

# 8.

## *The Suppressions of the Three Levels Movement*

THE BULK of this work has been concerned with describing San-chieh doctrines and attempting to place them within the broader context of Indian and Chinese Buddhist thought and practice. From this it should be clear that, whatever else may be said about their religious ethos, their doctrine and its institutionalization was far from unusual and can be described as well within the norms of Chinese and even Indian Buddhist doctrine. Given that new religious movements typically expend a great deal of energy explaining their relationship to the norm, this is not surprising. Nonetheless, the San-chieh drew imperial ire and sanctions no less than five times over a period of approximately one hundred and fifty years, leading to the eventual loss of their texts until the beginning of this century. This chapter, then, examines the possible causes for those suppressions in the context of the implementation of their economy of salvation, the Inexhaustible Storehouse of the Hua-tu Temple.

### THE HUA-TU SSU AND THE FOUNDING OF THE INEXHAUSTIBLE STOREHOUSE

The San-chieh practice of the Inexhaustible Storehouse described in chapter 7 was largely tied to a particular temple, the Hua-tu ssu 化度寺 (Temple of Conversion and Salvation) in the cosmopolitan capital of the newly united empire, Ch'ang-an. A review of the history of that temple suggests that many aspects of the movement need to be reevaluated, especially regarding the source of their support and the causes of their suppressions. In terms of the former, in spite of the fact that the San-chieh is generally characterized as a movement oriented towards the masses, a review of the institutional record of the Inexhaustible Storehouse makes it clear that the movement also received considerable support from the highest levels of Chinese society from its founding in the Sui throughout the T'ang dynasty. Once this becomes clear, new interpretations of their suppressions also are suggested. Because of their emphasis on the doctrine of decline the persecutions have

consistently been seen in light of doctrinal issues and their implications, that is, as the rulers' response to the implications of the doctrine of decline or the rulers' bowing to pressure from other schools and movements offended by the exclusivism of the San-chieh universalism. The belief in the lowered capacity of sentient beings is seen as reflecting poorly on the emperor's reign and his or her ability to institute just rule or to proclaim the truth and appoint the guardians of that truth. Or again the decline doctrine is seen to be linked to millennial and apocalyptic movements of mass unrest and therefore a threat to the social fabric. Thus it is assumed that the rulers' political and social concerns were somehow threatened or undermined by the implications of the decline doctrine. While this seems to be a reasonable assumption, I hope to indicate some of the shortcomings of this view and suggest that, in reducing historically complex situations to a single explanation, it invests those situations with a homogeneity not actually evident. Further, although in one sense this approach seeks to point out the ideological side of religious doctrine, because of its reductive nature it does so at the expense of the political nature of *politics*. Although I cannot offer a neat and easy alternative to this explanation, I suggest that fidelity to the complex and often obscure nature of the historical record leaves us no choice and is, if not the happiest of conclusions, the methodologically preferable approach.

#### PREVIOUS EXPLANATIONS

Although the San-chieh enjoyed periods of great popularity, their teachings or practices were proscribed five times over a span of roughly two hundred years: in 600 by Sui Wen Ti, in 694 and 699 by Empress Wu, and in 721 and 725 by Emperor Hsüan-tsung. Because of this their texts were also often (but not always) excluded from the official canon of Buddhist scriptures. Most accounts of these suppressions follow Yabuki Keiki, the pioneering scholar of the San-chieh, and attribute them to the belief in the decline of the dharma and the attendant pessimistic evaluation of living beings' capacity to receive, practice, and realize the Buddha-dharma. From this is drawn the conclusion that in periods when a strong patron of Buddhism is in power the implications of the doctrine of decline cast aspersions on the ruler's ability to exercise divine rule, manifest the virtues of benevolent leadership, bring peace and prosperity to the land, and in general realize harmony during the rulers' reign.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 133–35; Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, 300; Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 164. One problem with this ascription is that it assumes that the

A more sophisticated version of this explanation has recently been offered by Mark Lewis, who argues that it was not the doctrine of decline per se that angered the monarchs but rather the doctrine of the Universal Dharma that the San-chieh based on it that caused the suppressions.<sup>2</sup> As discussed in chapter 6, the doctrine of the Universal Dharma taught that the capacity of sentient beings of the third level to discern the truth was virtually nil; rather than risk the offense of slandering the dharma by presumptuously picking and choosing among the various teachings of the Buddha, we are told to recognize the essential truth value of *all* teachings, heresies as well as orthodox Buddhist doctrine. By eliminating the distinctions in the teachings and severing the link between text and authority (a link implicit in the very term for the Buddhist scriptures),<sup>3</sup> “the Three Stages sect challenged the rulers’ right to declare the supreme truth and to justify their rule through the defense of that truth and the elevation of its presumptive masters.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the implications of both the doctrine of decline and the Universal Dharma are seen as tantamount to treason. To these explanations is sometimes added that the insistence of the San-chieh on possessing the “sole formula for salvation during the decay of the dharma did not meet with the approval of other schools.”<sup>5</sup>

The underlying thesis in these arguments is that it was doctrinal concerns that caused the suppressions of the San-chieh. This point, for the most part, is well taken: the actions against the San-chieh were directed against religious texts and practices, not rebels.<sup>6</sup> Leaders were not executed nor followers exiled; rather, texts and practices were banned. This points to the difference between apocalyptic uses of the Buddhist doctrine of decline seen in many of the Maitreya groups, and the soteriological orientation of the San-chieh. Although messianic and apocalyptic movements usually incorporate the doctrine of decline into their teachings, they also contain an expectation of a

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San-chieh is based on the doctrine of *mo fa* and the three periods of the dharma, an assumption that, as detailed in chapter 4 above, turns out to be unwarranted; I do not think, however, that this changes the basic logic of the argument.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, “The Suppression of the Three Stages Sect,” 207–38. Lewis’s study is a superb exposition of many different aspects of the San-chieh, and though I disagree with his analysis of the suppressions of the San-chieh, I am indebted to his study for clarifying many other points.

<sup>3</sup> *Ching* 經, meaning the “warp” of a fabric, has long been understood as that which gives order, and the duty of the Chinese emperor is to correctly implement the meaning of the “text” or “canon” and thereby manifest order and harmony in their rule; cf. Lewis, “Suppression,” 208–10.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, “Suppression,” 228.

<sup>5</sup> Ch’en, *Buddhism in China*, 300.

<sup>6</sup> Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 135; Lewis, “Suppression,” 230–31.

future utopia occurring within history that is not found in the San-chieh. That is, it was precisely the concern with the degenerate conditions of the times in which they *lived* that motivated the teachings of the Three Levels and Pure Land masters, not future expectations of a reform or regeneration. Thus both Yabuki and Lewis have noted that it was precisely during the reign of vigorous patrons of the official Buddhist church that the San-chieh was attacked,<sup>7</sup> inasmuch as their doctrines reflected poorly on the abilities of a Buddhist ruler. This was especially true for Empress Wu (who briefly assumed the title of Maitreya, the future Buddha who would usher in an age of peace and spiritual realization) because she needed the textual support of the Buddhist canon to validate her claims and thus could not tolerate the doctrine of the Universal Dharma.

In pondering the arguments presented by these scholars, I was struck first of all by their *a priori* nature—that is, these arguments can be put forth without investigating the actual, particular circumstances of the suppressions. In fact, because the suppressions occurred in widely varying contexts, if one wishes to give a single, sweeping reason for the suppressions perhaps this is the only avenue open. But could it possibly be that the historical context played no part in the actions that the state took against the San-chieh?

The second anomaly that occurred to me is similarly related to what I feel to be the reductionist nature of the argument—inasmuch as the San-chieh never, to my knowledge, actually advocated revolt or disrespect of the ruler,<sup>8</sup> if it was solely the doctrine of decline or its implications for doctrinal hermeneutics that were so repugnant, why is it the ruler did not take action against all who propounded this view, particularly the Pure Land teachers? Tao-ch'o (562–645), for example, also believed that he lived in a period in which the traditional practices were completely ineffective; like Hsin-hsing, he argued that “if the teaching is appropriate to the time and capacity, the practice is easy and understanding is easy. If the capacity, teaching, and time are opposed, then practice is difficult and entrance is difficult.”<sup>9</sup> Instead of the universality of the Buddha-dharma Tao-ch'o advocated a *single* practice, the “one gate of the Pure Land,”<sup>10</sup> and the criticism of all who do not follow

<sup>7</sup> Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 133; Lewis, “Suppression,” 228.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as both Yabuki (*Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 133–34) and Lewis (“Suppression,” 56–57) have pointed out, the *San chieh fo fa* contains prescriptions for disciplinary actions that a “ruler who follows the dharma” may take during the decline of the dharma, including taking lives during war, censoring the monastic community, etc. *San chieh fo fa*, 273 ff; as pointed out in chapter 6 it was also the case that Hsin-hsing's communities did not tolerate monks who were lax in their discipline, and expulsion was mandated for numerous offenses, particularly lack of respect.

<sup>9</sup> T #1958, 47.4a.

<sup>10</sup> T #1958, 47.13c.

this “one way” is explicit, as it always is in schemes of doctrinal evaluation and grading (*siddhānta, p’an chiao*). Indeed, inasmuch as the single practice of the *nien fo* is, at least on the surface, more exclusive than the inclusive enfold of Hsin-hsing’s Universal Dharma, it would seem the former might be a more logical target if impugning the emperor’s prerogative to declare truth were the central issue.

Although it might be suggested that in recognizing the continued efficacy of at least one Buddha and one sutra in the dark period of the final dharma the Pure Land patriarchs were less extreme and hence less threatening, we must remember that in point of fact the San-chieh did advocate a particular teaching or dharma suited to the times, that is, the Universal Dharma: (1) their texts are literally filled with quotations from Buddhist sutras (the *San chieh fo fa*, for example, in a short 30 leaves contains over 130 references to thirty-five different canonical sources); (2) their practice included the constant repetition of the “seven roster Buddhānāma” liturgy, which included chanting the names of over one hundred individual buddhas; (3) they also cultivated the *dhūta* ascetic practices and other aspects typical of the monastic regimen; and (4) they were firmly part of a preceptual tradition, emphasizing the precepts for both renunciant and lay followers. All this simply underscores the fact that they *did* teach, they *did* worship the Buddhas, and they *did* cultivate normative Buddhist practices (the founder, Hsin-hsing, is even included within the section of the *Hsü kao seng chuan* reserved for “those who practice meditation”).

Related to this is the fact that, as pointed out in part two, the decline of the teaching was not really concerned with society at large: whether in its Indian origins as a polemic of “orthodoxy” or its Chinese manifestations as a doctrine of existential failure, the criticisms were virtually always directed inward, at the failure of the monastic community to apprehend the true dharma rather than society at large or the ruler.

Further, if the cause of imperial ire is to be sought in the implied criticism inherent in the doctrine of the universal teaching, we should expect that all rulers would always suppress all teachings that do not accord with their own understandings or political needs, for all differing doctrinal systems, which of course claim to be true, implicitly if not explicitly deny the validity or superiority of all other teachings.<sup>11</sup> Yet the shifting winds of imperial patronage did *not* typically include the suppression of those not the current court favorite.

<sup>11</sup> See also Stanley Weinstein’s discussion of the political use of Buddhist teachers and teachings, “Imperial Patronage in T’ang Buddhism,” in *Perspectives on the T’ang* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1973), 265–306.

In order to explain the “on again, off again” aspect of the suppressions (which *must* be accounted for if a *single* cause of the suppressions is accepted) I have mentioned that several scholars claim that it was precisely in the time of strong patrons of Buddhism that the ideological threat of the San-chieh was felt most acutely. This, however, simply does not accord with the facts. To characterize Hsüan-tsung an ardent backer of Buddhism is impossible—after all, he laicized tens of thousands of monks and nuns, imposed sharp curbs on ordination and temple construction, and, as with other T’ang rulers, elevated Taoism above Buddhism. Although he did patronize Buddhist establishments to some degree, it is questionable whether his support should be seen as greater than that which T’ai-tsung (who did *not* suppress the San-chieh) afforded the great translator Hsüan-tsang. It is equally doubtful that a Taoist would take offense at one Buddhist sect claiming doctrinal supremacy but not at others equally sure of their claims to the highest truth.<sup>12</sup> Much the same can be said of Sui Wen Ti and even Empress Wu, both of whose policies of legitimization made conspicuous and highly selective use of rituals, doctrines, and institutions of Confucian and Taoist origin as well as Buddhist. In the end, the Universal Dharma is little more than one of many Buddhist sectarian polemics, and the hermeneutical enterprise of sectarian doctrinal evaluation is a weak basis for the active suppression of those schools that engaged in such evaluations. This simple explanation, giving a single cause for the downfall of the San-chieh, also does not seem to be able to explain the fact of the continued survival and even patronage of the sect at the *highest* levels of T’ang orthodoxy, including support by the imperial family.

Another possible consideration for the suppressions is the highly visible success of the Inexhaustible Storehouse of the San-chieh. It is often commented upon that Buddhist institutions frequently prospered at the economic expense of the state, thus contributing to many of the large-scale suppressions of Buddhism. Once again, however, we can easily find many examples of temples and sects that possessed vast estates and engaged in entrepreneurial activities on a much greater scale than the San-chieh. Indeed, the usual source of monastic economic power, landed estates, is conspicuously absent in the case of the San-chieh movement, again forcing us to ask why the San-chieh alone would be the target of imperial sanctions if economic issues were the heart of the matter.

These and other, similar, inconsistencies have forced me to reevaluate the previous explanations for the suppressions of the San-chieh and conclude that doctrinal issues were probably never more than contributing causes. The direct causes are more likely to be found in simpler, historical events of

<sup>12</sup> For example, the Hua-yen teachings, closely linked to Empress Wu and clearly of political import.

a *realpolitik* nature. Because the obvious doctrinal factors do not seem to give satisfactory answers, let us look at each of the suppressions in context.<sup>13</sup>

### THE SUPPRESSION OF 600

The first suppression of the San-chieh occurred in the year 600 and is recorded in several catalogues of Buddhist scripture:

In the year K'ai-huang 20 (600) an imperial order prohibited the propagation [of these texts]. A warning concerning their ideas was also [given].<sup>14</sup>

This edict was given a mere six years after the death of Hsin-hsing, the founder of the San-chieh, and only eleven years after he had been invited to the capital of Ch'ang-an to reside at the Chen-chi ssu 眞寂寺 (later known as the Hua-tu ssu 化度寺), a temple established by the Sui statesman Kao Chiung 高穎:

In the beginning of K'ai-huang he [Hsin-hsing] was summoned to the capital; Vice Minister Kao Chiung invited him to dwell in the Chen-chi ssu and a sub-temple was established there.<sup>15</sup>

Although the name of the sub-temple is not given, the only sub-temple ever mentioned as being within the precinct of the Hua-tu ssu at this time was that of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, as in this record from the *Ch'ang-an chih* (the section on the I-ning fang 義寧坊) in the northwest part of Ch'ang-an:

#### East of the South Gate: Hua-tu ssu

Originally the Chen-chi ssu, and house of Kao Chiung, the Duke of Ch'i, Vice Minister of the left of the [Department] of State Affairs. In the third year of

<sup>13</sup> In a response to my analysis of the suppressions, and unwilling to give up the doctrinal link to *mo fa*, Masatoshi Nagatomi has suggested that perhaps something is to be found in the *Daśacakra kṣitigarbha-sūtra* (T #410 and #411) and its understanding of the age of decline, especially in its teaching that monks and nuns should not be criticized (oral comments given at *The Historical Legacy of Religion in China*, Harvard 1988). This connection is indeed possible, as this text was very important to Hsin-hsing (he is reputed to have written a number of commentaries on it and it is often quoted in extant San-chieh texts). Without any mention of *mo fa*, the decline theory, or the *Daśacakra* in the suppression edicts or other solid evidence, at this point I still find the doctrinal explanation unsatisfying; see John MacRae, et. al., "Special Report: *The Historical Legacy of Religion in China*," *Journal of Chinese Religion* 17 (1989): 61–116, esp. 68–71.

<sup>14</sup> *Li tai san pao chi*, T #2034, 49.105c; cf. the *Hsü kao seng chuan*, T #2060, 50.560b, and *Ta t'ang nei tien lu*, T #2149, 55.278a.

<sup>15</sup> *Hsü kao seng chuan*, T #2060, 50.560a; cf. the *Ming pao chi*, T #2082, 51.788b.

K'ai-huang [583] Chiung abandoned his house and petitioned to have it established as a temple. In the second year of Wu-te [21 Jan. 619–8 Feb. 620] the name was changed to Hua-tu ssu. In the temple was the sub-temple of the Inexhaustible Storehouse.<sup>16</sup>

And from the *Liang ching hsin chi*:

**East of the South Gate: Hua-tu ssu**

In the third year of K'ai-huang [583], Kao Chiung, Duke of Ch'i and Vice Minister of the [Department of] State Affairs of the Sui, abandoned his house and petitioned to have it established as a temple. At that time there was a sramana Hsin-hsing who came from east of the mountains,<sup>17</sup> and Chiung established a subtemple [for him]. There he composed a *San chieh chi* 三階集 in more than thirty *chüan*, which, for the most part, emphasized perseverance, hard work, and forbearance. He said that there are three grades of people, the wise, the stupid, and those in-between [the ordinary]; because of these teachings it is called the Three Levels. Because of the emphasis on conversion this temple is called the Temple of Conversion and Salvation [Hua-tu ssu].<sup>18</sup>

Kao Chiung, of course, was the famous general, statesman, and financial advisor to Wen-ti, the first emperor of the Sui.<sup>19</sup> Although he eventually fell from favor and was executed during the reign of Yang-ti, during his tenure he was no doubt among the most powerful men in the government, if not the most powerful. In addition to his military accomplishments, Kao Chiung is credited with the reforms in tax registration and civil administration that greatly increased the stability of the new dynasty.<sup>20</sup> Kao Chiung, like many of the Northern aristocrats, appears to have been a devout Buddhist, and he is reported as saying "I am now old. After I retire from the court, I wish only to live a pure life and read the Buddhist scriptures."<sup>21</sup> It is

<sup>16</sup> Sung Min-ch'iu 宋敏求, *Ch'ang-an chih* 長安志 (circa 1080), in Takeo Hiraoka, ed., *Chōan to rakuyō shiryō* (Kyoto: Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo, 1956), *chüan* 10, p. 9; cf. Hsu-sung, *T'ang liang ching ch'eng fang k'ao* (ca. 1810), in Hiraoka, *Chōan to Rakuyō shiryō*, *chüan* 4, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> "East of the Mountains" refers to the area east of the T'ai-hang Mountains, in modern-day Shanxi Province, not to the modern province of Shandong.

<sup>18</sup> *Liang ching hsin chi*, Wei Shu, 8th century (included in *Pai pu ts'ung shu*), *chüan* 3, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> For Kao Chiung's biography, see Wei Cheng et al., *Sui shu* (Beijing: Chung hua shu chi, 1965), *chüan* 41, pp. 1179 ff; see also Denis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge, 1979), vol. 3, part 1, 66–70.

<sup>20</sup> Wei Cheng et al., *Sui shu*, *chüan* 24, p. 681; cf. Étienne Balazs, "Le Traité économique du 'Souei-chou'," *T'oung Pao* 42 (1953), 154; A. Wright, "Formation of Sui Ideology, 581–604," in John K. Fairbanks, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 80.

<sup>21</sup> Wei Cheng et al., *Sui shu*, *chüan* 41, 1182. Kao's wife also donated a house to be used as a Buddhist temple; cf. *Ch'ang-an chih*, *chüan* 10, p. 9 (*Chōan to Rakuyō shiryō*, 120).

unfortunate that more is not known of his relationship to Hsin-hsing and the San-chieh, in particular whether or not the Inexhaustible Storehouse was part of the Hua-tu ssu while he was still alive. Still, as the chief patron of the founder and donor of their main temple, the fortunes of the San-chieh must have been closely tied to those of Kao Chiung, perhaps fatally so.

That is, keeping this relationship in mind, it seems quite plausible that the prohibition of San-chieh texts in 600 is related to the “rustification” of Kao Chiung the year before. Although arguably the most important statesman of the Sui, Kao had frequently incurred the wrath of the empress as she grew older. Besides other grievances, she was particularly angered at his opposition to her plan to depose the crown prince Yang Yung (Kao’s daughter was Yang Yung’s concubine) and elevate Yang Kuang (the second son) as heir to the throne—a feat that was accomplished in 600, the year of the suppression of Hsin-hsing’s writings. The possibility that this was related to Kao’s loss of status is increased in light of the fact that one of the supposed charges against Kao is that he was informed of the impending “demise” of the emperor by Buddhist clerics, perhaps seeming to echo Buddhist prophecies of the demise of the dharma.<sup>22</sup> In any case, Kao Chiung was demoted in 599 and executed in 607.<sup>23</sup> While all of this is simply circumstantial, given the charges against Kao in 599 and the intrigue accompanying the elevation of Yang Kuang to crown prince in 600, it is not hard to imagine that the edict proscribing San-chieh literature was also intended to curb any growing base of support that their most important patron might look to. This would be particularly significant if the Inexhaustible Storehouse existed at Kao Chiung’s home/temple during this period, so let us look briefly at the origins of that institution.

#### HSIN-HSING AND THE FOUNDING OF THE INEXHAUSTIBLE STOREHOUSE

There are only two sources that actually mention the *origins* of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, the *Liang ching hsin chi*, early eighth century, and the *T’ai p’ing kuang chi*, a work of the late tenth century. From the *Liang ching hsin chi*:

Within the [Hua-tu] Temple there was a subtemple [called] the Inexhaustible Storehouse [Wu chin tsang yüan 無盡藏院] that was founded by Hsin-hsing.

<sup>22</sup> *Sui shu, chüan* 41, 1183.

<sup>23</sup> *Sui shu, chüan* 41, 1184; A. Wright, *The Sui Dynasty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 73–75, 166. Another monk whose practices were similar to Hsin-hsing’s and who was also invited to the capital by Kao Chiung was Tao-cheng 道正; his practices were also censured (T #2060, 50.559a).

After [its foundation], the donations made by the people of the capital grew greater and greater. After the Chen-kuan period [23 Jan. 627–6 Feb. 650] the money, silks, and golden embroideries that had been collected there were beyond measure. Well-known monks were always appointed to watch over this treasury. The goods in the Storehouse were always used to repair monasteries<sup>24</sup> without causing the slightest diminution of funds. People came from as far away as Yen 燕 [Sichuan], Liang 涼 [Gansu], Shu 蜀 [Sichuan], and Chao 趙 [Hebei] to borrow funds. The amount loaned out each day was difficult to calculate. Some who borrowed money did so without any kind of written documents—when the time period was up they would simply repay the loan.<sup>25</sup>

A slightly different account is given in the *T'ai p'ing kuang chi*:

During the period of Wu-te [18 May 618–1 Jan. 627] there was a sramana named Hsin-i 信義 who practiced meditation according to the teachings of the Three Levels. In the Hua-tu Temple he established the Inexhaustible Storehouse.<sup>26</sup> After the Chen-kuan era the money, silks, gold, and jewels which had been given to this Storehouse were beyond calculation. Monks were always appointed to watch over this treasure, which was divided into three parts: one part was offered for the repair and expansion of temples throughout the land; one part was used to give to all of the suffering and downcast of the Field of Compassion; and one part was used for un-obstructed offerings.

Men and women of good society would come in repentance of their offenses and vie with one another in their donations so that order could not be maintained. They would abandon entire carts of money and silks, and after having donated their valuables and silks they would leave without even making their names known.<sup>27</sup>

Reviewing these two entries, we find that they both agree that the Inexhaustible Storehouse was founded at the Hua-tu ssu, and that after the Chen-kuan period it flourished. However, they disagree on the founder of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, with the *Liang ching hsin chi* giving Hsin-hsing and the *T'ai p'ing kuang chi* listing a Hsin-i as the founder.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the Kamakura edition used in *Chōan to Rakuyō shiryō* (p. 192), as well as the edition used by Yabuki (*Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 115) and Gernet (*Buddhism in Chinese Society*, 210); this passage would be better rendered as “The goods offered [to the Inexhaustible Storehouse] were used for the repair of the monasteries throughout the empire. People came from as far away as Yen, Liang, Shu, and Chao to take the funds offered to the storehouse for the repair of monasteries throughout the land.”

<sup>25</sup> *Liang ching hsin chi*, *chūan* 3, 14.

<sup>26</sup> According to the edition that I used, the original gives the character *wu shu tsang* 無書藏; Yabuki also emended this to *wu chin tsang* 無盡藏; cf. Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Li Fang, *T'ai p'ing kuang chi*, ca. 977–83 (Tainan: P'ing p'ing ch'u pan she, 1974), *chūan* 493, p. 4947.

Inasmuch as Hsin-hsing, the founder of the San-chieh movement, died at the Hua-tu ssu in 594, well before the Wu-te period (618–620) mentioned in the *T'ai p'ing kuang chi*, the possibility that Hsin-i is a simple mistake for Hsin-hsing must be ruled out. Although none of the other biographies, memorial steles, catalog records, or historical sources mention Hsin-hsing as the founder of the institution of the Inexhaustible Storehouse at the Hua-tu ssu, as we saw in Chapter One there are other records that show Hsin-hsing to be a likely founder of the sixteen practices of inexhaustible giving and the *idea* of the Inexhaustible Storehouse if not the actual institution founded at the Hua-tu ssu. For example, a *Ta sheng wu chin tsang fa* (*The Teaching on the Inexhaustible Storehouse of the Mahayana*, likely related to the texts translated in Appendices B and C below) in one *chüan*, attributed to Hsin-hsing, is mentioned in several catalogs.<sup>28</sup> In addition, several of the texts recovered from Tun-huang give further weight to the consideration of Hsin-hsing as the founder. The first of these is an epistolary testimonial that Yabuki has titled the *Hsin-hsing i wen*, which Yabuki believes written by Hsin-hsing himself or at least preserves his words accurately. According to this text, in 583 Hsin-hsing, at that time forty-four years old and resident in the Kuang-yen ssu in Hsiang-chou, abandoned “life and possessions” to entrust himself to the “sixteen types of eternal, joyous, self, and pure activities,” i.e., the sixteen practices of the Inexhaustible Storehouse described in chapter 7.<sup>29</sup>

Another text, the *Abridged Explanation of the Inexhaustible Storehouse*, gives almost the same list of sixteen inexhaustible acts of *dāna*.<sup>30</sup> Yet another fundamental San-chieh text attributed to Hsin-hsing, the *San chieh fo fa*, also discusses the superior merits to be gained from the repair of temples as opposed to the construction of new temples, one aspect of the Inexhaustible Storehouse that is mentioned in the *Liang ching hsin chi*.<sup>31</sup> There is thus a fair amount of evidence that, if not directly linking Hsin-hsing to the foundation of the Inexhaustible Storehouse at the Hua-tu ssu, certainly makes it plausible that he would actualize his theories in such an institution.

The monk Hsin-i, on the other hand, is only mentioned in texts that draw on the *T'ai p'ing kuang chi* for their information and are of an even later

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the *Ta chou k'an ting chung ching mu lu*, T #2153, 55.475a; *K'ai yüan shih chiao lu*, T #2154, 55.678c; *Chen yüan hsin ting shih chiao mu lu* 貞元新定釋教目錄 (Ryūkoku MS), included in Yabuki Keiki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, appendix, 228; *Chen yüan hsin ting shih chiao mu lu* (Nanatsu-dera MS), included in Makita Tairyō and Ochiai Toshinori, *Nanatsu-dera koitsu kyōten kenkyū sōsho* (Tokyo: Daitō Shuppansha, 1998), vol. 6: 111–12; and the *Jen chi lu tu mu*, included in Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, appendix, 221.

<sup>29</sup> *Hsin-hsing i wen*, 3–4. See also Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 10–17, 190.

<sup>30</sup> *Abridged Explanation of the Inexhaustible Storehouse*, 155–59.

<sup>31</sup> *San chieh fo fa*, appendix, 303.

composition, thus providing little help in answering this question.<sup>32</sup> If it were not for the fact that in addition to a different name this text also gives a different date (the Wu-te era, 618–627) we could perhaps take Hsin-i as a simple scribal error for Hsin-hsing. The *T'ai p'ing kuang chi* is itself based on the *Pien i chih* 辨疑志<sup>33</sup> and the *Liang ching hsin chi*,<sup>34</sup> so it would not be stretching things too far to posit that although Li-fang saw the entry in the *Liang ching hsin chi* that gives Hsin-hsing, he purposely changed it to Hsin-i, on the basis of the *Pien i chih*. It is strange, though, that a Hsin-i is not mentioned in either the historical records or the biographies of monks, which one would expect if he were that important a follower of Hsin-hsing.<sup>35</sup>

In any case, the records of the flourishing Inexhaustible Storehouse make it clear that the sanctions of 600 had little effect. First of all, we should remember that both the *Li tai san pao chi* and the *Ta T'ang nei tien lu* recorded Hsin-hsing's works in the canonical catalog. Secondly, as we have seen, it was popular with people from across the empire—indeed, the *Ta T'ang nei tien lu* record of the suppression adds that, “Although [the circulation of these texts was suppressed in 600] the followers of this tradition extend to the seas and heights of the land.”<sup>36</sup> Chih-sheng's record of this in the *K'ai yüan lu* likewise notes that, “although their practices were prohibited, the followers had spread further and further; practicing together they helped each other and grew ever greater in number.” In an interlinear note Chih-sheng adds an interpretation from his own standpoint of orthodoxy:

<sup>32</sup> The first of these is the *Chin shih ts'ui pien*, which, in a record of a memorial stele for the San-chieh follower Tao-an (607–668), mentions that as Tao-an became a monk and studied the *San chieh chi lu* at a young age, he would have been of the same period as the monk Hsin-i, who was recorded in the *T'ai p'ing kuang chi* as having studied the San-chieh teachings during the Chen-kuan period (Wang-ch'ang, *Chin shih ts'ui pien*, [1805, included in the *Shih k'e shih liao*, Taipei: I wen shu kuan, 1966], *chüan* 57, 19.) The record goes on, however, to say that according to the *Shan-hsi t'ung chih* Hsin-hsing was a monk of the T'ang, and then wonders whether they were of the same period or even one and the same person (*ibid.*, 20). Lo Chen-yü also noted the records of the *Chin shih ts'ui pien* and the *Shan-hsi t'ung chih*, but states that as Hsin-hsing was a monk of the Sui period he could not be the same as Hsin-i; cf. Lo Chen-yü 羅振玉, *Hsueh t'ang chin shih wen tzu pa wei* 雲堂金石文字跋尾, 11 (unpublished mss, Otani University Library). In another record, that of Fa-tsang's stele, Lo Chen-yü mentions Hsin-i as the founder of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, but again bases his entry on the *T'ai p'ing kuang chi* and so does not add anything to the discussion (Lo Chen-yü, *Hsueh t'ang*, 11).

<sup>33</sup> *T'ai p'ing kuang chi*, 4048.

<sup>34</sup> The *T'ai p'ing kuang chi* has extensively quoted the *Liang ching hsin chi* elsewhere, as, for example, in *chüan* 250.

<sup>35</sup> The *San kuo i shih* 三國遺事, a Korean work, does mention a Hsin-i, but it seems unlikely that this corresponds to the Hsin-i of the Hua-tu ssu; T #2039, 49.998c and T #2039, 49.1000a.

<sup>36</sup> T #2149, 55.278a.

“Hsin-hsing was the leader of the teaching (*chiao chu* 教主); his particular practices were heterodox (*pieh hsing i fa* 別行異法) and no different from the false Three Jewels begun by Devadatta (T’ien-shu 天授).” Nonetheless, the power and popularity of those false teachings is again attested, as he goes on: “Although Wen [Ti, Emperor] of the Sui, banned their propagation he was unable to eliminate their roots.”<sup>37</sup> And so Hsin-hsing’s teaching and the Inexhaustible Storehouse that he founded continued to thrive.

#### THE SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF THE INEXHAUSTIBLE STOREHOUSE

Thus, although we cannot say with certainty who actually founded the Inexhaustible Storehouse or when it began, we do know that it was started at the Hua-tu ssu as a function of the San-chieh; we also know that in spite of the proscription of 600 it was a flourishing institution from at least the beginnings of the T’ang dynasty through the latter half of the seventh century (that is, “after the Chen-kuan period,” 627–650). So, too, the records of the *Liang ching hsün chi* and the *T’ai p’ing kuang chi* tell us that the Inexhaustible Storehouse was popular across the empire and not only with the poor who took advantage of its interest-free loans—the fact that “men and women of good society” also flocked to the temple in order to *donate* goods indicates the appeal of the movement among the elite as well as the power of its model of communal charity. Although Chinese temples were not yet organized along strictly sectarian lines, it is also certain that for some time after Hsin-hsing’s death the Hua-tu ssu continued as a center of San-chieh activity. Seng-yung (543–631), for example, is described by Tao-hsüan as arriving in Ch’ang-an together with Hsin-hsing in 589, and taking charge of more than 300 disciples after Hsin-hsing’s death in 594. Seng-yung himself died at the Hua-tu ssu in 631.<sup>38</sup> Other San-chieh followers associated with the Hua-tu ssu during the seventh century include Hui-ju 慧如 (d. 618),<sup>39</sup> Ching-ming

<sup>37</sup> T #2154, 55.679a; for more on Chih-sheng’s note see also Antonino Forte, “La secte des trois stades et l’hérésie de Devadatta,” *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* 74 (1985): 469–76.

<sup>38</sup> T #2060, 50.584a. This record actually states that Seng-yung died at the Hua-tu ssu yüan, or the “Hua-tu ssu Subtemple.” Seng-yung’s memorial, the *Hua-tu ssu ku Seng-yung ch’an shih t’a ming*, on which the *Hsü kao seng chuan* is based, simply gives the Hua-tu ssu (cf. Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 41).

<sup>39</sup> Hui-ju’s biography is included in the *Ming pao chi* (T #2082, 51.788c), where it says that he died in the beginning of the Wu-te era (22 Dec. 618–22 Jan. 627) at the Chen-chi ssu, that is, the Hua-tu ssu.

淨名 (d. 620),<sup>40</sup> P'ei Hsüan-cheng 裴玄證 (d. ca. 634),<sup>41</sup> and Seng-hai 僧海 (599–654).<sup>42</sup>

Another indicator of continued San-chieh presence at the Hua-tu ssu is found in the *Abridged Explanation of the Inexhaustible Storehouse*, composed sometime after the death of Hsin-hsing, which, as noted in Chapter Seven, states that the practice of *dāna*, one of the most important San-chieh activities, was more efficaciously carried out at the Hua-tu ssu than in provincial centers.<sup>43</sup>

Probably the best-known reference to a monk of the Inexhaustible Storehouse in the Hua-tu ssu is the story of embezzler P'ei Hsüan-chih 裴玄智:

During the Chen-kuan period [627–649] there was a P'ei Hsüan-chih who was diligent in his cultivation of the precepts.<sup>44</sup> He entered the temple [Hua-tu ssu] and cleaned for more than ten years; the community in the temple [saw] that his practice was without fault and made him the guardian of the [Inexhaustible] Storehouse. Afterwards he secretly began to steal gold, but the monks were not aware of it and did not know how much was taken.<sup>45</sup> When the monks sent him [on a mission] from which he did not return, they were surprised and suspicious, so they looked in his sleeping room [and found] a verse:

Putting sheep before the jaws of a wolf,  
Placing a bone in front of a dog;  
I am not enlightened [lit. “an arhat”],  
How could I avoid stealing?

No more was ever known of him.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Little is known of Ching-ming; other than a mention in the *Ku ta Hsin-hsing ch'an shih ming t'a pei* as one of Hsin-hsing's “spiritual friends” (Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 9), the only other mention of him is a record of a stele, the *T'ang Hua tu ssu Ching ming ch'an shih Reliquary Inscription*, compiled by P'ei Hsüan-cheng in the third year of Wu-te (9 Feb. 620–27 Feb. 621); *Pao k'e ts'ung pien* (Sung dynasty, included in *Shih k'e shih liao* [Yen Keng-wang, ed.], *chüan* 7, p. 19; cf. Hubbard, “Chinese Reliquary Inscriptions,” 255.

<sup>41</sup> According to Tao-hsüan (T #2060, 50.560a–b), P'ei Hsüan-cheng was originally a monk at the Hua-tu ssu, although he later wore layman's dress.

<sup>42</sup> *Hua-tu ssu Seng-hai ch'an shih fen chi* 化度寺僧海禪師墳記, recorded in the *Yung chou chin shih chi* 雍州金石記, included in the *Hsi yin hsüan ts'ung shu* 惜陰軒叢書, in the collection *Pai pu ts'ung shu* (Taipei: I wen yin shu kuan: 1965–1971), box 58, nos. 20–21, *chüan* 2, p. 9; Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 54–55; Hubbard, “Chinese Reliquary Inscriptions,” 268.

<sup>43</sup> Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 117 and 507.

<sup>44</sup> Perhaps mimicking the Vinaya requirement that a “pure” monk oversee the storehouse; see Schopen, “Doing Business,” 540–41.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the *Liang ching hsin chi*, *chüan* 3, p. 14, which would read “but the accumulation was so great [in the Inexhaustible Storehouse] that the monks did not realize [that he was stealing].”

<sup>46</sup> *T'ai p'ing kuang chi*, 4047–4048; the story is also in the *Liang ching hsin chi* (*chüan* 3, 14), although somewhat less complete; this story reminds me of the lament in the *Kauśāmbī*

P'ei Hsüan-chih truly proved his worth as a man of the third level! In any case, we can thus safely assume that the Inexhaustible Storehouse of the San-chieh flourished at the Hua-tu, probably through the entire seventh century. Still, because Chinese temples were not strictly sectarian, there are other monks mentioned in connection with the Hua-tu ssu who in some cases seem to have no connection with the San-chieh and in other cases are remembered as followers of other traditions.<sup>47</sup> Fa-ch'ih 法持 and Chih-lien 智廉, for example, are both mentioned as dwelling at the Hua-tu ssu and yet both cultivated practices related to Amida.<sup>48</sup> Two of Kao Chiung's great grandchildren, Li-ching 立敬 and Li-lan 立覽, are also said to have studied the *Lotus* and the *Diamond* sutras at the Hua-tu ssu under a monk named Ming-tsang 明藏 during the Chen-kuan period (627–650).<sup>49</sup> Another monk, Fa-chieh 法界, is mentioned in a dated (676) colophon to a Tun-huang manuscript of the *Lotus Sutra* as the first, second, and third “checker” of the text, yet there is no evidence that he was related to the San-chieh.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the Hua-tu ssu, local branches of the Inexhaustible Storehouse appear to have been organized in the provinces throughout China,<sup>51</sup> although the Hua-tu ssu in the capital was clearly the cultic and institutional focus.

#### EMPRESS WU AND THE INEXHAUSTIBLE STOREHOUSE

The reign of Empress Wu is interesting in the history of the Inexhaustible Storehouse because there is evidence of her support of the Storehouse as well as suppression of San-chieh practices and literature. Although this might be interpreted as indicating the institutional independence of the Inexhaustible Storehouse and the San-chieh, the fact that a San-chieh monk was appointed controller of the Storehouse tells us that such

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prophecy noted above (chapter 6), “If even I [the head of the sangha] cannot keep the precepts, how can anybody else?”

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 129 ff. for a list of various monks recorded as having been at the Hua-tu ssu at one time or another.

<sup>48</sup> From the *Fo tsu t'ung chi*, T #2035, 49.279a and T #2035, 49.289c, respectively; cf. the *Wang sheng chi*, T #2072, 51.134c and T #2072, 51.135c, respectively.

<sup>49</sup> T #2067, 51.42a–b. Cf. Donald E. Gjertson, *Miraculous Retribution*, 89, n. 27.

<sup>50</sup> Stein No. 1456, Giles No. 2818 (Giles, 77). Although Yabuki had doubts about whether the year given in the colophon, *shang yuan* 3, referred to 676 or 762 (*Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 663), the “dyer,” Hsieh-chi, is mentioned in several other MS of the same sutra (e.g., Giles nos. 2298, 2411, 2569, 2631, 2449, 2705, etc.), of which at least two (2449 and 2705) give dates in the Hsien-heng era (670–673).

<sup>51</sup> Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, 212.

was not the case (see below). Let me begin, then, with the records of the Empress's support of the Inexhaustible Storehouse:

The Empress Wu moved the Storehouse to the Fu-hsien ssu 福先寺 in the Eastern Capital (Loyang). In the end, [however,] the products of the empire did not again accumulate [at this new location] and it was moved back to the original location.<sup>52</sup>

The Fu-hsien ssu was originally a private temple founded by Empress Wu at her mother's residence and at her own expense, prompting Forte to call it a "Buddhist ancestral temple' of the Wu family."<sup>53</sup> Originally called the T'ai-yüan ssu 太原寺, the name was changed to Fu-hsien ssu in the second year of T'ien-shou (6 December 690–25 November 691), suggesting that it was sometime after early 691 that she moved the Inexhaustible Storehouse. This is borne out by a memorial for the San-chieh monk Fa-tsang 法藏 of the Ching-yü ssu 淨域寺, who is said to have been appointed "controller" (檢校) of the Inexhaustible Storehouse at the Fu-hsien ssu in the 1st year of Ju-i (22 April–22 Oct. 692); he was later appointed controller of the Inexhaustible Storehouse at the Hua-tu ssu during the Ch'ang-an period (15 Nov. 701–29 Jan. 705).<sup>54</sup> Fa-tsang appears to have been a relatively important monk of this period, for in addition to his appointments as controller of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, his memorial tells us that he was also declared "Bhadanta" (*Ta te* 大德) of the Chien-fu ssu during the same period.<sup>55</sup> Although the tributes written in a memorial stele must always be received with a grain of salt, the mention of Fa-tsang's being "superior in the [ascetic practice] of the *dhūta*," "not eating food that was not [received] from begging," and the like bespeak of a virtuous monk engaged in traditional San-chieh practices.<sup>56</sup> This in turn reinforces Forte's assertion that "even in the case of the foundation of the ... Fu-hsien ssu, which was called

<sup>52</sup> *Liang ching hsin chi*, chüan 3, 14 (*Chōan to Rakuyō Shiryō*, 192); cf. Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, 367 n. 77. Most of the information concerning the Fu-hsien ssu may be found in Antonino Forte, "Il <<Monastero Dei Grandi Chou>> A Lo-yang," *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 33 (1973), 425 ff. Although this record in the *Liang ching hsin chi* gives one the impression that the Storehouse was actually moved to the Fu-hsien ssu and subsequently returned to the Hua-tu ssu, another record indicates that they both existed at the same time, inasmuch as it prohibits giving to the Inexhaustible Storehouse of both the Hua-tu ssu and the Fu-hsien ssu (see below); see also Antonino Forte, "Daiji" in *Hōbōgirin* 6 (1983), 695.

<sup>53</sup> Antonino Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1976), 97.

<sup>54</sup> *Ching-yü ssu ku ta te Fa-tsang ch'an shih t'a ming* 淨域寺故大德法藏禪師塔銘, included in the *Chin shih ts'ui pien*, chüan 71, 2; the text is also in Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 69–71.

<sup>55</sup> *Ching-yü ssu ku ta te Fa-tsang ch'an shih t'a ming*, in the *Chin shih ts'ui pien*, chüan 71, 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

T'ai-yüan originally, founded in 675 by Wu Chao in honor of her mother, who had died five years earlier, Wu Chao took care to choose monks for her monastery from amongst the most eminent of the time.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the most elevated personage of the realm chose, according to the standards of the time, an appropriately eminent *and* orthodox monk as preceptor for her “family ancestral temple.” The Inexhaustible Storehouse at the Fu-hsien ssu apparently continued for some time, as an edict of 721 prohibits giving to both the Storehouse at the Hua-tu ssu as well as the Storehouse at the Fu-hsien ssu (see below, 211–12).

At the same time, however, the *Ta chou k'an ting chung ching mu lu*, compiled in 695 at imperial request, is the first catalog to include the San-chieh materials in the section of apocryphal texts:

A benevolent imperial edict was received in the first year of Cheng-sheng (23 Nov. 694–21 Oct. 695); it ordered that the various apocryphal writings (*wei ching* 偽經) and sundry books of fortunetelling, etc., be established and sent to the Department of National Sacrifices for keeping. The doctrines in the above items [i.e., the San-chieh texts] are opposed to the Buddha's intent, and their unique doctrines (*pieh kou* 別構)<sup>58</sup> constitute a heresy (*i tuan* 異端). Thus they are within the boundary of apocrypha and sundry books of magic.<sup>59</sup>

The catalog goes on to record another edict aimed at restricting San-chieh practices:

Further, based on an imperial edict of the second year of Sheng-li (8 Dec. 698–26 Nov. 699) the followers of the Three Stages are only permitted to beg

<sup>57</sup> Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 113. In this section of his work Forte examined the background of the various monks involved in the *Commentary on the Meaning of the Prophecy about Shen-huang in the Ta yun ching* (previously thought to be an apocryphal version of the *Ta yun ching*) in order to show that they represented the orthodoxy of the time. One of the thrusts of his study is to show that the Buddhism of Empress Wu's time cannot be considered the heretical impulses of a woman infatuated with a “false monk,” as has been the traditional interpretation. Although Forte has suggested (p. 166) that the suppression of the San-chieh during Wu's reign indicates her concern with orthodoxy (the San-chieh being heretical), it seems to me that her patronage of the Inexhaustible Storehouse and Fa-tsang indicate that the San-chieh was considered part of the orthodoxy and, as with the other suppressions, we must look elsewhere for the cause of her two suppressions.

<sup>58</sup> An interesting play on Hsin-hsing's claim to teach not “distinct teachings” (*pieh fa*) but the Universal Dharma (see chapters 4 and 6).

<sup>59</sup> T #2153, 55.475a. This and the following are adapted from the translations in Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 166–67; see also Antonino Forte, “Some Considerations on the Historical Value of the Great Zhou Catalogue” in *Chūgoku-Nihon kyōtenshō mokuroku*, vol. 6 of the *Nanatsu-dera koitsu kyōten kenkyū sōsho* (Tokyo: Daito Shuppansha, 1998), 22–24; Tokuno, “The Evaluation of Indigenous Scriptures in Chinese Buddhist Bibliographical Catalogues,” in Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, 51–52.

for food, fast, go without grains, hold the precepts, and practice seated meditation. All other practices are opposed to the dharma [or, “against the law, *wei fa* 違法”].<sup>60</sup> Fortunately, we have received clear edicts which rectify the mistakes of the past. It is inadmissible that, on the basis of the old compilations, [the works of the San-chieh] would be in the catalog. Thus it is agreed to exclude them [from the catalog of the canon] as a message for the future.<sup>61</sup>

It is hard to know exactly what to make of these edicts. To begin with, the first edict makes it appear that the San-chieh texts were not the primary target but were caught in a wider sweep. Secondly, we should note that the San-chieh followers per se were not outlawed or jailed; indeed, they were permitted to continue basic San-chieh practices such as the *dhūta* and seated meditation. Secondly, both edicts were issued between the dates on which Fa-tsang was appointed controller of the Inexhaustible Storehouse at Loyang (692) and Ch’ang-an (701–705), indicating that the central San-chieh institution and source of popular support, the Inexhaustible Storehouse, continued uninterrupted and was even patronized by Wu into the eighth century. Again, although one might think that this points to the functional independence of the Inexhaustible Storehouse and the San-chieh movement, Fa-tsang’s memorial stele leaves no question that he was a follower of Hsinhsing and the tenets of the San-chieh.<sup>62</sup> Further, Forte noted a reference to a “subtemple of the Three Levels” (San-chieh yüan 三階院) in the Fu-hsien ssu,<sup>63</sup> thus indicating that the practice of the Inexhaustible Storehouse must have been associated with the San-chieh at the Fu-hsien ssu just as it was at the Hua-tu ssu.<sup>64</sup> This vacillation in Wu’s attitude is accordingly difficult to

<sup>60</sup> Following the Sung, Yuan, and Ming editions. One would like to know specifically what the “other practices” are that are here deemed illegal; Forte has also advanced the thesis that the Sheng-li proscription targeted Christianity as well as the Three Levels movement (“Some considerations,” 30–34).

<sup>61</sup> T #2153, 55.475a. This rendering follows the Sung, Yuan, and Ming editions. The *Taishō* edition reads “It is inadmissible that false compilations exist in the catalog.” As Forte has rightly pointed out (*Political Propaganda*, 166–67), this does not change the basic meaning and “the mistakes of the past” and “old compilations” are clearly references to the inclusion of the San-chieh works in the official canons of the *Li tai san pao chi* and the *Ta t’ang nei tien lu*.

<sup>62</sup> Apparently Empress Wu did support the practice of the Inexhaustible Storehouse generally, as she is recorded as having ordered “Take the property accumulated by my father and mother, use the old appanages of the two capitals, all that does not serve the construction of monasteries (*chao t’i chih yü* [招提之宇], dwellings of the sangha of the Four directions) and let all this be paid into the Inexhaustible Treasury (Treasures?),” T #2127, 54.304b, cited in Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, 212.

<sup>63</sup> *Li tai ming hua chi, chüan* 3, 19a (included in the *Pai pu ts’ung shu*, box 46), noted in Forte, “Il Monastero,” 426–27.

<sup>64</sup> This is also indicated by the edict ordering the abolition of the two storehouses (from the *Ts’e fu yüan kuei*, see below, 212), which notes that the donations that both temples received

explain, and may perhaps be due to a natural antagonism between the doctrines of the San-chieh that emphasized the utter decay of spiritual capacity and the apocalyptic ideology surrounding the empress which taught on the one hand that the world was still in the period of the semblance dharma (*hsiang-fa*) and on the other hand that Empress Wu was a great bodhisattva, future Buddha, and world savior.<sup>65</sup> Still, one yearns for something more concrete than theological differences of opinion about a date. It seems to me, for example, that even more ideologically charged might have been her failure to duplicate the charisma of the San-chieh Inexhaustible Storehouse within her family temple in Loyang, for if the ruler's right to declare abstract truth was important, even more so was the prerogative to provide for the well-being of the subjects, including providing charitable relief. Hence it is possible that her failure to duplicate the success and popularity enjoyed by the Three Levels even in her "family temple" might have seemed an affront to her authority. On the other hand, given that the edict specifically prohibits all San-chieh practices other than begging, fasting, abstaining from grains, holding the precepts, and meditation yet the most conspicuous practice of the Inexhaustible Storehouse continued, it might also be that the edicts were simply for show, satisfying some faction or political expediency, and were never actually enforced.

When we turn to the historical record, however, we find evidence that at least one important follower of the San-chieh, Li Chen 李貞, was actively opposed to the reign of Empress Wu. Li Chen was a rather insignificant son of T'ai-tsung and far overshadowed in history by his brother Kao-tsung. In 643 he was appointed governor of Hsiang-chou, a post he held until 653, and after a period as military governor of An-chou he again served as governor of Hsiang-chou from 670 to 674.<sup>66</sup> One can easily surmise that it was here, in Hsin-hsing's homeland, that Li Chen encountered the teachings of the San-chieh, for he is said to have composed at least two and possibly three memorial steles for Hsin-hsing.<sup>67</sup> Apparently dissatisfied with the doings of Empress

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on the anniversary of Hsin-hsing's death were particularly intense; thus, although the new Inexhaustible Storehouse did not flourish, it would seem that there was at least an attempt to transfer or mimic the Three Levels cultus of the founder at the Fu-hsien ssu. Perhaps the reason that it did not work out is to be found in the doctrine that specified that the Inexhaustible Storehouse was concretely manifested as the perfections of the "eternal, joyous, self and pure" solely at the Hua-tu ssu (see chapter 7, 174–75).

<sup>65</sup> Forte, *Political Propaganda*, 155–58.

<sup>66</sup> Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 26–27, 32, 69; see also Antonino Forte, "The Relativity of the Concept of Orthodoxy in Chinese Buddhism: Chih-sheng's Indictment of Shih-li and the Proscription of the *Dharma Mirror Sūtra*," in Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, 240 and 247, note 4.

<sup>67</sup> Hubbard, "Chinese Reliquary Inscriptions," 263–65.

Wu, Li raised the banner of revolt in 688 and died the same year. Hsüeh Chi (649–713), the man responsible for the calligraphy on one of the steles that Li composed for Hsin-hsing, was quite well known, and, because of his involvement in the forging of the *Fo shuo shih so fan che yü ch'ieh fa ching ching*, may tentatively be considered a follower or at least a San-chieh sympathizer.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, Hsüeh Chi was forced to commit suicide following the failure of a plot to poison Hsüan-tsung in 713 (the date ascribed by one text to Hsüan-tsung's first proscription of the Inexhaustible Storehouse; see below).<sup>69</sup> Thus, although the evidence is again merely circumstantial, the fact that so important a rebel was a follower of Hsin-hsing perhaps played a part in the suppressions.

Empress Wu's actions toward the San-chieh may have also been influenced by shifting attitudes towards Buddhism in general, especially after the disastrous fire that destroyed her treasured Ming-t'ang in 694. Indeed, regardless of Wu's special treatment of the Buddhist church, it is often commented upon that she also made judicious use of the symbols of all three major traditions, and especially in the face of the anti-Buddhist rhetoric and intense political intrigue following the fire she turned towards Confucian titles, names, and rites as a way of mollifying her enemies.<sup>70</sup> So the Three Levels was not the only Buddhist group that, previously favored, came to be officially proscribed after the fire. Perhaps, then, her vacillating stance towards the Three Levels movement reflects her need to respond to the general attacks on Buddhism that escalated after the burning of the Ming-t'ang complex. The point is that all of these scenarios refer to specific and localized causes for the proscriptions rather than transhistorical, doctrinal quarrels.

#### NO-BARRIER FESTIVALS

One more sign of the continued favor that the Hua-tu ssu enjoyed is their hosting of imperially sponsored "no-barrier festivals." Given that the Hua-tu ssu was the locus of the San-chieh practice of *dāna* embodied in the institution of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, it is not surprising that we find records of *wu che ta hui* 無遮大會, "no-barrier festivals," held there in the

<sup>68</sup> On the San-chieh involvement in the composition of this text see Forte, "Relativity," 239–49.

<sup>69</sup> Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, 345.

<sup>70</sup> For a detailed study of Wu's Ming-t'ang see Antonino Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias in the History of the Astronomical Clock* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente and Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988), especially chapter 4.

early eighth century.<sup>71</sup> Although these festivals, usually held by imperial command, have taken on many different forms over the years, they were basically an act of universal *dāna* on the part of a munificent benefactor and were thus a good match for the San-chieh doctrine of inexhaustible giving.

Several of the best-known examples of this kind of festival are from India. Aśoka, for example, at one time convened a great assembly of monks and was forced into a “bidding” competition with his son, who repeatedly countered Aśoka’s donation with largess of his own. In the end Aśoka made an offering of his entire kingdom, only to ransom it back with an additional 400,000 pieces of gold.<sup>72</sup> The stories of equally thoroughgoing charity recounted by the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang are also well known.<sup>73</sup>

In China the stories of Wu Liang Ti’s giving are famous and fairly numerous. Wu frequently convened assemblies in which all could participate (as many as 50,000 people reportedly participated in these assemblies, hence “no-barrier festivals”); one part of the festival was the emperor’s donation of his own person to the monastery, to be duly ransomed by his ministers.<sup>74</sup> Although these are the best-known examples, such gatherings were apparently not infrequent in China, usually centering around the preaching of the dharma and a vegetarian feast, a staple of Chinese temple life.<sup>75</sup>

Several interpretations of these festivals have been given, ranging from the symbolism of the “Buddha’s own divestment of the accouterments of royalty”<sup>76</sup> in the Indian case to the “undeniable influence of the concept of charity

<sup>71</sup> Nakamura gives *pañca-vārṣika* as the Sanskrit equivalent (Nakamura Hajime, *Bukkyōgo Daijiten* 佛教語大辭典 [Tokyo: Tōkyō Shoseki, 1981], 1327); cf. S. Beal, *Chinese Accounts of India* (ed. 1957, Calcutta: Susil Gupta, Ltd, 1957 reprint), 115, who gives *Moksha Mahaparishad*, “also called *Panchavarshika parishad*.” The usual explanation of the festivals is that they were held every five years, hence *pañca-vārṣika*, although other sources say that the name stems from the practice of the king giving away all of the treasures accumulated over a five-year period. For a general discussion of the *pañca-vārṣika* see John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka, A Study and Translation of the “Aśokāvadana”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 89 ff, and John Strong, “Rich Man, Poor Man, *Bhikkhu*, King: Aśoka’s Great Quinquennial Festival and the Nature of *Dāna*” in Sizemore and Swearer, *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation*, 107–23.

<sup>72</sup> Strong, *Aśoka*, 265–68.

<sup>73</sup> T #2084, 51.837c and T #2087, 51.873b.

<sup>74</sup> T #2035, 49.350b, 351b.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Michibata Ryōshū, *Tōdai Bukkyōshi no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 3rd edition, 1981), 411–12; see also Ch’en, *Buddhism in China*, 283–84 and Ch’en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 276–83. Such feasts and/or fasts (*chai* 齋) were also regularly accompanied by repentance rites and formed part of Taoist practice as well.

<sup>76</sup> Strong, *Aśoka*, 94.

rendered to the impoverished of the Field of Compassion” in the case of China.<sup>77</sup> No doubt there were many different motivating factors in China, among them the desire to emulate the Aśokan ideal in order to establish one’s claim as the Universal Monarch, the need to establish a solid relationship with a temporally powerful sangha, as well as, in the case of China, the tradition of state social welfare activities. Perhaps most important of all, though, was the establishment of the emperor as a member of the sangha and thus ruler of the religious world, just as prior to his ultimate act of *dāna* (and after his reinvestiture) he was ruler of the temporal world. This act of “transformation and renewal” thus formed an important and public display of the seamless unity of the realm and the ruler’s authority within that realm. No doubt the site of such a display was chosen very carefully, for it implied the full weight and sanction of the sacred and political charisma of the Dragon Throne; hence, too, the chosen site shared in that charisma.

There are four records of “no-barrier festivals” held at the Hua-tu ssu, three of which probably refer to the same event.<sup>78</sup> The *Fo tsu t’ung chi* (ca. 1296), under the 4th year of the Ching-lung era (710), records an imperial mandate to hold a *wu che ta hui*,<sup>79</sup> and the same work records that Chung Tsung (705–710) ordered a *wu che ta hui* to be held at the Hua-tu ssu.<sup>80</sup> The *Chiu T’ang shu* (ca. 945) notes that in the 4th year of Ching-lung, 1st month, 3rd day (6 February 710) a *wu che ta chai* 無遮大齋 was held at the Hua-tu ssu.<sup>81</sup> That these festivals were held at the Hua-tu ssu underscores the fact that this temple continued to be an important and well-patronized center of Buddhist life in Ch’ang-an, even after Empress Wu’s edicts. This continued importance as a site for enacting the drama of imperial and sacred charisma of the no-barrier festival, taken together with Wu’s continued support of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, make it difficult to assess the significance of her proscriptions. Was even imperial authority not enough to curtail San-chieh activities? Was their charitable institution too popular a force to be easily or quickly eliminated? Or do these reversals perhaps represent the changing winds of other religio-political situations, such as Wu’s abdication in 705 or Jui-tsung’s accession to that throne in 710, the year of the no-barrier festival at the Hua-tu ssu? We probably will never know.

<sup>77</sup> Michibata, *Tōdai Bukkyōshi*, 411.

<sup>78</sup> I have not been able to locate the reference for the second festival that Yabuki has listed as held in 708 (Yabuki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū*, 26).

<sup>79</sup> T #2035, 49.372c.

<sup>80</sup> T #2035, 49.451a.

<sup>81</sup> *Chiu T’ang shu* 舊唐書 (reprint of the Wu Ying Tien edition, Liu Hsü 劉昫 [887–946], ed., Taipei: Chung hua shu chu, 1965), 104.

HSÜAN-TSUNG AND THE DISPERSAL OF THE  
INEXHAUSTIBLE STOREHOUSE

After Hsüan-tsung took over the reins of power in 712 he embarked on a series of reforms, and the Buddhist church became a target for his changes. Private temples, a traditional means of avoiding taxes and corvée labor, were forbidden; unauthorized ordinations were prohibited and tens of thousands of monks and nuns defrocked; new temple building was forbidden; and even the religious activities of the monks were a subject of reform. Similar measures continued to be introduced throughout his reign, evidence of both the need to control a church grown luxuriant during the previous years of lavish state support and of Hsüan-tsung's well-known preference for Taoism (although Taoist establishments were also the target of these measures).<sup>82</sup>

In this context we find several records dealing with the dismantling of the Inexhaustible Storehouse. The *Liang ching hsin chi* record of the Inexhaustible Storehouse cited above continues:

In the first year of K'ai-yüan [22 Dec. 713–30 Jan. 714], [the Inexhaustible Storehouse] was destroyed by imperial order. The cash and cloths that had been kept there were offered to the various temples of the capital for repairing the broken and destroyed; these affairs [of the Inexhaustible Storehouse] were thereupon stopped.<sup>83</sup>

There are other records, however, which, while recording a dispersal of the goods of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, give 721 as the date of the action. The *T'ang liang ching ch'eng fang k'ao* (1810), for example, states:

**East of the Gate: Hua-tu ssu**

Originally the Chen-chi ssu and house of Kao Chiung, the Duke of Ch'i, vice-minister of the left of the [Department] of State Affairs. In the third year of K'ai-huang [583] Chiung abandoned his house and established the temple. In the second year of Wu-te [22 Dec. 618–10 Jan. 620] the name was changed to Hua-tu ssu. In the temple was the sub-temple of the Inexhaustible Storehouse. On the name plate is written Hua-tu ssu.... Empress Wu moved the Inexhaustible

<sup>82</sup> In 711, for example, Hsin T'i-fou memorialized that Buddhist establishments controlled 70 to 80 percent of the empire's wealth (*T'ang hui yao*, quoted in Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 129; on Hsüan-tsung's support of Taoism see Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, 361–62, 411–12; Tonami Mamoru, "Tōchūki no Bukkyō to kokka," in *Chūgoku chūsei no shūkyō to bunka* (1982), 632–33, who points out that these measures were applied to Buddhists and Taoists equally.

<sup>83</sup> *Liang ching hsin chi*, *chüan* 3, 14.

Storehouse of this temple to the Fu-hsien ssu in the Eastern capital [Loyang]. After many days it gradually diminished and subsequently was moved back to the original sub-temple. In K'ai-yüan 9 [1 Feb. 721–21 Jan. 722] the excess was dispersed to the various temples in the capital. The temple was extinguished.<sup>84</sup>

The most complete descriptions of this dispersal are found in the *Ts'e fu yüan kwei* (1013) and the *Ch'üan t'ang wen* (1814), both of which record two separate occasions on which action was taken against the Inexhaustible Storehouse. Although the *Ch'üan t'ang wen* gives no dates (the records are put in the section containing proclamations of Hsüan-tsung) the *Ts'e fu yüan kwei*, upon which it is based, dates both proclamations. The first proclamation follows an edict dated the ninth year of K'ai-yüan (1 Feb. 721–21 Jan. 722):

**Fourth month, 39th cyclical day [26 May 721].**

It is proclaimed! The delicacy of the scriptures has only one mark as its import, though the sublime truth of the Mahayana reveals the two gates. The monks of the San-chieh [chiao] at the Hua-tu ssu and Fu-hsien ssu have established Inexhaustible Storehouses, and each year on the 4th day of the first month<sup>85</sup> the gentlemen and ladies throughout the empire donate money [to these Inexhaustible Storehouses]. This is called the “protection of the dharma” and is said to succor the impoverished and the weak. [However,] there is a great amount of debauchery and fraud and things are not proper or upright. Therefore it is appropriate that [this practice] is prohibited. The money in the Storehouses will be given to the Censorate in the districts of Ching-chao and Ho-nan.<sup>86</sup> [When] these affairs are known and an accounting is made they shall be clarified in a record book, awaiting their subsequent disposition.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike the heretical ideas or the prohibited but unspecified practices attacked in the earlier proscriptions of San-chieh texts, in this proclamation Hsüan-tsung specifically prohibited giving to the Inexhaustible Storehouse, the same Inexhaustible Storehouse that was supported by Empress Wu and

<sup>84</sup> *T'ang liang ching ch'eng fang k'ao*, *chüan* 4, 24 (Hsu-sung, 1810, included in *Chōan to Rakuyō shiryō*, 51).

<sup>85</sup> I.e., the anniversary of Hsin-hsing's death.

<sup>86</sup> Ch'ang-an and Loyang, respectively. These names reflect popular usage and refer back to when these cities were the centers of the commanderies named Ching-chao and Ho-nan.

<sup>87</sup> Wang Ch'in-jo, et al., *Ts'e fu yüan kwei*, *chüan* 159, 15 (1013, Taipei: Chung hua shu chu edition, 1924). Cf. the *Ch'üan t'ang wen* 全唐文, *chüan* 28, Tung Kao 董誥, ed., 11–12 (*Ch'in ting ch'üan t'ang wen* edition, Taipei, Hui wen shu chu, 1961, 380). The *Ch'üan t'ang wen* adds the title “Proclamation Prohibiting the Gentlemen And Ladies of Good Society from Donating Money to the Buddhist Temples.”

survived her proscription of San-chieh ideas and texts. Here there is no mention of heretical ideas, apocryphal prophecy, or dangerous ideology. Rather, this edict alludes to debauchery and fraud, recalling the episode discussed above in which a monk, tempted by the treasures of the Storehouse as a “wolf in front of whose jaws a sheep has been placed,” could not help but embezzle funds. At the same time it is a rather empty accusation with no substance provided whatsoever, and as such it should most likely be taken as one of many such measures designed to gain control of the finances of the empire, *not* ideological opposition to the doctrine of decline or Universal Dharma. Rather than doctrinal issues, of which the proclamation makes no mention, it was the fraudulent administration (bookkeeping? tax-evasion? theft? skimming? laundering?) that called for legislative intervention.

The proclamation also calls for an accounting of the goods for “subsequent disposition,” and the following edict tells us the nature of this disposition:

On the 24th cyclical day of the 6th month [10 July 721] it is proclaimed that the goods, land, houses, and the six kinds of livestock of the Inexhaustible Storehouse of the Hua-tu ssu are to be divided equally among the Taoist and Buddhist establishments. First [these goods] will be used for the repair of the broken statues, halls, and bridges. If there is anything remaining it will be put into the permanent goods [of the monastery] and will not be divided amongst the monks’ private quarters.<sup>88</sup> Begin distribution [of these goods] from the poor Taoist and Buddhist establishments.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> That is, will be given to the monastery as a whole and not to individual monks. The nagging question, however, is which monastery or monasteries?

<sup>89</sup> *Ts’e fu yüan kuei*, *chüan* 159, 15. The same proclamation, with the title “Proclamation Disposing of the Goods of the Inexhaustible Storehouse of the Hua-tu ssu” is contained in *Ch’üan t’ang wen*, *chüan* 28, 15 (in the *Ch’in ting ch’üan t’ang wen*, 382). As mentioned above, there is some confusion about the dates of this dissolution, with the *Liang ching hsin chi* giving 713 while the *T’ang liang ching ch’eng fang k’ao* and the *Ts’e fu yüan kuei* both give 721. The context of Hsüan-tsung’s reign gives us no clues, as he issued similar proclamations concerning the property of the monasteries and governing the monks within the monasteries during both periods; see Ch’en, *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 116–17 and 133–34, for examples. As Tonami has pointed out, most scholars have followed Yabuki and given 713 as the date of the proclamation, but this should most likely be rejected in favor of 721 (Tonami, “Tōchūki no Bukkyō,” 635). The most unusual instance is found in Gernet’s work on Chinese Buddhist institutions (*Buddhism in Chinese Society*, 211–12), where he cites both the *Ch’üan t’ang wen* and the *Ts’e fu yüan kuei*, and states that the decrees are dated 713 in the former. Aside from the fact that the *Ch’üan t’ang wen* did not actually assign dates to the decrees, there was no 4th month of the first year of K’ai-yüan, which began in the 12th month of the civil year and ended one month later. Although Tonami has pointed to this discrepancy, he is wrong in stating, rather stridently, that Buddhist scholars have in general ignored the *Ts’e fu yüan kuei* and in particular not yet corrected the dates of the dispersal of the Inexhaustible Storehouse (p. 636), as Kenneth Ch’en had already corrected the date to 721 on the basis of the *Ts’e fu yüan kuei* (Ch’en, *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 163, n. 113 and 164).

Many aspects of this edict are interesting, including the nature of the confiscated goods (the first mention of land and buildings in connection with the Inexhaustible Storehouse) and the ecumenical nature of their disposal. It is also interesting to note that the use of the goods of the Inexhaustible Storehouse for the repair of religious buildings, statues, etc. and the dispersal of the remainder to the monastic community rather than to individuals are both in line with the San-chieh practices detailed in chapter 7.

Another suppression of the San-chieh during the reign of Hsüan-tsung is recorded in the *K'ai yüan lu*; in this suppression San-chieh literature was prohibited and the walls of the “San-chieh yüan” in the various temples are ordered removed and the followers are enjoined to live together with the other monks.

Knowing that they are contrary to truth and incite falsehood an edict was issued prohibiting them: on the third day of the sixth month of the thirteenth year of K'ai-yüan [725] an imperial edict was issued to all of the subtemples of the Three Levels 三階院 ordering the barriers [separating them from the rest of the community] removed. [The followers of the Three Levels] will live together with the community of monks in the main temple; separate dwellings are not permitted. The collected works 集錄<sup>90</sup> of [Hsin-]hsing are all prohibited and should be destroyed. If these edicts are not heeded, these practices will prejudice people. Therefore those who do not comply will be returned to lay life.<sup>91</sup>

Following the dismantling of the primary San-chieh institution of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, this edict records the further suppression of San-chieh institutional life as well as the banning and destruction of San-chieh texts. It is hard to know what to make of these San-chieh yüan; rather than seeing this as evidence of a separatist tendency or utopian communitarianism, it is entirely possible that these San-chieh subtemples or cloisters grew from their liturgical practices of the *pratyutpanna* or *fang teng* rites, both of which required separate or isolated rooms or halls for practice, or other forms of ascetic retreat, including perhaps modified forms of *dhūtaṅga* practice.<sup>92</sup>

Although there is no recorded support of the San-chieh by Hsüan-tsung, the fact that he waited some nine years after assuming power to act against

<sup>90</sup> A common name for Hsin-hsing's writings, e.g., the *San chieh chi lu* 三階集錄, T #2153, 55.474c or the *Jen chi lu* 人集錄, T #2082, 51.788b; cf. chapter 1, 11–13.

<sup>91</sup> T #2154, 55.679a.

<sup>92</sup> Ch'ang Yen-yüan's *Li tai ming hua chi* also mentions several San-chieh yüan (*Li tai ming hua chi*, *chüan* 3, 12, 16, and 17). On the need for separate quarters for repentance and other liturgical practice see Stevenson, “The T'ien-t'ai Four Forms,” 55, 76; on the separation of San-chieh followers from the main monastic community see chapter 4, 90–92.

them seems to argue against strictly ideological motivation. Most likely in this case the reason is as found in the proclamation of 721, that is, “there is a great amount of debauchery and fraud and things are not proper or upright.” Added to this was a need to set the finances of the empire straight after the largess of Empress Wu to the Buddhist community. His actions, then, should be seen as directed primarily against the institutional base of the sect, in other words, the Inexhaustible Storehouse and the separate dwellings of the followers.

The “separate dwellings” of the San-chieh bear closer scrutiny in this regard, considering that Buddhist temples were generally not divided along sectarian lines at this point. While I do not believe that the doctrinally sectarian nature of their Universal Dharma would be any more offensive than any other school’s claim to doctrinal supremacy, the institutional embodiment of that doctrine—physically removing the monks from other monks in the temples—might seem a move more calculated to achieve regulatory independence, and hence a move intolerable to other Buddhists as well as the government. If, however, as I have suggested in chapter 6, the separate cloisters were created out of liturgical need, as was not uncommon in Chinese monasteries, it is hard to consider this evidence of incipient separatism.

Another factor that might have contributed to the dissolution of the Inexhaustible Storehouse is the emperor’s desire to regain control of the imperial prerogative to act as the medium of charitable merit for his subjects. That is, just as Mark Lewis has argued that the Universal Dharma “challenged the rulers’ right to declare the supreme truth and to justify their rule through the defense of that truth and the elevation of its presumptive masters,”<sup>93</sup> Whalen Lai has recently argued that Buddhist charitable institutions usurped the “prerogatives of the ruler, who had the obligation of providing a minimal livelihood for his subject.... At a time when only the ruler should claim that obligation, any private party presuming to feed the poor would be stealing loyalty from the sovereign and could be perceived as challenging his right to rule,... to usurp that prerogative amounted to his being disloyal to his lord.”<sup>94</sup> In this connection it is perhaps especially significant that a Sung Ching wrote a memorial to the emperor on exactly this point (citing Confucius as his authority) in 717, the second decade of Hsüan-tsung’s rule and only a few years before his suppression of the San-chieh charitable institution.<sup>95</sup> In any case, it is certainly true that Hsüan-tsung’s

<sup>93</sup> Lewis, “Suppression,” 228.

<sup>94</sup> Whalen Lai, “Chinese Buddhist and Christian Charities: A Comparative History,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 12 (1992), 7.

<sup>95</sup> Lai, “Chinese Buddhist and Christian Charities,” 7.

outlawing the public and popular Inexhaustible Storehouse, the San-chieh community-based dwellings (“San chieh cloisters”), and ordering their texts banned and destroyed was a much more thoroughgoing attack than anything seen previously. This was shortly followed by a canonical condemnation.

In 730, a few short years after the orders dismantling the Inexhaustible Storehouse were issued, the famous *K'ai yüan shih chiao lu* was compiled by Chih-sheng. This catalogue of Buddhist scriptures, widely regarded as one of the most authoritative and comprehensive catalogues ever compiled, has been immensely influential to this day, passing on its seal of orthodoxy to even the Taishō compilation of the canon used by scholars and temples throughout the world.<sup>96</sup> Chih-sheng followed the precedent established by the *Ta chou lu* and included the San-chieh texts in the section of false or spurious texts. After he listed the titles of the texts, he also added a lengthy note drawing on the reports in the previous catalogues as well as noting the 725 proscription of individual Three Levels dwellings cited above.

This catalogue and Chih-sheng's judgement of the San-chieh is especially telling in terms of the vacillating status of the San-chieh, as has been recently detailed by Antonino Forte in his examination of the *Fo shuo shih so fan che yü ch'ieh fa ching ching* or the *Dharma Mirror Sutra*, a text forged by San-chieh followers.<sup>97</sup> The *Dharma Mirror Sutra* was admitted to the official canon with recommendations from the highest levels of the Buddhist orthodoxy in July of 712, one month before Hsüan-tsung ascended the throne and eight years before he banned the Inexhaustible Storehouse and confiscated its holdings. The San-chieh clearly enjoyed support at the highest levels of the empire at this time, for in addition to the San-chieh monk Shih-li, a board comprised of ten members of an imperial committee examined and certified the text, and “all but one of these were scholars from the imperial College for the Glorification of Literature (Chao-wen kuan 昭文館).”<sup>98</sup> In addition, the preface to the text named Bodhiruci and Manicintana, easily two of the most important monks of the time, as the translators of the text.<sup>99</sup> Yet in 730, less than twenty years after this ringing endorsement, Chih-sheng condemned the text as a “deception on top of a deception” perpetrated by Shih-li. Leaving aside the question of the content of the scripture in order to

<sup>96</sup> On this catalog and its judgements of orthodoxy see Kyoko Tokuno, “The Evaluation of Indigenous Scriptures in Chinese Buddhist Bibliographical Catalogues,” in Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, 52–58.

<sup>97</sup> Forte, “The Relativity of the Concept of Orthodoxy,” 239–49.

<sup>98</sup> Forte, “The Relativity of the Concept of Orthodoxy,” 239.

<sup>99</sup> On Manicintana see Antonino Forte, “The Activities in China of the Tantric Master Manicintana (Pao-ssu-wei: ?–721 c.e.) from Kashmir and of his Northern Indian Collaborators,” *East and West* 34 (1984): 301–45.

focus on this verdict, Forte has shown how what changed between 712 and 730 was not the text or the members of the committee, but rather the ideology of orthodoxy, or perhaps more specifically the status of the San-chieh within that ideology. That is, prior to Hsüan-tsung's proscription of the Inexhaustible Storehouse the San-chieh was powerful and influential—thus enabling Shih-li to sponsor the *Dharma Mirror Sutra* and have it accepted into the official canon. After Hsüan-tsung's actions, however, and in light of the *Ta chou lu*'s judgement of San-chieh materials, Chih-sheng had to be sure that this San-chieh text was clearly and unequivocally excised from the canon. Related to this “particularization” of the notion of orthodoxy, of course, are the connections between some members of the committee and the failed plot to assassinate the emperor. That is, in addition to Hsüeh Chi's involvement noted above, another member of the committee, Ts'ui Shih, also participated in the conspiracy to poison the new Emperor Hsüan-tsung and also committed suicide in 713. As Forte has reasoned, “If Shih-li was closely associated with certain members of that conspiracy, it would not be surprising for Hsüan-tsung to take action against Shih-li and his sect once he had consolidated his power.”<sup>100</sup> We can thus understand the suppression of the Inexhaustible Storehouse and the exclusion of their texts from the official canon as the products of specific historical situations involving specific (and changing) notions of orthodoxy and legitimacy, themselves dependent more on palace intrigue than on religion or doctrinal issues.

After these suppressions we can find no more records that directly link the Hua-tu ssu and the Inexhaustible Storehouse. There is, nonetheless, continued evidence of the popularity of the San-chieh and the importance of the Hua-tu ssu, as well as the continued presence of a “San-chieh yüan” within the Hua-tu ssu. The *Pao k'e ts'ung pien*, for example, lists stone pillar carvings of the *Tsun sheng t'o lo ni ching* 尊勝陀羅尼經 done in 801 and in 842 at the “San-chieh yüan of the Hua-tu ssu.”<sup>101</sup> That the Hua-tu ssu continued to be an important temple in Ch'ang-an is also evident from the fact that ceremonies and lectures were held there during the reign of T'ai-tsung (763–779) that involved the famous monk Amoghavajra;<sup>102</sup> that the emperor donated a golden name tablet to the temple ca. 825 without feeling the need to change the name of the temple in spite of its close association with the San-chieh;<sup>103</sup> that memorial steles for Hsin-hsing continued to be erected during the

<sup>100</sup> Forte, “The Relativity of the Concept of Orthodoxy,” 246.

<sup>101</sup> *Pao k'e ts'ung pien*, *chüan* 7, 32–33 and *chüan* 7, 36; the *Tsun sheng t'o lo ni ching* 尊勝陀羅尼經 probably corresponds to the *Fo ting tsun sheng t'o lo ni ching* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經, *Taishō* #967 and #971, translated in 683 and 710, respectively.

<sup>102</sup> T #2120, 52.834c–835a; T #2120, 52.835c; T #2120, 52.841b–c.

<sup>103</sup> *Ch'ang-an chih*, *chüan* 10, p. 9.

eighth and early ninth centuries;<sup>104</sup> that the San-chieh texts were once again included within the official canon in Yüan-chao's catalogue of 800, the *Chen yüan hsin ting shih chiao mu lu*;<sup>105</sup> and that the Hua-tu ssu was one of the first temples restored after the general persecution of Buddhism in 845 (renamed the Ch'ung fu ssu 崇福寺).<sup>106</sup> The Tun-huang collections also contain ninth- and tenth-century manuscript copies of the *Seven Roster Buddhanāma* (*Ch'i chieh fo ming* 七階佛名), an important San-chieh liturgical manual (see chapter 1),<sup>107</sup> and San-chieh texts continued to be copied as part of the official Buddhist canon in Japan through the twelfth century.<sup>108</sup> All this speaks of the great influence of the San-chieh throughout almost the entirety of the T'ang period as well as of the support it received from the highest levels of society, which in turn belies the narrative of the San-chieh as a form of popular Buddhism that ran afoul of the authorities because of its doctrine of decline or the implications of that teaching for the authority of the Buddhist canon. It also means that, rather than having been finally stamped out of existence because of any one edict or a cataloger's branding Hsin-hsing's writings heretical and banishing them to the spurious section of the canon, the San-chieh teachings and institutions are better described as slowly disappearing from the scene. Hence the "rise and fall of a Chinese heresy" of the subtitle to this book might better be cast as the "the rise and slow fade of a Buddhist community." As Nishimoto has suggested, their eventual demise might just as well be a result of the cult of the founder that grew up around Hsin-hsing at an early date and the attendant lack of attention to lineage successions,<sup>109</sup> in other words, a failure to routinize the charisma of the founder in successive generations.

## SUMMARY

The teaching of the Three Levels, begun by Hsin-hsing in the years immediately prior to the Sui dynasty, their texts, practices, and institution of the Inexhaustible Storehouse were the target of five separate edicts aimed at eliminating them. The first, during the reign of Sui Wen Ti in the year 600,

<sup>104</sup> Two memorials were composed by Yüan-chao; cf. Hubbard, "Chinese Reliquary Inscriptions," 265–66.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Hubbard, "Salvation in the Final Period of the Dharma," 180–88.

<sup>106</sup> *Chiu T'ang shu*, Liu Hsü, ed., 80b.

<sup>107</sup> Hirokawa, "Tonkō shutsudo," 76–77.

<sup>108</sup> See Hubbard, "The Teaching of the Three Levels."

<sup>109</sup> Nishimoto, *Sangaikyō*, 116–21.

simply states that the circulation of their texts was prohibited and a warning about their ideas was issued. The next two suppressions, almost a full century later, took place during the reign of Empress Wu, who was also a supporter of their Inexhaustible Storehouse. The first, in 695, declared that the San-chieh doctrines are heresies, opposed to the Buddha's teaching, and the second, four years later, prohibited practices other than begging, fasting, holding the precepts, and meditation and reiterated their exclusion from the canon. The final two edicts were issued under the reign of Hsüan-tsung, and they dismantled the Inexhaustible Storehouse in 721 because of fraudulent practices and in 725 eliminated the separate dwelling of San-chieh followers and ordered their texts destroyed. Between the various suppressions there are records indicating the continued popularity of the San-chieh, even after the edicts of Hsüan-tsung and perhaps continuing as late as the tenth century. What, then, of the idea that it was the emphasis on the decline of the dharma or the espousal of its remedy, the Universal Dharma, that caused the suppressions?

First of all, we need to keep in mind the simple fact that neither the decline doctrine nor the Universal Dharma is mentioned in any of the edicts. Secondly, what we do find in the historical record is a great variety of actions taken against the San-chieh community—sometimes texts are targeted, sometimes practices, and yet in other cases institutions are the target. Sometimes there seems to be an attempt to destroy the movement, other times to curb their spread, and other times simply to bring them in line. The situation of the protagonists likewise varied considerably—from the Buddhist rulers at the beginning of the Sui to Taoist rulers in the middle of the T'ang. To put it simply, the great variety of factors evidenced in the historical record combined with the lack of any direct reference to the doctrine of decline or any other specific doctrine makes it difficult to reduce the actions taken against the San-chieh community to any single cause, and certainly not to a single doctrine. Indeed, I do not think that all of the actions taken against the San-chieh communities are even best described by the singular term “suppression,” and would prefer to see developed a more nuanced taxonomy that would allow this diversity to be highlighted.

On a more theoretical level, I simply do not think that the suppressions of the San-chieh can be attributed to their doctrinal stance because, in the first place, the doctrine of decline and the “one-way” exclusivity of the associated teachings “relevant to the times” were also propounded by numerous others, as we have seen in chapter 3. As I have argued, the very origins of the doctrine of decline are to be found in a concern for an orthodoxy of dharma (*saddharma*) in the face of increasing diversity of dharma, and so too all scriptural hermeneutics (*p'an chiao*) of Hsin-hsing's time were implicitly if not explicitly critical of other systems—*p'an chiao* includes, after all,

“judgement” of the teachings within its scope. When all is said and done, the San-chieh doctrine of Universal Dharma is simply one more *p’an chiao*, one more way of grading the teachings so that one’s own teachings come out on top. For all of their posturing about the inability of the dharma to save and the like, the San-chieh teachers still *did* teach dharma—why would a ruler be any more worried about their claims to doctrinal supremacy than those of the myriad others claiming a similarly exclusive grasp of the “truth”? Although the level or even the content of their rhetoric might have been a contributing factor, it cannot be adduced as the sole or underlying cause of the suppressions.

Stanley Weinstein has argued “[the fact] that each of these schools [T’ien-t’ai, Fa-hsiang, and Hua-yen] came to the forefront among the Buddhist elite at the time that it did was attributable not so much to the momentum of its own inner doctrinal development as to the close connection that existed between the de facto founder of the school and the imperial family.... The philosophical schools were not formulated by monks who were immured in remote monasteries, but rather reflected, to a considerable degree ... the political needs of their imperial patrons.”<sup>110</sup> Although this close connection between doctrine and politics meant that the favored school changed several times over the Sui-T’ang period, never did it mean that the out-of-favor school was suppressed. That is, doctrine, so closely linked to imperial patrons, was not enough *in and of itself* to warrant action against the sect that held any particular doctrine not in favor at the moment. The theologically sectarian nature of Buddhist doctrinal systems did not call down the wrath of the rulers. The imperial patron of the Hua-yen teachings did not feel compelled to suppress the T’ien-t’ai school, which put its own teachings atop those of the Hua-yen in the *p’an chiao* heap.

Without denying that Buddhist ideas are as much ideology as theology, and perhaps contrary to the wishes of Buddhists themselves, Buddhist rulers do not seem to have often felt their power threatened by subtle points of Buddhist doctrine. Related to this, too, is the fact that in every case there is evidence of the continued existence and even support of San-chieh institutions at the highest levels, militating against accepting a singular cause for *all* of the suppressions. On the other hand, I think that the danger of being *close* to power is clearly demonstrated in the first suppression of the Three Levels movement immediately following the downfall of their powerful patron as well as their treatment under the rule of Empress Wu and Emperor Hsüantsung. We need to remember that, in spite of the mass popularity of the Inexhaustible Storehouse, Hsin-hsing and the community that he founded were supported at every turn by the highest levels of the elite—indeed, even

<sup>110</sup> Weinstein, “Imperial Patronage in T’ang Buddhism,” p. 305.

the Inexhaustible Storehouse was patronized by “men and women of good society” and Empress Wu. In other words, I think that we can turn Weinstein’s observations about the *rise* of particular schools to understanding the *demise* of the San-chieh movement: the fact that the San-chieh teachings fell from favor among the elite and were eventually banned was attributable not so much to the momentum of its own inner doctrinal development as to the close connection that existed between the highly placed followers of the school and the imperial family.

Finally, the notion that the “on-again, off-again” nature of the suppressions is due to the “strong Buddhist patronage” of a given reign is simply insupportable. First of all, we have to remember that in the case of Sui Wen Ti and Empress Wu both rulers initially *supported* Hsin-hsing or the San-chieh institutions. What made them change their minds? To my knowledge nothing in Hsin-hsing’s teachings changed between 589, the time that he received an imperial invitation to Ch’ang-an, and 600, the year that his teachings were banned. Secondly, as I mentioned, it is hard to characterize the reign of Hsüan-tsung as ardently pro-Buddhist—as with most of the T’ang rulers, his preference was for Taoism. On the other hand, it has been clearly shown by many scholars that imperial patronage of Buddhism by Sui Wen Ti and Empress Wu was part of a larger pattern of legitimation that in every case utilized elements of Confucianism and Taoism as well as of Buddhism. In the case of Empress Wu, for example, Guisso has written that “the influence of Buddhism in Wu’s legitimation was ... not negligible but neither was it predominant.”<sup>111</sup> This is especially true in the year of her first suppression of the San-chieh (695), when, after the burning of the Ming-t’ang, she responded to the hostile atmosphere by turning to an increased support of Confucian symbols (in 695 she dropped the title of Maitreya, among other things).<sup>112</sup> Thus the religious preferences of the ruler seem an unlikely cause of their ire.

What do I have to offer in place of the rich fare of religious doctrine as political power? Unfortunately little—the thin taste of the historical record is not overly satisfying. Although I do believe that what is doctrine for a Buddhist monk may simultaneously constitute ideology for monk and ruler alike, I also believe that we need to look at actual and discrete historical events rather than doctrinal/ideological issues if we wish to find the causes of the suppressions of the San-chieh—events such as the loss of rank of the important San-chieh patron Kao Chiung, the involvement of San-chieh followers in uprisings against Empress Wu and Hsüan-tsung, fraudulent

<sup>111</sup> Guisso, R. W. L., *Wu Tse-t’ien and the Politics of Legitimation in T’ang China* (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1978), 68.

<sup>112</sup> Forte, *Mingtang*, 254–55; Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, vol. 3, part 1, 312–33.

accounting practices, their “separatist” institutional base, and the like. Such isolated yet important events are more likely causes of imperial action than disputes over the correct interpretation of the Buddha-dharma.

Needless to say, such an approach will not satisfy the urge for a neat, all-inclusive answer to the question of “why.” Worse still, the details that would give us solid information about the circumstances of the suppressions are more than likely lost forever. On the other hand, this approach avoids the trap of historical reductionism, which, as in this case, tends to create more problems of interpretation than it solves. I also believe that concentrating on their teaching of decline or Universal Dharma as the sole cause of their proscription—in spite of their never having been so labeled in any source—gives the notion of “the orthodox” a uniformity and constancy that it does not in fact possess. Finally, it has served to focus attention on the uniqueness of Hsin-hsing’s teachings, a uniqueness that fades rather quickly when those teachings and practices are put into context.

In sum, the suppressions of Hsin-hsing’s teachings and practices were born of discrete historical and political situations unrelated to doctrinal issues or the intent to abrogate the authority of church or state. The sustained popularity of the movement between the suppressions and its lingering presence into the ninth and tenth centuries indicates that even the eventual demise of Hsin-hsing’s teachings should be sought outside the singular effect of the proscriptions. With this as background, then, let me turn in the final chapter to asking larger questions of the meaning of the study of the San-chieh movement.