

ORDER IS PRINCIPLE

*To starve to death is a very small matter.
To lose one's integrity, however, is a very
serious matter.*

—Ch'eng I, *Reflections of Things on Hand*

PRINCIPLE OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

From the introduction to *Reflections on Frogs and Butterflies*, by the honorable Resplendent Crane ancestors Yen Zu and Lu Po-Kung:

In the summer of the second year of the Qing period, the honorable Resplendent Crane mandarin and sage, Lu Po-Kung of the Bone Court, came to my Beijing study and stayed for two months. Together, we read the *Richuan* and the works of the Great Masters, meditated on the writings of Xue, and discussed the Five Constant Virtues. We lamented that the doctrines of the Crane's Way were as broad and wide as a sea with no shore. There are so many laws! There are so many roads to salvation! In the bleak period of the Fifth Age, these works are still the foundation for training new soldiers in the way of righteousness, yet no student can start down the Road Back on his own using only these tomes. In our darkening times, we agreed there was a chance that many who had newly taken the Second Breath would not receive proper instruction. As masters and teachers, we felt we had to take steps to ensure that none who were willing to walk our path would be left behind in eternal darkness.

To that end, we produced the following tome, since learning is the foundation of wisdom.

Fearing that a young Wan Kuei would not know where to start on the broader path to enlightenment, we selected passages from the Five Classics and the Great Learning that embody the fundamentals of our beliefs and we related them to the application of daily duties. Our work contains those essentials that address the student's search for the beginnings of things, the tenets of belief, the Eight Lotus Path, the rules of daily conduct, the rules of managing others, understanding of orthodox schools of our thought, and observations of our sages, bodhisattvas and worthies. Without this knowledge, we would all be susceptible to corruption — the student more than any.

Although we cannot allow those new to our Dharma to venture unguided into the fundamentals of our pure moral principles, if the newly reborn *him* is completely ignorant of the basics, where will he be when he is fully trained and prepared to fight the disease that blankets the world? This tome introduces those basics so the student can understand our path as a whole without needing

to comprehend all its intertwining details. In following our way, the youngster learns to apply our principles to his daily life and personal practice. He learns the meaning of honor and integrity. He understands the importance of the Fivefold Way and the Eight Lotus Path. He upholds the laws. He feels vigor in his limbs and excitement in his head at the thought of ridding the world of plague and returning it to the Age of Heaven.

Spread this work everywhere, to every small town, village and hamlet, so that any who wish to learn our ways can do so. When the next lin rises from his grave in an isolated village, away from the school or temple of an enlightened Crane teacher, his master may turn to this book to help him choose our way. If this same student then broods over the information found here and turns it over in his own mind, he shall discover the roots of righteousness. Full of knowledge of our ways, he can then seek out and read the works of the Great Masters, see their meanings, recite their words, absorb their wisdom and return to the truths of our Dharma. Such study prepares the student to journey to one of the Five August Courts, where he may receive all the proper instruction, beauties and richness of the Cranes. In this way, this tome communicates our teachings to those who are otherwise flailing in the darkness, and works against the turning of the Great Wheel. Instruction and teaching are always our most powerful tools against the Yama Kings.

This tome also provides the beginning of direction for the dedicated student. The student who proceeds accordingly from here, reading the *Ki Chuan*, meditating on the Five Constant Virtues, learning from wise teachers and applying the laws to every action, thus finds a firm foothold on the Road Back. If, however, the student refrains from study or the application of the rules of conduct, he drifts in emptiness and vacuity. A student without proper instruction trying to navigate the ways of the world is like a traveler trying to make his path through a storm at midnight. He can see little, move little, and act little. A student with proper instruction is strong and has the tools to guide him through the same storm. This book is the root of the first step on the way to harmony.

Understand the words contained in this tome. Meditate on their meanings. Follow their truths. They are the beginnings of the correct path, a sword against the plague of wickedness, and the tools with which to save the world. They are the foundations of integrity in a crumbling society. In these laws we find the principles of Heaven and Earth.

Master Yen Zu

Master Yen Zu
Mandarin of the Blood Court of Beijing

WALKING THE HARMONIOUS WAY

The Resplendent Cranes view themselves as the guardians of Cathayan integrity. It is in their hands to uphold the mandate of Heaven and return their people to its grace. The Cranes are Damned, but they believe the strict application of rules, laws, analects, scriptures, writings and doctrines holds the key to their redemption and that of the entire world. Their state of being is punishment for the sin of pride, yet this punishment is not eternal. If they strive to live in a close approximation to the way they did in ancient times, before Heaven punished the Wan Xian, they can become holy warriors once again. According to their teachings, many of their bodhisattvas have returned to this blessed state.

However, a long, hard road lies between being Kuei-jin and being warriors of Heaven, and no one is entirely certain anymore what behavior and actions are necessary for that transformation. The Resplendent Cranes find themselves bickering over the small details of their doctrine in hopes of uncovering the combination of laws, tenets and beliefs that will serve as a magic bullet to turn the Great Cycle back toward the Age of Heaven, redeem Cathayans of their undying twin state and rid the world of corruption. Even in the midst of the chaos at the end of the Fifth Age, the Cranes still argue over who is right and who is wrong, since that distinction may mean the difference between salvation and obliteration.

ON LIVING THE WAY

From the outside, the Cranes seem a humorless bunch, too busy going on and on about corruption, disease, plague, integrity, honor and propriety to get around to the business of being undead, drinking blood or murdering a few outsiders here and there. Their ceaseless upstanding ways, and their tendency to impose them on everyone else, don't win them many friends. But, their moral codes work together to form a genuine road map to enlightenment.

A Resplendent Crane doesn't merely live within the boundaries of the Dharma's laws, although many of the young ones who have yet to experience *ling* strive to do just that. The Crane learns to live the laws to the point where he becomes one with them. The laws become a natural part of his existence. The enlightened Resplendent Crane never wavers when faced with a moral decision. He is never plagued with self-doubt. He never hesitates before taking action, because he knows, absolutely, that the action he is about to take is the correct one.

As the Crane walks his road to enlightenment, he sees the laws of the Dharma as the pattern that holds the world together. He understands how the laws govern the changing of the seasons, the patterns of the weather, the petals of a flower or the movements of an enemy. He flows with the laws and reshapes himself accordingly.

Of course, the laws followed by Resplendent Cranes are far divorced from the laws of mortals, others *shen* or even other Dharmas. Sometimes, Cranes act bizarrely, yet completely within the realm of the rules set forth by their beliefs. One night, a Crane may piously tend the shrines of his parents and thereby ensure the prosperity of his descendants. The next night, he might be off torching a church, killing the entire congregation locked inside. He does not see these acts as the veneration of death or feel the loss of mortal life. He sees in them honor paid to his parents and a culling of the wicked—all part of his duties as outlined in the tenets of his Dharma.

The Resplendent Crane always works within his Dharma's laws and scriptures, but these strictures are designed to bring the Crane back to the state of purity before punishment, not to make him a latter-day hero. He is not on a quest to save the living world, but the *whole* world, and this often includes saving the world from itself. Interpretations of the sixth tenet, ordering Cranes to correct the "wicked," may include bloodshed, but one pays a price for eliminating the disease.

THE COMING OF THE SIXTH AGE

All of the rules, laws and scriptures of the Crane's Way are designed to accomplish one major goal: to return the Middle Kingdom to the Age of Heaven. The Cranes believe they have the power to reverse the otherwise inevitable turning of the Great Wheel before it reaches the

Sixth Age and plunges the world into endless darkness, and they are not going to stop until they achieve that goal.

Unfortunately, this is no easy task. Northerners and other foreigners overrun the world, bringing their filth, disease and corruption with them. The people of the Golden Courts carry the taint of wickedness, some irrevocably. The plague has spread so thickly that some have begun to believe turning back the Great Wheel is now an impossible task.

Yet most Resplendent Cranes have not given up hope and have pledged themselves to this Herculean achievement. If they cull enough of the plague-bearers, if they chop away enough of the disease, if they burn away enough wickedness and replace it with correct action and integrity, they can save the Middle Kingdom from itself. As long as Chi still flows from Heaven, the Resplendent Cranes believe they have one last chance to save the Kuei-jin from themselves and set the Ten Thousand Demons back on the path to redemption.

The specific meaning of turning back the Wheel is a matter for great debate within the Dharma. Some see a literal return to the dawn of time, a reversing of fate and destiny. Others see in it a way to bypass the devastating Sixth Age and begin ascending toward virtue and harmony. In the end, these distinctions are fine indeed: all Cranes work to return the world to harmony and are ready to sacrifice anything to do so.



MAINTAINING ORDER IN THE FIFTH AGE

Although times are tense, the Resplendent Cranes find it very hard to maintain the ancient ways. They still place high value on obeying the laws and elders. They continue to emphasize education of new Kuei-jin, not just the scriptures and tenets of the Dharma, but also to give the new recruits tools to combat the corruption facing the world. They continue to learn from courts, Dharmas and warriors across the Middle Kingdom, to further their own and others' enlightenment.

Resplendent Cranes see their tenets as a road map to salvation. They place the highest emphasis on the Eight Lotus Path, the collection of koans that provides a passage along the Road Back. They continue to root out wickedness and corruption wherever they find it — in the form of outsiders, *shen* and *akuma*, or even within themselves. They hold the Fivefold Way, as handed down by the Grand Arhat, as the ultimate social model for Kuei-jin society. They continue down the Road Back, hoping one day to return to their proper place under Heaven.

Each Crane must find his or her own path through this tangle of laws, scriptures, rules and moral codes, however. The Cranes believe laws are useless if those they govern cannot abide by them. Unfair laws, they believe, only breed further corruption and the laws, ultimately, must suit the Crane as much as the Crane must suit the laws. The vampire who discovers this balance not only follows the Dharma effortlessly, but can see the pattern of how the laws relate to herself, others in her *wu* and the whole world.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Dharma Book: Resplendent Cranes is your guide to the Shining Ice Guardians, one of the paths to enlightenment set forth in ancient times by Grand Master Xue. This introduction covers the basics of the Dharma, while subsequent chapters address specific points.

The Mandate of Heaven provides insight into the philosophy behind the Way of the Resplendent Crane, including the history of the Dharma, the tenets it holds so dear, views on training techniques, a dissection of the Eight Lotus Path, and a discussion of the Great Wheel. In typical Crane fashion, this chapter takes the form of a philosophical debate between members of the Dharma, each quoting important texts at one another.

Principles of Peace describes the sects within the Resplendent Cranes, their dealings with other Dharmas, important places for the Cranes and famous *wu*. Finally, the chapter examines the extensive Crane involvement with the Great Leap Outward — the Cathayan push to bring virtue (and virtuous retribution) to the West.

The Benefits of Splendor outlines a variety of new tools and toys for the Resplendent Crane player and Storyteller to further enrich the game. These tools include

more Traits, Rites, Discipline techniques, and character concepts for building exciting and engaging characters.

The Righteous Young provides a collection of templates for building characters, while **Masters and Worthies** presents a group of Storyteller characters who are important to the Resplendent Crane Dharma.

LEXICON

Law is a language unto itself. Only those schooled in it truly understand its twists and turns, and the Resplendent Crane system of teaching and learning does not leave language out of its curriculum. Obsessed with righteousness, integrity and the law, the Cranes have built their own vocabulary over the thousands of years of their existence. The following is a small part of the Dharmic lexicon.

Eight Lotus Path: The core of the first tenet of the Way of the Resplendent Crane, the Eight Lotus Path is made of eight koans, or "lotuses," about the proper way to conduct one's unlife. These are supplemental beliefs to the other seven tenets of the Dharma. Cranes believe that following the Eight Lotus Path will lead them to salvation.

Five Classics: A group of five key texts of mortal thought, namely *The Book of History*, *The Book of Odes*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Rites* and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*. For thousands of years, many accepted the Five Classics as manuals of conduct for dealing with daily situations. Not all Cathayans adhere to their faith in the Five Classics, however, claiming that their condition is fundamentally different from the one described by the mortal Great Masters in these works.

Five Constant Virtues: Strength, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faithfulness are the five virtues the Resplendent Cranes consider the most important. Every Crane must strive to embody these virtues at all times, or risk falling out of favor. Cranes see in these virtues the personal manifestation of the Fivefold Way, Xue's edicts on Kuei-jin society.

Great Learning: Made up of a pamphlet of the same name, *The Book of Mencius*, *The Analects*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Ki Chuan*, this collection is considered the basis of moral law in Resplendent Crane society. It is also referred to as "The Education of the Adult." The pamphlet called *The Great Learning* builds upon the *Ki Chuan*, often pulling quotes or concepts from the other works to elaborate on concepts explored in the fundamental text in a way that elder Cranes can use to teach and from which younger Cranes can learn.

jen: Literally Chinese for "seeds," the Cranes use *jen* to mean "virtue" or "integrity." *Jen* is the latent supreme excellence or perfect virtue in a being. Near the beginning of the Fifth Age, the definition was expanded to include the perfection of Heaven, the August Personage of Jade and the ancient Wan Xian warriors.

masters and worthies: A colloquialism stemming from China referring to highly educated Kuei-jin who



have progressed far enough along their Dharma that they can teach students. Students refer to a collection of jina and mandarins in this manner.

Mean, the: The foundation of the universe dictates that all things must have an opposite. Where there is Yang, there is Yin. Where there is P'o, there is Hun. The Mean is the principle of regularity and even-handedness, the universally recognized law of morality. Understanding the Mean means to find a center between good and evil, softness and harshness, strength and weakness. A great master understands the laws of the Mean.

Shining Ice Guardians: Colloquialism for the Resplendent Cranes. This name alludes to their belief in a tale of a stork that once pulled from the ice a frog that turned into a butterfly, as well as their cold, dispassionate demeanor when dealing with wickedness. Among Cranes, the term generally refers to those who adhere closely to the orthodox interpretation of the Dharma promulgated in the Blood Court of Beijing.

Superior Man, the: The ideal Resplendent Crane, a Kuei-jin who has so integrated righteousness and law that he acts morally without having to think about it. This concept is a teaching device used to illustrate moral action and attitudes, rather than to refer to a specific person.

those who stand aside: Accepted dissenters from Crane orthodoxy. Those who stand aside refers to followers of divergent sects who do not refute any of the fundamental teachings of the Crane's Way. These sects are an accepted part of Dharmic life, and even those who follow orthodoxy often spend time studying with them. These flirtations can last months or centuries.

those who turn the face: Heretics against Crane orthodoxy. Those who turn the face reject one or more of the key principles of the Way of the Resplendent Crane. They are often unliving zealots, pursuing a single Dharmic teaching to the exclusion of all others. They usually operate in secret, justifiably fearing reprisals from the orthodoxy.

THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN

To influence people with virtue is the foundation of government, while laws and systems are the instruments of government. When both are applied to help each other, government will flourish. But there must first be the idea before the laws can be put into practice. Otherwise, if there are selfish desires inside, it will be impossible to try and practice humanity and righteousness outside.

—Chang Po-hsing, *Chin-ssu lu chi-chieh*, 8:15a-16b

TEXTUAL INTRODUCTIONS

Translator's Note from *Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies*:

The format of philosophical texts written by followers of the Way of the Resplendent Crane has become formalized over the past several thousand years. Used as teaching tools during the earlier periods, the texts traditionally take the form of a question and answer session, where a nameless student asks a question, and the masters debate the issue. These "masters" may have existed dozens or hundreds of years apart, but since their views remain valid, the texts are written as if they are all together in a room responding to the supposed student.

This format mimics teaching sessions held in formal settings during the Fourth Age and part of the Fifth. Students would ask questions and the masters answered with advice, parables, and philosophical diatribes. Contradictions were rife as one or more masters disagreed on a topic, but all views, being equal, were included to give the student the widest possible understanding of the issue. Scribes recorded these disagreements for later foundations of debate and as examples of educated Cranes falling into the pit of misguided beliefs on their way to enlightenment.

I have translated the following selections from the collection of manuscripts called *Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies*, written by the honored ancestors Yen Zu and Lu Po-kuang, and penned near the middle of the Fifth Age. As the masters explain in their introduction, their aim was to collect all the essential pieces of Resplendent Crane philosophy into one convenient reference book for the advanced student and the newly reborn Kuei-jin. Like their forebears, these wise ancestors preserved the student-master-master dialogue to maintain the flavor of the ancient text and conform to the standards set out by earlier worthies. They believed format to be as important as content, as oftentimes the passages were committed to memory and used as sutras or koans during meditation.

Although the dialogues may feel wooden to the modern student, authors used this format for thousands of years, and it remains the preferred format for Resplendent Crane teaching manuals even in modern times. The student, upon mastering this work, should seek out the texts on which this book is based, including the *Ki Chuan* and the rest of the Great Learning, to further his education.

Good luck, and good learning.

Kim Soo Dong
Master of Archives,
Green Courts,
Seoul, Korea
March 13, 1957

OTHER VOICES

September 23, 2001

To Anguo Chun, self-styled master of the court of Hong Kong:

As you no doubt recall from our last meeting, I find your interpretation of our Dharma's heritage unnecessarily narrow and confining. You asserted an authority based purely on age and experience, neglecting to remember that there is a difference between ten years' experience and one year's experience repeated ten times. That you have presented me a modern Korean translation of "Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies" as proof of the continued relevance of your views only tells me that you are unaware of the difference.

However, I recognize that one must speak the language of one's audience. So, I have appended to selections from "Reflections" other important texts from our Dharma. I believe these personal accounts, official records, correspondence and other documents together constitute a necessary and sufficient argument against your position. Moreover, they discredit the rigidity of interpretation inherent in the "Reflections" and your own pronouncements.

I trust that in light of this you will cease interfering with my personal activities.

Sincerely yours,

Mona Ying
of the Shining Cranekeepers

THE ANCIENT EMPEROR

From Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies:

Beginning in his education, a student asks the great master for a tale of times before, so he can understand the teachings of the Dharma and grasp their meaning.

The great bodhisattva Cheng Yi answers the student:

In a time now past in China, there ascended to the throne of the Yellow Emperor a great and powerful ancestor of all the Shining Ice Guardians, Master Tzu Ying of the Seven Rivers. Although he was strong in his beliefs and advanced in his Dharma, he ruled his people fiercely. If anyone violated the rules of etiquette in his presence, he would order their hands and feet chopped off. If anyone violated his laws, he would order them to face the Eye of Heaven. Many feared his wrath.

This ancestor decided that he no longer had any use for the old laws and ways. He disavowed the Eight Lotus Path. He vilified the Fivefold Way. He proclaimed to all

his people, "No Wan Kuei after me will learn of our ancient ways. They will follow the new ways I will set forth. Therefore, I will get rid of all the old traditions, koans, analects and poems, and make laws anew. I will order all the books and scriptures collected and burned. This is the way we shall return to Heaven." In this way, he believed he could save the world. The people, with sorrow in their hearts, dutifully collected the great works of the ancient masters and worthies and committed them to the flames.

Realizing the ancestor's folly, the wisest sages of the age spirited away many books. They carried as many as they could in their arms, and plastered them in a wall. That is how they were preserved, although many sages lost their lives that day.

Tzu Ying ruled for many years, and all trembled. Without the laws of the ancients, chaos ran rampant through the land. Wickedness spread. The Yama Kings won many slaves, and the detested *akuma* stalked the righteous. Some gave in totally to their P'o nature and went over to the Devil-Tigers. Many Cranes did not learn the proper conduct, and could not advance in their learning. But Tzu Ying stood strong, and no one could challenge him for fear of their very existence.

One day, the minister of this horrible ancestor, Chao Kao, had a vision of a great crane standing on the ice, a frog in its jaws. The crane gently set the frog on the ice, and the frog turned into a butterfly. In a sudden flash of enlightenment, he knew the ancestor had acted in great wickedness.

Chao Kao could no longer stand by as an honorable man while the Way and the Path were discarded. He looked upon the evil that had ravished the land, the wars and the plague of northern barbarians. He wished a return to the ways of the ancients, when times were good, as they had been before Tzu Ying. He said, "If the distance on the Road Back between the ancestor and I is so far now, what will it be like when this ancestor is on the throne longer? What will happen in a year? In ten? What will happen to the whole of the world if this continues?"

He knew something had to be done.

Chao Kao conceived of an insurrection, but he did not know the temper of the people. He had to test their loyalties. A few days later, Chao Kao led a stag before the ancestor, and said with a bow, "Honored ancestor, is this not a great horse I bring before you?"

Tzu Ying laughed and said, "Why, Chao Kao, that is not a horse, but a stag! Anyone can see that! Do you think me mad?"

However, Chao Kao replied, "It is a horse. What else could it be? Consult the people and see what they think it is."

Tzu Ying asked the people if it was a horse or a stag and they answered all as one that it was a horse. Chao Kao thought, "Ah ha! The people are clearly on my side! I can revolt against this ancestor without fear, and the people's

hearts and minds will follow." He traveled among the courts and corpse families, and secretly raised a great army. After observing Tzu Ying's weaknesses, he attacked and drove the ancestor from the throne.

In the darkness of midnight, Tzu Ying begged on his knees before Chao Kao not to send him back to Yomi, yet he knew that Chao Kao believed in the old way. "Let me live as only a mandarin!" he pleaded, but Chao Kao said no. "Let me live as one of the loyal subjects!" he begged. Chao Kao, again, said no. "Then let me live, but despise me as you would despise a *chih-mei*!" Tzu Ying pleaded desperately, but Chao Kao could only see Tzu Ying's wickedness, and therefore ended his second life.

Chao Kao knew he had to set things right. He bade the wise masters to retrieve the ancient texts from their hiding place. He returned law and righteousness to the people, and purged all the *akuma* who had taken root. He ordered the destruction of wickedness, and put correct action in its place.

Integrity returned to the land. Honor was restored. The Damned returned to their journey along the Road Back.

Chao Kao taught that the ancient laws keep away chaos and madness, and bring peace to those who choose to travel the long road to enlightenment. The people were in joy. He became one of the greatest ancestors of the Resplendent Cranes until it was time for him to go out into the land as a bodhisattva, finish his great journey, and return to Heaven.

So it is remembered, so it is written.

THE CRANE AND THE JICE

From Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies:

The student asked of the master, "That is a story of long ago, and clearly a story, but what about the true history of the Resplendent Cranes?"

Master Chou Tun Yi answered the student:

In a time now past in China, Xue walked the world with great sorrow in his heart, for the Wan Xian had fallen from Heaven. They had committed the sin of pride, and Heaven had punished them for their wickedness. The August Personage of Jade had not cast them into Hell, but had cursed them to return to the world through the Second Breath and watch through new eyes, hungering to taste the flesh of their own family.

Xue sought answers. He wandered to and fro. He walked under bush and over mountain and through forest. He crossed rivers and deserts. He trod through snow. He sought enlightenment from every quarter, but none would come.

He pondered the meaning of wickedness, the ways of the ancestors, and the great transgression before Heaven, but he understood nothing. No answers would come! No enlightenment would shine upon him! In his exhaustion, Xue sat down to rest. He lay beneath the Falls of Tong for many days and many nights. His body bloated, and his skin turned green. None could have looked upon him and survived.



In terrible hunger, Xue emerged from the water, defeated. Naked, he knelt in the snow. The cold bit into his flesh. The wind ripped his hair. Xue despaired.

And there, on the edge of a pond, stood a crane. In the moonlight, the crane bent down and plucked a frog from the ice with its beak. It leaned over and placed the frog on the ice, and the frog became a butterfly. Xue was enlightened.

We, the Resplendent Cranes, follow this wisdom, handed down from the Grand Arhat. The ultimate hope of a return to the Age of Heaven drives us. While the Wan Kuei may be frogs swimming in a pond now, one day we can become butterflies and fly with the beauty of integrity and honor. Our state is not merely punishment, but a constant reminder of a sacred duty that we failed to fulfill, a sacred duty that will be ours once more. But one cannot return to the true righteousness of Heaven on one's own. Trying to walk the Road Back without a guide is like trying to cross a treacherous mountain pass in a blizzard.

In the beginning, we had only the Fivefold Way of honor and integrity. The Grand Arhat gave it to us all as a guide on the Road Back. That Great Principle was a shining beacon in the night, illuminating the pride that cast us all into darkness and sending it scurrying back to a corner. It served as a reminder of the paths of righteousness.

Yet the Fivefold Way was not enough, and many Kuei-jin were lost to the Yama Kings. During the Fourth Age, to assist those who could not follow the words of the Grand Arhat alone, the great sages and worthies of the Resplendent Crane Dharma supplemented the wisdom of Xue with the teachings of the legendary bodhisattvas who had succeeded early in their quest for enlightenment. Following Xue's example, these sages designed other lamps to light the path: the laws, the Great Learning, the Five Great Books, the Eight Lotus Path.

These teachings contain all the enlightenment of times now past, and are the foundation of Resplendent Crane thought. They provide a roadmap to return to righteousness without effort. By following the laws of these enlightened ancestors, the seeker learns to act virtuously without a second thought, govern fairly without hesitation, and act honorably without fail. The wise Crane, schooled in the ways of the ancients, always knows which path to take when faced with a divide. He never thinks, never worries, and is always correct in his action. He is in true harmony. This is the way to Heaven.

In the Fourth Age, teaching was simple: Learn the laws, learn the Fivefold Way, learn the Eight Lotus Path, and salvation happens naturally. Leaving the life of law was dangerous, but reveling in the laws assured a return to the beginning and the purity of Heaven. Yet, even with the Eight Lotus Path, the laws, the books, the tenets, the teachings and the worthies, there were those who managed to get lost on the Road Back. There were those who acted wickedly and without honor, who disregarded family, *wu* and court. There were still those lost to the Yama Kings,

who became *akuma*. Casualties exist in any war, and we have lost plenty in our fight against corruption.

Over the millennia, the Resplendent Cranes have had to refine the laws to keep up with the changing condition of the world. As the Great Wheel turns and Ages pass, the fundamental condition of the universe alters. The Cranes update their laws to reflect this, as what is righteous and correct in one Age may not be righteous and correct in the next.

In the Fifth Age, the laws have multiplied in response to the growing corruption of the world. The ancestors believe more laws allow the young Kuei-jin to think less about their place in things, and therefore require less effort to return to purity. The effectiveness of this technique is the root of many debates between the different sects of Resplendent Cranes. The disputes have become so furious that many have left to start their own sects based on the nature of the laws.

Some of the young claim there are now so many laws that they form a tangled spider web which holds us all fast. They claim they cannot discern right from wrong, since so many laws tell them so many different things. Rules have heaped upon rules, and the young cannot tell what is correct action anymore. Other young Wan Kuei suffer an opposite problem. Instead of being paralyzed by thoughts of seemingly contradictory laws, they follow those they know with an unholy zeal, never tempering their actions with thought. If the former are no better than endlessly reflective Bone Flowers, these latter are no better than wild Devil-Tigers. The mandarins and jina scoff at the complaints and failings of the young; only a clearly lit path can be the mechanism to stop the Great Wheel. Laws, they say, are simply further definitions and refinements of the universe.

And here we are, in the Fifth Age, facing the corruption, and possible end, of the entire world.

THE LIVING LAW

From Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies:
Master Chou Tun Yi continues:

According to the philosophy of the Resplendent Cranes, for everything under Heaven, there must be a law. Law is the principle through which the Hun is willed into existence and enlightenment wells forth. It survives between the pulls of Yin and Yang. It tames the P'o.

Law is the basis for all things. It is self-evident, self-sufficient, eternal, concrete, definite, unalterable and correct. Every blade of grass, every tree, and all things under Heaven possess it, and do so in sufficient amount. It is the driving force behind the creation and destruction of all things. The law is a living thing, growing with the seeds of its followers' souls, blooming among the worthy, and bestowing honor like dew on the blades of grass at dawn.

Resplendent Cranes live the law in a form that best applies to the aim of returning to Heaven. Those who are

still living or those of the other Dharmas may not understand the laws, yet to us they are clear. We have codified our laws in the form of the eight tenets. These tenets, in turn, expose other laws to follow on the way to enlightenment. The laws are the riddle of the onion: the outer layers only convey shape and size, while the pure essence lies inside. The master must reach the center.

Beginning with the small and intimate life with one's family or *wu*, the enlightened must accumulate and spread his overflowing influence so that not one single person or thing in the world can escape it. Every person, every thing, must be touched by righteousness. Only then can one put into practice the laws and systems of the Way of the Resplendent Crane. This is the secret to halting the Great Cycle and turning it back on its course.

THE FIRST TENET

Follow the Eight Lotus Path

A student asks the master why the Cranes must always follow the Eight Lotus Path when the other Dharmas are not constrained to such ancient scripture.

The Master Ming-tau Yu-shu replies:

In ancient times, a great master, Chou Mao-Shou, was about to cross the Yangtze River. Suddenly, a wind picked up. Black clouds obscured the sky. Dark gales whipped up the waves. On the shore, the boatman turned pale, afraid the small boat would capsize if they tried to cross in the raging torrent. Chou reassured the boatman of his safety.

The master climbed into the little boat with his mirror and shone it on the water. When he did this, the light illuminated the water all the way to the bottom. Suddenly, the clouds parted and the waves calmed down. The master could then continue on his journey.

The Eight Lotus Path is our unalterable and eternal path to Heaven. It contains the eight steps to our return. A mind of the Crane is the mirror. The Eight Lotus Path is the mirror's brightness. When the mind focuses on the Eight Lotus Path, the mirror's brightness reflects all confusion away. All clouds disperse. All gales pass. The wise sage, armed with the mirror, can cross any river. He can end any storm.

The minds of those concentrating on the Eight Lotus Path can perceive the illusory nature of things and clearly see right from wrong. The unenlightened, without the Eight Lotus Path, only see a reflection of reality, and are confused. They flounder in the darkness. Hold tight to the mirror, and follow the way of brightness. It is our way to salvation.

THE SECOND TENET

Follow the Fivefold Way

A student asks the master why the Cranes must always follow the Fivefold Way in a manner far more strict than the other Dharmas.

The Master Ming-tau Yu-shu replies:

In ancient times, the Grand Arhat handed down the Fivefold Way as the Great Principle for all of the Hungry Dead to follow. It contains the fundamental steps of the Road Back and places each of the Ten Thousand Demons in his own place in the great order. When following the Fivefold Way, one cannot drift off the stairs or stop abruptly. One must climb on.

A student should start with what he understands. At the first step, he examines the Way of the Origin, and sees that all Wan Kuei originate from the same place: they have all fought their way out of Hell and have taken the Second Breath. Once the student comprehends this, he can take another step, to the Way of Lineage, and understand the wisdom inherent in the workings of the great masters and worthies. The student can then progress to the third step, the Way of Integrity, and witness the impact of his actions on himself and others. Only with great honor can a Wan Kuei transcend his state and return to righteousness. Understanding the previous steps leads to the Way of Obligation, the ability to see the duty and responsibility to set in righteousness and teach others in the *wu*, the family, the court, and the Dharma. Once the student understands his duty, he can take the final step onto the Way of Propriety. He understands the correctness of his actions. He flows with principle. He understands his place and the way he must be. He is in harmony.

If a Wan Kuei understands the Great Principle clearly, he is happy to follow it. He lives the Fivefold Way without effort. He can see how it affects the self on its path to the Road Back, and he thus follows the Five Constant Virtues with ease. By following the wisdom of the Fivefold Way, we can find our way back to Heaven. This is the wisdom of Xue, and the foundation of all other tenets and Dharmas.

THE THIRD TENET

When you lose control, make amends. The Demon guides you but does not own you.

A curious student asks his master, "Can we do without the P'o mind, or should we give into it? And if we give into it, what should we do?"

The Master Po Ying replies:

How can we do without the P'o mind? It is part of us. However, the Hun is the ruler and the Demon must obey its orders. The P'o mind is like a soldier while the Hun mind is the general. The Demon is dangerous, but the Hun is subtle. Concentrate on the Hun.

The Resplendent Crane sage recognizes that sometimes the P'o does not respond to the Hun like a good soldier. Control is lost, desire takes hold, and the P'o acts with great dishonor. One must make amends for these times.

Remember that the dishonor created by the Demon is a burden, and the Dharma is a carriage on the Road Back. To carry a burden and ride in a carriage is to invite robbers and bandits. However firm and in control the wise

sage may be, when bandits attack, there is always regret. A sage does not carry a burden, but travels the road unfettered. He is free of worry.

To free the Demon and fail to make amends for its transgressions is to open the way to danger. If the sage does not make amends, he becomes lax. He indulges the Demon. Regulations and standards collapse. He forgets the chaos he has caused. The roots of wickedness sprout and take hold. He loses his way on the Road Back, and is lost forever.

If the sage continues with the burden of the Demon, he taints all others whom he contacts and who emulate his actions or speak his words. The tainted carry this to others, poisoning all Wan Kuei in *wu*, court and country. All may fall because the sage chose not to make amends.

THE FOURTH TENET

When injustice or corruption appears, correct it to the best of your abilities.

The student asks, "Master, when we witness an act of corruption, how should the wise Crane respond?"

The Master Po Ying replies:

Corruption breeds dishonor. Dishonor creates wickedness. Wickedness allows the Great Cycle to turn. Beat back corruption; let purity and law flow through the land.

Yet what to do when confronted with injustice and corruption? There is an old saying by the Great Master Cheng Yi, "Take away the force of the hog's teeth and there will be great fortune." A hog is a fierce beast. If one tries to control it by force, one has to work hard to get it under control. The hog runs wild and bites hands that attempt to master it. Chaos ensues. However, if one removes the hog's will to use its teeth, although the teeth remain, the hog no longer feels the need to bite, and is easy to control. When confronted with injustice, the sage follows the principle of removing the hog's teeth. He must eliminate corruption from the world, yet he cannot contain it simply by force. He examines it, gets at the root of the corruption, and stops it at its source.

The sage understands that corruption may not be rooted in a single individual. If desire drives the people, such as a want to alleviate cold, hunger or pain, even the threat of execution and death may not deter them from committing acts of great wickedness. How does one overcome the corruption of hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people? The wise sage, advanced in his Dharma, sees more than force as an answer to correct the problem. He understands that he must find a method to stop people's desires. He institutes governmental measures and laws, and he teaches the Eight Lotus Path and the Fivefold Way. He provides neither power nor punishment, but promotes education and satisfies the people's needs. He teaches his own people the ways of integrity and shame, and allows them to carry the message to the other Dharmas, the mortals, and the *shen*. In this way, even

when the people are tempted with great power or knowledge, they do not stray from the Road Back.

THE FIFTH TENET

Be generous to the worthy, defend the weak and instruct the young and errant.

The student asks the master about the state of younger and lesser Wan Kuei. "Why should we give of ourselves to the worthy, the young, and the errant?"

The Master Ho Shih-sheng replies:

From time to time, it is important for the Resplendent Crane to ask himself questions. Where is he on the path? Where does he want to be next? How is he going to grow?

When a Wan Kuei takes the Second Breath, he is only a husk of possibility. He is a seed. He is what he was and he is what he might be. With the water of integrity, the seed sprouts, spreading its green leaves to the sun in the spring. The seed bursts forth branches, leaves and flowers while the roots stay hidden in the deep, dark ground. The visible nature is the Hun, and the hidden is the P'o. Cultivate the seed with righteousness, tend the branches and leaves with the laws, and the seed will grow infinitely. A bodhisattva is a tree a thousand feet tall as one continuous whole, from roots to branches to leaves.

An advanced student understands that all beings are seeds, and the Resplendent Cranes are gardeners on the Road Back. The student must pick, prune, and encourage growth in others. He realizes he is not only tending to the garden, he is part of its unending cycle of birth and rebirth. While the student is a seed that has blossomed with righteousness, he can also nurture the other seeds into the same righteousness. He tends the seeds and ensures that they too grow straight to Heaven.

Education of the young and errant is key to dislodging selfish thoughts and stimulating growth into a great tree. Protect the weak by cultivating the flowers within the garden. Observe the worthy, bask in the shade of their leaves, and learn from their wisdom. This is the principle that unites us all, from *wu* to family to court to Dharma. Cultivating the seeds of others is the same as cultivating the seed within the self. By tending to the worthy, weak and errant, we tend to our own enlightenment.

THE SIXTH TENET

When the wicked will not listen to reason, straighten them as you were once straightened.

The student asks, "When we are confronted with a wicked creature, what action must we take?"

The Master Liu Kuan replies:

To be righteous in one's heart and possess true integrity means to turn away from immoral activities, those that impede the teachings of the Dharma and violate the Eight Lotus Path and the Fivefold Way. Evil activities are falsehoods that distract from the Road Back and encourage the turning of the Great Wheel.

Hearts must turn away from corruption. If one goes

down the path of integrity and accepts instruction to correct the ways of selfishness and pride, one will return to the way of Heaven. If one rocks and turns on the Path, one will find himself lost in the sea of wickedness with no way to enlightenment. One must be ever vigilant of possible steps off the path. The Great Master Cheng Yi said, "One infinitesimal mistake at the beginning can be an infinite mistake in the end."

Resplendent Cranes tend the great garden under Heaven. We must watch for weeds to sprout. If one does not prune the weed, the entire garden succumbs. Like flowers and weeds, one must examine each act of wickedness on its own merits. Is the individual or action a flower that has wilted, or is it truly a weed? A flower revives with the nourishment and sustenance of education. A flower can return to the garden. A weed must be rooted out. No trace may remain.

When a sage turns his back on wickedness, there is no more wickedness within him and the way is clear. Do not tolerate wickedness in the self, in the family or in the world. As you once learned the way of righteousness, so you must turn others and set them back on the way.

THE SEVENTH TENET

Defend the ghosts of your family and protect your living relations. Do not let them see you, however — you have become a disgrace to their honor.

The student asks the master questions about the family. "Master, how should we treat the family, even though we are no longer among the living?"

The Master Po Ying replies:

There is a foundation for the governing of the world. It is the self. There is a model for governing the world. It is the family. The foundation must be correct and the model must be good. How we tend to our families is how we tend to the whole world.

That which concerns oneself and that which concerns the family is the same. It is the pattern for the nature of destiny. To progress fully on the Road Back, one must practice filial piety and brotherly respect, for these reflect back on the self and lay the groundwork for the way one must live. The way one leads one's family along the road of righteousness is how one also progresses along that same road.

Beware of the temptation to retreat from the world. Although the Wan Kuei are damned, influence is still felt through their actions. Beware the impulse to abandon your court, descendants and the ghosts of parents to enter the mountains to search for answers. They will not be found there. Only in actions among your peers will you progress along the road to enlightenment. Only with righteous actions can the family also progress down the road of righteousness; allowing them to stray is like allowing a government to fall into anarchy. Do not retreat from the external world, for this abdicates the requirement of responsibility for the family, and focuses too much on the P'o and not enough on the Hun. Maintain the family, maintain the self, and all else will follow.



Yet, although the sage continues to guide the family in the ways of righteousness, the true Resplendent Crane does not interfere directly, as his family believes him dead and an honored ancestor. The Crane is still among the Damned, and he still carries the punishment of Heaven. Stay in the shadows; do not bring the living dishonor, and guide them to their destiny using the tools and methods available.

THE EIGHTH TENET

Maintain your dignity, honor and composure. You are an example of what the Damned can become.

The student asks the master, "When we go out into the world, how must we conduct ourselves?"

The Master Po Ying replies:

Only through displays of dignity can we serve as examples. All Wan Kuei have fallen far from Heaven and must suffer punishment for our pride, but we can overcome our condition and show that we have controlled the taint of the P'o.

The sage knows effortlessly what action is correct and what action is incorrect by living the law, but he also understands moderation in all things. Wickedness is always wrong, but general good is not necessarily the correct action. One must know when to be strong and when to be weak. Decisiveness, uprightness, strictness, firmness of action — these acts are strong, yet correct. Kindness, humility, and mildness — these acts are weak, yet also correct. Violence, chaos, softness, and indecision are defects in one's composure. Be strong and free of wickedness. When one is free of wickedness, both strength and weakness are correct.

Resplendent Cranes follow the laws of the Grand Arhat and those of Heaven. We are frogs now, but through an existence built on strong character we can one day again ascend to Heaven. Only through one's actions can one become a butterfly and be beautiful again in the eyes of the August Personage of Jade. The sages display acts of filial piety, brotherly love, proper humility and obeisance to their betters, integrity, shame, propriety, honor, composure and an understanding of the principles of the Dharma.

By living in this way, the Cranes attain perfection. To be a Shining Ice Guardian of character is to live in righteousness.

UNFOLDING THE LOTUS OF VIRTUE

From Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies:

Master Cheng Yi says:

There is an old Chinese poem:

"The leaves break the bandage of the green stem, stretch themselves and form a green pool with untidy edges. Now the flower comes from out of the vast surface of water, like a beautiful woman coming gracefully from her bath."

The lotus is the bright, white flower in the center of the murky darkness of the water's bottom. It looks fragile and weak, yet the stem remains strong against the currents. Shining Ice Guardians strive to emulate this ideal. In concentrating on the lotus, the student sees the truth about himself.

The student must meditate on unfolding the lotus. The stem rises from the water. The lotus spreads its pure petals. Reach out and peel them away from the stem. Within the center of the lotus is the essence of the Resplendent Crane Dharma: the Eight Lotus Path. Within these folds, we find enlightenment, and it is here that we will find salvation for ourselves and for the world.

THE EIGHT LOTUS PATH

The Great Master Cheng Yi continues:

The Eight Lotus Path consists of eight koans that, taken apart, are instructions for living in harmony, and taken together are a pattern for redemption. The student must meditate on each of the koans, first alone, then with a group, to discern the nature of all things. Once the student has grasped the Eight Lotus Path, he may act without hesitation, work without fear, and move without worry, knowing well he is on the path of salvation.

Reach down into the murky water and reveal the lotus.

The First Lotus is the *Recognition of Hope*. As we once were, we will someday be, if we recognize the wickedness of our forebears and return to purity without pride. Understanding that the work of the Resplendent Cranes is good and correct, there lives the hope that, one day, we will be free of our dual nature and return to unity with Heaven and with ourselves.

The Second Lotus is *Virtuous Existence*. To live in correctness in all things is no simple way to be. But if a seeker properly cultivates righteousness internally, he can only live virtuously externally. With meditation and focus, the Crane becomes great without expectation because, as the great masters have written, "Virtue is not an isolated instance." No one mistakes the actions of a virtuous man for anything other than harmony with Heaven.

The Third Lotus is to *Nurture*. When the Wan Kuei was alive and brought up children, he taught them as soon as they could eat or speak. So it is with the great learning of the Resplendent Cranes. A Shining Ice Guardian must prevent corruption before it can take root. He rewards actions that are full of righteousness and punishes actions full of treachery and recklessness. He teaches the young and gives strength to the weak. In this way, he learns to control the desires of the Demon and heals the pain of the family.

The Fourth Lotus is the *Purgation of the Wicked*. In every garden, there are weeds. When weeds grow unchecked, they choke every flower and every bush, and the garden falls into ruin. It is also thus among the Damned. There are those who must be pruned lest they bring ruin upon the Middle Kingdom. Destroy the wicked, preserve the righteous, and bring the world back to the beginning.

The Fifth Lotus is *Instruction*. When a Wan Kuei is young, he is not the master of knowledge or thought. His mind is still full of images of Hell. Proverbs and doctrines should spread before him every day. He should let their fragrance fill his soul. In time, he learns to master the ways of the living law, and thus, the Demon. In this way, if anyone approaches him with any kind of reckless or evil plan, he is impervious to its wiles and knows right from wrong.

The Sixth Lotus is the *Law*. The law exists in all things. It governs the growing of the grass. It predicts the changing of the days. It controls the flowing of the water. It turns day to night and into day again. Adhering to the law keeps the Hun in control and the P'o subservient. With the application of the law, a Crane can pronounce judgments and discern the integrity of all things.

The Seventh Lotus is *Harmony*. The state before deep feelings are aroused, such as pleasure, anger or sorrow, is equilibrium. This is the state of absolute quiet, like the moment before a fierce storm, a quiet that penetrates all things. That single moment of enlightenment, when all passions are equal and all great movements have yet to start, brings about a quiet of the soul. In harmony, the Crane can understand all things with clarity.

The Eighth Lotus is to *Transcend the Living World*. The earth-bound, once-mortal mind cannot comprehend Heaven, which is the first among all things and the progenitor of the entire universe. The only way to reach back toward Heaven is to break free of the living world and unite, once again, with the spirit. Only in this way can we return to our place in creation.

A traveler must know the destination of any journey before starting out. If he keeps it in mind and has the virtue to persevere through any obstacle between, he can reach the goal. The Eight Lotus Path is such a road, terminating in salvation. A traveler only need follow the road and keep his mind seriously on the goal to arrive where he wishes to be. Deviating from the path means becoming confused or trapped in illusion.

The Eight Lotus Path exists in purity. It is the white petals floating on the dark, murky water of damnation. Hold fast to that purity, maintain its integrity, and meditate on the righteousness of the flower. In this way, find salvation from the torment visited upon us by Heaven.

THE SUPERIOR MAN

From Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies:

The student observes, "In the ancient texts, there are many references to the Superior Man. Who is the Superior Man?"

The Master Cheng Hao replies:

The Superior Man is free from error in everything he does. His words carry the weight of virtue. He is firm in his actions. He has mastered the rumblings of his P'o and has honed the inner eye of his Hun. When a Superior Man encounters goodness, he rewards it. When a Superior

Man encounters wickedness, he destroys it. He is great without expectation. He is correct without effort. He has few desires. He is calm. He cannot be deflected from the course of perfect righteousness, and he is unalterably on the path to the Road Back.

The Superior Man has learned the way of the world so well that he works without thought or hesitation, because every act is one that brings good to his people and furthers his enlightenment. This does not necessarily mean good to all human beings worldwide; the Superior Man will not go out of his way to solve world hunger or bring about peace. He may even act in a manner that, to humans, is "evil." He is merely calm and understands what to do to further the cause of returning to Heaven.

The Superior Man is the Crane ideal. He forms an image in the student's mind of the perfect Crane to emulate. Through a balance of learning and teaching, a student of the Dharma can slowly make his way along the path, all the while envisioning the epitome of the perfect Crane who is at harmony with his actions. That is the way to swift education.

To attain the unattainable ideal, Cranes place great emphasis on learning and teaching. Learning the ways of our own kind and others gives us the tools to analyze an obstacle on the Road Back and determine whether our own mistakes or those of others caused it. Teaching others passes on the wisdom and the ways of the Dharma and brings new warriors into the fold. Both are essential in honing the Crane into a warrior of Heaven.

WHAT MAKES ONE GREAT

From the library of Mona Ying:

A memorial by Ding Yuh on the death of Li Tzu-Cheng, who led the final revolt against the Ming dynasty

We speak carelessly when we speak of "greatness" in a man. Everything begins in humble origins, and we must never blind ourselves to the fact that the seeds of tomorrow's great trees even now sprout somewhere underfoot, where we tread and do not think to look.

Consider brother Li, for whom we perform these rites. He did not dream when he was a boy in the wheat fields that he would lead rebels into the very throne room of a rotten dynasty. His mother did not tell him of strategy and morale, but sang him simple cradle songs. His father did not teach him how to distribute his forces against a siege, but how to plant and reap. You could have walked the length and breadth of the Yellow River and all its tributaries, and nothing would have called your eye to brother Li rather than to any of thousands of other playful, energetic lads.

When famine stalked the land, you would not have gazed into the face of his brothers and the face of young Li and said to yourself, "This one shall live, and those shall die." Nor would you have seen the terrible anger that would later stir within him. It lay deep within his soul, waiting for the rain of tears to let it send forth shoots.

Heaven called to the whole of the Middle Kingdom for someone to take up arms against the wicked Ming and their corrupt servants. It did not whisper into his heart alone, but shouted from uppermost north to the depths of the south. What distinguished brother Li was not that he heard the cry, for all did, whether they chose to acknowledge it or not. What distinguished him was that he acted in accordance with the passion inside him.

He started off with the injustices immediately at hand: a corrupt tax collector, a greedy undertaker. Each success let him see the next challenge ahead. But anyone could have done what he did, and all men should have. In a sense, greatness in the individual is a sign of failure in the many, for when each is in accordance with his Way, there is harmony, not great mountains of vice to be razed or vast chasms of ignorance to fill. Li prospered because he allowed himself to carry the virtue that rained down on all, but that most chose to ignore.

In the end, he triumphed gloriously, and then passed to his own harvest of sorrow. It is a terrible thing to end a dynasty. It is like the sorrow of the surgeon who must amputate a limb to save the body. The Middle Kingdom endures, but the pain is great, and we see even now that the new dynasty shall not reach the heights behind us all. Li did his duty, and his spirit has gone to its proper reward.

Let us, rather than gazing overlong at his grave, look instead into the faces of the children who even now run ahead of us, that this time we may see and nurture. Let us look into the spirit worlds again, to see where the dragon nests shriek in pain born of failed rites and perverted sacrifices before they fall to the fiends. Let us look into the natural world, to see drought and flood building, so that there need not be the terrible losses that provoke a Li into action.

In spite of the innate sexism of this memorial — as though women never act in a leading or guiding role — I am impressed to see its clear-sighted recognition of many important principles. I do not believe that the existence of objective moral principles requires me to accept the veneration of particular historical figures simply because of their rank in traditional evaluations. Greatness in the conventionally historical sense is a matter of circumstances, not a property of the soul. A "Superior Man" (more sexism!) is one who accepts the virtue in us all, not some inherently superior model of Crane philosophy. The world still waits for Resplendent Cranes willing to teach a true science of rectitude rather than this superstitious hodgepodge.

THE ESSENTIALS OF LEARNING

From Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies:

Master Cheng Hao continues:

One of the fundamentals of Resplendent Crane thought is the "essentials of learning." No creature, brought back by the Second Breath, instantly understands the entire path to enlightenment. No one teacher can instruct a pupil on the correct nature of virtue purely through book learning. No one student can learn the ways of righteousness alone. No Wan Kuei, regardless of how advanced in age or in his Dharma, can understand all the ways of the world. The student must leave his study and venture out into the world.

The student has many lessons to learn along his path. A wise Crane master learns much from simply observing those in his *wu* and their interaction. He learns from observation how and why other Wan Kuei follow the laws of society, and why, occasionally, they choose not to. He learns there are times to be a leader within the *wu* and times he must listen to the counsel of others. There are times when the ways of others solve problems better than his own, and he must learn why this is so and apply their wisdom to his own actions. He must understand the wisdom inherent in the other Dharmas, even if that wisdom is to know where and how the other paths fail — especially if the other paths fail.

The wisest leader, seeped in righteousness, possesses full understanding of *all* of the people, not simply those who follow his Dharma, or number in his *wu*, court or even in his own country. He understands when to become a leader of mortals, and when to use them only as Scarlet Screens. He understands the politics between his own people. Only in knowing all sides of a problem does the wisest Crane understand which choice is best, and only in this knowledge does he understand the choices that lead to turning back the Great Wheel.

The education of a Crane is never short. In theory, a Crane is always learning. Because we may live for millennia, Cranes choose to spend decades or even centuries simply observing, if only to eliminate possible false paths on the Road Back.

THE ESSENTIALS OF TEACHING

Master Cheng Hao continues:

As a bodhisattva aspires to attain Heaven, the ancestor aspires to become the bodhisattva, the mandarin aspires to become the ancestor and all aspire to become masters. While Cranes spend much of their existences learning and observing, they also teach others. A mind new to the Way of the Crane must be guided in its principles: the Eight Lotus Path, the Fivefold Way, the tenets, the manners, the rituals, the laws, the beliefs and the ways of the August Court. True wisdom cannot occur in a vacuum and cultivation of the Hun starts with learning.

Cranes are ready to teach their ways when they attain *ling* and become *jina*. A Crane *jina* has grasped the ways of righteousness in a way that has opened his mind. He understands how he fits within the laws of Heaven, he lives effortlessly, and he is ready to share with others. While tales from ancient times tell of a single great master taking on as many as 3,000 students at once, the Cranes feel training should be intense, personal and firm. Teachers take few students at a time, typically between three and five, lest their lessons be diluted.

As soon as a prospective student is no longer a flesh-eating *chih-mei* and becomes a *hin*, he is assigned a teacher. The learning period extends over a series of years and is extremely intense. Rewards are few, punishment swift and painful. Resplendent Cranes do not tolerate failure, even among their students. Smart pupils either quickly learn to affect outward success in all things, or they no longer follow the Way of the Resplendent Crane. The teacher uses pain and study both to open the student's mind and to train him to unconsciously follow the rules of the court and preserve integrity. A properly instructed Crane understands the path of righteousness without having to stop and think.

In some ways, the coming of the Fifth Age has changed the rules of teaching. While many Cranes try valiantly to cling to the old methods of few students over many years, some have discovered that the chaos of the present day and the possibility of the Sixth Age have not accorded them such luxury. There are too many new Kuei-jin and not

enough teachers. We have made compromises, even within the unbending culture of the Cranes: teachers are no longer necessarily *jina*, teachers may take on as many as 20 students at once in properly concealed schools, training periods have shrunk from several years to one, and students join *wu* as the final stage of their study. Staunch traditionalists consider this a travesty, but little can be done: it is more important to prepare warriors to help cleanse the Middle Kingdom than to spend time bent over dusty old tomes, reciting the words of ancestors.

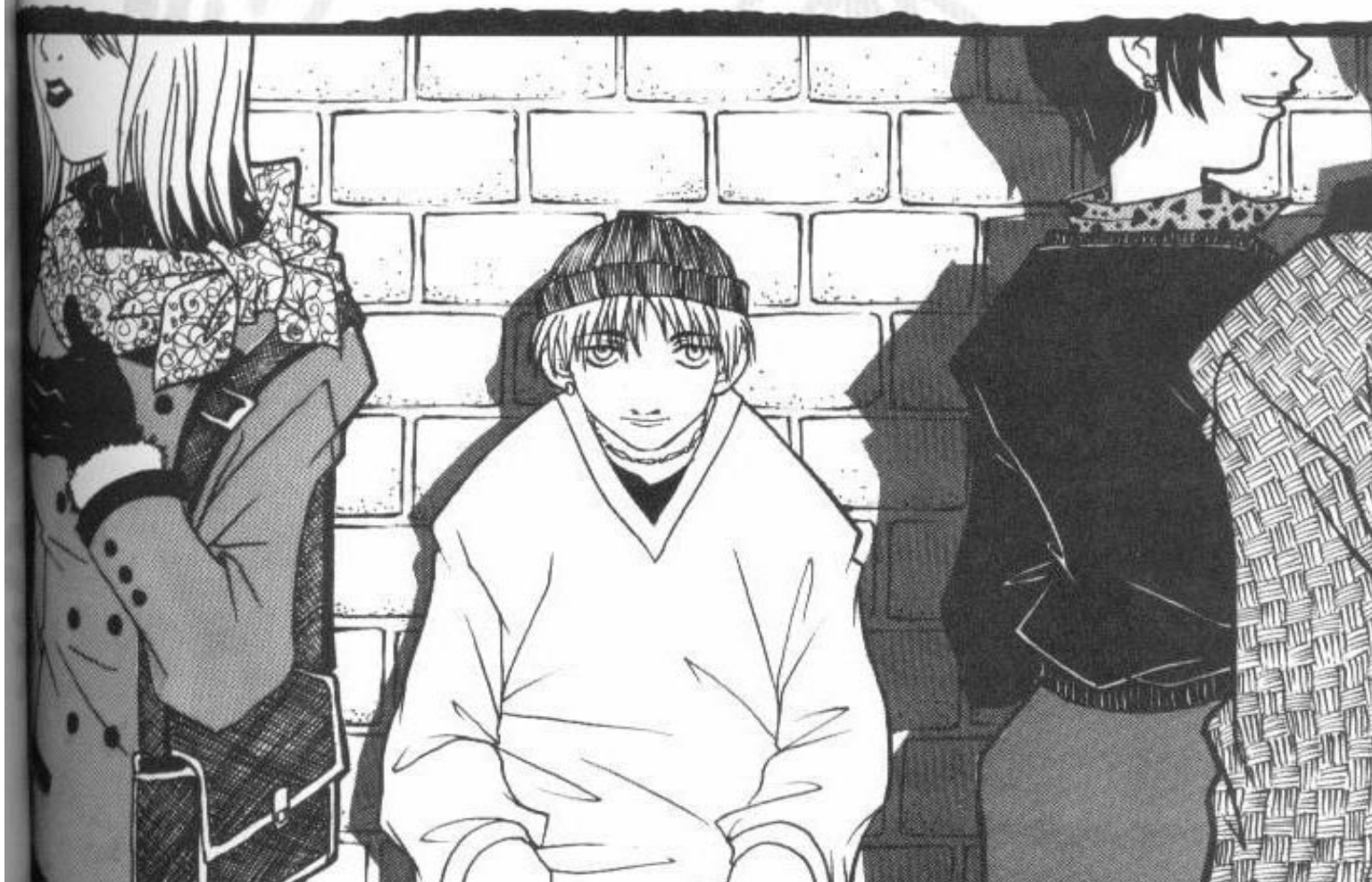
TEACHING THROUGH LEARNING

From the library of Mona Ying:

A memorial by Phatipatanawong Manee, to the assembled mandarins and ancestors of the Resplendent Cranes in the court of Bangkok, Midsummer Eve, 2000:

It is with much gratitude that I write to you of my experiences among the Dharmas and humbly suggest a policy for the future.

Forty-eight years ago, Ancestor Chaiyo and I shared a vision of the totemic animal of each Dharma giving birth to a fledgling crane. After much contemplation and sacrifice, we decided that it would be appropriate for me to seek out exemplary members of other Dharmas under slightly duplicitous circumstances. I would present myself as one dissatisfied with the Way of the Crane, pondering a new purpose and wishing to understand how I could honor what remained true in me from Crane teaching while finding a new anchor for my soul.



In the service of this vision and interpretation, I have traveled throughout the Golden Courts, serving a series of apprenticeships and ending each with some plausible apparent destruction. (It would not have honored Ancestor Chaiyo or Heaven to inflict the grief of apparent failure on my would-be mentors. Destruction beyond their control might justify mourning, but visible defection or even simple disappearance would add to that the pain of self-condemnation, and this would not be in accordance with the Third Lotus.) I spent between three and 15 years as a prospective adherent to each of the other canonical Dharmas, and an additional four years total among some of the heretical Dharmas.

On another occasion I shall write at length of my inquiries into the egg of potential within each Dharma that we can call upon to draw others to ourselves, whether as converts to our Dharma or as suitable subjects who retain the Dharmas to which Heaven has appointed them. Here I wish to call attention to a phenomenon that came as a surprise to me, and which I believe should influence our collective decisions about proceeding in this era of leaps and upheavals.

I undertook my role as student with all possible sincerity. Indeed, had Heaven called me to conversion, I would have accepted. Ancestor Chaiyo and I agreed that such calls do sometimes go forth and that it would be appropriate for me to answer were I chosen for it. In the end Heaven confirmed the correctness of my first calling, so that I was never more than a student of the other Dharmas. I was, I believe, a very good student, assimilating the lore of the Dharma as presented by our cousins within the Golden Courts. Over time, I found that sustained questioning made in integrity had a distinct benefit for the instructor: my mentors experienced significantly more auspicious moments than nearby comrades of comparable enlightenment up to that point.

Heaven wishes us to realize, I believe, that we may lead through questions as well as answers. Naturally, as a student I carried out the instructions of my teachers, and in this regard I was not a leader. But in opening themselves to the flow of wisdom in one direction, my teachers (probably unwittingly, and perhaps quite against their wills or preferences in some cases) also opened themselves to the counter-flow. Their effort to share the best they knew spoke through me to the spirit of wisdom whose fullest comprehension is our privilege as Cranes.

What I did individually and with other aims, I believe we should undertake systematically. Let us select and send out a few candidates each year, chosen for their skill in the disguise of sincerity, and let them travel to those courts most in need of enlightenment. We may minister to their ignorance in the form of the small, subordinate creature, just as the frog on the ice was essential to Xue's own enlightenment.

In the hope of ever-increasing benevolence among all Dharmas,

— Phatipatanawong Manee

The next time you dismiss me as a fool for questioning your ways, you should remember Manee's lesson, Anguo Chun. Not everything needs to be taught through rigid examination.

THE TURNING OF THE GREAT WHEEL

From Reflections of Frogs and Butterflies:

The student asks, "Master, what can you tell me about the coming of the Sixth Age?"

Master Cheng Hao says:

The turning of the Great Wheel is a loathsome thing, but confusion, misunderstanding and lack of integrity among the Wan Kuei has allowed it to continue and the Yama Kings to spread their great wickedness. The Wheel already threatens to turn into a Sixth Age, and this we cannot allow. The Cranes must act to save the world from itself.

The Way of the Resplendent Cranes, and no other Dharma, has the power to halt the turning of the Great Wheel and start it spinning back toward the time when the universe was pure and Heaven and Earth were one. This is no mean feat. No simple following of the tenets and laws can set the universe back to rights and bring about a new Age of Heaven. No lip service to the ancestors and to etiquette can hold back the Yama Kings and their plans for total destruction.

Only with great effort and perfect harmony can the Great Wheel be stopped and forced backward. The Cranes must free the world of the corruption that chokes it from every quarter. Today, wickedness pours in from all sides like a black wind. Young Wan Kuei do not know their place, and consort with *shen*. *Akuma* sprout like weeds in the spring rain. The despicable Kin-jin invade the Middle Kingdom with their debased culture. These have carried the disease of corruption into the heart of our domain. We know that we can no longer hope to save the entire world. We must save what we can, and that is the Middle Kingdom.

I see you are eager to go and root out wickedness. But you must remember: what is best for mortals or other *shen* may not be best for the world. That thought must temper your every move, thought and action. You cannot act with undue caring. You cannot be soft and indecisive. Instead, you must be to the world like a doctor to a sick patient. You must wield a skillful scalpel, cutting free the plague-ridden flesh while preserving the untouched. A doctor does not feel for the plight of the tumor or the disease, and neither should you. Cut deep, clean the wound and medicate the pain to ensure that the body heals whole and strong.

Heaven has given us one last chance for redemption. If the Wheel turns again, there will be no more, only destruction. This is a horrible burden to us all, but we must succeed, or else the world is lost.

How simple our masters and worthies make the matter seem. I find it interesting that the translation of the Reflections you choose to spread around is lacking in the long discussions on the subject of the Wheel, the Ages and their relation to the Eight Lotus Path that I know follows the above initial questions. I, too, have seen the original texts in the Temple of the North Facing Wind, my esteemed friend. I cannot help but wonder whether you chose a Korean translation simply because of this strategic omission.

Regardless, I choose not to quote back to you long passages with which you are already familiar. Instead, I present you with a series of memorials on the subject, including one of a very young vintage. See how all the fundamentals of Master Cheng Hao's statements remain in question: Are there truly Ages? Can the Great Wheel be turned back in a literal sense?

You may think it foolish to ask these questions, believing in blind obedience to the laws. But remember that part of our Dharmic duty is to uncover the true laws, not simply to ape those of past times. Universal righteousness is not a simple thing.

UNCERTAINTY, POSSIBILITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

From the library of Mona Ying

From the historical commentaries of Bei Ling, circa 1700.

Mortals think of the world as fixed, beyond the power of wishing to change. We know better. Is not our very existence a matter of passion beyond the bounds of what we would have thought possible? Do we not routinely work miracles drawing on the powers of Yin and Yang, darkness and light, mingled within us? We are beings whose every step proclaims that form cannot resist sufficiently strong desire.

However, most of us retain mortal habits of thought when it comes to history, in spite of our experience. We look at the written words and the physical evidence of the past and think, "It must have been so." But we err when we do this. Look and see for yourself, that you or your fellow Hungry Dead may make the people forget what truly happened and imagine they remember what did not. See that we may summon up forms out of nothing, and dismiss them into the void. Now consider that we are all diminished from the glories of the past. Look and see what the ancestors may do that you cannot, and see for yourself how those who walk the Road Back now rise to shorter heights than you did.

How regrettable that Bei allows nostalgia to color his work this way. The very fact of the ancestors' fall should tell him that they had at least as much wickedness lurking within as any of us.

I do not believe, therefore, that we can say with confidence anything beyond, "This is how the world seems to have been." Were there always barbarians beyond the sea, or did they come into being as an act of punishment for our hubris? Was the world always curved, or did it become so in the aftermath of a calamity we do not now name? Were we in truth Heaven's first chosen vessels upon the Earth, or did others come before us? Let us take none of these things for granted. Xue himself may well be a symbol, the echo of actors and events very different from what we now recognize as possible.

Humility becomes us in the face of great passion.

THE WHEEL AND ITS MAKER(S)

Continued from the commentaries of Bei Ling:

How seldom we stop to think about the implications of what we tell each other as the most basic truths. There is one Way. There is a way for each thing under Heaven. Fate appoints a role for each of us. Every thing under Heaven chooses whether to obey the Way appointed for it or not. There is a secret truth here waiting to be discovered.

Each thing is the way it is because the world is the way it is. A pebble caught in the flood moves from here to there because the weight of water carries it there, and the pebble must submit. But the pebble's movement in turn changes the flow of the water, so that the next pebble moves differently than it would have if the first had not been there. Then the third moves differently because of the second, and so on. The flood changes because of every pebble (and every blade of grass and every bug) it passes over. So it is with every other great thing in the world, be it the weather or the day and night. Countless small things shape the great just as they are shaped by it.

Thus there can be no Wheel of Ages that turns without it too being turned. The Age is the sum of everything that happens within it, just as everything within the Age happens because of the nature of the times. The August Personage made all, and we do not make him. But we do make the world, each of us, every night, in our every action and pause. Therefore those who say that we are doomed to follow the Wheel of Ages down into darkness really say, "I am unwilling to be other than I am and refuse responsibility for changing myself to be as I would wish." Hardness of heart makes what is merely possible seem inevitable.

Great passion becomes us in the face of insignificance. Just as we do not know what the world was, so we do not know what it must be. Let us hew to the Eight Lotus Path and thereby make the world, rather than submit it to us. The Way of the world is that we have the power of choice.

Here Bei shows great wisdom. One of the most important lessons that the modern era could teach the decadent past is that the will of the masses is great and it will prevail. Our task as the servants of the Way (I prefer not to rely on the superstitious implications of "Heaven") is to arrange circumstances so that the masses naturally and inevitably choose virtue. I understand now that many of my mortal efforts failed for want of a full appreciation of what the environment includes. Now I see that we speak to, and lead, not only humanity but the world I once thought of as inanimate and unresponsive. However, the principle of collective action endures despite the collective being much larger than my old teachers knew.

THE STAGE THAT IS THE WORLD

A letter from Ling I, Deputy Minister for Evaluation of Foreign Oracles, to Father Steven Ikaros, Deacon of the Parish of St. Andrew, Shanghai, upon the Festival of the Harvest Moon, 1745:

My dear friend,

I have considered your latest treatise most carefully, but I believe that you remain mired in a fundamental fallacy, which I shall endeavor to explain to you in terms that take into account the necessary restrictions of your education in Western lands far from civilization.

You say, correctly, that the world presents us with the appearance of continuity and persistent identity. This much is unquestionably true. At no point may we peel back the Ten Thousand Things and find them merely painted backdrops, with some vaster realm unlike this theatre of existence beyond them. You assert that this means the world has continuity and persistent identity, and here you fail to consider the implications of your other postulates.

When you and I were both alive, we distinguished easily, as men of good intellect, between the work of children or fools and that of talented artisans. The existence of childish scrawls and crude forgeries by desperate peasants does not negate the existence of Chi Po, nor of the master craftsmen of your homeland. We both saw that even a somewhat slow man could beg with more subtlety and nuance than, say, a pet dog, and present a story with more verisimilitude even though no more real in its assertions.

Death has only opened up new horizons of perception. As one of the Wan Kuei, I see beyond mortal limits to works of inspiring authenticity that are nonetheless wholly the product of an individual's imagination. You, with your sojourn among the dead and mastery of the clever arts that

let you sustain your body postmortem, likewise see these things. Have I not heard you sing the litanies of your barbarian creed, and seen how the voice freed of breath kindles unsuspected devotion and wonder in its audience?

Why, then, do you stop there? Do you truly believe there is nothing in the world with powers greater than ours, which has conjured us forth as easily as we make a memory or an image?

Thus I assert once again that there is no ground on which to believe in the actuality of history. The world seems to have a past because it suits the artist. The dooms you speak of are, like the dooms prophesied among my own kind, purely illusory, because they depend on the past. If the past is only what it needs to be to produce the present story that is our existence, then like a clever editor or redactor, we may choose to modify some elements and produce a different future.

With respect,

Ling I

One could construe Ling's words as incentive to idleness. I include them for a twofold reason. Note that he does not at any point reject the positive, present-moment validity of Dharmaic command. As the annals show, he was throughout his existence a particularly faithful servant to mortal society as long as he chose to remain connected to it, and then an exemplary instructor of younger Kuei-jin facing uncertainty over their Dharma and direction. But note also that he provides a reason completely unlike mine for a conclusion I share; that there is no inevitability in the Wheel of Ages. Someone who acted on his advice would proceed the same way I would, albeit with different motives but with the same refreshing freedom from the sense of predestination.

THE ICE OF THE SIXTH AGE

From the library of Mona Ying:

A memorial from Han Hui, Mandarin of the Court of Los Angeles and Field Commander of the New Promise Mandarinate, to the Extraordinary Commission on the Rectification of Borders, composed on the autumn equinox, 2001.

To the esteemed commissioners, in appreciation for the favor they have shown to this servant of the Way, greetings.

It has come to my attention that some participants in the Great Leap Outward misunderstand parts of the Resplendent Crane tradition with regard to the Wheel of Ages. I write this memorial for two audiences: for you, esteemed commissioners, so that you may examine for yourselves my fidelity to the Great Principle and to the Way that Heaven has assigned to me, and to the teachers and mentors here in the New Promise Mandarinate, for their use in future instruction.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE WHEEL

I begin by reiterating truths to which all Kuei-jin properly adhere. Like our brethren of other Dharmas, we of the Way of the Crane know that the plan of the world includes 12 distinct Ages, from creation in unity to consummation in unity. Among ourselves we disagree as do the adherents of other doctrines about how thoroughly the world has fallen from that plan, and whether the Wheel of Ages might stop at the Sixth Age, thereby ending in chaos rather than unity.

THE WHEEL'S MOVEMENT

Crane tradition differs from others in that we do not accept the inevitability of an age of darkness and demonic domination. We regard the Wheel as an explanation of what comes to pass if the Ten Thousand do nothing to stop it. Within our Dharma, two general schools of thought prevail about this matter.

Students of the cyclic approach say that the Ages must unfold in succession, but that the direction of the wheel may be reversed with sufficiently powerful righteous action. In this, they say, the universe reflects the cycle of dynastic evolution, or vice versa. My readers from outside China may be unfamiliar with this latter cycle, so I recapitulate it briefly. A new dynasty, according to our sages, begins with a righteous leader who restores order after a time of chaos. The new emperor discharges Heaven's assigned duties, and he (or she) and successive emperors guide the country to new heights of prosperity. In due season, prosperity reaches its highest peak, and a descent into morally leaner times begins. At the end of the dynasty, Heaven withdraws its mandate from sufficiently unrighteous emperors and chaos returns, to recede once Heaven bestows the mandate on the first emperor of the next dynasty.

However, the cycle does not unfold inexorably. The early promise of a new dynasty may quickly end, if the founder's heirs fail their duties. Nor must decline proceed without interruption. Even at the last, an emperor whose heart is open to the Way may institute reforms and lead the country back to spiritual and physical health. No dynasty has yet lasted forever, but in principle nothing prohibits the reign of righteousness from being eternal.

So it is with the universe, the brethren of the cyclic approach say. We are now in the twilight of the Fifth Age or even the dawning years of the Sixth, not because it must be so, but because we and our predecessors failed in our duty. The prospects for reform are surely not encouraging, but we Chinese remember that more than one dynasty entered a second period of glory after corruption and even outright civil war, so that hope may always be with us. For Cranes who see the world this way, the Great Leap Outward is part and parcel of our general effort to swing the Wheel back toward Ages of light.

Students of the stepping-stone approach compare the Ages, like the Eight Lotuses of our Dharma's Path, to stepping-stones spread evenly through a garden. The traveler who wishes to go from one side to the other must

step on them all (or at least on most of them), but not necessarily in any assigned order. Within this approach, two secondary schools of thought about the Sixth Age contend. One sub-school says that all the Ages serve Heaven's will and must indeed come to pass. If we put off the Sixth Age, skipping ahead to an Age not yet come, we shall face the Sixth at a later time. The consolation in this view is that we might collectively be better prepared for it after this warning epoch. The other sub-school says that the Ages are possibilities Heaven presents to us rather than requirements imposed upon us, so that we may choose simply to step past the Sixth Age if we can reach the Seventh.

The differences between these outlooks carry complex consequences, and our libraries brim over with commentaries, debates and discussion of all the secondary and tertiary issues raised. In practical terms, however, they all point to a shared goal: the establishment of Heavenly justice on Earth, without delay.

How much further we can expect to go remains a matter for sages to memorialize each other about. That individuals may purge themselves and rise as pure souls to union with the Way Itself is indisputable. Whether it is appointed to All Under Heaven to attain that state remains unclear. Perhaps we will dispute less when we have achieved that measure of virtue on which we all agree.

COUNSELS OF HOPE AND DESPAIR

Inevitability makes existence easy. It frees the individual from responsibility for outcomes, allowing attention to one's response. Graceful response to difficult fates underlies some of the greatest art, among *shen* and mortals alike.

However, we reject the liberty from consequence that goes with belief in a single possible path for the Wheel. This rejection gives us both hope and sorrow that other Dharmas do not experience, and that seem to be the primary points of contention among the Mandarin's students.

We believe that other Kuei-jin err in accepting the inevitability of an Age of Sorrows to come. But we do not believe they err in a foolish way. A full proof of the Crane tradition on this point runs to many volumes, and whatever this Age may be, it is not one that provides a great deal of time for leisurely scholarship. Certainly the unfolding experience of year upon year provides much evidence of growing wickedness, and little of strengthening righteousness. Therefore, we do not condemn our brethren of other Dharmas as foolish or lazy, but rather as fellow seekers of truth who have yet to apprehend a particular point.

One of my first edicts as Mandarin of Los Angeles acknowledged the diligent effort made by Kuei-jin of all Dharmas on behalf of the Great Leap Outward. Each year since my ascension to that honorable position, I have issued a fresh edict renewing my expression of thanks and adding to the list of honor those who came to the court in the intervening months. It is not my policy, nor that of



any of my kindred Cranes, to impugn the efforts of others. Indeed, it is perhaps particularly praiseworthy to persist in right action when one does not expect the world at large to properly honor the effort.

On the other hand, knowing that the Wheel *can* change its direction puts a greater burden on us, and makes despair particularly tempting. After all, the weight of the world's sins is very great, and we are but few before Heaven. In earlier Ages, our predecessors could think the Middle Kingdom was all that really mattered. Now we know how much lies beyond our boundaries, and their sins drag us down with them. This awareness drives the Cranes who take part in the Great Leap Outward. None of us believe that the sorrows to come can be very far off, and the mountains of darkness we must mine down loom very tall. We dig toward the foundation of primal purity as fast as we can, but I do not think any of us altogether escapes the conviction that we dig our own graves rather than a foundation for a glorious future.

These are the particular strengths and vulnerability of the insight vouchsafed to our predecessors in the Dharma, and taught to us by our scholars. Weighing hope and despair alike, we aim to proceed with the righteousness appropriate to all granted the Second Breath, with eyes open and hearts full of love for all that is good, and hands ready to mend every broken thing and to smite every pocket of wickedness that keep Heaven and Earth apart.

In the spirit of filial submission,

—Mandarin Han Hui of the Violet Path

THE AGES AND THE LOTUSES

From the library of Mona Yin:

From [CENSORED], to [CENSORED], loyal vassal and diligent scholar, greetings.

[CENSORED], you know by now that I do not abuse the privileges of leadership. I allow all loyal vassals considerable room within which to pursue their concerns, and I delight in the honest desire to understand the wisdom stored up in the Middle Kingdom but unfamiliar to our new subjects. Therefore, I hope you will take this warning with proper seriousness.

If you persist in this course, I do not see how I can spare you the embarrassment of trial and the agony of execution. This is neither the time nor the place to undertake a thorough examination of possible weaknesses in the edifices of Kuei-jin cosmology. In particular, [CENSORED], when we have Xu Yikui, one of the most famous inquisitors of the age, tramping to and fro, it is not an auspicious time to ponder defects in his (and my) Dharma.

You are, after all, not the first person to notice the not-quite-parallel between the twelve Ages and the eight Lotuses. Nor are you the first to reject the conventional explanation that there are more Ages than Lotuses because the world is more complex than the individual soul. I commend your mastery of the key insight that the soul, the world and Heaven itself are all equally complex when understood fully. Had you drawn the Second Breath rather

than becoming the victim of one of Zao-Lot's debased brood, I have no doubt that you would have been a formidable adherent of my Dharma.

But please, [CENSORED], as you value your ability to continue studying anything at all, immediately destroy all your writings suggesting that the Road Back as we currently practice it is fundamentally deficient. Your historical argument about stages of perfection among the Ten Thousand in earlier ages is indeed fascinating, and were the times more peaceable I would cheerfully read along with you and debate the fine points of what we learned together. You may have noticed, however, that the times are not peaceable. We have enemies without and interrogators within, and I would prefer that one of the most promising Western students of our Way not reach an ignominious end.

Is there nothing else that can hold your attention for a time?

In concern and maternal instruction,
—[CENSORED]

THE PURPOSE OF VIRTUE

From the library of Mona Ying:

THE SUPREMACY OF VIRTUE

Jhavran Delihl, in the "Debates of the Grove," 376 BCE, as transcribed by an anonymous observer:

I rise, first of all, to reject the assumption under which these debates take place. I regard the hypothetical equality of the Dharmas as a conclusion that we might reach during debate, not as a legitimate postulate in advance of the reasoning process.

However, I do not accept it as a conclusion any more than I do as an assumption. It seems clear to me that the Dharmas are not of equal merit beneath Heaven, and that the effort to pretend otherwise hampers our ability to perform the roles assigned to us.

Each of the other Dharmas depends for its existence on a state of disharmony in the Ten Thousand Things. There can be no need for Devil-Tigers without sinners, or without Yama Kings who insist on claiming Heaven's prerogatives. The Thrashing Dragons and Thousand Whispers are simply wayward children unwilling to accept their obligations, and have no cosmic significance whatsoever. The Bone Flowers are necessary only as long as the regrettable schism between living and dead realms persists.

Rulership, however, is fundamental. There was an August Personage before there were Ten Thousand Things, and when unity returns there will still be an August Personage. An imperial and a celestial hierarchy exists in times of virtue as well as in times of wickedness. The ruler's directives must always be interpreted and applied, while the subjects' petitions must always be studied and processed appropriately.

There will come a time when decay is no longer the dominant motif of things. No Wan Kuei will refuse to

accept responsibility for his appointment, and therefore two of the Dharmas will disappear. There will be no persistent vice, only the transitory weaknesses innate in finite existence, and therefore no need for another. And there will be no schism between the worlds, and therefore no need for the last. Only we will remain. We must never forget this, nor must those who foolishly seek to declare themselves our peers.

COMPLIMENTARY VIRTUES

Jhavran Delihl, in the "Second Debate of the Groves," 310 CE, as transcribed by an anonymous observer:

It is clear to anyone with the patience to observe our community for a few decades that the primal sin that destroyed our ancestors' ability to perform their assigned role — overwhelming pride — remains active among us now, beneath tonight's moon. We have heard advocates of each Dharma make fatuous cases for the supremacy of their particular role, and present plausible though deficient rationales from the words and writings of their predecessors. I am something less than overjoyed to hear myself cited in this way on behalf of the orientation toward Hun.

The facts of the world make plain what ought to be. The acorn does not revolt against itself to become a pine, nor does the caterpillar refuse to become a butterfly in its appointed time. Heaven's gift of reflection too easily leads us astray, just as it does all other creatures with thinking souls, into labyrinths of rationalizations. The simple truth is that Heaven allows those who walk the Road Back to manifest different Dharmas. We know from careful examination of the oracles that while the Yama Kings and their minions can and do taint this

One of the most common answers given to questions about the essence of our condition is, "because that's the way it is." This is never an acceptable answer from power, which must always be held to account by the masses. Here I present several different answers to the question, "Why do we as Resplendent Cranes adhere to these particular virtues?" Implicitly or explicitly, each answer to this question also points to a perspective on the overall role and destiny of the Dharma.

Note that I do not intend to endorse Jhavran Delihl's despair. In fact, I actively condemn it as a typically bourgeois self-indulgent luxury. In his latter years, he let mere emotion substitute for intelligent, directed passion and thereby deprived the Great Cause of his contributions. He robbed the cause thereby, because this second vitality does not exist for the sake of personal gratification. However, I do find a strong and significant kernel of truth in his final remarks when it comes to individual Cranes' failings. For the sufficiently useless and obstructionist individual, Jhavran's advice is well worth heeding.



process, they do not in the final analysis control it, so that what happens, happens because it is willed by a greater power than the ones below us.

(Champions of the various Dharmic heresies assert that Heaven appoints more ways than the five acknowledged here. In response, I note that they cannot prove any instance of someone returning to affiliation with their favored heresy except in cases where we can also prove outside manipulation of the return. I therefore dismiss their relevance to this matter.)

The Dharmas occur in roughly equal proportions taken over the expanse of time and space. Some are more numerous in a particular area or era, but this is no surprise. Just as there are hardy, rugged plants in the mountains and lush, sprawling ones in the jungles, so the environments of the soul and body bring forth different guardians to deal with different needs. Likewise, the misfortunes and miseries of different times and places mean that some motives to escape Yomi and draw the Second Breath are more prevalent than others. This commonness of motive is not the same thing as strength of need, of course; our societies are too far from primal virtue for them to manifest only the particular kinds of misery that could correct the underlying injustices and errors of that moment.

But I digress. The point is that Heaven wills that there be five Dharmas. It would be an act of great presumption to say that Heaven does not know what it is doing four-fifths of the time. Naturally, we who are the Shining Ice Guardians are properly the leaders and judges of all, just as the body has only one head. But we can no more dispense with the other Dharmas than the head can dispense with the liver or the stomach. A head may indeed live without the body, as our cousins of the Golden Courts demonstrate routinely, not to say tiresomely. But that is because of their special condition. The world remains alive, and it is precisely our mission to preserve the whole world from the fate we undergo as individuals. We do not know whether Heaven would restore the world to a semblance of life were it to die as we did. It is our mission as its guardians to see that the question remains unanswerable. And to this end, all parts are equally necessary, though not equal in the nature of their tasks.

VIRTUE FOR A SEASON

Jhavran Delihl, in the "Fourth Debate of the Groves," 1522, as transcribed by an anonymous observer

So, lords and ladies, here we are again, in an effort to impose through words a structure on the chaos that is the world. How wonderful the hope that words can accomplish what Chi does not and matter cannot: dam the manifold cracks through which essence leaks out into nothingness before it all dissipates and the Ten Thousand Things become No Thing. How vain.

It must be obvious to all that the world is leaking essence, no matter how much we preen and congratulate each other on our successes. We do not forestall wickedness among thinking creatures, nor disaster among the

unthinking elements. We do not satisfy the ghosts of the dead, nor the spirits of the living. Wherever you see our hand, there you see the taint of gathering darkness.

Perhaps it is true that our kind once exerted a noble kingship. In such an Age, if ever it existed, the Way of the Resplendent Crane would have made sense. It does not now. The proper duty of the wicked rulers at the end of a dynastic cycle is to fall and give way to worthier replacements. Insofar as we have been the kings and queens of All Under Heaven, we have done our duty with grave deficiencies. All the miseries of the world proclaim our failings.

I submit, therefore, that we who adhere to the Dharma are now obstacles to the progress of virtue rather than

assets in the great struggle. Our individual and collective duty must be to remove all traces of ourselves from the world so as to properly prepare the place for new ministers to discharge our function.

As I said, I reject Delihl's universal despair, but it is worth remembering his words. All of us who take on positions of leadership must constantly ask ourselves if we have become a roadblock to the very communal virtue we should be promoting.

I wonder, have you ever asked yourself that, Anguo Chun?



PRINCIPLES OF PEACE

Master Cheng laments the increasing split within learning. In ancient times, learning emphasized the improvement of oneself, aiming at concrete achievements. For this purpose, there was only Confucianism. The heterodoxical schools were not included. Today, people learn chiefly to impress others. Defects have multiplied and learning has been split into three parts, not including the heterodoxical schools.

—Reflections of Things on Hand

Adherents of the Resplendent Cranes Dharma come from different lifestyles, time periods and cultures. The thread that stitches them together as a group is the belief in the eight tenets of their Dharma and the Eight Lotus Path. But what is "correct" or "righteous" to one may be the essence of corruption to another. As such, every Crane's take on the laws and tenets that govern his society are tainted with his own personal views. While the laws themselves may be neutral regarding the details of nightly life, the Kuei-jin interpret them in light of what each Kuei-jin was before she died: poor peasant, merchant, priest, warrior, noble, staunch communist.

The other thing that holds Cranes together is the belief that the world can somehow be turned from its path of destruction, away from the Sixth Age and back toward the Age of Heaven, with the proper application of force. Cranes never lose hope. They never let go of the conviction that they can be redeemed from their state and, with effort, they can redeem everyone else as well. Unlike the other Dharmas, they do not believe the destruction of the world is a foregone conclusion. This belief touches everything they say and do. While they are out crushing whomever they see as the wicked, they know their chosen path will bring them eventual salvation.

ORTHODOXY AND HETERODOXY

Over the millennia, different views on the laws have come together and clashed. Voices have risen. Shadow wars have been fought. Strong personalities have come to the fore, and attracted followers to take up their banners. Newly crowned leaders have rubbed against the accepted norm of the reigning orthodoxy. Groups have broken off from the mainstream to establish their own temples and sects, focusing on the "proper" teachings to follow the Road Back and return to Heaven. Where once, thousands of years ago, pure orthodoxy of thought within the Dharma reigned, there now exists the orthodoxy of the Blood Court of Beijing and the heterodoxy of a thousand sects everywhere else.

Because of their views on government — those who are most able should govern and those less worthy should follow — the Cranes organize themselves into strict hierarchies. With their emphasis on learning to live the law, it comes naturally to them that those who are the best versed in the teachings should lead. Mandarins report to ancestors and bodhisattvas, jina report to mandarins, and

the Running Monkeys report to everyone with almost no say of their own. The elder mandarins run the sects themselves. Congregation services at the temples are led by younger mandarins. Jina assist the mandarins in their duties. Progression in a sect is based on enlightenment, and that enlightenment comes in the form of the sect's particular brand of Resplendent Crane wisdom.

Many students slavishly submit to their sect's teachings. However, some students discover new points of view on their Dharma along their philosophical travels, and break out to find their own way. The existing leaders of the established sects, especially among the Blood Court orthodoxy, do not admit the existence of ways to progress along the Road Back that are as true, let alone truer, than their own, and frown upon this practice. As the orthodoxy, they are clearly correct, and anyone else is contributing to the problems in the world. Nonetheless, some Cranes leave to found their own sects or cults.

Not all diverging sects are equal, either. Some have thousands of adherents and "proof" of the correctness of their teachings in the form of bodhisattvas and ancestors among their members. These have established fortresses and places of worship that have stood the test of time and attract students by the dozens to their hallowed halls. They also have long and traditional feuds with other established sects going back hundreds, even thousands, of years.

Other sects are no better than glorified cults: small and fly-by-night, with beliefs so divergent from the Resplendent Crane mainstream that they hardly resemble the ancient Shining Ice Guardians they seek to emulate. These cults are often no more than a few *wu* held together by a firm belief in an idiosyncratic take on one tenet of the Way of the Resplendent Crane. They often disappear overnight, as soon as the strong personality at their core dies or goes missing.

In the Fifth Age, everyone is running around claiming that his or her sect has a death grip on enlightenment. Worse, every sect claims its teaching of the Dharma is the one true way to cleanse the Middle Kingdom of the disease brought by the plague-ridden dogs from the outside. Cults spring up like weeds in the warm, summer rain. With less time to train young Cranes, more urgency behind putting the world to rights, and more difficulty maintaining coherence across the Dharma as a whole in a dark time of corruption, there are loud arguments over pithy points in doctrine. The doctrine *must* be correct in all ways if it is the one way to return the world to the Age of Heaven; one incorrect or misinterpreted point may be the weak link that allows the Great Wheel to turn and the Yama Kings to destroy the world. Minor arguments over little things like a basic understanding of the third step of the Eight Lotus Path have provoked midnight wars that wiped out entire sects.

Urgency runs as an undercurrent to all the different sects and cults. Who is right? One of them must be, and they had better figure out which one before the entire world is lost.

ON THE DEGREES OF DISSENT

From the lessons of Xu Yikui to students in the Blood Court of Beijing in the autumn of 1965:

There are ten thousand faces of the truth, and ten thousand faces of error. Students who have taken the first steps and felt Heaven's direct favor in one matter are too often inclined to assume they understand Heaven's will in all things, and to regard all errors as fundamentally alike. This is itself a failing, in that it denies the complexity of things. With more enlightenment comes a further understanding of the diversity within the essential principles of right and wrong.

As you travel among the followers of our creed, you must remind yourselves that different sorts of error require different sorts of correction. You cannot mend a broken wall with a bandage, nor do brick and mortar help heal cuts and bruises.

THOSE WHO STAND ASIDE

Remember that your knowledge of Heaven's will is imperfect. Those who achieve the bodhisattva state have, by definition, won free of the terrible legacy of sin, both their own and that of their predecessors. You — like your teachers — are far from that blessed condition. So it is possible for earnest, devout seekers of the truth to disagree as to how the tenets we share ought to be applied to particular situations. Among your brethren, some have souls as close to enlightenment as yours and yet believe very different things about the Way, the Path, and the demands of the moment. We refer to those who accept our principles but dissent from tradition as to their meaning as those who stand aside. They are your brothers and sisters, and when you must correct their errors, do so in the spirit of filial devotion.

THOSE WHO TURN THE FACE

Worst of all are those who claim for themselves the right to make over the essential principles. They claim that a vision of truth vouchsafed to them justifies their — and only their — discarding one or more pillars of the Way and the Path. They say that they guard a purer understanding, and that all the rest of us have fallen into error. In this they are like children who insist that all the rest of the dancers are out of step in the opera, or that all the other soldiers on parade have missed the cadence. When you correct them, do so firmly. You must always allow room for repentance to grow in their hearts, but unless they show signs of wishing to return to the true Way, act as vigorously as necessary to prevent their error from spreading. Some will claim that you have a duty to be merciful, and they are right... but your mercy to the world requires firmness toward them. You do not properly show compassion toward a sick man by sparing his disease, and you do not properly honor your Dharma by sparing its heretics.

THOSE WHO STAND ASIDE

The following sects, although they diverge from the orthodoxy of the Shining Ice Guardians of the Blood Court, stand as accepted parts of the Dharma. They emphasize different tenets and lotuses, but do not stand in bold philosophical opposition to the rest of the Crane's Way. This has not prevented some recriminations and shadow wars, but most observers accept those as legitimate parts of philosophical debate within the Dharma.

THE EIGHT LOTUSES BLOOMING

The Eight Lotuses Blooming sect has a tradition reaching back to the Southern Song Dynasty in China, when Neo-Confucianism was born and great masters argued with each other endlessly over the tiniest detail of their faith. Once a firm adherent to the orthodoxy of the Shining Ice Guardians, this sect broke off to find its way by focusing on the first, and what its followers consider the most important, tenet of the Crane Dharma: following the Eight Lotus Path.

Arising during the turmoil of the Great Wheel's turning from the Fourth to the Fifth Age, founded by the unorthodox yet honorable ancestor Wang Fu-chih, this sect believes that the primary goal of the Cranes is to find salvation in themselves and in others through the peaceful means of education and meditation. At the time of the founding, the honorable Crane ancestor witnessed chaos all around him and blamed the turning of the Great Wheel on the Kuei-jin's inability to control their violent impulses. He believed that if Cranes could overcome the impulse to violently gather the Chi needed to survive, and could instead find harmony within themselves, the Great Wheel would not turn further.

Eight Lotuses Blooming teaches that the path to turning the world back to the Age of Heaven lies through the power of serenity and understanding instead of swords and flames. Believers in this sect focus on cultivating harmony within themselves and others as the way to enlightenment. Teachers emphasize meditation rituals, quests, and cleansing journeys for students to learn the importance of each of the eight lessons within the first tenet.

Eight Lotuses Blooming teaches that the Eight Lotus Path is an onion. Students must master each lotus before they can progress to the next. Concentrating on a single lesson involving the Eight Lotus Path actualizes all the tenets of the Dharma, and progressing through the first tenet causes all the other tenets to be lived effortlessly. As the student peels back a skin to reveal the next layer, so he discovers it is easier to progress down the Road Back. Through breathing exercises and meditation on each of the lotuses, students focus their concentration to control their desires, including holding back the P'o when the Demon threatens to break through.

Because the members of Eight Lotuses Blooming are still Damned and must live off the life-force of others, they emphasize exercises and quests that hone their understanding of the Dharma. Their ultimate goal is to reach a state where they no longer require flesh and blood, but only breath, from their victims. As young Kuei-jin are not advanced enough to take Chi in any form other than blood, they are taught to take it as peacefully as possible when the need arises, including drugging or otherwise subduing the victim. The Eight Lotuses Blooming sect teaches that the theft of Chi is necessary to sustain the body while harmonizing with the Eight Lotus Path, and the masters who learn to steal life-force from afar are on the true path to harmony.

The Eight Lotuses Blooming sect encompasses hundreds of faithful who make yearly pilgrimages to its central base, the Temple of the Lotus Pond in Winter in Changan. The sect holds large seminars, congregational meetings, and debates – some of which are so famous, students travel from all over the Middle Kingdom just to listen to such esteemed personalities argue. The sect has produced a long and venerable line of mandarins, ancestors and bodhisattvas, enough to long since establish it as a viable path for those who wish to find conventional enlightenment outside Shining Ice Guardian orthodoxy.

THE EMPTY THRONE

Gao Hueli, who founded the Empty Throne sect, was one of the first Cranes to decisively show the effects of the Fourth Age yielding to the Fifth. His mastery of Disciplines was weak, his soul more prone to temptation from the P'o, but his heart was filled with desire to serve Heaven and the Way, and he fought a battle against the elaborate machinations of a *wu* turned *akuma*, commemorated by his comrade I Dan in the poem "Six Springs." After more than a century of valiant failures, he wrote the memorial, "On the Empty Throne" in 1647, following an auspicious occasion early in the Qing dynasty.

Gao's essential insight was that righteous action is more important than a particular way of achieving it, and that those who refuse to submit may nonetheless be encouraged, guided or even deceived into virtue. Among the people, some behave morally only when compelled. Some need the constant example a visible ruler provides. Others have been blinded by the belief (both ancient and modern) that they must choose the right for themselves if it is to have meaning. Still others have a grudge against the ruler, or for other reasons behave less virtuously in the presence of righteous authority. These are the subjects of Gao's form of kingship. "The empty throne," Gao wrote, "is like the lure a skillful fisherman casts. It attracts the sinful eye and leads the sinful body to twist and turn as the fisherman desires, so that the subtle knives of truth may penetrate quietly into the sinful heart. Thus is the canker removed."



The Quincunx's assembled ancestors did not greet Gao's insight with glad cries. He spent the next two years debating its merits. In the spring of 1650, he offered his opponents this challenge: they would pick a province known for its wickedness, and Gao would guide it to virtue by his methods. The ancestors consulted one another and settled on Shandong, which had suffered terribly in the civil wars between the Ming and Qing dynasties. Repeated destruction of the Yellow River dikes had destroyed much farmland and left behind pestilence, so that starving peasants felt compelled to turn to banditry. Qing forces were enjoying little success restoring order there. Gao accepted, composed the poem "Toward the Sea, Toward the Rising Moon," and walked off down the main highway.

No one saw him again for a century. Instead, they saw the rebirth of virtue in Shandong. It remained poor, for Gao had no power to restore fertility to depleted land. But order returned. In almost every village along the Yellow River, some peasant took it upon himself to organize dike maintenance and repair. The first Qing governor received his post as a hardship assignment, taking him away from more favorable duties as punishment for failings that need not concern us here. His memorials to the capital carefully skirted the edges of honesty, not quite claiming credit for work he couldn't prove he'd done but asserting his role in moral suasion. His successors continued this policy. Much improvement did occur through bureaucratic direction: the army and convicts alike repaired the ruined main roads, and a series of clever captains hunted down the major bandit bands. However, much else that grew better had little to do with the governor or his subordinates.

It was not the governor who inspired a renewed interest in the ancestral rites. No civil servant touched the hearts of the people to set up a food-sharing scheme that cut by half the deaths from famine in the dreadful "dead years" of the early eighteenth century. The people did these things themselves, or so they thought.

Gao walked back up the highway one summer evening singing a ballad of his own design, drawing on the words of Lao Tzu about how the people turn to the Way when they do not know they are ruled. He brought with him two wagonloads of evidence as to the nature of his work: receipts for expenses, diaries of individuals he had chosen for manipulation, the imprisoned souls of a few particularly wicked brigands whom he had driven to suicide, and much more. No honest critic among the courts could disagree that Gao's labor had made Shandong province virtuous, or at least that it had contributed. However, there remained quarrels over how much would have happened through other means had he not been there.

This last argument saddened Gao. He sat down in a small courtyard near the imperial palace and spent the next half-century composing commentaries on the classics, with particular emphasis on means of isolating purely mortal ideas from the celestial wisdom given to the sages. "We shall see," he said, "what happens when the building

tries to stand without its cornerstone." Events gradually vindicated him. After the bitter Heavenly Principle Sect rebellion of 1811-1814, worthies of the Quincunx begged him to return to activity.

Gao experienced his next auspicious occasion as he rose to answer one evening in the spring of 1821. "No," he said. "A principle that works in only one set of hands is unworthy. If what I say is true, then others may do what I have done." Since then he has resolutely refused to act upon others in any role but teacher. He practices the Way of the Single Action: when he walks from one court to another, he does not speak. When he speaks, he sits motionless. When he reads the classics, he does not listen to music. He says that he believes this sedate manner prolongs his existence by increasing his internal harmony, so that when circumstances again require him to act vigorously, he will be there to serve Heaven. In the meantime, he sends out his disciples to All Under Heaven.

The popularity of the Empty Throne principle waxes and wanes, like all intellectual fashions. Gao himself has never endorsed the notion of his student Ling Ku Mao that the Kuei-jin would also benefit from hidden leadership. Ling acquitted himself admirably against charges of heresy and *akuma* nature on three occasions between 1870 and 1920, and is now regarded more as a crank than as an active menace for his enthusiastic recommendation that all ancestors disappear or disguise themselves. The Silent Mandarins of Shanghai do not, of course, speak publicly about this matter more than about any other, but popular sentiment ascribes their choice to influence from Gao and Ling.

THE TWO-LI ROAD

The Two-Li Road is one of the oldest sects among the Resplendent Cranes, dating to the beginning of recorded human civilization or even earlier. Its adherents include many Crane ancestors and a great many young Cranes who were involved in politics during life. Two li is a short distance — about a mile — and the sect name refers to a vision of the proper order for mortal society. According to this sect, Heaven and Earth will again be in harmony when mortals never go more than two li from their birthplace. More broadly, the sect of the Two-Li Road aims to keep humanity fundamentally ignorant of the world at large and its corrupting temptations.

In the beginning, as all Kuei-jin agree, society was harmonious. Then discord crept in somewhere. Followers of the Two-Li doctrine believe that the weakness Yomi could exploit was civilization. People became wicked when tempted to move outside the roles assigned to them by the August Personage. Cities, of course, make excellent homes for sin, but the countryside can as well. Merchants create dissatisfaction, showing people things they cannot otherwise have and drawing their eyes away from the needs of here and now. Travel encourages envy and allows those who resist submission an alternative to proper humbling.

Critics of the Two-Li Road say that all this rests on too narrow an understanding of what it means to be in accordance with one's Way. Yes, humanity began in harmony, say the critics, but that does not mean that only life in pre-civilized primitive conditions can be harmonious. Followers of the Road respond with a simple observation: look at how the Wheel of Ages has turned since humans picked up tools and were not made to put them down again.

The Road as a sect has little organization. Individual elders gather like-minded followers to pursue particular goals, like the disruption of trade inside and out of China or the destruction of university libraries. Wu form when adherents of other Dharmas share the Road's vision; some operate independently, others also in submission to Road elders. Communities within the sect hold widely varying views about desirable tactics, from simple brute force to highly sophisticated sabotage intended to turn civilization's tools against it. None enjoy a great deal of success. For every triumph like the isolation of a small valley in inner Asia and its people's reversion to barbarism, many failures confront the sect. Pessimism prevails among members, barely leavened by the hope that humanity might yet destroy its own civilizations as the Age darkens but before it is too late for redemption.

More temperate members of the sect see civilization and virtue on a continuum. They have no expectation of altogether undoing the evils of technological, organized existence, but they see much room for improvement. Every step away from "progress" gives that much impetus to spinning the Wheel the other way, or at least removes some momentum from its turning toward darkness. Small steps are better than none.

THE YELLOW MOON

In a time now past, three great elder mandarins got together and had a lively debate over the *Five Great Books* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. They argued the need for Yin, the need for Yang, the need for strength and weakness, the need for good and evil, and the Way of the Mind and Heart. Every master they referenced in their long debate was once a living, human master who had passed on to either Heaven or Hell. None were among the Damned.

The three great elder mandarins realized that insight lay within the writings of the wisest of mortals. There was merit in the *Book of Mencius* and the *Book of Changes* — teachings these mandarins applied to the tenets and teachings of the Shining Ice Guardians. The Confucians and Neo-Confucians taught righteousness and rigid life within the laws, just like the Resplendent Cranes. Why should the mandarins not teach these writings to their students? The wise men began teaching their pupils from the writings of worthies and ancestors of the Wan Kuei who had lived before, as well as from preparation materials for mortal merit examinations in China.

This innovation did not go over well with the core constituency of the Resplendent Cranes. The ancestors swiftly removed the three great mandarins from their posts for heresy and sent them on their way. Undeterred, the old masters decided to start their own sect and promote their own brand of teachings. Called the Yellow Moon, the new sect did not grow very fast. For a long time, the Yellow Moon was comprised of only the three elder mandarins. They were happy: they studied their texts, memorized the koans, and debated such things as graduated taxation and the construction of new roads as ways to remove corruption from the world.

Unfortunately, all good things must end. Legends of the three great masters spread among younger Wan Kuei, and an adventurous *wu* sought them out. After much searching, they found the masters of the Yellow Moon sect sitting around a small table on the second floor of a teahouse, arguing drunkenly about the merits of cheap credit to small businesses. The *wu*, confused yet dedicated to finding wisdom in these great sages, bowed before them and begged to come to the temple and learn the great teachings. Clearly, these sages had wondrous wisdom to impart!

The three great mandarins informed the *wu* that they were standing in the temple, and that it served excellent meat buns.

After some confusion, deliberation, bribery and outright begging, the *wu* became students of the three great mandarins. Years of study and some enlightenment later, the Resplendent Crane member of the *wu*, Cheng Ho, chose to stay on with the Yellow Moon and recruit more students from resident *wu* in neighboring villages. Within a few decades, the Yellow Moon sect began to take on the shape and size of a real movement within the Dharma. One day, the three great mandarins sneaked out the back, leaving behind a note claiming it was getting a bit "stuffy" and they needed space.

The sect has since gone on without its founders. Jina who have advanced along their Dharma within the sect administrate the meritocracy exam to students who choose to join. Ranks within the sect are assigned based on exam performance and how well they apply the teachings of ancient human masters to their own progress along the Road Back. The Yellow Moon sect has been around long enough to become one of the more honored sects, despite the fact that the ancestor who first cast out the three mandarins still maintains they deserved to be thrown out. The sect even meets in a proper temple instead of a teahouse.

Much like the Neo-Confucians whom the Yellow Moon sect emulates, adherents have fallen into the trap of putting practice ahead of theory. Over time, the examination and the students who pass it have distilled down to ideological conformity. While the original founders believed in width and breadth of experience in philosophy, learning, and belief, present-day students of

the Yellow Moon focus on progressing through their sect and attaining positions in highly desirable *wu*. Students who graduate into the sect go about applying their learning with an inhuman zeal, forcing it on peers and using Scarlet Screens to "guide" villages and prefectures into a Yellow Moon version of pure righteousness.

In modern times, the Yellow Moon sect is losing many of its students, as Neo-Confucianism, the meritocracy exams, and the teachings of ancient masters has given way to Maoism, the allure of capitalism, and the bright lights of modern cities. But students still come, hoping to find enlightenment and the right tools to help cure the world of its ills in the ancient texts and the wisdom of masters long past.

THOSE WHO TURN THE FACE

The following sects are considered outright heresies by the authorities in the Blood Court and by many other Cranes. The ancestors argue that these sects' rejection or radical transformation of some of the basics of Crane belief makes their teachings antithetical to the true Way. Of course, in a Dharma as political as the Way of the Resplendent Crane, whispered accusations of heresy fly around all too often. Inquisitions and midnight wars aimed at wiping out the most offensive heretical sects and cults are a constant fact of Crane unlife, and so heretical cults that survive keep their existence a well-guarded secret. The following two testimonies came out of interrogations undertaken by Xu Yikui, an inquisitor of the Blood Court, as he pursued heresies across the Middle Kingdom. They reveal some details of two heresies still active in the Middle Kingdom and beyond. Yikui is convinced that many more are yet to be found.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TRAVELERS OF GREAT EARTH

Interrogator's Note: *What follows is a memorial written by the accused, one who gave her name only as Seventh Seeker in the North. We believe, but are not entirely sure, that she was a disciple of the Green Courts before falling into heresy. She offered to write out a memorial so as to avoid a prolonged interrogation (in her words, "since we both know what the outcome will be, let me be concise").*

In the winter after the Americans defeated Japan and the great storm erupted in the Yin World, six Resplendent Cranes of House Bishamon meditated together on the edges of the void where once the city of Hiroshima had been. On the night of the solstice, wisdom spoke to them, telling them that the visible hole in the world was merely the overt manifestation of the emptiness that filled all the Middle Kingdom. The Mandate of Heaven had been lost, and the void would only grow until such time as the emperor was found and restored to the throne.

At first they were confused, thinking of the Celestial Emperor and wondering if the Creator perhaps lay concealed somewhere within the Ten Thousand Things.

On the following new moon, wisdom spoke to them again, telling them that the emptiness in heaven would end when it could reflect a fullness on earth. It was not the Celestial Emperor they needed to seek, but the human king (or queen), who would found a new dynasty and unite the Middle Kingdom in political and social order.

The six christened themselves the Six Travelers, and set forth to search all reaches of the Middle Kingdom for a worthy emperor. They knew from history that the Mandate of Heaven is no respecter of social class, and that the right person of strong mind and heart might appear anywhere. They asked wherever they went for tales of surprising wisdom and courage, for these are the signs by which the Mandate's recipient becomes known. For 10 years they traveled, and they found no one worthy.

At the end of the tenth year, wisdom spoke to them all again, for the last time. They understood that nowhere in the Middle Kingdom would they find the person they sought. Just as the Middle Kingdom once sat closest to heaven and received its greatest favors, now it sat farthest away because of its people's sins. Heaven would raise up the Middle Kingdom again, but the rising would begin somewhere else. The new emperor would have a soul in tune with the ancient harmonies, but would not wear the skin of the Middle Kingdom. Thus he (or she) would be a rebuke to those who had once had the Mandate and an inspiration to those who had never known life under righteous rule.

The Six Travelers do not seek out disciples. Rather, they wait for the wisdom within them to speak to others. Discipleship in the Fellowship begins with a question from the student rather than with a word from the master. I felt called to them fifteen years ago, after the rest of my *uu* were sacrificed in a ploy between the Courts of the Quincunx. All I saw were ashes and dust, while off beyond the horizon, I felt in a dream, were lands as green as the Creator intended, fresh fields ready for the harvest. (Yes, I know that green is not the color of the ripe harvest.) I crept away from my court one night and wandered aimlessly, until encountering the Sixth Seeker in the North. He began to instruct me, and we traveled together until he deemed me ready to go on my own.

In the north, hard ships ply the ice and simple peoples roam the lands around the frozen sea. It seems strange to me that Heaven might place its Mandate among them, but the world is full of mysteries. Perhaps my role all along has been merely to draw the attention of servants of the void, whether witting like the *akuma* or unwitting like you who seized and will burn me, while my brothers and sisters find the new emperor elsewhere.

STRANGERS AMONG THEM?

To Master Yen, greetings.

Some of our Dharma taking part in the Great Leap Outward report hearing stories from Kin-jin and occasional particularly devout barbarian mortals about travelers who sound very much like the Seekers. I have been unable to confirm these accounts, but they seem plausible enough. If they could be found and convinced to negotiate with us, the Seekers in the West could be potent allies, not for their might but for their wealth of information. How little we know, in some ways, about the ins and outs of those foreign lands. What they must know... I judge that there must be at least half a dozen Seekers across the great Eastern sea. Alas for the gulfs of skepticism and dissent.

We know that they tend to shun the Kin-jin, as is only sensible. But what do they think of magicians, of shapechangers, of all the other *shen* Heaven (or Yomi) has seen fit to send out into the world? Who do they speak with, where do they dwell? How I wish I could take the generation it would likely require to properly investigate. Perhaps you have some students who would be willing to undertake the quest? I am sure that the Extraordinary Commission could be persuaded to provide some backing.

— Inquisitor Xu Yikui

THE LIBERATORS OF THE WHEEL

Interrogator's Note: This is a catechism of sorts, taken among the possessions of the accused, one Pradeep Gangol. It is to the credit of his ancestor that he recognized the error of Pradeep's ways and led us to the accused; we shall take no action at this time against Ancestor Ranjan Bhattari or the court of Nepal apart from a general inspection of their schooling. It appears that Pradeep fell into error on his own despite, rather than because of his instruction. While perhaps not as good as he would have gotten closer to the heart of the Middle Kingdom, his education was not essentially deficient.

Pradeep was found hiding in the basement of a factory, amid a pile of explosives stolen from construction sites. He had also stolen a variety of timing devices and was apparently attempting to assemble bombs for placement on board aircraft bound for destinations in Europe and Africa. I fear he is typical of the lone fanatics of this cult,

whose number I cannot yet guess at. I feel there must be a guiding heretic at the core of the movement, but I have yet to uncover any clues as to his identity.

How does the Wheel turn? The Wheel turns down into perpetual darkness.

Why does the Wheel turn down into perpetual darkness? The Wheel turns down into perpetual darkness because the World is too heavy.

Why is the World too heavy? The World is too heavy because it is too large.

Why is the World too large? The World is too large because the powers of destruction subverted creation.

How did the powers of destruction subvert creation? The powers of destruction subverted creation by creating land and sea beyond the Middle Kingdom.

Why did the powers of destruction create land and sea beyond the Middle Kingdom? The powers of destruction created land and sea beyond the Middle Kingdom because they knew that the principle of life would fill them once they had been made.

Why is it bad for land and sea beyond the Middle Kingdom to be filled with life? It is bad for land and sea beyond the Middle Kingdom to be filled with life because there can be no truth beyond the Middle Kingdom.

Why can there be no truth beyond the Middle Kingdom? There can be no truth beyond the Middle Kingdom because it was the only land and sea of the first Ages, and is the only land and sea in the will of the August Personage.

What must be done to lighten the World? We must lighten the world by removing all life from the land and sea beyond the Middle Kingdom.

Why will removing all life from the land and sea beyond the Middle Kingdom lighten the World? Removing all life from the land and sea beyond the Middle Kingdom will lighten the World because when there are no souls there, the principle of life will withdraw.

How will the withdrawal of the principle of life help? The withdrawal of the principle of life will help because when it goes, the sterile land and sea will dissolve into wind and dust, which are light.

Will this save the World? Yes, this will save the World. When the Middle Kingdom is again alone, the Wheel will again turn up.

When can we begin to lighten the World? We can begin to lighten the World now, with every tool of death that comes to hand.

NESTS OF CRANES

The Resplendent Cranes have many places they consider sacred or important. Temples take the form of meditation chapels, dojos, shadow colleges, law libraries and centers of learning for students who wish to focus their minds on the tenets and learn to live them effortlessly, honorably, and with integrity. More often than not, specific sects or cults control these temples, and host services

dedicated to one aspect or teaching of the eight tenets of the Crane Dharma.

These sacred places contain libraries of books full of analects and koans, teachers of great wisdom ready to dispense their knowledge to willing students, and gathering areas for debate on various points or interpretations of law. While pilgrimages to these temples are not required for progress along the Dharmic path, masters encourage students to make such journeys in order to perfect understanding along the Road Back. Students also win points for traveling to a temple well known for hosting debates, participating in them, and winning.

BEIJING

Seat of the Blood Court, northern pole of the Five August Courts of the Quincunx, and home of the Bestowed Ancestor, Beijing casts a long shadow among Resplendent Cranes. Jina and mandarins flock to the Blood Court to practice leadership and guide the Middle Kingdom toward righteousness. The city and the surrounding countryside are home to numerous Crane temples and schools as well. Most often stripped of outward symbols of religious practice, these simple buildings are the places where jina teach disciples the Way, where jina learn from mandarins, and where mandarins debate the fine points of Crane belief. Shining Ice Guardians believe that instructors should have only a few students at a time, so none of the teaching temples are especially large. What they lack in size, they make up for in prestige and number. Among the most respected are the Temple of Three Cranes Rising and the Temple of the Blossoming Flower. Three Cranes Rising takes its name from Master Han's practice of simultaneously guiding three disciples toward ling. Bestowed Ancestor Chiang became a jina at Three Cranes and many wish to follow in her path. The Temple of the Blossoming Flower is famous for its focus on the Eight Lotus Path, which its leader Master Ming-La claims holds the answer to all Dharmic questions. Ming-La derived her insight from an observation of Rising Majestically to the Western Sun, the bodhisattva who fell while defeating Ravana during the Week of Nightmares.

The Temple of the North Facing Wind sits about 150 miles north of the city proper and is the largest Crane temple in the region. Although instruction takes place there, the temple's size is due to its impressive archives. An expression of Crane support for the Ways of Origin and Lineage, the archives contain a variety of texts chronicling the curse of the Wan Kuei and many ancient works important to Cranes above all others. Teachers from other recognized temples petition for the right to bring students to this simple stone building in order to consult the archives. The waiting list is long and the halls are always full of students and teachers moving back and forth. Ancestor Tian, who heads the temple, denies rumors of a long-standing twilight war over lost texts with the keepers of the Shadow Song archive at the Bone Court.

THE TEMPLE AT THREE MOUNTAINS VILLAGE

On the banks of the Yellow River, Three Mountains has existed since times long past. It has changed little in the thousand years of its existence. Dynasties have come and gone, and the ways of the people have not changed. Peasants till the fields, merchants peddle their wares, doctors tend the sick, and people go about their lives not knowing that they are the subjects of a vast sociological experiment perpetuated by the Resplendent Cranes.

A Shining Ice Guardian long dead, Wang Ping, founded the Temple at Three Mountains. She had lived in the village centuries before, when it was no more than a dirt road and a small cluster of huts. One night, bandits broke into her home and kidnapped, repeatedly raped, and then murdered her and her family. She took the Second Breath with a mind full of vengeance, which she exacted. Hands full of blood and head full of an overpowering need to remove such wickedness from the world, she was soon discovered by a Resplendent Crane jina, who took her in and trained her in the ways of his Dharma.

Returning to the village as a Wan Kuei, and believing that her death had a deeper purpose, she started down her own path of purity. There, she experimented for many long years, tinkering from outside, bringing money and influence into an area that was once only mud and straw huts on a dirty river. She used the influx of cash as a cover to support her filial duties. She built shrines to her parents, protected her descendants, and endlessly manipulated the actions of village residents.

Over time, she communicated her findings to fellow Resplendent Cranes, and the ancestor of the local court approved Three Mountains Village as a site for research and study of the effects of various rules and proclamations as applied to mortals. Somewhat isolated, the village provided the perfect site to test various laws — as long as the Wan Kuei doing the studying never involved themselves in any way with the villagers.

Wang Ping, died long ago in a tangle with a couple of *hsien*, but Three Mountains Village lives on through layers of Scarlet Screens. It is run by the Kuei-jin of the Five Mighty Stones *wu*, who diligently report their results while guarding the local dragon lines. The Resplendent Cranes have virtually sealed the village off from the world as their own private laboratory, and so it has been almost untouched by the coming of the communists, or any other dynasty for that matter. The Cranes use it to study what makes mortals wicked, what makes them act with honor, and how to eliminate the plague of wickedness from the world. They insert "elements" of Crane-constituted "good" or "evil" into the village itself. For example, they starve the village for a while, and give food only to one person. They choke off the flow of money to the village and then scatter gold in the streets. They murder all the first-born sons in the middle of the night and record the reactions of



the peasants. Current research is important to the Blood Court of Beijing: the mandarins are trying to determine if wickedness is something one is born with or something one chooses, and this village may give a clue.

The human villagers are largely content, and rarely want to leave. They have never noticed that they could not leave if they tried. The village is essentially a pleasant and well-regulated concentration camp. The Resplendent Cranes have turned Three Mountains into their own terrarium through which to observe human nature, and through it, the world.

HONG KONG

Few places provide such a clear demonstration of the principle that one truth may lead to many answers, even conflicting ones, as Hong Kong. Resplendent Cranes lead both the preeminent *wu* of traditional residents, the Righteous Devils of Kowloon, and the preeminent *wu* coming in with outside challengers, the Victorious Whirlwind. The complexities of Kuei-jin history being what they are, Jiu Yow and her companions of the Whirlwind can (and do) portray themselves as the guardians of tradition, restoring the old Flame Court and ending the period of anarchic independence in which Anguo Chun led the Righteous Devils.

The struggle for supremacy continues. Jiu's position is secure enough that the Quincunx recognizes the Flame Court as again in active service, with her as its mandarin. She was almost ready to press for a chance at the ancestor creation rites when news came from America of Trip Monkey Wu's disastrous decline after premature ascension to ancestry. Now Jiu prefers to wait and concentrate on the tasks at hand. Both she and her rival Anguo find their long-term plans complicated by the absence of expected disorder. There has been neither harsh repression of Hong Kong's people by the new mainland-backed government nor particularly passionate resistance and uprising. Both leaders expected to use stirred-up human crowds as tools; instead, they must proceed more quietly.

KOREA

The Cranes of the Green Courts are almost all staunch traditionalists — those who prefer other approaches are welcome to leave, as soon as possible. For the Green Cranes, North and South Korea were like adjacent gardens in which different approaches to supreme authority over mortals could flourish for all to study. Kuei-jin neither ran government nor exerted substantial influence on government policies, but did provide what support they could through their own networks of influence and helped shield both governments from interference by other *shen*.

Unfortunately, neither experiment is going very well from the traditionalist Crane perspective. The South has become enmeshed in and dependent on foreign ties, and its industries too often serve merely to promote decadence and modernism elsewhere. The North teeters on the brink of collapse, and it scarcely matters (to Kuei-jin) whether the

end comes in war or implosion. Scholars who hoped to end the century with triumphant memorials on the demonstrated success of totalitarian government instead find themselves compiling studies as to how each system broke down and allowed sin to flourish even where the laws were strong. It is, apparently, not enough to have powerful organs of law and to use them vigorously. Something must happen among the people that did not.

Into this unhappy situation came a small band of Western vampires seeking refuge from the chaos in India. Crane scholars play an active part in studying the refugees — not their lore, but the vampires themselves, since their roots lie in advanced magical manipulation of mortal and supernatural raw material. The newly founded Gardeners of the Flesh sect teaches that the Korean failures show the necessity of breeding better human beings: smarter, more self-critical and much more subservient.

The "Nagaraja," as the refugees call themselves, can offer little insight into the details of their lineage's creation (or they refuse to), and Crane magicians watch eagerly for any sign of failing that could justify sentencing one or more of the outsiders to destruction via experimentation. In the meantime, early experiments on mass manipulation of breeding in isolated villages has begun, but it will be years yet before the experimenters can reliably evaluate their results.

HELL STEPS JIN

The Gardeners of the Flesh are prime candidates for the temptations of one or more Yama Kings and their servants. Filled with the certainty that their end is good, the Gardeners willingly adopt the most questionable of means in search of some competitive advantage over their rivals. They seethe with hubris, and most consider themselves vastly more insightful than other Cranes, let alone other Kuei-jin. Demons prepared to approach slowly and with a manner suggesting a touch of fear as well as hope may get excellent deals for holds in Gardener souls. So many demonic investments are so useful for the purpose, and after all, when a better humanity begins to displace its unworthy predecessor, there'll be plenty of time for Gardeners to cleanse their own souls...

This is how courts fall.

NOTABLE WU

The Resplendent Cranes are great fans of the *wu* construct. More than just a good, strong way to bind together several Kuei-jin to learn from and teach one another, it is also the way to build a family where one otherwise could not exist. Cranes cannot return to their mortal families, although they are required to maintain them, so the *wu* makes a fine substitute to fill the void. Often acting as leaders or father figures of their *wu*, be

occasionally finding wisdom in the humility of accepting orders rather than giving them, Cranes use the *wu* as a schoolroom, a teaching tool, and a method by which to achieve their Dharmic goals.

THE FIVE HARMONIOUS AVENGING THUNDERS

In a time not so long past in China, a *wu* formed, made entirely of Shining Ice Guardians dedicated to the ancient and venerable arts of *feng shui*. These are not mere geomancers, however. They have done more than dedicate their lives to the divining of dragon lines, the design of buildings in perfect harmony, and living in balance. They are ridding the world of the plague of wickedness! They are correcting injustice and dishonor in the world! They are destroying the Western taint on fine, traditional Middle Kingdom mysticism. The members of this *wu* have devoted their entire existences to debunking the terrible, popular, and very profitable business of Western pseudo-Chinese mysticism. The Western world is stealing, appropriating, and mutilating all things Oriental. This must stop!

In private circles, the members of the *wu* call themselves the "Venerable and Just Defenders of Traditional Feng Shui... with Guns."

The Five Harmonious Avenging Thunders *wu* believes that the corruption of the world and the turning of the Great Wheel stems from the Western affliction of borrowing half-understood aspects of Asian mysticism, messing around with them, and selling truckloads of terrible books to other unsuspecting Westerners through so-called nature stores. Worse, unsuspecting Kuei-jin who don't know any better pick these things up in pocket form and quote from them. These books not only sell, making Chinese mysticism look like a collection of shamanic-spirit-psychic-magical rituals, but they insist that people who hang wind chimes on their refrigerator doors will smell better, look better, and be more attractive. "Fast-food" Chinese mysticism is a plague created by the evil and diseased Western world that pretends to be linked to the ancient Chinese arts. It even claims Tibetan origin!

This corrupted practice must stop! There is, after all, the fourth tenet of the Dharmic path where, if corruption appears, the Resplendent Cranes are honor bound to correct it to the best of their abilities. For the Five Harmonious Avenging Thunders *wu*, this correction involves burning large piles of bad *feng shui* texts in roaring bonfires that may or may not also burn down a nature or New Age store, or the author of the "New Secrets of Shaolin" receiving a pointed critique from long range with a sniper rifle. If said author happens to be one of the debased Kin-jin, the Thunders have killed two birds with one stone and made the world a slightly better place.

The *wu* travels to the far ends of the Middle Kingdom, searching out malls and shopping centers in order to stop this plague of books, whistles, chimes, mirrors, flutes, red packets, and the obsession with improving the flow of so-

called "chi" through one's office cubicle. The faster they eradicate this wickedness, the quicker one more avenue that the Yama Kings can use to influence evil in the world will be destroyed.

The Five Harmonious Avenging Thunders *wu* are a tad over-energetic, but one cannot fault their tenacity. They get results, in their own strange little way, and they have a point. "Fast-food" Chinese mysticism is corrupting the understanding of true religious practices, eroding more of the culture of the Middle Kingdom for popular Westernism. Currently, they have set their eyes on the Western world itself. They're planning a little trip to California to hunt down a few so-called "*feng shui* masters," and are also preparing to stop the problem at its heart — at Western publishing houses.

THE AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

This *wu*, composed in equal measure of Cranes, Thrashing Dragons and Thousand Whispers, travels through the Americas. Every few years it sets up a new cover identity as an insurer, investment banking house or other behind-the-scenes partner in the funding of new businesses. American Development specializes in supporting plausible-sounding schemes that divination indicates will fail. *Wu* leader Kang Lo-Ti worked as head clerk in a Shanghai bank in the mid-19th century and has followed the evolution of financial methods ever since. From time to time, when forgotten ideas reemerge as the latest hot fad, he feels a touch of nostalgia and a sense of reconnection to the world he left behind.

For a long while, the American Development *wu* operated independently of any court. From time to time, Kang settled in a city with a Chinatown large enough to support some Kuei-jin, from whom he would learn news from back home. When the debate leading to the Great Leap Forward began, he sent his *wu*-mate, former journalist Jessica Huang, to listen on his behalf. He affiliated the *wu* with the Fence-Menders faction, which put him in good standing after the initial beachheads were secure. Now American Development makes reports for the New Promise Mandarinate's use as well as for its own purposes, and the Mandarinate enthusiastically backs American Development's efforts to make modern finance capitalism feed its own downfall.

Early on, American Development clashed routinely with Kin-jin who wished to exert influence over financial and other matters. Kang recognized this as a fruitless struggle: no matter how thoroughly he might disperse the ashes of one rival, there would always be another. American Development therefore now dedicates substantial resources to pre-investment research. At any sign of Kin-jin involvement behind the scenes of a target business, or the locale in which it operates, American Development withdraws any expressions of interest it may have made and goes in search of other targets. After all, the masses are many and vampires are few, and there are always alternatives.



THE SISTERS OF THE COOLING HEARTH

This *wu* is one of the oldest among the Cranes; its members are all female, gender-neutral or androgynous. They do not welcome males, though they're willing to advise groups of male Kuei-jin who wish to perform the same sort of mission.

The Sisters of the Cooling Hearth always select as their mistress a Kuei-jin in permanent Yin imbalance. Under her leadership, they seek out mortals who are dying and filled with some unresolved passion. They study their subjects before making any approach, searching for the underlying causes of the soul's unrest. Then one or more of them makes contact with the dying person to offer soothing encouragement, while the others work visibly or secretly to remove the distress.

While the Sisters take seriously their duty to show mercy to all in need, they have a more pragmatic concern as well. They seek to prevent dead mortals from becoming ghosts, or from rising on the Road Back in the absence of some motive other than pain and the compulsion to fix it. They believe that the Demon Emperor who is to come feeds the world's misery so as to create more vassals for his armies, and this way they deny him as many conscripts as possible.

The founding Sisters were Buddhist nuns in southeastern China during the Mongol Yuan dynasty. As new Kuei-jin themselves, they saw how mortal torment strengthened the forces of unrest and wickedness in the Yin World, and they felt that their oaths to Kuan-Yin to heal others remained in effect. As successive waves of

outside ideology swept over China, the Sisters incorporated relevant teachings from each of them. In the present, various Sisters speak of their mission in Buddhist terms, or in Roman Catholic ones of release from purgatory, or in Koestlerian ones of discharging deadly orgone radiation to prevent the creation of post-mortem psychic disturbances. The mission itself remains the same.

BEYOND THE WAY

The righteous Resplendent Crane cannot limit herself to existing among those who agree with her. Not only is it her Dharmic duty to instruct the errant and purge the wicked, but in order to continue her own education she must experience the world and its inhabitants. The way of seclusion is not a viable one for leaders.

THE OTHER DHARMAS

Acting as judges, jury and executioners of the entire world, the Resplendent Cranes keep their eyes on the workings of the other Dharmas. It is not simply their own who need to keep recourse to the law, but all Kuei-jin under the watchful eye of Heaven. Knowing the way the other Dharmas work, or don't work, is key to interacting with their followers, understanding their weaknesses and gaining insight from their strengths.

Cranes see one overwhelming truth when interacting with the other Dharma: no situations lack lessons. One can always learn from interactions with other paths, even

if the lesson simply reaffirms the correctness of one's own. Understanding other paths is key to learning how all the Kuei-jin work in concert, how to best govern them fairly, and where their strengths and weaknesses are best applied to the ultimate end of the Cranes — the turning back of the Great Wheel.

The following descriptions of the other Dharmas are taken from *Reflections on Frogs and Butterflies* by Masters Yen Zu and Lu Po-Kung:

THE HOWL OF THE DEVIL-TIGER

Where the Resplendent Cranes are in control of the Demon, the Devil-Tigers let it run free. Where the Cranes are reserved, the Tigers are mad. Where the Cranes make amends for their transgressions, the Tigers revel in them.

One who wishes to approach a Devil-Tiger must observe it first. Their path is radically different from that of the Shining Ice Guardians, and to the untrained eye, they seem to be throwing themselves into corruption rather than seeking to cure the world of it. They would will the Great Wheel to turn, just to have more pain and chaos in their lives.

The Tigers do not merely revel in their P'o nature. They learn to train it. They harness its power. They see themselves in the role that the Yama Kings have given up: punishing the wicked. If you can maintain your dignity and composure around them, you will see them as a Dharma focused entirely on the purgation of the wicked. They are a scythe to cull the unworthy in our quest for purity and righteousness. They are the embodiment of our sixth tenet and the Fourth Lotus. Focus on your composure and learn to master it around the Devil-Tigers, and understand their fundamental purpose in the scheme of things, as that purpose is a lesson to us. They are useful in our quest to turn back the Great Wheel.

One who has not mastered the eighth tenet of the Dharma might not have the facilities to dispassionately analyze the actions of the Tiger, and may see them as patently offensive. They appear to be out-of-control children who want only to destroy and spread their vile filth throughout the Middle Kingdom. One must remember that they are tools. Soon, it will be time to straighten or prune the wicked — and more than one Devil-Tiger will be pruned.

THE SONG OF THE SHADOW

The calm, cool, collected, detached Bone Flowers should have common ground with the Shining Ice Guardians. They share the same feelings toward the family, the same necessity for control, and the same determination to hold their composure under any condition. Like us, they are diplomats, scholars and intellectuals. Yet the two Dharmas are a universe apart.

The Bone Flowers have separated themselves from the living world. Like Buddhists, they focus on the world of the dying and the dead, claiming they are "like dust" and have fallen off the karmic cycle of birth and rebirth. They feel no need to take responsibility for the land of the living, the land of the now. They are too focused on their detachment from the world, and even their detachment from the rest of

the Kuei-jin. They sit in the basements of their moldering libraries, staring at their dusty tomes, contemplating their navels and their dead relatives while corruption runs rampant in the land. They spend all their time talking to spirits. They do not realize that soon, without action, they too might become spirits — or worse. They do not understand that their cool demeanor will not save them if the Great Wheel turns and they find themselves at the unpleasant end of the stick after the Yama Kings take control.

The Bone Flowers are nearly as culpable for the disease-ridden world as the other Dharmas. They refuse to take action, calmly allowing outsiders to spread their corruptive plague and the Sixth Age to arrive. This is unacceptable behavior when there is so much to lose if the stream of corruption is not halted!

There are many recorded incidents, even in this late age, where the Crane has sought to correct a wrongdoing among a *wu*, as he should, while his Bone Flower brother-in-arms has stood idly by and let such things take their course. When a Crane sees corruption caused by *hsien*, *akuma* or even his Kuei-jin brothers, he should not stand around and strike up conversations with the offender, hoping for arcane insights into a spirit world. He must put things to rights.

Despite their grave errors, however, there is much to respect and to learn from the Bone Flowers. Their libraries hold much knowledge — even knowledge better forgotten. The Bone Flowers have much to offer in the way of great learning, especially on the ways of the spirit realms. Given the chance, one should learn as much as possible from their ways, and apply the laws of the Dharma to this learning to examine its integrity, its failings, and the way to use it to best further the needs of the world.

THE PATH OF A THOUSAND WHISPERS

The Resplendent Cranes teach a kind of balance these Centipedes would appreciate: to balance strength and weakness in judging the honor of a deed or belief, to balance Yin and Yang while mastering the Hun and teaching the P'o to submit, to grasp the mean and use it to temper composure, integrity and action. Yet the Centipedes do not hold onto the mean in their search for balance. Instead, they swing to extremes. They cannot decide if they are strong or weak. They cannot decide if they want to have personal integrity or be truly wicked. They cannot decide if they want to be mad or sane. They try everything and more in their search for enlightenment.

Their self-absorption in their quest to find a balance among the throngs of humanity distracts them from what is important in the scheme of the world. They want to revel in mortal ways, continue to live their lives and wear masks, yet they pay no attention to the fact that when the Great Wheel turns, there will be no more humans to emulate. There will be no more lives to live. There will be no more masks to wear.

Worse, they insist on trying to find enlightenment among mortals. They have not yet learned that human

are to be governed secretly and kept blind to the ways of the Kuei-jin. Humanity holds no secrets to turning back the Great Wheel! Humanity is where the Kuei-jin began, when they were alive and ignorant of the true ways of the world. If there was anything to learn there, the Kuei-jin would have learned it before they took the Second Breath, not afterwards. Humans are not to be taken advantage of lightly, for that is the path to dishonor, but they are casualties and tools in the war to turn the Wheel back toward the Age of Heaven, not the route to keep it from moving forward.

Yet the Centipedes know better than anyone else the ways of mortals and how to manipulate them. They understand the mortal world and how to use it for the ends of the Kuei-jin. Take what is needed from them and dispose of them as you will before moving on to free the world from the corruption beneath which it labors.

THE DANCE OF THE THRASHING DRAGON

As Chi flows down from Heaven, it generates Yang. When its activity reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. When Chi becomes tranquil, it generates Yin. When this tranquility reaches its limit, it becomes Yang again. This is the Principle of Heaven and Earth. An equal balance of Yin and Yang leads to perfection of the Hun. This perfection brings about correctness in all things.

The Thrashing Dragons are not interested in correctness in all things. They are interested in the principle of movement and action, an overabundance of Yang that feeds their flesh and brings about action of dubious integrity and honor. For the Shining Ice Guardians, the pinnacle of the Eight Lotus Path is harmony and tranquility, the synthesizing of Yin and Yang with the Hun. This gives rise to righteousness and correctness. The Thrashing Dragons, however, only care about what Yang provides them and how they may act on these impulses. We find this unacceptable. We cannot abide wickedness and folly.

The universe requires a balance of Yin and Yang, and Dragons express purity of the active force of Heaven just as the Bone Flowers express the passive. Such energy, directed by the strong guiding hand of a Shining Ice Guardian, can lead toward a great cleansing of the disease that has infected the Middle Kingdom. It can destroy wickedness, put wrongs to rights, and restore honor and purpose to the land. It can invigorate the *wu* into action and spur the Kuei-jin toward turning back the Great Wheel. Separated from the maddening foolishness of the *penangalan* and the influence of the Golden Courts, Yang, like Yin, can serve our cause. Control, patience and an understanding of the place of all things under Heaven are the techniques to use when faced with the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon.

THE FLAME OF THE RISING PHOENIX

The heretical Flame of the Rising Phoenix is fundamentally wrong, and built on shoddy philosophical

foundations. Mistakes made in the previous life, before taking the Second Breath, are tools for learning and advancement, not a scourge with which to beat oneself for eternity. Instead of dwelling on the transgressions of the past and staying trapped in mortal life, one must move on, embrace the Fivefold Way, and join Kuei-jin society.

Focusing on, or appearing to, one's mortal family is a disgraceful act. This Dharma does not realize its own innate wickedness, and so lives in a cloud of delusion. It is shameful to cling to a past life and extort personal worship from the family! These deluded Kuei-jin must realize there is no salvation from their former kin — if there had been, they never would have taken a trip to Yomi in the first place! One must move on and concentrate on the more important problems plaguing the world. The correct action to take when faced with the Flame of the Rising Phoenix is to straighten them appropriately, and if they will not be straightened, purge them.

THE TEMPEST OF THE INWARD FOCUS

We Resplendent Cranes believe that the laws must apply to all people if all are to follow them. In this way, the bodhisattvas and ancestors craft the laws to appeal to the Hun and keep the P'o at bay. But the Tempest of the Inward Focus wants to follow all laws and none, hoping to find enlightenment down a path that zigs and zags. They ignore the clear path laid out by the laws. How can they know what must be done if they spend all their time running off after this pursuit or that? How can they focus their energies on fighting back the plague that stalks the Middle Kingdom if they spend all their time meditating on which road they should walk down?

The Tempest is lost in the wilderness with no path to follow. If they step out of bounds on their "quest" for enlightenment, they will fall.

THE FACE OF THE GODS

The Godlings have forsaken their history, their destiny, and their duty so that they can sit around and claim to be fallen gods who need only dally with human followers long enough in order to return to Heaven. Is this acceptable behavior for a Kuei-jin, to sit outside the boundaries of society, preach from a false throne, and play among mortals? Is this a true path to learning, enlightenment, and the Road Back?

The ancestors suggest that loyal Cranes either correct the fallacies held by these pretenders or eradicate them from the face of the world along with the outsiders and other foul menaces that stalk the land. On finding such a fool, one must weigh his existence against the great teachings of the Shining Ice Guardians and decide if his wickedness is significant enough to poison the land and its peoples. Cranes must set the fool on the road to righteousness and return him to Kuei-jin society, or else remove the Godling with the least amount of mess. Such a heresy as that of the Divine Face cannot go uncorrected.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING EARTH

Like the Crane's Way, the Spirit of the Living Earth puts great emphasis on moral behavior, ceremony, ritual, teaching, learning, and adherence to its tenets. These Cerulean Veils live within their means, take correct action when called upon, and live lives of high respectability. Though a small sect, the Living Earth is highly respected by the Cranes for its followers' appreciation of the flows of Chi, their dedication to protecting the dragon lines, and their firm determination to return to righteousness. While they do not hold the same beliefs about turning back the Great Wheel, they are our close comrades in their desire to live second lives full of integrity and honor.

However, the Cerulean Veils' adherence to the monastic life, along with their focus on the flow of Chi and on their favored spirits, makes them even more remote and moralistic than the most austere Shining Ice Guardian. One should not extricate oneself so wholly from society. After all, living within the society of the August Courts is part of being a Kuei-jin. Members of this sect also spend altogether too much time talking to and learning from the spirits. If the Spirits of the Living Earth can be convinced to take their learning more from the teachings of their Kuei-jin forebears and less from the spirit realms, whose denizens no doubt lie and mislead them, they could become the perfect warrior compatriots in the battle against corruption.

CRANES AND HUMANITY

The seventh tenet provides the framework for all Crane dealings with the daylight world: subtle protection of the family. The emphasis on remaining hidden makes Cranes strong proponents of Scarlet Screens and other buffers in their dealings with mortals. The Temple at Three Mountains Village (see page 39) is the most accomplished example of subtle but thorough interaction with a human society. But the seventh tenet only deals explicitly with the mortal family, not the overall human population. In typical Crane fashion, there exist many views of humanity, from mewling cattle to center of creation. The following texts illustrate some of the more prominent viewpoints.

HUMANITY AS DISEASE

From the testimony of accused *akuma* Izanagi Ishiro, May 11, 1995:

Certainly it is true that I was once a human being. What of it? Every speck of matter and energy that came together in my humanity had once been something else: the earth, a plant, an animal. I claim only that neither I nor any other of the Ten Thousand Demons has any more duty to one past form of our component material than to any other. We do not serve humanity, but the world itself, everything under Heaven.

You must know, my earnest inquisitor, the term "triage." A doctor faced with more injuries than he can

treat must set priorities, curing where he can and removing the parts that cannot be saved. This is our duty as well. I feel no particular hatred for humanity, any more than the surgeon hates the microscopic life that creates disease. I simply observe the consequences to the world at large of this infestation remaining untreated and set about applying triage to the growing world-pain.

Your minions caught me before I could apply this simple principle to the human rot afflicting the Home Islands. No doubt you think them very wise and virtuous. I almost wish I could be there to see the realization dawn on you, not many years from now, that perhaps the doom you then face could have been averted if only you'd listened to me here and now. Alas, justice is seldom so obliging.

HUMANITY AS UNRULY SUBJECTS

A memorial by Qi Shidao, Disciple of the New Promise Mandarinate, to the Blood Court, 11 November 2001:

I commend to the honorable mandarins of the esteemed court that they resist all efforts to strengthen political and social ties between China and the United States. I acknowledge that the current state of negotiations does make certain aspects of the Great Leap Outward easier. But the demands of justice take precedence over convenience, and what Heaven commands it also makes possible. Insofar as the Great Leap Outward is the proper task of our time, we can and will find ways to carry it out.

The arrangement that some mortals call "globalism" confirms the words of the sages long ago, that where there is much movement there is also much dissatisfaction. It is far easier to lead subjects whose heads do not rattle with upsetting visions of "the good life" that they could have somewhere else, or in other circumstances. Just as the largest waves form in deep seas rather than shallow ponds, so the intermingling of communities promotes more unrest than would prevail if they were cut off from each other.

I write to you now in part to recommend against a course of action I know you have considered in recent years. Overt violence against globalism will not produce satisfactory results. It appears to well-intentioned mortal onlookers like mere petty jealousy. If we are to actually reduce the extent to which nations and regions trade with each other, we must prepare for a sustained campaign waged by non-violent means. We must persuade (or coerce) leaders in politics and finance, while simultaneously using the organs of propaganda to win public support for the merits of increased self-sufficiency. I chafe under this latter limitation, for I know that Heaven allowed me to return to be a king, not a courtier. Nonetheless, my experience subduing rebellious conquests tells me that in this age, kingship no longer means what it once did.

Where we engage in acts of sabotage, we must take great care not to provide visible agents. The results must seem to stem from mere misfortune and happenstance. As with persuasion, this lack of public accountability chafes against our tradition, and I do not recommend the approach lightly. But I also see how acts that mortals can blame on specific individuals free them of the burden of thinking

hat the acts reveal any weakness in their current social order. They think such thoughts only when not distracted by other explanations.

My comrades in the pacification effort are of two minds when it comes to mortals' use of telecommunications. On the one hand, surely it is better for those who wish to consume foreign creations to consume only ideas rather than artifacts. Where the people sit and watch television and films and work on their computers, they are at least not buying tangible goods shipped from other regions, with all the infrastructure that requires. On the other hand, desires begin with ideas and images, and it is these telecommunications that make the rest possible. Our principal line of attack on this front begins with the unreliability of images not endorsed by political authority and goes on to emphasize the frightening, difficult, and confusing aspects of dealing with people very unlike oneself. Our secondary line of attack is to underwrite all those who flood the electronic channels with banal, useless transactions, in hopes that the people will turn back to more traditional means of approaching the world.

We of the pacification effort dream of a mortal world composed of small districts whose populations regard each other as at best irrelevant, at worst competition, whose folkways change seldom and who yield readily to the words of authority. We labor diligently to bring this to pass, and thank you for your consideration of the merits of our case.

In the spirit of speculation, I suggest that a more thoroughly divided world would better advance our traditional concern with turning the Wheel of Ages. Geographic and social isolation cannot guarantee immunity from the change of Ages, as I know from studying the accounts of our ancestors who dwelled far from the great centers of the Fourth Age and found themselves inexplicably surrounded by new Wan Kuei manifesting the characteristic deficiencies of the Fifth Age. And yet it is true that the Age came more slowly to those outposts. It is at least possible that a community even more thoroughly isolated and led by Wan Kuei who appreciate the spiritual risks could not only forestall the advance of a further, darker Age, but restore otherwise lost virtue. We have not, to the best of my knowledge, engaged in any systematic experimentation on this matter since the loss of virtue associated with the current Age became ubiquitous, and I commend this as a topic of investigation for ambitious jina willing to isolate themselves for an extended period of time.

Implicit in this speculation is a challenge I wish to declare explicitly: the notion of an "Age" as a universal state may not hold as much validity as we think. Karmic and Dharmic changes spread with the movements of troubled souls. If we could break up these bonds, perhaps what is now the apparently unstoppable juggernaut of a world-crushing Wheel may become many smaller Wheels, each more susceptible to righteous steering.

I hope these words contribute something to your debate.

In devotion to the great cause,

— Qi Shidao

HUMANITY DWARFED BY ALL UNDER HEAVEN

A letter to Ling I, former Deputy Minister for the Evaluation of Foreign Oracles, from an unknown source, found in his residence after a riot destroyed the block in 1969:

Dear friend,

Our mutual acquaintance once quoted the barbarian scripture, "When I look to the heavens, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" I propound the spirit of this text while of course rejecting its superficial theological crudity.

I submit to you that you have become overly attached to humanity at the expense of the other 999 things that comprise All Under Heaven. Not that I endorse the pernicious anti-humanity sentiment one finds increasingly often in these troubled times — I sympathize with it, and agree that the human race very much needs pruning, but cannot respect obsession that turns against the validity of the human concept as such. No, I wish merely to point out how very small a part the race from which we come plays in the greater scheme of things.

Look up. Do humans fill the stars, or the spaces between them? Look out. Do humans fill the deserts and mountaintops, or the winter wastes? Look down. Do humans fill the earth and the sea? The world belongs to the insects and vines, the elephants and pines, as much as it does to humanity. The skies belong to the clouds and winds, the heavens to the planets and stars. The seas belong to the krakens and to the spirits of silence and darkness. Beyond the Mirror lie worlds vaster than this, full of inhabitants who owe nothing to humanity and its concerns.

The sages of your Dharma are too often like judges who regard only nobles as part of their constituency, or like priests who will perform only rites described in a particular one of the classics. It's not that what they do is wrong — it is entirely correct, as far as it goes. It simply doesn't go far enough. In fact, it falls tragically short of what's necessary. Why do you not have entire academies dedicated to training young disciples to bring justice and order to the lands beyond the Wall? Why do you not encourage mastery of the transformative Disciplines so that students may go among the animals and birds and fishes to speak with them of Heaven's will?

If I, who am not committed to your cause, can see this in just a few short years of observation, I must wonder about the seriousness of your sages. Are they blind, or refusing to see? Although I have not given my post-mortem existence over to your Dharma, nonetheless I believe it no more dispensable than any of the others appointed by Xue at the beginning of our epoch, and I fear for the world when those chosen by Heaven for your role neglect so much of it.

Translator's Note: *The rest of this letter was apparently lost in the conflagration that destroyed Ling I's residence.*

THE GREAT LEAP OUTWARD

There is much disorder under Heaven and the situation is excellent.

Two factions take part in the ongoing effort to bring the blessings of Heaven and the Middle Kingdom to other lands. The Righteous Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders take the straightforward view that whatever is wrong with the world came from outside the Middle Kingdom, and that therefore outsiders deserve subjugation (if they submit) or annihilation (if they resist). The Harmonious Menders of Broken Fences believe that no invasion can succeed except insofar as the Middle Kingdom itself exists in proper harmony. They care about the New Promise Mandarinate, the Kuei-jin "colony" in North America, insofar as it allows them to strike against those they believe responsible for advancing corruption at home. These dark influences are not primarily a matter of mortal society, but of states of the soul. Kuei-jin do not neglect or ignore matters of business, politics, and other elements of human society, but neither are these their foremost concerns. What matters overall, particularly in light of the fullness of the Eight Lotus Path, is what happens in the spirit worlds and among the supernatural population under Heaven. A single *akuma* or practitioner of Kin-jin blood magic may well do more harm to the Middle Kingdom than a thousand capitalists or diplomats, to those who see beyond the flesh. The Extraordinary Commission on the Rectification of Borders, the gathering of ancestors and other worthies who oversee the expansion of the Middle Kingdom and Quincunx authority, seeks to balance these concerns.

The oldest and most successful front in the Great Leap Outward is the Pacific coast of North America. Kuei-jin influence now runs from Baja, California well up into the Pacific Northwest in one form or another, and encompasses the vast cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego. An attempted counter-strike by rebellious Western vampires called Anarchs ended in dismal defeat, and the Camarilla, the ruling sect of Kin-jin, accepts Kuei-jin rule on the West Coast as a fact of life. The New Promise Mandarinate will face no Camarilla opposition as it expands into territory controlled by the diabolical Sabbat.

In the opening months of the invasion, Fence-Menders and Crusaders struggled for dominant roles. The contest ended with the defeat of the Anarch coup, with Fence-Menders playing the decisive part in smashing the Anarch force and coming to satisfactory terms with the Camarilla. Now a division of labor prevails: Crusaders take the war into unconquered territory, seeking out Kin-jin and forcing into capitulation or destruction those who do not yield. The Fence-Menders concentrate on securing the conquered land and developing the stable institutions necessary for ongoing governance.

THE MANDARINATE AND ITS POWER

The success of the Great Leap Outward does not mean that mortals in California suddenly find themselves living under Chinese rule. The Mandarinate's war is aimed



primarily at supernatural beings, and the changes to West Coast society follow from this. Where a powerful vampire lord and his followers have been destroyed, for instance, networks of mortal contacts fall into disarray. Businesses that were heavily exploited or directed by vampires now have to run themselves, and many lack the leadership to do so. In daytime life this manifests as economic and social turmoil, and sudden outbreaks of confusion in communities that had been stable.

Even among Western *shen*, the Mandarinate wields somewhat limited authority. Lone vampires and small coterie who stay low and practice disciplined feeding may escape attention indefinitely. The Great Leap Outward is not, despite Crusader wishes, devoted to the annihilation of all rivals, but to their subjugation. The Mandarinate seeks submission, so that the souls of the local *shen* become harmonized with the aims of Heaven's agents, the Kuei-jin. Resistance brings a fight to the end, while targets who choose to surrender retain a substantial degree of freedom and power within the Mandarinate's overall authority. The San Francisco Bay area is currently the site of a stable truce between the Mandarinate and the Camarilla, with the Kuei-jin claiming prime feeding grounds as their exclusive domain. Several mandarins in Northern California remember when foreign mortals claimed authority over key parts of China and other Asian nations, and relish the opportunity to revisit this policy on the West's debased vampires. Slowly they expand the hunting grounds and associated rights of their court, pushing the Kin-jin into slow starvation and disunity.

Over time, the Mandarinate may become more involved in mortal affairs as well. For now, though, the ruling individuals realize that seeking significant influence in the region's governments would attract unwelcome attention from political loci beyond the Mandarinate's borders, and it is as easy to manipulate business through routine commerce as by infiltration or subversion. A few *wu* experiment with efforts to pick up the loose reins of influence left behind after a stubborn coterie perished; so far the results aren't particularly encouraging, and scholars back home debate whether such experiments should be forbidden.

One experiment that would *definitely* be forbidden if anyone learned of it is the work of the Heaven-Suffusing Surgeons. This small *wu* of Cranes takes inspiration from the Fellowship of the Travelers of Great Earth sect and is trying to create Kuei-jin from Western souls. Its members look for individuals who show an affinity for Middle Kingdom doctrines, provide a crash course in essential spiritual realities (reinforced by Soul Disciplines to the point where the subject can no longer think of alternative worldviews) and then sacrifice the subject in the midst of a holy rite of consecration. So far none of the subjects has walked the Road Back. The sect's leaders are patient, and believe that if they can escape detection, in their various strongholds in the mountains around the Los Angeles Basin, sooner or later they'll be able to stride into the Mandarinate's court with disciples who are Kuei-jin in truth despite never having been part of the Middle Kingdom. Rumors of these experiments reach the court from time to time, and the

court's enforcers have begun periodic searches for whatever underlying truth the claims may have.

CRANES IN THE MANDARINATE

As of early 2002, relatively young Cranes lead both the Crusader and Fence-Mender factions within the Mandarinate.

Maximum Sun of the Emerald Ministry *wu* is one of the fiercest warriors of the invasion. He's also incurably mad, believing himself the victim of a spiritual blight that makes his brain rot. He thinks maggots sometimes wriggle out of his ears and nose, and that others can see flies buzzing around behind his eyes whenever he fails to wear dark glasses. The torment of all this distracted him during crucial months of the summer and fall of 2000, costing the Crusaders the participation of their most effective leader in the field. However, his P'o provided a way out that winter when it began sharing the madness. His demon form now displays the blight prominently. He goes into battle as a thing of rot and decay, shouting to his foes that this is the true state of their souls. The extra intimidation proves crucial in otherwise marginal clashes, and garbled stories of his attacks help demoralize opponents on the fringes of the Mandarinate.

The elders know that the Mandarinate is far too new to have an ancestor, but when it matures, Han Hui of the Violet Path Posse may well become its first ancestor. While committed without question to the Fivefold Way and the Eight Lotus Path, Han believes that new times call for new expressions, and she's willing to consider all sorts of adjustments in traditional power structures. If it takes a new subordinate role for a Kin-jin "supervisor" to appease the Western vampires of a town or county, Han readily approves its creation. If some concessions with regard to mortal influence can speedily end a dispute, she makes them. Opponents who scrutinize her decisions in isolation often feel that she's given up something essential for doubtful gain, but taken overall the Mandarinate prospers, with more gains and fewer costs than in the earlier years of struggle.

Actually, the Mandarinate did have an ancestor for a few months. The Thrashing Dragon raconteur Trip Monkey Wu even survived a simplified version of the Naming the Ancestor rite (see p. 65). He proved unable to maintain effective authority, and after a moment of blindness that locked him into a three-day coma, he retired to the seashore of central California to contemplate his next steps. Some Dragons say he fell because Crane manipulators pushed him, though no clear evidence exists to support the charge.

OUTSIDE CHINA, INSIDE THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The Great Leap Outward began as an almost exclusively Chinese venture: conceived within the Quincunx, supervised by Kuei-jin known among Chinese elders, manned by recruits known in turn to the supervising authorities. Only a handful of Japanese and Korean vampires took part in the initial campaign.

Over time, it has become somewhat more diversified. Chinese vampires still outnumber all other participants combined, but it's no longer unusual for the court of a newly conquered city to include a few individuals from

Southeast Asia, nor for the shock troops engaged in this month's most intense battle to include Japanese warriors. Kuei-jin coming from outside China do so as individuals or *wu* without any particular support from their courts in almost all cases. The campaign looks like China's concern to the elders of other nations, and while they're happy to send would-be crusaders off on crusade, almost all of them expect it to end in dismal failure.

Two prominent exceptions exist among the Cranes: the House of Genji and a Crane *wu* in the Indian province of Kashmir.

The elders of House Genji in Japan worry deeply about the future of their country. The omens indicate that Japan's economic woes will get much worse before they get better. Genji analysts see in the Great Leap Outward the twofold opportunity to secure useful resources under the control of forces they can manipulate and to send out their own troublemakers en masse just as the Quincunx did. Their best diplomats are carefully negotiating with the Extraordinary Commission on the Rectification of Borders for a Japanese presence on the Commission itself. So far, both sides agree that the performance of the ever more numerous Japanese participants in the crusade will affect the possibilities for Genji involvement in decision-making. San Francisco's Japantown is also home to several *gaki* with pre-Leap roots in America, whose active resistance to the Mandarinate since its arrival in the Bay Area does not incline the Commission toward Japanese representation.

The orthodox Dharmas have long faced competition from organized heretics in India, and the clash of visions only increased following the secret turmoil around the Week of Nightmares and its aftermath. A *wu* of scholarly Cranes in Kashmir have recently suffered horrible revelations pointing toward a crushing defeat for the remaining orthodox courts throughout the subcontinent, at the hands of enemies whose identity they cannot discern. Without giving any hint of these revelations, they've actively encouraged displaced *wu* and individual Kuei-jin who have lost their *wu*-mates in recent years to join in the Great Leap Outward. Perhaps the Indian Crane tradition may survive outside India. Younger Cranes see in the Great Leap Outward the refreshing opportunity to engage in a somewhat more straightforward battle than the ones common in their homeland—in North America they fight neither god-monsters from the pit nor their own kin, and in this similar situation, many of them now experience auspicious moments.

THE WAR BACK HOME: THE BEAST COURTS

Kuei-jin are accustomed to formal, often tense, but essentially peaceable relationships with the shapeshifting races of the Middle Kingdom. Both sides know that individuals and groups who intrude too deeply into the other's affairs are likely to get slaughtered, and both sides accept this. When conflicts occur, diplomats on both sides work out terms of redress and withdrawal, so that the champions of the Yang World need not fight too often against those who've drawn the Second Breath and therefore inevitably carry some taint of Yomi.

Now this ambiguous harmony teeters on the brink of collapse. The expanding frontiers of the Great Leap Outward bring Kuei-jin into conflict with creatures that the Beast Courts regard as their cousins. Beast Court sages say that if werewolves and other Western changing breeds need punishing, the task should fall to the Beast Courts. Heaven, they say, has not appointed the Kuei-jin executioners of shapechangers for the crime of living in territory Kuei-jin want for themselves. Heated debate rages within the Beast Courts as to what compensation the invaders owe the Beast Courts for their infringement, while the Quincunx's experts in the affairs of shapechangers in turn debate whether it may be necessary to strike against the Beast Courts as well to eliminate the threat.

Additional information on the Beast Courts appears in *Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East*, the *Werewolf Storyteller's Guide* and *A World of Rage*, all supplements for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*.

A SECOND FRONT

With the general success of the New Promise Mandarinate clear, the members of the Quincunx's Extraordinary Commission on the Rectification of Borders now debate where to strike next. Four major schools of thought contend.

- **South America:** Peru has a long tradition of Asian immigration and a well-established community of Japanese descent. Kuei-jin of Japanese origin could therefore move in and establish initial connections among the overseas Japanese community with relatively little difficulty, and go on the offensive from a secured base of power.

- **India:** In theory, India already is part of the Middle Kingdom. In practice, it's a horrendous mess of heretical Dharmas, Western vampires with peculiar delusions of enlightenment, and general spiritual confusion. The Week of Nightmares three years ago, in which bodhisattva Rising Majestically to the Western Sun gave her life along with others to stop a powerful awakening demon, added another layer of mortal and *shen* disorder. The subcontinent is like an oozing sore in the skin of the world, allowing improper things to creep in. A Great Leap Southward would require coordinated strikes against many targets all at once, because unfortunately the disordered monsters of the area do manage to work together in the face of common threats, particularly in their elevated paranoia of recent years.

- **Russia:** Whatever once isolated Russia from outside supernatural influence is gone now, to judge from stories of terribly powerful vampires and odder creatures roaming free make their way into the Middle Kingdom. The people cry out for peace and good government, and get neither. Surely the time is right for a Great Leap Northwestward to rectify so much that now lies broken.

- **None of the above:** This remains the view of a plurality of Commissioners. Let mortals think in terms of months and years; Kuei-jin must consider decades and centuries. Much, much more time should pass and the New Promise Mandarinate undergo much more thorough scrutiny before the Commission commits itself to any new action.

THE BENEFITS OF SPLENDOR

Harmony is the value of performing the rites. Such was the beauty of the way of emperors past in matters great and small. Yet there are times when this is not acceptable. Where there is harmony for harmony's sake, undisciplined by the rites, it is not acceptable.

—Confucius, *The Analects*

THE CRANE IN PLAY

Playing a Resplendent Crane is both challenging and entertaining. Your character has, so she believes, the essential insight into the rules by which the world must run if it is to be saved. She is not a student of abstract principles, nor a refugee from the complexities of life, nor a seeker after pleasures. Her Dharma aims toward justice on every level, from the individual to the universal. She bears the weight of the age on her shoulders. This is the stuff of high drama, where the legacy of failures stretching across half the world's existence glimmers with the faintest hope for redemption.

The idea of a vampiric existence dedicated to mastering the rules of the world and seeing that everyone else hews to them may well seem dull. There are Resplendent Cranes, to be sure, whose existences would be dull indeed to play out, as they spend all their time culling through old libraries and producing scholarly treatises on minutiae of grammar and textual variation. Fortunately, there's far more to the sect than that.

PERFECT TRUTH AND IMPERFECT VESSELS

Cranes are not boring, static lawgivers because of one key fact, stated explicitly on p. 67 of *Kindred of the Earth*: every member of the Dharmapact seeks the heavenly law and desires it intensely, but even the most enlightened bodhisattvas know they have not achieved it yet, not completely. This all-consuming passion for righteousness and justice drives Cranes out of death back into the world; it does not deliver them into unlikeness with everything they seek at once, or ever.

All Kuei-jin who recognize the Hun as the supreme virtue agree on three fundamental principles:

- The essence of justice is as simple as Yin and Yang, as the perfect balance of Ebon Dragon and Scarlet Empress.
- The application of justice is as complex as the Ten Thousand Things, for there is a righteousness suitable for every thing that exists.
- The weight of sin guarantees that no individual can now fully understand justice as the August Personage intended it.

This tension between perfect truth to attain and the innate corruption of the seeker shapes the Cranes at every step of their existence.

THE CRANE HATCHES: CHARACTER CREATION

As with all the other Dharmas, the inclinations and tendencies common among Cranes are just that: trends, not universal laws. For every generalization that follows, there is undoubtedly a solid, appropriate character concept that does something else. The advice in the following paragraphs opens up possibilities, rather than being a set of rigid boundaries intended to close them off.

LIFE, DEATH AND RETURN

Your character's life continues to influence him after death. Denial and rejection are as valid responses as acceptance to that influence. For a Crane, the key question is: What role did justice play in your character's life?

Two extremes are obvious: your character might have been an instrument of justice or an enemy of it. Judges, police officers and the like can easily feel their work isn't done simply because they're dead. In addition, people who served justice in support roles and behind the scenes, like bailiffs, file clerks and custodians, may feel driven to act more directly than they did in life.

Conversely, the experience of Hell may be enlightening for some criminals, and also for people who weren't necessarily violators of the law but who in their various ways worked to undermine belief in and support for the idea of justice. A sociopath may now understand what he'd dismissed as delusion in life. A philosopher who thought of justice as purely a rationale for power probably also denied the existence of the supernatural, and finding out how wrong she was in life could fuel the desire to make right what she'd helped to subvert. A lawyer or politician who interpreted the law as purely a tool for advancing one interest over another may now see more, perhaps feeling that his client has become all of creation against the forces of destruction.

Specific circumstances rather than general principles may also propel people through Yomi to the Road Back. Revolutionaries and freedom fighters are likely to associate cosmic justice with work not yet done in human society. Crusaders for political and social change can come from anywhere in the Middle Kingdom, including highly visible trouble spots like Tibet and Myanmar (Burma) and less famous oppressed groups like the more badly treated minority peoples in China. Traditionalists, meanwhile, associate justice with the preservation of an order now threatened, whether the purity of Mao Zedong Thought in the face of outside influence, maintaining the doctrines of old-rite Roman Catholicism even as Rome revises its practices, or guarding the privileges of aristocracy in an industrializing "new tiger" nation.

In addition to great causes, small ones may sustain souls after death. Wise Cranes know there is a Way for small things as well as big ones, and Crane folklore tells of men and women who in life were conscientious janitors, nurses or grocers. They served the celestial order by advancing harmony where they were, and rose to continue that work after death because it will never be done until the Creator is reunited with creation. Some of them became great leaders and sages; others achieved enlightenment without ever leaving a single neighborhood. Mortal concepts of importance and triviality need not apply to the Hungry Dead.

Finally, there are many Cranes who had no particular interest in justice as a concept or cause in life, but acquire a passion for it in Hell. Suffering for moral crimes they didn't even know they'd committed, they yearn for something better. The impulse here lies quite close to one that creates many Devil-Tigers, the difference being that while the would-be Devil-Tiger wants to punish those responsible for his situation, the would-be Resplendent Crane wants to improve the world so as to keep people from sin in the first place.

Over the course of the Fifth Age, more Cranes returned for this reason than any other. Such a motive has always been common among the Cranes, and has only grown more so as the world darkens and ever more unrighteous souls go to the Thousand Hells. Cranes familiar with Western medicine sometimes speak of their origin as part of the world's immune system, and themselves as purifying agents created in response to the growing evils on all sides. Others say that the Way always includes its appropriate balance, so that great darkness must necessarily produce growing light.

THE PATH AND STARTING POINTS

Resplendent Cranes hew to a far more systematic path than the other Dharmas offer. In addition to the Fivefold Way all Kuei-jin recognize, the Eight Lotus Path provides a system of moral and intellectual development that can (and does) keep Cranes busy all the way to supreme enlightenment. Early commentaries on the Eight Lotus Path assume that practitioners begin with the First lotus (see p. 18) and make their way through each in turn to the last. In practice, each of the eight provides possible motives for new Cranes. Review the path and think about where your character might start, and also about which of the other lotuses might make a good second step, so that your character has drive as well as initial conviction.

The mainstream of Crane teaching has the student freshly emerged from *chih-mei* status begin with the First lotus. Indeed, many Crane teachers say that the First lotus opens within the soul while it is still bound by *chih-ma* torments, so that hope brings the soul back into awareness of itself and the world. (The New Dawn heresy claims that hope is appropriate only for *chih-mei* and the youngest disciples.) However, a Crane may begin her new existence with any of the lotuses as her current focus.

• **The First Lotus: The recognition of hope.** Without hope of some sort, of course, no soul rises from the grave or persists in the face of adversity. The world as it is offers countless reasons for despair, to which the only answer is the conviction that the world may become something other.

• **The Second Lotus: Virtuous existence.** This lotus makes an excellent starting point for repentant sinners, who felt no hope in Hell but instead returned to the world driven by a passion for virtue. Hope will come, if it comes, later, after they learn to exist righteously.

• **The Third Lotus: Reward for virtue, correction for wickedness.** Characters who walk the Road Back primarily because of the needs of others may start here. For instance, a Crane who returned to protect innocents from vice or from enemies who overwhelmed him in life begins with the impulse to nurture.

• **The Fourth Lotus: Purging the wicked.** Characters who hated wickedness in life and still do may begin with the drive to purge the wicked, as may those awakened to the horrible realities of evil while in Hell.

IMPULSE AND DHARMA

Sometimes Dharma is as much a matter of circumstance as of soul. Someone who returns to the world seething with rage at manifold injustice could align with either the Cranes or the Tigers fairly easily. Much depends in such cases on who gets to the newly created Kuei-jin first. This isn't as clear-cut as the cases covered by the Rite of Taking the Left-hand Path, in which the character moves decisively from one Dharma to another. Rather, it is a matter of the uncertain edges of each Dharma and the overlap between them. Ambiguity makes many Kuei-jin uncomfortable, and any Kuei-jin who spends a lot of time studying the gray areas risks censure and ostracism.

No mystery goes altogether unexamined, of course. Thoughtful mandarins sometimes assemble *wu* specifically to study the emergence of Dharma inclination within *chih-mei*. Why do some passions lead cleanly to one outcome while others allow for drift in various directions? In an age of complicated and confusing passions, this question strikes contemplative masters as a suitable topic for concern. Their peers, who see in it a potential assault on the foundations of Kuei-jin society, are more inclined to regard the whole subject as one more snare the Yama Kings lay for incautious Kuei-jin.

• **The Fifth Lotus: Instruction.** This is the domain of characters pleased with some particularly virtuous aspect of their mortal lives, who wish to continue the work of righteousness left incomplete by death.

• **The Sixth Lotus: Law.** The boundary between this lotus as a starting point and the Fifth is thin, a matter of emphasis rather than hard and fast categories. Cranes who upheld the law in life may begin here, as may those who were lawless or suffered from lawlessness. The important distinction here is the emphasis on order rather than virtue. The law may well be sinful and need reform itself, and that insight may come only later to a law-driven Crane.

• **The Seventh Lotus: Harmonious existence.** This lotus is the one least likely to provide initial motivation for new Cranes, but it suits a particular category of new Kuei-jin very well. Characters whose mortal lives were dominated by misery, who never had reason to believe in the power of justice or the use of virtue at all, may need to begin by separating themselves altogether from that state. Some end up inducing amnesia simply to more thoroughly leave the past behind. They'd rather face all the difficulties of Kuei-jin existence than deal with anything mortal in themselves, at least until the trauma of the past recedes somewhat.

• **The Eighth Lotus: Union of the worlds.** In earlier ages, when the Wall was lower and mortal men and women encountered spirits more regularly, this lotus held little appeal as a starting point. As the Wall thickens and people go longer without ever directly experiencing the reality of the spirit worlds, more Cranes start here. Their encounters after death fascinate them, and they wish to begin by better understanding these realms denied to them in life.

CHI AND SOUL VIRTUES

Resplendent Crane scholars argue endlessly about the relative importance of Yin and Yang in Crane existence. Most sects favor balance in the Chi Virtues for a pragmatic reason: it allows for the most freedom of action, removing or at least reducing vulnerabilities and compulsions. But almost nothing is universal among the Cranes, and this is no exception.

Some Crane sects teach that Yin imbalance is the proper state for any Shining Ice Guardian, as it emphasizes his removal from humanity and passage into the deeper, darker realms of being. Yin-imbalanced Guardians can more easily draw on the wisdom and power of the dead and need to spend less Chi simply to maintain their existence. Other sects teach the virtues of Yang imbalance. Yang-imbalanced Cranes can more easily stride among humans as leaders and masters, as is appropriate for Heaven's magistrates on Earth. Their abundance of sensual power also lets them remain fully aware of the world on a practical, existential level as well as on an intellectual one, thereby avoiding the temptations of hubris and isolation.

One of the very, very few things Cranes agree on is the supremacy of the Hun over the P'o. The Hun is the key to justice. It grants wisdom and power over base impulses, and thereby power to act on and over others. This is not to say that all Cranes necessarily hate or fear a powerful P'o, even though many do. Most sects regard the P'o as (at

best) an unfortunate defect to be beaten into submission, but there is a long tradition of dissent on this topic. Cranes with strong Demons can make potent enforcers, wielding the Disciplines that most thoroughly scourge those who need punishment and intimidate those thinking of sinning. The P'o has its place in creation like everything else, and can offer useful insights into the complex matter of governing creation.

The typical Crane likely has balanced Yin and Yang and Hun somewhat higher than P'o. But exceptions abound.

DIRECTION

A solid plurality of Resplendent Cranes face north. Most of these agree that the north direction is bound up with leadership, and emphasize leadership of various sorts. Some set out to lead Kuei-jin, immersing themselves in court politics. Others lead in the mortal society to which they no longer quite belong, acting behind the scenes in politics, religion or business. Still others work in more exotic realms, bringing order to the spirit realms.

This last mission overlaps with the west direction. Indeed, direction is an imprecise matter just as Dharma is, and small differences in emphasis may add up. A Crane who seeks to study the Yin World and learn from its denizens is more likely to align himself with the west, while a Crane who wants to impose structure on ghosts' encounters with the living and police weaknesses in the Wall may face either north or west. There's also the alternative sometimes called "Crane west," a scholarly and detached concern with the Yang World. Since the Way requires all things to occupy their proper place, someone must understand the many Yang spirits, and Cranes are not inclined to trust Thrashing Dragons to exercise the necessary propriety and discipline.

Crane consensus describes facing the center as a task one undertakes for a "season," whether it's a literal season or a mortal lifetime. Most Crane teachers discourage too much introspection for Running Monkeys, since it takes students away from their duty to accomplish. Reflection is more appropriate after time spent in the great work, when the Kuei-jin has accumulated experience and auspicious occasions. Then the Kuei-jin can withdraw from the world for a time, to study themselves, perhaps to work with a select few students. After another auspicious occasion (or, in some cases, one or more acts of blindness), she changes direction again and pursues the great work once more. Some Cranes find the center direction suitable as an ongoing commitment, but they're rare and often mingle poorly with others of their Dharma. Many of the Cranes who choose, as opposed to being assigned, to study with Kuei-jin of other Dharmas face the center.

Cranes who face east are often very similar to their north-facing colleagues. As with the distinctions between north and west, it's a matter of emphasis. A Crane who sets aside the burden of leadership in an effort to simply be among mortals for a time generally undergoes the formal

change to face east. Crane tradition calls for tolerating this as a short-term course of action — short by the standards of immortals, at least — and regards it as suspicious when pursued to excess. Cranes did not, so they tell each other, return to the world to play at life, and while it is good to avoid exhaustion in the course of duty, the point of rest should be renewed enthusiasm for their work.

Some of the Cranes' most honored sages faced east for long periods, however. Some of them led mortals, and some acted as counselors, advisors, spies and the like for others who led. Sunrise Poet, one of the greatest of all Kuei-jin chroniclers, was an east-facing Crane, whose 800-year series of volumes, the *Contemplation of Demonic Dances*, covered the effects of Kuei-jin decisions on successive Chinese and Korean dynasties. Some members of the Empty Throne sect (see p. 33) teach that the Kuei-jin's legacy of sin makes them unfit to wield power directly themselves, but prepares them to be excellent advisors. Therefore, say the sect's adherents, east is a more proper direction for Cranes than north.

Few Cranes choose to or feel compelled to face south. Cranes who wish to instigate changes, in mortal or supernatural communities, generally do so while facing north. They seek to lead their chosen subjects into some new state. Most Cranes regard south-facing Kuei-jin as too fond of agitation for its own sake. For Cranes, change gains value only within the context of a vision for the whole. Disorder may create opportunities, but is not desirable for its own sake.

ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

Crane characters with Physical Attributes as primary have always been scarce. The Cranes do have their great warriors and the like, but physically oriented Cranes are at least as likely to be artists or sculptors, dancers or specialists in physical tasks other than combat.

The majority of Cranes have Social or Mental Attributes as primary, in roughly equal numbers overall. Particular courts tend toward one or the other depending on the preferences of their Ancestors. Crane tradition puts high value on mental acuity and social finesse: the ideal Crane would excel at them all.

On the principle that everything under Heaven has some appointed role, Cranes do not dismiss any ability as inherently useless. The stereotypical Crane favors Intimidation, Leadership and Law, but in practice nothing is necessarily out of bounds. See "Cranes Among the Ten Thousand," below, for examples of how trickery and misdirection may serve the Dharma as well as more obvious rectitude.

DISCIPLINES

Sensible Cranes recognize that all Disciplines have their proper place in Heaven's design. Not all Disciplines seem equally safe or desirable, however. Above all, most Cranes favor the Soul Arts as fitting instruments of

justice. Their general emphasis on the value of Hun as the consummate virtue makes it easy for them to excel at all of the Soul Arts, and most Cranes like the power they offer. Significant Disciplines include the following:

BLOOD SHINTAI

The Way of the Resplendent Crane has an elemental affinity for blood and water, making this shintai a favorite. Some Cranes feel that the more distorting manifestations of this art — such as Permeate and Flow Like Blood — violate the eighth tenet's admonition for dignity, but the ancestors have come to accept it as a righteous manifestation of Crane authority. The bloodlash is the traditional weapon for Crane battles, and ritual lash duels feature prominently in shadow wars in the Blood Court of Beijing and some Japanese *uji*.

CHI'JU MUH (DRAGON TEARS)

When used in conjunction with the Hun, the Dragon Tear art is a well-respected, if advanced, Crane teaching. Few young Disciples learn this art from their first mentors, but it is not unknown. The gift of foresight given by Rasa is useful for studying ways in which to affect the Great Wheel and is thus a mainstay of Crane mandarins and sect-leaders. Crane worthies use Spirit-Eating to heal wounded and corrupted souls, seeing it as one of the most direct manifestations of the sixth tenet's mandate to straighten the wicked. In fact, most Cranes call this ability "wicked spirit straightening." The P'o aspects of Chi'iu Muh are either considered dangerous weapons of last resort or outright heresy, depending on the sect. In either case, they are not tools for disciples.

CULTIVATION

Cultivation is significant because of how thoroughly most Cranes distrust it. The P'o is not a partner to be negotiated with and understood, but a *thing* to be suppressed. As such, Crane masters are careful to whom they teach this art. In previous Ages, it was reserved for those who had achieved *ling* or otherwise proven their worth. It is more common now, but still taught as a dangerous art properly used to subject the Demon rather than engage in dialogue with it. Discussion with the P'o only leads to temptation and corruption among those not ready for it. Lesser applications of Scrutinize and Cleave the Demon to subjugate or bind the P'o are acceptable, but the tendency of the P'o to return stronger than ever makes Cultivation in general dangerous. The ability to fuse Hun and P'o with the level 5 power Two Become One is considered heretical in many Crane sects.

DEMON SHINTAI

The Godbody of the Demon is the most popular of Demon Arts among the Shining Ice Guardians for several reasons. Most importantly, it is the most obvious: there's no mistaking a P'o-addled Kuei-jin if he has spikes and a huge maw. This prevents the demon from surreptitiously usurping the Hun's mantle and thus keeps intact the



Crane's reputation for righteous action. Some of the lemon form's attributes can also be very useful, most importantly to remind the unrighteous of the hellish ornaments reserved for them. Although terrorizing the wicked is more the province of Devil-Tigers, a judicious application of the Horror characteristic can help guide a subject to the straight and narrow. Finally — and few Shining Ice Guardians are ready to admit this — the oppressed P'o of these Hun-obsessed vampires love the freedom of stretching the body into a nightmare shape.

EQUILIBRIUM

This Chi Art is a favorite of Crane instructors and inquisitors. Unlike either of the *pranas*, it does not imply a reliance on the active or passive way, but achieves a balance between the two. It is especially useful in creating the correct outlook in students by shifting their Chi balance (using the level 2 power *Adjust Balance*). Masters of meditation also use *Equilibrium* to adjust their own Chi balance in preparation for introspective journeys.

INTERNALIZE

Philosophically, this is one of the most critical arts for Resplendent Cranes. *Harmony With the All* (the level 5 power) is a personal manifestation of the ultimate Crane desire for all for creation: return to the First Age. It is seen as a holy state, and *Internalize* masters among the Cranes assume it before making key decisions or undertaking important rites. Even the more basic applications of *Internalize* such as *No Mind* and the *Blood Yoga* speak of the harmonious state of the Age of Heaven. Crane teachers disagree with other Dharmas as to the effects of this art, however. To them, it is not a question of balance between Hun and P'o, but of putting the P'o in its correct, subordinate place before the Hun. *Internalize*-backed meditation exercises are a mainstay of Crane temples.

OBLIGATION

If *Internalize* is a personal manifestation of the Crane Way, then *Obligation* is the social one. Through understanding and mastery of the Hun, the Crane imposes its authority on mortals and *shen* alike. *Obligation* is the wind from the north, the holy mantle of leadership served for the Shining Ice Guardians. As such, many Crane masters of *Obligation* feel a certain proprietary concern for it. They don't trust it in the hands of Kuei-jin who do not share the Cranes' sense of duty and restraint, and would prefer that it not be abused. What a typical Crane mandarin or ancestor thinks of as "abuse" would, of course, seem like precisely the right use to his counterpart in some other Dharma.

BACKGROUNDS

Background selection usually has more to do with the Hun and the individual character than Dharma, but a few backgrounds are common among Resplendent Cranes. The most important is *Mentor*. Cranes believe in a

hierarchy of teachers and students, and unless she is far away from her temple or cut off from it for one reason or another, a Crane generally has access to a teacher. This instructor is not always a helper, however. Just as often (if not more so), he is a taskmaster, critic and examiner. Those who belong to a tight-knit sect are likely to have Contacts or Allies as well.

CRANES AMONG THE TEN THOUSAND

Cranes know they are specially chosen (or appointed, or cursed) to lead. Their calling naturally takes them out of the company of their fellows within the Dharma, to mingle with others. That mingling can go smoothly or very messily indeed.

In the worst case, an overly confident Crane tramples on the interests and concerns of his *wu*-mates, refuses to take their insights seriously and eventually gets himself (or all of them) destroyed. Crane teachers generally make sure their students see the remains of especially notorious failures of this sort in their vicinity. A Crane who acts so foolishly betrays Heaven and Earth: whatever good he might have done, goes undone. In earlier Ages the world could survive the occasional spectacular display of idiocy, but now there's no room for it.

Crane mandarins and ancestors of large courts prefer to send new Cranes out among the Ten Thousand Demons on specific assignments before embarking on the long-term commitment of *wu* bonds. Missions lasting a few days, or even a few years, give the Crane disciple time to learn through personal experience just how other Dharmas affect the outlook and behavior of others who've walked the Road Back. Elders intervene to mediate disputes and, when necessary, remove a particular Crane who proves unsuitable for the assignment in question. Cranes who returned before World War II in any city of more than a million people likely had this sort of apprenticeship after their education within the Dharma concluded.

The press of circumstances makes this kind of opportunity very rare now. It sometimes happens where a Crane ancestor has enough authority over the court to insist that the elders of other Dharmas allow it, but even Cranes who can do this often choose not to. The currency of *guanxi* must pay for a great many expenses, and generally can't be used on luxuries like extended training. Now almost all new Cranes must deal with the comrades fate and the elders assign to them.

THE LEADER'S POSITION

Power over others comes in many forms. The visible authority to give orders that others must follow is only the simplest style. It's useful, just as a hammer and club are useful, but like them it's just the beginning.

Keep in mind that death and return don't instantly transform a person of the late 20th century into a carbon

copy of nearby old-timers. Modern people think about power and authority in a great many ways, but they're unlikely to suddenly start acting like emperors out of dimly remembered half-mythical eras. "Absolute power" carries images of Mao, Stalin and Pol Pot at the height of their success; an ambitious Kuei-jin might think of Qin Shihuangdi or the Mongol Khans as inspirations as well, but only in vague and allegorical terms. They have little to do with the practicalities of modern social manipulation.

Likewise, a new Crane who thinks of stalwart and persistent leaders is more likely to come up with one of the Tiananmen Square dissidents, or the zaibatsu magnates who preserved the dream of Japanese empire through all the years of American occupation, or a Triad "big brother" who remains rich and free despite changes in political regime and social climate. The noble exemplars of folklore don't matter any more than Robin Hood or William Tell would to a Westerner groping for ideas about how to cope with a crisis. Sometimes tradition plays a powerful role, but mostly only in relaxed times of contemplation, planning and daydreaming.

This gap in symbols does not escape the attention of elder Cranes, at least those who bother paying attention to the changing times. Elders vary in their responses. Traditions demand that youngsters learn and use the elder's preferred symbols, no matter how great the gap between then and now. Radicals, whether acting out of hope for the future or despair at the past, allow their students to use whatever masks may suit the underlying concepts, and some even embrace the new examples themselves. (This almost always looks foolish, and becomes an act of blindness.) In between, various combinations of tradition and modernity tend to leave everyone involved feeling somewhat dissatisfied.

What makes matters difficult for a *wu* composed entirely of Cranes of varying ages, though, is itself a key to successful Crane influence over new Kuei-jin of other Dharmas. Astute elders let their disciplines mingle with Kuei-jin of roughly the same age, speaking the eternal truths of Resplendent Crane doctrine in contemporary terms. Compared to her mentors, a Crane who returned a few decades ago and is making reasonable progress in her Dharma seems hopelessly distant from the ancient wellsprings. But compared to her peers outside the Dharma, she seems thoroughly anchored in traditional wisdom without having lost the flexibility of wit to apply old truths to a contemporary situation. She can lead others as she has been led... making sure, of course, that they stay a few steps behind, as is only proper.

UNSEEN AUTHORITY

In general, Cranes prefer those around them to understand that the Crane is leading, and rightly so. Whether by intimidation, coercion, persuasion or other means, most Cranes want their authority to be visible to others. In these wicked times, say many Cranes, Kuei-jin must see the example of wise virtue and know where to look for guidance.

A venerable counter-argument, almost as popular, states that only the pure of soul can directly face their rulers and survive. Kuei-jin do not see the departed August Personage or even his Ministers, except in visions, until they reach the highest pinnacles of Dharmic progression. Peasants do not face the emperor, nor do worker ants consult the queen of the hive at their whim. The way of All Under Heaven is for every subject to deal mostly with immediate superiors, and for some heights of authority to remain beyond the masses. Thus it is not the Crane's place to act as emperor or boss, but to set the tone for leadership and advise the authorities — preparing the soil from which others may harvest virtue.

The ultimate goal of all Crane activity is, at least in theory, an entirely righteous universe. Cranes acquire and use power to promote the restoration of cosmic order. If others refuse to submit to a visible ruler, then other means become appropriate. Crane scholars can and do debate particulars, but in the end most would agree that it is better for others to act righteously than not, even if it takes deception or trickery to get them to do so. Let Cranes shoulder the burden of accountability for lies before Heaven; let others simply do right, whatever they may think they're doing.

The Empty Throne sect (see page 33) offers the most thoroughgoing rationale for covert leadership within something close to Crane consensus about essential virtues. Other groups offer other justifications. In practice, their various paths all lead to the same general practices focusing on deception and subterfuge rather than direct command or intimidation.

Successful leadership-by-deceit requires a thorough understanding of one's unwitting subjects. Some shadow-walking Cranes spend years or lifetimes passing themselves off as believers in some other Dharma, or even pretending to be mortal or some sort of *shen* they aren't. Such Cranes can also maintain their Dharmic affiliation openly but decline positions of over-great authority. They content themselves with advising and assisting those who lead whatever group interests them... and gradually insinuate their own emphases and desires, so that the visible authorities end up carrying out the Cranes' wishes.

WHAT ALL THIS MEANS: PRACTICALITIES

To anchor the above generalizations, consider a typical *wu* in a large city. The *wu* has no overall mandate beyond providing mutual sanctuary and support for young disciples as they study their respective Dharmas. Its members come from several Dharmas, and may or may not be balanced when it comes to direction and soul states. In short, there's nothing flashy or special about it, at least not yet.

A Crane with prominent social graces is likely to end up as an unofficial leader of the *wu* by virtue of being best suited for negotiations with elders in the city's court. The member who hears the most interesting news and can arrange for promising tasks to be assigned to the *wu* exerts a great deal of influence on how the *wu* develops. Likewise,

whoever in the Dharma best performs the rites has remendous impact on the *wu*'s night-to-night fortunes and its ability to take advantage of promising opportunities, particularly those that require dealing with the spirit worlds.

The *wu*'s best fighter shapes the *wu*'s fortunes in moments of conflict. If the others need training, their instructor has the opportunity to inculcate philosophy along with practical skills... and many important truths do not need to come identified as tenets of the Dharma. Just as mortal martial arts secularize and modernize Confucian, Taoist and other teachings, so Kuei-jin combat instruction emphasizes the old truths of the lotuses and virtues.

The *wu* member who deals most skillfully with mortals shapes the *wu*'s place in the surrounding society. The same applies to whoever deals best with the worlds across the Wall.

Apart from particular expertise, *wu* members influence their companions in the give-and-take of concerns, questions and solutions. Cranes have the advantage, as they see it, of more fully encompassing doctrines than the other Dharmas, leaving them fewer opportunities to feel adrift without benefit of others' insights. A Crane well-versed in the lotuses and the virtues need never feel that he has to make it all up as she goes. This confidence provides the foundation for persistence while others are confused, letting her speak clearly and be the one to settle disputes. She needn't give orders to lead; she merely needs to be the one who has a plan when others cast around for something to do.

FLOCKS RISING TO HEAVEN: SECTS

Every Crane searches for the key to heavenly harmony and earthly order. Some feel sure they've found it and seek to teach their insights to others, while others look for a master to explain it to them. When would-be teacher and would-be student meet, a new community is born. Tradition applies the label "cult" to communities centered on the personality of one or a few individual Cranes, and "sect" to communities that share a commitment to particular doctrines with or without charismatic leaders. In practice, of course, the boundary blurs between the two.

Most Cranes mark their time by their movement to, in and through successive factions. Factionalism provides Cranes with mentors and students, peers and rivals. It grants an identity that supplements *wu* affiliation when it comes to havens and missions. In the case of all-Crane *wu*, the two types of bond may be identical; more often, a Crane's faction offers shelter in those moments when she is apart from the *wu* (since few *wu* spend all their time together, night after night through the ages). The faction to which a Crane gives allegiance at any given time therefore says a great deal about her, and is likely to play an important part in future challenges and opportunities.

A simple list of all the Crane factions active at the beginning of the 21st century could run on for many chapters. Instead of being so exhaustive, this section

provides some guidelines for players and Storytellers create their own factions to suit their particular chronicles. These guidelines don't cover the largest and most prominent sects, written up in the previous chapter (pp. 33-36) and in other volumes. Instead, these factions supplement and complement those larger groups. You can easily choose to have your character swear allegiance to an established sect, but few Cranes can escape dealing with other sects altogether. Use this section either to help you create a faction for your character or to understand the underpinnings of sect movements with which your character may have to deal.

Alternatively, a character may go sectless. This means the character has learned from a teacher unaffiliated with a specific philosophical movement within the Dharma, or else he adheres strictly to the orthodox teachings predominant in the Blood Court. Even in these cases, factionalism rears its head. In the former case, many observers would argue that your character and her teacher form a small cult or sect; in the latter, the orthodoxy often acts as the most well-established sect.

SECT AND THE EIGHT LOTUS PATH

Every sect has a view, or a few related views, on the proper order through the Eight Lotus Path toward enlightenment. Be sure to establish the sect's preferred sequence of lotuses. It provides a guideline for what's expected of leaders and long-time adherents, as well as a tool for player-character development (see "Cranes in Time," p. 61).

STEP ONE: LEADER AND DHARMIC INSIGHT

Every faction begins with one or more Resplendent Cranes who feel they have something distinctive to offer their Dharmic fellow-travelers. This insight may be purely personal, such as when a leader doesn't trust or respect the local Crane authorities or wishes to bring the blessings of Crane lore to an area where currently nobody expounds the Dharma's truths. Or the leader (or leaders) may have some new insight into a point of doctrine — a fresh approach to one of the eight tenets, a synthesis of Crane doctrine with something taken from another Dharma, or a mortal insight to add to or sever from Crane tradition.

Most Crane sages say that personally driven factions are less likely to fall into heresy or other error than doctrinally driven ones. Most Crane students believe that as well, but that piece of common wisdom is not as conveniently true as the sages would like. Issues of personality and belief don't divide up neatly in practice, and most factions draw on both motives. One or the other usually takes precedence for faction members and those around them, however.

"Factionalism is the sport of maturity," an old saying has it, and sect or cult creation is thus the prerogative of Cranes with experience and proven Dharmic progress. The



Dharma at large does not accept claims of authority from Cranes who haven't achieved *ling* (jina status), as they simply haven't had the opportunity to learn what they must do to blaze a new path, let alone to demonstrate their learning to others. In general, Cranes are likely to seek followers after they've been around at least 50 years but before they reach 500 or so. Older Cranes, having seen more of the world come and go, tend to focus on larger matters — the Dharma at large and Kuei-jin society as a whole — or on personal enlightenment and attachments. Rising Majestically to the Western Sun, the bodhisattva who fell in battle against Ravana (see p. 83), illustrated both tendencies, having withdrawn to meditate while remaining aware of developments throughout the Middle Kingdom.

Players don't usually portray sect leaders, as that post requires extensive experience. In chronicles with a great deal of downtime or with especially advanced characters, however, founding a Dharmic movement becomes a viable option. Followers should come almost entirely from the ranks of those returned more recently than your character, who look up to him as at least a bit more experienced. On the other hand, particularly if he is especially charismatic, your Crane can also have a few followers with greater experience, who find in the voice of relative youth some important truth and some fresh inspiration in the vigorous actions of one not yet weighed down by accumulated defeat. This opportunity is not license to indulge in

collecting powerful pawns without paying appropriate costs in backgrounds, and you should work with the Storyteller. Any game with especially powerful starting characters needs to be carefully monitored, lest it become an exercise in over-powered folly. If your character becomes a jina in play and founds a sect, as a player, you need to invest the time and effort to gather followers and tend to their needs.

In most chronicles, you start out portraying a young Kuei-jin disciple who gives her allegiance to one or more experienced Cranes portrayed by the Storyteller. As before, you should work with the Storyteller. Feel free to work on the leader's history and personality, with suggestions for what role the faction has played in events so far, but remain open to counter-suggestions from the Storyteller. In addition, be prepared for the Storyteller to work on some surprises. There are always secrets to uncover and consequences to deal with. The more fully you develop the faction leader as a character with motives and complexities of his own, the more hooks the Storyteller has to make things interesting in ways that are fun for everyone involved. Allow room for mutual inspiration.

STEP TWO: FOLLOWERS

Thoughts about this step often emerge at the same time as thoughts about the leader. Often, you'll have an idea for an interesting faction and work backward to this

what sort of Crane must lead it. In other cases, a strong leader personality or doctrinal issue suggests the sorts of Cranes who gather around to lend their support.

Extremes of follower personality become more common the more removed the faction leader is from the mainstream of Crane convention. Brilliant crusaders and radical heretics don't offer much appeal to vacillating, uncommitted, hesitant souls. They speak to would-be daring visionaries, ambitious young Cranes looking to make their mark and the like, and also to the defeated, drifting souls who desperately desire some anchor to cling to while they fight off the temptations of self-destruction. Self-styled heroes and victims flourish among marginal factions. The more personal and less doctrinal a faction leader is, the more appealing the faction seems to Cranes who lack either revolutionary zeal or a grinding sense of misery.

If your character is the faction leader, pay attention to background costs for followers. Your Storyteller can grant you bonus points to spend to support particularly nifty or suitable faction concepts, but she doesn't *have* to. In the more likely case that you are portraying a member of the sect, backgrounds remain important. Mentor will tie you to the leader (or a leader, at least), while Allies, Contacts and Resources help determine just how much of the sect and its resources you can draw upon. As always, cooperation generally gets you further than confrontational approaches. If another player is also portraying a sect member, the Storyteller may allow you to pool your backgrounds.

In general, the other Dharmas' followers take no deep interest in the minutiae of Crane affairs. Even scholars of the Dharma are unlikely to feel the personal drive to join a faction. The rare exceptions almost always go through the ritual changing of Dharma in due season, as they realize just how deeply they do in fact identify with the Cranes. Conversely, the factions whose members find themselves more and more alienated from the rest of Crane society gradually lose leaders and followers to other Dharmas — usually one by one, but mass conversions do happen a few times each century, always with accompanying scandal. Such losses of leaders or groups of followers create opportunities for dedicated disciples to rise through the ranks.

STEP THREE: RESOURCES

Some sects gather no assets apart from their members. Followers come together to meet, meditate or otherwise act in accordance with their shared purpose, and when they're done, they return to their individual and *own* pursuits. At the other extreme, some cults require members to sacrifice all their worldly attachments for the sake of the cause, and the leader administers all the wealth and resources her followers once owned. In between are most sects, with some shared assets.

In most cases, members donate some of their personal resources to the group at the outset. Ideally, the Storyteller should figure out which specific contacts, spheres of influence and resources the sect (or sect leader) has access

to. As a ballpark figure, he can give the cult itself one dot's worth of Contacts, Influence and Resources for each member who has three dots or more in the relevant background, up to a maximum of four dots. To attain five dots, the cult must have at least 10 members with three or more dots in the relevant background. The cult leader can make desperate appeals to individual members for extra resources, which should be roleplayed or governed with a Manipulation + Leadership roll depending on whether or not the players' characters are involved. The difficulty of the roll depends on the severity of the demand.

Over time, most sects accumulate various sorts of material goods: meeting places, libraries of important volumes, equipment that has proven useful in the sect's mission and the like. Sects of one to ten members add a dot's worth of a background chosen by the leader each decade. Each tenfold increase in the number of adherents doubles the dots gained each decade. The Storyteller can modify this rule of thumb, however. If the sect members simply don't care about worldly possessions or don't hold beliefs that promote or require sharing of possessions, the rate of increase may fall to a dot every fifty years or even less. If the sect teaches the importance of a purely nomadic existence, for instance, the sect may never acquire anything much. Sects that emphasize the importance of giving up individual possessions or are engaged in tasks requiring many material things — financial enterprises, or working as mercenaries, for instance — may accumulate two or more dots each decade.

The leader basically has as much authority over sect belongings as he can get away with. If the sect gives special reverence to its aged members, they may act as custodians and guardians of the wealth even though the leader gives the orders for night-to-night activity, and he may not be able to compel them to give up things for his use. Sects that have multiple leaders either end up dividing authority on some relatively straightforward basis like geography — the provincial commander gets to decide how to use the sect's assets in that province — or face ongoing squabbles about it. Unclear division of authority on this matter is one of the most common reasons for a sect to break up into schismatic chaos.

Sects don't always get richer and richer, of course. Each decade, the Storyteller can make an opposed roll of the leader's Hun versus P'o, difficulty 6. If the P'o wins, subtract one dot of the usual resource gain for each additional success by which the P'o roll beat the Hun roll. If this total uses up all that decade's gain, start subtracting dots of existing belongings. The Storyteller decides where the losses come from; the player (if portraying the leader) can and should consult on the decision, but since by definition it represents a failure of the leader's control, it is not a matter under the player's jurisdiction. In addition, the Storyteller may adjust the background ratings to reflect difficulties in play, from earthquakes and other natural disasters to warfare, calculated assaults and other offensive action directed against the sect.

STEP FOUR: THE FACTION AND OTHERS

The last question is how the sect relates to the world, both within Crane society and beyond it. Most sects exist to promote an idea and welcome those who profess it, but a great many other possibilities exist.

Among those who accept petitions for membership, standards of acceptance vary widely. Strict sects require long probationary periods and rigorous proof that the would-be member does in fact share the idea and meets the sect's views of good conduct. Mystically oriented sects look for evidence of suitable visions, or the endorsement of ancestral and other spirits. Enthusiastic proselytizers may welcome anyone who can nod in a reasonably approving manner, or who doesn't run away fast enough to escape the use of Soul Disciplines to instill loyalty.

This last practice, forcible conversion, is very rare, and is grounds for a purge of the sect by Dharmic authorities. Some Crane ancestors sponsor individual inquisitors and even entire *wu* (entirely composed of Cranes or mixed with suitably inclined Kuei-jin of other Dharmas) dedicated to investigating such abuses of power. Others rely on the insight and astuteness of their fellow Cranes without formal organization. Courts with dedicated inquisitors regard the others as anarchic and dangerously undisciplined, while less organized courts tend in turn to see such formality as tyrannical. Nothing in Crane doctrine prohibits or even particularly discourages tyranny — but it must always be tempered by self-examination, in which few tyrants choose to engage.

Some sects operate in secrecy. They make their name known but do not advertise their membership; depending on the degree to which they diverge from Crane orthodoxy, they may make strenuous efforts to keep their membership a mystery. In the highly literate society of the Ten Thousand Demons, whole moral, philosophical and intellectual movements can flourish and even play a significant role in the evolution of the society, with no public manifestation but a series of letters, memorials and other written documents. Some of the most honored scholars of the Crane Dharma are known only through their writings, and in a few cases scholars debate endlessly over whether one set of hands or several inscribed those documents. Secrecy protects critics from the wrath of their subjects, just as it protects the identities of Cranes engaged in infiltration or working under false identities for other reasons.

Secret sects recruit in just as wide a range of ways as public ones. Some don't recruit, and do not survive the passing of their last founders. Others identify prospective members and approach quietly. Still others listen for reports of individuals who want to find them, and wait for word of searches begun by those who agree with the sect's message.

All sects that value secrecy are demanding of new recruits, in one way or another. Especially if they are clearly heretics from Crane orthodoxy, sect members see themselves as an enlightened few in a mass of fools. To

accept another into their number is no small thing: the candidate must prove her worth. Some sects pre-harrowing ordeals to test prospective members, while others seemingly embrace them with open arms but watch them around the clock. New initiates have no time alone, no time to reflect or to have second thoughts. Those who reject a secret cult after entering it are in danger because they pose a threat to the heresy's survival.

Once in their new sect, members may or may not have many dealings with the outside world. If the sect's tenets include the wickedness and irredeemable corruption of the world, of course, members probably don't want to mingle with others, save perhaps to "rectify" them. Other sects reserve the privilege of speaking with outsiders to their leader, who may or may not give her approval to members who prove themselves worthy. Finally, some sects, particularly those grouped around shared ideas rather than charismatic personalities, maintain particular barriers to communication.

CRANES IN TIME

Crane tradition describes its adherents' increasing purity and wisdom in terms of the Eight Lotus Path. The path is a set of behaviors to follow and a set of steps to follow one at a time. In order to adhere properly to the first tenet of their Dharmas, Cranes must recognize the importance of all the lotuses and vigorously pursue whichever lotus they are currently striving to "complete." Thus a jina who strives to complete the Fourth Lotus (purgation of the wicked) spends much time hunting down corrupt. But that does not mean she is free to abandon the principles of instruction, law, hope and virtue taught by other lotuses. "Take one step at a time," say Crane teachers, "but follow the path as a whole." In play, you thus use the path as a framework for your character's development over time, along with other benchmarks.

As noted above, most Crane sects and individual instructors teach a preferred route through the lotuses. In most cases, students move on from one lotus to the next following an auspicious occasion or other inspiring event. Whether or not the character's Dharma rises does not necessarily affect her readiness to move onto the next lotus on her personal path. Indeed, Crane bodhisattvas say that they have walked the Eight Lotus Path many times, in many different ways, throughout their existence. Each pass allows the student to peel back one petal of the lotus, they say. In some cases, even acts of blindness may justify taking another step on the path: failure can be a lesson, too.

LOTUS QUESTS

Players and Storytellers, through the agency of their characters or through frank discussion, can set up time frames for the lotus a Crane is studying. Most often, a Crane remains focused on a lotus until he achieves it or demonstrates some new insight into it. This may be



simple matter that takes but a few nights, or a lengthy quest that may take years. The higher the student's Dharma, the more ambitious the task.

There are an infinite number of quests to be undertaken, and masters try their best to adjust them to the student at hand. The Storyteller should do the same when assigning your character a quest and so should you when your Crane becomes a teacher. As an aid to you both, described below are a series of possible quests for each lotus. The first task is quite simple and suitable for a young disciple or as a simple refresher. The last task is the stuff of legend.

- **The First Lotus (Hope):** Make a wretched child smile, find hope in a damned place like the Yin world, bring hope to a downtrodden people with a single act, free the Damned from Yomi Wan.

- **The Second Lotus (Virtue):** Find a virtuous mortal, lead a powerful man to virtue, find virtue in a barbarian nation, reform a wicked society.

- **The Third Lotus (Nurturing):** Grow a garden on barren soil, raise a child to adulthood in perfect virtue, guide a mortal dynasty to righteousness, heal a corrupted dragon nest.

- **The Fourth Lotus (Purgation):** Cleanse a polluted patch of land, destroy a wicked human without revealing yourself, root out the wicked elements in a corrupt nation, destroy a Yama King.

- **The Fifth Lotus (Instruction):** Teach a single pupil a new skill, found a school, guide another to *ling*, found a major sect or philosophical movement.

- **The Sixth Lotus (Law):** Write a treatise on an aspect of mortal law, write a treatise on an aspect universal law, design a perfect mortal society, impose law on a nation of barbarians.

- **The Seventh Lotus (Harmony):** Compose a harmonious melody, design a temple in harmony with the surrounding Chi, maintain perfect Chi balance for a year, restore a dynasty from chaos to order.

- **The Eighth Lotus (Transcendence):** Journey into the Mirror Lands and spirit courts, spend a year in meditation, undergo the Little Death, achieve *dâh*.

MISSTEPS

Cranes hold to strict philosophies, but they are also aware of the realities of present existence. (Or rather, Cranes who too vigorously deny individual variation end up succumbing to acts of blindness.) No matter how firmly an individual intends to follow the path as laid down by his sect, circumstances may force another sequence upon him. In most sects, examiners — students of the Third and Fifth lotuses, whether formally appointed or acting informally — survey the actions of their sect brethren to see what others' existences seem most concerned with at the moment.

Possible responses vary wildly, heavily influenced by the sect's preferences and the individual's temperament.

When the weight of recent thoughts and actions does not match well with the lotus the individual is supposedly mastering at this time, common responses include:

- **Justify the Actions.** This is the most common response. The realm of ideas is vast and can encompass many twisty rationales. There's usually some way to account for one's behavior as suiting the lotus one is studying, one way or another. At the Storyteller's discretion, particularly elegant justifications may constitute auspicious occasions, while overly blatant efforts at self-deceit can be acts of blindness.

- **Change the Actions.** Whatever keeps the individual from proper attention to the given lotus should yield. If the character must give up a personal goal for the sake of the lotus, so be it. (The P'o can of course use this conflict in crafting effective temptations.) The changes required may be small or great, and in any case the character knows he's making a personal sacrifice for the sake of the larger truth. Every orthodox sect respects this sacrifice, though heretics claim that the opposite choice is the one through which underlying truth reveals itself. (At least that's the generalization. In practice, most sects combine a variety of attitudes, not always logically compatible ones. Perfection in reasoning is part of that celestial consummation not yet achieved.)

- **Change the Lotus.** No Crane undertakes this response lightly. It means admitting an error in past decision-making: if he were in the right place along the path, he wouldn't have to move. In most sects the Crane must take one or more steps back, to review the earlier lotuses and discover what he missed to bring himself to his current predicament. Generally this means studying and practicing the other lotuses for a while longer. Such a change also costs the Crane status — respect for the character's integrity in admitting error only partially offsets having made the error in the first place. A slightly mitigated version of this option is the recognition that the lotus is complete and it is time to take the next step on the path. The Crane admits to the error of obsessing on a single aspect of his education, but is still seen as an accomplished student.

Most Cranes find one lotus or another especially problematic. Some take a great deal of time to complete tasks when working on that lotus, while others breeze through the first task but cannot bring themselves to move on. They become so focused on that lotus that they wish to peel back all its petals in a single pass. From such obsessions are heresies born.

THE ARSENAL OF JUSTICE

Resplendent Cranes, like all other Dharmas, have their fair share of special applications of rites and disciplines. The following are the most well-known.

NEW MERITS AND FLAWS

INTELLECTUAL P'O (2 PT. MERIT)

Whatever your P'o's Archetype, it shares the stereotypical Crane fascination for learning and tradition. You receive a -1 difficulty bonus on efforts to resist wave soul when it would force you to flee the presence of great scholars or scholarly archives, but suffer a +1 difficulty penalty on efforts to resist fire soul when confronted by threats to these scholarly treasures. Whatever your P'o does while in shadow soul, it will not voluntarily endanger the Crane heritage of scholarship. It may, however, use that heritage against the Hun, drawing attention to points of dogma that highlight possible acts of blindness.

DIDACTIC P'O (2 PT. FLAW)

Your P'o fancies itself a great teacher. Whenever you're in shadow soul, it takes the opportunity to deliver long lectures about its motives, analysis of the situation and so on, generally drawing on extremely garbled version of Crane theology. Whenever you barely escape shadow wave or fire soul (with a roll that generates just one success), make a Willpower roll against a difficulty of 7 minus the local Wall rating. If this roll fails, your P'o achieves a limited degree of control, enough to force you to expound briefly on all the aspects of Crane doctrine that your associates should consider in the midst of a stressful situation.

NEW DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUE

THE FIRE WHICH ILLUMINATES (GHOST FLAME SHINTAI 3, CULTIVATION 3)

This technique uses the external threat of fire to still the souls of nearby Kuei-jin, forcing them to confront their own Dharmic failings. The Fire Which Illuminates was originally a tool for instruction, letting students confront their weaknesses without fear of self-deception. Teachers summon a sheet of reflective flame in the calm, controlled circumstances of a well-prepared study, and students gaze within it to gain insight. The teacher stands ready to assist in dealing with the sometimes painful revelations of the flames. Crane inquisitors have discovered that the technique is useful as a tool for questioning or tormenting subjects. The inquisitor confronts the subject with his own failings, eroding his will.

System: The Crane conjures up a curving sheet of flame that takes on a smooth, mirror-like sheen. Any Kuei-jin who looks inside is not subject to fire soul, but instead feels compelled to keep gazing in, for a number of turns equal to the creator's Dharma rating. If the Cathayan wishes to resist, the player must make a Willpower roll against a difficulty of 7. The player cannot spend Willpower to gain an automatic success on this roll. For every turn that the

Cathayan gazes into the flames, she sees reflected there circumstances and images associated with one of her acts of blindness, beginning with the most recent. The subject's player must make a Hun roll each turn, difficulty 7, or the Cathayan loudly admits the act she sees reflected. Even players of Cathayans who welcome the use of the technique make these Hun rolls, as success implies that the vampire has fully accepted her act of blindness.

As part of instruction (in which case the subject does not resist the urge to gaze into the flames), use of the technique grants the subject's player a -1 difficulty bonus on his next auspicious occasion. If used for torment (in which case the subject resists the urge to gaze), the victim gains no such advantage and also loses a temporary point of Willpower every time she must exclaim her failings.

The Fire Which Illuminates costs 16 experience points to learn.

NEW RITES

As the instructors and traditionalists of the Kuei-jin world, Resplendent Cranes fill their unives with ritual. Some the of following Dharmic rites are debased Fifth Age equivalents of stronger Fourth Age rites presented in *Blood and Silk*, pp. 98-100. Elder Cranes take note of the increasing difficulty in exercising power and precision through rites, and cite it as further evidence of the world's growing wickedness.

At the Storyteller's discretion, one or more of the following complications may also apply. These particularly apply to the rites of past ages. They may also affect rites native to the Fifth Age in places where the rising Sixth Age is particularly strong: the most wicked cities, the most lighted parts of the countryside, the great strongholds of the enemies of Kuei-jin, and so on. These side effects are specially appropriate when a rite is marginally successful (only one success on the player's required roll).

- **Thickening Wall:** Whether a particular rite succeeds or not, the local Wall thickens by one point per level of rite, for one or more scenes. This most often affects rites that deal with the spirit world and is said to indicate the displeasure of the kings of the spirit worlds at being disturbed in this darkening time.

- **Thinning Wall:** Whether or not the rite succeeds, the local Wall thins by one point per level of rite, for one or more scenes. This most often affects warding and social rites, making it easier for hostile spirits to interfere in the aftermath of the rite. It is said to indicate the fragility of once-reliable protections.

- **Delayed Effect:** Even though everything goes well, the rite just doesn't take effect, for up to one scene per level of rite after its completion. Eddies in the flow of Chi keep forces churned and undischarged in the meantime.

- **Strengthened P'o:** The difficulty of rolls to resist shadow soul for the players of participants and bystanders rises by one per level of the rite, for one or more scenes.

- **Dark Visions:** Reflective surfaces throughout the area display views of the area as it will be under the Demon Emperor, or at least as it might be. Experienced Kuei-jin know that acting to forestall such visions often only ends up making them come to pass.

- **Déjà Vu:** Aspects of the surrounding environment in any way reminiscent of the characters' mortal lives seem strongly similar, for up to one scene per level of the rite. Depending on the circumstances, the difficulty of shadow, wave or fire soul checks may increase as sinister forces play on characters' memories, hopes and fears.

THE MARK OF JUDGMENT (LEVEL TWO OR THREE RITE)

This rite is one of the crucial tools of the Resplendent Crane who wishes to punish the wicked. The Crane prepares an infusion of his own blood (one point of Yang Chi's worth) and finely powdered gold. This provides a special ink with which the Crane can mark the forehead of a Kuei-jin or other subject — Kuei-jin only in the Level Two version, any target with the Level Three version. The mark gives the target a certain reek of malignancy, identifying him as a sinner in ways that others besides the Crane passing judgment can instinctually discern. This stink invites suitable reprisals.

System: The Crane spends ten minutes performing this rite over the infusion of blood and gold. The resulting ink remains potent until the next sunrise. He can apply it to sleeping targets, or use Yin Prana to mark waking targets without their knowledge. Once marked, the target exudes a faint but distinct aura of malevolence, and his player thus suffers a +1 penalty to the difficulty of social tasks until the mark washes off. This happens naturally in three full days, or earlier if the target applies fresh water to his forehead. Strong rain and perspiration can also make the mark wear off. The mark does not provide any particular details about the target's alleged sins, only a general sense that something's wrong.

THE VOICE WHICH COMPELS TRUTH (LEVEL THREE RITE)

This rite is one of the classical tools of the Crane magistrate, developed to assist the process of judicial inquiry. The subject of the rite must be seated for its duration, whether voluntarily or restrained in some way. Crane ancestors often have elaborate chairs and clamps made specifically for interrogation with this rite, but anything will serve, even a folding chair and a few strong ropes. Once the subject takes his seat, the Crane performing the rite alternates recitation of passages from the classics on the subject of truth and the benefits of confession with ceremonial gestures intended to channel the flow of Chi in the area.

Gradually the subject feels cut off, almost literally, from every impulse and ability to lie. In some cases,

depending on the rite's performer, a dark cloud of extracted dishonest soul-shards may surround the subject, or a dark mass of reeking liquid Chi may drain into a puddle around the chair. In other cases the compulsion is purely mental and spiritual. Once the rite is complete, interrogation begins. The subject cannot lie until he rises from the chair or the compulsion wears off, as described below.

System: The Crane spends at least one hour performing the rite, and the effects last one hour plus an amount of time equal to the duration of the performance. (That is, if the Crane spends one hour at the rite, the effects continue two hours after that, and so on.) The effect instantly dissipates if the subject rises from the chair (either during or after the rite's performance) or is subject to Obligation or any other supernatural means of compelling him to speak.

The subject's inability to lie does not automatically translate into a compulsion to speak the truth. He may choose to remain silent when questioned, although he can be subjected to any form of mundane coercion, persuasion, bribery or torture the interrogator can imagine. The subject may also give incomplete answers, but cannot lie or give strongly misleading impressions. Kuei-jin subjected to this rite may attempt to resist (the player rolls P'o, difficulty 9, to do so) and they are subject to fire soul as usual if tortured.

21 NAMING THE ANCESTOR (LEVEL SEVEN RITE)

In earlier ages, every Dharma had its own version of this rite, usually called Crowning the Ancestor. Now only the Cranes practice it on a regular basis, and the other Dharmas simply call on Crane masters of rituals when they wish it performed for one of their own. The only notable exception to this is Welcoming the Penangallan, the rite practiced in the Golden Courts by members of the Burning Embers sect of Devil-Tigers and the Passion Bloodflower sect of Thrashing Dragons (see **Dharma Book: Thrashing Dragons**, p. 59).

A Kuei-jin ancestor holds a position of spiritual authority as well as an institutional role, and Cranes concern for proper leadership makes them intent on proving that a candidate for ancestry does in fact have the necessary qualifications. Details of the rite vary from one sect to the next; what follows is a common version practiced among the August Courts of the Quincunx.

The candidate must first, over the course of five nights, compose a poem or memorial on each of the five ways of the Great Principle and then present each in an address to the examiners. Each night requires a Dharma + Academics roll for the written text and a Dharma + Expression roll for the speech, all at difficulty 7. If there are hecklers or detractors, make an opposed roll to represent the effort at distracting the candidate (generally Wits +



Expression or Manipulation + Intimidation) against the candidate's written or verbal roll, with the candidate requiring more successes than the hecklers. The standard modifiers for social rolls between characters with differing Dharma ratings apply (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 54).

The candidate must then maintain a 24-hour vigil in a spot chosen by the court's mandarins. This cannot be in direct sunlight, but can require the candidate to face terrifying or confusing environments. The usual rolls and costs for maintaining wakefulness during daytime apply, along with one or more Willpower rolls at difficulty 7 in the face of powerful distractions. The Flame Court of Hong Kong has been known to submit candidates to low-flying aircraft with a chosen spot just short of the end of an approach to a local airport.

Finally, the candidate must fight and defeat three disciples or jina chosen from among the court's ranks, all less than two centuries from their Second Breath. Tradition allows any hand-to-hand weapon for the challengers, while the candidate must use only his own abilities and disciplines. She must subdue the attackers, who strike at her simultaneously. Most courts allow one challenger death, but regard more killing as evidence that the candidate lacks an adequate range of resources for responding to such crises.

A candidate who passes all these tests stands confirmed before the court. A night of blessing and celebration follows, after which the new ancestor gains the following benefits:

- She may store five more points each of Yin and Yang Chi in her body than her Dharma level ordinarily allows.
- She cannot willingly enter fire soul, but she receives a -2 difficulty bonus on all efforts to oppose negative soul states.
- She may use Demon Chi to power Demon Arts and burn raw Demon Chi without having to make a shadow soul roll. Black Wind still requires a roll each round, but the above benefit drops the difficulty to 6.

These benefits last even if the ancestor steps down from authority. Only transfiguration into *akuma* condition or other comparably thorough reshaping of the soul can remove them.

ARTIFACTS AND TEXTS

Cranes have access to a variety of texts and magical secrets as the leaders of Kuei-jin society. They do not rely on as many as the Bone Flowers or Thousand Whispers, however. Texts and artifacts are useful crutches, but it is the Crane himself who must seek enlightenment.

ON THE EMPTY THRONE

Gao Hueli's seminal text on leadership through indirect means, *On the Empty Throne*, remains a favorite of Cranes who want or need to practice alternatives to the straightforward exercise of authority. Most copies are written or printed in a plain style and bound simply but sturdily, in keeping with the principle that what the eye sees most readily may not be most important. Beyond the substantial enlightenment to be found by studying it, *On the Empty Throne* has no mystical properties (and hence is not an Artifact).

THE HARP OF TRUE SONGS

Level 3 Artifact

This instrument is the last surviving product of a famous Crane-led monastery that flourished on the Shandong Peninsula during the Ming dynasty. The monks made instruments that supported the philosophical debates that were their primary undertaking, and the results were often disturbing. Most of the instruments were destroyed after the monastery's forcible closure in 1643.

When played by a musician with Performance 3 or greater, every two successes on the player's Charisma + Performance roll (rounded up) temporarily adds one dot to whichever soul virtue is dominant at the moment in each Kuei-jin in the audience. Everyone who hears the harp played becomes more of whatever they are at the moment — which may be not at all what they hope to be or wish they were, or even what they are under other circumstances. These Hun or P'o augmentations last for one scene and can cause soul imbalance as outlined on page 149 of *Kindred of the East*. The performer is unaffected.

THE CROWN OF RISING AUTHORITY

Level 4 Artifact

This crown dates from the late Han dynasty. At that time, the Wisdom Within Hell sect of Resplendent Cranes sought to make Yomi's ends and means serve the mission for cosmic justice; the crown was the last and finest of their handiwork before they died en masse in an assault by angry ancestor spirits. The crown itself is a simple silver band decorated with jade stones carved into the characters for Hell, Death and Beginning. Anyone who wears it takes on a dark and forbidding complexion, and the shadows in the area of the wearer seem to move just beyond the corners of an observer's eye. The wearer's player gets a -2 difficulty bonus on all efforts at intimidation and giving orders.

The wearer may also activate an effect the crown's creators called the Enforced Memory of Hell. The wearer's player spends a point of Willpower and makes a P'o roll, difficulty 6. Regardless of the roll's success, the wearer's form becomes hazy and indeterminate, and every Kuei-jin who peers at it sees the outlines and distinctive features of a demon that tormented him before he drew the Second Breath. If the player's P'o roll was successful, any Kuei-jin looking at the wearer during the rest of the scene suffers a modified form of wave soul: the observer's player makes a single Yang roll, difficulty 6, and must get more successes than the wearer's player did on his P'o roll to avoid flight. Even those who remain act at half their usual Willpower for the rest of the scene while trying to interact with the wearer. (If the initial P'o roll was unsuccessful, the wearer's hellish mien, although disturbing, is not quite accurate enough to provoke wave soul.)

At the end of the scene, the wearer's player must make a shadow soul roll. The P'o finds this artifact's power intoxicating, and if it takes control it invariably renews the effect (forcing the player to spend the required Willpower).