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POPULAR RELIGIOUS SECTS IN SOUTH-EAST CHINA:
SECT CONNECTIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF THE
LUO JIAO/BAILIAN JIAO DICHOTOMY*

Larry Thompson, to whom this article is dedicated, is one of the pioneers of the study of Chinese religions in Taiwan. This alone is reason enough to take the vegetarian sects in Taiwan as my starting point. I shall try to go back to the historical origins of two of these sects whose origins are to be sought in the southeastern part of the Chinese mainland. This will give us the opportunity to gain a picture of the variety of sectarian traditions there.

The next step will lead us to the roots of some of the sects which were active in Fujian and Zhejiang during the 18th century, which will shed some light on the connections between different sectarian traditions, especially between sects, derived from Luo Qing and the so-called White Lotus sects, which were transmitted in the Shifokou by the Wang family.

Finally I shall dare to present some considerations which can be inferred from this historical study, but which may be significant not only for the sects in southeast China. In particular, I shall deal with the problem of how to define the borderline between different sectarian traditions.

1. Vegetarian Sects in 19th century Taiwan

During the 19th century, Buddhism in Taiwan was seen to be represented by two main forms. On the one hand, there was what could be called monk Buddhism, while on the other, there were several vegetarian sects (*zhai jiao* 齋教), regarded as lay Buddhism. As the vegetarian sects were obvious offshoots of the sectarian tradition which on the mainland were labelled "heterodox" (*xie jiao* 邪教), one might be inclined to equate the former with "orthodox Buddhism." Actually, the majority of Buddhist monks by no means complied with the standards of orthodoxy. They became monks in order to earn their livelihood, and did not much care about the rules which monks were expected to obey. Usually they were married and ate meat, and had a rather bad reputation.¹

On the other hand, the members of the vegetarian sects took their religion very seriously. They observed the rules of the Buddhist laity, especially vegetarianism. They regularly chanted Buddhist sutras and made offerings to Buddhas and bodhisattvas like Amitabha, Shakyamuni and Guanyin. For most contemporaries, the members of these sects

I am indebted to Julian Pas for editing this article and to Ma Xisha for many vivid discussions and helpful suggestions.

¹ *Anping zaji*, pp. 20 f (*Taiwan wenxian congkan*. 52). For details see my *Volksreligion und nationale Tradition in Taiwan*. (Stuttgart, 1985), pp. 153-155.

were "home Buddhists," and certainly not adherents of some heterodox teachings. As far as we know, these sects were never engaged in any of the revolts which happened in Taiwan or anywhere in China during the last century. The members of these sects seem to have been much more "orthodox" Buddhists than most monks in Taiwan during that time.

Nevertheless, we can easily detect that the sects which flourished in Taiwan had their roots in some sectarian traditions of south China, which belonged to the broad stream of popular religious sects that the Qing authorities regarded as heterodox. The several *vegetarian halls* in Taiwan belonged to three sects: the Longhua pai 龙华派 ("Dragon-flower sect"), the Jintong pai 金幢派 ("Golden Flag sect") and the Xiantian pai 先天派 ("Former Heaven sect"). All three were known on the Chinese mainland and have been detected by de Groot during the 1870s in Amoy.² In Fujian they had already enjoyed a long history before they had been successively introduced to Taiwan in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It is a history which leads us right back to the almost inextricable roots of the popular sects of the Ming dynasty.

2. Vegetarian Sects in early 18th century southeast China

a. The Laoguan Zhaijiao

As most Chinese settlers in Taiwan came from Fujian, we shall start our search by looking into the sectarian traditions of that province. In the 18th century, there were several cases of "heterodox teachings" in southeastern China as can be seen from official documents. One of the best-known examples of sectarianism in south China concerns the Laoguan Zhaijiao 老官斋教 ("Old Officials Vegetarian Teaching") in Fujian, Zhejiang and Jiangxi.³

The Laoguan zhaijiao 老官斋教 seems to have first been noticed by the authorities in the year *qianlong* 13 (1748), when on the 13th day of the first month members of the sect started a rebellion to free a sect leader who had been imprisoned two months

² J.J.M. de Groot: *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China*. (Amsterdam, 1903/1904), pp. 170 ff.

³ The Laoguan zhaijiao has been studied several times before. Cf. Daniel Overmyer. *Folk Buddhist Religion*. (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 119-124; Daniel Overmyer. "Boatmen and Buddhas: The Luo Chiao in Ming Dynasty China." *History of Religions* 17 (1977/78), 284-302; Dai Xuanzhi. "Loaguan zhaijiao." *Dalu zazhi*, 54: 6 (June 1977) 1-12; Ma Xisha. "Jiangnan zhaijiao yan-jiu." *Qingshi yanjiu ji*, 7, (Beijing 1990), 201-225.

before.⁴ The rebellion, which broke out in the Jianning prefecture 建宁府 (northwest Fujian) was quickly suppressed by local militia and government troops, but it alarmed not only the provincial officials but also the emperor. The emperor was not happy with the local officials' treatment of the case and admonished them and told them to investigate more thoroughly and to arrest all sect leaders.⁵

The investigations brought to light a sectarian scripture, *Sanshi yinyou* 三世因由, which mentioned the first three patriarchs of the sect: Luo 罗, Yin 殷 and Yao 姚.⁶ From this, and from the evidence of captured sect members, it was concluded that Laoguan zhajiao was another name for Luo jiao 罗教 ("Luo tea-ching") or Dacheng jiao 大乘教 ("Great Vehicle teaching"). It was found that the Luo jiao had already been discovered about twenty years previously in several provinces, including Fujian. If at that time the officials had investigated more carefully and rooted out the sect completely, the emperor argued, things like the present rebellion could not have happened.⁷

The emperor's suspicion proved to be justified when in the same year, 1748, another case of the Laoguan zhajiao in Fujian was reported to the throne. This time the prefecture was not Jianning in the north, but Tingzhou 汀州府 in the southwestern part of the province. Following the investigations of the former insurrection of Jianning fu, one of the sect leaders, Yao Wenmo 姚文谟, had been arrested. He confessed that Yan Youhui, a disciple of his father's, was now a sect leader living in Longshangli 龙上里, a small village in Ninghua xian 宁化县. The local magistrate was immediately informed; he rushed to Longshangli in order to arrest Yan Youhui. After they had arrived at the house of Yan Youhui and tried to lead him away, more than a hundred people surrounded the

⁴ Some important documents related to this rebellion are published in *Shiliao xunkan* 27 and 28. A more detailed account of the events can be obtained from additional documents now in the First Historical Archives in Peking. The rebellion is shortly described by Overmyer. *Folk Buddhist religion*, pp. 121-123.

⁵ *Zhupi zouzhe* (hereafter: ZPZZ), referring to documents in the Chinese First Historical Archives in Peking. Documents are quoted in the following manner: first the date of the report [YZ meaning Yongzheng, QL meaning Qianlong], then the author or authors) QL 13/4/2 Xin Gui; Ka'erjishan; Pan Siju. Cf. *Qingshilu* (hereafter QSL) QL 13/2/23, j. 309, vol. 13, pp. 48 ff (edition Beijing 1986); QSL QL 13/3/20, j. 311, vol. 13. pp. 86 ff.

⁶ ZPZZ QL 13/3/14 Xin Gui (published in *Shiliao xunkan*, 27).

⁷ QSL QL 13/3/20, j. 311, vol. 13, p. 87.

house and liberated him by force.⁸

From the scriptures and objects found and the confessions of sect members, it is obvious that the sect belonged to the Laoguan zhajiao and had some relations with the Luojiao.⁹ The numerous reports related to these two cases show that the sect was not confined to Fujian, but had connections to the neighbouring provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangxi.

The origin of the sect was in Zhejiang, Chuzhou fu 处州府 Qingyuan county 庆元县, where at the time in question a sect leader named Yao Puyi 姚普益 lived. Each year Yao Puyi visited the communities of the sect in Fujian to initiate new members into the third degree.¹⁰ This sect leader is obviously identical with Yao Biqu 姚必起 mentioned by Yao Wenmo¹¹ and in a later report of 1753.¹² Yao Biqu had two half-brothers, Yao Bisheng 姚必胜 and Yao Bibiao 姚必彪, who were sect leaders in Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province. The great-great-grandfather (*goa-zu*) of these three brothers was the sect founder Yao Pushan 姚普善. Another member of the same family, Yao Puren 姚普仁, was a sect leader in Hangzhou.¹³

According to the evidence of several sect members, captured in 1753, the sect founder, Yao Pushan, was born in Chu-zhou fu, Qingyuan county, the same place where Yao Biqu was living. He was regarded as the third manifestation of Luo Zu 罗祖 (Patriarch Luo), the well-known sect-founder of the Ming dynasty, who lived from 1442-1527. Yao Pushan had a son, Yao Pufa 姚普法. This information is confirmed by the sect scripture *Sanshi yinyou*, which gives us additional details. Yao Pushan, whose secular name

⁸ ZPZZ QL 13/10/2 Ka'erjishan, Pan Siju.

⁹ Among the scriptures found were *Laoguan jing liu bu*, which refers to the *Wubu liuce* of patriarch Luo. There were also scrolls with the pictures of Wuji Shengmu and Laoguan Tianzun. ZPZZ QL 13/10/6 Wu Jinsheng.

¹⁰ ZPZZ QL 13/2/13 Xin Gui; Ka'erjishan. Actually the passage reads, that he came out to the local sect communities to choose dharma-names for the members. From other sources, however, we know, that a dharma-name was given only to members who had reached the third degree of *sancheng* 三乘. Cai Hengzi 采衡子: *Chongming manlu* 虫鸣漫录, j. 1 (quoted in Ma: *Jiangnan zhai-jiao yanjiu*, p. 214).

¹¹ ZPZZ QL 13/10/2 Ka'erjishan; Pan Siju.

¹² ZPZZ QL 18/7/13 Shi Hongyun.

¹³ ZPZZ QL 18/7/13 Shi Hongyun. In the same document, Yao Pusheng is called the grandson of Yao Pushan, which must be a mistake.

was Yao Wenyu 姚文宇, was born in 1578 and died in 1646.¹⁴ His son, Yao Pufa, died in 1671 at the age of 57¹⁵ (1615-1671).

Yao Pushan seems to have been a very successful sect leader. His sect spread over the three provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Fujian, its members counting several thousands. He organized his sect into three branches, each divided again into several sub-branches and further units.¹⁶ We do not know if this well-contrived organization, which was designed to last forever, ever really worked¹⁷, but there is no doubt whatsoever that more than a hundred years after Yao Pushan's death, there were a large number of sect communities which regarded him as their founder.

One branch of the sect obviously continued to have its center in Qingyuan, the home of Yao Pushan. Their leaders were descendants of the sect founder and his son Pufa. Other members of the same family had founded vegetarian halls in Wenzhou and Hangzhou. They claimed to be *zutang* 祖堂 ("founding halls"¹⁸), possibly indicating the centers of different branches of the Yao family. The leadership of the sect had obviously become hereditary, which had allowed the Yao family to accumulate a considerable fortune. Yao Bibiao, who was head of the *zutang* at Wen-shou in the middle of the 18th century, held the degree of *xiucai*, and thus belonged to the gentry.¹⁹ Members of the family continued to occupy the leading positions to the late 18th century.²⁰ There are even indications that as late as 1949,

¹⁴ *Taishang zushi sanshi yinyou* 太上祖師三世因由 printed in *kangxi* 21 [1682], edition of *guangxu* 1 [1875] (hereafter quoted as *Sanshi yinyou*) [j. 3:] *Qingyuan sanfu* 慶元三復, pp. 1a/b, 34b.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 37b.

¹⁶ *Sanshi yinyou, qingyuan sanfu*, pp. 9b-13b. ZPZZ QL 18/7/13 Shi Hongyun.

¹⁷ Some of the sub-unities seem to have existed only in theory, for the *Sanshi yinyou*, which was printed in 1682 does not name the holders of many of the positions available.

¹⁸ ZPZZ 17/7/13 Shi Hongyun.

¹⁹ ZPZZQL 18/3/13 Shi Hongyun.

²⁰ Cai Hengzi 采蘅子: *Chongming manlu* 虫鸣曼录, j. 1 (quoted in Ma: *Jiangnan zhajiao yanjiu*, p. 214). This was only one of the many cases where sect leadership became hereditary and the leading family became part of the gentry. Cf. Ma Xishax. "Lüe lun Ming-Qing shidai minjian zongjiao de liangzhong fazhan qushi" *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu*, 1984: 1, 22-33.

the Yao family was engaged in propagating sectarian teachings.²¹

In the early 18th century, there was a branch of the same sect in Jiangxi whose leader did, however, not belong to the Yao family. His name was Chen Wanshan 陈万善 (dharma-name Puwan 普万). Chen Wanshan seems to have been highly respected, for during the Kangxi-era (1662-1722) Yao Huanyi 姚煥一, who belonged to a side-line of the Yao family in Qingyuan, went to his home in Jiangxi, Fuzhou fu 抚州府, Linchuan county 临川县 to become his disciple. Chen Wanshan's high position in the sect probably derived from the fact that he was a disciple of the sect founder Yao Wenyu.²²

The sect of Chen Wanshan became known to the authorities in the year *yongzheng* 7 (1729).²³ Because of the persecution which ensued, Yao Huanyi changed the name of his sect into Laoguan zhaijiao. This is the origin of this name, which does not seem to have been used outside of Fujian and Jiangxi.

b. Other Sects of the Same Branch

i. *The Longhua pai*

One should expect that the vegetarian sects (*zhaijiao*) in Taiwan are in some way related to the Laoguan zhaijiao in Fujian. This is the case with one of these sects, the Longhua pai, but the relationship is more complicated than it seems at first glance.

The Longhua sect in Taiwan claims to have the same founder as the Laoguan zhaijiao, i.e. Yao Wenyu, who is also regarded as the third sequence of the three patriarchs:

²¹ Cf. Ma Xisha. "Jiangnan Zhaijiao yanjiu" *Qingshi yanjiu*, 7 (Beijing 1990) 201-225: 213, note 1.

²² ZPZZ 13/11/14 Kai Tai. The text does not name Yao Wenyu explicitly, but says that Chen Wanshan was a disciple of the ancestor of Yao Jiazhen.

²³ ZPZZ YZ 7/10/21 Shi Yizhi; YZ 7/12/6 Xie Min (both documents are published in *Shiliao xunkan*, 2). While in Shi Yizhi's report the correct name Chen Wanshan is given, in Xie Min's report the name is Chen Weishan 陈维善, who was said to have died more than ten years before. There are some inconsistencies, because in a later document (QL 13/11/24 Kai Tai) there is the information that Chen Wanshan was arrested, which means that he must still have been alive in 1729. Possibly Chen Wanshan and Chen Weishan are different persons.

Luo Zu, Yin Zu and Yao Zu.²⁴ However, the Longhua pai belonged to a branch of the sect other than the Laoguan zhajiao. After the death of Yao Wenyu, several groups of the Longhua pai, which were later introduced into Taiwan, never seem to have been subordinated to the Yao family of Qingyuan in Zhejiang. That means that they did not derive from the Laoguan zhajiao.

As mentioned previously, Yao Wenyu had organized his sect into three main branches: middle, left and right. At least in theory, each was again subdivided into eight branches, which again were divided into smaller units, each under the leadership of an appointed sect official.²⁵ According to the Taiwanese tradition, the two highest officials, besides the sect patriarch, were Puxiao 普宵, the leader of the left branch, and Puqing 普青, the head of the right branch. All Longhua sects in Taiwan trace their origins to the branch which originated with Puxiao, who is regarded as their fourth patriarch. Puxiao was very successful in founding new sect communities in Fujian and Jiangxi, but he died in 1644 at the age of 49 (1596-1644), two years before his teacher, Yao Wenyu. Therefore, Pubu 普步 (Yang Shichun 杨时春) was appointed *zongchi* 总敎²⁶ and became the fourth patriarch.²⁷

While the names may be correct, it is probably not true that Puxiao and Puqing were the two top officials at the time of Yao Wenyu, but that Puxiao and Pubu were the highest leaders of the sect after the founder's death. The *Sanshi yinyou* gives a list of the sect officials appointed by Yao Wenyu. Although Puxiao and Puqing are mentioned, they do not occupy the top positions. Both were leaders of sub-units in Linchuan county 临川县 in Jiangxi.²⁸ It is important, however, that their branch of the sect later claimed to represent the main line of succession of Yao Wenyu, and thus did not recognize the leadership of the Yao family in Qingyuan.

We do not need to follow in detail the line of Longhua pai patriarchs, who moved their base from Fuzhou fu in Jiangxi to Jianning fu 建宁府 in Fujian. There is,

²⁴ Some important information about the history of the Longhua pai is provided in the *Taiwan sheng tongzhi, Zongjiao pian* (hereafter quoted as *TWSTZZJP*), pp. 74b-80b.

²⁵ *Sanshi yinyou, Qingyuan sanfu*, pp. 9 ff.

²⁶ Yao Wenyu seems to have invented a hierarchy of twelve degrees, in which the degree of *zongchi* was the highest, i.e. that of the general leader of the sect. These degrees were still in use during the 19th century. Cf. Ma Xisha: "Jiangnan zhajiao yanjiu" pp. 214 f.

²⁷ *TWSTZZJP*, p. 76a.

²⁸ *Sanshi yinyou, Qingyuan sanfu*, p. 11a.

however, one point which will offer additional insight into the working of sect traditions. The ninth patriarch, Putong, 普通 had to retreat from Jianning to avoid persecution. In the year *kangxi* 35 (1696) he took refuge in the home of another sect leader, Pusheng 普升, who had a *zhaitang* in Changle 长乐 in Fuzhou prefecture 福州府 (Fujian). Pusheng did not belong to the same sect, which had its origin with Yao Wenyu. Instead, his line of succession traced back directly to Yin Zu, who was regarded as the spiritual teacher of Yao Wenyu.

The next patriarch of the Longhua pai, Puyue 普月 (Chen Guangming 陈光明) was a disciple of Pusheng and of Putong²⁹. That means that from that time on the Longhua pai was in fact a combination of two separate sects. Although they claimed a common origin, they had actually been different organizations. The distance from the Laoguan zhajiao had thus become still greater than it had already been before.

The important point to note here is that Yao Wenyu was obviously not the only one who claimed to be the successor of Yin Zu. There were others who made the same claim and they might have done it with more right than Yao Wenyu, as we shall see below. Since Yin Zu was regarded as the second patriarch after Luo Zu, all of these sects could be seen as belonging to the Luo zu jiao ("Teaching or sect of the Patriarch Luo"). The sect which originated with Yao Wenyu was one branch of this stem, with the Laoguan zhajiao as a sub-branch, while the sect of Pusheng, deriving directly from the second patriarch Yin Zu, was another branch from the same stem.

ii. The Two Patriarchs Yin Ji'nan and Yao Wenyu

We shall now look more thoroughly into the growing of this stem, which will lead us to the biographies of the two patriarchs, Yin Zu and Yao Zu.³⁰ According to the *Sanshi yinyou*, patriarch Yin, whose name was Yin Ji'nan 殷继南,³¹ was born in the year *jiaqing* 19 (1540) and executed in *wanli* 10 (1582).³² Ma Xisha quotes another source giving *jiaqing* 6 (1527) as the year of his birth,³³ which internal evidence suggests is more

²⁹ TWSTZZJP, p. 76a/b.

³⁰ A detailed account is given by Ma Xisha. "Jiangnan zhai-jiao yanjiu," pp. 204-208. See also Asai Moto: *Min Shin jidai minkan no shūkyō kessha no kenkyū*. (Tokyo 1990), pp. 82 f.

³¹ *Sanshi yinzu*, [j. 2,] *Jinyun Zhouzhuan* 缙雲舟转, p. 3b.

³² *Sanshi yinyou*, *Jinyun Zhouzhuan*, p. 54a.

³³ Ma Xisha. "Jiangnan zhajiao yanjiu," p. 204.

probable. His family lived in Zhejiang, Chuzhou fu, Jinyun county 缙云县.³⁴ After he had lost his parents and aunt, his uncle sent him to the Jinshasi 金沙寺 monastery, where he stayed for some years. Although he does not seem to have been a monk, he obviously was influenced in his religious understanding during that time.

In 1544, he was initiated into a vegetarian sect by a certain Lu Benshi 卢本师; his dharma-name became Puneng 普能.³⁵ Lu Benshi concluded from the answers given by Yin Ji'nan that he was a reincarnation of patriarch Luo Zu, and revered him as his teacher.³⁶ Thereafter, Yin Ji'nan became a sect leader and gained a large following in central and eastern Zhejiang. His sect was called Wuwei zhengjiao 无为正教 ("Orthodox teaching of *wuwei*").³⁷ Because his followers were so numerous, he attracted the suspicion of the authorities. He retreated, therefore, to Mount Tiantai, but was finally arrested and executed.

Yin Ji'nan had organized his sect hierarchically. The 28 top officials were called *huashi* 化师. They were the leaders of local communities and are mentioned name by name in the *Sanshi yinyou*.³⁸ Next came 72 officials with the title of *yinjin* 引进. After the execution of the patriarch Yin in 1582, one of the *huashi*, a woman with the dharma-name of Pufu 普福, reorganized the sect and established herself as leader, declaring that the patriarch had not finally left his community but would reappear in the world.³⁹ It was this same Pufu who forty years later accepted Yao Wenyu as her teacher, thereby indicating that he was the new incarnation of the patriarch.⁴⁰

Yao Wenyu had been born in 1578 (*wanli* 6) in Zhejiang, Chuzhou fu, Qingyuan county. Early in life he had entered a vegetarian sect; his dharma-name became Pushan, his religious name (*daoming*) Jingshan 镜山.⁴¹ In 1620, in Wuyi county 武义县, he met two members of Yin Ji'nan's sect, who accepted him as their teacher. When he was

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- 34 *Sanshi yinyou*, *Jinyun zhouzhuan*, p. 3b.
- 35 *Sanshi yinyou*, *Jinyun zhouzhuan*, p. 9a/b.
- 36 *Sanshi yinyou*, *Jinyun zhouzhuan*, p. 10b.
- 37 *Sanshi yinyou*, *Jinyun zhouzhuan*, p. 26a.
- 38 *Sanshi yinyou*, *Jinyun zhouzhuan*, pp. 40b/41a.
- 39 *Sanshi yinyou*, *Jinyun zhouzhuan*, p. 46a.
- 40 *Sanshi yinyou*, *Qingyuan sanfu*, p. 4a.
- 41 *Shanshi yinyou*, *Qingyuan sanfu*, pp. 1a-2a.

asked to give some proof for his claim to be a reincarnation of the patriarch, he provided details about some of the leading sect members. Thus, he established himself as a sect leader who obviously possessed rather strong charisma. Within two years, he gained a large following of 3,714 persons, which might be one of the reasons why Pufu, who had been a leader of Yin Ji'nan's sect up to that time, joined his group and declared him a new manifestation of the patriarch.⁴²

As described earlier, Yao Wenyu was a very successful sect leader and organizer. His sect spread over large parts of Zhejiang, eastern Jiangxi and northern Fujian. He claimed that his sect was the only "orthodox" successor of the sects of Luo Zu and Yin Zu, and fought against several "heterodox" teachers.⁴³ He did not succeed, however, in eliminating all internal strife between different sect leaders. After his death in 1646, there was no generally recognized leader of the sect. Yao Wenyu had a son by his second wife, née Zhou, who could not succeed him because--as we read in the *Sanshi yinyou*--he was still a child.⁴⁴ In 1650 (*shunzhi* 7), the woman Zhou returned from her refuge and secured the position of sect leader for her son Pufa 普法. Pufa died in 1671 at the age of 57.⁴⁵

This is the outline of the lives of the two patriarchs Yin Zu and Yao Zu as it is handed down in the *Sanshi yinyou*. We have to bear in mind that this scripture was in use with the Laoguan zhajiao and represents something like the official history of this sect. One of the functions of this history was without doubt to provide a foundation to the sect's claim that Yao Wenyu and his descendants were the rightful successors of the patriarchs Luo Zu and Yin Zu. There were obviously other sect leaders who had similar demands, but we cannot expect that the *Sanshi yinyou* would give us a clear account of these events. We must read it, therefore, with great caution and try to interpret it with the help of additional sources.

iii. Sectarian Competition

For the sake of clarity, let me first recount the bare facts. All sects dealt with so far

⁴² *Sanshi yinyou, Qingyuan sanfu*, p. 3a.

⁴³ *Sanshi yinyou, Qingyuan sanfu*, pp. 5a, 7a-8a.

⁴⁴ *Sanshi yinyou, Qingyuan sanfu*, p. 36a.

⁴⁵ *Sanshi yinyou, Qingyuan sanfu*, p. 37b.

regarded Luo Qing 罗清 as their first patriarch.⁴⁶ Luo Qing lived from 1442-1527 in Shandong and Zhili (Hebei). Yin Ji'nan lived from 1527 to 1582 in Zhejiang. Yao Wenyu was born in 1578 and died in 1646, also in Zhejiang. These were the so-called three patriarchs of the sect founded by Yao Wenyu, which was called Lingshan zhengpai 灵山正派.⁴⁷

From the dates, as well as from the accounts of the *Sanshi yinyou*, it is clear that the three patriarchs do not represent a real line of succession. In fact, Yin Ji'nan and Yao Wenyu entered into an existing sect and succeeded in being regarded, by at least some of its members, as their leader. Since they could not rely on the regular procedure of being nominated as sect leader by the former patriarch, they supported their claim for leadership by declaring themselves to be his reincarnation.⁴⁸

From later sect histories, we know that there is usually a great deal of competition and rivalry between the leading personalities of a sect.⁴⁹ Although the *Sanshi yinyou* tries to give us the impression that Yin Ji'nan and Yao Wenyu succeeded in being recognized as patriarchs by the sects they had entered, they were actually no more than branch leaders, while at the same time other branches supported different leaders. This can be proved in several cases by a careful analysis of the sources.

Let us first leave aside the sect into which Yin Ji'nan entered and which must have been an offshoot of the sect founded by Luo Qing himself. It is well-known that Luo Qing's sect was divided soon after the founder's death, so there is no need to prove that Yin Ji'nan could not really claim to be patriarch of Luo Zu's sect, but only of a branch. After Yin Ji'nan had died, his sect seems to have disintegrated and several of the local leaders, the *huashi*, continued without recognizing any central authority. The *Sanshi yinyou* leads us to

⁴⁶ I do not want to enter into the discussion of what the "real" name of Luo Zu was. Luo Qing is used in many sectarian scriptures, while the investigations of the Qing officials usually found out that the name of the sect founder was Luo Menghong 罗孟鸿. Either the sect members did not read their own scriptures, or there were additional traditions about his "secular" name. For an (incomplete) list of his names cf. Zheng Zhiming: *Wusheng Laomu xinyang suyuan*. Taipei, 1985, pp. 16-18.

⁴⁷ The name is mentioned in *Sanshi yinyou*, preface, p. 3a and in *TWSTZZJP* p. 80a.

⁴⁸ In the *TWSTZZJP* p. 86a it is suggested that the succession through reincarnation is due to the influence of Tibetan Lamaism. There are no historical proofs for this.

⁴⁹ An example is the later history of the Longhua pai in Fujian. See Seiwert. *Volksreligion und nationale Tradition in Taiwan*, p. 169.

believe that one of these *huashi*, Pufu, was actually the highest authority, but this is without doubt due to the fact that Pufu later recognized Yao Wenyu as leader. But besides Pufu, there were other *huashi* who were probably more influential than she. One of them was Puji 普记 (Chen Zizhong 陈子忠). He is number one in the list of 28 *huashi* appointed by Yin Ji'nan.⁵⁰ Puji was obviously a very influential teacher who refused to recognize Yao Wenyu's authority, for the *Sanshi yinyou* holds that it is necessary to state explicitly that Puji accepted Yao Pushan's authority.⁵¹

That this statement is not in accord with the facts can be seen from another source. In the *Kaixin fayao* 开心法要, which is a commentary of Luo Qing's scriptures written by the monk Lanfeng 兰风 and supplemented by Lanfeng's disciple Yuanjing 源静, the same Puji is mentioned as the first teacher of a sect which was called Wuji zhengpai 无极正派.⁵² This proves that the followers of Yin Ji'nan did not completely join the sect of Yao Wenyu, but were divided into different lines of which Yao Wenyu's Lingshan zhengpai was just one. It will be remembered that we already have another line that originated with Yin Ji'nan and led to Pusheng, whose sect later merged with the Longhua pai.⁵³

We can now more fully understand why Yao Wenyu fought "heterodox" sects. He demanded that all who belonged to Luo Zu's sect, and all who belonged to Yin Zu's sect, should accept this teaching as the only true interpretation.⁵⁴ Thus, when he stated that the 72 heterodox sects all had the same origin,⁵⁵ he was probably referring to sectarian groups of the same tradition which refused to join him. The *Sanshi yinyou* even describes one case in which one member of the community, Wang Changsheng 汪长生 separated from the sect and established his own.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ *Sanshi yinyou*, *Jinyun zhouzhuan*, p. 40b.

⁵¹ *Sanshi yinyou*, *Qingyuan sanfu*, S. 4a/b.

⁵² *Kaixin fayao*, edition of *shunzhi* 7 (1650), j. 4, quoted in *TWSTZZJP* p. 78a. For Puji see also Richard Shek. "Religion and Society in late Ming: Sectarianism and Popular Thought in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century China." Doctoral dissertation University of California. Berkeley, 1980, p. 242.

⁵³ See above p. 6.

⁵⁴ *Sanshi yinyou*, *Qingyuan sanfu*, p. 5a.

⁵⁵ *Sanshi yinyou*, *Qingyuan sanfu*, p. 8a.

⁵⁶ *Sanshi yinyou*, *Qingyuan sanfu*, pp. 8a/b.

With such a situation of high competition between different sect leaders, it is small wonder that after Yao Wenyu's death, the succession of his son Yao Pufa as sect leader was not unrivalled. Yao Pufa, who was 57 when he died in 1671, was accordingly 32 at the time of his father's death. He can hardly be called an infant. That he did not succeed his father immediately, but had to hide together with his mother for some years, may be an indication of the internal fights between ambitious sect leaders. Even after he finally claimed leadership, again, only a part of the members followed him, while others like the Longhua pai established their own successors and did not recognize Yao Pufa as their leader.⁵⁷

iv. *First Conclusions*

The reader may have the feeling that this detailed analysis of different branches of a sectarian tradition in southeast China is first boring and second unfruitful. Boring it might be, but it nevertheless allows us to gain some results which are fruitful for our general understanding of Chinese sectarianism in Ming and Qing times.

The generally accepted view of the history of the Luo jiao in southeastern China is that it was divided into two main branches. One branch was closely connected with the boatmen of the Great Canal and had its southern centers in Hangzhou and Suzhou.⁵⁸ The other branch was that of the Laoguan zhajiao in Fujian, the members of which were mostly peasants and artisans.

Our analysis has now shown that the Laoguan zhajiao was just one strand in a whole series of sects which all belonged to the same family. We can call the family "Luo jiao," but actually it was not just a continuation of Luo Qing's teachings, although his scriptures were handed down and possibly also read by the sect members. Already Yin Ji'nan, who lived only two generations after Luo Qing, had combined his teachings with the belief in Maitreya and the coming of a new world, elements which Luo Qing had criticized in his scriptures.

More important is the observation that practically none of the diverse sects which claimed descendance from Luo Qing and Yin Ji'nan are mentioned in any of the official documents that have been published so far. The only exception is the Laoguan zhajiao, and this is only because a local official abandoned the usual policy of ignoring sectarian activities.⁵⁹ Had he not arrested some sect members, which caused the futile attempt to free them, today nothing would be known about this sect in Fujian.

The Laoguan zhajiao may have had several thousands or even some ten thousands

⁵⁷ Cf. above p. 5.

⁵⁸ Cf. David E. Kelly. "Temples and Tribute Fleets." *Modern China*, 8, (1982), 361-391.

⁵⁹ ZPZZ, QL 13/3/27 Ne Qin (published in *Shiliao xunkan* 28).

of members in Fujian, Zhejiang and Jiangxi. But taken alone, this would not be a large proportion of the population. If it was, as we have seen, just one of many sects of the same kind, we must revise our picture of the social significance of popular sectarianism in Qing times. When we read of thousands of people who gathered at the meetings of Yin Ji'nan and Yao Wenyu, even if these were possibly not all devout sect members, we must conclude that the sects were by no means a marginal phenomenon.

c. Other Stems from the Same Root

We have said that the sects treated so far belonged to one family because they were all related in one way or another to Yin Ji'nan. They were branches which had grown out of the stem of Yin Ji'nan's tradition. This stem in turn had its roots in the sectarian tradition which traced its origins to Luo Qing.

Among the three sects which flourished in Taiwan and which were summarily called *Zhaijiao*, there was one that had grown out of the same root of Luo Qing's tradition, but not out of Yin Ji'nan's stem. This was the Jintong pai.⁶⁰ We have just a few rather isolated dates relating to the history of this sect, which, unfortunately, are sometimes contradictory.⁶¹ However, it is nevertheless possible to get some significant insights into the connections between different sects in late Ming.

i. *The Founder of the Jingtong Jiao: Wang Zuotang*

The founder of this sect was Wang Zuotang 王左塘, who was, according to the sources of the *Taiwan sheng tongzhi*, born in Zhili, Yongping fu 永平府, Dongshengjie 東勝街 in the year *jiajing* 43 (1564).⁶² Marui gives as a place of birth not

⁶⁰ According to the modern mandarin reading, the name should be read Jinchuang pai. However, the character 幢 can also be pronounced *tong* (cf. *Ciyuan* 辭源, Beijing 1980 edition). Among the three sects which de Groot detected in Fujian in the late 19th century, there was one Jintang pai 金堂派 (*Sectarianism*, p. 172), which probably is the same sect. In the Fujian dialect Jintong and Jintang are both pronounced *Kim-tong*. This pronunciation is confirmed by Masuda Fukutarô. *Taiwan no shûkyô*. (Tokyo 1939), p. 99. That the pronunciation in Fujian was *tong* is also confirmed by the fact in some documents that the character *tong* 童 was used (see below p. 16, note 92).

⁶¹ Sources directly referring to the history of the Jintong pai are very sparse. The *TWSTZZJP* uses two scriptures, the *Wuji shengzu shiji* 无极全祖事记 and a manuscript of Xiao Cifu 萧赐福 (p. 81a). I do not know of any other sources.

⁶² *TWSTZZJP*, p. 81a.

Dongshengjie but Shifokou 石佛口, which is not a contradiction, and says he was born in *jiajing* 17 (1738),⁶³ which from internal evidence seems more probable. Wang Zuotang is said to have died in *chongzhen* 2 (1629).⁶⁴

His religious names (*dao hao*) were Xiantian 先天 and Taixu 太虛, his monastic name Guangming 光明.⁶⁵ The sources state that his family was related to the wife of the Wanli emperor Shenzong, who in 1668 chose Wang Zuotang's niece, Qingluan 青鸞, as wife.⁶⁶ Zuotang was first a member of the Longhua jiao, the sect of Luo Zu's daughter, Foguang 佛光. Later, he himself wrote many religious scriptures and separated from the Longhua jiao to found his own sect.⁶⁷

Another account is more specific: it tells us that Wang Zuotang intended to marry Foguang but was refused. He later married a woman of a Zheng 郑 family.⁶⁸ This can hardly be true, because Luo Qing's daughter must have been about forty years older than Wang Zuotang, if not more than that.⁶⁹ Anyhow, the tradition continues that he left the Luo family to follow a teacher named Sun Zushi 孙祖师, who also belonged to the Longhua jiao. In the year *wanli* 10 (1582) Sun Zushi handed over the leadership to Wang Zutang. Because the community now grew very quickly, Zuotang separated from the

⁶³ Marui Keijiro. *Taiwan shûkyô chûsa hokukusho*. Taihoku (Taipei) 1919, reprinted Taipei 1974 (Asian Folklore and Social Life Monographs, vol. 56, 57), vol. 1, p. 80.

⁶⁴ *TWSTZZJP*, p. 81b. Unless otherwise stated, the following account of Wang Zuotang's life derives from *TWSTZZJP*, pp. 74a and 81a/b. For the year of Wang Zuotang's death compare below note 76.

⁶⁵ 普明 . According to Marui (*loc.cit.*) the religious names were Taixu and Puming

⁶⁶ According to the *Mingshi* (j. 114, p. 3536 *Zhonghua shuju* edition), the wife of Shenzong was a woman née Wang, whose family stemmed from Yuyao 余姚 (in Zhejiang), but who was born in Peking. This makes it not very probable that she was related to Wang Zuotang.

⁶⁷ *TWSTZZJP*, p. 74a.

⁶⁸ *TWSTZZJP*, p. 81a.

⁶⁹ Luo Qing lived from 1442 to 1527. Let's suppose he was sixty years old when his daughter was born, that would be 1502. It cannot have been much later, because his daughter became the leader of (a branch of) Luo Zu's sect after his death in 1527.

Longhua jiao and established the Jintong jiao.

In 1612, (*wanli* 40) Wang Zuotang went to the southern provinces of Zhejiang and Anhui to visit his sectarian communities. After that, he propagated his religion openly in the streets and attracted many new followers. This alarmed the authorities and he was arrested, but was pardoned in 1619 (*wanli* 47) because of his relation to the family of the empress. He died in 1629.

This is the traditional account of the Jintong jiao about its founder Wang Zuotang, an account that shows, as has been remarked, some inconsistencies. If Zuotang took the leadership from Sun Zushi in 1582, his date of birth can hardly be 1564. Thus, Marui's date 1538 is more probable. But even this date is too late to accept the tradition that Zuotang intended to marry Foguang, Luo Qing's daughter. However, the tradition does not seem to be completely wrong, as we shall see immediately.

ii. *Wang Zuotang and the Dacheng Jiao of Shifokou*

We have a report of the governor of Jiangsu, Zhang Bao, from the year 1768. His investigations found out that the Wuwei jiao 无为教 had been founded in the Ming dynasty by Luo Menghong 罗孟洪, who was also called Luo Zu. The text continues:

Luo Menghong's son, Foguang 佛广, and his son-in-law, Wang Shanren 王善人, separated [from the main sect] and founded their own tradition, which was called Dacheng jiao 大乘教.⁷⁰

Zhang Bao's account contains a mistake, as Foguang was not the son but the daughter of Luo Zu.⁷¹ Could it be that this Wang Shanren is the same as Wang Zuotang? That, in other words, he had a relation not with Luo Qing's daughter, but with his granddaughter? We have no proof of that. But what is clear from this passage is that one of the leaders of the Dacheng jiao, which was a branch of the sect founded by Luo Qing, was surnamed Wang. And we can even know, relying on a report of Nayancheng, that this was the Wang family of Shifokou in Yongping prefecture:

Luo Zu divided [his sect] into five branches, one branch is that of the Wang

⁷⁰ QL 33/10/1 Zhang Bao (published in *Shiliao xunkan*, 15).

⁷¹ That Foguang was Luo Qing's daughter is stated not only in the tradition of the Jintong jiao, but also independently in the tradition of the Wuweian cloister 无为庵 on mount Panshan 盘山 (Zhili, Shuntian fu). The sectarians living there regarded Foguang as their patriarch and said that she was the daughter of Luo Zu. Cf. Ma Xisha and Cheng Xiao. "Cong Luo jiao dao Qing bang," *Nankai shixue* (1984: 1), 1-28.

family in Shifokou.⁷²

Shifokou is Wang Zuotang's birthplace, but it is also the place where his contemporary, the famous Wang Sen 王森, had founded his Wenxiang jiao 闻香教, which is usually regarded as a branch of the Bailian jiao 白莲教.⁷³ We have no sources telling us anything about the relation between Wang Sen and Wang Zuotang, but it is more than probable that they belonged to the same family. Both are said to have had family relations with the empress.⁷⁴ Both were important sect leaders who in 1612 went proselytizing in the south.⁷⁵ Both were imprisoned after that, but while Wang Sen died in jail in 1619, Wang Zuotang is said to have been pardoned in that year and went out of sight. The similarities are astonishing indeed, one could even be inclined to assume that they were one and the same person.⁷⁶

Be that as it may, what is more important is the fact that we must conclude that the sect of the Wang clan in Shifokou was related to the Dacheng jiao, i.e. the branch of Luo Zu's sect which had been led by his daughter Foguang. That the Wenxiang jiao actually had some contacts with the Luo jiao even after Wang Sen, can be derived from the fact that two of his disciples went to Jimo county 即墨县 in Shandong, the native place of Luo Qing, to receive scriptures. Probably the scriptures in question were Luo Qing's *Wubu liuce*,

⁷² *Na Wenyi gong churen Zhili zongdu zouyi*, j. 40. p. 36a (p. 4347, Taipei 1968 edition).

⁷³ For the Wenxiang jiao and Wang Sen cf. Song Yuqing. "Qingchamen jiao kaoxi." *Ming Qing Bailianjiao yanjiu*, (Chengdu 1987), pp. 131-162. Asai Moto: *Min Shin jidai minkan no shûkyô kessha no kenkyû*, 187 ff.

⁷⁴ For Wang Sen see Asai Moto, *op cit.*, pp. 191 f.

⁷⁵ Cf. Ma Xisha. *Qingdai Baguajiao*. (Beijing 1989), p. 34 quoting Huang Zunsu: *Shuo lüe*.

⁷⁶ Asai Moto (*op.cit.*, p. 374) negates an identity. A strong argument for the identity of Wang Zuotang and Wang Sen is a remark in the biography of Cai Wenju 蔡文举, the third patriarch of the Jintong pai in Fujian: "Cai Wenju was converted to the Jintong jiao in the year *wanli* 47 (1619) at the age of 38. This was the year of the death of the founding patriarch Zuotang." (*TWSTZZJP*, 81b/82a). Actually, 1619 was the year of Wang Sen's death.

which at that time had already been printed.⁷⁷

Wang Zuotang's Jintong jiao can be regarded as a connecting link between the Luo tradition and the Wenxiang jiao of Wang Sen. That its origins point to the Luo jiao is clear not only from the fact that Wang Zuotang is said to have first belonged to the sect of Foguang. As has been said, he later joined another teacher, Sun Zushi, who ceded the leadership of his community to Wang Zuotang. This Sun Zushi is known from other sources as the fourth in the line of patriarchs who followed Luo Zu as sect leaders, but belonged to a branch other than the one founded by Foguang.⁷⁸ He is also the author of the *Yaoshi zhenkong saoxin baojuan* 钥匙真空扫心宝卷, where he is called Zhenkong Sun Zushi 真空孙祖师.⁷⁹ That means that both of Wang Zuotang's former teachers, Foguang and Sun Zushi, belonged to the Luo tradition. It cannot be doubted, therefore, that Wang Zuotang descended from this tradition.

On the other hand, the relation of his sect to the tradition of Shifokou is also very obvious. Not only did Wang Zuotang himself belong to the Wang clan, but the second patriarch of the Jintong jiao, Dong Yingliang 董应亮 (1582-1637) was also a native of Yongping fu. Dong Yingliang was sent by Wang Zuotang to the south to spread the sect there. In Wenzhou he converted Cai Wenju who became the ancestor of the Jintong pai in Taiwan. When he heard of Wang Zuotang's death in 1629, he rushed to Peking where he was told that he had been nominated by the late patriarch as his successor. Dong Yingliang was executed in 1637 (*chongzhen* 10) after a rebellion of the Bailian jiao two years before.⁸⁰

The last remark shows clearly that the sect of Wang Zuotang, although it had its roots in the tradition of Luo Zu, had finally gained the label of the White Lotus sect (Bailian jiao), probably because it was involved in a rather serious rebellion. The same had happened to another branch of the sect of Wang Sen, which in 1622 took part in the great uprising of Xu

⁷⁷ Ma Xisha. *Qing dai Bagua jiao*, p. 38, quoting Yue He-sheng. *Canwei zi ji*, j. 4.

⁷⁸ *Fo shuo anhuang chufen tiandi tanshi baojuan* 佛说三皇初分天地叹世宝卷, quoted in Sawada Mizuho. *Zôho hôkan no kenkyû*. (Tokyo 1975), pp. 330 f.

⁷⁹ Sawada Mizuho (ed.). *Kôchû haja shôben*. (Tokyo 1972), pp. 161 ff. Sun Zushi is also mentioned in the *Longhua baojing*, j. 4, p. 20a (Beijing 1929 edition) in a ritual text addressing the patriarchs of eighteen sects.

⁸⁰ *TWSTZZJP*, p. 81a.

Hongru 徐鴻儒⁸¹

Actually, the sect of Dong Yingliang seems to have been no other than the Dacheng jiao 大乘教 which was transmitted in Shifokou. In a document from the early 18th century we read that the head of the Dacheng jiao was a bannerman named Wang Wujū 王武舉 from Shifokou. The text then refers to the organization of this sect, naming some of the minor leaders, and continues:

The former leader of this sect, which is transmitted from master to disciple (yifa jiao 衣法教), was the bannerman Dong Yiliang 董一亮.⁸²

It is more than probable that Dong Yiliang and Dong Yingliang are the same person. That would imply that Dong Yingliang, whom the Jintong jiao regarded as their second patriarch, has been the head of the Dacheng jiao at Shifokou. The document further implies that the leadership of this sect had not continuously been in the hands of the Wang family, at least in the early phase of its history.

That the sect in Shifokou was called Dacheng jiao already in the early 17th century is confirmed by the *Longhua baojing*.⁸³ As we have noted above, Dacheng jiao was also the name of the sect which had been founded by Luo Qing's daughter Foguang and her son-in-law Wang Shanren.⁸⁴ Taking all the evidence together, it cannot be doubted that the so-called White Lotus sect of Shifokou had one of its roots in the tradition of Luo Qing.

iii. The Jintong Jiao in Fujian

The third patriarch of the Jintong jiao in Fujian is Cai Wenju 采文舉, who was born in Putian 莆田 (Fujian province) in 1584 (wanli 12). As a trader he lived in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, where he was introduced into a Longhua sect by a certain Chen Zhongsun 陳仲孫. Later he met Dong Liang (i.e. Dong Yingliang) in Jinhua

⁸¹ For the Xu Hongru rebellion cf. Richard Chu. *An Introductory Study of the White Lotus Sect in Chinese History with Special Reference to Peasant Movements*. (Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 109-123. Shek. *Religion and Society in Late Ming*, pp. 352-367.

⁸² *Yongzheng zhupi yuzhi*, YZ 10/2/29 Li Wei (quoted in Asai: *Min Shin jidai minkan no shūkyō kessha no kenkyū*, p. 374.

⁸³ *Longhua baojing*, j. 4, p. 21a states that the head of the Dacheng jiao 大乘教 was Shifo Zu 石佛祖, the "patriarch from Shifo[kou]." That *dacheng* is written here with another character is of no significance.

⁸⁴ See above p. 13.

fu 金华府 (Zhejiang province) and was converted to the Jintong jiao 金童教. "This was in the year 1619 (*wanli* 47) [. . .], the year when the founding patriarch Wang Zuotang died."⁸⁵ In 1622 Cai Wenju was ordered to return to his native place, Putian, in Fujian province, where he founded the Shudetang 树德堂. This was the beginning of the Jintong jiao in Fujian.⁸⁶

Between 1629 and 1644⁸⁷, Cai Wenju went to Peking every year to see the patriarch of the main line of the sect, on which occasion he presented rice and money as a tribute. After the execution of Dong Yingliang in 1637, the main line of the sect seems to have been led by Dong's wife, since it was she who invested Cai Wenju with the leadership of the sect in Fujian. Although he had also been arrested after the White Lotus rebellion in 1635, he had not been executed but died in 1654, a natural death.⁸⁸

From the fact that Cai Wenju after some time stopped sending rice and money to the sect centre in north China, we may conclude that he no longer felt subordinated under the main line of the sect. In Fujian, he was very successful in converting new members and establishing new *zhaitang*. From Fujian the sect later spread to Taiwan; thus the Taiwan Jintong pai regards Cai Wenju as its patriarch.

The leadership of the sect was transmitted among Cai Wenju's descendants, all surnamed Cai. The only exception was his immediate successor Chen Zhongsun, obviously the same person who had earlier introduced him into the Longhua sect. Some of Cai Wenju's disciples, however, separated from his line and founded their own sects, among them Xie Conglong 解从龙, whose sect spread across the border of Fujian province to Guangdong, Guangxi and other southern provinces.⁸⁹

During the middle of the 18th century, the Jintong jiao was still active in Fujian. From a report of the year 1748, we learn that the Jintong jiao⁹⁰ in Putian and in Xianyou

⁸⁵ As has been noted before (cf. above note 76), *wanli* 47 was the year of Wang Sen's death, while Wang Zuotang is said in other sources to have died in *chongzhen* 2 (1629).

⁸⁶ *TWSTZZJP*, pp. 81b/82a.

⁸⁷ The text is obviously corrupted here as to the date when the visits to Peking stopped. But it is explicitly stated that he went 18 times.

⁸⁸ *TWSTZZJP*, p. 82a.

⁸⁹ *TWSTZZJP*, p. 82a.

⁹⁰ *Jintong* is here written with a different character for *tong*. This confirms our reading of the sect's name.

county worshiped Guanyin Dashi.⁹¹ It is further said that in Ninghua county there were thirteen Guanyin *zhaitang*, which formerly had belonged to the Luo jiao. We may suppose that they also were communities of the Jintong jiao, and that this sect was probably identical with the Guanyin jiao, which had more *zhaitang* in other parts of the province.⁹²

iv. *Second Conclusions*

In our first conclusion we have stated that the Laoguan zhajiao did not represent the whole of the Luo tradition in Fujian. Instead, as has been shown, it belonged to a family of sects, all of which claimed descentance from Yin Ji'nan and which through the latter were related to the sect of Luo Qing. Now we have found that there was at least one other sectarian tradition active in Fujian, that of the Jintong jiao. This sect had its origin in Shifokou, in Zhili, and was part of the Wang family's sectarian tradition. However, the roots, or at least one of the roots, of this sect are also found in the tradition of Luo Qing. Insofar as the Jintong jiao and the Laoguan zhajiao in Fujian were each branches which had grown out of different stems, they had a common root in the Luo jiao.

It seems that the name, Jintong jiao, was in use only in Fujian and possibly in other southern provinces. In the north, the sect's name was Dacheng jiao. But the name, Dacheng jiao is also well known in the southern provinces of Zhejiang and Fujian. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure that this name always points to the same sect, unless we have further evidence.

However, even if we do not know in each case exactly to which tradition they belonged, we have an immense amount of material which proves that in the 18th century, vegetarian sects of different traditions were active in Fujian. Although they belonged to several different lines of succession, most of them seem to have been related in one way or another to the Luo jiao. It is, therefore, not fully justified to say that the Laoguan zhajiao represented *the* Luo jiao in Fujian. Instead, it was only one of many sects, which were rather similar in practice and belief, but which identified themselves with different leaders and organizations.

That the Laoguan zhajiao was only the tip of an iceberg can be seen from a remark by the Governor-General Ka'erjishan, who reported to the throne after the first incident in 1748. At first, the authorities proceeded to arrest all people "who were vegetarians," the usual formula to describe sect members. Not only the people in the neighboring villages became alarmed and fled as far as they could, but when the news spread to the towns and cities the people there were upset as well, which caused a security problem. The

⁹¹ It may well be that Guanyin was equated with Wusheng Laomu.

⁹² ZPZZ QL 13/6/26 Ka'erjishan, Pan Siju (published in *Shiliao xunkan*, 29).

indiscriminate search for sect members was therefore stopped.⁹³ Nothing could better illustrate how widespread vegetarian sects were in Fujian at that time.⁹⁴

3. Some Remarks about the Difference between White Lotus Sects and Luo Sects

This study has concentrated on the sectarian traditions in Fujian and southeast China. It is a preliminary to an attempt to get a more detailed picture of the role sects played at the grassroots level. What could not be done here is to analyze the beliefs and practices of the sectarians and to show how they were interrelated with the "normal" religious life of that region. I believe that the study of sectarian traditions since the Ming dynasty has now reached a point where we must stop regarding the sects as isolated events which had no social significance except in the case of rebellions. We have seen that the sects in Fujian were no marginal phenomenon but were ubiquitous. Usually they acted quite openly and their existence was known to the general populace. Some sect leaders in the late Ming were able to amass thousands of followers at public meetings, which must have been an impressive spectacle for their contemporaries.

Although this study is just a first step, it is possible to draw some conclusions which possibly are relevant not only for Fujian, but for the rest of the country as well. I shall focus my attention on the relation between different sects and on the problem of sect identity.

a. The Permeability of Sect Boundaries

Anyone studying Chinese sects will be perplexed by the number of different sect names on the one hand, and the identification of sects with different names on the other. So we can read in the *Ming shi* that Wang Sen promoted the Bailian jiao and called his sect Wenxiang jiao.⁹⁵ The reports from officials in Fujian equated the Laoguan zhajiao with the Luo jiao, and usually Wuwei jiao and Dacheng jiao were also regarded as other names for the Luo jiao.

What historical information can be derived from different sect names? What does it

⁹³ ZPZZ, QL 13/3/14 Ka'erjishan (published in *Shiliao xunkan*, 27).

⁹⁴ That the situation was the same in other parts of the province can be derived from an earlier report: In 1729 it was noticed that in the prefectures of Quanzhou and Zhangzhou (in the southeastern part of the province) the members of the Luo jiao are even more numerous (ZPZZ, YZ 7/10/21 Shi Yizhi, published in *Shiliao xunkan*, 2). These must have been sects other than the Laoguan zhajiao of the Yao family, because this sect was spread only in the western and northern part of the province.

⁹⁵ *Mingshi*, j. 257, p. 6623 (*Zhonghua shuju*-edition).

mean, for example, if we read that in Ninghua county in Fujian there had been thirteen *zhaitang* of the Luo jiao which later changed to the Guanyin jiao?⁹⁶ It certainly means that the sect communities changed their leadership. But I would doubt that we can draw any more conclusions, unless we have additional information. I do not think that the members of these thirteen communities changed their religious convictions and practices significantly when they--or rather their local leaders--decided to follow another leader. There might have been some details in ritual which were altered, but basically the religious life would have remained the same.

One of the results which our analysis has shown is the extreme permeability of sect boundaries. There was a strong competition between sect leaders, both within the same sect and between different sects. Internal competition was the main factor for the splitting of sects, usually after the death of a charismatic leader who had succeeded in uniting many followers. Examples are the splitting of Yin Ji'nan's sect after his death and that of Yao Wenyu's sect, but the phenomenon was extremely common.

For a number of reasons, the sect leaders usually tried to broaden their base by converting new members. However, the situation was not such that there was a large reservoir of possible sectarians who were just waiting to be converted. Since large and small sects of all kinds were ubiquitous, people who were disposed to join a sect usually had already found a teacher, however limited his following might have been. To convert new members meant, therefore, in many cases to draw people from another teacher into one's own sect. This explains why we so often read that a sect member first belonged to one sect or a certain teacher and later joined another, as was the case with Wang Zuotang and Cai Wenju.

The most effective way to enlarge the number of one's followers was certainly to induce other sect leaders to join one's own sect. That is probably what happened with the thirteen *zhaitang* of the Luo sect in Ninghua which were converted to the Guanyin jiao. Another example again is Yao Wenyu, who managed to unite many of the sectarian groups which had separated after Yin Ji'nan's death.

b. The Problem of Sect Identity

This structure of sectarian competition must have had considerable effects on the teachings and practices of the sects. It is a structure which some sociologists of religion have named a religious *market situation*.⁹⁷ To put it simply, there were many sect leaders offering their teachings and competing for a limited number of possible sect members. In

⁹⁶ ZPZZ QL 13/6/26 Ka'erjishan, Pan Siju (*Shiliao xunkan*, 29).

⁹⁷ Cf. Peter L. Berger. *The Social Reality of Religion*. (London 1967), pp. 135-153.

order to improve their numbers, they had to style their products according to the expectations of the customers. This naturally led to a certain assimilation of sectarian teachings, since the sects were competing for the same possible clientele. In fact, this assimilation of teachings happened with the majority of the larger sects during the Qing dynasty.

A market economy not only exerts pressure to assimilate the products, it also necessitates the development of a product identity. In the case of the Chinese sects, this could be reached by a variety of means. Because the teachings were so similar, they had to rely on outer symbols to differ from each other. First, of course, was the name. Unfortunately, there were no registered trademarks, and therefore the names of famous brands could easily be copied. This seems to have happened, for example, with the name Dacheng jiao.⁹⁸

Other symbols used to define a sect's identity were the scriptures which a sect proudly possessed. The content of the scriptures did not necessarily reflect the sect's teachings, but was above all a means to convey the image of participating in a long tradition. Otherwise, it would not have been possible for so many sects, which actually promoted the belief in Maitreya as a savior, to transmit the writings of Luo Qing, where this belief is sharply criticized.

From the fact that certain scriptures were transmitted in a sect we cannot, therefore, conclude without further consideration that it belonged to a particular tradition of teachings. It was a widespread practice among sect members to collect scriptures.⁹⁹ Scriptures like Luo Qing's *Wubu liuce* carried considerable prestige, so sectarians were eager to possess them, even if their own teaching was not fully in accord with Luo Qing's. The situation may be compared to the library of an ordinary Chinese intellectual: from the fact that it included the *Tao-de jing*, one cannot conclude that the owner was a Taoist.

As a rule, we may say that the more famous, and therefore widespread, a text was, the less it tells us about the actual beliefs of the owner and his sect, unless we have additional evidence. By the same token, we can conclude that scriptures which were not generally known, but transmitted only in a particular sect, give us a more reliable account

⁹⁸ Although we have made it probable that there is actually a connection between the Dacheng jiao of Luo Qing's daughter and of Shifokou, this does not probably apply to all sects which used this name. One example is the Dacheng jiao of Zhang Baotai in southwest China. Cf. *Yong Zheng Kang Shiqi cheng xiang renmin fankang douzheng ziliao, xia ce* (Beijing 1979), pp. 640 ff.

⁹⁹ Chen Wanshan is characterized as one "who asked for scriptures" (ZPZZ YZ 7/10/21 Shi Yizhi [*Shiliao xunkan*, 2]). Wang Sen seems to have been a great collector of *baojuan*, and his collection formed the base for the compilation of the *Longhua baojing*. Cf. Shek. *Religion and society in late Ming*, p. 356.

of what the teachings of that sect probably were. Thus, the *Sanshi yinyou*, which was the hagiography of the patriarchs of Yao Wenyu's sect, and seems not to have been used by other sects, will be nearer to the teachings of the Laoguan zhajiao than the *Wubu liuce*, although members of the sect also possessed the latter. As the *Sanshi yinyou* conveys the belief not only in Wusheng Laomu, but also in Maitreya, as well as the teachings of the three stages,¹⁰⁰ we may conclude that the Laoguan zhajiao did not have much to do with Luo Qing's original teaching. We should, therefore, be cautious when identifying sects like the Laoguan zhajiao with the Luo jiao, even if the Qing officials suggested this interpretation.

So far, I have left out one important means to define the identity of a sect, i.e. the patriarchs. Things are more complicated in this case than with the other symbols of sect identity. The difficulty derives from the fact that there are in many cases two kinds of patriarchs: the symbolic and the actual.

The point can easily be illustrated with the line of patriarchs of the Longhua jiao in Fujian. Beginning with the third patriarch, Yao Pushan (i.e. Yao Wenyu), there is a line of successors who obviously really depended on each other. These were the actual patriarchs who were crucial to the identity of the sect as a separate group. Succession lines like these can also be used for the historical analysis to detect diachronical connections between sects.¹⁰¹

More important for the identity of the sect as a *religious tradition* were the symbolic patriarchs. Actually, Yao Pushan had not been the disciple of Yin Ji'nan. He had first joined another sect and had never seen Ji'nan because the latter was long dead when Yao Wenyu started his sectarian career. Furthermore, Yin Ji'nan had never been a disciple of Luo Zu's, the so-called first patriarch. Certainly a sect which could claim the famous Luo Zu as its founder would greatly enhance its prestige among the competing sects. This does not mean that claims like that were always unfounded, but we should not simply take it at face value. Not all sects listing Luo Zu among its patriarchs necessarily belonged to an unbroken tradition leading back to Luo Qing.

c. Luo Sects and White Lotus Sects in the Qing Dynasty

The considerations about the identity of sects must lead sooner or later to the

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Sanshi yinyou, Jinyun zhou zhuan, pp. 29a-30b.

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In this way we can state that the Wuji zhengpai derived from Yin Ji'nan's sect, because we have a line of successors after Puji and know that he was Ji'nan's disciple. As members of the Wuji zhengpai were responsible for the republication of the *Kaixin fayao* (cf. Shek. *Religion and Society in late Ming*, pp. 241f), a commentary of Luo Qing's *Wubu liuce* by Jingyuan, we may conclude that Yin Ji'nan's sect really was connected with the Luo jiao.

question whether we are justified in using such expressions as the *Luo sects* or the *White Lotus sects* in the Qing time. I am not talking about the Bailian jiao in the Song, Yuan or even Ming dynasty, nor do I intend to deal with Luo Qing's "original" sect. The problem I have in mind is whether, after the 16th century, there have been sectarian traditions which were disparate enough to be classified either as White Lotus sects or as Luo sects. I do not doubt that there were considerable differences between various sects, but I doubt that these differences can be reduced to the dichotomy. I shall state my thesis rather cautiously, that the labelling of sects as belonging either to the White Lotus tradition or to the Luo tradition does not tell us much about the character of the sects in question.

The problem arises out of the above-mentioned two tendencies which affected all the larger sectarian organizations above all: 1. the pressure to assimilate their teachings; and 2. the use of similar or even identical prestigious symbols, like certain scriptures or references to certain patriarchs. These tendencies seem to have been strong enough to make classifications like "Luo sects" or "White Lotus sects" almost meaningless.

Let us consider two sects which in the historical literature are usually regarded as belonging to either of these two sectarian traditions: the Laoguan zhajiao, which is one of the few better known representatives of the Luo sects during the Qing dynasty, and the sect of the Wang family in Shifokou, which is usually said to belong to the White Lotus tradition.

Both sects were established at the same time, in the late 16th century, and both developed a vast organization covering several provinces.

Actually, the teaching of the Laoguan zhajiao contained all the elements which usually are associated with the White Lotus sect: belief in Wusheng Laomu, Maitreya, the three stages and the coming of a new era. It drew from the same stock of free floating popular beliefs that also shaped the teachings of the Wenxiang jiao and the so-called White Lotus sects.

What, then, is the difference between "Luo sects" and "White Lotus sects"? If we look for actual historical connections, we find no big difference either. Although Yao Wenyu claimed to be the successor of Luo Zu as patriarch of the sect, he objectively was not. While the Wang family's sect may not have claimed descent from Luo Zu,¹⁰² it actually had connections with teachers who belonged to his sect. To put it frankly, there is no historical evidence to suggest that the popular religious tradition, of which the Wenxiang jiao is a part, is any other than that from which the Laoguan zhajiao derived.

It could be argued that the Laoguan zhajiao was not a typical representative of the Luo sects. Certainly, there were also other Luo sects in the Qing dynasty, but we have no evidence that their beliefs adhered more closely to Luo Qing's original teachings. The

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In the *Longhua baojing*, which stands in the tradition of the sect in Shifokou, Luo Zu is repeatedly mentioned and also referred to as one of the venerable patriarchs, although the context is not a line of succession. The name *Longhua* was used by the Longhua jiao, which regarded itself as belonging to the Luo tradition.

problem is that we usually have just a few scattered remarks about a sect and its name. So it is impossible to say anything definite about its beliefs. It may well be that other Luo sects were not actually more true to the founder's teachings than the Laoguan zhajiao.¹⁰³

To sum up, it seems that both *Bailian jiao* and *Luo jiao* are labels which have been stuck to popular sects as soon as certain conditions were given. In the case of *Luo jiao*, the conditions were the possession of Luo Qing's scriptures or the veneration of Luo Zu as one of the patriarchs of the sect. In the case of the *Bailian jiao*, the label was preferably used for sects which were connected with politically ambitious rebellions. However, both labels inform us very little about the history and teachings of the sects in question.

d. Different Types of Sects

As the sheer number of sects which were active since the Ming dynasty and the diversity of their character are indeed bewildering, the need for some kind of classification is understandable. However, I would propose to look for more variables than the historical origins or the use of certain scriptures. It might be far more significant, for example, to examine to which social strata the members of a given group belonged than which patriarch they revered.

If there were really people who adhered to Luo Qing's original teachings--and we have no reason to doubt that such people existed, even if we could not prove it--then the religious beliefs of these people would have been more similar to that of the so-called orthodox Buddhist monks than to the followers of the Laoguan zhajiao, although the latter shared their reverence for Luo Qing and are thus regarded as being part of the same sectarian tradition. On the other hand, the teaching of the Laoguan zhajiao was nearer to that of Wang Sen's Dacheng jiao, although the latter was said to belong to the White Lotus tradition.

What we need is a typology of sects, which is not precluded by the way in which

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The sect in Shandong reported on in 1724, known under the names of Dacheng 大成, Wuwei, Luo zu and Kongzi 孔子 jiao, practised meditation on the formula *Wusheng fumu zhenkong jiaxiang* (Cheng Siguan YZ 2/9/12, *Yongzheng chao hanwen zouzhe huibian*, vol. 3, Jiangsu 1989, pp. 314 f). Richard Shek considers the group around Pushen 普伸, which was involved in the publication of the *Kaixin fayao* in 1652, to belong to the pole of the Luo sects, that "adhered rather strictly to Luo Qing's original teaching" (Shek. *Religion and Society in Late Ming*, p. 245). Actually, this group derived from Yin Ji'nan (cf. above note 52), whose teachings--according to the *Sanshi yinyou*--contained the three cosmic stages ruled by Dipankara (Randeng Fo 燃灯佛), Shakyamuni and Maitreya respectively, which was not an original Luo teaching. But this may well be a later interpolation.

Chinese officials classified religions. It would have to take into account that there was a wide spectrum of different sect types, ranging from rather intellectual forms, like Lin Zhao'en's Sanyi jiao or the "original" Luo teaching, to the little systematized teachings of a local charismatic, whose sect would hardly survive its founder. There were large-scale sects, hereditarily led by powerful families, which stood under the pressure of a religious market situation, and there were pietistic groups which did not differ much from Buddhist lay communities. It would become obvious that there was no clear-cut division between different sects or even between "heterodox" and "orthodox" forms of religion. These are categories which make sense only to Chinese officials, but not to historians of religion. To the Chinese officials, however, they are significant up to the present day.¹⁰⁴

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In August 1991 a Buddhist association called Sancheng jiao was detected in Xingning county, Guangdong province and suppressed by the local authorities because this group obviously belonged to the tradition of popular sects. *Nanfang ribao*, 21.1.1992, quoted in *China heute*, 11 (1992), Nr. 1, p. 3.