

BACKGROUND OF THE *Chi*

THE HISTORY OF SPIRIT WRITING IN CHINA

The spirit-writing rituals which can be observed in Taiwan are the modern manifestation of a tradition which was first developed in the Sung dynasty (960–1279). This tradition began in part as a form of non-verbal divination by common folk, but by the eleventh century was centered on written messages from immortals and deified culture heroes. In this new form it was embraced by many literati as a means of foreknowing both personal fate and topics on civil service examinations. *Fu-chi* specialists appeared as well, some of them from the great body of literate people who were not directly concerned with government service or preparation for it. So it was that spirit-writing came to involve every level of those who could read and write, and even the illiterate, who came to *fu-chi* practitioners to seek healing or knowledge of the dead.

One theme in *fu-chi* revelations was moral injunctions from the gods. Although at first such injunctions were specific and short, by the seventeenth century this method was used to compose whole books of ethical teachings. By the mid-nineteenth century, if not before, popular religious sects began to write scripture texts with the divine pen, texts which for some groups took the place of *pao-chüan*. Connections between the two types of books are clear: there are *fu-chi* books called *pao-chüan*, and some *pao-chüan* have later commentaries attributed to deities and immortals. Although some old *pao-chüan* of the sectarian type continued to be used, and a few new ones were composed, by the twentieth century it appears that most sects relied on spirit-writing books. Why did this transition take place? Perhaps in part because government suppression made it dangerous to possess *pao-chüan*, so that sects turned more to oral tradition and meditation, as Susan Naquin has suggested (Naquin 1981b). A more positive reason is that in the closing decades of imperial history, *fu-chi* offered a direct way of reviving a tradition that was beleaguered on all sides. Through spirit-writing all the saints and heroes of old could speak again to reassure and give moral direction. Thus it should cause no surprise that this method was employed by all classes, from scholars to village artisans and peasants. We shall examine yet other reasons in the course of this book.

Rituals to call down gods and spirits have been practiced in China since at least the Chou dynasty (c 1100–256 B.C.). As Henri Maspero pointed

out (1978: 129): "As for music, its purpose was above all to make the gods and spirits come." This theme can be seen clearly in some of the ritual poems of the *Book of Odes* (*Shih ching* 詩經), where, as a result of correct sacrifice, "the divine protectors arrive." Indeed, the ancestor being invoked was believed to be physically present in the form of an "impersonator," perhaps his grandson, who represented him at the ritual feast (Karlgrén 1974: 162–163).

The dominant Chinese form of shamanism involved spirit possession, in which a spirit was believed to enter the body of the medium and transform him or her for a time into a divine person. In such a state the spirit medium could speak the words of a god for purposes of healing, prediction, or moral instruction. In Maspero's words, "When the spirit entered them, 'the body was that of the sorceress, but the heart was that of the god' who spoke through her mouth." Here again, there are textual references going back to the Chou dynasty (Maspero 1978: 116–119; Groot 1892–1910 VI: 1187–1211 *et passim*).

The earliest references to a book revealed by divine beings are to various antecedents of the *Classic of Great Peace* (*T'ai-p'ing ching* 太平經) from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D. One of these texts was "revealed . . . by a deity sent by the Celestial Emperor with the order to renew the mandate of the Han ruling house" (Seidel 1969–70: 217). Another was "... revealed to a Celestial Master by T'ai-shang Lao-chun" (i.e., Lao-tzu) (Kaltenmark 1979: 20). Other books were believed to be composed and bestowed by the gods as well, such as the *Sūtra on the Transformations of Lao-tzu* (*Lao-tzu pien-hua ching* 老子變化經), which Anna Seidel maintains was produced in Szechwan in the late second century.

In the *Classic of Great Peace*, "the Celestial Master presents himself as a 'divine man' sent by Heaven to save mankind by means of a celestial scripture (*T'ien-shu* 天書) . . ." (Kaltenmark 1979: 24). The production of books by divine inspiration thus appeared at the beginnings of Taoist religion and remained a basic theme in this tradition from then on. The first more explicit references to direct divine composition through a human agent appear in the "Declarations of the Perfected" (*Chen-kao* 眞誥), edited by the Taoist author and alchemist T'ao Hung-ching 陶弘景 (456–536). The "Declarations" are based on revelation,

to a young man named Yang Hsi 楊羲 (330–?) during the years 364–370. In a series of midnight visions some dozen Perfected Immortals—from the Heaven of Supreme Purity—descended into him, in order to communicate both their canonical writings and personal instructions. . . . [Yang] was directed to make transcripts of the materials received, and pass them on to one Hsu Mi 許謐 (303–373), an official at the court of the Eastern Chin dynasty. . . . Yang Hsi con-

tinued to receive and copy for transmission to the Hsus the revealed matter, which included full-scale scriptures. . . . (Strickmann 1977: 41-42)¹

However, in this early Taoist material there is no reference to a characteristic emphasis of the spirit-writing tradition, namely, that the gods can take possession of a writing implement to compose what they will. The antecedent of this emphasis is traced by Chao Wei-pang (1942: 11-12) to an old divination cult devoted to Tzu-ku 紫姑, goddess of the latrine.

The Goddess Tzu-Ku

In a fifth-century source we are told that people made an image of Tzu-ku on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, the anniversary of her death as a human being. She was invited to descend into the image, which grew heavy when she arrived. The image was then asked simple questions about the future, with "yes" or "no" answers. When the answer was "yes," the image danced; when it was "no," it lay down as if to sleep. Most of the early devotees of this cult were women and girls, who inquired among other things about the prospects for the silkworm season.²

Simple divination with a Tzu-ku image continued through the T'ang dynasty (618-907), though evidently it was still not associated with writing. However there are T'ang references to written predictions of personal fate composed by spirit-possessed pens or chopsticks (Groot VI: 1309-1310). By Sung times the Tzu-ku cult was transformed by the belief that the goddess could not only write elegant compositions but even paint. Shen Kua 沈括 (1030-1086) describes an eleventh-century scholar who summoned Tzu-ku, and as a result,

a spirit descended into one of his concubines, who said that she was a female attendant of Shang-ti 上帝. She was able to write, in a rather clear and elegant style [and composed a book] which is now called the *Collected Writings of Female Immortals* (*Nü-hsien chi* 女仙集). . . . In recent years there have been many people who invite Tzu-ku immortals. Most [of her manifestations] are able to write; there are some very skilled at composing songs and poems, which I have seen several times. Many of these spirits call themselves "banished immortals from

¹ For references to later revealed Taoist texts, see also Strickman 1978. Hsu Ti-shan (1941: 10) suggests that some texts in the Taoist canon (*Tao-tsang* 道藏) were composed by spirit writing, an opinion shared by Henri Maspero (1981: 360, 394). Unfortunately neither writer attempts to demonstrate this suggestion. The matter deserves further investigation.

² This discussion is based on Chao 1942: 11-12 and Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 10-11. See also KCTS, *Shen-i* 神藝 section, *chüan* 310. In the 1934 Shanghai reprint owned by the University of British Columbia, this *chüan* occupies pp. 12-14 of *ts'e* 冊 514 in Box 109.2.

P'eng-lai 蓬萊 [a Taoist paradise], and are able to carry out every sort of healing and divination. In chess they are a match for the national champion.³

In his study of the *fu-chi*, Hsu Ti-shan collected 130 anecdotes concerning *fu-chi* from the miscellaneous writings (*pi-chi* 筆記) of scholars and officials. His collection is based in part on a section of the 1725 encyclopaedia *A Collection of Illustrations and Books From Antiquity to the Present* (*Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng* 古今圖書集成). The section is called "a record of materials [which spirits] have descended to write" (*chiang-pi pu chi-shih* 降筆部紀事). In addition to these collections of primary source references, we have J.J.M. de Groot's similar approach to this topic (1892-1910 VI: 1,295-1,322) and Chao Wei-pang's article (1942), "The Origin and Growth of the *Fu-chi*."

In the sources cited by these materials there are several additional references to Sung messages from a literate Tzu-ku. One of the best known is from the writings of the poet Su Shih 蘇軾 (1036-1101), who attended a Tzu-ku séance while he was stationed in Huang-chou 黃州 in the area of modern Hupei province. Su reports of this incident:

Straws and sticks were dressed in clothes as a woman. A chopstick was put in the hand. Two boys held it to draw characters with the chopstick. . . . (Chao 1942: 13-14).

The spirit first narrated her life history and then composed ten short poems, answered questions, and danced. At the end she asked that Su Shih record her appearance to make her name known.⁴

FU-CHI From The Sung Dynasty On

Thus by the Sung dynasty a Tzu-ku goddess who could write had become the center of an emerging spirit-writing tradition. At the same time, this tradition was evolving in other important ways. First, many of the practitioners discussed were male literati, in contrast to the greater involvement of women and girls in the pre-literate phase of this tradition. Second, the early tie with the fifteenth day of the first lunar month was broken, so that the goddess "could be summoned at any time," as Shen

³ Shen Kua 沈括, *Dream Torrent Essays* (*Meng-ch'i pi-t'an* 夢溪筆談), *chüan* 21, item 367. In the 1961 Taipei edition (ed. by Yang Chia-lo 楊家駱) this passage may be found in vol. 2, pp. 685-686. Cited in Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 11.

⁴ See also Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 12-17 for other references to a literate Tzu-ku. So closely has Tzu-ku become associated with these puppets in some places that in the Shanghai area she is actually called the "Winnowing Basket Maid" (*Chi-shao ku* 箕筲姑) (Shen P'ing-shan 1979: 131).

Kua wrote (*Dream Torrent Essays, chüan* 21, item 367; Yang edition vol. 2, p. 685). Third, other spirits began to appear in séances, including military and civil heroes of the recent past. All these changes took place as the civil service examination system was being revived, so that a fourth development in the *fu-chi* tradition was an increasing emphasis on divination concerning success or failure in the examinations, or concerning questions to be asked in them. All these tendencies developed further during the Ming (1368-1644) and Ch'ing (1644-1912) dynasties.

Hsu Ti-shan devotes eleven pages to discussing twenty-three cases of scholars from the Sung to the Ch'ing who used *fu-chi* to ask the spirits about examinations and attaining office. He prefaces this section by saying that

The popularity of *fu-chi* largely derived from the belief of literati and officials. Literati *fu-chi* in general terms began during the Sung dynasty, and the period of its greatest popularity was during the time of civil service examinations in the Ming and Ch'ing. There was a spirit-writing chapel in almost every prefecture and county. Particularly in such areas as Chekiang and Kiangsu, where the literati tradition most flourished, if one did not believe in *fu-chi* spirits, one could not pass an examination. . . . Those in office would think of *fu-chi* whenever an unsolvable problem arose (Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 32)⁵

Although this statement may be exaggerated, there is no doubt that some scholars were involved in spirit writing. Here we discuss just one example of this practice, from Hung Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202), *Jottings in the Spirit of I Chien* (*I-chien chih* 夷堅志).

Fang Chu 方壽 and Tz'u Yun 次雲 of P'u-tien 莆田 in the autumn of the Shao-hsing 紹興 *ting-ssu* 丁巳 year (1137) were about to go take the district examination. They were usually able to summon the deity Tzu-ku, and so asked her about the examination topic. The spirit was unwilling to tell them, saying, "The secrets of Heaven should not be divulged." After they again burned incense and poured wine and petitioned her several times, she wrote the two characters *chung-ho* 中和 ("harmony with the mean").

At that time [Fang] Chu was eighteen *sui* 歲 old and was practiced in composing poetry, so he went everywhere collecting [sayings with the term *chung-ho* in them], such as "teach harmony of the mean with the rites and music," and so forth. . . . All such sayings which could be used as examination topics he worked on in advance. In that year there were many examinees, so they were divided into two sections. The topic for the first [to write on] was "restoration may be hoped for at any time" (*chung-hsing jih-yueh k'e chi* 中興日月可冀), and the second topic was "it is the good fortune of the state when we are at peace with the Jung [tribes]" (*wo ho Jung, kuo chih fu* 我和戎國之福). [At this Fang

⁵ The section on *fu-chi* and examinations can be found on pp. 32-42.

Chu] for the first time understood what he had been told [by the spirit]. He was examined on the first topic, and made first on the list. . . .⁶

A characteristic early reference to the summoning of spirits other than Tzu-ku may be found in the 1366 work *Notes Taken During Breaks From Plowing* (*Ch'o-keng lu* 輟耕錄), by T'ao Tsung-i 陶宗儀:

[People] suspend a winnowing basket (*hsuan-chi* 懸箕) and "support the phoenix" (*fu-luan*) to summon immortals, all of whom are famous men of antiquity. When eminent scholars arrive [at the altar], among the poems and essays they write some are most excellent. . . . (*Notes Taken* 20: 10b-11a, in *Chin-tai pi-shu* 津逮秘書, box 4. See also Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 17-18.)

This openness to revelations from a variety of spirits led to the appearance in *fu-chi* séances of such well-known popular figures as Kuan-ti 關帝 (also known as Kuan-kung 關公) and Lü Tung-pin 呂洞賓, as will be seen below.

The sources provide a variety of reasons for engaging in spirit writing, in addition to questions concerning the examinations, such as seeking foreknowledge of life span and fortune, healing illness, bringing rain, and enjoying poetry and riddles. The spirits themselves are often most concerned to become better known through telling their own life stories. Both Groot and Hsu Ti-shan describe at length the use of *fu-chi* at the court of the Ming emperor Shih-tsung 世宗 (r. 1522-1566). The emperor built a *fu-chi* altar in the palace, employed a specialist in the art, and for a time promoted and demoted his officials in accordance with messages received (Groot 1892-1910 VI: 1,314-1,315; Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 101; KCTS *chüan* 310).

FU-CHI and Moral Instruction

However, for the purpose of this study, the most important aspect of the earlier *fu-chi* tradition was a minor tendency to use revelations as a means of general moral and religious instructions, which Hsu Ti-shan (1941: 60) says is not often found in the *pi-chi* sources he consulted. He nevertheless discusses eleven examples from the Sung on. These examples deal with two Ch'an 禪 *kôans*, wise advice to the rich about envy from the poor, the dangers of going to excess in times of success or failure, a call to repentance directed to one who had harmed others and covered up for wrongdoers, a

⁶ *Jottings* 21: 8. In the 1981 Peking edition, edited by Ho Cho 何卓, this passage may be found in vol. 3, pp. 1065-1066. It is discussed in Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 33. I Chien is the name of a scholar mentioned in the *Lieh Tzu* 列子 (4th cen. A.D.), who recorded the names of strange fish and birds he had heard of. (There are several examples of divination concerning examinations in KCTS as well.)

warning to a boatman who had murdered a traveler and stolen his goods, and so forth. One Ch'ing passage concerns a student named Yueh Pao-ho 岳保和, who

in the year of the triennial examination set up a *fu-chi* altar to inquire about his good or ill fortune. First the god of the locality descended to say, "A carriage is about to arrive. You must be devout and dignified." Suddenly the [local] household god, stove god, and city god all gathered, and in confusion and haste said together, "The Sage Kuan comes." In an instant the room was filled with a strange fragrance, the lamp turned green, and vapor from the wine jar went straight up. Yueh sweated in terror, knocked his head on the floor in awe, and reverently asked about the fall examinations. The *chi* said, "When celestial officials select scholars they discuss literary essays last, and first look at moral conduct. All those who are filial and friendly pass, those who are sincere and genuine pass, those who share their merit with others pass, those who do not cheat in dark rooms pass, those whose mind and mouth are as one pass, those who are not perverse and do not ask from others pass, those who look on others as they do themselves pass, those who err by speaking ill unintentionally pass, those who abstain from lust and immorality pass. I have examined your life and find not one good thing. I have ordered Chou Ts'ang 周倉 [the standard bearer of Kuan-kung] to destroy your family and extinguish its traces."

When the writing finished, the *chi* flew up in the sky. After a year had passed, an epidemic broke out, and in the whole [Yueh] family there was not half a person left.⁷

Although all the anecdotes gathered by Hsu Ti-shan involve students, scholars, or officials, a few refer to *fu-chi* practitioners among the common people, some of whom are said to lack formal education. We have seen that the Tzu-ku cult began among women and girls who were presumably illiterate. Written messages became a part of this cult as it grew more popular among the literati. Then, as Hsu Ti-shan writes (p. 21):

... after *fu-chi* became popular there was a type of *fu-chi* specialist who divined for others, either by going to their homes ... or, at times, by setting up *fu-chi* altars in their own homes or ancestral temples. Sometimes they invited one particular spirit; sometimes they knew which spirit was involved only after it came.

It would seem, then, that one aspect of the literate *fu-chi* tradition "returned" to the common people, whence in part it had come. Meanwhile, the original pre-literate Tzu-ku cult continued to be practiced in the first lunar month by women and girls (Chao 1942: 15-18; Werner 1932: 535-536).

⁷Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 63. The source cited here is the *Minor Records From Brightness Studio* (*Ming-chai hsiao-shih* 明齋小識) by Chu Mou-hsiang 諸晦香 (Chu Lien 諸聯), preface dated 1811, 1: 3.

The use of spirit writing by non-elite practitioners is important not only for the development of sectarian *fu-chi* texts later, but also for our understanding of cultural integration in the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. In several instances collected by Hsu Ti-shan we are told that students or scholars first encountered *fu-chi* because it was being practiced by someone else in their families, or because they knew of a local diviner who specialized in this technique.

For example, a tenth-century source, *A Record of Investigating Spirits* (*Chi-shen lu* 稽神錄), by Hsu Hsuan 徐鉉, tells of a certain

Chih Chien 支猷 of Chiang-tso 江左 who was from Yü-kan 餘干 [county, in modern Kiangsi province, whose ancestors] had for generations been minor officials. As for [Chih] Chien, he only liked studying to write essays, and falsely called himself a *hsiu-ts'ai* 秀才 [holder of the lowest level examination degree]. On the night of the fifteenth day of the first lunar month it was a common custom to take a rice winnowing basket (*chi* 箕) and dress it in clothing, stick a chopstick in the mouth [of the rough image], and divine by making it write on a pan of powder [flour?]. When Chien saw his family members doing this, he playfully invoked [the spirits]: "I request you to divine what level of office I, the *hsiu-ts'ai* Chih, will attain."

Then there was gracefully written on the powder the characters *ssu-k'ung* 司空 ("Minister of Public Works"). (Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 36)⁸

A seventeenth-century source, *Minor Records from Fukien* (*Min hsiao-chi* 閩小記), by Chou Liang-kung 周亮工 (1612-1672), tells of a

First Class Sub-prefect Chang 張 who regularly "suspended a carriage." After a long time had passed suddenly there were attacks by pirates. ... [Chang] did not know what to do. He heard that there was a villager who was able to summon spirits with a *chi*, so he ordered him to divine. For a long time no spirit came, and then suddenly the *chi* revolved like the wind, but stopped in a few minutes.

As a result of the ensuing message, Chang was able to defeat the pirates.⁹ A passage from the *Gazetteer of Ning-po Prefecture* (*Ning-po fu-chih* 寧波府志) tells of

a man named Wan Kuan 萬貫 from Mount Ch'ien-lien 錢煉, who, when he was twenty, was able to call down *chi* spirits by burning incense and by silent invocations. He had never applied himself to writing in his whole life, yet with immortals relying on his peachwood charm (*chi*), he was able to write charac-

⁸*Record of Investigating* 6: 15b-16a in PCHS 2: 868-869. This version indicates an omission after the words, "... what level of office I ... will attain" (as translated above). Hsu Ti-shan (1941: 36) provides the last sentence here, presumably from another edition. Both versions agree that Chih Chien did attain the title *ssu-k'ung*.

⁹Chou Liang-kung n.d.: part 2, p. 57; p. 113 in the Taipei edition. There is no date in the text, but Chou was stationed in Fukien from 1647-1654. "Suspended a carriage" (*hsuan-ch'e* 懸車) probably refers to spirit writing. In KCTS, *chuan* 310, these characters are replaced by *ching-shen* 敬神, "reverenced spirits." See Chapter 4 for a similar reference to a carriage.

ters and compose poems. After a while he no longer depended on the "peach-wood charm," but wrote holding a brush pen. After more than 1,000 days he could write poems and essays fluently. He frequently visited Nanking, where he associated with several members of the gentry and got along with them very well. (KCTS, *chüan* 310)¹⁰

Although this passage does not say that Wan Kuan practiced *fu-chi* among his gentry friends, the implication is there. In this case his skill provided a certain amount of upward mobility, despite his lack of education. We shall find similar aspirations among some modern *fu-chi* writers when we turn to the ethnographic material in later chapters.

Hsu Ti-shan tells as well of a man from Kung *hsien* 鞏縣 in Honan, to whom,

... spirits descended to reveal ... poems, essays, characters, and paintings. Further he was able to invite to descend such famous men of the past as Han [Yü] 韓愈 Liu [Tsun-yuan] 柳宗元 Ou-[yang Hsiu] 歐陽修 and Su [Shih] 蘇軾. He said that "there had been an altar in his home for several years and that eunuchs from Chung-chou 中州 [in Honan] all reverently believed in him."¹¹

It is not far in either time or spirit from this passage to the first reference we know of so far to the use of spirit writing in a clearly sectarian context, which is found in *chüan* 1416 of the *Veritable Records of the Ch'ing Dynasty* (*Ch'ing shih-lu* 清實錄) in a report dated 1792. The report is taken from a memorial submitted by Ying Shan 英善, the Financial Commissioner of Szechwan, which, as we shall see, was a geographical source of sectarian texts later on. Ying Shan wrote that he

... had seized a *fu-chi* [which was used] to confuse the masses, a serious offense involving composing rebellious poems and prefaces. ... In the name of *fu-chi* they have written verses which recklessly claim that Liu Wan-ch'ung 劉萬崇 is a descendant of the Han house. He broke the law with Ch'en Hsiao-tz'u 陳黻賜 and others and went along with rebellion. They formed a group and pledged sworn brotherhood. [This is] an extremely illegal business. ...¹²

Although no book name is mentioned here, later sectarian *fu-chi* texts were composed of just such "poems and prefaces."

The only other reference to sectarian use of *fu-chi* before 1850 that we

¹⁰ We assume this reference is to the Ming edition of the *Gazetteer of Ning-po Prefecture* (*Ning-po fu-chih*), written by Chang Shih-ch'e 張時徹 (1500-1577). However, we have not been able to locate this passage in the partial reprint published by the Orient Cultural Service, Taipei, 1970.

¹¹ Hsu Ti-shan 1941: 95. This reference is taken from *What the Master Did Not Discuss* (*Tzu pu yü* 子不語) by Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798), 21: 12

¹² TCLC 1416.5. We are grateful to Susan Naquin of the University of Pennsylvania for this reference.

have come across is in the *Memorials of Na-yen-ch'eng Submitted During His First Term as Governor-General of Chihli* (*Na Wen-i Kung ch'u-jen Chih-li Tsung-tu tsou-i* 那文毅公初任直隸總督奏議 (ed. by Jung An 容安), with a preface dated 1820, 41: 8-10, in a report dated *Chia-ch'ing* 嘉慶 20 [1815]). Under the general heading of "A memorial concerning the arrest of [persons involved in] the offense of stirring up and confusing [the people] with *fu-chi*," this report discusses the discovery of *fu-chi* equipment in the home of a man named Chiang Ying-lung 姜應龍 in Pao-ting Fu 保定府. Chiang was from Chekiang. In 1740 (*sic*) he took an unspecified military examination, but made his living as an itinerant physician. In 1796 he was taught *fu-chi* and its method of inviting spirits by a man from Soochow prefecture. He reported that he could "invite the phoenix" without charms, needing only to suspend a pen and pray silently. In the fall of 1803 he came to Chihli province and continued to practice medicine. Whenever he encountered a doubtful or difficult illness, he "invited the phoenix to seek prescriptions." Chiang got into trouble in 1815 when, as he divined about an illness, a spirit came which discussed a

Ming [dynasty] prince named Chu 朱 [surname of the Ming royal house], thirteen years old, from Chia-shan 嘉善 county in Chekiang. He had already ascended to the throne in Hangchow and sent [some of his officials] to Pao-ting Fu in Chihli.

The men were associates of Chiang Ying-lung, who thus was involved in the treason of Ming restorationism. The details of this somewhat complicated account are beyond our present concerns. Suffice it to say that, although there is no mention here of a specific sect, the name of a retreat associated with this group, Ta-sheng 大乘 was the name of different popular sects during the Ch'ing dynasty. In addition, itinerant healing and identifying living persons with past ruling houses were hallmarks of sectarian activity. However, there is no reference to *fu-chi* books or moral exhortations.

The practice of spirit writing was prohibited in 1317 and 1370, but, as we have seen, this prohibition had little effect at any level of society, from the imperial palace on down.¹³ By the early seventeenth century, books

¹³ In the *Statutes of the Yuan Dynasty* (TYSC section 57, p. 43), there is a proscription dated Yen-yu 延祐 4 (1317) which reads in part:

... it is prohibited for there to be societies which pray and sacrifice to deities, *fu-luan* to invoke the sages [reading *tao* 禱 for *l'ao* 禱], gathering at night and dispersing by day. ...

We are indebted for this reference to Sakai 1943: 196. The 1370 prohibition is recorded in Yao n.d. section 53, p. 3. This prohibition was later incorporated into the Ming and Ch'ing law codes. A guide to the terminology of the Six Boards of the Ch'ing government, composed by Ch'ing clerks for the use of their bureaucratic colleagues (Sun 1961: 307), lists, among the

of moral teachings were being composed by *fu-chi*, and by the late nineteenth century this method was being used to write books which expounded sectarian mythology. To this development we now turn.

EARLY SPIRIT-WRITING BOOKS AND THEIR CONTENTS

A Seventeenth-Century FU-CHI Book (1622)

The oldest spirit-writing book found by Overmyer so far is the *Precious Book of the Jade Regulations* (*Yü-lü pao-chüan* 玉律寶卷), composed in Shansi in 1622. It is in one *chüan* and twenty-six sections (*p'in* 品) in fifty-seven leaves. In 1981 Overmyer found a 1905 reprint of this book in Peking, published by a religious bookshop in Ch'ang-chou 常州, Kiangsu. It has two prefaces, one attributed to Ch'un-yang Lü 純陽呂 (the Taoist immortal Lü Tung-pin), and the other to Wen-ch'ang Ti-chün 文昌帝君, the god of literary pursuits.

The text itself is said to be by "The Great Emperor Who Assists Heaven" (Hsieh-t'ien Ta-ti 協天大帝), here identified with Kuan-ti. Each section is titled, begins with the phrase "The Great Emperor says" (Ta-ti yueh 大帝曰), and opens with a prose statement of its theme. This is followed by verse in seven-character lines, which leads to the dominant pattern of ten-character verse, arranged three-three-four. A simple classical style of language is used throughout, with few vernacular constructions. This style is a distinguishing characteristic of *fu-chi* books, which in general are less colloquial than *pao-chüan*. Of course there are differences among texts and authors, but even in books produced in modern Taiwan the classical style is dominant. This tendency is probably due to several factors: one is the greater role of literati in the spirit-writing tradition; another is the heightened sense of dignity necessary for utterances of the gods. In addition, the classical style may indicate that the medium, while in a possessed state, writes beyond his normal, "unpossessed," level.

After the prefaces, the first twelve leaves of the *Jade Regulations* are devoted to general moral exhortations. Beginning with section five, the text describes the sins and punishments of each of the ten courts of purgatory, with subsidiary chambers named and discussed as well. The term "jade regulations" in the title of this book refers to the rules and sanctions of purgatory; it is the counterpart in this *yin* world to the "royal

"major crimes" "falsely to call down heterodox spirits" (*chia-chiang hsieh-shen* 假降邪神), "to petition saints by *chi* divination" (*fu-luan tao-sheng* 扶鸞禱聖), and "to be possessed as a séance medium" (*wu-hsi t'iao-shen* 巫覡跳神), as well as many other sectarian and ecstatic activities. Here, the Ch'ing code imitated the earlier Ming code, which specifically prohibited *fu-luan* on pain of strangulation. See Groot 1892-1910: VI: 1242.

law" (*wang-fa* 王法) in the *yang* realm of the living. The *Jade Regulations* addresses the middle range of society: officials, clerks, soldiers, monks, priests, merchants, artisans, physicians, marriage go-betweens. These and other groups are named, along with their characteristic sins. The book is concerned with the moral reform of its readers and listeners through pointing out the inevitable results of actions (*karma*), affirming the reality of purgatory, and emphasizing its own veracity as a direct revelation of the gods.

The teachings of the *Jade Regulations* are popular Confucianism re-enforced with purgatory. Although there are a few terms at the end which may be due to sectarian influence on the *pao-chüan* form, its tone is that of an orthodox morality book. Indeed, at one point it warns against

... establishing heretical religious sects (*li hsieh chiao* 立邪教), accumulating money to enrich oneself [reading *lien* 斂 for *han* 斂], gathering at night and dispersing at dawn, fearing that others will report to officials. The books [of such groups] have never been in the canons of the three religions, nor are their teachings included in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. To entice men and women to practice heretical doctrines and so to transgress the law is to do injury to many, an unpardonable crime. (p. 43)

In its scope, detail, and level of moral commitment, the *Jade Regulations* is an impressive book, a catalog of late Ming sins and temptations. Its tone is egalitarian; what determines one's life is karmic merit; in this there are no distinctions of sex, age, wealth, or social status. It attacks female infanticide because "the nature of men and women is the same" (p. 35b), and criticizes selling young girls as slaves or concubines and making slaves out of orphans (pp. 35b, 27). It also denies that the fluids of childbirth are defiling. These fluids

... originally were not taboo (*yuan fei chin* 原非禁) ...; only when there are both men and women is there a world. What is sinful and defiling is deceiving the gods; for this there is no distinction between men and women; together they are fettered in the pool of filth [in purgatory]. (p. 28a)

Here all transactions are defined in moral terms.

This is not the place for a comprehensive discussion of the *Jade Regulations*; we will content ourselves with a few passages from its prefaces to indicate its tone, and with pointing out its similarities to spirit-writing books in modern Taiwan. The first preface begins with exhortations to recover the natural goodness of the mind, as described by Confucius, Mencius, and Ch'eng Hao 程顥, a Sung dynasty Neo-Confucian.

All of these [teachers] considered the mind to be as pure as the principle of Heaven. If one's virtue is in accord with Heaven, then one can form a triad with Heaven and Earth, and Heaven and Earth and all things will be nourished. . . .

All those who suffer in purgatory are people who did great injury to this moral mind when they were alive. If one wishes to spare people of the world from acute suffering, one must help them understand what happens in purgatory. (Preface, pp. 1b-2a)

The preface continues by saying that Shang-ti had granted permission to narrate this book so that

... for the illiterate it will be like the blind seeing flowers and deaf hearing music ... and so that the literate, seeing that all books which urge goodness have much meaning, will accept [their teachings]. ... There are very many who, after one look at morality books, put them aside, although the gods and sages have expended much effort. If the literate do not read [these books], would it not be best to expound them in common and simple terms so that illiterate men and women of the world will easily understand, correct their faults, and renew themselves? ... Literati who, after glancing at these books, say that their language is too shallow, are disobedient to the Great Emperor (Ta-ti 大帝). Since they do not understand his intentions, and say they wish to dispute this scripture, they in fact are reviling the Great Emperor, and so are the chief of sinners. I hope that people will not be reckless types who do violence to themselves and so throw themselves away, but will personally understand the Great Emperor's intentions, the essentials of which are to cause people to reform evil and move toward goodness, constantly preserve the moral mind, and accord with the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. (Preface, pp. 2b-3a)

The second preface, which continues in the same spirit, ends with the following lines of verse:

The merit of this scripture is eternal,
never to be destroyed.
Above, it accords with the mind of Heaven;
below, it rescues the lost.
If people are able to obey and practice it,
the Buddhas and immortals will all be glad.
Their names will be registered on
the Jade Towers [of Heaven]
and listed on the golden placard.

This preface concludes with its date (1622):

On the fifteenth day of the fifth month of the second T'ien-ch'i 天啓 year of the Great Ming [dynasty], Emperor Wen-ch'ang 文昌 descended (*chiang-luan* 降鸞) to write at the Pine and Cyprus Pavilion, Shansi. (Preface, p. 5a)

Although the *Jade Regulations* says of itself that it did not exist in the past, but was revealed in the Ming (p. 7a), its well-organized style indicates that it is not the first book of its type composed by *fu-chi*.

Nevertheless, it can serve as a Ming antecedent to similar texts in twentieth-century Taiwan, with which it has much in common, beginning with the whole idea of books of moral and religious teachings bestowed directly by the gods. Several other characteristics of the *Jade Regulations* are shared by many of its Taiwan descendants: composition in simple classical language; organization into prefaces and sections, with alternating passages in prose and verse; technical language involved in the *fu-chi* tradition, such as "descend" (*chiang-luan*); and providing the names, times, and places for revelations; conservative Confucian-oriented ethical teachings; and an emphasis on karma and purgatory. On the other hand, Taiwan texts do not use the name *pao-chüan*, may employ some vernacular language, and usually include short revelations by scores or hundreds of deities, not just three, as with the *Jade Regulations*. However, Lü Tung-pin, Wen-ch'ang, and Kuan-ti continue to be the most important revealing deities in the twentieth century. Through studying the *Jade Regulations* we learn that spirit-writing texts in Taiwan are part of a tradition at least 350 years old. Of course, the *Jade Regulations* owes much to such earlier discussions of purgatory as the *Precious Records of the Jade Regulations* (*Yü-li pao-ch'ao* 玉歷寶鈔) of the eleventh century.

Later FU-CHI Books

There is no doubt that this tradition was continuous, but the next books in Overmyer's collection appeared about 250 years later. There are three of them, which, in order of publication dates, are the *Boat of Salvation* (*Chiu-sheng ch'uan* 救生船) of 1876, the *Illustrated Book on Returning to the True Nature* (*Fan-hsing t'u* 返性圖) of 1878, and *A Precious Record of Instructions for Directing the Lost* (*Chih-mi pao-lu* 指迷寶錄) of 1881. Some of the revelations in these books are dated as early as 1855. Although in lists of donors appended to these texts there are references to halls (*t'ang* 堂), their general organizational context is unclear. Two of the three were produced and distributed in part through the efforts of local officials, military and civil, so that they further illustrate the role of such educated members of society in the *fu-chi* tradition. On the whole, the values supported in these texts are conservative and Confucian; there is no evidence in them at all of the sectarian mythology discussed in Chapter 2. In their organization, these books are considerably more complex than the *Jade Regulations*.

THE "BOAT OF SALVATION" (1876)

The *Boat of Salvation*, in four *chüan*, with one supplementary *chüan* added later, was published in Peking. Its printing blocks were recarved in

1874, and in a preface of that date a Ch'an master named Chi-tien 濟顛 notes that "in the past the blocks for this book were in Szechwan," but that reproducing them in north China will restrain evil customs and bring much merit. (Preface, p. 2b.)

There follow four prefaces attributed to Wen-ch'ang Ti-chün, one of them dated 1861, the other three 1863. All of this introductory material is listed in the table of contents of *chüan* 1, together with nineteen revelations.

In *chüan* 2 there are four prefaces and twenty-nine messages, in *chüan* 3 three prefaces and thirty-three revealed statements, and in *chüan* 4 three prefaces and thirty messages from the gods. This is a total of fourteen prefaces and one hundred eleven revelations. The deities involved are predominantly of popular or Taoist origins, such as Lü Tung-pin and others of the Eight Immortals, the stove god, the Astral Ruler at the Mouth of the Bushel (our Big Dipper) (Tou-k'ou Hsing-chun 斗口星君), and a city god. Other deities noted are Wen-ch'ang, the civil and military celestial emperors (Wen-ti 文帝 and Wu-ti 武帝), Kuan-yin, and several local figures.

Following the table of contents there is a "Ritual for Proclaiming This Text, Established by the Sage Emperor (Wu-ti)," which begins with instructions for preparing offerings of flowers, fruit, wine, tea, and incense. When all the worshippers are in their proper places the recitant (*tu-chiang* 督講) intones the "Ten Regulations of the Sage Emperor Wu for the Proclamation Altar." Next there are six instructions from the Ch'ing Shun-chih 順治 Emperor, the Sixteen Sage Edicts from the K'ang-hsi 康熙 Emperor, ten rules from Wen-ch'ang, ten more from Fu-yu Ti-chün 孚佑帝君, and a total of twenty-six from the stove god, six specifically for boys and six for girls. These and some additional miscellaneous instructions are all dated 1860. Such instructions occur only in *chüan* 1.

Revelations in the *Boat of Salvation* begin with verse (*shih* 詩) in five or seven character lines, followed by prose (*hua* 話) sections and long admonitions entitled *yü* 諭 or *hsun* 訓.

There are several references in this text to revelations in Szechwan, though one comment in the colophon notes that "In the past there was a book called the *Boat of Salvation* which came out of Tiennan 滇南 (Yunnan)." There are no official titles in the list of those who contributed to the costs of reprinting this text in Peking. However, in addition to the names of individuals and householders, there are the names of three supporting organizations: the Jade Nourishing Studio (Yang-yü Chai 養玉齋), the Clouds of Righteousness Altar (I-yun t'an 誼雲壇), and the Devotion to Fundamentals Chapel (Wu-pen t'ang 務本堂). This last is also noted as a contributor to reprinting the *Illustrated Book on Returning to the True Nature*.

THE "ILLUSTRATED BOOK ON RETURNING TO THE TRUE NATURE" (1878)

The *Illustrated Book on Returning to the True Nature* (*Fan-hsing t'u*) is in 10 *chüan*, with an additional closing chapter (*chüan-mo* 卷末). The frontispiece is an inscription reading "Myriads of Years to the Reigning Emperor!" On the title page it is noted that the printing blocks are stored in the "Contemplating Errors Studio" (Ssu-kuo chai 思過齋) in Hsi-chin 析津, which is in Yang-ch'eng 陽城 county of Shansi. There are two opening statements, the first by Hsi-hsin Tao-jen 洗心道人 of Hsi-chin. No author is given for the second, which is a general discussion of morality books (*shan-shu* 善書) and their ability to reform behavior.

There follow the "Sixteen Sage Edicts," a preface attributed to Confucius' disciple Yen-tzu 顏子, a second preface by Śākyamuni, and a third by the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool. Thus, these first prefaces represent Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. They are all dated 1855.

Next come "Fifteen Points on Proclaiming This Book from the Sage Emperor Kuan," "Eight Essentials for Proclaiming and Discoursing" by Emperor Wen-ch'ang, and "Five Admonitions on Proclamation" by Fu-yu Ti-chün. Then there is a "Ledger of Merits and Demerits" (*Kung-kuo ke* 功過格) revealed by "the Heavenly General Ma 馬 Who Preaches Salvation" (*yang-hua* 揚化). There are thirty entries in this ledger, which consists of lists of how many merits or demerits are acquired for various actions, posed in matched pairs of good and bad, such as twenty merits in one day for properly proclaiming this book, and twenty demerits for not doing so. The key terms are *neng* 能, "able" and *pu* 不, "not [able]." In several cases there are more demerits than merits, such as twenty merits for sincerity and reverence in worship, and thirty demerits for their opposite.¹⁴

Following the ledger there are three forms with blank spaces for dates and names, to be used in submitting petitions to the Emperor Kuan, Wen-ch'ang, and Fu-yu.

These forms, in the style of memorials to the throne, are prayers for ethical guidance, blessing, and salvation. Next come instructions on carrying out ritual, and an edict concerning the *Illustrated Book* by "Heavenly General Wang of the Golden Palace Who Protects the Way." The twelve points in this decree are concerned with such matters as giving priority to the Sage Edict, the need for understanding the Three Teachings, and the importance of ritual purity and propriety.

Next comes an additional preface, by Fu-yu Ti-chün, and an introduc-

¹⁴For a discussion of such ledgers of merit in the Ming dynasty, see Yü 1981: 118-137.

tion by an unnamed human editor. This is followed by a picture of the "Heavenly Ruler Wang," holding a sword and standing on wheels of fire. Finally, there are two statements of praise (*tsan* 讚) by the Immortal Chung-li 鍾離 and by Yen-tzu.

There are twenty-eight revelations listed in the table of contents of *chüan* 1, by such deities as Divine Official Ma, an earth god, Heavenly Ruler Ma, General Chou, Kuan-ti, Wen-ch'ang, Fu-yu Ti-chün, Yen-tzu, Tseng-tzu 曾子, Mencius, Chu Hsi 朱熹, Śākyamuni, The Golden Mother, and others. The first revelation is from the Divine Official Ma, Astral Ruler of the Bushel Mouth. It begins with eight rhyming lines of seven-character verse, followed by a prose "revelation" (*shih* 示).

The following *chüan* are all a combination of prefaces and revelations. There are a total of 312 revelations from a great variety of deities. The prefaces are by such figures as the Immortal Ts'ao 曹, Maitreya, Chu-ko Liang 諸葛亮, Chu Hsi, Kuan-yin, Chen-wu 真武, Ti-tsang 地藏, and so forth. Revealing spirits include those noted above, plus "The Demon King Who Flies About Heaven," Bodhidharma, K'uei-hsing 魁星, Ju-lai Fo 如來佛, T'ai-shang Tao-tsu 太上道祖 (Lao-tzu), Han Yü, Tung-fang Shuo 東方朔, and a large number of celestial rulers and generals. Revealers in *chüan* 9 include Ti-tsang, the Emperor of the Eastern Peak, the kings of the ten courts of purgatory, and "general city gods" (*tsung ch'eng-huang* 總城隍) from seventeen provinces and two metropolitan prefectures, representing all of China. At the beginning of each *chüan*, there is a picture of a celestial general.

At the end of the *Illustrated Book* there are three colophons by human editors, the first two of which are dated 1864 and 1867, respectively. These are followed by a list of donors, with names, titles, and amounts contributed. Most of the individuals listed were officials, either in office or expectant (*pu-yung* 補用). The titles given include those of members of the Han-lin 翰林 Academy, Provincial Judge, Prefect, Vice-Prefect, County Magistrate, Director of Salt Works, Second Captain, Sub-Lieutenant, Ensign, holder of fifth-class military merit, etc. Of the thirty-five donors for whom titles are provided, three were holders of the *chin-shih* 進士 degree. Office locations are provided in some instances. One was in Kiangsi; the others in Kwangtung.

There are seventeen individual donors listed who did not have titles. In addition, representatives of six halls (*t'ang*) provided funds: the Willow Shade (Huai-yin 槐蔭), Establishment in the Center (Chung-li 中立), Devotion to Fundamentals (Wu-pen 務本), Virtue Mountain (Te-shan 德山), Embrace Virtue (Huai-te 懷德), and Three Benefits (San-i 三益).

The total amount donated by all parties was 182 ounces of silver, 4

cash, and 2 pennies. An account of expenditures in this same amount is provided, followed by the words "expenditures and income both clear."

THE "PRECIOUS RECORD OF INSTRUCTIONS FOR DIRECTING THE LOST" (1881)

The *Chih-mi pao-lu*, or *Precious Record of Instructions for Directing the Lost*, in four *chüan*, was recorded by Shao Jui-ch'eng 邵瑞澄 in Tientsin. In arrangement this book is similar to the *Illustrated Book*, and begins with the same homage to the ruler and the sixteen "sage edicts" of the K'ang-hsi emperor. In *chüan* 1 there are eight prefaces, two statements of praise, and one introduction, followed by a table of contents which lists ninety-seven revelations. Of these revelations, twenty-three are from Fu-yu Ti-chün, seventeen from Kuan-sheng Ti-chün 關聖帝君, and nine from Wen-ch'ang Ti-chün. Five are attributed to Chung-huang Fo 中皇佛 and four to Kuan-yin. Most of the other revealers are limited to one appearance each, with a few coming two or three times. They include the immortal Li T'ai-po 李太白 (Li Po 李白, the eighth-century poet), Chu-ko Liang, the Jade Emperor, Maitreya, Samantabhadra, Mañjuśrī, the Matron of the Northern Bushel, the Emperor T'ai-i 太乙, Śākyamuni, Tseng-tzu, Ti-tsang, Yen-tzu, and a number of lesser-known celestial emperors and generals.

There are 142 revelations in *chüan* 2, most from the same deities noted above, with the addition of such figures as Min-tzu 閔子 (Min Ch'ien 閔騫, a disciple of Confucius), Chu Hsi, Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun 元始天尊, the Golden Mother, etc. In *chüan* 3 there are 130 divine messages and in *chüan* 4 there are 102. Again the deities involved are much the same.

Religious associations had a more prominent role in supplying funds for publishing this text. The names of eighteen *t'ang* are listed, most named with moral virtues: "Joy in Goodness," "Thinking on Goodness," "Embracing Virtue," "Friendship and Co-humanity," "Preserving the Mind," etc. Other donors include eleven married women, twenty-two men with no titles, eleven military officers, "various shops in Soochow," the Chi-chou 薊州 yamen (in Hopei), the six offices of the Tung-an 東安 county yamen (in Hopei), and four anonymous donors (*wu-ming shih* 無名氏). Most of the donations recorded are for one to five ounces of silver, several for less, and a few for as many as ten ounces. One chapel contributed one hundred ounces, five cash, and one penny. In three cases the motivation for giving is noted, "to provide for father in purgatory," "in prayer for parents in purgatory," and "for the healing of mother's illness." The military titles given, all in the "Disciplined Army" (*Lien-chün* 練軍), including two battalion commanders in Hsin-ch'eng 新城 county

(Hopei) and Tientsin, and members of the five companies of the Tientsin "Battalion of the Left."

Readers of FU-CHI Texts

The ethnographic literature on *fu-chi* divination outside Taiwan discusses this form of divination both in itself and as the focus of religious groups (Doolittle 1865: II: 112-114, Groot 1892-1910: VI: passim; Elliott 1955: Yang 1961: 259-263; Hsu 1948: 169). These materials are surprisingly scant, however, and tell us little either about the texts written or about the audiences receiving them. The overall picture that emerges from the ethnographic accounts, to the extent that there is one, is an identification of *fu-chi* with the literate classes, for the most part, well into the twentieth century, even though in some places the technique seems merely to have been added to the repertoire of mediums, priests of sundry kinds, and no doubt various scapegraces who exploited it for money. We have no real image of the membership of the groups, when there have been groups, nor even a clear picture of the differences among, say, Doolittle's "society or company established for facilitating such consultations" or Groot's "actual professors of the system," who "make a calling of their art, receiving at their houses clients" (VI: 1,307-1,308), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Hsu's "active membership of more than two thousand individuals" (1948: 169) or Graham's cult-like "Altar of Scholars" (*Ju-t'an* 儒壇) (1961: 103).

We get a much better picture of the intended audience, in fact, from the texts themselves than from the ethnographers' descriptions of *fu-chi* séances. In addition to lists of donors, there is a bit more evidence in these books concerning their intended audience. This internal evidence strongly suggests that the texts are addressed in part to persons of some learning. For example, in a preface to the *Precious Record*, attributed to Cheng-yang Ti-chün 正陽帝君, we read:

Since the teachings of the Sage no longer flourish, learning has daily become more false. At present large numbers of scholars (*shih-tzu* 士子) discuss karmic retribution, and maintain that all phenomena are untrustworthy (*yü* 迂, lit: "distorted, perverted"). Those who talk about human nature and destiny are very few indeed. Scholars are chief of the four classes of people: once their spirit and tradition are destroyed, the moral path of the world collapses, which is much to be regretted. Many have missed the ford, and there is no one at all who is able to point the way. The sea of retribution overflows; who is a scholar who has [the proper] knowledge?

Another indicator that this text is not intended for a folk audience can be found in a preface attributed to Li T'ai-po, which is concerned to

defend the validity of *fu-chi* revelation:

This altar does not heal illness, does not inquire about affairs, and, furthermore, one does not obtain advantage from it. For one man to exert so much effort only for this, I fear there is not such a fool in the world.

That is, the messages are from deities, not concocted by individuals for private advantage.

The *Illustrated Book* addresses itself both to scholars (*shih-jen* 士人) and commoners (*shu-min* 庶民). It promises merit to scholars who with

sincere minds expound [this text] to convert ignorant people. . . . If they are able to practice [the teachings of this book] personally and energetically for their whole lives with unremitting effort, scholars will have their names recorded in the palace [i.e., they will pass examinations with honors], and commoners will [attain] limitless blessings and wealth.

. . . if ordinary folk (*fan-jen* 凡人) wish to seek for long life or sons, they must reverently and with devout minds print one hundred copies [of this book]; then they can lengthen their lives and continue their lines; the response is like a shadow or echo. . . .

If scholars who are having difficulties with examinations are able to print and distribute one hundred copies with sincere minds, then their names will be recorded in the palace. (*chüan* 1, pp. 21b-23a)

Values in FU-CHI Texts

The values of these nineteenth-century texts are well illustrated by the *Illustrated Book*, which in an opening statement describes the role of morality books as follows:

Morality books were originally made known in the world to cause people to move toward goodness and reform their faults. . . . The people of the world all understand this, but, nonetheless, those who neglect it are many. Why is this? [It is because] some are befuddled with profit and desires; some consider themselves to be without faults; some are difficult to change because they mistakenly practice evil activities; and some do not believe because they suspect [these books] are fabricated. There are many different ways for people to deceive themselves and be in error. Although there are various books which urge goodness, it is indeed to be lamented that [some who] read them in the end are unable to reform. I hope those who read this book will apply themselves to each essay they read . . . , and that when they encounter a section which describes good words and conduct, they will think to themselves "Am I doing evil or not?" If they are already doing evil, they must improve and progress, stopping only at the highest goodness. . . .

The *Illustrated Book* itself is characterized as follows in one of its introductions:

What the *Illustrated Book* discusses is all the great way of the constant principles of human relationships (*lun-ch'ang ta tao* 倫常大道), and the fundamentals of good and evil. It supports the royal statutes, maintains moral transformation (*chiao-hua* 教化), and exhorts and warns common folk, for all of which it provides ordered principles. It is really a precious message for saving the world.

The ethical teachings of this book are described in some detail in a "Fifteen-Point Proclamation From the Holy Emperor Kuan," which warns against such practices as bribery, ostentatious display, unfair business practices, opium addiction, and heresy. There is also an emphasis on ritual decorum. In a closing homily, the Lord Kuan emphasizes the importance of embodying and practicing these injunctions and instructs reciters (*tu-chiang* 督講) to teach them to the illiterate.

We find repeated commands in this list of injunctions to expel those who do not comply, emphasizing the moral seriousness of the group or sect which must have been involved. Confucian concerns and terminology are dominant throughout this and similar lists, and the centrality of the Confucian school is noted at several points. For example, a message from Confucius' disciple Yen-tzu refers to the *Analects*, the *Classic of Filial Piety*, and other Confucian works, all of which "clarify the regulations of the Five Emperors and Three Kings and distinguish between the truth and falsity of heavenly principle and human desire." This passage continues with a lament about the waywardness of the present generation, and concludes: "Hence I have again descended into the dust to tell human beings that they should be careful to return to their [true] natures" (*chüan* 1, pp. 3-4).

A later statement of praise attributed to Yen-tzu concludes, "When the *Illustrated Book* is practiced in the world, it will support the Confucian tradition" (*chüan* 1, p. 32a).

Another indication of Confucian dominance in this text is that when the Buddha Maitreya descends with a message, it is entirely devoted to exhorting filial piety. Maitreya proclaims that

even [such Buddhist terms as] purity and Nirvāṇa really arise from filial piety. Without filial piety, how could one obtain the fruits of Buddhahood? Thus, even the great monk of the western region, the Buddha Śākyamuni, was also totally filial toward his parents. . . . (*chüan* 4, pp. 15-16)

Perhaps the most instructive differences between values in the *Illustrated Book* and those of some *pao-chüan* can be seen in injunctions to women. In several *pao-chüan* there is strong sympathy for the plight of women, coupled with overtones of liberation, but the attitude of the *Illustrated Book* at this point is quite traditional. Such is also the case with

the *Precious Record*, in which the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool exhorts women to shun arrogance, physical beauty, and cosmetic decoration. Women should be plain, filial, and obedient, must not go out the gate, and are to refrain from talking to outsiders (*chüan* 2, pp. 81-82).¹⁵

Thus these three nineteenth-century *fu-chi* books demonstrate the continued importance of Confucian values and compilers in the spirit-writing tradition. They remind us as well of the role of this tradition in cultural integration, since they are addressed to both scholars and commoners in a relatively simple classical style. However, there were other *fu-chi* texts produced at about the same time in which Confucian influence is much less dominant. It is to one of the most important of these that we now turn.

"THE GOLDEN BASIN OF JADE DEW"

The Golden Basin of Jade Dew (*Yü-lu chin-p'an*), in one volume, was first published in 1880, but there is a reference in the text to Maitreya's beginning to teach by means of the "phoenix," and "opening up Shu 蜀 (Szechwan) in the *keng-tzu* 庚子 year (1840-1841), altogether forty-one years [ago]" (p. 11). The work is of particular interest to us because it is a scripture of central importance to the Compassion Society, which provides a major case study in later chapters.¹⁶ The edition we use for present purposes (YLCP) was published by the Hsuan-feng 玄峯 branch congregation of the Compassion Society in Taipei county, Taiwan. No date is provided.

The place of publication in 1880 is given as the "Cinnabar Completion Terrace" (*Tan-ch'eng t'ai* 丹成台), which we have not been able to identify. This book is a collection of twenty-three revelations from the Golden Mother (4), Wu-tao Chen-jen 悟道真人 (3), Ch'un-yang Lu-tsu 純陽呂祖 (2), Maitreya, Ti-tsang, Kuan-yin, Chang San-feng 張三豐, Śākyamuni, Bodhidharma, and several other deities, none of whom is specifically Confucian.

The central deity is the "Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool" (Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu 瑤池金母), who is identified as the "Venerable Mother" (*Lao Mu-niang* 老母娘) (p. 30, etc.). Just as Wu-sheng Lao-mu in Ming dynasty texts, this mother/creator sends emissaries from paradise beseeching her wayward children to return. The "jade dew" refers to her tears of sorrow for humanity. The "golden basin" is the spirit writing tray on which messages are written with these tears. It also refers to the book so produced.

The mythology of the *Golden Basin* is summed up in the following

¹⁵ On the role of women in *pao-chüan*, see Overmyer 1985.

¹⁶ Seaman (1978: 51-62) includes a discussion of this book in the context of "morality books" produced in Taiwan. One 1895 reprint is in two *chüan*.

passages. First, a revelation attributed to the Golden Mother herself:¹⁷

Out of the primordial mist the two modes of being (*liang-i* 兩儀) were formed, and chaos (*hun-tun* 混沌) first opened up. Human beings and all things in the world were produced by the alternating movement and quiescence of *yin* and *yang*. Then [I took] a drop of material force from the time before the world began (*hsien-t'ien ch'i* 先天氣) and gave it to each creature and each human being, so that they covered the whole earth. It is difficult to describe all of heaven and earth in just a few words, [but from this we can see that] all have the same divine origin, human beings and demons, immortals and gods. Those who turn their backs on my way and reject my intentions [for them] in their confusion follow the path to becoming demons, while those who recognize my origin and practice my way of life will become Buddhas and immortals. Because their comprehension is so limited, people do not understand the decrees of heaven, so today through my tears I will explain all this to you in detail.

I think back to the time when there were as yet no people or other creatures; heaven was dark with clouds, and the earth cold; and I sat alone on [my] holy mountain (Ling-shan 靈山), lost in deep thought.¹⁸ Then I took primordial seeds, the divine natures of all the ninety-six myriads (*i* 億) of humanity, and flung them down to the red-dust world [this samsaric world]. The *ch'ien* 乾 [seeds] became men; the *k'un* 坤 [seeds] became women; and they in turn gave birth. The four continents and the ten realms I distributed evenly everywhere. P'an-ku 盤古 and Sui-jen Shih¹⁹ 燧人氏 both were commanded by me, and I also ordered the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors to descend to earth.²⁰ I commissioned all the sages as well to come down to earth to protect and support you, so that all those of divine origin [i.e., humanity] would have clothing to wear when it was cold, food and drink then they were hungry, and houses for shelter from rain and snow. (Pp. 26-27)

Additional details are provided in a revelation from "The Great Immortal Shan-fa" (Shan-fa Ta-hsien²¹ 善法大仙):

¹⁷ These translations from the *Golden Basin* are taken from Overmyer 1977. In earlier Buddhist discussions "Jade Dew" is a symbol of Kuan-yin's grace, collected in "Golden Basins."

¹⁸ Ling-shan is a name for the Golden Mother's paradise, originally derived from Ling-chiu shan 靈鷲山 or "Spirit Vulture Peak" (*Grdhrakūta*), in India, where the Buddha was said to have preached the *Lotus Sūtra*.

¹⁹ An *i* is conventionally defined as 100,000, but it may refer to 1,000,000 or 100,000,000 as well. P'an-ku and Sui-jen Shih are mythological culture heroes who separated the earth from the heavens and discovered fire, respectively.

²⁰ The "Three Sovereigns" were legendary culture heroes who invented writing, agriculture, etc. The "Five Emperors" were legendary rulers of antiquity who laid the foundations of social and political order.

²¹ Shan-fa Ta-hsien is not referred to in other Compassion Society texts, so we take him here to be a deified former member of the group which produced the *Golden Basin*. No description or personal name is provided.

... After heaven and earth had been created, various Buddhas led the ninety-six *i* of mankind down to the red-dust world ... [where they] had neither clothing to wear nor food to eat, and day and night were not yet divided. Then the Venerable Mother ordered P'an-ku to divide chaos so that light appeared, and day and night were distinguished. [However] mankind [lit.: "the multitudes of divine origin"] living in mountains and forests were starving and cold, living together with birds and beasts with nothing to wear but grass, and nothing to eat but plants. The Venerable Mother on [her] holy mountain could not bear this, so she sent down Fu-hsi 伏羲 to establish the principles of human relations,²² but people still had nothing to eat, so the Venerable Mother sent down her mother's milk, ordering Shen-nung 神農 to taste the various forms of vegetation ... from which he made rice, millet, pulse, wheat, and other grains for food.²³

The account continues with descriptions of other culture heroes commissioned to bestow such blessings as clothing and houses. With the exception of the Venerable Mother's controlling role, all this is standard popular mythology. Indeed, the principal contribution of the *Golden Basin*, and the reason it has attained the prominence it has among Mother-worshipping sectarians, is that it achieves a remarkable degree of integration between conventional myths and hagiographies and the unifying master-myth of the Golden Mother; as such it provides the principal intellectual rationale for Motherist sectarianism.

Unfortunately, after being comfortably established on earth, people soon forgot the source of all their blessings and began to abandon themselves to material pleasure. Shen-fa Ta-hsien continues:

Although they enjoyed limitless blessings, [people] all forgot about the Venerable Mother's grace and came to look upon wine, sex, and wealth as life itself. They rejected all rules of morality and proper human relationships, and devoted themselves to smoking opium, visiting prostitutes, and gambling. If they entered county office, they oppressed villagers and acted in an arrogant and reckless manner. They molested the old and cheated orphans and widows, thereby completely destroying their natural goodness. They cursed the wind and the rain, vilified the sun, moon, and stars, refused to believe in the gods, and ridiculed those who did good. ... Because of all this, these scattered and lost ones forgot their origin. The gods of destiny (San Ssu-shen 三司神) sent a memorial [concerning the situation] to the heavenly palace. The Jade Emperor was enraged, and he sent down calamities. In the *keng-tzu* year (1840), a heavenly decree was posted, ordering that the earth be swept clean.

²² Fu-hsi was a legendary emperor and culture hero, who among other things invented the Eight Trigrams and the domestication of animals. He is one of the "Three Sovereigns" mentioned earlier.

²³ Shen-nung was the legendary discoverer of agriculture. He too is one of the "Three Sovereigns."

When the Venerable Mother heard this, tears rolled down her cheeks like pearls because of the scattered and lost ones about to be destroyed with no way of escape. She summoned all the many gods and Buddhas, ordering them [to descend to earth] . . . and bestow grace by means of spirit writing . . . , to establish holy altars and proclaim the great way to save all mankind. How was she to know that the scattered multitudes had already so confused their original nature that imploring them to turn away was fruitless? They willingly had fallen into a pit of fire. (P. 30)²⁴

Shen-fa Ta-hsien concludes his message with a personal note characteristic of these revelations:

In recent years I have studied to become an immortal, and have now reached my goal. Now I have come again to exhort you friends of the Way and fellow members of [the Golden Mother's] family. When I saw your Dragon Flower Assembly (Lung-hua hui 龍華會) today,²⁵ I decided to approach . . . [to remind you] that all people are originally from Ling-shan, and that if you are willing to practice piety and devotion you can all become saints or gods. I hope that you will believe my words, for I have come to point the way back to Ling-shan and the Venerable Mother, where your rewards will be great. . . . Punting the iron boat [of salvation], you will pass the islands in the sea and ascend to the K'un-lun 崑崙 mountains. (P. 30)²⁶

The basic theme of the Venerable Mother's continuing active concern is summed up in the following passages:

The tears of the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool cover her cheeks; such sadness fills her bosom as cannot be released, only because of her children who have descended to earth, the ninety-six *i* who have entered human wombs. In two Dragon Flower Assemblies she has been unable to save them all; only four *i* have returned, ascending to the Jasper Towers [her paradise]. Today there are still ninety-two *i* scattered and lost in a sea of evil; because she does not know when she will get them back, the tears cover her cheeks.

The Venerable Mother with anxious heart has instructed that all human

²⁴ The motif of the Jade Emperor's decision to destroy the world is found in the beliefs of other sects as well, such as the Yellow Heaven sect (*Huang-t'ien chiao* 黃天教) active in Chahar in the 1940's. (Li Shih-yü [1948: 19] traces the history of the Yellow Heaven sect back to the late Ming.) In many contemporary Taiwan *pai-luan* groups Kuan-kung is credited with appealing to the Jade Emperor to allow him to establish *fu-chi* divination sects in a last attempt to save humanity from divine displeasure. (Some groups also credit him with succeeding to the office of Jade Emperor himself thereafter. See Shih Wu-yü 1981. Pages 189-217 deal with this belief, particularly in a sectarian context.)

²⁵ In orthodox Buddhist thought, "Dragon Flower Assembly" refers to the three great preaching assemblies of Maitreya after his advent. In the mythology of Chinese popular sects, this term was integrated with the three-stage eschatology mentioned above, with the third assembly yet in the future. In Compassion Society texts "Dragon Flower Assembly" sometimes refers simply to the collective worship services of the sect.

²⁶ K'un-lun mountains" refers to the Venerable Mother's paradise in the west, in sectarian mythology equated with Ling-shan 靈山.

beings be saved because she wishes to recover the original wholeness (*shou yuan* 收元).

. . . Four *i* have already ascended to the Lotus Tower, but ninety-two *i* are (still) scattered and lost. The Bodhisattva Maitreya, in compliance with imperial instructions came to the eastern land [viz., this world] to save all those destined for salvation (*yuan-jen* 緣人). [The Golden Mother] also invited all the gods and saints to reveal the religion, bestowing grace through descending in the spirit-writing pen. (Pp. 7, 11)

From this material we can see that, just as is the case with Ming dynasty *pao-chüan*, the basic value in the *Golden Basin* is religious salvation defined by a mythological structure. This structure is not present in the contemporary Confucian oriented texts described above, which are collections of moral exhortations. However, despite this mythological difference, the explicit ethical teachings of these two types of texts are quite similar, as can be seen in the passages just quoted. This similarity is strengthened by the concern of the *Golden Basin* to embrace all the "three teachings," including Confucian ethics. As we read in a preface ascribed to the Golden Mother:

When the world was [first] established, the Great Way was revealed in the whole realm, and divided into the schools of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Although their names are different, Principle pervades them all as one. . . .

Human beings are born through being endowed with the spiritual vital forces of heaven and earth. This spiritual endowment goes through creative transformations, and [people] grow in accord with the nurture of *yin* and *yang*. As they are nourished and molded they must embody loyalty and filial piety to establish the world (*li ch'ien-k'un* 立乾坤). They should strengthen a correct spirit (*cheng-ch'i* 正氣) to repay heaven and earth. . . .

Even though the three teachings have been transmitted, they have all been extinguished, so that for a long time the Great Way has not been understood. I arranged three "Dragon Flower Assemblies," but it is difficult to enlighten the lost. I have revealed many scriptures, but they have not brought understanding to the ignorant and benighted, who willingly submerge themselves in the sea of retribution, and make a prison of their own accord.

At first I did not know what to do, but just wept in sorrow. What good fortune that the Immortal Awakened to the Way, an advisor of Minister Lü 呂 several times requested a commission. . . . to use tears to write characters, to compose a book expressing my mental agony. . . . [This] Way has never been written down for fear that as it was transmitted for a long time it would enter into paths of heresy. But now there is no alternative to permitting it to be revealed to humanity. . . . (Pp. 1-2, dated 1880)

As can be seen in the passages translated above, in the *Golden Basin* salvation and ethical teaching are necessary because people are living in an immoral and infatuated way. This is so because they are entangled

in desires, and thus give themselves up to wealth, sex, wine, emotional depression, and opium (p. 37). The ethical principles emphasized in response to these problems are quite conventional, beginning with filial piety and respect for elders. As we read in a revelation from the Patriarch [Chang] San-feng 張三豐

I urge you to practice spiritual discipline; do not be contrary and disobedient. The kindness of parents is like that of heaven and earth. Filial sons and daughters enjoy Heaven; disobedient sons and daughters return to Purgatory. I warn you now: do not trifle with the kindness of your parents!

This passage continues with warning that brothers must not quarrel, and with injunctions against cheating others, to be trustworthy and sincere, to abstain from wine, sexual immorality, greed, and anger (pp. 25-26)

A message from the Patriarch Ch'un-yang 純陽 echoes these injunctions, and adds warnings against befriending those whom one should not, and against

... seeing [only] profit, forgetting moral principles, discarding trustworthy conduct, secretly resenting one's friends and ridiculing them, and wearing murderous knives at one's waist.

This message includes a section directed to officials:

I weep because you slander inferiors, gobble up salary, forget kindness done to you, [and have] crooked minds. You cheat the ruler, obstruct affairs of state, and harm good citizens. You accumulate [wealth], enrich your families, and thus injure frugality, but one never hears that you reduce punishments or lighten taxes. . . . I urge you, look toward what is high and lofty, and with loyal devotion aid the court. (P. 16)

Elsewhere in this book devotees are urged to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and to observe the five Buddhist prohibitions against killing, stealing, sexual immorality, wine and meat, and lying (p. 50). Standard means of penance are suggested as well: buying animals to release them, printing and distributing books, giving to the poor, aiding those in difficulty, reciting scriptures, and carrying out penance rituals (p. 68).

A related emphasis in the *Golden Basin* is repeated warnings against unspecified heresies and exhortations to orthodoxy. A set of "directions to the reader" begins:

This book completely reveals the Great Way of the Prior Realm (*Hsien-fien ta-tao* 先天大道) and discusses a Way which has never before been disclosed in writing. Because of confusion and disorder caused by heresy, distinctions have not been clear, and many people attack vegetarianism as heretical religion. They really do not understand what is involved in this practice. So now [this

book] has been revealed to manifest the orthodox Way (*cheng-tao* 正道) which has no partiality, with which heretical and magical arts cannot be compared. . . .

Men and women devoted to the Real, if your teachers' instructions accord with this book, they are the orthodox Way; if not, their way is not correct. All students should by no means enter paths of heresy. [If you do] you will have endless regrets. Be careful! Be careful! (P. 6)

Here and elsewhere sectarian texts seek to dissociate themselves from earlier groups which had long been condemned by the government.

Later on in the text there is an attack on such classical heretics as Ch'ih Yu 蚩尤, Yang Chu 楊朱, Mo Ti 墨翟, and the Yellow Turbans, who are manifestations of demons, who "disorder the orthodox Way." These "Five Demons" (*wu mo* 五魔), led by Ku-chiu Sa-tan 故虬撒旦 (Satan), who was at first a god (*lien-shen* 天神), long ago rebelled against the Venerable Mother and sought to keep people from returning to her.²⁷ These demons set up sects of their own, and through magic powers they entice and entrap with realms of desire. Even spirits and immortals sent down with the Mother's message are ensnared by demonic desires, so Kuan-ti and the Patriarch Lü suggest that spirit-writing altars be set up as a new means of direct revelation. The Venerable Mother assents, and

in response to her decree the two sages Kuan and Lü manifested themselves and preached in the Dragon Maiden Monastery of Pa-Shu 巴蜀 (Szechwan), opened the eyes of images, and began [to use] *fu-chi* with extraordinary spiritual power. (Pp. 37-42)

Thus by the late nineteenth century it appears that sectarian writers began to use the old form of morality books composed by spirit writing as a vehicle for "Venerable Mother" mythology, a development present in other texts in Overmyer's collection as well. For example, the books of the Way of Allegiance to the One (Kuei-i tao 皈一道) of the Golden Elixir Way (Chin-tan tao 金丹道) in Shantung are based on this mythology, and one of them, published in 1904, titled *The Scripture of the Unborn* (*Wu-sheng ching* 無生經), is attributed to the Mother herself. However, books containing more diffuse ethical teachings continued to exist, and texts of both types are produced in Taiwan today.

SPIRIT-WRITING BOOKS FROM MODERN TAIWAN

Sectarian congregations in Taiwan have produced hundreds of collections of *fu-chi* revelations, printed both as books and as magazines. The books are written in the alternating prose and verse style mentioned above, for the most part in simple classical Chinese, with some colloquial

²⁷ Here the Biblical Satan adds a dramatic mythological dimension to the old sectarian theme that the world is in a period of decline and chaos. A note of commentary appended to this passage identifies him with the old Chinese demon-rebel Ch'ih Yu 蚩尤 (p. 37).

constructions. Although verse revelations from deities may be flowery and obscure, on the whole the language of these texts is not difficult to understand once certain technical terms and conventions have become familiar.

In form, a typical Taiwan *fu-chi* book has the following characteristics:

1. A cover of paper in any one of several colors, with the book title.
2. A title page, including date and place of publication.
3. Several pages of pictures of sect deities, either drawings or photographs of images, some with their official seals stamped on the backs of the pictures. Some deities may be represented by pictures of tablets rather than images.
4. Photographs of sect temples, leaders, and ritual celebrations.
5. A table of contents, organized by sections and chapters, with each recorded revelation listed by name of deity, type of writing (prose, poetry, etc.), and page number.
6. A preface (*hsu* 序), usually revealed, sometimes written by a sect leader or editor.
7. A brief history of the sect (*yen-ke* 沿革), concentrating on times and places of revelation, books composed, temples built or repaired, etc.
8. The text itself, usually in the form of scores of short revelations in no particular order. In the text the name of the deity in each subtitle is usually followed by the character *chiang* 降, "descending."
9. A list of contributors who have helped defray publication costs.

Each revelation is characterized by its literary type. Verse forms include:

shih 詩, rhyming verse in two lines of seven characters each, or four lines of three characters each.

tz'u 辭, rhyming seven-character lines, four lines per column on a page, interspersed with occasional three character lines.

Prose sections are characterized by the following terms:

yueh 曰, said

shih 示, revealed

t'an 談, discussed

shu 述, narrated

In addition, there may be *tsan* 讚, statements of praise and exhortation, usually in prose, sometimes in rhyming verse in two lines of seven characters each. In texts and on sect temple walls, one also finds *lien* 聯, pairs of matched six-character lines. At the end of a book or chapter there is often a colophon (*pa* 跋).

These various forms may not all be found in any one text. Some books include short stories illustrating karmic retribution, similar to stories in nineteenth-century *pao-chüan*, but shorter and simpler. Occasionally one

finds as well "panel discussions" involving several deities and spirits commenting on a theme, as is the case with *The Way of Co-humanity and Love* (*Jen-ai chih Tao* 仁愛之道), discussed below.

The ethical teachings of these Taiwan texts are a combination of popular Buddhism and Confucianism, quite traditional in tone. The Confucian contribution can be seen in exhortations to fulfill the principles of the "five relationships," the "eight ethical norms," the "three obediences" for women, etc. There are long chapters on filial piety, co-humanity (*jen* 仁), and righteousness, some of them revealed by Kuan-ti, or even by Confucius himself.²⁸

From Buddhism the sects gained their emphasis on non-violence, compassion, and vegetarianism, and their basic sanction for ethical behavior, the doctrines of karma and purgatory. Karmic reward and retribution are frequently referred to, sometimes through simple stories. In addition to general ethical principles, these texts give more detailed instructions for proper ritual behavior. All of this is supported by injunctions to put these ethics into practice.

However, it is made clear that morality in itself is not enough; with it one can hope at best for rebirth in human form. One's goal should be salvation through inner realization of one's true nature. This enlightenment comes through study of the revealed books and through meditation, both of which can be carried out only in the context of ethical living.

A common theme is the need to show proper reverence for these books themselves by "putting them in a clean place" and by believing that they are what they claim to be. Loyalty and orthodoxy to a large degree are equated with adherence to the validity of *fu-chi* revelation, and heresy with its rejection. There is an associated criticism of "superstition" (*mi-hsin*²⁹ 迷信). These books often laud their own efficacy and value and praise those who have revealed and composed them.

²⁸ For a recent introduction to Taiwan spirit-writing texts, see Thompson (1982). Thompson emphasizes the generally orthodox tone of these books and their essentially Confucian ethical teaching.

²⁹ The term *mi-hsin* (literally "confused belief" or "infatuated belief") came into Chinese only in this century as a regular translation of the Western term "superstition," and in many respects it is not yet entirely at home in the language. For some speakers, *mi-hsin* seems to refer to excessive or unusual concern with religious affairs, rather than to the particular affairs in question. In Taiwan its most common occurrence is in condemnations of superstition, such as the political slogan "Smash superstition!" (*p'o-ch'u mi-hsin* 破除迷信). We have the impression that few people in Taiwan today use the term without a sense of opprobrium, but exactly what it is thought of as including and how roundly the practice or belief in question is to be condemned seems to vary dramatically from one speaker to another. In the sectarian context the term seems to mean performing ritual acts for immediate physical benefits, rather than for salvation in obedience to instructions from the gods.

*An Illustrative Text: "The Way of
Co-humanity and Love"*

The text we have selected to illustrate the values of spirit-writing texts produced in Taiwan is called *The Way of Co-humanity and Love* (*Jen-ai chih Tao* 仁愛之道, ed. by Huang Yin-ch'i 黃蔭齊 1973). Its originating congregation is the "Chapel of Co-humanity and Love" (*Jen-ai t'ang* 仁愛堂), which is identified as being associated with the "Society for Reverencing Goodness" (*Kung-shan she* 拱善社) of the "Clouds of Compassion Temple" (*Tz'u-yun kung* 慈雲宮), all in Kaohsiung. (Material from other texts, produced by groups in our case studies, is discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 10.)

The Way of Co-humanity and Love is a beautifully prepared book. It begins with pictures or tablets of the nineteen deities who are the most important revealers in it, each accompanied by an imprint from the god's official seal. There follow woodblock illustrations of the ten courts of purgatory, and then a table of contents listing ninety-one revelations from such deities as Kuan-ti, Fu-yu Ti-chün, Wen-ch'ang, Śākyamuni, Dīpamkara, Confucius, Mencius, Kuan-yin, Ti-tsang, Li Po, Mañjúsri, Chen-wu 真武 and a variety of lesser divine inspectors, guardians, and officials. In addition, there are several revealing spirits associated particularly with this sect, including three "Holy Mothers From Heaven" named Ch'en 陳, Lin 林, and Ho 何, who are titled respectively Chairwoman, Assistant Chairwoman, and Investigator of the sect.

The introductory section of *Co-humanity and Love* begins with a brief history of the group, which describes a terrible plague in Taiwan in 1921 that was particularly bad in Kaohsiung. Both Chinese and Western-style physicians were helpless. The passage continues:

Fortunately the three deities, the Holy Mothers From Heaven, Ch'en, Lin, and Ho, descended to [spirit writing] altars to bestow medical prescriptions to rescue the world. In every area those who were afflicted divined to seek prescriptions . . . and the epidemic gradually subsided. Local people, all bathed by an excess of the Holy Mothers' ample kindness, offered sacrifices to them in sincere devotion . . . and bowed down and offered incense in the original Yuan-heng 元亨 monastery of the Ta-ku 打鼓 grotto.

This account continues by saying that the people involved appointed about ten good men to look after worship of the Holy Mothers. Among these men was one named Lu Chu-te 盧珠得. They began to build a temple "to provide a center of faith for this city." After much discussion, devotees decided to restore the Yuan-heng monastery, which was in disrepair, and thus worship the Holy Mothers and Kuan-yin in the same place. This plan was deemed both sensible and economical, as it could be carried out

at less than half the cost of building a new temple. The name Yuan-heng was retained.

The task of rebuilding was begun in 1926 and completed in 1928. The account continues:

The present [1973] sect head (*t'ang-chu* 堂主) is Lu Ju-pao 盧如寶, the second son of the pious Lu Chu-te. While young he continued his father's traditions, and prepared a good foundation through the worship of gods and Buddhas.

After Chu-te's death, sect worship evidently declined, for we are told that his son "only worshipped images of the Holy Mothers in his own house" for several tens of years. Then, in 1970,

. . . observing that in this region the holy teaching was no longer transmitted, that the bonds of social morality had weakened, and that ethical principles were ruined, [he] implored the Mothers to oversee this area again, transform the people, and point out the way to the lost, thereby to restore Chinese culture. [Lu Ju-pao] then hastened to the Ch'ao-ti'en 朝天 temple in Pei-kang 北港 in Yunlin county [a prominent Ma-tsu temple], where he burned incense and prayed. After gaining permission seven times by casting diving blocks, he had a skillful artisan carve golden [colored] images.

The eyes of these images were opened on the sixteenth day of the first lunar month in 1971, and they were set up in Kaohsiung, the San-min 三民 district, Po-ai 博愛 Road, No. 53, 4th floor. In accord with an imperial bequest, this place was called the Kaohsiung Clouds of Compassion Temple (*Tz'u-yun kung* 慈雲宮). On the twentieth day of the third month of that same year, the gods decreed that this chapel be called the Chapel of Co-humanity and Love of the Society for Reverencing Goodness of the Clouds of Compassion Temple. At an auspicious time on the twenty-third of the same month, this chapel was opened and "studying the phoenix" [i.e., receiving revelations] began. [Later] we were instructed to compose the *Co-humanity and Love* to save the world. (Pp. 1-4)

The first revelation in this book is a list of ten chapel regulations (*t'ang-kuei* 堂規) from Holy Mother Ho. They are, in sum, that:

Ritual must be correct and proper.

Before entering the chapel, hands are to be washed and clothing neat.

One cannot enter the chapel while drinking wine.

During worship, men are to be on the left, women on the right.

When spirit writing is being carried out, all should be done in proper order, with all standing who should stand, and all sitting who should sit.

When each guest spirit has completed its audience, all members should chant in unison: "We respectfully see off such and such a deity on its return home."

Calling out what has been written must be done in a clear voice.

Participants must by all means be on time.

No dozing is permitted during spirit-writing sessions.

There is to be no shouting in the rear of the chapel; talking should be in quiet voices. (Pp. 5-6)

There follows a lengthy preface by the Holy Emperor Kuan, setting out the basic purpose and approach of this book. It begins by describing the desperate situation of mankind at the beginning before true teaching appeared. People were "confused and ignorant," beset with all sorts of suffering and shame. This passage continues:

But when the way of the sages was practiced in the world, people turned to enlightenment, the world was bright, and everywhere there were the "paths of order" (*li-lu* 理路). . . . People were able to awaken to the Way. . . .

In the modern world, however, science is glorious and bright, while the Way of the sages has been obscured, and customs daily decline. The minds of men are not as of old; they contend for fame and profit and induce [others to] immorality and theft. They are overcome with falsehood, deceit, and fear. This is all because people disregard their true nature and moral principles and thus injure their own bodies and minds. It is vital to realize that in human nature there is the highest truth, which should not be trifled with, for ethical principles there is the perfectly real which cannot be destroyed. If people do not preserve the moral nourishment of the Way and its virtue which has always existed, but are deluded by the false promises of fame and fortune and turn truth into falsehood, then they will be submerged in a sea of suffering, with no hope for escape.

There follows a section praising the "three teachings" and the "harmony of their principles with the mind of heaven and earth." Then the Emperor Kuan continues:

Now I wish to reform the corrupt customs of the world and rescue the minds of men sunk in depravity. For this only establishing the perfection of the Way of the sages will suffice, thereby to rectify the principles of the nature and destiny. Only thus can one dwell in the marvelous universe, and amorphous human life (*miao-mang chih jen-sheng* 渺茫之人生) have a purpose.

What is the way to accomplish this? It is to clarify the proper principles of human relationships, teach filial piety, carry out co-humanity, and make love universal.

To what does "clarifying the principles of human relationships" refer? It refers to the Five Principles (*wu-lun* 五倫), that is, those pertaining to relationships between rulers and subjects, fathers and sons, brothers, husbands and wives, and friends. The ruler should be humane, subjects respectful, fathers merciful and sons filial, older brothers friendly and younger brothers attentive, husbands and wives amiable and in harmony, and friends trustworthy and principled.

When such is the case, then the way of humanity is characterized by peaceful cooperation, the constant principles of human relationships are correct, and

people govern themselves. It is impossible to attain good order if these principles are ignored.

What does filial piety mean? It means obedience (*shun* 順), that is, obeying one's parents. Wherever one looks in the world, filial piety is at the beginning of things; it is the first principle of all conduct. For people to lack filial piety is like a stream having no source, and thus being sure to dry up. . . .

This discussion continues with quotes from the *Classic of Filial Piety*, from the *Book of Poetry*, and from Han Yü, a ninth-century Confucian scholar, to define "practicing co-humanity" and "making love universal." This latter is defined as

looking on the parents and children of others as one looks on one's own. Then there will be no selfish love in this world, and "great unity" will be attained.

The preface concludes with comments about the book itself, concerning which Kuan-ti says:

In order to save the people of the world, without regard for the difficulty involved, I have roamed about all over the realm, inviting great deities and sages to descend to this chapel to compose *The Way of Co-humanity and Love*. (Pp. 7-13)

Later in this book there are several stories illustrating karmic retribution, such as one about the wicked wife of a rich man who refuses to help the poor. As a result her son is killed by a bright ray of light from the sky (pp. 47-51). In one section of this volume, there is a 132-page discussion of retribution in purgatory, involving twenty-three participants (pp. 105-237). The basic theme is that goodness and evil have their own rewards, so ". . . it is to be hoped that people will not suffer through a thousand lifetimes and myriad *kalpas*, but will together ascend to the world of utmost bliss in the west" (p. 105).

The discussion proceeds as a devotee is taken through purgatory on a "soul carriage" (*hun-ch'i'e* 魂車) by a "General Li of the Central Altar of the Southern Region" (Nan-t'ien chung-t'an Yuan-shuai Li 南天中壇元帥李). On the way the devotee asks questions of the general and various officials and deities they meet. This journey involves several return trips, until each court has been visited. Here again Confucian virtues are bolstered by Buddhist karmic retribution.

Although the contents of the *Co-humanity and Love* are varied in style, its values are traditional. At one point the text refers to itself as a *pao-chüan* (p. 29), and there is even a somewhat garbled reference to the sectarian three stages of cosmic time, designated as those of red, green, and white *yang* 陽, and accompanied by repeated disasters (pp. 38-39). However, these disasters are due to karmic retribution and have no historical import.

There is no overall mythological framework in this book, which is basically a collection of moral injunctions revealed in various ways by concerned deities.

The ethical values of spirit-writing texts remain quite consistent, from the *Precious Book of the Jade Regulations* in 1622 to the *Co-humanity and Love* in 1973. However, by the nineteenth century some of these books discussed sectarian mythology, and their form became more complex. The *Jade Regulations* is revealed by only one deity, assisted by two others, but nineteenth-century texts may contain writings attributed to scores of deities from a variety of origins. In the *Jade Regulations* there are no references to supporting groups or sects, and no detailed ritual instructions, both of which are found in the later books. In twentieth-century texts from Taiwan these tendencies are intensified, frequently in the form of brief revelations from hundreds of deities, with many references to specific temples. Thus spirit-writing texts developed over time and have a history of their own.

LITURGICAL TEXTS

The books we have discussed so far are lengthy expositions of sect teaching, the end result of many hours of revelations attributed to the gods. They are expressions of a ritual process, intended for reading and study. Taiwan religious associations also use another form of book in congregational worship for group recitation. Such liturgical books are shorter, are printed with bigger characters, and tend to be larger in size, about six inches wide by ten inches long. In addition to the text of the scripture itself, they contain a variety of aids to worship: invocations (*chou* 咒), sometimes with tune notations provided; psalms for lighting incense; charm texts in transliterated pseudo-Sanskrit; short ritual books of orthodox origin, such as the *Heart Sūtra*; and instructions for what to do during the liturgy, such as "recite three times with nine prostrations." Such books are routinely found on altar tables, worn with much use.

Buddhist Scriptures

It is convenient to distinguish three types of liturgical books used in Taiwan: the first is a variety of Buddhist scriptures identical to those used in Buddhist temples and monasteries. By far the commonest collection is a compilation of orthodox Buddhist scriptures, invocations, verses (*gāthā*), *dhāranī*, and names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas entitled *Indispensable Buddhist Texts for Ritual Recitation* (FMPP). This book, prepared for use in

monastic ritual, is employed by a variety of groups all over Taiwan, has been reprinted time and again for both lay and clerical use, and contains no sectarian terms or references. Since the texts in it are all written in Buddhist classical Chinese, few lay reciters understand its literal meaning. For them, as for many monks and nuns, its significance is that it evokes the sacred power of an ancient and established tradition. The *Indispensable Buddhist Texts* opens with instructions for the use of musical instruments and rhythm in ritual, and then proceeds to a seven-page summary of Buddhist teaching, in classical language. There follow rationales for morning and evening worship, a table of contents, and then the passages to be recited during the dawn liturgy (*tsao-k'e* 早課). This consists for the most part of invocations in transliterated Sanskrit, together with homages to Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the *Heart Sūtra*, ten principles for Buddhist life and devotion, the formula for taking refuge in Buddha, Buddhist teaching and the monastic order, and a short passage extolling the saving power of Kuan-yin.

The evening liturgy (*wan-k'e* 晚課) opens with the *Amitābha Sūtra*, followed by an invocation, the "three refuges," and a penance text, which begins with five pages of homage to various Buddhas. The text itself, in prose and seven-character verse, states one's repentance for sins and resolve to reform. The liturgy continues with more homages, invocations, the *Heart Sūtra*, and vows by bodhisattvas to save all beings. The book goes on to provide psalms and invocations for different ritual occasions, such as offering incense and flowers, blessing ancestral tablets in monasteries, praising the patriarchs of the Pure Land schools, bathing the image of the infant Buddha, and guiding souls of the dead. Instructions for ritual action are interspersed throughout. The book concludes with a list of birthday celebration dates for Buddhas and bodhisattvas and of days on which a vegetarian diet is to be observed.

Sectarian Scriptures

The second type of liturgical text used by Taiwan sects consists of short scriptures that are not specifically Buddhist, but also not particularly sectarian, works that have been in circulation long enough to have taken on the quality of generally acknowledged morality texts of some sanctity, but whose origins are diverse and often obscure. Some are works of popular Taoism. Many are almost certainly *fu-chi* productions. Most of these scriptures are short, and are sometimes printed in large-character, accordion-pleated versions for chanting, but one more often finds volumes of them collected together. Fairly large collections of them may bear

the title *Compendium of Precious Scriptures from the Saints and Sages* (*Lieh sheng pao ching ho-ts'e* 列聖寶經合冊), although not all books with that title include quite the same selection of materials.³⁰

Many such texts are brief scriptures in honor of the sun, moon, and earth, written entirely in seven-character verse. Their message has a general appeal: an attitude of reverence toward the sources of life. For example, a commonly used text, particularly popular with the Compassion Society, is the *Earth Mother Scripture* (*Ti-mu ching* 地母經), also found under closely similar variant titles such as *True Scripture of Mother Earth* (*Ti-mu chen-ching* 地母真經) and *Honorable Scripture of the Earth Mother* (*Ti-mu tsun-ching* 地母尊經). It is found in *pai-luan* temples throughout Taiwan, but it originates outside Taiwan: according to its preface it was "transmitted by the flying phoenix" in the Earth Mother temple of Ch'eng-ku 城固 county in Shensi province in 1883.³¹

"THE EARTH MOTHER SCRIPTURE"

The *Earth Mother Scripture* begins with a psalm praising Mother Earth (*Ti-mu tsan* 地母讚), followed by a chant to accompany lighting incense, with tune notation provided. There is then an exhortation to read this scripture, which begins

The earth is able to give birth to all things and nourishes them as a mother. Her kindness, compassion, and virtue are generous and vast beyond compare. After creative chaos was first divided, Empress [Nü-]Kua put human relationships into proper order, the male and female principles blended their powers, and heaven and earth developed in a marvelous way. Then the goddess Mother Earth transmitted a scripture. This scripture is most efficacious. . . . (Pp. 1-2)

This passage continues with an exhortation to reverence and care for parents and honor the *Earth Mother Scripture*. Those who do so are promised health, good fortune, and long life.

After an "incense psalm," the text itself begins with a summary of the traditional view of creation. This book appears to be an expression of an earth mother cult: its chief concerns are to stress the creative power of the Earth Mother and her ability to bring blessings to those who appeal to her

³⁰For the curious, the tables of contents of two works with this title are listed in Appendix Five.

³¹Such dates are not always reliable, and the book does not have the form of a spirit-writing book. We can say at least that it did not originate in Taiwan, for in the Shanghai Municipal Library there is a manuscript edition of the same book, entitled *Book of Mother Earth* (*Ti-mu chüan* 地母卷). According to Li Shih-yü [1961: 69] it dates to 1923. Overmyer's copy (on which the following discussion is based) is distributed by the Sheng-an Kung in Hualien—see Chapter 6. Jordan's copy is put out by a regular tract publisher.

and recite her scripture. It is written in the first person:

All the Buddhas of the three worlds arise from me
and bodhisattvas do not depart from the body of the Mother.
All the gods are not separate from me;
if they left me, where would they rest?
The four directions, continents, and seasons were all created by me.
Rivers, lakes, and seas do not exist apart from me.
I produced all states and continents. . . .
I created mountains and forests
and produced the five grains and six kinds of rice . . .
When people are alive they eat me,
and when they die they return to my bosom.
Prefectures and counties do not exist apart from me;
temples and monasteries are formed of my body. (Pp. 7-8)

After bewailing the fact that people have forgotten their debt to Mother Earth, the text continues with passages like the following:

If every household will reverence Mother Earth,
there will be an abundant harvest of the five grains,
and peace and joy [will come].
[For them] there will be no great disasters or calamities,
and pious men and women will enjoy health and tranquility.
However if they do not listen to
Mother Earth's instructions,
there will be no harvest, and not enough to eat. . . . (Pp. 12-13)

The text ends with further praise for the *Earth Mother Scripture* and promises of salvation to all who reverence the Mother. There follows a scripture in honor of Kuan-yin, the *Scripture of the Five Grains* (*Wu-ku ching* 五谷經), the *Eyesight Scripture* (*Yen-kuang chen-ching* 眼光真經), the *True Scripture of the Sun* (*T'ai-yang chen-ching* 太陽真經), and the *True Scripture of the Moon* (*T'ai-yin chen-ching* 太陰真經).³² These latter praise the power and blessings of the sun and moon and urge reverence for them.

In sum, recitation of these little books reminds one of the sacred foundations of all life and of the need for a reverent and grateful attitude. They are admirably adapted to the spiritual needs of people of rural background. Their reverence for nature balances the Buddhist psychological and ethical concerns of the *Indispensable Buddhist Texts*, which can

³²This last is omitted in Jordan's edition, suggesting that other editions too may have slight variations in content. The Shanghai MS edition is identical with the Taiwan reprint examined by Overmyer.

often be found side by side with the *Earth Mother Scripture* on the same altar.

Latter-Day FU-CHI Liturgy Texts

The third and most distinctive type of liturgical text is produced by the Taiwan sects themselves through *fu-chi*. Liturgically oriented texts are often revealed very early in a congregation's development, setting the norms of worship and religious activity, and are left more or less intact thereafter. As an example of this type, we here discuss the *True Scripture of the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool for Universal Salvation, Restoring Wholeness, Establishing Wisdom, and Obtaining Spiritual Release* (YCCM). This book is commonly used in Compassion Society rituals. (See Chapter 6.) In simple classical language it begins with a revelation from the "Buddha of Compassionate Voice" (Tz'u-yin Fo 慈音佛), praising Kuan-yin, and saying that, in obedience to the Golden Mother's decree,

I, in this third period of the teaching, save all in the eastern realm [this world], restore the completeness and unity of souls, and rescue all the world. The way of this world from antiquity has been easily diverted; the minds of men are infatuated [with desire and profit]; and many, having lost their moral judgment, revolve in *samsāra* without cease. So they are cruelly bound about with disasters and difficulties. People all [have] the Buddha nature, but lack the means to return to Heaven. Who understands human nature and destiny? For complete spiritual nourishment, explaining meditation, wisdom, and release is of first importance. (P. 1)

There follow psalms for offering water and incense and for cleansing the altar, then nine invocations for cleansing the mouth, mind, body, and actions, for purifying the altar, for settling the locality god, for purifying heaven, earth, and the gods, for praying for spiritual light, and for offering incense. The text itself is written in a rather disjointed fashion to allow for ritual intervals, with instructions provided. It is a collection of pious and flowery phrases which have ritual significance but not much discursive meaning. Its basic themes are praise of the Mother and her promise of salvation. The core of this scripture is only four leaves long, transmitted from the Mother in the Prior Realm by a female immortal called Tung Shuang-ch'eng 董雙成. It begins with a first-person statement by the Golden Mother, and then continues as a dialogue between her and the "Great Being [bodhisattva] Tz'u-hang 慈航:

The Golden Mother said, "In antiquity my master, the 'Superior Man of Supreme Mystery' (Hsuan-hsuan Shang-jen 玄玄上人), transmitted the Way to Master Mu (Mu Kung 木公), and Master Mu transmitted the Way to me. Then

it was passed down orally, and not written down. Now Heaven has opened up a vast Way to save all in the eastern realm. I hope that all persons in the world will quickly seek out enlightened masters to understand their own mind and nature thoroughly. It is very easy to be entrapped by burning desires in the red dust world, but difficult to escape. Without the strength of wisdom, how can one find release? To seek release, one must first establish wisdom."

The Great Being Tz'u-hang, with his palms pressed together in reverence, answers:

"Oh Mother, please open up an expedient gateway to salvation, and explain the way of release so that the good fortune of all beings may be my own!" The Golden Mother was most pleased, and replied to the Great Being Tz'u-hang, "... listen quietly, and I will expound for you the *True Scripture for Universal Salvation, Restoring Wholeness, Establishing Wisdom, and Obtaining Spiritual Release*. . . (P. 6)

Tz'u-hang then asks why the Mother does not simply decree that birth and death be eliminated and so avoid much suffering. To this she replies that, although there is a way out of *samsāra*, it is not possible to eliminate it because people bring its sufferings on themselves. She then explains that the way out of *samsāra* is by returning to the foundations of one's being, to one's "original face." Tz'u-hang goes on to ask about the path of release, to which the Mother replies:

Release is not difficult; what is difficult is establishing wisdom. When body and mind are firmly settled, this wisdom arises. When wisdom has been produced, then release is easy. If one wishes to understand release, one must first get rid of the "six thieves" [disturbing influences from the senses], so that the ears do not listen to [evil] sounds, the eyes do not look upon sensual form, the body does not touch filth, the thoughts are not attached to things, the nose does not smell disturbing odors, and the mouth is not greedy for food. When the "six thieves" are empty, then the "five heaps" are spontaneously understood. [That is, one understands the self as a temporary conglomeration of fleeting elements.] . . . [So] the spirit and mind are nourished and lively, above and below are in flowing communication, and release is easy. (Pp. 8b-9a)

The text concludes with psalms of praise for the Mother and her teaching, and with assurances that reciting this scripture during the day brings peace and security and at night brings pleasant dreams. If one recites it while walking along, locality gods will protect one's soul, and if while traveling in boats and carriages, one's life will be preserved.

Following this text there is a long charm passage, the *Heart Sūtra*, and another incantation for rebirth in the Pure Land. The book ends with a colophon on the back cover, praising the *True Scripture* and urging that it

be recited three times a day with an attentive mind in a room for meditation in temple or home.

The Compassion Society uses three other texts with a similar format, the *Precious Penance of the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool for Restoring Wholeness* (*Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu shou-yuan pao-ch'an* 瑤池金母收圓寶懺), the *True Scripture of the Emperor of the East for Enlightening the Ignorant* (*Tung-hua Ti-chün ch'i-meng chen-ching* 東華帝君啓蒙真經), and the *True Scripture of the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool Which Nourishes a Correct Spirit* (*Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu yang-cheng chen-ching* 瑤池金母養正真經). Although in other *fu-chi* books there are often instructions for ritual decorum, texts of the sort discussed here are specifically for ritual recitation by both groups and individuals. As such they build verbal and doctrinal content into the act of worship itself, a characteristic which further distinguishes sectarian popular religion from worship in village parish temples, for in parish temples ordinary folk do not usually recite scriptures.

Fu-chi MAGAZINES

An interesting development has taken place in spirit-writing literature in Taiwan, apparently within the last twenty years: the appearance of *fu-chi* magazines. Even without making methodical efforts to do so we have collected a large number of issues of several publications of this sort, for which the initial publishing dates range from 1964 to 1981. These magazines are devoted to the moral improvement of individuals and society, through writings attributed both to human authors and to gods. Except for revelations in verse, they are written in modern vernacular language, with cover illustrations, tables of contents, publishing information, and lists of contributors. They are all about six by eight inches in size and have from forty to fifty pages per issue. They contain editorials, articles on moral and religious topics, revelations from deities, commentaries on classical texts, reprints of popular scriptures, biographies of deities, short stories about exemplary persons, news of temple dedications and special rituals, medical prescriptions, letters to the editor, miscellaneous short exhortations, and occasional cartoons. These contributions may be published in serial form or as regular columns. Although the amount of revealed content varies, all these magazines contain at least some spirit-writing material, from short verses to long "panel discussions" and public trails of souls from purgatory. (See Appendix Four for titles and publishers.)

These magazines all have their own publishing organizations, in some cases associated with individual *pai-luan* congregations. Nevertheless, their perspective is ecumenical; they include news from different sects,

revelations from a variety of deities, and discussions of texts and concepts from Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. This perspective is based on their concern to revive traditional Chinese moral culture, a culture they believe is being rapidly eroded by urbanization, secular materialism, and ideas derived from modern science. As such these magazines are consciously restorationist and apologetic; their columns frequently defend the validity and importance of religious belief and ethical principles, and suggest that religion and science should supplement each other. This restorationist concern is expressed politically as well, by occasional attacks on Communism and by references to Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek as national leaders and revealing deities. In this context it is not surprising that the teaching of these magazines is strongly Confucian in tone; to a large extent they are popularized Confucianism, with *karma* and purgatory as additional sanctions. Although there are a few references to old sectarian terms and revelation from the Golden Mother, there is no sectarian mythology as such, and messages from deities once strongly associated with sectarian tradition are Confucian in tone. This characteristic is well illustrated by the first issue of *Sacred Ordering Principles* (*Sheng li* 聖理, March, 1972). In its opening pages it uses such old sectarian terms as "prior realm of the limitless" (*wu-chi hsien-t'ien* 無極先天) and "Imperial Mother" (Huang-mu 皇中), with the character "mother" written on its side (a tradition followed by a few sects, most notably the Unity Sect and the Compassion Society). Yet there are no revelations here from the Mother, not a shred of the mythology associated with her. The magazine includes a reprint of an article by Chiang Kai-shek on "The Fate of China" (pp. 11-12), possibly included partly as a demonstration of political orthodoxy.

The magazine's combination of sectarian terms with restorationist themes is well illustrated by its statement of basic principles:

1. Proclaim the true ordering principles of the limitless, and restore Chinese culture.
2. Advocate the ancient moral teachings of our nation, and save all sentient beings on behalf of Heaven.
3. Promote true ordering principles, exhort the world, enlighten the age, reform the lost, and carry out the sacred way of life to save both self and others. (P. 5)

It is instructive to note that the first revelation in this text is from Sun Yat-sen, here called "Immortal Sun of Middle Heaven Who Transforms by Instruction" (*Chung-t'ien chiao-hua chen-jen Sun* 中天教化真人孫), and the second is from the "Eighth Patriarch, Lo Wei-ch'un" 羅蔚羣, a semi-legendary sectarian founder. (See Appendix One.)

Spirit-writing magazines have developed into a large and fairly complex body of literature which deserves a study in its own right. Here we will limit ourselves to a few more detailed comments about their contents:

Each magazine provides a statement of its basic purposes, similar in tone to that of *Sacred Ordering Principles*, mentioned above. Thus *Saints and Worthies* (*Sheng hsien* 聖賢), for example, gives the following list of goals on the inside cover:

1. Restore the moral principles of constant social obligations.
2. Strengthen the national spirit.
3. Promote Confucian ethics.
4. Explain and clarify the true principles of the saints and worthies.
5. Transform people so that all improve.
6. Urge loyalty, moderation, and righteousness.
7. Advocate the improvement of popular customs.
8. Lead society to good fortune and harmony.
9. Promote charity and good works.
10. Improve and renew temple congregations.

In the context of these general goals, magazine articles expound passages from such classics as the *Book of Changes*, *Tao-te Ching*, *Analects*, and the *Heart Sūtra*. There are articles explaining the meaning of *karma* or *nirvāna*, discussing the history and branches of Taoism, and describing the life of Śākyamuni and his relationship to China. There are revelations providing general moral exhortations, giving assurance to named leaders of congregations, or congratulating pious editors for their work. In addition there are what might be called short sermons, such as "A Spiritual Gas Station" in *Sacred Virtue* (*Sheng te* 聖德), No. 1 (March, 1981), p. 19, which suggests that morality books provide fuel for the moral and religious dimension of life. One passage reads:

However, life is more than just food [and clothing]; what is most important is to seek for spiritual life (*ching-shen sheng-huo* 精神生活); in this time, when the minds of men are not as of old, and souls are empty, what people need is not material goods, but the replenishing of their souls. . . .

This article is followed by another one titled "Looking for the Truth in the Midst of Ordinary Life," which advocates looking for and acting on the true moral principles which can be found within us (p. 20).

Some of these sermons are apologetic in tone, defending the validity of spirit writing, the existence of the soul, and even the value of theology, complete with the citation of European Christian theologians (e.g., *Sacred Ordering Principles*, No 1 [March, 1972], p. 27). There are also short features, such as instructions for daily devotions, recipes for vegetarian dishes, and herbal drug prescriptions for childbirth complications, listless

children and diarrhoea. All these materials are short and easy to read, made to order for busy lay people in modern Taiwan. Human writers have a much more important role in these magazines than in *fu-chi* books, which are composed almost entirely of revelations. In the magazines the function of the revelations is to lend authority to the whole publication, most of the pages of which may be devoted to a form of popular moral philosophy expressed in both articles and commentaries. Thus the magazines supplement the books and provide an even more flexible means of responding to the needs of the age.

Fu-chi DIVINATION AND *Pai-luan* SECTARIANISM

Having examined the textual tradition, we turn now to the groups themselves. *Fu-chi* texts can be revealed with or without sectarian support groups, just as sectarianism can exist with or without a *fu-chi* oracle. But our concern is the combination. We earlier introduced the sinism *pai-luan* as an English designation for a *fu-chi*-centered sectarian group. In Chinese, however, such groups have no single, generic name. They can be called *pai-luan*, of course. But they are sometimes referred to as "spirit religion" (*shen-chiao* 神教) or "Confucian spirit religion" (*Ju-tsung shen-chiao* 儒宗神教), (Tseng Ch'ao-tung 1964: 39). The reference to Confucianism (probably due to the association with writing) leads to their often being called simply "Confucian Religion" (*Ju chiao* 儒教 or *K'ung chiao* 孔教). Believers often refer both to their groups and to the practice of *fu-chi* and its associated ceremonialism as *pai-luan* or "phoenix worship." But they use other terms as well, mostly incorporating the term *luan* 鸞 "phoenix": "phoenix hall" (*luan t'ang* 鸞堂), and "phoenix chapel" (*luan t'an* 鸞壇); both occur, referring especially to the place where the activity is carried out, but more broadly also to the group and its activities.³³

When Chinese speak of the activity of receiving divination by *fu-chi*,

³³The term *t'an* 壇 is usually translated "altar," and sectarians seem to use it that way when they invite the descent of spirits to their *t'an*. But this translation can also be misleading because the Chinese referent is much broader. *T'an* 壇 and *t'ang* 堂 ("hall") both designate meeting halls or "temples" in the context of sectarian societies. Sometimes they are buildings built, rented, or bought for the purpose, sometimes rooms in private houses, and sometimes borrowed public temples. If both terms are used, a *t'ang* is usually thought of as being slightly larger than a *t'an*. In addition to referring to the place of worship or the altar, the word *t'an* tends to be used to refer to the worshipping group as well or to a subordinate branch of a multi-branch group. (A local group may also select a separate, additional name for itself as a "society" or *she* 社.) In sectarian parlance, the commonest referent of *t'an* seems to be the physical building, and, accordingly, where the sense does not clearly demand the translation "altar," we have tended, for present purposes, to prefer the term "chapel" as closer to English semantics.

they often speak of the "descent of the phoenix" (*chiang luan* 降鸞) or of "supporting the phoenix" (*fu luan* 扶鸞) or of "the flying phoenix" (*fei luan* 飛鸞). (The title of this book comes from this last.) *Pai-luan* is less often found in dictionaries than some of the others, but seems a shade commoner than most in popular parlance. This is one reason why we have preferred it. Another reason is that its use of the element *pai* 拜, "worship," seems more general than such verbs as "fly" or "descend" and better covers the wide range of activities that are often associated with *pai-luan* groups.

A *pai-luan* group may come into existence either by fission from another *pai-luan* group, or because people experiment with spirit writing and decide to found a group for further work of the same kind. An independently established group is dependent upon its founders and its revelations for its basic liturgical structure. Some groups, seeking assistance, have resort to friends of the founders who are thought knowledgeable in the proprieties of relationships with the supernatural. When this happens, a group may have certain liturgical resemblances to some other *pai-luan* or even to non-*pai-luan* religious associations.

When founded by fission from a parent group, a *pai-luan* society naturally carries with it much of the liturgical "tradition" of the original group, and normally continues to retain a relationship with that group, acknowledged by a yearly pilgrimage to the parent site and by frequent informal visits between the groups. (This follows the model of popular temples, which are similarly instituted.) A powerful (or divisive) group may thus spawn numerous smaller ones that are similar in their general liturgical style and form a loose "denominational" association. The relationship of mother-and-daughter temples is normally merely a historical one. Rarely is there any thought of centralized control of a system of temples. If we use the term "denomination," then the normative case would have to be described as "strongly congregational." More "presbyterian" arrangements also exist, however. The most conspicuous example of such an association in modern Taiwan is the Tz'u-hui t'ang 慈惠堂 or "Compassion Halls," which we have preferred to translate "Compassion Society" to emphasize its unitary character. About 200 organized "Branch Halls" (*Fen-t'ang* 分堂) or affiliated congregations of the Compassion Society dot the province, each the primary religious arena for a group of believers—anywhere from a handful to a couple of hundred—who engage in divination, meditation, liturgy, and occasional processions or festivals. (We shall examine the Compassion Society further in later chapters.)

Typically, a *pai-luan* group believes that it has a divine charter to contribute to the moral reformation of humanity by propagating the messages received through its *chi*. As we have seen, revelations are in fact quite diverse, ranging from housekeeping procedures and liturgical in-

structions through moralistic verses and commentary on the classics, to rarer but sometimes rather elaborate mythological explorations of Heaven and Hell. Thus the "Hall of Saints and Worthies" (Sheng-hsien t'ang 聖賢堂) of Taichung has published an entire book, *Journey Through Hell* (Sheng-hsien t'ang 1978), composed of revelations received over a period of several years describing a visit to the courts of Hell.³⁴

We have seen that many *pai-luan* societies edit their revelations and publish them either as books or in magazines. (*Journey Through Hell* was first published serially in *Saints and Worthies* magazine as it was being revealed.) The production of a book or magazine for free public distribution, no matter how small the printing, is an unusual and expensive accomplishment, and is always a point of pride for a group and a sign that it is fulfilling its moral mission. The editorial and publishing activities associated with the project can often be more compelling for some members than the activity or content of revelation itself.

All groups involve themselves in some religious exercises other than divination. Liturgy is the most important of these, but many groups also participate in local temple festivals, and pride themselves on being "accepted" as participants in the active system of processions that characterizes older Taiwanese cities and towns. Meditation and group chanting, closely related to liturgy, are also common.³⁵

A certain amount of liturgy provides a necessary context for the *chi*, since gods rather than demons must be invoked, and since gods could be angered by the absence of at least some evidence of the respect due them. Few groups avoid liturgical elaboration, except perhaps in divinatory "emergencies."

PAI-LUAN "Denominationalism"

The exact forms of liturgical elaboration have important micro-historical causes and significant micro-political effects, for they are related to the freedom of each group's *chi*, or more exactly the medium who wields its *chi*, to follow a style of revelation defined by the group's standing traditions or to introduce small but cumulative innovations. The social fission of two or more groups can be followed by a stylistic fission to stress their

³⁴It was followed in 1982 by *Journey Through Heaven* (Sheng-hsien t'ang 1982). Like *Paradise Regained* or *Paradiso*, it is less interesting than the account of hell preceding it.

³⁵By "liturgy" here we understand a wide variety of activities performed at the altar of the temple, typically including the formal presentation of offerings of fruits, tea, etc., kowtowing toward the altar, prayers or incantations offered to inspire the descent of a deity or to advise the deity about group activities, and individual and group chanting when it is directed to inspiring divine descents or exorcizing the hall of malign forces.

differences or by stylistic continuities that underline their historical and ideological similarities. One important arena for this sort of differentiation is liturgy. We noted that liturgy may either be patterned on the practice of the parent group if there is one, or elaborated following instructions from the *chi* itself. Since the *chi* is the final authority in this, as in other day-to-day decisions, a liturgically innovative *chi* wielder can effect quite substantial changes in the arrangement of a hall, in the system of names used, in the statuses of members, and in details of procedure. The *chi* wielder may have final authority because of his control of the instrument of divine opinion. But as a practical matter he also has a constituency of congregation members that must be sustained. Thus he is subject to certain constraints. At one extreme, there is the possibility that if a *chi* wielder goes so far as to offend the sensibilities of his public (by obvious profiteering, say), his extravagance could result in his eventually being denounced as a fraud. More typically, a *chi* wielder seems to be restrained largely by the interests of those who were already recruited to the group earlier, since they may have been attracted in part by exactly what he might propose to change, and their enthusiasm could be subverted if he made the changes.

We shall explore the micropolitics of *chi* wielding in later chapters. The point here is that there is a cumulative historical effect. Despite their structural limitations, *chi* wielders can and do introduce changes, and it is unclear, therefore, how long liturgical similarities of *pai-luan* "denominations" can remain visible. Like other "congregational" systems, autonomy of individual units tends to dilute the identity of the whole, even though the astute *chi* wielder, in a group that values its tie to its parentage, presumably manages to confine his liturgical innovation to what is not construable as something already central to the "denominational" identity of the group.

A large group of *pai-luan* in Fengshan 鳳山 near Kaohsiung, for example, requires that entering worshippers purify themselves by sprinkling water from a small sprig of leaves. This purification is not practiced by other Fengshan *pai-luan* halls of different parentage. By choosing to sprinkle or not to sprinkle, a Fengshan *chi* wielder is writing the history of his hall, for he is claiming association with one rather than the other group of halls. The decision to do anything other than what history required would be a politically loaded one and could occur only in an atmosphere of very bad relations among some of the groups. On the other hand, a group in Chiali 佳里 in Tainan county has already transformed itself into a form that makes it look quite different from its "denominational" parent hall, from which it has also begun to assert indepen-

dence in other ways. For practical purposes, then, and at least in the very short run, one can probably use liturgical differences to distinguish the "denominations" of *pai-luan*, which are related to their identities in a local system of intergroup relationships.³⁶

If liturgical differences clearly mark off groups of historically and micropolitically related *pai-luan* societies, so do differences in the way in which they use their *chi* for different sorts of revelations. We must guard against overestimating the extent of historical continuity, just as in the case of liturgy, for a *chi* wielder who produces a number of revelations that contribute to a slight change of direction in a *pai-luan* group can sometimes have an enormous effect. On the other hand, because *chi* revelations (and the conventions for editing them) are collectable in published books and can be reliably coded, they provide a relatively easy demonstration of the extent to which these "denominations" can vary in their emphasis.

A full study could probably show changes in a variety of features of the content of revelations, perhaps even in the values stressed by them. But a cruder sense of the process can be obtained by the less painstaking procedure of examining their general style. In the interest of presenting some indication of the extent to which historical "denominations" of *pai-luan* groups use their oracles similarly, Jordan tried the experiment of analyzing the revelations in collections published by two very different groups of historically related *pai-luan* societies. He wanted to see whether, in fact, revelations from societies known to be historically related in "denominations" were generally concerned with similar issues.

Taking the volumes collected up to that time, he assigned each group a letter name, and had a Chinese research assistant, Mr. Lii Maw-shyang (Li Mao-hsiang 李茂祥) classify the entries in each book of revelations, using a uniform scheme. Groups A and B were in Matou 麻豆 in Tainan county. One of them (B) is the Hall of the Wondrous-Dharma, which we shall describe in the next section. The other descends from the same (now moribund) parent group. Groups C through F were part of the system of historically related *pai-luan* in Feng-shan (the ones who practiced purificatory sprinkling). Finally, groups G through K were historically unrelated either to each other or to the other groups, so far as we know.

The statistics have been discussed elsewhere (Jordan 1981). From them it is easy to see that the foci of revelation in these groups are quite

³⁶ In fact, the word "local" may be ill-advised. One "denomination" consisted of the group in Chia-li, just mentioned, and its parent hall in P'u-li 埔里 in the mountains of central Taiwan. Another "denomination" was limited to one hall in Kaohsiung, one in Taipei, and one in a small agricultural village near the coast in Tainan county. The networks are usually closely local, but need not be.

different. In the proportions of *chi* revelations in each book that fall into our various content categories, we can also see the similarities that define the historically related *pai-luan* into "denominations." Those in which Jordan attended séances (the Matou groups and about half of the others) displayed liturgical traits that also differentiated them into the same "denominational" groups. Thus the "denominational" quality appears to be quite real.

Divergencies were clearly developing among the historically related groups making up the "denominational" clusters. We do not have clear enough historical data on these particular halls to enable us to calculate a rate of divergence over time—such a rate would, in fact, be a statistical extravagance, given the small number of groups involved—but it is clear that a process of fission was at work through the preferences of the *chi* wielder. Similarities also seemed to represent convergence of historically unrelated groups (especially group G with both the Matou and the Fengshan clusters). In part this probably represents the effects of the wide distribution of published revelation books and their careful examination by enthusiastic *chi* wielders. This results in a kind of homogenizing effect that makes *pai-luan* generally similar to each other and dilutes their individual genealogies even while they are differentiating themselves in response to micro-political and other forces.

Pai-luan groups, in summary, do a variety of things, do them more or less independently, and vary to some extent from one to another. These variations are probably important because both the activities that such groups engage in and the kinds of revelations that they receive when they focus their attention upon *fu-chi* work are differentially interesting and attractive to potential and current members. People attracted to silent meditation are not necessarily the same people who are attracted to editing and publishing, and these in turn are not necessarily the same ones who are attracted to spirit writing, who may be different again from those whose interests lie in the management of religious processions or in networks of social relationships among different halls. Probably almost any voluntary organization attracts different individuals for different reasons, and it should not surprise us to find this true of *pai-luan* as well. But it also means that slight variations in the proportions or style of different activities should have an effect upon the membership of the group. The tastes of the membership in turn place limits on the activities that will meet an enthusiastic reception. In the historical record we tend to see the broad similarities in such groups. In the ethnographic record we can see the enormous internal volatility and capacity for changing adaptations, as well as their vulnerability to subversion through unpopular innovations.

PAI-LUAN and Other Oracles

In a recent symposium, Liu Chih-wan (1981: 105) provided a brief typology of means of divination used in Taiwan. Throwing divination blocks (*poah poe* 擲筊), he tells us, is the commonest type of divination. More precise is the random drawing of revelation verses (*kiú chhiam* 求籤, more colloquially *thiu chhiam* 抽籤), though these are also often ambiguous. Next is revelation in dreams (*khùn sian-bāng* 顯仙夢), which has at any rate the advantage of close connection with the person about whom the revelation is to be received, but is, as Liu puts it, "thought to be unreliable." Finally, and most specific in their revelations, are three kinds of spirit mediums, called in Hokkien *tāng-ki* (童乩), *ang-t* (or *āng-t* 尪姨), and *hū-lōan* (扶鸞), the last corresponding to our *fu-chi* divination.³⁷ Liu differentiates a *tāng-ki* and an *ang-t* as male and female respectively.³⁸ For Liu Chih-wan, then, common means of divination can be ordered along a continuum from least precise to most precise as follows:

1. divination blocks
2. revelation verses
3. dream revelation
4. spirit mediums, including:
 - tāng-ki* (speaking, male)
 - ang-t* (speaking, female)
 - chi* wielder (writing)

For Liu, as for others, mediums are classed with means of divination, differing from divination blocks and revelation verses, not in their psy-

³⁷ (Uncolloquial) Mandarin readings are *t'ung-chi*, *wang-i*, and *fu-luan*, respectively.

³⁸ In and around Bao-an village, it is colloquial for a female medium to be called a *tāng-ki* if she presents revelations from a patron possessing god, and the term *ang-t* is normally reserved to women who conduct *khan-bōng* 牽亡 (séances with the spirits of the dead). *Ang* means "bent over," but it also has connotations of "sacred" (Ts'ai P'ei-huo 1969: 17); hence the occasional use of a homonymous character—*āng*—meaning "red" (*hung* 紅). (The Mandarin cognate *wang* is also written several other ways.) In Hokkien, *t* refers to an older woman. The expression *ang-t* seems literally to mean "old woman dealing with the sacred" or approximately that, although in fact such a medium need not be old. For female mediums in Bao-an, the distinction between *tāng-ki* and *ang-t* is one of function. The same usage is reported by Kuo Ho-lich (1975: 249–251). But because an *ang-t* is specifically female, the functional distinction is blurred for male mediums, who may be referred to as *tāng-ki* even if they perform *khan-bōng* work; if it is necessary to be more precise, they are called *khan-bōng*. According to Lin Heng-tao (1980: 51), *ang-t* also have additional specialized functions in some regions. The literature on *tāng-ki* is too extensive to discuss here. For a book-length general treatment, see Hsiao Ling-i 1977. Kleinman 1975 and Kleinman 1980, esp. pp. 210–243, provides a study of *tāng-ki* as healers. For book-length treatments of *tāng-ki*-centered sects, see Elliott 1955 and Myers 1974 on Singapore and Hong Kong, respectively. We know of no book-length study of *ang-t* or of the *khan-bōng* custom, but see Potter 1974.

chodynamics, micropolitics, or orthodoxy, but in the precision with which they can tie their messages to their clients' particular needs. Although this ignores the miraculous qualities attributed to possession, and the ability of some *t'ang-ki* to perform ritual, it is essentially the same distinction Jordan has made in discussing village divination (1972: 60-86) and elevated to the level of a general principle in suggesting that the function of a shaman is to produce the divine end of a "conversation" with human beings (Swartz and Jordan 1976: 658-663). In other words, whether a medium writes or speaks seems not to matter very much. Divination is divination. (Liu and Jordan follow other Chinese folklorists in this. See Lin Heng-tao 1980: 51-54; Wu Ying-t'ao 1975: 168-170.)

The difference is important to many patrons, however. There is nothing elevated about the social position of a *t'ang-ki*. On the contrary, most people not only seek to avoid such a career, but regard it as something of a tragedy when their friends are involved, and speak with great disdain of *t'ang-ki* as a lot. On the other hand, the association of *fu-chi* divination with literature and of literature with upper-class life makes it generally respectable among people with traditional values. The difference in social valuation of the two types of mediumship, combined with the potential functional similarities, leads to some people stressing the differences, some the similarities. Those who would disparage *pai-luan* or who respect *t'ang-ki* often refer to the *chi* wielder as a *t'ang-ki*. Those who would elevate *pai-luan* activity as especially worthy nevertheless often condemn *t'ang-ki* as "superstition." This conflict of symbolic valences in the person of the *chi* wielder is important in our understanding of both the rhetoric with which Chinese discuss *pai-luan* and the symbolic resources that the *chi* wielder has at his command.

PAI-LUAN and Other Sects

We saw earlier that the sectarian tradition did not always involve *fu-chi* divination, and indeed it still does not. Most sectarian societies in modern Taiwan do engage in *fu-chi*, whatever else they do. But it would be wrong to suggest that there are not others as well. Indeed, sectarianism of every sort thrives in contemporary Taiwan, and new and slightly different sects seem to be devised constantly. There are of course cults that center on small and often idiosyncratic shrines of "bereaved spirits" (*yu-ying kung*³⁹ 有應公) or other local godlings. There are also transient but sect-like groups that develop around a conspicuously successful healer or medium who succeeds for a time in commanding the exclusive allegiance of some followers. (An example would be the *kín-á sian* 囡仔仙 of Tainan, discussed

³⁹ On these spirits, see especially Thompson 1975.

by Hsiao, 1972.) These are traditional phenomena, by no means peculiar to Taiwan. The resultant groups are not normally sects, in most technical senses, but they do provide primary religious orientations for some of the populace some of the time.

With respect to sectarianism more properly so called, we note that several early-twentieth-century mainland sects have been transmitted to Taiwan in addition to those described above. In some cases, such as the Red Swastika Society (Hung-wan-tzu hui 紅卍字會) (Anonymous 1953) or the Fellowship of Goodness (T'ung-shan she 同善社) (Korne 1941), these seem to have remained largely the domains of mainland immigrants, at least until quite recently. In other cases mainland sects have already been successful in attracting a following among a broader range of Taiwan residents. Thus, in 1980, when Jordan visited Mr. Lii Maw-shyang (Li Mao-hsiang), a former research assistant, Mr. Lii told him he had joined a new religion, the "School of Celestial Virtues" (T'ien-te chiao 天德教), which stressed meditation and lifelong devotion by each member to a single one of a list of twenty virtues. The creation of a Szechwanese prophet named Hsiao 蕭 (born 1888), the sect's pamphlets claim over a million believers on the mainland at an unspecified time before the war, but Mr. Lii stressed that it was now made up principally of Hokkien speakers.

New sects too seem to be springing up, sects without such mainland forerunners, most too small to attract much public notice, and many having little obviously to do with *fu-chi*. In 1982 Jordan attended a conference in Taipei. As he sat in a sidewalk café sipping fruit juice, he was approached by an enthusiastic fellow patron of the café who announced that he had just printed up the first publication of his own religion: the "Celestial Man's Study Association" (T'ien-jen hsueh-hui 天人學會). It did not, so far as we know, involve *fu-chi* divination.

One of the most important of the Taiwan-born sects that does not engage in *fu-chi* is the "Religion of the Yellow Emperor" (Hsuan-yuan Chiao 軒轅教), founded in Taiwan in the 1950's, which in fact opposes spirit writing.⁴⁰

The intellectual and political climate of Taiwan at present is such that groups which might previously have described themselves as study groups or societies for meritorious works now freely announce, orally if not in their literature, that they are new religions, however much of already existing popular religion they incorporate. A few sects or individuals scorn *fu-chi*, but it is our impression that most individual believers even in those sects would in fact feel no particular inconsistency in engaging in

⁴⁰ On the Religion of the Yellow Emperor, see Hsiao 1972. A fuller study of this sect is presently under way by Christian Jochim.

it. Thus, for example, Mr. Lii did not know of any *fu-chi* divination being conducted in Taiwan by his new coreligionists in the Teaching of Celestial Virtues, and he stressed the importance of its program of meditation; but the heavily underlined pamphlets he provided both endorse and appear to contain *fu-chi* revelation.

Those groups that do engage in *fu-chi* may usefully be divided into two polar types. At one extreme is a small group of devoted believers who gather, perhaps at the house of one of their number or in a public temple, and engage in divination, accompanied by a modest amount of ritualism. At the opposite pole is an elaborate system of local congregations sprung from each other and all owing allegiance to a central administrative headquarters and central parent temple, and showing all the stresses and bureaucratization that such arrangements are heir to. Both of these poles represent sectarian societies, and the experience of a believer in each of them is very similar, despite the difference in scale which makes the former essentially a private affair while the latter can come to be seen as a security problem for the state.

This book is not a survey of all the sectarian groups we could find in Taiwan. They are countless and increasing in number. Rather, our concern has been to characterize the sectarian mentality, sectarian values, and the sectarian tradition. We have chosen to do this with three examples. The first, the Hall of the Wondrous Dharma, approximates the modest pole of the axis just described. It is an independent phoenix hall, with a short genealogy and little administrative elaboration. The other two represent island-wide organizations. One, the Compassion Society, was founded in Taiwan. The other, the Unity Sect, was imported from the mainland and operated at the time of our study just beneath the threshold of legality. The Compassion Society and the Unity Sect, theologically very similar, fall squarely into the tradition of late-Imperial devotion to the Venerable Mother. Members of the Hall of the Wondrous Dharma show little interest in the Venerable Mother, receiving revelations from locally popular divinities outside that tradition. They live on an equally vividly sacralized but much more parochial landscape, and are integrated into the complexities of interlocal religious rivalries that also preoccupy their non-sectarian neighbors. We hope, with these three detailed case studies, that we shall have captured more of what is essential in Chinese sectarianism than we could have done by a broader, but necessarily shallower, survey. Still, the limitations are clear, and it is important to recognize that there are many other groups, old and new, indigenous and imported, divining and scorning to divine, that also make their contributions to the complexity of religiosity in Taiwan.

4

CASE STUDY I: HISTORY OF THE HALL OF THE WONDROUS DHARMA

THE BIRTH OF A *Pai-luan*

In order to get a closer look at some of these features of *pai-luan*, we turn now to a *pai-luan* that was relatively autochthonous, early engaged in a wide variety of activities, and grew rapidly to incorporate a large number of people. By the end of the 1970's it had run its course, ultimately subverted by unpopular passions of its landlord. The story of the Hall of the Wondrous Dharma will enable us to get a closer look at some of the features of *pai-luan* that we have discussed more abstractly above.

Sometime in 1946, a prominent member of a *pai-luan* group in the Taichung area was transferred by the Taiwan Sugar Corporation to its office in Matou, where he was apparently well received and liked by his fellow workers. We may name him Wang Kung-i 王恭義. Among his new friends in Matou were Ch'en Shou-jen 陳守仁 (one of Jordan's informants) and Ch'en's friend Ts'ai Ch'ing 蔡慶. Wang Kung-i had not been in Matou very long before he drew Ch'en Shou-jen aside one day and asked him whether he knew that gods could descend to earth and communicate directly with human beings. Ch'en reports that he and his friends were at first unbelieving, but Wang Kung-i seemed so convinced of what he was saying that they agreed to see a demonstration. Wang Kung-i told them about the materials that would be needed, and they agreed that on a certain evening they would meet at the house of Ts'ai Ch'ing and watch Kung-i "fly the phoenix."

Some of the participants were very skeptical, according to Ch'en. Although they did not doubt that there might be something to what Wang Kung-i said, some of them suspected that he would be liable to summon demonic forces rather than gods. There was no telling what sort of danger this might bring upon Ts'ai Ch'ing's house. It would be better, someone proposed, to hold the séance in a temple, where malevolent supernaturals could be driven out, should they appear, by a powerful god. At length it was agreed that the demonstration séance should be held in a small temple to the popular god Kuan-kung located behind the famous Temple of the Five Kings, just outside town. Such a concentration