/Yang</i>           | 羊                 | <i>Xiang/Yang</i>      | good omen periods  |

| <u><i>Text</i></u>                           | <u><i>Characters</i></u> | <u><i>Pinyin</i></u>  | <u><i>English meaning</i></u>                             |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <i>Hsiao P'ò</i>                             | 小坡                       | <i>Xiaopo</i>         | section of Singapore north of the Singapore River         |
| <i>hsien</i>                                 | 縣                        | <i>xian</i>           | county  |
| <i>Hsien-sheng</i>                           | 先生                       | <i>Xiansheng</i>      | teacher (a rank of the sect)                              |
| <i>Hsien T'ien</i>                           | 先天                       | <i>Xiantian</i>       | Former Heaven, name for major time cycle                  |
| <i>Hsien T'ien Men</i>                       | 先天門                      | <i>Xiantian Men</i>   | Former Heaven Door; name of a sect                        |
| <i>Hsien T'ien Ta Tao/Hsien-t'ien Ta-tao</i> | 先天大道                     | <i>Xiantian Dadao</i> | Great Way of Former/Before Heaven (name of a sect)        |
| <i>Hsien T'ien Tao/Hsien-t'ien Tao</i>       | 先天道                      | <i>Xiantian Dao</i>   | Great Way of Former/Before Heaven (name of a sect)        |
| <i>hsiu-ksing</i>                            | 修行                       | <i>xiuxing</i>        | to practice and elevate one's virtues                     |
| <i>hsuan-kuan</i>                            | 玄關                       | <i>xuanguan</i>       | “Dark Pass”; space between the eyes                       |
| <i>hsüeh fu</i>                              | 血符                       | <i>xuefu</i>          | blood charms  |
| <i>hua-shen</i>                              | 化身                       | <i>huashen</i>        | have a “Transformation Body” of incarnate Buddhas or gods |
| <i>huet-hei (C)</i>                          | 血氣                       | <i>xueqi</i>          | blood and ether, the human constitution                   |
| <i>Hui Kuan</i>                              | 會館                       | <i>huiguan</i>        | voluntary association or guild                            |
| <i>Hui Neng</i>                              | 慧能                       | <i>Huineng</i>        | the sixth Ch'an patriarch in China                        |
| <i>hung</i>                                  | 紅                        | <i>hong</i>           | red or scarlet  |
| <i>Hung [Men]</i>                            | 洪門                       | <i>Hong [Men]</i>     | Heaven and Earth Society/League                           |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>                       | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u> | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>                   |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------|---|
| <i>Hung Lien Ch'i</i>                    | 紅蓮期                      | <i>Honglian Qi</i>   | Period of the Red Lotus                         |
| <i>hung paau</i> (C)/<br><i>hung pao</i> | 紅包                       | <i>hongbao</i>       | red packet                                      |
| <i>hung-wong</i> (C)                     | 雄黃                       | <i>xionghuang</i>    | a Chinese traditional medicine                  |
| <i>Hung Yang Ch'i</i>                    | 紅羊期                      | <i>Hongyang Qi</i>   | Period of the Red Omen                          |
| <i>huo-chu</i>                           | 火炬                       | <i>huozhu</i>        | clergy living in their own homes                |
| <i>hu-tao</i>                            | 護道                       | <i>hudao</i>         | lay helpers; "outer" members of Xian Tian Dadao |
| <i>hwang</i>                             | 黃                        | <i>huang</i>         | yellow  |

**I**

|                               |      |                    |   |
|-------------------------------|------|--------------------|---|
| <i>I-ching</i>                | 易經   | <i>Yijing</i>      | <i>The Book of Changes</i> (a Chinese classic text) |
| <i>I-kuan Tao</i>             | 一貫道  | <i>Yiguan Dao</i>  | The Way of Pervading Unity (name of a sect)         |
| <i>i-shaang</i> (C)           | 醫生   | <i>yisheng</i>     | doctor  |
| <i>it</i> (C)                 | 熱    | <i>re</i>          | "heat"  |
| <i>it-hei</i> (C)             | 熱氣   | <i>requi</i>       | hot air, a humour                                   |
| <i>it-tuk</i> (C)             | 熱毒   | <i>yidu</i>        | hot poison  |
| <i>it-tuk kung-tuk</i><br>(C) | 以毒攻毒 | <i>yidu gongdu</i> | use poison to drive out poison                      |
| <i>iu-kwaai</i> (C)           | 妖怪   | <i>yaoguai</i>     | monster or goblin; malevolent spirit                |

**J**

|                        |       |                     |  |
|------------------------|-------|---------------------|--|
| <i>Jan-teng Fo</i>     | 燃燈佛   | <i>Randeng Fo</i>   | Dipamkara Buddha; "Buddha of the Burning Lamp" |
| <i>ju tao/ju chiao</i> | 入道/入教 | <i>rudao/rujiao</i> | enter the teachings                            |

| <u><i>Text</i></u>                          | <u><i>Characters</i></u> | <u><i>Pinyin</i></u>  | <u><i>English meaning</i></u>   |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <b>K</b>                                    |                          |                       |   |
| <i>Kaai Sai</i> (C)                         | 解洗                       | <i>Jiexi</i>          | Untying and Washing<br>Away the Illness   |
| <i>k'ai-kwoh</i> (C)                        | 契過                       | <i>qiguo</i>          | ritual, adoption by a<br>person, god, stone, or<br>tree; bonding a child to<br>another person |
| <i>k'ai-ma</i> (C)                          | 契媽                       | <i>qima</i>           | bonded mother   |
| <i>k'ai-nü</i> (C)                          | 契女                       | <i>qinü</i>           | bonded daughter   |
| <i>Kai Sai</i> (C)                          | 解洗                       | <i>Jiexi</i>          | Untying and Washing<br>Away the Illness   |
| <i>Kai Shan Ta Pai</i> 開山大伯                 |                          | <i>Kaishan Dabo</i>   | pioneers  |
| <i>k'ai-tai</i> (C)                         | 契弟                       | <i>qidi</i>           | bonded brother;<br>homosexual lover   |
| <i>K'ai T'an</i> (C)                        | 開壇                       | <i>Kaitan</i>         | Opening the Ceremony  |
| <i>k'ai-tsai</i> (C)                        | 契仔                       | <i>qizi</i>           | bonded son  |
| <i>k'ai-ye</i> (C)                          | 契爺                       | <i>qiye</i>           | bonded<br>paternal grandfather  |
| <i>Kam Fa</i> (Mo)<br>(C)                   | 金花(母)                    | <i>Jin Hua (Mu)</i>   | Golden Flower Goddess<br>(Mother) (deity)   |
| <i>Kam Ha Ching</i><br><i>She</i> (C)       | 金霞精舍                     | <i>Jinxia Jingshe</i> | name of a vegetarian hall<br>in Hong Kong   |
| <i>Kam Mieu</i> (C)                         | 金廟                       | <i>Jin Miao</i>       | Temple of the Golden<br>Flower  |
| <i>kao-chi</i>                              | 高級                       | <i>gaoji</i>          | upper levels  |
| <i>k'ei</i> (C)                             | 奇                        | <i>qi</i>             | strange   |
| <i>k'ei-kwaai</i> (C)                       | 奇怪                       | <i>qiguai</i>         | strange   |
| <i>k'ei-peng</i> (C)                        | 奇病                       | <i>qibing</i>         | “strange” diseases  |
| <i>Kek Lok Si</i> (H)/<br><i>Chi Lo Ssu</i> | 極樂寺                      | <i>Jile Si</i>        | a Mahayana Buddhist<br>temple in Penang   |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>                                    | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u>                  | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>   |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| <i>king-ts'an...</i><br><i>t'aam ch'ut loi</i><br>(C) | 驚親...燂出<br>來             | <i>jingqin...</i><br><i>tanchulai</i> | let the fire dry out the<br>fear  |
| <i>Kiu Keng</i> (C)                                   | 叫驚                       | <i>Jiao Jing</i>                      | Calling Back the Soul<br>(ritual)   |
| <i>kongsi</i> (H)                                     | 公司                       | <i>gongsi</i>                         | hostels, rented worker's<br>rooms   |
| <i>ku-p'o wu</i>                                      | 姑婆屋                      | <i>gupo wu</i>                        | spinsters' house  |
| <i>ku t'ai</i>  | 姑太                       | <i>gutai</i>                          | term of address for<br>women of a certain rank<br>in the Xian Tian Dao sect                           |
| <i>Kuan-kung</i>                                      | 關公                       | <i>Guangong</i>                       | God of War  |
| <i>Kuan Ti</i>  | 關帝                       | <i>Guandi</i>                         | God of War  |
| <i>Kuan Yin</i>                                       | 觀音                       | <i>Guanyin</i>                        | Goddess of Mercy  |
| <i>Kuan Yin Miao</i>                                  | 觀音廟                      | <i>Guanyin Miao</i>                   | popular name for Tianfu<br>Gong, a major temple in<br>Singapore                                       |
| <i>Kuan Yin Tang</i>                                  | 觀音堂                      | <i>Guanyin Tang</i>                   | the Guanyin Temple in<br>Singapore  |
| <i>kuei</i>   | 鬼                        | <i>gui</i>                            | ghost; demon  |
| <i>kuei i/kuei-i</i>                                  | 皈依                       | <i>guiyi</i>                          | take refuge in Buddhism,<br>join a religion   |
| <i>Kuei-i Tao</i>                                     | 皈一道                      | <i>Guiyi Dao</i>                      | “Way of Following the<br>One Dao” (name of a<br>sect)   |
| <i>Kuei Jen Tieh</i>                                  | 貴人牒                      | <i>Guiren Die</i>                     | Honourable Man<br>Credentials (paper charm)   |
| <i>Kuei-ken Men/</i><br><i>Kuei Ken Men</i>           | 皈根門                      | <i>Guigen Men</i>                     | Sect of “Reverting to the<br>Root [of Things]” or<br>“The Way of Reverting to<br>the First Principle” |

| <u>Text</u>                                | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>       | <u>English meaning</u>   |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|--|
| <i>kui khi</i> (H)                         | 貴氣                | <i>guiqi</i>        | “expensive”; idiom used to describe difficult ailing children                        |
| <i>kui mia</i> (H)                         | 貴命                | <i>guiming</i>      | “expensively fated”: a person who is sickly in childhood but prosperous in adulthood |
| <i>kung</i>                                | 宮                 | <i>gong</i>         | imperial palace; used of temples   |
| <i>kung fu</i>                             | 功夫                | <i>gongfu</i>       | martial arts   |
| <i>kuo-yu</i>                              | 國語                | <i>guoyu</i>        | national language; Mandarin  |
| <i>kwaai</i> (C)                           | 怪                 | <i>guai</i>         | strange, queer   |
| <i>kwaan</i> (C)                           | 關                 | <i>guan</i>         | barriers   |
| <i>kwai</i> (C)                            | 鬼                 | <i>gui</i>          | ghost; malevolent spirit   |
| <i>kwai yan/kwai-yan</i> (C)               | 貴人                | <i>guiren</i>       | honourable man, protector  |
| <i>Kwai Yan Lok Ma/Kwai Yan Luk Ma</i> (C) | 貴人祿馬              | <i>Guiren Luma</i>  | Honourable Man, Lucky Horse (charm)  |
| <i>Kwan Ti</i>                             | 關帝                | <i>Guandi</i>       | God of War   |
| <i>Kwangtung</i>                           | 廣東                | <i>Guangdong</i>    | a province in South China  |
| <i>Kwoh Hsin</i><br>(sic.) <i>Ch'iao</i>   | 過仙橋               | <i>Guo Xianqiao</i> | Crossing the Bridge (ritual)   |
| <i>Kwoh Kwaan/Kwoh-kwaan</i> (C)           | 過關                | <i>Guoguan</i>      | Passing Through the Gate or Going Through the Barrier (ritual)                       |
| <b>L</b>                                   |                   |                     |  |
| <i>laan</i> (C)                            | 欄                 | <i>lan</i>          | wholesale middlemen  |
| <i>laang-tsan</i> (C)                      | 冷親                | <i>lengqin</i>      | to catch cold  |
| <i>Lao-mu</i>                              | 老母                | <i>Laomu</i>        | Venerable Mother (deity)   |

| <u>Text</u>                                   | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>           | <u>English meaning</u>  |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|---|
| <i>Lao-mu Chiao</i>                           | 老母教               | <i>Laomu Jiao</i>       | Venerable Mother Religion   |
| <i>lao shih</i>                               | 老師                | <i>laoshi</i>           | Master, teacher; a term of address for male rank in the Hsien T'en Tao Sect   |
| <i>Lao-sheng Mu</i>                           | 老生母               | <i>Laosheng Mu</i>      | Venerable Sainted Mother  |
| Lao Tzu                                       | 老子                | Laozi                   | author of the <i>Daodejing</i> , venerated by many Chinese as a Daoist deity. |
| <i>la-taat (sic.)</i> (C)                     | 邇邇                | <i>lata</i>             | unclean   |
| <i>lau-nin</i>                                | 流年                | <i>liunian</i>          | events in a year  |
| <i>leung</i> (C)                              | 涼                 | <i>liang</i>            | cold humour   |
| <i>li Lung-hua</i><br><i>k'ai-chih (sic.)</i> | 立龍華開基             | <i>li Longhua kaiji</i> | "Laying the foundations of the Longhua (salvation meetings)"                  |
| <i>lien</i>                                   | 蓮                 | <i>lian</i>             | lotus   |
| <i>ling</i>                                   | 靈                 | <i>ling</i>             | spiritual power   |
| <i>ling p'ai</i>                              | 靈牌                | <i>lingpai</i>          | temporary bamboo and paper soul tablets                                       |
| <i>Lo Chiao</i>                               | 羅教                | <i>Lojiao</i>           | Lo Religion   |
| Lo Wei Ch'un                                  | 羅蔚群               | Luo Weiqun              | name of a Daoist patriarch  |
| <i>loh-chaai tsai</i><br>(C)                  | 攞債仔               | <i>luozhai zi</i>       | child who dies before repaying his parents                                    |
| <i>loh-kwai tsai</i><br>(C)                   | 攞鬼仔               | <i>luogui zi</i>        | child drawing a spirit of the dead  |
| <i>loh-mong</i> (C)                           | 羅網                | <i>luowang</i>          | the "net", i.e. the barrier separating this world from the invisible sphere   |
| Loyang  | 洛陽                | Luoyang                 | a city in Henan Province, China   |

| <u>Text</u>         | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>      | <u>English meaning</u>                                |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| <i>lu chu</i>       | 爐主                | <i>luzhu</i>       | head of temple, literally master of the “stove”       |
| <i>lǜ/lu</i>        | 綠/祿               | <i>lǜ/lu</i>       | green/lucky   |
| <i>luk ma</i> (C)   | 祿馬                | <i>luma</i>        | lucky horse   |
| <i>Lung-hua</i>     | 龍華                | <i>Longhua</i>     | Dragon Flower (a religious sect)                      |
| <i>lung-hua hui</i> | 龍華會               | <i>longhua hui</i> | salvation meetings of the Buddhas                     |
| <i>Lung-hua Men</i> | 龍華門               | <i>Longhua Men</i> | Dragon Flower Sect                                    |
| <i>lung p'ai</i>    | 龍牌                | <i>longpai</i>     | dragon tablet; temporary bamboo and paper soul tablet |

## M

|                         |            |                    |  |
|-------------------------|------------|--------------------|--|
| <i>m-kau huet</i> (C)   | 唔[不]夠血     | <i>bugou xue</i>   | not enough blood,  |
| <i>m-saam, m-sz</i> (C) | 唔[不]三唔[不]四 | <i>busan busi</i>  | “not three, not four”  |
| <i>ma-ch'an</i> (C)     | 麻疹         | <i>maqin</i>       | measles  |
| Ma Tao I                | 馬道一        | Ma Daoyi           | Name of a Daoist patriarch                                     |
| <i>ma-tsai</i> (C)      | 麻仔         | <i>mazi</i>        | measles  |
| <i>Ma Tzu Kung</i> (H)  | 媽祖宮        | <i>Mazu Gong</i>   | Mazu Palace, name for Tianfu Gong, a major temple in Singapore |
| <i>Man Fat Tong</i> (C) | 萬佛堂        | <i>Wan Fo Tang</i> | name of a Hong Kong vegetarian hall                            |
| <i>mee</i> (C)          | 麵          | <i>mian</i>        | noodles  |
| <i>mei-tsai</i>         | 妹仔         | <i>meizi</i>       | bonded (female) servants, including concubines                 |
| <i>meng</i> (C)         | 命          | <i>ming</i>        | fate   |
| <i>Mi Tsung</i>         | 密宗         | <i>Mizong</i>      | Secret or Esoteric Buddhist sect                               |

| <u>Text</u>                  | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>     | <u>English meaning</u>                                      |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| <i>miao</i>                  | 廟                 | <i>miao</i>       | a temple  |
| Ming Ti                      | 明帝                | Ming Di           | Eastern Han Dynasty Emperor                                 |
| <i>mo sam-ts 'ing</i><br>(C) | 無心情               | <i>wu xinqing</i> | feeling little or no affection for her child                |
| <i>mo tou-fu</i>             | 磨豆腐               | <i>mo doufu</i>   | “grinding bean curd”, a term referring to lesbian practices |
| <i>mu-yu shu</i>             | 木魚書               | <i>muyu shu</i>   | “wooden fish” books   |
| <i>mui-tsai</i> (C)          | 妹仔                | <i>meizi</i>      | bonded (female) servants, including concubines              |

## N

|                           |       |                         |   |
|---------------------------|-------|-------------------------|---|
| <i>Nam-mo-lo</i> (C)      | 喃嘸佬   | <i>Nanwulao</i>         | chanting fellows; Daoist priests                    |
| <i>Nan Yang</i>           | 南洋    | <i>Nanyang</i>          | South Seas; often used to refer to Southeast Asia   |
| <i>Nei-ching</i>          | 內經    | <i>Neijing</i>          | <i>Internal Classic</i> (Chinese medicine classics) |
| <i>ng-hong</i> (C)        | 五行    | <i>wuxing</i>           | five elements                                       |
| <i>ng-kwai</i> (C)        | 五鬼    | <i>wugui</i>            | five demons   |
| <i>ni ku</i>              | 尼姑    | <i>nigu</i>             | nun   |
| <i>Nien</i>               | 捻     | <i>Nian</i>             | a Daoist sect                                       |
| <i>niu ch'ieh</i> (sic.)  | 扭結    | <i>niujie</i>           | “twist knot”, a ritual hand gesture                 |
| <i>nü-chien</i>           | 女間    | <i>nüjian</i>           | girls' room   |
| <i>nü-ta pu chung-liu</i> | 女大不中留 | <i>nüda bu zhongliu</i> | mature girls cannot be kept in the the family       |
| <i>nü-wu</i>              | 女屋    | <i>nü wu</i>            | girls' house  |

## O

|                |   |            |              |
|----------------|---|------------|--------------|
| <i>ooi</i> (C) | 會 | <i>hui</i> | associations |
|----------------|---|------------|--------------|

| <u><i>Text</i></u>        | <u><i>Characters</i></u> | <u><i>Pinyin</i></u> | <u><i>English meaning</i></u>          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--|
| <b>P</b>                  |                          |                      |  |
| <i>Pa Kua/Pa-k'ua</i>     | 八卦                       | <i>Bagua</i>         | Eight Trigrams                         |
| <i>Paai Cheoe</i> (C)     | 拜除                       | <i>Bai Chu</i>       | To Pray Away (to get rid of)           |
| <i>Paai Chuen Wan</i> (C) | 拜轉運                      | <i>Bai Zhuanyun</i>  | Prayers to Change Fate                 |
| <i>Paai Siu Yan</i> (C)   | 拜小人                      | <i>Bai Xiaoren</i>   | Pray (against) the Little Man (ritual) |
| <i>pai</i>                | 白                        | <i>bai</i>           | white                                  |
| <i>p'ai</i>               | 牌                        | <i>pai</i>           | tablet (paper charm)                   |
| <i>Pai Lien Ch'i</i>      | 白蓮期                      | <i>Bailian Qi</i>    | Period of the White Lotus              |
| <i>Pai-ma</i>             | 白馬                       | <i>Baima</i>         | White Horse                            |
| <i>Pai Yang Ch'i</i>      | 白羊期                      | <i>Baiyang Qi</i>    | Period of the White Omen               |
| <i>Pai Yu</i>             | 白玉                       | <i>Bai Yu</i>        | Name of a Daoist patriarch             |
| <i>pao-chuan</i>          | 寶卷                       | <i>baojuan</i>       | precious volume                        |
| <i>Pao En Ssu</i>         | 報恩寺                      | <i>Bao En Si</i>     | a monastery in Singapore               |
| <i>Pao-en</i>             | 保恩                       | <i>Baoen</i>         | "Protecting Grace" (rank title)        |
| <i>P'ao Shang Ta Ti</i>   | 保生大帝                     | <i>Baosheng Dadi</i> | the Emperor who Protects Life          |
| <i>Pao Shou Tieh</i>      | 保壽牒                      | <i>Baoshou Die</i>   | Long Life Credential (paper charm)     |
| <i>Pei</i>                | 杯                        | <i>Bei</i>           | Divining blocks                        |
| <i>Pi Shan T'ing</i>      | 碧山亭                      | <i>Bishan Ting</i>   | Cantonese cemetery in Singapore        |
| <i>po</i>                 | 補                        | <i>bu</i>            | tonic                                  |
| <i>po-hei</i> (C)         | 補氣                       | <i>buqi</i>          | strengthen the ether                   |
| <i>po-huet</i> (C)        | 補血                       | <i>buxue</i>         | build the blood                        |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>                   | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u>         | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>                            |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| <i>Po Ti-yü</i>                      | 破地獄                      | <i>Po Diyu</i>               | Breaking Hell (ritual)                                   |
| <i>po-ying tan</i> (C)               | 保嬰丹                      | <i>baoyingdan</i>            | protect infant pills                                     |
| <i>pong-paan</i> (C)                 | 幫辦                       | <i>bangban</i>               | “help-manage”  |
| <i>pu lo-chia</i>                    | 不落家                      | <i>bu luojia</i>             | girls who do not go to the family                        |
| <i>P'u Sa</i>                        | 菩薩                       | <i>Pusat</i>                 | Bodhisattva  |
| <i>P'u T'o Ssu</i>                   | 普陀寺                      | <i>Putuo Si</i>              | a temple in Singapore                                    |
| <i>Pu T'u Ku Yuan</i>                | 普渡孤魂                     | <i>Pudu Guhun</i>            | Universal Helping over of the Wandering Spirits (ritual) |
| <i>P'u Tu Men/<br/>P'u-tu Men</i>    | 普度(渡)門                   | <i>Pudu Men</i>              | Salvation Sect   |
| <b>S</b>                             |                          |                              |  |
| <i>saam wan ts'at<br/>paat</i> (C)   | 三魂七魄                     | <i>sanhun qipo</i>           | all animating forces in the body                         |
| <i>saat</i> (sic.) <i>wan</i><br>(C) | 失魂                       | <i>shihun</i>                | lose one's wits  |
| <i>sai-i</i> (C)                     | 西醫                       | <i>xiyi</i>                  | Western doctor   |
| <i>sai kong</i> (H)                  | 師公                       | <i>shigong</i>               | Daoist master  |
| <i>samsu</i>                         | 三蒸                       | <i>sanzheng</i>              | a Chinese spirit distilled from wine                     |
| <i>San Hua</i>                       | 散花                       | <i>Sanhua</i>                | Distributing Flowers                                     |
| <i>san-kuang</i>                     | 三光                       | <i>sanguang</i>              | Sun, Moon, and Stars: the three lights                   |
| <i>San Lung Chi<br/>Lu Pei</i>       | 三龍指路碑                    | <i>Sanlong Zhilu<br/>Bei</i> | name of a book   |
| <i>San Pau</i>                       | 三寶                       | <i>San Bao</i>               | name of a Buddhist sect                                  |
| <i>shan</i>                          | 善                        | <i>shan</i>                  | good   |
| <i>shan</i> (C)                      | 神                        | <i>shen</i>                  | deities  |

| <u>Text</u>                 | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>           | <u>English meaning</u>                           |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--|
| <i>shan-shu</i>             | 善書                | <i>shanshu</i>          | morality books; literally “good books”           |
| Shan Shui                   | 三水                | Sanshui                 | a district in Guangdong Province, China          |
| <i>Shan T'ang</i>           | 善堂                | <i>Shantang</i>         | “benevolence” or “goodness” halls                |
| <i>Shan Te T'ang</i>        | 善德堂               | <i>Shande Tang</i>      | a vegetarian hall in Singapore                   |
| <i>Shang T'ai</i>           | 上台                | <i>Shang Tai</i>        | Mounting the Platform (funeral ritual)           |
| <i>Shang Yuan Tan</i>       | 上元誕               | <i>Shangyuan Dan</i>    | Festival of first Daoist principal               |
| <i>shap</i> (C)             | 濕                 | <i>shi</i>              | wetness  |
| <i>she</i>                  | 社                 | <i>she</i>              | temple associations                              |
| <i>she</i>                  | 舍                 | <i>she</i>              | a lodge  |
| <i>she-pen huo</i>          | 蝕本貨               | <i>sheben huo</i>       | goods on which one loses, may refer to daughters |
| <i>shen</i>                 | 神                 | <i>shen</i>             | deity  |
| <i>shen chu p'ai</i>        | 神主牌               | <i>shen zhupai</i>      | permanent soul tablet, the ancestral tablet      |
| <i>shen wei pai</i>         | 神位牌               | <i>shenweipai</i>       | ancestor tablet                                  |
| <i>Sheng Mu Shen</i>        | 聖母神               | <i>Shengmu Shen</i>     | Holy Mother deity                                |
| <i>sheng-yang szu-tsang</i> | 生養死葬              | <i>shengyang sizang</i> | nourish while alive, bury at death               |
| <i>shi-shan</i> (C)         | 時辰                | <i>shichen</i>          | period of the day                                |
| <i>shi-shun ho</i>          | 時辰好               | <i>shichen hao</i>      | an auspicious time                               |
| <i>shih chai</i>            | 食齋                | <i>shizhai</i>          | to eat vegetarian food                           |
| <i>Shih chia mou ni</i>     | 釋迦牟尼              | <i>Shijia mouni</i>     | Sakyamuni Buddha                                 |

| <u>Text</u>                                      | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>            | <u>English meaning</u>                            |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <i>shih fang ts'ung lin/shih-fang ts'ung-lin</i> | 十方叢林              | <i>shifang conglin</i>   | the monastery for all the world                   |
| <i>shih-fu</i>                                   | 師傅                | <i>shifu</i>             | master or teacher                                 |
| <i>shih-ti</i>                                   | 十地                | <i>shidi</i>             | "Ten Places" (rank title)                         |
| <i>sho-chue wan</i>                              | 鎖住魂               | <i>suozhu hun</i>        | lock in the soul                                  |
| <i>shou wu chieh ti</i>                          | 受五戒的              | <i>shou wujie di</i>     | to take the five vows                             |
| <i>shou-yuan</i>                                 | 守圓                | <i>shouyuan</i>          | "gather to completion"                            |
| <i>shuang jie-pai</i>                            | 雙結拜               | <i>shuang jiebai</i>     | "mutually tied by oath", sworn sisters            |
| <i>Shuang Lin Ch'an Ssu (sic.)</i>               | 雙林禪寺              | <i>Shuanglin Chan Si</i> | a Buddhist monastery in Singapore                 |
| <i>shuk (C)</i>                                  | 屬                 | <i>shu</i>               | belong to   |
| <i>shuk wan kwai (C)</i>                         | 贖魂歸               | <i>shu hun gui</i>       | incantation dealing with capture of the soul      |
| <i>Shun Te</i>                                   | 順德                | <i>Shunde</i>            | a district in Guangdong Province, China           |
| <i>Shun T'ien Kung</i>                           | 順天宮               | <i>Shun Tian Gong</i>    | a Hokkien temple in Singapore                     |
| <i>shun-shu (C)</i>                              | 善書                | <i>shanshu</i>           | good books, morality books                        |
| <i>shuo chieh</i>                                | 說戒                | <i>shuojie</i>           | spoken ordination                                 |
| <i>si</i>  | 寺                 | <i>si</i>                | Buddhist monastery or temple                      |
| <i>Sip T'aa'i Sui (C)/ Sip Tai Seou</i>          | 攝太歲               | <i>She Tai Sui</i>       | Raising up the Minister of Time (ritual)          |
| <i>Siu P'o</i>                                   | 小坡                | <i>Xiaopo</i>            | section of Singapore north of the Singapore River |
| <i>siu-yan (C)</i>                               | 小人                | <i>xiao ren</i>          | "little men"                                      |

| <u>Text</u>                   | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>         | <u>English meaning</u>  |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <i>so-lo</i> (C)              | 蘇癆                | <i>sulao</i>          | male disease thought to be caused by intercourse with a woman within one hundred days of childbirth (Cantonese idiom) |
| <i>Song Moon Tiu Haak</i> (C) | 喪門弔客              | <i>Sangmen Diaoke</i> | The Visitor to the Dead   |
| <i>ssu</i>                    | 寺                 | <i>si</i>             | a temple  |
| <i>Ssu Fang Kuei Jen</i>      | 四方貴人              | <i>Sifang Guiren</i>  | Honourable Men from Everywhere (charm paper)  |
| <i>ssu yuan</i>               | 寺院                | <i>siyuan</i>         | a Buddhist monk's dwelling  |
| <i>Sui Tsing Paak</i> (C)     | 綏靖伯               | <i>Suijing Ba</i>     | a temple at Taipingshan, Hong Kong  |
| <i>Sung Sheung Fung</i> (C)   | 送傷風               | <i>Song Shangfeng</i> | Getting Rid of a Cold (ritual)  |
| <i>Szu-pa</i>                 | 四八                | <i>Siba</i>           | "Forty-eight" (name of a rank)  |

## T

|                      |     |                    |  |
|----------------------|-----|--------------------|--|
| <i>ta chai</i>       | 打齋  | <i>dazhai</i>      | ritual to pay respects to the dead                   |
| <i>Ta-ch'eng</i>     | 大乘  | <i>Dacheng</i>     | a religious sect                                     |
| <i>Ta-i Hsiang</i>   | 大義祥 | <i>Dayi Xiang</i>  | "Great Righteousness Omen" (name of a sect)          |
| <i>Ta-jen Hsiang</i> | 大仁祥 | <i>Daren Xiang</i> | "Great Virtue Omen" (name of a sect)                 |
| <i>ta jih tzu</i>    | 大日子 | <i>da rizi</i>     | "Big day"; used of festivals                         |
| <i>ta nan kuan</i>   | 大難館 | <i>danan guan</i>  | dying houses, literally "houses of big difficulties" |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>                  | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u>            | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>  |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Ta P'o</i> (H)                   | 大坡                       | <i>Dapo</i>                     | the "Big City", the section of Singapore south of the Singapore River, |
| <i>Ta-tao</i>                       | 大道                       | <i>Dadau</i>                    | the Great Way  |
| <i>taai-paan</i> (C)                | 大班                       | <i>daban</i>                    | "big bosses"   |
| <i>taai pei ch'aam</i> (C)          | 大悲懺                      | <i>dabeichan</i>                | rite of repentance   |
| <i>T'aai Sui</i> (C)                | 太歲                       | <i>Taisui</i>                   | Minister of Time   |
| <i>taam-po-yan</i> (C)              | 擔保人                      | <i>danbao ren</i>               | guarantor for loan   |
| <i>T'ai Ku</i>                      | 太姑                       | <i>Taigu</i>                    | term of rank for women in the Hsien T'ien Tao Sect                     |
| <i>T'ai Lao-shih</i>                | 太老師                      | <i>Tai Laoshi</i>               | "Great Venerable Teacher" (term of address)                            |
| <i>Tai Seou</i> (C)                 | 太歲                       | <i>Taisui</i>                   | Minister of Time   |
| <i>tan fan</i>                      | 擔幡                       | <i>danfan</i>                   | carry the banner   |
| <i>t'ang</i>                        | 堂                        | <i>tang</i>                     | hall, term for nunnery   |
| <i>T'ang</i>                        | 唐                        | <i>Tang</i>                     | Tang Dynasty   |
| <i>tang ki</i> (H)                  | 童乩                       | <i>tongji</i>                   | spirit medium (Hokkien idiom)  |
| <i>tao</i>                          | 道                        | <i>dao</i>                      | the way or path  |
| <i>tao yuan</i>                     | 道院                       | <i>daoyuan</i>                  | the residence of a nam-mo-lo   |
| <i>Tao-yuan</i>                     | 道元                       | <i>Daoyuan</i>                  | a Chinese syncretic religion   |
| <i>T'ao Yuan Fu</i><br><i>T'ang</i> | 桃園佛堂                     | <i>Taoyuan</i><br><i>Fotang</i> | Peach Garden Buddha Hall   |
| <i>tau</i>                          | 斗                        | <i>dou</i>                      | measure of grain   |
| <i>tau-chung</i> (sic.)             | 斗種                       | <i>douzhong</i>                 | measure of land  |

| <u>Text</u>                | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>      | <u>English meaning</u>  |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| <i>te</i>                  | 德                 | <i>de</i>          | virtue  |
| <i>teng-king</i> (C)       | 定驚                | <i>dingjing</i>    | settle fear   |
| Teochew                    | 潮州[人]             | Chaozhou           | Chaozhou people   |
| <i>Thian Hock Keng</i> (H) | 天福宮               | <i>Tianfu Gong</i> | a temple in Singapore   |
| <i>Ti</i>                  | 帝                 | <i>di</i>          | a ruler; defied being   |
| <i>Ti-Ts'ang Wang</i>      | 地藏王               | <i>Dizang Wang</i> | Buddhist Saviour of Hell  |
| <i>tieh</i>                | 牒                 | <i>die</i>         | credentials   |
| <i>tien</i>                | 殿                 | <i>dian</i>        | a palace; used of temples   |
| <i>T'ien-chun</i>          | 天君                | <i>Tian Jun</i>    | "Heavenly Lords"  |
| <i>T'ien-en</i>            | 天恩                | <i>Tianen</i>      | "Heavenly Grace" (a rank title)                                       |
| <i>T'ien Fu Kung</i>       | 天福宮               | <i>Tianfu Gong</i> | a temple in Singapore   |
| <i>T'ien Shih</i>          | 天師                | <i>Tianshi</i>     | celestial master  |
| <i>T'in Hau</i> (C)        | 天后                | <i>Tianhou</i>     | Heavenly Queen (deity)  |
| <i>t'in-shing</i>          | 天繩                | <i>tiansheng</i>   | heavenly thread   |
| <i>t'in-sing</i>           | 天性                | <i>tianxing</i>    | heavenly instincts  |
| <i>ting-hang</i>           | 頂航                | <i>dinghang</i>    | "Chief Navigators" (a rank title)                                     |
| <i>tit-ts'an</i> (C)       | 跌親                | <i>dieqin</i>      | to fall and injure  |
| Tiuchiu (H)                | 潮州                | Chaozhou           | a district in Guangdong   |
| <i>Toa Peh Kong</i> (H)    | 大伯公               | <i>Dabogong</i>    | popular deity in Southeast Asia; literally "Big Paternal Great Uncle" |
| <i>t'oi-shan</i> (C)       | 胎神                | <i>taishen</i>     | fetal soul  |
| <i>t'oi-tuk</i> (C)        | 胎毒                | <i>taidu</i>       | womb poison   |
| <i>Tong Xian</i>           | 童仙                | <i>Tong Xian</i>   | Immortal Youth  |
| <i>ts'aam</i> (C)          | 慘                 | <i>can</i>         | disaster  |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>               | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u> | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>  |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--|
| <i>ts 'e</i>                     | 邪                        | <i>xie</i>           | “improper”   |
| <i>ts 'e-fung</i> (C)            | 邪風                       | <i>xiefeng</i>       | poisonous wind   |
| <i>ts 'e-hei</i> (C)             | 邪氣                       | <i>xieqi</i>         | miasmata   |
| <i>ts 'e-mung</i> (C)            | 邪門                       | <i>xiamen</i>        | miasmata   |
| <i>tse-shan, kwai</i>            | 假神，鬼                     | <i>jiashen, gui</i>  | “false gods and demons”  |
| <i>ts 'e-shan</i> (C)            | 邪神                       | <i>xieshen</i>       | malevolent spirit  |
| <i>tsien</i>                     | 賤                        | <i>jian</i>          | edicts (paper charm)   |
| <i>ts 'in-shai</i> (sic.)<br>(C) | 前世                       | <i>qianshi</i>       | former generations   |
| <i>tsing-hei</i> (C)             | 清氣                       | <i>qingqi</i>        | peaceful ethers; balanced  |
| <i>ts 'ing leung</i> (C)         | 清涼                       | <i>qingliang</i>     | purifying-cool<br>(constitutional drink)   |
| <i>ts 'ip</i> (C)                | 妾                        | <i>qie</i>           | concubine  |
| <i>ts 'o</i>                     | 燥                        | <i>zao</i>           | dryness  |
| <i>Tso-kung Tao</i>              | 坐攻道                      | <i>Zuogong Dao</i>   | “Way of Sitting and<br>Practicing” (name of a<br>sect)                                 |
| <i>tsu</i>                       | 祖                        | <i>zu</i>            | ancestor or founder  |
| <i>Tsu shih</i>                  | 祖師                       | <i>Zushi</i>         | term of the highest rank<br>in the Hsien T'ien Tao<br>Sect                             |
| <i>tsu-sun ts 'ung-<br/>lin</i>  | 子孫叢林                     | <i>zisun conglin</i> | a monastery or nunnery<br>for “sons and grandsons”<br>(a “family” of monks or<br>nuns) |
| <i>tu-jen</i>                    | 度人                       | <i>duren</i>         | a convert in the sects   |
| <i>Tu Ming An</i>                | 度明庵                      | <i>Duming An</i>     | name of a nunnery  |
| <i>Tu Ti Kung</i><br>(sic.)      | 土地公                      | <i>Tudi Gong</i>     | God of the Earth   |

| <u>Text</u>  | <u>Characters</u> | <u>Pinyin</u>        | <u>English meaning</u>  |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|---|
| <i>Tua Peck Kong</i><br>(H)                              | 大伯公               | <i>Dabo Gong</i>     | popular deity in Southeast Asia; literally “Big Paternal Great-Uncle”                 |
| <i>tuk</i> (C)   | 毒                 | <i>du</i>            | poisonous   |
| Tun-kuan   | 東莞                | Dungan               | a district in Guangdong Province, China   |
| <i>t'ung</i>   | 同                 | <i>tong</i>          | together, shared  |
| <i>Tung Shan She/</i><br><i>T'ung Shan</i><br><i>She</i> | 同善舍/同善社           | <i>Tongshan She</i>  | Fellowship of Goodness, a branch of the Xiantian Dadao Religion                       |
| <i>Tung Shan</i><br><i>T'ang</i>                         | 同善堂               | <i>Tongshan Tang</i> | Fellowship of Goodness, a vegetarian house  |
| <i>Tung Te T'ang</i>                                     | 同德堂               | <i>Tongde Tang</i>   | name of a vegetarian house  |
| <i>Tung Wang</i><br><i>Kung</i>                          | 東王公               | <i>Dong Wanggong</i> | Royal Lord of the East (deity)  |
| <i>tze soh nui</i> (C)                                   | 自梳女               | <i>zishu nǚ</i>      | women who put their own hair up, signifying that they have taken an oath not to marry |
| <i>tzu-mei wu</i>  | 姊妹屋               | <i>zimei wu</i>      | sisters' house  |
| <i>tzu-shu nu</i>  | 自梳女               | <i>zishu nǚ</i>      | women who put their own hair up, signifying that they have taken an oath not to marry |

## W

|                       |     |                    |  |
|-----------------------|-----|--------------------|--|
| <i>Wai-ching</i>      | 外經  | <i>Waijing</i>     | External Classic (Chinese medicine classics) |
| <i>Wai Fa Uen</i> (C) | 圍花園 | <i>Wei Huayuan</i> | Surrounding the Garden (ritual)              |
| <i>wan</i>            | 魂   | <i>hun</i>         | soul   |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>                      | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u>   | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>  |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------|--|
| <i>Wan Shou Shan</i>                    | 萬壽山                      | <i>Wanshou Shan</i>    | Ten Thousand Longevity Mountain (name of a vegetarian hall in Singapore) |
| <i>Wang sheng ch'ien</i>                | 往生錢                      | <i>Wang sheng qian</i> | money to pay off ghostly debtors   |
| <i>Wing Lok T'ung (C)</i>               | 永樂洞                      | <i>Yongle Tong</i>     | a vegetarian hall in Hong Kong   |
| <i>wong-min kwai-lo (C)</i>             | 黃面鬼佬                     | <i>huangmian gui</i>   | foreigner, literally "yellow-faced devil"                                |
| <i>Wong Taai Sin (C)</i>                | 黃大仙                      | <i>Huang Daxian</i>    | Great Sage Wong  |
| <i>Wu Chi Sheng Mu/Wu-chih Sheng-mu</i> | 無極聖母                     | <i>Wuji Shengmu</i>    | Void Sainted Mother  |
| <i>wu-hsing</i>                         | 五行                       | <i>wuxing</i>          | five agents/elements   |
| <i>wu-kung</i>                          | 五公                       | <i>wugong</i>          | Five Lords (Elements) (rank title)                                       |
| <i>Wu-kung Tao</i>                      | 五公道                      | <i>Wugong Dao</i>      | name of an offshoot of the White Lotus, "Way of the Five Lords"          |
| <i>Wu Lao</i>                           | 五老                       | <i>wulao</i>           | Five Elders  |
| <i>Wu-sheng Lao-mu</i>                  | 無生老母                     | <i>Wusheng Laomu</i>   | Unbegotten Venerable Mother  |
| <i>Wu-wei</i>                           | 無爲                       | <i>Wuwei</i>           | "Sect of Inactivity"   |
| <b>Y</b>                                |                          |                        |  |
| <i>yam (C)</i>                          | 陰                        | <i>yin</i>             | feminine principal in nature   |
| <i>yamen</i>                            | 衙門                       | <i>yamen</i>           | government office  |
| <i>Yan-uen Shek</i>                     | 姻緣石                      | <i>Yinyuan Shi</i>     | Marriage Affinity Rock   |
| <i>yang</i>                             | 陽                        | <i>yang</i>            | masculine principal in nature  |

| <u><b>Text</b></u>                         | <u><b>Characters</b></u> | <u><b>Pinyin</b></u> | <u><b>English meaning</b></u>  |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------|--|
| <i>Yang/Hsiang</i>                         | 羊                        | <i>Yang/Xiang</i>    | good omen periods  |
| <i>Yao Ch'ih Chin Mu/Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu</i> | 瑤池金母                     | <i>Yaochi Jinmu</i>  | Golden Mother of the Yao Pool  |
| <i>Yao-ch'ih Men</i>                       | 瑤池門                      | <i>Yaochi Men</i>    | name of a Daoist sect  |
| <i>yap-hui (C)</i>                         | 入回                       | <i>ruhui</i>         | go in again (said of disease)  |
| <i>yeung (C)</i>                           | 陽                        | <i>yang</i>          | masculine principal in nature  |
| <i>yin</i>                                 | 陰                        | <i>yin</i>           | feminine principal in nature   |
| <i>Yin Ch'u (Ts'u)</i>                     | 陰娶                       | <i>Yinqu</i>         | ghost marriage   |
| <i>Yin-en</i>                              | 引恩                       | <i>Yinen</i>         | sectarian rank, literally means "conducting (or guiding) grace"                    |
| <i>Yin Yuan Tieh</i>                       | 姻緣牒                      | <i>Yinyuan Die</i>   | Peace Loving Couple Credential (paper charm)                                       |
| <i>Yu Huang Tien</i>                       | 玉皇殿                      | <i>Yuhuang Dian</i>  | Jade Emperor Temple, Singapore   |
| <i>yuan</i>                                | 苑                        | <i>yuan</i>          | park; used for temples; a Buddhist nunnery   |
| <i>yuan</i>                                | 院                        | <i>yuan</i>          | building surrounded by a wall; used for temples; hospitals and other institutions, |
| <i>yuan-tsu</i>                            | 原子                       | <i>yuanzi</i>        | original elements  |
| <i>yun-ch'eng</i>                          | 雲城                       | <i>yuncheng</i>      | cloud city   |
| <i>Yunü</i>                                | 玉女                       | <i>Yunü</i>          | Jade Maidens   |
| <b>Z</b>                                   |                          |                      |  |
| <i>zhaitang</i>                            | 齋堂                       | <i>zhaitang</i>      | vegetarian house   |



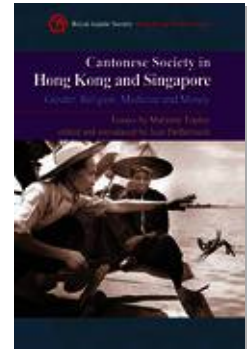
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## Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore

Jean DeBernardi

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