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    [Five-cents comics], vol.6, no.1 (1932), p.5
THE ORIGINS OF THE GREEN GANG
AND ITS RISE IN SHANGHAI, 1850–1920

Brian G. Martin

Introduction

The Green Gang was one of the most important secret societies in central and eastern China in the first half of the twentieth century, and during this period the city-port of Shanghai was a major, if not the major, centre of its activities. These activities have been the subject of a number of contemporary accounts and later scholarly and popular works, yet the origins and evolution of the Green Gang still remain shrouded in some mystery. In addressing this issue the present article discusses three main aspects of the modern Green Gang: the question of its precise origins, in the course of which it surveys the scholarly debate on this issue among Chinese historians; its organizational structure; and the factors which facilitated its emergence in Shanghai by the turn of the century. The main conclusion of the article is that the Green Gang was a recently established secret society organization whose structure was still in the process of definition in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Despite its claims to a distinguished pedigree in the eighteenth-century boatmen’s associations on the Grand Canal its origins, in fact, cannot be traced back much beyond the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century.

The Origins of the Green Gang

The origins and evolution of the Green Gang are rather problematic and are the subject of some not inconsiderable debate among Chinese historians. One leading historian of the Green Gang, Hu Zhusheng 胡祖生, has observed that among the histories of modern Chinese secret societies that of the

Green Gang is the one replete with the most complex problems; while another historian, Jerome Ch'en, has remarked that the history of the Green Gang "is a blend of facts and fiction, often more fiction than facts."1

One contentious issue is the exact origins of the Green Gang. Many historians consider the Green Gang to be identical with the branch of the Patriarch Luo Sect (Luo Zu Jiao 羅祖教), a dissenting Buddhist sect, which was active among the Grand Canal boatmen in the eighteenth century. Others, however, suggest a much later date on the grounds that references to the Green Gang as a specific organization only appear in the official records from the middle of the nineteenth century.2 The one Western historian who has made a particular study of the grain tribute boatmen's associations, David E. Kelley, argues that there is no evidence to suggest that the Green Gang "under any of its variant names" existed prior to the second half of the nineteenth century, although he does allow for the possibility of some kind of continuity between the Luo Sect and the traditions of the Green Gang.3 The picture is further complicated by the contention of one Chinese historian, Li Shiyu, in an article published in 1963, that the Green Gang did not originate as a branch of the Patriarch Luo Sect at all, although he has subsequently renounced this view.4 It should be noted in this regard that the various Green Gang manuals (tongcao 通草) which were published in the early twentieth century trace the organization's origins in an unbroken line back to the Patriarch Luo Sect and to the grain tribute fleets of the mid-Qing period.5 Whether this reflects an accurate representation of the facts or is merely the appropriation, or indeed the deliberate manufacture, of a tradition remains a question to be addressed by further historical research.

Another source of disagreement among historians is the nature of the relationship between the Green Gang and the Triads (Hong Men 洪門). Some historians contend that the Green Gang was merely a branch of the Triads, while others argue that the two organizations had quite separate origins and developed in quite distinct ways.6 This debate is of more than historical interest. In the early twentieth century, to claim that the Green Gang was an offshoot of the Triads, given the latter's pronounced anti-Qing nature and its involvement in the 1911 Revolution, served the political purpose of enhancing the Green Gang's revolutionary legitimacy and political credentials in the period of Guomindang rule.7 A majority of historians, however, argue that the general antecedents of the Green Gang are to be found in the Buddhist sect of the Patriarch Luo and the boatmen's associations that developed among the crews of the tribute grain fleets on the Grand Canal. A major discontinuity nevertheless occurred in the historical evolution of the Green Gang in the mid-nineteenth century which raises important questions, as yet unresolved, about the true origins of this organization. The doubts raised by these questions are compounded the fact that the earliest recorded form of the term Green Gang (Qing Bang 青幫)—Anqing Daoyou 安清道友 (the Anqing League)—did not occur before the middle of the nineteenth century.8
The Patriarch Luo Sect was an evangelical Buddhist sect which had evolved from the White Lotus Sect (Bailianjiao 白蓮教), and which was established in the late Ming. In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it spread throughout China, and in its turn spawned a number of sects, the most important of which included the Da Cheng Jiao 大乘教 (the Mahayana Sect), the San Cheng Jiao 三乘教 (the Three Orders of Buddhist Saints Sect), the Wu Wei Jiao 無為教 (the Non-Action Sect), and the Lao Guan Zhai 老官齋 (the Venerable Officials Vegetarian Sect). According to official Qing Government reports dating from the mid-eighteenth century, the Patriarch Luo Sect was introduced to the soldiers and boatmen of the grain tribute fleets on the Grand Canal in the early seventeenth century by three individuals, Weng Yan 溫巖 and Qian Jian 錢堅 (both from Miyun 密雲 county in Zhili 直隸) and Pan Qing 潘清 (from Songjiang 松江 county in Jiangsu 江蘇). These three were later known as 'The Three Patriarchs' and by the eighteenth century the Three Patriarchs Sect (San Zu Jiao 三祖教)—which was also known as the Pan Sect (Pan Men 潘門)—was the established sub-sect of the Patriarch Luo Sect among the crews of the grain tribute fleets.

The sect's structure generally followed the organization of the grain transport fleets and it set up associations in each of the fleets, each association taking its name from the name of its respective fleet (bang 館). A key role in the sect's organization was played by the boatswain (duoshou 舵手) on each of the grain transport boats. He was empowered to set up a 'church' (jiaomen 教門) on his boat to which he recruited his fellow...
This certainly motivated contemporary accounts such as that of Liu Lianke in 1940 which stressed the Triad origins of the Green Gang in order to gain political advantage: Liu Lianke, *Banghui sanbainian gémíng shì* [A history of the secret societies' three hundred years of revolution] (Macao: Liuyuan, 1940).

8 The following discussion is based on the works of Hu Zhusheng, Li Shiyu, Cai Shaoqing, Ma Xisha and Cheng Su, together with Atsushi Watanabe, "Secret societies in modern China: Ch'ing Pang, Hung Pang—late Ch'ing and early Republic of China," in *Zhonghua Mingguo chuqi lishi yantaohui lùnwén ji: 1912-1927* [Collected papers from the conference on the history of the initial period of the Republic of China: 1912-1927], ed. Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo [Research Institute of Modern History of the Academia Sinica] (Taibei: Academia Sinica, 1984), pp. 797-815; Tao Chengzhang, "Zhe'an jilue" [An account of the boatmen, and he would also place a spirit tablet to the Patriarch Luo on the ship's bowsprit. In time the dock officials (*má tou guan* 碼頭官), who were regular officials in charge of the administration of the docks along the Grand Canal, emerged as another key post in the sect's organization; they became senior members of the sect's associations with the right to open lodges (*xiangtang* 香堂) and to recruit disciples (*tudi* 徒弟). The city of Hangzhou, the southern terminus of the tribute fleets, became an important organizational centre for the boatmen's associations. It was here that a major temple of the Luo Sect (*jiāmiao* 教廟) as well as three Buddhist monasteries (*an* 寺) dedicated to Weng, Qian and Pan were located, together with their putative graves. These monasteries served also as hostels for the boatmen who came mainly from areas north of the Yangzi river (from Shandong and Zhili predominantly); and by 1727 there was a total of seventy of these monastery-hostels (*qīnshān* 寺山). The monasteries provided services similar to those provided by *huiguăn* 會館 (*Landsmannschaften*), such as temporary accommodation, medical care, and burial for the dead. At the same time it also functioned as a professional body which regulated the standards and transmitted the technical skills associated with the boatmen's occupation.

By the early nineteenth century these boatmen's associations had become so powerful that they were virtually a law unto themselves. Qing officials took action periodically to curb the more serious disorders caused by these associations, as when they arrested over 300 boatmen from the Jiabai Fleet 嘉白幫 in 1825. Disorder nevertheless was endemic among the grain transport fleets. In 1825, for example, the Censor who oversaw the grain tribute system memorialized the throne to complain of the regular use by the associations' leaders of the tactic of delaying the scheduled sailing of the tribute fleets as a means of extorting a wage rise for their followers from the bannermen. Over a decade later, in 1839, Lin Zexu 林則徐 noted...
that murders were carried out regularly by the boatmen's leaders, whom he described as 'teachers' (shifu 師父) holding positions in the monastery-hostels (laotang 老堂); and he noted that these 'teachers' used any means to increase their control over the boatmen including subverting the authority of the bannermen. 18

In the mid-nineteenth century, both man-made and natural disasters (notably the change in the course of the Yellow river in 1855) combined to bring about the demise of the boatmen's associations. These events also ushered in an extremely confused period in the history of the Green Gang which has yet to be evaluated satisfactorily by historians, and which is the key to an understanding of the formation of the modern Green Gang. By the mid-1850s the transportation of tribute grain on the Grand Canal had come to a complete halt. The move by the Taiping armies into the lower Yangzi and their occupation of Nanjing in 1853 ended grain tribute shipments from Zhejiang, and the change in the course of the Yellow river in 1855 made permanent the shift to sea transport for the grain tribute from Jiangsu which had commenced in 1848. 19 As a result of these changes it is estimated that between 40,000 and 50,000 boatmen lost their regular employment; when all those in ancillary and service occupations associated with grain transport along the Grand Canal are included, the final figure must be calculated in the hundreds of thousands. 20 The boatmen's associations, therefore, were completely disrupted by these developments and their organization disintegrated. The temple of the Patriarch Luo in Hangzhou, which had become
the devotional and organizational centre of the boatmen's associations, was completely destroyed due to the military activities associated with the Taiping Rebellion. According to the account in one Green Gang manual, as a result of this disaster:

In the fourth year of Xian Feng [1855] ... the proper sacrifices to the Great Provider ended, and as a consequence incense was not burnt to the three ancestors for over forty years.

Large numbers of unemployed boatmen joined various rebel groups such as the Nian (捻) and the Red Turbans (Hongjin 紅巾) in Subei 蘇北, and the Taiping in the Jiangnan. Many more, however, became salt-smugglers, especially in the Huai 淮 region of Subei which contained some of the largest salt-panns in the country. Salt was an official monopoly and a dietary staple of the Chinese population; its high price and inelastic demand ensured a flourishing illicit trade. The boatmen's associations already had well-established relations with the salt-smugglers in Subei. In the course of the eighteenth century the Qing Government had authorized the officers and crews of the grain tribute fleets to carry a certain amount of cargo on their own account. Many used this concession to smuggle salt from the north where it was cheap to the ports on the Yangzi where its retail price was very high. In this lucrative enterprise the boatmen formed close working relations with the professional salt-smugglers of the Liang Huai 濟淮 region of Subei, who were referred to in the records as 'green skins' (qingpi 青皮).

With the disintegration of the boatmen's associations a new organization emerged in the Subei region in the 1850s and 1860s—the Anqing League (Anqing Daoyou). Its membership was composed of former grain tribute boatmen and professional salt-smugglers, and although initially these two groups represented separate elements within a loose organizational structure, by the 1890s they had fused into a single integrated organization. The major activity of the League was salt smuggling, and its area of operations was, therefore, originally confined to that region of Subei, the Liang Huai, which was one of the largest of the twelve salt divisions under government monopoly, and where the salt-smugglers congregated. A further reason for the concentration of the League's activities in Subei was that the Jiangnan region remained a cockpit of conflict between the Taiping and Qing armies into the early 1860s.

By the 1870s and 1880s, however, the Anqing League had extended its activities to the lower Yangzi ports, notably Yangzhou, and the Lake Tai region. By the turn of the century this latter region had become a major centre of the League's smuggling activities.

It is now commonly accepted by historians that the name 'Anqing Daoyou' represents the first clear reference to the Green Gang in the official sources, although they continue to disagree as to its precise origins. Some historians believe that the character qing 清 in Anqing Daoyou referred to
the first of the twenty-four generational status groups into which the Green Gang was organized, and which was represented by the same character. Others consider that the term ‘anqing’ 安清, ‘peace’, was Buddhist in origin, and that it was used of a person entering a Buddhist sect, such as the Patriarch Luo Sect and its derivatives among the grain transport boatmen. Finally, there are those historians who believe that neither of these versions is correct. On the basis of Qing Government records they argue to the contrary that the term ‘anqing’ refers to the two neighbouring localities in Subei in which the League was first active, that is, Andong 安東 and Qinghe 清河 counties, at the point where the Grand Canal intersected with the Huai river. On the evidence presently available this latter explanation appears to be the most plausible of the three.

It is still not clear how the name Green Gang (Qing Bang) evolved from that of the Anqing League. One possible explanation is that since the qing 青 ‘green’, in the name Green Gang is a homophone of the qing 清, ‘clear, pure’ of Anqing, the former was written in error for the latter. This transposition could have been assisted by the fact that one element in the Anqing League, the professional salt-smugglers, were called ‘green skins’ (qingpī). Indeed, it might be suggested here that the name ‘Green Gang’ (Qing Bang) is in fact derived from the Subei term for salt-smugglers.

The immediate origins of the modern Green Gang, as opposed to its general antecedents, remain somewhat obscure. What can be inferred from the evidence presently available is that the foundations of the modern Green Gang were provided by the Anqing League, and that the Green Gang itself first emerged as a distinct organization in the 1880s and 1890s. In the late 1880s a certain Pan Shengtai 潘盛泰 and others, who belonged to the Anqing League, organized a ‘Pan Sect’ (Pan Men) which went under the official name of ‘Anqing Zhongxing’ 安清中興 [the Anqing Revival], and which was associated with the partial and temporary revival of the grain tribute system on the Grand Canal. The revival of the grain tribute system was one element in the politico-economic strategy of the officials of the Tongzhi Restoration (1862–1874) who sought to restore those conditions which had obtained prior to the onset of the Taiping and other rebellions. In the case of the attempted restoration of the grain tribute system, however, this strategy succumbed progressively both to escalating costs and to the development of a more economic and efficient alternative in sea transport in the course of the late nineteenth century. The revived system involved only six fleets (bang): the Jiang Huai 江淮四, the Xing Wu Si 興武四, the Xing Wu Liu 興武六, the Jia Bai 嘉白, the Jia Hai Wei 嘉海衛 and the Hang San 漢杉; and these six fleets provided a key element in the organizational system of the modern Green Gang. Tao Chengzhang 陶成章 noted the prevalence of this ‘Pan Sect’ or ‘Pan Family’ (Pan Jia 潘家) throughout the counties of the Jiangnan by the turn of the century. Tao also noted that by this time the ‘Pan Sect’ was also commonly known as the ‘Green Gang’, which in his view was a mistaken transcription of the term.
Tao, "Zhe'an jilue." The 'qing' which Tao gives for the term 'qing bang' is the *qing* which means 'celebration' (*nm*), and is, therefore, itself probably a mistaken transcription of the 'qing' in 'anqing', which is the *qing* meaning 'clear, pure'.

30 Another source, one of the Green Gang manuals (*tongcao*) which were published in the early twentieth century, states that in 1886 (the twelfth year of Guangxu) a further twenty-four generational status groups were created by members of the *Xing* 興 status group. It might be suggested that this event is the first clear reference to the creation of an organizational structure for the modern Green Gang.

It can be argued further that the creation of the modern Green Gang occurred over a prolonged period which extended into the first two decades of the twentieth century, and that its organization was effected at different times in different localities. Support for this view is provided by the Green Gang manual cited above which provides some evidence to suggest that the organization was carried out by members of the *Xing, Li* 理 and *Da* 大 generational status groups whose period of activity covered roughly the forty years from 1880 to 1920. The same document also notes that a third batch of twenty-four generational status groups was created in 1921, which would suggest that the process of defining the organizational structure of the Green Gang had not yet been fully completed by the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Some evidence for the proposition that the modern Green Gang was established at different times in different regions, and even in different localities of the same region, over the forty-odd year period from 1885 to round about 1925 is suggested by a survey of the Anqing and Green Gang organizations in the seventeen counties of the Huai region of Subei which was conducted by Wu Choupeng 吳壽彭 in the late 1920s as part of a larger enquiry into the social and economic conditions of the region. According to this survey almost all of the Anqing League organizations (in nine of the seventeen counties), for which some form of date was given, claimed to date from end of the Ming or the beginning of the Qing Dynasty. This would appear to indicate that the Anqing League organizations in these counties utilized the pre-existing boatmen's associations. The survey also revealed, however, that just under half of these Anqing League/Green Gang organizations (in eight of the seventeen counties) had been first established at some time in the second half of the nineteenth century, and mainly during the Guangxu period (1875–1908); and that two of them, those in Ganyu 贛榆 and Donghai 東海 counties, were established as late as 1914 and 1925 respectively. This would indicate a rapid expansion of these organizations in this region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of these organizations, which referred to themselves as 'Green Gang', moreover, were established in this later period, including the two which were set up in the early years of the Republic.

An important figure in the period of transition from the Anqing League to the Green Gang at the end of the nineteenth century was Xu Baoshan 徐寶山 (1866–1913), a prominent leader of the Anqing League in Subei. His sphere of operations was in the lower Yangzi valley in the region between Yangzhou and Zhenjiang 鎮江, and here he progressively built up an im-
pressive power base. By the first decade of the twentieth century he reputedly controlled over 700 salt-smuggling craft and had over 10,000 followers, and in 1899 he established his own organization, the Chunbao Lodge (Chunbao Shantang 春寶山堂). Throughout the 1890s and 1900s Xu enjoyed fairly complex relations with the Qing authorities and with the revolutionaries; in both cases the relationship oscillated between conflict and cooperation depending on which policy best served to maximize Xu's interests at any given time. The apogee of Xu's power occurred after 1900 when he was appointed commander of the Qing Government's local anti-smuggling forces, and especially with the outbreak of the 1911 Revolution when he seized power in Yangzhou. With the establishment of his authority in Yangzhou Xu gained control of the production and distribution centres of the salt industry. At the very moment of his triumph, however, Xu was assassinated by members of the Guomindang in revenge for the killing of Tongmenghui revolutionaries during his seizure of Yangzhou.35

The career of Xu Baoshan has a significance for the later history of the modern Green Gang for four main reasons. In the first place a number of his key followers, such as Zhang Renkui 張仁奎 and Gao Shikui 高士奎, went on to become important leaders of the Green Gang in the Republican period, and so provided in their persons a degree of continuity between the Anqing League and the modern Green Gang. Secondly, Xu's career reveals the complex relationship which existed between the leaders of the Anqing League and established authority, and the capacity of these leaders to cooperate successfully with that authority to mutual advantage. This was a pattern which was to be repeated by certain Green Gang leaders in Shanghai during the Republican period. Thirdly, a highly developed system of smuggling provided the economic basis for the power not only of Xu Baoshan but of all leaders of the Anqing League. The commodity, salt, was, as noted above, a necessary item in the diet of the Chinese population and one which was highly taxed by the State; therefore demand for cheap contraband salt was both high and constant. Again, the management of this smuggling activity demanded not only a corrupt relationship with the local authorities, but also a highly developed relationship with local merchants in order to ensure the effective distribution of the contraband salt. In all these ways, therefore, the salt smuggling activities of Xu and other members of the Anqing League provided both a precedent and a reservoir of practical experience on which later Green Gang leaders could draw when they engaged in trafficking in opium in the Republican period.

Finally, Xu Baoshan's career reveals the complex and confusing relationship that had developed between the Anqing League and the Triads by the turn of the century. As the creation of his Chunbao Lodge would suggest, Xu appears to have been a Triad member as well as a leader of the Anqing League. The relationship between the Anqing League and the Triads went back to the 1850s and 1860s when the Hunan Army was stationed in the Liang

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36 The following eleven Green Gang manuals have been consulted for the purposes of the present work:
2. Chen Guoping, Qingmen kaoyuan [The origins of the Green Gang] (Shanghai: Lianyi Chubanshe, 1946);
3. Daoji zhinan [A guide to the neglected way], (N.P.: n.p., 1921);
5. Liu Bainian, San’ an quanjii [The complete collection of the Three Monasteries]

Huai region to both eradicate the Nian and eliminate salt-smuggling. This force had been penetrated by the Gelaohui [the Society of Brothers and Elders] and most of its officers were members of the Gelaohui. These proceeded to cooperate in the salt-smuggling operations of the local leadership of the Anqing League, and by the end of the century a complex system of careful cooperation had developed between the Anqing League and the Gelaohui in Subei which allowed, on occasion, for leaders of the one organization to become members of the other. This relationship was continued by the modern Green Gang in the twentieth century. It was never free, however, of serious rivalry and frequent conflict, and was affected by changing power balances both within each secret society organization as well as between the two secret societies.

Most Chinese historians who discuss the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Anqing League and the emergence of the Green Gang in the late nineteenth century do so in terms of the re-emergence and reorganization of the gang. This approach is based on the assumption that the Green Gang and the eighteenth-century boatmen’s associations were one and the same organization. As noted above, there is no evidence to suggest that this was in fact the case (except for the organizational genealogies provided in the Green Gang manuals), and in fact there is some evidence to suggest that it was not. The argument that is made here is that the events in the second half of the nineteenth century reflect not so much the restoration of an old organization but rather the creation of an entirely new one. Although the Green Gang laid claim to the legacy of the Patriarch Luo Sect and the boatmen’s associations, it was in fact a new phenomenon. Its appropriation of the rituals and organizational structure of the defunct boatmen’s associations was part of a process by which it manufactured a ‘tradition’ for itself which in turn assisted its assimilation into the rural communities of Subei and later the Jiangnan.

The Organizational Structure of the Green Gang

Before proceeding to discuss the emergence of the Green Gang in Shanghai it is useful at this point to provide a brief description of its organizational structure. Details of the organization and regulations of the Green Gang are provided by the Green Gang manuals (tongcao) which were published in the 1930s and 1940s. The information contained in these manuals is a mix of fact and received (indeed appropriated) tradition, and disentangling the one from the other presents its own set of complex problems. Despite the difficulties, however, they constitute the major source of information on the internal organization of the Green Gang, and have been used extensively by those Chinese and Japanese historians of Chinese secret societies who discuss the Green Gang. The present section does not attempt a detailed exposition of the its organizational structure, and merely
gives an outline of the issue sufficient to provide the background to a larger work on the Green Gang in the early twentieth century.

The Green Gang organized itself as an ersatz lineage, and members regarded themselves as belonging to an extended clan system. They referred to the Green Gang as the 'family' (jia 家) and to their membership as being 'in the family' (jia li 家裡). An important aspect of this system was the organization of the Green Gang along generational lines in imitation of the generational structures of lineage systems. Senior leaders in the Green Gang were called 'masters' (shifu or laoshi 老師) and their authority within the system derived from the seniority of their generational status; only these 'masters', in theory, could recruit followers, who were called 'disciples' (tudi 徒弟). New members on entering the Green Gang were given, at the same time, a generational name (zi 字) which designated their position within the Green Gang hierarchy. The new members' generational status within the Green Gang would be the one immediately below that of their 'master'. In the first half of the twentieth century, for example, four generational status groups operated within the Green Gang which were, in descending order of seniority, the Da 大大, the Tong 通, the Wu 悟 and the Xue 学 (with the latter occasionally being referred to as the jue 覺). Thus followers of leaders who belonged to the Da 代 generational status group (the most senior of the four) were members of the Tong 順 generational status group, which was the next one down; those followers of the leaders of the Tong 順 generational status group were members of the Wu 復 generational status group; and, similarly, followers of leaders in the Wu 復 generational status group were members of the most junior generational status group of the period, the Xue.39

Originally, according to the tongcao, there were twenty-four generational status groups (zibei 字輩) whose creation was ascribed to the putative founder of the Green Gang, Jin Bifeng 金壁峰.40 According to the Green Gang manuals, the first four generational groups (the Qing 清, Jing 靜, Dao 道, and De 德) were assigned to the ancestral founders of the Green Gang: Jin Bifeng himself occupied the Qing generation; Luo Qing (the founder of the Luo Sect) occupied the Jing; Lu Kui 陸奎 (the 'Ancestor Lu') occupied the Dao; and the three 'Late Ancestors' (Houzu 後祖), Weng Yan 趙岩, Qian Jian 錢堅, and Pan Qing 潘清 occupied the fourth or Degeneration.41 There is some controversy over the origins of the last four generational status groups (the Da 大, the Tong 通, the Wu 復 and the Xue 学) with some sources denying that they formed part of the original generational structure of the traditional Green Gang, arguing that they were created only at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One source asserts that there were in fact only twenty generational groups in the original Green Gang structure; that the last of these generations, the Li 李, coincided with the final years of the Qing Dynasty which ended in 1911; that it was at this time that four further generational groups (the Da 大, the Tong 通, the Wu 復 and the Xue 学) were created; and that these were numbered twenty-one to twenty-four in the generational hierarchy.42 Another source agrees with this periodization, and adds a further refinement by

suggesting that these four generational groups were created by anti-Qing revolutionaries who sought to use the Green Gang groups in the Jiangnan, and that the generational names are an enigmatic reference to the Datong Military School (Datong Wuxue 大同武學) which was set up in Shaoxing by Xu Xilin 徐錫麟 and Qiu Jin 秋瑾.43 This latter suggestion, however, has not yet been substantiated by corroborative evidence. The controversy over the origins of the four generational status groups utilized by the modern Green Gang, and the implication that they were deliberately created in the late nineteenth century and arbitrarily grafted onto those of the traditional organization, tends to support the argument in the previous section that the Green Gang was a new phenomenon. This view is reinforced by the fact, also noted above, that two further sets of twenty-four generational status groups were created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which would suggest that the Green Gang was undergoing significant organizational changes in this period.

One further point needs to be made with regard to the generational structure of the modern Green Gang. Although membership of a senior generational group conferred influence and status within the Green Gang system, it did not necessarily confer power. Within the Shanghai Green Gang, for example, Huang Jinyong 黃金榮 did not become a member of one of the Green Gang's generations until late in his career, but this fact did not inhibit his ability to control his followers who were Green Gang members. Until he formally joined the Green Gang in 1923, Huang was described as having an 'empty character' (kongzi 空字), that is, he lacked membership of a formal generational status group (zibei 字辈). Du Yuesheng 杜月笙, for his part, was a member of the rather lowly Wu generational status group, which was ranked twenty-third out of the twenty-four generations. This did not prevent him, however, from exercising authority over Green Gang members who belonged to the generational status group, the Tong, that immediately preceded his own. This contradiction between formal status within the Green Gang system and the exercise of actual power is fundamental to an understanding of the development of the Green Gang in Shanghai. It reflects the fact, as suggested above, that the Green Gang was a relatively new phenomenon whose organizational structure was still evolving in the first decades of the twentieth century. As a result it was prepared to co-opt existing sources of gangster power (such as that exercised by Huang Jinyong), and at the same time its hierarchical structure was not sufficiently well-defined to prevent the acquisition of significant power by members whose formal status in the hierarchy was relatively low (such as Du Yuesheng).

The Green Gang was also organized into separate branches or gangs (bang). In the Green Gang tradition as recounted in the manuals, these branches were reputedly based on the grain tribute fleets (also called bang) of the Grand Canal. In the early twentieth century, however, there were only six major branches in the Green Gang structure, and, as mentioned in the pre-
ceding section, these appear to have been based on, or at least had the same names as, the six fleets of the grain transport that were revived temporarily by the Qing Government in the late nineteenth century. These six branches were the Jiang Huai Si, the Jia Bai, the Xing Wu Si, the Xing Wu Liu, the Hang San, and the Jia Hai Wei. These branches did not have precise geographical areas of activity, and their areas of predominance depended on the movements of the leaders of the 'Da' generational group of the respective branches, and on who among these leaders recruited followers and in what numbers. Two branches were influential in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s, the Xing Wu Si (which flourished in the French Concession) and the Xing Wu Liu (which flourished in the International Settlement), while the Jia Bai became the most powerful branch in Zhejiang after the 1911 Revolution.

According to the Green Gang manuals, the induction of new members involved fairly elaborate ceremonies, which were originally modelled on those of Buddhist monasticism. Green Gang initiates, for example, dressed in robes similar to those worn by Buddhist monks, and the terminology used in the ceremony was derived from that obtaining in Buddhist temples: the process of applying for membership was referred to a 'entering the monastery' (shangxiang 上香), while the customary payment made on joining the Green Gang was called 'making one's vows' (shoujie 受戒). The initiation ceremony itself was called xiangtang and ranged from fairly simple to extremely elaborate; whatever its degree of elaboration, however, it was normally held in a local temple. In general, the particular Green Gang leader who was accepting new followers and who was designated 'the master' was assisted by six other 'masters' who performed clearly defined and important roles in the ceremony. These included the introduction (yinjian 引進) of applicants, their instruction in Green Gang principles.

Figure 8
A photograph taken in 1913 of Shanghai's Green Gang bosses, all of whom belonged to the Da generational status group
An applicant for membership of the Green Gang first had to find a Green Gang ‘boss’ (laotou 老頭) with sufficient generational status to introduce him to the leader (‘master’) whose follower he wished to become. Once he had secured an introduction he then had to write out an application form (baishitie 拜師帖) containing information on his family background for three generations, his age, his native place, and his occupation, which he then presented personally to the ‘master’. The applicant then joined other initiates in the membership ceremony, which involved kowtowing three times and burning incense before the altars containing the tablets representing the Patriarch Luo and the three progenitors (zhuye 祖爺), Weng, Pan and Qian, which was followed by three prostrations before the ‘master’ and his six assistants. After a period of time the initiates were each given a mouthful of water, in a ceremony known as ‘the mouth cleaning’ (jingkou 淨口), which symbolized their purification and rebirth as a member of the Green Gang. The ‘master’ then put a series of formal questions to each initiate regarding his willingness to accept the rules of the society and the prescribed punishments for any breach of the Green Gang’s code. Each then received a certificate of membership on payment of a fee of Ch$10 or Ch$12 to the presiding ‘master’. The ceremony usually concluded with a formal dinner party.47

The Green Gang had, at least in theory, a very strict code of conduct which its members transgressed on pain of very severe penalties including death. The key regulations were the so-called ‘ten great rules’ (shi da banggui 十大規律) which were designed to ensure organizational solidarity and éprit. They forbade ‘disciples’ to deceive their masters or disgrace the Green Gang Ancestors, and encouraged them to respect their seniors in the Green Gang structure, to obey the society’s rules, to deal fairly with other members of the society, to keep the society’s secrets, and to avoid adultery and theft. They also bound all members to uphold the traditional Confucian virtues of ‘benevolence’ (ren 仁), ‘righteousness’ (yi 義), ‘propriety’ (li 礼), ‘wisdom’ (zhi 智) and ‘sincerity’ (xin 信). There were also a number of supplementary rules and proscriptions which covered such issues as the settlement of disputes between Green Gang members, mutual assistance among members, hospitality to travelling members, secret signs of recognition, and disciples’ responsibilities to their masters.48

The Emergence of the Green Gang in Shanghai

By the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Shanghai had emerged as an important centre of Green Gang activity. There were three general factors which, taken together, produced an environment there favourable to the growth of gangsterism in general and the development of
the Green Gang in particular. These were the emergence of Shanghai as a key transshipment point in the grain tribute system in the late nineteenth century; the mass peasant migration into Shanghai from the rural hinterland, especially from impoverished Jiangbei, consequent on its emergence as an industrial centre after 1895; and the existence of separate police jurisdictions in the city, together with the colonial nature of the police systems in the two foreign settlements.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century an increasing proportion of the tribute rice from the Jiangnan was transported by sea rather than by the Grand Canal, first in sea-going junks and then in steamships. One consequence of this development was that Shanghai, as the southern terminus of the sea-transport system, became an important transshipment point for the tribute rice from Jiangsu and Zhejiang. The tribute grain from these provinces was transported to Shanghai where it was stored, weighed and loaded onto the sea-going junks. The latter then assembled off Chongming Island and proceeded as a fleet to Tianjin, the voyage taking about one month or only one-third of the time it took to transport the grain up the Grand Canal. As a result, many former boatmen and others associated with the Grand Canal transport system moved to Shanghai in order to work on the docks, the sea-going junks, and the steamships when the latter began to replace the junks. These former transport workers on the Grand Canal brought with them to Shanghai elements of the new Green Gang organization which, as noted in the first section above, was in the process of definition during this period. Tribute rice was an increasingly important cargo for the steamers of the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company (Lunchuan Zhaoshangju 輪船招商局— the CMSN) after 1873, and the CMSN ships and docks in Shanghai became particular centres of Green Gang activity by the beginning of the twentieth century. By the end of the nineteenth century local officials began to take note of the increase in crime, smuggling in particular, on the Shanghai waterfront. In 1889, for example, Qing officials in Shanghai agreed on the need to establish an anti-smuggling squad on the Huangpu river in order to curb the activities of the numerous smuggling craft on the river. In this way, it may be suggested, Shanghai emerged as a centre for the modern Green Gang from the latter’s inception in the decades of the 1880s and 1890s.

In the early twentieth century, Shanghai’s position as the leading commercial and industrial centre in China acted as a magnet for peasants and merchants alike who came from all over the country to work in its factories and commercial firms. As a result, the city’s population burgeoned dramatically in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. The population for the whole of Shanghai virtually trebled in the brief twenty-year period 1910–30, increasing from just over one million to just over three million. The population increases in the foreign Settlements were even more dramatic. In the International settlement, the population doubled between 1895 and 1910 and doubled again between 1910 and 1930, while that of the French Concession almost tripled between 1895 and 1915 and more than tripled.

49 Hinton, Grain tribute system, pp.80–4; Chen Rongguang, Lao Shanghái [Old Shanghai], 3 vols (Shanghai: Taidong Tushu Ju, 1919), 1: 181.
51 Hu, “Qing Bang shi chutan,” p.117.
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again between 1915 and 1930.\(^{52}\) The greater part of this increase was provided by immigrants from other parts of China, principally the Jiangnan and Jiangbei regions. In the International Settlement, for example, immigrants from other regions of China made up over 89 per cent of the total population in 1895, over 82 per cent in 1910, and over 90 per cent in 1930.\(^{53}\)

In addition to the indigent peasantry, these immigrants also included various social groups who lived either close to the margins of the law or entirely outside it in their home communities. These groups included disbanded soldiers, salt-smugglers, bandits, local thugs and rural police constables who were attracted by the enhanced opportunities for their activities provided by Shanghai. Many members of these groups, like the peasant immigrants generally, came from rural Jiangbei which, as noted earlier, was a major centre of Green Gang activity. Many of them were, in fact, members of the Green Gang, and they brought with them their own organization which served to reinforce the Green Gang system already present in Shanghai. Support for this proposition is provided by a name-list of Green Gang leaders contained in a 1930s Green Gang manual, in which the overwhelming majority of those listed as resident in Shanghai (sixty-two per cent) actually came from other parts of China, notably Jiangbei, Shandong and Ningbo.\(^{54}\)

Thus, in the early years of the twentieth century Shanghai was a city of immigrants, and one where the social cohesion of the Chinese population was tenuous at best. In this situation the role of native-place (\(tongxiang\)) networks gained in significance, and these provided the basis for whatever social organization existed among the Chinese population. This fact was of enormous importance in the development of organized crime in the city. Given the fact that most of the gangsters were themselves immigrants, the native-place system itself became the basic building block of gangster organizations. Many gangster bosses restricted their area of operations to their fellow provincials, as did Gu Zhuxian 高竹軒 in the International Settlement and Jin Jiulin 金九林 in the French Concession, both of whose power bases were provided by their fellow immigrants from Subei.\(^{55}\) The gangsters used native-place networks to organize protection and other rackets (such as prostitution, gambling, etc.); to interpose themselves as middlemen between their native-place group and other such groups; to mediate relations between their fellow-provincials and petty officialdom in the various municipalities of Shanghai; and to gain control of the labour market and transform it into a lucrative racket.\(^{56}\)

The large influx of Chinese immigrants into Shanghai in the 1910s and 1920s, and the attendant increase in gangster activities, posed serious problems of social order and control for the city’s police authorities. These authorities, however, were ill-equipped to deal with such problems. Shanghai was in fact not one city but three—the Chinese City, the International Settlement and the French Concession—each with its own administrative, legal and (most important) police systems.\(^{57}\) There was little or no institutional cooperation

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\(^{52}\) Luo Zhiru, *Tongjibiao zhong zhi Shanghai* [Shanghai in statistics] (Nanjing: Guoli Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan [Academia Sinica], 1932), p.21, table 29. The figures given by Luo are as follows:

- a. The whole of Shanghai
  - 1910: 1,185,859
  - 1930: 3,112,250

- b. The International Settlement
  - 1895: 245,679
  - 1910: 501,541
  - 1930: 1,007,868

- c. The French Concession
  - 1895: 52,188
  - 1915: 149,000
  - 1930: 434,807

\(^{53}\) Ibid., p.27, table 43.

\(^{54}\) Chen, *Qingmen kaoyuan*, pp.281–313.

\(^{55}\) Wang, “Shanghai Qing Hong Bang gaishu,” p.64.

between the three separate police authorities, and what cooperation did occur was on an *ad hoc* and individual basis. The lack of such formal cooperation between the two foreign jurisdictions was all the more remarkable given their shared interests in the maintenance of their respective colonial authorities. The degree of isolation between the foreign administrations was reflected in the admission by the acting French Consul-General, Jacques Meyrier, to the French Municipal Council in the wake of the May 30th Incident in 1925 that no direct telephone link existed between the police authorities of the French Concession and the International Settlement. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the three municipalities were not merely civic administrations but were also separate national jurisdictions, and therefore routine police functions (such as criminal investigations and the maintenance of local order) could and did take on the character of exercises in international relations. The frustrations to which such a situation gave rise were well summed up by the Commissioner of the Municipal Police of the International Settlement in the following extracts quoted by Feetham in his report on the question of extraterritoriality to the Municipal Council in 1931:

> While the police forces do cooperate with each other to the best of their ability in the circumstances, full cooperation is impossible because of fundamental differences in ideas of police administration. Prevalence of crime in one area is not likely to give cause for anxiety to the police in another area; in fact, there is no exchange of information between the three authorities in connection with the general state of crime. There is no central Police control. . . .

> Further, while the principles on which the police administrations of the three independent areas of a large city work, differ as fundamentally as they do in Shanghai, and while political expediency gives rise to continual friction, there can be no real cooperation between the different police authorities in suppressing crime.  

Such a situation of divided and conflicting police jurisdiction allowed the gangsters to flourish and to extend their own organizational systems. They could set themselves up in one jurisdiction and conduct armed robberies, kidnappings and narcotics trafficking in the other two jurisdictions, and they could safeguard their base by bribing the local beat policemen and even relatively senior police officials. During periodic police crackdowns the gangsters could avoid any substantial loss in their position by moving between jurisdictions. It was for eventualities such as these that the various gangster groups entered into agreements and formed loose alliances among themselves. A good example of how the system of divided police authority worked to the advantage of leading gangsters is provided by the career of Wang Yaqiao 王亞樵. Wang, a Green Gang member and a professional assassin, ran Shanghai's equivalent of Murder Incorporated, and, despite being on the most wanted lists of all three Shanghai police forces, he was able to continue his activities virtually unhindered for almost twenty years. It can be argued, in fact, that the Shanghai gangsters successfully transferred to the advantage of leading gangsters is provided by the career of Wang Yaqiao 王亞樵. Wang, a Green Gang member and a professional assassin, ran Shanghai's equivalent of Murder Incorporated, and, despite being on the most wanted lists of all three Shanghai police forces, he was able to continue his activities virtually unhindered for almost twenty years. It can be argued, in fact, that the Shanghai gangsters successfully transferred

57 There are as yet no Western monographic studies of the police systems which operated in Shanghai prior to 1937. For an analysis of the development of modern police functions in Chinese Shanghai see Frederic Wakeman, Jr., "Policing modern Shanghai," *China Quarterly* 115 (September 1988): 408-40.

58 "Conseil d'administration municipale de la concession française à Changhai. Comptes rendus de la gestion pour l'exercice 1925, Séance du conseil du 9 Septembre 1925," p.140. The records of the French Concession Municipal Council are held in the Shanghai Municipal Archives.


60 In 1922, for example, the French Consul-General, Auguste Wilden, dismissed the entire personnel of one police post (composed of a sergeant and four constables) for taking bribes from local gangsters; M.A. Wilden (Consul-General de France à Changhai), à son Excellence Monsieur Poincaré, President du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères à Paris, Consulat-General de France à Changhai, 18 February 1924, Direction des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales d'Asie: Oceanie, No.34 E515, 4.

61 "Reported assassination of Wong Yao Jao" (Report by D.S.I. Coyne, 3 December 1936), Shanghai Municipal Police, Special Branch Sect.2, Investigation File D5374.

62 Liangshanpo was the hideout and stronghold of the Chinese 'Robin Hoods' at the end of the Song Dynasty as described in the Ming novel entitled 'The water margin.'

63 Although the Big Eight Mob's operations were taken over by the French Concession Green Gang in the mid-1920s, and its organization was absorbed into the latter's, nevertheless its influence persisted among the Chinese detectives of the Shanghai Municipal Police. The chief of these detectives in the 1930s, one Lu Liankui 魯聯桂, was not only a Green Gang member but was a follower of Ji Yunqing 楊雲清, one of the eight leaders of the Big Eight Mob. Zhang Jungu, *Du Yuesheng zhuan* [Biography of Du Yuesheng], 4 vols (Taipei: Zhuanji Wenxue, 1980), 1: 124, 136; Jiang, "Qingbang de yuanliu," pp.61, 66.
among the Chinese detective branch of the SMP, particularly regarding contraband opium, see E.W. Peters, *Shanghai policeman* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1937), pp.113–14. Peters was a sergeant in the uniform branch of the SMP who resided in 1936 in somewhat controversial circumstances over the death of a coolie; C.E. Gauss (Consul-General, Shanghai) to Secretary of State, Washington, “Political Report for February 1936” (6 March 1936), 893.00 P.R. Shanghai/89.


**Figure 9**

*Calligraphy of Huang Jinyong*

The situation was further complicated by the fact that gangsters also formed the basis of the Chinese detective squads in both the International Settlement and the French Concession. The chief of the Chinese Detective Squad of the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) in the 1910s and 1920s was one Shen Xingshan 沈杏山. Shen was also the principal leader of the Green Gang organization known as the Big Eight Mob (*Da Ba Gu Dang 大八股黨*), which controlled the narcotics traffic in the International Settlement in the late 1910s and early 1920s, and many of his lieutenants were also members of the Municipal Police’s Chinese detective squad.63 Indeed, the Big Eight Mob had such a grip on the SMP Chinese detective squad that one former China coast journalist observed rather sardonically that ‘almost every Chinese detective on the [SMP] force had a criminal record’.64 A similar situation obtained in the French Concession where Huang Jinyong was Chief of the Chinese Detective Squad of the French Police.

The fact that this state of affairs continued throughout the lives of the foreign settlements would seem to indicate that it was a deliberate policy rather than a mere chance occurrence. The probable rationale for this policy was that the coercion of selected gangster groups was the most cost-effective way of maintaining order among and control over the settlements’ Chinese populations. This reflected the fact that the police forces of both settlements were essentially colonial forces whose main task was to ensure the security of the colonial administrations and the lives and property of the imperial powers’ citizens, and not the enforcement of law among the subject (Chinese) population. Given that the gangster-detectives’ function was to mediate the coercive power exercised by the colonial authority over the indigenous Chinese population, their role was in effect that of ‘compradors of violence’. This general rationale was doubtless reinforced in the Shanghai situation by the enormous problems of social control posed by the continuous large increases in the Chinese populations throughout this period, and by the specific problems for police control posed by the separate national jurisdictions. Whatever the reasons for this policy, its effect was to strengthen and, to a degree, institutionalize gangster organizations in the foreign settlements. The access to foreign authority which
the gangster-detectives gained by virtue of their role in the system of control strengthened their power and enhanced their status among other gangster groups. Indeed, their role gave them a certain legitimacy within the settlements' colonial power structure and some of them, such as Huang Jinyong, were even decorated by the colonial authorities for services rendered.\textsuperscript{65}

The gangsters also took advantage of the colonial structure of the foreign settlements in other ways in order to enhance their security. One means which proved rather effective was bribing the consuls of countries enjoying extraterritoriality in order to obtain the nominal citizenship of these states and the extraterritorial privileges that went with it. In this way the gangster bosses could ensure that any criminal cases involving themselves would be heard by these consuls in the Mixed Courts of the International Settlement and the French Concession, who would invariably dismiss the proceedings. In the early 1920s the Portuguese, Spanish and Chilean consuls-general enjoyed a lucrative business selling the rights of citizenship of their respective countries to a large number of local Shanghai gangsters. Included in this number were Du Yuesheng, who enjoyed Portuguese citizenship, and the Guangdong narcotics 'king', Ye Qinghe 萬清和, who claimed to be a Chilean protégé.\textsuperscript{66}

By the 1920s, therefore, Shanghai had become notorious as the major centre of large-scale criminal activity in China. There are no reliable figures for the total number of gangsters in Shanghai; nevertheless, the most commonly cited contemporary estimate for the 1920s and 1930s was about 100,000, which represented just over three per cent of the city's population at that time.\textsuperscript{67} Most of these were members of the Green Gang which was by that time the predominant secret society-cum-gangster organization in Shanghai. According to a name-list of prominent Green Gang members compiled in the early 1930s, over ten per cent were resident in Shanghai, which represented the greatest concentration of Green Gang leaders in any city in China at that time.\textsuperscript{68}

The Green Gang system in Shanghai did not represent a single, integrated organization, but rather functioned as a loose structure of interlocking webs of influence and authority which allowed for the coexistence within it of different and competing groups. According to Jiang Hao 姜豪, who was himself a Green Gang leader and a member of the Guomindang in the 1930s, there was a total of forty-eight Green Gang leaders who were prominent in Shanghai over the period of thirty years from 1919 to 1949. All of these leaders recruited their own followers and exercised real, if unequal, power in their own right, while their relationships with one another oscillated between guarded cooperation and outright conflict, depending on which strategy best served their interests at any given time. The majority of these Green Gang bosses belonged to the Tong generational status group (thirty-four, or seventy per cent), while ten (or twenty per cent) belonged to the prestigious Da generational status group; only one, Du Yuesheng, belonged to the relatively lowly Wu generational status group.\textsuperscript{69} There were, in other words, different centres of power within the system at any given moment, and these shifted and changed over time.
By the beginning of the 1920s, for example, three or four of these groups had emerged as significant, if different, centres of power within the Green Gang system in Shanghai. There was the group headed by Zhang Renkui in the International Settlement. In the 1920s Zhang was the most prestigious Green Gang leader in Shanghai. He personified the link between the Anqing League in Subei of the late nineteenth century and the modern Green Gang in Shanghai of the early twentieth century, and his influence extended throughout the Subei region, including southern Shandong, as well as the Jiangnan and Shanghai. Perhaps the most important Green Gang organization in this period was, as noted above, the Big Eight Mob, also located in the International Settlement. It controlled a number of subordinate groups in the 1910s, including that of Huang Jinyong in the French Concession which took over the activities of the Big Eight Mob in the course of the 1920s. North of Suzhou Creek, a further Green Gang group was organized among Subei migrants by Gu Zhuxian which came to dominate the entertainment industry and the rickshaw business in the Zhabei-Hongkou district.

**Conclusion**

In sum, the Green Gang was a newly-established secret society organization. Despite its general antecedents in the boatmen’s associations and the Patriarch Luo Sect, the Green Gang’s actual origins cannot be traced back much beyond the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The Green Gang, indeed, was still in the process of organizational definition in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This fact is of fundamental importance in understanding its emergence in Shanghai. Rather than representing the adaptation of a long-established traditional secret society organization to a new Sino-foreign environment, the Green Gang in Shanghai, in fact, was part of a newly emergent organization still in the process of formation. In other words, the Green Gang as it developed in Shanghai was not an aberrant form of a well-established secret society system, but rather an integral part of a new phenomenon. This in turn suggests that secret societies, far from being static ‘traditional’ organizations, were in fact resilient social phenomena which not only drew on well-established traditions but could adapt, indeed transform, those traditions to meet the needs of changed social conditions. Indeed, these secret societies, as the history of the Green Gang in Shanghai indicates, represented one aspect of the Chinese popular response to the challenge of modernity.