

A STUDY OF THE YIGUAN DAO (UNITY SECT) AND ITS
DEVELOPMENT IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of an important and widely adhered to sectarian religion in Peninsular Malaysia originating from Taiwan (and Hong Kong), namely the Unity Sect (Yiguan Dao). It is a lay voluntary religious organization of congregational character, with its own worship centres, organizational structure, rituals, and interpretation of both canonical and spirit-writing texts. The sect places much emphasis on the rehabilitation of morality in response to the degeneration of human behaviour; cultivation of morality constitutes one of the major remedies suggested by the sect. Nonetheless, it remains largely unknown to the general public and is faced with continuous verbal and written attacks, and was (and still is) accused by its opponents as a 'heretical' sect. Notwithstanding this, the sect has continued to progress with its proselytism at an even greater rate in the last two decades. To date, there is still no systematic study of the Yiguan Dao in Peninsular Malaysia, especially its recent development. It is the objective of this dissertation to provide a detailed description and analysis of the sect's organization, teachings, and rituals, to help the public understand better what the sect in actuality teaches, and how its rituals are conducted. Most importantly, based on first-hand research data, this study helps to draw the reader nearer to the real picture behind the success of the Unity Sect which is based on the strong religious convictions of its members. This study also discusses the ongoing institutionalization and intellectualization process of the sect in Taiwan and its implications for the sect's future development. In the concluding chapter, a further examination is carried out concerning the success of the sect's proselytism in the Peninsula from the perspectives of cultural and ethnic identities. The question of the Unity Sect's 'globalization' is also discussed in this chapter.

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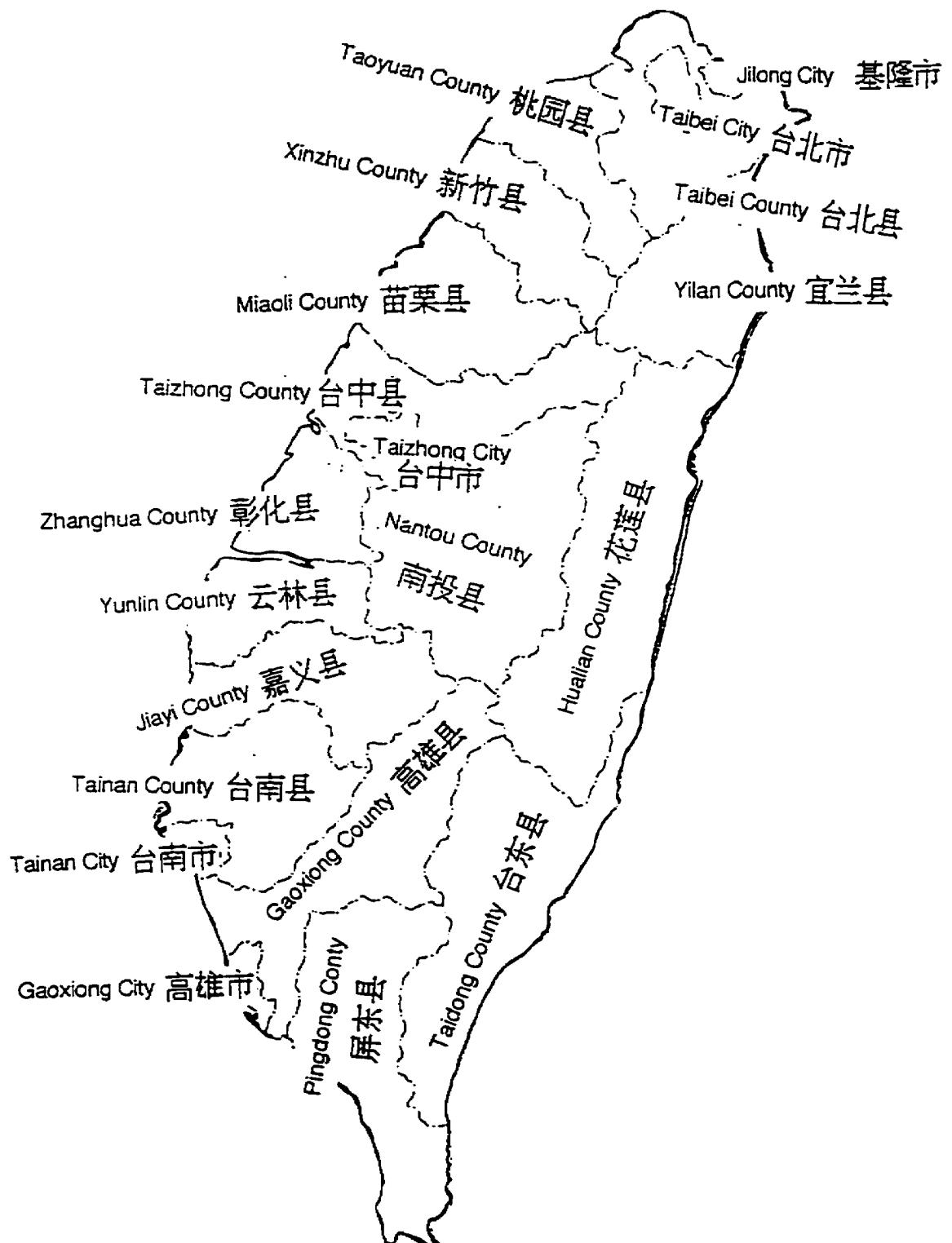
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Map of Peninsular Malaysia



MAP OF TAIWAN

Chapter 1

Introduction

This is a study of the history of the Unity Sect (Yiguan Dao 一貫道), a Chinese religious organization, with a substantial and growing membership, in Peninsular Malaysia. The sect is a lay voluntary religious organization of congregational character, with its own worship centers, organizational structure, rituals, and interpretation of both canonical and spirit-writing texts. The sect originates in China. It was judged to be heterodox and was proscribed during the Nationalist period and after 1949 in China. It continued to exist, even flourish, in Taiwan after 1949, but was an illegal organization until 1987. It developed in Hong Kong from the 1950s, but retained a low public profile. It first appeared in Peninsular Malaysia in the late 1940s, but its major growth has occurred only within the last two decades.

This dissertation covers both the history of the Unity Sect, and its contemporary development, especially in Peninsular Malaysia. It is therefore organized in two broad segments. In the first, I shall explore the origin and development of the Unity Sect in China, and its expansion to Hong Kong and Taiwan. I shall further discuss the organizational structure and theological aspects of the sect.

In the second segment, I shall explore the expansion of the Unity Sect to Southeast Asia. The study focuses on the sect's proselytism in Peninsular Malaysia, especially its development in the past two decades, based mainly on ethnographic observation. The history of competition and conflict between the sect

and Chinese Buddhist groups will be described with references to two major anti Unity Sect incidents that occurred in 1981 and 1993, indicating underlying unresolved tensions between the two opponents that require some sort of 'clearing and 'channeling' (*shudao* 流導). That the Unity Sect's development in the last two decades is made the focus of discussion in this study is mainly due to the fact that beginning from the middle of 1970s, the sect became an aggressively evangelistic organization, in contrast to the low public profile it had assumed in early decades. This vigorous advance in proselytism was closely related to its success in recruiting young members. The proselytizing zeal of these young adherents in turn increased the sect's share of membership of the Chinese religious organizations. This part of the study was hitherto unexplored and hence constitutes one of the main contributions of the dissertation.

Although I am a historian of religions by profession, it is my view that the approaches of anthropology, history, and textual studies should be applied here together. In this way a multifaceted view of this important sectarian movement, representing a living religious tradition in its own right, can be preserved. Textual studies based on liturgical texts used, and the spirit-writing texts, help to demonstrate the values and doctrinal sentiments shared by all sect members. Data gathered from the questionnaires, interviews, participation observation have enhanced my understanding of this sect and its contemporary development from an emic viewpoint. The two parts complement each other, and help to convey a deeper understanding of the Unity Sect in general, and its proselytism within the framework of the multiethnic society of Peninsular Malaysia in particular. That Confucianism is made the social matrix of sectarianism is a well known fact to scholars of Chinese religions. The Unity Sect's incorporation of Confucian values

into its doctrine is but a continuation of this sectarian tradition. An analysis of the Unity Sect's incorporations of the *Analect* illustrates clearly the approach used by the sect in revealing 'mind-dharma' or the 'hidden meanings' concealed in this Confucian classic. Nevertheless, this approach of proselytizing the sect through canonical texts study is strongly opposed by hard liners within the Sun-ist faction. I therefore discuss the implication of the process of "Confucianization" in the Unity Sect's recent development.

I further examined the success of the Unity Sect's proselytism in the Peninsula from the perspectives of cultural and ethnic identities. I touch on the current trends of the sect's globalization and its future outlook. It is hoped that the discussions at the end of my study will provide a clear picture of the sect's ongoing theological and organizational development.

Approaches

The first part of the dissertation is about the origin of the Unity Sect in China, and its development in Taiwan. This part of the study is therefore based primarily on textual materials, books and magazines published recently by the sect, and references to academic studies published by scholars in the related fields.

Being a historian of religions, I believe that the textual approach serve best the purpose of 'reconstructing' the history of origin and the teachings of the Unity Sect that remained largely unknown to the public due to its proscribed status, and bitter experiences resulted from ceaseless religious persecutions by the authorities

in the past.

In writing the history and teachings of the Unity Sect, the following sources have been used: (1) tracts and scriptures produced by the sect through the medium of spirit-writing (*fufu* 扶乩), such as *Precious Raft of the White Yang Epoch* (BYBF), *Ten Admonishments from Imperial Mother to Her Children* (HMXZ), and *A Discussion of Moral Trials* (TKL), (2) ‘precious volumes’ (*baojuan* 宝卷) published by sectarian groups namely, *The Precious Volume Concerning Maitreya Appearing Out of the West, the Ancient Buddha Who is About to Descend to be Reborn* (GDXMC) and *The Venerated Sutra in Which the Buddha Speaks of the Ancient Buddha Maitreya* (FMGZ), and (3) lecture notes [printed in the form of text books] prepared for various levels of classes in sectarian education. Textual studies, in this respect, shed light on the underlying links that bind the Unity Sect together with the larger sectarian tradition in China. Findings from these textual studies therefore indicate historical sources that contribute towards shaping theological and organizational structure of this religious movement today.

Recent publications by the sect including: (1) books authored by sect members such as: Su Mingdong (1983), Jiang Guosheng (1992a, 1992b), Li Yuzhu (1988), Jing Liang (1991) and others, (2) books composed and published by the Unity Sect organizations, such as: *Long Lasting Yet Full of Vigor, Sixty Years of Yiguan Dao: Prospect and Retrospect* (LJMX), *A Brief Introduction to Yiguan Dao* (YGJJ), *Handbook of the Unity Sect's Junior Cadres* (YDRS), (3) commemorative magazines issued by local Unity Sect's *Fotang* on special occasions, and (4) magazines published respectively by the Free China I Kuan Tao Association (FCIA), and branches and sub-branches of the Unity Sect on the regular basis, are

also referred to. The former account for the sect's history and theological aspects discussed from the emic point of view. While the latter carry news regarding important announcements made by the FCIA, and the current activities held by members of FCIA in general. Those published by individual branches and sub-branches concentrate on news and activities announced by their own groups. These magazines are meant for internal circulation, and are hence extremely difficult to have access to them.

Books and articles based on academic studies published by scholars in the related fields also constituted important references to this study. Among them, works by Li Shiyu (1948), Marjorie Topley (1954, 1956, 1957, 1963), Overmyer (1976, 1981, 1988, forthcoming), Jordan and Overmyer (1986), Song Guangyu (1981, 1983, 1996), Richard Shek (1986), Dong Fangyuan (1983), Lin Rongze (1993, 1994), Zheng Zhiming (1985, 1990), Meir Shahar (1992, 1994), and Philip Clart (1995, 1995/96) are of particular relevant to my study.

The second part of the study focuses on the case-example of the sect's expansion and its development in the last two decades particularly in Peninsular Malaysia. This segment of the dissertation is based mainly on ethnographic observation and findings from the questionnaires.

As a consequence of protective measures taken by sect organizations, it was not easy to interview members of the different organizations. A questionnaire containing twenty-two questions was created and administered to members of the sect throughout the Peninsula to obtain information from as wide a population as possible. My special request that a fair distribution of questionnaires be answered

by members from all levels (from ordinary sect members to sect leaders such as shrine masters and initiators) was granted, and was largely followed by participating sect organizations. A total of 1,000 sets of questionnaires were sent out, with concentration on the cities of Kuala Lumpur, Seremban, Malacca and Johore. A total of 513 sets or 51.3% of the questionnaires came back to me, some of which only reached me after I called several times to plead for cooperation. This sample provides useful background information with a fairly balanced sex ratio of 274 or 53.41% males compared to that of 239 or 46.59% females.

During my field studies on the Peninsula (January to March 1996, and also July 1996), I managed to develop more personal contacts, which enabled me to arrange small group dialogues with several branches. I also conducted personal interviews with sect members involved in manufacturing and/or supplying vegetarian food products, and in the running of vegetarian restaurants. The driving forces behind this line of business are many. The one that really moved me was the willingness of some sect members to completely change their established business in order to avoid taking life (*bu shasheng* 不杀生) and turning to new vegetarian ventures. These findings led to information that supplement that from the questionnaires.

As for cases of antagonism faced by the sect from non-sect members and Buddhist associations in the Peninsula, they remain a 'taboo' to many of the sect leaders. Research on this issue therefore required a different approach. To begin with, I conducted library research in order to look for relevant reports from local newspapers and magazines. Putting this information together caused me much trouble, since these reports are usually fragmented and are, in many instances,

written with the reporters' added moral judgments. I tried, as far as possible, to get the parties involved to respond to these reports. I also conducted personal interviews with sect leaders to help fill the 'missing gaps' in these reports and to verify certain facts.

In short, in studying historical and theological aspects of the Unity Sect, I used the textual approaches following the tradition of historian of religions. Notwithstanding this, I depart from this tradition by extending the analysis of the texts to observational materials that I gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Combination of these approaches used thus produced a multifaceted study of the sect in a way distinctive from conventional approaches.

Chapter organization

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Chapter one, Introduction, describes in brief the origin and nature of this lay voluntary sectarian group and its expansion to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Peninsular Malaysia. Besides, approaches, source of references used, and the division of chapters are also included in this chapter.

Chapter two surveys from a historical perspective the origin and development of the Unity Sect in China and its spread to Hong Kong and Taiwan. Emphasis is given to the development of the sect in Taiwan due to the fact that there is where the majority of the sect's *Fotang* 佛堂 ('Buddha halls') in Peninsular Malaysia originated.

Chapter three explores the important facet of the sect's organization, teachings and rituals. It serves to better our understanding on the nature of the sect, its functioning and the changes it underwent over the years to suit the current situation of the modern world.

Chapter four and five constituted the major contribution of this study focusing on the example of the sect's expansion in the Peninsula and its development during the last two decades. Chapter four begins with a general survey of the percentage distribution of population by religion and ethnic groups in Malaysia. This is followed by description on the stages of its development, with Topley's pioneering study on the history of the Former Heaven Sect in Malaya and Singapore as a starting point. The history of competition and conflict with Chinese Buddhist groups will also be described with references to two major anti-Unity Sect incidents that occurred in 1981 and 1993.

Chapter five continues to focus on this case study by presenting findings from questionnaires and personal interviews in the form of statistical analyses. It also touches on the sect's quest of political patronage, and the inclination of religious alternative among the youngsters in the Peninsula based on comparison of the membership compositions of the two church-like lay voluntary religious organizations namely, the Unity Sect and the Nichiren Shoshu of Malaysia (NSM). Three major groups of this religious movement in the Peninsula are made case study to exemplify different styles of management under the leadership of their respective elders/initiators.

Chapter six discusses the cultivation of morality as one of the major remedies suggested by the sect in response to the degeneration of traditional moral values. The practice of incorporating catalogues of Confucian values such as: the 'eight virtues' (*bade* 八德), the 'three cardinal guides' (*sangang* 三纲), and the 'four bonds' (*siwei* 四维), into its teachings is called by the Fayi Chongde 发一崇德 sub-branch as "Confucianizing the religion" (*zongjiao Rujiahua* 宗教儒家化).¹ Resistance from the other camp of the Sun-ist faction, as the result of Confucianization that goes along with the ongoing institutionalizing process of the sect, are analyzed here with alternative explanations.

Chapter seven further examines the success of the Unity Sect's proselytism in Peninsular Malaysia from the perspectives of cultural and ethnic identities. Besides, current trends of the sect's globalization and its future outlook are also discussed in this chapter.

It is the modest attempt of this study to fill the gap and the need for a systematic and comprehensive explorations of the Unity Sect from an academic perspective, particularly its recent development in Peninsular Malaysia. It is also hoped that this study will serve to better the understanding of the sect in Malaysia and contribute to the maintaining of religious harmony in the country.

¹ Cf. CDZG (1994: 28).

Chapter 2

From mainland China to Taiwan: history and development of the Unity Sect

The ‘celestial mandate’ and the Unity patriarchate

Like many earlier Chinese sectarians, the Unity Sect traces its history back to the period of remote antiquity. This is coupled with its theological foundation based on the unique legitimacy of its ‘celestial mandate’ (*tianming 天命*) and the transmission of the ‘mind-dharma’ (*xinfa 心法*),² handed down through the line of apostolic succession (cf. Jordan and Overmyer 1986:213). According to the sect’s teaching, the ‘mind-dharma’ has, for centuries, been transmitted from patriarch to patriarch (*zu zu xiangchuan 祖祖相传*), who ultimately have received the ‘celestial mandate’ from the personified primordial force of the cosmos, called the Eternal Mother (*Wusheng Laomu 无生老母*).

The line of succession extends way back to the remote antiquity with cultural heroes and historical rulers constituting the Eighteen Eastern Patriarchs (*Dongfang*

² By ‘mind-dharma’ is meant the transmission of teaching directly from the master’s mind to that of the disciple. The concept originated from the intuitive school of Chan Buddhism, claimed to have been established by Chan Master Huineng 慧能 in Tang dynasty, which does not rely on texts or writings, but on personal communication of its tenets. (cf. Soothill and Hodous 1982: 351)

shiba dai 东方十八代) of the first period.³ The Twenty-eight Western Patriarchs (*Xifang ershiba dai* 西方二十八代) of the second period consists of twenty-eight Indian Patriarchs, which begin with Mahakasyapa and end with Bodhidharma (cf. YGJJ [1988:23], Hisao Inagaki 1991: Appendix G). The Later Eighteen Eastern Patriarchs (*Dongfang hou shiba dai* 东方后十八代) of the third period begin with Bodhidharma, including the six patriarchs of the *chan* 禅(Zen) Buddhism, and end with Zhang Tianran 张天然 and Sun Suzhen 孙素真.⁴

Song Guangyu (1983:101) has pointed out that, from the viewpoint of historical studies, the above apostolic succession (*daotong* 道统) of the Unity Sect is a “false history” (*jia lishi* 假历史) for it contains many factual errors. Song, nevertheless, holds that the [errors] in the first two periods down to the sixth

3 As far as the eighteen Eastern Patriarchs of the first period are concerned, there are slight variations among the list provided by Song Guangyu (1983:97-98), Jordan and Overmyer (1986:289-290), and that found in the booklet entitled *Yiguan Dao Jianjie* <一貫道简介> [YGJJ] (A brief introduction to the Unity Sect) [1988:23] published by the Free China I Kuan Tao Association (中华民国一貫道总会 Zhonghua Minguo Yiguan Dao Zonghui). YGJJ's version begins with Fuxi 伏羲. Song's begins with Pan Gu 盘古. Jordan and Overmyer's also begins with Pan Gu, but note that Pan Gu is sometimes omitted. Besides, other than some minor variations in between, all three versions end with Mengzi 孟子 as the eighteenth patriarch of this period.

4 The fact that Bodhidharma doubled as the twenty-eighth patriarch of period two and the first patriarch of the third period has been explained as *laoshui huanchao* 老水还潮 ('the return of old water to the tide'), meaning the turning point which denotes "the return of the 'celestial mandate' back to China from the west [=India (cf. Soothill and Hodous 1982:222)]". On the question of Zhang and Sun sharing the 'celestial mandate' (*gongling tianming* 共领天命) and hence coexisting as the eighteenth patriarch of the third period, there are controversies between the 'Sun-ist' and the 'Liu-ist' factions. Both factions, however, deny that there can be any patriarchs after Zhang (cf. Jordan and Overmyer 1986:218-219). I shall return to this question in the later part of this chapter.

patriarch of period three, are the result of contests and struggles among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.⁵ He further pointed out that the *de facto* history of the Unity Sect should begin from Huang Dehui 黃德輝 (1624-1690), down to Zhang Tianran (1889-1947). This suggestion coincides with the fact generally accepted by Taiwanese scholars and the sect leaders as well that the 'Way of Prior Heaven' (Xiantian Dao 先天道) is the predecessor of the Unity Sect.⁶ Based on this understanding, Huang Dehui, founder of the 'Way of Prior Heaven', is honoured as the Unity Sect's ninth patriarch of the third period. Its "real history", to quote Song, henceforth also begins from Huang.

Although Yao Hetian 姚鶴天, the fourteenth patriarch, is the first patriarch claimed exclusively by the Unity Sect,⁷ we do not know much about him. It is Wang Jueyi 王覺一 (ca. 1821-1884), the fifteenth patriarch, who attracted particular attention from scholars studying the modern history of the Unity Sect. Ma Xisha 馬西沙 and Han Bingfang 韩秉方 (1992: 1161), for example, described Wang as "one who was fond of propagating the purport of oneness pervading in the three

5 Song Guangyu does not provide a satisfactory explanation to this question. Instead, he moves on to the discussion of conflicts and contests between Buddhism and Daoism during the Eastern Jin 东晋 period (317-420), when each tried to surpass the other by wantonly making up stories rather than basing their reasoning on historical facts (1983:102). By so doing, I think Song tries to imply that such practices are conventional, and the Unity Sect is no exception.

6 See Song Guangyu (1983:104, 1996:6), Lin Wanchuan 林万传 (1986:186), Wang Jianchua 王见川 (1996:201), Jin Liang 金梁 (1992:45-46).

7 Recent research by Wang Jianchuan (1996:113-114) pointed out that until the time of the seventeenth patriarch Lu Zhongyi 路中一, Lin Jinmi 林金秘 was recognized as the fourteenth patriarch. It was Zhang Tianran who replaced him with Yao Hetian. If Wang is correct, then the Unity Sect's exclusive line of patriarchs should only begin with the fifteenth patriarch Wang Jueyi.

religions (*sanjiao yiguan zhi zhi* 三教一貫之旨) ... a prolific writer and compiler of books, the profundity of his theological inquiry can hardly be matched by others". Lin Wanchuan (1986:1: 190-193), on the other hand, stresses the great influence he had upon the Unity Sect, especially his reformatory changes in theological and ritualistic aspects of the 'Way of Prior Heaven'.⁸ Both Song (1983:104) and Lin (1986:1:188) have even given Wang Jueyi the credit of having been "the actual initiator (*zhenzheng chuangshi zhe* 真正创始者) of the Unity Sect".⁹

Notwithstanding this, we should bear in mind the fact that the practice of borrowing and adopting each other's teaching and ritualistic aspects was a common phenomenon in the history of Chinese sectarianism, reaching back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although Wang's reformatory acts and his many writings might have inspired Zhang Tianran more than those of other predecessors, the fact that Zhang gave the Unity Sect its present shape is undeniable. As evidence for this the following two observations can be adduced: (1) Zhang's

⁸ According to Lin Wanchuan, Wang changed the idea of 'Universal salvation of the three periods' (*sanqi pudu* 三期普度), preached by the 'Way of Prior Heaven', to that of 'Universal salvation for the three realms' (*sancao pudu* 三曹普度) which extends the promise of salvation to the three realms of celestial beings, sentient beings in this world, and the beings of the underworld. He added to its initiation ritual the dotting of the aperture by hand (*yizhi chan* 一指禪), while abolishing the strict regulations imposed upon its members regarding vegetarian diet and sexual abstinence. Song (1996:48), however, pointed out that the strict regulations on food and sex mentioned above persisted, and were only removed by Zhang from 1930 on.

⁹ Kubo Noritada in his article "Ikkando ni tsuite" (On the Unity Sect) [1953:186-187] holds that Wang is but initiator of a faction (*par* 派), and should not be taken as the founding patriarch of the Unity Sect, the main reason being that the last act of salvation [based on the three-stage time scheme], which is fundamental to the Unity Sect, cannot be found in Wang's works. Kubo continues to hold this view to this day. (See his "preface" to Wang Jianchuan's book [1996:54])

authorship of a liturgical text entitled *Zanding Fogui* 〈暂订佛规〉 [ZDFG] (Provisional revised Buddhist regulations, published in 1939) provides, to this date, the still authoritative guidelines for Unity Sect's etiquette and ritualistic practices. (2) Also, we are told that Zhang had been left with practically nothing to start with by the time he 'succeeded' to the position of the sect's eighteenth patriarch of the third period in 1930.¹⁰

Viewed from this angle, Philip Clart's (1996a:2) description of the Unity Sect as "both a new and an old religion" aptly recounts the new breath brought into the sect by Zhang from 1930 on, while acknowledging the common features it shared with other Chinese sectarians as a result of its historical background.¹¹ It is at this point that the modern Unity Sect of today begins to take shape. The discussion of its modern history in this chapter will, therefore, focus on Zhang.

10 According to Song Guangyu (1983:121-122), there are various versions told regarding the succession of Zhang to the patriarchate. The common points among these varied versions are: (1) After Lu's death, Zhang had his patriarchate claimed through spirit-writing (*fujii* 扶乩). The other seven major disciples of Lu Zhongyi, however, refused to accept his claim. Lu's sister, *Lao gu nainai* 老姑奶奶, being a compromise figure, succeeded her brother in leading the sect. (2) Zhang, who failed to realize his claim, was ultimately forced to leave his hometown Jining. He was said to have 'started anew the realm of the Way' (*chongxin lingli daopan* 重新另立道盤) [meaning 'to initiate a new sect'] in Jinan 济南, the capital city of Shandong Province, after successfully converting his adopted younger brother (*yidi* 义弟) Su Zhizhen 宿志真, and his sworn brother Li Hongchen 李鸿臣.

11 Jordan and Overmyer's (1986:216) description that "the Unity Sect is a modern manifestation of the sixteenth-century sectarian tradition ...", also arrived at the same conclusion concerning the founding of the sect as an independent organization only by the time of Zhang's leadership.

Patriarch Zhang and the modern Unity Sect

Patriarch Zhang's original name was Kuisheng 奎生. His style name (*zi* 字) was Guangbi 光璧, while Tianran was his religious name (*daohao* 道号). He was born in 1889 in Jining 济宁, Shandong Province. He is said to be the incarnation of Jigong, the Living Buddha 济公活佛. According to Jordan (1982:442), at the age of nineteen, Zhang was married to a woman named Zhu, who died in childbirth the following year, leaving a daughter. A few years later he married again, to a woman named Liu, referred to this day by the Liu-ist faction of the Unity Sect named Zhengyi Fudao Hui 正义辅导会 [hereafter abbreviate as Zhengyi branch] (the 'Society for Supporting and Guiding by Correct Principles') as 'Mistress Liu' (*Liu shimu* 刘师母).

Zhang took a second wife named Sun Suzhen in 1930,¹² purportedly on celestial orders. Madame Sun's religious name is Huiming 慧明, and she is said to be the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Yuehui. She is "reputed to have possessed significant organizational skills in her own right and was apparently universally liked" (Jordan 1982:443) so that to this day, she is addressed by the Sun-ist faction [which constitutes the sect's main stream in Taiwan and overseas] as 'mistress' (*shimu*) of the sect. The Sun-ist faction insisted on the claim that she had come to share Zhang's 'celestial mandate' with him, which was denied by the Liu-ists. Notwithstanding this, Madame Sun's position as "mistress" was so established that Yuehui Pusa 月慧菩薩 [the Moon Goddess Bodhisattva from whom she claimed to

¹² Jordan's earlier sources suggest the marriage happened in year 1936 or 1934. Song(1983:122), who follows the sect's internal source, fixes the year as 1930.

be incarnated] “became an object of adoration in daily rites” by the time Zhang published his liturgical text of ZDFG in 1939. (cf. Jordan and Overmyer 1986:218)

When Zhang Tianran died in 1947, he did not leave a well-ordered organization behind him. Struggle between the Liu-ist and Sun-ist factions to control his sectarian empire soon broke out openly. Apparently, Madame Liu's faction was far less powerful. One observed that it did not take Madame Sun long time to take over most of Zhang's organization, and to have its loyalties successfully transferred to herself. Records from YGJJ (1988:81) shows that Sun began conducting a series of 'repentance classes' (*chanhui ban* 恒悔班) the year after Zhang's death (1948). Beginning from Chengdu, these classes rotated nationwide to Chongqing, Hankou, Beiping, Tianjin, Nanjing, Shanghai and other cities. With the exception of the ten *daozhang* ('Masters of the Way'), all disciples of Zhang who vowed to follow Sun in 'cultivating the Way' (*xiudao*) were required to participate in the five-days 'repentance class'. Only after 'purifying' themselves through these classes were they qualified to 'connecting the golden thread' (*jie jinxian* 接金线) [meaning pledging their royalty] to the 'mistress'. Wu Jingyu 吴静宇 (1991:158), in a recent publication noted that those who refused to submit to Sun's leadership at that time were the Liu-ists.

The sudden death of a charismatic leader like Zhang resulted in the immediate 'break-up' of the sect. The sect's organizational structure contributed (and still contributes) to these divisive tendencies. Even during Zhang's life, the Unity Sect was but a loosely connected entity made up of factions gathered under one common label. These factions had long persisted in the form of branches (*zu*

组) and sub-branches (*xian* 线), each headed by its respective 'Elder' (*qianren* 前人). The fact that they showed their respect and devotion to Patriarch Zhang allowed them to share in Zhang's 'celestial mandate'. This was done through his control of appointments to the various posts of sectarian ranking. To a certain extent, the monopoly of such mandatory authorization contributed towards the unification of all factions [that recognized his authority] using the name of Unity Sect. Bearing this characteristic in mind, it is to be expected that an entity of such nature is after all not unitary, and can easily be disrupted.

In recent years, numerous publications by the Unity Sect itself have supposedly eased the job of scholars who studied on this subject. However, due to the factional nature of the sect, the contents of these publications are not without bias. For example, the overwhelming accessibility of Sun-ist's version of publications on the sect's history have totally left out Madame Liu and the Liu-ist's faction. Stories told by Zhengyi-branch leaders, on the other hand, aim at discrediting the Sun-ist faction, particularly the authority of Madame Sun as mistress of the sect. Lack of records on the early history of the sect makes it difficult, and even impossible, to judge the accuracy of stories told by both parties. Thanks to the scholarly studies done by Jordan (1982), Song (1983), and Jordan & Overmyer (1986), we can at least be sure of one thing, namely, that conflicts among these factions are, more often than not, due to disagreement on the questions of sectarian leadership and the interests connected therewith. The major disputes between Liu-ist and Sun-ist factions over the question of whether Zhang's or Madame Sun's name should be used in the initiation documents are good examples.

History and development of the Unity Sect in mainland China

As mentioned earlier (see footnote 4), besides facing a challenge to his legitimacy claim to the sect's patriarchate, Zhang Tianran seemed to have encountered with another crisis of confidence when he married Madame Sun.¹³ Nonetheless, Zhang's charismatic leadership qualities helped weather all these disturbances. Beginning with nothing in the year of 1930, Zhang had, with the help of Li Hongchen [who was the head of Shandong "Bureau of Salt Management" (*yanwu juzhang* 盐务局长) at that time] and other friends, successfully established his first base of propagation in Ji'nan, the capital city of Shandong province.¹⁴ According to the book entitled *Lijiu Mixin: Yiguan Dao Liushi Nian Lai De Huigu Yu Qianzhan* <历久弥新：一贯道六十年来的回顾与前瞻> (LJMX) [Long lasting yet full of vigour: Sixty years of Unity Sect in prospect and retrospect] (1990:32-33), the period between 1930 to 1936 is categorized as the sect's 'newly established period' (*chuchuang shiqi* 初创时期). Five *Fotang* were set up in 1931, in the east, west, north, south, and the centre of Ji'nan city. Zhang himself was stationed at the *Fotang* located in the "Hall of Lofty Splendour" (Chonghua Tang 崇华堂). The sphere of its proselytization at that time was centered mainly in Shandong and Hebei provinces, and also several big cities outside these provinces. From among those earliest disciples appointed as sect leaders, five later became Zhang's ten 'apostles' (carrying the title of *daozhang* 道长). They were: Hu Guijin 胡贵金, Su Zhizhen (in charge of the west *Fotang*), Li Hongchen (in charge of the east *Fotang*),

¹³ Sources from the sect described this marriage as 'merely husband and wife in name', instructed by Patriarch Lu through spirit-writing revelation. It aimed to "achieve equality between men and women, henceforth ensuring humankind's deliverance of both sexes in this pressing age of the last act of salvation" (cf. Li 1948:49, Song 1983: 122).

¹⁴ Cf. Song 1983: 122-123.

Xu Hengpu 徐衡浦 (in charge of the south *Fotang*), Qi Mingzhou 齐鸣周 (in charge of the north *Fotang*), and Dong Yuquan 董玉泉.¹⁵

By 1934, Zhang began his propagation in Tianjin city. His mission there began to bear fruit after he had successfully converted Sun Xikun 孙锡坤 (d. 1953) in the following year. Sun was the president of a Chinese martial arts association called Daode Wuxue She 道德武学社 (the 'Morality Society for the Study of Martial Arts'). The association was combined with a planchette (*faji*) divination hall, set up on its premises (cf. Jordan 1982:444, Zhang Defu 1992:83). After Sun and all his disciples were converted to Unity Sect, the planchette hall was turned into the Unity Sect's first *Fotang* in Tianjin, named the Daode Tan 道德坛 ('the Shrine of Morality'). Sun Xikun was later to become one of the Zhang's ten 'apostles'.

Beginning with Sun's shrine as a starting point, Tianjin city had over the years developed to become the Unity Sect's major proselytizing base in the north. In 1937, Hu Guijin was summoned by Zhang to take over the leadership in Tianjin. The city had more than a hundred *Fotang* and a total of over one hundred 'initiators' by 1949.¹⁶ In fact, many of the sect's leaders from Tianjin later took the responsibility of proselytizing for the sect to various part of China. For examples: Feng Yueqian 冯月千, Zhang Baojing 张保经, Pan Hualing 潘华龄 and others spread it to Shanghai between 1939 and 1940. Zhang Wucheng 张武成, Qu

15 See Jiang (1992a:265) for the names of Zhang's ten 'apostles' (*shi da daozihang*). By 'apostles', I mean the intimate and well trusted comrades of Patriarch Zhang. I borrow this usage from Jordan (1982:444). Strictly speaking, only 9 of them were appointed by Zhang to the sectarian post of *daozihang* or 'master of the Way'. The last one, namely Pan Hualing, was appointed by 'mistress' Sun in ca. 1948.

16 See LJMX [1990:34].

Hongru 邱鴻儒, Sheng Kaobin 盛考斌, Guo Hairun 郭海潤, Yan Buli 严不理 and others brought it to the north-eastern part of China, especially the provincial capital city of Harbin during the years between 1937 to 1940. Zhang Wenyun 張文運, Han Yulin 韩雨霖, Jin Baozhang 金寶璋, Chen Yaoju 陳耀菊, Niu Congde 牛从德, Zhao Futing 赵輔庭 and others spread it to Taiwan ca. 1946 to 1949. All these people were summoned to evangelize out of Tianjin (cf. Song 1983: Appendix 9, LJMX 1990:34). Hence, Lin Rongzhe's (1993:8) statement that "almost eighty to ninety percent of the Unity Sect's [branches that] advanced from then on, owe their origins to Tianjin", clearly illustrates this fact.

The period from 1937 to Zhang's death in 1947 is categorized by the LJMX as the 'period of development' (*kaizhan shiqi* 开展时期). During this period, two important works were promulgated. The Unity Sect's liturgical and etiquette guide book, *Zhanding Fogui* [ZDFG] (Provisional revised Buddhist regulations) authored by Zhang Tianran, was first published in 1939. The catechism entitled *Yiguan Dao Yiwen Jieda* <一貫道疑問解答> [YYJD] (Answers to doubts and questions concerning the Unity Sect) was first published in 1937. It contains two parts (*juan* 卷) with answers to a total of 120 questions. As pointed out by Li Shiyu (1948:104), this is a comprehensive guide book providing a clear and thorough basic understanding of the sect for its readers. Meanwhile, the sect experienced a swift development which covered almost the whole nation. From Shandong and Hebei, it spread to north China, northeast China, Hubei and Hunan Provinces (*huazhong* 华中), including the city of Shanghai. It also spread to the northwest, and the southern part of China (LJMX 1990:32).

Regarding its rapid increase in influence among both the urban and the rural populace after 1937, Deliusin (1972:231) writes:

[It] seems to have had two causes. First, the war aggravated the already difficult situation of China's urban and rural poor to the point where they saw no solution to their problems short of the intervention of a miraculous, supernatural force. Ready to grasp at anything that was offered, they took the dim torch of the I Kuan Tao [=Yiguan Dao, Unity Sect] for a beacon of home.

Second, there was the fact of the society's ties with the Japanese occupation forces. Its founder, Chang T'ien jan [=Zhang Tianran], held a high post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Wang Ching-wei's 汪精卫 puppet government in Nanking, and some of its branch leaders held positions at the provincial and hsien levels.¹⁷

Jordan and Overmyer (1986:216-217), however, pointed out that Zhang "had to do much of his organizing under the Japanese" because his movement "had been centered in North China." The fact that Zhang's movement managed to attract a number of notables in Wang's Nanjing puppet regime [founded in 1940] "enabled him to gain a low-level post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and thus a passport for internal travel... [and] was able to shield itself [= the Unity Sect] against some of the disruption of the war years in Japanese areas." As a result of this, the Unity Sect

17 Both Jordan and Song report Zhang's relationship with various notables of Wang's puppet regime in Nanjing. Jordan's version showed that Zhang himself paid Li Lijiu 李丽久 [a sect member who then became important personage in Shanghai] a visit in Shanghai in 1942. At a dinner party organized by Li, Zhang got acquainted with Wang's Foreign Minister Chu Minyi 褚民谊, and the chairman of Wang's Committee on Military Affairs Sun Xiangfu 孙祥夫. "Alarmed at the celestial power and ethereal force of Master [Zhang]", all of them took refuge to him. Song's version, however, stresses the miraculous escape of Li and his wife in an air crash which he attributed to the efficaciousness of the sect. It was mainly due to Li's propagation of his miraculous experience that these notables in Shanghai and Nanjing were attracted to join the sect.

became unwelcome in Communist- and Nationalist-held parts of China.¹⁸

When the war ended in 1945, Zhang and his movement were trapped in an embarrassing situation surrounded by rumours and slanders. Zhang himself had been in failing health for some time, and he eventually passed away in Chengdu, Sichuan in 1947 at the age of fifty-nine. Although faced with various condemnations at that time, the sect "was well enough connected that the Nationalist government cooperated in his funeral" (Jordan and Overmyer 1986:217). His casket was sent by air to Shanghai, and was buried on Nanping Mountain in Hangzhou.¹⁹

In 1946, the Nationalist government issued a decree to outlaw all secret societies, political or religious, including the Unity Sect by name (Jordan and Overmyer 1986:217). Nonetheless, observations by Willem A. Grootaers and Li Shiyu in Beiping (the present Beijing) in 1948, showed that the leaders and members of some secret religious societies still met on the first and fifteenth day of each moon under a common official name of Fojiao Yanjiu Yuan 佛教研究院 (Centre for Buddhist Research). "This semi-monthly meetings [with sectarian seances held] aim to maintain the fervour of some members of secret sects that had to renounce their active apostolate in the face of the government's prohibition." Among these participants, a representative of the Unity Sect was identified. 18 Wartime China was divided among three warring governments: the Japanese Occupation zones, the Communist zones, and the Nationalist zones.

19 Rev. Hongmiao 释宏妙, in his booklet entitled *Tiandao Zhenchuan* 〈天道真传〉 (True transmission of the Celestial Way) [1975:39] wrote that Zhang was executed by the Nationalist government in Chengdu on August 13, 1947. This charge is certainly not true, as pointed out by Jordan and Overmyer (1986:217). The recently released picture showing a throng of Zhang's disciples visiting his magnificent grave site in Hangzhou at his first anniversary death date (cf. Jiang 1992) further negates Hongmiao's charge since it is rather impossible for a n executed convict to have his anniversary death date commemorated not only openly but also on such large scale.

As we have seen, Madame Sun had successfully taken over most of Zhang's organization not long after his death. This period is categorized by the LJMX as the 'period of changing the realm [meaning the transfer of leadership]' (*zhuan pan shiqi* 转盘时期) with Sun-ists dominating the sect's mainstream. After mainland China had fallen into the hands of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, the Nationalist government's prohibition was reenacted by the Communists. The Unity Sect and other popular religions have faced constant persecution as "reactionary cults" (*fandong huidaomen* 反动会道门).²⁰ Madame Sun and other sect leaders were forced to flee to Hong Kong. After a short stay in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaya (ca. 1951-1952), she again returned to Hong Kong. From 1954, she led an almost completely isolated life in Taiwan until her death in 1975.²¹

Although Hong Kong has since served to replace mainland China as one of the main centres for the sect's promulgation, however, as pointed out by *Yazhou ZouKan* 〈亚洲周刊〉 (1990:32) and Tsang Mei Lan²² (1995:4), it operates there with a low profile. It is believed to have developed first in the New Territories, and then spread to the rest of Hong Kong (cf. Tsang 1995:4). According to YGJJ (1988:63), it has at present more than 300 *Fotang* and a total of more than 50,000 sect members in Hong Kong. Due to the limited knowledge we have of the

20 Cf. *Fandong Huidaomen Jianjie* 〈反动会道门简介〉 (A brief introduction to the reactionary cults) [1985:2-3].

21 This is probably due to the fact that the Nationalist government in Taiwan continued to prohibit the Unity Sect by name to propagate openly from 1951 until its official legalization on January 21, 1987.

22 Tsang recently (1994-1995) did a study on one of the *Fotang* in Yuan Long, Hong Kong, for her senior thesis research under the supervision of Dr. Joseph Bosco entitled "Tian Dao as a model of Chinese belief system". I am grateful to Dr. Bosco for showing me this research report.

situation in Hong Kong, and most importantly, due to the fact that the majority of the sect's *Fotang* in Peninsular Malaysia originate from Taiwan, this dissertation will therefore focus on the development of the sect in Taiwan for the purposes of its study of the historical background.

The spread of the Unity Sect to Taiwan and its development

The Unity Sect began to spread to Taiwan after the end of its rule under the Japanese occupation (1895-1945). According to Song Guangyu (1996:66, 94-95), the sect was first brought into Taiwan by Chen Wenxiang 陈文祥 (1906-1988) from the Baoguang Tan 宝光坛 ('Precious Radiance' Shrine) of Ningbo, Zhejiang province. Born in Gaoxiong, Taiwan, Chen was initiated into the sect while serving as a medical doctor under Wang's puppet regime in Nanjing in 1942. He was then transferred to serve in the Land Forces Army Hospital at Ningbo in 1943, where he was also involved actively in proselytizing for the sect locally until he left for Taiwan.

Chen arrived in Taiwan on December 1945, and had the sect's first 'family hall' (*jiatang* 家堂) set up in Yilan on January 13, 1946. Five days later, he established the first 'public hall' (*gongtang* 公堂), the Guiyuan Fotang 归元佛堂 ('Returning to the primordial Buddha Hall'), in Taipei. Within just one year, Chen established altogether eleven *Fotang* [four 'public halls' and seven 'family halls'], covering a wide geographical area from the north [Taipei], northeast [Yilan], to the centre [Taizhong], as well as the south [Gaoxiong, Pingdong], with the Guiyuan Fotang as its headquarters. Chen then requested Pan Hualing in Shanghai to

supply him with extra manpower in aid of his operations in Taiwan. Accordingly, three 'initiators' (*dianchuan shi* 点传师) [Li Haoran 李浩然, Yang Yongjiang 杨永江, and Guo Jizhou 郭继周] , three 'celestial talents' (*tiancai* 天才) [Ji Xiushan 季山, Liu Changrui 刘长瑞, and Gu Chunian 谷椿年], and three 'human talents' (*rencai* 人才) [Lin Mengqi 林梦麒, Zhang Zhiqi 张志祺, Xu Dujing 许笃敬, and Zhang Siliang 张嗣良] were sent by Pan to his assistant in May, 1946.²³

According to Song Guangyu (1996:98-99), in the following year, an additional twenty four *Fotang* [including one 'public hall'] were set up in Taipei, Taipei County, Yilan, Xinzhu, Taizhong, Zhanghua, Nantou, Tainan, and Gaoxiong under Chen's leadership. Chen then recommended to Pan Hualing, who referred to patriarch Zhang for approval, that the four 'human talents' [sent earlier by Pan] be promoted to the rank of 'initiators'. In addition to that, Chen trained junior cadres (*banshi yuan* 办事员) selected from the local sect members (*daojin* 道亲) who assisted him in running the routine activities of the *Fotang*. Among these cadres, several of them were entrepreneurs who contributed both their labour and monetary support to Chen's endeavours in setting up new *Fotang* all over Taiwan. Chen was then appointed as the main contact person (*shuniu* 枢纽) by mistress Sun to take charge of all Sun-ist *Fotang* in Taiwan in 1947.

²³ See Song 1996:96. An 'initiator' is one who represents the Master to conduct the dotting during the initiation ceremony. The 'celestial talent' and 'human talent' together with the 'terrestrial talent' (*dicai* 地才) form a triad in conducting planchette revelation. The 'celestial talent' takes charge of writing the divine revelation on a bordered tray covered with layer of sand using a stylus. The 'human talent' reads it out aloud, and helps to erase the writing by levelling the sand with a wooden rake, while the 'terrestrial talent' helps copying down the divine revelation.

Meanwhile, instructed by elder Li Tinggang 李廷岗 of the Jichu 基础 (Foundation) branch in Shanghai, Tang Shaoji 唐绍继 and Wu Xinxue 吴学信 arrived at Taiwan from Xiamen (Amoy) to 'open up the spiritual wasteland' (*kaihuang* 开荒) in 1946. Zhang Peicheng 张培成 was, however, sent to replace Tang the following year. Wu subsequently separated from Zhang to proselytize for the sect on his own.²⁴

According to the YGJJ (1988:62-63), the Zhengyi 正义 ('Correct Principles') branch [of the Liu-ist faction] began to proselytize in Taiwan ca. 1946 to 1947 through Wu Xinxue, Zhang Defu 张德福, Zheng Dexiang 郑德祥, Deng Mingkun 邓明坤 and others. Its headquarters, the Tiandao Sanfo Yuan 天道三佛院 ('The Court of Three Buddhas Celestial Way') is currently located in Taizhong.²⁵

24 See Song 1996:112. We do not know why Tang was replaced. Apparently Wu, a Liu-ist, separated himself from the Foundation branch in Taiwan after its leadership was taken over by Zhang, a Sun-ist. The fact that this separation occurred in 1947, indicates the immediate split between Liu-ists and Sun-ists in Taiwan after patriarch Zhang's death. Jiang's book [1992a] carries stories from both sides, and provides us with rich sources of materials, and sometime even clues to some of the missing links.

25 Zhang Defu (quoted in *Gaoxiong Xian Jiaopai Zongjiao* 〈高雄县教派宗教〉 [GXJZ] 1997:74), however, pointed out that Zhengyi Fudachui [ZYFDH] only came into being in 1948. Wu, Zhang, Deng along with the Taiwanese sect members Xie Hanyin 谢含隐, Zhou Shizhang 周诗章, and others visited patriarch Zhang's grave in Hangzhou on the first anniversary of his death. Both Xie and Zhou were appointed by Madame Liu to become initiators. At that time, the Liu-ists met in Shanghai and established the ZYFDH in support of Madame Liu's leadership. The dating for the beginning of the Zhengyi branch in Taiwan by the YGJJ is therefore somewhat problematic. Also, the Zhengyi branch in Taiwan should include Wu's sub-branch currently led by elder Lin Yulan 林玉兰 with its headquarters, the Tiantong zongtan 天同总坛 ('Celestial Equal') located in Jiayi, Deng's sub-branch led by elder Zhou Shizhang with its headquarters the Tiandao Sanfo Yuan located in Taizhong, and elder Xie Hanyin's sub-branch with its headquarters located in Taipei. (cf. GXJZ 1997:74-75, Jiang 1992a:178-189)

The Jichu branch in Taiwan under the leadership of Zhang Peicheng centred its propagation mainly in Taipei (city and county). Zhang was appointed as the assistant overall contact person (*fu shuniu* 副枢纽) of the Sun-ist *Fotang* in Taiwan by Pan Hualing in 1948. Its headquarters, the Xiantian Daoyuan 先天道院 ('The Former Celestial Sanctuary of the Way'), was established in Taipei City in 1967.

Huang Ziran 黃自然, Gu Xiangling 顾祥麟, and Yan Zhu'e 袁翥鶴 were also summoned by the Foundation branch in Shanghai to 'open the spiritual wasteland' in Taiwan in winter 1947. They first stayed in Taipei, and then moved on to Jilong. Huang Ziran finally settled down in Sanchong with his headquarters, the Tianji zongtang 天基总堂 ('Celestial Foundation main hall'), located there. Gu and Yan later submitted to the leadership of Zhang Peicheng.

The Xingyi 兴毅 (Initiate Oneness) branch in Taiwan originated from the Xingyi shrine in Tianjin, which spread to Haerbin ca. 1939. It was first established in Taiwan by He Zonghao 何宗浩 from Harbin in 1947. It set up its first shrine, the Chunyang Tan 纯阳坛 ('Pure Sun' Shrine) in Tainan. By 1966, it had altogether 29 sub-branches or *danwei* 单位 ('units') dispersed all over Taiwan.

The Fayi 发一 (Promote Oneness) branch in Taiwan was first established in Taiwan by Liu Zhenkui 刘振魁, Hao Jinde 郝晋德, Liu Quanxiang 刘全祥, Zhang Yutai 张玉台, Li Yuming 李玉铭, Chen Hongzhen 陈鸿珍 and others from the Tongxing 同兴 ('Prosper together') shrine in Tianjin in 1947. The following year, due

to pressing conditions in north China, Han Yulin, Qi Yuxiu 邱裕修, and others left Tianjin for Taiwan. As all of them originally "saught the Way" (*qiudao* 求道, i.e. were initiated into the sect) at the Tongxing Shrine in Tianjin established by Han Yulin; they all came under the leadership of Han in Taiwan.

According to the YGJJ (1988:61) the Changzhou 常州 branch in Taiwan originated from the Bode 博德 ('Abundant Virtue') shrine in Changzhou (present Changzhou City in Jiangsu province), under the leadership of Wang Zhang 王彰德. In 1947, sent by Wang, Xu Changda 徐昌大 (d.1989) and others arrived at Tainan to proselytize for the sect. Under the leadership of 'elder' (*qianren*) Xu, the sect advanced from its base in Tainan to the Taidong (1948), Gaoxiong (1950), Taipei, Taizhong, Xinzhu, Miaoli, Zhanghua, Luodong, Yilan, Hualian, Penghu, Taoyuan, and Pingdong areas within the period of four decades. Senior elder (*lao qianren* 老前人) Wang, however, fled to Hong Kong with Gu Aiheng 顾爱珩 in 1950.

The Wenhua 文化 ('Culture') branch in Taiwan originated from the Wenhua Shrine in Tianjin. It was first spread to Taiwan by Jia Qingren 贾庆仁, Sun Luyi 孙路一, and others. Later, it was led by Zhao Futing. When Zhao passed away, its Taipei *Fotang* was taken charge of by Lu Yanqing 卢燕清, its Taizhong *Fotang* led by Wang Shujin 王树金, and its Gaoxiong *Fotang* by Sun Luyi (cf. Song 1983:202, YGJJ 1988:55).

The Haoran 浩然 ('Great Understanding') branch in Taiwan originated from the Haoran shrine in Tianjin. It was spread to Taiwan in 1948. It has branched out

into two sub-branches, Haoran (I) under the leadership of Chen Yaoju and her subordinate Liang Huachun 梁华春, and Haoran (II) under the leadership of Jin Baozhang and Niu Congde.

The Andong 安东 branch in Taiwan originated from the Jiaohua 教化 ('Teach and Transform') Shrine set up in Andong, northeastern China in 1940 by Chen Huiquan 陈慧泉 of the Daode ('Morality') Shrine in Tianjin. Summoned by Chen, Gao Jincheng 高金澄 (= Gao Binkai 高斌凯) and Liu Renhan 柳人汉 came to Taiwan in 1947 to proselytize for the sect. They started their missionary work in Xinzhu County, and gradually advanced to Taipei, Gaoxiong and other areas (cf. YGJJ: 57).

The Tianxiang 天祥 ('Celestial Auspicious') branch in Taiwan originated from the Tianxiang Shrine in Tianjin. It was first spread by Guo Hairun and Yan Buli to Harbin ca. 1938. With permission granted by Guo and mistress Sun, Liu Maozhong 刘懋忠 came to Taiwan to proselytize the sect in 1947. With the help of one Wu Shuilian 吴水炼, the Tianxiang branch gradually took root in Taiwan, and set up its headquarters in Taipei City (cf. Song 1983:178, Jiang 1992a:203).

When Chen Wenxiang of Baoguang branch and overall contact person of the Unity Sect in Taiwan was arrested and imprisoned for half a year in 1948, Master Pan Hualing came personally from Shanghai to restructure the leadership organization of the sect in Taiwan in order to ensure its smooth functioning during Chen's absence. According to Song (1996:99), under its new organizational structure, Chen remained as the overall contact person in Taiwan. Zhang Peicheng

from the Jichu branch was appointed as the deputy overall contact person. The Baoguang branch in Taiwan was divided into four areas (*qu 区*) [sic], namely: the Yilan [area] headed by Lin Mengqi; Luodong [area], headed by Zhang Zhiqi; the Taizhong [area], headed by Yang Yongjiang; the Tainan [area], headed by Su Xiulan 苏秀兰, and the Pingdong [area], headed by Liu Changrui.²⁶ Song may have miscalculated the above five areas into four areas; perhaps the mistake was caused by his division of these areas.

As we have seen, by 1948 the so called “thirteen branches and eighteen sub-branches” (*shisan zu shiba zhixian 十三组十八支线*) [illustrating the segmentary structure] of the Unity Sect in Taiwan had already been formed (Song 1996: 99).²⁷ To quote Song Guangyu: “The sect’s development and its spread [geographical] can be illustrated by a picture of ‘building one house on top of another’ (*diechuang jiawu 叠床架屋*) [meaning duplications] ... in addition to that, the varied sources of origin [of these branches] ... ultimately resulted in ‘many heroes coexisting and confronting each other’ (*qunxiong bingzhi 群雄并峙*).” (1983:137) Generally speaking, the competition among these groups observed by

26 According to the *Baoguang Jiande Jianjie* 〈宝光建德简介〉 [BGJJ] (1995:2), Master Pan had divided the Baoguang branch in Taiwan into four main ‘units’ (*danwei*), namely: (i) A Taipei unit headed by Chen Zihao 陈志浩 (= Chen Wenxiang) and Gu Chunnnian; (ii) a Taizhong unit headed by Yang Yongjiang and Liu Changrui; (iii) a Tainan unit headed by Su Xiulan, and a Yilan unit headed by Lin Mengqi and Zhang Zhiqi.

27 As pointed out by Philip Clart (1996a: 4), “The conventional figure given for the number of these branches is eighteen, but that does not accord with the real situation. As these branches have a tendency to split up again into sub-branches, and new branches may secede from established ones, it is very difficult to get a firm count.” Song’s version of “thirteen branches (*zu*) and eighteen sub-branches (*zhī*)” is probably based on Elder Chen Hongzhen’s talk in 1993 [cf. *Fa I Chorng Der* magazine 〈发一崇德杂志〉 . (1994, Feb:10)]

Song still occurs in Taiwan and elsewhere outside Taiwan to this date.

Another important organizational characteristic of the sect is that before 1963 most of the Unity Sect's *Fotang* were in the form of 'family halls' set up in individual's households. A 'family hall' provides a place for proselytizing the sect's teaching, and also for congregational worship for the sect members (*daqin*, literally meaning 'the relatives of the Way') in the neighbourhood. Hence, each 'family hall' is a nucleus by itself. The house owner [who set up 'family hall' in his/her house] doubles as the 'shrine master' (*tanzhu* 坛主) and convener.

The sect was, however, forced to announce its disbandment in 1963 by the Taiwan authorities based on accusations that it was not legally registered with the government, and that its activities were not conducted in the public domain (cf. Song 1983:133-134). Hence, some of the sect's branches (*zu*) began to construct public temples after 1963 to enable its activities to be carried out in accord with this requirement. Meanwhile, efforts were made to gain a legal status by joining existing registered religious organizations. Zhang Peicheng, for example, successfully organized the Taoist Association of the Province of Taiwan [TAPT] together with Zhao Jiachuo 赵家焯 and others by end of 1963.²⁸ Jichu's and also some of Baoguang's *Fotang* and public temples had joined the TAPT; whereas 'public halls' in the Zhanghua, Yunlin, Jiayi areas joined the local Buddhist Associations. The *Fotang* of Chen Wenxiang's Baoguang branch and some Wenhua branch *Fotang*

28 An advertisement by the TAPT even appeared in the Central Daily Press (*Zhongyang ribao* <中央日报>) on June 14, 1964, urging Unity Sect *Fotang* to join in as its members (cf. Song 1983:134).

associated closely with the Xuanyuan Jiao 轩辕教.²⁹ (cf. Song 1983:134)

As a matter of fact, there are still a number of small branches (*zu*) in Taiwan which are not mentioned above, due to their inactiveness. For the purpose of this study, in the rest of the chapter I intend to limit my discussion only to the major branches and/or their sub-branches in Taiwan, particularly those that extended their organizations to Peninsular Malaysia.

Major Unity Sect branches/sub-branches in Taiwan today

(1) The Baoguang branch

As we have seen, the Baoguang branch in Taiwan was divided into four major areas in 1948. This division gave a somewhat freer hand to individual sect leaders [under the common banner of Baoguang] to handle and keep track of their own sphere of the spiritual fields, which eventually gave rise to the formation of its various sub-branches at a later stage of its development. In addition to that, the political climate faced by the sect during the 1960's to even the late 1970's, also tended to encourage the survival strategy of 'breaking up the whole into parts' (*hua zheng wei ling* 化整为零). Below, we shall observe three major sub-branches of

29 According to Zheng Zhiming 郑志明 (1990:121), the Xuanyuan Jiao was established by Wang Hansheng 王寒生 in 1957 in Taipei. It has *('The Way') as its Almighty God, and the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黄帝 = Xuanyuan) as its founder (*jiaozhu*). It aims at proselytizing the inherent ethics and morality of the Chinese people. Also, please refer to Christian Jochim's 1990 article "Flowers, Fruit, and Incense Only. Elite versus Popular in Taiwan's Religion of the Yellow Emperor", in *Modern China* 16(1):3-38. Jochim has describes the Xuanyuan Jiao in Taiwan as the religion of the elite due to its simplicity and solemnity in terms of its ritual and offerings. I am grateful to Philip Clart for referring me to this article.*

the Baoguang branch, namely Chongzheng 崇正 ('Lofty Upright'), Jiande 建德 ('Establish Virtue'), and Yushan 玉山 ('Jade Mountain'). The names of all these sub-branches only came into being in late 1987, for the purpose of differentiating among themselves when they registered with the The Free China I Kuan Tao Association (Zhonghua Minguo Yiguan Dao Zonghui).

(i) The Baoguang Chongzheng sub-branch

It derived its name from the Chongzheng Baogong 崇正宝宫 ('The Jewel Palace of Lofty Upright'), one of the three administrative centres (*daowu zhongxit* 道务中心) of the present Chongzheng sub-branch, located in Taizhong. This sub-branch was originally under the leadership of senior elder Chen Wenxiang (1906-1988). As we have seen, Chen's zeal in proselytizing for the sect caused its rapid spread in Taiwan even at its earliest stage of development. Chen himself has been imprisoned for more than one hundred times by the security unit of the Taiwan authorities (Song 1996:98).

In addition to its early headquarters Guiyuan Fotang, the Chongzheng sub-branch has established three more public temples, namely the Yuande Baogong 元德宝宫 ('The Jewel Palace of Primordial Virtue') in 1950 in Guishan, Taoyuan; the Jingming Baogong 精明宝宫 ('The Jewel Palace of Refined Luminous') in 1970 in Pingdong, and the Chongzheng Baogong in 1983 in Taizhong. In fact, by 1974, Chen had divided all *Fotang* under his leadership into eight 'units' (*danwei*), namely Taipei City (*shi* 市), Taipei County (*xian* 县), Taizhong City, Taizhong County, Zhanghua County, Gaoxiong City, Pingdong County, and Taidong County.

He also adopted Lin Sanlong 林三龙 (who later changed his surname to Chen) [who took charge of *Fotang* in Taizhong City] as his son in the same year. (Song 1996:103)

After Chen's death, he was succeeded by Chen Sanlong who continues to lead the Baoguang Chongzheng sub-branch, with the three 'Baogong' 宝宫 ('Jewel Palace') functioning as its three major administrative centres. Chen Sanlong is currently an executive supervising committee member (*changwu jianshi* 常务监事) of The Free China I Kuan Tao Association (=Yiguan Dao Zonghui, the Federation of Unity Sects in Taiwan).

(ii) The Baoguang Jiande 宝光建德 sub-branch

It derives its name from the religious name (*daohao*) Jiande 建德 ('Establish Virtue') of its late senior elder Lü Shugen 吕树根 (1919-1982). This sub-branch traces its direct origin to Yang Yongjiang (d.1949), one of the three initiators sent by Master Pan Hualing to Taiwan to assist Chen Wenxiang's mission in 1946. Yang was later summoned by Pan Hualing to proselytize for the sect in the Taizhong area. He was assisted by Lü Shugen, a local born Taiwanese, who help to translate Yang's Shanghaiese mandarin into Taiwan Fujianese (Minnan 閩南) dialect. Yang passed away in 1949, and was succeeded by Lü, who led this sub-branch until his dead in 1982. Lu is among the sect leaders who suffered the lengthiest imprisonment (six years, 1950-1956) by the Taiwan authorities (Song 1996:83,100). Under Lü's leadership, the Jiande sub-branch advanced from Fengyuan, and Dongshi in Taizhong County, then to Taipei, Zhanghua, Gaoxiong,

Jilong, Miaoli, Xinzhu, and Nantou areas.³⁰

Lü also led several initiators under his leadership in a temporary shift to the business sphere in order to avoid unnecessary persecution. Among them, initiator Lin Zaimian 林再綿 later became a successful businessman. Through his business connections, Lin recruited Shi Qingxing [the present Elder of Baoguang Jiande] and Yau Wunian 姚武年 [the present managing director of the Ornasteel Enterprise Corporation] into the sect.³¹

According to the LJMX (1990:53-54), as early as 1950 Lü sent Chen Boling 陈伯齡 (=Tan Pak Ling) to promulgate the sect in Indonesia and had its first *Fotang*, the Qiaoguang 侨光 Shrine, set up in Malang, East Java.³² Later, it spread to Surabaya, Bandung, Jakarta, and Borneo. When Chen passed away in 1983 (?), its leadership was held for some time by Zhang Mingyue 張明月 in Hong Kong. It has a total of 400 to 500 *Fotang*, and more than 100,000 sect members. Today, its leadership is taken over by Wang Haode 王好德 of the Providence Maitreya Buddha Missionary Institute (Tian'en Milefo Yuan 天恩弥勒佛院) in Xinzhu, Taiwan.

30 Cf. BGJJ (1995:100-103).

31 Song's (1996:440) above narration seems to tell us that Lin and others were called to involve themselves in business after the 1963 incident, whereupon he became acquainted with Shi and Yao, and recruited them into the sect. This is rather misleading since we are also told that Shi and Yao 'sought the Way' (= joined the sect) in 1959 and 1958 respectively.

32 According to Iem Brown (1990:115), the Unity Sect in Indonesia is known as the 'Maitreya sect' (Agama Buddha Maitreya). It was first brought to Indonesia by Tan Pak Ling (ca. 1900-1985) in the 1940's (*sic*). " During the 1970s Tan's Maitreya sect began to gain a wider following and, within a decade, was very well established, with branches in more than 20 cities throughout the Indonesian archipelago and with a claimed membership exceeding 200,000.

The Jiande sub-branch under the leadership of Lü also expanded the sect to São Paulo in Brazil (1961), Singapore (1971), Malaysia (1973), and Japan (1980). Lü passed away in 1982, and was succeeded by Qiu Yaode 邱耀德, who passed away on December, 1983. Shi Qingxing 施庆星 became the new elder in 1983.

Under Shi's leadership, the Jiande sub-branch currently has altogether fifteen 'units' (*danwei*), with a total of 3,500 *Fotang* in all parts of Taiwan. Outside Taiwan, it has under Shi's leadership advanced further to Melbourne and Sydney in Australia (1985), Los Angeles (U.S.A. 1988), Thailand (1990), Argentina and Paraguay in Latin America, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, South Africa, and New Zealand. (cf. BGJJ 1995:8-9) It has currently, a total of more than 1,800 *Fotang* overseas, the majority of which are concentrated in Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia. In Malaysia, its *Fotang* are registered under the name of Wuji Shengmu 无极圣母 ('The Holy Mother of the Limitless').

Elder Shi has recently been elected as the President of the Free China Kuan Tao Association for a term of four years beginning April, 1996.

(iii) The Baoguang Yushan sub-branch

It derives its name from the Yushan 'village' (*cun 村*) of Nanhua 'country' (*xiang 乡*) in Tainan, where its headquarters the Baoguang Shengtang 宝光圣堂 ('Sacred Hall of Precious Radiance') is located. It traces its origins back to elder Su Xiulan, who began her proselytization for the sect in the Tainan area in 1946. After Su's death in 1959, she was succeeded by her disciple Wang Shou 王寿. Elder

Wang was arrested by the authorities in February 1977 for suspicion of ‘revolting against the ruling government’ (*panluan zui* 叛乱罪).³³ He was ‘imprisoned’ in a rehabilitation centre (仁教所) for three years and ten months. His bitter experience of imprisonment caused him to become a strong supporter of any attempt to seek legalization for the Unity Sect.

Currently, elder Wang’s leadership covers a total of 473 ‘family halls’ and five ‘public halls’ (gonggong fotang 公共佛堂) located in Tainan, Taipei and Gaoxiong. Wang has recently been elected as one of the two Deputy Presidents of the Free China I Kuan Tao Association.

(2) The Fayi Branch

The Fayi branch is currently the largest Unity Sect branch in Taiwan. According to Han Wannian 韩万年 (quoted in Lin Rongze 林荣泽 1993:274), the name of ‘Fayi’ is derived from ‘Fayi Dadao’ 发一大道 (the Great Way of Promoting Oneness), which connotes ‘promoting the pervading oneness’ (*fayang yiguan* 发扬一贯) This alteration was permitted by mistress Sun ca. 1947, upon a request by Han Yulin, who was about to leave for his mission in Taiwan. The reason for so doing was to avoid the aversion to the name of Unity Sect (Yiguan Dao) by local

33 See Guangtai’s 光泰 article in Shi (Appendix 4, 1978:150-158) for a detailed description of Wang’s arrest. Lin Benxuan 林本炫 (1989:13-14) has pointed out that Wang’s arrest was mainly due to his criticism of the government, which was associated with ‘political attempts’ that may have endangered the already unstable political climate at that time. Song in his latest publication provides an alternate explanation to Wang’s 1977 arrest. According to Song (1996:206), Wu, a building contractor who was in a dispute with Wang on the issue of a payment, maligned him for ‘attempting to enthroned himself as emperor’ (*you chengdi de qitu* 有称帝的企图) because Wang decorated the wall of his Fotang with the picture of nine dragons [which represent the symbol of imperial majesty].

Taiwanese who had been under Japanese rule for the last five decades. Lin, however, is in agreement with Song that the name Fayi is in actuality the representative designation for all *Fotang* in the Tianjin area.³⁴ Later, the name 'Fayi' was restricted only to the branch originating from the Tongxing Tan in Tianjin, with senior elder Han Yulin (1900-1995) as its highest leader before he passed away in January 1995.

Although the Fayi branch started its mission in Taiwan as early as 1947, it only began to take root after successfully establishing its first base in Douliu, Yunlin County in 1951. The first important Fayi branch *Fotang*, the Chongxiu Tang 崇修堂 ('Hall for Advocating Cultivation'), is originally a 'phoenix hall' (*Iuantang* 鸾堂)³⁵ owned by Lin Shuzhao 林书昭.

Earlier, in 1949, Han Yulin, Hao Jinde, Zhao Dagu 赵大姑, Chen Hongzhen, Han Wannian, and others were led by one Li Qinghe 李清贺 [a novice from Douliu initiated by Han], in seeking opportunities for proselytizing in his hometown. During that visit, Han bought up the 'Youth Photo Studio' (Qingnian Zhaoxiang Guan 青年照相馆) located next to the Douliu railway station, and established a *Fotang* on the

34 According to Song Guangyu (1983:127), after the end of the war [in 1945], to avoid the Unity Sect being insulted as 'traitor to China' (*hanjian* 汉奸) [because of its rapid spread in Japanese-ruled northern China during the war-time] , the name of the Unity Sect was altered to that of 'Fayi Dadao' in the Tianjin area; 'Kong-Meng Dadao (the Great Way of Confucius and Mencius 孔孟大道) in the area covering Beiping [the present Beijing] and northeast China; and 'Zhenli Dadao" ((the Great Way of True Principle 真理大道) in the Shanghai area ca. 1947.

35 Philip Clart (1996b:1) defines a 'phoenix hall' as "a voluntary religious association of congregational character centring upon communication with the gods by means of the divinatory technique of 'spirit-writing' (*fuluan* 扶鸾)."

premises. According to Han Wannian [quoted in Song 1996:125-126], in less than half a year's time Hao, Zhao and Chen, being 'strangers' who resided in Douliu, came under the suspicion of the local authorities. They were then called up to the police station for investigation, and eventually sent to the police headquarters (*jingbei zongbu* 警备总部) in Taipei. Traced through their correspondence, Liu Quanxiang, Li Yuming, Zhang Yutai, Qi Yuxiu, and other Fayi branch leaders who had stayed apart were also caught and imprisoned in Taipei police headquarters. Together they were labelled as 'political offenders' (*zhengzhi fan* 政治犯), and could have been sentenced to death. Luckily they were assisted by a sect member who worked in the police headquarters, and were eventually released from their imprisonments. Faced with such great blow, they were forced to retreat from Douliu. When the issue quieted down in 1951, Chen Hongzhen was summoned by Han Yulin to continue his mission. At this point, a *Fotang* was set up temporarily in the Rest house (= Taihe *lūshe* 太和旅社) owned by a sect member, madame Zhan. Lin Shuzhao and Lin Tingcai 林挺才 were among those who 'sought the Way' during that period. Zhan's husband rejection of the *Fotang*'s attachment to the rest house had created a big problem for elder Chen. Lin Shuzhao voluntarily offered his 'phoenix hall' to be adapted as the Unity Sect's *Fotang*. Meanwhile, Lin Tingcai [who at one time worked in the 'special branch' (*qingzhi danwei* 情治单位)], was promoted to the rank of initiator. With Lin's participation in the mission, the Fayi branch could proselytize the sect under a certain degree of protection. Within two years, more than thirty *Fotang* were established. Viewed from this angle, the Chongxiu Tang is referred to as the cradle of the Fayi branch's development in Taiwan. The fact that most of the Fayi's early important 'dharma assemblies' (*ahui* 法会) were held there, and that the majority of its present leaders were fostered

through these 'dharma assemblies' serves well to illustrate its important role in the history of the Fayi's development in Taiwan. (cf. Jiang 1992a:256-257, Lin Rongze 1993:276-277, Song 1996:125-129)

(i) The Fayi Chongde 发一崇德 sub-branch

Under the principle of 'whoever handles it, should follow it through' (*shuibar shuicheng* 谁办谁成), the religious field opened up by Chen Hongzhen naturally comes under her leadership. As pointed out by Lin Rongze (1993:278), the above mentioned concept is in actuality based on the clan ethics (*jiazu lunli* 家族伦理), deeply rooted in Chinese society. He refers to the Chongxiu Tang as an example of the relationship between a 'mother shrine' (*mu tan* 母坛 = Chongxiu Tang) and a total of over twenty public temples [that originated from it] with the status of its 'children shrines' (*zi tan* 子坛). Based on such reasoning, the responsibility to take care of these 'children shrines' could come to no one than Chen Hongzhen herself.

Upon establishing a stronghold in Douliu, Chen Hongzhen expanded to Zhanghua County, where the Guanyin Gong 观音宫 ('Palace of the Goddess of Mercy') in Erlin, and the Daoji Chanyuan 道济禅院 ('The Chan Court of Daoji, the Living Buddha') in Tianzhong were built. Encouraged by Senior elder Han, Chen made an important decision to proselytize in the Taipei metropolitan area in 1968. Between 1968 and 1981, she successfully penetrated the surrounding suburbs of Taipei City, namely Yonghe, Sanchong, Xinzhuang, Taoyuan, and Zhongli. By 1991, the total number of *Fotang* had increased rapidly from more than thirty public and family halls to more than 300 'public halls' (*gongtang*), and over 900 'family halls' (*jiatang*), covering most parts of Taipei City and Taipei County.

Today, elder Chen's 'religious domain' (*daochang* 道场) of the Chongde sub-branch in Taiwan, covers Yunlin, Zhanghua, Taibei, Taizhong, Miaoli, Gaoxiong, and Tainan. It has a total of over 140 'initiators' (*dianchuan shi*), more than thirty temple-structured 'public halls' (*da miao* 大庙), and more than 4,000 'family halls' at home and abroad. This sub-branch of the Fayi also has the highest percentage of members with a university or college education compared to the rest of the Unity Sect branches in Taiwan. (cf. LJMX 1990:40) These constitute the so called 'academic division' (*xuejie* 学界) of the Fayi Chongde sub-branch, playing the important role of a think-tank that contributed much to the branch's development and innovation in both its administrative and theological aspects at a later stage.³⁶

Elder Chen attributes the rapid development of the Chongde sub-branch in the last two decades to the participation of this 'academic division', which she described as a 'capital of wisdom' (*zhihui caichan* 智慧财产). She also pointed out that the name 'Chongde' 崇德 ('Advocate Virtue') derived from a revelation of Jigong, the Living Buddha during a 'dharma assembly' held in Kuala Lumpur many years ago. [It was first adopted in naming its cultural and educational foundation, Chongde Wenjiao Jijin Hui 崇德文教基金会, established in 1985. Later, the name 'Fayi Chongde' was used to represent the Fayi sub-branch under the leadership of

³⁶ The rise of this 'academic division' is closely related to the operation of its so called 'the meal catering groups' (*huoshi tuan* 伙食团), which formed informal religious organizations in areas nearby the campuses, providing meals and lodging facilities to college and university students who were sect members. It began its operation ca.1973, and continues to operate to this day. Lin Rongze's 1994 paper entitled "Yiguan Dao dazhuan xuesheng huoshi tuan zhi yanjiu 《一贯道大专学生伙食团之研究》 (A study of the Unity Sect's university students 'meal catering groups'), and Song (1996:332-349) provide detailed information on these organizations and their roles in the sect.

elder Chen.] In a recent speech, elder Chen proudly described the four major characteristics of this sub-branch as: (1) its academic division as a valuable human resource; (2) ownership of its many 'public halls' and 'family halls'; (3) the establishment of its five cultural and educational foundations, namely Chongde (1985); Chongren 崇仁 (1986), Chongyi 崇义 (1990), Chongli 崇礼 (1990), and Guanghui 光慧 (1989); (4) its management by 'collective leadership and coherent advancement' (*jiti lingdao, zhengti daidong* 集体领导,整体带动).³⁷

In 1977 elder Chen also began her overseas missions. Her first stop was in Tokyo. The following year, she visited on to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), and Bangkok (Thailand). In recent years, the Chongde sub-branch has even reached the U.S.A., central North America, Paraguay, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Macau. (cf. *Chongde zhi Guang* [CDZG] 1994:13) Nonetheless, the majority of her overseas *Fotang* today are in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Elder Chen is the former vice president of the Free China I Kuan Tao Association, and the present vice president of the World Unity Sect Association (Yiguan Dao Shijie Zonghui 一贯道世界总会) established in Los Angeles in October 1996.

(ii) The Fayi Lingyin 发一灵隐 sub-branch

This sub-branch of the Fayi branch does not have an official appellation, and has not yet registered with the Free I Kuan Tao Association. The name 'Lingyin'³⁸ is first used by Lin Rongze (1993:281-288) to refer to the Fayi sub-branch under the

³⁷ Cf. *Fa I Chong Der* (magazine), Vol.1, No.4, Feb. 1994, pp.12 & 14.

³⁸ The name 'Lingyin' is used because the headquarters and administrative centre of this sub-branch are located at the Lingyin Temple [of Jigong, the Living Buddha] in Sanxia, Taipei County.

leadership of the late elder Li Yuming (1912-1983).

Li came to Taiwan in 1947 together with other sect leaders of the Fay branch. She was summoned to assist elder Liu Zhenkui (1889-1962) in his evangelism in Taipei. Due to her inability to speak the Southern Min dialect, Li's many efforts to recruit sect members ended in failure. Nevertheless, Li's persistence and sincerity moved Chen Jinlian 陈金莲, a midwife who doubled as baby-sitter. After being converted in 1953, Chen had the first *Fotang*, Kunde Tan 基德坛 ('Feminine Virtue' Shrine) set up in her house. Though small and narrow, this *Fotang* became the cradle where most the the core cadres of the Fayi Lingyin sub-branch have been trained.

With the Kunde Tan in Taipei City as its starting point, the Fayi Lingyin expanded southward to Taipei County, Taoyuan, Yilan, Taizhong, Zhanghua, Zhongli, Xinzhu, Tainan, Jiayi, Gaoxiong, and Pingdong. By 1977, this sub-branch of Fayi had set up sixty-nine *Fotang*, covering over fifteen prefectures and cities (*xian shi*). However, forty-two or almost two-thirds of its *Fotang* were in Taipei City and Taipei County. Naturally, its first temple-structured 'public hall' cum administrative centre, Lingyin Si, is located in Taipei County. By 1983, its *Fotang* numbered 205, and twenty-two sect leaders had been appointed to the rank of 'initiators'. (cf. Lin Rongze 1993:283, 285)

Elder Li Yuming began her overseas mission in 1978, and had her first overseas 'family hall', Cai's (Cai shi 蔡氏) *Fotang* established in Singapore. Li visited Singapore again with her 'three talents' (*sancai*), 'lecturers', and other assistants to conduct the first 'dharma assembly' on the island in 1980. Following

this, a 'public hall', Huaxing Tan 化星坛 ('Transforming the Star' Shrine) was established in Singapore in the same year. From Singapore, the Fayi Lingyin sub-branch expanded to Thailand (1980) and Malaysia (1981). In spite of these successes, until elder Li's death in 1983 the Lingyin sub-branch's overseas religious field was still in its initial stage. Due to the continuous proselytizing efforts of initiators Wang 汪, Lan 蓝, Lü 吕 and several others from Taiwan by 1991, the Lingyin sub-branch overseas had spread to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, the U.S.A., and Australia, with the support of about thirteen (*sic*) initiators³⁹ and a total of over 700 *Fotang*. (Lin Rongze 1993:284-285, 286)

Elder Chen Jinlian (1915-1991) succeeded elder Li in 1983. By then, the Lingyin sub-branch had already been well established with twenty-two 'initiators' and 205 *Fotang*, covering all parts of Taiwan. As pointed out by Lin Rongze (1993:286), despite Chen's position as elder of this sub-branch, due to the vast 'religious domain' of Lingyin in Taiwan and abroad, she can only attend large scale "three-days' dharma assemblies"⁴⁰ and the openings of new *Fotang*; she retains the authority to make decisions on major issues of its administrative operation during the initiators' meetings. In 1990, for example, the duration elder Chen spent fully eight months traveling from one overseas *Fotang* to the rest and presiding at

39 The 13 overseas initiators, according to Lin, include: 2 in Singapore, 8 in Thailand, and 3 in Indonesia. According to the *Xinmin Fotang Luocheng Tekan* <新民佛堂落成特刊> [XFLT] (1995:8) 2 local sect leaders in Ipoh, Malaysia, had been promoted to the rank of initiator in 1987. Therefore, the total number of the Fayi Lingyin's overseas initiators was 15 by 1991.

40 The large scale "three-days' dharma assembly" are regarded by Lingyin's overseas *Fotang* as their major annual event to enhance their sect members' faith, and also the best opportunity for them to be close to their elder. (cf. *Mingde Ban Jiangyi* <明德班讲义> [MDJY](1993:82)

their respective three-day dharma assemblies.⁴¹

Elder Chen Jinlian passed away in 1991. The Fayi Lingyin sub-branch is currently under the leadership of senior initiator (*lao dianchuan shi* 老点传师) Liu Yan 刘炎 who is over ninety years old. Apparently, she is but the symbol of the sub-branch's solidarity. The Fayi Lingyin in Taiwan had by 1990 a total of 975 *Fotang* with the support of seventy five initiators. (cf. Lin Rongze 1993:286,288) The headquarters, the Lingyin Si 灵隐寺 in Sanxia, is not only a policy making body, it also serves as centre of coordination for all activities organized by this sub-branch at home and abroad.

(iii) The Fayi Tianyuan 天元 sub-branch

Like the Fayi Lingyin, the Fayi Tianyuan is not an official appellation, and it is not registered with the Free China I Kuan Tao Association either. The name 'Tianyuan' (Celestial Primordial) derives from the name of the temple-structured headquarters of this sub-branch of Fayi, the Tianyuan Gong 天元宫, built in 1985 in Sanzhi district (*xiang*) in Taipei County. The Tianyuan sub-branch was led by the late elder Zhang Yutai (1909-1990), a native of Tianjin. She was illiterate but had cultivated the Way diligently and served senior elder Han loyally for more than twenty years.

Despite her illiteracy, elder Zhang moved her disciples by her compassion and sincerity. She managed to have her first 'public hall', Guanyin Tang (the Hall of

⁴¹ Cf. MDJY 1993:82. This really was too strenuous a mission for an elderly lady of seventy-six. Elder Chen Jinlian passed away the following year while presiding at a 'dharma assembly' in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Goddess of Mercy) built in 1961 in Taizhong. Later, she had another 'public hall', the Guan Sheng Gong 关圣宫 (the Temple of Lord Saint Guan Yu) built in Xinfeng in Xinzhu County. Many of her early 'dharma assemblies' were held there. From Taizhong and Xinzhu, she then advanced north to Taibei, and eventually constructed another 'public hall', the Tianyuan Gong, in Taibei County. By 1991, the Fayi Tianyuan sub-branch *Fotang* in Taiwan, covered the areas of Taizhong, Xinzhu, Taoyuan, Taibei, and Hualian. (cf. *Zhishan Ban Jiangyi* 〈至善班讲义〉 [ZSJY] 1993: 166-167, Lin Rongze 1993:280)

Elder Zhang began her overseas proselytism in the 1970's. She sent initiator Lin Zhuoshu 林卓树 to 'open up the religious wasteland' in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. The Tianyuan sub-branch's *Fotang* in Singapore and Malaysia are registered under the name of Xinma Jigong Aixin Hui 星马济公爱心会 (the Compassionate Society of Jigong, the Living Buddha, in Singapore and Malaysia), and are currently lead by initiator Lin Yachang 林亚昌. Other than Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, Tianyuan has overseas *Fotang* also in the Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Paraguay, Brazil and Australia. In Thailand alone there are more than 200 *Fotang*. Today, there are over 2,000 *Fotang*, and more than one hundred initiators [in Taiwan and abroad] in support of this sub-branch missionary advancement. (cf. ZSJY 1993:166, LJMX 1990:40)

Elder Zhang passed away in 1990; she was succeeded by initiator Lin Zhuoshu.

(iv) The Fayi Tian'en 天恩 sub-branch

The Fayi Tian'en was led by the late elder Qi Yuxiu (1916-1992). This sub-branch of Fayi is registered with the Free China I Kuan Tao Association under the name of Fayi Tian'en. This registered name is adopted from the name of its headquarters, the Tian'en Gong 天恩宮(Temple of Celestial Grace), built in 1987 in Muzha, Taipei City.

According to Song Guangyu (1983:145), elder Qi's Tian'en sub-branch *Fotang* are mainly centred around Taipei City. It also cover areas such as Taizhong, Gaoxiong, Hualian, and Beigang. Before the Tian'en Gong was built, the Kangzhuang Fotang 康庄佛堂 (Majestic Buddha Hall) in Xindian served as its headquarters. Today, it has more than 300 *Fotang*, and a support structure of over 40 initiators in Taiwan and overseas. (LJMX 1990:40)

Elder Qi passed away in 1992. We do not have much information on this Fayi sub-branch in Taiwan today. As far as Malaysia is concerned, we know that four of its *Fotang* with their headquarters, the Zongxin Fotang 宗心佛堂 ('Model Mind' Buddha Hall) located at Ipoh, is currently under the leadership of initiator Liu Huizhong 刘惠忠 from Taiwan. Another faction of the Tian'en sub-branch in Malaysia is registered under the name of Chong'en Rujia Yanxi Zhongxin 崇恩儒家研习中心 (Chong'en Centre for Studying and Learning Confucianism). It was founded in 1989 and is currently lead by initiator Huang Jinchang 黃金昌.⁴²

⁴² Please refer to Chapter 5 for more information on the Chong'en Rujia Yanxi Zhongxin.

(3) The Xingyi branch

The Xingyi 兴毅 Branch in Taiwan, as we have seen, was first established by the late senior elder He Zonghao 何宗浩 (1906-1988) in 1947. He began his proselytism in Liujia, Tainan County. Some of his important cadres such as Xue Fusan 薛福三, Chen Fengde 陈风德, Chen Dai 陈带, Yang Fo'er 杨佛儿, Sun Yiren 孙义人, who are natives of Liujia, were initiated into the sect during this period. From Tainan it extended to Pingdong, Gaoxiong, and Jiayi.

By 1966, this branch had altogether 29 sub-branches (= *danwei*), each under the leadership of an elder. A Xingyi Branch Council (Xingyi Lishi Hui 兴毅理事会) was formed in the same year, with the Zhongyi 忠义 (Loyalty and Righteousness) sub-branch elder, Sun Yiren, as its president, and the Nanxing 南兴 ('South Prevail') sub-branch elder, Xue Fusan, as its vice-president. The Xingyi's sub-branches continued to grow in numbers over the years, and reached a total of 31 *danwei* by 1983. (Song 1996:145-146) In fact, before the death of Senior elder He in 1988, the Xingyi was the largest Unity Sect's branch in Taiwan.

As pointed out by Song (1996:146), due to its bitter experience of persecutions in the past, the Xingyi branch adopted rather tight security measures. A sect member only knows his/her own *Fotang* and the initiator of his/her sub-branch or *danwei*. In other words, there is no horizontal contact between *Fotang* under the leadership of different elders. This measure is, to this day, still observed in its overseas *Fotang*.

Senior elder He Zonghao began his overseas proselytism as early as 1973

under the name of the Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan 孔孟圣道院 (The Court of Confucius' and Mencius' Saintly Way). Within about a decade, its *Fotang* covered Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Australia, England, Canada, U.S.A., Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. It claimed to have 175,000 sect members overseas by 1983. (cf. Song 1996:147)

After senior elder He's death, only four *danwei* of the Xingyi branch represented by elder Yang Fo'er [of the Nanxing *danwei*] joined the Free China I Kuan Tao Association. Another 10 *danwei* come under the leadership of elder Wu Jingyu in Hong Kong; while the rest of the 17 *danwei* are under the leadership of elder Luo Tiaoshui 罗调水 forming their own Board of Counselors. (cf. Song 1996:76-77,149) According to Song Guangyu (1996:240), this breakdown was mainly caused by serious disagreement, especially among elder Luo's faction, about Senior elder He's earlier decision to join other Unity Sect sub-branches in their fight for officially registered status. Luo's faction is in favour of 'transmitting the Way secretly' (*michuan 秘传*) without interference from the legislative powers of the mundane world (*bushou renshi falu de yueshu 不受人世法律的约束*).

(4) The Jichu branch

As mentioned earlier, the Jichu branch in Taiwan had its first *Fotang* set up in Taipei. Zhang Peicheng, Huang Ziran, Gu Xiangling, and Yan Zhu'e were proselytizing for the sect together in its initial stage. Later, Huang Ziran separated from Zhang to develop the religious domain by himself. The sub-branch under the leadership of Zhang is called Jichu Xiantian, while the one lead by Huang is named Jichu Tianji.

(i) The Jichu Xiantian 基础先天 sub-branch

The name 'Xiantian' (Former Realm) derives from its headquarters, the Xiantian Daoyuan 先天道院, in Taipei City. Senior elder Zhang Peicheng is this sub-branch's leader. Below him are twelve *danwei* each led by its elder. With its web of second grade sub-branches, the Jichu Xiantian's *Fotang* cover the areas of Ruifang [in Taipei County], Taoyuan, Zhongli, Zhunan [in Miaoli], Zhanghua, Jiayi, Tainan, Yilan, Hualian, Taizhong, Jilong, and Yuli [in Hualian], with a total of about 5,000 *Fotang*, and over 300 initiators.⁴³

The overseas *Fotang* of this branch have reached Japan (5), Korea (50), Hong Kong (1), Philippines (10), Singapore (2), Malaysia (5), Indonesia (3), Thailand (8), San Francisco (2), Los Angeles (6), New York (2), Toronto (1), Brazil (10), Paraguay (1), and Argentina (1).⁴⁴ (Song 1996:119)

Senior elder Zhang was the president of The Free China I Kuan Tao Association for two terms (1988-1996) since its formation in 1988. He is currently the chairman of the Yiguan Dao Shijie Zonghui, established at the Quanzhen Daoyuan 全真道院 ('The Sanctuary of Perfect Truth') in Los Angeles on October 6, 1996.

(ii) The Jichu Tianji 基础天基 sub-branch

It derives its name from its headquarters, the Tianji zontang 天基总堂, in

43 Cf. LJMX (1990:37).

44 The numbers in brackets that follow in parentheses the name of each country/city are the number of *Fotang* found in these locations.

Sanchong, and is a member of the Free China I Kuan Dao Association. It has currently more than 500 *Fotang* in Taiwan. This sub-branch of Jichu is under the leadership of elder Huang Ziran. (LJMX 1990:38)

The course of legalizing the Unity Sect in Taiwan

According to LJMX (1990: 28), the history of the Unity Sect's effort in gaining a legitimate status in Taiwan was lengthy and tortuous. As early as 1960, elder Chen Wenxiang and elder Zhang Peicheng in their capacity as the contact person and assistant contact person of the Unity Sect in Taiwan, had sent a petition to the Home Ministry (*neizheng bu* 内政部) for the purpose of official registration (*sic*).⁴⁵ However, they received no response from the authorities. Zhang then helped organize the Taoist Association of the Province of Taiwan 台灣省道教會 [TAPT] in 1963, as an expedient measure to allow the Unity Sect's *Fotang* to be registered through the TAPT. Another attempt to earn legitimate status for the Unity Sect in Taiwan came in 1981. This time the proposed name for registration was 'The Sacred Teaching of China' (Zhonghua Shengjiao 中华圣教). Unfortunately the suggested name was usurped by Ma Yongchang's 马永常 faction, which announced at a congregation a so-called 'preaching assembly of The Sacred

45 According to Song Guangyu (1996:161-166), it was one Zheng Bangqing 郑邦卿 who sent in the petition in 1959 in the name of 'the provisional representative of the Unity Sect' (Yiguan Dao linshi daibiao 一貫道临时代表). Zheng was a parliament member as well as the third group group leader of the Police Headquarters. [Zheng joined the sect after being told that by so doing a tumor in his belly would be cured.] Due to unceasing attacks on the Unity Sect in the local press, Zhang and Chen together with Zheng advertised their joint statement in the local press in response to those accusations in 1963. I think LJMX might have mixed up these two incidents.

Teaching of China' (Zhonghua Shengjiao Budao Dahui 中华圣教布道大会) to be held in Qishan, Gaoxiong, in October of the same year. Ma's faction also submitted their petition for registering the Unity Sect under the name of 'The Association of Sacred Teaching of China' (Zhonghua Shengjiao Hui 中华圣教会) through Pei Mingyu 裴鸣宇, a ninety-two year old parliament member, in September, 1982.⁴⁶ Hence, the second attempt of the Sun-ists to legitimize the sect again ended up in failure due to the 'trouble' caused by Ma's faction.

In 1985, Zhang Peicheng, Qi Yuxiu, Chen Hongzhen, Xue Fusan, Shi Qingxing, Gao Binkai, and Lin Zhixiang 林枝乡 jointly sent in their petition to the Home Ministry to apply for the sect's legalization. The application was turned down for the reason that the legislative process for the new Religions Act (*Zongjiao fa* 宗教法) had not yet been completed.

It was not until January 21, 1987 [after many efforts taken by forty legislative committee members, and also assistance granted by notables in the ruling political party, the KMT] that the Home Minister announced the Unity Sect's legalization in Taiwan. Permission was further granted for the Unity Sect to set up their federation headquarters, The Free China I Kuan Tao Association, in December of the same year. The federation (*zonghui* 总会) was officially established on March 5, 1988.

46 According to *Gaoxiong Xian Jiaopai Zongjiao* (GXJX) [The Sectarian Religions in Gaoxiong County] (1997:93-98), Ma, an army man, was promoted to the rank of initiator upon the recommendation of the Jichu elder Zhang Peicheng. Initially Ma cooperated with Sun-ists in their effort to legitimize the Unity Sect. Both factions eventually broke off their cooperation due to their divergent opinions. Ma's faction thus proceeded with the application on their own. They were regarded as 'traitors' (*pantu* 叛徒) and eventually 'expelled' from the Unity Sect. Ma's faction successfully registered themselves under the name of Zhonghua Shengjiao Hui in September, 1988.

In spite of that, the struggles among the factions under the common label of the Unity Sect persisted. Not all the Sun-ist factions joined the Free I Kuan Tao Association. Senior elder Han Yulin of the Fayi branch, for example, was initially against this legislative process of legalizing the sect. Luo Tiaoshui's faction broke off from the rest of the Xingyi's *danwei* mainly for the same reason. As pointed out by Zheng Zhiming (1990:226-227), due to its many and diverse sub-branches, it is extremely difficult for the sect to consolidate as a single entity. In addition to that, the issues of 'true and false patriarchs' (*zhenjia zushi* 真假祖师),⁴⁷ and the attitude of 'each doing things in his/her own way' (*gezi wei zheng* 各自为政) among the elders of the Sun-ist, encouraged the split from within. The removal of the decree of restriction on the Unity Sect did not seem to benefit it, on the contrary, it is faced with even more difficulties than before. Zheng therefore suggests that the sect should try to resolve the source of its troubles, namely the question of the 'celestial mandate', and should establish a 'School of Religious Studies on the Unity Sect', so as to train a missionary force with superior academic quality.

Be that as it may, the problems faced by the Unity Sect in Taiwan now will have to be resolved by first achieving consensus among all factions. The fundamental break-through should therefore be the abandoning of separatism, and the removal of the 'walls' between all the sub-branches. To quote the newly elected president of the Free I Kuan Tao Association, elder Shi Qingxing, "... we need to work together without differentiating among ourselves in terms of units or sub-branches (*bufen zubie* 不分组别), so as to bring into play our traditional spirit of

⁴⁷ By this he meant the claims by several sect leaders [such as Ma Yongchang, Wu Ruiyuan 吴瑞源, Chen Huoguo 陈火国, and others] to succeed patriarch Zhang and mistress Sun as nineteenth patriarch. (Cf. Zheng 1990:94-95; GXJZ 1997: 86-87; LJMX 1990:49)

compassion and aims giving, consolidating the power of 'the relatives of the Way' (i.e. the sect members), and contributing our share towards spreading the Way." 48

The 'reunion' of the Zhengyi-branch under the leadership of elder Lin Yulan into the big family of the Unity Sect in Taiwan in 1988, following the advice of the late senior elder Zhang Wenyun, was a good start. (Jiang 1992a:81) The fact that the above call by elder Shi still had to be repeated after almost a decade later, shows that this first step of consolidating all the Unity Sect's factions is indeed difficult to achieve. It will probably need one or two generations for such an 'obstruction' to be completely removed. Elder Shi should in fact be congratulated for not 'hiding the sickness for fear of treatment' (*huiji jiyi* 讳疾忌医).

48 Abstract from an interview with Shi Qingxing, published in the General correspondence of the Free China I Kuan Tao Association (*Yiguan Dao Zonghui Huixin* 〈一贯道总会会议〉), No. 57, 1996, p. 32.

Chapter 3

The Unity Sect: its organization, teachings and rituals

As we have seen, the modern Unity Sect of today is in actuality a rather recent sectarian religion which began to take shape under the leadership of Zhang Tianran in 1930. Compared to its predecessors, the Unity Sect's organization, teachings and rituals are very much simplified, flexible, and fit in easily with life in modern society. For example, the concept of cultivation (*xiuxing* 修行) in the Unity Sect is 'half sacred half profane' (*ban sheng ban fan* 半圣半凡). In other words one can continue one's economic pursuits in supporting of one's livelihood on the one hand, while working for the religious goal of 'universal salvation' (*pudu zhongsheng* 普度众生) by proselytizing the sect on the other hand. Or, to put it in an even more down to earth expression: to do one's job is cultivation; to help others is also cultivation. (Song 1996:410) This is indeed the easiest way of cultivation that anyone can commit himself/herself to!

Another aspect that accounts for the Unity Sect's success is its adaptability, often described as flexibility, or 'liveliness' (*huopo* 活泼). Jordan and Overmyer (1986:263-264) quote patriarch Zhang's annotation [in his liturgical text ZDFG (leaf 3a)] on procedures for the presentation of daily incense offerings:

According to the regulations one should offer incense three times a day at [the three twelve two-hour periods of] *mao* 卯, *wu* 午, and *you* 酉.⁴⁹ [=morning, noon,

⁴⁹ Traditionally, the Chinese divided the time of a day into the twelve two-hour periods, each being given the name of one of the twelve Earthly Branches (*dizhi* 地支). *Mao* referred to 5 to 7 a.m., *wu* referred to 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., whereas *you* referred to 5 to 7 p.m.

and evening]. However, if because one is busy with religious affairs, there are times when this schedule is interrupted, there is no fault. If one is extremely occupied and wishes [to follow the rules] but simply has no time to do so, then to offer incense only once or twice a day is all right... In sum, what is important is ceaseless sincerity within, which is never forgotten for a moment.⁵⁰

Again, in a section on ritual prostrations, patriarch Zhang comments that:

although the above ritual regulations are firmly established, some times are busier than others, so one should apply them in a flexible way; one should not be rigid. (ZDFG, leaf 3b)

Patriarch Zhang also comments on the number of offering objects (in ZDFG, leaf 5b and 6a). He admits that fruits and dainties used in offerings are more difficult to obtain in villages, and so allow those *Fotang* in villages to have a smaller number of offering objects compared to those in towns and cities. He says: "... [One] need not adhere to the fixed numbers (*bubi juzhi dingshu* 不必拘执定数) ... For those poor and incapable families, they just have to offer whatever they can afford (*liangli er ban* 量力而办)."

From the above comments and annotations by patriarch Zhang on various liturgical aspects of the sect in ZDFG, we can imagine how responsive and flexible a person he was. In fact, this tradition of 'liveliness' in the Unity Sect still persists to this day. The organizing of TAPT by Zhang Peicheng to accommodate the Unity Sect's *Fotang* in helping them to acquire [through TAPT] the legalized status required by the authorities, and the building of the public temples by the Unity Sect's *Fotang* after 1963 to allow its activities to be carried out in the public domain,

⁵⁰ Unless otherwise stated, translations from ZDFG quoted here are Jordan's and Overmyer's.

are two good examples.

Below, we shall look into the three major aspects of the Unity Sect, namely its organization, teachings and rituals to recount the reasons for its popularity and also its ubiquity in Taiwan and elsewhere in the world.

(1) Organization of the Unity Sect

Patriarch Zhang in his ZDFG (leaf 1b, 2a) listed nine types of address used within the ‘sphere of profane world’ (*renshi fangmian* 人事方面) in the sect, namely, the ‘Honoured Teacher’ (*shizun* 师尊), the ‘initiator’ (*dianchuan shi*), the ‘guide’ (*yin shi* 引师) and the ‘guarantor’ (*bao shi* 保师), the ‘prior initiates’ (*qianren* 前人) or ‘prior worthies’ (*qianxian* 前贤), the disciples (*dizi* 弟子), the ‘junior learners’ (*houxue* 后学), the ‘shrine masters’ (*tanzhu*), ‘the relatives of the Way’ (*daoqin*). Among them, only three types of address (i.e. the ‘Honoured Teacher’, the ‘initiator’, and the ‘shrine master’) are in actuality the hierarchical ranks in the sect. As for the other terms of address: The ‘relative of the Way’ is the general term of address for the ordinary sect members. The ‘prior worthies’ or the ‘prior initiates’⁵¹ are respectful forms of address towards senior members (in terms of seniority in ‘seeking the Way’ = *lun bei bu lun sui* 论辈不论岁). The ‘guide’ is the one who leads or introduces a person to ‘seek the Way’, the ‘guarantor’ is one who insures

⁵¹ It is important to note that the address ‘*qianren*’ (‘prior initiates’), at least when ZDFG was published in 1939 , did not refer to one of the sect’s hierarchical ranks as it does today [where it is equivalent to the rank of ‘elder’]. Earlier, it referred generally to senior members in contrast to novices.

the good conduct of the person 'seeking the Way'.⁵² The 'disciples' and the 'junior learners' are both terms used to refer to oneself in a humble manner. The former is used to refer to oneself when talking to the 'Honoured Teacher' (= Founder of the sect); whereas the latter is used generally to show one's humbleness by lowering oneself as a 'junior' in relation to others.

It is interesting to note that the rank of the so-called 'ten apostles' carrying the title of *daozhang* or the 'master of the Way' do not appear at all in the ZDFG. The fact that the 'initiator' and 'shrine master' are ranks particularly stated in the ZDFG, can easily be explained in terms of the functional roles played by personnel appointed to these ranks in proselytizing the sect. The 'initiators' are but '*daili mingshi*' 代理明師, the representatives of the Enlightened Master (= Zhang Tianran) who carry out the apostolic duty of dotting and transmitting the 'three jewels' (*sanbao*)⁵³ to the novices during the initiation ceremony. (Jiang 1992b:119) The 'shrine masters', as we have seen, are the house owners who set up *Fotang* within their individual households providing places for proselytizing the sect's teaching, and for congregational worship. Together, all these *Fotang* form the religious domain of the 'Honoured Teacher'.

In the ZDFG, the address 'Mistress' (*shimu 师母*)⁵⁴ appears only under the

⁵² Both the roles of the 'guide' and the 'guarantor' are usually played by more senior members. Together, they form an indispensable pair of 'intermediaries' during the initiation ceremony.

⁵³ The 'three jewels' in the Unity Sect referred to the 'mantra', (*koujue 口诀*) the 'contract mudra' (*hetong 合同*), and the 'mysterious gate' (*xuanguan 玄关*). I shall return to this point later in this chapter.

⁵⁴ The address 'mistress' (*shimu*) is customary used in Chinese society by disciples as polite address to the wife of their teacher or master (*shifu 师父*).

third section of the ‘types of etiquette’ (*xingli leibie* 行礼类别), which include the ritualistic ‘rite for greeting and taking leave’ (*canjia cijia li* 参驾辞驾礼), the ‘rite of gratitude to [heavenly] grace’ (*xie'en li* 谢恩礼), the ‘rite of welcoming and sending off’ (*jiejia songjia li* 接驾送驾礼),⁵⁵ and the ‘rite for burning incense and kowtowing’ (*shaoxiang koutou li*). Apparently, the address ‘mistress’ in the Unity Sect differed in meaning from the ordinary usage, in the sense that it is taken more like an honourable title which places it within the ‘hierarchical ranks’ of the sect.

The prestigious status of the ‘mistress’ in the Unity Sect became particularly eminent after the death of patriarch Zhang, as a result of the open struggle between the Liu-ist and the Sun-ist factions over the control of Zhang’s religious empire. This is especially so in the case of the Sun-ist faction, based on the claim that Madame Sun shared the ‘celestial mandate’ with patriarch Zhang, and hence coexisted with him as the eighteenth patriarch of the third period.

The title of Daozhang (‘Master of the Way’), may officially have been added to the list of the hierarchical ranks within the sect at a later stage, but their status as ‘apostles’ to the Honoured Teacher was clear-cut. This can be seen from the fact that they were usually summoned to become the *de facto* leaders of Zhang’s religious domain in certain provincial cities. Even after Zhang’s death, they were among the few who were exempted from attending the ‘repentance classes’ conducted by Madame Sun in 1948.

⁵⁵ According to the ZDFG (leaf 3b), this ‘rite of welcoming and sending off’ is used during and after the ‘ritual for inviting [spirits] to the Altar (*qing tan* 请坛). It is also used to welcome and send off the Honoured Teacher, mistress, and the initiators.

The title of 'Senior Elder' (*lao qianren*) and the 'Elder' (*qianren*) also do not appear at all in the ZDFG. They were most likely 'added' to the list of the sect's titles of hierarchical ranking at an even much later stage. This is to allow discrimination to be made among all initiators based on their achievements in terms of the numbers of the subordinating initiators and *Fotang* that come directly under their leadership. As we have seen, a successful 'mother shrine' (*mu tan*) may 'give birth' to many 'children shrines' (*zi tan*) known as 'branch' (*zu*). A successful branch may later branch out into many sub-branches (*zhi*) or units (*danwei*). Again, the sub-branches may further branch out to form sub-sub branches.

Let us take the case of the Fayi branch in Taiwan as an example to illustrate how the terms 'Senior Elder' and 'Elder' came into being. The late Han Yulin is called the 'Senior Elder' of the Fayi branch in Taiwan because the Tongxing Tan he founded in Tianjin is the 'mother shrine' to all the Fayi sub-branches in Taiwan. Han's subordinating sub-branches later each branched out with their own numerous subordinate *Fotang* at the sub-sub branch level. Hence, leaders at the sub-branch level like Chen Hongzhen, the late Li Yuming, and the late Zhang Yutai, and others are each called 'Elder' by their own sub-sub branches. It is therefore clear to us that the nature of the honorific titles of the 'Senior Elder' and the 'Elder' discussed above are reflections of leadership structures within the respective sub-branches and sub-sub branches which are based mainly on the clan ethics deeply rooted in Chinese society. From the viewpoint of the Honoured Teacher all of them are but the initiators that represent him in his mission of 'proclaiming transformation on behalf of Heaven' (*daitian xuanhua* 代天宣化).

A branch or a sub-branch having too many 'Elders' of equal status, is likely to

encounter the bitter experience of ‘breaking up’ upon the death of the existing leading elder. This is because none of subordinate elders would submit to the leadership of an elder appointed among themselves to take the lead. The case of Xingyi branch in Taiwan serves well to illustrate this example. As we have seen, there are thirty one subordinate ‘unit’ leaders with the title of ‘Elder’ in the Xingyi branch. After the death of senior elder He Zonghao, his religious domain has since broken up into three major factions (cf. Chapter two). To avoid this problem, there is now a tendency to have only one elder leading the rest of the sect functionaries, namely the initiators. To discriminate among those initiators, an honorary title (which is not a formal rank) such as ‘senior initiator’ (*lao dianchuan shi*) or the ‘leading initiator’ (*lingdao dianchuan shi* 领导点传师) may be used to address an initiator whose ability or seniority has been particularly acknowledged for one reason or the other. The Fayi Lingyin in Taiwan, for example, is currently lead by ‘Senior Initiator’ Liu Yan who is over ninety years old and took over leadership after the successive deaths of elder Li Yuming and elder Chen Jinlian in 1983 and 1991 respectively.

Having said that, we shall now look at the entire organizational structure of the Unity Sect in Taiwan today. According to YGJJ (1988:20-23), the ranks of offices (*zhiji* 职级) in the sect can be divided into ten grades, namely: (1) the patriarchs (= the Honoured Teacher Zhang Tianran and Mistress Sun Suzhen), (2) ‘the masters of the Way’ (*Daozhang*), (3) the senior elder (*lao qianren*), (4) the elder (*qianren*), (5) the Initiator [or ‘the manager’ (*jingli* 经理)], (6) the shrine master, (7) the lecturer (*jiangshi*), (8) the junior cadres (*banshi yuan*), (9) the ‘three talents’ (*sancai*) [consisting of the ‘celestial talent’ (*tiancai*), the ‘terrestrial talent’ (*dicai*), and the ‘human talent’ (*rencai*)], and (10) the ‘relatives of the Way’ (*daojin*). Among

these ten 'ranks of offices' listed above, the patriarchs in rank one and the 'masters of the Way' in rank two have became parts of sect history. The 'Later Eighteenth Eastern Patriarchs' (Zhang and Sun) were the last patriarchs in the 'last act of salvation' (*mohou yizhuo* 末后一著) according to the 'three-stage eschatology' (*sanqi mojie* 三期末劫) in the Unity Sect's theological framework. Also, none of the 'ten apostles' carrying the title of the 'master of the Way' have survived to this day. They were either executed by the communists or died a natural death.

The present Unity Sect in Taiwan is in actuality an 'entity' consisting of the so-called 'thirteen branches and eighteen sub-branches' [each branch or sub-branch is leads by its own senior elder or elder or senior initiator] bearing the common name of the Unity Sect.⁵⁶ The Free China I Kuan Tao Association (= FCIA) established on March 5, 1988 in fulfillment of the legislative requirement, is supposedly the federation headquarters of all the Unity Sect's factions in Taiwan, in spite of the fact that not all the sub-branches recognized by the Unity Sect have joined the federation. There are also some self-proclaimed Unity Sect branches

⁵⁶ Though fragmentated, the coexistence of these branches and sub-branches has created a kind of competition among them, which indirectly has led to the ubiquity of the sect in Taiwan and abroad. Nonetheless, the zeal of sect members in proselytizing the sect also helps account for its popularity.

whose membership is denied by the federation.⁵⁷

Lin Rongze (1993:289-291), who studies the process of development in the Unity Sect by applying the theory of *fang*⁵⁸ put forward by Chen Chi-nan 陈其南 in defining the Chinese kinship system, discovered that there are many similarities to be found between the two. He argues that a new category of the so-called 'lineage-type religion' (*jiazhua zongjiao* 家族化宗教) ought to be added to the two categories of 'institutional religion' and 'diffused religion' suggested earlier by C.K. Yang. This is to facilitate the structural analysis of sectarian religions like the Unity Sect, many of which are institutionalized, and structured through the non-kinship relationship (*fei xueyuan guanxi* 非血缘关系) networks of teachers and pupils. He uses the Fayi branch in Taiwan as a metaphor to illustrate this 'lineage' characteristic of the sectarian religion. If one takes the Fayi branch as an 'extended family' with senior elder Han Yulin as its patriarch (*da jiazhang* 大家长), the

⁵⁷ According to GXJZ (1997:83-87, 89), these factions include the Wang Haode's Providence Maitreya Buddha Missionary Institute (Tian'en Milefo Yuan) with its headquarters located in Xinzhu, Chen Huoguo's 'The Great Way of the Goddess of Mercy' (Guanyin Dadao 观音大道), the 'Saintly Oneness' (Shengyi 圣一) branch with its headquarters 'The Court of the Nanping Mountain Saintly True Heavenly Buddha' (Nanping Shan Shengzhen Tianfo Yuan 南屏山圣真天佛院) located at Fengshan City in Gaoxiong County, and the 'Monastery of the Heavenly Halls' (Tiantang Si 天堂寺) of the Baoguang Branch. They are either *Fotang* formerly derived from 'phoenix halls' and still strongly influenced by 'phoenix halls', or those 'traitors' who claim the authority of the nineteenth patriarch of the 'White Yang epoch'.

⁵⁸ Literally, a *fang* may be rendered as a 'room'. In the terminology of Chinese kinship system, however, it connotes the subdivisions of a *jia* 家 or 'family'. Hu Hsien-chin (1948:18) who studied the common descent groups and its functions in China, explains that "within the extended family the conjugal families each occupy a section of the home, or a separate building and thus are known as *fang* 房. These subdivisions of the *chia* [=*jia*] are usually numbered 'elder *fang*', 'second *fang*', etc., according to the order of birth of the brother who is its head."

'elders' [under Han's leadership in their capacity as his 'junior learners'] in the Fayi sub-branches are equivalent to 'basic *fang* units' (*jiben fang danwei* 基本房单位) in relation to him. Those 'initiators' at the second grade sub-branch level of the Fayi sub-sub-branches [who are the elders' 'junior learners'], in turn each form a 'basic *fang* unit' in relation to their elders.

Based on this lineage structure (*jiazu jiegou* 家族结构) of the Unity Sect, when a sub-branch expands to a considerable size, it is customary for an elder to appoint subordinate initiator(s) to help supervise the second grade sub-branch *Fotang* on his/her behalf. In many cases, these initiators are the *de facto* leaders at the level of these second grade sub-branches. In like manner, the elders who in actuality lead the sub-branches should in accordance with the 'clan ethics' refer to senior elder Han as a consultant in his capacity as the patriarch of this branch.

Like the extended family in traditional Chinese society, the lineage structure of the branches/sub-branches in the Unity Sect tends to face the usual crisis of breaking up into smaller factions upon the death of its patriarch. As we have seen, some sub-branches limit the rank of 'elder' to only one person; this rank is supposed to be 'inherited' by only one succeeding leader. It aims to avoid the usurpation of power from within, since the authority for appointing new initiators (= *fang ming* 放命, literally 'the release of [celestial] mandate') is in the hands of those sect leaders with the rank of elder and above. The building of a centralized administrative headquarters cum religious centre (*daowu zhongxin*) along with the adoption of management by 'collective leadership and coherent advancement', constitutes yet another alternative. These 'devices' do help, in one way or the other, to maintain the status quo of the existing sub-branches upon the death of the

leading elder.

Below the initiators are the lecturers who undergo a full five-year sectarian education programme conducted separately by almost all the branches/sub-branches⁵⁹ in Taiwan today. These 'study classes' (*yanjiu ban* 研究班) are conducted systematically with fixed syllabi drawn up for each grade of the class. The Fayi Lingyin sub-branch, for example, began in 1992 a five-year comprehensive sectarian education programme in order "to bring up future sect leaders who will become the pillars of its religious domain" (*zaojiu daochang de dongliang zhi cai* 造就道场的栋梁之才). A comprehensive set of courses divided into six grades is to be conducted in three stages. The first stage consist of the Mingde 明德 ('Illuminating virtue'), the Xinmin 新民 ('Renewing the people'), and the Zhishan 至善 ('Utmost Goodness') classes, conducted for a duration of one and a half years. The second stage consist of the Xuande 宣德 ('Proclaiming virtue') and the Hongde 弘德 ('Proselytizing virtue') classes, conducted also for a duration of one and a half years. The third stage consist of the 'Canonical texts study classes' (*jingdian ban* 经典班) conducted for a duration of two years.

The Mingde class (eighteen weeks), is offered to all 'relatives of the Way' who have attended the three-day 'dharma assemblies', to enhance their knowledge on the basic teaching of the sect. The Xinmin class (eighteen weeks) aims to train

⁵⁹ This requirement has been gradually adopted by many of the sub-branches in Taiwan today. However, in their overseas *Fotang*, this ruling may not be strictly followed at this stage. The lack of missionaries from Taiwan to back them up with full technical support necessary for conducting these classes, and also the lack of local preachers are two important factors that allow for a certain flexibility in appointing lecturers overseas.

junior cadres (*banshi yuan*) of superior quality, focusing on the Unity Sect's regulations and etiquette (*fogui lijie* 佛规礼节), the learning of the 'sacred instructions' (*shengxun 圣训*), and also discussions of the correct attitude a junior cadre should have towards his/her occupation and family. The Zhishan class (eighteen weeks) aims at enhancing the junior cadre's conviction and dedication towards the Way (*). Its contents cover the teachings of the three religions, the preciousness of the 'mind dharma' and the 'three jewels' (*sanbao xinfa 三宝心法*) of the sect. The Xuande class (eighteen weeks) trains junior lecturers (*jiangyuan*) capable of handling the junior class lessons and of preaching on the sect teaching during the one day 'dharma assemblies' conducted for novices. The Hongdao class (thirty-six weeks in two terms) trains lecturers capable of conducting lectures on selected topics during the three-day 'dharma assemblies', and also of teaching the lessons in Xinmin and Zhishan classes. [Both the Xuande and Hongdao classes lay stress upon the training of skills in preaching and lecturing.] The 'Canonical texts study classes' consist of seventy-two weeks of lessons conducted in four terms. It aims at training senior lecturers capable of preaching and lecturing on the canonical texts. It covers the study of canonical texts from the five religions, namely: the *Four Books* (*Sishu 四书*), the *Book of Rites* (*Liji 礼记*), the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing 易经*) of Confucianism; the *Daode Jing*, the *Book of Zhuangzi*, the '*Canon of Clear and Tranquility*' (*Qingjing Jing*) of Daoism; the '*Platform Sutra*' (*Tanjing 坛经*), the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Heart Sutra*, and the '*Recorded Sayings of Chan Masters*' of Buddhism; the *Bible* of Christianity; and the *Koran* of Islam. The purpose of studying these canonical texts "is to offer testimony to the existence of the Way (*jie jingdian zheng Dao 解经典证道*), and to expound the 'mind dharma' hidden within*

these texts.”⁶⁰

As a matter of fact, the Unity Sect has all along devoted much time in almost every congregation to education in the Confucian canon and certain other texts, including the study of and commentary on morality books (*shanshu* 善书). As pointed out by Jordan and Overmyer (1986:237), “... the Unity Sect is perhaps second only to the public school system in its pursuit of education for its members... It seems likely that the study of the Chinese heritage attracts many working-class and uneducated people to membership.” In addition to that, the learning of the proper way of paying obeisance to deities in various rituals following the regulations and etiquette of the sect is always taken seriously as part of the duty of the sect members. Both liturgical training and sectarian education have contributed to the uniformity of its basic [theological] teachings and its rituals in Taiwan and abroad despite the variations found in different branches or sub-branches.

With the launching of this comprehensive programme of sectarian education in recent years, ‘lecturers’ are expected to be well versed in the sect teachings, and junior cadres acquainted with its basic teaching and the regulations and etiquette in various rituals. Ordinary sect members, too, are equipped with the correct understanding of the basic sect teachings. In addition to that, many of the Unity Sect branches or sub-branches have recently set up ‘colleges’ (*xueyuan* 学院) to provide continuing education for the existing initiators and lecturers. They aim at upgrading their education level as well as updating their knowledge in the application of modern technology in their missions.

⁶⁰ Cf. “Preface” in *Xinmin Ban Jiangyi* (*Lecture notes for a ‘Renewing the People’ class*) [1992:6-7]

Education programs for the ‘shrine masters’, though not mentioned here, are often grouped under the category of ‘shrine masters and junior cadres class’ (*tanzhu rencai ban* 坛主人才班). This is because the operation of the routine business of a local ‘public hall’ or a ‘family shrine’ is usually in the hands of a ‘shrine master’ and a numbers of junior cadres (*banshi yuan* = [*daochang*] *rencai*). Hence, it makes sense to have classes held jointly for these two groups of sect personnel. Besides, there is also an unofficial organization called ‘fellowship meeting’ (*lianyi hui* 联谊会) that forms a kind of liaison for all ‘shrine masters’ and junior cadres in the whole sub-branch to provide opportunities for them to get together and exchange their experiences in their missionary activities.

The three ‘talents’, as explained elsewhere in this dissertation (see footnote 27 in Chapter two), together form a triad in conducting planchette revelation during the ‘dharma assemblies’. Though seldom conducted in ordinary congregations nowadays, planchette revelation still plays an important role in the Unity Sect mission. The statement of the late senior elder He Zonghao that one should “use the planchette [as an *upaya*] when proselytizing the Way; get rid of it when cultivating the Way” (*kaidao yongji, xiudao qiji* 开道用乩修道弃乩) clearly illustrates how important planchette revelation is in enhancing the faith of the novices. In fact, as we have seen, it is also used during the three-day ‘dharma assemblies’ held annually in Taiwan and overseas *Fotang* as a means of sustaining the zeal and conviction of the sect members. As for the job of training the ‘three talents’, it has become the responsibility [and in a way the monopoly] of the elder in every sub-branch. To avoid any possibility of misusing the planchette revelation, permission must be granted from the elder concerned before any such revelation by the ‘three talents’ can be conducted.

Below, I summarize the various 'ranks of offices' in the Unity Sect in the form of a diagram (see p. 70):

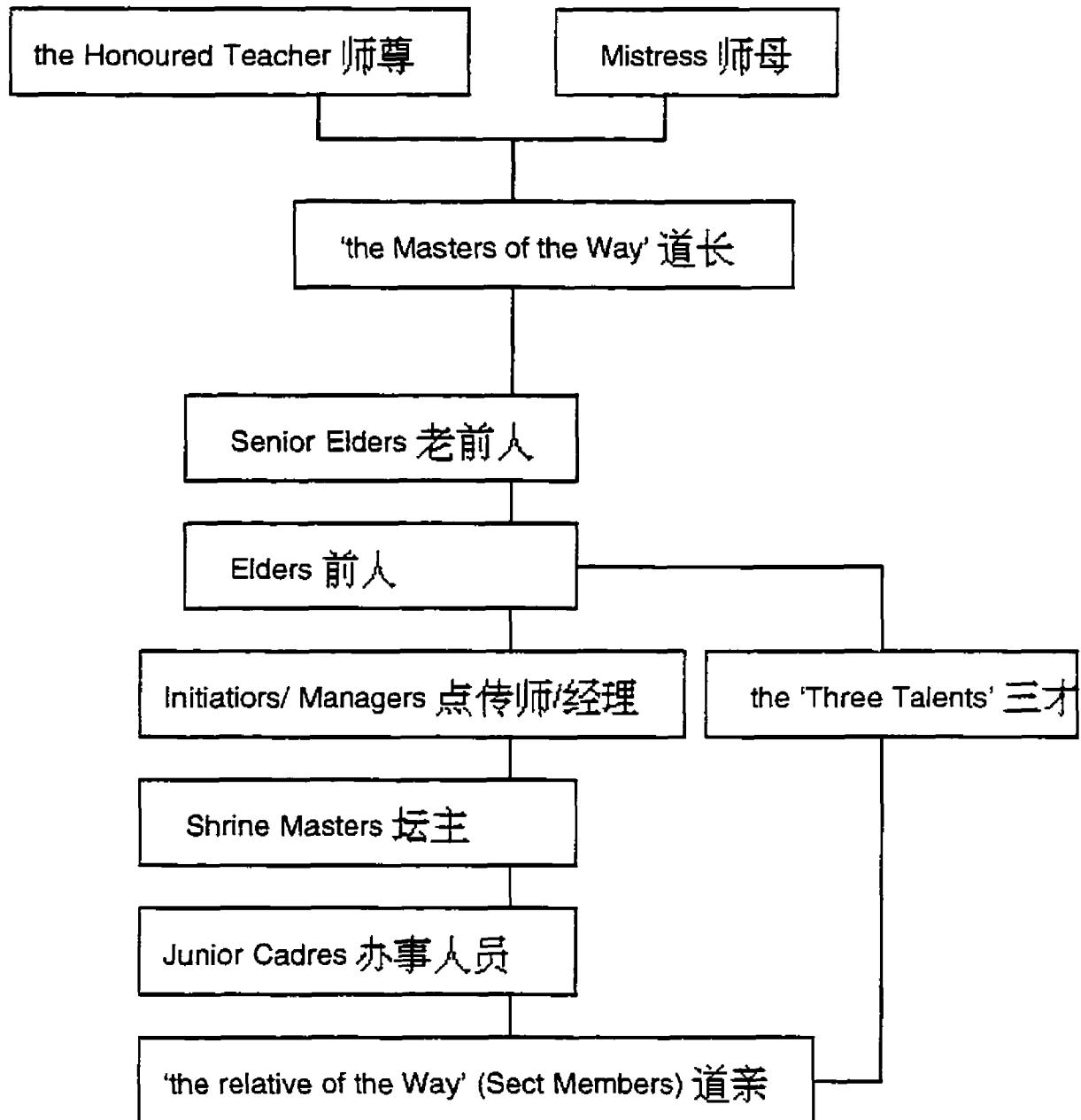


Diagram 1: 'Ranks of Offices' in the Unity Sect

In looking at all the above efforts taken by the Unity Sect leaders in Taiwan in general, one is impressed by their programs of self improvement and updating, which portray their ultimate intention of keeping the sect's development in step with the modern world. Changes attempted by some of its open-minded leaders may help in modernizing the sect's organizational structure, and even democratizing its existing leadership.

Given its present situation, it is unavoidable that the Unity Sect's present pattern of the charismatic and authoritative leadership will eventually come to an end. More and more of the old-style leaders originating from mainland China have passed away in recent years. They are the older generation who gained respect because of their great sacrifices and suffering in opening up the religious "wasteland" in mainland China and/or in Taiwan. Many of the sect leaders of younger generations today, on the contrary, may lack their predecessors' opportunities to attain similar pride and respect. Hence, it has become relatively difficult for leaders of the younger generation to exert authority. In order to acquire the cooperation of their subordinates, these leaders may have to humble themselves to the extent of putting themselves on equal footing with their subordinates. If such a condition should prevail, one can expect a big change in the superior-subordinate relationships within the Unity Sect, which had been taken for granted thus far. To be sure, such a change will unavoidably bring about changes in the sect's present organizational structure and its pattern of leadership as well.

(2) The Unity Sect's teachings

As we have discussed elsewhere in Chapter two, the Unity Sect's theological foundation is based on its unique legitimization by the 'celestial mandate' along with its transmission of the 'mind-dharma', handed down through the line of apostolic succession. Added to this is the creation myth that centred on the salvation at the end of the three-stage epoches of Green, Red and White Yang 阳 (i.e. the sun) by the Three Buddhas, namely the 'Lamplighter' or Dipamkara Buddha (Randeng Fo 燃灯佛), the Sakyamuni Buddha (Shijia Fo 释迦佛), and the Maitreya Buddha (Mile Fo 弥勒佛). All three stages of this salvation were commissioned by the Eternal Mother, who tearfully awaits the return of her estranged and suffering children [so-called 'primordial ones' or 'people of the origin' (*yuanren* 原人)] who lost their way in the 'red dust world' (*hongchen* 红尘).

Based on the creation myth and the story of salvation, members of the Unity Sect are repeatedly reminded that they are among those ninety-two myriads of the 'children of the royal womb' (*huangtai* 皇胎) yet to be rescued by Maitreya who is soon to appear (*danglai* 当来), and whose fundamental task is to restore primordial unity (*shouyuan* 收圆) as the last act of salvation history during the White Yang

Jordan and Overmyer (1986:222) point out that "In the Unity Sect an enormous emphasis is placed upon initiation."⁶² This is mainly due to the fact that the sect believes that this act of initiation itself 'saves' an individual from purgatory and guarantees a place at the side of the Venerable Mother for eternity.⁶³ According to the Unity Sect's teachings, at the time a person is born, the 'numinous nature' (*lingxing* 灵性) [believed to be 'a partition of the Eternal Mother's spirit

⁶¹ The Unity Sect's understanding of three stages of time consists of the first period, the 'Epoch of the Green Yang' (*qing yang qi* 清阳期); the second period, the 'Epoch of the Red Yang' (*hongyang qi* 红阳期); and the third period, the 'Epoch of the White Yang' (*baiyang qi* 白阳期). According to the YDJJ (1988:13), the first period started from the reign of the culture hero Fu Xi with the Lamplighter Buddha controlling the heavens (*zhang tianpan* 掌天盘). The second period started during the reign of Zhou Wenwang 周文王 (ca. 11 century B.C.E.) with Sakyamuni controlling the heavens. The third period began at the time when *wu* 午 (the seventh Earthly Branches) superseding *wei* 未 (the eighth Earthly Branches) [*wu-wei jiaoti* 午未交替], i.e. ca. 1912 (Minguo shiqi 民国时期) with Maitreya Buddha in control of the heavens. The division of history into these three periods is a modern adaptation of a sectarian time scheme first discussed in the sixteenth century. (Cf. Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 261).

⁶² By 'initiation' is meant the dotting of the aperture located between the two eyebrows [or at an intersection point of lines running vertically through the nose and horizontally through the eyes] of a novice by the initiator [using his/her thumb] during the initiation ritual. The aperture is given various kinds of names, including among others: the 'mysterious gate' (*xuanguan*), the [Christian] cross (*shizija* 十字架), and 'the main entrance of life and death' (*shengsi zhi zhengmen* 生死之正门).

⁶³ Cf. Jordan and Overmyer (1986:231). Sect sayings or metaphorical expressions, such as "*mingshi yizhi, chaosheng liaosi*" 明师一指, 超生了死 ('a dotting [at the aperture] by the enlightened master saves one from [the suffering of] transmigration'), and "*dianpo xuanguan qiao, Yanwang xia yi tiao*" 点破玄关窍, 阎王吓一跳 ('a dot at the mysterious aperture, gives Yama, King of the Hell, a start'), clearly illustrate the faith in the efficaciousness of being initiated into the sect. In fact, the initiation itself is one of the three jewels (*sanbao* 三宝) 'transmitted' to the novice during the initiation ritual, called "*dedao*" 得道 ('receiving the Way').

(*laomu de fenling* 老母的分灵)] enters into one's body through the 'mysterious gate'. However, sentient beings became attached to fame, profit, alcohol, debauchery, wealth and temper (*ming* 名, *li* 利, *jiu* 酒, *se* 色, *cai* 财, *qi* 气), so that they eventually immerse themselves in *samsara*, the "sea of suffering". In other words, their endowed 'true nature' (*benlai mianmu* 本来面目) becomes so defiled that they lose the original way back to Heaven. The sect therefore proclaims that only when one is initiated into the Way (*rudao* 入道) will one's spiritual nature be enlightened again. This is to ensure that upon one's death, one's 'numinous nature' will exit through the 'mysterious gate' which leads a person back to the primordial paradise of the principle realm (*litian* 理天) where the Eternal Mother resides. As Senior Elder Han Yuling always preaches: "We sentient beings come from Heaven, and should therefore ultimately return to Heaven".

Also, we are told that the salvation by means of initiation is further extended to the other two realms of beings, namely the 'Immortals and Buddhas' (*xianfo* 仙佛) and the ghosts during this last act of salvation ordained by the Eternal Mother. Unity Sect doctrine conceives of the cosmos as tripartite, consisting of the phenomenal realm (*xiangtian* 象天, the world inhabited by human beings and ghosts), the ethereal realm (*qitian* 气天, the heavens ruled over by the deities of the popular pantheon), and the principle realm (*litian* 理天, the primordial paradise governed by the Eternal Mother).⁶⁴ Both 'immortals and Buddhas' and the ghosts depend on human beings in helping them to be initiated into the Way, without which they are unable to return to the paradise of the Eternal Mother. Hence, the phrase "*renshen nan de*" 人身难得 ('it is difficult to 'obtain' a human body') is constantly

⁶⁴ The translation of 'tripartite cosmos' and the 'three realms' above follows Philip Clart (1996:101).

repeated in the sect teachings to point out to people how lucky they are to have been born as human beings, and how silly it would be for them not to 'seek the Way' (*qiudao*) in order to attain immediate salvation and enjoy eternal life in the principle realm. In any case, the concepts of 'a person of superior capacity' (*shang gen ren* 上根人) or 'those with karmic potential' (*you yuan ren* 有缘人) are always used to refer to those who adhere to the Way, in contrast to those described as 'without the proper destiny' (*wu yuan ren* 无缘人) because they turned down the sect's offer of salvation.

Another important teaching in the Unity Sect is the duty to fulfill one's vows (*liaoyuan* 了愿). A frequently quoted phrase that reads: "ni ruo yuan buneng liao, nan ba xiang huan" 你若愿不能了, 难把乡还 ('if you do not fulfill your vows, it is difficult for you to return to the native place') is always used to remind sect members of their duty to proselytize the sect and to cultivate the Way diligently. The 'native place' here refers to the primordial paradise of the Eternal Mother. Since the ultimate aim for all sect members in cultivating the Way is to 'return to one's original roots, [in order] to meet the Eternal Mother' (*guigen jianmu* 归根认母), fulfillment of one's vows is therefore a task of paramount importance.

During the initiation ritual, all sect members give 'ten great vows' (*shitiao dayuan* 十条大愿): (1) to preserve the Way after receiving it, (2) to repent with a true heart (for men) or to cultivate and refine one's moral character (for women), (3) not to behave with empty heart and false intention (*xuxin jiayi* 虚心假意), (4) not to retreat and shrink back (*tuisuo buqian* 退缩不前), (5) not to deceive their teacher or

despise the patriarchs (*qishi miezu* 欺师灭祖), (6) not to despise their elder brethren in the faith (*miaoshi qianren* 藐视前人), (7) to follow the 'sect regulations' (*zunshou fogui* 遵守佛规), (8) not to divulge heavenly secrets (*bu xielou tianji* 不泄漏天机), (9) to manifest the Way, and (10) not to act recklessly and without consideration (*bu liangli er wei* 不量力而为) [for men] or not to be dishonest in cultivating oneself (*bu chengxin xiulian* 不诚心修炼) [for women].⁶⁵

The above mentioned 'ten great vows' are in fact the sect members' basic rules of conduct presented in the form of an oath. In addition to that, the three-stage eschatology that emphasizes the last act of the Dharma (*mofa* 末法) creates a kind of 'sense of impending crisis' among the sect members. All these factors help to explain partly the zeal of sect members in spreading the sect. The ZDFG (leaf 9b) clearly states that "aiding someone in doing a good deed (i.e. 'to seek the Way'), is indeed helping oneself in accomplishing goodness. If only one's conduct is meritorious, one's vows will be fulfilled." (*chengren jishi chengji, xinggong fangneng liaoyuan* 成人即是成己行功方能了愿). The Unity Sect also teaches that one should practice 'the dual cultivation of nature and destiny' (*xingming shuangxiu* 性命双修), which means that other than cultivating and emancipating one's original nature (= 'sageliness within'), one should at the same time fulfill one's mission of saving the world (= 'kingliness without'). Only when an equilibrium is achieved between the two types of cultivation, will one manifest the perfect stage of 'rounded merits and full fruition of virtues' (*gong yuan guo man* 功圆果满) which promises the attainment of immortality and Buddhahood.

⁶⁵ The translation above is adopted from Jordan and Overmyer (1986: 301-302) with some modifications.

The frequently quoted saying of Confucius “My doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity” (*Wu dao yi yi guan zhi* 吾道一以貫之)⁶⁶ is taken not only as the source from which the Unity Sect derives its name, but also points directly to the essence of its teachings, namely the Oneness which embraces all things in the world. It is said that even the mind and nature (*xin-xing* 心性) of the five religions are all in conformity with the ‘principle of Oneness’ (*yi li* 一理).⁶⁷ This Oneness is the root of the Heavenly Way. It is further argued that the ‘myriad things and numbers can never part from the One, for without the One nothing could be accomplished. Without the One, all things could not return to their roots of origin’ (*wanwu wanshu jie buneng liyi, liyi ze bucheng, bu de qi yi ze buneng guigen* 万物万数皆不能离一,离一则不成,不得其一则不能归根).⁶⁸

The sect also teaches ‘cultivating and nourishing the mind and nature’ (*xiuyang xin-xing* 修养心性), and ‘rectifying one’s mind in order to fulfill one’s nature’ (*zhengxin jinxing* 正心尽性). Here, the so-called ‘the sixteen characters

⁶⁶ Cf. James Legge *Confucian Analects*, chapter 15, in *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1 (1972: 169).

⁶⁷ Interestingly, the following doctrines attributed to Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam quoted below by the Unity Sect each end up with the Chinese character ‘one’ to demonstrate the sharing of the concept of ‘oneness’ among them. They are: ‘all teachings returning to the One’ (*wanfa guiyi* 万法归一), ‘embracing the primordial, preserving the One’ (*baoyuan shouyi* 抱元守一), ‘holding the mean and pervade the One’ (*zhizhong guanyi* 执中贯一), ‘sorting out the truth and return to the One’ (*qingzhen fanyi* 清真返一), ‘pray silently and be close to the One’ (*modao qinyi* 默祷亲一).

⁶⁸ Cf. *Jichu Ban Quanji* 〈基础班全集〉 [JBQJ] (*Collected Works for Beginning Studies Class*) (n.d. :15).

mind-dharma' (*shiliu zi xinfa* 十六字心法) that "The mind of man is restless (prone to err); its affinity for the right way is small. Be discriminating, be undivided, that you may sincerely hold fast the mean' (*renxin weiwei, daoxin weiwei; weijing weiyi yunzhi juezhong* 人心惟危, 道心惟微, 惟精惟一, 先执厥中)⁶⁹ is always quoted to admonish the sect members to refine their minds, and constantly stay close to the Heavenly Way so that the 'mind [leaping about like] a monkey; thoughts [galloping about like] a horse' (*xinyuan-yima* 心猿意马, fanciful and fickle ideas) are kept under control. This is particularly so because 'a single good thought is the heavenly halls, a single evil thought is purgatory' (*yi nian zhi shan ji tiantang* 一念之善即天堂, *yi nian zhi e ji diyu* 一念之恶即地狱). Hence, it is important that one always 'sincerely hold fast the due Mean' (*yunzhi juezhong*)⁷⁰ to avoid misdeed or misjudgment.

In order to advance in the Way (*jing jin* 精进), one must put the Way into practice. Among others, to lessen the sin of killing by purifying one's mouth (*qingkou*) [meaning to be a vegetarian] is most preferred by the Unity Sect. Abstention from meat is mainly due to the understanding that killing the three types of living things (*san yan* 三厌) ⁷¹ will cause retribution and wickedness (*zhizao nieqian* 制造孽愆) which contravene to the idea of 'constantly nourishing one's compassionate mind'. People who cultivate the Way should identify with Supreme Heaven's will of considering love for the welfare of living things. Abstention from

⁶⁹ Cf. James Legge, *Book of Documents*, "Da Yu mo" <尚书·大禹谟>, in *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 3 (1982:61-62).

⁷⁰ Cf. James Legge, *Confucian Analects*, in *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1 (1972:350).

⁷¹ 'San yan' refers to the species of birds, beasts and aquatic animals.

the five pungent roots (*wu hun* 五辛) ⁷² is due to the belief that eating these roots will cause one's primal *qi* of the five organs (*wuzang zhi yuanqi* 五脏之元气) to easily dispersed. Besides, they all belong to *Yin* and turbidity. Eating them will easily damage one's pure *Yang* 阳 body.⁷³

Besides, one must always reflect upon one's transgressions and repent, because only then will one's numinous nature be enlightened and one's behaviour in accord with the Way of Heaven. A quotation from the *Doctrine of the Mean* admonishes that "The path may not be left for an instant. If it could be left, it would not be the path."⁷⁴ is borrowed by the sect to stress the importance of one's actions following the principle of the Heaven (= the Unity Sect's teachings).

One must also practice the three types of 'alms giving' (*san shi* 三施), namely proselytizing the sect (*fa shi* 法施), donations in supporting the activities of proselytizing (*cai shi* 财施), and protecting the sect against all types of resistance and adversity (*wu wei shi* 无畏施). These alms constitute a part of the so-called 'kingliness without' (*wai wang* 外王), which is especially emphasized in this time of impending apocalypse in the course of which all the uninitiated will perish. It is at this point that the role of the Eternal Mother comes into play. She cannot bear to see the 'jade destroyed together with the [ordinary] stones' (*yu shi ju fen* 玉石俱焚 = the perishing of the good and the bad without discrimination), hence she

⁷² 'Wu hun' (= *wu xin* 五辛) refer to garlic, three kinds of onions, and leeks. (cf. Soothill and Hodous 1982:128).

⁷³ Cf. *Yiguan Dao Yiwen Jieda* [YYJD] ((1937:39-40).

⁷⁴ My translation follows that of James Legge (1972, Vol.2:384).

unceasingly commissions immortals and Buddhas to descend to the rescue of the sentient beings in the mundane world. In fact, the Eternal Mother herself also descends at the Unity Sect's 'dharma assemblies' to admonish and transform the so called 'injured souls' (*canling* 残灵) who are but the ninety-two myriads of former 'Buddhas and immortals' (=her children) who have lost their way in samsara.⁷⁵

In the 'Preface' to a revelation writing entitled *Huangmu Xunzi Shijie* 〈皇母训子十诫〉 ('Ten admonishments from Huangmu to her Children') [HMXZ] Huangmu (= the Eternal Mother) descend and writes:

Thinking of my children breaks my heart. With endless sorrows, the native home of bliss [becomes] dreary and desolate. I summoned all immortals and Buddhas to descend to the 'eastern land' [of the mundane world] in order to salvage the 'imperial primordial ones' (*yuan huang*). Alas! They cling to the 'dream of the golden millet' (*meng huangliang* 梦黄粱) ⁷⁶ Awfully worried [by their self indulgence], I descended personally to save (*du*) and transform [them] in the profane world. Despite thousands of words and [innumerable] letters written in blood, all were taken lightly like a puff of wind passing the ear. (HMXZ n.d.:28-29)

Li Shiyu 李世瑜 (1948:121) points out that the HMXZ quoted above is a work of spirit-writing which was first published in 1941. Nonetheless, the Eternal Mother mythology had long existed in the various traditions of the sectarian texts

⁷⁵ Cf. Overmyer (1988:117).

⁷⁶ According to the story of the 'Golden Millet Dream', a poor scholar dreamt that he had become a high official but awoke to find that the pot of millet he had been preparing was still cooking on the fire. (cf. "Zhen Zhong Ji" 枕中记 ["The World Inside a Pillow"] by Shen Jiji 沈既济 [ca. 740- ca. 800] of the Tang dynasty). The story is used metaphorically to refer to the futility of sentient beings in chasing fame and profits.

called 'precious scrolls' (*baojuan*), the history of which can be traced back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁷⁷ The fact that this theme of the 'Matriarch' or Laomu ('Venerable Mother') continues to survive along with the three-stage/Maitreya-oriented mythology to this day constitutes yet another solid example of the long history of goddess worship in Chinese religion.⁷⁸ Yearning for motherly love is in the nature of humankind. The myth of the Eternal Mother which promises direct access to the Mother's paradise after death is particularly appealing to its adherents.⁷⁹ In addition to that, "This is all made easier because in this last age they are an elect, the special recipients of a new divine revelation that will enable them to survive the collapse of this world and make it to the next".⁸⁰ What is required of them are but their piety and faithfulness to the sect!

The Unity Sect does not see itself as a religion, but as the *(= the Way) which is revealed and transmitted to the mundane world upon the decree of the Mingming Shangdi 明明上帝 ('the Brilliant Supreme Emperor' = Eternal Mother) in response to the cosmic movement (*yinyun* 应运). In fact, discussions of the distinction between *and *Jiao* (= teachings or religion) appear in many of the tracts published by the sect. It is also one of the basic teachings taught in the junior study class. To quote from the teaching materials used in the 'one-day dharma assemblies', JBQJ (n.d.: 11-15), the differences between *and *Jiao* are as follows:***

⁷⁷ Cf. Overmyer (1988:116-119), Overmyer and Li (1992:17-31).

⁷⁸ Cf. Alan Chan (1990:52-54), Robert P. Waller (1987:50), Sangren (1983: 4-25).

⁷⁹ Wang Guangci 王光賜 (1985:60) who studies the teachings of the Unity Sect in comparison with those of Christianity also admits that this is a powerful attraction for converts to the sect.

⁸⁰ Cf. Overmyer's book entitled *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries [= Precious Volumes]* (forthcoming), chapter VIII:1.

(1) The one who 'takes charge' (*zhang zhe* 掌者) is different :

The one in charge of the Unity Sect is the Eternal Mother (*lao mu* 老母)

The one in charge of Buddhism is Sakyamuni

The one in charge of Daoism is Laozi

The one in charge of Confucianism is Confucius

The one in charge of Christianity is Jesus Christ

The one in charge of Islam is Prophet Mohammad

(2) The root and the stems (*ben mo* 本末) are different:

Dao, the Way, is like the roots of a plant

Jiao, the religions, are like the stems and leaves of that plant.

(3) [Methods of] salvation are different:

Dao aims at cutting off cause and effect (= *karma*), escaping from transmigration, transcending birth and death, and returning to the root of origin to recognize the Mother (*gui gen ren mu*).

Jiao aims at [admonishing people to] observe good causes, cultivate the fruit of goodness, to accumulate hidden virtue (*yinde* 阴德), [so as to enjoy] vast blessings(*hongfu* 洪福) in the next life.

(4) The cultivation (*xiuchi* 修持) is different:

Dao is the supreme dharma (*shang cheng fa* 上乘法), a direct pointing that leads one to see into one's nature and become a Buddha (*jian xing cheng fo* 见性成佛).

Jiao is the middle or lower dharma, [which teaches] meditation and reciting scriptures.

(5) The time is different:

Dao does not descend if the right time has not arrived, it aims at saving [at the end of] the kalpa; the time is short [and impending].

Jiao does not have a limitation in time; it aims at teaching and transforming; its time is long.

(6) Methods of cultivation are different:

Dao [teaches] the dharma of sudden enlightenment (*dunfa*頓法), a direct pointing by the enlightened master leads to seeing one's nature (*zhi zhi jian xing*直指見性), cultivation will see its reward in the same life (*yi shi xiu, yi shi cheng*一世修, 一世成).

Jiao [teaches] the dharma of gradual enlightenment (*jianfa*漸法), one's nature will only gradually awaken from a superficial level to profundity, continuous rewards will only be enjoyed upon continuous cultivation.

(7) The mind and nature (*xin-xing*) of the five religions are in conformity with the 'principle of Oneness' (*he yi li*合一理), ... the root of the Heavenly Way.⁸¹

From the discussion above, one can clearly understand how the Unity Sect sees itself in relation to the other religions. Its claims, particularly that of representing the *Dao* that underlies all religions has offended other religions in Taiwan, especially the Buddhist Association. As pointed out by Song (1983:25, 32-38), this has resulted in leaders of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism sending in joint petitions to condemn the Unity Sect as heretical, and to urge the authorities to take action against it.

So far, we have come across various aspects of the Unity Sect's teachings based on the academic studies of scholars and also on extracts of several of the tracts published by the sect itself. However, there are still some more liturgical texts

⁸¹ Cf. footnote 67.

that can further our understanding of the sect's teaching which are not usually shown to outsiders and sect members of lower ranks. The text of 'ritual exhortations' (*lizhu* 礼嘱) is one such important document.⁸² The text is recited by initiators to novices during the initiation ritual (*diandao li* 点道礼); a translation of the full missal text (except the text of 'ritual exhortations') for that ritual is provided in Jordan and Overmyer (1986:300-301). This portion of the text begins following the completion of the transmission of the 'ancient Contract' (*gu hetong* 古合同) with three kowtows:

"The Great Way restores its primordial unity in the year of double eight.

Until now it has already completed the double nine realms.

The pattern of triple six realms serves to fulfill [the Heavenly decree].

Those remaining karmic heaps [still unsaved] and scattered souls [will then be delivered].

[Initiated by] (Liu) Qingxu 刘清虚, universal transformation [will be accomplished only] in this year of assembly.

Sentient beings [young and] old, have together benefited from the grace [of the Venerable Eternal Mother].

Multitude of Buddhas descend to guard and protect the spiritual altar."

(Three kowtows!)

"At this very day of the Nine-yang , all sentient beings in this mundane world go forward to pay their homage.

Each and every one has received the Way of returning to their native place.

You will be guaranteed freedom from adversities for 10,800 years."

⁸² The translation of this original text of 'ritual exhortations' is done by special arrangement. I am indebted to the anonymous informant who made it possible for this text to be translated here for the first time.

I have now received a decree from the Enlightened Master,
Transmitting to you the original mysterious and efficacious gate.
(Three kowtows!)
(Male initiates repeat the oath after the Junior Beacon)

"If you do not fulfill your vows, it is difficult for you to return to the native place.
At present, calamities and diseases surround you on all sides,
Old and young alike are faced with war and famine.
[Should you] reverse your intentions and slander the Way,
[Should you] curse your teacher and scold Heaven,
Your great vows will never be accomplished.
Right in front of you is the true-yang pass,
Real water and real fire (?)⁸³ are already completed.
I now point out a route to you,
The radiance of the lamp illuminates in front of [your] eyes.
Joy is expressed in the pupils of your eyes,
[For you have] today discovered a broad and level road.
The Western [Paradise], though far away, can be reached in an instant,
There in the realm of primordial chaos you will live forever.
Now that you have received [the Way of] the last act of salvation,
You can leap out of the deep pool of bitter sea [of samsara].
Flying aloft you will ascend to the [other] shore,
And instantly board the boat to the clouds".

With one pointing to the assembly at the centre
[You have now] attained transcendence and will be free from adversities for 10,800 years.
(Transmitting the 'mysterious gate')
(Three kowtows!)

⁸³ The expression look like 'inner cinnabar' (*neidan* 内丹) terms. I do not know their exact meanings.

(Transmitting the 'mantra')

(Three kowtows!)

...

[For Men]

"Now that the time has reached the years of the last kalpa,
[I] honestly tell all the multitude of scattered souls,
Should you loose this opportunity,
It will be difficult to free yourself for 10,800 years".

I have now received the dharma decree,
And have compassionately transmitted to you the true dark aperture.

(Three kowtows!)

(Female initiates repeat the oath after the Junior Deacon)

"If you do not act in accord with your vows,
You will surely be punished by Heaven".

I have no other exhortation [for you].

Listen sincerely [to these verses]:

"Turn around the light from your eyes [to illuminate the source],
[Just like] a ray of the true sun.

You can observe it right in front of your eyes,
Below the lamp you can see the radiance.

The path of the enlightenment once accomplished,
[You will] return to the native place.

Now that you have received the dot [of initiation],
[Your soul will] float aloft to Heaven.

Never again [will you suffer from] life and death,
All day long you will refine your divine radiance".

With one pointing to the aperture within the forest,
Understanding [this dot of initiation] will awaken you and ensure that you
are freed from adversities.
(Transmitting the 'mysterious gate')
(Three kowtows!)

(Transmitting the 'mantra')

(Three kowtows!)

...

** [For women]

In the above text of 'ritual exhortations', the 'year of double eight' is interpreted as the year when the sixty-fourth patriarch ⁸⁴ taking charge of the Unity Sect, which is supposedly the year when the Great Way restores its primordial unity (= the last age). The 'double nine realms' and the 'triple six realms' are two similar metaphoric expressions which refer to the Later Eighteenth Patriarch Zhang Tianran, whose mission to save the [ninety-two myriad] 'primordial ones' was decreed by Heaven.⁸⁵ Eschatological terms such as the native place, the Mother's grace, the true dark aperture, the years of the last kalpa, the scattered souls, the remaining karmic heaps, the dotting of the aperture, the promise of freedom from

⁸⁴ Double eight is taken to mean eight times eight. The resultant sum, sixty-four, is equivalent to the sixty-four hexagrams, the total produced by the eight trigrams (*ba gua* 八卦). Here it refers to the sixty-fourth patriarch (adding up the eighteen Eastern Patriarchs, the twenty-eight Western Patriarchs, and the Later eighteen Eastern Patriarchs) Zhang Tianran (and Sun Suzhen).

⁸⁵ In the HMXZ (n.d.:48), the phrase 'double nine realm' is used along with the title Gong Chang (the two particles composing the character of 'Zhang', originally the name of a legendary sect leader [cf. Overmyer 1988:126]) to refer also to the eighteenth patriarch Zhang Tianran who took charge of salvation in this last age in response to the cosmic cycle (*yinyun*).

calamities and adversities for 10,800 years, the importance of fulfilling one's vows the attainment of transcendence, and the exhortations to religious piety are among those appearing in this 'exhortation' text that indicate the three-stage time scale and the Eternal Mother mythology in the theological structure of the sect.

In the 'Main Purposes of [Proselytizing] the Way' (*道之宗旨) Confucian values such as 'loving one's country and being faithful to one's duties' (*aiguo zhongshi* 爱国忠事), 'exerting an honest character and esteeming propriety' (*dunpin chongli* 敦品崇礼), 'being filial to parents' (*xiao fumu* 孝父母), 'being respectful to one's master and elders' (*zhong shizun* 重师尊), 'being faithful to friends' (*xin pengyou* 信朋友), 'explaining clearly the five moral relationships and the eight virtues' (*jiangming wulun bade* 讲明五伦八德), 'scrupulously adhering to the four moral standards, the (three) cardinal guides and the (five) constant virtues practiced in ancient times' (*kezun siwei gangchang zhi guli* 恪遵四维纲常之古礼), 'inspiring innate knowledge and innate ability to their highest excellence' (*qifa liangzhi liangneng zhi zhishan* 启发良知良能之至善), 'establishing oneself and also establishing others; enlarging oneself and also enlarging others' (*jili liren* 己立立人 *jida daren* 己达达人), 'returning the world to peace and tranquility; bringing human mind to that of meekness and benevolence; hoping to attain the world of great harmony' (*wan shijie wei qingping* 挽世界为清平, *hua renxing wei liangshan* 化人性为良善, *ji shijie wei datong* 襟世界为大同) are frequently quoted to make up the 'mottoes' of the sect.*

This ethical teaching is in accord with Zhang Tianran's preface in ZDFG who lamented the deterioration of the traditional values. He writes: "... but now we are just at the time of disasters at the end of the third period of time, when the minds of men are not as of old and the customs of the world have deteriorated (*renxin bugu* 人心不古, *shifeng tuihuai* 世风颓坏)."⁸⁶ "Moreover, European customs have come to the East, with their exaltation of science, and the constant moral principles of the former kings have been swept away, while the teachings of the sages have been rejected. So it is that ... unprecedented calamities have been formed and an evil turn of fate confronts us." To Zhang, these calamities are created by human beings themselves. Thus, with the heavenly grace and in response to this time of disaster "the Way of Heaven has been especially revealed and the path to the universal salvation has opened wide. ... various deities have sent down instructions to humankind by means of the flying phoenix (=*fūjī*, spirit-writing) and manifested the [way of] 'all-pervading unity' (*fayang yiguan*) in order to awaken the world." With the 'numinous nature' (*líng-xìng*) bestowed by the Imperial Mother (Huangmu = Eternal Mother), and the transmission of the 'mind-dharma' (*xīnfa*) by grace of his teacher, Zhang is thus given the mission of restoring "the Way of the former Kings (*xianwang zhī dǎo* 先王之道) on rectifying the mind and developing the moral character (*zhèngxīn xiùshēn*) and that [of] the teaching of the sages (*shèngrén zhī jiào* 圣人之教) [which] gives priority to the paths of propriety and righteousness (*lìmén yìlù* 礼门义路)." Here, again, Confucian ethical teachings, the compassion of the Mother, the initiation by the 'enlightened master', and the revelations by way of *fūjī* are emphasized as important means of salvation in the Unity Sect.

⁸⁶ The translations follows Jordan and Overmyer (1986:257) with slight alterations. Unless otherwise stated, the translation of Zhang Tianran's preface is Jordan's and Overmyer's.

Another important teaching of the Unity Sect is the concept of 'trials' (*kao* 考).

In the tract entitled the *Discussion of Moral Trials* (*Tan Kao Lu* 谈考录 =TKL), it is stated clearly in the "patriarch's maxims on demonic trials" (*zushi tan kaomo geyan* 祖师谈考魔格言 = ZTKG) that "demon does not arise without the *Dao* (= the Way), the *Dao* does not flourish without demon. *Dao* and Demon manifest themselves simultaneously. Both *Dao* and Demon become evident and explicit (*zhangming* 彰明). [Nonetheless] upon the accomplishment of *Dao*, the demon will become extinguished by itself (*dao cheng er mo zi mie* 道成而魔自灭)". Again the maxim teaches that to those who cultivate the Way without trials, is hard to discriminate between the true and the false. The text says, "... those enlightened ones [who] understand the trials of the Buddha (*mingren zhi shi fo kao* 明人知是佛考), their mind will become even more determined. [For] if there are no trials in the Great Way, it is difficult [to grade humankind into] the three vehicles (*triyana*) and nine classes (*san cheng jiu pin nan fen* 三乘九品难分)." Hence, it admonishes the devotees "not to go off into wild flights of fancy, and take cultivation lightly." They will have to turn back and think of their future, strengthen their will, their mind, and their body. "The 1000 demonic trials do not cause a superior man (*junzi* 君子) to retreat; [and] the 10,000 difficulties do not change [the will of] a perfect man (*zhenren* 真人)." They will have to "diligently awaken to the Great Way at all times (*dadao shishi qin wu* 大道时时勤悟), bearing in mind their vows, and repent constantly (*yuan chan shishi zai xin* 愿忏时时在心)", and also "persistently forge ahead towards the Way, [in order to achieve the grade of] the supreme vehicle of the three

[highest] grades in the nine lotus (*jiulian sanpin* 九莲三品),⁸⁷ ... living leisurely and happily in the celestial capital".⁸⁸

The meaning of 'trial' (*kao*) is further elaborated in a preface to the TKL written by Qiu Xianzhang 邱峯章 in Shanghai in 1948. The preface begins:

What is testing ? It is examining. Why examine? To distinguish the true from the false, the loyal from the deceitful, the crooked from the straight. These can be understood as soon as one examines them; hence examining is necessary. If learning is not tested, then it remains incomplete; if the self and mind are not tested, then there is no way to understand their nature and principle; if iron is not refined, it will not become steel; if the Way is not examined, one cannot attain salvation; this is a certain principle.⁸⁹

According to a tract entitled *A Record of How To Make Moral Progress in Accord with the Truth* (*Shuaizhen Jinxiu Lu* 率真进修录 = SZJL),⁹⁰ there are altogether eight types of testings, namely: 'inner testing' (*nei kao* 内考), 'outer testing' (*wai kao* 外考), 'testing by anger' (*qi kao* 气考), 'unusual testing' (*qi kao* 奇考), 'being tested by everything going well' (*shun kao* 顺考), 'being tested by

⁸⁷ According to Soothill and Hodous (1982:19), *jiulian* (=the abbreviation of *jiupin liantai* 九品莲台) refers to the paradise of Amitabha. In sectarian religion, the [golden] lotus also refers to the paradise of the Eternal Mother. (Cf. Overmyer 1976:137)

⁸⁸ My editions of the TKL and ZTKG are included in a tract entitled *Zhengzong Bu Er Famen Tianran Gufo Pudu Shouyuan* <正宗不二法门天然古佛普渡收圆> (= ZFTPS, *The True Teaching of the Non-dual Dharma, Universal Deliverance and the Restoration of Primordial Unity by the Ancient Buddha Tianran*), an undated reprint from Hong Kong.

⁸⁹ ZFTPS (n.d.:21-22). I follow the translation of Jordan and Overmyer (1986:255) with slight alterations.

⁹⁰ The copy of SZJL I have is also included in ZFTPS (n.d.:53-54). I follow the translation of Jordan and Overmyer (1986:256-257).

everything going wrong' (*ni kao* 逆考), 'being tested when things are turned upside down' (*diandao kao* 颠倒考), and 'testing in the Way' (*dao kao* 道考).

In fact, testing is affirmed by the sect members as a kind of 'trial in life' (*rensheng kaoyan* 人生考验). A common saying among them which reads "an evil person is subjected not to testing but calamities; whereas a good person is subjected to testing and not disasters" (*e ren shou jie bu shou kao* 恶人受劫不受考; *hao ren shou kao bu shou jie* 好人受考不受劫), clearly discriminates between testing and the suffering of calamities. They even go to the extent of identifying testing with the advantages of :

- (a) enabling discrimination between the true and the false, i.e. selecting the good and eliminating the bad.
- (b) putting an end to one's 'karmic grievance' and retribution (*yuannie* 兔孽). One's sins will be removed one *fen* 分 ('fraction') with every trial one encounters (*mokao yici* 魔考一次, *xiao yuan yifen* 消冤一分).
- (c) transforming one's natural disposition (*bingxing* 禿性). Getting rid of bad habits, changing and transforming one's temperament (*qizhi* 气质).
- (d) deciding one's grade and position (*pinwei* 品位). Trial by Heaven and humans will help determine the stage of one's attainment (*tian kao ren yan* 天考人验, *yi ding guowei* 以定果位).⁹¹

⁹¹ The above materials are gathered from a pictorial illustration of the eight types of trials entitled 'the picture of trials in human life' (*rensheng kaoyan tu* 人生考验图).

Given the positive attitude they have towards trials, it is no wonder the Unity Sect members can withstand all kinds of bitterness and sufferings that confront them. Indeed, the 'trials' are their great 'weapons' in the face of adversity, for they gratefully accepted and willfully transformed into 'miracle achievements' impossible to ordinary people. Their unceasing courage in the midst of repeated persecutions while proselytizing for the sect in the history of the Unity Sect's development constitutes a typical example of this attitude.

Finally, I would like to refer to the 'fifteen regulations' (*shiwu tiao fogui* 十五条佛规) of the Unity Sect which are in actuality the code of ethics and behavioral expectations to be observed by all sect members. They are usually copied, inserted into a wooden frame and hung on the wall of the *Fotang* to act as a reminder to sect members. Below are the 'fifteen regulations' with annotations as necessary:

(1) Respect the immortals and Buddhas. 'The Way is real, Principle is real, and the Heavenly Decree is real', therefore the immortals and Buddhas are also real. One who cultivates diligently should respect the immortals and Buddha, and keep his mind upright; one will then be blessed by the immortals and Buddhas at all times.

(2) Obey the seniors and foster the juniors (*zunqian tihou* 尊前提后). One must respect one's seniors and obey their instructions. One should also foster one's juniors and be good at giving systematic guidance to them.

(3) Fast [your mind], be dignified, honest and upright (*zhaizhuang zhongzheng* 斋庄忠正).

(4) Follow [the proper] rules and customs (*xungui daoju* 循规蹈矩). By following rules and conforming to convention one can become a superior person who is capable of acting freely and in conformity with norms.

(5) Shoulder responsibility (*zeren fuqi* 责任负起).

(6) Emphasize the sacred and deemphasize the profane (*zhongsheng qingfan* 重圣轻凡).

One spends relatively less time on sacred work than that on profane. One must, however, make sure that one's profane work does not hinder one's contribution to sacred work when the latter is needed.

(7) Be modest, courteous, gentle, and amiable (*qiangong he'ai* 谦恭和蔼).

(8) Do not abandon the sacred instructions (*wuqi shengxun* 勿弃圣训). The sacred instructions revealed by immortals and Buddhas should be kept carefully in order to avoid demonic trials.

(9) Do not be attached to that which is visible and tangible (*mo zhuo xing-xiang* 莫著形象).

One should only believe in principle, cultivate according to the *Dao*, and worship the Heavenly decree. Other than that, one should not form attachments.

(10) All formalities must be clear (*shouxu bi qing* 手续必清). Formalities relating to money and accounting should be handled in an orderly manner.

(11) Report to your superior before departing on and after returning from a long journey (*chu gao fan mian* 出告反面).

(12) Do not disturb the [structural and administrative] system (*buluan xitong* 不乱系统). One will have to cultivate following the organizational structure and should not try to bypass the immediate leadership.

(13) One must treasure public property (*aixi gongwu* 爱惜公物).

(14) One should be flexible when dealing with things (*huopo yinshi* 活泼应事).

(15) One should be prudent in words and actions (*jin yan shen xing* 谨言慎行). ⁹²

⁹² Cf. *Yiguan Dao Rencai Shouce* <一貫道人才手册> (=YDRS, *Handbook of the Unity Sect's Junior Cadres*)[1992: 4-6].

(3)The rituals of the Unity Sect

As pointed out in ZDFG (leaf 2b, 3a), other than ‘burning incense’⁹³ at ‘family shrines’ and ‘public halls’, the Unity Sect also holds various types of congregations during certain grand ceremonies (*dadian* 大典), festivities, the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month, and also during commemorative occasions (*jinian ri* 纪念日), along with the ceremony of initiation (*ban fo shi* 办佛事) and the ritual of inviting spirits to the altar (*kai/qing tan* 开/请坛). All these types of ‘burning incense’ are many and diverse (*fanza* 繁杂). One needs to come to the *Fotang* to practice them regularly before one can actually become accustomed and comprehend to them completely. Jordan and Overmyer (1986:293-303) have already provided a good collection of liturgical texts and ‘missals’ of the Unity Sect. The present study will therefore touch on only a few of the major rituals and focus its discussion on the role of the Venerable Eternal Mother, the Maitreya Buddha, and Jigong, the Living Buddha in the Unity Sect.

The layout of a *Fotang*'s altar and lecture hall

The impression one gathers on entering a Unity Sect’s *Fotang* is its simplicity and solemnity. The same also applies to its rituals. A *Fotang* is always referred to as ‘the dharma boat’ (*fachuan* 法船), for it is where sentient beings are ‘ferried’

⁹³ The term ‘burning incense’ (*shaoxiang* 烧香) is used here metaphorically to refer to the sect’s liturgy.

across to 'the other shore' (*bi'an* 彼岸). The heart of the *Fotang* is the altar before which most of the rituals take place. A brief description of the arrangement of a standard *Fotang* will suffice to visualize the operation of various rituals in the *Fotang*.

The arrangement of the altar includes a large inscription of the Chinese character "Fo" (= Buddha),⁹⁴ a pair of scrolls, a long table (*shangzhuo* 上桌, 'the upper table'), a square shaped table (*xiaozhuo* 下桌, 'the lower table') and two old-fashioned wooden armchairs (*fayi* 法椅, the 'dharma chairs').⁹⁵ The scrolls are hung up vertically on the two sides of the large inscription *Fo* which is located at the centre of the altar. The content of the couplets written in the scrolls usually refer to 'universal salvation for the three realms' (*sancao pudu* 三曹普度) or the descending of the Heavenly Way. A typical couplet reads: 'May the truth of the Great Learning be handed down for thousands of autumns as the golden precept' (*Daxue dao chuan qianqiu er wei jinjian* 大学道传千秋而为金鉴) and 'May the principle of the Mean remain for ten thousand generations and so become the elixir'

⁹⁴ It can also be the writing of the full title of the Eternal Mother (Mingming Shangdi Wuliang Qingxu Zhizun Zhisheng Sanjie Shifang Wangling Zhenzai 明明上帝无量清虚至尊至圣三界十方万灵真宰, 'the Brilliant Supreme Emperor of the Limitless Pure Voidness, the Most Venerable and the Most Sacred True Ruler of the Three Realms and the Myriad Spirits of the Ten Directions'), a picture of the Goddess of Mercy (= 'the Ancient Buddha of the South Sea' [Nanhai Gufo 南海古佛]) or Confucius or even Laozi (= 'the Supreme Old Lord [Taishang Laojun 太上老君]). (Cf. YDJJ 1988:5)

⁹⁵ According to Li Shiyu (1948:49), the armchair to the left is meant for the Honoured Teacher, and the one to the right is meant for the Mistress. However, the initiator I interviewed pointed out that these chairs are not necessary just meant for the 'use' of the Honoured Teacher and the Mistress, rather they are prepared for all 'immortals and Buddhas' who 'borrow the aperture' (*jie qiao* 借窍) of 'Celestial Talent' during the 'dharma assemblies'.

foundation' (*Zhongyong li liu wanshi ze zuo dangen* 中庸理留万世则作丹根). ⁹⁶

Below these inscriptions stands the 'upper table'. On top of it, there is a Wuji ('Limitless') Lamp which represents the Eternal Mother. There is (or are) also one, or three or five statue(s) of the main deities, namely the Maitreya Buddha (at the centre of the altar), the Ancient Buddha of the South Sea, and Dharma Lord Guan (= Guan Di 关帝) to his left, and Jigong, the Living Buddha, and Dharma Lord Lü (= Lü Dongbin 吕洞宾) to his right. Two incense burners are put in front of them respectively. On the 'lower table' there are five to twenty-five dishes of offerings, usually fruits like apples and oranges, with five on each dish. In front of these sacrificial articles stands a small incense burner for the Maitreya Buddha. There is yet another bigger incense burner (known as *bagua lu* 八卦炉, the 'eight trigrams censer') for the Eternal Mother, all Celestial Gods and Sages (*zhutian shensheng* 诸天神圣) and the Stove God; and the two long oil lamps (known as *ri yue deng* 日月灯, 'the lamps of the sun and the moon') representing 'the two elementary forms' (*liangyi* 两仪= *yin* and *yang*). ⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Cf. Mary Yeung (1996: 16).

⁹⁷ The offering articles in the number of five (or a multiple of five) symbolically represent the five phases of metal, wood, water, fire and earth (*wuxing* 五行). The 'limitless' lamps together with the 'lamps of sun and moon' symbolically represent the primordial transformations from the limitless ultimate (*wuji* 无极) to the supreme ultimate (*taiji* 太极); the supreme ultimate then further engenders the two elementary forms. Hence, when lighting the lamps, one will have to start from the central limitless lamp, follow by the 'sun lamp' on the left, and the 'moon lamp' on the right. At the end of the ritual, one will have to 'send off the Buddha lamps' (*song fo deng* 送佛灯) by extinguishing first the 'moon lamp', followed by the 'sun lamp', and lastly the 'limitless lamp'. This sequence has the symbolic meaning of the 'myriad differences returning to the One' (*wanshu guiyi* 万殊归一).

Another important place of the *Fotang* is of course the lecture hall. This hall is usually an extended section of the worshipping space, which is big enough to accommodate the arrangement of two separate sections of seats for male and female sect members. A blackboard and a stage are provided for the use of the preacher who conducts the sermons. As we have seen, the Unity Sect devotees more time to the study of and commentary on moral books than to worship during a congregational meeting. Song Guangyu (1996:312) points out that this is due to the influence of the ‘phoenix halls’ which stress lecturing (*xuanjiang* 宣讲) using the Confucian ethics, and hence turned the sect into a ‘religionized Confucianism (*zongjiao hua ruxue* 宗教化儒学).

Rituals observed in the Unity Sect

- (a) Ritual for saluting and taking leave of the honorable presence (*canjia cijia li*).

On arriving at or before leaving a *Fotang*, a devotee presents himself/herself at the kneeling bench before the altar. There he/she alone performs silently a series of kowtows.⁹⁸ In the case of group ritual, they are done following the calls of a senior deacon (*shang zhili* 上执礼) and a junior deacon (*xia zhili* 下执礼), who speak as follows:

Senior Deacon: To the Brilliant Supreme Emperor (= Eternal Mother): Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

⁹⁸ A simplified substitute for this ritual are three bows before the altar.

Senior Deacon: To all Celestial Gods and Saints: Three kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.
Senior Deacon: To the Patriarch Maitreya: Three kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.
Senior Deacon: To the Ancient Buddha of the South Sea: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To the Living Buddha, the Honoured Teacher: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To the Moon-Wisdom Bodhisattva: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To the Honoured Teacher: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To the Mistress: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To the Initiator: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To [both] the Guide and Guarantor (*Yin-Bao Shi*): One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To the Company of Prior worthies [prior initiates]: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: Rise! Salute! The end of ritual for saluting / taking leave. Lower hands! Bow!
Junior Deacon: Retire. ⁹⁹

(b) Ritual for presenting incense

The regular ritual for presenting incense involves 'burning incense' and kowtowing with a longer list of adored deities compared to the ritual for saluting or taking leave. The missal below is used in the ritual for presenting incense which is performed three times every day, morning, noon and evening. The procedure is different from that of the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month. Also, the actual presentation of incense sticks is covered in the first section of the following ritual

⁹⁹ Extract from YDRS (1992:40-41). According to YDRS (1992:34), the Free China I Kuan Tao Association in 1990 agreed on a uniform ritual for presenting incense (*tongyi xianxiang li* 統一獻香), to be put into practice from the first day of the first lunar month in 1991.

(see Appendix 1). Given here are the kowtows that follow that presentation. [Please refer to Appendix 2 for brief annotations on the deities listed below].

Senior Beacon: Salute! Kneel!

To the Brilliant Supreme Emperor: Ten kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows; six kowtows; seven kowtows; eight kowtows; nine kowtows; ten kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To Heaven, Earth, Ruler, Parents, Teacher: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To All Celestial Gods and Saints: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Patriarch Maitreya: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Ancient Buddha of the South Sea: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Saints [founders] of the Five Religions: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Living Buddha, the Honoured Teacher: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Moon-Wisdom Bodhisattva: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To All Guardians of the Law: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Great Emperor of Longevity: Five kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Stove God: Three kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Honoured Teacher: Three kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Mistress: Three kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Marshal Who Guards the Worship Hall: Three kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the General Who Guards the Worship Hall: Three kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Bodhisattva Who Transforms the Teaching: Three kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To All Great Immortals: Three kowtows.

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.
Senior Deacon: To the Master of the Way (*Daozhang*): One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To the Initiator: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To the Guide [and] the Guarantor: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
Senior Deacon: To One's Own Ancestors: One kowtow.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow.
[Kneel and chant the “**Sincere Repentance Text**”]

Male Believers: We, (report own name)
Female believers: Believers,
Senior Deacon: Kneel with devout minds and hearts below the Lotus [Throne] of the Brilliant Supreme Emperor, fortunate to receive the true transmission. Three kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.
Senior Deacon: [Homage to] the Patriarch Maitreya, whose wonderful dharma is limitless, who protects and shelters all sentient beings. [We] repent before this Buddha, [vowing to] reform and renew ourselves [so that we can] be registered together in Heaven. Three kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.
Senior Deacon: We [relatives of the Way] of the Buddha Hall [beg forgiveness should our minds] be turned upside down, and confused. [We] pray to the Patriarch [Maitreya] who pardons our sins in a generous spirit. Ten kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows; six kowtows; seven kowtows; eight kowtows; nine kowtows; ten kowtows.
Senior Deacon: Homage to Amitabha, the Ten Buddhas, and the Heavenly Primordials! Ten kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows; six kowtows; seven kowtows; eight kowtows; nine kowtows; ten kowtows.
Senior Deacon: Rise! Salute! kneel! Pray for the Eternal Mother's Great Compassion. One hundred kowtows!
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows ... [count one hundred kowtows].
Senior Deacon: To the Patriarch of the Golden Elder (Jingong Zushi 金公祖师). Five kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow, two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: To the Ancient Buddha Tianran. Five kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.
Senior Deacon: To the Sacred Mother of China. Five kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.
Senior Deacon: To the Honourable Dean of Academic (Yuanzhang daren 院长大人). Three kowtows.
Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.
Senior Deacon: Rise! Salute! The end of the ritual of offering incense. Lower hands! Bow!
Junior Deacon: Retire. ¹⁰⁰

(c) Ritual for inviting [spirits] to the altar

According to YDRS (1992:68), the aim of this ritual is to invite the Eternal Mother and all Celestial Gods and Saints to descend and protect the altar [prepared] for initiation, in order to hide the 'eyes and ears' (= vision) of Devas and men (*tianren* 天人), and to sanctify this Pure Land. Sandalwood chopped into small strips is especially used in this ritual. The rite begins with the ritual of presenting the sacrificial offerings (*xian gong* 献供), and continues with the following liturgical sequence. It also make use of two callers, referred to as Senior Deacon and Junior Deacon.

Senior Deacon: Let the two sides stand respectfully and reverently listen to the
Invitation to the Chapel!

[The Invitation Officiant (*qingtan ren* 请坛人, usually the initiator or sometimes the senior deacon) recites the Invitation Scripture:]

¹⁰⁰ Cf. YDRS (1992: 46-49). An explanatory note at the end of the 'Ritual for presenting incense' (1992:59-60) emphasizes the reciting of the 'Text of Sincere Repentance' as the daily 'homework' which is of utmost importance to any one who cultivates the Way. It is hoped that through reciting this repentance text one will confesses one's own faults everyday and hence turns over a new leaf.

INVITATION SCRIPTURE

All remain respectfully still, take your places respectively in an orderly manner, straighten your clothes and [hair] in good order, sincerely and respectfully listening to the proclamation.

As the auspicious smoke rises from the Eight Trigrams censer, the Holy Mother who nourishes and transforms descends and approaches the altar.

Guandi at the left, [Lü] Chun Yang at the right, and the gods of the twenty-eight Celestial Mansions protect the altar. The Venerable Mother approaches the altar and all the gods have a dignified air, with right fingers held in an attitude of scolding and left fingers held in a gesture of chastising. The Thunder Department, Wind Department, Tiger Department, and Dragon Department all appear dignified and severe.

All of you stand respectfully and listen carefully to my words: Now the 'third realm' (= the third epoch) has arrived, and the Great Way is clearly evident. The gods and immortals of the various departments, protecting and sheltering the divine altar, and demons and spirits obey the imperial decrees; do not be stupid and stubborn.

On encountering difficulties, aid them to resolve difficulties; in time of disasters, help them to get rid of disasters; support each other in doing good; deal with all problems in a cooperative spirit; and so great calamities will depart.

Efficacious and luminous astral officials, obeying the imperial commands, quickly take charge of the heavens and report in detail the affairs of [salvaging] beings from the three realms (*sancao*).

Do not permit yourselves to be distracted; at all times be, as you should be, fully devoted to your responsibilities, so controlling and settling [all beings] in the third realm [of the last age].

I, your Mother, have ordered the various immortals to transmit this proclamation on my behalf.

[Help those with karmic affinity who] meet the Way to attain the Way, and thus help rotating the world in accord and with its course; and the twelve primal gods, each in his heaven.

The times will soon arrive, [so] do not oppose this special announcement [of mine].¹⁰¹

[YDRS 1992:144]

Senior Deacon: Two sides salute each other! Each approach the kneeler!

Junior Deacon: First position! Second position! ...

Senior Deacon: Salute! Kneel! First incense presentation: three sticks!

Junior Deacon: One offering; two offerings; three offerings.

Senior Deacon: Rise! Kneel! Second incense presentation: three sticks!

Junior Deacon: Four offerings; five offerings; six offerings.

Senior Deacon: Rise! Kneel! Last incense presentation: three sticks!

Junior Deacon: Seven offerings; eight offerings; nine offerings.

Senior Deacon: Rise! Kneel! Present incense: five sticks!

¹⁰¹ The translation for this Invitation Scripture follows Jordan and Overmyer (1986:297-298) with some alterations.

Junior Deacon: One offering; two offerings; three offerings; four offerings; five offerings.

Senior Deacon: Five kowtows!

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows; four kowtows; five kowtows.

Senior Deacon: Kneel for reading of the [text of] the Last Act:

At the time of the Last Act, not discussed before, the enlightened master is here to reveal it [to all], [so that] we fools recognize and can find the way that leads us to the native place, and [the key to] birth and death is before us.

Today respectfully the most blessed leader who 'in support of the Heavenly grace'¹⁰² and a group [of petitioners] with devout hearts kneel before the

Lotus Throne of the Brilliant Supreme Emperor ...

Senior Deacon: One kowtow!

Junior Deacon: One kowtow.

Senior Deacon: and petition the Venerable Buddha Maitreya [who descend] in response to
the coming of the third period of salvation, ...

Senior Deacon: One kowtow!

Junior Deacon: One kowtow.

Senior Deacon: 3,000 disciples and all the [gods] of the constellations will come at this
opportune time to assist the Three Buddhas to gather 'numerous [residual]
heaps' (*yunshu*= the yet unsaved sentient beings). [Understanding that] this
is the great event of the last age, we beg to report [our realization] to the
Mother.

Senior Deacon: Three kowtows!

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows, three kowtows. [YDRS 1992:145]

Senior Deacon: Let the representative of the new initiates approach the kneeler! Salute!
Kneel!

Three kowtows!

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; three kowtows.

Senior Deacon: Kneel and listen to the reading of the Memorial [cf. Appendix 3].

¹⁰² The phrase *ding'en* 顶恩 (= in support of the Heavenly grace) is used by Madame Sun in lieu of *bao'en* 保恩 (= recommending [some one to be bestowed] the Heavenly grace); the change in the memorial (*biaowen* 表文) after the death of Zhang Tianran marked Madame Sun's succeeding to the leadership. This is a point strongly opposed by the Liu-ist faction, who take it as a sign of Sun's usurpation.

[Let seekers carefully listen to their own names read out from the Memorial. When the reading is completed, let everyone indicate whether his name is correct or not.]

Senior Deacon: [This is done.] Burn the Memorial!

Ten kowtows!

Junior Deacon: One kowtow; two kowtows; ...

Senior Deacon: Rise! Salute! Two sides split ranks (*fenban*)!

Junior Deacon: First position! Second position! ...

Senior Deacon: Two sides salute each other! The Ritual for Inviting [Spirits] to the Altar is finished. Lower hands! Bow!

Junior Deacon: Retire. ¹⁰³

The above rite is followed by the Ritual of Transmission of the Way (= Ritual of Initiation). The rite includes the oath taken together by both the Guide and the Guarantor to guarantee that the Way that initiates are being introduced to is the 'Celestial Way of the True Principle and the True Tradition of Nature and Principle'. This is followed by the oath (= the Ten Great Vows) taken by the initiates to cultivate the Way diligently upon receiving it (cf. p. 75-76). The initiator then conducts the rite of initiation.¹⁰⁴ When the ritual is completed, the initiates are congratulated by all congregational members for having become 'relatives of the Way' and hence part of the family members of the Maitreya Buddha (*Mile juanshu* 弥勒眷屬). In fact, as pointed out by Mary Yeung (1996:20), this awareness of equality among all sect members is also evident in the wearing of uniform ceremonial dress ¹⁰⁵ during the sect's congregations.

¹⁰³ Cf. YDRS (1992: 69-70). The translation follows Jordan and Overmyer (1986:298-300) with some alterations.

¹⁰⁴ For the text uttered by the initiator during the initiation rite, please refer to pp. 84-87.

¹⁰⁵ The male sect members wear grey scholarly robes, while the female sect members wear grey gowns.

From samples of several of the rituals conducted in the Unity Sect, it is clear that they all share the common characteristics of simplicity and solemnity. Other than offerings and burning of incense, the practice of kowtowing is rather remarkable in the sect's rituals. It is explained that besides showing respect to the immortals and Buddhas, this practice of kowtowing is intended to 'calm down one's mind' while at the same time causing one to be submissive (*dixin xiaqi* 低心下气).¹⁰⁶ The exercise of repentance that constitutes part of the daily ritual, is believed to free sentient beings from their sins and allow them to lead carefree and content lives. Most important of all, the 'seeking of the Way' removes them from transmigration. Sect members claim to have escaped from the suffering of samsara by the grace of the Eternal Mother and are henceforth constantly reminded of their apostolic mission in the universal salvation.¹⁰⁷

Main deities of the Unity Sect

The three main deities worshipped in the Unity Sect are as follows:

(a) The Eternal Venerable Mother (*Wusheng Laomu*)

In the Unity Sect, the character 'mu' 母 (mother) is written sideways as '𠂔' with the unbroken square '□' representing the *Dao* in the state of tranquillity.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ The usual proverb reads '*disheng xiaqi*' 低声下气, meaning to be meek and subservient. The character 'sheng' 声 (voice), has been replaced by the character 'xin' 心 (mind), since the Unity Sect always emphasizes on the cultivation of the mind.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Guo Mingyi 郭明义 (1990:166).

¹⁰⁸ The Unity Sect calls this character the 'prior heaven mother' (*xiantian mu zi* 先天母字). Song (1983:43) pointed out that the unbroken square is in actuality a deformed (*bianxing* 变形) way of characterizing a circle which represents the 'limitless ultimate' (*wuji*).

The straight line ‘|’ in the middle represents the *in motion that gives birth to the myriad things. The two dots in between represent the *and *forces respectively (cf. YYJD 1937: 15-16, Song 1983: 43, Mary Yeung 1996:63) Because the *or the ‘limitless ultimate’ is capable of giving birth to the myriad things, and transforms them from formless (*wuxing*) to things with forms and names, it is called ‘the Venerable Mother of the Limitless’ (*Wuji Laomu*) to honour its compassionate creation of their existence.¹⁰⁹ Due to the fact that this primordial force of *controls the 10,000 things, it is called the ‘Supreme Emperor’ (*Shangdi*). Also, the defilement of the endowed numinous nature of the ‘people of the origin’ that required ‘reillumination’ (*fuming*), is associated here with the Confucian teaching of ‘illustrating illustrious virtue’ (*ming mingde* 明明德) that appears in the *Great Learning*.¹¹⁰ Putting together the two meanings [of *Shangdi* and *Mingming*], ‘the Venerable Mother of the Limitless’ is henceforth also called ‘the Brilliant Supreme Emperor’ (*Mingming Shangdi*). (cf. YYJD 1937:16)*****

The term ‘*wusheng*’ ('unborn') originates in Buddhism. According to Soothill and Hodous (1982: 380-381), it means “not born, without being born or produced; nirvana as not subject to birth and death, or reincarnation; the condition of the absolute.” Scholars like Song Guangyu (1981), Zheng Zhiming (1985), Richard Shek (1986), and others hold that the mythology of *Wusheng Laomu* (The Unborn Venerable Mother), began as a personification of more abstract discussions of the ontological entity [such as the ‘True Emptiness’ and the ‘Venerable True

¹⁰⁹ Cf. YYJD (1937:16) and Lecture Notes on XLTS (1991:9). Apparently this explanation is based on Laozi’s *Daode Jing* which says that “The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.” (*youmin wanwu zhi mu* 有名万物之母). I follow the translation of D. C. Lau (1963:57)

¹¹⁰ The translation follows James Legge, Vol. 1 (1972:356).

'Emptiness'] in Luo Qing's (1442-1527) writings published in 1509.¹¹¹ Overmyer, on the other hand, takes a skeptical attitude towards this inference. He notes in one of his articles written in 1989 that "One suspects that there must have been a sectarian oral tradition of this kind [of three-stage eschatological mythology] before the sixteenth century".¹¹² With the discovery of the oldest Chinese sectarian scripture *The Precious Volume, Expounded By The Buddha, On The Results Of [The Teaching Of] The Imperial Ultimate [Period]* (*Fo Shuo Huangji Jieguo Baojuan* 佛说皇极结果宝卷), hereafter abbreviated as *Huanji*) published in 1430, this puzzle is now largely solved. As pointed out by Overmyer and Li (1992: 27-28), "There are thirty references to mother goddesses in the *Huangji* book, ... though none of them has the central importance of Wusheng Laomu in some sixteenth century texts. ... The *Huangji* book is also valuable for its references to the three stages of cosmic time, to the role of Maitreya, and to various Taoist-appearing terms and themes, none of which are part of Luo Qing's teachings."

The long review on the study of the origin of the Eternal Mother myth above is essential for us to trace the long tradition of the sectarian teachings inherited by the Unity Sect all the way back to fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This living mythological tradition of salvation by the grieving Mother also came to be incorporated into the spirit-writing cults or 'phoenix halls' of post-war Taiwan.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Richard Shek (1986:472), for example, argues that "most of the basic ideas of the Eternal Mother myth are adumbrated by him [Luo Qing 罗青]. It takes only a little imagination on the part of his followers to translate them into full-scale vivid images... Indeed, the emotive image of a divine Mother who tearfully awaits the return of the estranged and suffering children is so appealing that it did not take long for some sectarians inspired by Luo Qing to propose it."

¹¹² Quoted in Overmyer and Li (1992:29). This is because neither the Eternal Mother nor the 'three stage mythology' appeared in Luo Qing's writings.

¹¹³ Cf. Philip Clart (1995:6-7).

What then is the role of Eternal Mother in the Unity Sect?

The Eternal Mother is equated with the *(the Way), and is personified as 'the only God in the cosmos', 'the Ruler of 10,000 spirits', the overall controller of order in the cosmos, [including] the changes and transformation of Heaven and Earth, and [is also responsible for] the existence of humankind.¹¹⁴ Due to her supreme status and primordial nature, she is neither represented by an idol nor a picture at the altar. Rather, her existence is represented by the 'mother lamp' (*mudeng* 母燈) located at the central position of the 'upper table', symbolizing illumination.*

She receives the highest numbers of kowtows in any ritual conducted in the *Fotang*. Her name is mentioned with awe and devout hearts in all petitions/memorials used in all rituals conducted by the sect. The 'Invitation Scripture', in particular, reflects her exalted position as creator of the cosmos who nourishes and transforms all things in the mundane world. During the rite of initiation, a multitude of deities, celestial mansions and spirits are summoned to descend to protect the altar, and to proclaim on her behalf the special announcement at this time of the last age.

Needless to say, her imperial decree is the only source of the celestial mandate claimed by the Unity Sect to legitimize its mission of universal salvation. This mandate, we are told, is bestowed upon 'the enlightened master(s)' who promulgate, on her behalf, the heavenly secrets (*tianji* 天机) that are revealed only during the 'Epoch of the White Yang'. A frequently quoted phrase that reads:

¹¹⁴ Cf. Lecture Notes on XLTS (1991:9).

"Humans can enlarge the principles which they follows; those principles do not enlarge humans" (*ren neng hong dao* 人能宏道, *fei dao hong ren* 非道弘人)¹¹⁵ is borrowed by the sect to emphasize the mission shouldered by sect members to proselytize for the Heavenly Way, which admonishes humankind to practice goodness (*xiang shan* 向善). Another of their sayings goes: "Sentient beings help in [promulgating] the Heavenly Principle; Heaven [in return] bestows on them success [in their lives] (*ren bang tianli* 人帮天理, *tian zhu ren shun* 天助人顺)"¹¹⁶ This further illustrates sect members' belief in the reciprocal relationship between people and Heaven.

Apparently, 'Heaven' (*Tian*) here refers to the personified Eternal Mother, who embodies not only the primordial force of the cosmos, but also the power of rewarding [and penalizing] her subordinate beings in accord with their own deeds. Notwithstanding this, the fact is that the Eternal Mother has long been portrayed as a compassionate mother among maternist sects, so much so that her dear image was (and still is) deeply rooted in the minds of her devotees.

As observed by Philip Clart (1995:17), when addressing the Eternal Mother, the intimate term of "mother" (*muniang* 母娘) is used by the phoenix disciple who in turn address himself or herself using the similar metaphorical expression of her "child" (*haizi* 孩子). It is also not uncommon for the Unity Sect's members to address the Eternal Mother as "venerable mother" (*lao muniang* 老母娘) or simply "mother" (*mu*) in the case of the popular expression: "children of [the same] mother"

¹¹⁵ Cf. James Legge, *Confucian Analects*, "Wei Ling Gong", in *the Chinese Classics*, Vol.1, (1972:302). I follow Legge's translation.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Jiang Guosheng 蒋国圣 (1992b:214).

(*yi mu zhi zi* 一母之子) used often to emphasize the common source of origin of all sect members. In any case, the official designation “the Brilliant Supreme Emperor” is only used in the liturgical texts or during formal occasions.¹¹⁷

(b) The Maitreya Buddha

In the Unity Sect, the Maitreya Buddha is represented by an image of a pot-bellied laughing monk, known popularly as the ‘Cloth-bag’ (Budai 布袋).¹¹⁸ Despite the metamorphosis of the Indian Maitreya’s image from a slim and majestic prince to the completely Chinese appearance of the present Laughing Buddha, its original Indian elements has to certain extent enriched the meaning of the Maitreya cult in China. This is evident in the case of the free translations (*yiyi* 意译) of his name Ajita and his family name Maitreya from Sanskrit into Chinese. As we have

¹¹⁷ In fact, “mother” (妈 ma) is commonly used among followers of the Chinese popular religions to address female deities. For examples: the intimate terms of “Guanyin ma” 观音妈 ('mother Guanyin'), and “Mazu” 妈祖 ('the Matriarch') or “niang ma” 娘妈 ('mother') are respectively used as designations to the Goddess of Mercy and the Queen of Heaven (Tianhou 天后). This is in conformity with my earlier proposition that the long history of goddess worship in Chinese religion illustrates the universal human yearning for motherly love.

¹¹⁸ Budai was a wandering cleric from the Prefecture of Fenghua of the Province of Zhejiang who lived in the first half of the tenth century. He carried all his belongings in a cloth bag slung over his shoulder [and hence he is being named Budai]. He became very popular with the people, mainly because of his ability to predict the weather. Although a Maitreya cult had already been established in China as early as the fourth century during the time of Dao An 道安 (312-385) and continued to be popularly adhered in the fifth and sixth centuries, the cult declined after the seventh century. When the image of Maitreya reappeared during the Song dynasty, it was then in the shape and appearance of Budai. He was taken as the reincarnation of Maitreya Buddha due to his dying words which included this poem: “Maitreya, true Maitreya. His body takes myriad forms, but at the times he manifests himself to men, none of his contemporaries recognize [him].” (Cf. Kenneth Ch'en [1964:405], Thompson [1973:109-110], Overmyer [1976:151]). The translation of the poem is Overmyer's.

seen, the Chinese have translated 'Ajita' as *wu neng sheng* 无能胜 (meaning 'unsurpassable'); while that of 'Maitreya' as *Ci* 慈 (meaning 'compassion'). Blending together his family name and name in Chinese --- Ci Wu Neng Sheng became the honourable designation of Maitreya Buddha, with the meaning of 'the Unsurpassable Compassionate One'. In the Unity Sect, too, this designation is constantly referred to in emphasizing Maitreya's divine potency and his compassionate love toward sect members.¹¹⁹

According to *Huayan Jing . Ru Fajie Pin* 〈华严经入法界品〉 (the chapter of *Gandhavyuha* of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*), the designation 'Maitreya' derived from Maitreya Buddha's first attainment of *cixin sanmei* 慈心三昧 ('the compassionate-mind samadhi'). The Unity Sect teaches that those who cultivate this samadhi view the innate nature of all beings as equal; and since their first vow have vowed not to eat meats of all types of beings (*guan yiqie zhongsheng benxing pingdeng* 观一切众生本性平等, *chu fa xin ji bushi yiqie zhongsheng rou* 初发心即不食一切众生肉).¹²⁰

The *Sutra of Maitreya's Ascend [To Tusita Heaven]* (*Mile Shangsheng Jing* 〈弥勒上生经〉) telling of Sakyamuni's prediction of Buddhahood for Maitreya and the wonder of his Pure Land in Tusita Heaven. This sutra is often referred to by sect members in support of their three-stage epochal eschatological teaching. Maitreya, the future Buddha who is soon to appear (*danglai* 当来), therefore 'supersede' Sakyamuni to become the popular adored figure in the sect's *Fotang*.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Jin Liang (1991:16-17).

¹²⁰ Cf. Cong Lin 从林 (n.d.:13)

Added to the Maitreya Buddha's compassion and unsurpassable qualities is his transformed appearance that portrays him as a symbol of the typical Chinese way of expressing hope for prosperity and contentment.¹²¹ A couplet in a Buddhist temple quoted below aptly put such qualities and hopes into words [though not without some sense of humour and satire]:

Dadu neng rong, rong tianxia nan rong zhi shi.Kaikou bian xiao, xiao shijian kexiao zhi ren) ¹²²

大肚能容，容天下难容之事。开口便笑，笑天下可笑之人。

"The big belly is capable of containing; it contains all the things under heaven which are difficult to contain.

The broad face is inclined to laugh, to laugh at the laughable people on earth."

Another pair of couplets which is heavily coloured by sectarian flavour is, according to *Rensheng Daolin* <人生道林> (the 'Book of Way in Human Life'), adopted from the 'sacred instructions' of the Maitreya. Below is a quotation from this book:

Xiaokou changkai, jieyin yuanren deng shengyu. Cixin wujian, qin xie fozi fu Longhua..

笑口常开，接引原人登圣域。慈心无间，亲携佛子赴龙华。

¹²¹ In Chinese society, the phrase *fuxiang* 福相 ('fortunate appearance') is customary used to refer to a fat person. It is also not uncommon to associate prosperity with fatness. Similarly, a person who always show a laughing face (*xiaokou changkai*) is believed to enjoy a happy and contented life.

¹²² According to Luo Weiguo 罗伟国 (1994:122), this couplet is seen hanging at the altar of the Tanzhe Si 潭柘寺, a Buddhist Temple in Beijing. In this couplet, devotees are advised to take things easy, be compassionate and tolerant, only then will they be happy for ever. The translation of this couplet is Kenneth Ch'en's (1964:407).

"With a constant smile, [I] receive and guide primordials ascend to the holy realm.
With a continuously merciful mind, [I] lead all buddhas to the assembly of the Dragon Flower."
(1989:293-294)

In this couplet, sectarian terms such as: 'primordial ones' (*yuan ren*), 'the holy realm' (*shengyu 圣域*), 'the Dragon Flower [Assembly]' (*Lunghua*) are found. It indicates the parting of the sectarian teaching from that of orthodox Buddhism. An examination of two of the 'precious scrolls' published by sectarian groups further reveals the intention of their authors in "supporting and reflecting a sense of sectarian identity".¹²³

In both *Gufo Danglai Xiasheng Mile Chuxi Baojuan* <古佛当来下生弥勒出西宝卷> [GDXMC] (The precious volume concerning Maitreya appearing out of the west, the Ancient Buddha who is about to descend to be reborn) from the late nineteenth century,¹²⁴ and the *Foshuo Mile Gufo Zunjing* <佛说弥勒古佛尊经> (The venerated sutra in which the Buddha speaks of the Ancient Buddha Maitreya)

123 Cf. Overmyer's *Precious Volumes* (forthcoming), chapter VIII :13.

124 For detailed narration of the content of several important chapters in GDXMC, please refer to Overmyer's *Precious Volumes* (forthcoming) [chapter VIII: 6-13].

[n.d.] for examples, 125 “Sakyamuni and Maitreya are a pair of blood brothers for consecutive three rebirths (*sanshi yilai wei qin xiongdi* 三世以来 为亲兄弟). Together, they cultivate the Great Way and attained the supreme perfect enlightenment (puti wushang zhengjue 菩提无上正觉). Between two of them, Maitreya is the elder brother. One day, the two brothers agreed to a contest on meditation [for three days], facing the two Buddhist canes erected each in front of them. Should the cane one is facing first bloom with a [dragon] flower, he will be given the priority to descend and ‘rule the world [on behalf of Heaven]’ (*zhishi 治世*). On the first day of meditation, Sakyamuni, who take a furtive glance, noticed that the cane in front of him merely gave out a radiance of five colours; whereas the one in front of Maitreya was blooming with a red flower shining like a rising sun. He observed that Maitreya was in ‘intent contemplation’ (*dading 大定*), Sakyamuni [furtively] removed the flower and put in on top of the cane facing himself before entering into ‘intent contemplation.’” (cf. FMGZ n.d.:11-12) After three days, both of them opened their eyes and discovered that “the colour of the dragon flower had faded and its radiance was reduced (*yanse buyue 颜色不悦*, *guangming jianshao*

125 Cf. Overmyer’s *Precious Volumes* (forthcoming), chapter VIII:2. The *Foshuo Mile Gufo Zunjing* [FMGZ] has a preface which reads: “Mile xiasheng Jing Xu” (Preface to the sutra of Maitreya’s descent to be reborn). Both GDXMC and FMGZ might have shared the common original source. This is evidence in terms of the story regarding Sakyamuni stealing the dragon flower from Maitreya’s cane (*chanzhang 神杖*), the detailed description of end-time disasters, criticism of the evil deeds of minor gods, sprites and sentient beings of all levels of social standing, and also many common religious practices. In many instances, the phrases and sentences are exactly the same. While GDXMC is associated with the Yuandun 圆顿 Sect, FMGZ is attributed to the tradition of the ‘Dragon Flower’ Sect. Also, some of the sectarian terms such as: the Eternal Mother, the ‘imperial fetus’ (*huangtai*), ‘the Great Way of Golden Elixir’, and ‘the Learned Youth Buddha’ (Rutong Fo 儒童佛, a Buddhist manifestation of Confucius) mentioned in GDXMC are not found in FMGZ. In terms of the length of the text, FMGZ has only fourty-five pages, which is about one-third of GDXMC with a total of 125 pages. Other than these variations, the content and the overall tone of these two texts are basically similar.

光明减少). Maitreya says:

"I now hand over the world for you to rule. It's a pity that [things are] not going to be 'complete and perfect' (*buneng quanmei* 不能全美). Within the 3,000 years, there will be uneven distribution among the people who are rich, [poor], suffering or happy. There will be less bumper harvests for the five types of grains. There will be disputes over the question of territory, and social unrest in the four directions. Thefts and bandits will constantly occur. Sprites will be at ease and the 100 kinds of harmful forces will cause troubles simultaneously. People will suffer. 3,000 years after this I will descend by myself to preach (*shuofa* 说法) in [the mundane world whence] the limitless radiance is shining and illuminating from within and without (*wuliang guang zhao* 无量光照, *neiwai jie ming* 内外皆明). Those auspicious signs that have never appeared before will exist [at that time]."

(FMGZ n.d.:12-13)

Chapter four in FMGZ, entitled "Sweeping away and destroying the heretical spirits" (*saomie xieshen pin* 扫灭邪神品), describes Maitreya's exhortation to the Jade Buddha (Yu Fo 玉佛)¹²⁶ on how to deal with the various sprites of withered trees (*kumu* 枯木), stones, and of pythons, snake, foxes, rabbits, oxen, sheep, as well as those harmful forces of gold and jade vessels that receive people's sacrifices, but only harm people. In the midst of discussing various calamities faced by the people, the teaching of Sakyamuni during his reign of 3,000 years in the mundane world is again referred to as an age of great disorders, and also the degeneration of Dharma (FMGZ: 29-29). People are taught the easiest way of salvation by "reciting the Buddha's name five times" (*nianfo wusheng* 念佛五声),

¹²⁶ In FMGZ (n.d.:14-15), the Jade Buddha is said to be an arhat named Dhuta (*toutuo zunzhe* 头陀尊者). He is the presiding elders (*shangshou* 上首) among all disciples of Maitreya. Grieving over the decline of the age in the last 2,500 years after Sakyamuni's rule in the world, he offered himself to descend on behalf of Maitreya to release those with karmic affinity from suffering while awaiting Maitreya's descent in another 500 years to come. In GDXMC, however, the Jade Buddha seems to refer to Maitreya himself.

and for them “there will be no more taboos” (*bai wu jinji* 百无禁忌). (FMGZ: 30). In the concluding sentence of this chapter, Maitreya’s repeated exhortation to the Jade Buddha reads:

“It is therefore [important] to teach sentient beings to recite [the name of] Buddha [and] to burn incense, [so that all of them will] transcend to the realm of Heaven. All pitiful orphan souls [upon] listening to the recitation of Buddha’s [name], will at that instant escape from the suffering of samsara, and thence become joyful (*chaoba chuli* 超拔出离, *xiling kuale* 悉令快乐).” [FMGZ n.d.:32]

From the above narrations, it is interesting to note that Sakyamuni was portrayed in both ‘precious scrolls’ as a negative figure who cheated in order to win the contest. He was thus held responsible for the cause of degeneration of Dharma during his period of rule in the mundane world. This unconventional story could possibly be an attempt by the authors to establish a ‘sectarian identity’. Nevertheless, they might have overdone their job in that this version of story tends to upset the traditional sequence of the three presiding Buddhas in accord with the three-stage time scale mythology. This may explain the reason why this story is rarely cited elsewhere in other precious scroll literature. Notwithstanding this, this text does a fine job in reminding us of the *upaya* used by sect leaders in proselytizing for the sect. The story also tells us the compassionate and tolerance of the Maitreya Buddha and his promises of salvation in the last age of the Dharma. The practice of “reciting the Buddha’s name five times” and burning incense to secure an ultimate salvation leads us to recall the teaching preached by Mao Ziyuan 茅子元 (1086-1166), a Buddhist monk who began his mission of proselytizing for the White Lotus sect in 1133 just after the beginning of the Southern Song period (1127-1279). Mao is said to have taught among others the

practices of taking refuge in the Three Jewels, observing the Five Prohibitions (*wujie* 五戒), and reciting Amitabha's name five times.¹²⁷

Having said that, I would like to return to the discussion of Maitreya's role in the Unity Sect. How important is Maitreya Buddha in its teachings?

Before we proceed, a brief review on the role of Maitreya in popular religious literature produced by popular religious sects in China prior to the Unity Sect can contribute to our understanding of any transformations occurring in the later versions of Maitreya's mythological tradition.

A detailed study of this literature by Overmyer in his important article entitled, "Messenger, Savior, and Revolutionary: Maitreya in Chinese Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries",¹²⁸ sheds much light on our understanding of Maitreya's role in Chinese historical sources, and most importantly, in the sectarian scriptures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

As aptly pointed out by Overmyer (1988:110), "Maitreya has played a variety of roles in different texts and circumstances. He is a symbol of hope for deliverance in the future who presents different facets to persons in diverse social and religious situations. Though Maitreya's basic promise is constant, the needs and interests of his devotees shape what they see."

Notwithstanding this, the mainstream of sectarian teachings is based on a

¹²⁷ Cf. Overmyer (1976: 90-93).

¹²⁸ This article appears in Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre (eds.) *Maitreya, the Future Buddha* (1988:110-134).

distinctive creation myth of three successive cycles of time, each 'controlled' by a Buddha. Maitreya constitutes the third and the last Buddha in these cycles, who comes to rescue the lost from the profane world by reminding them of their sacred roots and showing them the way home to the Eternal Mother, chief deity of sectarian tradition. In her heavenly paradise (known as the 'Principle Heaven' in the Unity Sect) they will enjoy felicity and long life for eighty-one eons. (cf. Overmyer 1988:111) Maitreya's role in this literature is predominantly otherworldly.

Overmyer has also pointed out that "in some non-canonical Buddhist texts written in Chinese in the sixth century, Maitreya and similar figures appear in a very different setting, as militant saviours who descend in a time of chaos and decay to cleanse the world of evil and established a purified community of the elect" (1988:113). Such descriptions of Maitreya's role as "taking charge of the world" (*zhang shijie* 掌世界) are also found in some popular religious literature. Though only a few showed such a clear political inclination; they "were often viewed with suspicion by official investigators" (1988:111).

To discuss the role played by the Maitreya, one will have to look at it at both quantitative and qualitative levels. Overmyer's above mentioned study shows that "at a quantitative level, Maitreya is not an important figure in *pao-chuan* (= *baojuan*) literature ... However, as part of a defining mythological tradition in sectarian scriptures, Maitreya has an important qualitative role. Wherever we find the three-stage time scheme noted above, with its promise of collective salvation, Maitreya's influence is present even if he is not mentioned." (1988:115) His concluding remarks note that due to the complexity of the symbol of Maitreya, "no single explanation of his significance will suffice, ... the particular role he play depends on

the interests of the preachers and writers who hence formulated the ongoing Maitreya tradition." (1988:131). This is particularly relevant to my discussion on the role of the Maitreya in the Unity Sect below.

The fact that the Unity Sect portrayed Maitreya as its 'patriarch taking charge of the [heavenly] realm during the White Yang epoch' (*baiyang zhangpan zushi* 白阳掌盘祖师), clearly indicates the absorption of the three-stage time scheme mythology into its theological structure. We are also told that the role played by Maitreya during this last age of Dharma is 'to restore the primordial unity (*shouyuan*) as the last act of salvation history', ¹²⁹ upon receiving the 'celestial mandate' of the Eternal Mother (*fengle Laomu de tianming lai ban zhe chang shouyuan dashi* 奉了老母娘的天命来办这场收圆大事). [cf. Cong Lin n.d.: 19] In other words, Maitreya's role in the Unity Sect is as a messenger and saviour who is decreed by the Eternal Mother to carry out the eschatological task of spiritual deliverance in the last age of the Dharma.

¹²⁹ Cf. Jin Liang (1991:10). Maitreya's mission is always referred to as 'the course of the great affairs' (*yi dashi yinyuan* 一大事因缘). In the Unity Sect, he was believed to have incarnated and manifested previously as Fu Dashi 傅大士 (497-569), Budai (? - ca.902), Xu Huanwu 徐还无 (?-1828), and Lu Zhongyi (1848-1925), the last two being the thirteenth and seventeenth patriarchs of the Unity Sect. (cf. Jin Liang [1991:40]). It is said that Maitreya cannot accomplish by himself this mission of 'restoring the primordial unity' --- the great affairs. Hence, all Unity Sect's members should vow to become his myriad incarnations to reveal and preach in the mundane world on his behalf (*benzou renjian* 奔走人间, *xianshen shuofa* 现身说法) [cf. Cong Lin n.d.: 38]. Or, to put it in another way, all sect members ought to 'bring to mind unceasingly the birth of the ancient Buddha; and advance unceasingly [toward actualizing] the descend of the Maitreya (i.e. to turn this *saha*-world into the Maitreya's homeland --- a land of bliss)' (*nian-nian Gufo chushi* 念念古佛出世; *bu-bu Mile xiasheng* 步步弥勒下生) [Li Yuzhu 李玉柱 1988: 126]. Used in this sense, Maitreya is but a metaphoric expression symbolizing the accomplishing of his great compassion.

As we have seen, the Unity Sect is essentially a matrist sect with its three crucial characteristics of millenarianism, salvation, and exclusivity all focused solely on the worship of the Mother.¹³⁰ The adoption of the Maitreya-Eternal Mother mythological structure did not, in any way, abate the dominant role played by the Eternal Mother within its theological framework. Therefore, Overmyer's observation that Maitreya is only an important figure at the qualitative level also holds in the case of the Unity Sect.

A review of two of the important tracts published by the Unity Sect in 1937 and 1941 respectively, namely: (1) *Precious Raft of the White Yang Epoch* (白阳宝筏) *Baiyang Baifa*, hereafter abbreviated as BYBF), and (2) *Ten Admonishments from Huangmu to Her Children* (*Huangmu Xunzi Shijie*, hereafter referred to as HMXZ), further validate Overmyer's view point mentioned above. Below are quotations from these two books.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Cf. Philip Clart (1995:18). By 'millenarianism', Clart means the urgency of sect members' return to the Eternal Mother's paradise of the Principle Heaven at the end of the last age, which is an era full of great cataclysms indicating the impending destruction of the word and humankind. By 'salvationism', he means the conferral of the three jewels at the time of initiation, which constitute the key to the 'accomplishment of the Way' (*chengdao 成道*) and thence the guarantee of its salvation. By 'exclusivity', he means the status of the elect enjoyed by sect members on whom are exclusively bestowed the grace to attain the Mother's paradise.

¹³¹ The reason for selecting these passages in both the BYBF and the HMXZ is because they illustrate well the important transitional changes of Zhang Tianran's role in the sect. At first, he was portrayed as patriarch Gong Chang with a certain degree of ambiguity in the BYBF. Later, in the HMXZ, he was clearly identified as patriarch Gong Chang with his own name Tianran used alternately with that of the former in these passages. He was also said to be the incarnation of Jigong, the Living Buddha. These changes indicate the establishment of Zhang Tianran's powerful position in the Unity Sect by at least 1941, through planchette revelation.

(1) *Precious Raft of the White Yang Epoch* (BYBF) 132

Chapter one

[Mile Fo hao Jin Gong, zhangduo zhigao ba chuan cheng.] (p.25)

弥勒佛号金公，掌舵执篙把船撑。

Maitreya Buddha, addressed respectfully as the 'Golden Elder' (= the seventeenth patriarch of the Unity Sect, Lu Zhongyi), operates the rudder, holding the pole to punt the [dharma] boat.

[(Lao Huangmu) Jiao Gong Chang lai ling dong, you chai san qian liu bai ying.] (p. 27)

(老皇母) 叫弓长来临东，又差三千六百英。

[I, the Venerable Mother] Summoned [Patriarch] Gong Chang to descend to the Eastern Land, and I also sent 3,600 saints.

Chapter two

[Mile lingming lai dongtu, zhufo zhuzu xia dongchuan.

Gewei sanqi baiyang yun, shoushu yuanzi fan yaotian.] (p. 29)

弥勒来东土，诸佛诸祖下东川。各为三期白阳运，收束原子返瑶天。

Maitreya received the decree to come to the Eastern Land; all Buddhas and patriarchs descended to the Eastern River.

Respectively [acting] in response to the White Yang [period] of the three stages of cosmic time, bring together the 'children of the origin' [and sending them] back to the paradise of Jasper Pool.

Chapter three

[Baiyang sanqi Mile zhang, zhang zhe sanpan hua zhumi.

Youyuan de deng xiantian dao, quan-quan fuying zhao yuanzi.] (p.33)

白阳三期弥勒掌，掌着三盘化诸迷。有缘得登先天道，拳拳服膺找原
子。

132 According to Li Shiyu (1948:116), this tract was revealed in the year 1937. It consists of eleven chapters of sacred instructions. Except for the tenth chapter revealed by the Eternal Mother, all the rest were revealed by Jigong, the Living Buddha. The copy of BYBF I have is included in another tract entitled *Guide Book for the Awakening [of Humankind]* (*Xingshi Zhinan* 〈醒世指南〉 = XSZN).

Maitreya takes charge of the third epoch of White Yang, he takes charge of the third realm, saving the lost.

Those with karmic affinity first attain the Way of Prior Heaven, and sincerely [devote themselves to the mission] of looking for the 'children of the origin'.

Chapter five

[Gong Chang Laozu ling tianming, dai tian xuanhua zhao yuanzhen.] (p.38)

弓长老祖领天命，代天宣化找原真。

[Patriarch] Gong Chang has received the heavenly decree, proclaiming transformation on behalf of Heaven, and looking for the 'primordial' and the perfect.

Chapter nine

[Mile Gufo ba chuan zhang, Gong Chang zhi gao ba chuan wan.] (p.50)

弥勒古佛把船掌，弓长执篙把船挽。

Maitreya , the Ancient Buddha takes charge of operating the rudder, while [Patriarch] Gong Chang holds the pole to push the [dharma] boat.

Chapter ten

[Sanqi laizhi dajie xian, kongpa shansun shan ernan.

Suoyi chaixia sanfo zi, zhang zhe sancao jiu jieguan.] (p.59)

三期来至大劫现，恐怕伤损善儿男。所以差下三佛子，掌着三曹救劫关。

When the third epoch arrives, great calamities appear, [I, the Mother am] afraid that it could hurt my good sons, therefore I send down the Three Buddhas to take charge of the three realms, rescuing those who face calamities.

(2) Ten Admonishments from Huangmu to her Children (HMXZ) ¹³³

Forward

[Jin zhi baiyang yingyun, chiling Mile zhangpan, Gong Chang chandao, gongban shouyuan, wan sancao, tongdeng puti] (p.31)

¹³³ According to Li Shiyu (1948:21), this tract was revealed by the Eternal Mother in the year 1941.

This can be considered as the first full elaboration of matrist sect literature found in the Unity Sect.

今至白阳应运，敕令弥勒掌盈，弓长阐道，共亦收圆，
挽三曹，同登菩提。

Now that the time of White Yang has come. [I, the Mother] command Maitreya to take charge of the [heavenly] realm, and Gong Chang (= Zhang Tianran) to proselytize for the Way. Together they should shoulder the mission of 'restoring the primordial unity', and bringing salvation to the Three Realms [so that] all will attain enlightenment.

The first admonishment

[Zi nū fanben bai Tianran, shizi jie qian dian lingqiao.] (p.36)

子女返本拜天然，十字街前点灵窍。

[The Mother's] sons and daughters must reverence [Zhang] Tianran to return to the source, and receive the dotting of the luminous aperture in front of the crossroad (= right at the intersecting point [or the cross] located between the two eyebrows).

[Tiandao chanfa shengmai chuan, chiling sanfo ban shouyuan.] (pp. 44-45)

天道阐发圣脉传，敕令三佛办收圆。

The Heavenly Way elucidates the dharma, [thus enabling it] to be transmitted following the tradition of the sages. [I, the Mother] command the three Buddhas to manage the 'restoration of the primordial unity'.

The second admonishment

[Chai Mile zhang tianpan wanpan guizheng, ming Tianran zhang daopan Lingmiao (Tianzun) huashen.] (p.45)

差弥勒掌天盘万旁归正，命天然掌道盘灵妙（天尊）化身。

[I, the Mother] sent Maitreya to take charge of the Heavenly realm and convert all religions to return to righteousness, and decreed that [Zhang] Tianran, the incarnation of the 'Efficacious and Marvellous, Heavenly Worthy' (= Jigong, the Living Buddha) should take charge of the religion.

The third admonishment

[Xiang mi zhen, qiu Gong Chang, dadao de cheng. De Tiandao shu xinggong xiuzhen jiewei.] (p.63)

想觅真，求弓长，大道得成。得天道，速行功，修真借伪。

To seek the Truth, one must ask Gong Chang, so that one can attain the Great Way. Upon receiving the Way, hurry to accumulate merits and cultivate the True Self by means of the false (body).

The ninth admonishment

[Xian rujin baiyang zhan Mile yingyin, ming Tianran zhang daopan puhua zhongxi.] (p. 118)
现如今白阳展弥勒应运，命天然掌道盘普化中西。

Now that the White Yang [epoch] shows Maitreya responding to the cosmic movement, [I, the Mother] command [Zhang] Tianran to take charge of the religion and transform universally the East and the West (= the world).

The tenth admonishment

[Mile Zu deng baotai dianjiang fengxian ... Tianran zi shuai yuanren gong chao foyan.] (p.126)
弥勒祖登宝台点将封仙 ... 天然子率原人共朝佛颜。

Patriarch Maitreya mounts the treasure terrace to make a roll call of generals and appoint immortals. ... Master Tianran leads all the primordials who long to pay homage to the Buddha (= the Eternal Mother).

From the abstracts of the BYBF and the HMXZ quoted above, it is evident that qualitatively, Maitreya's role in the Unity Sect remains the same as that found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries popular religious literature or precious scrolls mentioned earlier. He is still one of the three Buddhas within the framework of the three great cycles. He succeeded his predecessor Sakyamuni, and presides over the last cycle of the White Yang epoch's mission of salvation ordained by the Eternal Mother. Notwithstanding this, his mission is now shared by Patriarch Gong

Chang.¹³⁴ Maitreya is said to 'take charge of the heavens' (*zhang tianpan* 掌天盤) while Gong Chang and 'takes charge of the teachings' (*zhang jiaopan* 掌教盈).

When one compares the HMXZ with the BYBF, one discovers the increasing importance of Zhang Tianran in the Unity Sect at least by the year 1941. In the tract of HMXZ, his name Tianran is used alternately with that of "Patriarch Gong Chang". Besides, the tract also reveals that Patriarch Zhang is an incarnation of Jigong, the Living Buddha. The 'division of labour' (and thus the sharing of power) between Maitreya in the realm of heavens on the one hand, and Zhang Tianran in the worldly realm on the other hand, clearly indicates the fact that Maitreya in the later period of the Unity Sect is relatively less important than his predecessors, who do not share their power with anybody else.

As pointed out earlier, the practice of kowtowing is rather remarkable in the Unity Sect's ritual. There are distinct differences in the numbers of kowtows received by the Eternal Mother and the other deities in the sect's pantheon. This is not surprising considering the Eternal Mother's supreme position in the Unity Sect. Nonetheless, a comparision of the different number of kowtows received by each deity along with the listing of their names during the course of these rituals helps indicate the position of Maitreya in the sect.

¹³⁴ Cf. footnote 85. As we have seen, Gong Chang is a legendary sect leader. According to Sawada Mizuho, he founded the Yuandun jiao (Religion of Complete and Instantaneous Enlightenment) in 1624. He was also believed to have composed the *Dragon-flower Precious Scripture* (*Longhua Baojing* 《龙华宝经》) published in 1654 (cf. Overmyer's *Precious Volumes* [forthcoming], chapter VII: 1). Gong Chang is also used in the Unity Sect as a respectful title of Zhang Tianran in replacement of his full name. This observation of 'name taboos' (*minghui* 名讳) is practised in traditional Chinese society when referring to the name of someone most respected or honoured.

In the 'ritual for saluting and taking leave of the honourable presence'¹³⁵ for example, though Maitreya is the patriarch of the White Yang epoch, he does not seem to enjoy honour equivalent to his status. His name appears only after 'all Celestial Gods and Saints' with an equal number of three kotows in both of the rituals mentioned above. In the case of the 'ritual for presenting incense', Maitreya is number four in the listing after the Eternal Mother, 'Heaven, Earth, Ruler, Parents, Teacher' (*Tian di jun qin shi* 天地君亲师), and 'all Celestial Gods and Saints'. He and the other eight category of deities share an equal number of five kowtows.¹³⁶

This ranking appears intentional on the part of sect leaders; it may be an effort to 'tone down' the portrayal of Maitreya in order to protect the sect from being accused as the offshoot of the White Lotus Sect (*Bailian Jiao* 白莲教),¹³⁷ long viewed by the authorities as heretical and revolutionary in nature. In fact, this viewpoint can be further validated by the direct negation of any relationship whatsoever with the White Lotus Sect by the sect in the memorial text read and vowed by both the Guide and the Guarantor (*Yin-Bao shi dangyuan wen* 引保师当愿文) during the initiation ceremony. An abstract of its relevant portion reads:

135 Cf. pp. 98-99 for the text of 'ritual for saluting and taking leave of the honourable presence'.

136 Cf. pp. 100 for the original text of this ritual with the counting of kowtow. The other eight deities who share the same number of kowtows are: (1) Heaven, Earth, Ruler, Parents, Teacher; (2) all Celestial Gods and Saints; (3) the Ancient Buddha of the South Sea; (4) the Saints [founders] of the Five Religions; (5) the Living Buddha; (6) the Moon-wisdom Bodhisattva; (7) all Guardians of the Law, and (8) the Great Emperor of Longevity. [Cf. Appendix 2 for brief annotations on the deities listed]

137 Maitreya's worship was first incorporated into the White Lotus Sect by Han Shantong 韩山童 (d. 1355) towards the end of the Yuan dynasty (1280-1368). Due to the millenarian orientation of this sect, it was always referred to as heretical and hence persecuted by successive dynasties. [cf. Richard Shek 1987, Vol. 9: 534-535] Also, please refer to B.J. Ter Haar's fine study on this subject entitled *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*, published by E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1992.

“... If we are introducing and guaranteeing [these candidates = the novices] into a left-hand [heretical] Way and a peripheral gate [of wisdom] (*zuodao pangmen* 左道旁門), into the false teachings of the ‘White Lotus’ (*xiejiao Bailian* 邪教白蓮), or deceiving them for their money, we desire to be punished by Heaven and destroyed by lightning”.

[YDRS 1992: 146] 138

How then should one explain the rather significant role played by Maitreya in the context of ‘Sincere Repentance Text’ (*Yuanchan wen* 懈忏文) 139 chanted by sect members in their daily ‘ritual of presenting incense’ (*xianxiang li*)? I perceive this as a historical remnant (*lishi de cancun* 历史的残存) in the course of the theological development of the Unity Sect, which could hardly be replaced without affecting the root-structure of its teaching. In other words, given the constant state of the creation myth and the continuous preaching on the three-stage time scheme of salvation by the Three Buddhas in the Unity Sect tradition, such an abrupt change in Maitreya’s role [particularly in this text of ‘sincere repentance’] may have been considered as destructive and unnecessary.

(c) Jigong, the Living Buddha

Jigong, the Living Buddha (1148-1209) is a figure widely known at the folk level. His Buddhist name is Daoji 道濟 (“Ferrying Across by the Way”), but he is popularly addressed as Jidian 济颠 (“Crazy Ji”). This is due to his wild and carefree character, along with his disregard for the accepted norms of the monastic

138 I follow Jordan’s and Overmyer’s translation (1986: 300) for this portion of the memorial text.

139 Cf. pp. 101 for the content of this ‘Repentance Text’.

community and his eccentric behaviour of habitual wine drinking.¹⁴⁰ However, he is highly praised and exalted by the people because of his pure and upright qualities. His role as a Buddhist miracle-worker made him a most welcome figure venerated by the laity for his superhuman power.¹⁴¹

Jujian 居簡 (d. 1246), a Song dynasty Chan Master, in his “Inscription On the Sarira Relics of the Recluse from the Lake, Elder Fangyuan (*Huyin Fangyuan Sou Sheli Ming* 湖隱方圓叟舍利銘)” wrote:

“ ... The elder (*sou* 翁) was from Tiantai county in Linhai prefecture [in today's Zhejiang]. He was a descendant of Commandant Li Wenhe 李文和. He was ordained at the Lingyin Monastery by the Chan Master Fohai. He was wild and carefree yet upright and pure (*kuang er shu, jie er jie* 狂而疏, 介而洁), and would not soften his critiques. Overall, [his behaviour] was not in line with the accepted norms; however, more often than not in his attainments he was head and shoulders above [his contemporaries] (*yao weijin he zhunsheng, wang-wang chaoyi* 要未尽合准绳, 往往超诣) ... He wandered over half the land; for four decades he was a disillusioned vagabond (*xinjiao ban tianxia, luobo sishi nian* 信脚半天下, 落魄四十) ... Hot or cold, he never had a whole garment to his body; whenever one was donated to him he would immediately use it to pay the waiter in the wine shop. His bed and meals were never regularly provided. He dedicatedly prepared medicines for old and sick monks. ... The elder's name was Daoji. He was also called “Huyin” 湖隱 (The Recluse from the Lake) and Elder Fangyuan (“Square-circle”). All these names were given to him by his contemporaries. He passed away at the Jingci 净慈 Monastery on the fourteenth day of the fifth month, the second year of Jaiding period [June 17, 1209]. The local people stored his sarira (*sheli*) remains and stored them below the Twin Peak (Shuangyan 双岩) ... ”

[*Beijian Wenji*, juan 10 <北涧文集。卷十>]¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Meir Shahar (1992: 40).

¹⁴¹ Cf. Meir Shahar (1992: 66).

¹⁴² Cf. Zhou Chunyi 周純一 (1990: 539) for an extract from the original text. I follow Meir Shahar's translation (1992:37-38) with slight alterations.

From the extract above, we come to know that Jigong was also addressed by his contemporaries as Huyin and Fangyuan. A native of Tiantai [in present Zhejiang province], he was characterized as a wandering monk who was “wild and carefree yet upright and pure” and liked to drink wine.¹⁴³

Tian Rucheng's 田汝成 *Xihu Youlan Zhiyu* 〈西湖游览志余〉 (“Supplement to the West Lake Tour”), published during the Jiajing reign period (1522-1566) of the Ming dynasty, includes a biography of Daoji which supplies the following details:

“Crazy Ji’s (Jidian) original name was Daoji. He was wild and did not pay attention to small details of conduct. He used to drink wine, eat meat and drift about the marketplace. People thought he was mad, for which reason they called him ‘Crazy Ji’. Originally he was ordained at the Lingyin Monastery. Yet the monks there disliked him; therefore he took up residence in the Jingci Monastery. He would recite sutras and light funeral pyres for people, and in each case they would attain salvation. At the age of seventy-three, he sat down in the meditation posture and passed away ... His molded statue is still preserved in the [Jingci] monastery.”

[*Xihu Youlan Zhiyu*, juan 14]¹⁴⁴

Tian Rucheng's Jigong biography based on folklore materials has him breach another monastic rule by eating meat (in addition to drinking wine). The element of conflict between Jidian and the Lingyin Si monks leading to his

143 Cf. Laurence G. Thompson (1982: 143), footnote no. 33. His dual disposition was later rationalized by his devotees by claiming that his pretended craziness was an expedient or *upaya* for saving the world.

144 Cf. Zhou Chunyi (1990: 536-537) for quotation of the original text and his arguments on the sources used by Tian Rucheng in his version of Jidian’s biography. The translation of the abstract from this text quoted above is Meir Shahar’s (1992: 73-74).

withdrawal to the Jingci Monastery is also newly added. He also lights funeral pyres for people, and in the course of so doing save the souls of the deceased from the suffering of samsara. As observed by Meir Shahar (1992: 73-75), by the early sixteenth century at the latest Daoji was a popular figure in Hangzhou lore. Tian's Jigong biography not only indicates a growing veneration of Jidian on the part of the laity, but also allows us a first glimpse of his reappropriation by the monastic establishment, which in his own days granted him neither title nor position.

Furthermore, those newly added details in this version also provided sufficient hints for novelists of the later periods to expand it into longer versions of Jigong popular legendary novels. The earliest novel on Jigong, entitled *Qiantang Huyin Jidian Chanshi Yulu* 〈钱塘湖隐济颠禅师语录〉 (*Recorded Sayings of the Recluse from Qiantang Lake, the Chan Master Crazy Ji*, hereafter abbreviated as the *Recorded Sayings*), published on the third year of Ming Longqing period (1569), constitutes a good example. A later Jigong novel, entitled *Jidian Dashi Zui Puti Quanzhuan* 〈济颠大师醉菩提全传〉 (*Complete Biography of the Drunken Bodhi, the Great Master Crazy Ji*, hereafter abbreviated as the *Bodhi*) in twenty *hui* 回 (= chapters) was published in late Ming or early Qing period as a rearrangement of the *Recorded Sayings* in a chapter-structure.¹⁴⁵

The *Bodhi* is of particular interest to us because it was reprinted in 1982 with commentary (*pingshu* 评述) at the end of each *hui* by Jigong himself through revelations conducted in the Shengde Tang 圣德堂 ("Hall of Sagely Virtue"), a phoenix hall in Taizhong. The novel is renamed *Jigong Huofo Zhengzuan* 〈济公

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Zhou Chunyi (1990:546-547).

活佛正傳> [JHZ] (*Orthodox Biography of Jigong, the Living Buddha*), and is also reprinted and widely distributed for free by many of the Unity Sect's *Fotang*. A Preface by Jigong says:

"The JHZ has been published in by the *Sagely Virtue Magazine* from its first issue until today and is now complete. Disciples of the Hall of Sagely Virtue intended to publish this book in a single volume, and to distribute it widely for free, [in order to] save those with karmic affinity. [They] also have gathered the classics and carefully carried out textual research. This spirit is indeed praiseworthy. In order to admonish the world, to help people in their effort to awaken the Way and to cultivate perfection (*wudao xiuzhen* 哲道修真), I therefore will descend [and wield] the stylus to add commentaries at the end of each chapter, so as to enhance its impression on the people, and make people understand the meaning of my action (*juzhi* 举止) at that time. From tonight onward, [I] will descend on a series of occasions and support the phoenix (*fuluan*) narrating my thoughts at that time, and expounding Chan's inner workings (Chanji 禅机), so that people understand the reason why I pretend to be crazy, awaken to their original face (*benlai mianmu* = true nature), break through various forms, and seek for their true self; only then will one awaken and accomplish oneself (*ziwu zicheng* 自悟自成). As a Chan Master I disseminate the Chan school's mind-dharma, a Way not transmitted outside the teaching (*chuanbo Chanzong xinfa, jiaowai biechuan zhi dao*). Hence my frequent acts of 'berating Buddha and scolding Patriarch' (*hefo mazu* 呵佛骂祖), are not because I want to annoy the Buddha and Patriarch, but due to the fact that everybody possess the Buddha-nature, every one is [capable of] attaining perfect accomplishment (*yuancheng* 圆成); do not look for it apart from yourself, for human and Buddha nature are equal. Hence, [the acts of] berating Buddha and scolding Patriarch aim at awakening the self-nature of humankind. This is just like the popular saying: to hit [somebody] is because you love him/her; to scold [somebody] is because you care about him/her (*da shi ai; ma shi teng* 打是爱，骂是疼). Therefore the Buddhas do not get angry and blame me, and the Patriarchs are equally happy [with me]. Be that as it may, only those with great wisdom will understand the 'inner working of Chan' (= essence of Chan) and not interpret them according to common sense (*sujian* 谷见) ..."

[JHZ 1991 reprint:2-3]

Although the legendary eccentric behaviour of Jigong has long been accepted by his devotees,¹⁴⁶ it is somewhat in conspicuous contrast with the whole character of phoenix halls, a religious institution often referred to as 'the School of Sages' (*shengmen* 圣门)¹⁴⁷ which stresses morality cultivation and the Confucian ethics. It is therefore not surprising to see such commentary being attached to the original novel, and above all an explanatory preface that is put into the mouth of Jigong, the Living Buddha himself.

The fact that the JHZ with commentary has been reprinted and distributed widely by the Unity Sect *Fotang* shows that they are in agreement with this effort by a phoenix hall to rationalize the eccentric behaviour of the legendary Jigong as an *upaya* to save sentient beings. Shahar, for example, points out that the sect downplays Jigong's love of wine. He adds that "informants from the sect generally contend that, contrary to popular belief, the clownish god carries medicine, not wine, in his gourd". (cf. Shahar 1992:30) Another item of Jigong's paraphernalia --- a broken fan, is regarded as a symbol of his miraculous power. Sect members are fond of telling Jigong's miraculous stories using the metaphoric expression of 'turning and transforming' (*bozhuan* 拨转), to refer to his effortless miracle working by just fanning with this broken fan.¹⁴⁸

In the Unity Sect, patriarch Zhan Tianran is reverently referred to as "Jigong

¹⁴⁶ As pointed by Shahar (1992:27), in the case of Jigong spirit mediums, they must entertain their clients with jokes and witticisms, or else the latter would not be convinced of their authenticity.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Philip Clart (1994/95:186).

¹⁴⁸ One of the Unity Sect organization in Malaysia and Singapore, Xing-Ma Jigong Aixin Hui (Jigong Compassionate Society of Singapore and Malaysia), for example, has a gourd and a broken fan in their society's emblem symbolizing Jigong.

Laoshi” 济公老师 (“Master Jigong”) or simply “Laoshi” because he claimed to be the incarnation of the latter. A four-volume anthology of Jigong’s “sacred instructions” (*shengxun*) entitled *Laoshi de hua: Cifu ban de dingning* <老师的话：慈父般的叮咛> [LHCD] (“Message from our Master: Exhortations From Fatherly-like Compassion”) was published by Mingde Chubanshe between 1991-1993. An introductory preface (*yinyan* 引言) in the book by Ou Seng 鸥僧 clearly states the reasons for publishing this anthology, it goes:

“... In order to educate and train our missionary force, ... and to awaken sentient beings in the last age of the Dharma according to their capacity (*genqi* 根器), the White Yang religious domain (*daochang* 道场), has since the time of our Honoured Teacher (*shizun* = Zhang Tianran) until today used canonical texts, the study of the Dao (*daoxue*), mind-dharma, and various dharma-assemblies as *upaya*. In addition to that, all Immortals and Buddhas also cooperate in revelations through the flying phoenix and by means of ‘borrowing aperture’ (*jieqiao* ‘借窍’) ¹⁴⁹. This is to aid opening up the ‘religious affairs’ (*daowu* ‘here refers to the religious arena) and to enhance devotees’ conviction. Among them, the spread and influence of the ‘literature of instructions’ (*xunwen* 训文) is most effective in moving a person’s mind. For several decades, they are reveal in classical or vernacular language, in slang or in the form of maxims, poems or in verses ... They are, however, different from those works produced by literati which are meant for amusement. They embrace compassionate feeling and solemn vows of universal salvation [of humankind from] *kalpic* disasters ... [Jigong, the Living Buddha], our compassionate father and teacher of the three realms in particular, has affectionately appear in crazy manner in religious meetings everywhere using jocular and humorous language, so as to exhort and transform his stupid and stubborn disciples. ... To show our gratitude [to our compassionate teacher], the Mingde Publishing House has came out with the anthology of his sacred instructions. ... ” [LHCD 1991, Vol.1]

¹⁴⁹ *Jieqiao* is a kind of spirit-mediumship. Literally, it means the borrowing of a medium’s body by a certain deity who descends through that medium’s aperture, and hence has him/her speak on behalf of that deity.

The LHCD was compiled and edited in the form of ‘recorded sayings’ (*yulu* 语录), an old genre of Buddhist literature that began to be used in the Tang dynasty (618-907), and saw its height of popularity during the Song dynasty (960-1126).¹⁵⁰ This traditional form of recording the master’s actions or statements was first being revived and popularized in its modern day usage by the Buddhist circles in Taiwan at that time.¹⁵¹ Due to great demand, volume three and four of this book series were published one and a half years after the first two volumes. The ‘sacred instructions’ that appear in the latter two volumes tends to be longer as their emphasis lies on instructions in the correct way of cultivation directed to more senior members.

As pointed out by Zhou Chunyi (1990: 553), the earliest temple in Taiwan with Jigong as its patron deity was the Lingyuan Si 灵源寺 (“The Monastery of the Numinous Source”) built in 1953. The rest of the Jigong temples were mostly built in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Although they are registered under the category of

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Guo Peng 郭朋 (1990: 288). Feng Zuomin 冯作民 (1982: 75-76) points out, however, that the term ‘*yulu*’ began to appear only during the Song dynasty. Feng further point out that the note which reads “their ‘recorded sayings’ have already been published” (*you yulu xingshi*) added by Zanning 赞宁 [919-1001], complier of the *Song Gaoseng Zhuan* 〈宋高僧传〉 (‘The Song Biographies of Eminent monks’), to the biographies of ‘Huangbo 黄檗 [? - 850] and Zhaozhou 赵州 [778-897]’ and ‘Tiantai Deshao 天台德绍 (891-972)’ is probably the earliest rendering of this term that he has come across.

¹⁵¹ The *Jingsiyu* 〈静思语〉 ([Recorded] Sayings of Still Thoughts) of Rev. Zhengyan 证严, compiled by Gao Xinjiang 高信疆 and published by Jiuge Chubanshe 九歌出版社 (1989), and *Xingyun Chanhua* 〈星云禅话〉 (Chan Words of Master Xingyun) of Rev. Xingyun compiled and published by Foguang Chubanshe 佛光出版社 are good examples of such publications that became popular during the late 1980s and 1990s.

Buddhism, they are in actuality temples of the vegetarian sects and the Unity Sect. Smaller shrines worshipping Jigong provide either the services of spirit-mediums consultations or planchette divinations through Jigong. There are numbers of "morality books" (*shanshu*) attributed to revelations of Jigong published by the phoenix halls in Taiwan such as *Record of A Journey to Heaven* (*Tiantang Youji* 〈天堂游记〉), *Record of A Journey to Purgatory* (*Diyu Youji* 〈地狱游记〉) and several others.

Be that as it may, Jigong, the Living Buddha in the Unity Sect, has in actuality been 'replaced' by patriarch Zhang Tianran, a case rather similar to that of the replacement of Maitreya by the Laughing Buddha that I have discussed elsewhere in this chapter. The blending of the belief in the legendary Jigong's miracle-working, and the deified character of Zhang Tianran as Jigong's incarnation even while he was still alive, remolded a new image of Jigong in the Unity Sect.

As we have seen, the use of 'taboo name' Gong Chang instead of Zhang's proper name indicates his exalted position as a charismatic leader. The recognition of his rule over the teaching realm in the White Yang epoch allows him to share power with Maitreya in the mission of universal salvation within the three-stage time scheme eschatological framework. The popularity of Jigong in the planchette revelation tradition further guarantees Zhang Tianran's continuous active role in the Unity Sect as Jigong's incarnation. The successful blending of Zhang Tianran's many identities provide an astounding example of a charismatic sect leader whose influence will continue to inspire his devotees even long after his 'return to the void' (*guikong 归空* = death).

Summary

That the Unity Sect has, within a rather short history of over six decades, has become the largest sectarian religious group in Taiwan with branches and/or sub-branches spreading rapidly all over the world is not a surprise. This success, as we have seen, is mainly due to the flexibility and simplicity of its organization, teachings and rituals.

Other than the well known fact of its adaptability that fit in easily with life in modern society, the 'inter-play' of the following related factors also contributes largely to its successful proselytizing. As pointed out earlier, the creation myth of the 'three-stage eschatology' along with the promise of salvation by the Eternal Mother, expressed metaphorically in term of intimate 'mother-children' relationship, is especially appealing. Many ordinary sect members are attracted, in the first place, by the Unity Sect's promise of instant escape from the suffering of *samsara*, and the transmission of the 'three jewels' when 'seeking the Way'. They are also impressed and moved by the 'the relatives of the Way's' (*daqin*) warm reception during their visits to the *Fotang*.

The belief in a reciprocal relationship between people and Heaven, on the other hand, serves as important driving force to sect members who diligently promulgate the Way and hope for the Heavenly bestowal of success in their lives in return. In fact, this belief illustrates one face of a coin represented on the other face by the concept of 'trial' (*kao*). As we have seen, those who successfully undergo various testings in their missions, will eventually be rewarded with 'grades and positions' (*pinwei*) upon their death in the Principle realm where the Eternal Mother

resides.

Novices who 'seek the Way' are referred to as 'those with karmic potential' and 'person of superior capacity'. By virtue of the Eternal Mother's grace, they become an 'elect' upon the dotting of their apertures during the initiation rite, and thence automatically are removed from transmigration. Notwithstanding this, in order to return to the native place, they have to fulfill their vows by observing the 'dual cultivation of nature and destiny'. In other words, they need to fulfill the apostolic missions of universal salvation and of cultivating and emancipating their original natures.

The stress on the fulfillment of vows go along well with the sect's exhortation of putting the teachings into practice. Sect members are urged to place particular emphasis on the missions in view of the 'impeding apocalypse in the last age' (*tianshi jinji* 天时紧急). In this respect, ordinary sect members are particular zealous in initiating somebody into the sect. They believe that by so doing they gain merit and henceforth advance in the Way (*jing jin*), which eventually leads them to their destiny. Other than fulfilling apostolic missions, the importance of observing daily rituals is given high priority.¹⁵² It is believed that the practice of kowtowing and the exercise of repentance in the daily ritual frees them from sins, calms their minds, and causes them to be submissive.

The control over the use of planchette revelation by the Elder of each branch or sub-branch monopolize the important task of training the 'three talents', prevents usurpation of power from within the sect by other leaders. On the other hand, its

¹⁵² Philip Clart (1996a: 13) points out that a strong anti-intellectual trend is more pronounced in some *Fotang* than others.

effective use during the annual congregations serve the purpose of enhancing the faith of the novices as well as sustaining the zeal and conviction of the existing sect members.

That the three crucial characteristics of the sect, namely: millenarianism, salvation and exclusivity remain as its best selling points guarantee its continuous advancement in the religion market of today. In addition to that, the absorption of Jigong, the Living Buddha into the pantheon of the Unity Sect (with the deified Patriarch Zhang as Jigong's incarnation) has further enhanced its popularity. The wild and carefree but upright image of Jigong has long made him a most welcome and venerated figure among the laity. His growing distinctive position in the planchette revelation tradition shows the developing trend of focusing on his miracle-working power. This emphasis can also be found in the stories told and the retold by sect members about Jigong's assistance to devoted adherents by just fanning his broken fan.

Last, but not least, we have also seen that as more of the old-style leaders pass away, the Unity Sect's present pattern of charismatic and authoritarian leadership will eventually come to an end. The modernization process following the institutionalization of the sect's organizational structure along with its launching of comprehensive sectarian education programme by some of the open-minded leaders has, over the years, attracted sect members from all walks of life. Nonetheless, these changes have also caused anxieties and uneasiness among some of the old-style leaders. To what extent will this opposition affect the sect's future development? I shall return to this point in greater details later in Chapter Six.

Chapter 4

The Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia

We have thus far follow the macro historical overview of the development of the Unity Sect in China and Taiwan prior to its transmission to Southeast Asia (cf. chapter two). We have also devoted to an account of the beliefs and practices of the sect, including descriptions and analyses of the group's organization, ritual activities and main deities worshipped (cf. chapter three). We shall now take a closer look at the contemporary sectarian practice in Peninsular Malaysia in the following two chapters.

Before going into the case-example's micro history of the sect and its development on the Peninsula, a general survey of the percentage distribution of population by religion and ethnic groups, based on the 1991 General Report of the Population Census of Malaysia, will help familiarize the reader with the diversified religious landscape in this multiethnic country. The study of "Vegetarian halls" belonging to the two major Former Heaven Sect (Xiantian Dao) offshoots during the late nineteen and early twentieth centuries in Malaya and Singapore by Marjorie Topley, facilitate important background information regarding the first contact of the early local Chinese immigrants community with the sectarian teachings prior to the spread of the Unity Sect to Malaysia. With Topley's pioneering study as a starting point, this chapter begin to explore into the various stages of development of this sectarian movement in the Peninsula. The history of competition and conflict with Buddhist groups is also described in this chapter.

Ethnic and religious diversity in Malaysia

One of the basic characteristics of Malaysian society is its ethnic and religious diversity. A reference to the 1991 percentage distribution of population by religion and ethnic group in Malaysia clearly supports this observation.

Table 1 :Percentage distribution of population by religion and ethnic groups, Malaysia, 1991

Religion	Malaysian citizens							Non-M'sian C'zns	
	Total	Bumiputera			Chinese	Indian	Others		
		Total	Malay	Other Bumi					
Islam	57.6	88.2	100.0	32.0	0.4	5.3	88.1	82.4	
Christianity	7.9	8.1	-	47.0	7.8	8.1	5.2	11.7	
Hinduism	6.6	-	-	0.1	0.2	83.1	0.2	1.3	
Buddhism	19.1	0.1	-	0.7	68.3	0.7	6.1	2.7	
Confucianism/Taoism/ Chinese religion	5.5	-	-	0.2	20.2	0.1	0.1	0.5	
Tribal/Folk	1.2	1.9	-	11.3	0.1	0.1	-	-	
Others	0.5	0.3	-	1.8	0.3	2.6	0.1	0.3	
No religion	1.5	1.2	-	6.8	2.7	0.1	0.1	0.6	
Unknown	0.1	-	-	0.1	0.3	0.1	-	0.5	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Number (thousands)	16,775.8	10,281.4	8,507.0	1,774.4	4,609.0	1,313.6	571.7	722.3	

Source: *General Report of The Population Census (GRPC)*, Vol. 1 (1991:76)

The distribution of the population by religion in Malaysia is highly correlated to the ethnic composition (see Table 1). For example, 100% of the total Malay population are Muslims, 88.5% of the total Chinese population are Buddhists and/or followers of Confucianism/Taoism/Other traditional Chinese religion, while 83.1% of the total Indian population are devotees of Hinduism.

Although Christianity shares the third highest percentage of adherents from the total Malaysian population (after Islam and Buddhism), it differs from Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism/Taoism/ Other traditional Chinese religion in that it does not 'belong' to a majority of a particular ethnic group.¹⁵³ Also, it has the largest percentage of adherents concentrated in the States of Sabah (27.2%) Sarawak (36.6%), and Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan (12.3%) in East Malaysia (cf. *GRPC* 1991:74).

In terms of religious religious affiliation, Table 1 above also discloses the fact that the Chinese in Malaysia show an array of fragmented diversities: 68.3% of all Chinese are Buddhists, 20.2% are devotees of a broad category of 'Confucianism /Taoism/ Other traditional Chinese religion', 7.8% are Christians, 0.4% are Muslims, 0.2% are followers of Hinduism, 2.7% claim to have no religion, while 0.1% and 0.3% belong to the categories of 'Tribal / Folk', and 'Other' religions respectively.

It must, however, be pointed out that the fragmentation of the religious beliefs of the Chinese in this country is far more complex than has been displayed. This is based on the survey published in the report of the 1991 government population census. A few of those religions adhered to by Chinese devotees not listed here are as follows: the institutionalized Chinese sects such as the World Red Swastika Society, Zhenkong Jiao or the Teaching of True Void, Dejiao associations, the Unity Sect, and the Nichiren Shoshu (a school of Mahayana Buddhism introduced from Japan, which constitutes an independent system of

¹⁵³ The 47.0% of the Christian population under the category of 'Other Bumiputera' includes minority indigenous ethnic groups such as the Duzun, Kadazan, Bajau, Murut and other Bumiputera (in the State of Sabah and Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan), the Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau and other Bumiputera (in the State of Sarawak).

religion by itself). Also, the Satya Sai Baba movement (first brought in by a small number of Indian devotees c.1969), and the Baha'i faith (an Iranian religion founded in 1863) are among the 'new' religions which have gained converts among the Chinese population to a lesser extent. To be sure, the over-simplified categorizations in the above mentioned survey of the religious affiliations of the Chinese in this country failed to provide detailed information for the purpose of comparison in this study. They nevertheless provide a rough picture of the syncretic and the adaptable nature of Chinese religious beliefs.

At this point, it is also important to note that although Islam has been the official religion of Malaysia since the year 1957, this does not in any way suggest that Malaysia is an Islamic State. The position of Islam as the official religion is essentially a recognition of its premier status in the evolution of the Malaysian polity.

154 While the Malaysian Constitution recognizes the government's obligation towards Islam, it also pledges to uphold freedom of worship and to allow non-Muslims to practise their own religions. (Chandra 1987:1-2)

The non-Muslims in this country are represented by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs (a public forum formed in late 1983). This council enables expression of views, and is a means for suggestions to be made by delegates to the Malaysian government on matters pertaining to interfaith relations. The composition of this consultative council shows the perception of all Chinese Malaysian as 'Buddhists' on the part of the government. Although the Dejiao associations and also some other Chinese

154 For the argument on the political negotiations between non-Malays and the Malays over citizenship rights and privileges preceding the country's independence, which eventually led to the recognition of Islamic supremacy in Malaysia, see Susan E. Ackerman and Raymond L.M. Lee (1990: 40-41).

religious bodies tried to send their delegates to this council, their appeals have not been able to be realized to this date.

After this brief background study, we shall now return to the topic of our specific concern, namely the spread and the development of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia.

The spread of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia

Prior to the spread of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia, some of the early Chinese immigrants during the late nineteen and early twentieth centuries were already familiar with, and practised a Chinese popular sect, the so called Great Way of Former Heaven (Xiantian Dadao 先天大道). Topley's studies of this sect and its offshoots in Malaya and Singapore (1954, 1956, 1957, 1963) showed that most of them belonged to the two major Xiantian Dao offshoots, namely the 'Sect of Reverting to the Root' (Guigen Men 归根门) and the 'Universal Salvation Sect' (Pudu Men 普度门). They formed residential religious establishments for both men and women in which the residents maintained sexual abstinence and followed a vegetarian diet. They were known collectively as 'vegetarian halls' (*zhaitang* 斋堂). While recognizing their common origin, ideological identity and structural similarity, these 'vegetarian halls' were mutually exclusive as to their administration and control (cf. Topley 1957:14).

Topley noted that in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Taiping and a few other towns are found branches of the Guigen Men that originated from a branch (*tang*) in Mei

Xian 梅县, Guangdong, a predominately Hakka area; this sect is particularly popular with Hakka people. In both Singapore and the Federation [of the Malay States = Malaya] are found also several sub-divisions of the Pudu Men. Some of these originate from Guangdong, including Hainan Island and Leizhou, and at least one from Fujian. (1957: 15-16)

The majority of the women in the houses of the [Xiantian Dadao] sect in Singapore and Malaya are amahs, some retired and others working women, of the Cantonese dialect group.¹⁵⁵ There are also 'vegetarian halls' in which the majority of the residents are locally born women, often entering as children, given to the halls by their parents. These halls are predominantly Hakka and Teochew. The existence of these vegetarian halls is to satisfy the need for security in old age of both local born and immigrant Chinese women. (cf. Topley 1956: 105, 1954:56)

Members of 'vegetarian halls' are free to come and go as they please as long as they get their allotted work done and attend religious observances. The only other limits imposed on members are that they lead a pious life, learn the sutras and follow a vegetarian diet while living in the house. (Topley 1954: 57) They earn their pocket money by performing ceremonies at funerals and providing vegetarian food for outside consumption. Other lucrative occupations of inmates of 'vegetarian halls' are fortune telling, sewing, cake-making and the performing of various odd jobs for outsiders. (Topley 1956: 109-110)

¹⁵⁵ This group of vegetarian houses are also referred to as 'sister [residential] houses' (*jiemei zhaitang* 姐妹斋堂). They are normally opened by women emigrating from Sun Tak (Shunde 顺德) district of Guangdong, who protest against the marriage system and prefer to support themselves with their own incomes.

Today, there are barely any male vegetarian halls left in the Peninsula. Those male vegetarian halls that persist are run by 'vegetarian aunties' (*chai ko* 莉姑 in Hokkien) who are elderly ladies, often widows or never married. These vegetarian lady custodians reside in the temples, take in orphan girls and maintain the premises. Some of them may also perform chanting services for funerals, or some magical and divination offices for the lay public, as a means of support (cf. Nagata 1995:320-21). Preaching and/or evangelizing for the sect is in actuality, beyond the reach of these people.

As these *chai ko* are gradually dying out, no replacements are forthcoming. The present remaining female vegetarian halls will either 'disappear' eventually as in the case of male vegetarian halls before, or be 'adopted' and reconstructed by monks of the 'purer' Mahayana Buddhist tradition. They may even be occupied and turned into 'Buddha halls' (*Fotang*) by the advancing Unity Sect, as has been happening in recent years. Considering the secrecy of the Great Way of Former Heaven and its offshoots as observed by Marjorie Topley at that time, the possible impact they had upon the Unity Sect in the Peninsula, if any, can be expected to be vague and limited.

A note of clarification may be necessary to add here regarding the designations 'Xiantian Dadao' (used by Topley in her writing), 'Xiantian Dao', and 'Tiandao'. The latter two are used quite often to refer generally to the Unity Sect today.

'Xiantian Dadao' 先天大道 ('The Great Way of Former Heaven') in actuality is not the name of a particular sect. Rather, this designation is used by most of the

Chinese sectarian groups (in the past and also today) to specify the 'primordial origin' of the sects adhered by them.¹⁵⁶ In fact, this term carries a 'sense of superiority' among the sectarians over the followers of other religions. The latter are referred to by the former as '*houtian*' 后天 or 'Later Heaven' which implies a merely 'humanly acquired stage of achievement'.¹⁵⁷

The 'Xiantian Dao' ('Way of Prior Heaven') was brought into Taiwan from mainland China ca. the reign of Xianfeng 咸丰 (1851-1861). During the Japanese occupation in Taiwan, the Xiantian Dao together with Longhua Jiao 龙华教 ('Dragon Flower Sect') and Jin Chuang Jiao 金幢教 ('Golden Streamer Sect') was categorised under the broad category of '*zhaijiao*' ('Vegetarian Sect'). [cf. Zheng Zhiming n.d.:31].

Elsewhere in this dissertation, I have pointed out that the view that the Xiantian Dao shared its historical origin with the Unity Sect, and is the predecessor of the Unity Sect, is generally accepted by Taiwanese scholars and the sect leaders. I have, nevertheless, argued that the modern Unity Sect only began to take shape from 1930 on under the leadership of Zhang Tianran. (cf. chapter one)

That some of the Unity Sects in Taiwan adopt the name 'Xiantian Dao' 先天

¹⁵⁶ This explain why sectarians insisted that the sect is a 'Way' (*Dao*), not a religion.

¹⁵⁷ The fact that these religions have their own respective 'founders' is taken as such.

道¹⁵⁸ should not, in any way, be confused with the '[Vegetarian Sect] Xiantian Dao' mentioned earlier. One possible explanation for the adoption of the latter's name, is to avoid continuous persecutions by the Taiwan Nationalist government of the Unity Sect, which persisted until early 1980s.

In the same manner, I would think that the name 'Tian Dao' 天道 ('the Celestial Way') is an abbreviation of the full name 'Xiantian Dao' [which incidentally in accords with the meaning the '(Primordial) Way descended from Heaven'] was, (and to certain extent still is) used by sect leaders to 'replace' the name Unity Sect at a certain point to avoid religious persecutions in Taiwan, and the accusation of being a 'heretical sect' in (and outside) Taiwan.

As observed by Tan Chee Beng (1985:2), local Chinese newspapers reports in Malaysia and Singapore until 1980s still referred to the local Unity Sect organizations generally by the name of "Tiandao Jiao from Taiwan". Today, the sect is sometimes still conveniently referred to as such. As we have seen, the branches/ sub-branches of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia are each registered under different names. The only Unity Sect organization in the Peninsula that used the name 'Unity Sect' in its registration is 'the Perak Federation of Unity Sect Organizations' (Pili Yiguan Dao Zonghui 霹雳一贯道总会), a Baoguang Jiande local sub-branch that comes under the direct supervision of its

¹⁵⁸ For example, the Senior Elder Zhang Peicheng of Jichu branch named his first public *Fotang* established in Taipei City in 1967 as 'Xiantian Dao Yuan' ('The former Celestial Santuary of the Way'). Later, the Jichu sub-branch under his leadership also incorporated the name 'Xiantian' into his sub-branch registered name as 'Jichu Xiantian' during the legislation of the Unity Sect with the authorities in 1987. To be sure, this naming do not bring any implication of this sub-branch's relationship with the '[Vegetarian Sect] Xiantian Dao in Taiwan today.

The Unity Sect: its initial stage of development (1948-1975)

The first Unity Sect *Fotang* (named Yuanguang Tang 元光堂) in Peninsular Malaysia was set up by Lü Wende 吕文德 in 1948. Lü, a Teochiu, was born into a family which engaged in small business at a certain mining location in Kuala Lumpur. The family later earned a big fortune from investment in tin-mining. Lü claimed that the family wealth was brought along by his birth. When Lü had grown up, he stayed in Swatow (Shantou 汕头), a Treaty Port in Chaozhou 潮州, to look after his family's business there. At that time, the Unity Sect was brought into Chaozhou by elder (*qianren*) Li Haoran 李浩然 of the Baoguang (Precious Radiance) branch from Shanghai. Lü learned of the sect and later was initiated. Upon the fall of Guangdong Province to the Chinese Communist Party, he was forced to leave Swatow. On returning to the Peninsula, he set up the Yuanguang Tang in Kuala Lumpur. This was the first Unity Sect *Fotang* in Malaysia. It also served as the residence of the 'mistress' (*shimu*) Sun Huiming, during her short stay (between 1950-51) in Malaya.¹⁶⁰

159 It was registered in 1992. Others tend to use the name connected to Confucious and Mengzi, probably for protection reason.

160 According to Puguang 浦光 branch Elder Wang Youde 汪有德, Sun fled from Shanghai to Macao, then to Hong Kong ca. 1950. She was invited by Lü Wende to stay in Kuala Lumpur. After her short stay there, she left Malaya in 1951, and went back to Hong Kong again, before settling down in Taiwan in 1954 [information based on personal interview with elder Wang on 13/8/1996 at Xinmin Tan 新民坛, Burnaby, British Columbia].

According to one Mr. Tai's letter to Su Mingdong 苏鸣东 (22/11/1980),¹⁶¹ when the Unity Sect first spread to Malaysia in 1948, its propagation did not achieve much progress over the years. By 1966, Lü Wende had only managed to set up four *Fotang*. It was not until 1975 that propagation of the sect began to be more successful. He also reported that (by 1980) some of the branches of the Unity Sect in the Peninsula had already registered with the Malaysian Government under the names of Morality Society (*Daode Hui* 道德会),¹⁶² the Kung Mung Sern Tao Yen Worshipping Association (*Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan* 孔孟圣道院)¹⁶³ and so on. Tai ascribed the success of the Unity Sect's propagation to a revelation by *Jigong*, the Living Buddha, through a seance in one of Lü's *Fotang*, which stated that the 'celestial destiny' (*daoyun* 道运) had reached the direction of South meaning Southeast Asian countries, which were traditionally called *Nanyang* 南洋 or the South Seas. Sect members are therefore urged to propagate the *diligently (*nuli bandao* 努力办道).*

Tai's observation was generally correct, if looked at from the overall situation of the spread of Unity Sect in Peninsula prior to 1975. If, however, the initial stage of setting up 'family shrines' (*jiatan*) in the Peninsula by other branches of the Unity Sect is taken into account, then the founding date can further be pushed back to 1972. For example, the first 'family shrine' (named *Xiaodian Fotang* 孝典佛堂) of Jiande, a sub-branch (*zhixian*) of the Baoguang branch (hereafter referred to as

161 See Appendix in Su's book *Tiandao de Bianzheng yu Zhenli* 《天道的辨正与真理》(1989:449-50).

162 *Daode Hui* is the official registered name of the Baoguang branch *fotang* set up by Lu Wende.

163 *Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan* is the official registered name of Taoxing 太兴 sub-branch of the Xingyi branch *Fotang* (hereafter referred to as Xingyi Taoxing), first set up in 1978 at Seremban, Negeri Sembilan and registered under the Society Act in 1979.

Baoguang Jiande), was set up in Batu Pahat of the Johore State in that year.¹⁶⁴

The stage of its consolidation period (1976-1993)

Following this, elder (*qianren*) Chen Hongzhen, of Chongde, a sub-branch of the Fayi branch (hereafter referred to as Fayi Chongde), visited Singapore in 1978 to set up a 'family shrine' at Zhu Chaoxing's 朱朝兴 house.¹⁶⁵ During the first 'dharma assembly' (*fahui*) held in Singapore, Zhu's mother (Madam Tan) was initiated. Upon her request, elder Chen visited Malaysia the same year to have the first two 'family shrines' of Fayi Chongde set up each at Madam Tan's and her son-in-law, Huang Tiancai's 黃添財, house. This ground-breaking visit of Elder Chen again led to the development of Fayi Chongde's *Fotang* in the Peninsula.

Another sub-branch of Fayi branch, under the registered name of Puti Lianshe 菩提蓮社, also had its first 'family shrine' set up in Kulim of Kedah in the northern part of the Peninsula. Huang Yajian 黃亞健 (from Kulim), who worked in Singapore, was initiated together with his mother at Elder Li Yuming's *Fotang* in 1979. Through this relationship, elder Li was able to set up Puti Lianshe's first 'family shrine' at Huang's house in 1981. Huang's relative, Zha Baochu 查保朱 (initiated at Kulim), helped this sub-branch of Fayi branch to 'open the wilderness'

¹⁶⁴ While working in Singapore, Mr. Tan K.P., the then 'shrine master' (*tanzhu*) of Xiaodian fotang, was initiated there. On returning to his hometown, he set up the first *Fotang* of the Baoguang Jiande in Batu Pahat, and hence marked the historic starting point of this sub-branch of Baoguang in the Peninsula.

¹⁶⁵ Zhu, who served in the Singapore army, was sent to Taiwan for training. Initiated in Taiwan, he then asked for permission to have a 'family shrine' set up at his residence in Singapore.

in Ipoh, Perak, at a later date.

The third major sub-branch of the Fayi branch, registered under the name Xing-Ma Jigong Aixin Hui 星马济公爱心会 (the Singapore-Malaysia Jigong Compassionate Society), was first brought to the Peninsula in 1980 through one Initiator (*dianchuan shi*) from Singapore by the name of Lin Yachang. He had his first *Fotang* (Aide Fotang 爱德佛堂) set up at Air Tawar, Perak. From here, his *Fotang* flourished in every part of Ipoh, and then spread to other states and Singapore.

The Changzhou branch of the Unity Sect has its main 'public hall' (*zongtang* 总堂) set up at Petaling Jaya, Selangor, in 1979, under the leadership of Initiator Tai Chuen Ching 戴荃清 from Hong Kong. Tai, who worked in a Hong Kong-owned factory in Petaling Jaya, stayed in Malaysia from 1966 until he left for Canada in the late 1980's. The *Fotang* is currently under the supervision of initiator Chen Jiancheng 陈健诚, a history graduate from Nanyang University, Singapore. Tai, however, remains in touch with the *Fotang*. He still visits Malaysia once every one or two years.

From the above examples, we learn, that except for a few cases, many of the sub-branches of the Unity Sect in the Peninsula have their roots in Singapore, rather than directly in Taiwan or Hong Kong. This is not surprising considering the close relationship between Chinese Malaysians and Chinese Singaporeans, in terms of blood-ties, close proximity, history and economy. Through the webs of relationships (*guanxi* 关系) which are established along the lines of relatives,

colleagues and friends, members of the sect are connected by strong determination and diligent cultivation (*kaihuang xiazhong* 开荒下种). Often a piece of spiritual 'Virgin Territory' was changed into fertile evangelic fields when new *Fotang* sprang up one after the other. Such are the cases as we shall observe in the following chapters.

Resistance and trials (*kao*) facing the Unity Sect

Before going further into the development of the Unity Sect in the Peninsula, it may be useful to view the Malaysian ethnic Chinese religious landscape from a larger perspective. This means from the position of this newly grown sect and the possible shock wave it could have caused to the existing Chinese religious bodies, especially the Malaysian Buddhist Association (MBA), the umbrella organisation of nearly all the Mahayana Buddhist associations in Malaysia.

The MBA has all along enjoyed the status of representing ethnic Chinese collectively, insofar as the government preception of ethnic Chinese religious affiliation is concerned. When the Unity Sect began to gain popularity when its numerous *Fotang* mushroomed over a wide geographical area in villages, market towns, and city towns in the Peninsula, its speedy advancement certainly provided a great threat to the existing interests of the MBA as well as other Chinese Buddhist associations. The tensions between the Unity Sect and the Buddhist associations might have been further intensified by the appointment of Rev. Bai Sheng 释白圣

166 as the chief abbot of the famous Mahayana Buddhist temple, the Kek Lok Si (Jile Si 极乐寺) in Penang since 1979 or earlier.¹⁶⁷

On the other hand, the over-enthusiastic evangelistic spirit of sect members from Taiwan in propagating the sect and converting new sect members might have caused some maladjustment among the new converts, who were too eager and zealous in following what they had just been taught. For example, it is not uncommon for a novice to voluntarily shift to vegetarian diet abruptly, and hence refuse to join his/her family members who are non-vegetarians for lunch and/or dinner. The vow given is regularly regarded as an 'evil oath' (*fa dushi* 发毒誓) by the general public¹⁶⁸ Also, the *Fotangs'* establishment during their initial stage were relatively 'mobile' in nature as they were usually set up in a sect member's house or in a rented building. Furthermore, preachers from Taiwan who came with tourist visas could be stationed at a local *Fotang* for only a short period of time. To continue their preaching, they visited the *Fotang* on a rotational basis. These factors may have caused the public to think that they were merely foreign religious

166 Bai Sheng (1904-1989) was the chairman of the The Buddhist Association of Republic of China (Zhongguo Fojiao Hui 中国佛教会) from 1960 to 1986. He was the key figure responsible for instigating the sending in of a secret report against the Unity Sect to the Taiwan authority in November, 1982. [Cf. Sung Guangyu's *Tiandao Gouchen* 〈天道钩沉〉 , Appendix 7 (1983:33-35) and also Chapter 4 (1983: 32-38)]

167 Cf. D. S. Hsiung 熊钝生 ed. *Who's Who in the Republic of China* (Zhonghua Minguo Dangdai Mingren Lu 〈中华民国当代名人录〉), Vol. 1 (1979:567). I am unable to indicate the exact year of his appointment.

168 This is because the oath contains the phrase: ' If [I] ... divulge heavenly secrets (*xielou tianji* 泄漏天机) ..., [I] desire to receive Heaven's punishment and be destroyed by lightning (*yuan shou tianqian leizhu* 愿受天谴雷诛)'. The interpretation of this phrase is controversial between sect members and the public (see explanation below).

personnel who came for the sole purpose of 'swindling' the members by mean of collecting membership fees (*gongde fei* 功德費) and other forms of donations.

In fact, local press accused the Unity Sect in Singapaore as a 'heretical sect (*xiejiao* 邪教) controlled by an international bloc of swindlers' (*guoji laoqian zuzhi* 国际老千组织). These reports were mainly based on the above mentioned perceptions on the part of the general public, and to a certain extent were also instigated by the local Buddhist associations . Soon, the fervour against the Unity Sect extended across the border of Singapore to the southern states of Johore, Malacca, and even north to Perak in Peninsular Malaysia. I referred to this case as the 'July 1981 incident', for it became a public issue in Singapore in early July, 1981, and ended on the 20th of the same month when twelve Taiwanese preachers were expelled from Singapore and blacklisted by the Singapore government. The Local Chinese daily press in Malaysia, nevertheless, continued to carry news on this issue, focusing on the Unity Sect in the Peninsula until August 1981.

Information gathered from Malaysian Chinese local press reports (from 15/7/1981 to 18/8/1981) can be summarized as the following : (1) Sect members are mostly young males and females in their early 20's. (2) Almost all personnel who helped propagate the sect in Johore were from Singapore, although some were from Taiwan. (3) The sect was found in Johore Bahru, Ulu Tilam, Muar, Batu Pahat, Pekan Nenas, Pontian, and Kluang of Johore State, Malacca town, Gemenceh Baru and Seremban of Negeri Sembilan, Pulau Ketam and Port Klang of Selangor, Kepong of Kuala Lumpur, and Pantai Remis of Perak. (4) The Malaixiya Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan, its Malacca branch and main 'public hall' at Seremban, as well as the Wuji Shengmu Gong's Johore state head office at Batu

Pahat, were the two locally registered branches of the Unity Sect mentioned by name in these reports. (5) The Johore State Police Head Office instructed police stations in all districts, to investigate activities of the heretical sect following the banishment of twelve sect personnel from Taiwan by the Singapore authority. (6) The three times (morning, afternoon, and evening) for burning daily incense were mistakenly reported as time for daily preaching in the *Fotang*. (7) Most novices became vegetarians and refused to eat meat for fear of committing a sin. (8) Sect members paid ten dollars each when joining the sect. They also donated to the *Fotang* from time to time. (9) Novices were 'made to swear an evil oath' during the initiation ceremony. (10) the lay Buddhist associations, when interviewed, expressed their strong disagreement with the use of Buddhist scriptures such as the *Diamond Sutra*. These associations believed that its original meaning was being twisted by the sect. They also disagreed with the use of the Buddhist term 'three jewels', and the sect's teachings on 'the reign of Maitreya Buddha replacing Sakyamuni, the Buddha of the past'.

Though fragmented, these press reports do provide useful information regarding the spread of Unity Sect in many parts of Johore and Malacca by 1981. The Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan and Wuji Shengmu Gong, being the two most important Unity Sect's bodies in the Peninsula, were (and still are) actively involved in propagating the sect. The Buddhist associations disapproved of the Unity Sect's teachings based on the beliefs that organized time into three successive cycles, each 'controlled' by a Buddha. They also disagreed with the use of Buddhist terminology, and the borrowing of Buddhist texts. The general public, on the other hand, were against the members' practice of vegetarian diet and the 'evil oath' they swear during the initiation ceremony.

The anti-sectarian fervour in the Peninsula during the '1981 July incident' seemed to reach its height when a Buddhist Studies Seminar was organized in Penang on the 17th of August, with the theme of 'Smiting Heresy and Spreading the Truth' (*poxie xianzheng* 破邪显正). The speaker was the chairman of the Malaysian Buddhist Association, Rev. Jin Ming 释金明. He associated the Unity Sect with the White Lotus Sect (*Bailian Jiao*) and used the two names simultaneously in his speeches. He accused the former as a heretical sect maintaining only a facade of Buddhism. He also spoke on the question of 'obtaining the *Dao*' (*dedao* 得道) by sect members as violating the law of causation. He said this idea was 'ridiculous'. He further argued that the sect's ultimate aim of returning to the Venerable Mother's side was not equivalent to attaining the stage of nirvana in Buddhism, and hence remained in the three realms (*trilokya*) of *samsara*.¹⁶⁹ He advised all Buddhists to discriminate between the true and the heretical teaching, based on the basic Buddhist doctrine of *Aryastangikamarga* (*ba zhengdao* 八正道, the eightfold noble path).

To members of the Unity Sect, this resistance and these adversities were 'demonic trials' (*mokao* 魔考), a term widely accepted by them as examinations ordained by Heaven to test their sincerity towards the *Dao*. In fact, the common saying among sect members is: 'if the Way is not tested, one cannot attain salvation' (*wukao bu chengdao* 无考不成道). This clearly illustrates the acceptance of one's destiny on one hand, and the courage and determination to overcome any difficulty that one face, on the other hand. Indeed, this seemingly contradictory pair of ideas constituted the underlying force which assured continuous success in propagating

169 Cf. *Nanyang Shangbao* 〈南洋商报〉, 18/8/1981, p.21.

the sect in the Peninsula after the so called 'July 1981 incident'.

While experiencing a quantitative growth in its membership, the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia continued to face much disturbance, particularly from the adverse press reports of some minor local Chinese newspapers and magazines. These publications accommodate the taste of readers from the lower social stratum. From time to time, they carried follow-up reports of social issues in relation to the sect which, in many instances turned out to be exaggerated. The inaccuracy of such news was partially due to the lack of professionalism among these local journalists as well as to the nature of these publications. The attitude of non-interference (*wu-wei* 无为) adopted by most of the local sect leaders in response to adverse news is partly to be blamed too.

Thus, a familial problem facing a sect member could eventually became a public issue due to the lack of effort on the part of the sect leaders to mediate between the parties concerned. The outbreak of such familial disputes provided excellent material for the media to exaggerate, using big and provocative headlines, so as to draw the interest of their readers. A vicious circle thus ensued when news of this nature was carried repeatedly by the press, while sect leaders took it passively as another form of testing (*kao*) of the sect.¹⁷⁰ In fact, this is one of the major problems encountered by the sect which remains unresolved to this day.

Having said that, we shall now turn to another major incident confronting the Unity Sect which happened as recently as 1993. On the 8th of September, 1993, the *China Press* <中国报> carried a news item with the headline: 'Heretical sect
170 The saying popularly used among sect members which read 'Heaven testing and human examining' (*tiankao renyan* 天考人验) may serve to illustrate the adoption of such attitude.

caused disaster to my family: husband and wife fell out, daughters fled'. Mr. Yan Cailin 颜财林 aged forty-four, a social activist from Muar district of Johore state, accompanied by a police officer from the political affairs department of Muar police station, the village head (*cunzhang* 村长) of Pagor in Muar district and others, attended a press conference 'to lift the veil of an evil heretical sect'. He pointed out that his twenty-three year old daughter first encountered the sect five years before. After joining the sect, she gradually began to observe a vegetarian diet and considered non-vegetarians as 'impure' (*anzang de ren* 肮脏的人). She alienated herself from the family, but preached ceaselessly to her mother and younger sister, and eventually prevailed upon them to flee from home. He also disclosed that about two thirds of the students in a primary school at Pagor in Muar district were recruited by the sect. To illustrate, he quoted an example of a student from that school who complained to the mother that his classmates were unwilling to let him join them in the games because he is a non-vegetarian [and thus 'impure']. He pleaded with Home Ministry to ban this heretical sect originating from Taiwan, and appealed to various Chinese organizations, religious bodies and political parties to come together to deal with the leaders and their agents.

A Johore edition of a national newspaper, the *Nanyang Shangbao* carried a shorter version of Yan's familial problem on the following day. The report, however, added that Yan's wife refused to share the sleeping room with him. She also used a different set of cooking utensils and bowls for herself. Yan also mentioned the issue of oath taking, and the collection of donations from sect members in the name of 'accomplishing one's vow' (*liaoyuan*). He wondered where all these donations could have gone. In both press reports, no name of the so called heretical sect was mentioned.

On the other hand, an interview with the Pagor village head Mr. Zheng Yushu 郑玉树 appeared on the cover page of the 9/9/1996 *China Press* under the heading: 'Children followed parents joining heretical sect: primary school students made to swear evil oath'. Zheng disclosed that out of forty Chinese families at the small village town of Pagor, more than half joined the local heretical sect organization set up by Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui 马来西亚无极圣母总会. Influenced by their parents, school students also joined the organization. The report also stated that Yan Cailin's eldest daughter had in fact joined the sect while studying in a secondary school at Pagor. A police source stated that they did not have concrete evidence to take action against this legally registered religious organization. The parliamentary secretary of the Minister of Home Affairs was reported to have said that he was currently attending to the issue of heretical sect organizations in Malaysia and would take stern action against them once the ministry had gathered sufficient evidence.

When interviewed by reporters, the assistant head of the related primary school denied the allegation that two-thirds of their students had joined the heretical sect. She also negated Yan Cailin's earlier statement that the students discriminate against their playmates in terms of religious affiliation and diet. In a press interview one Mr. Yan, who is in charge of the sect's local *Fotang*, responded emotionally that Yan Cailin was talking nonsense, and should not have associated his own familial problems with the sect.

Added to these interviews was a small column named 'News exposure' (*xinwen zouguang* 新闻走光), written by a press reporter to serve as background

information to its readers. It carried the heading: 'The Sect of Heavenly Way [had] caused many cases of tragedies' (*Tiandao Jiao daozhi beiju anli duo* 天道教导致悲剧案例多), and stated that *Tiandao Jiao* is also known as the Unity Sect or 'Duck Egg Sect' (*Yadan Jiao* 鸭蛋教). The sect was introduced from Taiwan into Malaysia during the early 1980's (*sic*). Due to the fact that sect members often experienced tragedies such as broken families, money swindles and sexual assaults, the sect was therefore referred to as 'heretical' by the public. The column described the founder of the religion (*jiaozhu*) [*sic*] as the 'Holy Mother of Unlimited Apex' (*Wuji Shengmu*). Novices paying ten dollars on joining the sect will then be transmitted the 'three jewels', namely the 'ancient contract' [secret mudra], the 'mysterious gate' (*xuanguan*), and the 'spoken mystery' (*koujue*) [= secret oral instructions]. They ought to 'make evil oath' (*fa dushi*) not to reveal these secrets to others, or face 'punishment by Heaven and be destroyed by lightening'. Sect members, while preaching, used the myth of three stages time scale [of green, red and white epochs] to confuse (*mihuo* 迷惑) sect members. Abetted by some unlawful elements (*bufa fenzi* 非法分子), sect members departed from their normal behaviour (*yifan changtai* 一反常态). Other than observing vegetarian diet, they alienated themselves from family members, and some even began to resent and be jealous of (*duchou* 妒仇) attachments between men and women. As a result, relationships between husbands and wives were broken (*yidao liangduan* 一刀两断), causing the same type of familial tragedies to recur.¹⁷¹

171 Though abridged, the content of this column is fully preserved with key-words translated literally, followed by its original words in brackets. I intend to use this piece of work to illustrate the abuse of 'news judgment' by mass media, in this case the press, who tend to lose their impartiality on such issues. As can be seen in this example, it was written with the reporter's added moral judgment. The incorrectness of some of the facts presented here showed that serious research on the part of the reporter is required so as to provide the readers with the facts.

On September 14, accompanied by Unity Sect's members, Yan Cailin's wife and his eldest daughter called for a press conference at a vegetarian restaurant in Batu Pahat. They clarified that their fleeing from home to work outside was purely a familial problem of their own, and had nothing to do with Wuji Shengmu Zonghui. They hoped that the public would stop playing up Celestial Way as a heretical sect, as they felt that was very unfair to the sect.¹⁷² Yan's daughter added that she had joined the Unity Sect in 1987 because she identified with the sect's doctrine which teaches its member moral values such as observing human relations, being filial to parents and respectful to elders. Due to disputes within the family, both she and her mother were forced to flee from home to release their tensions. She also disclosed that Yan had used violence against her mother, the case of which had been reported and recorded in the police station. Yan's wife, who had remained silent until this point, then burst into tears and revealed that she had tried several times to go home but was stopped and chased away by her husband. She was terrified by Yan's constant berating. He also blamed her for being unable to help out in his business. She requested that Yan guarantee her safety and to stop blaming her, before she dared to attempt a reunion.

On the issue of her refusal of sexual intercourse with her husband, she explained that she observed this sexual abstinence in order to 'preserve her bodily purity' (*baochi qingjie zhi shen* 保持清洁之身). She complained that she had suffered from serious angina pectoris in the middle of the night several years ago. Failing to relieve her suffering through medical treatment, she turned to divine

¹⁷² This press conference was organized by Batu Pahat branch of the Wuji Shengmu Zonghui. Yan was extremely angry over this matter, and hence proceeded with his continuous attacks to the sect.

healing (*shaoxiang baishen* 烧香拜神), and was finally healed without medicine. She was then chosen to be a spirit medium by the deity concerned 'to save sentient beings from sorrows and bitterness'. Hence, she ought to maintain her 'bodily purity' and follow a vegetarian diet. Yan, who did not believe in the mysterious experiences she claimed to have experienced, constantly berated her. Disputes between her and Yan thus occurred.¹⁷³

The impact of Yan Cailin's case could also be felt in the northern part of the Peninsula. In Air Tawar, Perak, several committee members of a Fayi sub-branch, namely Xing-Ma Jigong Aixin Hui, called for a press conference at the Aide Fotang. In the conference, they clarified an overstatement (*guofen xuanran* 过分渲染) by one press report with the heading: 'Sign board of a *Fotang* at Jalan Melayu in Air Tawar destroyed by an angry wood-cutter with his axe: Wife refused to share her bed; son declined to address his father'. They express their anger and grievances over the press report which described the sect as heretical and responsible for this 'family tragedy'. They also reprimanded the press for taking photos of the *Fotang* without authorization. They maintained that the Unity Sect guides its members to do good deeds (*daoren xiangshan* 导人向善) and in no way teaches them to act against a husband or a father. The *Fotang* concerned was established and registered with the authorities in 1984. Based on their performances over the past ten years, they were confident that the public would give the sect a fair judgment .

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173 See *China Press*, 14/9/1993, p.2. A simpler version of this news [with some variations] was also carried by the Johore edition of the *Nanyang Shangbao* on the same day. Mrs. Yan's own narration above clearly shows that she had since turned to spirit medium cult for assistance, despite the fact that she was earlier a sect member of the Muar branch of the Wuji Shengmu Zonghui.

174 See *Guanghua Ribao* <光华日报>, 17/9/1993, p. 6.

It is quite surprising that the Jigong Aixin Hui, which all along had kept a low profile, fought back openly in response to the press report. But a bigger time-bomb waited to be exploded, when the Wuji Shengmu Zonghui chairman Mr. Tan Kee Piow 陈其彪 and its committee members called for a press conference at its national main office in Kuala Lumpur. Tan condemned Yan Cailin's false incrimination of the Muar branch through mass media, which had caused serious damage to its image. He maintained that the purpose of their organization is to emphasize human relations and morality. One must first cultivate humanity in order to achieve the Celestial Way. He pointed out that the dispute between Yan and his wife was purely an individual's family problem. The sect, nonetheless, was reluctantly forced to shoulder its responsibility. Tan also claimed that the issue of 'swearing with an evil oath' arose as a result of being 'unscrupulously quoted out of context' (*duanzhang quyi* 断章取义) by the sect's opponents. Tan argued that one's aim of seeking the Way is to be delivered (*shouji* 授记)¹⁷⁵ by god. To achieve this aim, one must take an oath (*liyuan* 立愿) in the first place, which denotes one's willingness to realize the sincere mind of the beginner (*fa chuxin* 发初心). He stressed that one should not confuse the meaning of *liyuan* with that of 'swearing an evil oath'. He also clarified that the phrase of striking one's body by the five [types of] lightning' (*wulei hongshen* 五雷轰身) misunderstood by most

¹⁷⁵ The original meaning of *shouji* is the prediction of Buddhahood by Guatama Buddha. Tan, however, took it as two separate words, which read *shou* 授 and *ji* 记. While *shou* refers to 'confer', *ji* gives the meaning of 'mark'. Hence, to him, the word *shouji* connotes the sectarian meaning of 'initiation' (*diandao*).

people.¹⁷⁶ To him, it merely metaphorically referred to ‘the [cause of an unpeaceful mind due to] censuring of one’s conscience for one’s misdeeds’ (*zishen de liangxin qianze* 自身的良心谴责). He warned that ‘any person who tried to link up the reputation of the Wuji Shengmu Zonghui with problems arising from personal factors, would have to bear the consequence of [possible] legal action’.¹⁷⁷ This open challenge by the Wuji Shengmu Zonghui, had in fact, cost it a high price to counter Yan Cailin’s continuing vengeful attacks.

Mutual attacks between Yan and the Wuji Shengmu Zonghui through the mass media were taken seriously by the government. Mr. Huang Jiading 黃家定, parliamentary secretary to the Home Minister, warned that illegal preaching by foreign religious personnel carrying tourist visas would be prosecuted [a warning pointed directly at the core of the Unity Sect since many of its visiting preachers constituted cases of this nature]. More than a month later, Huang repeated his previous warning and verified the fact that some Taiwanese were involved in propagating heretical teaching in Johore, causing disunity among the Chinese communities in Muar and Pagor.¹⁷⁸

By early November, 1993, Yan had organized a ‘Committee of Justice and

176 It seems that there is a variation in the last phrase of the oath. There is no such wording as ‘*wulei hongshen*’ in the current text of the oath. Rather, the phrase ‘*tianqian leizhu*’ 天谴雷诛 is commonly used [cf. footnote 172. See also Jordan and Overmyer (1986:302)]. Li Shiyu’s version of the oath, however, carried the phrase ‘*tianda wulei hongshen*’ 天打五雷轰身 (1948:83).

177 See *Xinming Ribao* <新明日報>, 27/9/1993, p.7.

178 See *Nanyang Shangbao* (Johore edition), 1/10/ 1993, p.8 and *Nanyang Shangbao*, 12/11/1993, p.10.

Anti-heretical Sects' (*Fan Xiejiao Zhengyi Weiyuanhui* 反邪教正义委员会). On November 11th, he announced that twenty-five people from different states, including several retired police officers and leaders in the Chinese community, had joined this committee to combat the heretical sect. He urged those who had experienced suffering from joining the sect to help in exposing the veil of these heretical organizations by providing him with necessary information.¹⁷⁹

Yan even went to the extent of urging the president of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Dato' Seri Lin Liangshi 林良实, to take note and respond to public complaints against the Unity Sect members making use of several MCA national leaders's names (including MCA's cabinet ministers) to help promote the Unity Sect.¹⁸⁰ Two days later, Dato' Seri Lin tactfully responded that any religion whose teaching is suspected of deviant activity should be referred to the Home Ministry for investigation. He maintained that Malaysia is a country which has a policy of freedom in religious beliefs, and such freedom is guaranteed in our constitution. Since he respects and supports the constitution, he also respects the [free] existence of all religions.¹⁸¹

The two opposing parties, who had so far challenged each other through the media, began to change their battlefield. Mr. Yau Guangyu 姚光裕, vice chairman of Wuji Shengmu Zonghui and chairman of its Muar Branch, had twice lodged police reports, on receiving a mysterious call, and later, an anonymous letter

179 See *Xin Tong Bao* 〈新通报〉, 11/11/1993, pp. 1 and 3. Mr. Yau Guangyu pointed out that this committee is secretly supported by local Buddhist association which provide materials used to attack the sect (interview on 2/4/1996).

180 See *Nanyang Shangbao* (Johore edition), 18/11/1993, p.12.

181 See *Nanyang Shangbao* (Johore edition), 20/11/1993, p. 13.

threatening his life. Earlier, he had been confronted by Pagor's truck farmers, who boycotted farm chemical products distributed by his agency. Yan Cailin, who had instigated the boycott, openly urged the manufacturer concerned to change its agency, or otherwise be faced with the loss of their sales market in this area.¹⁸²

In other instances, three men [in their capacities as husbands or fathers] were put forward by the vice-chairman of a Buddhist association in Segamat, Johore, to attend a press conference on November 25, 1993 to expose the breakdown of their happy families by the heretical sect. Both Mr. Zeng (aged 62) and Mr. Chen (aged 59) complained that their life partners had alienated themselves from the families since they had joined the heretical sect. They refused to do housework and spent most of their time in the *Fotang*. Zeng even lodged a police report against the *Fotang*'s keeper when he failed to stop his wife from going to it. Mr. Ye (aged 58) complained that his son had joined the heretical sect about eight years before, and stayed at the *Fotang* every day until 2 to 3 a.m. next morning. Ye, nevertheless, pointed out that, other than over-occupying himself in the *Fotang* and declining to eat meat at home, his son went to work as usual.¹⁸³ It

182 See *China Press*, 22/11/1993, p.6. Mr. Yau Guangyu, who has a MBA degree, is a chartered management accountant and the managing director of a company. He is a soft spoken-man and has been a member of the sect for more than twenty years. The fact that he became the target of attack at the latter stage of this incident is mainly because he is the chairman of the Muar branch *Fotang* where Yan's wife was initiated. He is taken by Yan Cailin as the instigator responsible for organizing Yan's wife and daughter's press conference earlier. According to Yau, he had also attended a 'negotiation meeting' called by Yan in Muar, which ended up with a few hundred people assembled there and ready to deal with him. He was encircled by a big group of emotional people for two hours, and was allowed to leave after that. He took this incident as 'outer testing' (*waikao*) of the sect, and felt it necessary for the sect to explain clearly to would-be members the content of the oath, and also to provide some sort of counselling service to members whose family members are non-sect members in future, to avoid any unnecessary misunderstanding regarding the Unity Sect [information based on interview with Mr. Yau on 2/4/1996].

183 See *Nanyang Shangbao*, 25/11/1993, p.16.

is interesting to note that all three cases had occurred years back, but only now were brought out upon the instigation of the local Buddhist association. The ultimate aim for so doing was obvious. They hoped that more public attacks against the Unity Sect would eventually lead to its elimination by the authorities.

Yan Cailin and his 'Committee of Justice and Anti-heretical Sect' continued to play his role of exhorting those who were against the Unity Sect to come out openly with their testimonies revealing the misdeeds of the sect. Press reports continued to carry news released by this committee until November 30, 1993.

Meanwhile, the turmoil imposed upon the Unity Sect's organization was also being experienced by the branch *Fotang* of Malaixiya [Shi-Ru-Dao 释儒道] Daode Hui at Lingga New Village, Muar. The *Fotang* had been established in the village about seven or eight years before, and had a membership of about 300 people. On the 27th of November, the door of their newly built *Fotang* was, defaced with black paint, and the building pelted with rotten eggs. Both the *Fotang* keeper and its advisor Mr. Ou urged the police to take action against those involved in this atrocity. Ou also offered a reward of Malaysian \$500 for anyone who could provide reliable information leading to the arrest of the offender.¹⁸⁴

Entering into the new year of 1994, one more case of violence occurred in Muar on the 8th of January. A wagon belonging to Mr. Yau Guanyu, while parked outside his residence, was destroyed and burned. Faced with such provocation, a reward amounting to Malaysian \$30,000 was advertised in the *Nanyang Shangbao*

¹⁸⁴ See *Nanyang Shangbao*, 28/11/1993, p. 4.

by the Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui, for information leading to the arrest of the offender.¹⁸⁵ Such continuous act of violences and gangsterism might have caused the people to gradually lose their interest in for the appeal of Yan and his 'Committee of Justice and Anti-heretical Sect', indicating the turning of the tide.¹⁸⁶ The ending of press reports on campaigns against the Unity Sect by early 1994, could possibly be explained in terms of the readers' response to the news. The shift of anti-Unity Sect sentiments from verbal struggle to violent force which involved legal prosecutions at its later stage of development, might have caused the press to be more cautious in carrying related news. Or perhaps the ponderous pace of legal procedure discouraged their interest.

We have thus far examined the on-going development of the '1993 incident' of anti-Unity Sect activities in Peninsular Malaysia, mainly through articles from local Chinese newspapers, covering a period of more than four months. The focus of this entire issue seemed to concentrate on the rivalry between Yan Cailin on one hand, and the Baoguang Jiande sub-branch *Fotang* of the Unity Sect, namely the Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui and its Muar Branch in Johore on the other. Buddhist associations of certain localities took part in instigating the anti-Unity Sect activities, but their role in most of cases was in the background.

Compared with the 'July 1981 incident', we see a new scenario in the sense that, several branches (*zu*) of the Unity Sect had since 1981 grown into sectarian organizations of considerable size and strength. In encountering the challenge

¹⁸⁵ See reward advertisement in *Nanyang Shangbao*, 13/1/1994.

¹⁸⁶ Based on interview with Mr. Yau Guangyu, 2/4/1996. This notwithstanding the fact that the violence caused might or might not be related to Yan Cailin. In any case, the public tended to show their sympathy and even give their support to the weaker side of the two opposing parties.

against the sect, they dared to stand up openly to defend themselves and explain their stand. The majority of the accusations they faced during the incident of 1993 were those of familial disputes, and to a lesser extent, theological disagreements. The accusation on the issue of swindling members' donations, had been reduced to a negligible one. Several of the more successful Unity Sect branches had established close links with political figures at both national and state levels. They were invited to participate social functions of these sect organizations. Some of them even accepted appointments as honorary advisors to the organizations governing boards (*lishi hui* 理事会).¹⁸⁷

The 1993 incident of the anti-Unity Sect campaign could not have been dragged on for a period of more than four months had the antagonism been merely between Yan Cailin and the Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui. In fact, local Buddhist associations were aligned with Yan against their 'old enemy'. Yan's capacity as social activist and his sound economic standing as a successful insurance agent, enabled him to gain enough support to carry out a series of attacks against the Unity Sect. The Chinese media's continuous wide coverage of this news served indirectly as 'battlefield' for the two opposing parties to condemn each other both in writing and in speeches. Backed up by the readers' eagerness to learn about this situation, these follow-up reports thus managed to persist for a long time.¹⁸⁸ The Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui, on the other hand, had

187 We shall return to this point in greater detail when discussing the aspect of the Unity Sect and political support. At the moment, however, it is important to point out that such *guanxi* 关系 (social connections) with the political figures, especially those with ministerial status, has always been used by sect leaders to emphasize the legitimacy of their organization.

188 It is not uncommon for competing Chinese local newspapers to carry news of certain controversial social issues using big subtitles with provocative wording. By so doing, they hope to catch interest of the general public, thereby increasing their sales volumes.

already been well established and enjoyed good patronage from political figures at both national and state levels. The conflict between these two rivals was therefore expected, involving substantial manpower and time.

Although the incident ended up with neither side winning, it definitely deserved to be pondered by the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia. How should the Unity Sect deal with its member's familial problems in future? This is certainly an unavoidable question that has long awaited an answer. The suggestions by Mr. Yau Guangyu (see footnote 182) are among the possible solutions to this problem.

The sect's literature published recently, in the name of *Jigong*, the Living Buddha entitled *Laoshi de Hua* ('the Message From Our Master'), also touches on the question of husband and wife relationships. For example, in volume one, it is said that 'Husband and wife should respect each other. They should also help each other, and be considerate to each other, only then will the cultivating of the Way brings happiness to their family' (1991:76). And in volume three, '...Cultivating the Way without taking care of one's family is a mistake... [If within a family] only the husband or the wife is cultivating the Way, it is important for him/her to move and transformed (*ganhua* 感化) his/her partner [so as to identify with him/her], this is, [to adopt the attitude of] mutual forgiveness and accommodation ... only then can the family be considered a successful one' (1993:108-109).¹⁸⁹

In fact, a section in volume 3, under the subtitle of 'Demonstrating the Way by Oneself' (*yishen shidao*), is devoted to the discussion on 'the three cardinal

¹⁸⁹ This literature is a compilation of *Jigong's* tracts, in the form of quotations (*yulu*). The title of the book is *The Message From Our Master* (*Laoshi de hua*), and has so far been published in four volumes, ca. 1991-1993.

guides and the five constant virtues', and also on human relations (*gangchang lunli* 纲常伦理). It covers a wide area of familial issues, ranging from filiality, relationships between husband and wife, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, son-in-law and his parents-in-law, as well as family education to the younger generations (1993:101-113). Besides, the concept of 'clearing' and 'channeling' (*shudao* 疏导) rather than 'suppressing' (*yayi* 压抑) [a problem] is also stressed in this work. The readiness of the Unity Sect to adopt a flexible approach on dealing with frictions, if put into practice, should therefore contribute towards resolving the familial problems facing its members in the Peninsula.

The Unity Sect in the Peninsula: its present stage of development

We have so far discussed the initial stage of the Unity Sect's development in the Peninsula (1948-1975). We have also examined the second stage of its consolidation period through 1976 to 1993, by focusing on the two major resistances confronting the sect in 1981 and 1993 respectively. We shall now return to its present stage of development.

The first two stages of its development saw the difficult efforts of 'opening the wilderness', supported by trained preachers from Singapore and Taiwan. As we have seen, the initial stage of its development usually started with a 'family shrine' set up in a sect member's residence. Along with the growth in size of its membership, 'public halls' were gradually set up, to accommodate the need for bigger congregational sites. The number of 'family shrines' continued to grow in parallel with the 'public halls', for they are the roots of the main stem of the Unity

Sect. To ensure the steady growth of these family and public *Fotang*, a lot of following-up work would have to be done so as to uphold the zeal and faith of sect members. This means that the posts of 'lecturers' (*jiangshi*) and 'initiators' would have to be filled by local sect leaders to sustain the on-going activities of the local *Fotang*.

During its earlier stage, training programs were usually carried out in the forms of 'dharma assemblies' (*fahui* 法会) or 'study classes' (*yanjiu ban* 研究班) under the supervision of the 'elders' and/or preachers from Taiwan. These assemblies usually lasted for three days. They merely served to teach the basic etiquette and disciplines (*fogui lijie*) of the sect, and to transmit its teaching by these visiting preachers. Usually, a session of planchette divination followed to uphold the faith of these participants, and to encourage them to further their advancement in cultivating the Way. Supplementing these 'dharma assemblies', were tracts laid out in the form of questions and answers, used as guidelines for sermons and group discussion. Among these tracts, *Mingde Xinmin Jinxiu Lu* <明德新民进修录> (Record of progress in illuminating virtue and renewing the people), *Yiguan Dao Yiwen Jieda* (Questions and answers about the Unity Sect), *Xingli Tishi* <性理题释> (Explaining topics concerning the nature and principle), and *Chen Zhong* <晨钟> (Morning bell) were most commonly referred to.

As more than four decades have passed, many of the branches of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia have, in recent years, introduced a complete set of sectarian education programs. These are classes at different levels conducted for beginners up to the grade for would-be lecturer. Both the Fayi Chongde and Puti

Lianshe have compiled a set of comprehensive teaching materials for use in these classes. They are printed in the form of serial text books. Recruitment of new sect members, however, seems to continue along the line of friendship, family members and relatives. A sampling survey that I conducted in Peninsular Malaysia on January to March, 1996, by means of questionnaires clearly illustrates this fact:

Table 2: Reasons for Joining the Unity Sect

Reasons for joining	Male	Female	Total
Friends	137 (50.00%)	96 (40.17%)	233 (45.42%)
Family members	59 (21.53%)	73 (30.54%)	132 (25.73%)
Relatives	34 (12.41%)	31 (12.97%)	65 (12.67%)
Colleagues	27 (9.85%)	21 (8.79%)	48 (9.36%)
Classmates	15 (5.47%)	15 (6.28%)	30 (5.85%)
Unknown	2(0.73%)	3(1.26%)	5(0.97%)
Total	274(100.00%)	239(100.00%)	513(100.00%)

Source: Answers derived from 513 questionnaires distributed to 1,000 sect members.

From the data above, we found that 45.42% of members surveyed had joined the Unity sect because of obliging their friends. 25.73% and 12.6% of them followed their family's members and relatives respectively in joining the sect. Only less than 1% of the sect members do not indicate their reason for joining the sect. I have also encountered several cases in which the whole family's members (including young children) joined the sect and all of them observed vegetarian diet. This was usually practiced by pious sect members, in order to achieve the ideal

stage of cultivating the Way, namely *qijia* 齐家 or ‘regulating one’s family’. 190

In the following table, ten major aims of joining the Unity Sect were each identified by both males and females sect members:

Table 3: Ten Major Aims of Joining the Unity Sect

Male Sect members	Female Sect members
1. To escape from samsara (<i>chaosheng liaosi</i> 超生了死)	1. To escape from samsara.
2. Out of curiosity (<i>haoqi</i> 好奇).	2. Out of curiosity.
3. The quest for peace and tranquility (<i>qiu ping'an</i> 求平安).	3. The quest for peace and tranquility.
4. The quest for a happy life.	4. To understand the truth of life.
5. The quest for the truth. 191	5. To quest for one’s true self.
6. To seek for one’s true self (<i>zhao hui ziji</i> 找回自己).	6. To lead a meaningful life.
7. Not quite sure of the aims (<i>mimi huhu</i>)	7. To worship.
8. The Way is good (<i>Dao hao</i> 道好). 192	8. The Way is good.
9. To seek for spiritual refuge (<i>jingshen jituo</i> 精神寄托).	9. Karmic cause (<i>jiyuan</i> 机缘).
10. To worship (<i>baibai</i> 拜拜)	10. Not quite sure of the aims.

Source: Answers derived from 513 questionnaires distributed to 1,000 sect members.

190 The term *qijia* first appeared in *The Great Learning* (*Daxue* <大学>), one of the *Four Books* (*Shishu* <四书>) transmitted by the Confucian School. It emphasized the importance of rectifying one’s mind in cultivating oneself. After this stage had been accomplished, one then extended this cultivation to that of regulating one’s family. The two stages of cultivation are always collectively referred to as *xiushen qijia* 修身齐家. They are taken as the major factors which contributed towards the realization of a rightly governed, tranquil and happy kingdom. The Unity Sect used this Confucian’s concept to stress on the importance of cultivation, right from the smallest social unit of a family household.

191 By this answer, they mean to better their understanding regarding the Way (*Dao*) by attending the sermons delivered in the *Fotang*.

192 By this answer, they mean the good feeling they have for the sect, particularly the aspects of filiality taught, and also its etiquette and disciplines (*lilie* 礼节) observed by sect members.

It must be pointed out that these aims, as shown in the listing, are arranged in the sequence of their frequencies mentioned in the questionnaires received. These aims portrayed the degree of understanding the respondents had, or rather the earnest hopes that they prayed for, on joining the Unity Sect as a member. It is interesting to note that the aim of 'escaping from samsara' (*chaosheng liaosi*) is first in these lists, which indicates the priority given by most people to the salvation promised by the sect. Curiosity (*haoqi 好奇*) constituted their second main 'aim' or motive for them to join the sect. This finding reveals the fact that the Unity Sect, labelled as 'heretical' by local press media, had over the years maintained a kind of mystique to non-sect members. This feeling in turn challenged them to join the sect to look into it themselves.

Some sect members experienced a sense of 'obscurity' (*mimi huhu 迷迷糊糊*) at the initial stage of their joining the sect. This condition is expected , since many of them first join the sect merely to satisfy their friends, family members or relatives. Nevertheless, many of them claimed that they gained insight into the sect's teaching after they were initiated. In fact, the dotting of one's 'mysterious aperture' (located on one's forehead and between the two eyebrows) during the initiation ceremony, is always taken by sect members as 'opening up of one's wisdom' (*kai zihui 开智慧*) and a required step on the path to salvation.

Leadership in the Unity Sect is organized in the shape of a hierarchical pyramid. One's status within the organization is largely based on one's seniority coupled with one's capability and contributions to the sect. Based on these criteria,

local sect leaders in the Peninsula have to undergo quite a long period of 'apprenticeship' before being appointed to the posts of 'lecturers' and 'initiators'. Nevertheless, to catch up with the pace of its advancement and to achieve the aim of localizing the leadership of local *Fotang*, some of the posts were filled by local sect leaders upon accomplishing certain levels of sect's educational training. For example, the Puti Lianshe established its stronghold at Ipoh, Perak in 1984 with its first 'public hall' set up in the Temple of Baosheng Dadi 保生大帝 at Kampar, after converting the owner of this temple. The group experienced a boom in its spread, with six 'public halls' and nearly thirty 'family shrines' set up in the state of Perak during the period 1985 to 1988.¹⁹³ Faced with an acute shortage of preachers, some of the more able local sect members were appointed to the posts of lecturers, assistant lecturers (*jiang yuan* 讲员), and the junior cadres of the *Fotang* (*banshi renyuan*) in the following year. By 1987, two Ipoh sect leaders were appointed to the post of 'initiators'. The third 'initiator' was appointed in the year 1992.¹⁹⁴ Their appointment to the post of 'initiators' complements of the process of localizing local *Fotang*'s leadership, since they are the people who have an 'apostolic mandate' to initiate (*diandao*). Their advice is also sought after by all the Puti Lianshe's *Fotang* in Ipoh.

According to Lin Rongze (1993:285), the Puti Lianshe had by 1991 established five of its religious centres (*daowu zhongxin*) at the state level in Kulim of Kedah, Kuala Lumpur of the Federal Territory, Ipoh of Perak, Malacca and Johore, with over 200 *Fotang* spread all over the Peninsula. After the death of

193 See *Commemorative Souvenir of Xinming Fotang* (*Xinming Fotang Luocheng Tekan* <新民佛堂落成特刊> , hereafter abbreviate as XFLT) [1995:4,7].

194 See XFLT (1995: 8, 11).

elder Li Yuming (1912-1983) and her successor, elder Chen Jinlian (1915-1991), all these local *Fotang* continued to identify with the mother body in Taiwan¹⁹⁵ and referred to it for spiritual advice and moral support. Fayi Lingyin in return provided them with updated teaching materials, and trainers to operate the on-going training programs.

To upgrade the preachers' knowledge on canonical texts of the Five Religions (*Wujiao jingdian* 五教经典), a two weeks' Canonical Texts Studies Class (*jingdian ban*), was held for the first time at Kulim, Ipoh, and Kuala Lumpur respectively in 1993. The class was conducted by a group of visiting 'initiators' and lecturers from Taiwan. Similar classes of this nature were held continuously in 1994 and 1995. To back up the running of these classes, a set of teaching materials was compiled and printed in the form of books issued by Fayi Lingyin in Taiwan.¹⁹⁶

The above example of Puti Lianshe served to illustrate one of the patterns of development of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia. By identifying with the Fayi Lingyin, local *Fotang* enjoyed the transfer of its innovative technology in preaching and propagating of the sect. The running of the 'Canonical Texts Studies Classes' in the Puti Lianshe's *Fotang* of Malaysia and Singapore, for example, was an

¹⁹⁵ Since this sub-branch of Fayi branch has its administrative centre located at LingyinShi in Sanxia, it is designated as 'Fayi Lingyin' for convenience discrimination from other sub-branches of the Fayi in Taiwan.

¹⁹⁶ I have so far come across four volumes of this texts entitled 'The Canonical Class Lecture Notes' (*Jingdianban Jiangyi* 〈经典班讲义〉). The contents of these texts consist of selective paragraphs from *Mengzi* 〈孟子〉, *Zhuangzi* 〈庄子〉, the *Platform Sutra*, the *Bible*, *Lunyu* 〈论语〉, *Daode Jing* 〈道德经〉, the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Koran* and some quotations from famous *Chan* masters.

extension of this new programme outside Taiwan, after it has been carried out on trial basis in Fayi Lingyin's *Fotang* between 1990 to 1992.

Other than direct help rendered by trained personnel from the Fayi Lingyin and their counterpart in Singapore, local *Fotang* also gained experience of organizing activities through participation in these activities organized in Taiwan. At this point, local *Fotang* in the Peninsula seem to be benefiting from these modernizing programs. The high concentration of ethnic Chinese population in Malaysia and other Asian countries has made this area an overseas mission field for the Unity Sect's propagation. The multi linguistic talent of Chinese in this area also provides it with a reservoir of potential support for the sect's propagation, along with the recent new wave of global emigration by the sect leaders and members, particularly to the Western world.¹⁹⁷ Viewed from this aspect, the help rendered by the Fayi Lingyin to the Puti Lianshe's *Fotang* in the Peninsula might partly be conceived of as its long-term self-help planning. The spirit of evangelism among the Unity Sect members is of course, the underlying factor which contributes towards its advance in various part of the world.

197 There are many factors which have led to this recent wave of global emigration. Among them, the three most important factors are: (1) the propagation of the sect in Taiwan has almost reached the saturating point, (2) the booming of the Taiwanese economy since late 1970s encouraged some of the successful entrepreneur sect members to fulfil their vows by proselytizing the sect overseas, while looking for investment opportunity in these countries (Song 1996: 429), and (3) the question of security which concerns sect members in Hong Kong, especially with its impending take over by the Peoples' Republic of China in July, 1997.

Chapter 5

The Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia (II)

This chapter continued to focus on the case study of the sect's contemporary development in the Peninsula. Description of the age distribution, educational background, and economy activity of sect members based on data from questionnaires and personal interviews are supplied here with statistical analyses. That the observation of vegetarian diet and the involvement of vegetarian ventures by sect members has become 'emblem' of this sectarian movement in Peninsular Malaysia in the eye of the public, definitely deserve a further exploration. This observation is discussed here in some detail. Besides, the quest for political patronage that help to authenticate the legitimacy of the movement's activities, is also discuss here with illustration of facts and examples.

In order to illustrate clearly the preference of religious alternative among the youngsters in the Peninsula to church-like lay voluntary religious organizations such as the Unity Sect and the Nichiren Shoshu of Malaysia (NSM), a comparison of the membership compositions of the two religious bodies is made. Findings from these examples indicate clearly this inclination in the last two decades. Also, among the nine groups of the Unity Sect in the Peninsula under study, three major groups are selected for detail case study to demonstrate examples of different styles of management under the leadership of their respective elders/initiators.

Putting the two chapters (four and five) together, it is hoped that this case-example of the Unity Sect's contemporary development will serve to demonstrate the adaptation and adoption of a living sectarian movement outside its place of

origin, namely Peninsular Malaysia.

Background studies on the sampling of sect members

(a) Age groups and sex

A study on the age and sex distributions of sect members based on data derived from the questionnaires, revealed the fact that 78.17% or 401 out of a total of 513 sect members under study are distributed within the three major working age groups between 20 to 29, 30 to 39 and 40 to 49 years old. Those aged below 20 and between 50 to 59 years old constituted only 7.41% and 8.36% of these sect members respectively. Detailed data are presented in the table below:

Table 4: The distribution of sect members by age group and sex

Age group	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Below 20	23 (8.39%)	15 (6.28%)	38 (7.41%)
20 - 29	55 (20.07%)	68 (28.45%)	123 (23.98%)
30 - 39	84 (30.65%)	67 (28.03%)	151 (29.43%)
40 - 49	69 (25.18%)	58 (24.27%)	127 (24.76%)
50-59	27 (9.85%)	16 (6.69%)	43 (8.38%)
60 - 69	11 (4.02%)	6 (2.51%)	17 (3.31%)
70 - 79	—	4 (1.67%)	4 (0.78%)
Unknown	5 (1.82%)	5 (2.09%)	10 (1.95%)
NUMBER	274 (100.00%)	239 (100.00%)	513 (100.00%)

In examining these distributions by sex and age group, we found that the males are represented in sequential order by the three highest percentage of working age groups between 30 to 39 (30.65%), 40 to 49 (25.18%), and 20 to 29 (20.07%) years old. The fact that the first two age groups, in particular, constituted

55.83% of the total male members under study, might be justified by cross referencing with the ten main purposes for male members to join the sect in Table 3 which, among others, include the quest for a happy [family] life, and for spiritual refuge.¹⁹⁸ Other than the ultimate purpose of escaping from samsara, they also adhered to the sect for such practical reasons as to release stress in their capacity as bread earners for their families.

The distribution of female sect members, however, portrayed a slightly different pattern, with those aged between 20 to 29 (28.45%), 30 to 39 (28.03%) and 40 to 49 (24.27%) years old respectively registered as the three biggest age groups. This differed from the male's distribution structure in that its age group between 20 to 29 years old is the biggest of all. This showed that the females had joined the sect at a much younger age than the males.¹⁹⁹ A comparison of the list of their purposes in joining the sect in accordance to their priorities suggested that the females are relatively more pious than the males. Some of them even attribute their joining the sect to karmic causation (*jiyuan* 机缘).

Be that as it may, both males and females sect members demonstrated a high concentration of 75.9% and 80.75% respectively on the same age categories mentioned above. Members from these age categories are the cream of the society comprising youths and middle-agers. Backed up by the vitality of these members, it is no wonder that the Unity Sect managed to advance to almost every corner of the Peninsula in two decades.

¹⁹⁸ Refer to Table 3 of Chapter Four.

¹⁹⁹ For those in the age group below 20 years old, more than half joined the sect during their childhood, following their parents. In terms of religious affiliation, this type of 'conversions' did not offer much meaning to our studies, since they just follow what their parent did.

(b) Educational attainment of sect members

According to the 1991 *Population and Housing Census of Malaysia*, the percentage distribution by educational attainment of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia is as follows:

Table 5: Percentage distribution by educational attainment of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia

Educational attainment	%
Primary	39
Secondary	41
Tertiary *	7
Unknown	---
Never attended school	13
Total	100
Number (thousands)	4,063.0

*Tertiary level covers academic education after Form 5.

A sample survey on the educational attainment of 513 sect members are as follow:

Table 6: Educational attainment of the Unity Sect members in the Peninsula.

Educational attainment	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Primary	80 (29.20)	74(30.96)	154 (30.02)
Secondary	162 (59.12)	137(57.32)	299 (58.28)
Tertiary	23 (8.39)	10 (4.18)	33 (6.43)
Unknown	7 (2.55)	3 (1.26)	10 (1.95)
Never attended school	2 (0.73)	15 (6.28)	17 (3.31)
Total (%)	274(100.0)	239(100.0)	513(100.0)

Compared with national educational level of ethnic Chinese, this sample of sect members showed a 17.38% higher percentage of secondary level graduates and a 9.69% lower percentage of those who never attended school. The primary and tertiary levels of sect members are lower than the national percentage by 8.98% and 0.57% respectively. Overall, we can say that the literacy rate of the sect members is higher than that of the national ethnic Chinese. This is due to the fact that more than two thirds of the sect members are young or middle-aged, who enjoyed better opportunities to attain education up to the secondary level under the free national education scheme of the Malaysian government.

Except at the tertiary level and those who were illiterates, the difference between males and females sect members in terms of educational attainment at the primary and secondary levels was minimal.

(c) Economy activity of sect members

Unity Sect members are involved in various occupations, ranging from self-owned business to peddlers. Below, are the percentage distribution of sect members by occupational group and sex based on data gathered from questionnaires:

Table 7: Percentage distribution of sect members by occupational group and sex

MALES:		FEMALES:	
Businessman	55 (20.07%)	Housewife	59 (24.69%)
Technician	33 (12.04%)	Teacher/clerk	48 (20.08%)
Worker	28 (10.22%)	Worker	36 (15.06%)
Artisan	26 (9.49%)	Dressmaker	31 (12.97%)
Sales and Services	23 (8.39%)	Student	14 (5.86%)
Student	22 (8.03%)	Peddler	12 (5.02%)
Administrative worker	20 (7.30%)	Private tutor	6 (2.15%)
Teacher/clerk	16 (5.84%)	Hair-dresser	5 (2.09%)
Peddler	13 (4.74%)	Businesswoman	4 (1.67%)
Driver	11 (4.01%)	Administrative worker	4 (1.67%)
Pensioner (Retired)	6 (2.18%)	Contractor	1 (0.42%)
Contractor	4 (1.45%)	Nurse	1 (0.42%)
Small plantation owner	3 (1.09%)	-----	-----
Unknown	14 (5.11%)	Unknown	18 (7.53%)
NUMBER (%)	274 (100.0%)	NUMBER(%)	239 (100.0%)

Taking into account the aggregate percentage of both sexes, we found that 12.5% of sect members are involved in teaching or clerical jobs, and another 12.5% as general workers. 11.5% of them are involved in business, 4.7% as administrative and managerial workers, while 4.5% were in the sales and services line. The rest of them are involved in various jobs such as technicians, artisans, dress makers, drivers, contractors and so on. Included among them were 11.5% housewives, 7.0% students, and 1.2% pensioners. Combined together these statistics, suggest that more than two-thirds of the Unity Sect members under study were from the middle or lower middle income groups.

(d) Leadership quality in the Peninsula

Among 513 sect members under study, 21 of them were appointed to the post of 'Initiators' (*dianchuan shi*). The educational attainments and occupations of these leaders, are used here to determine leadership quality of the sect.

Table 8: Percentage distribution of sect leaders by educational attainment and sex

Educational attainments	Males	Females	Total (%)
College/University	3	1	4 (19.05%)
Secondary	7	3	10 (47.62%)
Primary	4	2	6 (28.57%)
Unknown	1	-	1 (4.76%)
TOTAL	15	6	21 (100.00%)

Table 9: Percentage distribution of sect leaders by sex and occupational group

Occupational group	Males	Females	Total (%)
Business	7	1	8 (38.1%)
Housewives	-	3	3 (14.3%)
Peddlers	2	-	2 (9.5%)
Clerical works	1	1	2 (9.5%)
School headmaster	1	-	1 (4.8%)
Contractors	1	-	1 (4.8%)
Dressmaker	-	1	1 (4.8%)
Pensioner	1	-	1 (4.8%)
Unknown	2	-	2 (9.5%)
TOTAL	15	6	21 (100.00%)

From the data above, we can say that in terms of educational attainments and occupations, male sect leaders in the Peninsula showed a higher level than their female counterparts. The fact that male initiators outnumbered their female

counterparts by more than half has also something to do with their educational and economic level. By cross referencing data from Table 7, we found a correlating denominator between the high percentage of businessmen sect members and the high percentage of male sect leaders in business. In the same manner, we found that high percentage of housewives among sect members corresponded with high percentage of female sect leaders. This fact also supports our earlier findings that conversion of sect members was most commonly done through the connection (*guanxi*) of friendship.

The Unity Sect and vegetarian ventures

Except for monks, nuns and 'vegetarian aunties' (*chai ko*) who observed a full vegetarian diet, the majority of the Chinese Buddhists in the Peninsula observed a vegetarian diet only on the first and fifteenth days in every lunar month.

Until 1980's, there were only a few vegetarian restaurants available in the Peninsula. Almost all of them were typically run by Buddhists. Attempts to open new vegetarian restaurants usually ended up with great disappointments. The two cases below served to illustrate this fact. For example, He Shao Tang 何绍棠 dined in the Sushi zhi Jia 素食之家, the only vegetarian restaurant available in Klang, Selangor, during his first visit there in 1979. It was closed down in May of the following year, due to poor business.²⁰⁰ Today, in Klang alone, there are at

²⁰⁰ See He (1996:29-29). He Shao Tang is an Unity Sect initiator from Taiwan. He was brought to that vegetarian restaurant during his first trip to Klang. During that trip, he stayed on for some time and successfully converted both owners of that restaurant and motel where he stayed. He noted that the restaurant was out of business by May, 1980.

least nine vegetarian restaurants or dining shops operated by the Unity Sect members.

In another example, a Mr. Yang Kairong 杨开荣, who owned an ordinary dining shop selling chicken rice in Kuala Lumpur, changed it into a vegetarian restaurant after adhering to the Unity Sect in 1986. For more than a year, his business suffered losses, to the extent that he decided to close it, and prepared for migration to America.²⁰¹ It was not until 1988 that he restarted his vegetarian restaurant business at the original site. Since then, he has enjoyed a boom in this line of business, and opened four more branches in 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1995, around Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya of Selangor. Other than the five restaurants owned by Mr. Yang, there are at least twelve more vegetarian restaurants in and around Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya today. All of them are run by Unity Sect members.

Along with the advancement of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia, new vegetarian restaurants run by sect members mushroomed all over the country. In fact, in order to avoid taking life (*bu shasheng*), it is not uncommon for sect members to change their occupation to that of vegetarian ventures. A good example of this is the case of one Mr. Li Shijie 李世杰, an established fishmonger in Batu Pahat, Johore. After joining the sect in 1992, he was encouraged by sect leaders from the Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui to give up that business. Mr. Li, who is now a 'Shrine Master' (*tanzhu*), took the challenge and changed his

²⁰¹ Yang, a middle age man, is a famous chef by profession. He is currently the sole proprietor of 5 vegetarian restaurants located around Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, Selangor. He attributes his success to the compassionate grace of the Wusheng Laomu (the Venerable Eternal Mother). [Based on interview conducted on July 4th, 1996]

business to that of selling and supplying vegetarian foodstuffs, as well as books and tapes on the Unity Sect. In addition to that, with two other friends he opened up a Chinese and Western vegetarian restaurant in 1995.

The popularity of vegetarian products consumed in the Peninsula can be detect by the mushrooming of local manufacturers and the suppliers dealing with the vegetarian foodstuffs businesses. To date, there are six or more such factories set up in Malacca, Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, supplying about 65% of total local demand for fresh and frozen vegetarian products made of gluten (*mianjin* 面筋). There is a vegetarian mini market in Kuala Lumpur, dealing with more than 300 varieties of vegetarian products and health food, including frozen food, canned food and dried and solid food, some of which are imported from Japan, America, Taiwan and Australia. At least ten leading vegetarian foodstuffs suppliers (some of them are manufacturers cum distributors) are found, located mainly in the states of Perak, Selangor, Johore and the national capital of Kuala Lumpur. These suppliers cater to the needs of all vegetarian restaurants and retail dealers through out the Peninsula, and some even export local products to Singapore.

The Lotus Vegetarian Foodstuffs Private Limited Company (formerly Lotus Vegetarian Food Supply) in Kuala Lumpur, is an example of a success story. It began its operation in 1982 with merely a small stall in the market place selling home-made vegetarian food. By 1988, it had already established itself, owning its own business premise at the present site. It supplied a total of forty-four varieties of vegetarian foodstuffs, including five types of its own brand of canned food, and the first vegetarian oyster sauce on the market. By 1996, it had came out with

vegetarian moon-cakes and vegetarian chili sauce. Today, the majority of its series of products is marketed to department stores throughout Peninsular Malaysia. According to its managing director, Mr. Tan Ban Hai 陈万海, the annual sales volume of its brand of oyster sauce and chili sauce amount to around 120,000 bottles each. Besides, the sales of its canned food amount to 48,000 cans, and its moon cakes a total of 25,000 boxes annually. The total business of the company amount to around two to three millions of Malaysian dollars per year.²⁰²

It is interesting to note that most of these vegetarian ventures in the Peninsula, especially in the line of restaurants and manufacturers, are run by sect members belong to the Xinyi and Baoguang branches of the Unity Sect. Also, the vegetarian restaurants operated by sect members largely outnumbered those conventionally run by the Buddhists, so that this line of business has mistakenly taken as a 'monopoly' of sect members. In fact, I was told that there are two types of vegetarian dishes, namely the Buddhist's and the Unity Sect's. Faced with competition from the varieties of vegetarian dishes available in sect members' restaurants, these conventional vegetarian restaurants experienced a decline in their business. Some of them were even forced to close down. This economic factor has also contributed to the antagonism between Buddhists and Unity Sect members.

The Unity Sect and political support

It has been a practice for all religious organizations in Malaysia to seek

²⁰² Based on interview with Mr. Tan Ban Hai at his shop in Kuala Lumpur on July 3, 1996.

patronage, or at least to have a close link with political figures, preferably those of ministerial status. As mentioned earlier, they are usually invited to participate in activities such as the dedication of their new buildings, fund-raising dinners, anniversary celebrations and so on. The appearance of political figures tends to authenticate the legitimacy of these functions in the eyes of the public. This is particularly so in the case of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia where such legitimacy has always been keenly sought after. The following examples served to illustrate this fact.

The Malaixiya Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan enjoyed an open proclamation of membership by Datuk Wang Chengjiu 王成就 while he was still in his office as the cabinet Deputy Transport Minister and the Deputy Vice President of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), a component parties of the coalition ruling government. Through Datuk Wang's political connections (*guanxi*), its main 'public hall' at Seremban received in 1985 funding of Malaysian \$10,000 for its renovations, from the Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Liang Weipan 梁维泮 , who doubled as the national chairman of the MCA at that time. Datuk Wong also openly acknowledged the miraculous power of the 'three jewels' (*sanbao* 三宝) in his personal experiences. He claimed to have applied the mysterious 'three jewels' in time of danger, and to have been saved in two incidents

which occurred ca.1982, and in 1985 respectively.²⁰³ This personal account of Datuk Wong is oftenly referred to by the Kong-Meng group of the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia as solid proof of the invaluable 'celestial way' preached by them. Besides, the names of former Science and Environment Minister Mr. Wang Qihui 王其辉, and the famous national Chinese education leader Mr. Shen Mu Yu 沈慕羽 who joined the sect, are also constantly quoted by sect leaders to gain the confidence of novices and would-be members. The Kong-Meng group had also the Negeri Sembilan State Executive Councillor Datuk Huang Sihua 黄思华 (present Deputy Finance Minister) attend and gave an address at its main 'public hall's twelfth anniversary vegetarian dinner in 1989.

The Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zhonghui has, over the years, invited the following important political figures to its board of committees. The present Health Minister Mr. Cai Ruiming 蔡锐明 and the Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry Mr. Guo Zhuzhen 郭洙镇 are its legal advisors. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Home Trades and Consumer Affairs, Mr. Chen Caihe 陈财和, Selangor State Executive Councillor Dato' Deng Shihan 邓诗汉, Johore State Executive Councillors Datuk Liu Wenfeng 刘文丰 and Mr. Cai Xili 蔡细历 are listed as its honorary advisors. Earlier, the new building of the Wuji Shengmu Zhonghui at Titiwangsa, Kuala Lumpur, was inaugurated by Housing and Local

203 A robbery occured in a seafood restaurant at Seremban, which Datuk Wong happened to dine there with a group of friends. They were suprisingly overlooked by robbers who failed to open up the sliding door of their dining room. In another case, he met with a car accident on his way back from Kuala Lumpur to Seremban. His car was badly damaged, but he was not hurt at all. These stories were carried in *Mister Weekly (Xiansheng Zhoubao <先生周报>)*, No. 143, Nov. 13, 1989. I reconfirmed them with Datuk Wong during a short interview at his office in Seremban on March 15, 1996.

Government Minister Mr. Li Jinshi 李金狮 in 1989. The above listing alone is enough to impress the general public with its political links to the current ruling authorities.

The Chong'en Centre for Studying and Learning Confucianism (Chong'en Rujia Yanxi Zhongxin), a sub-branch of the Taiwan Fayi branch of the Unity Sect, was founded in 1989. By 1995, it had set up more than 20 centres spreading over the states of Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johore, and Kuala Lumpur. By 1994, it had only Mr. Chen Caihe as its honorary advisor. Nevertheless, it secured more than 10 honorary advisors ranging from cabinet Minister Dato' Dr. Chen Zupai 陈祖排, former cabinet Minister Datuk Amar Stephen Yong, Deputy Ministers Datuk Feng Zhen'an 冯镇安, Dato' K. Kumaran and Dato' Chen Guangcai 陈广才, Deputy Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Mr. Weng Shijie 翁诗杰, Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Home Trades and Consumer Affairs Mr. Chen Caihe, Selangor State Executive Councillor Dato' Deng Shihan, Parliamentary Members Mr. Hu Yaqiao 胡亚桥 and Dr. Li Chongmeng 李崇孟, and even Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Malaya Professor Dato' Dr. Osman Bakar, all in 1995! 204

Despite this long list, the political figures who participated more regularly in the Unity Sect's activities are Datuk Huang Sihua, Mr. Guo Zhuzhen, Mr. Weng Shijie, Mr. Chen Caihe, Dato' Deng Shihan, Mr. Cai Xili, and Dato' Chen Zupai. Except Mr. Guo, all of them are from the MCA. The fact that MCA political leaders at state and national levels are being 'used' by several main branches of the local Unity Sect to promote the sect and legitimize their positions in this country was the

204 I gathered this information from the 1995 *PABC Building Fund Raising Memorial Magazine* (*Chong'en Rujia Yanxi Zhongxin Choujian Zongtan Jinian Tekan* 〈崇恩儒家研习中心筹建总坛纪念特刊〉) (1995: 9-10). This souvenir publication of the Chong'en Rujia Yanxi Zhongxin also contains a congratulatory message on official letterhead by Dato' Chen Zupai.

focus of a complaint by Yan Cailin through the press during the 1993 incident.

A report carried by *Mister Weekly* highlighted this aspect of the Unity Sect's political links, while touching on the antagonism of Yan Cailin and his 'Committee of Justice and Anti-heretical Sect' against the Unity Sect. The reporter wrote sarcastically that while the populace with little education regard the sect as heretical, those well-educated intellectuals, such as scholars and ministers hold an entirely opposite view. They do not consider the sect as heretical, but would think that it should be propagated for the benefits of the society and general public. The report traced the long history of close relationships between cabinet ministers and the sect, and added that the name of these ministers had been 'lifted' as 'live signboards' (*huo zhaopai* 活招牌) to recruit new members and to enhance its members' confidence on the sect. Both Datuk Huang Sihua and Mr. Shen Muyu, when interviewed by the reporter, suggested that such a critique should attempt to understand the sect in the first place before commenting on it.²⁰⁵

The Unity Sect: an alternative to traditional Chinese religion?

We have thus far examined the composition of the Unity Sect members in Peninsular Malaysia by sex, occupational group and educational attainment. From these samples of informants' answers, we also learned that most of them are active and pious members. The following breakdown data help to illustrate this:

205 See *Mister Weekly*, December 6, 1993, pp. 30-31.

Table 10: Percentage distribution of sect members by sex and position

Position	Male	Female	Total
Ordinary member	14.60%	16.32%	15.40%
Junior cadre	27.00%	34.73%	30.60%
Shrine master	51.46%	45.61%	48.73%
Initiator	5.47%	2.51%	4.09%
Unknown	1.46%	0.84%	1.17%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 11: Percentage distribution of sect members by sex and diet

Food diet	Male	Female	Total
Vegetarian	83.21%	76.15%	79.92%
Non-vegetarian	16.06%	23.85%	19.69%
Unknown	0.73%	—	0.39%
TOTAL	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

As we have seen, more than 78% of the sect members under study are young or middle-aged. The fact that they opted for a religion like Unity Sect which emphasizes ethical living, congregational ritual, and spiritual self-discipline, tends to suggest the trend of the younger generation, with higher educational opportunity and attainment, to look for alternative spiritual quest which provides them with a more coherent system of theology. Young educated Chinese in Malaysia today are generally dissatisfied with traditional Chinese religion, which emphasizes ritual performance itself rather than an internalization of the ideas and meanings of the religious ritual (cf. Tan 1983: 239, Tong 1992: 285-286). A survey done by Ong Swee Li (1989:61, 64) on age group distribution and educational attainment of 100 active members of the Nichiren Shoshu of Malaysia (NSM) in the Peninsula,

portrayed this similar trend of quest for a religious alternative among many young people.

Table 12: Percentage distribution of the NSM's members by age group

Age group	Number/Percentage
10 - 19	15
20 - 29	24
30 - 39	29
40 - 49	17
50 - 59	7
60 - 69	5
70 +	3
TOTAL	100

Source: Ong (1989:61).

Table 13: Percentage distribution of the NSM's members by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Number/Percentage
Primary School	12
Lower Secondary	25
Upper Secondary	38
College/University	20
Never Attended School	5
TOTAL	100

Source: Ong (1989:64).

If we were to compare the NSM and the Unity Sect in the Peninsula, it is interesting to find out that both are categorized as new religions (cf. Piyasilo 1990: 136-137), and they share a number of similarities too. For examples: Both sects are lead by lay people. Members in both sects are inculcated with a strict regime of daily ritual/chanting and self-discipline (cf. Nagata 1995:322-323). They attend congregational rituals regularly, and possess strong missionary zeal. They are also comprised mainly of youths and middle-agers. In term of propagation, both sects experienced great advance all over the Peninsula from the late 1970's onwards.

The name NSM in Chinese reads ‘Malaixiya Rilian Zhengzong Fojiao’ 马来西亚日莲正宗佛教. The word *zhengzong*, which means ‘the true tradition’, seems to irritate Buddhism of other traditions, especially mainstream Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Malaysia. Rev. Piyasilo, a Malaysian Buddhist monk, quoted his friends from Japan who “complained that the Nichirenists ‘break up families, take away their children and buy out companies.’” (1990: iii). He even wrote that “The Nichiren Shoshu has not been accepted as a ‘Buddhist’ society locally” (1990: 163). According to one *Mister Weekly*, rumours and erroneous accusations condemning NSM arose unceasingly, so that it appeared to be a ‘mysterious sect’ (*guiyi* 谗异) in the eyes of the public. Among others, the accusation that the chanting of *Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* ('hail to the wonderful law of the lotus') before a *gohonzon* (a scroll depicting Nichiren's sacred calligraphy) by the NSM's members aimed at 'salvaging the souls of those Japanese soldiers killed during the second world war' (*nianjing chaodu erzhan shi zhansi de Ribenjun wanghun* 念经超渡二战时战死的日本军亡魂),²⁰⁶ was the most serious, perhaps to express the anti-Japanese sentiments still strongly felt among those who suffered torments of the Japanese occupation in Malaya during the Second World War. Be that as it may, the Nichiren Shoshu of Malaysia (NSM) has continued to expand over the years to become a highly organized and independent system of religion in Malaysia. It had successfully built a four-block complex of buildings, its Cultural Centre (*Bunka Kaikan* 文化会馆) at Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, in 1988, which serves as its prayer hall, administration hall, hostel and canteen (Ong 1989: 44).

Compared with the Unity Sect, the NSM seems to face with lesser degree of resistance. Judith Nagata has aptly pointed out one of the main reasons. She writes, “By far the largest intra-Mahayana division [in Malaysia] is marked by a total lack of co-operation between the Chinese and Japanese (Soka Gakkai)

²⁰⁶ See *Mister Weekly*, No. 354, December 6, 1993, pp. 12-14. According to this report, the NSM had since 1991 changed its name to that of Soka Gakkai of Malaysia 马来西亚创价学会 (SGM), to clarify its nature as a ‘value creation society’, and the reality that it is an organization of lay Buddhists.

Buddhists; the distancing seems to be mutual" (1995: 322). To be sure, this mutual 'avoiding' attitude by both parties has reduced any possible friction to a minimum. On the other hand, the fact that NSM over the years has participated actively in cultural, educational, and anti-drug campaigns organized by government agencies helped to establish its image as a religious organization dedicated to the promotion of peace, culture and education. Its success in putting on large scale and impressive gymnastic performances has also added to its acceptability.²⁰⁷ The international presence of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) with Ikeda Daisaku of world renowned reputation as its president, has contributed yet another factor in enhancing the NSM's position in Malaysia.

The church-like organization and missionary activities of the NSM have reached their targets effectively. Its religious activities include discussion meetings and study meetings based on the collected works and teaching of Nichiren Daishonin ('the Great Holy Sage'). In any case, congregational chanting constitutes one of its major activities.²⁰⁸ Three major cultural activities of gymnastics, brass bands, and cultural dancing, are organized by the NSM to provide 'value creating activities' for its young members in the Youth Division (Ong:53-58).

From the comparisons above, the Unity Sect in Malaysia certainly has much to learn from the NSM. To enhance its acceptability to the public, the former should take into consideration the NSM's pattern of establishing its image by means of 'cultural packing' (*wenhua baozhuang* 文化包庄), and active

²⁰⁷ Examples of these large scale gymnastic performances contributed by NSM include a celebration of its Cultural Festival at the national level in 1985, the 36th anniversary National Day celebration of Malaysia in 1993, and the opening ceremony of the ASEAN Games held at Kuala Lumpur in 1989.

²⁰⁸ It is believed that such chanting can improve one's life, bring happiness, and lead to the development of a better society (Smith 1995:1011).

participation in activities organized by government authorities. The NSM's organizational structure, which caters to the needs of its members from different age groups, can also serve as a model for a pragmatic way of operating.

Organizational structure of the Unity Sect in the Peninsula today

Insofar as the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia today is concerned, I have managed to identify altogether nine of the bigger groups. As mentioned earlier, the first Unity Sect's *Fotang* in the Peninsula, Yuanguang Tang, was set up in 1948 by Lü Wende of the Baoguang branch on his return from Chaozhou. It is located at Kuala Lumpur and had been registered under the name of 'Morality Society' or Daode Hui (and later as Malaixiya Shi-Ru-Dao Daode Hui 马来西亚释儒道道德会). The late Mr. Lü is so far the only local sect leader who had attained the hierarchical status of 'elder'. The Changzhou branch (which originated from Changzhou in present-day Changzhou City, Jiangsu Province) had its 'public hall' at Petaling Jaya, Selangor registered as Yuhua Shengmu Gong 育化圣母宫 in 1979.²⁰⁹ The rest of the seven groups were sub-branches (*zhixian*) of the three main branches (*zu*) in Taiwan, namely Fayi, Xinyi and Baoguang. The four sub-branches of Fayi branch in the Peninsula are the Chongde (1978), Xing-Ma Jigong Aixin Hui (1980), Puti Lianshe (1981), and Chong'en (1989). The two sub-branches of Xinyi branch were registered under the names of Malaixiya Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan (1977), and Malaixiya Kong-Meng Tiandao Yuan (1979). And, the biggest group is the sub-branch of Baoguang registered under the name of Wuji Shengmu (1972).²¹⁰ They are presented in the form of diagram in Diagram 2 attached below.

209 The Senior Elder (*Lao Qianren*) of Changzhou branch had since 1950 fled to Hong Kong and stayed there until her recent emigration to Toronto in August 1996. The Malaysian *Fotang* of this branch was set up by Mr. Tai Chuan Ching from Hong Kong upon her summons.

210 The figure in the bracket after names of each group indicate the year when their first *Fotang* were set up in the Peninsula.

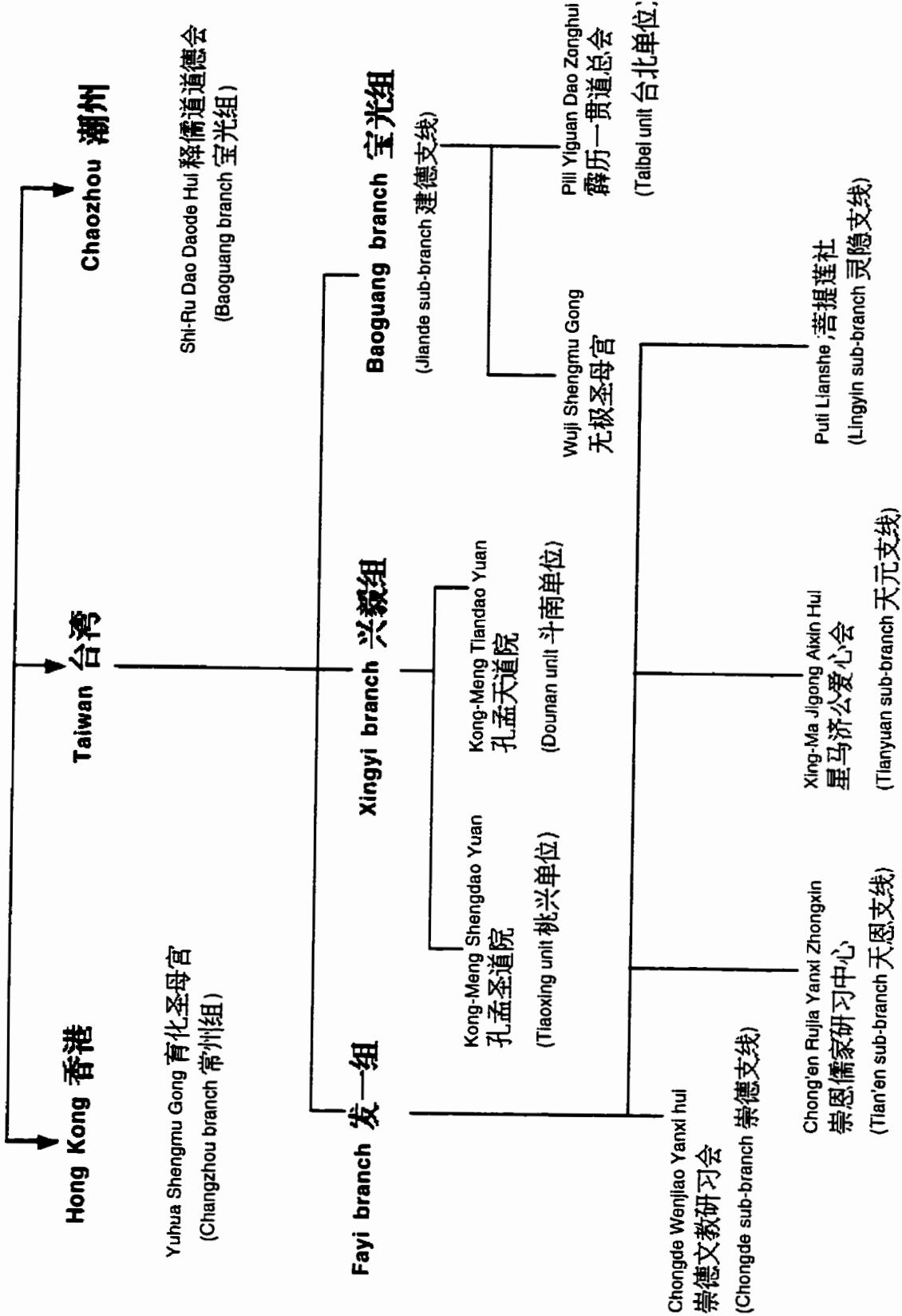


Diagram 2: The Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia (branches/sub-branches under study)

For the purpose of examining the organizational structure of the Unity Sect in Peninsula Malaysia, I picked only three groups for case studies. They are chosen here because they illustrate examples of different styles of management under the leadership of their respective Elders/initiators.

Case 1: The Chongde Wenjiao Guan, Kuala Lumpur (CWGKL)

This group of the Unity Sect in the Peninsula is by far the most highly organized.²¹¹ Under its Taiwan headquarter's reform programme, a complete five years' sectarian educational curriculum was first introduced to Kuala Lumpur branch of the Fayi Chongde in 1985. They are: the *Xinming ban* ('renewing the people class'), *Zhishan ban* ('utmost goodness class'), *Peide ban* 培德班 ('fostering the virtue class'), *Xingde ban* 行德班 ('practicing the virtue class'), and *Chongde ban* 崇德班 ('upholding the virtue class'). A total of more than eighty lecturers have been appointed to conduct all levels of classes in the Peninsula. Each *ban* or level of class lasts for a duration of ten months with a weekly two-hours lesson carried out continuously for forty weeks. These classes aim at providing systematic sect teaching and etiquette, along with material from canonical texts and sutras of the five religions (*wujiao* 五教), namely Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and Islam. They also function as training grounds for future sect

²¹¹ The mother body of Fayi Chongde in Taiwan enjoys high percentage of members with a university or college education through its programme of "[vegetarian] meal catering groups for college and university students" (*dazhuan xuesheng huoshituan*) organized in areas nearby the campuses. They constitute the so called 'academic division' of the Fayi Chongde sub-branch. Backed up by this 'academic division', it underwent series of "intellectualization" in its organizational structure especially after its '1980's confidence crisis' (*xinxin weiji*). Its overseas centres also benefited from these innovative reforms soon after their successful try out in Taiwan.

leaders, ranging from the basic supporting cadres (*jichu ganbu* 基础干部) of *banshi renyuan* to preachers (*jiangyuan*) and lecturers (*jiangshi*).

The adoption of a management system centering on ‘districts’ or *qu* as units of operation, was first introduced in the Peninsula in 1987.²¹² In every *qu*, a joint committee known as *zhong-yizi ban* 忠义字班,²¹³ is formed. It is comprised of a planning group (*zhongzi ban*) and an executive group (*yizi ban*) which work together to ensure that all policies made are carried out accordingly. Beneath them is the administrative unit, organized into nine departments.²¹⁴ The planning group holds its monthly meeting on the last week of the month. The executive group holds its meeting on the first week of the following month, and the shrine masters (*tanzhu*) call for meetings on the second week of the same month. Information and policies decided are made known to all levels through these meetings. The executive group or *yizi ban* plays the role of connecting the *qu* committee and all shrine masters in that particular district. Although each *qu* functioned as an entity by itself, inter-*qu* help may be ascertained through its Central Advisory Board.

212 The Chongde groups in the Peninsula are divided into 3 major *qu*, namely the northern, the southern and the central. The southern *qu* take charge of *Fotang* in the states of Johore and Malacca, the northern *qu* supervised *Fotang* in the states of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak, whereas the central *qu*, with its national headquarter at capital city of Kuala Lumpur, also take charge of *Fotang* in Klang of Selangor, and Seremban of Negeri Sembilan. The entire operating system is known as *zhengti daidong, jutu lingdao* ('coherent advancement and collective leadership').

213 The *zhongzi ban* is make up by a group of initiators and senior lecturers, whereas members of the *yizi ban* are representatives from all shrines or *Fatang* in that district.

214 The nine departments (*zu*) are: *daowu* 道务(evangelistic affairs), *banwu* 班务(sectarian education), *gongguan* 公关(public relationships), *chuwu* 厨务(kitchen duties), *wenshu* 文书(clerical work), *fuwu* 服务(servicing), *jiedai* 接待(reception), *zongwu* 总务(general affairs), and *dashiji* 大事记(documentation).

At present, the Fayi Chongde in the Peninsula has two *qu* head quarters, namely the Chongde Wenjiao Guan 崇德文教馆 (Chongde Education and Cultural Centre) located at Kuala Lumpur and the Chongde Daoyuan 崇德道院 (Chongde Santuary of the Dao) in Alor Setar of Kedah. The one in Kuala Lumpur doubles as its national headquarters (*daowu zhongxin*) to link up all *Fotang* in the three *qu*. All *Fotang* are urged to achieve the aim of *sanduo sihao* 三多四好 ('the three many and four good activities') put forward by Elder Chen Hongzhen.²¹⁵ She also stresses on the policy of 'local personnel operating the local organizational affairs' (*bendi ren ban bendi shi* 本地人办本地事). The adoption of this policy has helped to train local sect leaders who are capable of shouldering the responsibility of running the routine activities of the sect organization independently. The elder plays the role of spiritual leader who gives advice, and only offers help [backed up by her rich resources in Taiwan] to the local *Fotang* whenever necessary.

Since early the 1990's, the CWGKL has been actively involved in organizing various social-cultural activities. With the support of its mother body, a series of public talks, focusing on the theme of creating a 'loving and caring society', by guest speakers from Taiwan were held. Music nights were put up by Taiwan Chongde's choir. Charitable medical services were organized, offering free treatment to local patients. Along with this operation, forums on health care are also held. Besides, CWGKL has also organized Chinese arts charity exhibition to raise fund for its cultural and educational activities. Blood donation, visiting old folks

²¹⁵ 'The three many' (*sanduo* 三多) referred to 'many newly recruits, many attendants in the two-days 'dharma assembly' for novices, and many attendants in the classes of sectarian education'. 'The four good' (*sihao* 四好) referred to 'good in learning the Dao, cultivating the Dao, preaching the Dao and advancing the Dao'. I do not have the figure for its membership, however, I estimate the number to be around 40,000 to 50,000 people.

homes and orphanage homes in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya areas, photography contests, and so on also form part of its many activities. According to its Secretary, Mr. Chen Jianfa, all these activities are aimed at intensifying its public exposures by means of 'cultural packaging'. In fact, Mr. Chen is the master mind behind the launching of all these non-sectarian activities in the public domain.²¹⁶ He hopes that these efforts will contribute towards changing the longstanding negative impression of public toward the Unity Sect.

Case 2: Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui (MWSZ)

This group of the Unity Sect owes its origin to the Baoguang Jiande sub-branch in Taiwan. It is structured like any other social organizations in the Peninsula, comprising of a national head office, states liaison offices (*zhou lianwei hui* 州联委会), and states' branches. Along with this organizational structure, it operates through the mechanism of its principal 'public halls' (*bentang* 本堂) which play the role of coordinating the activities to be carried out by 'public halls' (*gongtang*) and family shrines (*jiatan*) in their respective states.

At present, the MWSZ has five *bentang*, namely Tianguan 天关 (1980) and Tianxuan 天宣 (1995) in the state of Johore, Tianli 天理(1994) in Malacca,

²¹⁶ Mr. Chen is a man of calibre, and a successful businessman in his early thirties. He is executive director to two limited companies and the advisor to one marketing company. He involved actively in coordinating social-cultural activities to be held jointly with local Chinese press, and youth organizations such as the Young Malaysians Movements, in order to extend its network of *guanxi*. He is also zealous in propagating the sect. A numbers of professionals, bussinessmen and even politicians have joined CWGKL because of his efforts.

Tianshang 天上 (1989) in Kuala Lumpur, and Tiangong 天官 (1991) in Negeri Sembilan. According to my informant, a new *bentang* in Penang named Tianwei 天威, will be completed by the end of 1996. The fact that Johore state has two *bentang* correspond to its status as the stronghold of the MWSZ, with a total of 267 *gongtang*, constituting 50% of its total *gongtang* in the Peninsula. Kuala Lumpur and Selangor²¹⁷ stand second with eighty-six *gongtang*, while Malacca, Penang, and Negeri Sembilan each with sixty-six, thirty-six and fifteen *gongtang* respectively, stand third, fourth and fifth in positions in terms of the number of *Fotang* set up in the respective states. Ipoh of Perak and Kuantan of Pahang, each with five and eight *gongtang* respectively, have yet to build *bentang*. One important characteristic of the MWSZ is that the number of its *gontang* largely outnumber its *jiatan* in all the states. I was told that *jiatan* only constitute 10% of MWSZ's total *gongtang* in the Peninsula. It is no wonder that MWSZ has the largest number of recruited sect members in the Peninsula.²¹⁸ The fact that many of its initiators and important cadres come from the business and entrepreneurial class, also account for its ability to construct a number of magnificant *bentang*, and own many *gongtang* as premises for promoting the sect.

In Tianshang *bentang* of Kuala Lumpur for example, there are three initiators in charge of all *gontang* and *jiatan*. The *bentang* is organized into a

²¹⁷ Originally, before becoming part of the Federal Territories to the Federal Government, Kuala Lumpur belonged to the state of Selangor. Hence, to this date, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor are conventionally taken as one and popularly address with its Chinese abbreviation as Xue-Long 雪隆 ('Xue' refer to Selangor and 'Long' refer to Kuala Lumpur).

²¹⁸ I was told that its recruited members totalled 100,000 people, 5,000 of them are active members who observed vegetarian diet. It has also 16 initiators and 500 lecturers which form the core of its evangelistic activities (based on interview made on March 12,1996 at MWSZ's head office in Kuala Lumpur).

numbers of departments with two to three person assigned to the duty of each department. They are departments of reception, morality books (*shanshu*) and culture, evangelistic affairs, kitchen duties, ritual and etiquette, educational, children and youth, sound system, transportation, public relation, gardening, repairing and preserving, ‘birth and death affairs’ (*hong bai shi* 红白事),²¹⁹ and ikebana.

On the first day of every lunar month, initiation ritual (*diandao*) are held in the morning, afternoon, and evening at Tianshang *bentang*. Classes and cadres’ extension educational programmes, conducted at district level, are also held at *bentang*.²²⁰ Regular classes are conducted in each *gongtang* or public hall. These classes include: *Xinjin ban* 新进班 (the newly recruits’ class) [four hours], *Lijie ban* 礼节班 (etiquette learning class) [twelve hours], *Jichu ban* (foundation class) [sixteen hours], *Mofan ban* 模范班 (model class) [one year], and *Rencai ban* (talent class) [one and the half year]. The first three stages of classes provide sectarian education and etiquette learning for novices. The fourth and the fifth stage of classes aim to train up its junior cadres (*banshi yuan*) and lecturers (*jiangshi*), who are future sect leaders. The Elder, who represents the highest spiritual leader and symbol of consolidation for Baoguang Jiande, is given the honour of conducting the important annual the three-day ‘Dharma assembly’ (*Yuanjue ban* 圆觉班) at the national level.

219 By ‘birth and death affairs’ it means the participation in the occasion of a sect member giving birth to a baby or attending the funeral of a sect member or his/her close relatives.

220 These classes include *Dazhong ban* for sect members, and *Qingkou ban* for ‘shrine masters’ [*qingkou* = those who already purified their mouths by observing vegetarian diet]. Extension education includes classes conducted for junior cadres or *banshi yuan* and ‘shrine masters’ (*tanzu rencai jiaoyu* 坛主人才教育), and those for *jiangshi* or lecturers (*banyuan yanjiu* 班员研究). Initiators’ meetings at district level are held at *bentang* too.

Tianshang and other *bentang* also conduct classes for children, cultural dances, and a choir, Chinese orchestra (*huayue tuan* 华乐团), and a teenage training camp for their young members. As for charity activities, blood donation, visits and donation to old folks homes and orphanage homes, donation to Chinese private schools' educational funds and stipends given to children of sect members from poor families are among those found in their annual schedule. The MWSZ also donated a handsome amount of Malaysian \$12,633 to Peoples' Republic of China for relief the floods and drought calamities that occurred in 1991.

Case 3: The Malaixiya Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan (MKMSY)

The MKMSY is one of the earliest Unity Sect organization in the Peninsula registered with the government authorities. It has its first as well as its main 'public hall' (*zongyuan* 总院) set up in Seremban of Negeri Sembilan. Over the years, the MKMSY has extended its branches to the states of Malacca, Johore, Pahang, Perak, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, with its strongholds centered at Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Kuala Lumpur. At present, it has altogether eighteen 'public halls' and thirty 'family shrines', spreading over those states mentioned above. It has a total of 20,000 sect members, about 1,000 of whom are actively involved in the *Fotang* activities.

Following the tradition of Xingyi zu in Taiwan, the MKMSY created an additional hierarchical post of 'assistant initiator' known as *lingren* 领任. The appointment of these 'assistant initiators' is essential, considering the present

leadership structure in MKMSY, with initiator Lai alone shouldering the overall affairs of all MKMSY's *Fotang*. The other two initiators, Tai and Huang, only take charge of *Fotang* in Malacca and Kuala Lumpur (for Tai), and Kuantan and areas in east coast of the Peninsula (for Huang). With these appointments, its main leadership consists of three initiators, five *lingren* (one in Seremban, two in Kuala Lumpur, one in Malacca, and one in east coast), and fifteen lecturers serving all its *Fotang* in the Peninsula.

Though identified with the Xingyi *zu* in Taiwan, the link between the MKMSY and its mother body in Taiwan has almost been 'cut-off', especially after the death of Xingyi's founding Elder (*lao qianren*), He Zonghao, in 1988.²²¹ Without any technical support from Taiwan, the MKMSY has to survive by training its own lecturers and future leaders. I was told that its elementary and intermediate classes for sect members are conducted fortnightly due to lack of teaching personnel. The class for learning ritual and etiquette (*wenli ban* 文礼班) is carried on every week along with the class for children. Training classes for junior cadres (*chuji rencai ban* 初级人才班) and lecturers (*rencai ban*) are conducted only four times a year.²²² Lectures given during these classes are based on canonical texts such as the *Platform Sutra*, the Four Books (*Sishu*), and the book on 'Mind-dharma of the Three Religions' (*Sanjiao Xinfǎ* 三教心法) written by Wu Jingyu. In addition to that, 'dharma assemblies' (*fahui*) at national level are held twice a year. Each *fahui* lasted for a duration of three days. The 'New year aspiration class'
²²¹ This is mainly due to the fact that the MKMSY does not, *de facto*, belong to any of the thirty-one sub-branches (*danwei*) of Xingyi *zu* in Taiwan. It was founded by a group of local sect members consented by elder He himself. For some years, under the instruction of elder He, it was 'attached' to the Taoxing *danwei* with Elder Su serve as its supervisor. After the death of both Elders Su and He, the MKMSY was left to develop by itself.

²²² I was told that some of the instructors for these courses are invited (rather than sent) from Taiwan.

(*Xinchun zhixiang ban* 新春志向班) aimed at encouraging the aspirations of sect members at the beginning of the year. The 'Year end repentance class' (*Nianzhong Chanhui ban* 年终忏悔班), however, provide an opportunity for its members to repent their wrongdoing during the year.

Like other Unity Sect's organizations, the MKMSY also participate in charity activities such as blood donation and visiting and donation to old folks homes during the Chinese new year. The MKMSY, however, above all seems to be more keen in its evangelistic mission. Its membership is made up of a large portion of housewives and wage earners, and a certain percentage of business people dealing in direct sales, house construction projects, and steel manufacturing factories. The sex ratio between its female and male members is 7:3. Also, it has a relatively high 60% of senior age members compared to 30% of the middle-agers, and 10% of youths and students.²²³

The Unity Sect within the multi-ethnic context of Peninsular Malaysia

We have so far examined the Unity Sect from different angles, based on sampling data as well as case studies. We shall now returned to the question of how does the Unity Sect in the Peninsula go about within the context of a multi-ethnic society?

Other than its evangelistic zeal, the Unity Sect in Peninsular Malaysia

223 Data provided by the MKMSY's advisor Mr. Lin Han Mao 林汉茂 during my visit to Seremban on March 12, 1996. Mr. Lin on several occasions pointed out to me with pride MKMSY's autonomous status compared to other groups of the Unity Sect in the Peninsula.

usually keeps a low profile in the public domain. The fact that the Unity Sect is faced with a strong attack from Chinese Mahayana Buddhists, as we have seen, is mainly due to the immediate conflict of interest between Unity Sect and MBA (see Chapter 3). Another important point to add is that: both the Chinese Buddhist associations and the Unity Sect draw their membership from the same pool.²²⁴ By cross referencing Tables 14 and 15 below, we can detect the the main reason which gives rise to such conflict.

Table 14: Percentage distribution of Buddhists by state in Malaysia, 1991.

State	%
Johore	26.0
Kedah	13.0
Kelantan	4.6
Malacca	26.8
Negeri Sembilan	21.9
Pahang	13.7
Perak	22.4
Perlis	10.5
Penang	33.8
Sabah	7.3
Sarawak	10.4
Selangor	22.8
Trengganu	3.4
Federal Territories	
-Kuala Lumpur	34.3
--Labuan	11.4
MALAYSIA	18.4

Source: Abstract from Khoo (1995:74), Table 3.9.

224 It is also important to note that majority of these group of people are educated in Chinese.

Table 15: Distribution of Unity Sect's *Fotang* by *zu* and state in Peninsular Malaysia

State	Changzhou	Chongde	Chong'en	Jiande	Jigong	KMSD	KMTD	Puti
Johore	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Kedah	-	✓	-	-	✗	-	-	✗
Malacca	-	✗	✗	✓	-	✓	-	✗
N. Sembilan	✗	✗	✗	✗	-	✓	-	✗
Pahang	✗	✗	-	✗	✗	✗	-	-
Perak	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	-	✓
Perlis	-	✗	-	-	-	-	-	-
Penang	-	✗	-	✓	✗	-	✗	-
Selangor	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
K. Lumpur	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	-	✓

✗ locations of *Fotang*✓ centres of *Fotang* concentration

Source: Information based on field-studies data collected in 1996.

From Tables 14 and 15, we find that those states with high percentage distribution of Buddhists such as Johore, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Penang, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, also doubled as areas or even centres of Unity Sect proselytism. It is therefore not difficult to comprehend why Chinese Buddhist associations from these localities tend to instigate and/or support opposition against the Unity Sect.

Other than acting as background support for local anti-Unity Sect resistance, Buddhist associations in Malaysia also have reprinted booklets attacking it originally published in Taiwan by their counterparts. For example, the Life Centre for Buddhist Studies (Malacca district branch) [*Rensheng Foxue Zhongxin (Jia quhui)* 人生佛学中心(甲区会)] during the early 1980's reprinted a book by an ex-sect member, Shi Wentu, entitled *Wo Zhenyang Tuoli Yiguan Dao* (How I escaped from the Unity Sect), published in 1978 by the Buddhist Publishing

Company in Taibei. The Centre then sent it to all Chinese schools' libraries and Buddhist associations in Malacca for free. An abridged version of the same book is published under the "Buddhist Digest's Readers Sponsoring Society for Publishing Tracts" (*Fojiao Wenzhai Duzhe Yinjing Hui* 佛教文摘读者印经会) 225 slightly later than the former, and is also distributed widely among Chinese readers in the Peninsula. A brief introduction about the author Shi and his aim in writing the book along with the publisher's note in the name of YBAM, is added to serve as the 'preface' of this publications. The note reads:

" We respect the freedom of belief by individuals. However, [due to the fact that] the Unity Sect claimed itself to be one of the sects (*zongpai* 宗派) of Buddhism, we therefore published this essay (*benwen*) to help our fellow Buddhists to discriminate between the true teaching and the heretical (*bianbie xiezhang* 辨别邪正). The original text has been deleted and abridged to suit the local environment ". (n.d.:2)

Another two booklets of the same nature, namely *Tiandao Wenda* (Questions and answers on the Celestial Way) by Rev. Shengfa, and *Tiandao Zhenchuan* (True transmission of the Celestial Way) by Rev. Hongmiao, first published in 1986 and 1974 respectively in Taiwan, are also available at Buddhist temples in Malaysia. Ironically, the titles of these latter booklets sound like those proselytizing the sect.

The threat faced by Buddhist organizations of other traditions in the Peninsula, such as Theravada Buddhist temples, if any, is negligible, since their members are

225 The *Buddhist Digest*, published in english and Chinese, is a quarterly magazine organized by the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM). Established in 1970, the YBAM is the umbrella organization for a host of university and other Young Buddhist Associations through Malaysia.

mainly from the English speaking group.²²⁶ The probability of converting Christians to become sect members is even more rare, since the theological aspect of both religions are far apart, and their members are mostly English educated too.

Some *Fotang* do work hard to recruit Indian members. During my field-research, I found several tracts on basic Unity Sect's teaching had been translated into the Tamil language. Nevertheless, spoken Malay language is most oftenly used in these classes, since only very few instructors can handle Tamil.²²⁷ When I enquired about the probability of producing a satisfactory outcome from these classes, local sect leaders agreed with me on the limitations faced at this stage. Nevertheless, they believed that this problem will ultimately be solved; after all the Unity Sect's tradition of transmitting the teaching is through the mind! ²²⁸

Islam in the Peninsula, as pointed out earlier, it is often taken as a parallel equivalent to ethnic Malays in the Malaysian context.²²⁹ As Ackerman and Lee (1990:4) aptly pointed out: "All Malays are Muslims by birth". It is a legal offence to convert a Malay into a devotee of another religion. The Unity Sect in the Peninsular is no exception. In fact, to avoid any possible problems, Confucianism has always

²²⁶ So far, few *Fotang* in the Peninsula are able to conduct classes using English as medium of instruction. This is due to lack of preachers who speak English. Also, they face the difficulty of references written/ or translated in English.

²²⁷ Spoken Malay language is the linguafranca, used by all ethnic groups in Malaysia in the market place and in their daily lives.

²²⁸ One souvenir magazine of the Xing-Ma Jigong Aixin Hui, has the sentence which read 'although colour of the skins may differ, the nature of [all beings] are equal' (*fuse bu yiyang, dan benxing shi pingdeng de* 肤色不一样,但本性是平等的) printed along with a picture showing its Indian sect members (cf. XMJG 1996:19).

²²⁹ In fact, to this date, the saying that 'conversion to Islam was to *masuk Melayu* ('become a Malay') is still popular among the non-Muslims in Malaysia. [cf. Nagata (1974:339)]

been used to 'represent' the Unity Sect in Malaysia and other areas outside Taiwan. Typical of these are the names used in registration of the Unity Sect's organizations, such as Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan, Kong-Meng Tiandao Yuan 孔孟天道院, Chong'en Rujia Yanxi Zhongxin, and the address of its sectarian educational classes as 'Adult Education on Confucian Studies' (*chengren ruxue yanxi jiaoyu* 成人儒学研习教育).²³⁰

In recent years, studies of Confucianism have been encouraged by government authorities.²³¹ The Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, has showed particular interest in dialogue between Islam and Confucianism.²³² In his speech at the opening of the International Seminar in 1995, he mentioned among others: "It is our conviction that a civilisational dialogue between Islam and Confucianism would greatly contribute towards global peace and understanding".²³³

The Unity Sect's organizations in the Peninsula have always been

230 In fact, the registered name of Jilongpo Chongde Wenjiao Yanxi Hui 吉隆坡崇德文教研习会 in Malay language is 'Pertubuhan Confucian' (Confucian Society).

231 The Malay translated versions of *Mengzi* and *Lunyu* by Associate Professor Obaidullah Mohamad of University of Malaya have recently been published by the national publication bureau, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

232 The first "International Seminar on Islam and Confucianism: A Civilisational Dialogue" was organized by the government authorities and held in the University of Malaya on March 13-14, 1995. A following up forum on the theme "A Dialogue on the responses of Muslim and Chinese civilisations to the challenges of the contemporary world" was jointly organized by *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, the *Star*, and *Utusan Malaysia* (the three national press of Chinese, English, and Malay languages) on August 4, 1996 (cf. *Ming Bao Yuekan* 《明报月刊》 31(9), September, 1996, pp. 62-65). Deputy Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar himself officiated both these forums.

233 Cf. *New Straits Times*, 14/3/1995. Also, cf. *Yazhou Zhoukan* 9(12), 26/3/1995, p. 72.

'indentified' by ministers as centres for propagating aspects of Confucian ethic and philosophical thinking.²³⁴ Hence, it is not surprising that the Chong'en Rujia Yanzi Zhongxin (Chong'en Centre for Studying and Learning Confucianism) has managed to have the consent of more than ten top figures of ministrial posts, and even academicians, to become its honorary advisors.

Be that as it may, should the Unity Sect's organizations in the Peninsula want to be identified *de facto* as the representative of Confucian teaching, they will have no choice but to support themselves with solid Confucian knowledge made relevant to the contemporary local society. The extent to which such an option of Confucianization will augment its basic theological structure of ultimate human salvation, will be examined and discussed in the chapters that follow.

234 The congratulatory messages (*xianci* 贺词) by cabinet ministers published in a commemorative issue of a Unity Sect's new *Fotang* opening ceremony, or its souvenir publications on fund raising dinners, often contain such phrasing.

Chapter 6

'Confucianization': A means to an end ?

What does 'Confucianism' 235 mean to the Unity Sect? How does 'Confucianism' fit into the theological structure of the Unity Sect? What is the implication of 'Confucianization' to the Unity Sect's development in the recent years?

In attempting to answer these questions, I will apply the emic approach that describe a religious tradition by using the specific language and distinguishable categories of its adherents. (cf. Nielsen and Hein 1983:6, Smith 1995:336). This is to respect the standpoint of the sect under study. Besides, historical interpretations and sociological concepts may also be used whenever applicable.

Self-definition

Like other sectarian religions, the Unity Sect also emphasizes the Confucian ethical teachings. 236 This is shown by Patriarch Zhang Tianran's preface to the ZDFG (1939) and by the sect's "Main Purposes of Proselytizing the Way" (1937)

235 Confucianism is but one of the facets of the rich religious mosaic that makes up the Unity Sect. Nonetheless, it is a defining facet based on the rationale that the Heavenly Way has descended to the school of Confucianism (*dao jiang rumen* 道降儒門) in response to the White Yang period of the three stages of cosmic time (cf. *Renli Guizhen* <认理归真> [n.d.:18], Dong [1983:254-255]).

236 It is referred to as one of the "moral revivalistic sects" by Li Yiyuan (1991:123).

that have already been discussed earlier in chapter three.²³⁷

In fact, following the maternist eschatological theology of the “last age of the Dharma”, the Unity Sect stresses its salvationist doctrine while at the same time promoting Confucian moral values in order to restore the deteriorated old customs and human minds (*wanhui shidao renxin* 挽回世道人心).

From the emic point of view, the values contained in the Unity Sect's rituals are predominantly Confucian in nature.²³⁸ For example, the 'burning of incense and kowtowing' (*shaoxiang koutou* 烧香叩头) in the daily 'ritual for presenting incense' is to be performed with solemnity (*zhuang* 庄), reverence (*jing* 敬), and sincerity (*cheng* 诚) in accord with the Confucian teaching of 'subduing oneself and returning to propriety' (*keji fuli* 克己复礼). As for the chanting of repentance text in this ritual, it is said to adhere to Zengzi's exhortation of 'three (self) examinations' (*sanxing* 三省),²³⁹ and Yan Yuan's 'four don'ts' (*siwu* 四勿).²⁴⁰ Also, the

²³⁷ Overmyer explains that it is because Confucianism maintains the basic human values of loyalty and filial piety, values that support the moral and religious validity of lay life, which is the social matrix of sectarianism (cf. Overmyer [forthcoming], chap. VIII:7).

²³⁸ Cf. 'Lecture notes for the Unity Sect Regulations and Etiquette Class' (*Fogui Lijie Ban Jiangy* (FLBJ) 〈佛规礼节班讲义〉) (1993: 11, 14).

²³⁹ The 'three self-examinations' refer to daily examining on the three points: Whether, in transacting business for others, I may have been not faithful; whether, in intercourse with friends, I may have been not sincere; and whether, I may have not mastered and practised the instructions of my teacher (cf. *Confucian Analects* Bk. I, chap. IV: 139). The translation is Legge's.

²⁴⁰ The 'four don'ts' refer to the four steps of attaining perfect virtue. They are: Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety (cf. *Confucian Analects*, Bk.XII, chap.III:250). The translation follows Legge's.

kowtowing to Heaven, Earth, Ruler, Parents, and Teachers (five kowtows), and to one's own ancestors (one kowtow) in the ritual is said to repay the 'five graces' (*wu'en* 五恩), and to observe the traditional value of remembering one's ancestors (*shenzhong zhuiyuan* 慎终追远) which are in line with the Confucian teaching of 'exalting the virtuous and repaying great service' (*chongde baogong* 崇德报功).²⁴¹

The matching of these values align the Unity Sect with the Confucian doctrine. In the same way the wearing of ritual garments (*lifu* 祀服) modelled after the "long gown" of the traditional scholar by the sect members, as well as its simple but solemn rites observed during the rituals, help legitimize its claim to 'revive the propriety of antiquity' and proselytize for the Confucian thought.²⁴²

Annotations (see below) that come along with these matching Confucian moral values such as *sanxing* and *siwu*,²⁴³ however, elaborate upon them using simple sectarian orientated language comprehensible to working-class congregations. In fact, it is these annotations that are taken seriously by ordinary members as dogmatic rules of cultivation to attain the salvation promised by the

241 Cf. C. K. Yang (1961:254).

242 The famous saying of Neo-Confucian Zhang Zai (1020-1077) that goes "to manifest the purpose of heaven and earth, to establish the Way for the people, to perpetuate the forgotten teachings of the ancient sages, and to find a lasting peace for the ten thousand generations to come" (*wei tiandi li xin, wei shengmin li ming, wei wangsheng ji juexue, wei wanshi kai taiping* 为天地立心,为生民立命,为往圣继绝学,为万世开太平) is always quoted in the Unity Sect's writings to assert their mission of proselytizing for the teachings of Confucianism.

243 Cf. The Section in the SZJL entitled "How to subdue one's body and mind" (*xiangfu shenxin* 降伏身心) [n.d.: 56].

Sanxing (the “three self-examinations”)

- (1) On the question of faithfulness -- Have you fulfilled your duties of saving sentient beings and proclaiming the Way on behalf of the Heaven?
- (2) On the question of sincerity -- Have you kept your promise of not cheating in word and action? Have you showed respect to seniors and inspired your juniors (*chengshang qixia* 承上启下)?
- (3) On the question of mastering and practising the instructions -- Have you comprehended and put into practice the mind-dharma transmitted by the Teacher, the exhortations of all immortals and Buddhas, and the instructions of the Elders?

siwu (the “four don’ts”)

- (1) Since we cultivate the real Way, we need to recognize the truth, be disillusioned with all forms and appearances, always keep our mind and intention within the dark aperture, do not allow it to gallop outside, then (our vision) naturally will not be harmed.

244 In fact, the section of “How to preach the teaching” (*ruhe kaishi daoyi* 如何开示道义) in YDRS (1992: 216-219) clearly indicated the different approaches of preaching to the ‘intellectuals’ (*zhishi fenzi* 知识分子) and the general public. For the former, the approach of using canonical texts as testimony to the Way is recommended. As for the latter, the approach of introducing the Way by means of cause and effect theory is preferred.

- (2) Avoid saying bad things about others, then you will naturally escape from the evil karma produced by the mouth.
- (3) Do not readily believe what you hear. Otherwise, your will be displeased and your mind will fill up with evil ideas and thoughts within a momentary slip.
- (4) Make no move without careful thought. Examine your mind and make sure your movements are rational so as to avoid the evil karma produced by your body.

Observations by Philip Clart in a case study regarding the "Divine Teachings of the Confucian Tradition (Ruzong Shenjiao 儒宗神教)" (= the Phoenix Halls) also hold in the case of the Unity Sect, "Confucianism is viewed as incorporating the essence of the orthodox Chinese religious tradition which is under threat from the ever increasing Western influence in modern Taiwanese society" (Clart 1996:405). Thus, it is not surprising that the Unity Sect's championing of the "Confucian tradition" also carries with it "a strong overtone of cultural nationalism and revivalism".

In line with the sect's exhortation to purify human nature from all desires and attachments of the profane world, observation of moral conduct is strongly emphasized in its teachings. This morality is largely derived from the 'Confucian' catalogue of virtues and values, emphasizing the 'five moral relationships' (*wulun*) between the lord and his minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between older and younger brother, and between friends; the 'eight virtues' (*bade*) (of filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, trustworthiness, propriety, righteousness,

ness, modesty, and a sense of shame); the ‘three cardinal guides’ (*sangang*) (rule guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife), and the ‘four bonds’ (*siwei*) (propriety, righteousness, modesty and the consciousness of shame).²⁴⁵

Emically speaking, this catalogue of morality values is the quintessence of “Confucian ethics” (*Rujia lunli* 儒家伦理), and of the “Way of Confucius and Mencius” (*Kong-Meng zhi dao* 孔孟之道).²⁴⁶ The integration of these values into the Unity Sect’s teachings is coined by the Fayi Chongde sub-branch of the sect as “Confucianizing the religion”, and the ‘end product’ of this integration is named “the Unity Sect’s Confucian thinking” (*Yiguan Dao rujia sixiang* 一貫道儒家思想).²⁴⁷

Looking from the historical perspective, Confucius himself may have been the earliest person to start this tradition. This is evident in the case of his using quotations from *The Book of Songs* to serve the purpose of his moral training. As pointed out by Raymond Dawson (1981: 21-22), the *Songs* is a collection of poems which had already become part of the common literary heritage before Confucius time. It consists partly of folk songs and partly of formal odes used for ceremonial occasions. The Master showed no interest in literature but made use of the *Songs* for his educational purposes. To elaborate, Dawson quotes a passage in the *Songs* that runs: “As cut, as filed, as chiselled, as polished” (*ru qie ru cuo* 如切如磋,
ru zhuo ru mo 如琢如磨), which originally refers to the jade-like elegance of a

²⁴⁵ Although intellectual historians may argue that “Confucian morality” has long become “a generalized Chinese civil morality, advocated by Daoists and Buddhists as much as by Confucians”, I agree with Philip Clart that the above argument “cannot properly be applied to the evaluation of emic religious categorizations”. (Clart 1996b: 406-407)

²⁴⁶ Quoted from Clart 1996b: 407.

²⁴⁷ Cf. CDZG (1994:27) for the use of this terminology.

princely young lover, but is cited in the *Analects* (1.15) as a simile to refer to the polishing and refinement of a person's character for educational purposes.

A discrimination between the *Shijing* 〈诗经〉 (*The Book of Songs*) and *shijiao* 诗教 (= the teaching/education of the *Songs*) as shown above, will henceforth ease our understanding of the difference between the Yiguan Dao *ruijia sixiang* and that of the orthodox Confucian philosophy.

Sectarian interpretations of the *Analects*: a case study

A crucial activity of *Fotang* congregations are long sermons on ethical teachings based mainly on selected canoncial texts of the “three teachings”. The *Analects*, being the main classic of Confucianism, is frequently quoted and referred to as an authoritative source. Hence, a case study of the idiosyncratic interpretations given by the sect to this classic will certainly throw more light to our understanding of what ‘Confucianism’ means to the sect members. Below are some of these samples paired with textual meanings and sectarian interpretations:

(a) Zi yue: “Zhao wendao, xi si ke yi”. (*Analects* IV, Ch. XV. 8)

子曰：朝闻道，夕死可矣。

Textual meaning (=T. M.): Confucius said, “If a man in the morning hears the right way, he may die in the evening without regret”.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Unless otherwise stated, the translations for T.M. portion follow Legge's.

Sectarian interpretation (=S. I.): One with karmic affinity who receives the Celestial Way in the morning may die in the evening, yet one is capable of transcending oneself and escape from samsara.

(b) Zigong yue: “*Fuzi zi wenzhang, kede er wen ye; fuzi zi yan xing yu tiandao, bu kede er wen ye*”. (*Analects V*, Ch. XII. 12)

子贡曰：夫子之文章，可得而闻也。夫子之言性与天道，不可得而闻也。

T. M. : Zigong said, “The Master’s personal displays of his principles and ordinary descriptions of them may be heard. His discourses about human nature, and the way of Heaven, cannot be heard”.

S. I. : Zigong gasped in admiration of the profound meaning of the nature [and principle] (*xing - li* 性理) and the Heavenly Way which is hard to predict and can rarely be heard of, for its transmission is due to the cycle of the cosmos (*tianyun*). This shows how precious the Heavenly Way is.

(c) Zi yue: “*Duxin haoxue, shousi shandao*” (*Analects VIII*, Ch. XVIII. 13)

子曰：笃信好学，守死善道

T. M. : The Master said, “With sincere faith he unites the love of learning; holding firm to death, he is perfecting the excellence of his course”.

S. I. : One should believe in the Way with sincere faith. In addition to that, one ought to learn and cultivate the Way diligently. One hold it firm to death knowing that the Way is true, the principle is true, and the celestial mandate is true. Being a faithful devotee, one is ready to sacrifice one’s life to protect it.

(d) Zengzi yue “Shi bu keyi bu hongyi, renzhong er daoyuan. Ren yiwei jiren, bu yi zhong hu? Si er houyi, bu yi yuan hu?” (*Analects VIII*, Ch. X. 7)

曾子曰：士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远。仁以为己任，
不亦重乎？死而后已，不亦远乎？

T. M. : Zengzi said, “The officer may not be without breadth of mind and vigorous endurance.

His burden is heavy and his course is long. Perfect virtue is the burden which he considers it is his to sustain; — is it not heavy? Only with death does his course stop; — is it not long?”

S. I. : Cultivators of the Way ought to have lofty aspiration and staunch willpower. With vows to be fulfilled, one should at all times urge oneself to proclaim the Way and transform others on behalf of the Heaven. As long as one still has a breath left, one must not be sluggish in one's mission.

(e) Kongzi yue “Junzi you san wei: Wei tianming, wei daren, wei shengren zi yan”. (*Analects XVI*, Ch. IX. 8)

孔子曰：君子有三畏，畏天命，畏大人，畏圣人之言。

T. M. : Confucius said, “There are three things of which the superior man stands in awe. He stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven. He stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of sages.

S. I. : Heaven dictates the Truth, “Heavenly decree” stands for the order of the Truth. Great men represent Heaven in managing the Way; the words of sages aim at proclaiming and transforming sentient beings on behalf of Heaven. As these three things are of prime importance, they should therefore be venerated with awe by all cultivators of the Way.

To mention but a few of these quotations is sufficient to illustrate how the Unity Sect attempts to reveal the ‘mind-dharma’ or the ‘hidden meanings concealed in the Confucian classic. This emic way of interpreting canonical texts is, to the intellectual historians, unorthodox and ‘misleading’ as well. Nevertheless, it is venerated by the ordinary sect’s members as the correct teaching expounded by the Heavenly Way. In fact, the pride of being able to participate in Confucianism as the most prestigious of China’s ‘great traditions’ of Confucianism observed by Philip Clart among many of the Minzheng Tang Phoenix Hall 明正堂 disciples (Clart 1996b: 404), is also shared by those Unity Sect’s members who admire and adore Confucius’ thinking.

‘Confucianism’ and the process of ‘intellectualizing’ in the Unity Sect today

Elsewhere in this dissertation we have seen the Unity Sect’s success in proselytism inside and outside Taiwan, so much so that its number of adherents has grown rapidly in size within the last few decades. Today, it has become the largest sectarian religious organization in Taiwan with sub-branches spreading all over the world.

For a religious organization of considerable scale like the Unity Sect to continue its growth, the process of institutionalization and the gradual replacement of its charismatic type of leadership is probably the only possibility. The eagerness shown by the mainstream Unity Sect leaders’ ceaseless efforts in legitimizing its position as a registered religious organization in Taiwan constitutes a good

example of such a development trend. However, the process of institutionalizing the sect does not advance smoothly and without resistance. In fact, to this date, the resistance from those hardliners who stick strictly to the so-called tradition of 'no transmission outside this teaching' (*jiaowai biechuan* 教外别传) and that of 'not establishing words' (*buli wenzi* 不立文字) is still strongly felt (cf. chap 2: 38).

The gradual increase in numbers of sect members who are graduates from college and the university has, over the years, formed what may be described as an intellectual level (= 'academic division') within the sect. They are highly educated and well versed in canonical texts. It is therefore natural that they would try to claim authority by virtue of their knowledge. This would then entitle them to a share in the decision-making process, particularly in regard to mission policies.

However, prior to the "confidence crisis" (*xinxin weiji* 信心危机) of 1980,²⁴⁹ the role played by this group of intellectuals was somewhat limited. On one hand, the approach of proselytism used in the earlier periods was mainly that of

²⁴⁹ According to Song Guangyu (1983: 135), this crisis arose in September 1980 when some of the college's and universities' sect members of the Fayi Chongde's Taipei 'academic division' negated the authenticity of the divine revelations. Song attributes this incident to "the change of ideas of the sect members in question as a result of changes in their working and living surroundings [after their graduation]". Failing to fulfill what they had vowed before (for examples to observe a life-long vegetarian diet [*qingkou*] or life celibacy [*qingxiu* 清修]) caused some of those who took the vow seriously to face their life with constant feelings of guilt. They counteracted such tensions radically by negating completely the authenticity of their adherence (Song 1996: 342). The same crisis has also been experienced by the Jichu, the Xingyi, and the Baoguang branches of the Unity Sect (cf. Song [1995: 205]).

revelations through planchette divinations and the 'borrowing of the apertures'.²⁵⁰ On the other hand, most members of the intellectual group were still 'juniors' and hence do not qualify themselves to participate in the core of the sect's structure of hierarchical leadership.

Both Song Guangyu (1983: 134-135) and Lin Rongze (1994: 5-6) have taken the incident of 1980 as marking a new era in the history of the sect's proselytism. To them, the incident denotes a change of emphasis in proselytism from the traditional devices of divine revelations to that of the study and disclosure of the 'sublime meanings' (*weiyan dayi* 微言大义) concealed within the canonical texts of the three religions (particularly that of Confucianism).

Nonetheless, looking from the perspective of the sect's trend of development in terms of process of institutionalization mentioned above, I would argue that the choice of 'intellectualizing the religion' in response to the 1980 incident was but one of the important links that constituted part of its ongoing development process. On the one hand, the trend made it conducive for its rationalization process to proceed, and in this way also accelerated the gradual demise of its charismatic pattern of leadership. On the other hand, the 1980's crisis provided an opportunity to the intellectual group in general, and the Faye Chongde's 'academic division' in particular, to get themselves directly involved in the 'intellectualizing reform' that

²⁵⁰ Although Confucian values are been taught through these divinations, they usually comprised only of a particular value pronounced and put into the mouth of the deity descended at that time. To be sure, the learning of Confucian values through this way was rather limited in its scope. The teachings, nonetheless, suffice the purpose of exhortating the sect members, most of whom are illiterate or receive little education.

was (and still is) to be followed after the incident. 251

This reform has speeded up the intellectualizing process and hence its change in the approach of proselytism by stressing on the study of canonical texts.

252 To put it in another way, this change has added to it a strongly humanistic flavour (*renwen secai* 人文色彩), and has in fact prepared it for its task of participating actively in the activities of reviving traditional Chinese values and culture generated by the Taiwanese Nationalist authorities.

In the case of the Fayi Chongde, beginning with the 1980's, all major *Fotang* under Elder Chen Hongzhen's leadership registered and cooperated with local authorities at county and city levels to conduct Chinese classical studies (*guoxue* 国学 = the study of the Four Books) classes and the 'Chinese Classical studies

camps' following the basic guiding principles laid down by the Council of the

251 Lin Rongze in his 1994 paper tends to overemphasize the role played by the 'academic division' in the process of the Unity Sect's institutionalization and thence its intellectualizing. He quoted Wing-tsit Chan (1953:217-218) who said that "Throughout Chinese history it was the intellectuals who set the pattern and determined the directions in the development of education, government, art, and religion", to testify to his above mentioned opinion. Nevertheless, viewed from the entire trend of the Unity Sect, the role played by the 'academic division' of the Fayi Chongde is but that of an 'accelerator' who makes the best use of the incident (as an excuse and rationale) to hasten the process of the sect's institutionalization and to make their consultative services available to the core administrative authorities of the sect.

252 There are, however, several other factors that led to such act of intellectualization other than the 1980's incident. As pointed out by Song (1983: 11), the year 1980 constituted one of the three peak periods of the Unity Sect's persecution by the Taiwanese Nationalist authorities (the other two years were 1963 and 1974). Lin Benxuan (1989: 11-12) attributes it to the unstable internal political situation in Taiwan at that time. The promotion of the study of Confucian canonical texts such as the *Four Books* by the CCRM (see below) that reached its high point during the late 1970's and early 1980's also offered an opportunity to the Unity Sect to participate this movement, and hence allowed the sect to legitimize its position in the eyes of the ruling government as a supporting and reliable 'ally' of their political interests.

Chinese Cultural Renaissance [Movement] (= CCRM, Zhonghua Wenhua Fuxing Yundong 中华文化复兴运动).²⁵³ The Fayi Chongde's participation in government-organized cultural activities soon came to be imitated by other mainstream branches and sub-branches of the Unity Sect. They too followed suit and cooperated with local authorities in running these activities as one of their important agendas.

Fission within the Sun-ists: An alternative explanation

We have discussed in chapters two and three the split between the Liu-ist and Sun-ist factions due to the struggle over the control of Zhang Tianran's religious empire after his death in 1947. In the course of this struggle, the Sun-ists turned out to be the winner and thus represent the dominate mainstream of the Unity Sect in Taiwan today.²⁵⁴ We have also observed that within the Sun-ists

253 The CCRM is a movement guided by the Council of this movement founded on July 28th, 1967. Its first president was the late Taiwan Nationalist President Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 (1887-1975). The main purposes of this council among others are: To promote studies on national culture, to create and pursue various cultural establishments based on the essence of moral principles, democracy and science. And, to encourage public or private cultural and academic bodies to propagate fine traditional Chinese culture form the angles of research and thought. Since March 29th, 1968 the Council publishes a magazine entitled Chinese Cultural Renaissance Monthly (*Zhonghua Wenhua Fuxing Yuekan* <中华文化复兴月刊>) [cf. *Zhongguo Xiandaishi Cidian* <中国现代史辞典>, *shishi bufen* (史事部分), vol. 1, 1990: 246-247].

254 It is important to note that both Liu-ists and Sun-ists do not conflict with each other over the issues of registration with the government and the approach of transmitting the teachings. As the split between the two factions has already been discussed in detail in Jordan's (1982) as well as Jordan's and Overmyer's (1986) writings, I intend to focus my discussion here only on the fission between the two opposing camps within the Sun-ists in relation to the 'intellectualizing movement' lead by the sect's intellectual group.

themselves, there exists a faction of hardliners who insist on continuing the sect's tradition of secret transmission and hold fast to the teaching based on the assumption of spiritual superiority over the temporal power.²⁵⁵ To Song (1996:76-77, 149), failure to reach an agreement between the two Sun-ist camps on the above mentioned issues has caused this fission. It is clearly indicated by the opposing camp's refusal to join the Free China I Kuan Tao Association (= FCIA) as its federated members.²⁵⁶

However, further investigations into the process of institutionalization of the Unity Sect along with the intellectual group's effort of 'intellectualizing' it (see above) tend to suggest an alternative explanation. It seems to me that the occurrence of this fission mean more than mere disagreement over the two major issues mentioned above. In other words, I suspect there is an underlying struggle for leadership power between the two opposing camps. On one hand, we have the camp (constituting the mainstream Sun-ist faction currently dominating the operation of the FCIA) in favour of institutionalizing the sect and 'intellectualizing' its

²⁵⁵ This thinking is stated in Answer to Question 11 of the YYJD (1937: 12-13). C.K. Yang has quoted from Li Shiyu (1948: 37) the explanation as "... we all are the [Unbegotten] Mother's children, and the officials in the government are also her children. How can there be any reason for the Mother to register with her children? ..." (Yang 1961: 223). This is in actuality an oral elaboration on the Answer by an initiator during a sermon recorded by Li. Its reasoning is interesting in that the relationship between the sect and the government is coined in terms of Confucian familism. It is therefore expected to be even more convincing than the mere reasoning in the YYJD that the sect's is heavenly ordained and hence needs no registration with the government.

²⁵⁶ Song Guangyu states that "the Elders that advocate legalizing the sect and opt for open proselytism are those who experienced the bitterness of being arrested and jailed; the opponents are those who never experienced such hardship. While enjoying the result of legalization (and therefore freedom from the threat of being persecuted), they oppose open proselytism to boost themselves and hence established their reputations (for daring to oppose and to be different)" (Song 1996: 280). This, however, merely touches on the reason for this fission without digging further into the underlying roots of conflict that are responsible for its occurrence.

proselytism by means of expounding the 'hidden dharma' through the study of canonical texts. On the other hand, we have the opposing camp (constituting those who choose not to become members of the FCIA, and those whose membership to the FCIA is being denied) ²⁵⁷ insisting on secret transmission of the 'mind-dharma' and stressing very much the instinctive way of (sudden) enlightenment to the *Dao*. The latter groups in the opposing camp rely heavily on the revelations by means of planchette divination and the 'borrowing of the aperture' in their proselytism.

As we have seen, the ongoing trend of institutionalizing the sect (advanced by the main stream Sun-ists) along with several other favourable situational factors discussed earlier has, over the years, absorbed considerable numbers of intellectuals into the sect. The institutionalizing process goes along well with the intellectuals' interest to claim their authority of knowledge in canonical texts as their basis of power. The promotion of the *guoxue* study in the sect's agenda beginning from the 1980's further enhanced their intellectual identity and their 'control' over the machinery of the sect's proselytism. The increasing role played by the intellectuals expectedly aroused uneasiness among some sect leaders drawing their power from *faji* and the charismatic way of leadership. It is therefore natural that they negated the authenticity of proselytizing the sect by means of canonical texts study, and some even go to the extent of accusing the mainstream Sun-ists of 'turning the Celestial Way into a teaching' (*bian dao wei jiao* 变道为教). In short, it is the struggle of power between the two opposing camps which constitutes the underlying root of conflict leading to the fission within the Sun-ists in Taiwan today.

²⁵⁷ The former belong also to the Sun-ist faction, while the latter are those not recognized by the FCIA but who identify themselves with the Sun-ist faction of the sect recognizing Zhang Tianran and Sun Suzhen as their eighteenth patriarchs (cf. footnote No. 57).

At this juncture, however, it is important to point out that the change in the approach of proselytism that goes along with the institutionalizing and the intellectualizing process advocated by the mainstream Sun-insts does not, at any rate, alter the core of the basic beliefs in the Unity Sect. The bottom line of the sect's teaching is still the constant three-stage maternist eschatological theology. The intellectuals and the 'academic division' in particular, remain faithful to the sect's premise that based its presumption on the fact that it is essentially Heavenly revealed, and hence its transmission of the Way through patriarchate is decreed by Heaven. This is where the line of limitation cuts across that no intellectual in the sect could possibly go beyond.

Activities organized by the Unity Sect after the founding of FCIA

As we have seen, the ongoing institutionalization of the Unity Sect and the active participation of the main stream branches and sub-branches of the sect in social and cultural activities held in the public domain, helped to prove itself harmless and successfully established its positive image in the eyes of the governing authorities. Backed up by the petition filed by forty political figures among the ruling elite (who had earlier benefitted from the undivided support of the sect members during the election) in January 1987,²⁵⁸ the Unity Sect was eventually declared officially as a legalized religious organization in February 1987 after more than forty years of suffering from repeating humiliations and accusations as heterodoxy by the authorities.²⁵⁹ Following that, the FCIA was founded in March 1988.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Song (1996: 262-268).

²⁵⁹ Cf. Joseph Bosco (1994:436-443).

That the authorities entrusted the Grand Spring Sacrifice Ceremony (*chunji*) Kong dadian 春季祭孔大典) in the Confucius Temple of Taipei City to the FCIA in April 21, 1991 was reported with great pride in the trial issue (*shikan hao* 试刊号) of the FCIA newsletter published on August 1991. Looked at from the angle of the sect, this undertaking implied the official recognition of its effort in promulgating Confucianism. To ensure the smooth running of the rites and rituals on that occasion, a total of eighty-eight senior members from the 'academic division' of the Fayi Chongde were selected to take charge of the important role of 'disciples of propriety' (*lisheng* 礼生).²⁶⁰ To abstain from killing and uphold a compassionate mind (*jiesha chiren* 戒杀持仁), the vegetarian 'great sacrifice' (*tailao* 太牢) was used for the first time in this grand ceremony instead of animal sacrifices.²⁶¹

Other activities related to 'Confucian' ethics and traditional Chinese culture include: the offering of scholarships and stipends to students of moral integrity and filiality (*jiexiao* 节孝), public commendation (*gongkai biaoyang* 公开表扬) ceremonies for model parents, as well as the traditional 'rite for adulthood' (*chengnian li* 成年礼). Besides, public lectures on Confucian thought and morality, the Chinese classics study camps, concerts, Chinese orchestra performances, essay writing competitions on the Study of *Dao* (*daoxue*), Chinese calligraphy

²⁶⁰ Cf. Lin Rongze (1994: 21), CDZG (1994: 27).

²⁶¹ Traditionally, the 'great sacrifice' includes four pigs, two sheeps, and one ox. It is interesting to note that the abstaining from killing pronounced here in the religious sense, seems to 'overrule' the changing of traditional sacrificial rite performed ironically to honour Confucius himself! It reminds me of the case of Zi Gong who wished to do away with the offering of a sheep connected with the inauguration of the first day of each month. Confucius said to him "You love the sheep; I love the ceremony" (*Er ai qi yang, wo ai qi li* 尔爱其羊,我爱其礼)[cf. Analects 3.17].

classes and so on are activities held on a regular basis. They are usually sponsored by 'Cultural and Educational Foundations' (*wenjiao jijinhui*) set up by the branches or sub-branches of the Unity Sect in Taiwan.²⁶²

In fact, it is because of the sect's persistent efforts in conducting the canonical texts study classes in conjunction with the Council of the Chinese Renaissance Movement, and its extensive promotion of traditional Chinese culture and moral values in the public domain that it is designated by some people as "the non-governmental Council of the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement" (*minjian de Zhonghua Wenhua Fuxing Yundong Tuixing Weiyuanhui* 民间的中华文化复兴运动推行委员会).²⁶³

Summary

We have thus far discussed the emic view of 'Confucianism', how 'Confucianism' fits into the theological structure of the Unity Sect, and the implications of 'Confucianism' and the process of 'intellectualizing' for the development of the sect in recent years. While the Unity Sect identified itself as an advocate of the Confucian thought and ethics, its folk version of 'Confucianism' falls out of the strict definition of the intellectual historian and the philosopher (cf. Clart

²⁶² Other than the five cultural and educational foundations established by the Fayi Chongde (cf. chp 2), until 1990 the Xingyi branch has its foundation named "Kong-Meng Wenjiao Jijinhui 孔孟文教基金会" set up in 1987, the Changzhou branch has its "Chonghua Wenjiao Jijinhui 崇华文教基金会" set up in 1989, while the Jichu branch set up "Daode Wenhua Jiaoyu Jijinhui 道德文化教育基金会" in 1990 (cf. Soo 1995: 322, footnote16).

²⁶³ Cf. Song Guangyu 1983: 220.

1996b: 406-407). Nonetheless, the incorporation of basic Confucian values into the sect's doctrine has successfully generated an energetic strive among sect members to practise these values in their daily life. To put it in the Unity Sect's terminology, this process of incorporation is called "practising Confucian thought in one's living" (*rujia sixiang shenghuohua 儒家思想生活化*).

Outsiders who first encounter with the Unity Sect's members are usually impressed and amazed by their good manners, humility, politeness, and hospitality. To sect members, it is natural that people who have already received the *Dao* will correct their mistakes and revert to good deeds (*gaiguo qianshan 改过迁善*).²⁶⁴ They attribute these changes in their character to the practice of 'Confucian thought' (= Confucian ethic and values). This claim by the sect members fits in well with the central idea in the Confucian teachings that one ought to live the right life in society and find one's place in the world.

At this point, it is important to note that by showing the important implications Confucianism has on the moral teachings of the Unity Sect I do not, in any way, try to imply that Confucianism is the only source of influence to dominate and/or shape the moralistic character of its members. It goes without saying that the idea of cause and effect in Buddhism, the Daoist (philosophical) concept of 'purity' (both in mind

²⁶⁴ To put it in the words of the ordinary sect members, "in the process of cultivating the *Dao*, we strive to correct our shortcomings (*gai maobing 改毛病*), to remove our temper (*qu piqi 去脾气*), and to rid ourselves of all our behaviours and habits that are not in accord with the *Dao* and principle. By so doing, we are able to turn over a new leaf". Viewed from this point, I would agree with Philip Clart's observations that one of the reasons for the success of the Unity Sect is its private nature, focusing totally on the individual (cf. Clart 1995/96: 147).

and behaviour) 265 have a great impact in forming the moral ideas of the sect members too.

That Confucianism is made the focus of discussion in the present chapter is mainly due to the trend of gradual “intellectualization” in the mainstream Unity Sect that goes along with the “institutionalization” process throughout 1970s and especially during the 1980s, which led to a greater emphasis on the Confucian teachings. On one hand, the label ‘Confucianism’ is used as an *upaya* to designate its doctrinal teachings to non-sect members and ordinary sect members. On the other hand, its persistency and extensive promotion of traditional Chinese culture and moral values in the public domain along with the ‘study classes’ conducted using mainly Confucian canonical texts has gained the sect the reputation of an ‘advocate of Confucianism’. President Li Denghui 李登輝 of Taiwan has in several of his public speeches has praised the Unity Sect’s contributions towards maintaining social peace and stability in addition to promulgating Chinese culture, traditional ethical values and human relations (*fayang zhonghua wenhua ji chuantong lunli daode* 发扬中华文化及传统伦理道德). 266

Elsewhere outside Taiwan, Confucianism has always been used to ‘represent’ the Unity Sect (cf. chp 5: 31). In the case of Malaysia, as we have seen, the Unity Sect’s organizations have always been ‘identified’ by ministers as centres for propagating aspects of Confucian ethical and philosophical thinking. In a commemorative publication of the Chong’en Rujia Yanxi Zhongxin for example, the

265 Cf. Song Guangyu (1983: 92-93) for a detailed discussion on the close relationship between the concept of ‘purity’ (*chunjing* 纯净) and morality in the context of Unity Sect’s way of cultivation.

266 Cf. “Special report” in the *Yiguan Dao Zonghui Huixun*, No. 53, February 1996.

minister in his congratulatory message urged the sect to contribute to "promulgating human relations and virtues" (*changdao renlun daode* 倡导人伦道德) and "purifying the general mood of the society" (*jinghua shehui fengqi* 净化社会风气) as well.²⁶⁷

In Indonesia, a souvenir magazine in commemoration of the 1991 New Year and Confucius's 2,542th Birthday, published by 'the Supreme Council for the Confucian Religion in Indonesia' (MATAKIN = Majelis Tinggi Agama Konghucu Indonesia), interestingly contains photographs of the magnificent building of the Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan ("the Court of Confucius' and Mencius' Saintly Way") in Los Angeles, U.S.A. These pictures are proudly displayed inside the magazine to demonstrate how successful the proselytism of Confucianism is in the West. Apparently, the MATAKIN has 'misidentified' itself with the Unity Sect that use the name of Kong-Meng (Confucius and Mencius) in their registrations overseas.²⁶⁸

A study by Iem Brown (1990) shows that the Unity Sect in Indonesia is registered under the name of 'the Maitreya Sect' (Agama Buddha Maitreya).²⁶⁹ The latest announcement by the FCIA regarding the registration of the Unity Sect in Indonesia indicates that the new name 'Eka Dharma' ('Dharma of Oneness'),

²⁶⁷ Cf. Minister of Housing and Local Government, Dato' Dr. Chen Zupai's congratulatory messages in *PABC Building Fund Raising Memorial Magazine* (1995: 8).

²⁶⁸ Cf. Tan Chee Beng (1983: 225-226) for a good description of the historical development and the formation of Confucianism as a religion centers on the worship of Confucius in Indonesia. Coppel (1979: 742) points out that in 1965, "Confucianism" was stated in Indonesian regulation as one of the six officially recognized religions, together with Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hindu-Bali and Buddhism, although since then there has been some resistance to the official recognition of "Confucianism" as a religion.

²⁶⁹ Cf. footnote 32.

proposed and supported by both Mr. Iketut Pasek, Chief Secretary of the Department of Religion, Republic of Indonesia and Mr. Budi Setiawan, the Director General of Hindu-Bali and Buddhist Affairs Supervision Department, will henceforth be used. It is reported that when this registration comes into effect, the sect will able "to expound and promote the gospel of the Almighty God along with Buddhism and other officially recognized religions in the Republic of Indonesia".²⁷⁰

In Surat Thani (Ban Don) of Southern Thailand, the construction of a magnificent "Temple of Master Kong, the Former Teacher, and the Great Completer, Supreme Sage" (Dacheng Zhisheng Xianshi Kongzi Miao 大成至圣先师孔子庙) was completed and inaugurated on December 1992 by Han Yulin, Senior Elder of Fayi branch, and the Provincial Gavenor of Surat Thani. The main hall of the temple worships Confucius together with his four "principal successors" (*sipei* 四配), while the hall at the rear is devoted to the "ten Wise Ones" (*shizhe* 十哲) represented by tablets. The top floor of the building is the 'Palace of the Limitless' (Wuji Gong 无极宫) devoted to Eternal Mother, Maitreya Buddha, Jigong, the Living Buddha, the Moon-Wisdom Bodhisattva, Guandi and Lu Dongbin. Senior Elder Han was extolled by the Royal Head Monk (Sengwang 僧王) of Thailand as "a reborn Confucius" (*Kongzi zaishi* 孔子再世).²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ See "Special Report" in *Yiguan Dao Zonghui Huixun*, No. 49, October, 1995. I am unable to confirm whether the registration under 'Eka Dharma' has actually come into effect by now. If so, the implications are highly significant, because it means that the Unity Sect has become the seventh officially recognized religion in the Republic of Indonesia. Previously, the sect was categorised under the category of Buddhism in this Republic.

²⁷¹ Cf. *Zhengde Zazhi* 〈正德杂志〉, No. 91, March 1993: 3-4, 10. The four principal 'successors' of Confucius are Yan Hui 颜回, Zengzi, Zi Si 子思 and Mengzi.

That the Unity Sect has been taken by many local authorities overseas and their people at large as the 'representative' of Confucianism is therefore not surprising, considering the sect's intimate association with Confucianism, be that in name, canonical texts study, or the general outlook of its moral revivalistic orientation and the practice of its simple but solemn rituals following the style of antiquity. One may argue that most of these activities carried out by the sect incline to be functional in nature. However, one can in no way deny the sect's sincerity in promulgating and practising the catalogue of Confucian values and virtues, which it believes to constitute an important part of its agenda in cultivation leading to the salvation it promised to its members.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In previous chapters, I have explored the various aspects of the Unity Sect from its origins and history, to its development in mainland China and Taiwan. I have also discussed the sect's organization, teachings and rituals. I have, however, focused on the spread of the sect to Peninsular Malaysia and its recent development there, based on data acquired from empirical studies. Also discussed in this dissertation is the ongoing trend of institutionalization of the sect to replace of its charismatic pattern of leadership, and above all, its establishing of a sound organizational structure.

An interesting aspect that I have discovered from this study is the alternative the sect provides for young people in Peninsular Malaysia. One tends to have the wrong impression that young people will respond only to a religion that gives them a lot of freedom, or that they do not adhere to any religion at all. My study proves that such a generalization is incorrect and misleading.

I have, in chapter five of this dissertation, pointed out the trend of a quest for a religious alternative among many young people in the last two decades by referring to cases found in both the Unity Sect and the Nichiren Shoshu of Malaysia (NSM) in the Peninsula. I have explained that this trend is closely related to their general dissatisfaction with traditional Chinese religion, which emphasizes ritual performance itself rather than helping them to gain insight into the ideas and meanings of these rituals.

The Unity Sect and the NSM both share being religions of a congregational nature, stressing ethical living and spiritual self-discipline. Through attending Church-like sermons on the regular basis, and above all, participating actively in the task of proselytism, members of the congregations can strongly feel both a 'sense of belonging' and a 'sense of achievement' among themselves. These religious activities have indeed given them meaning (and in the case of NSM, "added values") to their lives, and henceforth offered them a more defined world view compared to what the more ritualistic aspect of traditional Chinese religion can offer.

In addition to that, the varieties of recreation and/or skill-learning activities such as choirs, the folk dancing class, vegetarian dishes cooking classes, the Ikebana classes, etc. provided by the Unity Sect organizations in the Peninsula suit the tastes of these young people well, while help keeping a balance between the 'sacred' and the 'profane'.

All the above observations clearly indicate the flexibility of the sect in organizing its activities in such a way that it accommodates not only the spiritual quest of these young people, but also their everyday interests. The success of the sect in recruiting young members, as pointed out earlier, has in return helped the sect recover from its long standing dormancy to become an aggressively evangelistic organization beginning from the middle of the 1970s.

Below, I would like to further examines the success of the Unity Sect's proselytism from different angles, namely the perspectives of cultural and ethnic identities. I would also like to touch on the current trends of the sect's globalization

and its future outlook.

Multiethnicity, religion, and ethnic identity

As pointed out by Chandra Muzaffar (1987: 15), Malaysia has experienced rapid urbanization since its independence in 1957. Urbanization became more intense after 1969.²⁷² The government, in implementing the New Economic Policy (NEP), is committed to the urbanization of the Malay community, playing thus a pivotal role in this process. Under the leadership of the present Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohammad (since 1981), the country's urbanization process has been hastened at an even greater speed.²⁷³

Philip Clart (1995/96: 147-148) in discussing secularization in Taiwan as a result of rapid urbanization points out that secularization means essentially Westernization. It is but an imported product, introduced into a society whose traditional world-view remained largely intact. He quotes findings from empirical studies conducted by Song Wenli and Li Yiyuan in 1986 in Xinzhu City, the result of 272 A New Economic Policy (NEP) was launched after the May 1969 racial riots, with the primary goal of economic advancement for the Malay community through a variety of means, including expanded educational opportunities and rectification of "inter-ethnic imbalance in the ownership and control of wealth in the country". To quote DeBernardi, the events of the NEP's implementations "led to an increased awareness of ethnic divisions and have intensified loyalty to practices which express ethnic distinctiveness" (1994:121). Since early 1990s, however, the NEP has been replaced by a new New Development Policy (NDP), which stresses expanding national wealth before redistributing it. Under the NDP, the focus is mainly on economic advancement, while relaxing issues such as languages and nationalism. This move has greatly improved ethnic relations, and is mainly responsible for the achievement of high national economy growth, the pride of which is shared by every citizen of the country.

273 The country has, since late 1980s, experienced a tremendous progress in economic development, with a splendid high economic growth rate of above eight percent per annum for nine consecutive years.

which showed that even the most secularized individuals (= 9.8% of those self-declared non-religionists) "still held a number of practices which can be viewed as part of 'traditional Chinese religion'". Clart phrased it as "some basic premises of this [traditional] world-view".

According to Clart, the social-structural transformation [that evolved faster than changes in social consciousness] that took place in Taiwan, left the traditional world-view largely intact. The new social forms thus developed act simply as plausibility structures for this world-view. He adds that this traditional world-view will not vanished completely with the passage of time due to the factor of cultural identity. Giving up key parts of this traditional world-view would mean deculturation. To Clart, this is one of the important reasons why the traditional world-view of the Unity Sect survives quite well (and has in fact become its selling point to many Taiwanese irrespective of their social background) in the midst of Taiwan's rapid urbanization process.

Clart's above observations that Taiwan's secularization and its "self-limiting process"²⁷⁴ help to explain, among others, two factors relevant to the case of Malaysia, namely: (1) that the traditional world-view has survived (though in varying degrees) despite secularization brought about by urbanization process, (2) that due to the factor of cultural identity, the traditional world-view will not vanished completely with the passage of time.

The Malaysian government has "become part of Islamic resurgence"

²⁷⁴ Clart (1995/96: 148) applies the assertion put forth by Stark and Bainbridge that in the process of secularization, some key parts of the traditional world-view will be maintained. This limitation to complete secularization is designated by Stark and Bainbridge as "a self-limiting process".

beginning in the early 1970s.²⁷⁵ Until late 1980s, the share of national wealth among the people was largely drawn along ethnic line. Added to these factors is the already mentioned continuing urbanization and thus secularization process in the country. Given these situations, the Chinese traditional world-view has, at a certain point, been 'transformed' by the local Chinese community through the symbolism of religion to portray the identity of the ethnic Chinese and/or Chinese culture in response to the increasing Islamic resurgence. This also is in defense of Chinese identity which they feel is threatened by government policies now uncommonly coloured by strong Malay nationalist overtones.²⁷⁶ This condition was clearly indicated in Chandra Muzaffar's speech at a 1984 seminar held in Kuala Lumpur. Chandra warned of the dangerous of religious polarization, and observed that religion in Malaysia (during the 1980s) has not only being used to propagate ethnic identity but has also become a new channel, a new conduit, for transmitting ethnic fears and insecurity (quoted in DeBernardi 1994: 121).

As we have seen, the Unity Sect claims, and strives hard to 'revive the propriety of antiquity' and proselytize for Confucian thought. From a cultural

²⁷⁵ Cf. Chandra Muzaffar (1987: 5-6). As pointed out by Tan Chee Beng the increasing Islamic resurgence and the increasing government response to it are bound to lead to more religious conflict (1987:248).

²⁷⁶ DeBernardi (1984:25-34) in her attempt to explore reasons for the revitalization of the Hungry Ghosts Festival in Penang, Malaysia during the 1970s and early 1980s, points out that " [this revitalization] is in fact a self-conscious effort on the part of the Chinese community and its leaders to pour new content into old social forms." She further points out that local Chinese in Penang at that time had turned to folk religion (= Hungry Ghosts Festival) and the use of Mandarin (through the "Speak Mandarin Campaign") to forge a sense of unity and identity for the Chinese community, with the aim of protecting the cultural heritage of the Chinese people for generations to come. While I do not agree fully with some of Bernardi's interpretations in her 1984 article, I endorse her insight into such mobilization of folk religion among the Chinese to become "sociologically and symbolically complex", in order "to assert their strength, pride, and a hoped-for ethnic solidarity". (cf. DeBernardi [1984: 25,1994:121])

perspective, this claim and effort sound particularly sensible to those who lament the erosion of traditional values in present day society, and are earnest in their quest for effective remedies to overcome this ‘social illness’. On the other hand, faced with a threat to the persistence of Chinese ethnic identity, it is natural that the traditional values promoted by the sect might have attracted those who incidentally look for these values and the traditional world-view in fulfillment of their quest for ethnic (and also cultural) identity through the symbolism of religion.

The lay-based characteristic of the Unity Sect with its ethical doctrines and salvationist perspectives focusing on “how to live the right life in the society”, and “how to find one’s place in the world (*chushi* 处世)” [while promising deliverance from the suffering of *samsara* and a return to the Eternal Mother], has “succeeded in putting together a plausible package of compensators that are traditional enough to satisfy the need for a reinvigorated Chinese cultural identity, yet at the same time give the individual practical guidance in his or her everyday life in modern society [of] today” (Clart 1995/96: 144-145). The fact that the Unity Sect membership in Peninsular Malaysia is represented by people from all walks of life, illustrates this well-balanced coverage of the sect in satisfying the needs of and/or in helping those who make sense out of its teachings irrespective of their social background. To be sure, the Unity Sect’s progressive proselytism in the Peninsula during the middle of 1970s and the 1980s has, in one way or another, benefited from this identity quest.

Globalization of the Unity Sect and its future outlook

That the Unity Sect has spread rapidly to many parts of the world in recent years has mainly been brought on by the new wave of global emigration among its leaders and members. While the former emigrate for both evangelism and security reasons, most sect members like any other emigrants from Hong Kong emigrate with their families largely for the purpose of security.

The emigration of sect leaders (and their branch headquarters) in Hong Kong to the Western world before its take over by the Peoples' Republic of China in July, 1997 is not difficult to understand. To date, the sect remains a proscribed religion in mainland China under the designation "reactionary cult" (*fandong huidaomen*). Apprehensiveness about the new authorities attitude toward the sect has prompted them to establish a secure new base for their branches or sub-branches outside of Hong Kong. For example, Elder Wong of a Hong Kong based Xingli branch began his plans for overseas 'expansion' in 1988. He established a one-year course (*kaihuang ban* 开荒班) for his future missionaries which includes instruction in both English and Mandarin concerning the doctrines of the sect, the scriptures of the five religions, and vegetarian cooking. Twenty out of ninety graduates of this course were then chosen to help his nephew and niece in the first U.S.A. Xingli branch *Fotang* set up in San Francisco in 1989. With the help of his daughter, Initiator Wong, Elder Wong establish the first Canadian *Fotang*, the Mingde *Fotang*, in Vancouver in the same year. At present, Canada has become the country with the highest number of Xingli affiliated *Fotang*. Elder Wong even plans to move his branch's headquarters and assets from Hong Kong to Vancouver prior to 1997. (cf. Clart 1996a: 21-22) The above example of Elder Wong and his *Fotang* suffices for the purpose of illustration for the rest of the cases in Hong Kong.

Clart's research on the Unity Sect *Fotang* in Greater Vancouver also reveals that there is a boom of *Fotang* foundings that started in the early 1990s. He points out that eleven out of sixteen *Fotang* for which he possess fairly definite founding dates were established between 1990 and 1995. While all the *Fotang* opened in the 1980s originated with Hong Kong based branches, the 1990s saw the advent of an increasing number of *Fotang* of Taiwanese background, apparently reflecting the large number of Taiwanese investor immigrants in these years (Clart 1996a: 17).

The establishment of *Fotang* in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippine, as we have seen, can be traced back to quite an early date. The earliest *Fotang* in Peninsular Malaysia, to my knowledge, was established in Kuala Lumpur in 1948, while the first overseas *Fotang* of Baoguang Jiande sub-branch was established in Malang, East Java of Indonesia in 1950. The majority of the *Fotang* in these areas, however, were established from 1970s on. These *Fotang* were (and still are) mostly established by Taiwan based branches or sub-branches during the period when the Unity Sect organizations in Taiwan still suffered constant persecutions by the Nationalist authorities.

According to the LJMX (1990: 51), the earliest date of the Unity Sect's spread to South Korea and Japan can be traced back to 1946 and 1948 respectively.

The LJMX (1990: 76-79) and CDZG (1994: 50-56) published by Free China I Kuan Tao Association (FCIA) and the Fayi Chongde sub-branch respectively

allocate much space to discuss their vision of 'globalize religious affairs' (*guojixing daowu* 国际性道务). The stress on the importance of the main purposes and aims of the organization serves as a guiding principle, and a sound organizational structure ensures the persistence of the organization. Also important are qualities of leadership, the attitude of being considerate, long-term planning for fostering and training future missionaries, academic research on studies of the *(*daoxue* 道学), and publication of multi-languages texts for proselytizing the teachings written in accordance to the customs and cultures of the local communities. Most importantly, the establishment of a worldwide federation of Unity Sect organizations (*shijixing Yiguan Dao zonghui* 世界性一贯道总会) has enhanced horizontal integration among all branches and sub-branches of the sect. (cf. LJMX 1990: 78-79) The Fayi Chongde sub-branch, however, stresses the importance of establishing a centralized 'religious cum activity centre' (*daowu zhongxin*), in order to establish a systematic and well-organized administrative structure for the operation of religious affairs, and also to act jointly with the 'Cultural and Educational Foundations' (*wenjiao jijinhui*) owned by this sub-branch in carrying out educational and social welfare activities. In order to foster future missionaries, an advanced sectarian educational programme at the college level has been launched in addition to the five-year sectarian education programme carried out earlier. Missionaries are also familiarized with the taboos, customs, and rituals of other religions in addition to their religious texts. This is to ensure the smooth functioning of proselytism outside Taiwan.*

From the two 'blue prints' of the Unity Sect's organization, we see the ambitious visions of some of these 'open-minded' Unity Sect leaders for achieving this high sounding globalized mission.

To be sure, the term 'globalize' in the religious context means much more than mere 'geographical spreading' of religious institutions. That the numerous *Fotang* of the Unity Sect are found in many parts around the world alone does not qualify the sect to be designated as a 'world religion'. Linguistic barriers and cultural gaps, for instance, are among the two great obstacles that 'hinder' the teachings of the sect from being transmitted effectively to its target novices.

Song Guangyu has quoted an interesting example illustrating the dilemma faced by Taiwanese missionaries while conducting sermons in Singapore. Song observed that many Singaporeans can speak fluent Mandarin, but cannot read and write in Mandarin. Many proverbs and allusions (*diangu* 譬喻) familiar to any Taiwanese cannot be understood by sect members in Singapore, not to mention preaching based on any canonical texts. The initiators or lecturers concerned, in order to allow sect members to comprehend their talks, will have to preach by incorporating Confucian ethical and traditional values into daily life events, using simple spoken Mandarin. (cf. Song 1996: 472-473) That many Singaporeans are attracted to the *Fotang*, according to Song, is because the use of Mandarin in preaching provides them an opportunity to learn the language.

Compared to dilemma of linguistic barriers and cultural gaps faced by preachers preaching to people in Europe and North America, the case of Singapore is but a minor one. Adjustments are required to ease communication. In the case of preaching to Indian sect members as experienced by some *Fotang* in Peninsular Malaysia, the media of instruction is largely spoken Malay. While local sect members admit the limitations faced by them at this stage, they nevertheless

believe that this problem will eventually be solved by the sect tradition of 'mind transmission'.²⁷⁷

The case of proselytism in the West is going to be even more complex in future. Currently, the *Fotang* do not have problem with the recruitment of sect members. In fact, many of the *Fotang* in Vancouver are visited by first generation Chinese immigrants (some of them are already members before emigration), strongly identified with traditional Chinese culture preached by the Unity Sect organizations. As observed by Philip Clart (1996a: 25), "the Unity Sect doctrines and practices are so closely enmeshed with Chinese culture that it is not easy for Westerners (not even the second generation ethnic Chinese) to find access to them. Attempts to convert Westerners have been largely unsuccessful so far".

Philip Clart has compared to the case of the Unity Sect's attempt to proselytize in the West with that of the struggle to spread the gospel in China. To him, Christianity has to be "enculturated" and become a genuinely Chinese religion if it wants to gain a firm foothold in the Chinese cultural area (Clart 1996a: 26). A similar situation remains a challenge for the Unity Sect.

Summary

That the Unity Sect has proselytized successfully in Peninsular Malaysia in the recent two decades is indicated by its capability to offer a more defined world view, and to cater for everyday interests of young members. The Chinese

²⁷⁷ Theoretically this argument sounds sensible, but the question is how many of them can really be enlightened through this stage of transmission?

traditional world view and morality values propagated by the sect also turned out to be an asset, especially during the early 1970s and 1980s, when the local Chinese community felt that their ethnic identity was threatened by the increasing Islamic resurgence and government policies coloured by strong Malay nationalist overtones. These qualities possessed by the sect at that point were found particularly relevant to their identity quest, and hence helped the sect to successfully recruit those who made sense out of this religious symbolism.

In the case of globalization of the sect, the movement may claim its 'success' in achieving the target in terms of geographical spreading of its *Fotang* in countries all over the world. This target was 'realized' with the new tide of emigration wave to the West brought about by the sect leaders and members who have emigrated from their homeland for various reasons.

So far, the sect has successfully made Malaysia and other Asian countries [with high concentration of ethnic Chinese population] the major mission field for its propagation. Faced with the dilemma of linguistic barriers and cultural gaps, the movement's proselytism (to non-Chinese) in the West thus far has been largely unsuccessful. However, given the time and the reservoir of potential support for the sect's propagation from sect leaders among the multi linguistic talented Chinese in Malaysia and Southeast Asia and their rich experience in multiethnic and multi culture society [who undergo a five-year comprehensive sectarian educational programme], and the strong zeal of proselytizing the sect among the sect members, this ultimate goal of globalization may eventually be realized.

Abbreviations

CCRM	Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement
CWGKL	The Kuala Lumpur Chongde Cultural and Educational Centre
FCIA	The Free I Kuan Tao Association
GRPC	General Report of the Population Census of Malaysia, 1991
KMSD	Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan (The Court of Confucius' and Mencius' Saintly Way)
KMTD	Kong-Meng Tiandao Yuan (The Court of Confucius' and Mencius' Heavenly Way)
MATAKIN	Majelis Tinggi Agama Konghucu (The Supreme Council for the Confucian Religion in Indonesia)
MBA	Malaysian Buddhist Association
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MKMSY	Malaixiya Kong-Meng Shengdao Yuan (The Federation of the Court of Confucius' and Mencius' Saintly Way, Malaysia)
MWSZ	Malaixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui (The Federation of the Holy Mother of Unlimited Apex, Malaysia)
NSM	Nichiren Shoshu of Malaysia
SGI	Soka Gakkai International
TAPT	Taoist Association of the Province of Taiwan
YBAM	Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia

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Xiansheng Zhoukan 先生周刊

Xinming Ribao 新明日報

Xin Tongbao 新通报

Yazhou Zhoukan 亚洲周刊

Yiguan Dao Zonghui Huixun 一贯道总会会讯

Zhengde Zazhi 正德杂志

Appendix 1

Ritual for Presenting Incense

Presentation of incense sticks in the first section of the "Ordinary days" (*pingchang*) daily 'Ritual for Presenting Incense' (*xianxiang li*).

According to YDRS (1992:37), altogether twelve sticks of incense are offered to the following deities and patriarchs in the large incense burner as shown below:

Five sticks of incense to the 'Brilliant Supreme Emperor' (Mingming Shangdi).

Three sticks of incense to 'All Celestial Gods and Saints' (Zhutian shensheng).

One stick of incense to the Stove God.

Three sticks of incense to the Honoured Teacher and the Mistress.

The arrangement of the incense is illustrated in the Diagram 2 below.

		3
4	1	2
	5	
3	1	2
	1	
3	1	2

After the incense presentation, the ritual of saluting and kowtowing follow the instructions called out by both the Senior Deacon and the Junior Deacon. (cf. Chap 3)

Appendix 2

Brief Descriptions on Immortals and Buddhas of the Unity Sect

Mingming Shangdi 明明上帝 -- 'the Brilliant Supreme Emperor' = the Eternal Mother.

Tian di jun qin shi 天地君亲师 -- Heaven, Earth, Ruler, Parent, Teacher.¹

Zhutian shensheng 諸天神圣 -- All Celestial Gods and Saints [from the three realms of principle, phenomenal and the ethereal].²

Mile Zushi 弥勒祖師 -- Patriarch Maitreya.

Nanhai Gufo 南海古佛 -- 'the Ancient Buddha of the South Sea' is the sectarian address for the Goddess of Mercy = Guanyin.

Wujiao Shenren 五教聖人 -- 'the Saints [founders] of Five Religions, namely Confucius, Sakyamuni, Laozi, Jesus Christ, and Prophet Muhammad.

Huofo Shizun 活佛師尊 -- 'Living Buddha, the Honoured Teacher' = Patriarch Zhang Tianran. Zhang claimed to be the incarnation of Jigong, the Living Buddha and was hence addressed as such.

Yuehui Pusa 月慧菩薩 -- 'the Moon-Wisdom Bodhisattva' = Mistress Sun Huiming who claimed to be her incarnation.

Gewei falu zhu 各位法律主 -- 'All Guardians of the Law'. They include Guanyu, Zhangfei, Yuefei and Lü Dongbin (=Lü Chun Yang 吕纯阳). Nonetheless, they are usually represented at the Unity Sect altar by both Guanyu and Lü Dongbin only.

Changsheng Dadi 長生大帝 -- 'Great Emperor of Longevity' = Nanji Xianweng 南极仙翁 (The Old Immortal of the South Pole, the God of Longevity).

Zaojun 灶君 -- the Stove God.

Shizun 師尊 -- 'the Honoured Teacher' = Zhang Tianran.

¹ According to Yu Yingshi (1996: 100-101), the practice of worshipping 'Tian-di-jun-qin-shi' was already popularized by late Ming (ca. 1640). Nonetheless, its traceable history is not earlier than middle of the thirteenth century.

² Cf. p.3.17 for detailed explanations of the three realms.

Shimu 师母 -- the Mistress = referred to Sun Huiming by the Sun-ist. The Liu-ist, on the other hand, addressed Mistress Liu as *shimu*.

Zhendian yuanshuai 镇殿元帅 -- 'the Marshal Who Guards the Worship Hall' = Maomeng 茂猛, Zhang Tianran's son.

Zhendian jiangjun 镇殿将军 -- 'the General Who Guards the Worship Hall' = Maotian 茂田, another son of Zhang Tianran.

Jiaohua Pusa 教化菩萨 -- 'the Bodhisattva who Transforms by Teaching' = Yunyou daxian 云游大仙.³

Gewei daxian 各位大仙 – 'All the Great Immortals'.

³ According to Jordan & Overmyer (1986: 295), Jiaohua Pusa referred to Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮, a statesman and strategist in the period of the Three Kingdom (220-265).

Appendix 3

Memorial 4

In the year _____ of the Republic, or the lunar _____ year, the _____ th month, the _____ day, at approximately the _____ th hour, at the *Fotang* of _____ county/city in _____ Province, there come today [the following individuals:]

The most blessed leader _____ [filled in with the name of Zhang Tianran by Lu-ists, of Mistress Sun by Sun-ists] together with the Guide _____ and the Guarantor _____ respectfully and with devout hearts kneel before the Lotus Throne of the 'Brilliant Supreme Emperor' and speak as follows:

From the time heaven was created to the present, three Buddhas have already passed. Humanity after [each] has not received the universal transmission of the Celestial Way. They do not understand 'the principle and its meaning' (*liyi* 理义). The tradition of the Way has already declined. To date more than three thousand years have passed, and today we humbly receive the release of mercy by Imperial Heaven: the true teaching is gathered and nourished in the Eastern Land [=China]; the true sect of great mercy of the Patriarchs is regaining its force in Pa 巴 Province [=Sichuan]. At present all living beings are in great distress and have not yet attained deliverance. The disasters of floods and fire [at the end of] the eon are already before their eyes. So this congregation (*hui* 会) was founded to provide salvation to the countless living beings by putting in order this plan to save the seeds [=disciples] whose destiny is to be saved. [This is the same as] the blessings of Tang 汤 and Wu 武 [legendary founders of the Shang and Zhou dynasties], and the great virtues of Yao 尧 and Shun 舜. Now before the altar, may God accept this memorial and [have them] registered, [so that they be] protected by all the gods. Today _____ [names of one or two novices, otherwise the phrase "a group of people"] breaks away from the "wordly dust" and recognizes the erroneous path and earnestly prays that God grandly condescend to lead him/them on the bright road.

⁴ The translation of this Memorial is Jordan's and Overmyer's (1986:299) with some modifications.

We have nothing else to lay before you except to offer simple offerings of vegetarian food to attain the hearing of this text.

[Names of the petitioners are inserted here with their birthdays.]

Each wishes to assist with a 'merit contribution' of \$_____.

I, the leader, _____, and all others stoop to submit one hundred kowtows.

Appendix 4
Chinese Texts

Pp. 84-87

礼嘱

(Text of Ritual Exhortations)

大道收圆二八年,至今已整二九盘
三六盘式为填起,只余蕴子合残灵
清虚普化开会此年,苍生白首,共沾恩典,
一切诸神,护庇灵坛。

**
此日正在九阳天,大千蕴等俱朝前
各个皆得还乡道,保你无恙万八年
余今领受明师命,传你本来玄妙关。

...
当前即是真阳关,真水真火已俱全
...
一指中央会,万八得超然。

**
今时已至末劫年,实告一切众残灵
你若失了此机会,万八年载难身翻
余今领受法敕旨,慈悲传你真玄关。

...
林中寄一点,知悟保无恙。

愿忏文

('Sincere Repentance Text')

(乾)余蕴

(姓名) 虚心跪在

(坤)信士

明明上帝莲下幸受真传 三叩首

弥勒祖师妙法无边护庇众生忏悔

佛前改过自新同注天盘 三叩首

凡系佛堂颠倒错乱望祈

祖师赦罪容宽 十叩首

南无阿弥十佛天元 十叩首

请坛经

(Invitation Scripture)

大众肃静,各列齐班,俱整衣冠,诚敬听宣 八卦炉中起祥烟,

育化圣母降临坛关帝居左,纯阳右,二十八宿护法坛。

老母至坛,诸神俨然,右指呼叱,左指呵鞭雷部风部,虎部龙部,各显威严,尔等恭立细听吾言。今逢三天,大道显然,诸神真,护庇灵坛,鬼神听旨,切莫冥顽,遇难救难,遇善相助,遇事相办,大劫远退星曜灵官,领

帝敕令,速办天盘三曹之事,一一详参,不准退意,时时皆然,各尽尔职镇压三天母命诸真,代我传宣,见道成道,运转乾坤,十二元辰,各据其天,时势将至,毋违特宣。

表文

(Memorial)

中华民国__年岁次__月__日__时分前后在台湾省__县/市__路佛堂之中今有
钦加顶恩率引保虔心跪在
明明上帝莲下曰窃自开天以来已经
三佛之运生民而后未得大道普传理义不明道统已坠至今三千余年矣今
蒙 皇天开恩正宗钟毓于东土
祖师鸿慈正派再振于巴郡今时众生涂炭未得救拯水火劫煞已到眼前所以立下
此会广救众生整起此着普收有缘种子不啻汤武鸿恩尧舜大德坛前
上帝吸纳案下神祇俱庇今有众生等
突破尘缘醒悟迷津祈
上帝大赐明路儿等别无可陈惟献清供素蔬以达
上闻
乾童男女
各愿助功德费__元正
儿 率众等俯伏百叩

道亲个人资料调查问卷

1. 姓名: _____
2. 年龄: _____
3. 性别: 男 / 女
4. 教育程度: 大专 / 中学 / 小学 / 未曾上学
5. 教育语文源流: 华文 / 马来文 / 英文
6. 职业: _____
7. 您求道的原因是什么? _____
8. 求道已有多长的时间? _____
9. 是谁度您求道? 家人 / 亲戚 / 朋友 / 同事 / 同学
10. 家中是否有其他成员求道? 有 / 没有
11. 请列下已求道的成员和人数: _____

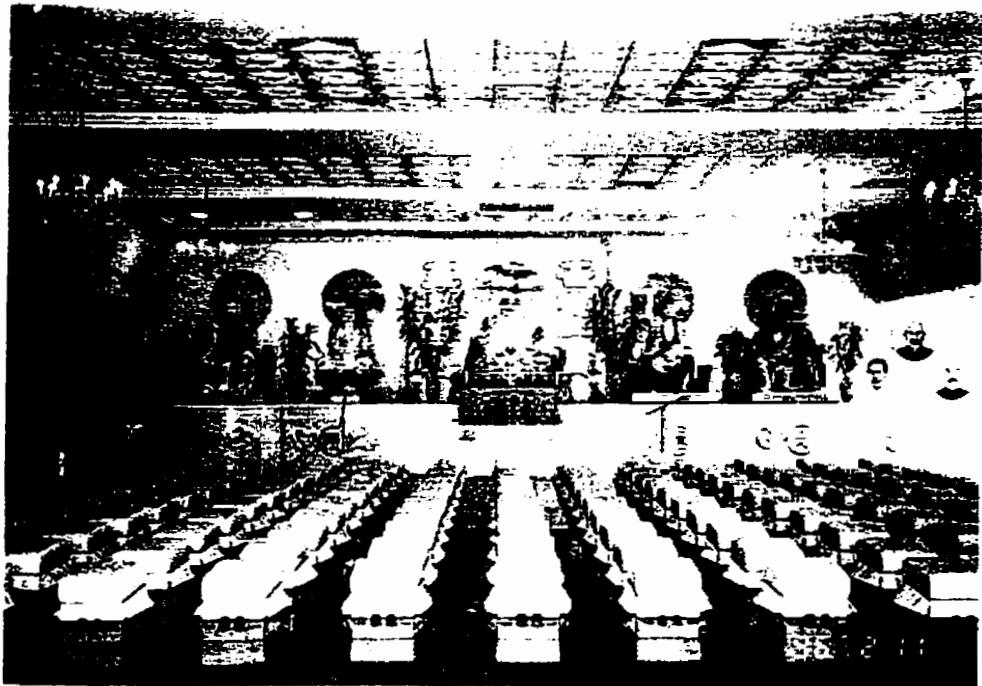
12. 请列下您所属的组别或单位: _____
13. 求过道后您可有经历什么殊胜之处? _____
14. 您在道中担任什么职位? 普通道亲 / 办事员 / 坛主 / 讲师 / 点传师(经理)
15. 您是否已经清口? 是 / 还没有
16. 若尚未清口多久吃一次素食? 偶尔 / 初一十五 / 每星期 / 常常
17. 您通常在哪儿吃素食? 佛堂 / 家里 / 素食馆 / 素食档口 / 朋友家里
18. 您是否经常参加佛堂的活动? 是 / 不是
19. 请列下您参加过的的主要活动: 听讲道 / 参拜礼(上供) / 法会 / 生活营 / 其他
(请列出) _____

20. 您是否有阅读善书或佛书? 有 / 没有
21. 请列下您读过的三本善书的书名: _____

22请列出您家中供拜的神明：_____

(完卷)

多谢您的合作！



1. The spacious and gorgeous *Folang* worshipping hall of the Tianxuan Bentang, Muar, Johore. Please note the pictures of patriarchs and the deceased founding Elders are also on display at both sides of the main altar.



2. The big and air-conditioned lecture hall cum theatre at the ground floor of the Tianxuan Bentang, Muar, Johore.



3. The spacious worshipping hall of Kong-Meng Shengda Yuan, Malacca branch. Please note the separate altar at the side of the main altar honouring the deceased Senior Elder He Zonghao, founding Elder of the Xingyi branch.



4. A gorgeous 'family shrine' set up by Mr. Hong Defu, a successful businessman, in his personal residence at Batu Pahat, Johore.



5. A 'Vegetarian Hall'-turned *Fotang* in Kuala Lumpur. Note that the original altar for the worshipping of 'seven immortal maiden' (*qi xiannu*) has remained intact. Only the new items of a 'Limitless' Lamp [representing the Eternal Mother] and the image of Maitreya Buddha are added to it.



6. Regular weekly congregation held at the 'Vegetarian hall'-turned *Fotang* [top floor of the building]. Note that on the 'upper table' of the altar, a picture of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, is found together with the image of Jigong, the Living Buddha. On the 'lower table' are found the 'Limitless' Lamp and an image of Guanyin.



7. The scene of a 'kowtowing' ritual held in the *Fotang*, Yuhua Shengmu Gong of Petaling Jaya, Selangor. Note the 'bundle of incense' (*daba xiang*) burned at the altar during the congregations held on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month.



8. A social gathering dinner held by Yuhua Shengmu Gong on the occasion of celebrating the fifteenth day (Yuanxiao) of the traditional Chinese New Year.



9. A scene of a performance staged during the 'New Fotang Building Fund Raising Vegetarian Dinner', held in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan on the 9th of March, 1996.



10. A scene of a 'Cultural Forum' jointly organized by Faiy Chongde Cultural and Educational Centre, Kuala Lumpur, and other voluntary social organizations in conjunction with the award ceremony for photographic contests focusing on the theme of compassionate love.



11. A performance staged by children of sect members of the Wuji Shengmu Zonghu, Batu Pahat branch, in celebration of the 'Mothers' Day'.



12. A traditional cultural dance staged by sect members of the Tianxuan Fotang, Muar, Johore, during the celebration of traditional Chinese New Year, 1996.



13. A front view of the headquarters (*zongyuan*) of the Melixiya Kong-Meng Shengda Yuan, located at Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. The man in the white shirt is Mr. Lin Han Mao, the advisor to this branch of the Unity Sect organization.

馬來西亞無極真全團總會 柔佛州聯絡處1994/1995理事表	
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行政諮詢委員會	黎慶榮
行政諮詢委員會	黎慶榮

14. A notice board showing the list of the advisors, executive committee members, and committee members of the Melixiya Wuji Shengmu Zonghui, Johore State Liaison Office, 1994/95. Note the offices of those listed as advisors to this organization.

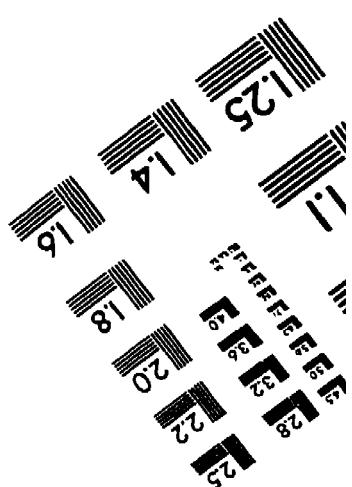
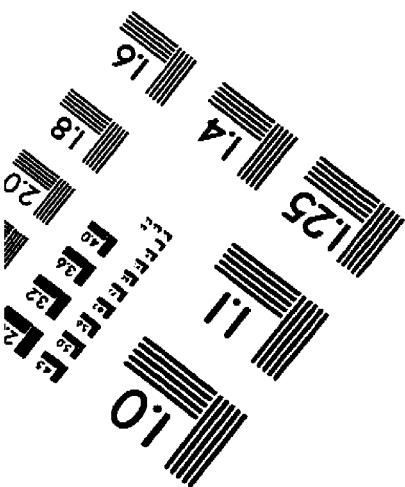
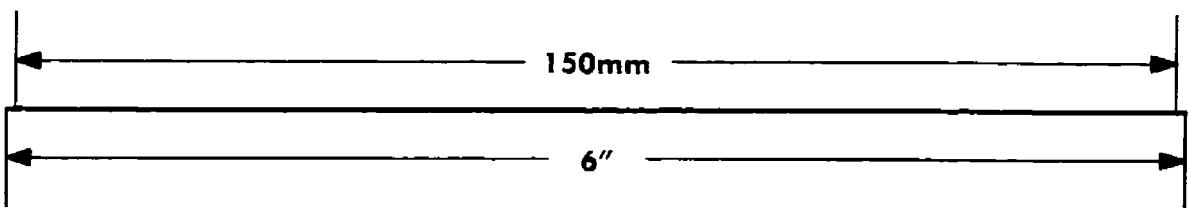
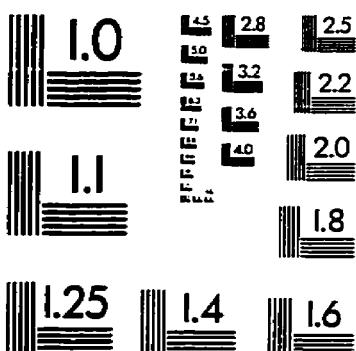
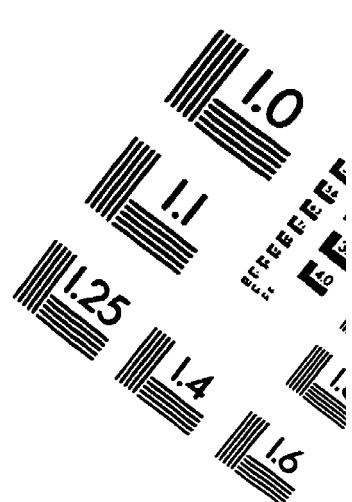
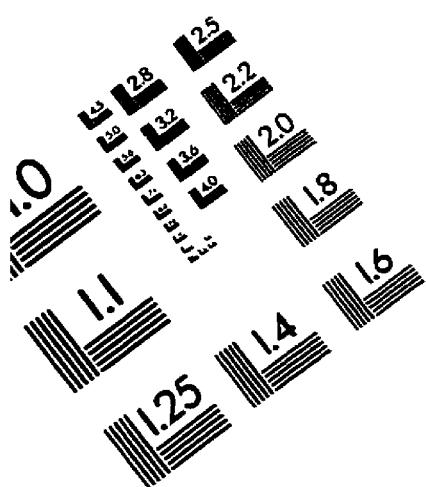


15. Two vegetarian restaurants run by the Unity Sect members located at Jalan Gajah Berang, Malacca.



16. A Chinese and Western Vegetarian Restaurant at Batu Pahat, Johore. The owner, Mr. Li Shijie, now a 'shrine master', was formerly an established fishmonger.

IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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