

and princesses in all time to be happy healthy prosperous, with intent that here in the Jade Land there should be success and prosperity in all harvests of the Law for the people good, low and middle.

"To-day on this evening there is the preaching of the noble (*āysñā*, as Avestan *āsna-*, Armenian loan-word *azniu*) profound Law of ultimate truth."

It will be seen how the thoughts of the orator are clothed in an Indian garment.

LIEH-TZŪ AND THE DOVES: A PROBLEM OF DATING

by DERK BODDE

Concerning the dating of the Taoist work *Lieh-tzū* 列子 there is, as is well known, a wide divergence of opinion, for whereas most Western scholars accept it as a work of the third century B.C., modern Chinese scholarship tends to regard it as a forgery of the third or fourth century A.D. Among the passages used to support the latter dating is that from chapter eight, describing the release of living doves on New Year's day, in which some scholars believe there is a Buddhist influence. The passage in question, whose setting is the city of Han-tan (capital of the state of Chao) in the fifth century B.C., reads as follows:¹

The people of Han-tan (had the habit), on New Year's day, of presenting (live) doves to Chien-tzū.² This greatly pleased Chien-tzū, who liberally rewarded those (who made the donations). To a stranger who asked the meaning of this (custom), Chien-tzū explained that the release of living creatures (*fang-shêng* 放生) on New Year's day was a manifestation of kindness. "But," said the stranger, "if the people, knowing of Your Lordship's desire to release them, compete with one another in catching them, those that die in the process must indeed be numerous. If you really wish to let them live, the best way would be to prohibit the people from catching them at all. For if they have to be caught in order to be released, the kindness does not compensate for the cruelty." Chien-tzū acknowledged that he was right.

Another less developed version of the same story appears in the seventeenth chapter of *K'ung Ts'ung-tzū* (a work of Later Han or post-Han date); in it sparrows (*ch'iao* 雀) take the place of doves (*chiu* 鳩), and the setting, while still Han-tan, is shifted from the fifth to the third century B.C.:³

¹ Translation slightly modified from that of L. Giles, *Taoist Teachings from the Book of Lieh Tzū* (London, 2nd printing, 1925), pp. 118, 119.

² I.e., Chao Chien-tzū 趙簡子, head of the Chao clan in the state of Chin, who died in 458 B.C. See E. Chavannes, *Mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* (Paris, 1905), v, 40. Han-tan 邯鄲 was some ten *li* south-west of the present city by that name in southern Hopei.

³ *K'ung Ts'ung-tzū* 孔叢子, 5/8a-b (Ssü-pu pei-yao ed.).

The people of Han-tan (had the habit), on New Year's day, of presenting (live) sparrows to the King of Chao, which they tied together with varicoloured cords. This greatly pleased the King, and Shen-shu reported it to Tzū-shun,⁴ . . . saying: "The releasing of them on New Year's day is a manifestation of the giving of life."

Dr. Waley, who accepts the early dating of *Lieh-tzū*, writes as follows about the anecdote from it we have just quoted:⁵

In certain passages of *Lieh Tzū* critics have seen references to Buddhism; thus the anecdote (viii, 24) about "release of living things" as part of a New Year ceremony has been interpreted as referring to the Buddhist custom of *fang-shêng* ("release of live things"). It remains to be proved that this Buddhist custom was known in China at anything like so early a date as the third or fourth century A.D., the period to which critics attribute the forging of *Lieh Tzū*.

Dr. Waley is unquestionably right in denying the possibility of Buddhist influence, for the Buddhist practice to which he alludes does not seem to have become widespread before the T'ang dynasty, and is apparently first referred to only during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang (early sixth century).⁶ Does this fact in itself, however, in any way prove the counter thesis that this *Lieh-tzū* passage is actually a product of the third century B.C.? Obviously it does not, and therefore, in what follows, we shall look for external datable evidence in an effort to determine whether any specific period can be found which, more than others, possessed a cultural milieu favouring the appearance of a story of this kind. The Han dynasty, as we shall see, constituted such a period, for during it there developed what might almost be called a cult of doves (*chiu*), as evidenced not only in the alleged custom of releasing doves on New Year's day, but in other stories and practices as well.

1. The presentation of dove-staffs to the aged

During the Later Han dynasty, annually in the eighth month, according to *Hou Han-shu*, 15/2b, a "registration of households" (*an hu* 案戶) took place throughout the empire, in the course of which the populace of

⁴ I.e., K'ung Tzū-shun 孔子順, a seventh-generation descendant of Confucius who was councillor to King An-hsi (276-243) of Wei during the latter part of that ruler's reign. See Chavannes, *op. cit.*, v, 431, note 5.

⁵ Arthur Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (London, 1939), p. 258.

⁶ See citations in Ting Fu-pao, comp., *Fo-hsiieh ta-tz'ü-tien* (Great Dictionary of Buddhism) [Shanghai, 2nd ed., 1929], *sub fang-shêng*. The earliest of these is the biography of Hsieh Cheng 謝徵 in *Liang shu*, 50/5a, where it is stated that Hsieh "composed an 'Essay on Releasing Living Things' (*Fang-shêng wên* 文), for which he was conferred favours by the world." This statement is immediately followed by a date corresponding to 529. (References to the dynastic histories are to the Chung-hua Book Co.'s 1923 photolithographic reprint of the 1739 Palace edition.)

each prefecture was ranked according to age. On this occasion the local authorities held a reception for the aged, at which persons over seventy were given millet gruel, while those over eighty were in addition presented with staffs, the handles of which were decorated with the figure of a dove. The explanation for this dove figure, as given by the text, is that "the dove is a bird which has no difficulty in swallowing (its food), and the wish here is that the aged should (likewise) have no difficulty in swallowing."

Without discussing the plausibility of this explanation, we should note that this practice of conferring dove-staffs is apparently unmentioned in texts dealing with the Former Han dynasty, so that it seems to be of Later Han origin. Like many official ceremonies inaugurated under the Later Han, however, it was undoubtedly inspired by statements in the ritualistic texts, specifically, in its case, by what is said in the *Yüeh-ling* (Monthly Commands) under the eighth month: "In this month, support is given to the decrepit and aged. They are presented with stools and staffs, and distribution is made to them of millet gruel, drink and food."⁷ Though this says nothing about the staffs being decorated with doves, the idea for so doing may possibly derive from another passage in *Chou-li* (where, however, the reference is to the second and not the eighth month): "In the middle (month) of spring, he (the Netter of Birds) nets the spring birds. He presents doves to nourish the aged of the country."⁸

Apart from what is said in *Hou Han-shu*, the existence of dove-staffs in Later Han times is attested by such writers of the day as Wang Ch'ung 王充 (A.D. 27-ca. 100),⁹ Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140-ca. 206),¹⁰ and Kao Yu 高誘 (fl. dur. 205-12).¹¹ Moreover, it is also evidenced by two objects of Han date of which Laufer, in separate publications, has provided illustrations. The first is a pottery hill-jar, on whose cover, moulded in low relief, appears a man leaning on a staff; a side panel of the same jar shows a similar figure, holding, however, not an ordinary staff, but what appears to be a bird-like object. Laufer, in commenting on its possible meaning, draws attention to the *Hou Han-shu* passage about dove-staffs we have just cited.¹²

⁷ Cf. *Li chi*, ch. 4; tr. J. Legge in *Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford, 1885), xxvii, 287-88. Also contained in *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, viii, 1; tr. R. Wilhelm, *Frühling und Herbst des Lü Bu We* (Jena, 1928), p. 92.

⁸ *Chou-li*, xxx; tr. E. Biot, *Le Tchou li* (Paris, 1851), ii, 211.

⁹ *Lun hêng*, ch. 36 (tr. A. Forke, *Lun-Hêng*, Berlin, 1911, ii, 84), in which Wang wonders why the staffs presented to aged persons should be surmounted by a dove rather than some other kind of bird.

¹⁰ In the passage quoted from him below, on which see note 14.

¹¹ In his commentary on *Yüeh-ling*, as found in *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* (see note 7), where he writes: "This (practice mentioned in *Yüeh-ling*) is the same as the present ranking of households, with its distribution to the aged of dove-staffs and gruel."

¹² B. Laufer, *Chinese Pottery of the Han Dynasty* (Leiden, 1909), Plate LVI, Fig. 2, and remarks on pp. 205, 206 (where he gives a somewhat garbled version of the *Hou Han-shu* passage). Unfortunately, Laufer's photograph is not clear enough to let us see for ourselves the bird which he says is there.

Likewise, in his other publication, Laufer reproduces, from a Chinese catalogue of bronzes, a drawing of a bronze staff handle, topped by a dove, which by the catalogue is labelled a "Han dove staff-head".¹³

2. How doves saved the life of the Han founder

There is a Han story according to which Kao-tsu, founder of the dynasty, while campaigning against Hsiang Yü in 205-204 B.C., was once saved by doves from capture by his opponent. This story is unknown in the accounts of his campaigns given by *Shih-chi* and *Han-shu*, and seems to have become current in written literature only toward the end of the Later Han, though many references to it occur in post-Han texts as well. The earliest version I have found is that by Ying Shao (ca. 140-ca. 206), in his *Fêng-su t'ung-yi* 風俗通義:¹⁴

It is popularly said that when Kao-tsu was battling with Hsiang Yü between Ching and So, he hid himself in a thicket of reeds. (Hsiang) Yü pursued him, but just then some doves were cooing above him, so that the pursuers believed surely nobody was there. Thus (Kao-tsu) succeeded in escaping, and so when he mounted the throne, he singled out this bird (for special attention). Hence (during the Han dynasty there arose the custom of) making dove-staffs for presentation to aged men.

The battle here mentioned is presumably that of June, 205 B.C., which took place between Ching 京 and So 索, south of Jung-yang 滎陽 (near the modern Chengchow, Honan). In the histories, however, it is recorded as a victory for Kao-tsu, with no mention of his having had to hide from Hsiang Yü.¹⁵ Whereas this version of the story makes it the inspiration for the practice of conferring dove-staffs on the aged, another version, slightly changed in locale and date, links it to the custom (described in *Lieh-tzū* and *K'ung Ts'ung-tzū*) of releasing doves on New Year's day. The earliest example of this second version found by me is that in *San Ch'i*

¹³ Laufer, "The Bird-Chariot in China and Europe", in *Boas Anniversary Volume* (New York, 1906), p. 419, reproducing the drawing found in the eighteenth century catalogue of imperial bronzes, *Hsi-ch'ing ku-chien* 西清古鑑, 38/19a-b (Shanghai: 1926 photolithographic reprint of the 1751 ed.). (In Laufer's article the reference is mistakenly given as 38/39.)

¹⁴ Edition of the Centre franco-chinois d'études sinologiques, *Le Fong sou t'ong yi* (Peiping, 1943), p. 87. The story in question does not occur in the text proper of *Fêng-su t'ung-yi* now extant, but has been added to it from quotations found in several other works, of which the earliest is Li Tao-yüan's (d. 527) *Shui-ching chu* (Commentary on the Water Classic), 7/11b (Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an ed.). Forke, in his translation of *Lun-hêng*, ii, 84, note 4, has already noted the passage.

¹⁵ See H. H. Dubs, *History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Baltimore, 1938), i, 80, 81.

lieh-chi 三齊略記, a work by an unknown Chin author, today known only in quotation:¹⁶

At Jung-yang there is a Well of Escape (Mien-ching 免井), and when the Duke of P'ei, (founder) of the Han, was fleeing from Hsiang Yü, he took refuge in this well. (At that time) there was a pair of doves perching above it. Someone said that the Duke of P'ei had fled into the well, but (Hsiang) Yü replied: "Were someone in the well, the doves would not be perching above it." Thereafter the Duke of P'ei saved himself from his danger. It is probably because of this that later, during the Han era, (there arose the custom of) releasing doves on New Year's day.

The events described here are presumably those of June/July, 204 B.C., when Kao-tsu was besieged by Hsiang Yü at Jung-yang, and succeeded only with great difficulty in escaping from the city.¹⁷ The same story, in a somewhat telescoped form, also appears in the *Ti-li shu* 地理書, by Lu Têng 陸澄 (425-494):¹⁸

Jung-yang has a well inside which the King of Han hid from Hsiang Yü. A pair of doves flew and perched on the well, so that (Hsiang) Yü supposed no one was there. Thus the Duke of P'ei succeeded in escaping, and on this account (the well) acquired its name (of Well of Escape). It is because of this that, during the Han era, (there arose the custom of) releasing doves on New Year's day.

Other versions of the story also exist (some in local gazetteers of relatively recent date), in which the well is variously named Well of Distress (Ô-ching 厄井), Well of Yao (Yao-ching 堯井), or Well of Pigeons (Po-ko-ching 鵓井); its location, though usually placed in the general vicinity of Jung-yang, is in one case (that of the Well of Pigeons) shifted all the way to the neighbourhood of Lin-ch'êng 臨城 (in south central Hopei), i.e., far north of the scene of Kao-tsu's actual campaigns against Hsiang Yü.¹⁹

3. The dove-chariot

Very occasionally, in Chinese writings on bronzes, references are made to certain small bronze objects termed *chiu-ch'e*, "dove-chariots", which are

¹⁶ See *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan*, 29/5b (Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an ed.), where it is quoted as *San Ch'i lieh*. On this lost work see *Pu-chün-shu yi-wên-chih* (Supplemental Treatise on Literature for the Chin History), in the K'ai-ming Book Co.'s *Êrh-shih-wu-shih pu-pien* (Supplemental Compilations on the Twenty-five Histories), iii, 3741, top.

¹⁷ Dubs, *op. cit.*, i, 84, 85.

¹⁸ Now lost, but quoted (as *Ti-li chih* 志) in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan*, 921/6b.

¹⁹ See the citations in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan*, 189/9a; the *T'u-shu chi-ch'êng* encyclopaedia, ts'e 517, 29/27b (Chung-hua photolithographic ed. of 1934); and *P'ei-wên yü-fu*, p. 2116.1, sub Ô-ching (Commercial Press: Wan-yu wên-k'u ed. of 1938). Most of these recount only the story itself, without explicitly linking it either to the dove-staffs or the freeing of doves.

said in the texts to have been used as toys. They consist of the figure of a dove mounted between two chariot-like movable wheels, with the dove's tail being sometimes supported on a third smaller wheel. Usually a baby dove sits on the back of the adult bird, while others sometimes perch on her tail or breast. In the Chinese catalogues of bronzes picturing these dove-chariots, they are said to have originated in the Han dynasty and to have continued being made until the T'ang. Aside from the drawings found in these works, a very few actual specimens are extant in bronze collections today. In the West they have been illustrated and discussed in some detail by Laufer and Seligman, as well as, recently and more briefly, by Hentze.²⁰

Despite the fact that Seligman wrote in ignorance of Laufer's earlier study,²¹ the two men come to remarkably similar conclusions. Both point out that the Chinese dove-chariots are not unique, being paralleled in Europe by bird-chariots found at various Bronze Age sites. Though the European examples apparently vary considerably in date (Laufer assigns one to probably the eighth century B.C., whereas Seligman would date his examples around 1300), they are surely considerably older than the earliest Chinese examples, provided these do belong, as traditionally stated, to the Han dynasty.²² It is the common conclusion of Laufer and Seligman, therefore, that the bird-chariot probably originated in Europe and spread from there to Han China (according to Laufer, probably via Siberia).

Conclusions

1. The *Lieh-tzū* anecdote about releasing doves on New Year's day has nothing to do with the Buddhist practice of *fang-shêng*, "releasing living things", since the latter is not mentioned before the sixth century A.D., whereas the latest date suggested for *Lieh-tzū* is only the third or fourth century A.D.

2. The Han dynasty saw the development of an interest in doves which manifested itself in: (a) the distribution to aged persons of staffs, the handles of which were decorated with the figure of a dove; (b) the alleged

²⁰ Laufer, "The Bird-Chariot in China and Europe" (see note 13); C. G. Seligman, "Bird-Chariots and Socketed Celts in Europe and China", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, n.s., vol. 23 (1920), 153-58; Carl Hentze, "Le symbolisme des oiseaux dans la Chine ancienne", *Sinologica*, vol. v, no. 2 (1957), 74, 75. All three articles contain good illustrations, but whereas Laufer and Seligman focus their attention on the bird-chariots *per se*, Hentze discusses these only in the context of a much broader theory, whose speculative nature and lack of precise documentation make it difficult for me to accept its conclusions.

²¹ In a postscript, Seligman states that he became aware of the latter only after writing his own paper.

²² The studies of Laufer and Seligman were made many years ago, and further research on this subject would be desirable.

custom of releasing doves on New Year's day; (c) the story of how the Han founder, Kao-tsu, while campaigning against Hsiang Yü, was saved from capture by the presence of doves above his hiding place (a story variously used to explain the practice both of a and b); and finally (d) the making of small bronze dove-chariots, believed by Laufer and Seligman to have originated in Bronze Age Europe and to have passed from there to China of the Han dynasty.

3. None of the datable texts cited in support of the foregoing developments is earlier than the first century A.D.; those connected with the Kao-tsu story, indeed, first appear only toward the end of the Later Han and continue into much later times. The evidence, therefore, points strongly to the first and second centuries A.D. (and not the Former Han) as the period when the cult of doves first really gathered momentum. In view of this fact, it seems extremely unlikely that the *Lieh-tzū* anecdote could have been written as early as the third century B.C., and much more probable that it too belongs to the first or second century A.D. Conceivably, indeed, it (as well as the parallel in *K'ung Ts'ung-tzū*) could have been written somewhat later, *i.e.*, sometime during the third or fourth century, which is where modern Chinese opinion has tended to date the *Lieh-tzū* as a whole. The Later Han, however, seems on the whole a more probable period, since it is then that most of the dove references occur.

4. I have no ready explanation as to why Han-tan is made the locale of the *Lieh-tzū* and *K'ung Ts'ung-tzū* stories, but appears in no other text. We have already seen, however, that the Kao-tsu story, though usually located in the general region around Jung-yang in Honan, is in one instance shifted to a place in Hopei well north of Han-tan.

5. The fact that the *Lieh-tzū* dove anecdote probably dates only from the Later Han, or, conceivably, is even post-Han, does not in itself, of course, necessarily invalidate the thesis that the *Lieh-tzū* as a whole belongs to the third century B.C. Such a thesis can be proved or disproved, however, only by painstakingly analysing the other stories in the book, and then synthesizing the resulting data.