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POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHINESE SECRET SOCIETIES

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Description

*by Elliott A. Holt*

Analysis of the characteristics of Chinese secret societies, the uses to which they are put by the Kuomintang, the Communists, and the Japanese, as well as their potentialities in opposing the Japanese.

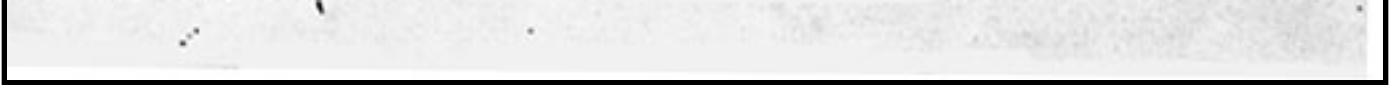
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Washington  
1 July 1945

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## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Chinese secret societies traditionally have their origin in movements which are forced underground, in conditions which nurture rebellion, or in the same human instincts which make "joiners" of Americans. The one element they have in common is secrecy. There is, however, great divergence in the degree and extent of secrecy. They are found everywhere that Chinese live and in all levels of Chinese society. They are formed for almost every conceivable purpose, but in general may be described as principally religious, political, self-protective, mutual benefit, or even racketeering in their aims.

Most, if not all, Chinese secret societies have a mystical character. Societies which resort to armed resistance frequently promise their members invulnerability to wounds if a specified formula is followed. There are usually elaborate rites,, especially for initiation of new members. Many societies have degrees of membership, each with its allure of new secrets to be learned. Secret signs of recognition, secret language, or even secret, writing may be used.

The organization of a Chinese secret society is often very loose. Branch societies may be largely autonomous, and it is a common device for them to bear names different from each other and from the parent organization. Coordination within a society or even among societies may be achieved by conferences of repre-

sentatives or through the formation of a coordinating society.

Offsetting this structural looseness is a tight relation between members. Applicants for membership must be sponsored by members, who take on not only the responsibility of steering them through initiation and inducting them into the secrets of the organization, but a continuing responsibility for their conduct. The relation between member and sponsor is akin to that between student and

teacher in China. Similarly, "blood brotherhood" constitutes a familial tie, with corresponding responsibilities. Joining a secret means subjecting oneself to rigid discipline and to unquestioning obedience to the leaders of the society. Usually only death can release one from membership or from the vows taken on entry

As the people's means of organizing against, or in defiance of, government, it is in the nature of Chinese secret societies to be opposed to established authority. As weapons of opposition they are very effective, but they rarely develop constructive plans; they are repositories of conservatism, resenting change, or calling for a return of the old. While they are often in opposition to a local official or landlord, their leadership frequently comes from the same class. Moreover, since all considerations of security tend to place autocratic control in the hands of the leaders, the leaders sometimes divert the resources of the society to their own ends.

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The Kuomintang, which was born as a secret society and rose to power with the aid of another, found it necessary to create yet other secret societies for the double purpose of opposing its enemies, both internal and external, and of bolstering its position under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership. Such a secret society within the Party has put the CC Clique in control of the Party machine. Another in the Army has tightened the bonds of loyalty between army officers and the Generalissimo. In both cases special service organizations have been developed which have many features in common with the traditional secret society.

Areas of China now controlled by the Chinese Communists are areas in which the peasants had organized in secret societies through the twenties for protection against the depredations of successive warlords. In those parts that had been under Japanese authority before coming under Communist control the same or similar societies had been used to resist the Japanese. Under Communist control, however, the Communist method of organizing the people seems to have now supplanted, or absorbed, the traditional secret society method.

In 1927 Kuomintang control of labor in the Yangtze Valley and coastal areas was largely delegated to a vast racketeering secret society with headquarters in the French Concession of Shanghai. This society shared Kuomintang fears of labor's growing self-consciousness under the stimulation of Chinese Communist organizers. Until Pearl Harbor

it was able, by

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organizing its own labor groups and by strong-arm methods, to keep labor from organizing. Since then its hold on labor in the Shanghai area has been loosened, both by the Japanese and by Communist organizers from nearby guerrilla areas.

In Chungking the Central Government has had to meet the opposition of a somewhat similar society which controls local Government in Szechwan, Sikang, and parts of the northwest. This opposition has on the whole been passive, but has flared up at times in local revolts.

The Japanese have long been aware of the potentialities of Chinese secret societies as a political tool. To what extent they were involved in the creation of secret societies in China prior to the war is not clear, but there is reason to believe that they are making use of societies which straddle free and occupied areas of China. Secret societies are known to have been created for the purpose of meeting on their own ground the societies which controlled the underworld in Shanghai and elsewhere.

In occupied areas secret society opposition to the Japanese remains a potential force and is likely to become active as the Japanese position weakens sufficiently to offer some hope of Chinese victory.

## POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHINESE SECRET SOCIETIES

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Scope of the Report

This report is designed to provide an understanding of the place of secret societies in the present-day political scene in China. It does not attempt to provide detailed information about particular societies. Such societies as are mentioned are chosen for their value in illustrating specific points. They comprise only a small percent of the societies reported to exist, and undoubtedly a much smaller fraction of those in existence. Nor is any attempt made to provide names and addresses of secret society members or leaders. Rather, it

is hoped that the report will be an aid to evaluating information about specific secret societies or an individual's connection with one.

## B. Sources of Information

The literature on Chinese secret societies is extensive but of varying quality, and often based upon inaccurate reports by persons unfamiliar with the Chinese language. Some Western scholars of China have made distinct contributions to the subject by studies based on Chinese sources. A few Westerners have reported on their experiences as members of a Chinese secret society or as officials who have had contacts with Chinese secret societies among overseas Chinese. Studies by missionaries usually concentrate on the religious aspects of these societies.

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The most assiduous students of Chinese secret societies in recent years seem to have been Japanese. The present study makes some use of sources in both Chinese and Japanese languages.

It is not surprising that most of what is known about specific secret societies is historical, or relates to societies which retain more of the secret society tradition than of secrecy. The more current the information sought, the less is to be found. Scraps of information drawn from here and there and an occasional report on the activities of some society furnish only scattered details. Nevertheless, when these are combined with material available on the past activities of Chinese secret societies, a picture of present-day societies emerges.

## C. Definition of a Chinese Secret Society

A. Chinese secret society is any association of Chinese in which secrecy is a bond of organization. It is not necessarily a subversive organization, or even political in its objectives. Secret societies are formed for a wide variety of purposes, and while most of them have both a religious and a political tinge, the only thing in common to all of them is some degree of secrecy.

The name of a secret society does not in itself reveal its secret character, and the term used to designate the type of organization varies as much as that indicated by the English words society, sect, lodge, fraternity, order, grange, association, and

the like. The overall term for secret society, pi mi hui, does not distinguish between fraternal or religious groups in which perhaps only the ritual is secret, and organizations which are secret because they oppose, or defy, existing government. The reason may lie in the fact that few Chinese secret societies have not at some time engaged in activities which put them at variance with government.

While Chinese secret societies characteristically arise in spontaneous response to some need of a group of people, societies may be deliberately created, as in the case of societies which have been planned, organized, and financed by the Kuomintang and by the Japanese in Occupied China.

#### D. Historical Background

Among the earliest known Chinese secret societies is the Red Eyebrows (Ch'ih Mei), a political society dating from early in the Christian era. Some resemblances between Chinese secret societies and those of primitive peoples in the Eastern Hemisphere suggest that the former may also have primitive origins. As each ruling dynasty waned and the restraints on exploitation of the people by local government weakened, secret societies sprang up or were revived. Some, whether admittedly political, religious, or social aimed at overthrowing the dynasty; others were content with ridding themselves of vicious local officials or getting relief from an intolerable economic situation. The last century saw two major

rebellions staged by secret societies --- the Taiping and Boxer rebellions --- and engendered so many societies in all parts of China that they became an important factor in the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty. Sun Yat-sen provided the leadership and the direction to opposition that had long been mounting. He was not only a member of at least one powerful society --the Elder Brothers Society (Ko Lao Hui)-- but he organized a number of secret societies in succession. The Kuomintang is a direct descendant from these societies.

Two powerful and ancient secret societies should be mentioned for their influence on the present: the White Lotus Society (Pai Lien Hui) and the Hung Society.

The White Lotus Society was a Buddhist society with anti-dynastic tendencies. First mention of it is found in the fifth century. Later it took a leading part in the overthrow of the Mongol Yuan dynasty. During the Ming dynasty, which followed, it lay dormant, but sprang into life again in the Manchu dynasty. Early in the nineteenth century it was proscribed, along with a number of societies suspected of opposing the government. Most writers agree that it has since lost its identity, but that a whole series of societies trace direct descent from it, and that other societies show marks of its influence. The Right Living Society (Tsai Li Chiao), in North China seems to be one of many descendants of the White Lotus Society, as were the Boxers.

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The Hung Society is one name given a loose group of societies whose base is in south China and which have a common ritual and history. English-language authors also speak of it as the Hung Men, Flood Gate, Red Gate, Hung League, and the Triad Society. The name Triad is variously explained as being derived from the names of societies within the general group: The San T'ien Hui, the San Ho Hui (san meaning three in each case), or the T'ien Ti Hui in which the trinity is of heaven, earth, and man. Branches of the Hung Society are found under various names wherever overseas Chinese have gone. That in the United States now calls itself the Hung Man Chee Kung Tong. Whether the Hung Pang (Red Circle or Red Gang) is an offshoot of the Hung Society or is another name for it is not clear. It may be part of the Hung Society which has converted its ancient Robin Hood tactics to modern racketeering. There is a further lack of clarity in the relations between the Hung Pang (Red Circle or Gang) and the Ch'ing Pang (Green Circle or Gang), which are sometimes spoken of as one organization, the Ch'ing-Hung Pang. While stories as to their origins vary, most such accounts give them separate origins.

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## II PURPOSES OF SECRET SOCIETIES

### A. Difficulty of Determination

Chinese secret societies have been formed for almost every conceivable purpose, and under all sorts of guises. In fact, it is not always possible to determine the original aims of a society. Some writers say that the White Lotus Society (Pai Lien Hui) was originally a variant sect of Buddhism which was pronounced heretical and driven underground, with the result that it became anti-dynastic. Others say that it was anti-dynastic society formed in the semblance of a Buddhist sect, and therefore suppressed.

The very fact that a secret society is secret makes determination of its purposes difficult, for the life of its members may depend on the concealment of its real objectives. In this type of organization it is possible, also, for the leaders to keep the rank and file of the members, as well as the world in general, confused as to its real purposes. Nor should it be assumed that a society can have only one aim. Some Chinese secret societies are comparable to American clubs which provide social events for their members, engage in welfare work in the community, extend the business opportunities of its members, and act as pressure groups on political issues.

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## B. Principal Aims

The Encyclopedia Sinica <sup>1</sup> differentiates secret societies on the basis of their being political, religious, a combination of the above, or "personal," as in the case of the Golden Orchid Society (Chin Lan Chiao) whose girl members are pledged not to marry. From what can be learned of present-day secret societies in China it seems more realistic to say that the aims of a society may be primarily religious, political, self-protective, mutual benefit (social), or any combination of those. Some have added racketeering.

1. Religious. The term "secret sect" is sometimes used to distinguish religious secret societies from other types. But, since the history of this type of secret society in China seems to show that it is practically impossible for it to avoid becoming involved in political matters at some time, the distinction is rather artificial. A secret sect may be started without regard for considerations of politics, but it easily becomes the tool of particular interests.

Many secret societies have stemmed directly from religious movements, either as sects of Buddhism, Taoism, or some other religion, or as new combinations of existing religions. Sometimes

Such societies seem to have been started with no ideas of secrecy, but have been driven underground by persecution as heretical sects. The Golden Elixir Society (Chin Tan Chiao) is one of the oldest of the religious sects still active as such, perhaps because it has been able to withstand infiltration of secular interests more successfully than most.

In the first ten years after the Revolution when toleration of both religion and of secret societies was at a high point in China, a number of new secret sects sprang up. Their distinguishing features were their attempt to fuse various religions and their emphasis on moral and ethical standards. Some of them prohibited smoking, drinking, and gambling. Their existences, membership, and general aims were all open, only an inner core of ritual and revelation, and perhaps purpose, being kept secret. Officials and well-to-do businessmen seem to have formed the leadership of these societies, whose members were drawn largely from the upper and middle classes.

These societies spread rapidly. Branches of one or more soon appeared throughout China, including Manchuria, and even in Japan and among overseas Chinese as far south as Singapore. Their efforts at a fusion of religions, which in several cases included Christianity, may be explained do the basis of the impact of the Western world upon China at the time. The element of secrecy is harder to explain. It could, of course, have provided a cloak for political preparedness at a time when rival groups were

constantly contending for power. At least one, the Fellowship of Goodness (T'ung Shan She) had many members of the pro-Japanese Anfu Clique among its leaders. The susceptibility of these societies to Japanese manipulation in Occupied China will be discussed below).<sup>1</sup>

2. Political. The classic example of the use of political secret societies in China in modern times is the over throw of the Manchu dynasty. The seeds of opposition to that dynasty had been kept alive throughout its two hundred and fifty years in various secret societies and had flourished under misgovernment in the nineteenth century. Sun Yat-sen capitalized on this opposition and on the loosely woven but widespread net of secret societies within China and

among overseas Chinese. While the societies from which he drew support were of all types, the societies which he formed to provide leadership for his movement were admittedly political. The present Kuomintang is an outgrowth of these societies formed by Sun Yat-sen, and retained the characteristics of a secret society until its reorganization under Soviet influence in 1924.<sup>2</sup>

It still makes use of the secret society type of organization.<sup>3</sup>

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When the Revolution in 1911 succeeded in overthrowing the Manchu dynasty, the objective for which most Chinese secret societies had worked and plotted since the middle of the seventeenth century were accomplished. Since then the political aims of the secret societies have taken a somewhat different bent. Some societies simply faded out. Others have become concerned with protecting their own vested interests. Meanwhile new political secret societies have been formed on a drastically new basis: to support the government, rather than to overthrow it.

A political secret society which had its birth and growth as an anti-Manchu organization, and which supported Sun Yat-sen in the Revolution, continues in western China as the power behind local government. This is the Elder Brothers Society, or Ko Lao Hui. It still exists in the central China provinces of Hunan and Hupeh where it became prominent in the last century, but its center of strength seems now to be in west and northwest China. It is active in Kansu, Shensi, and as far north as Inner Mongolia. In Szechwan and Sikang it dominates local and provincial government and seriously limits the control of the central government over local affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Some writers find a connection between the Ko Lao Hui and the Red and Green Gangs (Hung Pang, Ch'ing Pang), in the the lower Yangtze Valley and coastal regions. Some evidence

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points to three general, but not exactly delimited, spheres of influence: the Ko Lao Hui in the west and northwest; the Ch'ing Pang in the central and lower Yangtze Valley and along communication lines; and the Hung Pang in the north, south and overseas. In any case these societies seem to have much in common and to derive their

differences largely from the differences in their bases of power. The Ko Lao Hui stands on a program of resisting Central Government encroachments. The Ch'ing Pang, if not the Hung Pang, has at the same time supported the Central Government and succeeded in wringing concessions from it. The political aims of this type of society are no longer concerned with eliminating bad government, but with controlling government to protect the economic interests of the society.

An example of a modern political secret society is the Society for Purifying the Heart (Hsi Hsin She) formed by Yen Hsi-shan among the officials of Shansi after he became governor. This is probably the same society as the one recently reported to include some two-thirds of the civil and military personal in Yen Hsi-shan 's area. This organization undoubtedly has much in common with the Officers' Moral Endeavor Corps formed by Chiang Kai-shek a few years ago in an effort to improve the morale of the Chinese Army and to weld it to himself as the national leader. The Shansi Society has added advantages because its secret society organization. It is said for instance that the

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standard punishment for infractions of its rules against smoking, drinking, and gambling is suicide, a not uncommon penalty for breaking secret society rules.<sup>1</sup>

3. Self-protective. Closely related to the anti-dynastic type of secret political society is the peasant vigilante organization which is formed on secret society lines. It appears when organized government breaks down or when the depredations of local warlords, landlords, or tax collectors become unbearable. The members are usually ill armed and ill trained, but depend on mystical charms and incantations to protect themselves. Such societies as the Big Swords (Ta Tao Hui), the Little Swords (Hsiao Tao Hui), the Red Spears (Hung Ch'iang Hui), and the Red Lantern Society (Hu Teng Hui) are among those most frequently mentioned, but a great many societies of this sort are known. In the 1920's they sprang up all over North China and only subsided when the Kuomintang gained a measure of control over the warlords of that area. Sometimes they were hardly distinguishable from bandit gangs, as peasants who were separated from their land by war, famine, or excessive taxation banded together. In some cases they organized against a landlord or local official. In other cases they were organized under the leadership of

the landlords who trained and armed them, and who used them for their own ends. Frequently they had to bide their time until the warlord of the moment was showing signs of weakness when they would rise up and drive him from the area.

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After the Japanese invasion of Manchuria such societies formed pockets of local resistance until Japanese control became too strong. Again, in the present war they have led, and are leading local resistance and guerrilla movements against the Japanese in China proper.

Major Carlson describes this type of organization from his experience in North China in the first years of the Sino-Japanese war as follows:

"The local forces of the people are generally led by the middle peasants, but their ranks are filled by the poor. Their form of organization is rather backward and has many medieval traits. They have numerous names and each is independent of the other. Superstition is the bond that all use to bind their members together. The groups are divided according to the different god each worships and the different method each uses to train its members. The particular god each worships and the rituals it performs are as a rule kept secret. The eating of meat and garlic and sexual intercourse are forbidden by all the sects. Such are the peculiar traits of these semi-medieval peasant organizations." <sup>1</sup>

In the past the people's grievances against one segment of the ruling hierarchy have frequently been diverted by this segment against some other group. In the case of the Boxer Rebellion anti-dynastic feeling was turned against the foreigners on whom the government laid the blame for its inadequacies. In Szechwan at present local warlords with the backing of the Ko Lao Hui seem able to convince the people that their difficulties are due to Central Government inter-ference with the affairs of the province.<sup>2</sup>

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Mutual Benefit. A type of secret society which is especially prevalent among overseas Chinese has its beginnings at least as mutual benefit society. The Chinese, finding themselves in a strange land among strange customs and laws, and often discriminated against, formed "tongs." Membership in a tong may be base on common

geographical origin in China or on common membership in a clan. Other tongs derive from the anti-dynastic Hung League, or Triad Society, whose base is in South China, the home of almost all overseas Chinese.

The benefits derived from membership in such a society are not always mutual as between the rank and file of the members and the leaders of a society. The benefits which the average member derives are identification with a group, association with other members, the use of the lodge hall, arbitration of his difficulties with other members, and protection against non-members and outside authorities. In addition he may count on help if he becomes ill and on having his bones shipped home for burial in China if family finances are not adequate.

The leaders derive these same benefits, as well as substantial monetary and other benefits. They may not only reserve a percentage of dues for themselves, but collect a fee on most transactions in which the members are involved. The fact that such a society, while giving protection to its members, demands implicit obedience from them offers its leaders tempting possibilities. Under such circumstances the murder of a political or other rival is easily

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Racketeering. Racketeering is probably a by-product rather than original purpose of a secret society. But while the techniques are modern the secret society tradition is not without precedent for this type of activity. The so-called Robin Hood bands which are romantically described as robbing the rich to feed the poor were probably not always uninterested in the division of the spoils. Nor is the levying of protection money a modern invention. The opening of China to Westerners and modern big business and the granting of foreign concessions presented new opportunities. Best known in this connection are the various pang, a term which is usually translated as "gang." The most publicized are the already-mentioned Green and Red gangs, (Ch'ing Pang and Hung Pang), though pai(white) and hei (black)gangs are also spoken of. The Ch'ing Pang originated as a banding together of boatmen on the Grand Canal for self-protection, or, according to another version, for smuggling. It spread throughout the whole system of the Grand Canal and the Yantze Valley waterways and later along railway lines until it is said to have gained a stranglehold on communications over a wide area. Before Pearl Harbor it had its headquarters in the French Concession in Shanghai, from which point of vantage it not only controlled all

types of labor having to do with communications, but derived a profit from most transactions in the city --- gambling, opium, and prostitution being its special preserves. Its influence

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reached as far north as Manchuria. Not a little of its power and profit came from its monopoly of the business which it derived from its leaders' appointment as opium suppression chief.<sup>1</sup>

The leaders of the Ch'ing Pang were men of wealth and standing in the community, though the source of their wealth did not bear examination. As in other countries, the fact that they had become bankers and philanthropists gave them standing in the community. Its membership varied from those who found it necessary to join for "protection" to gangsters and the usual scum of an underworld. It is frequently stated, but not confirmed, that Chiang Kai-shek is a member of the Ch'ing Pang. Other men high in the present government are also named. Anyone rising to political power in China in the twenties and thirties would have been seriously hampered by opposition from the Ch'ing Pang. Whether or not Chiang and other government leaders are members, they have been able to turn the wealth and power of the society to the advantage of the Kuomintang on more than one occasion.

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### III. FACTORS PRODUCING SECRET SOCIETIES

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#### A. Oppressive Government

Secret societies have for many centuries been the Chinese people's answer to oppressive government. As one writer put it, "Having no ballots, the peasant used bullets—or sword, or scythes or pitchforks or boycotts or whatever other weapon might be handy."<sup>1</sup>

The Chinese peasant has not asked much of government, except that it should not prevent his earning a minimum living, for himself and his family. It is when taxes and levies and interest rates no longer leave him a subsistence-level living that he rebels. In traditional

Chinese political theorizing the people's right to rebel is stated as a basic tenet. Coupled with this tenet is that of the government's duty to protect the welfare of the people: When this duty is not met, the people have the "right to rebel." Naturally, however, whatever theory may be expounded, the government does not allow people to organize resistance openly. In practice the people's right to rebel has been used by an incoming dynasty to justify the overthrow of its predecessor. Therefore it has been necessary for the people to meet secretly or to give their meetings the appearance of legitimacy and innocence.

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Suppression of political or religious movements has as a rule resulted in their going underground, rather than in their extinction. The suppression of a secret society usually results in added secrecy, or in a change of name, slogan, or cover. Secret societies flourish when freedom of press, speech, or assembly is denied.

#### B. Unstable Government

— Lack of stable government provides another motivating force for the creation of secret societies. When the people find themselves overrun by bandits or at the mercy of successive warlords who raid their fields or larders they look to government for protection. But if government is unable or unwilling to help them, they must help themselves. Sometimes a leader comes forth from their own numbers; sometimes a landlord organizes the people secretly. In the latter case the landlord is apt to be more interested in his own protection than that of the peasants, and he may even dupe them as to the ultimate aims of the organization which is formed. Nevertheless, the result is a secret society.

Famine, flood, and other so-called natural disasters may also breed secret societies when government is unable to provide adequate relief measures. Roving bands of starving and dispossessed people will band together to protect themselves and to pool their resources; including their ability to steal enough to hold body and soul together. The words chiang hu (river-lake)

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seem to have been traditionally used in connection with this type of secret society. On writer calls the members "river and lake

professional travelers," and explains the term as follows:

"They are travelers, tramps and loafers, without names or family ties. They organize themselves into 'brotherhoods' for mutual protection, and know no law above that of their own. They claim to defend the common people and fight against corrupted officials. They are fortune-tellers, quack doctors, patent medicine sellers, wrestlers, robbers, etc. They are found at country fairs, religious festivals, market places, street corners, etc. They are the products of centuries of defective social organization and poverty." [1](#)

Robin Hood bands which rob the rich to feed the poor are also a tradition in China. This type of activity has been attributed to the Hung Society, among others, at various times and places.

### C. Social Factors.

— In addition to the causes of secret societies which derive from the individual's environment are those basic desires within him which make a secret society attractive. Secret societies are the clubs of rich and poor in China. They provide opportunities for social gatherings, for lodge halls, for elaborate dinners, and at the same time cater to people's love of the mysterious and the exclusive. The Chinese like Americans, are known as "joiners." Like many Americans, they delight in the opportunity to take part in elaborate rituals, to progress from the secrets of one degree to those of the next and to use secret signs and greetings.

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Movements such as Freemasonry, with which some Chinese secret societies have much in common, seem to have their roots very deep in human culture.

## IV. CHARACTERISTICS

### A. Secrecy

— As has been mentioned, the only characteristic common to all secret societies is the element of secrecy. There is, however, great variation as to what is secret. The very existence of a society may

be its most closely guarded secret, or it may exist quite openly. Its membership may not only be kept secret from outsiders, but only a small fragment of it may be known any one member. In any case its rites, especially those of initiation, are closely shrouded in secrecy.

Meetings are commonly held at the time of religious festivals in order that the gathering together of a number of people shall not be suspect. They are often hold in out-of-the-way places at night for the same reason. It is said of the Ko Lao Hui in Szechwan that meetings --- apparently for initiation --- are given the name of the mountain in which they can be referred to secretly. <sup>1</sup> A common device is for the branches of a society to be known by different names. Even the different branches of a society within the same city may go under different names, and when a name becomes dangerous to either

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the society as a whole, or to a branch, a new one is adopted.

Secret signs of recognition and secret language go with many of the societies. Leaving the top button of one's gown unfastened, touching the left shoulder, elbow, or wrist with the right hand, arranging tea cups in a pattern may all be signs to convey to the initiated that a fellow member has appeared on the scene. There are secret signs in handling chopsticks, eating, drinking wine, smoking tobacco or opium, and even chewing betel. An accompanying verse is often recited.<sup>1</sup> The secret languages are akin to thieves' cant, and are usually based on using one expression for another, as for instance:

Secret Language

Meaning

Lotus flower	Bowl
Green silk	Hair
Black dog	Cannon
Sand	Rice
To wash the face	To cut a head off
To dry	To sleep

One shot with 3 reports  
Horse

3-fold kowtow  
Man 2

Secret writing is devised by adding or dropping elements of characters, by subdividing a character into separate elements, or by the use of numbers or other devices. 3

Another device for disguising the nature of a society or its business is to substitute a word of the same sound but different meaning in its name or slogan. For instance, the

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word hung in the name of the Hung Society is properly the word meaning "vast" or "flood," but it is pronounced exactly the same as the word for "red," which is often substituted. While in speaking the difference is not evident, it shows up in writing.

This accounts for the fact that "Hung Men" as a name for this society is sometimes translated "Flood Gate" and sometimes as "Red Gate."

## B. Mysticism

Quite aside from those societies which are avowedly religious, most societies show a mystical influence. A few as the White Lotus Society and societies derived from it, trace their origins to Buddhism. More often, their roots seem to be in Taoism, which is the basic religious creed of the people throughout China and which contains much mysticism. The group of societies often spoken of as the Triad Society (Hung Men, San Ho Hui, San T'ien Hui, etc.) shows the influence of both Buddhism and Taoism in its ritual, probably because, while it started as a Taoist Society, it absorbed many members from the White Lotus Society when the latter was suppressed early in the last century.

One aspect of mysticism which is common to many secret societies, especially those of the Self-protective type such as the Big Sword Society (Ta Tao Hui), is known as "boxing." It is from this term that the Boxers (I Ho Ch'uan, Righteous Harmony Fists) receive their English name. Boxing in this sense means a series of exercises in the nature of shadow boxing, which, when accompanied by the proper incantations, is believed

to create immunity to sword or bullet wounds. Hypnotism and trances may be made to serve also. The convenience of these practices in persuading inadequately armed, or unarmed, peasants to oppose professional soldiers is readily seen.

While the relationship of these devices to Taoist practices is not hard to trace, there is probably also some residue of the ancient demon worship which has not been erased from the culture of the people in the remoter regions. In Szechwan, where the Elder Brothers Society (Ko Lao Hui) was grafted onto the indigenous Han Liu Society, whose beginnings apparently go back to pre-historic times, some branches retain traces of ancient demon worship, as well as accumulations of wizardry and sorcery.<sup>1</sup> The latter practices are presided over by lay Taoist priests.<sup>2</sup> The fact that priests -- sometimes renegade priests -- are found in secret societies, would account for the term "Priests' Army" used to designate those taking part in Big Sword Society (Ta Tao Hui) uprising in Fukien.<sup>3</sup>

### C. Composition of Membership.

Not only are there secret societies for every strata of Chinese society, but not infrequently membership in a society is open to those from all levels. This may be cited as an example of democracy, but is more likely to mean that one man's dollar is as good as another's, and the society has uses for all kinds of men.

While the very secrecy of Chinese secret societies often casts a sinister atmosphere around them, the fact that a man belongs to such a society is not necessarily evidence of subversive ideas or activities on his part. He may be motivated by the highest ethical standards in joining. Even in the case of a racketeering organization, the members are drawn not only from those who exact "protection" but from those who desire protection; it may be necessary to be on the inside to gain immunity.

Chinese secret societies are not exclusively men's organizations. The Golden Orchid Society (Chin Lan Chiao) is unusual, however, in being restricted to women, and even more unusual in that its members are pledged not to marry. <sup>1</sup>

A few societies have women's branches, notably the Ethical Society (Tao Yuan), Awaken Goodness Society (Wu Shan She), and Moral Instruction Society (Tao Teh Esueh She) -- all religious societies formed since the Revolution. The Ko Lao Hui in Szechwan is reported to have many women members, who are said to be useful in some extra-legal activities because of their relative immunity to arrest.<sup>2</sup> One colorful example of a society with mixed membership is the Touch Society (Mo Mo Chiao) whose members of both sexes are said to sit together naked in the dark for the purpose of invoking mystic manifestations.<sup>3</sup>

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On the whole, however, secret societies have been men's organizations, as is natural in a society in which women's place has been distinctly in the home.

#### D. Relations among Members

1. Blood Brotherhood. As a part of the ritual of initiation of many secret societies the new member signs his name in blood; the ceremony is considered nonetheless binding if the blood used is that of a chicken.<sup>1</sup> A variant is the passing of lip to lip of a cup of wine into which each person present has placed a drop of blood from pricked finger. This practice not only gives rise to the term "blood brothers" but is supposed to weld the members into one family.

Membership in a Chinese secret society gives one not only the privileges, but also the responsibilities of belonging to the same family. The Chinese take their family responsibilities, even the most remote relationships, very seriously. Traditionally as long as a Chinese has the means of supporting an additional person he is not expected to turn away anyone who can lay claim to membership in the same family. Likewise, if he has jobs to dispense he is expected to add members of his own family on the payroll first.

It is not considered a sign of weakness, favoritism, or bad administration, therefore, when a "blood brother" is given a public office for which he is manifestly unfitted, or when

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his widow and children are supported from public funds. These merely

show extensions of family virtues. The old saw that "blood is thicker than water" carries into political relationships, and it is axiomatic that one can never "let a brother down."

2. The Teacher-Student Relationship. Almost as important as familial relationship in traditional Chinese life is the relation of student to teacher. The teacher is an object of veneration. No matter how great a man has become, any former teacher, however humble and inadequate, is still greeted with the utmost respect. The teacher, on his part, acquires glory in proportion to the success of his student. The relation between an entrant and his sponsor, or "teacher" is similar. The "teacher" not only acts as guarantor, but often takes on actual teaching duties in preparing the new member for the initiation ceremonies and instructing him in the secrets of the society. In return the "student" would find it difficult forever after to deny a request from his "teacher."

3. Implicit Obedience. As in a Chinese family, implicit obedience of the elders is the rule in secret societies. In the initiation rites the new member takes a vow to obey the rules of the organization or pay the penalties imposed for infraction. For serious offenses, such as disclosing the secrets of the society the penalty may be death. The same penalty may be imposed for transgressing on the familial relationship, as in committing adultery with a member-brother's wife.

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#### E. Rites

Secret society initiation ceremonies are apt to be long and elaborate. It seems not uncommon for them to start at nightfall and continue until dawn, especially with the feast which is an integral part of all initiation.

The initiation ceremonies of the Hung Society have been described by a number of writers.<sup>1</sup> It includes a long recital of the traditional history of the society, the presentation of the candidates, a symbolic journey, a catechism in which the candidate is represented by his sponsor, the reading of the rules of the society, and the taking of vows. Much of the ceremony is in verse. Since the ceremony is ordinarily transmitted by word of mouth, vagaries of memory and individual taste appear.

The accumulation of tradition in the initiation ritual is illustrated by the fact that a symbolic cutting of the queue, which used to represent defiance to the Manchu, was found twenty years after the Revolution in the rites of a secret society by a Westerner who as admitted. [2](#)

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The similarities between the Hung Society symbolism and that of freemasonry have been pointed out by a number of writers. J.S. M. Ward devotes much of three-volume work on the society to this subject. [1](#) The society itself is not unaware of this similarity, and the branch in the United States which is often known as the Chinese Freemasons is said to have received a charter from the Masons in California recognizing them as such. [2](#)

#### F. Degrees.

It seems to be a common practice in Chinese secret societies to have a series of degrees through which members may progress. Each degree has its own secrets and prestige value. The sponsor or sponsors of a new member will then ordinarily be of a higher degree than the entrant. Progress from one degree to the next theoretically comes as a reward for meritorious service in the society, but seems also to involve the payment of money, and it is possible, though not usual, to attain a high grade for a sufficient monetary consideration. The chief values of the system of degrees, however, seem to lie in (1) keeping members interested; (2) providing a source of income to the society; (3) testing new members; and (4) keeping the top secrets of the society in the hands of a select few. In the Fellowship of Goodness (T'ung Shan She) this element of selectivity was heightened by the fact that the candidates for the higher degree had to draw lots, which seems to have been so handled as to eliminate those considered undesirable from entering into the higher brackets. [3](#)

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#### G. Organization

Chinese secret societies are guarded not only by secrecy. The looseness of their organization is in itself a protection to individual branches or members. The extreme of decentralization is found in those groups which are formed under the name of a well-known

society to meet a local need and disbanded when the need has passed.

It is true that some societies have an elaborate scheme of organization with a central headquarters in which there are departments for administration, finance, education, etc. In such cases the structure has many similarities to that of a government over a corresponding number of people. In some cases the central direction of a society is in the hands of a super secret society, such as the Unification Society of the Fellowship of Goodness (T'ung Shan She)<sup>1</sup> or the Red Star Mutual Association (Hung Hsing Hsieh Hui) to which a Hung Society conference in 1935 is said to have entrusted the affairs of the coordinated body.<sup>2</sup> The traditional description of the division of the Hung Society into lodges on a territorial basis probably represents an attempt to rationalize a high state of decentralization rather than lines of authority from a central body.

It is probably largely through the holding of conferences, as well as through overlapping membership, that connections between societies are maintained. How general the practice of

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holding conferences is can only be guessed, but it appears that a national crisis may be the occasion . It is well known that Sun Yat-sen brought together representatives of a number of societies to enlist their help in staging the revolution. Mention has been made of a conference of the Hung Society which took place in Shanghai in the summer 1935 at a time when the country was seething with anti-Japanese feeling. Again in 1940, after the Government had moved to Chungking, a large secret society conference was held there for the purpose of forming a "united front."<sup>1</sup>

#### H. Inherent Attitude of Opposition

Chinese secret societies are characteristically opposition groups. It is their nature to be "anti" something. Until 1911 they were most often anti-dynastic, although localized groups of low economic level were apt to oppose, not the dynasty which failed to provide them with secure and equitable government, but the landlord or local official whose oppressions they felt directly. In the nineteenth century, secret societies were responsible for local uprisings throughout the country, as well as the Taiping and Boxer rebellions.

Until the Revolution Sun Yat-sen drew the support of the secret societies as being himself against the government, and therefore on their side. In fact, until the Kuomintang came into power in the middle twenties, it was looked on with sympathy

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by the secret societies as a party which was at odds with the official government in Peking. The support which the Kuomintang thereafter derived from the Ch'ing Pang <sup>1</sup> was not so much on the basis of the latter's pro-government attitude, as its opposition to communism and foreign imperialism. The Ko Lao Hui, which was instrumental in the Revolution, has resisted expansion of Central Government powers at its expense.<sup>2</sup>

In the years after the Revolution when religious liberty was allowed, and there was no longer a foreign dynasty to oppose, a number of religious societies arose which directed their crusading against gambling, drinking, opium-smoking, and other vices of man rather than of government.

The strength of secret societies lies in their ability to oppose. Their weakness has been in their inability to plan and act constructively as well as destructively.

### I. Autocratic Role of Leaders

While Chinese secret societies have traditionally been the means by which the people have organized to protect their own interests, it is quite possible for a society to become the tool of its leaders. One reason for this is that there has been little opportunity for the people to develop leadership of their own. Frequently their leaders have come from the landed gentry whose interests lie in the preservation of the status quo. A Soviet writer, who may be expected to emphasize differences in class interests, reports that when there were widespread

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uprisings of the people against warlordism in 1929, their reactionary leaders were responsible for the raising of such demands as: Down with the Kuomintang. Hail to the Japanese who are saving China. Restore Confucian Education. Women must not unbind their feet or cut

their hair <sup>1</sup>. Even if some of these objectives were actually desired by the people, they were not the causes of the revolt.

It is natural that the control of a secret society should be in the hands of a small group of leaders. Even when the true purposes are known to all members of the society, and this is not always the case, the fewer the people who know the details of plans for achieving them, the better the chances of success. The secrecy feature makes it possible for the "cover" of an organization to be so complete that even the average member does not know its true purposes. It also means that the purposes of a society can be changed by the decision of only the few top leaders. When members are pledged to unquestioning obedience, when they do not always know who their leaders are, when they may not even voluntarily withdraw, they are easily brought into line, or kept in line. The alternative may be death.

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## V. THE USES OF SECRET SOCIETIES

### A. The Kuomintang and Secret Societies

1. General. As has been pointed out, the present Kuomintang is based on a series of secret societies which were organized by Dr. Sun Yat-sen for the purpose of overthrowing the Manchu government of China and setting up a republic. After the successful conclusion of the revolution the party was organized openly under its present name. Later reorganizations have taken it further from the secret society pattern.

Nevertheless, the leaders of the Kuomintang, who cut their political eyeteeth in the secret society tradition have not forgotten the advantages of implicit obedience and unwavering loyalty which a secret society demands. Nor have they forgotten the power which such societies as the Ch'ing Pang, the Hung Pang, and the Ko Lao Hui wield.

2. The Ch'ing Pang as a Supporter of the Kuomintang. The most powerful organization in the Yangtze Valley when Chiang Kai-shek moved into it on his Northern Expedition in the fall of 1926 was the

Ch'ing Pang. The leaders of the Ch'ing Pang had recently developed two fears: One was of "foreign imperialism" which to them meant any encroachment of foreign business on their preserves; the other was of Communism, not only as a threat to capitalism, but also as the only effective organizers of labor in China. Any threat to big business was a threat to the Ch'ing Pang.

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Communist members had been admitted into the Kuomintang when it was reorganized by Sun Yat-sen under Soviet guidance in 1924 . Peasants' and workers' unions organized in advance of Chiang's march to Hankow had greatly facilitated his progress. The people had made an immediate response to promises of a better deal. Meanwhile, the large industrial centers, including Shanghai, has been experiencing strikes staged by the workers who had learned from Communist organizers how to protect effectively against the feudal conditions under which they were worked.

Under the circumstances the Ch'ing Pang was in no mood to welcome the Kuomintang, or at least not that part of it which was ready to continue cooperating with the Chinese Communists and the Soviet advisers. Chiang Kai-shek, whose meteoric rise in the year following Sun Yat-sen's death had attracted widespread attention, was known to be restive under the direction the Kuomintang Party was taking. It was natural therefore that an alliance should be arranged between him and the Ch'ing Pang which would permit him to stage a Party housecleaning and set up a government more to his liking, than the one in Hankow. He had the best-trained army in China. He needed money. The Ch'ing Pang provided the money on the agreement that he would rid China of foreign imperialism and Communism. Meanwhile, it joined hands with Communist cells to wrest the city of Shanghai from the warlord who had been in control. When Chiang Kai-shek arrived with a few thousand troops they were ready to hand over the city to him. Elsewhere in the Yangtze region the Ch'ing Pang also aided Chiang's

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troops, and its leaders are said to have been instrumental in bringing even Manchuria into the Kuomintang fold.

Help in ousting the former warlords was accepted from Communist cells and the labor unions, not only in Shanghai but also throughout the

lower Yangtze Valley. It was no part of Chiang's plan, however, to leave labor armed and organized under its own leaders. Therefore, as soon as Chiang had gained control of the Yangtze Valley, a Communist purge took place. Again the Ch'ing Pang rendered invaluable assistance. Ch'ing Pang followers struck first at union headquarters, which they took over, and a new union, supplied with Ch'ing Pang members was created. From then on Ch'ing Pang control of labor was established. What happened is briefly described as follows:

"... 'Reorganization' and 'unification' committees for labor unions appeared, operated by the pangs (Ch'ing and Hung Pang) chiefly with cooperation from the Kuomintang. During the following years the gangs were the chief anti labor instrument in Shanghai. They sent armed gangsters to break strikes and subsidized individuals to control or destroy unions or organizations that might arise among workers. They controlled the 'labor racket' in Shanghai, as well as prostitution, kidnapping, child slavery, and other unsavory business."<sup>1</sup>

When the Shanghai Incident took place in 1932, after anti-Japanese feelings had reached the boiling point because of Japanese seizure of Manchuria, the Ch'ing Pang again lent its aid. Armed members, or persons armed and paid by the Ch'ing Pang, fought behind the Japanese lines.<sup>2</sup> In this their motives were not exclusively

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patriotic, since an attack on Shanghai threatened to topple their empire. Nevertheless they showed a decided preference for Kuomintang over Japanese rule.

Again in 1937 the Ch'ing Pang pitted its weight against the Japanese invasion of Shanghai. As an organization, it has withstood both Japanese and puppet control. Its leader went to Hongkong, in order to maintain freedom of action, and later escaped to Chungking, again casting his lot with the Kuomintang. Some of its members have openly cooperated with the Japanese, it is true. Others are said to have found a profitable business in smuggling between occupied and free areas, with information sold to either side. Nevertheless, the Ch'ing Pang on the whole still support the Kuomintang.

Only Japanese occupation has weakened the hold of the Ch'ing Pang on

labor in the Shanghai area. Not only has there been a sharp curtailment of industry with large numbers of workers moving inland. But the Ch'ing Pang organization has suffered. The part that the Japanese have played in undermining Ch'ing Pang power will be discussed below.<sup>1</sup> One result is that, Tu Yueh-shen, the remaining top-ranking Ch'ing Pang leader of pre-war days who is still active, is in Free China. While he has lieutenants in Shanghai and an organization for penetrating to that area, he is at a great disadvantage. There are indications that he is having difficulty

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In supporting his Shanghai organization and in holding its loyalty. Meanwhile, labor organizations seem to have supplanted the Ch'ing Pang in its control of labor, and there seems reason to believe that the Chinese Communists, who have furnished labor its only effective leadership in the past, have had a part in the organization of the labor unions. Still, despite Japanese and labor encroachments, the Ch'ing Pang is still important.

3 Opium "Control". One of the problems facing China which Chiang Kai-shek early tried to solve was that of the widespread sale, and use of opium which had been given impetus by the opening of China to the West. This he attempted to do by means of an opium monopoly which he put under the direction of T. V. Soong. Soon, however, the program met with difficulties, and, according to Miss Sues,<sup>1</sup> Soong found himself the object of an attempted assassination. In any case Chiang found it expedient to appoint as opium suppression commissioner the Chief of the Shanghai Ch'ing Pang. Thereafter the latter controlled legally the opium monopoly and was responsible for the enforcement of opium suppression. The opium business continued to flourish.

4. The Ko Lao Hui. When the Central Government moved to Chungking, it moved out of the sphere of the Ch'ing Pang and into the most sacred preserve of the Ko Lao Hui. Szechwan and Sikang had never been more than nominally under the control of the Central Government. Actually they were, and are, controlled by a warlord group

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Which derives its power from the Ko Lao Hui. Many of the top leaders are Ko Lao Hui members. While Chiang Kai-shek was able to install in Szechwan a civil governor who is one of his class and loyal friends and has a high reputation as an administrator, the governor has very

little control outside of the capital city of Chengtu. Even within the city it has been estimated that half the population has Ko Lao Hui connections.<sup>1</sup> Ko Lao Hui control in Szechwan reaches down to the lowest levels of government and local affairs. It is said, for instance, that when it was desired to move a school which was backed by one of the highest men in the central government to a location near Chengtu it was necessary first to secure the cooperation of the local Ko Lao Hui leaders and thereafter to invite them to the school twice a year for a feast.<sup>2</sup>

The Ko Lao Hui, like the Ch'ing Pang, derives revenue from opium. The hinterland of Sikang grows considerable opium which is transported into Szechwan for sale along a highway controlled by the Sikang governor.

One advantage that the Ko Lao Hui has for the Government is its strong stand against Communism. The Ko Lao Hui was instrumental in holding the Chinese Communists at bay when the latter made their "long march" and before they finally succeeded.

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in breaking through into Shensi. Their stand has been consistently anti-communist as is not surprisingly in an organization which faces the past, resists change of all sorts, and will break no rival.

Whether it is only wishful thinking, or whether the facts bear out the statement is not known, but it is said that while the government does not try to control the Ko Lao Hui, it does try to use it and has had considerable success.<sup>1</sup> How little control the Government has over the Ko Lao Hui even in Szechwan is indicated by its repeated participation in armed revolts.<sup>2</sup>

5. The Secret Societies in the "Limited Front". It is not surprising that under the circumstances that in the spring of 1940 the Government staged a meeting of a thousand secret society representatives in Chungking to enlist their cooperation. It is reported that the Government's primary concern in calling the meeting was for the formation of a "united front" in Szechwan, but that it also hoped to extend the cooperation of the secret societies until it had their active support not only in Free China, but in Occupied China as well. As evidence that the meeting had Government sanction, the fact was cited that a Government official was present to

administer the oath of office to the officers of the coordinating organization which was formed.<sup>3</sup>

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In occupied areas, also, the Government has made efforts to enlist the aid of the secret societies. One of the propaganda pamphlets put out by the Political Bureau of the Military Affairs Commission is on the Big Sword Society, (Ta Tao Hui). In glowing terms it describes how the people of an area in Kiangsu Province refused to follow a Big Sword leader who was collaborating with the Japanese, but fell in with a plan which resulted in the extermination of a whole Japanese battalion.<sup>1</sup>

6. Kuomintang-created Secret Societies. By 1932 Japanese encroachments on China, plus the unsolved Chinese Communist problem, had convinced Chinese leaders that drastic measures were required to bolster the Government and secure support for Chiang Kai-shek as the national leader. The technique which was adopted was to tighten the bonds between the Generalissimo and his followers by the formation of secret societies. At least two such organizations were created, one in the Party and one in the Army. While English-language writers have furnished some information about these societies, the most detailed information, as well as the sharpest criticism, comes from Japanese sources.<sup>2</sup>

The Blueshirts (Lan I She) is the name by which the Army society is usually mentioned. It is also referred to as the Regenerationists (Fu Hsing She)<sup>3</sup> and the Society for Apply Strength (Li Hsing She).<sup>4</sup> Whether these are other names for the same society or are names given to branches or related groups is not known. A Society to Encourage Ambition (Li Chih She).

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May also be another name for the Blueshirts, but is given in one source as the name of a directing society for the Blueshirts and the CC Group which is discussed below.<sup>1</sup>

Confusion regarding this society in the statements published about it extends to its relation to other groups. It is sometimes mentioned as the same as the Ch'ing Pang, and sometimes as another name for Tai Li's secret police. The confusion with the Ch'ing Pang probably

arises from the fact that Ch'ing Pang members belong also to the Blueshirts or have been used by the Blueshirts in the society's terroristic activities. According to an anonymous Japanese author<sup>2</sup> Tai Li is an arm of the Blueshirts. The author admits, however, that there are times when the society forms only a shell around Tai Li's special service organization.

Young officer graduates from the Whampoa Military Academy who were indignant over the impotence of the Kuomintang to prevent Japanese encroachments formed the backbone of the society. Its chief aims seem to have been to prepare to meet Japanese aggression and to root out all anti-Chiang Kai-shek forces within the country, and especially within the Party. All other political parties were considered enemies of the Kuomintang. Three fundamental principles were agreed on: (1) recognition of Chiang Kai-shek as the supreme leader; (2) recognition and expansion of the Whampoa group as the central organ; and (3) respect for Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Three Peoples' Principles with

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the addition of the organizing skill of the Communists and the fervent nationalistic spirit of the Fascists.<sup>1</sup>

As one instrument for carrying out these policies a Bureau of Investigation and Statistics was set up under the Military Affairs Council with Tai Li as vice-chairman. At the same time, efforts were made to reform and strengthen the Army, especially through political training. Apparently, also, the Blueshirt organization sponsored smaller patriotic secret societies for specific purposes, and, as one means of getting support for itself and for Chiang Kai-shek, attempted to control newspapers and university faculties.

In the middle thirties the Blueshirts were credited with a number of anti-Japanese terroristic acts, including assassination of Japanese and of pro-Japanese editors of Chinese papers. The Japanese complained of such activities not only in Shanghai,<sup>2</sup> but in North China,<sup>3</sup> and even in Manchuria.<sup>4</sup>

The society in the Kuomintang corresponding to the Blueshirts in the Army is not distinguished from the Blueshirts by some writers, but is called by Japanese writers the CC T'uan, or CC Group, from the names of the two Ch'en brothers, Ch'en Kuo-fu and Chen Li-fu, who are its

leaders. The anonymous Japanese author mentioned above<sup>5</sup> goes a step further and says that the CC Group

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set up a secret organization known as the Managerial Association (Kan she) for the purposes of "carrying out cultural operations in opposition to the Communist Party" and of meeting Blueshirt competition for Chiang's confidence and for control of the Party. He says, however, that even as early as the split between the left and right wings of the party in 1927, Chiang had had the Ch'en brothers organize a secret political society, the Chekiang Revolutionary League (Che-chiang Ke-ming T'ung Chih Hui) from among old party members of Chiang's home province of Chekiang.

Like the Blueshirts, the CC Group also directs a special service organization. This "Bureau of Investigation and Statistics", whose chairman is Chu Chia-hua, is set up in the Party.

Whether or not one can distinguish the Blueshirts and the CC Group from their respective special service organizations, it is possible to draw a number of parallels between membership in the latter and in traditional secret societies. Absolute secrecy and obedience are required. Members are not permitted to change their allegiance or withdraw at will; death is the penalty for attempting to withdraw. New members must be guaranteed by fellow members who are thereafter responsible for their conduct. There are prohibitions against personal indulgences. There are even degrees of membership; membership in the Blueshirts is divided into three grades, with five classes in each grade.<sup>1</sup>

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## B. The Chinese Communists and Secret Societies.

Since the Chinese Communists settled in North China, the type of secret society with which they have had the most contact is not doubt the self-protective peasant organization. As has been pointed out, this type of secret society was prevalent in rural North China where the government was unable for many years to prevent warlordism, banditry, flood, famine, and misgovernment from decimating the people. In these same areas the Japanese have been unable to establish continuous controls over the people, who have in increasing numbers accepted Communist leadership in their resistance to the

Japanese.

On the "long march" in 1934-35 the Communists had felt the power of the Ko Lao Hui and had made unsuccessful efforts to gain its aid and cooperation. Edgar Snow says that when the Chinese Communists were setting up their regime in Shensi even the Ko Lao Hui was brought into Soviet life and given open and legal work to do.<sup>1</sup> It is said that Ho Lung, a Communist army commander and a Ko Lao Hui member of the highest degree, was able to enlist whole Ko Lao Hui branches in the Communist cause.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless a fundamental gap remains between the two organizations.

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According to Soviet writers, <sup>1</sup> anti-Japanese resistance by the people in Manchuria and North China, which was at first organized locally by the various secret societies, soon developed a tendency to unite and to cooperate with Chinese and Korean Communists. As early as May 1933 a Chinese correspondent writing to the Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury stated that some three thousand members of several secret societies on the Shansi-Honan-Hopei border were "rampant" under the direction of a famous Communist who styled himself commandant of the Third Division of the Anti-Japanese and National Salvation Army.<sup>2</sup>

Various North China warlords had tried in the twenties to augment their forces from the peasant organizations, but only Feng Yu-hsiang succeeded. His first step seems to have been to send officers to the societies to help them train their members. Later he was able to form his National People's Army (Kuominchun) from the secret societies. It is probably pertinent in this connection that he had been in the USSR and learned much of Soviet methods of organizing the people.

From accounts of foreign observers who have been in the Chinese Communist area it seems clear that the Communists have

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Succeeded in organizing widespread resistance to the Japanese. They seem to have been able to provide the people with trained leadership, a coordinated but elastic plan of resistance, and an economic program which meets at least the people's minimum needs. Since the greatest weaknesses of the self-protective secret societies lie in their

segmentation and in their lack of trained leadership, other than that provided for their own ends by the landlords, it would not be surprising if Communist leadership had supplanted the older form of organization. That may explain an apparent change in the Chinese Communist attitude toward secret societies. In 1936 P'eng The-huai stressed the necessity for gaining the active participation of the secret societies in the anti-Japanese front.<sup>1</sup> More recently Chinese Communist leaders have expressed a lack of interest in the usefulness of secret societies.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the Yen-an radio continues to broadcast news of secret society resistance as it occurs in Japanese-controlled areas.

### C. The Japanese and Secret Societies

1. Developing Interest. "The real war in China," wrote a New York World-Telegram correspondent in 1943,<sup>3</sup> "began not on 6 July 1937, but back in 1912 ... it was then that the Japs began to send over swarms of Black Dragon members ... to keep China in

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turmoil, prevent unity, delay modernization, divide and rule." The whole story of the Japanese use of secret societies in China may never be told. At present much that is surmised cannot be proved, but enough is known to leave no doubt that the Japanese have not overlooked the importance of secret societies in Chinese life.

It is known that since the Japanese have occupied areas of China they have organized secret societies in competition with the Hung Pang and Ch'ing Pang. An unsigned article on the Black Dragon society in the China Weekly Review<sup>1</sup> tells of the revival after the Manchurian Incident of a secret society which the Japanese had organized in Shantung in 1922 from among bribed Chinese compradors, secret society outlaws, and some permanent Japanese residents. That they may have had a hand in the creation of other secret societies will be shown in the next section.

One evidence of Japanese interest in Chinese secret societies is the number of articles which have appeared in Japanese publications in recent years. This interest was, of course, stimulated by anti-Japanese activities on the part of Chinese secret societies.

2. Secret Religious Societies. The World Red Swastika Society (Shih-

chieh Hung Wang-tze Hui) has been alleged to have

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Japanese connections. This society is an offshoot of a group of secret sects which were formed in North China in the first ten years after the Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Two of them were founded in Tsinan in Shantung during the period of Japanese control there. Headquarters of the others were in Peking at a time when Japanese advisers and Japanese money could be had for the asking there. One of them, the Fellowship of Goodness (T'ung Shan She), was backed by leaders of the pro-Japanese Anfu Clique, and it is probably no coincidence that this society disappeared as the Kuomintang secured control of North China.<sup>2</sup> Among the societies which were known to have been operating as private social welfare agencies in Manchuria in 1940 was the Universal Ethical Society (Wan-kuo Tao-the Hui).<sup>3</sup> In 1928 its founder was reported to be living in Dairen, since "persecution" made it impossible for him to live in China.<sup>4</sup> Another of this group of societies, the Tao-the Hui, is mentioned in a recent report as Japanese-controlled and as related to a society in Free China which is suspected of conducting espionage and smuggling for the Japanese.<sup>5</sup> An older religious secret society which is mentioned in the same connection is also mentioned as the parent organization of a social welfare group operating in Manchuria.<sup>6</sup>

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Further evidence of Japanese interest, if not complicity, in the Red Swastika Society is found in the fact that the Tokyo Asahi <sup>1</sup> welcomed the head of the Shanghai section on his arrival in Japan in October 1937 as the first important Chinese to come to Japan from Shanghai since the start of hostilities. The Asahi did not fail to point out that he was a graduate of the Army school in the same class as General Doihara, that "arch priest of expansionists who had spent many years and millions of yen loosening the ground for conquest in North China ..." <sup>2</sup>

The following year the Shanghai press stated "Abandoning its passive, neutral stand as a philanthropic organization, the Chinkiang branch of the Red Swastika Society ... has announced its intention of working against the regime of Gen. Chiang Kai-shek ..." <sup>3</sup> In 1940 the Red

Swastika Society was registered as a social welfare agency in Manchuria. But with the present paucity of information it is not possible to say whether the Society is actively cooperating with the Japanese or impartially taking care of wounded and needy of whatever race or political persuasion.

It is well known that a part of the Japanese technique for gaining control of the people of an area is to gain control of

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their religious organizations. In North China the Japanese lost no time in setting up organizations to control Protestant, Mohammedan, and other groups. There is no reason to think they would overlook as fruitful a field for their endeavors as the secret religious societies whose existence was no secret. Since the membership of these societies was principally from the more conservative of the middle and upper classes, it must be well represented among the Chinese puppets. While it would certainly not be safe to argue that all members of the societies in question are collaborators, the possibility of Japanese coercion should not be overlooked.

3. The Ch'ing Pang and Hung Pang. Even before their invasion of Shanghai in August 1937, the Japanese began to work through the underworld of the city for the purpose of eliminating Communist and Central Government elements within the area. After the invasion they lost no time in trying to extend their control through the underworld, which meant through the Ch'ing Pang and Hung Pang. Their first efforts were directed toward getting cooperation and the information which would make it possible for them to act later. They cooperated in the setting up of gambling houses and opium dens and gained the confidence of gangsters. They kept detailed records as they learned the secrets of the business and who was involved. <sup>1</sup>

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As part of their plan to strengthen their hold in Shanghai and elsewhere in occupied China the Japanese also created and financed secret societies in competition with the Ch'ing Pang and Hung Pang, from which they were not getting the cooperation they desired. The top leader of the Shanghai Ch'ing Pang had betaken himself to Hong Kong where he refused overtures from the Japanese; another high-ranking member who remained in Shanghai was slow to share the profits of the drug business with the enemy.

Three Japanese-sponsored "Chinese" secret societies have been reported; the Chinese Imperial Way Society or Yellow Way Society (Chung-hua Huang Tao Hui); the An Ch'ing Hui; and the Chinese Great Way Society (Chung-hua Hung Tao).

The Chung-hua Huang Tao Hui<sup>1</sup> was formed in January 1938. Its membership consisted mainly of hired terrorists. It was located on the same floor of the New Asia Hotel as the headquarters of the Asia Rehabilitation Society, with which it undoubtedly had close relations. Its slogan was "Asia for the Asiatics," but among the victims of its program of terrorism and assassination were a number of prominent Chinese who were outspokenly anti-Japanese.

By 1940 the reputation of the Huang Tao Hui had become so unsavory that it was reorganized as the An Ch'ing Hui.<sup>2</sup>

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The League was invested with the garb of public respectability through a formal inauguration in Nanking. One of the principal purposes of the new organization seems to have been to draw political power and support from the Ch'ing Pang for the newly-organized Nanking Government.

The Chinese Great Way Society (Chung-hua Hung Tao)<sup>1</sup> was designed to draw members from the Hung Pang into the Japanese camp. Although its ostensible objectives were peace and morality, it, too, seemed to draw its members from the underworld and to be involved in terrorist activities.

These Japanese-inspired societies were undoubtedly closely related to Japanese interests in the development of the drug business in China. As long as the Ch'ing and Hung Pang could maintain headquarters in the French Concession of Shanghai the Japanese could not openly attack them. They therefore attempted to meet fire with fire by setting up their own gangs for drug-peddling and the elimination of anyone who stood in their way. After Pearl Harbor they were able to take direct action. From then on it was a case of cooperating or going out of business. It is perhaps a measure of the lack of cooperation which the Japanese got in the coastal areas that they were quick to boast that they were indebted to Ch'ing and Hung Pang leaders in Hankow for assistance in transportation of supplies to the

Hunan front in 1944.<sup>2</sup>

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#### D. Secret Societies as Organizations of Local Resistance

The Ko Lao Hui, while accepting the Central Government in some respects, has opposed sharply the Central Government encroachments at times. In the Kansu rebellion around Minhsien in 1943, according to a Japanese source, the Ko Lao Hui provided leadership for the peasantry whom the burdens of war, taxation, and conscription had aroused.<sup>1</sup> An element of the Ko Lao Hui in Szechwan, probably a particularly unruly one which derives from a very old mystical cult, is credited with leading a revolt in Penghsien in August 1943. It rallied the peasantry behind cries of bad conscription practices, burdensome taxes, and so forth, but its real aim seems to have been to rid itself of the "down-river" magistrate and his attempts to create a model hsien. Such attempts would naturally run counter to local vested interests. The affair was settled through negotiations with the Ko Lao Hui.<sup>2</sup>

The so-called "pumpkin war" around Suifu (I-p'in) in southwest Szechwan earlier that same summer probably had more complicated secret society connections. The area is one in which Liu Wen-hui, governor of Sikiang Province since he was dislodged from Szechwan in the mid-thirties by the Central Government, has a considerable interest --- and control --- through

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property he owns there and through his recent success in placing his men in official positions. He is a Ko lao Hui member. When the Central Government began moving its troops into the Suifu area, they displaced provincial troops controlled by Liu Wenhui. The local populace who had put up with depredations by Liu's troops were quickly organized under the Ta Tao Hui to resist a like treatment from Central Government troops. There is a suggestion that the provincial troops (Ko Lao Hui controlled) may have aided the Ta Tao Hui uprising.<sup>1</sup> This uprising ended in defeat, but has broken out again from time to time.

Because little is known of the role of secret societies in Occupied China in staging opposition, it should not be assumed that the secret

societies there have no interest in resisting the Japanese. It is reported that in areas temporarily under Japanese domination the people form Red Spear (Hung Ch'iang) societies which are ready to strike at any time.<sup>2</sup> Some estimate of the potentialities may be had from the fact that in the early days of the war there were said to be a million and a half Red Spears in Honan alone.<sup>3</sup>

That active secret society resistance is already occurring in Occupied China is borne out by recent

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accounts such as the one of an uprising organized under the T'ien Hsien Hui not far from Nanking. The Yen-an radio reported that peasants, youths, women, and intelligentsia, who at an early date numbered thirty thousand, were resisting the payment of taxes and not only refusing to join the puppet army but fighting against it.<sup>1</sup> Such an uprising probably indicates a weakening of Japanese control in the area and presages other such uprisings as Japanese control grows weaker or the Japanese army show signs of withdrawing from an area. This would follow the pattern of the same type of society in regard to warlords. When the warlords were too strong to resist, the people submitted, but whenever there was some slight hope of success a secret society arose to oppose them.

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- 1 See for instance, Carl Glick, Double Ten, p. 54.
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