Some Remarks on the "Three-in-One Doctrine" and its Manifestations in Singapore and Malaysia

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I.

Efforts at harmonizing the Three Doctrines, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, reach back as far as pre-T'ang times. They became more evident during the Sui and T'ang periods. Tendencies towards an amalgamation of the Three Doctrines appeared during the Sung and Yüan periods, and are found with increasing frequency under the Ming dynasty up to the point when Lin Chao-en established the San-i-chiao, "Three-in-One Doctrine", or Hsia-chiao in which the Three Doctrines were merged into one. Lin was a native of P'u-t'ien County, which, together with Hsien-yü County constituted the former prefecture of Hsing-hua in central Fukien province.

Similarly to his more famous younger contemporary and Fukien countryman Li Chih, Lin Chao-en was a popular figure during his lifetime, but was later denounced as a heretic by the Confucian orthodoxy. Thus Chu I-tsun called Li Chih and Lin Chao-en together "the two heretics of Fukien". Quite a number of authors of the 17th century wrote biographies of Lin or mentioned him in short notices. The editions of the Fu-chien t'ung-chih of 1684 and of 1737 contain a biography of Lin, but not the later editions of this work nor the P'u-t'ien hsien-chih of 1758 (with supplements of 1879 and 1926). Since the early 18th century Lin Chao-en as a historical personality has been almost forgotten. Only the followers of the Three-in-One Doctrine remember Lin. They pay their respects to his tomb — which is even mentioned in P'u-t'ien hsien-chih (4.27a) — and worship him as the founder of their religion, San-i chiao-chu.

* The first part of this article is a slightly revised version of a paper read at the International Congress of Orientalists, Canberra, in January 1971.


3 DKWJ 30226.29.

4 Out of the numerous writings on Li Chih in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages only the most recent biography written by K.C. Hsiao in Draft Ming Biographies 7, 1967, need be mentioned.

5 Ming Shih tsung (ed. 1705), ch. 50, 27b.

6 Ch. 51, sect. Hsien shih, Hsing-hua-fu, and ch. 60, 8a.
In modern times, the first scholar to point out the role of Lin Chao-en in Ming intellectual life and among those thinkers who were influenced by Wang Yang-ming was ÖYANAGI Shigeta, whose paper of 1928 on the Three Doctrines during the late Ming period includes a separate paragraph on Lin. A Chinese translation of this paper appeared in 1944. A short notice on Lin Chao-en is contained in Shina gakugai daijii by KONDO Moku. In 1952 MANO Senryū published an article on the same subject with a special consideration of Lin Chao-en, succeeded by a contribution on Lin and his Work in the Memorial Volume for Shimizu Taiji in 1962. The most thorough study of Lin Chao-en's thought to date was made by SAKAI Tadao in his Chūgoku senshō no kenkyū (Tōkyō 1960) one of the most important recent contributions to Ming intellectual history. Chapter 3 of this work deals with the trends towards syncretism of the Three Doctrines, and Section 8 of this chapter with the thought of Lin Chao-en in particular (pp. 263–285). No reference to Lin Chao-en can be found in Western sinological literature prior to Tu Lien-che's biography of Lin in Draft Ming Biographies No. 6, 1966. The first introductory study on Lin's life and thought was published in 1967 by LIU Ts'un-yan under the title "Lin Chao-en (1517–1598). The Master of the Three Teachings".

No reference to the Three-in-One Doctrine during the 19th and 20th centuries can be found in Western, Chinese, or Japanese literature. During the late 19th or early 20th century the Three-in-One Doctrine spread to Southeast Asia, transmitted by immigrants from Hsing-hua, Lin's native prefecture where the Doctrine was most popular. In Malaysia and Singapore today quite a number of temples dedicated to this doctrine exist in various places. They are, however, never called miao, szu, or kuan, the usual names of Buddhist or Taoist temples, but t'ang, yün, lung, tz'u, or kung. There are not a few temples scattered throughout West Malaysia. These and some more general aspects regarding the Three-in-One Doctrine will be dealt with in the second part of this paper. This part will be limited to the temples of Singapore.

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[13] I am indebted to Mr. CHoo Chin Tow of Singapore who first drew my attention to the San-i chiao temples at Kuala Lumpur by his unpublished Master's thesis (University of Malaya) of 1968 Some Sociological Aspects of Chinese Temples in Kuala Lumpur (in Chinese) and later located the temples at Singapore.
The biggest temple is Chiu-li tung, "Nine-Carps-Grotto", at Tiwary Road, corner of Muar Road (fig. 2). Smaller temples are Ch'ung-san t'ang, 187 Thompson Road (fig. 3), T'ien-shu t'ang, 18 Petain Road, established in 1964 (fig. 4), T'ien-hsing tz'u, Kampang Potong Pasir (off Meyappa Chettiar Road, off Upper Serangoon Road) (fig. 5), and Hsing-sheng kung, in the upper floor of 280 A Changi Road, 5 miles. Most temples are kept up by people from Hsing-hua. They speak a particular dialect. It was common in Singapore and elsewhere in Malaysia, and seems to a certain degree still to be the case today, that people speaking the same dialect "formed associations clearly centered upon particular temples." Chiu-li tung is situated in the midst of an area of motor car spare part and repair shops, a profession carried on in particular by Hsing-hua people. But, in some cases, such as T'ien-shu t'ang important members of the Board of Trustees, Tung-shihhui, originate from Fu-ch'ing county, which adjoins P'u-t'ien in the North and belongs to Fu-chou Prefecture, or even come from one of the counties of former Ch'üan-chou Prefecture in the South.

The better equipped temples have idols of Confucius, Lao-tzu, and Sakyamuni. In every temple, however, the idol of Lin Chao-en, the Founder of the Three-in-One Doctrine, San-i chiao-chu, also called Hsia-wu-ni, is worshipped (fig. 6). Usually he has at least two associates (p'ei), the Taoist adepts and "True Men", Chen-jen, Chang San-feng to his left, and Cho Wan-chun to his right (fig. 7). The former was from Southern Manduria and lived in the early Ming period, the latter came from Hsing-hua and was a friend of Lin Chao-en. Quite often the Founder of the Three-in-One Doctrine has additional associates, such as the Taoists Lu Shih-yüan, Hsieh Yüan-hui, Wang Ch'eng-kuang, and Ch'en Shan-te (see below); so far none of these can be identified. In some temples further idols of popular saints and deities are worshipped, such as Kuan-yin, T'ai-i chen-jen, Hsüan-t'an yüan-shuai, and others. On a scroll kept

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16 The temple with the same name at 605 Bukit Timah Road is likewise kept up by people from Hsiang-hua, but it has no relation to the Three-in-One Doctrine.
17 See Fu-chien tung-chih (ed. 1868) 263, 57a–b; (Hsing-hua fu) P'u-t'ien hsien-chih (ed. 1758/1925) 32,4b–6b.
18 They all are mentioned by E. T. C. Werner, loc. cit. (n. 16) and in other pertinent reference works.

[31] 陳善德 [32] 大乙真人 [33] 齊天大聖 [34] 玄壇元帥
at Ch'üng-sang t'ang a whole pantheon of the Three-in-One Doctrine is painted (fig. 8). On the top are Sakyamuni, K'ung-tzu, and Lao-tzu. In the second row the Founder of the Three-in-One Doctrine, Lin Chao-en, accompanied by Chu Hui-hsü and Lin Chen-ming on the left, and Lu Hsing-ju (Wenhui) and Chang I-lin to his right. They are all called "master", it-tzu. Lu Wen-hui is known as a pupil and follower of Lin, but the identity of the three others cannot as yet be established. In the third row there is Buddha Maitreya, Mi-lo-fo, in the centre, accompanied by Lin Chao-en's followers Tung Shih on the left and Ch'en Chung-yi on the right. Both were from Hsing-hua, lived during the late Ming and early Ch'ing periods, and were engaged in the publication of Lin Chao-en's writings. The bottom-row is flanked by the legendary Bodhisattvas Chia-lan, Sangarama, on the left, and Wei-t'o, Veda, guardians of Buddhist temples. In the centre there is the "True Man" Chang San-feng, to the right the "True Man" Cho Wanch'un, and to his left Ho Hsin-yin. The inclusion of the latter as an adherent of the Three-in-One Doctrine is remarkable. Ho Hsin-yin (1517—1579) was a non-conformist comparable to Lin Chao-en and Li Chih. He is said to have visited Lin Chao-en when he travelled to Fukien in 1562—1564, and to have praised Lin's writings, but it is not known that he shared Lin's ideas on the amalgamation of the Three Doctrines or even became a follower of the Three-in-One Doctrine. This scroll, as well as all Three-in-One Doctrine temples, illustrate the religious syncretism taught and practised by that sect. Sometimes the Taoist element seems to predominate over Buddhist and Confucian elements.

Chiu-li tung preserves two stone-inscriptions dated 1948 and 1954 (figs. 9 and 10); these afford some information on the Three-in-One Doctrine in Southeast Asia and on the history of the temple. In particular it shows the very strong Taoist element in the Three-in-One Doctrine of recent time. This trend towards Taoism was, however, not dominating in the writings of Lin Chao-en himself. Quite to the contrary, Lin advocated that "the Three Doctrines should be united in Confucianism and take K'ung-tzu as master"; he was merely "a Taoist-inclined Confucianist". The text of the first Chiu-li tung inscription reads as follows:

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19 See the preface of Lin-tzu pen-hsing shih-ju, reprint P'u-t'ien 1939.
20 See E. T. C. WERNER, loc. cit. (n. 16), pp. 57—58.
21 See ibid., pp. 553—554.
22 See his biography in Draft Ming Biographies No. 14, 1970.
23 See the biography of Lin Chao-en in Draft Ming Biographies 6, 1966, p. 3.
25 Liu, loc. cit. (n. 12), p. 266.
26 I am indebted to Professor Jao Tsung-i, University of Singapore, for giving me a first copy of the inscription which I compared with the original text in October 1970. At the same time I copied the second inscription.
Stone tablet in memory of the public construction of the Nine-Carps-Grotto:

We can trace the origins of the doctrine of the Holy Immortals (Hsien)\textsuperscript{27} back to Kuang Ch'eng-tzu at the time of the Yellow Emperor\textsuperscript{28}. It is recorded in the historical traditions. Through more than five thousand years the Tao [of this doctrine] has been successively truthfully transmitted. During the Chien-yüan period of the Han dynasty (140—135 B.C.), when our Min area had not yet come under the administration of the Empire, first the nine brothers of the Ho family went travelling to the district of Hsing-hua. They lived at the Nine-Carps-Lake, cultivated themselves, and became senior Holy Immortals\textsuperscript{29}. Therefore this county was named Hsien-yu, "where the Holy Immortals travel"\textsuperscript{30}. On the island P'u-hsi in the Southeast of the sea\textsuperscript{31} there lived the Holy Immortal's elder Lu Shih-yüan, and the masters Hsieh (Yüan-hui), Wang (Ch'eng-kuang), and Ch'en (Shan-te)\textsuperscript{32} who together cultivated the excellent [tradition of the] Tao of the Holy Immortals. Their descendants built dykes for protection against the sea and prepared arable land, and they also established the county of P'u-t'ien\textsuperscript{33}. Since ancient times the mountains at the Nine-Carps-Lake area have been a natural scenery for Holy Immortals. The recent investigations for water-conservancy are famous in China and abroad\textsuperscript{34}. Moreover, during the Sung and Ming dynasties, one after another the filial

\textsuperscript{27} On the meaning of this term see J. Needham, Science and Civilisation in China, vol. 2, Cambridge 1956, pp. 39 and 141—154. The term is used here in a rather vague meaning.

\textsuperscript{28} A legendary Taoist hermit at the time of the Yellow Emperor. See DKWJ 9493 .. 185.

\textsuperscript{29} During the period of Yüan-shou (122—117 B.C.) the nine brothers Ho from Lin-ju\textsuperscript{145} in present Honan are said to have come to the lake and practised alchemy (lien-tan)\textsuperscript{146}. They were successful and each of them mounted a carp, which transformed itself into a dragon and went away as Holy Immortals. See (Hsing-hua-Lu) P'u-t'ien hsien-chih (ed. 1758/1925) 32, 1a-b; DKWJ 167 .. 629. Lin Chao-en is reported to have visited this lake in 1540. See Lin-tzu pen-hsing shih-lu\textsuperscript{147}, ed. 1939, 7a. Good coloured photographs of the Nine-Carps-Lake are contained in Magnificent China, ed. by Wu Luen Tak, 2nd. ed., Hongkong 1968, pp. 40—41, p. 31, and pp. 124—125.

\textsuperscript{30} Established as a part of P'u-t'ien in Sheng-li 2, 699 A.D., later as Ch'ing-yüan\textsuperscript{48} county, renamed Hsien-yu\textsuperscript{49} during the early T'ien-pao period (742—756). See DKWJ 374 .. 7 according to Tu-shih tang-yü chi-yao; Hsin T'ang-shu (ed. Wu-chou tung-wen) 41, 13b, which gives the first year T'ien-pao, 742.

\textsuperscript{31} P'u-hsi has been identified as a small island near to Mei-chou yü\textsuperscript{50}.

\textsuperscript{32} The four names could not be identified (see above). P'u-t'ien hsien-chih, sect. Hsien-shih chuan 32, 2a, mentions only a certain Holy Immortal named Ch'en for the Sung period.

\textsuperscript{33} First established in 589, then abolished, and re-established in 622. See DKWJ 31025 .. 2 according to Tu-shih tang-yü chi-yao; P'u-t'ien hsien-chih 1,3a.

\textsuperscript{34} About three quarters of P'u-t'ien hsien-chih ch. 2 deals with water conservancy, shui-li.

daughter Lin, who was canonized as Heavenly Empress and Holy Mother 35, the “True Man” Cho Wan-ch’ün 36, and the Founder of the Doctrine Lin Lung-chiang (i.e. Lin Chao-en) who put his faith in the amalgamation of the Three Doctrines, became famous. Sacrificial rites for the Holy Immortals and sages and temples were established everywhere in China and abroad. Many years have passed already since the idols of the Holy Immortals came to the South; they widely spread the right doctrine (i.e. the Three-in-One Doctrine), set forth testimonies, made me believe in the faith, and saved and helped the people to prepare against calamities and to ward off evil. From 1944 onwards when Singapore was under Japanese occupation for five years, redemption festivals 37 were held and, on eight occasions, religious ceremonies were observed. Their virtue covered far and near; their achievement spread everywhere among ghosts and men. People of our faith made provisions to start construction work but have not yet finished the whole work. When in the Autumn of 1945 victory in the war was achieved, the Grotto had been completed and rules were fixed to held a redemption festival every ten years (Chia 154) in order to commemorate it. The adherents of the Doctrine as well as good and believing women compatriots contributed funds under very difficult conditions with great enthusiasm. They collected the large amount of more than 400,000 dollars. Thus they completed the precious covered seat (for the Founder of the Doctrine) for ten thousand years and established fragrant offerings for a hundred generations. To recompense virtue and to exalt merit we have engraved this stone tablet for everlasting transmission. Composed by Kuan Ch’iung-k’ai from Chin-chiang of P’u-yang (= P’u-t’ien), a follower of the Doctrine, who was 61 years of age when he respectfully washed himself to write this inscription.

(Then the names of the initiators and sponsors follow.)

On a lucky day in the first moon of the 37th year of the Chinese Republic, wu-tzu (1948), the trustees initiating and aiding the building and the treasurer and followers of the Doctrine Liu Yüan-lin together with their friends set up this stone.

35 Sixth daughter of a certain Lin Yüan [54]. She lived in the late 10th or early 11th century, died at a young age, and was worshipped later under various names as the goddess of the sea. She is best known as Ma-tsu [56]. Lin was from P’u-t’ien.


37 For note 17.

38 P’u-tu [53]: Religious ceremonies and offerings, primarily Buddhist, for the redemption of living men as well as of the spirits of the dead. See DKWJ 13982 .. 60; De Groot, loc. cit. vol. II, p. 419.
公建九鰲洞碑記：

我國仙教，溯源黃帝時廣成子，史傳記載，歷五千餘年，道脈真傳，當漢建元間，吾閭未拓疆，先有何氏九兄弟，遊來興郡，居九鰲湖，修成仙翁，故邑曰仙遊，海之東南島，莆義有盧士元仙長，謝王陳諸師，同修瓘瑶仙道，後人隨海成田，又立縣莆田，自古九鰲湖山，天然仙景，近今考察水利，中外聞名，更有宋明兩朝，迭出林孝女，勑封天后聖母，至卓萬春真人，林龍江教主，皈依三教為一貫，仙聖祀典，宮殿建遍華洋，仙駕南來，多歷千年所，宏開法教，丕著聲靈，度世拯民，禦災捍患，當甲申星洲淪陷中，五年普度，肅八次法壇，德被遠近，功遍陰陽，同人等等興土木，未竟全功，遂于己酉秋，抗戰
The second inscription reads as follows:

Stone tablet in memory of the second big redemption festival held each decade in the Nine-Carps-Grotto in 1954.

The history of our doctrine of the excellent law has been already described in detail on the other stone tablet. When in 1944 the first redemption festival was held and extensive construction work was started, the difficulties caused by the Japanese occupation prevented the completion of the Grotto. The Holy Immortals master prophesied that by the Autumn of 1945 there would be victory in China and Europe.

The Holy Immortals master prophesied that by the Autumn of 1945 there would be victory in China and Europe. And actually it happened this way and the Grotto was completed. A vow was taken to open widely once every ten years the gate of the law of our Doctrine. This year we have invited trustees from in and outside the Doctrine, have trained masters in the canonical scriptures of the Three Doctrines, and have assembled former Mu-lien actors. Con-

38 Chao-nan, Shônan (55) was the Japanese designation of Singapore during the time of occupation, 1942—1945. See: Lee Ting-Hui, "Singapore under the Japanese", *NYHP* XVII, 1961, Pt. 1, pp. 31—69.

39 Moginlin or Maudgalyayama, the main person in a Buddhist legend performed on the stage too. Apparently the Three-In-One Doctrine has taken over this custom from Buddhism in connection with its festivals of redemption. See *DKWJ* 23105, 139—140; De Groot, *loc. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 414—419; E.T.C. Werner, *loc. cit.* (n. 16), pp. 309—310.

[55] 聲南

128
tributions were asked for in order to complete the place for the redemption festival, to construct a worship shelter with iron pillars and, so as to preserve a recorded history [of the temple] to erect in the main hall a stone tablet which clearly records the fragrant names of the trustees and of those having contributed more than twenty dollars, and two copper tablets which record in succession the fragrant names of the masters in the canonical scriptures, of the actors and of all those having contributed more than five dollars. The necessary expenses amounted altogether to more than 26,000 dollars Singapore currency. So that in future permanent memory might be incited. Again composed and written by (Kuan) Ch'iuang-k'ai at the age of 66.

(The names of the trustees and of the donors with the amount each of them had contributed follow)

Publicly set up on the day chia-wu in the seventh moon of Chia-wu, the 43rd year of the Chinese Republic (6 August 1954).

九鲤洞甲午第二届逢甲大普度纪念
碑。頒经法教史, 碑已详述矣。當甲午年
第一届普度大兴土木, 与於昭华, 洞宇
未竟功。仙师预示, 乙酉秋, 中欧胜利。果
尔洞宇建成。宏愿十年一度, 大启法門。
今岁举聘教内外董事, 訓练三教经师,
召集善目连剧员, 奏幕福缘, 完成普度
道场, 建铁柱拜亭七座, 屏史金堂石碑
一面。载明董事及贰拾元以上虔缘人
等名, 铜碑二面, 列载经师剧员, 全体及
五元以上虔缘人芳名, 总计费需坡幣

46 The two copper tablets are fixed on the wall of the temple behind the stones.
It is evident from these inscriptions that to this day the Three-in-One-Doctrine is a living religious sect among the Chinese in Singapore. Inscriptions are thus not only of historical interest, but they may also be relevant to the understanding of the present. They are read by living people and may have an influence on their thinking and perhaps even on their actions.

(To be continued)
1. Lin Chao-en's tomb at P'u-t'ien. Taken in 1957 from an earlier photo dating probably from the 1920s or 1930s.
2. Chiu-li tung

3. Ch’iung-san t’ang
4. T'ien-shu t'ang
5. T'ien-hsing tz'u

6. Idol of San-i chiao-chu in T'ien-shu l'ang
7. San-i chiao-chu with four associates: Chang San-feng, Cho Wan-ch’ün, Hsuan-t’an yün-shuai and Wei-t’o. From a photograph (kept in T’ien-lhsing tz’u) of a painting.

8. San-i chiao pantheon of Ch’iung-san t’ang
9. Chiu-li tung inscription of 1948

10. Chiu-li tung inscription of 1954