

MAGIC WRITINGS IN MODERN CHINA

BY I. V. GILLIS

RECENTLY while engaged in writing up some bibliographical notes in connection with the cataloguing of the books of "The Gest Chinese Research Library," I noted with astonishment the dates of the prefaces to two works. These prefaces were written under the name of the Taoist immortal Lü-tsu, A. D. 755-805, and yet the prefaces were dated the first year of Chia Ch'ing (1796) in one instance; and the twenty-ninth year of Tao Kuang (1849) in the other. It was not until I noticed the words *fu-chiang* in one of them that I realized that these prefaces were supposed to have been written by the Patriarch Lü" through the medium of the Chinese planchette.

As to Lü-tsu, the Patriarch Lü, he is also known as Lü Yen and Lü Tung-pin. He is one of the Eight Immortals (*pa hsien*) and is revered by scholars as a patron god under the designation Shunyang, "Pure Essence of the Universe." He is said to have sprung from a good family and to have passed the official examinations in the highest rank. One account states that he became the magistrate of Tê-hua, which is the present city of Kiu-kiang in Kiangsi. Later he became a recluse on the Stork Peak (Ho-ling) of the Lu Mountains near the present site of Kuling. It was here that he discoursed on the five grades of genii and the three categories of merit. Here also he met the fire-dragon who gave him a magic sword with which he was able to perform many miracles. One account says that he made a journey to Yo-yang as a seller of oil in the hope of making converts to his doctrine. During the year which he spent on this trip he tried to find someone who would be sufficiently unselfish not to demand more than the amount of oil which the price warranted. Finally he found one old woman who did not ask for more than her due. He was so pleased that he went to her house and threw rice into a well, thus turning the water into wine, the sale of which made the old woman wealthy. His characteristics are the magic sword, *chan yao chien*, which he carries on his back, and a fly-switch of horse-hair which he carries in his hand. (Condensed from *Chinese Reader's Manual* by Mayers, *Chinese Mythology* by Ferguson, and *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* by Werner.)

As a matter of possible interest I reproduce herewith one of the prefaces, the translation of which is as follows:

LÜ-TSU HUI CHI TSUNG HSÜ

Preface to the collected writings of the "Patriarch Lü"

Towards the east I have wandered as far as the Wu-lai mountain; to the west I entered the Ch'ing-ch'êng hills; in the south I went as far as the Chung-lai mountain; and in the northerly direction I have traversed the Chien-ko region. This I have done many times.

As for my writings,—there are not even one or two of my books to be found in the whole of Szechuan; and every time I noticed this fact it irritated me.

In the autumn of the *ting-wei* year I was dwelling (spiritually) at Yüan-t'ung chih in the T'ang-an district in the "Temple of Ten-thousand Longevities," engaged in transmitting through the planchette (instructions for the) reformation of the age; when one day, just as I was about to leave (i.e., his spiritual presence at the planchette), some of those present requested (through the planchette) my permission to publish a complete set of my previous works—divinations, prose, verse, and songs—all classes. Convinced of their sincerity (of purpose) I consented. I instructed them to buy a complete set of my works and said that I would correct the books myself.

In a few months a complete set was collected, and then I descended to the earth again (i.e., "entered into the planchette"; and through that medium communicated the revision) and collated and arranged the books one by one under the title *Hui-chi*. The collection is divided into two parts—a main section and a supplement. Indeed, it was an arduous task.

Now, that the work of cutting the blocks has been completed, I indite these few words (in expression) of my gratification that what I had in mind hitherto (has now come about).

And who were those who made the request? Hu An-hui; P'êng Wên-tou; and Ch'ê Ch'ui-pi.

Dated at the beginning of summer in the *chi-yu* (29th) year of the reign of the Emperor Tao-Kuang (1849) (written by Tung-pin Lü Shun-yang.

In connection with the subject of magic, or spirit writings through the medium of the Chinese planchette, I would draw attention to this very same method in the case of a work that was privately published here in Peking a few years ago by a group en-

呂祖彙集總序

吾東遊巫峽西入青城南至邛崃北過劍閣屢矣見吾經品未流播一二於蜀中每以爲恨丁未之秋吾駐唐安元通市之萬壽宮乩諭化世將去之日有以刊吾歷來經典及一切諭文詩歌各體爲請者吾鑒其誠而許焉命購齊吾書吾自證訂不數月書齊吾復降一一編次名曰彙集分爲正附吾蓋有苦心焉茲梓工已備吾誌數語蓋喜其先得我心也請者誰胡安惠彭文斗車垂璧也

呂祖彙集

總序

道光己酉初夏洞賓呂純陽序



PREFACE TO THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF THE "PATRIARCH LU"

gaged in "working the planchette" in order to obtain the correct rendering and interpretation of certain Chinese classical works through "direct contact" with the original authors themselves.

The particular work I refer to is the well-known classic—*Ta*

Hsüeh, and the title of the "planchette version" is *Ta Hsüeh chêng shih*.

From the catalogue of the "The Gest Chinese Research Library" I would quote my own notations, as follows:

SUBJECT—verification and explanation of the text of the *Ta Hsüeh* by Confucius himself through the medium of the Chinese planchette (*chi-sha*).

REMARKS—this work is supposed to be "divinely inspired" and written by Confucius himself. I personally attended one of the seances and am not prepared to say whether the whole thing is a "fake" or not. One thing is certain, if it is, the greater number of the participants are not parties to it, and are deluded into believing the genuine seriousness of the performance. At any rate, the book is of interest on account of its "mysterious origin," and was given to me by one of those interested in the movement.

Although in no way connected with "magic writings," I include herewith a "date" of possible interest. In a work on the Imperial seals of the Ch'ing Dynasty there is a preface by the Emperor Ch'ien-Lung, dated in the 62d year (of his reign). Now, out of respect to his grandfather, the Emperor K'ang-Hsi, Ch'ien-Lung abdicated the throne to his son at the end of the sixty-year cycle of his reign, in order not to exceed the length of K'ang-Hsi's reign. I noted, therefore, with some surprise the date "Ch'ien-Lung 62d year." Investigation of this point resulted in my learning that after Ch'ien-Lung's abdication and up to his death, many "court" documents were dated with his reign title, and especially all those directly connected with the Imperial family.