

SECRET RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES IN NORTH CHINA IN THE MING DYNASTY

by Chao Wei-pang

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Huang Yü-pien (黃育禰), tzŭ jen-ku (壬谷), was the magistrate of Ch'ing-ho (清河), a district in the south of Chihli (Hopei 河北), in the years 18?—1833, during which a number of secret religious societies flourished. By the order of the Manchu government all these societies were prohibited, because they were supposed to be rebellious organizations. Huang Yü-pien proclaimed the edict forbidding these societies and printed his proclamation in the form of a pamphlet, 30,000 copies of which were distributed to the villages of this and neighbouring districts. In 1833 he was transferred to the magistrate of Chü-lü, another district in South Chihli where these societies were also prevalent. During the suppression of these societies, he confiscated 20 books called Canons (經) or divine rolls (寶卷), published by them at the end of the Ming Dynasty. In the next year he wrote a book of 3 *chüan*, under the title *P'o-hsieh Hsiang-pien* (破邪詳辯), i.e. Criticizing the Heterodoxy in Detail. In writing this book, he took the 20 canons or divine rolls and the deposition of the leaders of these societies as his main sources of information. Five years later, when he had been transferred to the magistrate of Ts'ang-chow (滄州), near Tientsin, he found 31 kinds of canons or divine rolls, published by secret religious societies, of which only five kinds were included in those he found in Chü-lü; then he wrote a fourth *chüan* of the *P'o-hsieh Hsiang-pien* based on the new materials. In the *P'o-hsieh Hsiang-pien* the author criticised the canons and divine rolls one by one. In each case he gave the title and quoted several sentences from the author before criticising it. Moreover he separated the quotations from his own words by a mark. This is a great advantage to all who want to study these secret societies when the original publications are not accessible. These quotations are very valuable though not first-hand material. (The canons and divine rolls belonged to several societies which were similar in nature). Although the author of the *P'o-hsieh Hsiang-pien* did not indicate to which society a certain canon or roll belonged, this can be learned from the title and the contents mentioned in the *P'o-hsieh Hsiang-pien*. The present paper is based mainly on this book, in which the reprint edition in the *kuei-wei* (癸未) year of Kuang-hsü (i.e. 1883) is used.

I. HISTORIES AND DOCTRINES

In the *Ku-fo T'ien-chen K'ao-cheng Lung-hua Pao Chüan* (古佛天真老證龍華寶卷) sixteen religious societies and their founders are mentioned;¹ they are:

(Name of society)	(Name of founder)
<i>Hung-yang chiao</i> (紅陽教)	P'iao-kao Tsu (飄高祖)
<i>Ching-k'ung chiao</i> (淨空教)	Ching-k'ung Seng (淨空僧)
<i>Wu-wei chiao</i> (無爲教)	Ssu-wei Tsu (四維祖)
<i>Western Ta-ch'eng chiao</i> (西大乘教)	Lü P'u-sa (呂菩薩)
<i>Huang-t'ien chiao</i> (黃天教)	P'u-ching Tsu (普淨祖)
<i>Lung-t'ien chiao</i> (龍天教)	Mi P'u-sa (米菩薩)
<i>Nan-wu chiao</i> (南無教)	Sun-shih Tsu (孫師祖)
<i>Nan-yang chiao</i> (南陽教)	Nan-yang Mu (南陽母)
<i>Wu-ming chiao</i> (悟明教)	Wu-ming Tsu (悟明祖)
<i>Chin-shan chiao</i> (金山教)	Pei-hsiang Tsu (悲相祖)
<i>Tun-wu chiao</i> (頓悟教)	Tun-wu Tsu (頓悟祖)
<i>Chin-ch'an chiao</i> (金蟬教)	Chin-ch'an Tsu (金蟬祖)
<i>Huan-yüan chiao</i> (還源教)	Huan-yüan Tsu (還源祖)
<i>Ta-ch'eng chiao</i> (大乘教)	Shih-fo Tsu (石佛祖)
<i>Yüan-tun chiao</i> (圓頓教)	P'u-shan Tsu (普善祖)
<i>Shou-yüan chiao</i> (收源教)	Shou-yüan Tsu (收源祖)

But the history and doctrines of only a few of these societies are known.

1) *The Hung-yang Chiao*

The *Hung-yang chiao* was also called *Hun-yüan chiao* (混元教). According to the *Hun-yüan Hung-yang Hsüeh-hu Pao Ch'an* (混元紅陽血潮寶懺),² it was founded in the year *chia-wu* (甲午) of the Wan-li period (1594) by P'iao-kao Tsu. Among the secret societies of the Ming Dynasty probably this was the first. Huang Yü-pien says: "P'iao-kao should be considered the first to institute a religious society; then Huan-yüan and others rose one after another to start similar organizations."³ P'iao-kao was an alias of the founder of the *Hung-yang chiao*; Huang Yü-pien says that he was a native of Hung-tung (洪洞) in Shansi and

1) *Po-hsieh* I, p. 14.

2) *Po-hsieh* II, p. 3; cf. *The hung-yüan hung-yang hsien-hsing chieh-kuo ching*, *Po-hsieh* II, p. 1.

3) I. 3.

that his name was Kao-yang (高陽)⁴ This society lasted to the Ch'ing dynasty. The *Ta-ch'ing Lü-li* (大清律例) in the section of Prohibiting the Heterodoxy (禁邪教類) reads: "The *Hung-yang chiao* and some other religious organizations with various names do not train their members to recite charms, but worship the old Ancestor P'iao-kao."⁵ In the *P'o-hsieh hsiang-pien* four canons of this sect are quoted and criticised. They are:

Hun-yüan hung-yang hsien-hsing chieh-kuo ching

(混元紅陽顯性結果經),

Hun-yüan hung-yang ta-fa-tsu ming ching

(混元紅陽大法祖明經),

Hun-yüan hung-yang hsueh-hu pao ch'an

(混元紅陽血潮寶懺),

Hun-yüan wu-shang ta-tao yüan-miao chen ching

(混元無上大道元妙真經).

About ten years ago Cheng Chen-tuo (鄭振鐸) came from Shanghai to Peiping and bought many Buddhist divine rolls, of which two kinds belong to this society also.⁶

About the doctrines of this sect we know the following points:

a) The three periods of the world.

The evolution of the human world is divided into three periods: the *ch'ing-yang* (青陽) period, the *hung-yang* (紅陽) period and the *pai-yang* (白陽) period. The character *ch'ing* means green or blue, *hung* means red and *pai* means white. The present is the *hung-yang* period. Therefore the society is called the *hung-yang* society. The past was the *ch'ing-yang* period, and the future will be the *pai-yang* period. Each period is governed by a founder of religion: the *hung-yang* period is governed by *Shih-chia-fo* (釋迦佛 Sakyamuni), the *ch'ing-yang* period by *Jan-teng Tao-jen* (燃燈道人), and the *pai-yang* period by *Mi-lo Fo* (彌勒佛 Maitreya).

b) The Empty Native Land (真空家鄉).

The Empty Native Place was the paradise of this sect. It was supposed to be the place of happiness where men were immortal, where there was no birth, no old age, no sickness and no death, and where there was no prejudice.⁷

4) IV. p. 20. b. Huang Yü-pien says also that Kao Yang, the founder of the **Huang-yang** society, was only the first man who was called P'iao-kao Tsu; Han T'ai Hu (韓泰湖), a native of Ch'ü-chou (曲周), Chihli, was also so called, and there were some others who also assumed this name.

5) The explanation of these three terms, cf. p. 98.

6) Jan-teng Tao-jen.

7) cf. II. p. 1. and 2.

c) The Empty Old Ancestor (真空老祖)

This religious society worshipped the Empty Old Ancestor as the highest god. He was also called the Real Old Ancestor (至真老祖). It is related that one day he sat on the lotus throne and had a discussion with the other gods about the people in the East Country (東土), i.e. China, who had all forgotten their native place and were plunged in floating visions. At last he sent P'iao-kao, his fifth-generation pupil, to preach among them.⁸ Besides the Old Ancestor this society also worshipped the Eternal Mother (無生老母), but her position did not seem to be so eminent.

d) The Lake of Blood (血潮)

They held that the women produced blood and dirty water when they gave birth to children, this water and blood would flow into a lake which was called the Lake of Blood. When a woman died, she had to go to the lake and drink all that she had contributed. But if some members of the Hung-yang society were invited to hold the Holy Blood Lake Meeting (血潮聖會) and recite the canons of the society when a woman died, then she would be released from this penalty. This society had a book of the canons called *Hun-yüan hung-yang hsueh-hu Pao-ch'an* (混元紅陽血潮寶懺) probably composed for this purpose,

2) *Huan-yüan chiao* (還源教)

The founder of this society was called Huan-yüan Tsu. He was a native of the town Tung-sheng-wei (東勝衛) in Luan-chow (灤州), Yung-p'ing Prefecture (永平府),⁹ and founded the society in the 16th year of the Wan-li (萬曆) period (1588).¹⁰ In the *P'o-hsieh hsiang-pien* three canons of this sect are quoted. They are:

Hsiao-shih Wu-hsing huan-yüan pao-chüan, 24 p'in

(銷釋悟性還源寶卷),

K'ai-hsin chieh-kuo pao-chüan, 24 p'in (開心結果寶卷),

Ming-cheng ti-yü pao-chüan, 24 p'in (明証地獄寶卷).

Its doctrine

a) Synthesis of the three religions

It was a general trend from the end of Sung to combine some elements of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism into one system. All the religious societies mentioned in this paper belonged to this trend, but it

8) cf. II. p. 3. b.

9) I. p. 16. In fact the district Luan-chow did not belong to the Prefecture Yung-p'ing; there must be a mistake.

10) I. p. 16.

was only this society which preached explicitly the synthesis of the three religions. Sometimes they called their canons the Canons of the Three Religions (三教經).¹¹

b) The mountain without shadow (無影山)

The members of this society said that the gods lived on the mountain without shadow or the Spiritual Mountain (靈山), where the soul of man would also go when he succeeded in cultivating himself. They said that on this mountain Huan-yuan, the founder of the society, went into the world after bidding his seven disciples, one of whom was called Chen Yüan-hsing (真圓性), to go back to the mountains from which they had come and there cultivate themselves. Later on his "round light" (圓光)¹² returned to the mountain and left a note to his disciples. When Chen Yüan-hsing came here he saw the note telling the pupils that if they wanted to see their master again, they should come to join the meeting on the Spiritual Mountain. Then Chen Yüan-hsing went about calling all the disciples to come together to the mountain, where they would always stay with their master and would not reincarnate.¹³

In the canon of this sect the term "Native Country" was sometimes used for paradise,¹⁴ but it was not clear whether it was the same as the Spiritual Mountain or not.

c) Hell

A divine roll of this society told a long story about Huan-yüan's visit to hell. It relates that Huan-yüan received from the Old Buddha of the Spiritual Mountain (靈山古佛) the Stick without a Name (無名桂杖). With this stick in hand he could ascend to heaven and descend into hell. The hell was described more or less the same as that of Taoism. At last Huan-yüan hung eight golden boards in the eighteen prisons of hell and wrote six sacred formulas on the walls of its six offices, so that all souls in hell were saved.¹⁵

d) The Eight Precious Objects

This sect considered the eight precious objects (八寶) as very important. They held that when Chen-hsing gave up his body and came back to Native Country, Old Buddha bestowed upon him eight precious objects:¹⁶

11) I. p. 21 b.

12) "round light" is here a term for the spirit.

13) I. p. 20 b.

14) I. p. 22.

15) I. p. 28 b.

16) I. p. 16 — 17.

1) *T'ung-t'ien pao* (通天寶), lit. precious object reaching the heaven and stars. Whoever held this sacred object would be able to control the sky, sun, moon.

2) *Huei-chu pao* (慧珠寶), or pearl of wisdom. This sacred object was secretly put in front of Buddha. The man who possessed it would be able to see as far as one hundred thousand li.

3) *T'an-hsiang pao* (壇香寶) or sacred object of sandalwood.— They called the incense by this name.

4) *Mou-ni pao* (牟尼寶).— This term is probably derived from the Sanskrit *muni*. It was said that even the King of Hades feared the man who had this object.

5) *Chin-sheng pao* (金聖寶) or the golden sacred object.— The value of this object was not clearly explained.

6) *Wu-chia pao* (無價寶).— This object was able to change the weather and protect the owner from wind and rain.

7) *Chang-sheng pao* (障聖寶).— A man who had this object could go anywhere he liked and come back home at once no matter how far it was.

The eighth precious object was not mentioned.

In another place¹⁷ the eight precious objects were explained in a different way; they were the ears, the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the hands, the heart, the feet and the *mou-ni chin-pao* which was said to be hidden in the body.

e) The ten steps of self-cultivation

Sitting in meditation as the Buddhists do was considered an important means of self-cultivation. There were ten steps of development. The first step was "to take up the brilliance from the bottom of the sea" (海底撈明). The brilliance was the soul substance, which was imagined to be a brilliant ball and was therefore also called the round light (圓光). The beginning of self-cultivation was to try to find it in the abdomen. The last step of self-cultivation was when it passed through the K'un-lun (透出崑崙). K'un-lun was the crown of the head. As the result of self-cultivation by sitting in meditation, the soul substance was supposed to be able to come out through the crown of the head and to go up to the heavenly palace.¹⁸

17) I. p. 18.

18) I. p. 21. cf. I. p. 23.

3) *Huang-t'ien chiao*

This society was supposed to have been founded by P'u-ching tsu (普靜祖). Its history was unknown. In the *P'o-hsieh Hsiang-pien* was quoted a canon entitled *P'u-ching ju-lai yao-shih t'ung-t'ien pao-chüan* (普靜如來鑰匙通天寶卷), which probably belonged to this society. It preached very strange doctrines, for example: a) That the heart was like the dragon, and the will like the tiger; human nature was violent but fate was mild. The heart was represented by Monk T'ang (Hsüan Chuang 玄奘), the will by his white horse, fate by Sha Seng, the spirit by Chu Pa-chieh (豬八戒), and the temper by Sun Wu-k'ung.¹⁹ b) Instead of the eight precious objects, this society preached the seven precious objects. They were the spermary, breath, blood, brain, marrow, kidneys and heart. The spermary was compared to mercury, the breath to fine jade, the blood to gold, the brain to efficacious pills, the marrow to crystal, the kidneys to the oyster, and the heart to coral. It was said that those seven precious objects in the body could consolidate into the drug of immortality.²⁰

c) A man was born with five kinds of male energy (called five *ch'i*), and a woman with five kinds of female energy (called five *shen*). If a man could absorb the female energy in sexual intercourse or a woman could absorb that of the male, he or she would become immortal.²¹

4) *Ta-ch'eng-chiao*

The founder of this society is unknown. It had two branches, the Western and the Eastern, at the end of the Ming Dynasty. The leader of the Western *Ta-ch'eng chiao* was Lü-niu (呂牛), called Lü P'u-sa (Buddha Lü) by his followers. The Leader of the Eastern *Ta-ch'eng chiao* was Wang K'un (王坤), called Shih-fo Tsu (石佛祖), because he lived in the town Shih-fo-ssu (石佛寺).²² The name of this sect 大乘教 was also written 大成教. In the beginning of the Ch'ing dynasty it still prevailed.

The *Tung-hua Lu* (東華錄) states that the leader of this society, a Manchu whose family name was Wang, lived in the town Shih-fo K'ou (石佛口) in Luan-chow. Under his direction there were two men in charge of the organization of the society. One was Ch'ou Shih-jung (周世榮), who lived in the village Ch'ü-lü Ts'un (曲呂村) in Jao-yang-hsien (饒陽縣), and the other was Wang Ying (王瑛), who lived in Kung-chia T'ai (貢家臺), Shen-hsien (深縣).²³ In the reign of Tao-

19) II. p. 8 b. 9.

20) II. p. 8 b.

21) II. p. 9.

22) IV. p. 17.

23) **Tung-hua Lu**, 29th day of the 11th month, in the 10th year of Yung-cheng (雍正).

kuang (道光) some of the members were seized by the government and some prominent ones were even put to death.²⁴ No canon quoted in the *P'o-hsieh pien-cheng* can be definitely attributed to this society. Therefore we know nothing of its doctrine.

5) *Shou-yüan chiao*

The founder of this society was called Kung-ch'ang (弓長). These two characters make the character Chang, very probably his family name. This society appeared later than the others and included nearly all the elements of the previous societies in its system. An important canon of this society was the *Ku-fo-t'ien-chen K'ao-cheng lung-hua pao-ching* (古佛天真考證龍華寶經) composed of 24 parts. This canon was quoted and criticized at full length in the *P'o-hsieh pien-cheng*; hence we have more material about the doctrine taught.

a) Origin of the universe

According to the doctrine of this society at first there were no heaven and earth, no sun and moon. From the void emerged an old Buddha, by the name of Wu-chi t'ien-chen ku-fo (無極天真古佛), who arranged heaven and earth; and a goddess called Eternal Mother (無生老母), who then took charge of heaven. There is no mention of where Eternal Mother came from and what relation she bore to Old Buddha. Mankind is said to have originated from Eternal Mother, who gave birth to the twins, Fu Hsi (伏羲) and Nü Wa (女媧), though brother and sister, they married and became the first parents of mankind, begetting sixty-nine hundred thousand children, who were sent to the East Land (東土), i.e. China.²⁵

b) Institution of the society

The children of Eternal Mother indulged in vanity and lost their original nature. Then Eternal Mother wanted to call them back and sent Old Buddha to the East Land. He was born in a village called Ta-pao Chuang (大寶莊).²⁶ At first he was like other boys, but when he became old enough he was inspired and called by the Jade Emperor.²⁷ He went to the Native Land to interview Eternal Mother and she taught him the "ten steps of self-cultivation (十步修業)." Then he founded the *Shou-yüan chiao*. It was he who was called Kung-ch'ang tsu.²⁸

24) I.

25) I. p. 1—2.

26) Where this village was is unknown.

27) Jade Emperor is the highest deity of Taoism, but here he is taken as a deity under the Eternal Mother in rank.

28) I. p. 2—4.

c) Calamities

This society made a prophecy that great calamities would come: in the year *chia-tzu* (甲子) of the lower *yüan* (下元)²⁹ a fatal calamity would be sent down, in the year *hsin-ssu* (辛巳) the people would starve because they would get no crops, and in the year *kuei-wei* (癸未) pestilence would prevail. According to its calculation the year *chia-tzu* of the lower *yüan* would be the 4th year T'ien-ch'i (1624 A.D.), the year *hsin-ssu* would be the 14th year of Ch'ung-cheng (1641 A.D.) and the year *kuei-wei* would be the 16th year of Ch'ung-cheng (1643).

The prophecy also foretold that in those years the four elements, earth, water, fire and wind, would all shake at the same time so that not only the people would suffer death but also the gods would have no place to live on the earth. The society distributed to the people written charms, which were supposed to have the power to save them. At the same time, by the order of Eternal Mother, the Highest Old Emperor (太上老君) had built large soul boats, 3,600 large-sized golden boats, 12,000 medium-sized golden boats, 8,400 small-sized soul boats and 18,000 canoes to save the people: and Eternal Mother ordered 5,000 and several hundred gods, goddesses and immortals, 96 million divine children, 84,000 golden boys and jade-girls, and 18,000 beneficial guardian deities to man the boats and save the people.³⁰ Three hundred sixty Lu-pan, gods of the carpenters, made the boats using a compass to survey the earth, water, fire and wind.³¹

d) Lung-hua Meeting (龍華會)

According to this society its members would go by boat to attend the Lung-hua Meeting.³² The meeting would be held in the Tu-tou T'ai-huang Palace (都斗太皇宮), in the Native Land. The palace was described as a most beautiful place where the ground was paved with gold, the ways were lined with golden ropes, and the ponds, built with seven kinds of precious stones, contained the eight kinds of water of virtuous deeds. The Eternal Mother sat on a lotus throne in the palace. Around the palace were various beautiful buildings.³³

Five thousand and several hundred Buddhas and gods, 96 million divine children, boys and girls from various countries would attend the meeting. At the meeting examinations of morality and good deeds would be held and ranks would be granted to those who had great merits. There were all together thirty-six kinds of examinations.³⁴

29) Lower *yüan* (下元) is also called the third *yüan* (三元).

30) I. p. 12.

31) I. p. 12 b.

32) The meaning of the term **lung-hua** see p. 104.

33) I. p. 1 b and p. 11 b.

34) I. p. 12.

e) The registration

When a new member was initiated into the society, his name was written on a piece of yellow paper, called *piao* (表) or memorial. The *piao* was burnt as an offering to the Eternal Mother. This was called "to register." After that the new member received a certificate called *yün-ch'eng shou-chüan* (雲程手卷), or passport to heaven. It was believed that his soul would go to the Eternal Mother with it when he died. Those who had not registered would not be allowed to attend the Lung-hua Meeting.³⁵ The first ten numbers of the registration were held by the following Buddhas and gods: Mi-to Chiao-chu (彌陀教主), Fa-wang-fo (法王佛), San-yang-fo (三陽佛), Wu-liang-fo (無量佛), Huang-chi-fo (皇極佛), T'ien-yüan-fo (天元佛), T'ai-pao-fo (太寶佛), P'u-shan-fo (普善佛), Ju-t'ung-fo (儒童佛 Confucius), and T'ien-chen-fo (天真佛) or Kung-ch'ang.³⁶ During the registration, sacrifice would be offered to the Eternal Mother, for which the new member had to pay.

The members of this society presented to the Eternal Mother three kinds of *piao* or memorials: the *K'ai-huang chen-piao* (開荒真表) every month, the *kuei-chia sheng-piao* (歸家聖表), and *Pa-huang chen-piao* (拔鎮真表). By the first kind of *piao* they reported to the Eternal Mother their missionary work; by the second they reported the names of the new members; by offering the third, it was believed, they could diminish their crimes.³⁷ During the offering of *piao* incense was burned in the hope that when the gods smelt the incense they would descend.³⁸

f) Inheritance of the lamp

The inheritance of the lamp is a Buddhist term meaning the inheritance of the Buddhist doctrines, which are compared to the light. The *Shou-yüan chiao* took this term and said that Sakyamuni inherited the lamp from Jan-teng-fo (燃燈佛), Maitreya (彌勒佛) inherited it from Sakyamuni, T'ien-chen Lao-tsu (天真老祖) from Maitreya, and then both leaders and common members of the three schools and five branches with their various sub-branches could all inherit the lamp.³⁹ It was said, moreover, that Jan-teng-fo had called the first meeting of Lung-hua Huei, Sakyamuni the second meeting, and Maitreya the third.⁴⁰

35) III. p. 3—4, I. p. 11 b.

36) I. p. 15.

37) I. p. 5. (開荒).

38) I. p. 6.

39) I. p. 6.

40) I. p. 1 b.

6) *Wu-wei chiao* (無爲教)

Two divine rolls quoted in the *P'o-hsieh Hsiang-pien* probably belong to this sect: *Huang-chi chin-tan chiu-lien cheng-hsin kwei-chen huan-hsiang pao-chüan* (皇極金丹九蓮正信皈真還鄉寶卷),⁴¹ *Fo-shuo ta-fang-kuang yüan-chuo-siu to-lo liao-i pao-chüan* (佛說大方廣圓覺修多羅了義寶卷).⁴²

The Eternal Mother is supposed to have sent Mi-lo (彌陀) to this world to save the people drowned in worldly pleasures and going astray. He disguised himself as a common person and founded the Wu-wei sect, whose doctrine was in most parts the same as that of the *Shou-yüan chiao*.⁴³ About the evolution of religions they claimed that the Buddha of the past had superintended the religions for 108,000 years, the Buddha of the present would superintend for 27,000 years, and the Buddha of the future would superintend for 97,200 years. The Buddha would thus superintend for 232,200 years.⁴⁴ Moreover, out of the 96 million divine children, two million souls had been saved by Wu-chi (無極), two million souls by T'ai-chi (太極), and 92 million more were still to be saved by Huang-chi (皇極).

This society divided itself into eight branches, called by the names of the eight diagrams.⁴⁵ Very probably the *Pa-kua chiao* (八卦教) of the Ch'ing dynasty took its origin in this society.

7) *Pai-yang chiao* (白陽教)

At the beginning of the Ch'ing dynasty the *Pai-yang chiao* prevailed in North China. It probably evolved out of the *Hung-yang chiao*;⁴⁶ its name derived from the term *Pai-yang chiao* (white yang) period, which, according to the doctrine of this society, would come when the *hung-yang* (red yang) period would end. This society states that now the moon became round on the eighteenth, instead of the fifteenth day of each month; and that when the moon would become round on the 23rd day of each month, it would be the end of the *hung-yang* period and the *pai-yang* period would begin.⁴⁷

The society had its own method of reckoning time. It took 18 hours (one hour = two western hours), instead of 12, as one day and 18

41) IV. p. 23 b.

42) IV. p. 19 b.

43) IV. p. 23 b. p. 19 b.

44) IV. p. 24.

45) IV. p. 25 b.

46) IV. p. 25.

47) IV. p. 26.

months as one year. In fact one year had 810 ordinary days.⁴⁸ Now a secret religious society called *I-Hsin T'ien-Tao* (一心天道) in Tientsin also uses this calendar.

The members of the society worshipped the Eternal Mother, who was born in the K'ang-hsi period (1662—1721) in a village called Kuo-kung-ying (國公營) of Ch'ing-yüan (清苑) district in Hopei; she was divorced by her husband after giving birth to a son, who was later struck to death by lightning. Then she lived in a Buddhist temple near Kuo-kung-ying and preached the doctrine of the *Pai-yang chiao*. After her death the followers buried her behind the temple and built a brick pagoda for her.⁴⁹

II. CANONS AND DIVINE ROLLS

Huang Yü-pien found in Chü-lü and Tsang-chow 46 kinds of canons and divine rolls published by those religious societies in the period from Wan-li to Ch'ung-cheng (1573—1643).⁵⁰ Recently Cheng Chen-tuo (鄭振鐸) bought in Peiping some of these canons and rolls which were printed in the Wan-li period under the auspices of the eunuchs.⁵¹

In the collection of Huang Yü-pien there are only four canons,⁵² the others being divine rolls. In Cheng Chen-tuo's collection only one kind is entitled canon. Out of these five kinds of canons four belong to the *Hun-yüan chiao* (also called *Hung-yang chiao*) and one to the *Shou-yüan chiao*. Those which belong to the *Hun-yüan chiao* are in prose; the one which belongs to the *Shou-yüan chiao* is in verse, in the same style as the divine rolls. In outer form the canons are like the canons of the Buddhists;

48) III. p. 26.

49) III. p. 26.

50) I. preface, III. preface.

51) Cheng Chin-tuo's *Chung-kuo Su Wen-hsüeh shih* (中國俗文學史), vol. II. p. 317. Cheng got a number of divine rolls, among which he ascribes two kinds to the *Hung-yüan chiao*; in fact in his collection there are seven kinds belonging to these secret societies and not to Buddhism.

52) The canons:

- 1) *Ku-fo t'ien-chen K'ao-cheng lung-hua pao-ching* (古佛天真考證龍華寶經), quoted in I, pp. 1.
- 2) *Hun-yüan hung-yang hsien-hsing chieh-kuo ching* (混元紅陽顯性結果經) quoted in II. pp. 1.
- 3) *Hun-yüan hung-yang ta-fa-tsu ming-ching* (混元紅陽大法祖明經), quoted in II. p. 2.
- 4) *Hun-yüan wu-shang ta-tao yüan-miao chen-ching* (混元無上大道元妙真經), quoted in II. p. 3 b.

The canon in Cheng's collection is the *Hun-yüan hung-yang chung-hua yao-ching* (混元紅陽中華寶經).

for example, the *Ku-fo T'ien-chen K'ao-cheng lung-hua pao-ching* is divided into 24 chapters, each having a subject similar to that of the Buddhist and Taoist canons.

The greater part of the publications of these societies were called divine rolls and imitated the Buddhist divine rolls in style. The Buddhist divine roll evolved from the *pien-wen* (變文) of the T'ang dynasty. At that time there was a custom that the Buddhist priests preached the doctrine to the public in the temples. On this occasion they not only explained by instruction but through songs. — Their texts, written in prose and verse alternatively, were called *pien-wen*.⁵³ This custom lasted until the reign of Chin-tsung of the Sung dynasty, and then the divine rolls developed, which were in structure and style same as the *pien-wen*. The earliest divine roll we know is the *Hsiang-shan pao-chüan* (香山寶卷), which is traditionally said to have been written by P'u Ming (普明), a Buddhist priest, in the year 1103 A.D.⁵⁴ The divine rolls of the secret religious societies of the Ming dynasty imitated those of the Buddhist priests not only in structure and style but also in content. Even the title often begins with the characters of *fo-shuo* (佛說) i.e. "the Buddha said."⁵⁵

A) *The content*

Cheng Chen-tuo classifies the divine rolls into two kinds: the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist. The Buddhist rolls either preach Buddhist doctrines or tell Buddhist stories. The subjects of the non-Buddhist divine rolls are stories of the non-Buddhist deities, folk-tales, or miscellaneous matters.⁵⁶ The canons and divine rolls of the secret religious societies may be similarly classified into two kinds: a) the canons and divine rolls expounding their doctrines or telling stories of the respective societies, b) divine rolls with stories of deities and folk-tales as their subjects. The first part of the present paper is based on the material from the first kind of canons and divine rolls. The material from the second kind will be dwelt upon in the following:

All these secret religious societies were synthetic in nature; they intended to include all the deities they knew, Buddhist and Taoist, in their system and to put them under the role of the highest one, Old Ancestor or Eternal Mother. The stories of these deities were taken as the subject of the divine rolls.

53) cf. Hsiang Ta (向達), *T'ang-tai su-chiang k'ao* (唐代俗講考), *Yenching Journal of Chinese Studies* (燕京學報), No. 16 (1939), pp. 119-132.

54) cf. Cheng Chen-tuo, *Chung-kuo Su Wen-hsüeh shih* II, chapter 11, pp. 306 — 308.

55) IV. p. 27 b.

56) Cheng Chen-tuo, vol. II. p. 310 — 311.

a) Kuan Kung (關公).—There are two rolls⁵⁷ dealing with the story of Kuan Kung and his sworn brothers. The story is the same as that of the novel *San Kuo t'ung-su yen-i* (三國通俗演義), but Kuan Kung is said to be the pupil of Shih Luo (師羅), a form of the Goddess of Mercy from the South Sea. The story describes how he cultivated himself to become a deity.

b) The rulers of purgatory.—The story tells how the ten rulers sat in meditation.⁵⁸

c) Ti-ts'ang Wang P'u-sa (地藏王菩薩).⁵⁹—The Indian Dhyani-Bodhisattva is called Ti-ts'ang Wang in China. This roll tells how the monk Mu Lien (目連) broke open the gate of Feng-tu Ch'eng, the city of the dead, with his stick of nine rings. He did it to save his mother, who was imprisoned there. At the same time eighty-four thousand souls confined in this city all escaped. Then Mu Lien went with his mother to the Spiritual Mountain to see Buddha and was appointed by Buddha as Ti-ts'ang Wang P'u-sa, the Lord of Hell, in order to get back the souls who had escaped from Feng-to Ch'eng. The story is based on two Buddhist tales, one of which tells that a Brahman maiden saved her mother from the torments of the damned by making daily offerings before the image of an ancient Buddha and that later she became a Bodhisattva;⁶⁰ and the other tells that Monk Mu Lien saved his dead mother from hell by breaking open the gate of the city with his crosier. The divine roll combines them into one.

d) The Goddess of T'ai-shan (泰山娘娘).—She went to the West and interviewed the Eternal Mother.⁶¹ The members of the secret societies worshipped the Goddess of T'ai-shan, they said, otherwise they could not go to see the Eternal Mother after death.

e) Hsi-wang Mu (西王母).—The story tells that Chin-chih Ta Hsien (金枝大仙 The Great Immortal of the Golden Bough) incarnated Chiang Yüan (姜嫄), the empress of Kao-hsin (高辛) and mother of Hou Chi (后稷), and that she became the Old Mother in the Moon Hall (月殿之老母) i.e. the Goddess Hsi-wang Mu, after death. It is also

57) *Hu-kuo you-min fu-mo pao-chüan* (護國佑民伏魔寶卷), quoted in vol. I, pp. 33—36; *San-i hu-kuo you-min fu-mo pao-chüan* (三義護國佑民伏魔寶卷) quoted in vol. IV, p. 1.

58) *T'ai-shan Tung-yüeh shih-wang pao-chüan* (泰山東嶽十王寶卷), quoted in vol. IV, p. 2.

59) *Ti-ts'ang P'u-sa chih-chang you-ming pao-chüan* (地藏菩薩執掌幽冥寶卷), quoted in vol. IV, p. 2 b. In the *Kuei-chia pao-en pao-chüan* (歸家報恩寶卷), quoted in vol. I, p. 32. The story of monk Mu Lien is also found there.

60) Cf. *Ti-Ts'ang P'u-sa pen-yuan ching* (地藏菩薩本願經).

61) *Ling-ying T'ai-shan Niang-niang pao-chüan* (靈應泰山娘娘寶卷), quoted in IV, p. 3 b.

said that Hsi-wang Mu was a form of the Eternal Mother. The story also treats of how Hsi-wang Mu examined the founders of the three religions, Confucius, Buddha and Lao Tan.⁶² This is a most absurd story. According to tradition Chin-chih Ta-hsien, Chiang Yüan, the Old Mother in the Moon Hall and Hsi-Wang Mu had no relation at all.

f) Li-shan Lao Mu (離山老母).—The story reads as follows: The Eternal Mother changed her name to Li-shan Lao Mu and left the Spiritual Mountain for the village Wang-chia-chuang (王家莊) in Liang-ch'eng (涼城) of the State Pien (汧國) to convert Wang Yuan-wai (王員外) and his third son, Wang Wen-hsiu (王文秀). She gave Wang Yuan-wai a picture, which was hung in the study of Wang Wen-hsiu, and Wang Wen-hsiu worshipped it morning and evening. Then a girl, whose name was Wang-ying (王英) came out of the picture and married Wen-hsiu. Later the Eternal Mother came and called them to go to Heaven.⁶³

g) The Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Buddha (千手千眼菩薩).—The story tells how Buddha converted the brothers Pao-chung (報忠) and Pao-hsiao (報孝), their mother and wives. While they were on the way to Hsiang-shan (香山) to fulfil their vows, they met the Eternal Mother on a wagon drawn by a white ox. She asked them to ride in her wagon to the Cave of Immortal Water (仙水洞) at the Heavenly River to see the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Buddha.⁶⁴

h) The Goddess of Mercy in the White Robe (白衣觀音).—She is the child-giving goddess. The story reads: Ch'ang Chin-li (常進禮) and his wife prayed to the goddess to give them a child, and they got a son and a daughter. Then the husband and wife together with the children went to the temple to fulfil their vow and then they went to the P'u-tuo Mountain (普陀山) and got a chance to see the Goddess of Mercy. In the story the method of how to live religiously is expounded.⁶⁵ The P'u-tuo Mountain is an island in the East China Sea near the Chekiang Province; it is considered to be the sacred mountain of the Goddess of Mercy.

i) The God of Medicine.—This is a story of a Taoist deity. The king of Ch'in (秦王) was ill, because spiritual worms ate the blood in his heart. He asked the God of Medicine to cure his disease. The god

62) **Hu-kuo Wei-ling Hsi-wang Mu pao-chüan** (護國威靈西王母寶卷), quoted in IV, p. 5—6.

63) **Fo Shuo Li-shan Mu pao-chüan**, quoted in IV, p. 6—7.

64) **Ch'ien-shou ch'ien-yen P'u-sa pao-en pao-chüan** 千手千眼菩薩報恩寶卷, quoted in IV, p. 7 b.

65) **Hsiao-shih Pai-i Kuan-yin P'u-sa sung ying-erh hsia-sheng pao-chüan** (銷釋白衣觀音菩薩送嬰兒下生寶卷), quoted in IV, p. 8.

spoke out the cause. But the worms heard it and hid themselves in the gall, where the probe could not touch them, so the god could not cure the king. However later the god cured the disease of Emperor Yung-Lo (永樂) of the Ming dynasty and the Emperor built a temple to worship him at Mo-chow (鄭州). In this roll it is also said that the Eternal Mother decides the sex, male or female, when a child is to be born.⁶⁶

The above nine rolls all take the stories of Buddhist and Taoist deities as their subject, but the stories are more or less changed and the doctrines of the secret societies are put in.

The following rolls have the popular tales, religious and profane, as their subjects:

j) The story [of the Emperor of Liang (梁皇).—The Empress, surnamed Hsi (郗), was the reincarnation of an earthworm. She wanted to tempt the famous Buddhist monk Chih Kung (志公) to break the commandment of observing a vegetable diet. After death she became a big snake, which coiled around a pillar in the imperial hall and prayed the Emperor to save her. Then the Emperor together with his prime-minister Pan-Jo (般若) and general Chih Huei (智慧) went to Huang-hua Tung (黃花洞 cave of yellow flowers) to invite Chih Kung to read the scriptures at the court, and the snake was saved and flew to heaven.⁶⁷ The Emperor in this story is Wu-ti of Liang State (梁武帝), a patron of Buddhism.

k) The story of the girl Huang (黃氏女).—This girl was only seven years old, but she abstained from meat, burned incense and read Buddhist scriptures every day. The king of Hades sent two messengers to call her to come to purgatory and see the ghosts there,⁶⁸ in order that she should tell it to the people.

l) The *Fo-tsu chuan-teng hsin-yin pao-chüan* (佛祖傳燈心印寶卷)⁶⁹ tells the story of the Buddhist patriarchs.

m) *The Hsiao-shih meng-chiang chung-lieh chen-chieh hsien-liang pao-chüan* (鎖釋孟姜忠烈貞節賢良寶卷)⁷⁰ takes a folk-tale as its subject. The story is about the lady Meng Chiang-nü (孟姜女), who sent winter clothes to her husband, who was building the Great Wall. The roll says that it was she who created the four seasons.

66) *Chi-ku ch'ung-hsiao yao-wang pao-chüan*, quoted in IV, p. 9.
IV, p. 9.

67) *Fo Shuo Liang-huang pao-chüan* (佛說梁皇寶卷), quoted in IV, p. 11.

68) *Fo Shuo huang-shih-nü k'an-ching pao-chüan* (佛說黃氏女看經寶卷), quoted in IV, p. 21.

69) quoted in vol. IV, p. 21. b.

70) quoted in vol. IV, p. 11. b.

n) *The P'u to hsin-sheng chiu-k'u pao-chüan* (普度新聲救苦寶卷)⁷¹ treats of the Emperor Ying-tsung of the Ming dynasty (明英宗). While the Emperor was leading an army to subdue a northern nomadic tribe, a mad woman tried to prevent him and advised him not to advance. He did not listen to her and finally was defeated and captured. It is said that it was the god Lü Tsu who disguised himself as a mad woman. While the Emperor was kept in the camp of the enemy, the god sent food to him and dug a well for him. After the Emperor had come back to his palace, the god often appeared there. Then a temple was built for him in Huang-ts'un (黃村), a village near the capital. This is also a popular tale. The roll adds to the tale that it was the Eternal Mother who had intended to save the Emperor, thus: the Eternal Mother changed to the Goddess of Mercy, the Goddess of Mercy changed to Lü Tsu and Lü Tsu disguised himself as a mad woman.

The above stories are only a skeleton of the substance of the divine rolls. Attached to them are explanations of how to lead a religious life and observe the ethical principles. The stories themselves are mostly popular tales. Even the stories about Buddhist and Taoist deities are only those which are very popular and well known to people. However they are more or less changed to suit the purpose of preaching the doctrines of these societies.

The rolls take these tales as their main subject, because the knowledge of the writers is limited and because they were intended to suit the taste of the people who read or listen to them. This shows that the societies are religious organizations of the lower classes.

B) *The style*

The canons and divine rolls are written in prose and verse alternatively. One paragraph in prose is followed by another in verse. From the viewpoint of folklore the verse is more interesting. It imitates the style of the Chinese theatre plays or the popular songs. Huang Yü-pien pointed out that the style of the canons and rolls is often like that of *K'un-ch'iang* theatre plays (崑腔):

“I have seen the performance of the *K'un-ch'iang* plays in the country. It often uses such tunes as are called *ch'ing-chiang-yin* (清江引), *chu-yün-fei* (駐雲飛), *huang-ying-erh* (黃鶯兒), *pai-lien-tsu* (白蓮詞), etc. The canons and rolls use the same tunes in order that they may be sung easily. They are written as theatre plays.”⁷²

Moreover, he shows that the *Pang-tse-ch'iang* (椰子腔) theatre plays often use the “ten-character sentence” (十字句). One sentence

71) quoted in vol. IV, p. 16.

72) vol. III, p. 28.

is composed of three parts, the first and second part each of three characters and the third part of four characters. The canons and rolls also imitate this style.⁷³ He gives as an example that *Fo Shuo Mi-tuo pao-chüan* (佛說彌陀寶卷) begins with this style and continues in it at some length.⁷⁴

The following sentences quoted from the rolls can show this style clearly:

或是男, 或是女, 本來不二; 都仗着, 無生母, 一氣先天.⁷⁵
 3 3 4 3 3 4

起爲頭, 上蒲團, 關門閉戶; 咬剛牙, 捲竹簾, 採取清風.⁷⁶
 3 3 4 3 3 4

Another striking feature of the style of the divine rolls is that they imitate also the style of the popular songs (俗曲). Huang Yü-pien says that the tune *K'u-wu-keng-ch'ü* (哭五更曲) is found in nearly every roll and that the style of the rolls is sometimes like that of *ku-erh tzu* (鼓兒詞), *ta-shih-pu-hsien* (打拾不閑) or *ta-lien-hua-lao* (打蓮花落).⁷⁴ The style of the following line quoted from the *Hu-kuo you-min fu-mo pao-chüan* (護國佑民伏魔寶卷) is said to be that of *ta-lien-hua-lao* but in fact is that of the "ten-character sentence" in the *Pang-tze-ch'iang* theatre play:

“手打着蓮花樂, 口把佛念, 動不動, 發現出無字真經。”

During the reciting of the canons and divine rolls musical instruments were probably used. In the country districts in North China there are still some similar organizations. They perform on musical instruments when they recite their canons.

III. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

First of all, it can be clearly seen that all these religious societies are synthetic in nature. Their doctrines are composed of elements from the popular Buddhism and Taoism. The most striking feature is the pre-

73) vol. III. p. 28.

74) quoted in vol. IV, p. 8. b.

75) V, 9. b.

76) IV, 2.

dominance of the concept "empty" and "non existence", which are expressed in terms such as "the Empty Home," "Old Empty Ancestor," "the Mountain without Shadow," etc. This shows clearly the influence of Buddhism. Another feature common to nearly all these religious societies is the practice of cultivating oneself by a certain method such as sitting in meditation, in order to become immortal or even a god. Such methods of self-cultivation are mostly of Taoist origin. Of course, the ethical doctrines of Confucianism are also an important component of the teachings of these societies. There is one society which even explicitly preaches the combination of the three religions.

An important factor in the doctrines of these societies is the division of human history into three periods, the green, red, and white.

The names of the *Hung-yang chiao*, probably the earliest of all these societies, and the *Pai-yang chiao* of the Ch'ing dynasty are derived from the idea that their time was just the transition from the red period to the white. In the doctrines of the *Shou-yüan chiao*, which is the most systematic, this element also plays an important role. Closely connected with this element is the prophecy that Mi-lo-fo (Maitreya) will come to the world again and take charge of the religions in place of Sakyamuni. This tradition also takes its origin in Buddhism. We shall deal with it first and then come to the division of the three periods.

In the *P'u-sa ch'u-t'ai ching* (菩薩處胎經) it is written that Mi-lo P'u-sa will be born in this land (India) after 5,670,000,000 years and will become Buddha under the *lung-hua* tree. It is also said that he will call the third meeting to preach the doctrines of Buddhism under the *lung-hua* tree in the *Hua-lin* Garden. Taking this tradition as a basis the *Mi-lo chiao* (彌勒教) was founded in the Sui (589-617) and T'ang (618-905) periods in China. This religious society flourished from then on, down to the end of Sung dynasty (960-1276) in North China, especially in the Hopei Province. The *Pai-lien chiao* (白蓮教 Society of White Lotus), which originated in the Sung dynasty in South China, passed to North China and adopted the prophecy of Mi-lo-fo's rebirth into its system. A prominent figure of the *Pai-lien chiao* was Han Shan-t'ung (韓山童) whose grand-father was banished from his native country to Yung-nien (永年), Hopei, for making propaganda for the secret society. Han Shan-t'ung followed his grand-father into exile and organized the *Pai-lien chiao* there. He got a great number of followers and rose into revolt against the Mongolian reign in 1351. The rebellion was not subdued till the fall of the Mongolian reign.⁷⁷

77) Concerning the history of the *Mi-lo chiao* and *Pai-lien chiao* cf. T'ao Hsi-sheng's (陶希聖) articles: *Ch'u-chi-ti pai-lien Ch'iao-huei* (初期的白蓮教會), *Shih*

The secret religious societies in the Ming dynasty took from *Mi-lo chiao*, very probably through the *Pai-lien chiao*, the prophecy that the world would become chaotic and that Mi-lo-fo would descend to the world.

In the Sung dynasty Ch'ai Wang (柴望) wrote a book entitled *Ping-ting Kuei-chien* (丙丁龜鑑), which means: warning against the *ping* and *ting* years. The Chinese use the sexagenary cycle to designate the year. He points out that in the Chinese history when the years *ping-wu* (丙午) and *ting-wei* (丁未) occur disasters shall happen. These events are generally called the calamities of *ping-wu* and *ting-wei*. According to the doctrine of the five elements the "heavenly stem" *ping* belongs to the fire, which is red. The Chinese also use the names of twelve animals to designate the cycle of twelve years, and they have a definite combination with the twelve earthly branches. According to this combination the branch *wei* is connected with *yang* (羊) the sheep. Hence the calamities of *ping-wu* and *ting-wei* are also called the *hung-yang*, or red sheep suffering (紅羊劫). But they said that when the *hung-yang* suffering would occur, then Mi-lo-fo should come and save the people.

The following interpretation was given: Their time was the *hung-yang* (red) period when Sakyamuni was the master of all religions; after it the *pai-yang* (white) period would come and Mi-lo-fo would take the place of Sakyamuni. Furthermore, before these two periods there will have been the *ch'ing-yang* (green) period, during which Jan-teng Lao-tsu will have been the master of all religions. Thus the doctrine of the three human eras was formed. In the *Chi-fu T'ung-chih* (畿輔通志),⁷⁸ we read that the *Pai-lien chiao* took the following eight characters as sacred words: *Chen-k'ung chia-hsiang wu-sheng fu-mu* (真空家鄉無生父母). The first four characters mean the Empty Native Land and the rest mean the Eternal Father and Mother; they are important elements in the doctrines of these societies, and also an evidence of the close connection between the religious societies discussed above and the *Pai-lien chiao*.

In a word the secret religious societies of the Ming dynasty in North China were the later expressions of the synthetic trends of Chinese religions. Historically they were closely connected with the *Mi-lo chiao* of T'ang dynasty and the *Pai-lien chiao* of Yüan dynasty, from which they inherited essential elements.

Huo (食貨) vol. I, No. 4; *Yüan-tai Mi-lo pai-lien chiao-huei ti pao-tung* (元代彌勒白蓮教會的暴動), *Shih Huo*, vol. I, No. 4; *Ming-tai Mi-lo pai-lien chiao chi-ch'i-tuo yao-tsei* (明代彌勒白蓮教及其他妖賊), *Shih Huo*, vol. I, No. 9.

78) by Li Hung-chang (1884), vol. 132. p. 61.

In the present time some secret or half secret religious societies are very active in North China, among which the *I-kuan Tao*⁷⁹ seems to have a historical connection with the religious societies of the Ming dynasty, especially the *Shou-yüan chia*. Though Ch'ang Kuan-pi (張光璧), the leader of the *I-kuan Tao*, claimed to have been taught by Old Buddha Mi-lo (彌勒古佛) to found this sect, its doctrine is the same as that of the religious societies of Ming in some essential points. The *I-kuan Tao* preaches also the three periods of human history but it says that the present time is the end of the white *yang* period. The Eternal Mother is also worshipped as the highest deity. The society is also said to have been founded by the Kung-ch'ang tsu (弓長祖) as the *Shou-yüan chiao* of Ming, but Kung (弓) and Ch'ang (長) form the character *chang* (張), which refers to Ch'ang Kuang-pi.

79) Cf. Willem A. Grootaers, *Une Société Secrète Moderne I-Koan-Tao*. *Folklore Studies*, vol. V, (1946).