

THE GATHERING OF BROTHERS AND ELDERS
(*KO-LAO HUI*)
A NEW VIEW

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Gathering of Brothers and Elders (*Ko-lao hui*; referred to below as the Gathering), occupied an important place on both China's domestic and international political agendas. It was considered by Chinese officials and literati, but also by foreigners, to be a widespread organization of bandit and robber gangs, concentrated in Hu-nan and Hu-pei. According to them, the Gathering originated in the earlier Ssu-ch'uan *Ku[o]-lu* tradition, which went back to the second half of the eighteenth century and continued into the second half of the nineteenth century. There was also a strong belief that the Gathering was especially engaged in anti-Ch'ing resistance, in addition to its more common activities of smuggling and robbery. The Yang-tzu River Valley Riots of 1891—a series of attacks on missionary posts along the river and the Grand Canal—have often been interpreted as being the result of a conspiracy by the Gathering against the Ch'ing.¹ By and large, this view of the Gathering and its historical origins has been taken over by modern scholars. In their view, the Gathering started in the 1860s as an unorganized

This research was partly funded by a scholarship from the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences. The translations of the titles of Chinese primary sources are only intended as indications of the type of source involved. I have made no attempt to translate the various studio-names.

¹ For the traditional view, cf. Liu Cheng-yun, "The *Ko-lao hui* in Late Imperial China", University of Pittsburgh PhD dissertation, 1983. Liu has gathered an impressive amount of archival material to which I had no access. For an extensive historiographical survey, cf. Liu (1983) pp. 9–19.

After handing this article over to the editors, I came across the following Taiwanese dissertation, Hsü An-k'un 徐安琨, *Ko-lao hui te ch'ï-yüan chi ch'ï fa-chan* 哥老會的起源及其發展 (The origins and development of the Gathering of Brothers and Elders; T'ai-wan sheng-li po-wu-kuan, T'ai-pei, 1989). Apart from one crucial piece of evidence on a wave of arrests of members of *Ku[o]-lu* bands in 1781, it was impossible to integrate this dissertation into my article. He shares the established scholarly view as outlined in this paragraph and in the rest of this study. Hopefully, I can do more right to Hsü's excellent dissertation in a future study.

(group of) gang(s), but had developed into a hierarchially structured organization with complicated rituals by the 1890s.

Preliminary Remarks on the Sources

The most important source on the Gathering of Brothers and Elders, Hirayama Shû's (1870–1940) *Shina kakumeitô oyobi himitsu kessha* (*China's Revolutionary Parties and Secret Societies*), was first published on November 1, 1911, as a supplement to the Japanese magazine *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin* (*Japan and the Japanese*).² It was quickly translated into Chinese, and published in May 1912 as *Chung-kuo mi-mi she-hui shih* (*The History of China's Secret Societies*). Many substantial changes were made to the text, especially to the chapter on Hirayama's revolutionary experiences. The Chinese version was to be reprinted many times and became a standard source on "secret societies", including the Gathering, especially in Chinese and Japanese (the Japanese version is never used!) research.³

What has not been noted before is that a substantial part of his work was plagiarized from William Stanton's famous *The Triad Society or the Heaven and Earth Association* (originally published in the *China Review*, 21 [1892–1893] and 22 [1893–1894]; published in book form in Hong Kong, 1900), as the following table shows.

Table 1

S	Stanton's original (1900)				
H1	Hirayama's original Japanese version (1911)				
H2	the Chinese translation (1912)				
S	H1	H2	S	H1	H2
1–6	1–4	1–7	67–69	32–34	50–54
6	5–6 (expanded)	9	71–91	34–40	54–62
6–8	49	76–77	91–96	38–42	62–64

² The book has been reprinted in *Nihon shisôshi shiryô sôkan* 日本思想史史料叢刊 (Collectanea of Sources on the History of Japanese Thought; Tôkyô, 1980) Vol. IV. In Hirayama (1911, 1980 reprint) pp. 109–116, the editors discuss the original edition and its Chinese translation; this is followed by some biographical information on the author.

³ *Chung-kuo mi-mi she-hui shih* 中國秘密社會史 (The history of Chinese secret societies; Shanghai, 1912) and a plagiarized version of large parts by Hsü K'ô 徐珂, *Ch'ing-pai lei-ch'ao* 清稗類鈔 (Topically arranged copies of anecdotes from the Ch'ing; Shang-hai, 1918²) vol. 27, as pointed out by Charlton M. Lewis, *Prologue to the Chinese Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976) p. 101 and p. 255 note 22, pp. 256–257 note 51. He does not question the value of Hirayama (1911, 1980 reprint) itself.

8, 10-24	12-18	22-32	99-108	43-48	66-74
24-29	18-20	33-36	116-117	42-43	64-66
29-38	6-12	12-21	118-124	31-32	46-50
38-61	20-30	36-46			

Apart from omitting difficult sections (such as poems) and summarizing a number of paragraphs, Hirayama sticks fairly closely to the original text. He inserts a few paragraphs on events after 1900 and sometimes adds a few details, probably from other secondary sources available to him.⁴ Whenever Stanton quotes complete Chinese texts, he copies them *in extenso*, such as one set of oaths and the examples of diplomas. The principal additions by Hirayama Shû to Stanton's book are a long chapter on the Gathering of Brothers and Elders and the account of his personal revolutionary experiences in China from 1895 onwards.

The archives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs contain an extensive file on "secret societies", hundreds of pages long. It was compiled in 1910, slightly earlier than Hirayama's book, by special agents who were appointed to travel around China and collect material on such groups. Nishimoto Seiji was one of these agents (his report is dated December 13, 1910). He contributed a vast amount of material, which must certainly have impressed his superiors. However, like Hirayama's book, Nishimoto's material also mainly consists of an unacknowledged translation of Stanton's book. Although the translation is not identical to Hirayama's, there are many similarities and he adds the same information as

On the influence of Hirayama and Hsü, e.g. Luo Erh-kang 羅爾剛, *T'ien-ti hui wen-hsien-lu* 天地會文獻錄 (A record of documents from the Heaven and Earth Gathering; preface 1942; Hong Kong, n.d.) p. 95; Hsiao I-shan 蕭一山, *Ch'in-tai mi-mi she-hui shih-liao* 近代秘密社會史料 (Historical materials on modern secret societies; 1933; Tai-pei, 1965) introduction: p. 5b, p. 7b; 2: p. 15b; 3: p. 1a (Hirayama and Hsü as separate sources); Ts'ai Shao-ch'ing 蔡少卿, *Chung-kuo ch'in-tai hui-tang-shih yen-chiu* 中國近代會黨史研究 (Research in the history of modern Chinese gatherings and bands; Pei-ching, 1987) p. 21, p. 23, p. 47 (Hirayama and Hsü as separate sources), p. 150, p. 152, p. 203, p. 207; Ch'in Pao-ch'i 秦寶琦, *Ch'ing ch'ien-ch'i t'ien-ti hui yen-chiu* 清前期天地會研究 (Research on the Heaven and Earth Gathering in the first half of the Ch'ing; Pei-ching, 1988) p. 62, p. 109 (Hirayama and Hsü as separate sources), p. 288; Watanabe Jun 渡邊淳, "Shin-matsu karôkai no seiritsu" 清末哥老會的成立 (The establishment of the Gathering of Brothers and Elders during the late Ch'ing), *Kindai chûgoku nôson shakaishi kenkyû* 近代中國農村社會史研究 (Research in the social history of modern Chinese villages; Tôkyô, 1967) p. 112 note 3 (Hirayama and Hsü as separate sources). The list could be extended even further.

⁴ Other sources were: Lao Nai-hsüan 勞乃宣, "I-ho-ch'üan chiao-men yüan-liu k'ao" 義和拳教門源流考 (An investigation of the origins of the Boxer sect), *I-ho-t'uan* 義和團 (The Boxers; Shanghai, 1951) IV, pp. 433-439 and the essay by T'ao Ch'eng-chang discussed below.

Hirayama.⁵ Kurt Radtke points out that it was a common trend at the time for Japanese to gather information on contemporary China via Western sources.⁶

The plagiarizing of Stanton's book by Nishimoto Seiji and Hirayama Shû in itself already reveals much about their lack of knowledge about the Triads and similar brotherhoods. Hirayama first went to China in 1895 and subsequently returned on a number of short visits. However, neither he nor his close friend and collaborator Miyazaki Tôten actually spoke Chinese, so they communicated with local intellectuals through notes written in classical Chinese! Some of the notes of Miyazaki's conversations with Sun Yat-sen have been preserved and are included in Miyazaki's collected works. They also spoke with Sun in English (which Hirayama had learned during his school days at a Canadian missionary school in Tôkyô) or in Japanese.⁷ Hirayama must have eventually learned to speak some Chinese, but it is out of the question that during such brief and busy visits he could have become sufficiently fluent in the numerous local languages (Cantonese, Hsiang, Hakka), group jargons and accents required to speak directly with members of different brotherhoods themselves, let alone to note the distortions caused by elite perceptions of such groups. Not surprisingly, he never refers to information obtained from his 1897 meeting with leaders, supposedly of the Gathering, in Hunan in the company of Chinese intellectuals. The only information recorded by him that may have been gathered during his own visits and meetings consists of a few names of leaders and their ranks. This is relevant, because it suggests that the lack of independently obtained facts in Hirayama's book is not due to any personal scruples about publishing such sensitive information.⁸ I have no

⁵ *Gaimushô* 外務省, 1-6-1 no 4-2-1-1.

⁶ Kurt Radtke (personal communication).

⁷ Hirayama (1911, 1980 reprint) editorial comments: p. 117 (he learned about Sun Yat-sen from reading the *North-China Daily News* on his way to China in 1895, as well as from reading Sun's book—in English—on Sun's kidnapping in London!). Miyazaki Tôten, *My Thirty-Three Years Dream* (original 1902; tr. by Etô Shinkichi and Marius B. Jansen [Princeton, 1982]) p. 74, p. 128, p. 133, p. 150, pp. 153-154, p. 202. Marius B. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954) p. 242 note 24. Miyazaki Ryûsuke 宮崎龍介 and Onogawa Hidemi 小野川秀美, *Miyazaki Tôten zenshû* 宮崎滔天全集 (The complete works of Miyazaki Tôten; Tôkyô, 1976) pp. 164-184.

⁸ Hirayama (1911, 1980 reprint) pp. 49-50, pp. 79-80 and p. 84. He was absent at the famous 1898 meeting in Hong Kong, when Sun Yat-sen met leaders of these groups. Only one of the names of the leaders met by Sun is included in Hirayama's table of mountains, halls and important leaders, Hirayama (1911, 1980 reprint) pp. 51-52. Jansen (1954) p. 65 remarks that Miyazaki described in a

comparable data on Nishimoto Seiji, but there is no evidence from his work that he was any better informed than Hirayama.

This background knowledge on Hirayama and his book also places the chapter on the Gathering of Brothers and Elders in a rather different perspective. The first small part is again derived from Stanton's book. The last section contains the anti-Manchu charter and rules in vernacular Chinese, which had been made up entirely by T'ao Ch'eng-chang for the Lung-hua Gathering (this organization never came off the ground).⁹ The rest of the chapter gives the texts of an invitation, diplomas, rules and a ritual (all in classical Chinese). Exactly the same material is also contained in Nishimoto's 1910 report.¹⁰ Internal evidence shows that it probably dates from 1898 and originates from a group in Chen-chiang. As far as we know, Hirayama was not in China at that time. How Nishimoto and Hirayama obtained this material is totally unclear.

The term Gathering of Brothers and Elders (*ko-lao hui*) is never mentioned in the original Chinese material, nor are any allusions made to it. The fact that Nishimoto and Hirayama inserted this material and used it in their discussions of the Gathering is entirely based on their own subjective judgement. However, Hirayama and Nishimoto only use the term *Ko-lao hui* itself in the introductory historical remarks, which are all based on those of other scholars and their own speculations.¹¹ In view of their plagiarizing of Stanton's book, and Nishimoto's and Hirayama's evident lack of intimate knowledge of any brotherhoods, their judgement can not be relied upon.

The Chinese material itself appears to be original, unlike the text composed by T'ao Ch'eng-chang in vernacular Chinese and referred to above. Hirayama notes that the material was called *Chin-pu-huan*, which is confirmed by another manual with the same name, (*Ta-hung-shan*) *Chin-pu-huan*, published in 1947.¹² It was compiled by a group from Hu-nan, but published in Nan-ning.¹³ This manu-

newspaper article how difficult the meetings between him, Hirayama and these leaders were. We should not underestimate the influence of Chinese literati on the perceptions of Hirayama and Miyazaki. Pi Yung-nien introduced the leaders to them in a letter, that "made them sound like the heroes in the *Three Kingdoms* and the *Water Margin*", cf. Miyazaki (1902; 1982) p. 186.

⁹ Hirayama (1911, 1980 reprint) pp. 51-67. Also, cf. note 15.

¹⁰ *Gaimushô*, 1-6-1 no 4-2-1-1.

¹¹ Hirayama (1911, 1980 reprint) pp. 48-51.

¹² Hirayama (1911, 1980 reprint) p. 55 gives *chin-pu-huan* as a technical term for the documents of Gathering.

¹³ I have seen two different editions of the (*Ta-hung-shan*) *chin-pu-huan* 大洪山金不换 (The "Gold-cannot-be-changed" of the Great Hung Mountain

al contains a much more elaborate version of the same material that was incorporated by Nishimoto and Hirayama. The name of the Gathering of Brothers and Elders is again only mentioned once in a short historical survey of various groups supposedly belonging to the Heaven and Earth Gathering or Hung tradition. The survey is highly derivative, as it consists entirely of quotes from other post-1911 works.¹⁴

The group responsible for the 1947 book considered itself to be part of the Hung tradition, but, in fact, the book combines elements from the Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-pei/Hu-nan predatory tradition (specifically the names of its organizational hierarchy), the mythology (rather than the ritual) of the Heaven and Earth Gathering (or Hung) tradition, and the story of the heroes of the Water Margin. The precise nature of this *Chin-pu-huan* material still needs to be established, but the groups that composed and used the material certainly did not refer to themselves as Gathering of Brothers and Elders.

A second famous source on ritual brotherhoods is T'ao Ch'eng-chang's (1878–1912) essay, *Chiao-hui yüan-liu k'ao* (An investigation of the origins of religious groups and gatherings). He wrote it in 1910 during a stay in Tôkyô. We can compare its contents with an earlier, and much more detailed, treatise which he wrote on "secret societies", based on observations made by him about such groups during a visit to Che-chiang in 1904. Such a comparison enables us to distinguish the remarks based on personal experience from those based on speculation. All his famous statements about the origins of religious groups and ritual brotherhoods (such as the White Lotus Teachings, the Heaven and Earth Gathering or the Gathering of Brothers and Elders) prove to be 1910 additions, based on

[group]): a. a reprint of one of the original 100 numbered copies (No. 14), published in Nanning in 1947 (preface 1946), photographically reprinted as volume 4 of the third series of the above-mentioned *Mi-mi she-hui ts'ung-k'an* (T'ai-pei, 1975); b. an undated reprint, which repeats most of the bibliographical information from the Nanning edition, but is not numbered. The Nanning edition has photographs of the leaders. Furthermore, a postscript included in both editions specifies that the original edition was a limited and numbered edition. Only the Nanning edition has such a number. In the undated reprint the place for the number is left blank and the book does not contain any photographs. It also gives a different compiler. The undated reprint, therefore, has to be the later edition. Liu Cheng-yun has used the undated reprint. Furthermore, he treats the material in Hirayama (1912, in the Chinese version) and the 1947 compilation as two completely independent sources.

¹⁴ (*Ta-hung-shan*) *chin-pu-huan*, p. 7. This particular reference stems from T'ao Ch'eng-chang's essay, which is discussed below.

historiographical myths, rather than actual fieldwork.¹⁵

After 1902, T'ao had visited Japan frequently, and from 1907 until after the 1911 Revolution he spent most of his time out of China, in South-east Asia or Japan. Since he also wrote his 1910 essay in Tôkyô, it is not unlikely that he moved in the same circles as Nishimoto Seiji, Hirayama Shû and Hirayama's friend Miyazaki Tôten, and was influenced by their views. There are certain similarities between T'ao Ch'eng-chang's essay and Hirayama's additions to Stanton's book. As I mentioned above, Hirayama even transcribed material composed by T'ao in vernacular Chinese (which is never used in the writings of [members of] these ritual brotherhoods!) into his chapter on the Gathering of Brothers and Elders. Whatever the precise extent of the influences they had on each other, T'ao's essay evidently is not a reliable source of information on real predatory groups.¹⁶

There is an impressive quantity of post-1911 books, which claim to transmit the customs of the various "secret societies". Much of the material presented in these books (reprinted on Tai-wan in the *Mi-mi she-hui ts'ung-k'an*) was copied from earlier sources, such as the works by Hirayama Shû and T'ao Ch'eng-chang, or even made up by the authors themselves. The information given in these books about the Gathering does not reflect any original research and they should not be used as the basis for any serious historical research.

Authentic and unprejudiced accounts of the ritual brotherhoods are extremely scarce. The hitherto ignored writings on Western Hunan by Shen Ts'ung-wen (1903-1988) are an exception. In his

¹⁵ T'ao Ch'eng-chang 陶成章, "Chiao-hui yüan-liu k'ao" 教會原流考 (An investigation of the origins of sects and bands), published as an appendix to T'ao's *Che-an chi-lüe* 浙案紀略 (A concise record of the Che-chiang case), republished together in: *Hsin-hai ko-ming* 辛亥革命 (The 1911 Revolution; Shanghai, 1957) III, pp. 99-111 and translated by Ssu-yü Teng, "The Evolution of China's Secret Sects and Societies," *Renditions* 15 (1981): 80-102. T'ao's 1904 experiences are described by himself in *Che-an chi-lüe*, pp. 18-21 (with a description of the local groups which he visited), and *passim*. His rules are also contained in *Hsin-hai ko-ming* (Shanghai, 1957) I, pp. 534-544, quoted, however, from Hirayama's book (in the Chinese edition of 1912). On T'ao Ch'eng-chang, cf. Mary Backus Rankin, *Early Chinese Revolutionaries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971) especially pp. 148-157, pp. 169-171, p. 191, p. 211. Rankin (1971) pp. 276-278 notes 6, 9, 12, 13 points out problems in the contents of the *Che-an chi-lüe*.

¹⁶ Several books by other participants in these same events seem to be based on Miyazaki's and T'ao Ch'eng-chang's accounts, rather than to present independent information: Feng Tzu-yu 馮自由, *Ko-ming i-shih* 革命逸史 (Anecdotal history of the revolution; original 1939; T'ai-pei, 1953) I, pp. 73-76; Ch'en Shao-pai 陳少白, *Hsing-chung-hui ko-ming shih-yao* 興中會革命史要 (Concise revolutionary history of the Revive China Society; *Hsin-hai ko-ming* I, Shanghai, 1957) p. 61.

youth, Shen served as a mercenary under the leadership of a Dragon Head (*lung-t'ou*).¹⁷ This title had been the common autonym used by the chiefs of Hunan gangs, who, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, were denoted in persecution reports by officials as being part of the Gathering. There are numerous references to the autonyms of their leaders (*lung-t'ou ta-ko*) and members (*lao-yao*) scattered through Shen's literary work. More importantly, he also gives a sustained description of the relevant groups, based on personal experiences. He called them "roving bandits (*you-hsia*)". According to him, they called each other "younger" or "elder" brother, and had their own set of ethical rules, in which valour, mutual support and respect, loyalty and defending the weak were central values. He describes an elaborate form of divine judgement, preceded by a blood oath.¹⁸

During interviews with his biographer Jeffrey Kinkley in the 1980s, Shen Ts'ung-wen denied having been a member of the Gathering. And in all of his discussions of the Hunan ritual brotherhoods and gangs, he never uses the term Gathering of Brothers and Elders. The one exception is an addition to the 1981 version of his autobiography (which is not in the original version; whether this addition was authorized by the author is unclear).¹⁹ The fact that such a knowledgeable observer did not use the term and denied having been a member of the Gathering (despite statements to the contrary by biographers, including Kinkley!) is significant: because Shen did not write under pressure and had no vested interest in the revolutionary cause, he is a rare impartial eye-witness. Furthermore, he wrote at a time when neither the gangs themselves, nor authors writing about them, had any reason

¹⁷ Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford, 1987). On his experiences as a soldier, cf. Kinkley (1987) pp. 33–66; on his supposed links to the Gathering, cf. Kinkley (1987) pp. 29–30, p. 37, p. 40 (in a footnote to this page, Kinkley adds that Shen denied he ever was a member of the Gathering!), p. 64, p. 135, pp. 305–306 (Shen denies here that Ho Lung was a member of the Gathering; I have checked all the published Chinese sources given by Kinkley, which confirm Shen's denial). The secondary literature (including Kinkley himself), always describes Ho Lung, Shen Ts'ung-wen and his protagonists as members of the Gathering.

¹⁸ Shen Ts'ung-wen 沈從文, *Shen Ts'ung-wen hsüan-chi/ san-wen* 沈從文選集/ 散文 (Selected Works of Shen Ts'ung-wen, Prose; Ch'eng-tu, 1983), pp. 321–327 (sustained description); other remarks, cf. *Shen Ts'ung-wen hsüan-chi/ san-wen*, p. 203; *Pien-ch'eng* 邊城 (Frontier City; Shanghai, 1934, 1939) pp. 12–13, pp. 49–50, p. 93, p. 97, p. 112.

¹⁹ Cf. footnote 17. For the two versions of his autobiography, cf. *Shen Ts'ung-wen tzu-chuan* 沈從文自傳 (Autobiography of Shen Ts'ung-wen; no place, 1936²) p. 23 and *Shen Ts'ung-wen tzu-chuan* (Beijing, 1981) p. 17.

to be afraid of using the term. Since the contents of Shen's descriptions otherwise tally well with ethnographic fieldwork of the 1930s and earlier inquisition reports, this suggests that the term Gathering of Brothers and Elders was introduced into the sources by officials and historians.

The historical background of terminology and ritual

The history of the social and cultural environment of the Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-pei/Hu-nan region is highly complicated. Richard von Glahn's book on the region during the Sung is one of the few studies which treat this environment in any detail. In this section, I will first discuss some local terminology and customs, and then show how it was eventually incorporated into the Ch'ing predatory tradition with which this investigation is concerned. The principal aim of my highly selective survey is to demonstrate the way in which this particular predatory tradition continued local customs.

Until the Sung, the Klau were the most important local minority culture. They still survive, even today, in Kuei-chou and Western Hu-nan, but they once also inhabited the eastern part of Ssu-ch'uan. Very likely, the modern Miao have continued and incorporated much of the former Klau culture.²⁰ The ethnographer Jui I-fu has analyzed the various ways in which the minority autonym "Klau" has been transcribed into Chinese throughout the ages. In Ancient Chinese, one Chinese character (which has been placed in the glossary under Klau* and has the reconstructed pronunciation **tləŋ*, sufficed to transcribe their autonym, Jui points out that, even today, the sounds that we transcribe as "t" or "k" are very difficult to distinguish among the Klau or Miao. Names consisting of one character were used until the T'ang to refer to this culture. The initial consonant had disappeared from the Chinese pronunciation much earlier, and by the T'ang, a need was felt to add a second character, in order to express the initial consonant that was still

²⁰ Richard von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes* (Cambridge, Mass, 1987) pp. 21–24, pp. 33–35 on the Sung Klau. Claudine Lombard-Salmon, *Un exemple d'acculturation chinoise: La province du Gui Zhou au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1972) pp. 111–138 on the Miao, and pp. 147–151 on the Klau. On the Klau in history and towards the middle of the twentieth century, cf. Inez de Beauclair, "The Keh Lao of Kweichow and their History", *Studia Serica*, 5 (1946): 1–44, republished in *Tribal Cultures of Southwest China* (T'ai-pei, 1970) pp. 148–189. I use the transcription Klau to fit my use of the Wade-Giles transcription. The "k" sounds more like a "g", both in Mandarin Chinese and in the Klau language.

present in the minority language: for instance *ch'i-lao**¹, *ch'i-lao**², or *hsieh-lao*.²¹ These, and many similar terms, were used to refer to one and the same culture. This process of dimidiation has been extremely common in the various Chinese languages ("dialects") since initial consonants have started to disappear. Peter Boodberg has suggested that it is at the root of the *fan-ch'ieh* system.²²

During the Southern Sung, the Klau in Ch'ü-yang (Hu-nan) called their military leaders *tu-mao*.²³ Literally it means "chief hat", with *tu* functioning as an adjective, "chief", to *mao*. I suspect that *mao* was used to transcribe a local term for "leader".²⁴ Among the Klau and Miao, the blood oath was commonly practiced to bind voluntary groups together.²⁵

It is not always clear whether local groups in the Ssu-ch'uan/Hupei/Hu-nan border region actually belonged to minorities or not, because of the continuous cultural exchange between local groups and newcomers. To give one example of the resulting confusion, the Miao language as given by the *Miao-fang pei-lan* ("A Complete Overview of the Defenses against the Miao") of 1820 has actually been incorporated into the modern local language ("dialect"; a variant of the Chinese language group) of the Hsiang-hsi region (Eastern Hu-nan).²⁶

²¹ Jui I-fu 芮逸夫, "Lao (lao) wei ch'i-lao (ch'i-lao) shih-cheng" 僚 (僚) 爲佬佬 (佬佬) 試證 (A tentative demonstration that Lao [Lao] is the same as Ch'i-lao [Ch'i-lao]), *Kuo-li chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan li-shih yü-yen yen-chiu-suo chi-k'an* 國立中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 20 (1948) pp. 343-356. Ideally, I should have used reconstructed pronunciations throughout this section. However, I am not competent in this field and did not want to proceed without expert advice. I do not think that the use of Mandarin pronunciations interferes with my fundamental argument.

²² On these matters, cf. Peter A. Boodberg, "Some Proleptical Remarks on the evolution of Archaic Chinese," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 2 (1937), especially pp. 355-360 and N. C. Bodman, *A Linguistic Study of the Shih Ming* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954) pp. 40-65.

²³ Hung Mai 洪邁, *Jung-chai sui-pi* 容齋隨筆 (Miscellaneous notes by Hung Mai; Shanghai, 1978) *ssu-pi*: 16: pp. 799-800. The note does not specify the people, but remarks that the local people used the word *neng*, which was a Klau term according to Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修, *Hsin T'ang-shu* 新唐書 (New history of the T'ang dynasty; Pei-ching, 1975) 222b: 6328.

²⁴ Cf. other terms for leader, in which *tu* functions in the same manner, *Hsin T'ang-shu*, 222b: p. 6317 and Richard von Glahn, "The Country of Streams and Grottoes" (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1983) pp. 299-300, note 7.

²⁵ Takenouchi Fusashi 竹内房司, "Myôzoku no kan ni tsuite" 苗族の款について (On the custom of "k'uan" among the Miao tribes), in: *Rôhaisei no sekai* 老百姓の世界 (The world of the common people) 5 (1987) 52-64; Ling Ch'un-sheng 凌純聲 and Jui I-fu, *Hsiang-hsi miao-tsu tiao-ch'a pao-kao* 湘西苗族調查報告 (A report on investigations among the Miao tribes in Western Hu-nan; Shanghai, 1947) pp. 152-153, pp. 160-163.

²⁶ Lombard-Salmon (1972) pp. 301-302.

In 1130–1135, a large-scale uprising took place in Eastern Hunan, the heartland of the contemporary Klau and later of the Miao. It is always considered to have been a Han-Chinese uprising, but it seems more than likely that it also involved local minorities. The original leader Chung Hsiang was a successful local shaman and healer, thanks to which he had become an important local power broker. After he had been captured and killed, one of the leaders who succeeded him was Yang T'ai. This man was usually called Yang *yao*, because he was still very young and in this region *yao* meant "young".²⁷ Local ruffians and bandits formed the main component of the rebel army, which also fought on water with large boats. Locally, boats were called "dragons" (*lung*). The boat of the rebel leader Yang *yao* was called "dragon head" (*lung-shou*).²⁸ Chung Hsiang himself was referred to by his followers as Old Father Chung (Chung *lao-ye* or *lao-fu*).²⁹

The term "dragon" to denote the boats used by these rebels is of course much better known from descriptions of the dragon boat races on the festival of the fifth day of the fifth month (*tuan-wu*). These races go back to before the T'ang dynasty. The festival, including the boat races, was very popular in Eastern Hu-nan (also among the minorities). According to a late Ming description, the boats were called "dragon boats" (*lung-chou* or *lung-ch'uan*) and the leader of the boat a "headman" (*t'ou*). Each boat was supported by a specific area, but when people moved to another region they continued to support the boat from their old region. Shamans were hired to assist the boatcrews by suppressing evil influences and thus ensure their victory. Each boat was assigned a colour and a flag in the same colour.³⁰

²⁷ This is confirmed by numerous sources (who is copying whom is unclear): e.g. Lu Yu 陸游, *Lao-hsüeh-an pi-chi* 老學庵筆記 (Miscellaneous notes by Lu Yu; Pei-ching, 1979) 1: pp. 1–2; Hsiung K'o 熊克, *Chung-hsing hsiao-chi* 中興小紀 (A small record of the restoration; *Wen-yüan-ko ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* 文淵閣四庫全書) 8: pp. 13b–14a; Yüeh K'o 岳珂, *Chin-ts'o ts'ui-pien* 金佗粹編 (Collected works of Yüeh K'o; *Wen-yüan-ko ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu*) 6: p. 9b. An independent source from the early Ch'ing is Li Shih 李實, *Shu-yü chiao-chu* 蜀語校注 (Collated and annotated version of "The Shu language"; Ch'eng-tu, 1990) p. 142 and pp. 143–144 (notes 10 and 11).

²⁸ *Chung-hsing hsiao-chi*, 13: p. 23b; *Chin-ts'o ts'ui-pien*, 6: pp. 14b–15a and *Chin-ts'o hsü-pien* (*Wen-yüan-ko ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu*) 25: pp. 7b–8b.

²⁹ *Chung-hsing hsiao-chi*, 8: p. 6a and *Chin-ts'o hsü-pien*, 25: pp. 1a–b.

³⁰ The most detailed source is from the late Ming, Yang Ssu-ch'ang (Chao Wei-pang tr.), "The Dragon Boat Race in Wu-ling, Hu-nan," *Folklore Studies* 2 (1943): 1–18. The standard work on this festival is Huang Shih 黃石, *Tuan-wu li-shih shih* 端午禮俗史 (A history of the rites and customs surrounding the Double Five festival; Kuo-li pei-ching ta-hsüeh chung-kuo min-su hsüeh min-su ts'ung-shu

During the Ch'ing these dragon boat races continued to be highly popular, despite continued attempts by officials throughout the centuries to prohibit them, because the races often led to violent clashes. In nineteenth century Han-k'ou, the competitions were organized by the headmen of the porter and longshoremen gangs holding jurisdiction over each of the piers (*ma-t'ou*) in the harbour, assisted by the boatmen who used the piers, and by neighbourhood shopkeepers.³¹ The races were immensely popular among the local Hunanese population. Apparently, the races also served as a meeting place for the discharged braves of the Hunan armies who had fought the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace until 1863.³²

It is my contention that the ritual brotherhoods in the eighteenth and nineteenth century predatory tradition denoted as *Ku[o]-lu*, *Ko-lao* (i.e. Gathering of Brothers and Elders) and so forth continued many aspects of local culture in the Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-pei/Hu-nan border region. The customs which they adopted were by no means esoteric or secret, but part of a widely shared local cultural repertoire. The social and cultural distance between the brotherhoods and local society was probably much smaller than later scholarship and the use of the analytical term "secret society" have led us to believe.

Local predatory brotherhoods and other groups, especially minorities, practiced the same type of blood oath covenant to bind their members together. The covenant did not include the passing under a gate of knives or swords, typical of the Heaven and Earth Gathering tradition. Therefore, it seems unlikely that it was copied from that particular tradition.³³ The kind of values which were enforced by the blood oath ritual were the same in both the Klau and Miao minorities and in the predatory groups: loyalty and mutual support. These values were an integral part of local culture and by no means confined to marginal groups of ruffians and bandits.

The many similarities in organizational terminology are especially striking. Thus, the Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-pei/Hu-nan predatory

國立北京大學中國民俗學民俗叢書, vol. 102, T'ai-pei, original 1963, reprint 1974), especially pp. 104–144 on the Dragon Boat races. A Western study of its symbolism is Göran Aijmer's *The Dragon Boat Festival on the Hupeh-Hunan Plain, Central China* (Stockholm, 1964).

³¹ William T. Rowe, *Hankow, Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796–1895* (Stanford, 1989) pp. 201–206.

³² Rowe (1989) p. 204.

³³ I am preparing a book on the Heaven and Earth Gathering tradition and its ritual.

groups of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often used the terms *mao-ting* and *lao-mao* for their leaders. Here, we find the same crucial element *mao* from the Klau term *tu-mao* for "leader". The prefix *lao* and the suffix *ting* both carry the connotation "chief", in the same way as *tu* in *tu-mao*. The headmen of the dragon boats in the Dragonboat Festival (or *tuan-wu*) were called "dragon heads" (*lung-t'ou*), which was also a common term for the leaders of our predatory groups. The use of coloured flags to denote the territories of the different dragon boats, is reflected in the use of flags to indicate the territories of different predatory groups and their post of Fifth Sir of the Red Flag. The term *yao*, with its distinctive local meaning of "young", was incorporated in the term *lao-yao* for the ordinary members of our groups. Despite the weak honorific prefix *lao* "venerable, chief, respectable", *yao* could still have meant "young". It referred to age in membership years. New members of the same groups were referred to as "babies", "nephew babies" or "young nephew brothers". The groups used many other age-related kinship terms to indicate differences in the rank of members.

The similarities between the various Chinese terms for Klau, and the terms *ku[o]-lu* and *ko-lao* are also noteworthy. The term *kuo-lu* is already documented in 1743, but without further explanation. Li T'iao-yüan (1734–1803), a well-known scholar from Ssu-ch'uan, has written our best source on the meaning of the term in the form of a laudatory poem, with preface, from 1748, in honour of a successful local general. The preface states that "[the term] which the people from Shu [Ssu-ch'uan] use for gamblers is everywhere *kuo-lu*." From the rest of the preface and the poem itself, it is clear that the term also referred to pickpockets and bandits.³⁴ The name was not an autonym, but a derogatory term coined by the local population.

The precise origins of the term *ko-lao* are never specified in the sources. On phonological grounds the terms *ku[o]-lu* and *ko-lao* have been considered by various scholars to represent different Mandarin Chinese forms of one common oral original, which had

³⁴ *K'ang-yung-ch'ien ch'eng-hsiang jen-min fan-k'ang tou-cheng tzu-liao* 康雍乾城鄉人民反抗鬭爭資料 (Materials on the resistance struggles of the city and country people during the K'ang-hsi, Yung-cheng and Ch'ien-lung periods; Peiching, 1979) *hsia*: p. 634 (1743) and pp. 634–635 (1745, with the addition that the term was a "local expression [*t'u-yu* 土語]). Li T'iao-yüan 李調元, *T'ung-shan shih-chi* 童山詩集 (*Collected poems by Li T'iao-yüan; preface 1769; Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng*) 1: p. 6 (this chapter is dated 1748). On Li, cf. Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, 1943), pp. 486–488; Li was something of a child prodigy in poetry.

an unknown local pronunciation.³⁵ I would like to extend this hypothesis even further and suggest that both *ku[o]-lu* and *ko-lao* are actually transcriptions of the original oral version for the minority autonym Klau. One way in which this might have happened is that the name of this minority had locally become a general derogatory term for predatory bandits and such.³⁶ The use of variant forms of this term, such as *ku[o]-lu* or *ko-lao*, is then the result of different local pronunciations. The use of names of foreign peoples in derogatory terms (such as Yankees in various European languages, Apaches in French, or Dutch courage in English) is, of course, very common. We have to test this hypothesis by looking more closely at the relationship between the *ku[o]-lu* and the *ko-lao-hui*, as well as the way(s) in which both terms are used by bandits and officials.

A nineteenth century Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-pei/Hu-nan predatory tradition

The oldest datable description in which the term Gathering of Brothers and Elders is used is an extremely detailed Appendix in the anti-Christian compilation *Pi-hsieh chi-shih* (written in 1861; first published in 1862). The compiler of this work based himself on personal experiences as a functionary in the armies of braves fighting the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace.³⁷ The Appendix has

³⁵ Tso Tsung-t'ang 左宗棠, *Tso wen-hsiang kung (tsung-t'ang) ch'üan-chi* 左文襄公 (宗棠) 全集 (Collected works of Tso Tsung-t'ang; *Chin-tai chung-kuo shih-liao ts'ung-k'an hsiü-chi* 近代中國史料叢刊續集, T'ai-pei), *shu-tu*, 11: p. 29b. Liu (1983) pp. 19–20 summarizes the argument. Also, cf. Chuang Chi-fa 莊吉發, "Ch'ing-tai ko-lao-hui yüan-liu k'ao" 清代哥老會源流考 (An investigation of the origins of the Ch'ing period Gathering of Brothers and Elders), *Shih-huo* 食貨, *fu-k'an* 復刊, 9:9 (1979) 7 (pro); Chang Li 張力, "T'an-shih kuo-lu" 探試囑嚮 (A tentative exploration of the [term] *Kuo-lu*), *She-hui k'o-hsüeh yen-chiu* 社會科學研究 (1980: 2) 69–70 (contra); Hu Chu-sheng 胡殊生, "T'ien-ti-hui ch'i-yüan ch'u-k'ao" 天地會起源初考 (A first investigation of the origins of the Heaven and Earth Gathering), *Li-shih-hsüeh* 歷史學 (1979: 4) 65–66 (pro, but the way in which he reaches his conclusion entirely contradicts my arguments. Relying on T'ao Ch'eng-chang's essay and some fanciful logic, he argues that the Heaven and Earth Gathering stems from the same source as the Gathering of Brothers and Elders).

³⁶ *Han-yü ta tz'u-tien* 漢語大詞典 (Hong Kong, 1990) Vol. V: p. 107 gives three examples of pejorative usage under *hsieh-lao*.

³⁷ T'ien-hsia ti-i shang-jen 天下第一傷人, *Pi-hsieh chi-shih* 辟邪紀實 (A factual record to expulse evil; on the date of compilation, cf. *xia*: p. 18a; first edition 1862, cf. postscript). The editions that I have been able to consult in various libraries in Leiden, Princeton, Harvard and Tôkyô all date from 1871 or later. The Appendix precedes the bibliography, indicating that it was cut with the original edition and not added later. The preliminary remarks by the author also suggest circa 1861 as the date of composition.

never been used before in research on the Gathering.

It is commonly assumed that the Gathering was founded much earlier than 1861, because both Tseng Kuo-fan and Tso Tsung-t'ang write on "gatherings" from Hu-nan and Hu-pei which used the blood oath ritual, as being a problem in their armies from 1853 onwards. Prohibitions against them had not been successful.³⁸ Nevertheless, Tso's first datable mention of the term itself is from circa June 1865.³⁹ In that same year, he applied the term, retrospectively, to his 1853 prohibition of brotherhoods.⁴⁰ Tseng's first datable mention of the term is even later, from 1866.⁴¹ These dates for the use of the term—as opposed to the mention of the underlying problem of local predatory groups or ritual brotherhoods—are confirmed by Liu Cheng-yün's thorough survey of material on the Gathering of Brothers and Elders in the Ch'ing archives kept in the Palace Museum in T'ai-pei. In this material there is only one memorial which dates from 1863, followed by one each in the years 1865 and 1866 respectively.⁴² Thus, the perception that ritual brotherhoods were a problem in the armies of braves antedated the use of the term Gathering of Brothers and Elders by over a decade.⁴³

The Appendix—in view of its very early date and remarkable detail—therefore becomes a crucial document in any discussion of

³⁸ Liu (1983) pp. 55–56. Tseng Kuo-fan 曾國範, *Tseng wen-cheng kung wen-chi* 曾文正公文集 (Collected works of Tseng Kuo-fan; *Chin-tai chung-kuo shih-hiao ts'ung-k'an hsiü-chi*, T'ai-pei), *tsa-cho*: 2: p. 43b; also a 1853 prohibition, *chia-shu*: 4: p. 12b; *Tso wen-hsiang kung (tsung-t'ang) ch'üan-chi, p'i-tu*: 3: p. 36b (1853 instruction), *kao-shih*: p. 2b (1865 prohibition in Fu-chien, dating the problem of gatherings to 1853, without mentioning the Gathering).

³⁹ *Tso wen-hsiang kung (tsung-t'ang) ch'üan-chi, shu-tu*: 7: p. 57a.

⁴⁰ *Tso wen-hsiang kung (tsung-t'ang) ch'üan-chi, shu-tu*: 7: p. 60b.

⁴¹ *Tseng wen-cheng kung wen-chi, chia-shu*: 7: p. 33b.

⁴² The oldest three cases mentioned in Liu (1983) date from 1863 (Liu [1983] p. 50), 1865 (Liu [1983] p. 53), and 1866 (Liu [1983] p. 54). The memorials collected by Liu as evidence, in his footnotes and Appendix A (discounting double occurrences), allow the following count of incidents, roughly divided into periods with a significantly different frequency:

1863–1866	3 (less than 1 a year)
1867–1891	58 (until the Yang-tzu River riots; 2½ a year)
1891–1894	42 (after the riots; more than 10 a year)
1895–1910	24 (irregular, less than 2 a year, varying from none to 6)

⁴³ On the relationship between the Gathering and the braves, as perceived in modern scholarship, cf. the summary by Liu (1983) pp. 51–60 and his further references.

the nature of the term Gathering of Brothers and Elders.⁴⁴ In this text, the members of the Gathering are referred to as highway robbers and river harbour pirates. With the outbreak of the rebellion of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace in 1851, the Gathering had initially decreased in numbers, because members had joined the rebellion. Later, however, because braves from Ssu-ch'uan and Kuei-chou often joined the ranks of the Gathering, followed in order of importance by Yün-nan and Kuang-hsi, and at the end of the list Hu-nan and Hu-pei, it had spread all over China among the braves. These remarks reflect a primary characteristic of Chinese historiography, namely the tendency to explain phenomena by providing a genealogy. The remark that members of the Gathering joined the rebellion of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace might reflect the well-established historical fact that many members of the Heaven and Earth Gathering tradition joined this rebellion in its first stages.⁴⁵

The author of the Appendix had twice been robbed by members of the Gathering, whom he identifies as braves from an army camp. He had encountered them more often, but then the presence of too many other people had prevented anything worse from happening. These negative experiences caused him to write this essay. I shall now summarize the factual information given by him, and then comment on its value as a source. In this summary, I follow the structure of the Appendix.

a. The members of the Gathering conclude blood brotherhoods by drinking wine mixed with the blood of a cock and swearing an oath. They add the self-malediction that, should they ever in the future retain any thoughts of real blood relatives, Heaven and Earth may destroy them.

b. The leader is called *lao-mao*, the members are called *lao-yao*. Other names include for instance Fifth Sir of the Red Flag (*hung-ch'i wu-ye*) or Saint Sage (*sheng-hsien*).

c. They have to take young children with them (their sex is not specified), who are often sexually abused. These children are called "young nephew brothers (*shao-chih-hsiung*)" or Protector (*t'ai-pao*). The exceptionally bad children are allowed to join the group and become *ko-lao*.

⁴⁴ *Pi-hsieh chi-shih*, Appendix: pp. 13a-15b.

⁴⁵ Cf. Jen Yun-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement* (New Haven, 1973) pp. 68-69, p. 95, p. 96, p. 255, p. 383 note 22. Also consider the case of a Triad leader who was arrested in 1852. He claimed to be Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and caused much confusion, before his real identity was finally established.

d. They generally call older people "older brother" (*hsiung-ti*), in which case they call themselves "younger brother *ti-hsiung*"; they call younger people *ti-hsiung*, in which case they call themselves *hsiung-ti*.
 e. If anybody undertakes something (*shih*) without consulting the *lao-mao*, that person is beaten by him. The *lao-mao* also settles disputes among members, by inviting them to a teahouse and listening to the case. He then passes a verdict, after which the loser has to pay the expense of the teahouse. If someone disagrees, he is killed in a variety of ways. "I have once seen someone in the gatherings and bands, who cut through the sinews of [someone's] feet; the one who[se feet] were being cut [through] cried out in pain and said: 'Ko-lao, why don't you finish me off.' The *lao-mao* then ordered his head to be severed." The author recounts several other incidents among the braves, which he claims to have witnessed in person.

f. They have their own terminology and symbolic acts; here the author gives a large number of examples, one of which is using three fingers when passing around tea or tobacco, greeting people and placing one's chopsticks in their bowls. This practice is well known from the Heaven and Earth Gathering tradition. Its origin is unclear.

g. They rob people, including acquaintances. They have special terminology for this.

The survey ends with the comment that the Gathering of God (*shang-ti hui*, i.e. the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace), the Heaven and Earth Gathering tradition and all other known bandit groups of that time belonged to the Gathering of Brothers and Elders.

The author of the Appendix goes into more detail than any of the other descriptions of the supposed Gathering of Brothers and Elders that were made from 1887 onwards, and also gives far more jargon. The *Chin-pu-huan* material is more elaborate on ritual and mythology, but is particularly derivative in this respect of the Heaven and Earth Gathering tradition, and does not contain any jargon or anecdotal information.⁴⁶

The author of the Appendix consistently prefaces titles used by members of the Gathering with *ch'eng*, "to [be] call[ed]", and jargon expressions with *wei*, "to be considered to be". The two instances of *ko-lao*, on the other hand, are not prefaced by either

⁴⁶ Apart from the *Chin-pu-huan* material, cf. an 1887 case in: *Chin-tai-shih tzu-liao* 近代史資料 (Materials on modern history), 67 (1987) 77-79 and Chang Chih-tung 張之洞, *Chang wen-hsiang kung tsou-kao* 張文襄公奏稿 (Collected memorials of Chang Chih-tung; postscript 1931?) 20: especially pp. 2a-5a.

term and he does not explain them. They are contained in two more speculative sections of the survey. The material in item c. contains actual terminology, but the accusations about abusing children concern the same type of fear which this author tried to spread about the Christian missionaries. Here, it was probably inspired by the term used to describe new members.⁴⁷

The gruesome accusation in item e. is equally suspect. Furthermore, *ko-lao* was hardly the appropriate term of address for either a *lao-mao* or once's fellow members, when—according to the author's own information—they used *hsiung-ti*, *ti-hsiung*, or possibly *ko-tzu*. It is also unlikely that our author, obviously a high official in the Hunan armies, really could have been present at any actual meetings, which he himself describes as secretive, and which had been expressly forbidden by Tseng Kuo-fan and Tso Tsung-t'ang. His claim of having been present at Gathering meetings (as implied in this anecdote) seems at variance with the author's prefatory remark that he had been robbed twice by members of the Gathering. The general context within which the two instances of *ko-lao* are placed is not very convincing; the absence of the terms *ch'eng* or *wei* further indicate that the term *ko-lao* had probably been made up by our author himself.

The reliable parts of this text, especially items a, b, e, and g, tally well with customs among local non-Han peoples (such as the Klau or Miao). The use of jargon (cf. items b, c, d, f, and g) is quite natural: any group with a restricted membership develops its own jargon, perceived as "secret" to (and by) outsiders. The absence of this type of information in memorials on older groups probably reflects the nature of our sources (which show little interest in such information). Why the author of the Appendix felt the need to record so many details is unknown, but it does fit in with his detailed interest in Christianity. Apparently, he felt the one ought to know one's enemy as well as possible.

⁴⁷ On this type of accusation in general, cf. B.J. ter Haar, "Images of Outsiders: The Fear of Death by Mutilation" (unpublished manuscript, 1992). On their use by this author, cf. the third *chüan* of the *Pi-hsieh chi-shih*. Also, cf. a similar accusation of kidnapping children by the *ku[o]-lu* in a memorial by Ch'iu Yang-sheng 邱仰生, in: *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih-wen p'ien* 皇朝經世文編 (Compilation of texts on practical affairs from the august dynasty; Ho Ch'ang-ling ed., 1886), 75; p. 28a. Yen Ju-i 嚴如燾, in his *San-sheng pien-fang pei-lan* 三省邊防備覽 (Complete overview of the border defenses in the three provinces) accuses the *ku[o]-lu* of kidnapping small children to train them as killers. Quoted from Chiang Wei-ming 蔣維明, *Ch'uan-hu-shan pai-lien chiaio ch'i-i tzu-liao chi-lu* 川湖陝白蓮教起義資料輯錄 (A source-compilation on the White Lotus Teachings uprising in Ssu-ch'uan, Hun-nan, Hu-pei and Shen-hsi; Ch'eng-tu, 1980) p. 26.

Significantly, the structure of the Ssu-ch'uan *Ku[o]-lu* was identical to the Gathering as described in the Appendix. Below, I have indicated the relevant part(s) of the Appendix in brackets. Yen Ju-i describes the *Ku[o]-lu*, because of their connection to the 1796–1804 so-called White Lotus Uprising. They swore a blood oath (*pai-pa*) (cf. item a.); their leaders were called *lao-mao* or *mao-ting*, members were called *ta-wu* or *ta-man*¹ (cf. item b.); young members could be called “babies (*wa-tzu*)” (cf. item c.); they called each other older and younger uncle (*po* and *shu*) (cf. item d.); there is considerable social control and they respect each other (cf. items a. and e.); and they have their own jargon.⁴⁸ Liu Jung (1816–1873) describes the so-called Red Cash (*hung-ch'ien*) and Dark Cash (*hei-ch'ien*) gangs in a memorial from, or antedating, 1863 (when he was transferred outside Ssu-ch'uan). According to him, these groups originated in Ssu-ch'uan. He defines the titles (*ta*) *mao-ting*, *tso-t'ang lao-mao* and states that all functions carry names (cf. item b.). He does not explain the terms Red Cash and Dark Cash, but he does state that the autonyms used by them for their groups were of the type “X Hall of X Mountain (*mou-shan mou-t'ang tzu-hao*)” (not mentioned in the Appendix, but very common in later groups, designated as the Gathering, as well as within the Heaven and Earth Gathering tradition). He also mentions the existence of a membership certificate (not mentioned in the Appendix either, but very common in later groups), that five coloured flags were used to indicate the territories of groups (cf. item b.), and that members submitted without protest to the punishments imposed by their leader (cf. item e.).⁴⁹ Other memorials give roughly the same information, adding further details on terminology and ranking, such as the term “nephew babies” (*chih-wa-wa*). One of these terms is *lao-yao*, which was still used by the brotherhoods described by Shen Ts'ung-wen in his writings on Western Hu-nan.⁵⁰

Ku[o]-lu, Red Cash and Dark Cash were already different names

⁴⁸ *San-sheng pien-fang pei-lan*, quoted from *Ch'uan-hu-shan pai-lien chiao ch'i-i tzu-liao chi-lu*, p. 21, p. 26.

⁴⁹ Liu Jung 劉蓉, *Yang-hui t'ang wen/shih chi* 養晦堂文/詩集 (Collected prose and poetry of Liu Jung; *Chin-tai chung-kuo shih-liao ts'ung-k'an* 近代中國史料叢刊, T'ai-pei) 8: pp. 28a–b. Autonyms of the type “X Hall of X Mountain” were already used much earlier, cf. a 1844 memorial on the *Ku[o]-lu*, quoted by Liu (1983) p. 45.

⁵⁰ E.g. Ch'en Ch'ing-yung 陳慶鏞, in: *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih-wen hsu-p'ien* 皇朝經世文續編 (Sequel compilation of texts on practical affairs from the august dynasty; Sheng K'ang ed.; 1897) 97: pp. 33a–b and Hu Lin-i 胡林翼, in: *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih-wen hsu-p'ien*, 97: pp. 35a–b.

for the same predatory tradition in 1748.⁵¹ Furthermore, a remarkable number of membership titles can be traced as far back as 1781, when a large number of *Ku[o]-lu* members was captured as a result of large scale persecutions:

Table 2⁵²

Each title is followed by the number of captured members who had it. I have attempted to place the titles roughly in hierarchical order. Most people came from *Ssu-ch'uan*, followed in importance by *Hu-nan* and *Hu-pei*.

Special titles:

<i>lao-yao</i>	4	(Venerable Young One)
<i>san-wa</i>	2	(Third Infant)

Groups of titles:

The <i>man</i> -group: (highest ranks)		(rank and file: First <i>Man</i> until Eighth <i>Man</i>)			
<i>lao-man</i>	3 (Old <i>Man</i>)	<i>man-i</i>	1	<i>man-liu</i>	2
<i>ta-man</i> ¹	1 (Great <i>Man</i>)	<i>er-man</i>	1	<i>man-ch'i</i>	1
<i>ta-man</i> ²	2 (Great <i>Man</i>)	<i>man-san</i>	2	<i>man-pa</i>	2
(unclear)		<i>man-ssu</i>	2		
<i>hsiao-man</i>	3 (Little <i>Man</i>)	<i>man-wu</i>	none		
<i>man-er</i>	4 (<i>Man</i> the Child)				

The <i>lao</i> -group: (highest rank)		(rank and file: Venerable Second One until Venerable Eighth One)			
<i>lao-ta</i>	3 (Venerable Oldest One)	<i>lao-er</i>	2	<i>lao-liu</i>	1
		<i>lao-san</i>	1	<i>lao-ch'i</i>	4
		<i>lao-ssu</i>	1	<i>lao-pa</i>	4
		<i>lao-wu</i>	1		

The <i>hsiao</i> -group: (highest rank)		(rank and file: Small Second One until Small Tenth One)			
<i>hsiao-yi</i>	1 (Small First One)	<i>hsiao-er</i>	3	<i>hsiao-ch'i</i>	none
		<i>hsiao-san</i>	1	<i>hsiao-pa</i>	1
		<i>hsiao-ssu</i>	2	<i>hsiao-chiu</i>	1
		<i>hsiao-wu</i>	none	<i>hsiao-shih</i>	1
		<i>hsiao-liu</i>	none		

All titles are given in the confessions as part of the names of the arrested persons. It is quite possible that others preferred to use

⁵¹ Cf. the 1748 poem by Li T'iao-yüan, *T'ung-shan shih-chi*, 1: pp. 6–7. Also, cf. Yen Ju-i, in *San-sheng pien-fang pei-lan*, quoted from *Ch'uan-hu-shan pai-lien chiao ch'i-i tzu-liao chi-lu*, p. 21, p. 26; Ch'en Ch'ing-yung in the *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih-wen hsi-p'ien*, 97: pp. 33a–34a.

⁵² Based on Hsü (1989) pp. 36–52. Strangely, Hsü himself only notes the instances of *ta-man* and *hsiao-man* (Hsü [1989] p. 21).

their own names, rather than their titles. In the last decennium of the nineteenth century, these titles were still in common use among groups labelled as *Ko-lao-hui*.⁵³ The term *lao-mao* is conspicuously absent. Possibly, the term *man* (with a grand total of 24 occurrences) reflects the same underlying sound as *mao*; the precise meaning of the term is not clear to me.

It has been pointed out before that the Hu-nan/Hu-pei Gathering continued customs and terminology of the *Ku[o]-lu* gangs of Ssu-ch'uan. However, the underlying assumption has always been that the Gathering eventually evolved into an independent and much more sophisticated organization.⁵⁴ The material from the Appendix clearly demonstrates that this is not the case. Apart from the much later *Chin-pu-huan* material (the Nishimoto/Hirayama set and the more elaborate 1947 version), we have a description from an 1887 inquisition report and some material from 1891. Neither adds anything substantial to the tradition, as it is already documented in the 1861 Appendix, or, for that matter, in the various sources on the so-called *Ku[o]-lu* bands as early as 1781.⁵⁵ There is no significant increase in organizational complexity or ritual practices.

I have already noted that the *Chin-pu-huan* material combines terminology from the Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-nan/Hu-pei predatory tradition, with mythology from the Heaven and Earth Gathering tradition, and mythology from the Water Margin vernacular tradition. This means that whatever additions were made to our predatory tradition in the *Chin-pu-huan* material, they stem from external sources and do not reflect an autonomous internal development.

The name Gathering of Brothers and Elders as a label

My investigation should have made clear three basic points:

a. at least since the Sung, there has been a remarkable continuity, over time, between the terminology and customs of ethnic minor-

⁵³ For instance Hsü (1989) pp. 101–107.

⁵⁴ Liu (1983) pp. 28–29, p. 49 for general statements, pp. 61–89 for a detailed analysis. As Liu has noted as well, very little of the material on the structure of the Gathering actually stems from Hu-nan or Hu-pei.

⁵⁵ For reasons of space I have not included a detailed comparison of the 1861 Appendix with the later sources referred to in note 45, or with the *Chin-pu-huan* material. The continuities between the Appendix and later evidence on the Gathering are essentially the same as those pointed out in the main text between the Appendix and the *Ku[o]-lu*.

ities and other peripheral groups in the Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-pei/Hu-nan region;

b. many groups denoted during the second half of the nineteenth century as Gathering of Brothers and Elders (certainly those possessing any significant organizational structure) are part of the same continuous tradition of predatory groups as the *Ku[o]-lu*, Red Cash and Dark Cash groups, that goes back to the second half of the eighteenth century at least;

c. the name *ko-lao (hui)* (Gathering of Brothers and Elders) is suddenly introduced from 1861 onwards by members of the official elite, and there are no reliable sources by ritual brotherhoods or predatory groups themselves that use the name as an autonym.

Within the system of terminology used by the predatory tradition under consideration, *lao* was a minor adjective (in terms such as *lao-mao*), and *ko[tzu]* was only a common form of address. I have already noted that the two instances of *ko-lao* in the Appendix are extremely suspect. From the perspective of our groups, an autonym such as *ko-lao hui* would have been singularly lacking in distinction. In fact, predatory groups in the Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-pei/Hu-nan region (including those which produced the *Chin-pu-huan* region material) always referred to themselves as belonging to "X Hall of X Mountain".

On the other hand, the term *ko-lao hui* would have seemed quite natural for officials faced with this predatory tradition, since it sounded similar to the well-established term *ku[o]-lu* (and the underlying oral variants, possibly going back to the name of the Klau minority), which was used for similar groups. Unlike the previous term *ku[o]-lu*, the new term also fitted the use of terminology such as *lao-mao* or *lao-yao* and the frequent references to brothers (*ko[tzu]*, *ti-hsiung*, *hsiung-ti*). For outsiders, the lack of distinction to the term would have mattered very little. Nevertheless, this etymology, though superficially plausible, is never explicitly given in any of the sources which I have seen. To my considerable surprise, the term is actually never explained by contemporary observers.

The chronology of the increased use of the term Gathering of Brothers and Elders, from 1861 onwards, seems to indicate that it was first coined by the author of the *Pi-hsieh chi-shih* Appendix. His use of the term was then copied by his fellow officials in the Hu-nan armies fighting the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace.⁵⁶ Like the author

⁵⁶ The crucial role of the Appendix is also indicated by the fact that Tso Tsung-t'ang perceived Ssu-ch'uan as being the place of origin of the Gathering, despite the evident predominance of incidents from Hu-nan and Hu-pei (e.g.

of the *Pi-hsieh chi-shih*, they were faced with growing unrest among the braves, who had long since been organized into ritual blood brotherhoods. The term helped officials to label this intractable problem in a convenient way, and also served to link together conceptually disperse and confusing incidents. All early occurrences of the term stem from this one specific context.⁵⁷ The real origin of the unrest among the braves must be sought in their very irregular payment and, at a later stage, in the lack of suitable professions open to them, once they had been demobilized.⁵⁸ Blaming the ritual brotherhoods was a convenient way of masking the failure of government policy.

The term was therefore actually a label, but it was used as a pseudo-autonym. The term could be introduced into sources as if it was used by the actual predatory groups themselves. Members of these groups or otherwise suspicious people could be (and, in my opinion, were indeed) forced to confess to membership of the Gathering. More or less the same process had taken place in the case of the White Lotus Teachings several centuries earlier.⁵⁹

The hypotheses presented in this short investigation help us to understand the chronology of, and reasons for, the appearance of the term *ko-lao (hui)* in the sources. The primary reasons for inventing and using the term were located in the context of perception and persecution by Ch'ing officials and literati. It is important to note that Westerners took over this interpretation at the time.

sources quoted throughout Liu [1983]), especially *Tso wen-hsiang kung ch'üan-chi, shu-tu*: 10: pp. 35a-b, 11: p. 29b and discussion by Liu (1983) pp. 50-53.

⁵⁷ Cf. Liu (1983) pp. 51-60 quoting memorials by Tseng Kuo-fan, Tso Tsung-t'ang, and others.

⁵⁸ On the problems of the braves, in addition to Liu (1983), cf. Jen (1973) pp. 222-229, pp. 336-337 and Luo Erh-kang, *Hsiang-chün hsin-chih* 湘軍新志 (A new treatise on the Hsiang armies; Ch'ang-sha, 1939) especially pp. 198-202 and pp. 209-215 (he interprets the Gathering as the principal cause of these problems, instead of the result). Also, cf. Chao Lieh-wen 趙烈文, *Neng-ching-chü jih-chi* 能靜居日記 (Diary of Chao Lieh-wen; *Chung-kuo shih-hsüeh ts'ung-shu* 中國史學叢書, T'ai-pei, 1964) p. 1563. The author of this diary describes a wall poster from 1865, supposedly put up by the Gathering, complaining about this situation. Chao considers this to be the real cause of the unrest among the braves. The poster is signed "I write my heart" and does not itself refer to the Gathering. I wish to express my thanks to Han Yün-hung for his help in deciphering the calligraphy of this diary.

⁵⁹ B.J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden, 1992) *passim*. A pseudo-autonym is a label or generic term which comes to be perceived in the minds of outsiders as an autonym. It is then "put into the mouth" of suspects in the course of the inquisition process or by historians engaged in rewriting the sources. I treat the problem of recognizing pseudo-autonyms and labels in more detail in my book.

Conspiracy theories about so-called secret societies, *viz.* the Free Masons or Jews, were extremely common in the West during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.⁶⁰ During the 1891 Yang-tzu River Valley riots, the Western countries put enormous pressure on the Chinese government to produce the culprits. In this way, they contributed considerably to the existing stereotypes about the Gathering.⁶¹

Since the Gathering was held to be responsible, the scapegoats had to be made to fit the image of (to be constructed as) members of the Gathering. As in the case of the White Lotus Teachings in the past, this could be achieved through enforced confessions and the rewriting of the original transcripts (such as putting in the name "Gathering of Brothers and Elders"). Some of the scapegoats who were presented as members of the Gathering did belong to predatory groups, others did not. The recognition that the term Gathering of Brothers and Elders is a late nineteenth and early twentieth century derogatory label finally enables us to make that distinction. If we ignore the pejorative terms *Ku[o]-lu* and *Ko-lao-hui*, the evidence is quite clear that, from the late eighteenth century onwards until the early twentieth century at least, the various predatory groups denoted with such (and other) terms in the Ssu-ch'uan/Hu-pei/Hu-nan border region shared roughly the same organizational structure and ritual practices.

⁶⁰ J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (London, 1972). People studying the history of anti-semitism and racism will encounter these conspiracy-theories all the time and they have by no means died out.

⁶¹ Cf. my "Images of Outsiders: The Fear of Death by Mutilation" (unpublished manuscript, 1992) for a detailed study of these riots and the different stereotypes involved.

GLOSSARY

- ch'eng* 稱
*ch'i-lao**¹ 玃猪
*ch'i-lao**² 玃猿
chih-wa-wa 侄娃娃
Chin-pu-huan 金不換
Chung-Hsiang 鍾相
Chung lao-ye 鍾老爺
er-man 二滿
Feng-huang 鳳凰
Hirayama Shû 平山周
hei-ch'ien 黑錢
Ho Lung 賀龍
Hsiang 曲
Hsiang-hsi 湘西
hsiao-ch'i 小七
hsiao-chiu 小九
hsiao-er 小二
hsiao-liu 小六
hsiao-man 小滿
hsiao-pa 小八
hsiao-san 小三
hsiao-shih 小十
hsiao-ssu 小四
hsiao-wu 小五
hsiao-yi 小一
hsieh-lao 獃獃
hsiung-ti 兄弟
Hung 洪
hung-ch'i wu-ye 紅旗五爺
hung-ch'ien 紅錢
Hung Hsiu-ch'üan 洪秀全
Hung Mai 洪邁
*Klau**¹ 玃, 猿
Ko-lao hu 哥老會
ko-tzu 哥子
Ku-lu 嗶嚕
Kuo-lu 囉嚕
lao-ch'i 老七
lao-er 老二
lao-fu 老父
lao-lu 老六
lao-man 老滿
lao-mao 老帽
lao-pa 老八
lao-san 老三
lao-ssu 老四
lao-ta 老大
lao-wu 老五
lao-yao 老么
- lung* 龍
lung-chou 龍舟
lung-ch'uan 龍船
lung-shou 龍首
lung-t'ou 龍頭
lung-t'ou ta-ko 龍頭大哥
ma-t'ou 碼頭
man-ch'i 滿七
man-er 滿二
man-i 滿一
man-liu 滿六
man-pa 滿八
man-san 滿三
man-ssu 滿四
man-wu 滿五
mao-ting 帽頂
Miao 苗
Miao-fang pei-lan 苗防備覽
mou-shan mou-t'ang tzu-hao 某山某堂字號
neng 能
Nihon oyobi Nihonjin 日本及日本人
Nishimoto Seiji 西本省二
pai-pa 拜把
Pi Yung-nien 畢永年
po 伯
san-wa 三娃
shang-ti hui 上帝會
shao-chih-hsiung 少姪兄
sheng-hsien 聖賢
shih 事
shu 叔
*ta-man*¹ 大滿
*ta-man*² 大蠻
ta-wu 大五
t'ai-pao 太保
ti-hsiung 弟兄
t'ou 頭
tso-t'ang lao-mao 左堂老帽
tu-mao 都帽
t'u-jen 土人
t'u-yu 土語
tuan-wu 端午
wa-tzu 娃子
wei 爲
Yang T'ai 楊太
Yang yao 楊么
yao 么
yao-man 么滿
you-hsia 遊俠