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MILLENARIAN THEMES IN THE WHITE LOTUS SOCIETY

MILLENARIAN THEMES IN THE WHITE LOTUS SOCIETY

By

Theresa J. Flower, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: History of the White Lotus Society	23
Chapter Three: The Organization and Ideology of the White Lotus Society	55
Chapter Four: Conclusion	132

Chapter One:
Introduction

2

Throughout the centuries, the peace and calm of the Chinese countryside was periodically shattered by explosions of resentment against the established regime. While occasionally, when motivated by particular regional concerns, the impact of these outbursts was localized, often large sections of China served as the battlefield for a struggle which would decide who would be the future wielders of imperial authority. As the impetus for the groups which acted as spearheads for these rebellions came from a variety of external and internal stimuli, scholars who attempt an overview of Chinese rebellions are faced with the complex problem of discovering the primary cause. In the end, most scholars tend to see it as being born of the social, political and/or economic conditions of the day. As a result, they frequently reduce religion to merely a tool in the hands of the leaders, which enabled them to play on the superstitions of their discontented followers, and to camouflage their illegal activities.¹

Teng Ssu-yü, in "A Political Interpretation of Chinese Rebellions and Revolutions"² wrote that :

... Chinese rebellions and revolutions were usually caused primarily by corrupt governments.... An efficient government and good leadership may assist people to overcome economic and other difficulties and galvanize a country into vigorous action; on the other hand, a corrupt government with bad leadership always abuses natural and human resources and, consequently, is more likely to irritate the people eventually into subversive action.

In addition, while he admits that "religious ideas, superstition, and secret societies often excited the mass of the

people into action",⁴ he states that "these factors worked like modern propagandists and organizers in a revolution".⁵

Vincent Y.C. Shih, while he clearly establishes religious elements as important components of many Chinese rebel ideologies,⁶ he also writes that by the end of the T'uan dynasty (1260-1368):

Incense burning, a Buddhist practice, had now become a common sign of both secret societies and rebellious groups. Its function seems to have been to cover up their actual activities and present the front of a harmless group of Buddha worshippers. This may also explain why the ideologies of secret societies always contain Buddhist ideas and nomenclature.

Yuji Muramatsu, in "Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies"⁸ follows in the same vein. For him,

Rebel leaders often rationalized their uprisings by referring to potents, rumors, children's songs and so on, which were commonly faked or planted and then interpreted as showing a supernatural power's support of their uprisings.

These modern views are in accord with many earlier investigations of rebellious groups with what might be considered strong religious inclinations. In 184 C.E. the Yellow Turbans, under the leadership of Chang Ch'ueh, led a revolt against the decaying Han dynasty (25-220 C.E.). According to a memorial, written at the time and recorded in the Hou Han Shu:

The reason for Chang Ch'ueh's armed revolt ... is that the ten chief eunuchs were mostly unprincipled, their relatives and friends control many districts (in the empire), they grasp the money and oppress the people who have no place to redress their grievances but by revolt.¹⁰

As for Chang's healing practices and preaching concerning the

triumph of the T'ai-p'ing Tao and the Yellow Heaven, according to the Tzu-chih t'ung chien, they were employed simply to "deceive and exploit the people."¹¹ Later investigators adhered to the same approach. In 1769, Chao Ch'ang-sheng made a study of a group whose members were "all vegetarians who followed Buddhist ritual practices... (believing) that in so doing one could avoid illness and lengthen life."¹²

Yet, in the end, he passes this judgment on these activities:

In discovering this group I was afraid that they would privately unite together to deceive the people and act as bandits. They are "heretics of the left" (tso-tao i-tuan) who gather the people under false pretences, meet at night and disperse in the day, falsely claiming that they are carrying out religious and charitable activities.¹³

This view, that religion was merely a tool in the hands of rebels who would trick the gullible into joining their prohibited activities, reoccurred even in the dynastic law codes. The Ch'ing code, which in this case was taken verbatim from the Ming, states :

... all societies calling themselves at random White Lotus, communities of the Buddha Maitreya, or the Ming ts'un religion (Manichaeans), or the school of the White Cloud, etc., together with all who carry out deviant and heretical practices, or who in secret places have prints and images, gather the people by burning incense, meeting at night and dispersing by day, thus stirring up and misleading the people under the pretext of cultivating virtue, shall be sentenced.¹⁴

Certainly there were rebellious groups for whom religion played a minor role: perhaps it even served as a tool, particularly to give the appearance of divine support for plans already made. This is apparent in the reports on the

rebellion of Ch'en Sheng and Wu Kuang against the Ch'in dynasty in 209 B.C.E.¹⁵ In this case, the immediate cause of the rebellion seems to have been the failure of a group of conscripts to arrive at their destination at the appointed time - a dereliction of duty punishable by death. Being ambitious men, Ch'en and Wu realized that in rebellion they had nothing to lose, for failure would only mean death, but victory would open unlimited possibilities to them. To support them in their endeavour, they maintained that they represented the legitimate claimant to the Chinese throne (a common practice). In addition, because of the oppressive nature of the Ch'in, they promised to overthrow their "unprincipled government and ruthless laws."¹⁶ They even included a vague idea of equality in the question: "Are princes, lords, generals and prime ministers a race of their own?"¹⁷ However, this was not enough; they also thought it wise to seek the aid of a soothsayer, who suggested they call upon the extra-human aid of a "spirit". This involved, according to the Shih Chi, writing "Ch'en Sheng will be king" in red on a piece of silk and hiding it in the stomach of a fish, where it was discovered by his followers. Then Ch'en had Wu go at night to a temple near where his soldiers were stationed. There he lit a lantern and cried in the voice of a fox: "Great Ch'U will arise and Ch'en Sheng will be king."¹⁸ While some genuine belief might be indicated by Ch'en Sheng's employment of a diviner as one of his generals,¹⁹ the religious influence on the rebel activities was practic-

ally negligible.

Yet there were other types of groups involved in revolutionary activities, and any study which fails to consider the predominant role played by religion for them as the impulse to action would be guilty of missing the mark. One such group, the White Lotus Society (Pai lien hui) will be the focus of this paper. Like its counterparts, the myriads of diverse societies which abounded in China,²⁰ it provided an extra-official organization which could offer security and protection for its members in times of individual, economic, social and political upheaval.²¹ In addition, during times of wider distress, this society and others of an official, unacceptable nature (hsieh chiao, yin chiao, wei chiao, chiao fei)²² could become a channel through which, while still claiming to respect the mandate of Heaven in terms of the legitimate rights of the previous dynasty, people outside of the official bureaucracy could voice their opposition to the actions of the ruling regime. Yet, unlike other rebellious groups, such as those of Ch'en Sheng and others, the White Lotus's raison d'être is not contingent on only the immediate concerns of the day, for there were times of upheaval when it was not active.²³ Furthermore, the presence of hereditary leadership and a complex religious ideology in the society, suggests a more permanent existence. Nor can the White Lotus be related to the secret societies such as the Triad and the Hung, for throughout its existence from the

twelfth to the nineteenth century, the members of this society, inspired by their particular religious beliefs, gave their own interpretation to social, political and economic events.²⁴ For them, a mere change in dynasty was not enough, nor the redistribution of wealth and rank, for they sought to bring about salvation for all through the distribution of scriptures and tracts, the reading of sutras, the reciting of mantras and evangelizing of the masses. When the propitious time should come to pass, they would help bring about a new era in which Maitreya would return, a righteous ruler would sit on the imperial throne and paradise on earth would be established.

Millenarianism

Millenarian, millennial, eschatological, chiliastic and other related terms, in their narrowest context, can be restricted to descriptions of orthodox Christian beliefs concerning the eventual Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His thousand year reign over God's kingdom on earth, at some far-distant time. But for some, the culmination of such a dream could not remain in the realm of the unforeseeable future. In fact, such a postponement was, for many, not in accord with God's message to His people.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written

therein; for the time is near. (R.S.V.Rev.1:1-3)

Many people, including Fifth Monarchy Men, Ranters, Free Spirit, Taborites and Anabaptists, following the example of many of the earliest Christians, seized on the immediacy of God's promise in this and other Biblical passages, and were determined, albeit unsuccessfully for the most part, to aid Him in making it a reality.

From the sixteenth century, as new worlds came under the sway of European guns and ideas, millenarian dreams filled the hearts of many Christians, orthodox and radical alike, with hopes that the whole world could now be converted to Christianity and the millennium become a reality. This vision inspired explorers and missionaries for centuries, but soon, for most people, hopes began to fade and, once again, the establishment of the new age was placed in the all too distant future. While millenarian fervour died down considerably in Europe, the dreams of missionaries began to fire the imagination of their newly-converted flock, who were searching for an understanding of their place in the world that the Europeans had created for them. Christian and native religious beliefs mingled to inspire a variety of movements in the "emerging" nations, which were and are described as "millenarian" by historians, sociologists and other observers of such phenomena. Lately, the term has gained much wider application so as to include movements which, though they have not employed any distinctly Christian concepts in their ideology, may still be termed "millenarian". In Millennial

Dreams in Action, Studies in Revolutionary Movements the

report of a conference on millenarian movements, a pattern was sought into which would fit groups influenced by Christian ideals as well as indigenous movements of a clearly non-Christian type (to which the White Lotus would belong).

A tentative model to cover millenarian movements of different times, nations and ideologies was put forward by Norman Cohn. He regarded as "millenarian" any movement inspired by a dream of salvation which would be

- a) collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a group ;
- b) terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some otherworldly heaven ;
- c) imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly ;
- d) total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present, but perfection itself ;
- e) accomplished by agencies which are consciously regarded as supernatural.

From Cohn's description, it is obvious that the dreams that drive millenarian movements have much in common with those of the utopians and socialists. In fact, as previously mentioned, in studies of such movements as the White Lotus, political, social and economic concerns, which are the dominant features of utopian and socialist ideologies, tend to overshadow the religious motivations of these groups. However, since religion is the predominant source for the ideas and ideals serving to inspire the millenarian movements, a line must be drawn between such movements and those with non-religious foundations.

The millenarian nature of the White Lotus ideology revolves around two major foci which are distinctly religious: that is, beliefs concerning Lao-mu and those concerning Maitreya. Clustered about these two centres may be found all of Cohn's criteria. Thus, as children of Lao-mu, all members of the White Lotus Society are eligible for salvation. This salvation would further occur as a result of the terrestrial descent of Maitreya, her agent, to bring about a total and final transformation of the world, and this event was felt to be imminent.

While Cohn's criteria are clearly delineated certain groups as millenarian, in order for them to operate, a specific view of history is necessary, about which more can be said than that it merely alludes to a belief in the imminence of the final event. According to the millenarians' understanding of history, the coming of the new age is assured because it is guaranteed to be the culmination of the historical process. In the case of the White Lotus, not only does religion provide for a millenarian view of salvation, but it is also the source for a view of history that is, necessarily, in tune with such aspirations for a sudden and total transformation of the world. For those within the Judeo-Christian tradition, with its clearly defined linear view of history, finding support for such a view does not present a problem. However, in the case of the White Lotus, this involved a radical melding of various understandings of time available in China.

Most of the philosophical systems in China had millenarian possibilities that could be developed, but very few

people took advantage of them ; for most, there were other, far more important issues. Since, in general, both Taoism and Confucianism held a positive view regarding the possibilities for the improvement or even perfectability of human nature, they were not antagonistic to millenarian aspirations. In fact, perhaps two of the most important non-Buddhist theories with strong millenarian leanings, the T'ai P'ing (Great Peace) and Ta T'ung (Great Equality) are found in texts of both schools.²⁷ T'ai P'ing first appeared in the Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'ui (c239 B.C.E.) and continued to reoccur throughout the centuries to describe either the time of the sage kings, which would never come again, or a time attainable in the present through good government,²⁸ or even a time that would come to pass in the distant future. On the other hand, Ta T'ung can be traced to the Li Chi and the Huai Nan Tzu²⁹ in which it is portrayed as an idyllic time in the past. But perhaps, since it had existed before, like the T'ai P'ing, it would come again. It was to this hope that the more visionary elements among the rebel groups clung; for they were often "inclined to reverse the time-dimension of the regressive conception and turn it into a progressive one."³⁰

Thus the Taoist hopes for the T'ai P'ing under a Righteous Prince (Chen Chun), the Confucians faith that an enlightened emperor would bring about the Ta T'ung and even the Manichaeian promise of the reign of the king of Light (Ming Wang) were possible sources for the millenarian view of history

found in the ideology of the White Lotus.³¹ Nevertheless, it was the Buddhist view of history which gave the strongest impetus. However, according to most Buddhist philosophers, the individual's earthly existence is merely part of a continuing cycle of birth and death from which one must strive to escape, and salvation can only be achieved through the destruction of the bonds which bind one to this wheel of rebirth. Therefore, for the Buddhist, it would seem that the millenarian view of history, with its promise for the future is but one of this world's bonds, from which, for the unenlightened, there is no escape.

Yet, on the popular level, in both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, history and historiography have become the means by which the ages of humankind are further delineated within the eternal cycle. This process is indicative of the transposed emphasis from a concern with cosmic time and its all encompassing cycles of rebirth to that of a particular age of humankind within this cycle; from a concern for universals to one for individuals, groups and nations within a particular span of historical time.³²

In most Buddhist chronicles and other historical and non-historical texts, this span of time often begins with a golden age, marked by the advent of a Buddha who establishes the dharma. This is followed by a period of steady decline in which the condition of mankind and religion worsens until the world is in desperate need of purification. At this point, when it is clear that matters cannot get any worse, a new

Buddha, Mettaya (Maitreya) arrives; the dharma is again established; and the golden age of bliss for mankind returns to the earth. While some people would see this within the larger cyclical context of the impermanence of existence, the immediate concern of most individuals lies in the relatively smaller and more comprehensible period of time marked by the arrival of these Buddhas. Here, they find meaning for their lives.

In Theravada Buddhism, this evolutionary, linear view of history is described in various texts, but it is the description found in the Digha-nikaya which, at least in Burma, is the best known and most studied.³³ In this text, a period of prosperity and righteousness, when men and gods mingled together and there was no want, was soon followed by a period of decline caused by man's desire to have more than was necessary to satisfy his needs. Then laws and government became necessary and the dispensations of the Buddha were gradually corrupted.³⁴ But this period would not last forever. A cakkavati³⁵ would eventually reign and prepare the way for the arrival of Mettaya by uniting the world under the rule of Dharma.³⁶ At this time :

Not only the renovation but also the fulfilment of Buddhism was expected from Mettaya; universal compassion is to become through him a cosmic reality. Universal love (metta) is to be fulfilled throughout the world through Mettaya, as his name indicates.³⁷

While such expectations were put in the mouth of Gautama, they are not emphasized within canonical Theravada Buddhism. However, on a popular level, they became an import-

ant tenet. Now those who found arhatship beyond their grasp could look forward to the coming of Mettaya and under his personal guidance, achieve ultimate liberation.³⁸ Such a belief had a substantial influence on the people of Burma during the disorientation caused by the complete conquest of their country by the British in the mid-1800s. Many felt that the conditions for the establishment of the millennium were at hand. The status of the dharma and humankind could not worsen any further. As in other places and other times, such beliefs gave impulse to two divergent reactions. For some the answer was withdrawal to Ma Aung Monastery of Mandalay, to practise the Buddhist precepts and to passively await the imminent arrival of Mettaya.³⁹ Others felt that the situation demanded more positive action. As late as the Saya San revolt in 1930-1932, under the leadership of individuals calling themselves Setkya-min, the Burmese equivalent to the cakkavati, men fought and died, trying to make the millennium a reality.⁴⁰

Just as the Digha-nikaya supplied canonical support for a view of history which was to act as a foundation for millenarian aspirations, so there also appears within the traditions of orthodox Chinese Buddhism theories of this type. By the sixth century, Chinese Buddhists had already transformed the Indian theory of immeasurable time into more manageable units, which in the north led to discussions of man's historical evolution in terms of the duration of the

Buddha's dharma on earth. According to the theory developed, this dispensation could be divided into three periods :

1. Period of the true dharma, when the teachings of the Master were rigidly adhered to ;
2. Period of the counterfeit dharma, when the true dharma was hidden, and something resembling it was then in vogue ;
3. Period of the decay of dharma, when the dharma was, in disrepute, and about to disappear.⁴¹

While there were various attempts to calculate the exact length of each period, millenarians and philosophers alike felt that their's was the final period. This, then, left the adherents of this belief with the question as to what were to be the activities of human beings during such a period.

There were two different, popular schools of thought on this question. First on the fringes of orthodoxy there was the San Chieh Chiao (Three Stages School) of Hsin Hsing (540-590. C.E.)⁴². For them, the new age required a new and different teaching, which only Hsin Hsing could supply. He felt that :

Our inner, transcendental vision is lost; Buddha is no longer visible to us in his 'true form' but only in the complicated, kaleidoscopic mirage that our physical senses convey; he is accessible only as mirrored in All Creatures that have Life.⁴³

Therefore, every living creature was a potential Buddha, worthy of worship. In addition, according to this sect, the Vinaya and other guides for Buddhist behaviour were corrupted to such an extent that they could no longer be obeyed. This anarchism extended even to imperial authority, as, for members of this school, no government during this period

was deserving of respect. This attitude led to a series of government persecutions, until the final destruction of the sect in 845 C.E.

In opposition to this sect stood the eventually triumphant teachings of the Pure Land school, spread by Tao Cho (562-645) and Shan Tao (613-681). They, too, demanded radically different action during this final age. They taught that all one needed to do to escape the depravity of the age was to take refuge in Amitābha and so enter the Western Paradise.

While during this early period, the Buddhists focused on the problems of the final age and not on the promise of Maitreya, the existence of such ideas does indicate that before the founding of the White Lotus there was an intellectual climate that could support a view of history necessary for its millenarian activities.

Thus, with this progressive conception of time and the inspiration of millenium, which they gleaned from Buddhist, Taoist and Manichaeian sources, members of the White Lotus Society were to formulate a view of salvation which would see mankind taken beyond the age of decay to the period in which Maitreya would come and the dharma would be re-established.

SOURCES

The main source for the ideology of the White Lotus is their pao dhuan (precious scrolls).⁴⁴ However, because societies such as the White Lotus spent much of their existence in hiding under government interdict, scholars are forced to rely on government sources for information about the White

Lotus in general, and their pao chüan in particular. The largest collection of White Lotus pao chüan is found in the P'o-hsieh hsiang-pien (A Detailed Refutation of Heresies), Hsi p'o-hsieh hsiang-pien (A Continuation of a Detailed Refutation of Heresies), and Yu-hsü p'o-hsieh hsiang-pien (A Further Continuation of a Refutation of Heresies) written by Huang Yü-pien, an official involved in the expeditions against the Eight Diagrams. Writing between 1833 and 1839 Huang hoped, by gathering the sectarian's pao chüan together, to aid other officials in identifying and destroying the White Lotus forever, and by exposing the "inconsistencies" in the pao chüan to break the hold that the sect had on the literati and others.⁴⁵

As, in North America, these works are only available in summary form in Japanese (Sawada Mizuho, Hokan No Kenkyu)⁴⁶ this study was made through the texts and translations of the pao chüan in the theses of Daniel Overmeyer and Richard Chu.⁴⁷ In addition, for more general information, there are the variety of government edicts cited by J.J.M. DeGroot. There is also his eyewitness accounts as well as those of George Miles⁴⁸ at the end of the nineteenth century. There is, further, M. Topley's observations on a modern White Lotus related sect, the Way of Former Heaven in Singapore.⁴⁹

Footnotes

- 1 In Daniel Overmeyer, "Folk Buddhist Sects: A Structure in the History of Chinese Religions", Ph.D Thesis, University of Chicago, 1971*, there is a detailed discussion of this problem. See pp. 5-8. For the purpose of this paper, we will take the religious nature of the White Lotus Society as proven, government edicts to the contrary.
- 2 Teng Ssu-yü, "A Political Interpretation of Chinese Rebellions and Revolutions", in Ching hua hsüeh pao (Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies), 3(1958).
- 3 Ibid., p. 91.
- 4 Ibid., p. 112.
- 5 Idem.
- 6 Vincent Y.C. Shih, "Some Chinese Rebel Ideologies", in T'oung Pao, 44(1956).
- 7 Ibid., p. 192. (italics mine)
- 8 Yuji Muramatsu, "Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies", in Arthur Wright, ed., The Confucian Persuasion (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969).
- 9 Ibid., p. 240.
- 10 Hou Han Shu, 108.22b, trans. in Teng, p. 97.
- 11 Ssu-ma Kuang, Tzu-chih t'ung-chien (The Mirror of History for Aid in Government) (Canberra: Australian National University, 1969), trans. Rafe de Crespigny, p. 71.
- 12 material from Shih-lao hsün-k'ian (A Periodical of Historical Material), cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 13.
- 13 Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 15. (italics mine)

*Hereafter referred to as Overmeyer, Thesis.

14 Ta Ch'ing lu-li, chüan 15, section on ritual law, chapter on "Prohibition of Religious Teachers, Mediums and Heretical Practices", in ibid., p. 93.
See also J.J.M.DeGroot, Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China (Taipei: Literature House Ltd., 1963), p. 137.

15 For a more detailed discussion see Shih, pp. 154f and Muramatsu, pp. 243 and 249.

16 Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Shih Chi, T'ung-wen edition, 89/3a in Shih, p. 155.

17 Shih Chi, 48/3a-b, in ibid., p. 154.

18 Shih Chi, 48/ab-3a, in ibid., p. 155.

19 Muramatsu, p. 243.

20 See C.K.Yang, Religion in Chinese Society (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 58-80, etc. and Paul D'Enjoy, "Associations, Congrégations et Sociétés Secrètes Chinoises", in Sociétés D'Anthropologie de Paris, Bulletin et Memoires, series no. 5, 5(1905), pp. 373-389.

21 See Yang above.

22 Jean Chesneaux, Secret Societies in China in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 55.

23 Overmeyer, Thesis, pp. 75-76.

24 However the division of influence between the White Lotus related societies in the north and those of the Triad in the south offered by scholars such as Chesneaux, Secret Societies, p. 36 overlooks periods in which the White Lotus held sway over much of China. At these times, it was possible that these two extra-legal groups established some contact and thereby influenced one another.

25 Sylvia L. Thrupp, ed., Millennial Dreams in Action; Studies in Revolutionary Movements (New York: Schocken Books, 1970).

26

Norman Cohn, "Medieval Millenarism: its Bearing on the Comparative Study of Millenarian Movements", ibid., p. 31.

27

For a detailed discussion see Timoteus Pokora, "On the Origin of the Notions of T'ai P'ing and Ta T'ung in Chinese Philosophy", in Archiv Orientalni, 29(1961), pp. 448-454 and Joseph Needham, Time and Eastern Man (Glasgow: University Press, 1965), pp. 23-31.

28

For example Ch'in Shih Huang-ti tried to achieve such an age and in 210 B.C.E. claimed that the T'ai-p'ing had arrived. Shih Chi, ch. 6 cited in Needham, p. 27.

29

Li Chi, ch. 9 and Huai Nan Tzu, ch. 2, cited ibid., 24.

30

Ibid., p. 25. While the Li Chi is clearly Confucian, the affiliation of the other two texts is problematic, but the Huai Nan Tzu is considered to be strongly Taoist.

31

See Chapter Three, section C below.

32

According to Kitsiri Malagoda, "Millennialism in Relation to Buddhism", in Comparative Studies in Society and History, 12(1970), p. 425, this millennialism is the result of Buddhism's "transformation" from a "religious technology of wandering mendicant monks to the status of a world religion commanding allegiance among large masses of laymen."

33

M. Bode, Pali Literature in Burma, p. 2, cited in E. Sarkisyanz, Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), p. 10.

34

Dīgha-nikāya, XXVII: 9-20, (London: Pali Text Society, 1971), trans. T.W. Rhys-Davids, pp. 65-71.

35

Ibid., XXVI: 6-9, pp. 63-65.

36

Ibid., XXVI: 24-25, pp. 73-74.

37

E. Abegg, "Der Buddha Maitreya", in Mitteilungen der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft der Freunde Ostasiatischer Kultur

7(1945), p. 31 cited in Sarkisyanz, p. 44.

Notice that this view of millenarian salvation fits into Cohn's schema.

38

Malalgoda, p. 428.

39

Not unlike the members of modern messianic Buddhist associations who wish to become weikas, men with supernatural powers including the ability to prolong their lives until Mettaya comes, see E. Michael Mendelson, "Religion and Authority in Modern Burma", in The World Today, 16(1960), pp. 110-118, "The King of the the Weaving Mountain", in The Royal Central Asian Journal, 48(1961), pp. 229-237, and "Messianic Buddhist Association in Upper Burma", in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 24(1961), pp. 560-580.

40

For a more detailed discussion see Sarkisyanz and D.E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

41

Kenneth Ch'en, Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 298. This pattern was taken by Hsin Hsing from the Lotus and Avatamsaka Sutras and was accepted by most Buddhists.

42

For a detailed discussion of the San Chieh Chiao see Ch'en, Buddhism in China, pp. 288-298 and Arthur Waley's review of Sankai Kyo no Kenkyu (An Investigation concerning the Three Degrees Sect) by Yabuki Keiki (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1927), in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, pp. 162-169.

43

Waley, "Three Degrees", p. 163..

44

To be discussed later, see Chapter Three, section B.

45

See Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 8.

46

Sawada Mizuho, Hokan no Kenkyu (Tokyo: Saika Shokin, 1963).

47

Richard Chu, "White Lotus Society in Chinese History",
Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1967.

48

George Miles, "Vegetarian Sects", Chinese Recorder,
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49

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Chapter Two:

History of the White Lotus Society

Before attempting a detailed discussion of the various elements that comprise the millenarian ideology of the White Lotus, it is important to trace the historical development of the sect in which that ideology is reflected. In spite of the fact that millenarian concerns are deeply rooted in religious thought, they do not, nor can they, exist outside of history. Social, economic and political events, influence and are influenced by the aspirations of men and women, especially those attempting to establish a new age. This is true of the White Lotus in China; for, because of the overwhelming mass of land and people, the centralized system of government could, at best, exercise only limited direct control. Therefore in times of trouble, famine, drought, floods and similar disasters, only the strongest could survive. Under a weak government, such calamities could topple an emperor or even a dynasty. At such times, as affairs went from bad to worse, so millenarian convictions intensified, and those who looked for signs could find them in abundance. Thus, periodically throughout the centuries, the members of the White Lotus were inspired to act, interpreting these historical events in terms of their millenarian ideology. Their albeit unsuccessful endeavours to overthrow the government and replace it with one more conducive to their expectations could not help but change the course of history.

There is, however, a basic problem which must be faced before any survey of the White Lotus Society's activities may be undertaken. During its long history from the Sung to the

present day, the society has assumed a variety of names. For example, in 1806, Lin Ch'ing of the Eight Diagrams¹ confessed at his capture that :

... the original name of his religion was the Three Suns Sect (San-yang Chiao), which is divided into Green, Red and White Sun groups, and because it is divided into eight sections, named after the eight diagrams, it is also called the Eight Diagrams Society. Later the name was again changed to the Society of Heaven's Principle (T'ien-li hui)²

The literature of the White Lotus itself does not offer any obvious explanation for this diversity. However, the nineteenth century contemporary of the Eight Diagrams, Huang Yü-pien, was not so reticent. He wrote :

Since heretical sects have become popular new sutras have been composed whenever the members so desire; also they change the name of the sect from time to time. (In a supplement) Whenever the new members compose a new sutra they form a new branch.³

Such a statement would seem to indicate that the changes in name may have occurred to accommodate ideological changes which were unacceptable to the sect as a whole.⁴ Yet perhaps there are two more obvious reasons which come closer to the truth. After failing in their attempts to overthrow the established regime, by changing their name, the members of the White Lotus might hope to escape being identified with the rebels and thereby survive government persecution. In addition, under a new name, since it lacked the stigma of defeat, they could hope to find new members to support future insurrections, without rejecting the still viable ideological foundations which had inspired them originally.

Without digressing into a detailed discussion of this ideology which distinguishes all sects that can be placed under the broad canopy of the White Lotus Society, there are, nevertheless, other points of similarity which help to identify these various groups as belonging to White Lotus Society groups. These commonalities are particularly evident in the different names of the sects where certain colours, red, green and white constantly appear, with terms such as chai, indicating vegetarian diet, ts'ai (vegetarian), jan-teng fei (light offerers), hsiang-fei, hsiang-chün (incense burners), all hinting at the common membership of the various sects within the White Lotus.⁵ Sometimes the connections are not so clear. For example, George Miles in the Chinese Recorder of 1942, describes a vegetarian sect with which he had contact in Hankow. He lists the various stages of advancement within its hierarchy, as follows : Chung-sheng, T'ien-en, Chang-en, Yin-en, Pao-en, Ting-kang, Shih-ti and Tso-shih.⁶ Likewise, Marjory Topley, in her article on the Great Way of Former Heaven, lists three groups within this sect which use the same nomenclature, with only minor changes.⁷ It is interesting to note that this author feels that the Great Way of Former Heaven is linked with certain sects described by De Groot as being part of the White Lotus.⁸ Only through this linking of terms and concepts can the various sects of the White Lotus be discovered.

The beginnings of the White Lotus must be seen within the wider context of Buddhist lay associations. In fact,

the White Lotus Society, in its choice of name can trace its origins back to the White Lotus Society of Hui-yüan. In 402, as tradition tells us, Hui-yüan assembled his followers, both lay and clerical, on Mount Lu, where, before a statue of Amida, they vowed to achieve sufficient merit to gain rebirth in the Western Paradise. There are many problems with the historical authenticity of this story. T'ang Yung-t'ung refutes the establishment of this society for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the absence of any mention of the event in books from 402 to the ninth century.⁹ Kenneth Ch'en also feels that the claims that a White Lotus Society was formed at this time are tenuous at best. For him, the most glaring discrepancies occur in the T'ang dynasty list of the 123 members of the society. One member was not even born in 402, and "another equally erroneous case was that of Ch'ueh Kung-tse, who died during the period 265-275 and was probably in the Western Paradise in 402".¹⁰ Chih P'an does give some details in Fo-tsu t'ung-chi¹¹; however, they are far too sketchy for us to draw any conclusions.¹² In fact, Chih P'an accuses the White Lotus of his day of "falsely claiming ancestral sanction" (wang-t'o yu-tsu)¹³ In his study of the available evidence, Richard Chu came to the following conclusions :

First, the date 402 for the founding of the Pai-lien-she is questionable, but there was a gathering of Buddhist adherents on Mount Lu in that year; second, the name Pai-lien-she became very popular towards the end of the T'ang dynasty ; thirdly, during the Sung, religious groups under the Pai-lien-she became very well known.¹⁴

E. Zürcher, too, gives a detailed discussion of this gathering on Mount Lu¹⁵ which was the first "manifestation of the particular devotional creed practised by both monks and laymen, and obviously adapted to the latter's needs and way of life."¹⁶ In this lies the significance of the perhaps legendary foundation of the White Lotus Society with which later the Pure Land could, and did, claim communion. Thus, future lay associations, such as the White Lotus Society of Mao Tzu-yüan, influenced by Pure Land teachings, could rightly claim to be following the example of this tradition.

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties Period (386-589) and the Sui (590-618), this popularization of Buddhism continued with ching-shih (teachers of sutras), chiang-shih (master lecturers) and others, travelling from temple to temple to recite and comment on their favourite sutras before a mixed audience of laymen and clerics.¹⁷ Even the biased report of the literati Chao Lin indicated the favour in which these activities were held by the masses.

There was a certain Wen-shu who gathered multitudes in order to speak to them. He acted as if he were speaking on the sutras, but (in reality) what he discussed was none other than base, vulgar and filthy subjects ... Ignorant men and fascinated women delight in hearing him speak and his audiences choke the monasteries. They regard him with respect and consider him the ideal monk.... However, those followers of the Buddha who know the truth and are even slightly skilled in the literature all ridicule him.¹⁸

Also, during this period, the lower classes began to form lay associations under the direction of monks. These were to aid

them in the practice of nien-fo and the performance of other meritorious activities, which could not be done through individual effort. Some came together to copy or recite sutras, to have vegetarian feasts, or to give material support to the monks of specific monasteries.¹⁹ It was groups such as these which were responsible for many of the images in the Yun-kang and Lung-men caves.

Buddhism became increasingly available during the T'ang when, in the footsteps of T'an Luan (476-542), Tao Ch'o and his disciple Shan Tao, masters of the Pure Land school, began preaching in central China. In their use of the vernacular, these monks were the spiritual forefathers of the White Lotus evangelists. The success of these attempts to popularize Buddhism was such that, in spite of the setback caused by the persecution and destruction of 845, it was reported in 1093 that :

... at present (Buddhist) teachers, without distinction between the sects, all use (Pure Land teachings) to attract disciples. In building worship halls, making images and establishing societies, they make no distinctions between rich and poor, young and old, and all of them sincerely adhere to the Pure Land School.²⁰

This period, which saw an upsurge in efforts by the sangha to open the saving grace of the Buddha to all levels of society by means of lay associations and other methods, also was marked by the gradual reduction of the sangha's independence and its assimilation into the body politic of the Chinese state. This loss of autonomy was brought about

through the introduction of official ordination to maintain the high moral standards of the clerics and control the size of the sangha. However, these noble plans were thwarted. Because of financial difficulties, the government was soon actively involved in selling ordination certificates. Thus, they allowed any who desired and could afford it to enter the monasteries, in order to escape punishment or civil obligations. In addition, the sangha's authority was further reduced with the governments of the T'ang and Sung both maintaining a civilian bureaucracy to oversee its affairs.²¹ The struggle of the sangha with the state had been going on for centuries and under the leadership of various monks, inspired by Hui-yüan, it had thwarted some government attempts to curtail its power.²² However, these were merely battles won in a war in which the government was eventually victorious, for by the end of the T'ang the sangha, at least tacitly, acknowledged government supremacy.

As government restrictions on monastic life and its resultant corrosion forced the religious to look elsewhere for salvation, the lay associations which had their beginnings under monastic supervision soon became alternatives to the sangha. Thus, finally, with the disruption and instability accompanying the establishment of the Southern Sung (1127-1279), many lay associations took this opportunity to establish their independence from the disunified sangha. During this period, their activities expanded beyond congregational chanting to include a vegetarian diet and evangelism through the printing

and distribution of spiritual tracts. In addition, without orthodox monastic supervision, many associations, including the White Lotus Society began fullscale assimilation of popular ideas from non-Buddhist sources, such as those of the Taoist and Manichaeans. Whether or not a "pure" Buddhism existed at this point, even in the sangha, is a moot point; for the syncretistic process can be traced to the early practice of ko-yi, "matching the meanings". Similar practices were carried out in the Pure Land's deification of the Chinese pantheon for the bestowal of Buddhist salvation and the use of Chinese popular deities to guard Buddhist temples. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the Buddhist associations only followed, albeit to the extreme, the example of their orthodox parent.

It is within this tradition of lay associations that the White Lotus Society, founded in 1133 by Mao Tzu-yüan (1086-1166), belonged. Mao trained under Pei Ch'an Fan Fa-chu (d.1128), a Master of the Northern Ch'an.

Fan Fa-chu and his two predecessors at the monastery of Great Compassion in Soochow were all noted for their combination of T'ien-t'ai doctrine and ardent Amidist piety, coupled with a concern for penance ritual, based on the Lotus Sutra.²⁹

This combination of T'ien-t'ai philosophy and Amidist devotionism had become quite popular during the late T'ang and the Sung periods. At this time, too, as was previously mentioned, there was also a rise in the popularity of the Lotus symbol, especially among the lay associations, who wished to gain respectability by claiming Hui-yüan as their ancestor. It

was probably with this in mind that Mao first established the Lien-tsung ch'an-t'ang (Lotus School of Penance Hall), and then the Pai-lien ts'ai (White Lotus Vegetarians).

Chih P'an discusses the early history of the White Lotus in some detail in order to prove the sect to be an anathema to orthodox Buddhism.

Pour ce qui est de Mao Tseu-yuan, bonze du temple de Yen-siang dans la commanderie de Wou, il étudia d'abord sous un maître de la loi de Brahma. Imitant l'école de (T'ien-) t'ai, il fit une image²⁴ où il mettait en harmonie les quatre terres et un texte de salutation et de résolution matinales. Sa gāthā était de quatre vers, et on répétait cinq fois l'invocation au Buddha. Il exhortait les hommes et les femmes à mener ensemble la vie de pureté. Lui-même s'instituant le Maître-guide du Lotus blanc. Il recevait assis les hommages des fidèles. (Ses fidèles) s'abstenaient d'oignons et de lait, ne tuaient pas, et ne buvaient pas de vin. C'est ce qu'on appelait la (doctrine) végétarienne du Lotus blanc. Recevoir sa doctrine perverse était qualifié de "transmettre la loi"; se livrer avec lui à des actes impurs, était qualifié "de loi du Buddha"..... Il eut maille à partir avec les autorités, et fut jugé coupable de rendre un culte aux démons. On le bannit à Kiang-tcheou. Mais le reste de sa bande imita²⁵ ses pratiques, qui jusqu'à présent sont florissantes.

These texts, mentioned by Chih P'an and used by the White Lotus during this early period are the Yuan-ching ssu-t'u t'u (Picture of Four Lands Joined to Each Other), the Sheng-chao li ts'an wen (Confession Text of Morning Worship), and the Ssu-chu ko-chien (Fourteen Buddhist Songs). In the Fo-tsu t'ung-chi, Chih P'an also discusses the origin of these texts:

Quand (Mao Tseu-yuan) parle de la figure des quatre terres, il plagie les paroles fondamentales de l'école de (T'ien-) t'ai, et y ajoute diverses stances; toutes sont en style vulgaire. Pour

ce qui est de sa formule de résolution matinale, il a résumé en un seul principe les sept résolutions de Ts'en yun;²⁶ mais on ne sait comment il s'y prend dans la pratique. Ses stances se psalmodient en quatre vers; elles ressemblent donc aux chants de bûcherons (des pêcheurs, des laboureurs)... Il parle faussement de la conduite pure et ne mène qu'une vie de débauches.²⁷

In spite of its critical tone, this passage does serve to indicate the efforts of this new society to make its teachings accessible and comprehensible to the lower classes. By means of penance, chanting, the hymns in the vernacular set to the tune of folksongs, and vegetarian diet, all the members, men and women, could together achieve the same results as educated monks, gained through the study of Pure Land and T'ien-t'ai philosophy. Through these activities instituted by Mao, all could gain sufficient merit to be reborn in Paradise or, maybe, even change the world.

While Chih P'an lived a century after Mao Tzu-yüan, his polemic against the budding White Lotus Society marked a trend that not only would continue, but had its beginnings in Mao's life-time. While scholars are not certain that Mao allowed the mixing of men and women or "monks with hair", married clergy,²⁸ there were other reasons for the early clerical and official attacks. While there are no specific reasons given for the exiles of Mao in 1131 and 1137, one could conjecture that the popular, evangelistic spirit of the new society made it very well-liked among the masses. By offering a large group of people a new focus of identity, it proved a threat to government and orthodox Buddhists alike;

for both groups had previously claimed the loyalty of many of the people who were now members of the White Lotus. However, the establishment was not totally antagonistic ; for Mao was briefly recalled from exile in 1133 and commissioned by Emperor Kao Tsung to preach his doctrine at court, with the title Tz'u-chao tsung-chu, "Master of Compassionate Light". This official patronage only increased the popularity of the new society, for the Lu-shan lien-tsung pao chien "Mirror of Mount Lu Lotus School", reported :

The transforming influence of Tz'u-chao tsung-chu was felt over all of the land. Princes, ministers of the court, monks and laity all venerated him. There were very many who (through his influence) were converted by reciting the Buddha's name. The records are too numerous to recount.²⁹

But this state of affairs did not last long; for in 1137 Mao was exiled again and remained there until his death. However, as Chih P'an reports : "mais le reste de sa bande imita ses pratiques, qui jusqu'à présent sont florissantes." ³⁰

After Mao's death, there is no further mention of the White Lotus during the Sung, except, maybe, in 1257 : "It is prohibited for heretics to form societies of those who wear white clothing." (Pai-i hui).³¹ However, from the beginning of the Yuan dynasty (1276-1367), the White Lotus suffered government persecution. As a result, the White Lotus was often forced underground, to mix with other banned sectarians which, in turn, led to increased syncretism. In a memorial sent to Kublai Khan in 1281 to report the rebel activities of the sect in Kiangsu and Anhwei provinces under the leadership of Tu Wan-1,

it is stated that the group had in its possession : "a 'Mantra on the Five Dukes' (Wu-kung chou) ... presumably a kind of charm adopted from Taoism.³² a 'Diagram for Turning One's Back on Transmigration' (T'ui-pei t'u) a book with pictures predicting the rise and fall of dynasties³³ a 'Blood Basin' (Hsüen p'ian ... exercising implement) and an 'Illustrated Book on Astrology' (T'ien-wen-t'u-shu)."³⁴

Possession of these objects and their participation in a revolt led to the prohibition of the sect in the same year.

In 1308 all government officials in Kiangsu and Fukien received instructions :

All the White Lotus temples (Pai-lien t'ang) should be destroyed, along with all the images (shen-hsiang) in them. All the members (tao-jen) should be dispersed to their original registered places of residence. All involved officials are hereby ordered to vigorously seek out and arrest these sectarians. Those officials who are lax in enforcement will be heavily punished. In addition, all similar groups are prohibited.³⁵

Since the Mongols must have been familiar with Buddhist terms and the difference between Buddhist and folk beliefs, it is significant that they use the terms tao-jen and shen-hsiang (instead of fo-hsiang). It was also reported that the sectarians were all married, and that men and women were worshipping together at night.³⁶

The persecution continued throughout the history of the White Lotus; however, during the Yuan, there was a brief period of respite between 1313 and 1322. This occurred during the reign of Jen-tsung, when the emperor was introduced to Hsiao Chüen-kuei, a sect leader. This fateful meeting led to the

following decree of recognition :

.....In the mountains behind Fukien ... there are White Lotus temples (Pai-lien chiao-t'ang) ... There are those who don't understand Buddhism who have destroyed some of these temples ... The usual practice (of the sect members) is to build their temples using solicited contributions. In these temples they regularly chant sutras, pray for prosperity and long life for those in higher positions, and carry out other beneficial activities.... There is one temple called "Respond to Compassion Hall of Eternal Life" (Pao-en wan-shou t'ang); each such temple has a head priest and assistant priest in residence Another temple belonging (to the sect) is called "The Hall of Pure Response". Every locality (in Fukien area) has these Lotus Halls (Lien-t'ang) which carry out charitable activities. All responsible local officials are hereby ordered to stop prosecuting and suppressing this religion

Further, all the Lotus Halls, water and land, people, rolls of cloth, mills, shops (supplies for) feasts, sutra storehouses (chieh-tien k'u) bathhouses and boats which belong to this sect are neither to be molested, nor confiscated. There are to be no more such actions by those who presume on their power and authority From today on (their temples) are to be called "White Lotus Temples" (Pai-lien chiao-t'ang). For each such temple ... a director (chu-chi) is to be appointed. All local officials are instructed to protect the temples of this sect... (In the temples) sutras are to be constantly read, prayers offered for the long life of the emperor, and good works performed.³⁷

It is significant to note that, in spite of persecution, the White Lotus was able to achieve an advanced stage of institutionalization and economic success. Since the acceptance of this group into the establishment was of such brief duration, it is doubtful that it made much impact on the development of the White Lotus at this point. From this period, the White Lotus sectarians "made common cause with rebels".³⁸ Yet, in spite of the persecution which resulted from such activities, throughout

its history, the White Lotus Society was the subject of constant memorials to the emperor. These often showed that it existed in settled communities with wealth, not unlike that indicated above, which were repeatedly destroyed, only to be rebuilt again.

According to De Groot, the main cause of this rebellious nature was just such persecution at the hands of a government fearing the power of heterodox groups.³⁹ With the rebellions of 1622, 1796 and 1813, this treatment was, at the least, a contributing cause. Yet there were others; a government, weakened by the corruption of eunuch power, or financial difficulties, that could no longer maintain control over disaffected groups; natural disasters for which such a government could not effect relief; foreign invasions or foreign rule; all of these in various combinations could set the stage for revolt by the White Lotus and other groups.

During the Yüan dynasty, China was beset by many revolts under the leadership of the White Lotus,⁴⁰ but it was under Han Shan-t'ung and his son, Han Lin-erh, that the sect made its first major contribution to the collapse of a dynasty. According to the Ts'ao-mu tzu, written during the Ming by Yeh Tzu-ch'1, the following was the immediate cause of the rebellion :

In the year Keng-yin (1350) during the reign of Chih-cheng (1341-1367) ... when the Yellow River changed its source and flowed towards the south, Chia Lu persuaded the Prime Minister T'o-t'o to recover the old river course dredged by Yu, and he, himself, was put in charge of the operation. Along the river bank more than 260,000 men were conscripted for the labour. The funds

alloted by the government to pay for the labour were not paid in full.⁴¹

Since the labourers had been recruited from Honan, Kiangsu and Shantung, traditional rebel hotbeds, the rebellion spread quickly from its place of origin in Hopei and eventually included Anhwei, Szechwan and Shensi,⁴² with all the rebels claiming membership in the Red Army (probably because of their common use of red turbans as means of identification).

The government forces proved to be incapable of stemming the tide of revolt. Although they were able to capture and execute Han Shan-t'ung very early in the revolt, hereditary succession was so well established that his son, Han Lin-erh, was able to assume command immediately and continue the revolt. Under his leadership and that of others, the White Lotus remained active during the early Ming. The pinnacle of their activity was reached with the brief establishment of a series of petty kingdoms:

In the strongholds of the movement during the fourteenth century, such as the state of Sung, under Han Lin-erh and Liu Fu-t'ung in the Shantung-Anhwei area, the state of Han under Chen Yu-liang in the Yangtze valley, and the state of Hsia under Ming Yu-chên in Szechwan and Shensi, the Maitreya Buddha continued to be worshipped and the White Lotus sustained itself.⁴³

However, ultimately the White Lotus revolt did not bring any drastic changes to China. While one of its members, Chu Yüan-chang (1328-1398) did become the emperor Ming T'ai-tzu, the founder of the Ming dynasty, he immediately rejected any association with the White Lotus.

It would be wrong to leave the discussion of the White

Lotus's revolt here; for, from the discussion to this point, it would seem this rebellion followed a non-millenarian pattern. It is merely one among many revolts of men pushed beyond endurance by external conditions. But, in his repudiation of his former comrades in arms, Chu himself indicates the importance of millenarian ideology for their cause :

.... the ignorant people unfortunately were deceived by the magical arts and believed in the reality of Maitreya, whose birth would alleviate their sufferings, in spite of the absurdity of the teachings of this sect. ⁴⁵

The Ming Lu, in its prohibition of the White Lotus and other sects, continues in the same vein :

.... those who absurdly proclaim the Maitreya, White Lotus, Manicheism, White Cloud or other such groups, are agents of heresy and disorder. Some harbouring charts and idols, some burning incense in order to organize meetings, some banding together at night and dispersing by day, some pretending to devote themselves to good deeds while stirring up the common people. Let the leaders be garroted and the followers whipped one hundred strokes and banished three hundred li. ⁴⁶

However, it is in the Yuan Shih that the religious foundation of Han Shan-t'ung's revolt, specifically, is established :

Han Shan-t'ung's grandfather (was a leader of) the White Lotus society (Pai-lien hui), who deceived the people by means of conducting worship services (literally : shao-hsiang ... burning incense). (For this) he was banished. As for Shan-t'ung, he said that the empire was in great disorder, and that the Buddha Maitreya ⁴⁷ was about to descend to be reborn. All the ignorant people of (the present provinces of Honan, Kiangsu and Anhwei) eagerly believed him. Liu Fu-t'ung and six other sect leaders proclaimed that Shan-t'ung was really the eighth descendent of the Sung Emperor Hui-Tsung (reigned 1101-1126), and that therefore he should be the

lord of China. Fu-t'ung and the others then slew a white horse and a black ox, and took oaths before Heaven and Earth, that they would rise together in rebellion.⁴⁸

In addition, Han Lin-erh claimed to be the Hsiao Ming-wang, the Lesser King of Light, so that not only had Maitreya descended to be reborn, but the King of Light had appeared⁴⁹ to establish the millennium.⁵⁰

Thus, the Confucian desire for the return of the rightful ruler to the throne, (a member of the Chinese dynasty of Sung), the arrival of the Manichaeian King of Light, and the birth of the Buddha Maitreya, complemented by the sacrifice of the white horse and black ox, combined to establish the millenarian expectations of Han Shan-t'ung's revolt.⁵¹ The Ming Lu was correct to give at least equal weight to the members of the White Lotus being "agents of heresy as well as disorder". While the economic crisis created by the change in the Yellow River's course may have been the immediate stimuli for a great number of those who took part in the revolt, others, members of the White Lotus Society for some time before the revolt, saw that this was one of many conditions which proved the time was right for the establishment of the millennium. They sought to establish a new age, not merely to reap their revenge on ineffectual government.

During the Ming (1368-1644), the White Lotus continued its violent millenarian activities. Once again, inspired by that ideology that had motivated Han Shan-t'ung and his comrades, groups which had continued in peaceful and unobtrusive preparation for the promised time, often for a generation or more,

took up arms against the government. However, in the sixteenth century, the mantra Chen-K'ung chia-hsiang wu-sheng lao-mu (the True and Empty Land and the Eternal Mother) began to dominate the Confucian, Buddhist, Manichaeian and Taoist components of that ideology. In addition, as Huang reported, "all of (the pao chüan) were published in the Ming Wan-Li (1573-1620) and Ch'ung-chen (1628-1644) periods."⁵² This sectarian literature to be discussed later was produced in great abundance in areas where the White Lotus was in control. In fact, the existence of the pao chüan proves that the White Lotus had reached a size where oral tradition was no longer feasible, and where it was possible for the society to dominate an area without fear of government persecution.

Government persecution of the sect continued with increased vigour during the Ming period, as it would again under the Ch'ing,⁵³ as a result of the rise in rebellions involving the White Lotus Society. In some areas, such as Hopei, White Lotus activity did not stop with the accession of the new dynasty. By the 1390's, Szechwan, the area of Ming Yü-chan's activities, had once more fallen into a state of unrest. The most serious flare-up occurred in 1397 in Han-chung (southern Shensi) under the leadership of T'ien Chiu-ch'eng, and lasted until 1409. T'ien, with the title Han Ming huang-ti (Han Emperor of Radiance) borrowed his reign title, Lung-feng, from his ancestor in arms Han Lin-erh.⁵⁴ The sect was also active in Kiangsi, Kansu and Shensi during this period.

While the fifteenth century marked a time of rural

distress caused by natural calamities, poor harvests and heavy taxation, which made sporadic, violent outbreaks common in both north and south China,⁵⁵ because of its millenarian concerns, the White Lotus was not always involved. With the world view of the White Lotus, such external stimuli was not sufficient for revolt. In 1420 in Shantung, T'ang Sai-erh, gathered her followers together for rebellion by claiming to be the mother of the Buddha, as well as the possessor of a precious book, pao shu, a magic sword and the ability to gain the services of ghosts and spirits in her cause.⁵⁶ In 1500, Li Fu-ta, another member of the White Lotus, began his rebellion by spreading a rumour about the imminent descent of Maitreya. Nor were these rebellions restricted to Chinese adherents of the White Lotus. With leaders being sent into exile, often beyond the borders of China proper, as well as other rebels fleeing the country to escape persecution, there was bound to be contact with non-Chinese tribes. This was likely influential in the revolt of a Man tribesman, P'u Fa-wu, who proclaimed himself the king of Man and the reincarnation of Maitreya.⁵⁷ 1577, 1583 and 1600 saw uprisings instigated by the White Lotus, and even secret societies during this period were claiming affiliation with the White Lotus in their violent activities.

But perhaps the rebellion which tells us the most about the White Lotus during the Ming period was that which occurred under the leadership of Hsü Hung-yin in Shantung in 1622. In Chapter 257 of the History of the Ming Dynasty, the history of

the revolt is described :

Before that time, Wang Shen, a man from Kicheu (situated northwest of Peking), had received incense from a wicked fox, and then placed himself at the head of the White Lotus sect, calling himself the headman of the sect of Smelling Incense. Amongst his followers were propagation-chiefs of various rank, also heads of congregations and other title-bearers, who had their branches in the region round the imperial residence, as also in Shantung, Shansi, Honan, Shensi and Sze-ch'wen. Wang Shen lived in the village of the Stone Buddha (Shih-po k'ou or shih-fo chuang) in Lwan-cheu (in the extreme north-east of Chihli). His followers and partisans paid him their ready money, which they called court-tribute, and kept up with him by means of flying bamboo-slips, a correspondence about their strategems, with a velocity of several hundred miles a day. In the 23rd year of the Wan li period (1595) Wang Shen was taken prisoner by the authorities and sentenced to death, but through bribery he contrived to escape. He then proceeded to the capital, where he managed to attract cognates of the imperial family and palace-officials to his religion.

After matters had come to this pass, his disciple, Li Kwoh-yung set up a separate sect, which made use of written and spoken formulas to evoke spirits. Now between these two sects jealousy arose, which resulted in the whole matter coming to light. In the 42nd year (1614) Wang Shen was again seized by the authorities, and five years afterwards he died in prison. His son, Hao-hien, as also Sü Hung-jü from Kü-yü (in south-west Shantung) and Yü Hung-chi from Wu-yih (in Chihli) joined the sect, the result being a new influx of followers.

Thus opened the year (viz., 1622) when Hao-hien saw the Liao-tung region entirely lost to the dynasty (conquered by the Manchus), and rebellious people on all sides ready for any extravagance. He then planned with Sü Hung-jü and other adherents simultaneously to take up arms on mid-autumn day of that year. But the plan got wind, and so Sü Hung-jü was obliged to commence the insurrection before the appointed time. He took the title of Emperor Chung-hing Fu-lieh, and called this year the first of the Hing-shing period of the great Ch'ing dynasty. They wore a red kerchief round their heads as insignia. In the fifth month, on

the day wu-shen, they took Yun-ch'ing (in western Shantung), after which they also surprised Tseu, T'eng, and Yih (i.e., the southern strip of Shantung, east of the Great Canal), and their hosts grew to several myriads.⁵⁸

With the obvious signs of declining dynasty, droughts, Manchu incursions and the resultant refugees, this period was ripe for rebellion. Lu-k'un, undersecretary to the Board of Punishments, wrote : "People who spread heresies such as the White Lotus members existed all over the country. Wherever their leaders go crowds gather. If only one will lead, these people are ready to follow."⁵⁹ With such support, the establishment of the new age became a distinct possibility, and this is exactly what Hsü was reported to have promised. The Tsou-hsien hsiang-t'u chih (gazetteer for Tsou-hsien in Shantung) states that : "Hsü could enable the people to see gold hills, silver hills, rich hills, wheat hills, oil fountains, liquor wells, etc., and it was said that those who convert to his faith, the White Lotus sect, would never be poor in their lifetimes."⁶⁰

It is clear from the History of the Ming Dynasty that the Smelling Incense society was well established by the time of Hsü's revolt, covering a wide area, with an organized hierarchy of "propagation chiefs", "heads of congregations" and an hereditary leadership. In addition, the use of red kerchiefs would link this sect with the Red Army at the end of the Yuan. This all goes far to substantiate Hsü's claim that his rebellion was twenty years in preparation. Again this indicates that the sectarians had more in mind than merely the rectification of the immediate social, political or economic problems

of the period.

It is also interesting to note that the White Lotus sect in the Stone Buddha village was also responsible for the Precious Dragon Flower Sutra Examined and Corrected by the Old Buddha, which contains the most complete statement of the Eternal Mother mythology.⁶¹ In addition, Na Yen-ch'eng (1764-1833), Viceroy of Chihli, wrote :

The Wang family of Shih-fo k'ou in Luan-chou has produced a book entitled A General Interpretation of the Three Stages of Religion in Response to Kalpic Change (San-chiao Ying-chieh tsung-kuan t'ung-shu), in which it is written : "The lamplighter Buddha, Sakyamuni Buddha, and the Buddha Yet to Come (wei-lai fo) are each related to the three kalpas. The Lamplighted Buddha was the ruler of the past, Sakyamuni Buddha controls the present, and the Buddha Who is Yet to Come will rule the future. He is none other than Maitreya. The Buddha Who is Yet to Come will descend to be born in Shih-fo k'ou."⁶²

Since it is not dated, there is no proof that this text itself directly inspired Hsu's revolt. However, it is significant to note that the early seventeenth century was the period in which the millenarian ideology had reached maturation and was being committed to writing. Therefore, there is a possibility of correspondence between the writing of a scripture with a clear millenarian statement and a revolt with millenarian aims.⁶³

During the Ch'ing (1644-1912), government persecution and rebellions led by the White Lotus continued as in the past. In 1774, the Wangs of the Stone Buddha village, having re-established themselves after their suppression under the Ming, revolted under the guise of the White Yang sect. This time, under Wang Lun, the sect added healing and boxing to their

repertoire.⁶⁴ In addition, in this period the sectarians supplemented their ideology with the slogan "Fan Ch'ing, Fu Ming" (Oppose the Ch'ing Restore the Ming), for the White Lotus, along with other would-be rebels were prepared to take full advantage of the non-Chinese nature of the dynasty. It is also for this reason that in 1718 in Honan, Kuan Chin changed his name to Chu Fu-yeh (Chu referring to Chu of the Ming and Fu-yeh to restore Ming heritage), and so, claiming to be a descendent of the Ming imperial family, rebelled against the government.⁶⁵

In 1796, under the leadership of Lui-Sung and Liu Chih-hsieh, the first of two rebellions under the White Lotus which would shake the government to its very core began. The sectarians, using the San-chiao ying-chieh tsung-kuan t'ung-shu and the Wan-nien shu, prophesied the descent of the Buddha, and the appearance of the Niu-pa. With their aid, the sectarians would bring down the Manchu and re-establish the Ming.⁶⁶

This rebellion was put down with great difficulty by government forces, and was followed almost immediately by the 1813 rebellion of the Eight Diagram sect or the Religion of Heaven's Guiding Principle (T'ien-li chiao) under the leadership of Lin Ch'ing and Li Wen-ch'eng.⁶⁷ So ineffectual was the government reaction that the Eight Diagrams was able to rally five provinces against the imperial authority for nine years. But, in the end, as a result of government preparations, the White Lotus ceased to exist as an independent entity.

Throughout the history of its activities which, at one time or another enveloped most of the provinces in China proper, and sometimes beyond, the White Lotus displayed a remarkable ability to survive. It had brought governments to their knees, endured defeat, persecution and exile only to arise again and again.⁶⁸ But after the destruction of the Eight Diagrams, the Society as an entity which could command the loyalty of whole provinces, became fragmented. However, from this period, various sects, including the Big Sword Society, Red Beards, Red Spears, Boxers and the present-day Great Way of Former Heaven used Buddhist and Taoist ritual and can be linked to the White Lotus. Through them, the White Lotus lived on, influencing others who, following in its footsteps, continued its noble struggle.

Footnotes

1

Pa-kua (Eight Diagrams) as part of the White Lotus see Jean Chesneaux, Secret Societies in China in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1971), p. 28. Cf. Daniel Overmeyer, "Folk Buddhist Sects: A Structure in the History of Chinese Religions", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1971.*and J.J.M. DeGroot, Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China (Taipei: Literature House Ltd., 1963), 152.

2

T'o-ching and others eds., Kan-ting p'ing-ting chiao-fei chi-lueh (An Account of the Pacification of Religious Bandits), chüan 2b (n.p., 1816), p. 24a, cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 210.

3

Huang Yü-pien, P'o hsieh hsiang-pien (A Detailed Refutation of Heresies), chüan 1. p. 14 and Yu hsü p'o-hsieh hsiang-pien (A Further Continuation of a Refutation of Heresies), p. 30, cited in Richard Chu, "White Lotus Society in Chinese History", Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1967, p. 130.

4

See p. 43 and the creation of a new sect by Li Kwoh-yung. See also Majorie Topley's account of Lo Wei-ch'un's contribution to the Great Way of Former Heaven in "The Great Way of Former Heaven", in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 26(1963), p. 367. She also gives a possible source for the numerous names in her discussion of "work names", pp. 384-388.

5

For examples see DeGroot, pp. 166, 443, 448, 475, 509. etc.

6

George Miles, "Vegetarian Sects", in The Chinese Recorder, 33(1902), pp. 3-4.

7

Topley, p. 374.

8

Ibid., pp. 386-387.

9

Chu, p. 19.

*Hereafter referred to as Overmeyer, Thesis.

10 Kenneth Ch'en, Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1963), pp. 107-108.

11 Chih P'an (flor. 1258-1269), who wrote the Fo-tsu t'ung-chi (Record of the Lineage of the Buddha and Patriarchs), was a monk of the T'ien-t'ai school. By means of historiographic traditions from non-Buddhist and Buddhist sources, particularly from his own school, he compiled a comprehensive history of Buddhism. For a detailed discussion see Jan Yün-hua, "The Fo-tsu t'ung-chi, a Bibliographical and Bibliographical Study", Oriens Extremus, 1963, pp. 61-82..

12 Chu, p. 19.

13 Chih P'an, Fo-tsu t'ung-chi, chüan 47, Taisho, vol. 49, p. 425a, cited in Chu, p. 21.

14 Chu, p. 21.

15 E. Zürcher, Buddhist Conquest of China, the Spread and Adaption of Buddhism in Early Medieval China (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 217-219.

16 Ibid., p. 219.

17 For a detailed discussion see Chapter VI, "Educational and Social Life", in Kenneth Ch'en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism (Princeton: University of Princeton, 1973), pp. 240-303.

18 Chao Lin, Yin-hua lu, chüan 4, ch'ieh-pu, Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng edition, vol 2831, p. 25, cited in ibid., p. 255.

19 Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p. 290.

20 Tsung hsiao, Le Pang wen lei (Miscellaneous Writings Concerning the Joyous World), cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 139.

21 For a detailed discussion see Ch'en, Buddhism in China, pp. 241-257.

22 For example see Jan Yün-hua, A Chronicle of Buddhism in China 581-960 A.D., Translations from Monk Chih P'an's Fo-tsu t'ung-chi (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1966), pp. 54, 60.

23 Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 129.

24 That is, the world of the pure and impure, of the śrāvaka and pratyeka-buddhas, of the bodhisattvas and finally of the dharma-kaya.

25 Chih P'an, Taisho, vol. 49, p. 425a, in Paul Pelliot, "La Secte du Lotus Blanc et la Secte du Nuage Blanc", in Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 11(1904), pp. 308-309.

26 Tsun-chih Tz'u-yin (964-1032), "the honourable Tz'u-yin".

27 Chih P'an, Taisho, vol. 49, p. 425a, in Pelliot, "La Secte du Lotus Blanc", pp. 310-311.

28 The fact that Mao was succeeded by Hsiao Mao (Little Mao) who may have been his son might indicate married clergy.

29 Chüan 4, cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 130..

30 See footnote 25.

31 Sung Shih (History of the Sung Dynasty), Li-tsung section, cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 131. However, it is equally possible that this referred to the Manichaeans.

32 Vincent Y.C. Shih, "Some Chinese Rebel Ideologies", in T'oung Pao, 44(1956), p. 186.

33 Ibid., p. 186.

34 Ta-Yüan t'ung-chih t'iao-ke, chüan 28, cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 132. It is significant to note the early influence of popular beliefs, particularly those of the Taoists, on the ideology of the sect.

35 T'ung-chih t'iao-ke, chüan 29, cited in ibid., p.133.

36 Idem.

37 Yüan tien-chang (Imperial Edicts of the Yuan Dynasty) vol 1, chüan 33, p. 470, cited in ibid. p. 134. Perhaps the emperor felt that the sect's illegal activities would be curtailed if they were placed under benevolent government supervision.

38 Yüan-shih, chüan 202, fol., 8 in DeGroot, p. 150.

39 The main object of his book as set out in the introduction is to prove that the very nature of Chinese government is prejudiced against any group which it considers heterodox.. By proving that there is no tolerance and all non-Confucian groups have been and are persecuted, he hopes to remove the stigma placed on Chinese Christians missions that they are by their own disreputable actions attacked by the government. Therefore he is inclined to view the activities of other non-Confucian groups in light of this premise.

40 For example in the Upper Yangtse under Tu Wan-i in 1280, in Kiangsu under P'ien Yün-yu, a blacksmith supported by a cloth-seller among others in the 1330's, Chu, pp. 96-98 and Shih, pp. 188-189.

41 quoted by Ch'ien Ch'ien-i, Kuo-ch'u ch'ün-hsing shih-lüeh, Shih-yuan ts'ung-shu edition, 1/1b, cited in Shih, p. 190.

42 The renewal of the interdicts against Chinese bearing arms and the rumored proposal to slay Chinese bearing certain common surnames made many join the White Lotus cause.

43 The final days of the Yüan dynasty were marked by the reigns of a number of ineffectual rulers, eight between the death of Kublai Khan and the succession of the last Mongol emperor in 1333. The latter, little more than a boy at the time of his accession to the throne, faced with the problems of the Yellow River breaking its banks, famine in the north, and financial instability, was unable to unite the Mongols to save the empire.

44

Chu, p. 100.

45

Kuo-ch'ao tien-hu, 3/15b-16a, cited in Shih, 193.

46

Ming Lu, Li-1 section, in Chu, 109 and DeGroot, p.137.
(italics mine)

47

Shan-t'ung as Maitreya see Overmeyer, "Folk Buddhist Religion: Creation and Eschatology in Medieval China", in History of Religions, 12(1972), *p. 46 and Yuji Muramatsu, "Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies", in Arthur Wright, The Confucian Persuasion(Stanford Calif.:Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 248.

48

Sung Lien (1310-1380) and others eds., Yüan Shih, chüan 42, Shun-ti, section 5, p. 346 cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p.15.

49

A belief substantiated by the Ta-hsiao ming-wang ch'u shih ching (the Sutra of the Birth of the Major and Minor Kings of Light). Han Shan-t'ung claimed to be the Major King of Light and his son the Minor King of Light. See Guillaume Dunstheimer, "Some Religious Aspects of Secret Societies", in Jean Chesneaux, Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840-1950 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 25.

50

"The Empire is in great disorder, Maitreya Buddha has descended to be reborn and the King of Light has appeared in the world." Kao-tai, Hung yü lu, chüan 7, cited in Overmeyer, Article, pp. 52-53.

51

All these support the idea that the corrupt ruler had lost Heaven's favour, and that Heaven was indicating through favourable omens that the time was appropriate for a change in dynasty. See Mencius, chapter 5, section 2, par. 9! The sacrifice of the black ox and white horse by Liu Pei is mentioned in the San-kuo chih yen-i (The Explanation of the Three Kingdoms). Tz'u Hai, p. 928 sites the Han Shu for the sacrificing of a white horse when swearing an oath.

52

Huang, P'ao hsieh, 1/1a, cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 166.

*Hereafter referred to as Overmeyer, Article.

53 often the laws against sectarians in both dynasties were identical, the laws of the Ch'ing being taken verbatim from those of the Ming.

54 Hok-lam Chan, "White Lotus-Maitreya Doctrine and Popular Uprisings in Ming and Ch'ing China", in Sinologica, (Dec., 1968), p. 215.

55 Shih, pp. 202-203.

56 Shih, p. 202 and Chan, p. 216. The possession of a special book is a re-occurring theme to be found in popular novels such as the Shui-hu ch'uan (The Water Margin) and in the legends surrounding famous men such as Chang Tao-ling.

57 Ming Shih, ch'uan 289, p. 187 cited in Chu, p. 106.

58 DeGroot, pp. 166-168.

59 Ming Shih, ch'uan 226 cited in Chu, pp. 108-109.

60 Tsou-hsien hsiang-t'u chih, p. 18 cited in Chu, p. 113.

61 Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 167.

62 Cited in ibid., p. 168.

63 This text inspired later rebellions. Lin Ch'ing of the Eight Diagrams sect, after his arrest in 1813, said: "I once used this book (Three Stages of Religion) to deceive the people, saying that they should rebel in response to the change in kalpas. Even though our effort failed, this was merely because the time was not right (after all). But in the future others will rebel!" Ibid., p. 169. For other activities of the Stone Buddha Village see DeGroot, pp. 474-475.

64 DeGroot, pp. 295-306.

65 Chan, p. 218 and Chu, p. 248, ftn. 5.

66 DeGroot, pp. 351, 353, 367. The cult of Niu-pa was based on a trick played with the character Chu in the name of Chu Yüan-chang, the founder of the Ming, which includes the character niu for 牛 and the character pa which is eight.

67 DeGroot, Chapter XIV.

68 DeGroot, pp 347-349, 375.

Chapter Three:
The Organization and Ideology
of the White Lotus Society

The foregoing discussion of the history of the White Lotus has established that sect's amazing resilience, in spite of defeat and persecution. The chief determinant in this resilience is the allure of the White Lotus ideology, an ideology gleaned from a variety of sources and which is enticing precisely because of its millenarian nature.

Immediate failure did not destroy the faith of the White Lotus Society in its ideology's promise of a new age; rather it made it even more desirable.¹

A Organization

However, without having a form in which to work, any ideology would merely be idle dreams, incapable of fulfillment. Therefore, it is natural that a mutual correspondence should exist between organization and ideology.² Accordingly, the ideology of the White Lotus becomes the ground on which its organization is founded, and, in turn, its organization is that which gives form to its ideology. As well, the development of ritual as a social expression of this ideology provided for cohesion among the members of the organization in their attempts to achieve a common goal as defined by their ideology.

By 1313, when the society received a brief respite from government persecution, it had already reached an advanced stage of institutionalization.³ Analogous to the Buddhist sangha, the religious organization of the White Lotus was capable of amassing great wealth, for the most part without even the limited official recognition afforded its mother and model, the sangha. Its wealth came

from a variety of sources. Huang Yü-pien reported that "these sectarians pretended to be doctors or fortune tellers, or act as merchants, and go everywhere to evangelize and collect money."⁴

In addition, new members were required to pay a membership fee. While many of the new membership, often whole families, would have little money, there were men of substance who undertook the leadership of the sect, and on whom ultimately, the sect depended for financial stability. Kuo Tzu-hsing, Chu Yüan-chang's superior, paid for an army of 4,000 retainers to fight for the White Lotus cause.⁵

Since most of the White Lotus groups practised a form of mutual aid, even communism, all would benefit from the sect's prosperity. The San-sheng pien-fang pai-lien reports: "The followers of the White Lotus sect need not bring any goods or money in joining. There is no difference between yours and mine in clothing or food."⁶ Even when the government had confiscated or destroyed the holdings of the sect and the membership was scattered, there were reports of men travelling over great distances to bring money to the aid of their leaders in exile.⁷

This process of amassing wealth enabled the members of the White Lotus to break their ties with the orthodox establishment. They could thus form a new society, supported by an organization which joined leadership and membership together, through rituals such as nien-fo, vegetarianism, morning confession and penance, carried out in a supportive atmosphere of a group with common belief that it was preparing for the imminent

establishment of the millennium.

In the diverse accounts of the White Lotus and related sects, there is a clearly established hierarchical structure within their organization.⁸ While, at first, the important positions of leadership were in the hands of monks, after the White Lotus Society had severed its ties with the monasteries, these positions fell to the uncelibate huo-ohū (those "dwelling in fire", or monks with hair) then to laymen. While backgrounds of the leaders might vary,⁹ the leadership had one common characteristic. Even those in charge of small local units claimed to be in almost continual communication with the divine.¹⁰ In fact, many of the most important leaders established their own divine nature in the eyes of the membership. According to Chih P'ang, Mao Tzu-yüan, "while he was seated received the veneration of the multitude (tso-shou chung-pai) ... and was blazently considered to be the same as the Buddha (chien-t'ung yü-fo).¹¹ Furthermore, in one paō ohūan, it is written:

After the Lamplighter Buddha, Sakyamuni, succeeded him and transmitted the lamp (oh'uan teng). After Sakyamuni, Maitreya Buddha handed down the lamp. After Maitreya Buddha, the True Heavenly Venerable Ancestor (T'ien-chen lai-tzu) will in his turn pass on the lamp. T'ien-chen asked who would succeed him, and was told that his successors will be the "three schools" (san tsung) and the "five branches" (wu p'ai, i.e. the members of his sect..)

Huang Yü-pien comments :

T'ien-chen is Kung-chiang (a sect founder) who was a man. The disciples referred to above are Kung-chiang's own disciples ... Such teachings naturally cause the people to be fearless of difficulty and happy to follow (the leader) because they themselves can continue the task of transmitting the lamp.¹²

As has been previously seen in chapter 2, many leaders made such claims, thus making them recipients of a loyalty from the membership which would support them in times of prosperity and defeat. In addition, by claiming this special relationship with the divine, these leaders were able, not only to supply irrefutable proof that the millennium was imminent, but also guarantee the success of the sectarians' endeavours to bring it about.

However, for an organization such as the White Lotus to endure over the centuries, it could not totally depend on the divine link, for the selection of its leaders. With few exceptions, at the top, succession was established through heredity; even Mao Tzu-yüan was probably succeeded by his son.¹³ In its Law against Rebellion and Serious Resistance, enacted in 1769 and amended in 1801, the government gives support to the significance of heredity within the sect's structure :

His paternal grandfather and father, his sons and their sons, his brothers, and all who dwelt with him, not excepting members of other tribes; furthermore, his father's brothers, his brothers' sons, irrespective of whether they still dwell in the family-home or have separated themselves therefrom; all these, if above the age of sixteen, shall be beheaded, even if they be irrecoverably ill or infirm. Such males under the age of sixteen, as also the culprit's mother, daughters, wife, concubines and sisters, together with the wives and concubines of his sons, shall be given as slaves to families of deserving officers; and the possessions of the culprit shall be confiscated.¹⁴

At the lower levels, the succession was spiritual or master/

disciple.¹⁵ Yet those persons succeeding to a position of authority also had to establish themselves charismatically by affirming that they too had special powers. Through their ability in the areas of faith healing, feats of magic or prophecy, they indicated that the distinctive relationship with the divine was maintained.

This association with the supernatural agencies was also achieved through the mediation of the wu, or sorcerers, the spiritual descendents of the Shang priesthood, who were often linked with popular Taoist priests. With their abilities as diviners, magicians and geomancers, these men and women, the traditional intermediaries between the gods and the masses, gave their blessing to the cause of the White Lotus.¹⁶

This affiliation with the divine in a variety of ways gained the leadership the base of support that it needed. While, during times of disorder, they could count on the support of those discontented with the immediate situation, to exist in times of peace and preparation as they did, they could still depend on the support of a loyal core of followers. It is for this reason that the government lived in fear of the sectarians. In 1386, it was recorded :

... evil and rebellious elements falsely fake the name of religion, burn incense and chant the Buddha's name in order to attract refugees and vagrants. These ignorant folk then join the heretics in crowds. They hope by means of strange, superstitious practices to escape from disasters, but in the end they are merely used by bandits for their own violent purposes. Therefore, when the nation is in a period of stability and prosperity, it should not relax its vigilance, but mow them down like grass and seize them like monkeys.¹⁷

In his Sacred Edict, Shi Tsung said :

.... From these religions (Buddhism and Taoism), a class of loafers come forth without a fixed livelihood or abode, who, assuming the names in vogue in these religions, corrupt the science of the same. The greater part of them use (their doctrines about) calamities and felicity and happiness to sell for money their foolish magic and unreliable talk. They begin, by mere seduction, to appropriate to themselves the goods and money of others, in order to fatten themselves therewith; and then gradually they proceed to hold meetings for the burning of incense, in places where males and females mingle promiscuously: Farmers and craftsmen forsake their business and trades, to go to meet these men who talk so much about extraordinary things; and, which is worst of all, rebellious and revolutionary individuals and heretical miscreants glide in among them ... Sects such as those of the White Lotus and Smelling Incense are instances of it. 18

Through the success of their proselytizing, the White Lotus succeeded in opening the gates to salvation and the millennium to all who were without hope, "refugees and vagrants". They were unlike secret societies with their esoteric knowledge to which only the initiate could gain access, and with dire consequences for any who would break the bonds of secrecy. 19

These sectarians aimed at collective salvation for any who would see the Truth as they saw it. A would-be member needed only exhibit a sincere wish to join, participate in the religious beliefs and ritual of the White Lotus, be recommended by a member, gain the approval of the leader or the divinity whose wishes were made known through the leader, and pay a membership fee. 20

Once in the sect, any member of ability and piety could advance to positions of responsibility. In the various descrip-

tions of the sectarians' hierarchy, women too had a rôle to play; however, it is clear that their advancement had its limitations. Topley makes Pao-en the highest rank to be achieved by women and Miles the lower rank of T'ien-en.²¹

Although De Groot's description is not as specific, he does indicate that all ranks were open,²² but adds: "women are entitled to be religious leaders, but in reality they rarely act as such."²³ Besides demanding vegetarianism from all its members,²⁴ in order to advance, chastity also became a prerequisite.²⁵ In some cases, after all the other prerequisites were met, the final qualification for a position within the sectarian bureaucracy, as within the Confucian, was the passing of an examination.²⁶

Thus, on a practical level, the White Lotus had wealth and a devoted membership which would be at the disposal of Maitreya and the millennium which he would bring. When that time would arrive, the sectarians would have the organization necessary to bring about the overthrow of the old regime and would be capable of carrying on in its stead to usher in the new age.

B Ideology :

The organization of a sect can have no existence without an ideology for which it is the practical expression. But how does the membership come to know and understand the ideology which is the origin of its rituals and the motivation for its actions ? This must be understood before any

detailed discussion of the ideology itself can be attempted.

The illiterate and semi-literate Chinese assimilated an assortment of religious and political ideologies from a variety of sources, but perhaps the most important was that of travelling players and storytellers. For example, Confucian ideals could be gleaned from books such as San Kuo Chih Yen-i (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms)²⁷ which was a popular source for plays staged by itinerant actors on marketdays. In addition, one should not overlook the anti-Confucian ideas which were disseminated through plays based on the Shui-hu chüan, known in English as All Men are Brothers.²⁸ The popularity of this book rose in direct proportion to the instability of the times. In a description of its influences in the late Ming, Li Wen-ch'ün wrote:

.... as conditions during the late Ming became increasingly similar to those of the late Sung, the Shui-hu chüan was resurrected. Storytellers were telling Shui-hu stories, folkplays were playing Shui-hu themes, painters were painting Shui-hu pictures, and Shui-hu figures were even painted on gambling cards.²⁹

The official view of this book's unsettling effects, even though it was not devoid of Confucian morals, is indicated in edicts such as one issued in 1799:

All bookshops which print the licentious story Shui-hu should be rigorously sought out, the book blocks and printed matter burnt and the officials who have failed to prohibit its production severely punished.³⁰

The actors and playwrights who spread Buddhist and Taoist ideas were generally not concerned with the sources of their material, as long as the audience enjoyed it. Therefore,

in most cases, the Taoists depended on their priests and adherents and the Buddhists on their monks and lay followers, to propagate their own beliefs.

As is so often the situation where religious Taoism is concerned, precise information on its methods of proselytizing is scant, but it is clear from the popularity of their Taoist beliefs among the masses that such proselytizing was successful. For the Buddhists, at first, monks used to travel the length and breadth of China searching for masters of the finer points of Buddhist philosophy and would take part in discussions which were often attended by laymen. Tao-an and Hui-yüan were such as these; men who travelled in search of masters and became in their turn masters. Then, during the T'ang dynasty, there arose a class of monks who travelled about, lecturing on sutras or challenging local masters to debate on points of doctrine or to take part in imperial councils on Three Religions. But interest in such discussions was limited to a very small and erudite group of monks and laymen. However, in this period there was also a marked increase in attempts by monks, Tao Cho, Shan Tao and others, to stimulate a wider interest in Buddhism. To achieve this goal, they used a variety of tools, including religious associations, but, as previously mentioned, popular public lectures also attracted large audiences.³¹ In order to gain and keep the attention of the illiterate and semi-literate people who gathered on market and festival days, looking for entertainment, these lectures made extensive use of

a type of literature known as pien wen.³²

With a mixture of prose and poetry, following the practice of Buddhist translations, they would embellish a particular event found in the sutras, such as the very popular story of Mu-lien's (Moggallana) rescuing his mother from Avici hell³³, and thus put Buddhist theology in a beguiling package. This form proved to be so popular that it was employed by non-Buddhist writers, wandering minstrels and ballad singers.

It is within this tradition of pien-wen and vernacular literature that the pao-chüan genre, employed by the White Lotus, developed.³⁴ Written on a variety of topics, they were extremely popular, especially during the Ming, when they were composed for funerals, birthdays and other special events; even for court occasions. As the authorship of the pao-chüan is often unknown or obscure, and as in many cases they formed part of a previously oral tradition,³⁵ dating is difficult. Nonetheless, the earliest extant pao-chüan, the Hsiang Shan pao-chüan (the Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain), containing the legend of Kuan yin, was composed in 1103.³⁶

Unlike the pien-wen, the pao-chüan were composed entirely in verse, employing popular tunes which, in the case of the White Lotus, were described by Chih P'an as resembling "done aux chants de bucherons ..." ³⁷ to the accompaniment of simple musical instruments. The report of a later Ch'ing

observer indicates the same form existed, even at that late date :

.... the performance of the k'un-oh'iang plays in the country often uses such tunes as are called oh'ing'oh'iang-yin, ohu-yun-fei, huang-yin-erh, pai-lien-tzu, etc. Now the heretical writings (i.e. precious scrolls) also use the same rhythm, in order that they may be sung easily, exactly like the k'un-oh'iang theatre plays. ³⁸

Perhaps this indicates a relationship between the pao-oh'ian and the art of the Sung called t'ian-ohing-yin-yuan, which means "to beat (a musical instrument) and to chant about karma". ³⁹ Discussion of the chain of deeds and retributions in order to inspire good deeds was a favourite theme of the pao-oh'ian. ⁴⁰

Their subject matter, too, differed from that of the pien-wen ⁴¹ for they often went beyond the motifs offered by the Buddhist sutras. ⁴² In the case of the sectarians, their pao-oh'ian was devoted to the revelations which had been disclosed to the founders and leaders of various groups within the White Lotus. ⁴³ In this way, new ideas could be introduced and accepted as equal to much earlier revelations. While, at other times, these texts existed only in manuscript, during periods of White Lotus ascendancy over certain areas, there would be flood of printed pao-oh'ian. Thus, through these texts, the ideology of the White Lotus which would bring salvation to all, was made accessible to all.

As previously mentioned, within the ideology of the White Lotus Society, disseminated through the pao-oh'ian, the two major foci are beliefs concerning Lao-mu and those concerning

her instrument Maitreya, who, along with various other Buddhas throughout time is "personally thought by Lao-mu an excellent means (miao-fa) for rescuing the scattered and the lost".⁴⁴

From these two centres, the society developed a view of salvation which is millenarian, according to the criteria set forth by Cohn and which distinguishes this Chinese folk Buddhist sect from other such groups. Furthermore, both these were ultimately more central to this development than the offerings of T'ien-t'ai and Pure Land⁴⁵ with which it was begun. Nevertheless, to establish Lao-mu and Maitreya in their positions within the White Lotus ideology, the society melded certain ideas, such as the salvational role of the feminine, a view of history and the position of Maitreya found within Chinese Buddhism. These ideas were further reinforced by structural parallels found in Taoist and Manichaean sources. All these gave substance to the sectarians' beliefs concerning the imminent advent of the millennium on earth.

1. Maitreya

At first, the nascent White Lotus Society, under the leadership of Mao Tzu-yüan "was distinguished by its strict vegetarianism, and complete abstinence from wine; all directed towards the accumulation of good karma (ching-yeh) and rebirth in Amida's western paradise."⁴⁶ Chih P'an himself, in his polemic against the society of his day, clearly links Mao's teaching with that of orthodox T'ien-t'ai philosophy and Pure Land devotionism.⁴⁷ However, when the Society made its

first important appearance on the political stage under the leadership of Han Shan-tung, Maitreya had gained ascendance⁴⁸ over Amitabha.

Until 1351, while members of the White Lotus Society such as Shan-tung's grandfather had been persecuted by the government, except for one recorded incident under the leadership of Tu-Wan-i, the sect had been guilty of no violent actions against the state. Perhaps the inability of the establishment (Confucian and Buddhist) to accept their existence⁴⁹ and let them worship in peace like other lay associations, forced the White Lotus Society to re-evaluate its position. One may speculate that consequently members of the Society came to see themselves as part of the millenarian scheme, associated with the Buddha Yet to Come, Maitreya, and their mistreatment as proof that the world had finally reached its lowest ebb. They knew that their position would soon change with the triumph of Maitreya.

By the Sung, many adherents of Amidist Buddhism had achieved a certain amount of political consciousness. Wang Jih-hsiu (d.1173) in his Lung-shu ching-t'u wen wrote :

In the morning after one has washed his face, lighted incense and performed worship, he should pray, saying : If I enter samadhi (ch'an-ting) ... subsequently see Amida Buddha attain to eternal life and achieve divine wisdom, then before having left the world even one year, I will return to save all sentient beings, and gradually change the land of Jambu, this whole world, into the pure world of utmost bliss (chien-chien pien ts'u nan-ven-fa-ti chieh wei ch'ing-ching chi-le shih-chien) I will become a high minister ... in order to

assist our ruler govern and instruct ... I will be reborn in the form of a prince ... and by means of my official position convert all sentient beings, so that they devote themselves to the Buddha's way, and are released from the sea of suffering. Thus, our nation, and all the evil worlds of the ten regions will become the Pure, Quiet Land of Utmost Bliss.⁵⁰

However, this was not radical enough for the White Lotus Society; instead they turned to Maitreya, on whose behalf certain of his followers had been far more actively involved with bringing about the necessary changes in government to establish the Buddhaland on earth. In 610, the Tzu-chih t'ung-chien (the Mirror for Aid in Government) records that about a hundred rebels, claiming the advent of Maitreya, had opened a new era, unsuccessfully attacked the imperial palace at Loyang. A search through the capital for members of the Maitreya society resulted in the imprisonment of the members of thousands of families.⁵¹ In 611, "several tens of bandits (k'ou), all wearing dark hats and white robes, burned incense, held (offered) flowers and called (their leader) Maitreya Buddha."⁵² These bandits led another unsuccessful attack on Ch'ien-an. In 613 Sung Tzu-hsien, claiming to practise magic under the influence of Maitreya, failed in his attempt to assassinate the emperor.⁵³ Likewise, in the same year, Hsiang Hsi-ming, a monk from Shensi, holding himself to be an incarnation of Maitreya, proclaimed 613 as the first year of a new era, Pai-wu, and made himself emperor.⁵⁴ As a result of such activities, and perhaps due to the support that the belief in the eventual arrival of Maitreya on earth gave to the recently replaced

Empress Wu,⁵⁵ the T'ang proscribed the sect in 715.

Now there are those with white clothing and long hair, who falsely claim that Maitreya had descended to be born. By means of supernatural and deceitful actions they have gathered followers from a wide area. They say they understand Buddhist concepts, and irresponsibly speak of good and bad omens. They have written short sutras which they falsely claim were spoken by the Buddha himself.⁵⁶

This persecution forced the followers of Maitreya underground. In 1047 under Wang Tse,⁵⁷ in 1326 under Chao Ch'ou-ssu and Kuo P'u-sa, in 1337 under Pang Hu,⁵⁸ rebellions were fought in the name of Maitreya. When, in 1351, this Maitreyan ideology was assimilated into that of the White Lotus Society, and the Maitreya Society, for all intents and purposes, ceased to be of any major importance. But this was not the fate of the Maitreya.

Until the White Lotus came under the leadership of Han Shan-t'ung, there was no clearly established association of Maitreya with the White Lotus. Now, in Shan-t'ung there was a man whose ties with the White Lotus were well-established through heredity and who proclaimed the imminent rebirth of Maitreya. Likewise, this Buddha had the allegiance of other commanders under the White Lotus banner. When Ming Yu-chen established his Hsia kingdom, he rejected Buddhism and Taoism for the worship of Maitreya.⁵⁹ Indeed, so important was Maitreya that, when Chu Yuan-chang finally gained the imperial throne, he condemned the White Lotus and its belief in Maitreya,⁶⁰ and he took positive steps to re-establish orthodoxy.

Thus, from this point, while the sectarians continued to employ the techniques and ritual which the followers of Amitābha had adopted to popularize Buddhism, Amitābha himself was set aside for a Buddha whose more radical character was in tune with the worsening times.

Since the reign of Maitreya would come with the culmination of the world's history, these sectarians placed the end of history in their lifetime. Like the members of San Chieh Chiao, their view of history was expressed in terms of three stages. By one branch of the White Lotus, the Religion of Completion (Yüan-chiao), in a text called The Book of Response to the Kalpas (Ying chieh ts'ie), these three stages were expressed in the following way :

1. Age of the Green Sun, in which the Lamp-lighter Buddha rules, seated on a green lotus.
2. Age of the Red Sun, ruled by Sākyamuni on a red lotus.
3. The present, in which Sākyamuni has resigned his throne and Maitreya rules, is the time of the White Sun religion. In this period "The White Lotus rules the world" (Pai-lien chang-shi).⁶¹

In an unnamed pao chüan the sun imagery is more directly related to the idea of kalpas:

The age of the red sun has come to an end. The white sun will soon arise. Now the moon is full on the eighteenth day; when it is full on the twenty-third day, then the great kalpa (ta-chien-mahā-kalpa) will arrive.⁶²

For the more modern White Lotus affiliate the Great Way of Former Heaven, the history of the world is seen in terms of

cycles of Truth, over each of which one of the Buddhas presides. Somewhat like the San Chia Chiao, the Way of Former Heaven divides each cycle into three stages of Truth.

First comes an advent: various wise men predict the imminent appearance of the Buddha and teach some of the general ideas he will propound. Then the Buddha himself appears and teaches. Afterwards the teaching is handed on to sages. Truth gradually becomes distorted, and organized religions appear based on the Buddha's teachings.

Then at the end of each cycle there is also promised a catastrophe which will eventually destroy all of mankind; a deluge after Dīpaṅkara, then a fire after Śākyamuni and finally a wind in the Maitreyan cycle. However, there is hope; for if all join the Great Way in this last period when Maitreya is incarnated on earth as the patriarch of the sect, the reign of bliss will be established.

Because he was to change the world, Maitreya was called upon to take an active political role. For some, he might be born to take the part of the emperor who would establish the dharma, which is the role that the Great Way sect would have him play.

Maitreya has the task of teaching the Truth to all men. To make this possible certain conditions are necessary in this world. One is that all mankind must convert to the Great Way religion, all sectarian differences must be sorted out and various bodies within the fold must be amalgamated. Maitreya will lead the orthodox sect and therefore this is the only way he can reach all people. Another is that complete harmony between heaven and earth must be established. Men cannot learn Truth if they are in physical misery, and Truth cannot reach the people, moreover, if the head of state does not hold Heaven's Mandate to rule.

To avoid this destruction of the world by a nuclear explosion (the wind of Maitreya) the patriarch who is the incarnation of Maitreya must be given an opportunity for reaching the masses to teach them the Truth. This can be achieved only if there is a return to the dynastic system and the patriarch sits on the Dragon throne as Emperor.⁶⁵

For others, Maitreya would support the rightful claimant to the imperial throne. Han Shan-t'ung, in addition to prophesying the descent of Maitreya, also proclaimed himself to be the legitimate heir of the Sung dynasty. Before he rebelled in 1796, Liu Chih-hsieh declared that a son of one of the White Lotus leaders was the incarnation of Maitreya and that one Wang Shuang-hsi was the Niu-pa.⁶⁶ In these instances, the sectarians were influenced at least in part by the Confucian theory of the Mandate of Heaven. An unnamed pao chüan states that : "Previously, Sakyamuni ruled the world (ch'ang-shih) ; in the future Maitreya will rule the world. Since Sakyamuni's rule is ended, therefore the Heaven-determined destiny (T'ien-yün) (of the dynasty) has also ended."⁶⁷ In this way the world would be made ready for salvation.

At this point great changes would take place. Traditional units of time would no longer apply. The Precious Scroll of the Universal Enlightenment Tathagata of Non-action Who Understands the Principles (P'u-ming ju-lai wu-wei liao-i pao-chüan) states :

Eighteen kalpas have already been completed, and the form of all things is about to change. (In this new time) a year will have eighteen months,

a day eighteen hours, a month forty-five days, and a year eight hundred and ten days. Heaven and earth will be in harmony, among men there will be neither youth nor old age, birth nor death, and there will be no distinction between men and women. This then is the Great Way of Long Life, in which all will live for 81,000 years. The time destined by Heaven has been fulfilled, and a new universe is being established (yu-li ch'ien-k'un shih-chieh).

In another pao chüan there is the following description :

The past is called wu-chi, or limitless ultimate, the period of the Ch'ing-yang, or the Green Sun, which was under the Jan-teng Buddha's control. The seat of this Buddha is the green lotus. During the Ch'ing-yang, each year had six months; each month had fifteen days; and each day had six watches totaling twelve hours. The present stage is called t'ai-chi, or supreme ultimate, the period of the Hung-yang, or the Red Sun, which is under the control of Sakya Buddha. The seat of the Buddha is a red lotus. During the present stage of the world, each year has twelve months; each month has thirty days; each day has twelve watches, equal to twenty-four hours. The future stage is called the huang-chi, or royal ultimate, the period of the Pai-yang, or the White Sun, which will be under the charge of Maitreya Buddha. The seat of this Buddha is a white lotus. During that stage, each year will have eighteen months; each month forty-five days, and each day will have eighteen watches equal to thirty-six hours. In the future stage, heaven and earth will be perfected; there will be no distinction between old and young, male and female, life and death.

These pao chüan are directly opposed to the traditional Chinese view of cosmic time which is expressed in the twelve earthly branches and the ten heavenly stems, as well as the imperial prerogative over the Chinese calendar. Therefore, the reaction of the Confucian orthodoxy, as represented by Huang Yü-pien, is understandable. He observes:

The twelve periods of every day have a vitally important significance and a wide range of uses.

This system of order (11) existed before the sages appeared, and since they appeared has been handed down for 10,000 generations. And now these heretics falsely say there are eighteen periods - - how stupid, deceitful and reckless they are.⁷⁰

Finally, and most important, as hinted above, the advent of Maitreya held out the promise of a period of utmost physical bliss. When Maitreya arrives in the world:

All people will be kind-hearted, doing the ten good deeds. Because they do good deeds, their life-span will be long and filled with happiness and peace. Men and women will (cover the land) densely, cities and towns will border on one another, and chickens will fly from one to the other; in their farms, one planting will yield seven crops, and plants will ripen themselves, without tilling or weeding.⁷¹

While there is no specific evidence that the White Lotus Society employed orthodox sutras in the formation of these beliefs concerning Maitreya's coming, there are certain ideas within the orthodox tradition which were in tune with those of the sectarians. Within Indian Buddhism, Maitreya is pictured both as human and as divine; as Maitreyanātha, inspirator of Asaṅga in the composition of his sastras on vijñānaśālin-yogācāra doctrines, as the human disciple of Bavāri and as the Buddha who is yet to come.⁷²

From ca 200 B.C.E., when there was a growing feeling that it would be impossible to achieve enlightenment in this life, it was Maitreya in his role as Buddha to Be, with his promise of rebirth in Tuṣita heaven which held a place in the hearts of Buddhist adherents. While the Theravadins accept Maitreya as the only Bodhisattva in the present age and,

unlike the previous Buddhas, being alive and therefore the object of prayers, Maitreyan beliefs were not that important. Yet there are examples of individuals who had great faith in Maitreya. When King Dutthagāmaṇi (104-80 B.C.E.) was about to die, his last thoughts were fixed on Maitreya and Tusita heaven. Likewise Mahā-Saṅgharakkhita, on his death bed disclosed that, contrary to popular belief, he was not an arhat. "Thinking to see the Blessed one Metteya, I did not try for insight."⁷³ But, all in all, any possible millennial implications of the doctrine were played down outside China, or ignored until modern times, when Maitreya became an important entity in the anti-British activities of the Burmese.

In China, just as there is a variety of Buddhist literature in which Maitreya appears, so there are a variety of ways in which Maitreya is portrayed. In some, such as Fo shuo ta cheng fang teng yao hui ching, translated by An Shih-kao (2nd cen.), and Mi-li p'u-sa wen pa fa hui, translated by Bodhiruci of Wei (6th cen.) Maitreya appears merely as a disciple of the Buddha. In others, such as Liao pen sheng zu ching, translated by Chih-oh'ien between 223 and 255, and Ta cheng she-li-so-tan-mo ching, translated by Chih-hu of the Sung, he is a bodhisattva mahasattva, a disciple, but a mark above the crowd. Then, in Mi-li p'u-sa so wen pen yuan ching, translated by Dharmarakṣa, and Mi-li-p'u-sa so wen hui, translated by Bodhiruci, Maitreya is the Buddha to Come and there are even hints of the terrestrial paradise

which will be established by his coming. Finally, there is the Mi-li ch'eng fo ching, translated by Kumarajiva (5th cen.) with its detailed biography of the future Buddha and of the world upon his arrival. Thus, at different times, Maitreya's character as the future Buddha was being developed and made accessible to the literate Chinese.⁷⁴

However, while many believed in Maitreya in his role as creator of this worldly bliss, for most, the event was too far in the future to affect their lives. For them, it was the picture of Tusita heaven "avec ses apsaras, ses oiseaux merveilleux, sa musique céleste, ses eaux aux huit vertus, le sable d'or de ses rivières, etc. ..." ⁷⁵ not unlike the Pure Land of Amitābha in nature which was attractive. In 370, Tao-an, with eight of his disciples, assembled before a statue of Maitreya and made a collective vow to be reborn in Tusita heaven in order to gain inspiration and guidance from Maitreya in their exegetical activities.⁷⁶ While Tao-an's reasons for entering Tusita were those of a scholar monk, among the lower classes there were many who merely longed for the blissful existence that such a heaven could offer them. Under the Liang (502-557), Hsiao Shen, in his criticism of Buddhism, wrote: "... they (the Buddhist monks) would confuse them (the people) with vague statements, frighten them with a hell of incessant suffering, lure them with absurd theories and entice them with the happiness of the Tusita heaven."⁷⁷

With the promise of a blissful existence after death and the eventual utopia on earth, Maitreya became a popular object of devotion. This was particularly the case during the fifth and sixth centuries when the rapid rise and fall of dynasties led to such confusion that the final stage of the dharma seemed to be at hand. During the Northern Wei, Sakyamuni and Maitreya were the deities most often portrayed in the Lung-men caves. Members of the ruling class, monks and nuns invested vast amounts of money to have images constructed in hopes of gaining Maitreya's blessings for themselves and their families, blessings which they hoped would bring them to Tusita heaven. But, as times grew calm, and the political scene stabilized, interest in Maitreya declined, to be replaced by devotion to Amitābha. Then, in the Sung, Maitreya was transformed into Mi-lo-fo, the laughing Buddha, or Pu-t'ai, the Hempbag Buddha in whom one sees:

.... the representation of a number of Chinese life ideals. The huge protruding stomach and the hemp bag denote prosperity and wealth of material goods, for only a rich person would have enough to eat and be fat. The reclining figure is indicative of the spiritual contentment and relaxation of one who is at peace with himself and the world

For some, however, the millenarian aspects of Maitreya were not forgotten. Ideas concerning this Buddha were established early on a popular level, for even Tao-an's faith had its basis in oral traditions current in China at the time. For those whose lot in life was still, at least to them, indicative of the final age of dharma, the rather passive desires for change

which were expressed in Amitābha were not enough. They longed for a time such as that expressed in the Fo-shuo Mi-lo hsiang-sheng Ching (Maitreya-vyākaraṇa) :

..... (At the time) the Yen-fou (regions of the East-Jambudvīpa which is primarily India, but also China) shall become very flat and even, and as clear and bright as the face of a mirror. In the Yen-fou grains and food shall flourish, having all kinds of wealth in profusion. Villages shall lie so close together that the crowing of cocks in one shall be heard in the next. At that time the weather will be mild at all times, and the four seasons will regularly succeed each other. None of the people will suffer any of those one hundred and eight afflictions. Lust, anger, and idleness will rarely take place. The people will all feel equal, and will be of one mind, mutually expressing pleasure upon meeting their fellows and in virtuous greetings And at that time all the people of Yen-fou will be equal in all respects. 80

For this reason, they turned to the promise which Maitreya held out for his devotees. Therefore, it was to him that the sectarians turned. In fact, other than radically shortening the amount of time before Maitreya's arrival and placing it in the imminent future, or, in some cases, the immediate present, the views held by the sectarians merely emphasized ideas which were already evident in the orthodox sutras. However, in the case of the White Lotus Society, the role of Maitreya in the millenarian drama was that of Lao-mu's instrument for the salvation of her children.

2. Lao-mu

A pao-ch'uan entitled Hun-yüan hung-yang hsiang hsiang pao-ch'ien (the Lake of Blood Precious Confession of the Primal Origin Red Sun Sect) states :

On the fifteenth day of the Chia-wu year of the (Ming Wan-li period 1594), the most honored P'iao-kao venerable ancestor, while living on the Great Tiger mountain, opened a wide new means of salvation (feng pien) to save the multitude of the lost.⁸¹

Huang Yü-pien adds that P'iao-kao (He who floats on high) and Kung Ch'ang, the founder of the Huan Yüan (Return to Origin) sect in 1588, both White Lotus members, were the first to write "concerning the Eternal Mother. These terms do not appear before this period."⁸² Therefore, it is clear that at least by the end of the sixteenth century the salvatory grace of Lao-mu and her mantra Chen-kung chia-hsiang wu-sheng lao-mu (the True and Empty Land and the Eternal Mother) were a part of the White Lotus ideology.

In the Precious Dragon-Flower Sutra Examined and Corrected by the Heavenly Spirit Old Buddha (Ku-fo t'ien-chen k'ao-cheng lung-hua pao-chüan), in which, Huang Yü-pien states, is the most complete statement on Lao-mu, there is the following description of her activities. Before anything existed

..... from the midst of the True Emptiness (chen-k'ung) there appeared (hua-ch'u - appeared by transformation) the Illimitable (old) Buddha. When the Buddha appeared he arranged (an) Heaven and Earth.⁸³ The Unborn Mother (wu-sheng lao-mu) established the Former Heaven (li hsien-t'ien). She also (like the Buddha) was unborn and came from before the beginning.

The account continues:

The Eternal Mother gave birth to Yin and Yang, and to two children, male and female. She named the male child Fu-hai and the girl Nu-kua (both Chinese cultural heroes). Fu-hai was named Li, Nu-kua was named Chang. They were the original ancestors of man. They married

After the end of the primeval chaos (hun-yüan liao), they gave birth to ninety-six 1 (9,600,000) of sons and daughters from the imperial womb (huang-t'ai).

The Eternal Mother sent her children to the Eastern Land (tung-t'u) to live in the world. Here their heads were surrounded with light, and their bodies were of many colours, and with their feet they trod k'un-lun mountain (But after) they reached the Eastern Land they all became infatuated (mi).. and (the Mother) commanded (them) to meet together in the Dragon-flower assembly.⁸⁵

As mother of all human beings, Lao-mu is deeply concerned with their fate. In the Hsiao-shih shou-yüan hsing-ohüeh pao-ohüan (The Precious Scroll which Explains the Restoration of Completeness and Perfecting of Enlightenment):

The Eternal Mother in the Native Land (chia-hsiang) weeps as she thinks of her children. She has sent many messages and letters urging them (to return home), and to stop devoting themselves solely to avarice in the sea of bitterness. She calls them to return to the Pure Land (Ching-t'u), to come back to Mount Ling (Vulture Peak), (so that) the mother and her children can meet again and sit together on the golden lotus.⁸⁶

To this end, Lao-mu has sent various Buddhas as instruments of her salvation in order to rescue her children. According to Li Shih-yu, during the first two kalpas, 2000,000 of her children have been rescued, and the third, which will be governed by Maitreya, will see the final return of all the imperial children.⁸⁷

Lao-mu does not leave all earthly activities to her messengers. Huang Yü-pien reports that in

.... the Ch'ing K'ang-hsi period (1662-1723), Wu-sheng lao-mu became incarnate in Ch'ing yüan county (of Hopei province) and after she grew up was married and gave birth to a son. Later, she was divorced by her husband and her son was killed by lightning. (After this) she

taught disciples in a monastery in which they placed her bones.⁸⁸

Likewise, a magistrate of an old White Lotus centre of Luan-chou in the same province, wrote that in sectarian texts, "Wu-sheng lao-mu pined (for her lost children). She therefore came down to the world to bring about their salvation."⁸⁹

While the historical period in which Lao-mu assumed this role as mother of humankind by her own involvement with them on earth and in the Native Land, and by being an instigator of Maitreya's activities, can be clearly established, the same cannot be said about the origins of this deity. Female deities have long held an important place in the hearts of the Chinese people. This is evident on the popular level in vernacular novels such as Feng-shen yen-i (Investiture of the Gods) and the Shui-hu chuan, where feminine deities play a pivotal role.⁹⁰ In the north, where most of the White Lotus' activities took place, the former was the most popular; in the south, it was the latter. Perhaps Lao-mu's roots are in the myths of the aborigines, with whom the White Lotus had contact. The Miao, for example, trace their ancestry back to one female ancestor, and have a myth of creation from two people, a brother and sister.⁹¹ Likewise, among the Yao, whose culture spread into Honan and parts of Shantung, areas of White Lotus activities, there is the worship of female deities as creators.⁹² Within the beliefs of the Taoist and the Manichaeans, which will be discussed in some detail later, the feminine also played a dominant role.

Finally, and most importantly, Buddhism itself is a possible source. According to Conze, "the feminine element was with Mahayana from the very beginning, owing to the importance it attributed to the Perfect Wisdom The Prajnaparamita is not only feminine by the grammatical form of her name, but on the statues and images the femininity of her form is rarely in doubt."⁹³ In addition, Prajñāpāramitā is identified as the Mother of Buddhas (Jināna Mātā) a role which is developed throughout Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā.⁹⁴ Then there is the undeniable importance of the feminine as prajña and in other guises in Tantra philosophy and practice. Although it was chiefly the Right-handed Tantra that was established in China and that attracted the Chinese,⁹⁵ it is not clear whether some of the sexual practices of the Left-handed variety were not also introduced, but were hushed up by Confucian moralists.⁹⁶ Likewise, in some of the Tantric texts listed in Taisho, fo-mu (Mother of Buddhas) is an important deity.⁹⁷ Kuan-yin too might have contributed to the creation of Lao-mu, particularly in her incarnational activities and her compassion for humanity. The syncretistic nature of Chinese religions on a popular level makes it possible for any number of sources to be the origin of Lao-mu.

Whatever her origins, Lao mu remained an important concept to her children in the White Lotus Society, to a very late period. Western missionaries coming into contact with the sect in 1813 reported that its dogma was :

We recognize no other god than the Ancient Mother without Origin. It is she who gave us our body which we use for working, our intelligence which raises us above all other created beings, and our souls whose beauty is so great that it resembles the gods.⁹⁸

Likewise, after the failure of the Eight Diagrams, and the segmentation of the White Lotus Society which accompanied it, groups believing in Lao-mu still came to the notice of official sources. In 1823, the Viceroy of Chihli, Nan Yen-ch'eng, a man who had been keeping a watchful eye over White Lotus activities for some time,⁹⁹ reported on the remnants of believers in Lao-mu active near the Village of the Stone Buddha.¹⁰⁰ Then in 1838, the emperor received information about the existence in Honan of temples and pagodas devoted to the Unbegotten Mother, which he ordered destroyed.¹⁰¹ Again, in 1848, there was a report that the Golden Elixir Society (Chin Tan Chiao) was also worshiping Lao-mu.¹⁰²

Through their beliefs in the saving grace of Lao-mu and in her instrument, Maitreya, the White Lotus sectarians found support for a millenarian view of salvation. They saw the world as the stage where a millenarian drama was unfolding, in which they would militantly participate as supporting actors. In doing this, however, they did not reject their Buddhist roots. Maitreya, as the Buddha to Come, was well-established within both Mahayana and Theravada traditions. Similarly, there were sources for the myth of Lao-mu and her saving grace. But what separated them from others was the interpretation they placed on these Buddhist themes.

Although they accepted Maitreya as the future Buddha, they placed his coming, not in the distant future of the orthodox Buddhists, but, rather, in the imminent future, like the Maitreyan Society. But, unlike the Maitreyan Society, they adopted a feminine deity, Lao-mu, who through her love for mankind sends Maitreya to bring about the millennium, a role that the feminine in Buddhism had demonstrated only a potential to play.

3. Structural Parallels

While Buddhism had already provided an ecological niche for Maitreya, the role of the feminine and the view of history, it was within the favourable environment provided by other belief systems within China that these ideas flowered into the White Lotus Ideology. It is clear that inherent in Chinese Buddhism there was much with which the society could work to crystallize this ideology. However, it is possible that in its formulation it found reinforcement in the structural parallels found in Taoism and Manichaeism.

(a) Taoism

Throughout the centuries since its introduction into China, Buddhism has had a very intimate relationship with Taoism on a philosophical as well as religious level. While the overt use of ko-yi or analogy as a tool to make the strange and complex Buddhist philosophy comprehensible to the Chinese was soon disregarded, the borrowing which gave birth to Ch'an and which established heaven and hell within the mind-set of the religious Taoists, continued, albeit often unconsciously

and imperceptably. As they viciously fought each other for converts and political influence, this affinity endured, and each was made the richer for it.

While a detailed discussion of this complex relationship is beyond the scope of this paper, any attempt to understand the White Lotus Society must include an appreciation of its Taoist nuances. However, as is so often the case with the little traditions of which both the White Lotus and religious Taoism are a part, the threads of influence are so tightly interwoven that figure and background are lost in a swirl of patterns.¹⁰³ As a result, we are reduced to merely speculation on possible connections and likely influences.

It is unlikely that the ideological links between philosophical Taoism and the White Lotus to be suggested here are the result of direct borrowing by the sect. Rather, they are merely indicative of the eclectic process which takes place between great and little traditions, for a variety of reasons, consciously and unconsciously. In this way, philosophical Taoist ideas could reach the White Lotus already digested by the religious Taoists or directly from the pool of philosophical ideas which had filtered down to the lower classes. There are three possible areas in which this process of assimilation may have occurred: that is, in the importance of the feminine, in the use of yogic practices towards the development of supernatural powers, claimed by many leaders of the White Lotus Society, and finally, in the view of the historical process.

Of all the major philosophical Taoist works, it is in the Tao Te Ching that the feminine plays a role equivalent in importance to that of Lao-mu. In this text, the feminine and the Tao are considered as one (VI, XXV),¹⁰⁴ and therefore the qualities of the feminine are extolled (X, XXVIII). Through the images of the dark or mysterious (I), the valley (XVI, XXV), and water (VIII, LXXVIII), the Tao Te Ching indicates that the power of the feminine and, in consequence, that of the Tao lies in submissiveness (XLI). In addition, the Tao as mother is not overlooked (LII, XX), and even the sage is seen to have the characteristics of a mother (XLIX). In the Chuang-tzu¹⁰⁵ the feminine does not dominate in the same manner; However, it is still in evidence within the Inner Chapters. In Chapter V, virtue is likened to water, (p.74) and in Chapter XI, the Perfect Way is still linked with the dark and mysterious (p.119-120). While, clearly, it is an enormous leap from this abstract to such Taoist deities as Hsi Wang-mu (Queen Mother of the West), mentioned in both Chuang-tzu (p.82) and Lieh-tzu (p.64)¹⁰⁶ and to Lao-mu, it still does not omit the possibility of texts such as these preparing the way, or, at least, giving support for the later importance of the feminine on a popular level.¹⁰⁷

In the Tao Te Ching (X), this assuming of the attitude of the feminine is linked to Taoist yogic activities. From this and other references to yogic, Arthur Waley goes so far as to conclude that the text was written by a practising¹⁰⁸ "Quietist", that is, one who practises tsao-wang, "sitting

with a blank mind".¹⁰⁹ However, within these passages, there is no indication that such practices would engender supernatural powers in its practitioners. Rather, like similar passages in the Chuang Tzu (Chapters II, p.36; IV, p.58; VI, p.90; XXI, p.224 and XXIII, p.249) an understanding and a unity with the Tao is achieved. Yet in Chuang Tzu Chapter VI, p.77 and XVII, p.182 and in Tao Te Ching XVI, L, and LV, it is demonstrated that various powers are acquired by those who have achieved the Tao, particularly the ability to escape from harm, a promise that was often made by sectarian leaders to their followers before battle. In addition, Lieh-tzu (p.34,37, 46) and Chuang-tzu (p.32,33,34) both describe other powers which were claimed by the hsien, the Taoist immortals, or realized men who rode the wind and lived on air. All these passages relating to yogic and magical powers are subject to controversy.¹¹⁰ This is not an important issue, for, in much later periods, the sectarians, like their religious Taoist counterparts, in most cases would not look beyond the literal meaning of these wondrous tales.

The role of the feminine and the hints of yogic practices and powers are important as possible links between the philosophical Taoists and the sectarians. The view of history which can be gleaned from the various Taoist writers, however, is equally significant because of its potential as a support for millenarian expectations.

To attempt to systematize that which was never meant to

be systematized is folly, and so it is in the case of the view of history put forward by the Tao Te Ching and the Chuang-tzu. However, there are certain intimations which should not be ignored. First, in both texts, it is evident that in the distant past there was a time of peace to which mankind might return. The Tao Te Ching states that there was a time when the Way was "valued of old" (LXIII) but that since then humanity has separated itself from the Tao and Confucian morality has become necessary (XXXVIII). Whether or not, because of these statements and certain nuances of translation, this text can be viewed as directing an attack against feudalism,¹¹¹ it is clear that mankind can return by discarding vestiges of civilization (LXXX). Since the movement of the Tao Te Ching is circular, it is possible for man to re-establish the Way and regain the simple state when

.... though adjoining states are within sight of one another, and the sound of dogs barking and cocks crowing in one state can be heard in another, yet the people of one state will grow old and die without having had any dealings with those of another. (LXXX)

In Chuang-tzu, there is a much more detailed picture of the ideal time which the author calls "the Great Peace" (p.146-7 of.138) and the deterioration which is now the lot of humanity (p.171-174). But like the Tao Te Ching (LXVII, LXIII, LXVI), this text puts forward standards of government which could enable mankind to re-establish the Tao through the rule of the sage (p.78-79, 133,146). This idea was also taken up by

other Taoist philosophical texts, such as the Lieh-tzu (p.55, 102-3) and Huai-nan-tzu (p.24, 35, 46, 80)¹¹²

While, textually speaking, the rule of the sage is guided by the principles of wu-wei (non-action), many Taoists began to take a more active role in the establishment of the rule of Tao. Men such as Hsi K'ang, who belonged to the philosophical school of Taoism,¹¹³ actively participated in politics, for men firmly fixed in the Tao could bring about sage government. From the end of the Han dynasty to the T'ang, this promise of aid by a sage and the era of peace that his government would bring inspired the activities of many religious Taoists. Just as their confreres in the White Lotus Society, they saw such a promise as a call demanding their active participation in bringing about its fulfilment.

The last days of the Han dynasty were marked by omens, revolts, disasters and other phenomena, signifying that the end of the dynasty was at hand. Therefore the arrival of the chia-tzu year (184), the beginning of a new sexagenary cycle, gave rise to millenarian aspirations among the three religious Taoist groups who had amassed a following during this period. Whereas the three agreed that a new era had arrived, they had various views on the kind of government to be established and the role of the sage in this activity. However, these views combined to create the Perfect Emperor of T'ai P'ing (Great Peace), both sage and emperor in the

Taoist pantheon. Perhaps, too, this synthesis influenced, even paved the way for the role that Maitreya was to play in the ideology of the White Lotus.¹¹⁴

In 184, the Yellow Turbans,¹¹⁵ under the leadership of Chang Chüsh, attempted, by attacking the imperial capital, to replace the azure heaven (the Han) with the new yellow heaven, and by so doing, to bring about the T'ai p'ing tao (the way of great peace). In their case the chen chün (the ideal ruler) was Chang Chüsh, a man who, as the "Great Sage and Good Master", had the charisma of a sage with a healing touch and, as "Yellow Heaven" and the "Great Peace of Yellow Heaven", associated himself with the ideal ruler Huang-ti. In him, like Maitreya of the Great Way of Former Heaven, both religious and political power combined in one man who would bring about a new age.¹¹⁶

To the west, in the same area, two other groups were putting forth different ideas. The one which took as its text the Lao-tzu pien-hua ching,¹¹⁷ written in c.185 C.E., held that the role of a saviour would be played by Lao-tzu, who promised that in this time of turmoil, "I myself will change destiny I will shake the Han reign."¹¹⁸ As he had done before, Lao-tzu was to manifest himself on earth to save humankind. However, while he carries as his insignia the staff of an immortal and jade tablets engraved with gold characters, which are symbols of both religious and political power,¹¹⁹ it is not clear whether he wishes to re-establish the Han to its former greatness or to overthrow it. While the latter seems

most likely, the role that Lao-tzu had played in his previous manifestations was that of advisor to emperors, just as later revolutionaries under the White Lotus banner often had a person claiming to be the rightful ruler and one who was the incarnation of Maitreya.¹²⁰

In such cases, emperor and deity (or sage) do not combine in one person and the actual overthrow is carried out by the former.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the records of this group are scant, and there is no indication of their involvement in millenarian activities.

The Five Pecks of Rice under the Celestial Master, Chang Lu, rather than attempting to topple the Han, successfully established a state within a state.¹²² Unlike the Pien-hua Ching group in the same area, Lao-tzu's role for the Five Pecks of Rice was that of a detached supernatural personage, T'ai-shang Lao-chün, whose text was Wu-ch'ien wen (Script of Five Thousand Characters - the Tao Te Ching,¹²³ and who, once he had selected Chang Tao-ling and his successors of the Celestial Masters as his instruments, withdraws. It was to be through Chang's activities that the sage government would be established. Therefore Chang Lu's state was a necessary interregnum before the new virtuous dynasty would be established. Later, perhaps, in reaction to other groups who awaited divine intervention into earthly affairs, the Celestial Masters expected Lord Li, an emissary of Lao-tzu, who would establish the T'ai p'ing on earth.¹²⁴ After the Han dynasty had collapsed, Lao-tzu and his role in the activities of the groups

described above, inspired others with the surname Li and certain healing abilities, to try their hands at establishing a new dynasty. Finally, the legends surrounding one such messiah, Li Hung, reached such proportions that he was identified with Lao-tzu.¹²⁵

In the Tung-yüan shen chou ching, written before 420 C.E. Tai-shang Tao-chün (Lao-tzu) tells the reader that with the arrival of the chên chün Li Hung (the Perfect Lord Li Hung) a new era of bliss will come to humanity.

The Tao says, if you receive this Sutra (ching) in twelve chuan all your illnesses will be healed, you will become high officials and everything you wish will come true. You will also be able to see the True Ruler who is about to come (tang-lai chen-chün). The True Ruler is not far off. When the shen-chia cycle arrives calamities will arise and the empire will be in great disorder Then the True Ruler will be born again (kenz-sheng - a term used in descriptions of Maitreya) When he appears, all saints, sages and immortals, and all those who receive this sutra will come to assist the Taoist priests from every quarter of the earth to rule as ministers.....

When the True Ruler appears in the world, he will rule by non-action. No one will suffer from weapons, punishments or imprisonment. Since the saints (shen-jen) will rule the world, the people will be prosperous and happy, and not for money and possessions Phenix, white cranes, unicorns and lions will become domestic animals. All will act only according to the Taoist law (tao-fa) and the great ministers of state will be Taoist priests. Men and women will be thirteen feet tall..... The Land of the True Ruler will be gloriously happy (ta-le)¹²⁶

Perhaps such views were influenced by an older tradition of a perfect state - a Chinese utopia, Ta-ch'in.¹²⁷ While its origins may be in a sparse knowledge of Rome, or even India

in the second century A.D., this state was understood in the terms of Chinese experience.¹²⁸ It was to be governed by a just ruler who did not act without consulting his elders and who travelled the country every three years to see that justice was being done and to allow his people to address their grievances to him in person. If the king's rule displeased heaven, which showed its displeasure in natural disasters, the people would choose a sage to rule.¹²⁹

In addition, not only did this country produce "des pierres précieuses, la perle lumineuse (ming-chou) et le jade qui brille la nuit (i-kuang pi)"¹³⁰ it was also on the border of the country which contained the palace of Hsi Wang-mu, who lived there on Mount K'un-lun, where Lao-mu's children first walked on earth.¹³¹

While it is clear from the above that the Taoist, philosophical and religious, had written sources for any millenarian aspirations, they might have had, the effect of any of these on the White Lotus is difficult to judge. But, in certain practices of the sectarians, this is not the case. The Taoist priests who joined the White Lotus in battle, perhaps because they too had millenarian expectations, were probably responsible for introducing such things as faith-healing. This was an important part of the repertoire of the Yellow Turbans and the Five Pecks of Rice, as well as of the White Lotus. In addition, there was the type of yoga practised by the White Lotus of which Huang Yü-pien gives this description

The basic (system) is called Shih-pu hsi-yeh or the Ten Steps of Self Cultivation. The method is sitting in meditation as the Buddhists do, attaining the ten steps of development. The first step is called hai-ti lao-ming, or to take up the brilliance from the bottom of the sea. It means to find the soul substance in the abdomen. The last step is known as t'ou-ch'ui k'un-lun, or passing through the k'un lun which means that the soul substance has been able to come through the crown of the head and go up to the Heavenly Palace (Paradise) ¹³²

There are many similarities between the practice of Buddhist dhyana and Taoist yoga. Both An Shih-kao in his An-pai shou-i-ching (Sutra on Concentration by Practising Respiratory Techniques) and Tao-an in his Sutra on Breathing used analogy to explain the new meditative technique to the Chinese. ¹³³ However, while there may be an affinity between the two on that level, on the popular level the Taoist and Buddhist goals are at odds. For religious Taoists, the goal was to develop within the body, by means of circulating the breath, an embryo which would be immortal. ¹³⁴ While the Buddhists could understand the demands for a moral life which were forced upon the Taoist adept because they were probably the result of Buddhist influence, ¹³⁵ they would have problems with seeming concern for physical immortality. Not only does the description of the White Lotus yoga supplied by Huang seem much closer to that of the Taoists, than of the Buddhists, but in the case of the Great Way of Former Heaven, the goals are identical. Through the practice of Taoist yoga and hygiene, an adept of Shih-ti rank (which is one of the ten stages of a bodhisattva) tries to achieve physical immortality, and one

of the Wu-kung rank "can fly like the Taoist sages of ancient times, and it is they who can build Cloud Cities as refuges from catastrophes.....¹³⁶

For its support of various rebellious groups throughout the centuries, the Taoist Church was constantly placed under interdict by the imperial government, and, as a result, its membership was forced to spend much of its time underground.¹³⁷ It was there that it met and mingled with its fellow sectarians. In fact, during the suppression which often followed the rebellious activities of the White Lotus Society, officials not only reported capturing Taoist prognosticatory literature and tracts, but also told of the White Lotus forces employing Taoist priests to use their magic powers against the imperial forces. This, combined with many ideas and practices which they held in common could only increase the Taoist influence, which had been revealed very early in the history of the White Lotus Society.¹³⁸

(b) Manichaeism:

On the other hand, the Manichaeans, too, shared many structural parallels in the form of ideas and practices with White Lotus Society.

In 694 C.E., the first Manichaean missionary reached the Chinese court.¹³⁹ Chih P'an reported:

... un homme du royaume de Po-sseu (Perse) nommé Pou-to-tun (note: c'était un homme du pays de Ta-ts'in de la mer occidentale) vint rendre hommage à la cour en apportant la fausse religion du Eul tsong king (Livre des deux principes).¹⁴⁰

The Manichaean Church had had a long and varied career in the

west, and by its gradual movement east, culminating in its entrance into China, the Church was pursuing its founder's dream of world conversion. However, most Chinese rejected the gnosticism that the Manichaeans had to offer. Yet, the Manichaeans did add certain beliefs, in addition to certain practices, such as vegetarianism and others, to the pool of ideas from which the millenarian vision of the White Lotus Society was formed.

In 719, another Manichaean arrived, with the same title of fo-to-tan. This time, as throughout their early history in China, the Manichaeans had the support of foreign powers.

La septième année k'ai yuan (719) lisons-nous dans le Ts'o fou yuan kouei, le sixième mois, le royaume des Ta-che (Arabes), le royaume de T'ou-houo-lo (Tokharestan) et le royaume de l'Inde du Sud envoyèrent des ambassadeurs rendre hommage et apporter tribut. Pour ce qui est du royaume de T'ou-houo-lo, le roi de Tche-han-na (Jaghāniyān), nommé Ti-cho (Tes), (fit) présenter à l'empereur une requête pour lui offrir un grand mou-cho (another rank title), homme versé dans l'astronomie;¹⁴¹ cet homme (disait-il), est d'une sagesse très profonde; il n'est aucune question à laquelle il ne sache répondre; j'espère humblement que l'empereur, dans sa bonté, fera appeler auprès de lui le mou-cho et l'interrogera en personne sur l'état des choses chez votre sujet, ainsi que sur nos doctrines religieuses; l'empereur reconnaîtra que cet homme a bien de telles capacités; je souhaite et je demande que, par ordre (de l'empereur), il soit subvenu à son entretien et en même temps qu'on établisse une église pour qu'il s'y acquitte du culte prescrit par sa religion.¹⁴²

Imperial acceptance allowed the Manichaeans to begin proselytizing.. Such was their immediate success that in 732, the new religion

suffered its first prohibition :

La vingtième année k'ai yuan (732), le septième mois, un ordre impérial (dit) : La doctrine de /

Mo-mo-ni (Mâr Mâni) est foncièrement une croyance perverse; faussement elle prend le nom du bouddhisme et trompe (ainsi) le peuple; c'est ce qu'il convient d'interdire formellement. Mais, puisque c'est la religion indigène des Hou occidentaux et autres, s'ils la pratiquent personnellement, il ne faut pas leur en faire crime. ¹⁴³

However events in Central Asia were proceeding in such a way as to give the Manichaeans a second chance to convert the Chinese, for, during his occupation of Loyang, between November 762 and March 763, the ruler of the Uigurs had become a follower of Mani. ¹⁴⁴ From this period, in which the Uigur ruler was in a position of equality with the emperor of China, the Chinese Manichaeans used this powerful political ally to gain concessions for their church. The Uigurs often demanded and received permission for the establishment of temples, such as Ta Yun-kuang ming in Ch'ang-an and Loyang in 768 and others in various cities in the Yang-tze basin in 771. Hou San-sheng, the commentator on the Tzu-Chih t'ung chien c 1285 wrote:

Dans le dix-neuvième chapitre du T'ang chou houei yao, il est dit ceci: le souverain, qaghan des Ouigours, ordonna à des de la Lumière d'apporter leur doctrine chez les T'ang. La troisième année ta-li, le vingt-neuvième jour du sixième mois (17 juillet 768) un décret impérial accorda aux manichéens ouigours qu'on leur élèverait un temple et donna à ce temple un écriteau portant, (le nom de) Ta-yun-kouang-ming. La sixième année (771), le premier mois, un décret impérial accorda que, dans les villes préfectorales de King, de Hong de Yue, on établirait un temple Ta-yun-kouang-ming. ¹⁴⁵

The Manichaeans became so much a part of the religious establishment that in 790 their priests along with those of the Buddhists and Taoists were asked to pray for rain, and their temples, like those of the Buddhists were being used to store valuables. Yet

the Ch'uan t'ang wen reported that :

Parmi les divers barbares qui sont venus (en Chine), il y a (les sectateurs de) Mo-ni, ceux du Ta-t'sin et ceux du dieu céleste; les temples barbares de ces trois sortes qui existent dans tout l'Empire ne sont pas, dans leur ensemble, aussi nombreux que les temples de nous autres bouddhistes dans une petite ville. 146

Since the privileged position of the Manichaeans in China depended on the ability of the Uigurs' military might to maintain their status of equality with the Chinese court, when the tide began to turn in the 840's, the Chinese rounded on the nearest representative of the cause of their humiliation. For them, the people who acted as ambassadors for the barbarians and who used that position to gain adherents were marked for destruction.

In an imperial letter, (842), the situation was described in this way :

Pour ce qui est la religion manichéenne, avant la période t'ien-pao (742-755), elle était interdite dans le royaume du Milieu. Depuis plusieurs règnes, parce que les Ouigours avaient pour elle respect et foi, on lui a, alors seulement, permis de se développer librement. (In fact it was the k'ai yüan period (713-742).) Dans nombre de places fortes du Kiang et du Houai, nous avons fait que cette religion (a pu) se propager. Récemment, de chacun (de ces endroits), il m'a été transmis des rapports selon lesquels, depuis qu'on a appris la ruine des Ouigours, ceux qui croyaient à cette religion se montrent tièdes à cause de cette (défaite); les religieux étrangers qui sont dans ces (régions) - là semblent n'avoir autant dire pas d'appui. Dans les villages inondés des (pays de) Wou et de Tchou (Kiangsu and Hopei), le caractère des gens est méprisant et mesquin; dès l'instant où la foi s'en est allée, la pratique paisible (de cette religion) est extrêmement difficile. D'ailleurs le Buddha

est le grand maître. (Or) il a prescrit de pratiquer la religion suivant les causes (de mérites religieux). Quand, dans le peuple, les causes sont épuisées, il ne faut absolument pas imposer (la religion) de force. Je pense beaucoup aux religieux (venus) de loin (qui appartiennent) aux pays étrangers, et je désire qu'ils soient dans une sécurité absolue. Aussi ai-je donné l'ordre qu'ils pratiquent leur religion dans les régions croyantes des deux capitales et de T'ai yuan. Pour ce qui est des temples (manichéens) du Kiang et du Houai, je les ai fermés provisoirement; j'attends que le pays même des Ouigours soit rentré dans le calme, et immédiatement donnerai l'ordre (de revenir) à l'état de chose ancien.¹⁴⁷

This was a mild beginning, and by 843 persecution was in full swing. Manichaeism and Uigur property was confiscated and their religious books burnt. Many monks were killed, and those who escaped were forced to return to civilian life. Without contact with other Manichaeism groups, who during the apogee of Chinese Manichaeism had supplied groups in China with their high ecclesiastical officials, and because of the destruction wrought by imperial officials, the orthodox Manichaeans never recovered.

However, certain vestiges still survived among the people, but when Manichaeism appeared again its character had changed. Now it had become a source of political agitation and, therefore, was forced to exist in secret. The Po-tsu-t'ung-chi reported that in 920

The Manichaeans of Ch'en-chou in Honan rebelled, and set up Wu-i as Emperor. The court sent troops which captured and beheaded him. The members of this sect do not eat meat or drink wine. They assemble at night to carry out obscene activities. They have a picture which depicts the seated Mo-Wang (Manichaeism King) with the Buddha washing his feet, and saying the Buddha is only the great vehicle (ta-sheng), while their religion is the supreme vehicle (shang-shang-sheng)¹⁴⁸

While the Manichaeans were again suppressed after this rebellion, their popularity, which is evident in Wu-i's ability to gather 1,000 men in his cause,¹⁴⁹ was not diminished. A half a century later it was reported that one of their number was called upon to exorcise a demon.¹⁵⁰ While it is difficult to say for certain which of the revolts that followed were definitely Manichaean, the influence of their beliefs is obvious. In 1120, Fang La led a revolt against the Sung which originated in the Fukien and Chekiang areas, Manichaean strongholds until the seventeenth century.¹⁵¹ The practices of his followers, described by Chuang Chi-yu, included vegetarianism, abstinence from wine and burying the dead nude.¹⁵² In addition, their chief was known as Mo-Wang and his subordinates were called mo-mu and mo-fu (demon mother, demon father). There were also other practices which were not Manichaean; for the group also chanted the Diamond Sutra and claimed descent from Chang Chüeh, a leader of the Yellow Turbans.¹⁵³

The years 1130, 1133, 1235 were marked by Manichaean-related rebellions. But the most important in terms of the White Lotus was that of Han Shan-tung, in 1351, for here, contact between the White Lotus and the Manichaeans can be clearly established. Not only did Han Shan-tung promise the rebirth of Maitreya, but he assured his followers that the King of Light had appeared.¹⁵⁴ Support for such a claim could have come from the Ta-hsiao-ming wang-ch'u-shih ching (the Sutra on the coming into the world of the greater and lesser kings of light) which, in the Po-tsu-t'ung-ch'i, is included in

a list of Manichaean texts.¹⁵⁵ In addition, although Chu Yüan-chang (Ming T'ai-tsu) was antagonistic towards his former comrades, he did name his new dynasty Ming, which may have been to indicate that he was the promised King of Light. From this period, although the Manichaeans, like the Maitreya society, continued to have an existence independent of the White Lotus, their importance on the political sphere lies in their contributions to the ideology and practices of the White Lotus.¹⁵⁶

These contributions were such that a late eighteenth century writer, Hsia Hsieh claimed, albeit incorrectly, according to most scholars, that "the White Lotus is a branch of Manichaeism."¹⁵⁷ The government, too, seemed to see these groups as being at least of the same nature and grouped them together in imperial edicts.¹⁵⁸

The history of the Manichaean religion makes such confusion understandable. A.V. Williams Jackson described its creation in this way :

Mani endeavoured, by making a synthesis of elements from various religions, to form a new religion, eclectic in character and inspired by the fervour of his own idealistic enthusiasm, one that should not be confined by national borders but universally adopted. In other words: Mani's aspiration was to bring the world, Orient and Occident, into closer union through a combined faith, based upon the creeds known in his day.¹⁵⁹

Hans Jonas says that, while remaining true to the gnostic ideal, Mani

..... deliberately fused Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Christian elements with his

own teaching, so that not only could he declare himself to be the fourth and concluding prophet in a historical series (succeeding Zoroaster, the Buddha and Jesus) and his teaching the epitome and consummation of his predecessors, but his mission could in each of the three areas dominated by the respective religious traditions emphasize that aspect of the Manichaean synthesis which was familiar to the mind of the hearers. ¹⁶⁰

It was because of these efforts by Mani and his followers to consciously adapt themselves as far as possible to their religious environment while remaining true to the basic principle of their faith that their religion could successfully mingle first with the Buddhism of Northern India where Mani himself was said to have preached, and then with Taoism and Chinese Buddhism.

In the earliest period, the Manichaeans assimilated certain concepts from the Buddhists' "ethical and ascetic ideal of human life"¹⁶¹ and perhaps the theory of transmigration, although this belief was also held by the neo-Pythagoreans. In China, this process continued and is exemplified in the text translated and published by Chavannes and Pelliot. Found in the Tun-huang caves, its date is uncertain, but it can be placed no later than 1035, when the caves were walled up. ¹⁶² From the very beginning, the style of the text takes as its model that of the Buddhist sutra. Its versification, using a rhythm in groups of four characters, while rare in traditional Chinese poetry, is a popular form for Buddhist sutras. In addition, the text begins with the Envoy of Light sitting among his disciples and the faithful, where he will respond to a question

posed by one of his more competent disciples. In this text, it is A-t'o, who, according to the translators, was probably Addai, the apostle of the Manichaeans to the east.¹⁶³ Likewise, in the manner of a Buddhist sutra, when the question is raised, the response of the Envoy of Light is "It is very good, it is very good", a double exclamation, which is sadhu, sadhu in Sanskrit.¹⁶⁴ When expounding their doctrine, the Manichaeans also employ Buddhist technical terms, such as "chan tche-che 'ami excellent' (qui) est une expression technique du bouddhisme traduisant le kālayānamitra du sanscrit"¹⁶⁵ and five conditions of existence as lun-huai wou tsui.¹⁶⁶ In a Manichaean fragment, translated by Haloun and Henning, this method, not unlike ko-yi, was likewise adopted; so that even the legends about Mani's birth read like the birth stories of the Buddha. The author even goes so far as to cite Buddhist texts, such as the Mahamayāsutra and the Ch'eng-shih lun (satyasiddhisāstra) translated by Kumārajīva to support Mani's teaching.¹⁶⁷ It is small wonder then, that, in descriptions of what could possibly be Manichaean sects, supplied by Chih P'an after the persecution of 843, it is impossible to say for certain whether or not they are in fact descriptions of heretical Buddhist sects.

The Manichaeans also had a close relationship to the Taoists. An apocryphal text, the Hua-Hou-Ching (the Sutra on the Conversion of the Hou) contains in the T'ang recension eighty-one "conversions" or "transformations" achieved by Lao-tzu after he left China for the west,¹⁶⁸ In the first

chapter, Lao-tzu promises that one of his future avatars would be called Mo-mo-ni, who will "tourner la roue de la grand Loi."¹⁶⁹ In addition, the two most important Manichaeian texts, the Erh Tsung Ching (the Sutra on the Two Principles) and the San Chi Ching (the Sutra of the Three Times), were briefly included in the Taoist Canon when it was revised in 1019 and they were later banned during the Sung. However, neither of these phenomena indicate any Taoist sympathy for Manichaeian doctrines, for the Taoists, like the Buddhists, considered the sect to be heretical.¹⁷⁰

Yet, from the very beginning, there was interaction between Manichaeians and Buddhists, which led to the former often giving support or added emphasis to practices and ideas that were indigenous to the latter. Buddhas such as Dipankara, the Lamplighter Buddha, Vairocana, the Brilliant One, Amit-abha, Infinite Light, and even Maitreya, whose origins can possibly be traced to the god Mithra,¹⁷¹ owe much to the religion of the Manichaeians.¹⁷² It was probably as companion groups forced underground by government persecution that the White Lotus and Manichaeians made contact, and the exchange of ideas and practices occurred.

A detailed discussion of the Manichaeian beliefs is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, elements which are analogous and are pertinent to the discussion of the White Lotus will be briefly set forth.¹⁷³

As previously seen, the feminine in the form of Lao-mu

plays a very important role in the ideology of the White Lotus. While possible sources for this deity exist in both Buddhism and Taoism,¹⁷⁴ perhaps it is within Manichaeism that the parallels are most striking.

For members of the White Lotus Society, it is Lao mu, with the support of the Old Buddha, who, by transformation (that is, non-sexual generation)¹⁷⁵ creates the world and its inhabitants. When her children become corrupted and so entrapped by the red dust of the world to which she has sent them,¹⁷⁶ it is through her intercession that their escape is eventually achieved. Out of compassion, at various stages in time, she sends Buddhas such as Maitreya as instruments of her salvation.

Likewise, during the second of the three periods in the Manichaean schema, the Mother of Light, Shanmu, with the aid of the Living Spirit, Ch'ing feng, by transforming the flawed bodies of the archons, creates the heavens and the earths. In this case, Darkness, in order to imprison the light in flesh, creates humanity. However, just as Lao-mu accomplishes the rescue of her children covered by the red dust,¹⁷⁷ so the Mother of Light, aided by the Living Spirit and the Messenger, (Hui-ming chih) makes possible the liberation of the light covered by flesh. Finally, to achieve this emancipation, the Mother of Light and her helpers also send messengers, first the Illuminated Jesus, then Zoroaster and the Buddha, the historical Jesus and finally Mani.

Therefore, it is clear that like Lao-mu, the Mother of Light, guided by compassion for the people of the earth, and because of the light which is imprisoned in them, intercedes on their behalf and sends those who would bring about their salvation. In addition, the macrocosm, which is the universe and the microcosm which is the individual are the loci of the salvation drama. Therefore, as in the Buddhism of the White Lotus, life on earth, while being a trap for the individual, also becomes the means of its release. Therefore, both the Manichaeans and the followers of T'ien-t'ai and its successor, the White Lotus, life on earth is affirmed.

However, these activities of the Mother of Light occur in the middle period. Just as members of the White Lotus and other Buddhists, the Manichaeans also see time as being divided into three periods. For the Manichaeans, during the first or former period, before the existence of either heaven or earth, Light and Darkness are separate from each other, both existing without beginning and unaware of each other. However, the constant contending, which is the mode of existence of Darkness, brought Darkness into contact with the Light. The combat between Light and Darkness begins the second or middle stage, where the Mother of Light's activities to rescue the imprisoned light take place.

Finally, there is the third stage, when Darkness and Light are finally separated. The time just prior to this is described by a Manichaean writer, Kephalaïs, the Sage, as a period of the final degradation of man :

Thou seest how near it has come to the end of the world; the lifetime of men has come to a fraction, their days have decreased, their years have become fewer, for the Life and Light that were in the world in the first generations are more than today.¹⁷⁸

Those who are born today in these last generations are small and stunted in lifetime, and they are also born each one in a single womb, scarcely two or less or more, while they are also ugly in their appearance, small in their size, and weak in their limbs. Their ideas and thoughts are filled with weakness; in old age they waste away their lifetime with sufferings, also death comes to them swiftly.¹⁷⁹

To the Manichaeans, such a time only signaled the nearness of the final release for the light particles. Then

..... The outrageous heretics who now rejoice will be vanquished by thee, the wrathful one. (The good) will be absolved (forgiven) since them (he) will absolve (forgive), and they will atone for everything which by them has been sinned. Rejoice will those who have wept, and weep will those who now laugh..... Teach, worship, and chant, for near (is) that time¹⁸⁰

Until that time, they were instructed to be militant:

..... And by the Shield of Light, and the Buckler of the Faithful and the good spear that is militant, may they repel, conquer subdue (?) and keep afar all the enemies of rectitude, adversaries of virtue, and all of the Prince of Lies(?), Ahriman *** unto (the end of?) time.¹⁸¹

Finally, after the hero of Light defeats the minions of darkness in an Armageddon:

..... The light Body shall be freed from (its) fetters, the forces of Light and Darkness will be separated evermore, and so will doers of good and their evil foes. The universe - heaven and earth, and the countless dense and close things - will be properly dissolved and freed from the pitiful Adorable One; the demon races will be put into the dark prison for ever, and the Race of Illumined will leap for joy and return to the Realm of Light¹⁸²

When all but an insignificant amount of light, which is still caught within the darkness, is separated and returned to its origin, the visible cosmos will be destroyed by Fire, which will burn for 1468 years. At this point, Light and Darkness will be forever separated.¹⁸³ The date for this, according to a Chinese adjusted calendar would be the year 1890 A.D.¹⁸⁴

While Maitreya has always had an eschatological role as the Buddha yet to come, it is perhaps this Buddha's close associations in Central Asia with the Manichaeian saviour, who will arrive at the end of time, that has brought this part of Maitreya's character to the fore. This was particularly true for Chinese revolutionary groups who, after the prohibition of orthodox Manichaeism, would have had the most contact with its sectarian offspring, and who wished to further substantiate their millenarian aspirations.

The possibility for borrowing of Manichaeian ideas by the White Lotus is given added credence by the many practices which the two groups held in common. The Manichaeians offered the only instance of total lay vegetarianism and abstinence from wine. The Manichaeians were only allowed to eat vegetables, for they could not harm sentient beings.¹⁸⁵ In Buddhism, before the establishment of lay associations like the White Lotus, vegetarianism was practised only by monks.¹⁸⁶ Laymen had vegetarian feasts on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, or in order to fulfil a vow.¹⁸⁷ In the imperial edicts issued against the White Lotus, they are described as well as meeting at night for, the officials claim, nefarious reasons.

While it is obvious that a persecuted society would be safer if it held its meetings at night, it is nevertheless significant to note that the Manichaeans were required to worship the sun at sunset, and the moon and the Pole-star, which necessitated meetings at night. Na Yen-Ch'eng, Viceroy of Chihli, reported that the White Lotus, too, worshipped the sun three times a day.¹⁸⁸

In conclusion, when we speak of Taoist influences on the White Lotus, the only thing that can be said with some certainty is that practices such as faith healing and magic probably could trace their origins back to Taoist sources by way of Taoist priests. When we discuss the exchange of ideas in an illiterate or semi-literate society, we must acknowledge that links such as those between philosophical and religious Taoists and the sectarians cannot be clearly established. All that can be said is that millenarian ideas were available and seemed to have been employed to support the millenarian activities of the Yellow Turbans and the Five Pecks of Rice. The abstract feminine principle found in the Tao Te Ching and other philosophical texts may have affected the development, or at least the importance of feminine deities, like Hsi Wang-mu, in popular Taoism. Again, however, the determination such developments would have on the White Lotus are difficult to trace.

Similarly, the tracing of Manichaean nuances in the White Lotus creates another problematic situation. Certain

millenarian concerns and actions are clearly part of Chinese Manichaeism. The use of the term "ming-wang" by both groups could indicate an exchange of ideas. There is also the example the Manichaeans set of complete vegetarianism, the development of independent associations, and perhaps meeting at night, which could suggest contact.

It would be natural for the White Lotus to adopt whatever was useful from various religious systems existing in China. But it would be wrong to overlook the growth of most of these ideas in the ground of Buddhism itself. The Sangha also served as a model for the Buddhist lay associations and vegetarianism was practised by the monks whom members of the associations wished to emulate. Also yoga and magic, often the second as a result of the first, had long been a part of the monks' repertoire, especially in the north. The feminine, too, in forms such as Kuan-yin and Prajnaparamita is not unknown to Buddhism. Finally, by far the most important concept to the development of the White Lotus, the promise of salvation viewed in millennial terms, had its roots in Chinese Buddhism. Thus harmonious Taoist and Manichaean elements resonated with the undertones of White Lotus and its Buddhist heritage to produce the beliefs which orchestrated the White Lotus millenarian theology.

It was these beliefs, fused into a cohesive ideology which gave structure and inspiration to the organization. The mutual relationship of these two, ideology and organization,

is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that it was ideology which produced the identification of the leadership with Maitreya, while it was that same leadership which developed, albeit through divine inspiration, the ideology in the form of pao chüan. Similarly, through its hierarchical structure, rituals, communism, etc., the organization became a viable expression of this ideology and made its millenarian aspirations more than a dream, or food for scholars. Thus the melding of ideology and organization resulted in an alloy sufficiently durable to resist the acid environment in which the White Lotus has continued to exist.

Footnotes

1 For an explanation of the process in which failure merely heightens the belief in a prophecy see Leon Festinger et al, When Prophecy Fails (New York: Harper Torchbacks, 1964), particularly the introduction.

2 This is also discussed ibid., pp. 205 etc.

3 Chapter 2, p. 36, above.

4 Huang Yü-pien, P'o-hsieh hsiang-pien (A Detailed Refutation of Heresies), chüan 3, pp. 8a and 28a quoted in Daniel Overmyer, "Folk Buddhist Sects: A Structure in the History of Chinese Religions", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1971, * pp. 262-263.

5 Ming-t'ai tsung-chiao, ed. Pao Tsung-p'eng in Ming-shih lun-ts'ung, ed. Pao (Taipei: Taiwan Student Bookstores, 1968), x, 20 cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 78.

6 San-sheng pien-fang pai-lan, chapter 2 cited in Richard Chu, "White Lotus Society in Chinese History" * Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1969), p. 74.

7 J.J.M. DeGroot, Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China (Taipei: Literature House Ltd., 1963), pp. 347, 354, 467.

8 Chapter Two, p. 26, above..

9 As time went on more men who passed minor examinations were not employed by the civil system. These too sought advancement in the secret and religious societies. See Victor Purcell, The Boxer Uprisings: A Background Study (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 273. Likewise, a blacksmith, a police officer, a father of an imperial eunuch, a carpenter and men like Chu Yüan-chang who was in turn a monk, a bandit, and finally an emperor all held positions of leadership at one time or another within the White Lotus groups.

*Hereafter referred to as Overmeyer, Thesis.

10

This took various forms. In some cases, it would be the divinely inspired ability to practise magic or healing, in others, it came in the form of divine communications. Perhaps the most important was that which allowed some to claim to be divine themselves.

11

Chih P'an, Fo-tsu t'ung-chi, Taisho, vol 49, p. 425, cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 254.

12

Huang, chüan 1, pp. 7a-8a cited in ibid., p. 255. (italics mine) Cf. Marjory Topley, "The Great Way of Former Heaven", in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 26(1963), p. 377: Patriarchs of this sect as incarnations of Kuan-yin, Maitreya, Dipankara and the Bushel Mother (a Taoist deity).

13

Chapter Two, pp. 43 and fn 28, above.

14

DeGroot, p. 235, this is much later but it supports the other examples.

15

Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 188 and chapter two, p. 43, above.

16

C.K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 106; Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization in China (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1957), vol. II. Such priests gave their support to the White Lotus Society, see Chu, p. 54.

17

Ming law code in Chin Ch'uan Chi, chüan 2 cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 91.

18

DeGroot, pp. 245-246. The negative attitude of the government in this and other quotes is understandable and cannot be taken at face value.

19

Charles Glick and Sheng-hwa Hong, Swords of Silence: Chinese Secret Societies (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1947), p. 63. tells of the warning to the Triad novice:

If anyone be so wicked as to break these laws may he die by losing blood from the seven openings, and be drowned in the Great Ocean and his body lost forever. May the spirits of his ancestors be

cursed and damned, and may his descendents exist in the deepest misery and want for a thousand generations.

20 Chu, pp. 178ff and Overmeyer, Thesis, pp. 250ff.

21 George Miles, "Vegetarian Sects", in The Chinese Recorder, 38(Jan., 1902), pp. 4-5 and Topley, p. 379.

22 DeGroot, p. 201.

23 Ibid., p. 203.

24 Miles, p. 9 an exception.

25 Topley, p. 375, DeGroot, p. 201; Miles, p. 5. Yuji Muramatsu, "Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies", in Arthur Wright, Confucian Persuasion(Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969, p. 247, states that the White Lotus had a "mystic cult of sexual intercourse". From its earliest days, members of the White Lotus had been indicted for sexual promiscuity. Chih P'an reported that the society "parle faussemment de la conduite pure et ne mène qu'une vie de débauches". (Chapter 2, p. 33) Since the society open its membership to both men and women at a time when the establishment dictated that men and women could not even store their clothes together in the same trunk or hang their clothes on the same hook [see R.H. Van Gulik, Sexual Life in Ancient China (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961)] when combined with meeting at night, their actions were bound to lead to conjecture. This is not to omit the possibility of sexual activities being included in the White Lotus ritual for the society's ideology and practises discussed below show links with Tantra and Popular Taoism, both employed sexual means to achieve their religious goals. In addition sexual licence has often been a part of the practises of groups believing in the imminence of the millennium..

26 Topley, p. 374 and Miles, p. 3.

27 Lo Kuan -chung, San-kuo Chih Yen-i(An Explanation of the Three Kingdoms).

28 Shui-hu chuan (English title: All Men are Brothers), trans. Pearl S. Buck, New York: John Day Co., 1968.

29 Wan-ming Min-pien, pp. 196-197 cited in Chu, pp 115-116.

30 Purcell, p. 273.

31 Chapter Two, p. 28, above.

32 The exact meaning of this term is unclear. According to Cheng Chen-to, Chung-kuo su-wen hsieh-shih (Peking: Tso-chia Publishing Co., 1957), 1.190 cited in Kenneth Ch'en, Chinese Transformation of Buddhism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 252, pien is the character meaning to change. Therefore the term could describe "changing the style of the sutras to be used in popular lectures". On the other hand, Chou Shao-liang, Tun-huang pien-wen hui-lu (Shanghai, 1954), p. x and Chou I-liang, Wei-chin nan-pei-ch'ao lun-chi (Peking, 1963), pp. 381-383 cited in idem, suggests that "monks took hold of some of the marvelous events or episodes (shen-pien) in the sutras, elaborated and embellished them, and then used them."

33 Kenneth Ch'en, Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 288.

34 According to Jaroslav Prusek, "The Narrators of Buddhist Scriptures and Religious Tales in the Sung Period", in Archiv Orientalni, 10(1938), p. 378, the pao chuan "in many respects are but a later development of pien-wen."

35 In the case of the White Lotus Society, this might have also been a means by which the authors could escape persecution.

36 According to Hajime Nakamura et al., eds., Ajia Bukkoshi-Chugoku Hen vol. 3, Gendai Chugoku No Sho Shukyo (Jinsu Shukyo No Keifu), Yoshioka Y., (Tokyo, 1974), p. 166 and Prusek, p. 379, legend assigns the authorship of this text to the abbot of Shang T'ien Chu monastery, the Ch'an master P'u-ming. Historically, Chiang Chih-ch'i (1031-1104), an official turned Ch'an monk, is thought to be the author.

37 Chapter Two, p. 33, above.

38 Huang, chüan 3, p. 28 cited in Chu, p. 62

39 Prusek, p. 378.

40 Yoshioka, p. 166..

41 For example some used historical themes.

42 For a detailed discussion of the structure of the pao-chüan, see Li Shih-yü, Pao-chüan hsin-ven, Wen-hsüeh 1-ch'ian tsung k'ian, no. 4 (Peking, 1957), p. 169, cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 279.

43 One of the pao chüan that Huang collected in 1833 called the Precious Dragon Flower Sutra Examined and Corrected by the Old Buddha in a section called "Going East and West to Get Sutras" states:

The Venerable Buddha King (lao fo-wang) of the Stone Buddha Village (Shih-fo ch'ang), personally went to the Dragon Temple (the abode of Lao-mu) and took a sutra back to the village. Huang, chüan 1, 7b cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 167. There are other examples within the White Lotus; T'ang Sai-erh received a treasure book, see chapter two, p. 42. Likewise, the founder of the Celestial Masters, Chang Tao-ling, received a book from a celestial being who styled himself the Secretary from under the Pillars, H.J.M. DeGroot, "On the Origins of the Taoist Church", in Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), vol. 2, p. 140.

44 Cited in Overmeyer, "Folk Buddhist Religion: Creation and Eschatology in Medieval China", in History of Religions, 12 (1972), p. 57.

45 Explanation of True Emptiness Precious Scroll (Hsiao-shih chen-k'ung pao-chüan) "praises Amida and proclaims the True Emptiness", Overmeyer, Thesis, pp. 213-214

*Hereafter referred to as Overmeyer, Article.

46 Overmeyer, Article, p. 47

47 Chapter Two, pp. 32-33, above.

48 Chapter Two, pp. 37ff, above.

49 As evident in the government persecution under the Yuan, Ming and Ch'ing dynasties, and Chih P'an's attacks.

50 Chüan 4 and 6 cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 235.

51 Tzu-chih t'ung-chien, 607, ch. 180, pp. 5632-5633, cited in Teng Ssu-yü, "A Political Interpretation of Chinese Rebellions", in Ching hua hsüeh pao (Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies), 3(1958), pp. 99-100.

52 Cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 145.

53 For a description of this and others in the same period see Chu, p. 37.

54 Idem. Perhaps this group was active even earlier; for the Wei Shu reports that in 515 a Mahayana rebellion took place in which 50,000 rebels were involved under the leadership of a monk and nun who, inspired by the Dasabhumika sutra, claimed "a new Buddha has appeared in the world, old Mara will be eliminated". Z. Tsukamoto, Shina Bukkyoshi Kenkyu hokokusho (Tokyo, 1942), p. 274. See also Yuji Muramatsu, p. 246.

55 For a detailed discussion of Empress Wu's activities see C.P. Fitzgerald, The Empress Wu (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire for Australian National University, 1955), pp. 127f, Ch'en, Buddhism in China, pp. 220-221 and the for the possible Manichaean nuances, see E. Chavannes and P. Pelliot, Un Traité Manichéen Retrouvé en Chine (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1912), pp. 171-174.

56 Sung Min-ch'iu, ed., T'ang ta ching-ling chi, chüan 11a, k'ai yüan 3, 11mo., 17day, cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 90.

57

Hok-lam Chan, "White Lotus-Maitreya Doctrine and Popular Uprisings in Ming and Ch'ing China", in Sinologica, (Dec., 1968), p. 213.

58

Vincent Y.C. Shih, "Some Chinese Rebel Ideologies", in T'oung Pao, 44(1956), pp. 188-189.

59

Chapter Two, p. 38, above.

60

Ibid., pp. 38-39.

61

Cited in Overmeyer, Article, p. 67. The use of this colour scheme by another White Lotus group, the Eight Diagrams, is reported by DeGroot, p. 421.

62

Huang, chüan 3, p. 10a cited in Overmeyer, Article, pp. 66-67.

63

Topley, p. 371.

64

Ibid., p. 387.

65

Ibid., p. 372

66

Chan, p. 218.

67

Huang, chüan 3, p. 18a cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 242.

68

Huang, chüan 2, pp. 10a-10b cited in Overmeyer, Article, p. 65.

69

Hun-yüan hun-yang hsien-hsin chieh-ko sao-pei cited in Chu, pp. 70-71.

70 Chüan 3, p. 10a cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 244.

71 Cited in Shih, p. 189.

72 For a detailed discussion see Etienne Lamotte, Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien: Des Origines à l'Ere Śāka (Louvain: Publications Universitaires et Institut Orientaliste, 1958), pp. 775-788; cf. E. Frauwallner, On the Date of the Buddhist Master of the Law Vasubandhu (Rome: I.S.M.E.O., 1951).

73 Richard Robinson, The Buddhist Religion (Belmont, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), p. 59.

74 This discussion is taken from Matsumoto's Miroku Jodo Ron reviewed by Noil Peri, in Bulletin of Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 11 (1911), pp. 441-446.

75 Ibid., p. 447

76 E. Zürcher, Buddhist Conquest of China, the Spread and Adaption of Buddhism in Early Medieval China (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), p. 194. This is also in keeping with one of Kaitreya, that of inspirer of the Yogacara cutras.

77 Seng Yu, Hung-ming chi, Taisho, vol. 52, 9/57, cited in Shih, p. 188.

78 Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p. 407

79 Tao Te Ching, chapter LXXX.

80 Taisho, vol. 14, p. 453 cited in Chan, pp. 212-213.

81 Huang, chüan 2, p. 3a cited in Overmeyer, Article, p. 56.

82 Huang, chüan 2, p. 1a; chüan 1, pp. 3b-4a in idem.

Here Overmeyer also cites Cheng Chen-to, vol. 2, p. 314, who says that in Yao shih pao chüan, dated 1543, the Lao-mu myth is also mentioned.

83

In this pao chüan, the Old Buddha is clearly placed below Lao-mu for in Huang, chüan 1, p. 13b cited in Guillaume Dunstheime, "Some Religious Aspects of Secret Societies", in Jean Chesneaux, Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840-1950 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 27, it is Lao-mu who "gave him the order to harvest the fruits of nirvana".

84

In Chiu-k'u chung-hsiao yüeh-wang pao-chüan cited in Chu, p. 73, it is said that "Whether originally male or female makes no difference. They both received their original breath from the Eternal Mother."

85

Huang, chüan 1, pp. 1a-2b cited in Overmeyer, Article, pp. 59-60.

86

Cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 204.

87

Li Shih-yü, Hsien-tai hua-peimi-mi tsung-chaio (Contemporary Secret Religious Societies in North China) (Chengtu, 1948), p. 47 cited in Dunstheimer, p. 27.

88

Huang, chüan 3, pp. 26a-26b cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 214.

89

Luan-chuo chih 1896, chüan 18, pp. 28b-29a cited in idem.

90

For example in Feng-shen yen-i (Investiture of the Gods) chapter 1, Nü-hua niang-niang or Shang-ti shen-nü (Divine Woman, God on High) decrees the end of the Shang dynasty and in Shui-hu chüan, chapter 41, Sung Chiang, one of the heroes receives book from Chiu-t'ien hsüan-nü, the Mysterious Goddess of the Ninth Heaven.

91

David Crockett Graham, Song and Stories of the Ch'uan Miao, Smithsonian Institution Miscellaneous Collections 23, no. 1, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1854), pp. 72-73..

92 Wolfram Eberhard, Local Cultures of South and East China (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), pp. 141, 144.

93 Edward Conze, Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, Selected Essays (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer Ltd., 1967), pp. 80-81.

94 Edward Conze, trans., The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary (Holinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), chapter 1, v. 15. For a detailed discussion of the feminine in this text see Joanna Rogers Macy's article "Perfection of Wisdom: Mother of All Buddhas", presented at the American Academy of Religions conference in Chicago, Nov., 1975. It is also significant to note that the Prajnaparamita was traditionally preached on Vulture Peak, which is where the children of Lao-mu return and where her palace is situated. Hsiao-shih shou-yuan hsing-chueh pao-chuan (The Precious Scroll which Explains the Restoration of Completeness and the Perfecting of Enlightenment), see ftn. 87, above.

95 See Chou I-liang, "Tantrism in China", in Harvard Journal of Asian Studies, 8 (1945), pp. 241-332; Ch'en, Buddhism in China, pp. 325-337.

96 Van Gulik, pp. 114, 238, 260, 340ff.

97 Po-mu is mentioned ten times in titles alone. Lao-mu is also included in the title of certain texts, for example: the Lao-mu Ching or Lao-nu jen (Taisho 559; Mahallikapariproccha).

98 Jean Chesneaux, Secret Societies in China in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 38.

99 Chapter two, p. 45.

100 DeGroot, p. 492; in this case the reference is to belief in the Unbegotten Father and Mother- the Old Buddha and Lao-mu; see also pp. 420, 470.

101 Ibid., p. 529; this is an area in which the Eight Diagrams were active previously; see p. 420.

102

Ibid., p. 542.

103

For a detailed discussion of the problem of "religious" and "philosophical" Taoism see Fung Yu-lan in Jan Yun-hua, "Problems of Tao and the Tao Te Ching", in Numen, 22(1975), pp. 208-234; H.G. Creel, What is Taoism? and Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970,) pp. 24ff; and Holmes Welch, Taoism, the Parting of the Ways(Boston: Beacon Press, 1965). pp. 88ff.

104

Unless otherwise indicated, D.C. Lau's trans. Tao Te Ching (Hamondsworth, Middlessex: Penguin Books, 174), is the edition used.

105

The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), trans. Burton Watson, is the translation used for all references to the Chuang-tzu.

106

The Book of Lieh Tzu (London: John Murray, 1960),
trans. A.C. Graham, is the translation used for all references
to the Lieh-tzu.

107

Cf. Ellen Marie Chen, "Tao as the Great Mother and Its Influence on Motherly Love", in History of Religions, 14(1974), pp. 51-64.

108

The Way and its Power, a Study of the Tao Te Ching and its Place in Chinese Thought (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), trans. Arthur Waley, p. 86.

109

Ibid., p. 45.

110

See Welch, p. 15ff.

111

For example, Hou Wai-lu's translation of the Tao Te Ching, chapter II cited by Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization in China, vol. II, p. 110:

Thirty spokes combine to make a wheel;
When there was no private property carts were made
Clay is formed to make vessels; for use.

When there was no private property vessels were made for use.
Windows and doors go to make a house;

When there was no private property houses were made to use.
Thus having private property leads to profit (li) (for the feudal lords).

But not having it leads to use (yung) (for the people).

112

Tao, the Great Illuminant; Essays from Huai Nan Tzu (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1969), trans. Evan Morgan is used for all references to the Huai-nan-tzu. For further discussion of the Taoist view of history see chapter one, pp. 11-12, above.

113

Donald Holzman, La Vie et la Pensée de Hi K'ang (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1957).

114

This discussion is taken from:
Anna Seidel, "The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism: Lao Tzu and Li Hung", in History of Religions, 9(1970), pp. 216-247; R.A. Stein, "Remarques sur les Mouvements du Taoïsme Politico-Religieux au IIe Siècle Ap. J.-E.", in T'oung Pao, 51(1964), pp. 8-10; and Howard S. Levy, "Yellow Turban Religion and Rebellion at the End of the Han", in Journal of the American Oriental Society, 76(1956), pp. 214-225.

115

The Yellow Turbans followed the teachings of Huang-Lao, therefore Huang-ti as the ideal ruler and Lao-tzu as both his advisor and as Huang Lao Chün were the important figures. See Anna Seidel, La Divinisation de Lao Tseu dans le Taoïsme des Hans (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1969). Perhaps this explains the lack of the active participation on the part of Huang Lao Chün in the activities of this group.

116

This was thought of in terms of the descriptions in the T'ai P'ing Ching, see Stein, p. 6 and Shih, p. 169.

In order to achieve peace immediately, one needs only to follow the tao of t'ien (heaven) and ti (earth) without discrepancy. The Yüan-ch'i (the primeval breath) are three: the great yang, the great yin and the harmony; there are three physical forms: t'ien, ti, and jen (the titles taken by Chang and his brothers were Dukes of Heaven, Earth, and Man). . . . When the three completely agree without discrepancy and all share the same anxiety and form one family, there

*Hereafter referred to as Seidel, Article.

is no doubt that peace will be achieved immediately and the span of life will be prolonged. T'ai P'ing Ching trans in Shih, p. 166.

117 Seidel Article, pp. 122ff and La Divinisation for translation and detailed discussion of the text.

118 Seidel, Article, p. 225.

119 Ibid., p. 228.

120 Li Yüan, the founder of the T'ang, may have been fulfilling these Taoist messianic hopes by the claims he made for the house of Li, see ibid., p. 244. It also interesting to note the possible aboriginal influences mentioned in Ibid., p. 234.

121 This is not unlike the relationship established between Maitreya and the rightful ruler.

122 Healing was also practised by this group.

123 Stein, p. 6.

124 Seidel, Article, p. 237.

125 Ibid., p. 234.

126 Ibid., pp. 238-239.

127 Stein, p. 15.

128 Ibid., pp. 21ff.

129 Ibid., pp. 11, 15.
This conception of the sage seems in keeping with the views held by Chang and also followed by numerous later rebels, see Seidel, Article, p. 233.

130 Stein, p. 10.

131 Ibid., p. 10, This might indicate a relationship between Lao-mu and Hsi Wang-mu.

132 Chu, p. 72; cf. Miles, p. 7.

133 Chang Chung-yüan, "Introduction of Taoist Yoga", Review of Religion, 20(1956), p. 135.

134 See Holmes Welch, pp. 71-73; Chang Chung-yüan, pp. 131ff.

135 Henri Maspero, Le Taoïsme (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), pp. 53, 86, 87.

136 Topley, p. 376; other possible Taoist influences, eg. on the Eight Diagrams are discussed by DeGroot, p. 155.

137 DeGroot, pp. 100ff, 78 etc. for discussion of the treatment of the Taoist Church throughout the centuries.

138 Tu Wan-i, chapter two, pp. 34-35.

139 Chavannes and Pelliot, pp. 171-1174 while accepting this date suggest that the introduction of Manichaeism may have been earlier.

140 Chüan 39, cited in ibid., pp. 174-175.

141 As the Jesuits later discovered, knowledge of astronomy was a valuable asset in achieving a foothold in China. Both Buddhists and Manichaeian astronomers exerted a great influence over the Chinese calendar of this period. Ibid., pp. 182-201.

142

Ts'o fu ylan kua is dated in the year 1013 and found in the Bibliotheque Nationale edition, #548, cited in Ibid., pp. 176-177.

143

T'ou Yu, T'ung tien, chapter 40, fol. 11vo, written between 766 and 801, cited in ibid., p. 178.

144

This event is described on the Karabalgasoun Stele (ibid., pp. 201-233; see also T.A. Bission, "Some Records of the Manichaeans in China", Chinese Recorder, (July, 1929), pp. 421-423 for a detailed description). His conversion occurred when he and his mercenaries occupied Loyang after the death of their employer, the former emperor Hsuan-tsung, and of his son. During this stay, he came into contact with Manichaean monks, and when he returned to his kingdom he brought four with him to establish their faith. Even the Manichaean patriarch in Babylon sent him monks and nuns to aid him in his task. These ties between Mesopotamia, Central Asia and China remained strong and with the rise of the Abbasides, Manichaeans from the west found shelter in the east.

145

Chavannes and Pelliot, p. 225.

146

Ch'uan T'ang Wen, chapter 727, cited in ibid., p. 246. Yet they did not lack property; see DeGroot, p. 60 and Chavannes and Pelliot, p. 258.

147

Cited in Chavannes and Pelliot, pp. 255-256..

148

Ch'uan 54 cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 151.

149

Chavannes and Pelliot, p. 284.

150

Ibid., p. 286.

151

P. Pelliot, "Les Traditions Manicheenes au Fou-kien", in T'oung Pao, 5(1923), p. 194.

152 Chavannes and Pelliot, p. 132.

153 For a description of this group see Shih, pp. 174f. Shih mentions that debate about the possibilities of Fang Lā being Manichaeism. Chavannes and Pelliot feel that while there are practices in common the group is not Manichaeism. (p.312)

154 It would seem that the ruler sent by Maitreya to establish his reign of peace had become manifest as Han, the Major King of Light and in Han Lin-erh as the Minor King of Light, see chapter two, p. 41.

155 Chavannes and Pelliot, p. 318.

156 This is particularly evident in the similarities between the sect described by Miles and the White Lotus Society see chapter two, p. 26. In addition both the White Lotus and the Manichaeism were active in the area around Fukien.

157 In Chung-hsi chi-shih, chuan 2, p. 16b, cited in Chu, p. 25.

158 Chapter One, p. 4 and chapter two, p. 39, above.

159 A.V. Williams Jackson, Researches in Manichaeism (New York:AMS Press Inc., 1965), p. 3.

160 Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Beacon Hill, Boston, Beacon Hill Press, 1958), p. 207.

161 Ibid. p. 208.

162 Chavannes and Pelliot, pp. 7-8.

163 Ibid. p. 5.

164 Ibid. p. 13.

Herbert Giles, Confucianism and Its Rivals (London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1926), p. 196 compares the ending of this text to that of the Diamond Sutra:

When the Buddha had delivered this sutra, all the monks and nuns, lay brothers and lay sisters, together with all the devas and demons in the universe, having heard the Buddha's words, rejoiced with one accord, accepting them with faith, proceeded to put them into practice. - Diamond Butra

Then all the members of the great assembly, having heard this sutra, accepted it with faith and rejoicing, proceeded to put it into practice. - Manichaeian Treatise

165

Chavannes and Pelliot, p. 14.

166

Ibid., p. 37.

167

G. Haloun and W.B. Henning, "Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of the Teaching of Mani, the Buddha of Light", Asia Major, n.s. 3(1952), pp. 192-193.

168

Chavannes and Pelliot, p. 142.

169

A phrase used to describe the Buddha.

170

Some feel that the two texts gained admittance into the Tao Tsang through bribery. In addition, in a Taoist text of the Sung dynasty, Yu lung ch'uan, list along with a legendary biography of Lao-tzu, eighty-six heretical sects, and the fifth is Manichaeism. Ibid., pp. 290-291.

171

For the Iranian influences on Maitreya see: Jean Przyluski, "Un Dieu Iranien dans l'Inde", in Rocznik Orientalisty, 7(1930), pp. 1-9; Jean Filliozat, "Maitreya l'Invancu", in Journal Asiatique, 23(1950), pp. 145-149.. W. Bauch, "Maitreya d'après les Sources Sériinde", in Revue de l'Histoire des Religions, 132(1946), makes this point by showing the interaction of Maitreyan beliefs with those of the Manichaeans. For example: "Cela n'empêche pas que Mani soit appelé en même temps le cinquième dhyani-buddha, dont Maitreya est une émanation, et que, dans le fameux traité manichéen de Touen houang. . . on voit Maitreya

et fusionner en une seule personnalité. p. 77. Also on p. 78, "Sans aucun doute, il s'agit ici (in an Uigurian fragment) d'une grande synthèse où, à la fois le 'Mithras invictus', Jésus fils de Dieu et 'Maitreya ajita' fusionnent."

Robinson also mentions the Manichaeans adopting this composite saviour (p. 60) as well as Maitreya and other Buddha's assuming the role as gods of light which would make such a fusion possible. (pp. 59-60)

172

For a detailed discussion of Buddhism and Gnosticism see E. Conze, "Buddhism and Gnosticism", in The Origins of Gnosticism, Colloquium of Messina, 13-18 April, 1966 (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1967), pp. 651-667.

173

This discussion is taken from the translations of the Erh Tsung Ching (Sutra of Two Principles) and San Chi Ching (Sutra of Three Periods) as translated and annotated by Chavannes and Pelliot.

Also: Jackson, Researches in Manichaeism.

Jonas, The Gnostic Religion.

Bission, "Manichaeans in China".

F.C. Buritt, The Religion of the Manichees (Cambridge: University Press; 1925).

Geo Widengren, Mani and Manichaeism (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965).

H.-C. Puech, Le Manichéisme: Son Fondateur- Sa Doctrine (Paris: Civilisation du Sud, S.A.E.P., 1949).

Duncan Greenless, The Gospel of the Prophet Mani (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1956).

174

See above.

175

See above, p. 80.

176

The Precious Scroll of the Most Holy Savior Maitreya (Ta sheng mi lo fo hua ke pao chuan), cited in Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 164, states: "... all living were confused and lost in the red dust...."

177

It is significant to note that Lao-mu's children are "surrounded by light" and then "lost in the red dust". See above, p. 80 and Overmeyer, Thesis, p. 164.

178

Kephala the Sage, 146: 9-14 in Greenless, pp. 258-259.

- 179 Kephalaia the Sage, 147: 10-17, in Ibid., p. 259.
- 180 Turfan Pahlavi Fragment S. 9, cited in Jackson, pp. 83-84.
- 181 Turfan Pahlavi Fragment S. 7, in Ibid., p. 132.
- 182 British Museum Chinese Hymns, 232-234, cited in Greenless, pp. 254-255.
- 183 Jonas, pp. 233-235; Puech, p. 77.
- 184 Haloun and Henning, pp. 201-202.
- 185 It is significant to note that the Chinese Manichaeans of an earlier period ate leeks and onions. Then, later, like the Taoists and Buddhists, they were forbidden to eat strong-smelling vegetables. For a full discussion see Chavannes and Pelliot, pp. 226-238.
- 186 See Ch'en, Chinese Transformation, pp. 283ff for a detailed discussion of vegetarianism among these associations.
- 187 Ibid., pp. 288ff.
- 188 Cited in Chu, p. 72. Also the Manichaeans may have been influential in the adoption of white clothing by the White Lotus, although white is considered to be the colour of Maitreya. Moreover, the idea of the eventual triumph of the White Sun itself may be a Manichaean contribution.

Chapter Four:

Conclusion

Throughout their history, the Chinese have shown a penchant for forming a wide variety of associations.¹ Whereas some of these associations gained official recognition, others suffered the full brunt of government persecution.

While the thrust of a number of these persecuted groups was political, many were motivated by religious concerns. The White Cloud Society (Pai-yün hui) is an example of the latter.² Established during the same period as the White Lotus Society, this society, too, under the leadership of laymen, practised vegetarianism and public evangelism, and made use of the vernacular and its popular styles in the composition of their devotional and doctrinal works. Likewise, its founder was within the orthodox lineage, having also studied under a Ch'an master. Yet, while both societies developed within the early tradition of devotional lay associations, the White Cloud Society lacked the syncretism of the White Lotus Society and enforced celibacy among its members. In addition, the doctrines of Lao-mu and Maitreya did not encroach upon the White Cloud Society's T'ien-t'ai and Ch'an beliefs. However, but for a period in the reign of Jen-tsung, when the White Lotus too gained a brief respite, the White Cloud were subject to antagonism on the part of the establishment. Chih P'an described them as bandits; their founder suffered banishment and in 1370 the sect was banned. In spite of their orthodoxy and the fact that they were never reported to have been involved in millenarian activities, (perhaps because they lacked beliefs concerning Lao-mu and

Maitreya), this sect continually suffered the same treatment as the White Lotus.³

During the Ming, there appeared another sect also dominated by religious concerns⁴ which received similar treatment. The Lo sect worshipped the Old Patriarch who has soared upward, its founder who, while he too was within the orthodox Ch'an lineage, later became a saving bodhisattva whose role was not unlike that of Lao-mu. Along with the White Lotus, the White Cloud and others, this group was included in the Ch'ing law against Heresies and Sects.⁵ Here, those who actively proselytized the Lo Society's beliefs were condemned to government slavery and those who merely believed were subject to perpetual exile in remote border countries. This society in its popular nature, and many of its practices and beliefs had much in common with the White Lotus. In fact, during its early period, the only example of this group's active involvement in revolutionary activities⁶ had strong millenarian overtones, extremely reminiscent of the White Lotus. Conducted under the leadership of a medium, who claimed to be Lao kuan nung (Mother of the Lao kuan - the Lo Society), it was inspired by the promise of Maitreya's coming. In addition, at the same time, its texts included beliefs in the Native Land, albeit without Lao-mu. Later, however, a reform took place and the society came out quite strongly against the White Lotus.

Members of the White Lotus religion go to hell and suffer all the pains of birth and death. They are caught on the wheel of rebirth and never find release. The White Lotus confuses

the people, is greedy for money and breaks the laws of the land. It gets a grip on the people and does great harm to many.

Though both these societies were classified with the White Lotus and seemed to be similar to this society in many respects, there is one major difference: that is, but for one exception which may have been due to the influence of White Lotus ideology, neither group was involved in millenarian activities. The White Lotus Society, by expressing its religiosity in millenarian undertakings, demonstrated that it was different from most Chinese societies.⁸

The development of a millenarian cosmos entailed a radical reworking of ideas proper to the Chinese Buddhism in which the White Lotus Society developed. Thus, the role of Maitreya, as the Buddha-to-be, was given greater emphasis and the place of the feminine in the form of Lao-mu became an important component in the salvation drama. Also the time in which this drama unfolded was transformed, and what for many would involve eons, for the sectarians was measured in merely years. This metamorphosis transpired in a cocoon spun with Buddhist, Taoist, and Manichaeian strands. From it emerged an ideology with a view of salvation which is truly millenarian.

The millenarian nature of this ideology may be seen by its close approximation to the criteria set forth by Cohn. Cohn's first criterion is that salvation must be open to the faithful as a group. It is quite evident that the members of the White Lotus Society, Lao-mu's children, would be the

object of her salvation. However, it was their duty to open the doors of salvation to everyone so that all might become aware of Lao-mu's love for her children. Therefore, the members were actively involved in public evangelism and composing and distributing their texts. Since membership in the society was the only visible sign of awareness of Lao-mu's love, it was necessary that admittance to the society be of easy access. When a new member wished to join the society, all that was required was that he or she be prepared to abstain from wine, become a vegetarian and participate in the rituals of the society. Then, upon showing his or her sincerity, she or he was recommended by a member to the leader, who, through divine inspiration, allowed him or her to pay the necessary membership fee. Thus, all who sincerely believed, as members of the White Lotus, could participate in this millenarian salvation.

Secondly, salvation must occur on earth. In the case of the White Lotus, the salvation drama unfolded in China. There, the home of Lao-mu's children, Maitreya would come to establish his kingdom of peace on earth, and there the battle between the forces of right (the White Lotus) and those who did not believe, would take place. Then, victorious, the White Lotus would witness the legitimate emperor assume the Chinese throne⁹ and the society would participate in the earthly paradise which would materialize.

Thirdly, the society must be inspired by the knowledge that salvation is imminent. The White Lotus knew that Maitreya

was about to arrive for the dispensation of Sakyamuni was at an end and the deterioration of the quality of life, which marked that time, was evident to all. Soon the rule of Maitreya would be established. The society had been waiting in readiness for what must be done; now they would act.

Fourthly, through its actions, the world must be totally transformed. In support of Maitreya, the society would destroy all that was known before. Now, with the coming of the new age, men and women would live longer, there would be peace and all humanity's needs would be satisfied without effort. Old categories would no longer apply, even time classifications would be radically altered.

Finally, while the White Lotus was militantly involved in bringing about the new age, it must be through the mediation of supernatural beings that this age would be achieved. Lao-mu, because of her compassion for her children, would establish the new age and make their salvation possible. She would send Maitreya to earth to liberate her children. In this endeavour, he would be aided by the leaders of the society who maintain a special relationship with the divine. In this way, the members of the White Lotus knew that their activities were divinely inspired and, therefore, were bound to succeed. While the question of what might have been is difficult to decide, it seems reasonable to assume that without belief in Maitreya and Lao-mu and their participation in the culmination of world history, the White Lotus would not have been millenarianly active.

In conclusion, it is only natural that a sect such as the White Lotus should often find itself involved in the act of establishing the millennium. The very belief in its imminence implies that believers would always be in a constant state of readiness and preparation. But more importantly, expectations of this nature would always be on hand to support claims that the millenarian event was actually beginning. Since each member's salvation was intimately connected with his or her participation in that event, every apparent Maitreya was quick to find a following.

Footnotes

1 See C.K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970).

2 For a description see Daniel Overmeyer's thesis, "Folk Buddhist Sects: A Structure in the History of Chinese Religions", Ph.D. Chicago, 1971, pp. 173-176. and P. Pelliot, "Les Secte du Lotus Blanc et la Secte du Nuage Blanc", in Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 11 (1903), pp. 311ff.

3 See Chapter Two, p. 39; note the same description is applied to the White Cloud, White Lotus and Manichaeans.

4 For a description of the Lo Society see J.J.M. DeGroot, Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China (Taipei, Taiwan: Literature House Ltd., 1963), Chapter VII and Overmeyer, Thesis, pp. 176-198.

5 For the part related to the White Lotus and White Cloud Societies see DeGroot, p. 137, and for the Lo Society see DeGroot, pp. 146-147.

6 To rescue one of their leaders; see Overmeyer, Thesis, pp. 190-193 for a description of the revolt.

7 Huang Yu-pien, P'o-hsieh hsiang-pien (Detailed Refutation of Heresies), chuan 2, p. 7a, in Ibid., p. 194.

8 One may go so far as to say that the only other society of this kind is the T'ai-ping.

9 Either Maitreya, their leader or perhaps the descendent of the previous dynasty.

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