NOTES AND QUERIES

NOTES ON SOME VEGETARIAN HALLS IN HONG KONG BELONGING TO THE SECT OF HSIEH-T'IEH TAO: (THE WAY OF FORMER HEAVEN)*

On Saturday, March 16, 1968, members of the Society visited four vegetarian halls at Ngau Chi Wan, Kowloon, belonging to a religious sect called Hsien-t'ien Tao. These notes are based on materials provided for the visit, which we have rearranged and expanded slightly, and they include also a brief account of the visit itself.

We chose vegetarian halls for our visit because they are, to many members of the public in Hong Kong, less known places of worship than the more popular temples, and the monasteries and nunneries of Buddhism. When we first came across these particular halls in Kowloon and discovered they were of the Hsien-t'ien Tao sect they seemed to us to be an obvious choice for another reason: they follow an ideology standing outside Buddhist and Taoist religion and again far less known to most people in Hong Kong than these faiths.

A field study will have to be made before a full account can be written up of either vegetarian halls or of the Hsien-t'ien Tao and its operation in Hong Kong today. These notes are intended to provide the reader with some general outline information and are based on information already obtained by Marjorie Topley here, and in research elsewhere, and by James Hayes in interview with members of these Kowloon halls prior to the visit. The short bibliography of works which we have appended provide more detailed material on the background of this and similar religious groups, and their vegetarian halls in China in traditional times. We refer the reader also to an article by Marjorie Topley elsewhere in this volume on matters of religion in the nineteenth century.†

I. THE VEGETARIAN HALL AND ITS PURPOSE

Vegetarian halls (chai-t'ang) form part of the organization of more than one Chinese religion. They are found, for example, in

* The illustrations to these notes are at Plates 14 to 19.
† See pp. 9-43 above.
Buddhism, and are perhaps better known to the general reader in this context; and they are found in connexion with a number of esoteric sects with mixed beliefs of which Hsien-t'ien Tao is one of the most popular in the region of Hong Kong. Their main purpose is to provide members of the connected faith with a place where they can meet and engage in common worship and also practise certain individual religious tasks, especially in the sect. They are usually residential today.

The diet provided in such halls, is, as one would expect from their name, entirely vegetarian. Many halls today welcome members of the public who wish either to worship one of their deities, some of which are generally popular with the Chinese, or to take vegetarian food. Vegetarian meals are often provided, for example on such popular festivals as those of Kuan-yin: “Goddess of Mercy”.

The halls of all faiths are particularly popular in Hong Kong with unattached women especially working and retired domestic servants (amahs). They provide a home in old age and a pied-a-terre for the working woman. Many of the residents of the halls visited were retired amahs and several of their occasional inmates were said to be working amahs and factory girls. Halls also provide funeral benefits and house the soul-tablets of deceased members. It is usual for women to make regular payments during their working life for permanent residence and funeral arrangements later on.

Another attraction of the halls, both Buddhist and sectarian, is that they recruit members through what one might term a pseudo-kinship system. One joins through a master who is regarded as something like a father; the fellow disciples of this man are termed (paternal) “uncles” and one’s own fellow disciples “brothers”. Halls normally house “family” households, and one hall may be connected with others through extended “family” relationships, and, in the case of the Buddhist halls, with monasteries and nunneries occupied by monk and nun “brothers” in the “family”. Genealogies may be constructed and kept.

Such “families” practise “ancestor” worship (unmarried persons may receive such ritual attentions and have tablets placed for them in the hall: not customary in the traditional Chinese actual kinship system). They also engage in many social activities
of the kind in which members of the actual family participate: members attend each other's birthdays, anniversaries of death, and so on, and visit back and forth among the various vegetarian halls in the "family" group on such occasions. Membership, then, provides real social satisfactions as well as security.

But a further attraction of vegetarian halls, which is offered by the sect only, is rank. The inmates of halls of Hsien-t'ien Tao differ in one important sense from those of the Buddhist faith. Buddhist halls are a fairly late development in the religion and were built to house lay-members of the faith: individuals not wishing to take the full vows of the clergy but wishing to live a life of abstinence. Halls of Hsien-t'ien Tao, however, exist not only for lay-members, although many of the inmates hold no office or rank in the religion; they exist also, and more importantly, for those who have taken religious degrees and hold rank. It is for such rank that special religious tasks are necessary and they include Ch'\text{\textquoteright}an Buddhist type meditationary activities and Taoist exercises for breath circulation and control. It is reckoned that such persons need special living facilities for their purpose and the majority of the sect's rank-holders live in vegetarian halls at least on an occasional basis: men as well as women.

Rank in the sect is undoubtedly an attraction to many of the unattached women residents of the halls of Hsien-t'ien Tao. Rank-holders do not shave their heads as do the Buddhist clergy, or wear special robes, except for certain ceremonials, and like the lower members of the sect they refer to themselves as "laymen". They do, however, distinguish non-rank-holders, using the term hu-tao: "helpers of the way (sect)." for them. Rank-holders may have a good deal of responsibility for teaching and spreading the religion. You may be surprised to know that there are amahs, occupying a humble position in secular society, who are, in their religious life, rank-holders enjoying not only the respect, but also the obedience of many other women, to whom they might be religious "masters". This brings us to the question of the religious beliefs of Hsien-t'ien Tao and what, more precisely, it is a sect of.

II. AFFILIATIONS AND BELIEFS OF Hsien-T'ien Tao

Hsien-t'ien Tao is one of a large group of sects tracing themselves either to a common pair of founders, a monk and layman
said to have been of the Buddhist faith and to have lived in China in the early part of the eighth century; or to one of their patriarch-successors. These sects share a common ideology, have the same goals, and some have a similar system of rank and appointments, even possessing the same rank-names and terms of address. Some of these sects are, like Hsien-t'ien Tao, vegetarian, that is to say they demand a permanent vegetarian diet (and also sexual abstinence) from their rank-holders; and some, generally speaking the more recent off-shoots, are non-vegetarian. It is only the vegetarian sects which are organized through vegetarian halls.

Some of the other sects operating in Hong Kong today and recognised by Hsien-t'ien Tao to be related to it are P'u-tu Men: "The Salvation Sect" and Kwei-ken Men: "The Sect of Reverting to the Root [of Things]," which are both vegetarian; and T'ung-shan She: "The Fellowship of Goodness", which is non-vegetarian and was particularly active in the period leading up to the founding of the Chinese Republic and immediately afterwards.

The ideology of these sects is known by Hsien-t'ien Tao rather confusingly as Hsien-t'ien Ta-tao: "The Great Way of Former Heaven". It is syncretic, incorporating elements from a number of sources but most importantly from Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism, and from Taoism, and the Yin-Yang cosmology which received general acceptance by the Chinese in traditional times. In combining all these elements however Great Way ideology, as we will refer to it here, produces an original synthesis: a system of ideas distinct from any other. The religion divides time into three major epochs, or cyclical periods, during each of which it is supposed that Absolute Truth comes into the world, is taught by a major Buddha and other distinguished sages, and then, unless men have made efforts to prevent it, becomes distorted and finally disappears. The disappearance of Truth from the world is followed by a major catastrophe (there might also be minor, localised disasters during each period due to minor Truth distortions). All sects in the group believe we have already passed through the first of these periods which was followed by a great flood; some believe we are in the second period now (dominated by Sakyamuni Buddha) which will be followed by a great fire unless we act to prevent it; and a few believe we are actually in the third period which will be followed by a wind catastrophe (interpreted by the sect Kuei-ken Men as an atomic war). It is in this final period that the
Buddha Maitreya: "The Buddha to Come", will appear, and the catastrophe can be avoided if men help him to set the world to rights.

III. The Chinese Government and the Sects

Esoteric sects were regarded with the greatest suspicion in traditional times. They clothed much of their religious activity in secrecy; men and women met together for worship in their halls, even sometimes residing in the same premises (although in separate apartments); leaders did not wear clerical dress, they sometimes lived in their own homes and were not easily recognised as sectarians, and therefore could not be controlled like Buddhist monks; and such men wrote their own sutras. All these things were considered highly unorthodox.

But worse still, organizations of the group to which the Hsientien sect belongs believed strongly in a millenium. When Maitreya appears, it was believed, he will attempt to set things right by organizing (with man’s help) an ideal form of government and preventing the spread of distorted doctrines and the catastrophes they lead to. During the last century the sects were under the control of patriarchs and it was commonly believed by members that Maitreya, when he appeared, would be incarnate in the body of one of these leaders (such men engaged in special religious practices similar to those of tantric Buddhism, to “absorb” Buddhas of their choice and take on their powers). When undertaking work for the millenium the sects took special secret names, one being, significantly, the White Lotus (from the symbol associated with Maitreya Buddha).

When the State, in the nineteenth century, heightened its campaigns to stamp out sects, it was particularly those of the Hsientien group which took its attention. Marjorie Topley has been able to examine the patriarchal records of several of these sects for the period, and they tell a violent tale: many of their top leaders were, at this time, banished, imprisoned or executed, often after torture. The campaign against the sects has continued into this century and in the 1950’s mainland newspapers carried news of further punishment for sectarians for their interpretation of local floods and other natural disasters as signs of the distortion of Truth and bad leadership of the country.
IV. EFFECTS OF SUPPRESSION ON SECT ORGANIZATION

One effect of campaigns against the Hsien-t’ien sects was to create leadership problems. Patriarchs were sometimes put to death before any successor could be appointed, sometimes several of those likely to succeed to office were put to death simultaneously too, and there was no precedent for electing a leader from among the remaining rank-holders. This led to further splintering into sub-sects: new offshoots appeared headed by various of the remaining men of top rank.

An effect of all this on the sect which concerns us here was to cause it to abandon the patriarchate entirely and also do away with the next highest places which were occupied by five men known as the “Five Elements”. Leadership was handed over to men of the rank immediately below these five who became known as “family heads” (chia-chang), and were placed in charge of groups of vegetarian halls occupied by his “kinsmen”.

Another effect was on the establishment of vegetarian halls themselves. In some cases members met in their own homes when campaigns against the sects were at their highest, or non-residential halls were established in the towns where they could pass as shop-houses. Sometimes only the “family head” and other top rank-holders lived in residential halls and these were built in lonely places difficult of access.

But the banishment of leaders also brought the sects down to the south of China: to places where they were exiled. Previously their strongholds appear to have been Szechuan and Anwhei provinces. They were strong also in the Hanyang region. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they began to spread into Hong Kong and to other places overseas: Singapore and Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia, and Borneo. For instance, during our visit we were told that there are currently 100 halls of the Hsien-T’ien Tao sect in Thailand and on the walls of several of the halls visited we were shown photographs said to be those of halls there and in Singapore.

V. VEGETARIAN HALLS AND THE Hsien-T’ien Sect in Hong Kong

At the present time we have only fragmentary information on the Hsien-t’ien sect in Hong Kong. The sect appears to have reached here, however, sometime in the late nineteenth century: it will
be noted below that one of the halls visited was established in the period 1912-13 (No. 3) and another about 1910 (see under No. 2).

The expansion of vegetarian halls in the second decade of this century is referred to, though with specific reference to the New Territories, in the Administrative Report for 1920 of the District Officer, North. He wrote:

One of the most remarkable features of the year has been the rapid growth of "chai t'ong"* or "vegetarian halls". Five years ago these religious or quasi-religious establishments had practically no foothold in this district: now they are everywhere in parts within reasonable reach of the railway and main roads, Sha Tin, Tai Po, Fan Ling and Pat Heung, each have several and are asking for more. Their promoters or managers are extremely secretive as to the objects of these enterprises, but it is sufficiently clear that they are designed chiefly to attract the well-to-do of Hongkong, particularly the womenfolk and that the believer is not expected to come empty-handed. Pending a straightforward explanation of the sudden "boom" in these "halls" permission is being refused for all new establishments as well as for extensions to existing ones.

There is another entry in his 1921 Report:

The embargo on "chai t'ong" continues in force. The revelations in a "fung shui" case....... coupled with certain vague statements from the "T'ongs" regarded funerals of members seem to indicate that one of the objects of these institutions is to find good "fung shui's" for their supporters.

The same District Officer commented to his superiors:

Nominally they are places of retreat where the earnest-minded withdrawn from their fellowmen and living on the simplest of food can meditate upon 'the most Excellent "Way".' But in practice they come nearer to a Thames-side hotel.

An unfavourable opinion was also expressed by the District Watch Committee, a statutory body of leading Chinese citizens in Hong Kong to whom the matter was referred for advice. It was also asserted that the then Government of Kwangtung had an equally unfavourable opinion and had in fact expelled them from its territory "which, if true, would at once account for their phenomenal growth in ours" he wrote.

* Cantonese romanisation.
It is clear from these comments that the Government of Hong Kong at that time was uncertain of the religious affiliations of these halls and it is not possible therefore to say with certainty whether or not they were all sectarian or how many were of the Hsien-t'ien sect. Nevertheless from the remarks made about the secretiveness of the promoters and managers as to their objects, one must assume that some at least belonged to the sects. It is particularly interesting to note the reference to the opinion of the Government of Kwangtung and one may wonder how far traditional Chinese ideas of unorthodoxy influenced the ideas not only of the Chinese citizens commenting and who may have known more of their true nature, but also, more subtly, those of the British officer in charge of the District in which the vegetarian hall boom was being experienced. One can of course appreciate Kwangtung's feelings about this boom. Expulsion of sects from its territory would be of little avail if they were planning to set up establishments not far away and from where they hoped to conduct work for the millenium!

It is interesting, perhaps, to compare the situation here with that in Singapore about the same time, where it is clear from evidence collected by Marjorie Topley there was a similar boom in development. The Singapore Government was clearly unaware of the sectarian connexions of halls built at that time, and indeed is still unaware, as far as she knows, of such connexions with halls built also in the 'thirties when there was another boom associated with the influx of unattached working women from Kwangtung at that time. Presumably these developments were too far away to concern the Government of China or perhaps they were unaware of them also.

Today, in Hong Kong, the Hsien-t'ien sect of concern is a registered company, going under the name of the Sin Tin Taoism Association Ltd. ("Taoism" as used here comes from the term Tao used in the sect's name: Hsien-t'ien Tao, and should not be confused, as in fact it sometimes is, with the religious system of this name). It does not appear to be militant today in its search for its religious goals but, on the contrary, does much valuable charitable work. In 1943, during the Japanese Occupation the Sin Tin Taoism Association raised money to provide a home for the aged, which it established at Tung Choi Street, Kowloon. In 1945,
as the landlord claimed back these premises, the home moved temporarily to the Pun Har Tung chai-t'ang at Ngau Chi Wan. In 1946 the Association again raised money to build a home for the aged at Shatin and in the same year the home moved into these new premises. In 1955 Sir Alexander Grantham, then Governor of Hong Kong, visited the Home at Shatin.

The sect today appears to attract business men, mainly in traditional-type pursuits and of middle years, and a few school teachers; but its largest contingent is undoubtedly female. Although the District Officer in his comments about talks of vegetarian halls being designed to attract chiefly the well-to-do, the majority of inmates of the halls are certainly in the lower income brackets. One is not certain where the money raised for charity comes from but one might assume, perhaps, that it is largely from lay-members in business and living in their own homes. It is hard to believe that the vegetarian halls make large profits.

There are said to be something like 70 halls of this sect in Hong Kong (including the New Territories) today. Those we visited were said to have from about 30-40 permanent inmates and some 20-30 casual residents each, although we have not been able to check these figures to date. One of the spiritual advisors of the ladies living in the halls we visited told Marjorie Topley that the various sects of the religion represented in Hong Kong (excluding the non-vegetarian) had recently been coming together again. Previously they had regarded each other as mutually unorthodox as they sprung from different leaders, but they had decided to sink their differences and work together in their common beliefs. This, interestingly, coincides with a similar campaign for amalgamation underway in Singapore.

VI. VISIT TO THE HALLS IN NGAU CHI WAN

The following background information was obtained by James Hayes on three of the halls visited by the Society. Our visit to the fourth hall was not on our original itinerary and was in the nature of a surprise. We therefore have no information, unfortunately, on this hall at present.

1. **Wing Lok T'ung 永樂洞**

This hall was built in the 20th year of the Chinese Republic (1931-32). It was founded by a female member of the sect who
held the third highest of six ranks which may be taken by members of the sect (the two highest are reserved for men only). This rank is known as Yin-ên (音恩) "Conducting (or Guiding) Grace" and entitles the holder to the middle name of Ch'ang (長). For a full list of ranks in various of the sects see "The Great Way of Former Heaven......" by Marjorie Topley, cited below.

This lady's father, said to have been an ordinary tenant farmer, and a native of Fa Yuan district, Kwangtung, had held the Chêng-ên rank in the sect, one below his daughter's. He died in the second year of the Republic (1913-14) and the daughter, his only child, followed him into the religion. Photographs of both these persons can be seen at the hall.

The founder of this hall was also said to have been in charge of the YEE WOH hall (怡和堂) in Canton, but on the Japanese occupation of South China in 1937-39 she and a body of her followers removed permanently to the WING LOK T'UNG in Ngau Chi Wan.

One of the present inmates of this hall was previously with the founder in Canton, having followed her into the sect at the age of 9 (she is now over 60 years of age). Her mother was said to be a cousin of the founder.

2. Kam Ha Ching She (金霞精舍)

This hall was built in the 16th year of the Chinese Republic (1927-28). The founding lady was of the same rank as the founder of the above hall and like her had previously been in charge of a vegetarian hall in Canton, the SHUI WOH T'ONG (瑞和堂) before coming to Hong Kong.

The SHUI WOH T'ONG and the YEE WOH T'ONG above, form part of a group of halls of the sect known to members as the "WOH groups", because they each have WOH as part of their name. They are not to be confused with the secret society of this name.

The establishment of the KAM HA CHING SHE was said to have been a result of an increasing following among women from Hong Kong who visited the founder in Canton. Deciding to establish a hall in the Colony she set up the MAN YUAN T'ONG (民緣堂) on a floor in rented premises in Third Street, Hong Kong island, probably about the year 1910. The growing number of
followers and would-be subscribers encouraged her then to build
a new hall and she was able to purchase a private plot with a small
house on it at Ngau Chi Wan, formerly occupied by a Buddhist
nun. The house was pulled down and replaced then by the present
hall. This hall belongs to the same sect as a group of halls studied
by Marjorie Topley in Singapore and the founder of one of these
halls, the FEI HA CHING SHE (飛霞精舍), there, was not only
well known to the inmates of this hall in Hong Kong, but his
photograph was observed by us to hang on its wall in a place of
honour.

3. Man Fat Tong (萬佛堂)

This hall was established in the first year of the Chinese Re­
public (1912-13). The founder was a native of Sai Chiu, Kwang­
tung and was at some time a domestic servant in Hong Kong. She
held the same rank as the founders of the above halls and co­
operated in financing the hall with three or four other former
domestic servants. They begun by building the main shrine room,
the rest of the main structure being added some years later (about
1923). Gradually she bought more land and enlarged the structure
as funds came in from co-religionists and would-be inmates.

One of the present inmates of the hall, now 67 years old, was
brought here by the founder from Canton when she was 20 and
she worked two years in Hong Kong as an amah before returning
to the hall, where she has been ever since. Another lady, now 58,
was brought here when 14 years old and has never been employed
outside the hall.

Appearance and Lay-out of the Halls, and Deities Worshipped

The founders of these halls said there was no particular reason
why they had chosen Ngau Chi Wan for their halls apart from the
fact that the land was cheap and had good fèng-shui (geomantic
properties) and the environment quiet. The surroundings of these
halls must undoubtedly have been conducive to the contemplative
and religious life in those early years. Although they are now
bordered by a busy and noisy market and adjacent to the big
housing estate of Choi Hung, the noise does not appear to penet­
rate into the halls and their small gardens in which they grow
some of their vegetables even today.
The halls are all substantial buildings, somewhat simpler in style than the usual run of Chinese temples and they do not declare themselves obviously as religious institutions. Once inside, however, their religious nature is obvious from the images one sees immediately in the main downstairs shrine room where one enters.

A few words are in order here on the deities worshipped by members of the sect and particularly in the vegetarian halls, for one of these deities effects the lay-out of the hall itself.

Women inmates may worship any god or goddess popular with them in a private capacity, and some have pictures and small images of such deities in their own sleeping quarters. *Hsien-t'ien* religion has itself incorporated, however, a number of gods and goddesses and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas into its worship. *Kuan-yin* is commonly found in halls of the sect and was in fact found in the halls in Ngau Chi Wan. Popular Chinese triads such as: *Sakyamuni, Lao Tzu* and Confucius (Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism) are also common and appeared in the lower shrine room of the WING LOK TUNG. The sects relate various gods and Buddhas to each other by the theory of reincarnation: one god is the reincarnation of another, or of a Buddha in a different age. They are also related to each other by their cooperation in the work for Truth in a particular “Truth” epoch.

A goddess peculiar to the sects of the religion exists, however. In this sect she is known as “Golden Mother of the Yao Pool” (*Yao-ch'i'h Chin-mu*). In other sects she is known by different names: several simply call her “Venerable Mother” (*Lao-mu*), while *Kuei-ken Men* “The Sect of Reverting to the Root [of Things]” calls her “Unbegotten Venerable Mother” (*Wu-shêng Lao-mu*). Some sectarian leaders have told Marjorie Topley that they can tell when a particular sect split off from others in the religion by the term of address they use for “Mother”. Mother is supposed to change her name every few years or so in order to prevent the unorthodox off-shoots from obtaining access to her. Any message sent to her under the incorrect name will fail to arrive. More sophisticated members say, however, that this goddess is in fact a symbolic representation of the Void: out of which the cosmos, and with it, Absolute Truth, emerged. But to most ordinary members, particularly female members, she is a goddess of great compassion and power and they sometimes identify her with *Kuan-yin*. 
It is in connexion with worship of "Mother" that the lay-out of the shrine rooms in vegetarian halls of the sect is important. Mother must be placed higher than any other deity and should occupy a room to herself (or occasionally shared with Kuan-yin with whom, as we have said, she is sometimes identified). This means that halls of the sect should whenever possible be built on two storeys, with "Mother's" room on the upper storey. This was so in the case of all the halls visited. Usually, one of the popular triads is housed in the main downstairs shrine-room (occasionally one finds an image downstairs of the many armed Chun-t'i: "Goddess of Dawn" supposedly of Buddhist origin, but she was not present in the halls visited).

Upstairs besides the room dedicated to "Mother" there is often a shrine also for the soul-tablets of past members.

Members of the Society were fortunately permitted to visit all shrine rooms (some halls do not permit outsiders to enter the "Mother" room).

Relations between the Halls and the Ngau Chi Wan Village

There is a certain amount of inter-action between the halls at Ngau Chi Wan and the village of this name which, though on the fringe of urban Kowloon and augmented by neighbouring squatter huts and factions, is still largely inhabited by the descendants of founding Hakka families who came to this spot in the mid-eighteenth century and after. The annual festival of the god of the main village temple (said to be a Ch’iu Ch’au deity whose image was brought up from the sea off Ngau Chi Wan by village fishermen a long time ago) occurs on the 25th of the 2nd lunar month. At this time the inmates of the halls visit the opera performance that is held in a matshed on open ground in front of the KAM HA CHING SHE and worship at the portable shrine that is brought on these occasions from the temple half a mile away. Our visit took place just before this festival and already the bamboo structure on which the matshed for the opera was to be built, was being erected. A large temporary cooking stove had also been constructed for the occasion for serving vegetarian food (which Marjorie Topley gathered in conversation with some of the inmates was contracted for by the village temple association from the vegetarian halls).

Again, at the Festival of Hungry Ghosts on the 7th of the 7th moon, it is "traditional" practice for about 100 students from the
village to visit the KAM HA CHING SHE to be given a bowl of rice and other food. This is supposed to “help make them stronger and more diligent”. (The sects hold masses at which cooked rice is used and which, in Singapore, is certainly handed out to the poor of the area round a vegetarian hall after the service. It may be that the rice handed out in this case is similarly treated to religious rituals and that it is this which gives it its ability to make students “strong” and “diligent”).

It is also reported that leaders of the Village Affairs Office of Ngau Chi Wan village are invited to dinner on the 15th day of the 1st lunar month, no doubt to keep up friendly relations between close neighbours.

The vegetarian halls certainly went to great effort to entertain members of the Society on our visit. Each hall provided us with plentiful, and extremely tasty, vegetarian snacks, fruit, cold drinks and Chinese tea. We would like to record our gratitude to them for their generosity. We would also like to record our gratitude to those in charge of the halls for permitting this visit and in letting us wander at will, and to the spiritual advisor of the inmates and to other male members of the sect who came along to answer our many questions; also to Mr. Tsang Sum of the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs, Hong Kong Government for much assistance with the visit.

SOME WORKS OF REFERENCE
1. The most comprehensive work on sects in general in the nineteenth century and of campaigns against them is J. J. M. de Groot's Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China: a Page in the History of Religions (Amsterdam, Johannes Muller, 1903-4) 2 Vols. It has now been reprinted (legally!) by Literature House Ltd., Taipei, Taiwan, 1963. Many of the sects he mentions are members of the Hsien-t'ien group. For evidence of this, see:
2. Marjorie Topley, “The Great Way of Former Heaven: a group of Chinese secret Religious Sects”, in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. XXVI, Pt. 2 1963, pp. 362-392. “Great Way” ideology is described in more detail in this article, and also the system of ranks and appointments used by several of the sects. The evidence for linking these sects with the well-known White Lotus organization is also discussed.

The relationship among the sects discussed was not however known to these writers at the time.

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