

CHINESE
GODS

KEITH STEVENS



佛像神像

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KEITH STEVENS

THE UNSEEN WORLD OF
SPIRITS AND DEMONS

C&B

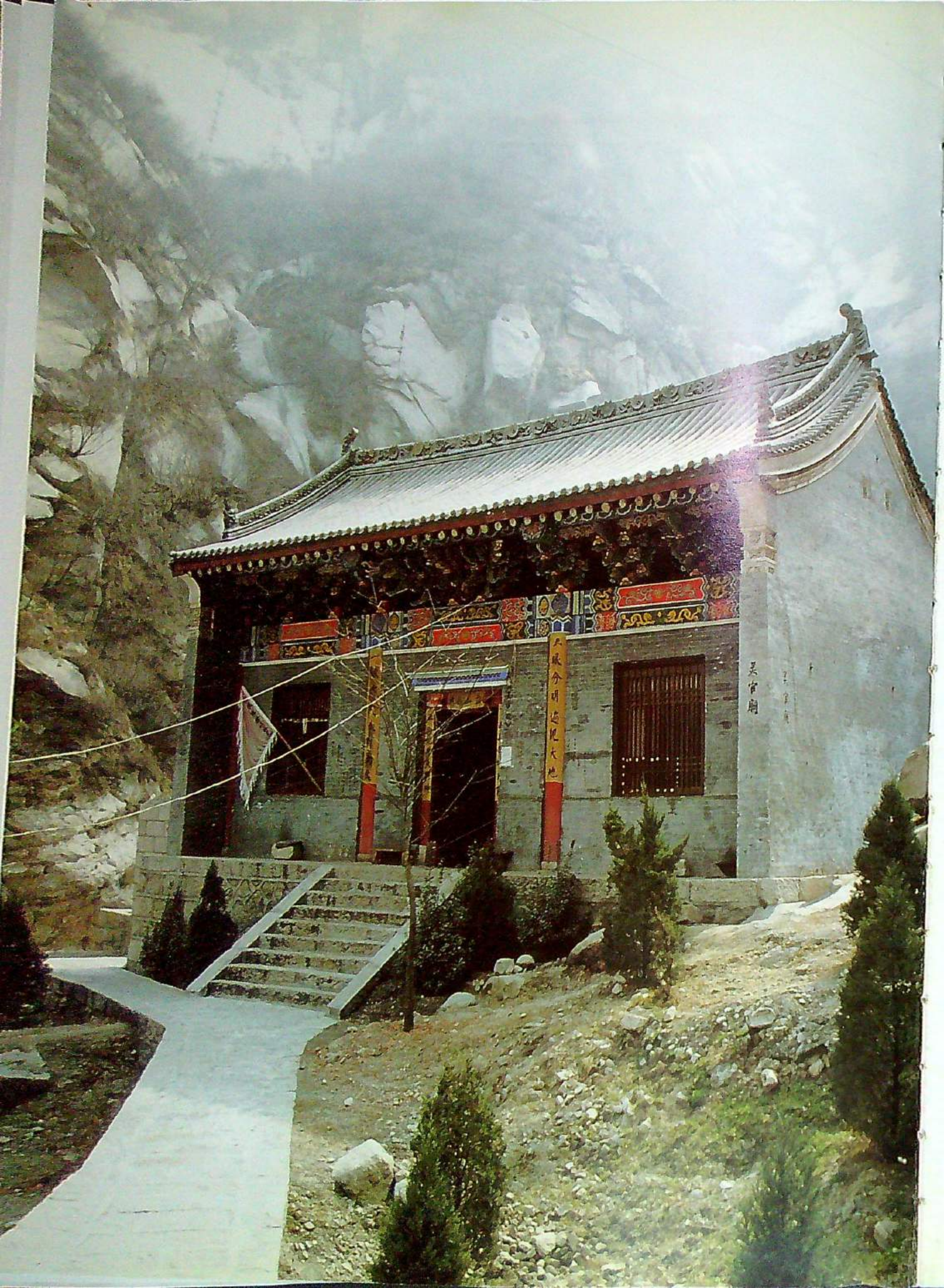




CHINESE GODS

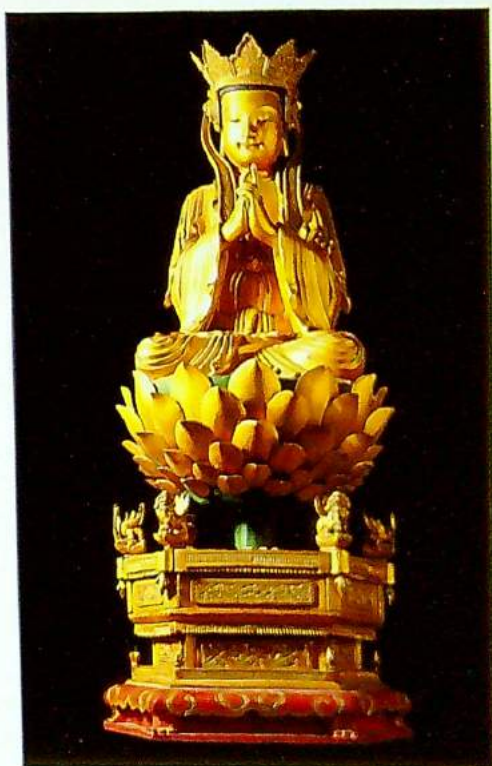
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C&B

COLLINS & BROWN

To my wife, Nora,
my three daughters Gillian, Ruth and Carol
for their understanding and forbearance
over several decades of temple expeditions
and to the thousands of Chinese
who have helped and supported me,
especially David Tan

First published in Great Britain in 1997 by
Collins & Brown Limited
London House
Great Eastern Wharf
Parkgate Road
London SW11 4NQ

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Photographs © Keith Stevens, 1997
Illustration pages 34–5 © Robert Ingpen, 1997

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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
The catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library.

ISBN 1 85028 409 1

Typeset by Collins & Brown Limited
in Times, Ariel Narrow and Footlight Light
Printed in Hong Kong

Frontispiece: One of the many temples on Hua Shan
(one of China's five Taoist holy mountains) in Shensi
province (see page 8).

▽ This Unknown God is typical of the hundreds of images
of deities and their assistants which can be found both in
Asia and in Europe. It is impossible to identify
him; all one can be sure of that he was
originally carved as a specific deity on a
now-deceased devotee's commission
and was once revered on the devotee's
private altar in Hong Kong.



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Chronology

Chinese historical dating is based on reign years within a dynasty. This makes orientating oneself within a period extremely difficult. For the ordinary person, it is more

trouble than it is worth. Most of China's long history is divided into dynasties, but these are no more than markers to most people, highlighting the golden eras

<p>Shang Dynasty c. 1750-c. 1050 BC</p> <p>The Shang dynasty, based in the Yellow River basin, saw the flowering of the Bronze Age following the time of hunters and farmers. During this period, new skills such as metal-working and the development of writing appeared. There is little historical evidence for events before about 1200 BC, although hereditary monarchs continued to rule throughout the period. The later period is documented by inscriptions on divination bones excavated near Anyang in the 1920s.</p>	<p>Chou Dynasty c. 1050-221 BC</p> <p>The Chou dynasty was the longest-lived of the Chinese dynasties. It divides into the Western Chou (c. 1050-771 BC) and the Eastern Chou (771-255 BC), separated by an attack by steppe nomads when much western territory was lost. The Eastern Chou is often subdivided into the Spring and Autumn (771-464 BC) and the Warring States periods (464-221 BC). The last king of the Chou died in 256 BC. The Western Chou ruled over a feudal system later regarded by Confucians as a Golden Age. During this period, iron was worked, records kept and cities expanded, while a class of scholar-officials developed.</p>	<p>Ch'in Dynasty 221-207 BC</p> <p>One of the Warring States, Ch'in, was led by a series of ambitious rulers from c. 350 BC. Using a system known as Legalism, they established a strong bureaucracy and gradually dominated the other states. Cheng, who succeeded in 246 BC, finally united all the kingdoms under his rule. In 221 BC, he declared himself Huang Ti (Emperor). As the First Emperor, he was renowned for his grim and strict rule, during which he burned books and executed scholars opposed to his government. He is also credited with building the Great Wall. Our word for China comes from the dynastic name: Ch'in.</p>	<p>Han Dynasty 206 BC-AD 221</p> <p>The Han dynasty was founded by a rebel general, Liu Pang. It is separated into two periods, the Earlier or Western Han (206 BC-AD 9) and the Later or Eastern Han (AD 23-221), dating from when the capital moved from Ch'angan to Loyang. This era is regarded by northern Chinese as the time of the foundation of classic Chinese culture. They call themselves Men of Han. Southern Chinese, on the other hand, call themselves Men of T'ang.</p> <p>The fifth emperor, Han Wu Ti (reigned 140-86 BC), extended China's boundaries almost to those of today in a military campaign which</p>	<p>successfully absorbed southern China. Chinese civilization prospered, but troubles from the nomads from the north led to higher taxation and discontent and, eventually, to peasant uprisings. His successors were weak and in AD 9 the throne was usurped by Wang Mang who ruled for fifteen years before the throne reverted to the Later Han. However, in the later period, central government was weak.</p>
<p>Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms AD 907-960</p> <p>A series of short-lived minor dynasties, including the Liang, followed the collapse of the T'ang, although they ruled over only a small area of northern China.</p> <p>There were actually more than ten kingdoms which rose and fell during this period of intense disorder, when there were serious incursions from Tibet and most of the rulers were of steppe origins.</p>	<p>Sung Dynasty AD 960-1279</p> <p>China was reunited under the Sung in AD 960 - a period of great renaissance and another Chinese golden age followed. The Sung dynasty divides into the Northern Sung (AD 960-1126) with its capital at Kaifeng, on the Yellow River and the Southern Sung (1127-1278). The Northern Sung was constantly threatened from invaders, the Hsi Hsia from the north-west and the Liao and Jurchen tribes from the north-east.</p> <p>This was a time of art and science, scholarship and civilization. It was also a period when rivalry between Taoism and Buddhism led to an extraordinary increase in state relationship with the local cults. This was deemed desirable as the worship of gods to protect and aid the peasants had led to a stable society. This worked two ways with the official recognition and support for certain popular</p>	<p>cults bringing them into the official establishment.</p> <p>The Jurchen, who had first defeated the Liao, occupied Peking in 1115 where they established their dynasty, the Chin. They then moved on southward capturing Kaifeng in 1126, and the then Sung emperor in 1127. The son of the Sung emperor fled further south to Hangchow where he set up his court. The Southern Sung repelled attacks by the Chin and ruled southern China, until both dynasties were finally overthrown by the Mongols of Genghis Khan.</p>	<p>Yüan (Mongol) Dynasty 1279-1368</p> <p>The Mongol emperors established their own dynasty, the Yüan, in 1271 and ruled over the whole of China from 1279. They had captured Peking in 1215 and destroyed the Chin dynasty by 1233, but did not conquer the Southern Sung until 1279. The Chinese hated the Mongols who, in their turn, did not trust the Chinese. Few Chinese have been deified from this era.</p>	<p>Ming Dynasty 1368-1644</p> <p>In the 1350s, a serious rebellion started in the Yangtze valley against Mongol rule. It prospered and set up a rebel state with its capital at Nanking. In 1366 a peasant named Chu Yüan-chang took over the rebellion and greatly expanded the territory the rebels controlled. By 1368, he had conquered most of China and declared a new dynasty, the Ming. The last Mongol-controlled province, Yunnan, fell to his armies in 1382.</p> <p>In 1421, the second Ming emperor, Yung-le, moved the capital back to Peking. By 1448, a series of short reigns by young emperors had led to corruption and economic decline. There were revolts, further incursions by the Mongols and rule by self-serving palace eunuchs, as well as costly and unnecessary wars.</p>

such as the T'ang and the Ming. Historical personalities therefore exist timelessly and little difference is perceived between one war and another, each with its named victorious heroes, although they lived centuries apart when dated by Western chronology.

Temple keepers generally follow the line of the

teahouse storytellers and refer to their particular deities or heroes as having lived 'a thousand years ago' or 'during the T'ang dynasty'. Both mean, 'I don't know when they lived, but it was a long time ago'.

The most important Chinese Dynasties, as far as this work is concerned, are shown in **Bold**.

<p>Three Kingdoms AD 221–280</p> <p>This was a period of warfare and diplomacy as each of the three kingdoms – Wei (capital Loyang in the north), Wu (capital, first at Wuchang and later in Nanking, both on the Yangtze) and Shu (capital Chengtu in Szechwan) – fought for supremacy. Most Chinese knowledge about the period is obtained from storytellers and operas based on the famous Chinese novel, <i>The Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i> (see page 148).</p>	<p>The Two Chin Dynasties AD 280–420</p> <p>In 280, the king of Wei having conquered the other two kingdoms was ousted by one of his generals who founded the Chin dynasty. A lengthy period of disunity and trouble ensued as warring generals called in steppe nomads from north of the Wall as allies, but failed to enforce their return home. This disorder permitted Taoism and Buddhism to flourish. Buddhism was a recent import from India and many Chinese deities, Taoist and Buddhist, date from these times.</p>	<p>Northern and Southern and Sui Dynasties AD 420–617</p> <p>The final collapse of the Chin was followed by a period known as the Northern Dynasties (Sung, Ch'i, Liang, Ch'en) and Southern Dynasties (N. Wei, E. Wei, N. Ch'i, W. Wei, N. Chou). This covered the years AD 420 to AD 589 when numerous short-lived dynasties controlled small areas of China.</p> <p>Then, in AD 581, a general named Yang Chien conquered all of northern China and established the Sui dynasty. Turning his attention southwards, he reunited all of China under one ruler in AD 589. By AD 610, the Sui controlled much of Vietnam and Central Asia as well. However, the Sui dynasty only lasted until AD 618 before it too fell to another usurper.</p>	<p>T'ang Dynasty AD 618–907</p> <p>The Sui were followed by the golden age of the T'ang, founded by Li Yüan. China finally became a bureaucratic state after the second T'ang emperor, T'ai-tsung, reduced the power of the aristocracy and formalized the civil service examinations. Under his auspices, Hsüan-tsung, a Buddhist monk, set out for India in AD 629 to find and bring back Buddhist scriptures as told in one of the earliest Chinese novels, <i>Monkey</i> (see page 98).</p> <p>There were several attempts to overthrow the dynasty, not least the revolt led by An Lu-shan in AD 755. The dynasty never really recovered, its final years saw many nomad invasions and other rebellions.</p>
<p>Ch'ing (Manchu) Dynasty 1644–1911</p> <p>By 1640 the Manchus (also originally from Central Asia) held all the land up to the Great Wall. The last Ming emperor had hanged himself in the Spring of 1644 as rebels entered Peking, thus facilitating its capture by the Manchus in Autumn 1644. The new dynasty was proclaimed on behalf of the seven-year-old emperor by his uncle and Regent, Dorgon.</p> <p>The Ch'ing were regarded by Han Chinese as foreign usurpers. Various princes of the Ming royal family continued their struggle for nearly twenty-five years against the new dynasty, particularly along the southern provincial coasts of China and in Taiwan. Several revolts took place in Taiwan against the foreign dynasty during the eighteenth century.</p> <p>The Ch'ing dynasty ruled China up to the 1911 revolution when it was overthrown by the Republic. Successful at first in repelling incursions by of steppe people and the Russians, corruption and military decline had set in by the 1790s. The arrival of Western traders and diplomats, the modern weapons of the West and the rise of</p>	<p>the opium trade made conflict inevitable and the dynasty was publicly humiliated at the end of the Opium Wars (1839–42).</p> <p>Serious rebellions between 1853 and the mid-1870s followed throughout much of China; they were eventually suppressed by Manchu warlords helped for the first time by native Chinese Green Banner armies and a few Western mercenaries. Japan also began extended her influence and in 1895 obtained possession of Taiwan. Anti-foreigner feelings rose among the Manchus, culminating in the Boxer Rebellion of 1898–1900.</p>	<p>Republic of China 1911–49 (mainland) 1911 to date (Taiwan)</p> <p>Republican movements among the Han Chinese began in the 1890s as people began to realize that political reform was necessary. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) was an early activist who led the Kuo Min Tang (KMT) or Nationalist party following a rebellion in Szechwan province in 1911. A Manchu officer who controlled the army, Yuan Shih-k'ai, became the first President of the Republic. He consolidated power in his own hands, ignoring election results, and tried to make himself emperor. Provincial revolts followed and he died in 1916.</p> <p>From 1917 on, there were two governments in China: the republican Nationalist government based in Canton and a Manchu warlord government in Peking. Sun Yat-sen was succeeded by a young general, Chiang Kai-shek, who regained control over much of China by 1928. Right-wing in politics, he attacked the Communists in 1930, eventually forcing their retreat north on the Long March (1934–5).</p> <p>Meanwhile Japan was expanding her territories in Manchuria from 1931, setting up a puppet empire there in 1933. In 1937 Japan</p>	<p>launched a major attack and captured much of eastern China. The 'United Front' (Nationalists and Communists) could not defeat them, and by 1941 the accord had broken down. The USSR supported the Communists from 1945 onwards and the Americans Chiang Kai-shek. By 1946, civil war was raging.</p> <p>Initially successful, Chiang Kai-shek's regime was corrupt and soon became unpopular. The Communists found it easy to foment trouble and in 1949, the Red armies swept south. The Nationalists retreated to Taiwan.</p> <p>On 1 October 1949, Mao Tse-tung proclaimed the People's Republic of China in at the T'ien An Men (Gate of Heavenly Peace, now beside Tiananmen Square) in Peking.</p>



MAP LEGENDS
COUNTRY
 Province
LANGUAGE AREAS
 1 Hainanese
 2 Cantonese
 3 Fukienese
 4 Wu
 5 Kan
 6 Hsiang
 7 Hakka
 8 Ch'aochou
 Mandarin is spoken across northern China and is the official language in all other provinces.

Taiwan (Formosa)

After the surrender of the remnants of the Ming forces to the Ch'ing in 1681, the Manchu regime in Peking planned to abandon Taiwan. However, Shih Lang (see page 163) offered many arguments in favour of incorporating the island into the empire. These prevailed and in 1684 Taiwan was made a prefecture of Fukien province.

The eighteenth century was a period of unstable 'frontier' society with only a tenuous political hold by central authority. Most immigrants were of humble origins and local elites had mostly risen from their ranks. Many wealthy investors brought capital with which they bought land, set up mills and granaries and financed irrigation projects. Migrants formed brotherhoods with others from their native districts and religious groups that provided security and companionship.

Apart from the intermittent communal struggles and aboriginal revolts, two severe

rebellions took place - the Chu I-kuei rebellion of 1721 by Fukienese settlers, and the Lin Shuang-wen revolt between 1786 and 1788. The latter required more than 100,000 imperial troops to quell it. Other rebellions included the Wu Fu-sheng in the south of Taiwan in 1730, and the large rebellion of 1862-3 led by Tai Wan-sheng.

In 1874, Japan briefly invaded Taiwan. Following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5, the island was ceded to the Japanese and remained part of its empire until 1945. The

ill-organized anti-Japanese resistance produced a number of local heroes who were later deified.

In 1949, the Nationalist Kuomintang retreated to Taiwan, along with about 2,000,000 mainlanders. Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) ruled the island as President until his death and was succeeded by his son, Chiang Ching-kuo (1910-88), who was also President for life. Martial law was lifted in 1987. Power has since partly shifted from the mainlanders to the native Taiwanese.

Pronouncing Chinese Words

VOWELS

a	as a in father
ai	as y in by
e	as u in up
ei	as ei in eight
i	as ee in see
ih	as u in huh!
ing	as in bring
iu	as ieu in view
o	after h, k and k' as uh, but after other consonants as aw in paw
ou	as ow in flow
u	after ss, sz, tz and tz' it is faintly pronounced, but after y as yo in yodel
ui / uei	as ay in way
ü	as ü in über

CONSONANTS

ch	as j in jay
ch'	as ch in church
hs	is an aspirated s (eg hsing) – the same as 'hissing' without the first i
j	is soft r (a cross between l and r)
k	as g in game
k'	as k in kiss
p	as b in bag
p'	as p in pond
t	as d in dot
t'	as t in top
ts / tz	as ts in jetsam
ts' / tz'	as ts in cats

Glossary

- biretta:** a **BODHISATTVA's** five-leaf crown.
- Bodhisattva:** a divine being (male, female or an idea) who has postponed entry into **NIRVANA** and remains on the human plane so as to help other humans to salvation.
- cangue:** a neck yoke used as a punishment (Portuguese: *canga*).
- Chai:** a basic periodic traditional Taoist communal rite; demonic cleansing.
- Chen-jen:** sage.
- Cheng:** correct, orthodox, right and proper.
- chiao:** divination or oracular blocks.
- Ching:** Sutra, texts recorded as spoken by The Buddha himself.
- Dhyani:** (cosmic) Buddhas.
- Feng-shui:** geomancy, a pseudo-science to assure good fortune to the living.
- Fu:** a Buddha or The Buddha.
- fu:** charm or talisman written by religious specialists to obtain power over spirits.
- fu-chi:** spirit writing, usually using a sand table.
- Fu-jen:** Madame, a prestige title, formerly used for a consort.
- Hou, Po, Kung:** gradations of the rank of Duke.
- hsieh:** depraved, heterodox, impious, and dissident.
- Hsien:** an Immortal, divine or inspired, transcendental worthies.
- ju-i:** type of sceptre carried by many deities.
- ku-hun:** Hungry or Orphan Ghosts – the forlorn, roving spirits of those who died before their due date, or those without living descendants to care for them.
- kuei:** ghosts, disembodied spirits, evil spirits, demons and shades.
- lunar year:** The Chinese lunar year begins with the first new moon after the sun has entered the sign of Aquarius (ie between 21 January and 19 February in the Western calendar). The calendar has a cycle of sixty years and each year is associated with one of twelve animals: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat or sheep, monkey, chicken or rooster, dog and pig (1996 is a year of the Rat). Up to 1911, China used the lunar calendar exclusively; it is still used by Chinese farmers and fishermen in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South-East Asia and Tibet.
- Manushi:** (human) Buddhas.
- niang:** maid.
- Niang-niang:** originally an empress, now used for dowagers.
- nirvana:** in popular conception, a state of bliss or Paradise. It is the state attained by Buddhas and represents the final release from the cycle of reincarnation.
- P'ai:** sect.
- pa-kua:** the Eight Trigrams. Eight groups of three lines in combinations of broken and unbroken lines – the basis of the *I Ching*, an ancient system of divination and wisdom.
- pailou:** a permanent memorial arch.
- san:** three.
- shan:** mountain.
- shen:** deity or spirit.
- sheng or Sheng-jen:** sage or saint.
- shih:** master.
- T'ien-shen:** Celestial Spirit.
- Ta-ti:** Great Emperor.
- tael:** a unit of weight (25–70g / 1–2.5oz). In imperial China, it was a unit of currency, but not a coin, equalling a tael weight of pure silver. Carried by a deity or an assistant, it is a lump of gold or silver shaped a little like a Dutch clog.
- Tao-shih:** a Taoist ordained priest.
- Tao-t'ai:** an imperial official, a Circuit Intendant.
- Tatar:** (Ta-ta-erh) A vague title applied by native Chinese to the various tribes inhabiting the steppes of Central Asia. It was also applied to the Manchus (Ch'ing dynasty ruling class).
- Tsung:** a sect or school.
- Wang-yeh:** Excellency.
- yamen:** the office and residence of an imperial official, usually that of a city magistrate.
- yin and yang:** the two opposing principles of Chinese philosophy and religion: *Yin* is dark, female and negative; *Yang* is light, masculine and positive. *Yang* must be nurtured to overcome *Yin* in the Taoist's search for immortality. Their interaction is thought to maintain the universe and to influence the fate and destiny of everything within it.



Introduction

This book is an introduction to the imagery of Chinese deities and demons and their legends and beliefs in relation to the common people, as observed from a Western point of view. The deities described include all the predominant ones and a very limited number out of the myriad minor deities which have been noted on altars in southern China, in the provinces south of the Yangtze, and in particular in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and the Overseas Chinese communities in South-East Asia. Cult beliefs, rituals and iconography vary from place to place. Sadly space does not allow inclusion of every variation.

This book is primarily about 'popular religion', the traditional religious beliefs of the common people, although I have also tried to cover the official imperial cults honouring Heaven, Confucius and his disciples, the cults and deities of Taoism and Buddhism, and syncretic cults incorporating Christian and Muslim beliefs into Chinese cults. This is a distinct body incorporating elements of all the different Chinese doctrines and beliefs. Its deities are seen in Chinese towns and villages on the altars in temples and shrines frequented by those usually lacking a formal Confucian education – the man or woman in the street. One Chinese, in Shanghai in 1989, described the cults of popular religion as 'social customs rather than religion'.

I have examined the iconography, rituals, legends and beliefs across the majority of southern Chinese ethnic groups, with each group having its own variants. I have tried to reflect, where possible word for word, the stories and beliefs as told to me by devotees, temple keepers, god-carvers and members of temple committees over some thirty-five years in Hong Kong, Taiwan and South-East Asia in particular.

A major problem has involved the contradictory stories and legends, with the temple staff giving different versions during successive visits. These contradictions would appear to be due to sheer lack of interest on the part of the temple custodian or to an unwillingness to admit to a foreigner ignorance of the identity of deities in their temple. Suggestions are

usually offered in a confident voice, suggesting unequivocal accuracy. It is only later, on revisiting and perhaps talking to others, that the positive identification becomes less certain. It has been somewhat surprising to me how little many temple watchmen, devotees and even god-carvers know of the myths, legends and histories behind the deities in their own temples and shops.

The ideal sources have been senior members of temple committees. While the vast majority of devotees and staff members are only too keen to be of assistance, they tend only to be able to offer snippets, such as that the deity is a deified T'ang dynasty general, or a Sung scholar-official, or even a general who 'lived a thousand years ago'. As an example of controversial identification of the major deity in several Taiwanese temples, the deity named as Ti-T'ien Ta-ti has been variously claimed to be Chou Wang, the twelfth century BC tyrant; the son of Pi Kan who was a relative of another Chou Wang (the younger brother of the supreme deity, the Jade Emperor); and Lin Fang (a pupil of Confucius).

Four major languages are spoken, Cantonese, Fukiene (Hokkien), Hakka and Wu (around Shanghai), each with minor dialects of their own. Although they are mutually intelligible when written, when spoken the difference is roughly similar that between Dutch and English. Two other ethnic groups, the Ch'aozhou and Hainanese, have also spread throughout South-East Asia. The former have provided a sizeable share of



◁ Devotees worshipping a local deity – Ch'i-p'an Ta Hsien, the Great Immortal of Ch'i-p'an Mountain, in a rural temple on a mountain top some distance north of Kunming. The lack of a temple custodian was clear from the debris left by the devotees. [Yunnan province]



△ A typical, urban, popular religion temple in the heart of Kowloon where a temple keeper not only kept the place reasonably tidy, but also kept candles burning on the altar.

This temple, which pre-dates British rule, would have been a rural place of worship, in those days possibly without a custodian. [Hong Kong]

recent emigrants to Hong Kong. However, within the province of Fukien, from which the majority of emigrants left for Taiwan, there was strong rivalry between emigrants from the smaller inter-provincial groups of people from Ch'üanchou and Changchou.

This led to major rebellions in Taiwan during the eighteenth century from which emerged a number of 'heroes' who are now deified and revered on local altars. These struggles were primarily between Hakkas and Fukienese, or between the settlers from Chang-chou and Ch'üanchou. The map on page 8 shows the provincial boundaries of southern China with the language groups referred to, marked in red.

For the more academic reader, it should be pointed out that cults have not been dated as precisely as they could be from information in old gazetteers. The cult of K'ai Chang Tsun-wang (who is better known as Ch'en Yüan-kuang) dates back a thousand or so years, as far as temple custodians are concerned. However, it is recorded in the county gazetteer that a temple dedicated to him was restored in about AD 1115.

The recent change in romanization in English translation on mainland China from the long-standing Wade-Giles to Pinyin has been reflected here only in the Index of Gods (see page 188 following) where the Pinyin version follows the Wade-Giles.

Chinese Religions

At this point, an extremely simplified classification of the images on Chinese altars should help the reader to understand some of the complexities encountered in this book.

There are two basic orders of 'gods': the first are the Celestial deities from Buddhist, Taoist and popular religions. They are the heroes of mythology, the creators and the primeval discoverers and inventors. The second order includes the popular religion cults of deified men and women of consequence; heroes, worthies and benefactors – now members of the Celestial bureaucracy; intercessors to whom offerings are made and requests for boons addressed; as well as the spirits of deceased local people who are revered as *shen* (spirits) after a miracle, dream or blessing was attributed to them.

Chinese popular religious tradition is the simple veneration of divine individuals whose hierarchy and bureaucracy is ruled over by the Jade Emperor (see page 51). They are believed to have the powers to protect from demonic forces and influence, and grant cures and blessings. Every deity of the second order, great and small, is a man or woman who, after death, was promoted for various reasons to the dignity of a *shen*. To a great extent, many Chinese deities can be regarded in the same light as early Christian saints, the spirits of deceased humans who can intercede in Heaven on behalf of the living. They were misnamed gods, rather than spirits, by Christian missionaries who regarded them as 'graven images bowed down before and worshipped'.

The exoticism of the Chinese pantheon, as well as Chinese beliefs and rituals, have tended to obscure the comparative simplicity of popular religion, with its eminent practicability, and the general devotion and spiritual peace of the priests and religious specialists of Buddhism and Taoism. The majority of Western scholars describe Chinese religious beliefs in philosophical and cosmological terms leading back to the Great Chaos before the Creation, whereas most Chinese see the deities from a very pragmatic point of view, 'How do they affect me and what must I do to get the best required result?'

Another enlightening example of Chinese attitudes was revealed in Kowloon. A thin, elderly god-carver in the back streets explained that, as a Roman Catholic, he viewed the images with great disdain but, as he said, it was a living. He added that he did not find the wish to order the carving of such images strange. People needed the comfort and assurance of a power beyond humanity, and he, as a Catholic, sympathized with that view, although his parish priest had remonstrated with him for encouraging the reverence of idols.

Chinese not only worship individual and groups of deities from the Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist pantheons, as prescribed in the official registers, but also individual deities whose cults first sprang up without official sanction. The mixture is loosely termed 'folk' or 'popular' religion and the spirits of individual cults are 'popular religion deities'. However, it is almost impossible to separate clearly between cults and their 'parent' pantheon as a number belong to two and even three

of the pantheons, albeit in different forms, with different titles and with remote common origins.

In China in imperial times the pantheons of the Taoists and Buddhists had a uniform structure. This is still very much alive in Hong Kong, Taiwan and South-East Asia, and is beginning to reappear on mainland China now that an element of religious latitude is permitted. As with all religions, Buddhism, Taoism and popular religion are embellished with stories of heroes, teachers, immortals and sacrifices, although popular belief as such does little to explain to the ordinary person their social and moral responsibilities. Popular belief should not be confused with Taoism despite being referred to as such by foreigners.

Westerners tend to see the three beliefs of Chinese religion as separate and individual, whereas in practice the edges are blurred, especially with popular beliefs. At times it is difficult to define which element was originally Taoist, Buddhist or local belief. Possibly one of the simpler demarcations between Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism and popular beliefs is the differentiation provided by the Communist authorities on the mainland, who regard the first three as 'normal religious activity' and popular beliefs as 'feudal superstition'. They have tolerated the former (as well as Islam and Christianity) as organized religious bodies with 'officials', priests, who can be held responsible for anything which the authorities regarded as subversive or illegal: popular religion has no such organization.

Gods, Spirits and Deities

Foreigners tend to be confused by the way that Chinese refer to both mythological beings and deified humans, even those deified during the past hundred years, as spirits or *shen*.

One of the most common deities, Kuan Yü (see page 147), is an excellent example of the ambiguity. He is usually referred to by foreigners as the God of War, whereas he is the patron of loyalty and revered by all disciplined forces, including the army, hence the misconception. Chinese regard him, an historical human, as a *shen* just as they do the Yellow Emperor (see page 57). Although the latter is said to be a prehistoric human who lived for many hundreds of years and is humanized as a major image, he

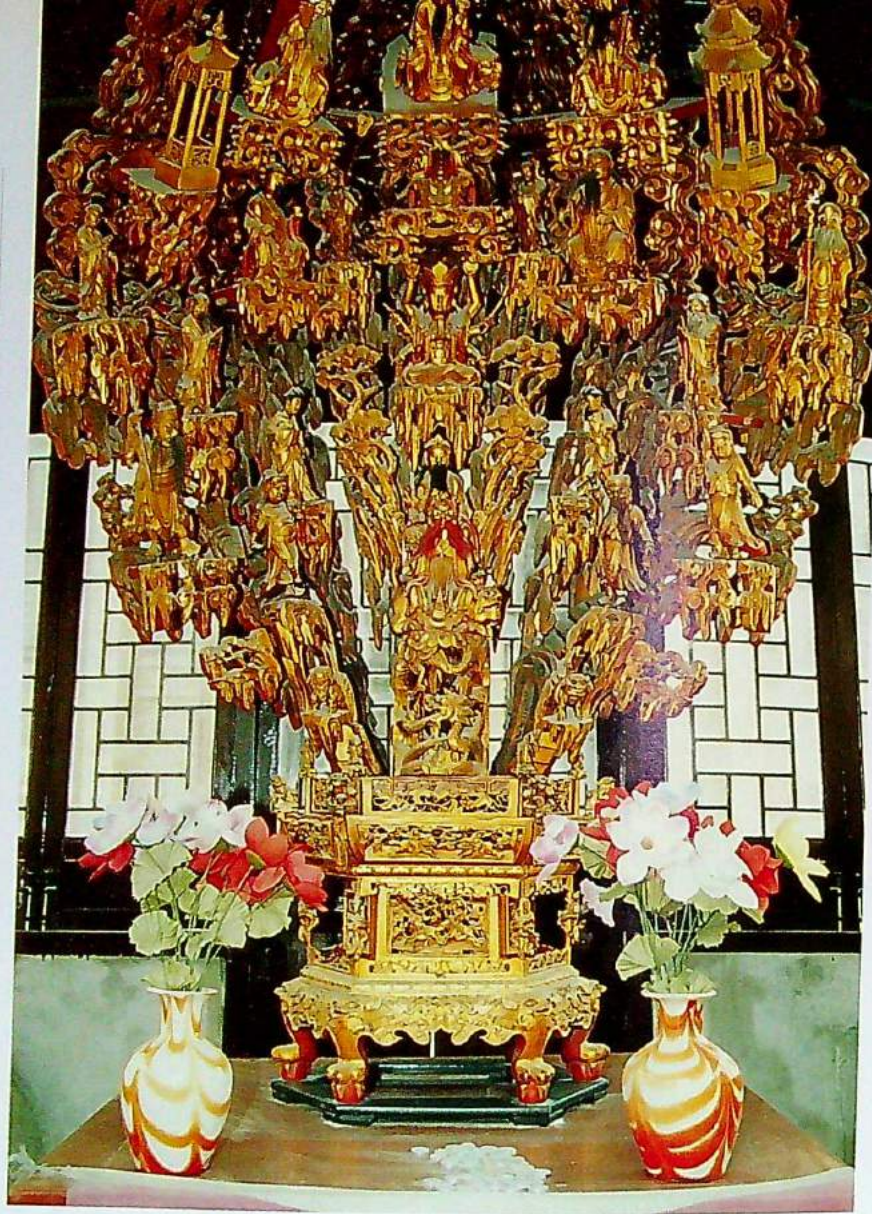


△ A personal soul tablet of a Mr Yang dating from the nineteenth century. [Central China]

▽ Each of these soul tablets is dedicated to a generation, not an individual. They are on the main altar of a clan temple. [South China]



▷ A few temples, nearly all in the coastal provinces of central-west China, have this gold-lacquered spread of caves and crags with small images of Taoist deities perched within them. Known as 'Taoist Mountains', these were centres of reverence within the temple or monastery. The great majority, however, have been broken up and the individual images of the deities sold to foreign collectors or decorators. This example from an old temple in the heart of Pudong, the suburb across the river from central Shanghai, was saved from destruction during the Cultural Revolution. [Shanghai]



almost certainly represents a dynasty and not a single person. They also look upon the Taoist supreme deities, the San Ch'ing Shang-ti (see page 68), as *shen*. Furthermore, Taoists refer to Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun (see page 69), as a *shen* even though he was the deity who set the stars in motion before all beginnings.

To attempt to avoid confusion we shall speak of **gods** throughout this book when we refer to mythological beings, of **spirits** when we refer to deified humans, and **deities** to include both.

Many devotees see the Universe as divided into three levels: the world of the Buddhas, spirits and Immortals; the human world; and the Underworld or the world of the dead (see page 178). Chinese terms for the numerous titles and groups of deities are well nigh impossible to translate into English. The word *shen* for example is usually translated as 'saint'. However, the basic *shen* has a much broader meaning, which includes

the concept of 'mortal beings who have been canonized'.

Many Chinese claim to believe in a single, invisible god known as Shang-ti. Though he is not the creator god, he is still equated in many twentieth century Chinese minds with the Judaic-Christian-Muslim, single, invisible, all powerful deity. He was a power that developed out of the chaos of the creation, the supreme god of the Shang dynasty, also known as Heaven, and was only worshipped by the emperor. Though he was one of the few deities who was not a deified human, he was humanized as the Jade Emperor during the Sung dynasty. Since then, he has been referred to as Shang-ti less and less, while the Jade Emperor has been regarded as the Lord of Heaven.

Buddhists revere the Buddhas, those who have achieved perfect enlightenment, and do not believe in a supreme deity. There are two types of Buddha: the 'living' who were originally human, like

The Buddha himself, and the 'abstract', such as O-mi-t'o Fu (see page 88). Taoists believe the world to be ruled by a trinity of supreme deities, the San Ch'ing Shang-ti. Confucianists consider the world to be governed by Heaven, impersonal though endowed with consciousness. Finally, popular belief has borrowed from all three and attempted to meld the ideas, along with deified heroes and worthies into an acceptable system.

Religious Activities

Chinese, in general, are deeply attached to tradition and the old ways, and the scholar-elite, though not strongly opposed to what they regarded as superstition, always adopted a condescending tone towards belief and rituals of popular religion. Chinese peasants and a great majority of the urban dwellers, however, personally see to it that various family ceremonials, and reverence for the ancestors and the deities are carried out according to custom.

Convention governs the pattern and form of veneration, such as the offerings, ritual prostrations and bows, the layout of the altars and altar tables, and the methods of communication with the deities, right down to the way the sticks of incense are to be lit, held and placed in the urns on the altars. There is a fine dividing line, which most Chinese seem unaware of, between religion and social activity. Nothing can make them fail to burn sticks of incense on the altars of their ancestors at the seasons fixed by the rites, or to turn over the prescribed alms to the different religions' associations, Buddhist or Taoist.

Apart from a few exceptions, China enjoyed a remarkable degree of tolerance over the centuries, permitting Buddhism to thrive alongside Taoism and Confucianism. Confucianism remained the cult of the scholar officials, while Buddhism and, to a limited extent, Taoism became the religions of the less well educated. Popular religion remained the main recourse for the common people. The contradictions between the main beliefs, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, were mostly ignored, becoming entwined in popular religion.

Religious activities as part of every day life have always been a major element in the lives of the Chinese, with the gods, spirits, ghosts and ancestors ever present. However, the five hundred years

from the seventh to the twelfth centuries AD saw major changes, which widened the concept of the gods from being simply national mythical and semi-official deities, the latter coming to prominence within the growing pantheon, to include a vast range of locally affirmed deified humans from all walks of life. Many of these in time became nationally worshipped. It was also the period when Buddhism lost its Indian origins and became a Chinese religion with distinct native Chinese sects and cults.

Chinese are taught that every human

▽ Sakyamuni (Shih-chia-mou-ni Fu) is generally considered the principal Buddha and the source of Buddhism (see page 86). He is the fourth Buddha of the present kalpa (era) and will be followed by the fifth Maitreya, Mi-lo Fu, in some three thousand years time. Although the basic primitive Buddhism taught by Sakyamuni ceased to exist many centuries ago, his image is still one of the major figures on Buddhist altars. [Taiwan]



▷ These unidentified images are typical Confucian figures, rarely seen on popular religion altars nowadays. Formerly they would have stood on a private altar or an altar dedicated to the Gods of Literature and imperial officialdom. [Unprovenanced]

▽ An unidentified Taoist figure of an Immortal, almost certainly from a 'Taoist Mountain' (see page 14). [Unprovenanced]



has several souls, perhaps as 'selves', a spiritual, an aura and a brutish or sensual self. The spiritual soul passes on through the purgatory of the Underworld and having been purified is reborn. The aura consists of the genes passed on to the descendants, represented by the ancestral tablet on the clan altar. The sensual soul or self, comprising the urges, instincts and emotions, is buried and decays with the body after death.

Buddhists believe that the spiritual soul, purified by purgatory, is reincarnated as a new life to gain further merit until the time comes when the soul fully pure is freed from Earthly existences and achieves Nirvana. Taoists believe the spiritual soul continues its Earthly incarnations until it transcends the cycle and rises eventually to merge with the Void.

How then does this leave the deified humans? The usual answer is that they have voluntarily remained within the Celestial bureaucracy to help humanity and will achieve Nirvana or enter the Void when there is no further need for their services as spiritual officials.

If we consider the acceptance of a spiritual existence and in some way or other live up to that belief, we must include both ancestor worship and Confucianism as religious beliefs. Both

recognize the spiritual side of human nature. Society was stable, guided by firm rules and managed for many centuries by Confucian scholars, and philosophers influenced not only the rulers, but also the nobility. They recalled the golden era and tried to guide rulers to restore it.

Different Needs, Different Gods

In broad terms Buddhism, Taoism and popular religion provide for different needs. People appeal to the Immortals and the popular belief spirits, the *shen*, when they seek health, change from ill-fortune, sons and relief from adverse weather for farmers.

In very general terms, the Buddhist clergy and the mystic Taoist both provide spiritual aid: the former perform burial and post-mortuary ceremonies; the latter perform exorcisms of demonic forces. Devotees may pray to Ti-tsang Wang for salvation from purgatory or to Ts'ai Shen for wealth, just as the ancient Greeks prayed to Zeus for success in battle and the modern Hindu merchant prays to Ganesha for a good bargain.

Devotees will most commonly turn to popular belief in the matter of 'luck', and especially a run of bad luck. There are a number of minor deities prayed to for just

such a change for the better, with runs of bad luck attributed to one's fortune or *karma*, reflecting one's own or one's ancestors' behaviour.

Religious belief is very important in the life of the people. There is a strong belief in the supernatural world with its spirits of humans (ancestors, deified heroes and worthies), of natural objects and of mythological beings from prehistory. There are also demons – all of these can influence, affect for good or harm the lives of the living.

Life, especially for rural Chinese, has always been hard, and dangers have always existed. Some threatened the family, others threatened the whole community – starvation and disease, flood and drought, bandits or invasion. Then there has always been the ever present problem of fate which, if understood, might be taken advantage of despite being adverse. While such threats and problems can be avoided or alleviated with spiritual help from the gods, one of the most widespread beliefs is that demons are the cause and a great many of the minor cult deities are popular for their powers over demonic forces.

It is difficult nowadays, if not well nigh impossible, to imagine peasant life in remote rural China or anywhere else before modern communications, including roads, were established. Nights would have been pitch dark, silence would be echoing, sickness would often lead to death, childbirth was hazardous, journeys were long, arduous, expensive and time-consuming.

Most peasants did not venture further than the local village, and then only for fairs and festivals. People embarking on voyages or long journeys took precautions to commend themselves to personal deities or protectors, for the dangers on their way would be legion and nobody was safe. Chinese quite naturally also seek heirs, bumper harvests and prosperity, peace, health and good fortune, and know that they will receive spiritual aid by propitiating the relevant deities, Buddhas and Immortals.

Deities of Popular Religion

The mass of popular belief's deities is divided into the spirits of mythical and legendary humans, the deified human spirits of worthies and heroes now in the Supernatural World, the impersonal nature spirits, the demonic spirits who

roam the Earth and the Underworld (the ghosts of lost humans), and finally, the ancestors. They are the spirits of humans who, after death, have been despatched from Earth to the Underworld. There they pass through judgements and purgatory before being sent either to the eternal peace of the Western Heavens or back to rebirth on Earth.

Chinese accept as natural the presence of unseen spirits at all times. Some are malignant, others simply going about their business, but all are part of the Supernatural World, and are organized and controlled by a Celestial bureaucracy of which many of the gods are part. Without much thought, Chinese mentally accept the Celestial bureaucracy patterned on the human bureaucracy they know and understand. So there are, for example, among the immense Celestial administration, City Gods, the spirit of each town or city equivalent to the magistrates or mandarins of imperial China.

Many of the deities are, however, not thought of as bureaucrats. They are saints or sages, wise and with untold powers, the gods for every conceivable role and aspiration or need. Malignant spirits are looked upon in much the same light as the living regard beggars and small time thugs, creatures who can be fobbed off with alms. As certain demons are known to carry disease and others as great mischief makers, devotees ensure that routine offerings to the roaming demons are provided, but always laid outside the home and never indoors.

There is also a growing cult of the shades, a trend noted almost exclusively in Taiwan within the last thirty years. It has long been the practice to bury any bones found lying on the ground or the foreshore, a task which earns merit and the gratitude of the spirit of the creature whose bones have been left exposed. They were generally the result of an accident, such as bones on the shore the remnants of an unidentified drowned sailor, or the bones in wild country the result of an attack by an enemy or wild animals. In each case the spirit of the unfortunate has been left roaming, uncared for, often angry at its fate and even potentially dangerous in its anger.

The shades of the unknown dead are not revered by the living nor are they prayed to individually. Usually there is a mass grave over which a small tablet is raised bearing an honorific euphemism



△ In a number of temples, tablets bearing the deity's honorific title stand before, or in place of, the deity. They are common in small rural temples which cannot afford to buy images. [Unprovenanced]

▽ A typical unidentified popular belief deity, labelled as *Ta Jen* (Excellency) [Taiwan]



▷ It is not unusual to see images of the **Santa Maria** (Virgin Mary) or Baby Jesus on the side altars of temples in the Philippines.

▽ The Lord **Dato** [Datuk], **Na-tu Kung**, is only to be seen in Malay-speaking areas of South-East Asia. He is the tutelary deity of the locality, the Earth God, a spirit of the original Malays who lived in the various areas where the Chinese shrines now stand and where the spirits are revered as the local 'landlord spirit', the **Ti-chu Kung**. This cult has markedly increased in popularity since the early 1960s, as the deity is regarded as beneficent and friendly. Prayers and pleas are usually offered by devotees in Malay as he naturally does not understand any of the Chinese dialects.
[Malaysia]



for the unidentified deceased, before which passers-by may offer a propitiatory offering in case the spirit should consider harming the passer-by.

Some shades have developed into a form of deity that is usually only prayed to by social outcasts, such as pimps, robbers, gangsters and prostitutes. Others have been rehabilitated: although they were thugs during their human existence modern tales of their derring-do have changed the memory to that of a local hero or martyr.



Biographies of the Gods

All deities have human biographies – many of them derived from epics, or novels – even when they are claimed in legend to have lived before Creation and are described as a force or power emerging out of Chaos. These biographical sketches of gods, goddesses, spirits, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as all the Immortals, illustrate the democratic nature of godliness, drawn as they are from all walks of life, from emperors to rural fishermen, and from infants to aged generals.

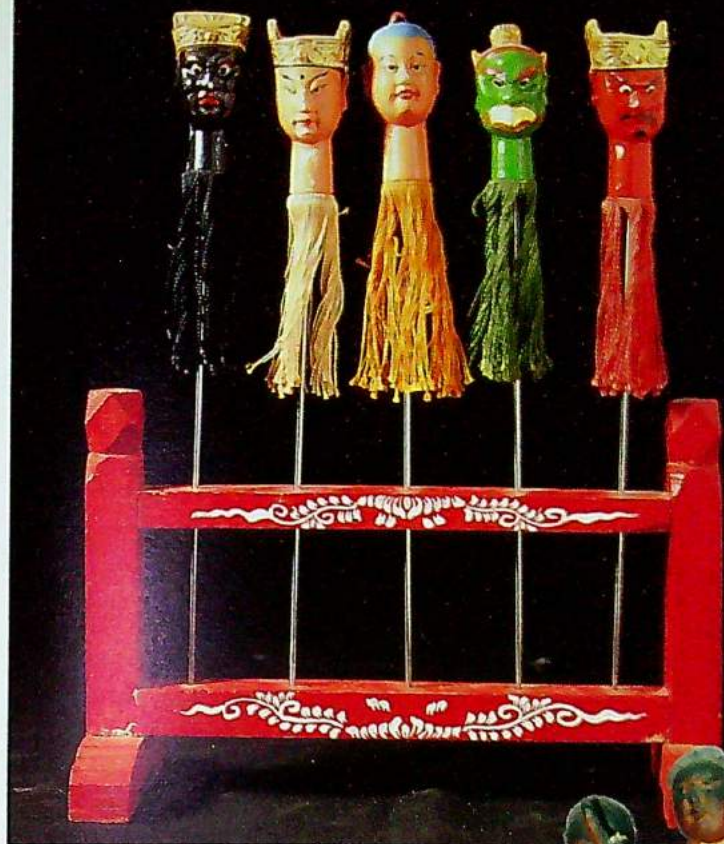
Gods and spirits possess almost all human traits, reflecting human strengths and weaknesses. They marry, show great courage, but are also vulnerable and can

die. They display rapacious appetites for food and drink, sex and adventure. One or two are outstanding examples of rollicking, roaring, hard-drinking trenchermen. They can be calm and friendly, but can also be extremely capricious in behaviour.

There is, however, a problem with ambiguous and contradictory stories, where titles and roles are associated with individual deities which on examination have developed locally. They have little or no connection with other deities who have identical stories, titles or roles. Typical of this are the two Fukienese maternity goddesses – Lin-shui Fu-jen and Chu-sheng Niang-niang (see page 120 and 118). Both of them are said by their devotees to be the protectors of pregnant women. Legends told about both of them appear to support the concept that they might be one and the same deity. However, iconographically and otherwise, this is clearly not possible.

The main sources of the myths, legends and historical background of the deities have been the stories related by temple staffs, devotees and the god-carvers. Some of these biographies are so short as to be virtually of little value or so complicated by local variations that the story is difficult to unravel. In the complicated versions, the detail is such that it includes the surname of the wife before her marriage, and the hour of births and deaths of every member of their family. These details are of everyday import and interest to the average Chinese, so they provide additional verisimilitude.

Tales about deities provide glimpses into Chinese history which, although consisting mostly of legend or myth, do provide another side to the academic version, a richly active and imaginative picture of China down the millennia. These epic legends told by temple keepers and devotees, by the tea-house storytellers and at grandmother's knee, are common knowledge to a greater or lesser extent to all Chinese. They have thousands of variations, often with the narratives distorted by the imagination and memory of the teller. It is only in the last few years that street storytellers have disappeared from outside temples and in tea houses. Free television in most tea houses has led to their redundancy!



◁ The Five General Rack is part of a temple's spirit medium's equipment. In theory, he pierces his cheeks during trances with the pointed end of two skewers, two more are used to pierce the arms or calves, while the third, the Spirit General of the Centre, is used to pierce the tongue, all supposedly without drawing blood. Each spike, about 20cm (8ins) long, bears the head of one of five gods, known collectively as the Wu Ying Chiang-chün, the Generals of the Five Directions or the Five Battalions. They command spirit armies protecting an area or village. Each is responsible for one front: north, south, east, west or centre. [Unprovenanced]

▷ A row of identical images stands on the only altar in a small rural temple in Chinhu village in the Yunlin country of Taiwan. They portray a peasant with a rather phlegmatic expression, dressed only in trousers and a shirt which has been knotted across his chest. He has unkempt hair, a black moustache and is standing on waves. The people who are crawling up the poles held in his two hands and across his shoulders are, in fact, adults. These are all portrait images of Ch'en Ying-hsiung, Ch'en the Hero. He is a perfect example of the way that popular religion deifies a local hero or worthy.

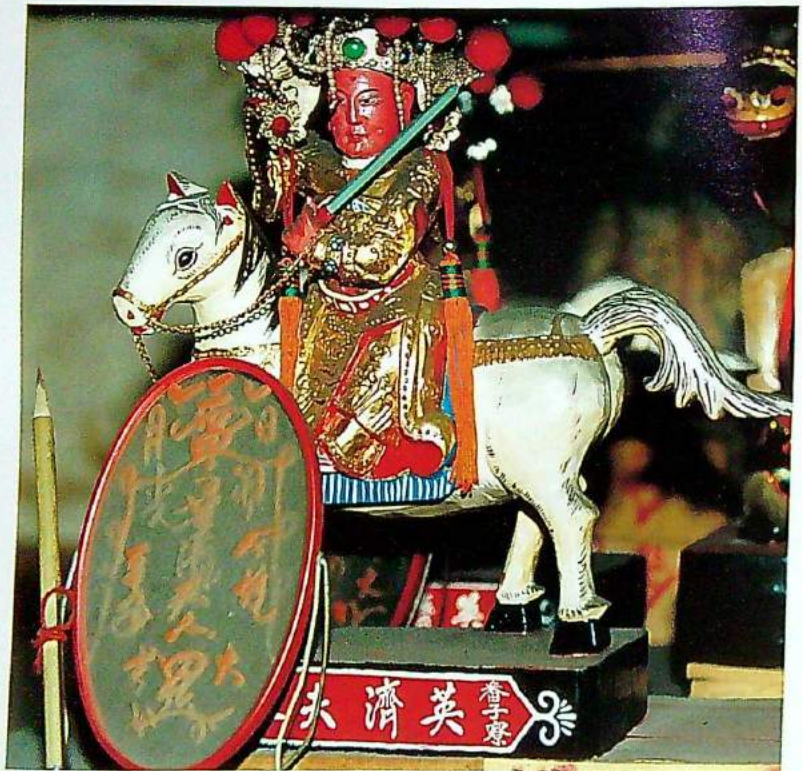
The locals say that he lived in the village during the reign of the Ch'ing Tao Kuang emperor (1821-50). At some point during this period there was a great typhoon which caused exceptional flooding and very many people were drowned. Ch'en distinguished himself in this emergency, saving many people, until he was swept away and drowned while trying to save a child. The temple in which Ch'en's images stand was built on top of the mass grave where the flood victims were buried. He is regarded as a Wan Shan Yeh (see page 186). [Taiwan]



Iconography

Deities are represented on altars mainly by images (ie statues). Other forms include a portrait on board, paper or glass, and wooden tablets or sheets of paper bearing the deity's name or title. Others are represented in their absence by ash in incense pots. Images vary from several centimetres high to more than life size. Unless the images are of deities whose iconographical characteristics are unique and widely known and accepted, or are identified without hesitation by the temple keeper and all the temple committee, or are inscribed with their name or title, then it is well nigh impossible to identify them.

▷ Ying-chi Fu-jeu was the second daughter of Mr Chang, an eminent member of the small central Taiwanese village of P'umei. Born during the Ming dynasty, she was known both as Yün-niang, the Cloud Maid, and Ying-min. Her title is given on the base of the image. This is one of the half dozen or so small images that stand in front of her main image, and portray her astride a white horse (see also pages 166, 167).



There are five main ways to identify the images of Chinese deities:

- 1 By their title. This can be carved into the front face of the base (a comparatively modern trend), written on a notice above, below, or beside the image, or on the board above the altar.
- 2 By the title of the temple. Titles sometimes reflect the main image at the time that the temple was built.
- 3 By the characteristics of the image itself. These include the dress and pose, the objects held or carried by the deity, animals and birds incorporated into the carving, facial colours, facial and hand expressions, and the object on which the deity stands or sits, such as rocks or clouds, a chair or throne.
- 4 By the title or name given by the temple staff or by devotees.

- 5 By the group in which the deity is depicted. This is far from infallible. There are many discrepancies due to images being misplaced on altars or simply left out of groups, and colours may change when the images are being refurbished.

Some images have attributes which make them easy to identify if not impossible to mistake. Many are relatively standard images without attributes, varying marginally in dress and appearance. Their identity will be known only to the temple committee, the god-carver, the temple custodian and devotees. There are a number of standard images which cannot possibly be identified.

- 1 A standard Buddhist image has the other-worldly, calm characterless face, is dressed in simple priestly

his knees, or with one hand clutching his official girdle. There are a number of alternative elements to this image such as the cap, crown or helmet which rarely are more than the assumption of the god-carver.

A limited number of images have individually unique characteristics carved and fitted by the god-carver, usually at the request of the temple committee who have been advised of the special characteristics by the spirit of the deity itself in a dream. These include such features as a series of gold spots across the face, a striped multi-coloured face, or six arms each holding an individual item such as a mirror, sword, tablet, charm or planet. In practice it means that unless the image is one of the hundred or so deities whose iconographical characteristics are widely



- robes and is sitting cross-legged.
- 2 A standard Taoist image is a lean, standing or seated figure with a black beard and tiny Taoist crown, holding either a gourd or fly switch.
- 3 A standard popular religion male image is a seated scholar-official with the obligatory full black or red beard, holding a tablet with both hands in front of his chest, or with his hands either resting on his arm rests or on

known and accepted, and are to be seen on altars in most Chinese ethnic communities, it is unlikely that an image out of context can be identified.

A 'rule' which most god-carvers accept and conform to is the form of deities from the prehistory era, that is before the reign of the mythological Yellow Emperor (see page 57). As the 'invention of clothing' is attributed to the Yellow Emperor, it goes without saying

◁ There are many temples in Java dedicated to Kuo Liu-kuan – a seventeenth century Chinese merchant from Java. He escaped from pirates who, with demonic help, had created a storm and tried to carry off his rich cargo. Known as Lord of the Beneficial Seas, Tse-hai Chen-jen, he is revered as a protector both for his generosity and as an immigrant who became a great and rich local worthy. A temple was first built in the 1780s in his honour in Semarang where he is thought to have been borne off to Heaven on a cloud. His image there portrays him as a scholar-official, but with his robe slightly open at the front, usually a sign of an ancestral image. His portable image is in front of his main image. He is flanked by four servants: two Chinese and two Javanese who are barefoot. The Javanese man has a furled umbrella and the woman is carrying a box. [Indonesia]



△ Shen Nung (see page 57) ruled China before the Yellow Emperor, who invented clothing. Shen Nung is therefore always shown wearing a skirt of leaves. [Taiwan]

▷ An image of the popular religion deity **Pai-ma Chiang-chün** who comes from Leichou. Nowadays he is revered by the Hainanese. [Kuanglung province]



△ **P'i-lu Che-na** or **Vairocana** in meditation (see page 94). Notice that he is in lotus position, seated in a lotus flower, and is wearing the five-leaf crown. (Note that, as a rule, bodhisattvas have passed beyond being male or female.) [Unprovenanced]

that all deities from earlier eras would not be wearing clothes. So they are, almost without exception, portrayed dressed in either animal skins, or skirts and necklets of leaves.

Most god-carvers appear to produce similar if not identical images time after time, with accepted characteristics, be they a hat, gourd, sword, etc. A few with fertile, artistic minds, carve individual images which usually can be identified. However, in some cases, they are so individual that they have to be either labelled or identified by the temple keeper.

To illustrate the problems of identifying not only the minor deities but in a number of instances the main deities on altars, consider a medium size popular religion temple at the edge of the town of Tampin in central Malaysia. This temple is used mainly by Fukienese Chinese. In the mid-1960s, religious activity was reasonably active though the temple itself was run down, colourless and grimy. In 1963 the temple keeper had been able to name every deity, though he was unable to relate their legends, claiming he had forgotten them. Only one was an image of a deity noted in other temples either then or since, the popular exorcist deity **Fa-chu Kung** (see page 75). The others either had descriptive titles such as 'The General with the Six Arms' or were **Pestilence Wang-yeh** (see page 115) with a common surname. All images were grimy, caked in incense soot and dust.

By 1994 the temple had been enlarged and refurbished with two new side altars added containing the **Earth God** (see page 131) and **Kuan Yin** (see page 89), neither of which had been represented in the 1960s. Apart from **Fa-chu Kung** whose image had now disappeared, the other images were still present, but now cleaned and repainted, together with two other images looking reasonably newly carved representing generals, one astride a mythical animal and the other a white horse. In 1994 the temple keeper, a recently retired schoolmaster who was unable to recall the earlier temple keeper, claimed to know the title of the main deity on the altar and promptly gave an entirely different one to the one provided thirty-one years earlier. He neither knew the names and titles of the others nor did he know any of the legends behind the deities, including the main deity. He seemed rather bewildered why anyone should wish to know. He added that these

deities had been revered on this altar for many a year, had proved efficacious to their devotees and that was, surely, all that mattered.

On being shown the titles provided in 1963 he was marginally interested but did not recognise any and, more to the point, as a school master he explained that two of the characters written in 1963 did not, as far as he was aware, exist.



This is borne out by them not appearing in any of the major Chinese dictionaries.

Taoist Images

Immortals are generally represented as scholars of imperial times, standing or sitting, wearing loose-fitting robes of varying hues, sometimes bearing Taoist symbols. Their hair is pulled back into a large topknot, occasionally surmounted by a tiny crown. The crown in turn may be surmounted by a flame on a pin. They wear sandals, and sometimes a belt with a pouch.

They can be depicted sitting in a relaxed position with legs drawn up, on a rock, in a cavern or on the ground, or standing on billowing, multi-coloured clouds. Very occasionally they are portrayed astride a mythical bird or beast. Most Immortals carry a scroll and or a fly switch, though others carry a sword, fan, gourd, musical instrument or small bowl, the latter being held in an unusual

manner with fingers bent in a curious manner so that only three fingers grip it.

Buddhist Images

Contact with India influenced Chinese native sculpture, bringing about the gradual disappearance of its Taoist ethereal qualities and producing a sense of real physical presence. Buddhist images and legends were similarly affected by

The most popular deity whose image can be seen everywhere, on household as well as in Buddhist, Taoist and popular religion altars, is Kuan Yin. She has a great many forms with a number of obscure ones such as riding a buffalo or lying full length like the reclining Buddha. She has a special series of poses with possibly the best known being 'Royal Ease'. It is possible to trace the

◁ An unidentified warrior assistant, carrying a spear to protect his lord or lady. [Unprovenanced]

▽ Yin Chiao, canonized as T'ai Sui (Lord of Time, see pages 59 and 62), is always shown with several sets of arms. Here the back pair are each holding a gold coin; the middle pair are holding a sword and a rattle, while one of the front pair holds a fly whisk. [Taiwan]



popular religion's beliefs. The majority of Buddhist images are gilded and portrayed as bald, with smooth characterless faces, and long ear lobes. There is often a bump in the centre of the forehead. The Buddhas are usually shown with the head covered in black or blue ringlets (known to Chinese as 'snails').

Bodhisattvas are recognizable by their comparatively large biretta-style five-leaf crown, which usually has a minute Buddha in the middle of the central leaf. Images have cast down eyes, and the pose is serene. There are many complicated poses, including being seated on a lotus, rocks or on the ground, in lotus position, or with one leg bent and the other suspended.

In pictures Buddhist deities are usually portrayed sitting on an open lotus, or on a bench or large meditation platform. They hold prayer beads, lotus flowers or a pagoda.





development for Kuan Yin, who arrived in China as an Indian Buddhist male and gradually, to fill a need, changed into a Chinese female during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Popular Religion Images

These can be divided into major, lesser and subordinate deities, together with a vast array of attendants and disciples. Deified civil and military officials are comparatively easy to differentiate, although there are numerous occasions when a confusion of characteristics by the god-carver causes one to hesitate.

Civil officials wear civil or court robes and caps, and hold either a tablet of authority (an audience tablet) before their chest, or a *ju-i* sceptre cradled in one arm. They are also often portrayed with a rigid, wide girdle or belt which, like a hoop, extends beyond the shape of the body and is clutched in one hand while the other hand rests on the knee.

Military officials wear armour, covered by a robe so there is only a glimpse of armour around the leg, one shoulder and forearm, and a military hat. They wear or carry a sword, either sheathed or unsheathed. Marshals and generals may also be wearing the rack across their backs containing four flags, a clearly visible identification on parade and in battle, indicating the rank and formation of the officers. Both civil and military images may have animals under one or both feet and are usually portrayed sitting on thrones with tiger skins over the back of the chair and dragon's head arm rests. Frequently they are depicted as awe-inspiring beings sitting slightly forward on their throne with legs spread wide apart, one slightly forward of the other, looking straight ahead.

Certain deities are well known for their facial colours. Kuan Yü's face is said to be the colour of a jujube; Pao Kung's is black with a black and white yin and yang sign on his forehead. Such features are unique. Apart from some half a dozen major deities whose faces are specifically another colour, all have approximately flesh coloured faces, whereas lesser deities may have a single-coloured or multi-coloured face. A number of images are portrayed holding or carrying gourds and lustral water in tiny bowls; almost without exception, these are mystic or popular Taoists, the gourds containing elixirs and potions of one

kind or another. Many of the famous Chinese doctors and herbalists in former times were Taoists.

Attendants

Attendants bear, among other things, fans and umbrellas to cool and shade their deity. A number of attendants carry unique items, such as the medicine gourds, pill boxes and pills carried by the attendants to the Gods of Medicine; swords, and the baskets or strings of coins, or gold and silver *taels* ('shoes' or blocks) for the Wealth Gods.

They may also carry axes and lances to protect their lord or lady; seals for the authorizing of their lord's orders; tablets proclaiming their individually appointed authority; locks and chains to secure prisoners; or bowls of refreshments. Attendants rarely come singly; usually there are a pair flanking their deity, both looking inward, in contrast to major or subordinate deities who almost always look straight ahead.

Marks & Attributes

Certain signs are specifically used to identify an image or its function. It has to be borne in mind that such marks or attributes, although believed to be uniquely Buddhist or Taoist, can be found as standard on images of the other religion. For example, the third eye in the centre of the forehead is generally assumed to be Buddhist. Originally it was the Deva eye which allows the deity to see things at any distance. It is generally known as the Heavenly Eye. *T'ien-ven*, and is also to be seen on major and minor Taoist and popular religion mythological deity images. Some peculiarities, such as wings, bumps on the forehead like incipient horns or pointed tufts of hair above the ears, are only seen on tamed demons or mythological deities. Although normally found on popular religion deities, they have been noted on a few Buddhist deities.

The many-armed and three-faced deities, assumed to be Buddhist having originated in the Hindu pantheon, can also be popular religion mythological deities, such as Yin Chiao or Chün-t'i P'u-sa (see page 93). There are, however, the usual jokers in the pack such as the Sung dynasty general, who was later promoted in the Celestial hierarchy as Chün-ch'üeh Shang-ti by a Ming emperor who had been cured after praying to him. He



△ There are three or four separate temples in Taiwan in which dogs are revered on altars either for their loyalty in adversity or because they braved great hardships and saved human life. The Loyal Dog General, *I-chüan Chiang-chün*, is renowned for its part in a patriotic group of 108 people, formed to protect the people of Peikang against a gang of bandits. The 108 plus dog were so successful that the bandits were determined to destroy them. After one very fierce and successful battle with the bandits, the group celebrated their victory with a banquet. The bandits used the opportunity to poison the dog, who otherwise would have alerted the group. Then they attacked the village killing all 108 in their sleep. Some years later, after the bandits were destroyed, an imperial decree honoured the 108 as *I-min*, and a temple was built to revere them. The dog too was honoured and given the title of General. Murals in the temple show the battle and the victory of the 108 over the bandits. [Taiwan]

◁◁ A popular religion altar, displaying multiple images of Kuan Yin (see page 89), as well as Buddhist images and those of other popular religion deities. [Singapore]



△ Some deities have a cavity in the back sealed with a wooden bung. This will contain the ritual objects, which again vary from place to place. However, the most common concept is that life must be injected into the image and therefore a live insect is placed in the cavity before it is sealed. In Hunan province, the majority of images also had a slip of paper written by the priest who had performed the 'eye opening' ceremony describing the deity, and for whom it has been carved and when. This, together with bits and pieces of cord, metal, cotton and twigs, sorted and tied to represent the entrails, is also placed within the cavity. In other areas it is merely the eye dotting which brings the image to life and gives it power (*ling*). [Hunan province]

is now portrayed as a standard Taoist Immortal with no indication whatsoever of his military standing. Only a few images of Chinese deities illustrate the way of life in China before 1949, such as the attendants to the patron of actors. These are portrayed as wrestlers, boxers, musicians: others wear the tall conical caps, calf-length trousers and sleeveless jackets of the city mandarin's retinue.

Some images have hinged arms and legs. This is to enable the deity to be dressed when devotees make costly outfits for it. It is as if the image were actually a living person and the act of dressing it is vested with great meaning. Some images are provided with not only joints at the knees and elbows but also at the wrists and ankles. Kuan Yin is a favourite deity for such a commission.

It should be borne in mind that for many reasons, often personal to the god-carver, images are given an ambiguous characteristic. Good examples are the bodhisattva whose hair is tied up in a top-knot, albeit a double top-knot, and a deity who was given a black face because the god-carver had misconstrued the meaning of the specific Chinese written character. There are also exceptions which have to be accepted for what they are, usually popular religion adaptations of Taoist or Buddhist deities.

Quite small, cheap images of certain deities are bought by devotees during pilgrimages, whether they were away for a lengthy period or merely one day. These, looking for all the world like fairings, are to be seen in serried rows on stalls lining the entrance drives to better known, popular monasteries and nunneries.

Composite Deities

Pictures of mythological deities in old Chinese books often portrayed them as ferocious creatures with tusks, horns or with the head of a wild animal. Such combinations of human and animal forms, of human and bird forms and of human and other forms were not uncommon and even now a few deities have retained them. However, most of those early deities on temple altars today are depicted as humans, the only indication of their mythological origin being the 'ear-pressing' tufts and skirts of leaves. Many early pictures are now regarded as the 'evil' form, the unorthodox; and the modern carving as the orthodox or 'good' form.

Imported Deities

Chinese popular religion has adopted and blended in with its own pantheon deities from a number of other foreign religions, not least of which has been Buddhism, though of recent years it has been more a matter of adopting Buddhist deities and philosophies from Thai, Tibetan and Mongol Buddhism. Two of the City God's attendants, Horse Face (*Ma-mien*) and Buffalo Head (*Niu-t'ou*) whose arms, legs and bodies are human while their heads are those of a horse and cow are examples of Hindu deities brought by Buddhism to China.

More obvious to foreigners has been the adoption of various Catholic saints into the popular religion pantheon in the Philippines (see page 18). Here images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and other Christian saints are to be seen on many a Chinese altar together with deities from Fukienese and Cantonese local cults. Images of Kuan Yin have often been taken by foreigners to be a Madonna image in Chinese guise – and this might well be true! Both are regarded as sanitized and aloof from the slightest stain of sexuality. Both are identified as the Queen of Heaven. Both sometimes wear a crown or other vestments of royalty, and both are regarded as an intercessor to whom men and women can turn with their earthbound problems. They are both regarded as approachable, possessing a feminine compassion and unlike most male deities can be looked to for comfort.

In a Chinese ancestral temple near Manila the altar dedicated to the Chinese Buddhist Saviour of the Underworld, *Ti-tsang Wang* (see page 91), is accompanied by Christ and several Christian saints, as well as Kuan Yin P'u-sa and the life-size ancestral image of a former *Kapitan China*.

This syncretism often did more to enlarge a god's appeal than to undermine it; and in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand local Earth Gods have been installed, each being of the native ethnic race. These have proved very popular local deities whose function parallels that of the Chinese Earth God, but has the advantage of the deities knowing local customs and mores.

A number of images and tablets on altars, and in a few places the actual temples themselves, are dedicated to foreigners, that is non-Han Chinese. These vary from the Indian deities who came with

Buddhism and are now regarded as Chinese, to Westerners such as the American Frederick Ward who died in action, leading a Chinese imperial force during the Taiping Rebellion.

A variety of other deities of local origin appear in temples in different countries. Local worthies in Indonesia include

handed over to the person who ordered the image, it is carried with due solemnity to the temple with the head or eyes covered with a cowl or mask of red paper. The image stands lifeless awaiting the ceremony which will welcome the deity concerned to the empty statue, requesting him or her to take up residence.

◁ This image is complete, but is waiting to have its eyes 'opened' in the ceremony described below. It will wear the blindfold, or mask, of red paper until the ceremony is under way. [Shanghai]



Embah Raden (Noble Grandparent) and Embah Jugo (Noble Uncle), the latter is traditionally said to have been an officer in the Taiping rebellion who fled to Java from China after the destruction of the Taipings in Nanking in 1864.

Dedicating & Activating Images

Until they are vested with life and power, images are only objects in a god-carver's shop, though in Singapore the original blocks of wood selected by devotees and ear-marked for a specific deity are regarded as blessed. Once finished and

The cowl, or mask, of paper is only discarded when the ceremony of 'opening the eyes' is performed. The ritual dotting of the eyes of the deity with red 'ink' using a writing brush, must take place. Although it is called 'eye opening', the ritual varies from place to place. Religious specialists often use the blood obtained first from a cockerel's comb and then from the decapitated cock during the rite to activate a deity. This they use to dot the eyes of the new image in order for it to be possessed by the spirit of the deity and be available and ready for reverence.



△ Identifying and dating of individual images, out of context and unlabelled, is usually impossible as most images are standard forms without any unique identifying characteristic. They are usually weathered by exposure to sub-tropical damp and heat, which removes much of the original paint within a decade or so. This image – of a soldier standing on his horse – is an excellent example. It is heavily weathered, but the base is in much better condition than the head and body. Painted in the heavy colours typical of northern and parts of central China, there is no clue to its identity. The vegetable pigments suggest that it was carved before the turn of the century, and the martial pose suggests that he is an historical military hero, but more is impossible to guess. [Unprovenanced]



◁ Rosewood tablet dedicated to the emperor of the day and wishing him long life.

▽ Cantonese tablet dedicated to the surgeon deity, Hua T'o.

▷ Taiwanese tablet dedicated to the 'Seventh Immortal Maiden' (Ch'i Hsien Nü).



◁ Tablet dedicated to the 'Ruler of the Myriad of Spirits Everywhere in the Three Worlds' – Heaven, Earth and the Underworld' (T'ien-ti San Chieh Shih Fang Wan Ling Chen-tsai).

▽ A tablet dedicated to the Taoist deity, Chu Ta Hsien.

▷ A mid-nineteenth century ancestral tablet from central China dedicated to someone's father, a Mr Yang.





Tablets

Tablets are often found on Chinese altars. Made of wood, they have many local variations and styles. They also have a number of roles and functions.

The Chinese generally believe that everybody has three souls. When a person dies, their first soul is buried with the body, the second is led to the ancestral tablet, and the third is borne off to the Underworld (see page 178) for judgement and eventual rebirth. The most commonly seen tablets, therefore, are ancestral ones.

Each tablet represents the repository for the spirit of one person or for a married couple. They are usually kept in the home, where they are revered by their descendants. Alternatively, they are placed in a special hall within a Buddhist temple. The benefits obtained from prayers said by the monks help the dead in their after life and, at the same time, the family is spared from having to offer the spirits in the tablets incense on a regular basis.

There are also ancestral tablets that are dedicated to a whole generation within one clan. They are kept with other generation tablets on the main altar of the clan temple (see page 13).

Other tablets on altars will represent a deity or group of deities. These are usually only seen in rural temples where the cost of carving an image is too much for the community. However, a number can be seen on the altars of better-off temples standing at the feet of the main deity and acting as additional representations.

Finally there are the very superior tablets, rarely seen nowadays, dedicated to the emperor of the day. His title would not be on the tablet; it simply wished the emperor long life. These used to be obligatory in all major Taoist and Buddhist temples. They stood on the leading edge of the main altar. Local officials would greet the emperor before them on his birthday and at the Lunar New Year.

▽ Five small images in single file on the ridges of temples used to be in vogue in a number of major temple complexes in northern China before 1949. Each one is a single tile, usually yellow; they were regarded as protective creatures from mythology. Sets vary slightly from temple to temple, but in general they are a hen, lion, dragon, phoenix and one mythical creature. They are not very common, but seem to be gaining popularity within the Taiwanese community.

The story, as related in northern China, tells how the cruel ruler, Min Wang, prince of Ch'i, was defeated in 283 BC by an alliance composed of six other states. He was strung up to the end of a roof ridge in his palace where he was left hanging without food and water until he died. The people of Ch'i, in order to keep his infamy and depravity fresh in their memories, placed his effigy, riding a hen, on the roof of their homes. As the years passed, so further creatures appeared on the roof ridge corners to ensure that Min Wang did not escape from his perch. Temple keepers in Taiwan are all, without exception, unable to say why he should be riding a hen. However, a *Dictionary of Chinese Symbols* explains that the hen, like the cock, can drive away evil spirits. This is a detail from the temple dedicated to Sun Pin shown opposite. [Taiwan]

Temples & Altars

Temples and monasteries range from the large, scattered establishments with several major halls and numerous buildings, to the tiny outdoor shrine. Single hall temples with one altar or one major and two secondary altars are most common, though there are many with a main hall and one or two side halls. Each hall has a main and perhaps secondary altars; each bears one or more images of the deities. In any town or village the largest non-official building used to be the temple. Even today in Taiwan, temples are the most ornate structures and, as well as being the residence of the gods, act as a community centre.

Types of Temple

Chinese temples, built in the main by associations or the local communities, are in general Buddhist (where nuns and monks live and worship), orthodox Taoist, popular religion temples and shrines, or clan temples. The last are the homes for the spirits of the departed of the greater family bearing the same surname. The temples of popular religion are traditionally dedicated to both national and local spirits of deified heroes, notables and saints,

as well as to the deities of the legendary and mythological China-wide Celestial pantheon. These temples – there are usually one or two in each village and more in towns and cities – are normally controlled by temple committees.

Chinese, ranging from the highly educated to the illiterate, from the superstitious to the non-superstitious, from the believer to the non-believer, all see these

in a different light. A non-believer, non-superstitious Chinese will hardly notice the temples in his neighbourhood and be scathing in his comments to a foreigner who expresses interest in them. A devout Buddhist or Taoist will often ignore the popular religion temples but, with the usual Chinese tolerance, accept all faiths without much comment. Most popular religion devotees will describe themselves as Buddhists.

For convenience, non-Buddhist temples can be divided into general headings even though the establishments may have



one or more altars and between one and twenty plus images on each altar:

- major community temples dedicated to a major deity
- minor community temples dedicated to one, often specialized, deity
- clan temples with only ancestral tablets (rarely with portrait images)

temples built on hilltops or hillsides out in the country in Taiwan, and even the small shop-houses in South-East Asia.

One of the easiest ways to differentiate between Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian temples is by the occupants. A Buddhist temple with priests dressed in saffron robes or their every-day working



- public shrines dedicated to Earth Gods and lesser local deities
 - high-rise flats converted into private temples with one or more room
 - converted, private shop-houses with or without a spirit medium
 - rural shacks, corrugated iron huts or sheds built by private enterprise
- Many of the new temples have proved money spinners for the owners, such as the large, multi-storey, syncretic

clothes, grey jackets and trousers, is easy to identify, as are the Taoist with priests in blue, red or multi-coloured robes, especially when they have their braided hair circled in black bands, and are wearing their other regalia and minute crowns. Confucian temples rarely have staff present except during ceremonies, apart that is from a caretaker or two who tend the altars. Visiting foreigners will find that they are always welcome so long as they

◁ A temple dedicated to Sun Pin (see page 129), whose image is displayed on the roof. Such portrayals seem to be a modern trend in Taiwan.

▽ A small street-side shrine dedicated to the local Earth God (see page 173). This deity is called Ta Po-kung. [Singapore]



△ An unnamed cave temple in the Yellow Earth country of Shensi province. Such temples appear to be very unusual and contain a small altar with only one or two deities.

◁ The Ch'iu clan temple near Lukang in Taiwan. Such temples contain only the soul tablets for the extended Ch'iu family (see page 13).

do not interfere with devotees' devotions, but they are frequently confused by what they hear and see.

Popular religion temples, for the great majority of the time, are virtually silent and empty apart from the temple keepers going about their chores. Occasional devotees wander in and do the rounds with their devotional bows and incense. However, during festivals the bustle and noise is beyond belief. During a busy period it can drown conversation, particularly with the heavy reverberation of the large bells, rung after a donation has been received. The noise includes the clatter of divining blocks on the floor, the rattle of fortune sticks, the general bustle of people, noise generated by the throng milling around with opera being broadcast over the sound system from the temple stage.

There are also drums being beaten, cymbals and hand bells clang, hawkers

and mendicants calling out and in some temples the blowing of the buffalo horn. On top of this there is the thick atmosphere produced by the incense smoke from the altars and the heat from the incinerators where charms and petitions, hell money and paper objects are constantly being burned.

People go individually to a temple to worship a deity. They do not join a temple in the Western sense, nor do they worship a god who proves ineffectual. They move if needs be to another temple or another altar where the god is, as far as they are aware, powerful and 'effective'. Of course, to play safe, and most do, Chinese offer simple reverence before each and every deity in the temple.

Architecture & Decoration

Old temples in Chinese cities, including Hong Kong and Macau, have a number



△ The main Buddha hall of a modern Buddhist temple in Hong Kong's New Territories.

▷ A popular religion temple, known locally as a Taoist temple, in the suburb of Pudong across the river from central Shanghai. It has recently been reopened after being refurbished – it had been gutted during the Cultural Revolution in 1966–7.

▷ A popular religion temple on top of a high-rise building in central Changhua city. [Taiwan]



of large stone halls with courtyards; to a great extent, these have remained unchanged to this day. In South-East Asia, and formerly in southern China and Taiwan, the rural or village temples usually consist of a simple room, covered by an ornamental roof of some kind, and with one small altar against the wall opposite the entrance door. Frequently they are shacks with plank walls and galvanized tin or attap roofing. In a wealthy community, they may be built in the local stone. Public temples built by the local community may reflect the architecture of the yamen, but more often they are halls built of stone oriented on lines dictated by geomancy. Most popular religion temples face either water or the south.

Chinese temples range from the extremely simple, basic hall or room to the large multi-halled establishments – a spread of halls and corridors, such as is

and also on side altars lining the inner temple walls. Taoist and Buddhist temples and shrines are where the relevant gods, Buddhas, Immortals and ascetics are worshipped. While Buddhist and Taoist temples relied on the patronage of the wealthy elite and rents from their properties, popular religion temples relied on villagers, peasants and other working men and their wives for support.

Private temples belong to an association or to one or more individuals who have established a main deity on their altar, usually together with a number of other, often unconnected, deities for private worship. In many cases, the deities are for the use of the general public and the offerings and donations provided by devotees provide a living for the owner.

The great majority of popular religion temples have to pay their way. In some of the bigger ones, where a number of

▽ Buddhist temples and monasteries are maintained and run entirely by their monks and nuns. The same is also true of Taoist establishments. The resident priests in both religions perform all public functions of ritual, divination and mortuary. However, there are major differences between the Buddhist and Taoist concept of priests and monks. Buddhists are residents of their temple or monastery and sworn to celibacy. They are divided into those who perform social services, those who perform rituals, and those who meditate. This monk is wearing his working clothes. [Hong Kong]



◁ Taoism has its senior and junior religious specialists, each concentrating on its own level of rituals. Taoist priests are either monastic and resident in their temples, or secular, living at home and performing religious ceremonies and rituals as and when required. On the whole, they are married men with families. [Taiwan]



found in Buddhist and Taoist monasteries. The layout of the altars and the pattern of devotions in popular religion temples is fairly standard; there is a main deity in the centre of the main altar. Depending upon the wealth and needs of the community, this image is either alone (with or without its aides) or is surrounded by several or many other deities on secondary altars flanking the main altar

religious specialists operate, income is obtained from the sale of religious charms and incense, and from the fees charged by religious specialists for the interpretation of the cryptic oracles obtained by divination.

Private temples are often set up in shop-houses, or in a room in a private house. They only flourish when the main deity proves to be effective.

Temple Layout

The great majority of Chinese temples are built of brick, stone and stucco in a traditional local style. It used to be the rule that temple roofs were higher than any surrounding buildings to ensure good geomantic influence. The roofs are typically Chinese in character with curved ridges, best described as they are colloquially in Taiwan as 'buffalo horn buildings'. These are surmounted by protective figures, usually five in number. They include a cockerel and mythical animals (see page 30). They can also be adorned with glazed ceramic flowers, phoenixes, dragons and birds. These symbolize blessings and good fortune from the deities.

Guardian generals or ministers are painted on the main doors themselves to guard the entrance. A major recognition feature is the fireplace or incinerator outside where paper money and other paper

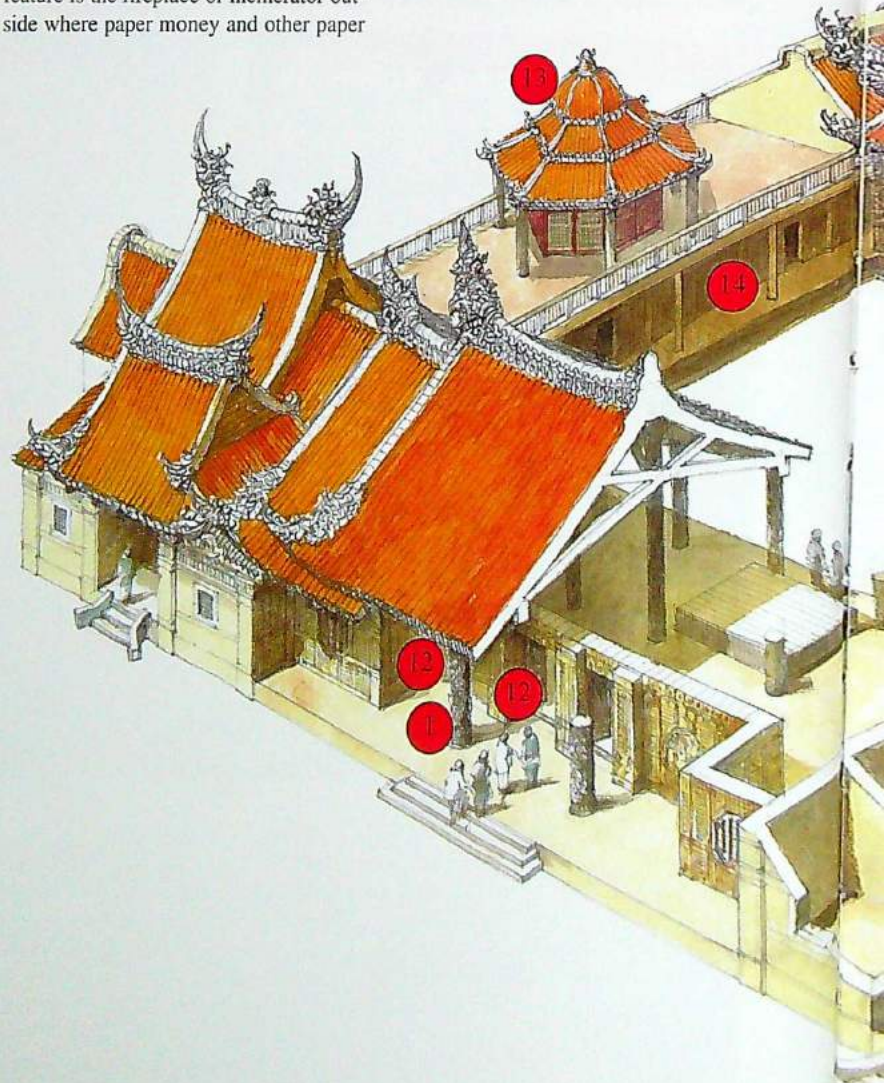
offerings to the gods often are burned. Beyond the doors, inside the dimly lit and smoky grimy hall or rooms, are the altars. At the side or rear are the small rooms for the temple caretakers.

The majority of popular religion temples consist of a single hall with the (main) altar in the north facing the entrance. This bears the main deity in the centre, either alone or with other minor deities flanking him or her. In very many places, there is a pair of secondary altars flanking the main altar, also facing south, bearing secondary deities revered for special purposes, maternity, wealth, etc.

Some temples also have side altars backing on to the side walls facing inwards. These will again carry minor deities who have individual roles and responsibilities. Usually there are altar

A typical, southern Chinese, two-hall, major popular religion temple

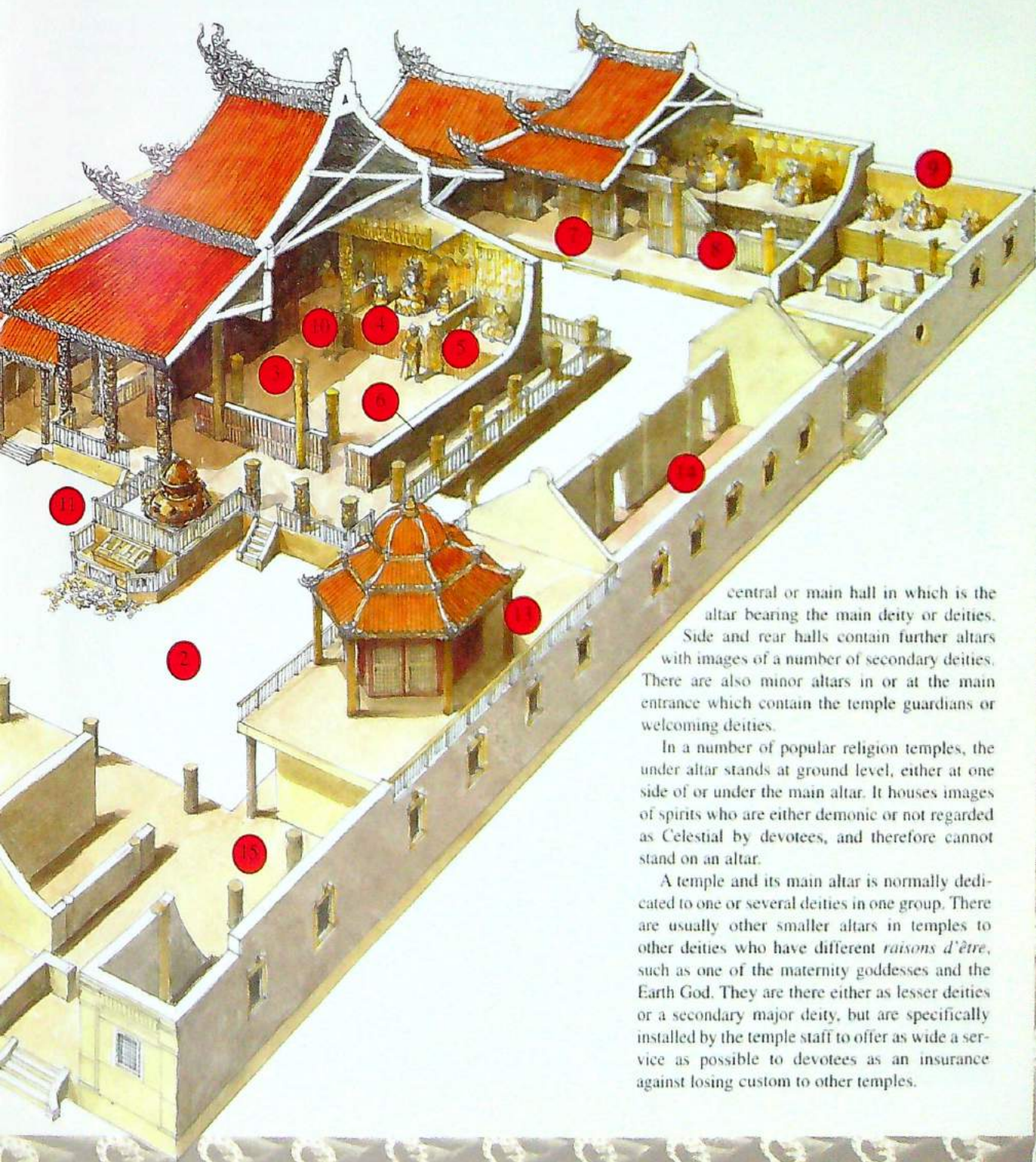
- ① Main entrance to the complex
- ② Main, roofless courtyard
- ③ Main or central temple hall
- ④ Main altar or shrine
- ⑤ Secondary altar of the main hall
- ⑥ Side altars; in some temples the Lohan shrines
- ⑦ Rear hall entered from courtyard; sometimes for ancestor worship
- ⑧ Main altar of the rear hall
- ⑨ Secondary altar of the rear hall
- ⑩ Under altar
- ⑪ Incinerator for paper offerings
- ⑫ Door Guardians (see page 177)
- ⑬ Bell towers
- ⑭ Living quarters, store rooms and offices
- ⑮ Often a secondary altar



tables before the altars – many bearing one or two images, and even several dozen on occasions – all facing the entrance. The deity or deities on the altar, the style of the altars, and the decoration are often remarkably similar wherever you go, although this will depend upon the wealth of the community.

Devotees will enter through the main

doors of a large temple, between the door guardians, and find themselves in a front hall or roofless courtyard. This tends to be used mainly during festivals when trestle tables carry all the offerings from the multitude of devotees. In rural temples, it is also a centre for the elderly to meet friends and chat in the cool, to read and even to play cards. Beyond is the



central or main hall in which is the altar bearing the main deity or deities.

Side and rear halls contain further altars with images of a number of secondary deities. There are also minor altars in or at the main entrance which contain the temple guardians or welcoming deities.

In a number of popular religion temples, the under altar stands at ground level, either at one side of or under the main altar. It houses images of spirits who are either demonic or not regarded as Celestial by devotees, and therefore cannot stand on an altar.

A temple and its main altar is normally dedicated to one or several deities in one group. There are usually other smaller altars in temples to other deities who have different *raisons d'être*, such as one of the maternity goddesses and the Earth God. They are there either as lesser deities or a secondary major deity, but are specifically installed by the temple staff to offer as wide a service as possible to devotees as an insurance against losing custom to other temples.

▽ Many popular religion temples mix Buddhist and Taoist deities indiscriminately on the same altar. This temple has put Sakyamuni (The Buddha), flanked by Ananda and Kasyapa (see page 95) behind, and in front is a popular religion deity from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Chu-ko Liang (see page 150). In this case, the temple is regarded as Buddhist, both by its devotees and by the temple staff, although there are no resident Buddhist priests. [Taiwan]

In South-East Asia, quite a number of temples have been sited in shop-houses where the single hall with its one major and perhaps one or two secondary altars have been crowded into the area which, in other shop-houses, is the shop. Other single-hall temples, mainly in rural settings in the centre of tiny villages, are no larger than a single car garage, containing one or two popular religion deities, sometimes with attendant figures. Also, private temples are frequently the residence of a spirit medium.

Until the early 1960s, popular religion temples in all areas were colourless, dark and grimy places with comparatively plain and, in the main, not over-large images. To a great extent, they have remained so in Hong Kong and Macau. Increased wealth among devotees, in particular in Taiwan, together with subsidies from official sources, has led to temples being refurbished with gaudy roofs, to Western eyes at least, and a complete redecoration inside. Some temples have been lavishly redecorated with the walls, eaves and altars covered in gilt, handsome carvings, murals and other lavish embellishments. All this is paid for by rich donors whose charity earns merit in the next world. Altar offerings, however,

have only changed in minor ways – for example, cold tea is sometimes replaced by hard liquor, often in unopened bottles.

Many temples contain murals which perform one or more of several functions. Murals to the illiterate are as books are to the literate. These frescoes provide a visual narrative of one of a number of themes. They can encompass a 'full' pantheon of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, or of Taoist Immortals and deities, or of popular religion groups such as the Thirty-six Generals; fearsome scenes of the punishments meted out to sinners in the Underworld; and historical scenes portraying the life and times of the main deity or deities of the temple.

Such illustrated hagiographies on the side walls of the main hall also show the miracles performed by the main deity to help promote their worship and prove to devotees their power. There are also scenes of battles or of the countryside which highlight specific feats or successes achieved by the deity during their life.

Temple Staff

Day-to-day reverence does not require the services of any specialist and popular religion temples have no regular priest as such. They are run by committees who



usually hire religious specialists as and when required. The majority are manned by one or more custodians, normally an elderly man or woman, depending upon its size. These are usually laymen who provide services for devotees for a fee, such as topping up the oil lamps, selling incense stick bundles, and interpreting oracles. Larger ones have several staff, who look after the finances and running of the temple, as well as the caretakers.

Temple keepers, in general, are no more than watchmen and 'shopkeepers', while shrines and very small popular religion temples have no one to care for them apart from passers-by who wish to earn merit from the chore. It is always surprising to find that many temple keepers concern themselves very little with the identity of even the main deity or deities. Unless the secondary altars contain the standard Earth God, Kuan Yin or maternity goddesses, they display great ignorance about the other lesser heroes and worthies even when their titles are displayed above or before the images.

Altars

Certain temples are known throughout communities by a generic title or by the title of the main deity on the main altar

for their specialized function and for the service offered by the main deity or deities. The more common are the City God and Tung-yüeh Temples for post-mortuary services, the Civil and Military Temples (*Wen-wu*, in Cantonese *Man-mo*) for their general benefits of protection and literary success, and in Fukienese communities the Wang-yeh temples for their protection against pestilence and epidemics in particular.

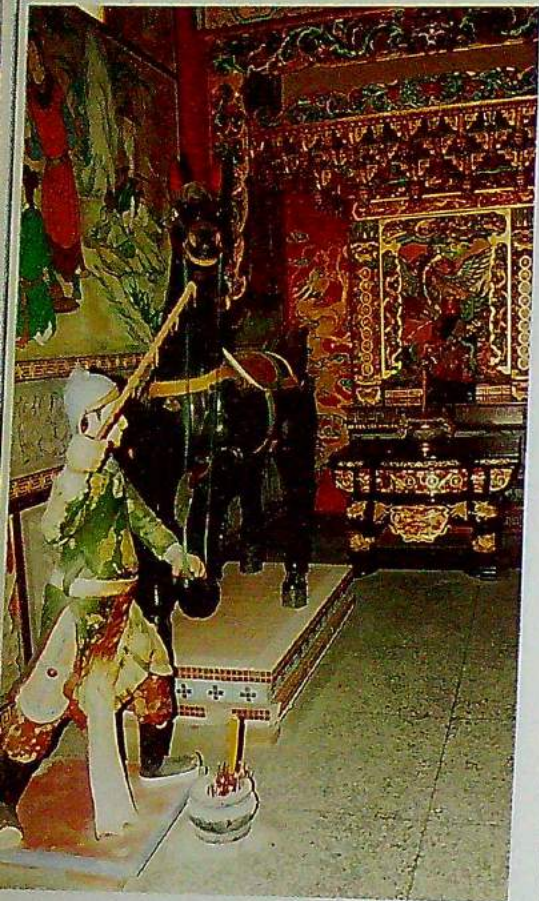
The deities on altars can be either an individual deity or a standard group of deities from a mixture of cults and religions. Buddhist temples tend to have distinctive and particular groups which vary little throughout China and Chinese communities. Taoist temples have standard groups too, but also have the odd, 'outsider' deity placed there for a specific reason, mostly due to the interpretation of a dream requiring the presence of the deity in that particular temple.

Popular religion temples can also have standard groups, usually a main deity and his or her entourage. However, over the years the altar and surrounding altars have been changed or become cluttered with other images of unconnected deities. A great number of popular religion temples with multiple deities on its main and



▽ The actual altar can vary from being an open stone or wooden platform to a highly-decorated display unit. The images of the deity or deities stand on it. In front of the altar proper, there is almost always an altar table which carries various paraphernalia like the 'Red Fish' drum (shown above), ritual implements and the offerings. These include a pair of candlesticks and oil lamp, two vases of flowers and bowls of unblemished fruit. In older temples, it is quite usual for the 'ever-burning lamp' to be suspended from the ceiling over the altar table by three thin chains. In Buddhist and Taoist temples, there is also an ever-burning flame. The altar is sometimes framed with drapes or long boards bearing pertinent inscriptions. [Hong Kong]





△ The horse and groom (about half life-size) of the main deity, Mo Fu Ch'ien-sui, of this temple. Beyond them is a secondary altar dedicated to the Northern Emperor (Hsüan-t'ien Shang-ti, see page 65). [Taiwan]

▷ A modern trend in Hong Kong, Taiwanese and South-East Asian temples has been the increase in number of images on altars. Before 1900, most temples had one main deity to each altar flanked by his or her aides. Thus, in a temple with a main hall and two side halls, even if the main hall had three altars, the maximum number of deities would be five. Most rural temples in Hong Kong, Taiwan and South-East Asia still are like this. As affluence has increased, more and more people have donated images of deities, and temples have expanded their altar space. Particularly in Fukien communities, altars are crowded with images of dozens and even scores of minor, unconnected, individual deities. In a number of temples, these altars have been labelled *Lieh-sheng Tan*, literally the 'Altar for All the Saints'. The majority of the images on this example are Kuan Yin (see page 89) or the Earth Gods. [Singapore]

secondary altars show a marked degree of either co-operation or toleration with major deities from various Chinese ethnic and social communities. They not only share the altar, but often the prime location, the back row. This is especially so in Taiwan and South-East Asian Chinese communities.

In Chinese popular religion temples, mostly in towns, there is an altar of unconnected deities, a row or so of smaller images often with no main deity. If there is one, it can be a tablet bearing the title of a major deity. Often in shop-house temples, the only altar will be a shelf at the rear wall bearing a row or two of unconnected images. These are not difficult to find in Taiwan, Singapore and some of the areas in Malaysia and Indonesia where Fukienese are predominant. Devotees pray before these altars not to any specific deity, but to the group in the hope that at least one of them will be able to assist the devotee.

It is a rule that all major images on the main altar are immovable except before Chinese New Year or the annual festival of the main deity when the images are cleaned and the altar swept. The most usual layout is for the major deity with his portable image before him, to stand in the centre of the main altar. However, this is not always the case.

Lesser deities flank the major deity's image, either on his altar or on secondary altars, with those of lesser importance on the left hand. Standing obliquely before him, both left and right, are his major aides, and behind him, again obliquely, are his lesser aides. As the name implies, portable images are taken out to be

paraded around the area during festivals. In some cases they are taken, on invitation, to neighbouring temples during their festivals (see page 46).

In addition to the main deity on the main altar in the main hall, it is not uncommon in Fukienese community temples for images of the wife and parents of the main deity to be displayed, either as a tablet or in image, on the secondary altar of the rear hall of the same temple. The main altar in the rear hall is usually dedicated to Kuan Yin, whose image occupies the senior position. It is also common for images of the San Kuan Ta-ti (see page 55) to stand on the altar table before the main altar in the rear hall.

A number of deities are the tutelary deities (spirits) identified with a particular social group or geographic area. A lone temple will house a local deity, the patron and protector of the people of the area. As the cult gains fame following favourable reports by devotees spreading the word, so 'branch temples' are opened dedicated to that same deity.

Further images of deities can be noted on the altar table or tables before the main altar and on another, even smaller, usually square altar table in front of that. The long tables are repositories for donated or visiting deities, and also for small portable images of the main deity which can be borrowed and taken home.

The censers or incense urns are filled with the accumulated ash of thousands of incense sticks. New sticks, in threes before major deities and ones before lesser deities, are stuck vertically and already smouldering into the regularly smoothed-down ash. Unlit sticks must never be



placed into an incense urn. Incense ash is considered by the Fukienese as a potent protective charm and is sometimes taken with water as a medicine on instructions from the deity, or worn as an amulet around the neck.

HOUSEHOLD ALTARS

The majority of Chinese homes have a small household altar on which stand the ancestral tablets of their immediate family, usually including the three previous generations. These altars vary from a simple table or shelf to an elaborate and expensive shrine.

Nowadays most household altars bear one or two images, nearly always an image of Kuan Yin and one or more protective deities of their choice. Formerly block-printed sheets of paper bearing the likeness of major deities were pasted on the wall behind the incense burner. These were in five colours: the deities number between one and nine, always in odd numbers, though some containing several score have been seen. A photograph taken in the kitchen of the late Chairman Mao's mother reveals that she had some dozen images though, apart from Kuan Yin, the others were not identifiable.

Promotion & Demotion

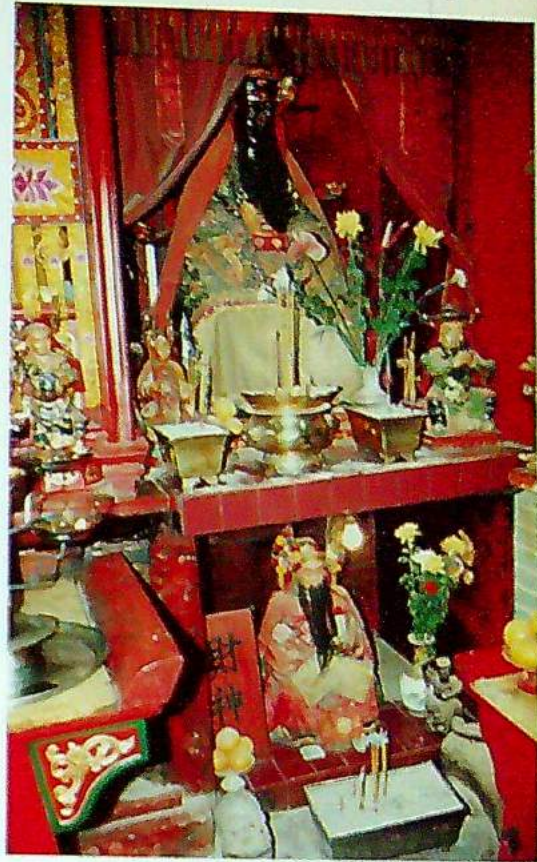
At first glance the images of the deities on the altars in Chinese popular religion temples would appear to be permanent fixtures, as indeed is the relative position of images. And so they are in a great number of places. However, changes for several reasons do take place, the main one being the addition of a further deity to the temple altar and the balance of seniority requiring marginal movement

to take place. Although almost all temples will retain the main deity for which the temple was first built, there have been a few cases where the original main deity has been replaced by another deity.

Distinction between the deities' seniorities and powers is something the Chinese appear not to become too excited about. They know in their own minds which deity or deities rule the pantheon and its departments, each with his or her proper place. As far as can be ascertained, the concept of many of the deities not having equal rank does not seem to arise.

The specific deities on the altar and their relative seniority and order of display depends upon a number of factors. First and foremost was the original decision to establish the altar to house that deity or deities, which would have been a decision made by a local group or individual to revere the deity, in response to a specific action perceived to have been made by that deity. This could have been protection, assistance, the gift of essential benefits, or in order to seek such assistance in the future. The initial decision does not mean that this deity will always remain the main deity on a secondary altar. A new problem or disaster may appear which needs to be dealt with by a different deity.

However, the most common cause for change is that a new temple keeper is appointed and he moves the secondary deities around while cleaning. Another reason for a change in position or deletion of images is a decision of the temple committee following some incident, often a devotee's dream.



△ The upper altar in a temple in Hong Kong. The upper altar is dedicated to Pao Kung (see page 182) and it is flanked by an image of Monkey (see page 100) on his right and an unidentifiable deity on his left.

The lower altar contains two images of a Wealth God (see page 122). Beside the incense box are two images of Tiger Spirits (see page 185) which are black with incense smoke.



Communication with & Worship of Deities

▽ A life-size image of one of the San Shan Kuo-wang (see page 111), which is being carried by a man inside, parading before the temple during a festival in Peikang in Taiwan. To the sound of fire crackers, devotees followed this image and its attendant procession, carrying their own images of the deities in order to revitalize them at the main altar in the temple. In legend, the Three Mountain Spirits, with their armies of tamed demons, saved the fleeing Sung emperor from his Mongol pursuers.



People go to temples for a number of reasons: to propitiate the deities, to seek advice, help and comfort, or to satisfy an inner requirement for devotion of the unknown. Results can be either tangible or intangible, and are possibly never authenticated – the only means of ascertaining that the deity understands the request and is responding, is through divination. Believers accept that they can thereby avoid the harmful *Yin* influences and protect themselves from ill fortune or a change in luck.

Although traditional Chinese worship is, in the main, individual, it can be communal, as during the number of occasions when communities celebrate a temple festival or certain mortuary rites. Corporate worship usually involves religious processions which were, and still are, arranged as a response to plague, bad weather and bad harvests, or the annual feast day of the main deity.

Outside mainland China possibly the prime reason why many devotees ever visit a temple is to obtain an immediate assurance and response to a question or problem which is worrying them. Psychologically, devotions to deities and the practice of everyday rituals can reduce the devotee's anxiety about common and universal problems such as sickness, financial success or loss, the weather, child bearing and rearing, and natural catastrophes.

The primary ritual is for inner purity, involving or implying fasting, abstinence, self-control, self-denial and on some occasions penance. Many of these commitments involve vegetarianism.

Chinese prayers and sacrifices are commonplace, practical and in many instances, though not consciously, offerings are an extension of social custom, a simple sharing of food. Although many devotees do experience religious presence, usually through the rituals and atmosphere before the altars, and in the presence of the spirits of the other worlds, to others there is little if anything ethereal, ecstatic or sublime in temple rituals. It is simply, like so many Chinese

transactions, a question of bargaining and money's worth.

Devotees believe they can induce the deities to show mercy in response to the communities' devotions. This is not magic but prayer; the latter being a supplication not automatically granted should the deities choose not to concede it. Although in the popular mind the difference between prayer and magic is blurred, magic spells work automatically, whereas prayers are non-coercive.

It is rare for religious feeling to be entirely transcendent; devotees are eager for terrestrial, not merely post-terrestrial, blessings. They want specific results, whether to cure a child or elderly person of disease or to guarantee a pass in an important examination, to ensure the birth of a son or find a suitable match for a daughter.

Prayers and petitions are offered for all that it is in a deity's power to bestow – usually the relief of human misfortune. They include requests for: advice on personal problems, the granting of good health, professional success and honours, prosperity, good harvests on land and at sea, safe delivery in childbirth, safe and comfortable journeys, success when embarking on a risky venture, protection from and avoidance of fire, tempests and infectious diseases, improvement to one's fortunes, and requiem – help in guiding souls through purgatory.

Cures are effected by either seeking help from more powerful deities (spirit officials) to oust the more lowly demonic spirits who are believed to cause disease

and sickness, usually using armies of tamed demonic spirits to carry out the task, or by the deity him/herself appearing to a medium and prescribing a herbal cure, protective amulet or charm. It is accepted that just as illness can be caused by demons, so deities can cure people if devotees make the right sacrifices, and so one can be cured by the supernatural.

It is also to be borne in mind that the Chinese belief in the ability of the dead, if so inclined, to plague and terrorize the living is balanced by the belief that the dead take on a certain wisdom, an ability to foretell the future. This is exploited by shamans, mediums who seek out dead relatives in the Underworld and provide messages of comfort or otherwise for the living.

Communications

Deities communicate with humans through spirit possession, visions and dreams. All human communications have to be made either through straightforward and simple prayers, or by two-way dialogues before an altar, using tools such as oracular blocks or fortune sticks. This allows the devotee to receive an answer to their question or petition, and often authorization to take the opportunity to do something they wanted to do, but were not sure of the reaction of people close by. Revelations through a medium by spirit writing (see page 48) form an important aspect of communication, especially popular with temple organizations when seeking advice and in decision-making. It avoids individuals forcing their will in committee.

DIVINATION

Divination is the foretelling of the future and the hidden, whereas an oracle is the provision of advice by a spirit. Divination in ancient China was practised by observing a pattern of cracks in the bones of sheep and tortoise shells. A question would be posed to the deity before the application of heat to the bone or shell which caused the cracks. A religious specialist would then read the answer.

Answers obtained through oracles are almost always obscure or ambiguous and require interpretation. This is usually provided by a member of the temple staff who, over long years, has acquired the experience and ability to read and interpret the enigmatic language used on the printed slips or the signs appearing in the sand or shell.

ORACULAR BLOCKS

Oracular, fortune or divination blocks called *chiao*, are used by devotees who require a yes/no answer from the deity. The flat surfaces are held together by devotees with both hands; the blocks are waved through the incense smoke before the deity from whom the devotee is hoping to obtain an answer. After the question has been posed by the devotee, but not voiced aloud, the blocks are thrown up and forward to land before the altar. They fall in one of three ways. The answer received from the deity is 'read' from the position of the fallen blocks.

- One side up and one side down is regarded as positive: *Sheng* or *Shang*;
- Two flat sides down is negative: *Kai*;
- Two round sides down is 'no ... but': *Hsiao* (laughter). It means, 'Try again, as the deities have insufficient information.'

It is traditional that what is being asked is usually a legitimization of the devotee's own solution to his or her problem. It is perfectly acceptable to try again and again, slightly altering the question, until the deities agree. The blocks are also used to ensure that whatever decision has been reached is in full accord with the deity's wishes, and also to decide when the deities and ancestors have eaten their fill of food and drink offerings.

FORTUNE STICKS

Fortune sticks are 60–108 narrow, thin slivers of bamboo. Each bears a number which corresponds to a printed fortune slip. If there are sixty-four, they relate to each of the hexagrams of the *I Ching* (Book of Changes). The sticks are kept in an open-topped bamboo tube which is held by the devotee before their chest as they stand or kneel before the altar.

Having first used the divination blocks to ascertain whether the deity is willing to respond to a request for a fortune to be read, the bamboo tube is rattled in a downward motion while a plea for the devotee's fortune to be read is silently voiced. As the tube is rattled, several bamboo slivers will gently rise within the tube until one stick falls to the ground.

The devotee then casts the oracular blocks to see if the stick selected is the 'correct' one. If it is, he or she notes the number and obtains either a preprinted, simple Delphic poem, which will require interpretation from the temple keeper or one of the temple specialists, or the number of one of the sixty-four hexagrams,



△ A pair of oracular blocks. They consist of two kidney-shaped objects, frequently two pieces of bamboo or tree root, with one flat (*Yin*) and one convex surface (*Yang*).

▽ Fortune sticks are narrow, thin slivers of bamboo, varying in number between 60 and 108. Each is about 30cm (12ins) long.





△ Throwing oracular blocks in Hong Kong. Traditionally the devotee uses both hands.

▽ This little girl is shaking the fortune-stick container so that one will fall out and select itself. [Hong Kong]



which will also require interpretation. Tradition has it that the oracular response is accurate and authoritative only at the moment the stick falls.

Offerings

Devotees, either individual or communal, are either making a bargain or fulfilling a vow when they make offerings or sacrifices, anticipating receiving some benefit or favour. Such reciprocity links deities and humans. Although to many foreigners it sounds like a bribe, devotees do not see it in that light. They expect some response, be they blessings or tangible goods. The former can be immediate or delayed and can also be direct or indirect.

Deities retain their human desires, needs and powers so that they not only desire but require food and drink, as well as recognition of their superiority. This results in devotees bringing or purchasing on the spot items which they can offer to the deities themselves.

Alternatively, devotees could request the civil mandarin to petition the emperor in Peking to reward deities with titles and promotion within the Celestial bureaucracy. Note that there is a difference between payments to deified spirits as part of a bargain and the fee linked to stylized 'officially worded' petitions to the deities.

Present day rituals before the altar by devotees reflect the sacrifices made to Heaven by Chinese emperors. The object

being sacrificed was offered up before or on the altar by the emperor with appropriate words honouring the deity, at the same time requesting blessings and benefits. Some deities, usually local, have a ritual and sacrifice created by devotees, whereas the popular, wide spread cults have a sacrificial ritual regulated by 'official' books.

There is a subtle difference between offerings which the deities can consume (albeit the aroma and the essence) and sacrifices which are burnt to reach the deities for possession. In the first category we have food and in the latter, incense and paper goods. Offerings in general consist of food and drink, and ritual items such as incense, oil and paper goods.

FOOD AND LUXURIES

During major festivals, ceremonial meals are offered to the statues of the deities, placed on the altar tables before the main altar. When the deities were deemed to have finished their meal by taking all they require from the essence of the offering, the remains are removed by the devotee donor and taken home to be consumed by the family. This may only take as long as the time for one incense stick to burn. In many cases devotees will use the divining blocks to see whether the deities are satisfied. In some places bowls of water were delivered to the deities to enable them to wash their fingers. This vividly brings home the notion that the deities possess very human traits, not only the spirits who were deified humans, but the mythological gods as well.

Food is classified as either vegetarian or non-vegetarian, with tea, wine, grain products and fruits included in the former and meat, fish, eggs and lumps of fat in the latter. Food offerings can include the 'three meats' (pork, chicken and fish), or the 'five flesh' (pork, chicken, fish, duck and eggs). Beef, dog meat and eels are taboo. Usually three or five small cups of tea are placed on the altar together with the food offerings.

There are also the offerings to the deified spirits as payment for services, which can compare with the shared gift of a cigarette passed to a shade in much the same way as a man offers one to another on meeting and starting to chat. Few shades and even fewer deities are treated to cigarettes. Those which have been noted include Liao T'ien-ting (see page 165) and the Tall and Short Demons (see page 173) in Singapore.

INCENSE

The first offering of smouldering incense is made at the entrance to the temple, to the Lord of Heaven and Earth, a spirit who is only rarely manifest either as a tablet or an inscribed urn. The next, and most important offering of incense is to the main deity before whom three sticks are placed. The incense is as much as anything the invitation to the deities to partake of the offerings.

A number of the gods are too far above humanity to be prepared to listen to a devotee's plea. However, believing that respect should be shown to all deities and not daring to risk displeasing any deity by leaving him or her out, a devotee will insert one or three sticks of incense in each incense pot throughout a temple in sequence to the junior deities, unless it is a deity to whom a specific plea is being made. This is just as one would serve the most senior guest at home first.

Incense announces the presence of the devotee, invites the deities to pay attention and is a respectful act, with the incense intended to burn for sufficiently long to assure the deity of the sincere intentions of the devotees. It is burnt either as camphorwood chips left to smoulder in the incense bowl on altar tables before the deities, or in the form of joss sticks, which come in various sizes and in differing perfumes depending upon the quality and quantity of sandalwood powder on the stick.

It must be remembered that joss sticks have no place in Buddhism, though camphorwood chips in incense bowls are commonplace. For that matter, fortune telling is not permitted in Buddhist establishments by divination or by any other method.

OTHER OFFERINGS

All paper items offered to the deities must be taken to the altar table before the deity or deities concerned and offered for their inspection before incineration. These include charm papers, printed prayers, paper images and paper money. Gold and silver paper offerings are also burnt. These have often been purchased as part of a 'kit' from a member of the temple staff. It is still the practice in Taiwan to set off fire crackers to announce an offering to a deity, though nowadays this is banned in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. It usually signifies a stage in the ceremonies and is often accompanied by offerings of wine or tea.



Finally, devotees call upon the temple staff to 'add oil' (*shang-yu* or *t'ien-yu*) to the ever-burning lamp when they are about to leave a temple after devotions have been completed. There is a small fee for the service which consists of the member of staff pouring a small quantity of oil into the bowl containing a floating burning wick, calling out at the same time the name of the donor. This burning wick, the everlasting light, is symbolic of dispelling darkness and ensuring tranquillity within the community.

Ceremonies

Ceremonies include prostration before the altar, the adding of oil to the 'ever-burning' lamp on the altar, the saying of prayers, making of vows either silently or audibly, lighting and distribution of incense sticks to the incense pots before all the deities, recitation of scriptures or charms, offering of some form of sacrifice (charms, paper money, or food and drink), and kneeling or standing to communicate using divining blocks or sticks, to discover the deities' response and reaction to the prayer, request or vow. Taoist and Buddhist ceremonies include chanted recitation of scriptures punctuated by strikes on the wooden fish, gong or bell.

Taoist ceremonies, whether in Taoist or popular religion temples, begin with purification of the vicinity in which the ceremony is to be performed, followed by an invitation to the deities read out before their images. When such major ceremonies take place in popular religion

△ Numerous small items are laid on the altar tables as offerings, some to remain there, others to be taken home again. Oranges and other fruits (neatly arranged), tea and wine, small cakes and bunches of flowers tend to be left, while food, particularly expensive cuts of meat or fish, are taken home. In some areas, bunches of small onions or scallions are hardy and long lasting, and so are placed on the altars to ensure long life or an enduring marriage.

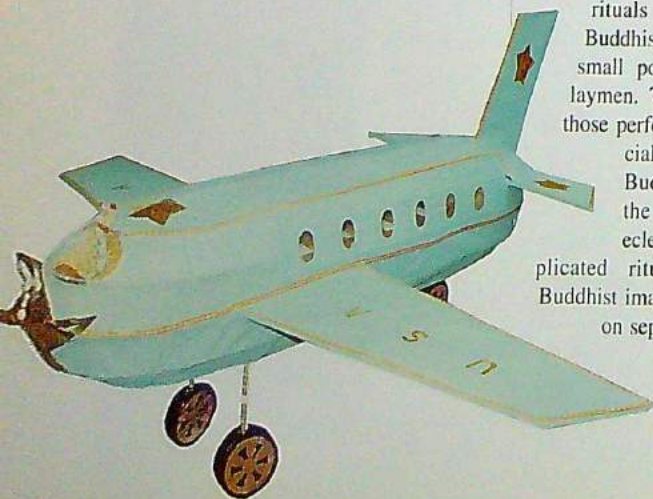
▽ A Five Thunder Block (see page 49) as used by shamans in Hong Kong. Before he goes into a trance, the shaman places such a peach wood block, dedicated to the Wu Lei, in front of him to counter demonic forces which might prevent him from returning from the Underworld.



▷ These young people are offering the standard incense sticks and prayers before a deity in Hong Kong's New Territories.



△ ▽ Some of the many forms of paper gifts offered to the dead. These range from the practical – clothes and money – via ordinary luxuries such as these paper servants (above) or an air conditioner, to the extremes of large cars, steamships or aeroplanes (below). [Hong Kong]



temples, deities from neighbouring temples will have been invited in advance. On their arrival in their palanquins (carrying chairs), they will be escorted to their places and offered tea, wine and incense.

This is followed by chanting from religious texts by religious specialists who are accompanied by lay members of the temple committee. Their role is to follow the devotions and accompany the specialist in his obeisances. They also hold smouldering incense sticks in special 'dragon-headed' holders and try not to appear too bewildered and overawed.

At another stage, memorials are read out to the deities and then burnt for the deities to retain. Finally, the deities are thanked and sent back to their celestial domain. This may all take several days, with long intervals in between; meanwhile live opera is performed ostensibly for the benefit of the deities but in practice the local inhabitants will remain glued to it for much of the time.

We should first bear in mind that there are marked differences between the rituals performed by Taoists or Buddhists, and those performed in small popular religion temples by laymen. The latter are travesties of those performed by the religious specialists of the major Taoist and Buddhist schools. However, the complex, somewhat eclectic temples do hold complicated rituals. There Taoist and Buddhist images are displayed not only on separate altars, but often confusedly together, side by side on the same altar.

Both Taoist and Buddhist rituals are performed before them.

Routine rituals of cleansing of a neighbourhood include the *Ta Chai*, and other periodic communal ceremonies. Theatres are also cleansed before a performance. The latter consists of a number of short playlets which invariably involve the deities, for instance one of the many escapades of Monkey (see page 100).

Rites, as with other religious practices, are many and various, such as the rite during which the devotee assailed by demons has to pass through an arch consisting of a large tiger's mouth which frightens off the demons, and the passage under swords for the same reason.

Public Festivals & Processions

The Chinese celebrate annually five major festivals and hundreds of local minor festivals. Some are secular, the rest are Buddhist, mystic Taoist, or popular religion anniversaries. The majority are celebrated according to the lunar calendar with only a few tied to the solar. On every count, festivals are enormous fun despite their ordered piety, the opposite to any excessive fear of the deities.

The five major festivals are the Lunar New Year; *Ch'ing Ming*, when ancestors are remembered, and the *Yu-lan-pen*, also known as the *P'u-tu* or Universal Salvation festival, and as the Hungry Ghosts Festival. This is celebrated by Buddhists and Taoists on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month and is primarily dedicated to those who died, either by accident or violently, before the date written for them in the Celestial

registers. It is connected with the release of suffering souls from the Underworld (see page 185). Vast quantities of food are laid out at the side of the street during this festival for the deprived souls, those without descendants on Earth (whose collective responsibility it is to send food and other offerings to the dead to support them during their period of purgatory). These deprived souls have been released into the world to fend for themselves and obtain whatever sustenance they can from the community.

The fourth major festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, and the last is *Chung Yang* on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.

FESTIVAL DATES

Nearly all deities have annual celebrations such as their ascension day (when they were borne off to heaven), the day of their enlightenment and their birthday on which special ceremonies are performed in their temples. They are mainly thanksgiving ceremonies at which large sums are spent on sacrifices and feasting. These give devotees a much needed break in labour, a recreational catharsis from the tensions of monotony.

Although the majority of deities have their festivals celebrated on the anniversary of their birth, death or ascension to Heaven, the actual date of these, particularly local and minor deities, is often selected by the priest in charge of the temple or by the temple committee. Festivals are individually celebrated, temple by temple, though the overall arrangements are made by a committee organized by the monastery or local community concerned. Arrangements include the visit of the main deity to the major streets of his 'parish', including calling at nearby temples to pay respects. This is done in the form of his portable image borne in his palanquin.

FESTIVAL RITUALS

During annual temple festivals, a new robe is often placed on the image of the deity. In Taiwan in particular, the deity is escorted by an impressive cortege of larger-than-life marionettes, including his aides and servants, followed by the image of the deity in the sedan chair carried by young men of the local community.

In Fukienese communities the aides are represented by giant bamboo-framed silken images carried by a devotee concealed inside. The rear of the parade is

taken up by the devotees, each carrying a stick of incense. It is a great honour for devotees to carry sacred objects in such religious processions and they are selected for such a role by the deity speaking through divining blocks. Such processions are cheerful occasions, alive with music and firecrackers, and often with children dressed up as servants to the deity, usually meaning that their parents have offered the child to the deity for special protection.

Each festival has its own characteristics, and its own rituals and legends. Devotees revel in the annual festivals of their local deities, but also hold periodic traditional 'village' festivals to cleanse the community of demonic influences. Such large-scale periodic rituals are referred to as *Chiao* when celebrated by the Cheng-i P'ai (see page 78), basically popular religion, and as *Fa-hui* when celebrated by the Ch'üan-chen P'ai.

These *Chiao* are usually held at fixed intervals and depending upon the village or area these can be every ten years, or every three or seven years. They consist of a series of rituals performed by Taoist ritual specialists, usually Cheng-i Taoists, who lead the invitation to the deities to attend, and later welcome them to the *Chiao* and ensure that the offerings are passed to the deities with due ceremony. The *Chiao* rituals in Taiwan tend to be performed before two major altars, the internal and the external. The internal altar bears the San Ch'ing (see page 68), the Jade Emperor (see page 51) and various senior stellar deities. The external altar has the local deities, such as the City Gods and the Earth Gods, together with the San Kuan Ta-ti (see page 55) and various military deities.

In many temples in former times, before the Lunar New Year and in many instances before a major festival, all the images of deities were taken off the altars and washed at a ceremonial bathing. During this, the eyes of the deities were covered for the sake of modesty. Each deity tends to be washed once a year, and in many cases paraded through the streets with much jollity before being returned to its altar for another year, with the guarantee of its goodwill being assured.

The temple too would have a good going over. The gilding and beautiful carvings and decorations once more became visible. Nowadays, the altars are sometimes dusted and swept perhaps

▽ A large paper image, built over a bamboo frame, was said to represent *Ch'e Kung* (see page 157). It was displayed inside a large mat-shed during a *Ta Chai* festival in Hong Kong's New Territories. Rituals and opera were being performed simultaneously in the background – the former to propitiate them and the latter to entertain them.





△ A protective charm portraying the Wealth God, Hsüan-t'an Yüan-shuai, astride his tiger (see page 64). It would be hung on an outside wall to ward off demonic attack. The mirror, which shows a demon how it really is, is an additional deterrent. [Unprovenanced]

▽ Images being carried by devotees from their 'home' temple to visit another as guests during the latter temple's annual festival. [Taiwan]

once a year, with quite a few of the lesser images being replaced in an entirely different sequence. It is noticeable in Hong Kong, however, that many images are left encrusted with grime year after year, more so on secondary altars than the main. The annual cleaning process can be a scene of considerable activity with water, but little soap is in evidence. In Ch'aozhou temples in particular, both in Taiwan and in South-East Asia, it seems to be customary for images to be washed in a bowl of weak cold tea.

GOING ON VISITS

During certain festivals portable images, which normally stand before the main image, are taken from the main altar to visit a neighbouring temple. In Taiwan, they can be carried quite long distances to the cult centre or 'mother' temple. There they enjoy the festivities, watch the opera performed in the temple yard, and return to their own temple with their power (*ling*) recharged.

The palanquin is usually a highly decorated piece of furniture which spends the remainder of the year tucked away in the corner of the temple looking for all the world rather like a store cupboard, a purpose for which it is often used.

Religious Specialists

Religious specialists include the monks of Buddhism, the ritual masters and priests of Taoism, and the ritual specialists and mediums of popular religion.

They perform unique specific functions which are usually clearly understood by laymen. The person in the street knows that for mortuary rituals they should go to a Buddhist. If their fate appears to be a constant run of bad luck and they want it changed for the better, there is a popular religion deity who specializes in just that.

Each religion has its own ritual experts. In addition, the spirit mediums of popular religion act as go-betweens for the invisible world of the deities who control, among other things, nature and certain human conditions. There are also the shamans who exorcize demonic presences and also visit the Underworld to seek information about people recently deceased. Geomancers generally work from home and provide a service helping to influence the fortunes of the living.

Taiwan is well known for the divide between the lively, semi-tropical south and the quieter but more cosmopolitan industrial north, with its less comfortable climate. There is a similar divide between the northern Taoist specialists and the southern. The former, known as Black-head Taoists, preside over much less flamboyant rituals than the southern Taoists, known as Red-head Taoists.

The Red-head specialist, called this for their red hat, usually a scarf knotted round the head, performs his rituals stripped to the waist, wearing a white or off-white apron. The ritual includes cracking a whip to dispel demons, a



buffalo horn to summon beneficial spirits, cabalistic signs, and ritual self-injury using swords and spike-balls. They punctuate their rituals with hand bells and drums or 'red fish' (see page 37).

The Black-head Taoists, in contrast, wear long, multi-coloured or black or blue robes while they recite their rituals from texts spread before them. They wear the distinguishing black cap with its gilded 'flame' fixed on top. They also use hand bells and percussion drums to mark the ritual as it progresses, but this is the extent of the 'noise' which so marks the southern Red-head rituals.

Spirit Mediums

A number of Chinese deities are popularly believed to be associated with spirit medium activities. This appears to be mainly a Fukienese and Ch'aochou practice, common in Chinese communities in South-East Asia. The Cantonese in Hong Kong and Macau regard it with suspicion. However, due to the close proximity of Cantonese, Fukienese, Hakka, Ch'aochou and Hainanese Chinese in South-East Asia, all now seem to employ mediums though the Fukienese and Ch'aochou are still predominant.

Provincial and regional differences in spirit medium practices are marked. Those performed in one area can be quite heavily frowned upon in another. It is not possible to generalize about practices except to note that in all areas there are spirit mediums who are possessed by deities and provide answers for devotees to their questions.

Popular religion devotees consult spirit mediums about their future, health, wealth and luck, but never call upon them for funerary rites. Ancestral tablets have never been noted in temples where spirit mediums operate. On the other hand, Buddhist clergy, orthodox Taoists and Confucianists regard such practices as vulgar popular rituals.

Spirit medium activities are based on the concept that a deity can temporarily take possession of a human. During that short possession, devotees are able to obtain spiritual advice and even herbal medicine prescriptions from the deity. The medium acts as a go-between, mediating between the deities and their devotees. The general belief is that, when a deity enters the body of a human medium, it temporarily displaces part of the medium's soul.

HOW TO BECOME A MEDIUM

Mediums may be male or female, young or old, but almost without exception they are selected by the deity or deities who thereafter possess them and who issue oracles in their name. In practice anyone can become a medium. There are two types, those who feel the power and fall into trances unwittingly and those who from an early age have been trained within the community, boys as 'divine soldiers' and girls as 'divine females'. Most claim to have some sense of mediumistic power but a few, those who show marked talent and inclination, are carefully trained. In a trance or dream, the identity of the deity is revealed; they are then instructed by the deity as a medium. If the vocation is confirmed by means of divining blocks, the affirmed medium will serve an apprenticeship.

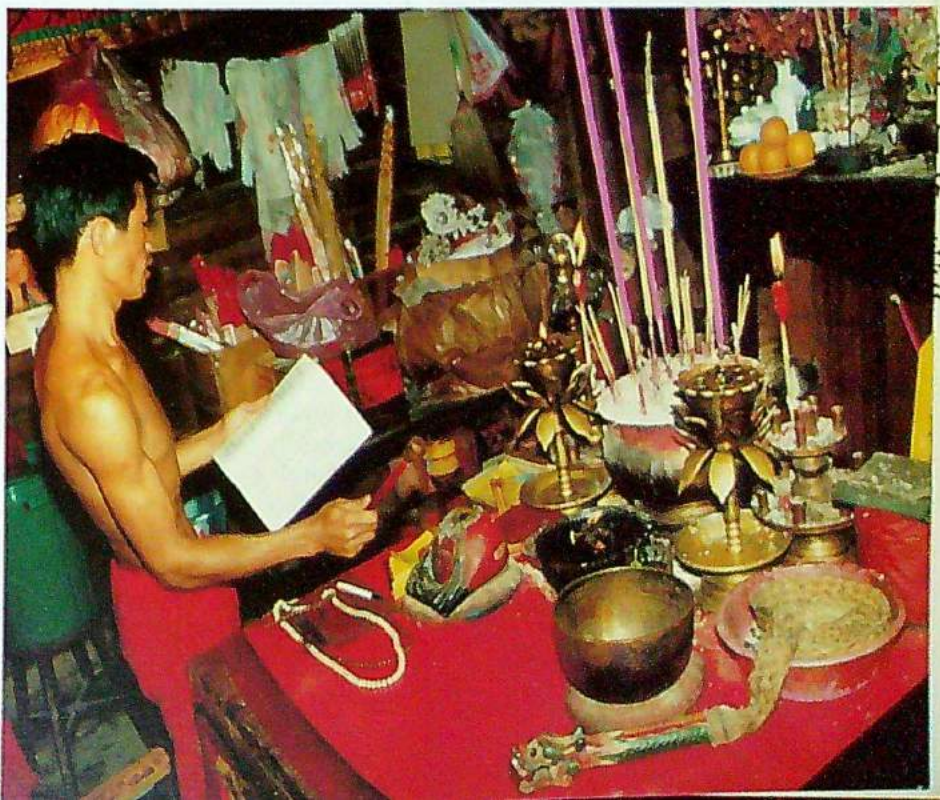
There are two main types of medium. Those who use characters either written in the sand, in the air or on charms, are sedate and are called Scholar or Literate Medium (*Wen*). The Soldier or Warrior Medium (*Wu*) inflicts wounds upon themselves in one way or another during their seances as well as writing charms on paper. This is sometimes done to show that the medium is so deeply possessed as not to notice pain.

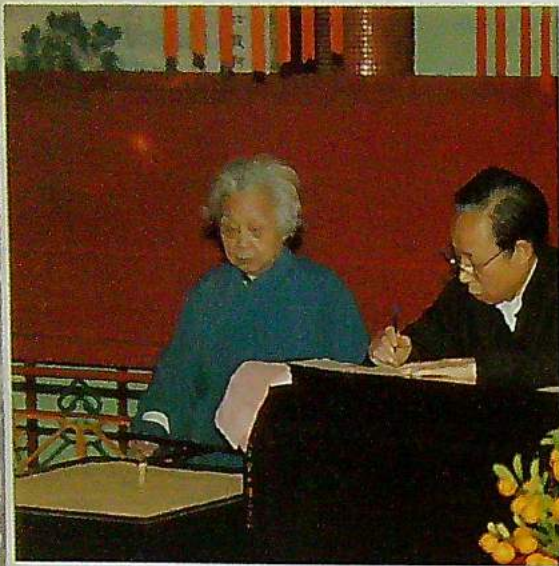
The deities most commonly claimed to possess various mediums include Li Na-cha (see page 63) who is the most popular, Monkey, Kuan Yü (see page 147), Chi Kung Huo Fu (see page 100).



△ A Red-head Taoist blowing his buffalo horn to summon beneficial deities.

▽ A popular religion shrine in a rural area of northern Malaysia where the temple keeper (and owner) is chanting from a religious text, while keeping time on his 'Red Fish'. His demon-dispelling whip is coiled up in the foreground.





△ Spirit writing is performed either on a sand table or with brush and paper, before the altar on which the image of the medium's deity stands. The deity is politely asked to descend and provide responses to questions posed by devotees, giving direct and immediate access to the wishes and views of the Celestial spirit. The sand table method, called *fu-chi*, requires at least two participants: the writer and the reader as here. However, there can be as many as five in the team. [Hong Kong]

▽ A spirit medium in a trance, with his face transfixed by the large spike, one of the temple's religious objects. More usually he would use one of the Five General spikes, which are held by the medium, not by an assistant. [Singapore]



Hsuan-t'ien Shang-ti (see page 000), and Erh Lang Shen (see page 62). Less common are one or more of the Pestilence Wang-yeh (see page 113), Fa-chu Kung (see page 75), Tung-yüeh Ta-ti (see page 180) and T'ien Hou (see page 137). These are popular deities whose power and influence is such that they can speak with authority and can also refer matters up to the most powerful deities if so required. In practice devotees tend not to be interested in the medium, only in the deity who has possessed him.

HOW TO CONSULT A MEDIUM

The problems posed by devotees to the deities predominantly cover illness, disease and marital issues. The deity's replies are either written with a stick in a tray of sand by the entranced medium or scribbled during the trance in red ink or in rarer cases with his or her blood after self-flagellation has drawn blood. Sometimes the deity speaks with the voice of the medium. Both written and oral responses are 'translated' by the interpreter aide who stands beside the medium. Often the written replies are regarded as charms and are used medicinally by being burnt. Then either the ashes are consumed in water, or used with water to wash the whole or part of the body inflicted with disease.

Mediums give comfort and advice to devotees in their responses, but avoid suggesting anything beyond their competence. They frequently advise people to seek advice from a doctor or an official if the request touches on matters of law or administration, adding that the deity who is possessing the medium will guide the doctor or official.

The variations in rituals are many. Mediums also supervise the carrying of images of the deities in the small but heavy sedan chairs specially made for the task. These are carried by teams or groups of enthusiastic and energetic young men who find that the deity being carried forces the chair to leap about and in some instances communicates with devotees using taps on the ground with the arms of the sedan chair despite the attempts by the carriers to keep the chair stable and upright.

A SEANCE

In South-East Asia, a seance usually begins with a ringing of a hand bell by the assistant who stands beside the medium's chair in front of the temple's main altar; this is followed by either chants or

calls by the assistant. Although he is seen as an assistant, he is usually a much older man and often a retired medium. Offerings are prepared and paper charms burned. In Taiwan the medium is brought in in a sedan chair by a procession of devotees, sometimes as few as half a dozen, before taking their place beside the chair. During this time, the medium begins either to shake more and more violently or to slap his/her sides until they relax on to the medium's chair where they sit for the seance.

Mediums can either sit or stand. Those who stand usually sway and stagger before the main altar as they enter their trance. Those seated at the altar table go into their trance with their body swaying, head rolling, and hands and feet tapping the floor and table. An assistant stands beside the medium to ensure that no harm comes to them, though in a small number of instances the medium works alone and sits on a low stool before the main altar.

One such was an elderly lady who placed the stub of a burning wax candle on her tongue allowing the soot from the flame to coat the roof of her mouth as she shook from side to side while entering her trance. Most seances are punctuated by calls from the medium in strange tongues, by twitches and violent lunges back and forth. They are restrained and helped by one of the assistants.

In some seances the medium performs several acts using spiked balls, swords or a mace to flail himself, drawing blood and exhibiting his immunity to demon attack. He also uses the Five General spikes (see page 19). The resultant blood is a 'sacrifice' used to write charms, or mixed with liquid (tea or wine) to be consumed by the devotee. This is followed by questions from devotees, seeking advice and in some instances prescriptions, put through the medium to the deity possessing him. The ritual lasts about fifteen minutes after which the assistant pulls the medium to his feet, thus ending the seance.

Exorcists

Taoist exorcist specialists, or 'ritual masters', are responsible for the discovery of the identity and nature of spirits causing trouble to their clients in order that they may be countered with the correct charm and ritual. This is often done by the ritual master interrogating the local Celestial bureaucrats – the Earth God to begin with

as he is local, followed by the relevant City God and even, through the go-between of lesser deities, the great and powerful Tung-yüeh Ta-ti.

Exorcists are said to have the ability to apply specific named rites of exorcism, such as the Five Thunder Rites, to summon the celestial aid of individual deities. Their command over supernatural powers and ability to attack and destroy supernatural malign forces is remarkable, but it needs to be great in order to rid the person possessed of the malign forces. Some seances are performed to drive out demons. Such specialized seances are complicated and extremely ritualistic.

These ritual masters, popular religion's 'lower echelon' religious specialists, dress in a very similar fashion to the mediums. They have bare feet and bare chest, a red cloth wrapped around the head and an apron decorated with multi-coloured diamond-shapes. They carry a buffalo horn and a long whip. Such Taoist exorcist specialists should not be confused with the common sorcerer. Taoists use written texts, rites and traditions, whereas the sorcerer uses traditional oral chants and prayers.

The 'upper echelon' ritual specialists work from home and provide services in and for temples (consecrating new deities or celebrating a deity's birthday) and also for individuals (funeral rites and the popular rites of exorcisms). They have under their command great armies of spirit soldiers with which to combat evil forces.

These great armies, organized into fighting bodies under generals and spirit lords whose names and titles usually simply consist of a rank or title with a single surname and no more, are represented in image form on a number of altars in Taiwan. Represented in image by a dozen or so soldiers, they are lined up on parade under a senior officer, always called The General. They are either on the main altar itself before the main deity or on a side altar of their own. Their images are rarely made of substantial material, but are usually painted paper on bamboo frames.

Charms, Talismans & Amulets

Religious charms are still widely used – some written, others oral – for every conceivable ache or pain, for sick animals, women in labour, protection of the household and a similar plea to the English chant, 'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Bless the bed that I lie on.'

Devotees also obtain paper charms to which the patient's ailment is transferred. These are then burned. All Chinese peasants know that disease and many other misfortunes are the result of demonic possession, which must be exorcized or conjured out by means of charms or rites, written or spoken in religious language. These are usually talismans or amulets, items impregnated with vital energy, usually inscribed with a mystical pseudo-character and used as a charm to drive out the evil spirits.

Charms, or *fu*, prepared by a Taoist specialist are so powerful that no spirit dare disobey a summons, and have to be handled with great care; stories are told of men who have used and misplaced their *fu* only to be killed by a horde of avenging spirits. In legend the Yellow Emperor defeated Chih Yu in battle by the power of a charm he had obtained from Hsi Wang-mu (see page 53).

Metal sigils cast at astrologically propitious moments, bearing the image or title of a protective deity or Buddha, give the wearer protection against sickness, lightning and other perils, while there are others which bring immunity in battle. Amulets (also a charm) are very numerous, used to protect the wearer from disease, accidents and general harm.

WU LEI / FIVE THUNDER BLOCKS

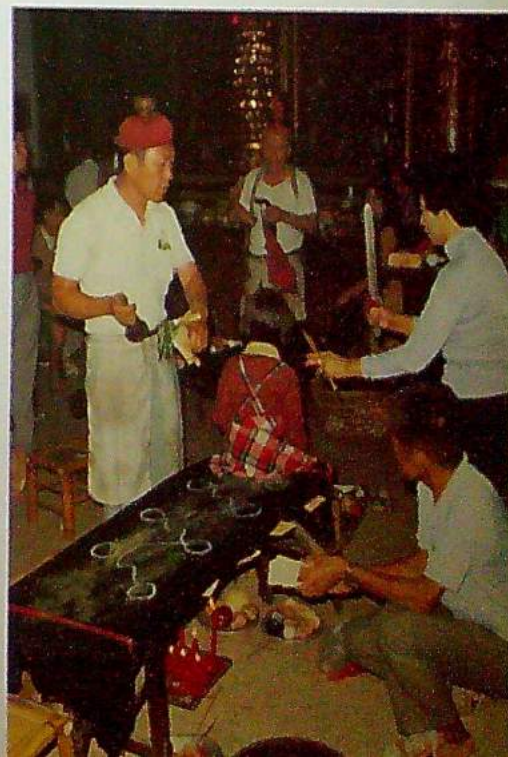
These carved and inscribed blocks can bear signs relating to a specific deity, such as the snake entwined around a sword and tortoise which refers to the Northern Emperor (see page 65). A number of images, especially demon-destroyers from Hunan and Kuangsi, are portrayed holding a Five Thunder Block (see page 43) in their right hand and a bowl of lustral water in the other.

The power of thunder (note: not lightning) can revitalize, exorcize and cure the sick or, if used by an expert, can destroy enemies. A major Taoist exorcist charm is known as the Five Thunder Spirits, with Wu Lei texts and registers of spirit names. It is used by Taoist religious specialists, but is kept secret and never discussed. They are the means by which religious specialists counteract harmful magic, the ritual specifically expelling harmful spirits. Such charms bearing the Thunder God's likeness were common in north and central China and used to call upon the Five Thunder Lords for spiritual aid. However, they are only rarely to be seen in Hong Kong.



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▽ An exorcism in progress in Tainan. It is being undertaken by Red-head religious specialists. [Taiwan]



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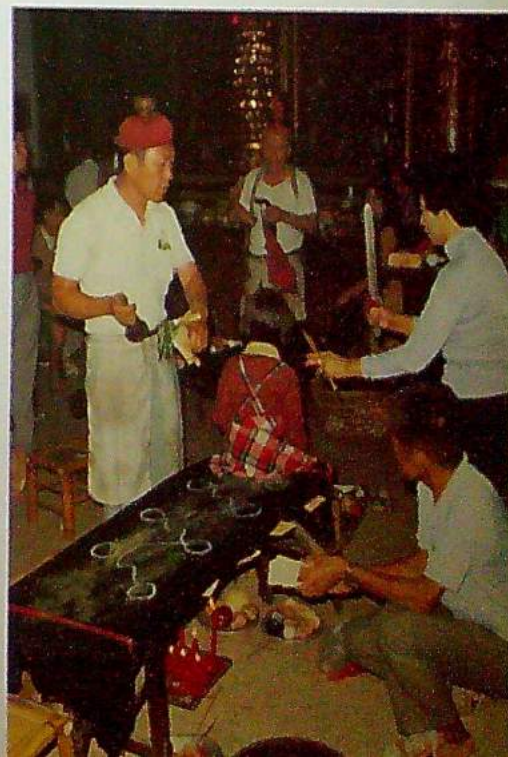
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Creation & Prehistory

Images of a number of deities seen mainly in Taoist temples are mythical spirits from before the creation of the universe. Others, also mythical (though some are regarded by devotees as human), are revered as creators not only of the Earth, but also of Chinese civilization. Finally, there are legendary spirits – dating from prehistory – who are known by name or title. Though regarded as individuals, they are more likely to represent dynasties.

Although the major mythical and legendary deities whose images have been seen on altars in southern Chinese communities are included in this chapter, many are described in later chapters, such as nature or marriage. These deities are the product of the vivid imaginations of devotees, and include the anthropomorphic early spirits like the Northern Emperor, the God of the Wind and others. Chinese, when they think about the subject, tend to describe them all either as *hsien* (transcendental worthies), that is the Divine or Inspired Immortals.

Primordial mythical deities and creators are reasonably well known to Chinese religious specialists and devotees, generally from legendary stories recorded down the centuries. The result has been a somewhat confused picture with overlapping individual roles and characteristics.

The development of a Chinese supreme deity is far from clear. In earliest times the all-seeing, all-powerful, unseen god was **Shang-ti**. He is still referred to as the All Highest, not only by Christians, but even by the late Chairman Mao.

The Chou dynasty (c. 1050–256 BC) founded its government on religion and transformed another 'Shang-ti', the deified spirits of ancestors under the previous dynasty, the Shang, into a high god, independent and supreme. The importance of this change cannot be over-emphasized. When this supreme deity finds the rule of a human emperor abhorrent, whenever a king failed, by persistent misrule, in his duties to the god, then the god rejects him and seeks out a suitable substitute. This transfer of the Mandate of Heaven, based on the belief in a supreme deity, led to the easy acceptance of new dynasties, and carried

with it strong ethical implications which continued down to the fall of the last dynasty in 1911.

MYTHICAL DEITIES

The creation of the universe out of the great chaos tends to be described in two parts. The first is the creation of the heavens by mythical deities, followed by the creation of the Earth and its immediate neighbours, the Sun and Moon, by mythical humans. The picture is confused simply because the various deities have appeared in a number of legends, sometimes in the era of chaos, and in others as a luminary during the tales of the development of civilisation within China. The first group consists of the mythical deities.

The Jade Emperor

The Jade Emperor on High, **Yü Huang Shang-ti**, also known as the Lord of Heaven (**T'ien Kung** or **T'ien Wang**), is a first rank mythological deity. He was, and still is, revered China-wide as the Supreme Ruler of the Heavens, of the Underworld and Protector of Humanity. He is especially concerned with meting out justice to humans which he does through his bureaucratic channels, via his spirit officials (deities) and the Courts of the Underworld. His rule is conceived as a parallel to the terrestrial rule of the emperor of China, he being the Celestial ruler and the Chinese emperor the earthly. The story of his appointment is told in the *Feng-shen Yen-i* (see page 60).

Although the Jade Emperor appears in a great many of China's myths and legends his genesis will probably never be known. To the person in the street, however, all Buddhist, Taoist and popular religion deities are his subordinates, and

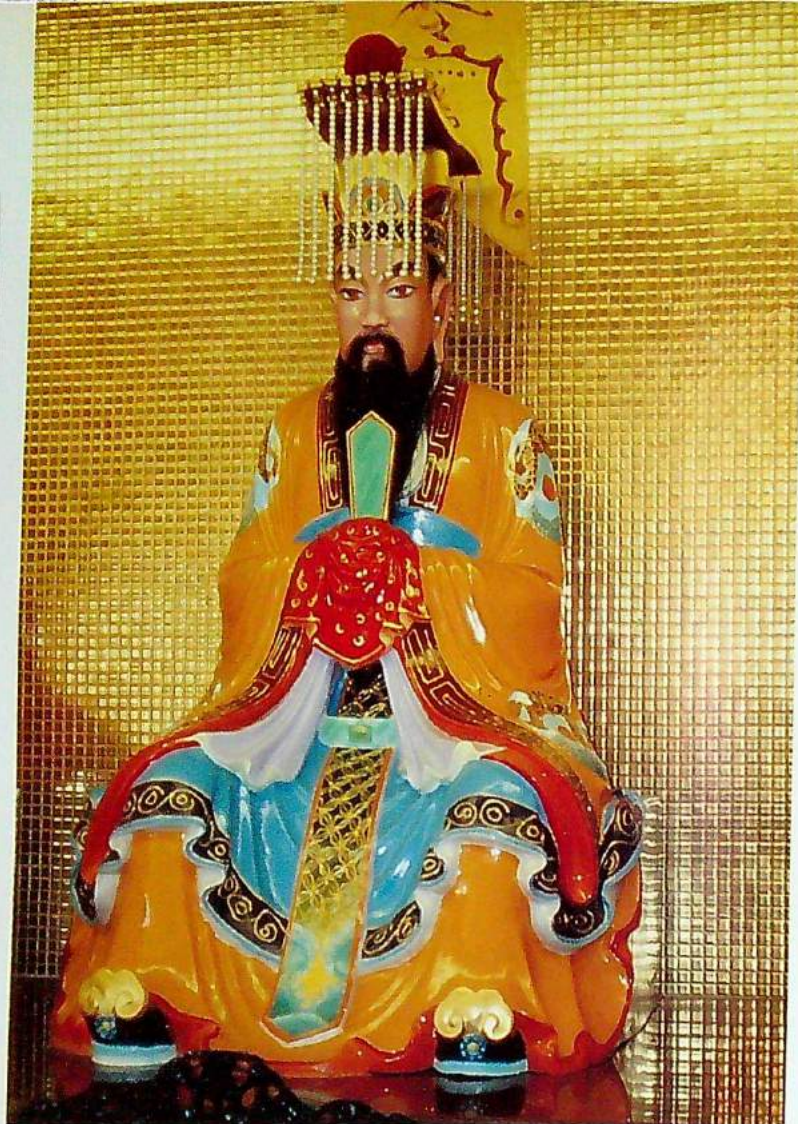
◁ **Wu-chi T'ien-yüan** is the main patron of the Taoist sect Hsien-t'ien Fa P'ai. He is known as the Chaos Immortal as he, with his consort, **Wu-sheng Lao-mu** (the Eternal Mother), helped create Heaven (but not Earth) out of the primeval chaos. He is shown as a primitive man sitting in a cave, dressed in a skirt and necklet of leaves, with long white hair, beard and eyebrows. He holds a firewheel in his left hand, while his right hand is held up palm out at face height. [Taiwan]

▽ Several different legends have been told about the Peach Blossom Girl, **T'ao-hua Hsien-nü**, which suggests that there might well be more than one deity with this title. She was worshipped China-wide. She is also known by her surname, **Ch'en**. This has led to confusion with a lady warrior known generally as **Lin-shui Fu-jen** who is also called **Ch'en Fu-jen** (Madame Ch'en). **T'ao-hua Hsien-nü** is said to have been born into a rich family and had been transformed from a peach flower after her parents had pleaded with a deity to send them a child. She was famous for her remarkable ability to foretell the future. In the *Feng-shen Yen-i*, she was the wife of General **Chang Kuei**, commander of the armies of **Chou Hsin**; she was killed by **Li Na-cha** (see page 63) who struck her with his magic bracelet, whereupon she became a stellar deity. In another story she was a heroine who killed **Chao Kung-ming** by magic during the same wars.

She is painted here with **Wang Ling-kuan** and **Marshal Chou**. Her standard image in Hong Kong and Macau shows her as a young woman dressed in flowing robes or armour, standing bearing a sword. [Unprovenanced]



▷ All images of the Jade Emperor, Yü Huang Shang-ti, are somewhat similar, portraying him as a bearded, usually gilded image of an emperor, sitting on a throne, with a jade tablet clasped in both hands before his chest. His head-dress is not a crown in the Western sense, but the classic archaic Chinese imperial crown, the *mien*. This is a rectangular, flat-topped, mortar board style cap from which thirteen cords bearing green, red and blue beads, descending almost to eye level, are suspended at the front. Thirteen indicates his supreme rank. His image is placed as high on the altar as possible, even to the extent of placing it on the top of as many as three or four tiers. In theory, the feet of his image must never be permitted to touch the floor. This is the case for all deities, but particularly for him. [Hong Kong]



well-timed worship will secure a writ of pardon for a soul in the Underworld. He can be prayed to, through intermediaries, for remission of sins, fulfilment of desires and in some places, at a special ritual, invoked for male offspring.

In one legend, the Sung Chen Tsung emperor, in order to divert his ministers from an unfortunate treaty he had been obliged to sign with some barbarian tribes in 1012, announced that he had been visited in a dream by an Immortal with a letter from the Jade Emperor. The emperor issued an edict proclaiming that the Jade Emperor himself appeared in a dream and had identified himself as the Master of Heaven and Earth, and the Incarnation of the Tao. The emperor added that the Jade Emperor had told him that he was one of the Sung emperor's forebears, so the Jade Emperor would be revered as a major deity.

The Jade Emperor delegates any day-to-day responsibilities to his ministers and judges; it is also accepted by devotees that he is the arbiter during

disagreements between the deities. A Supreme Sovereign of the Universe is not to be approached lightly, nor is he usually approached directly, receiving only standard devotional offerings and only very rarely pleas. Worship is therefore performed with great care, and his altar and image are treated with great solemnity. He is propitiated, but rarely asked directly for advice or help, except by ignorant and often illiterate devotees.

It is widely accepted that the Jade Emperor personally receives reports from each and every Kitchen God (see page 174) during the period from the twelfth day of the final lunar month until the lunar New Year's Day. He examines each human's conduct and adds his comments to the records kept on every living person against the day that the human will die and be summoned to enter the Courts of the Underworld for judgement. The Jade Emperor's forces include his powerful spirit armies, capable of destroying anyone or anything, which he can unleash upon anyone who offends him.

In many parts of China he was considered too holy, too awesome and too powerful to be represented by an image, and only a tablet bearing his title was placed on the altar. In other parts, among the Fukienese in particular, his spirit was believed to reside in the ash of the main incense pot on the primary altar table in the temple dedicated to him, and not even a tablet is permitted.

Hsi Wang-mu

The Golden Mother, Chin-mu, is perhaps better known as the wonderful and legendary goddess, the Queen Mother of the West. Hsi Wang-mu, the Ruler of the Western Heavens, the Controller of Time and Space, and of Death. The Western Heavens are located in the mountains of the Immortals, the K'un-lun, far to the west of China, a land where the sun sets and Heaven and Earth meet. The mountains, inhabited by millions of Immortals, are now, like her, major symbols of immortality.

She is not only a major mother goddess of mystic or orthodox Taoism, worshipped originally China-wide, she is also a deity revered by popular religion devotees to whom she is a major magical deity. She is an important mythological figure, one of the most ancient of Chinese cult figures; and one who, though she seems to have started out as an unkempt human goddess with a panther's tail and tiger's fangs, has never been a human, has no personal name, and is a deity of the Former Heaven (*Hsien-t'ien*) formed of fundamental essence.

There are many legends and beliefs surrounding her cult. It is said she was born on top of a mountain in Kansu province, the Hui-chung Shan, on the peak of which is a stage inscribed 'The Ancient Pool of Jade Green'. As a mistress of sexual practices, she is said to have obtained her power from the vital energy of some thousand young men who all perished having lost their vital energy to her individually.

Taoist tradition has it that Hsi Wang-mu and the other deities of Hsien-t'ien can only be perceived through divine love and meditation, that they are only found through faith, and that to the profane and ignorant they would appear as nothing out of the ordinary. She used to be the special patron of queens and empresses, and many royal pilgrims made their way to one of her major

temples, especially the shrine on the lower slopes of T'ai Shan in Shantung province. She is now regarded as the bestower of long life, the patron of women and especially of brides, and worshipped by some especially at the birth of a daughter.

As the Queen of the Immortals, each Immortal who has received their orders – and there are tens of thousands of them – report to her and pay obeisance before leaving the Western Heavens to take up posts in the human world. She also presides over conventions of important Immortals and conducts philosophical discussions. The best known story about her and her Orchard of Peaches tells of how Monkey (see page 100), the scallywag hero of *Hsi-yu Chi* (see page 98), consumed all the elixir and peaches of long life just before her banquet, which is held once every 3,000 years.

Aides to Deities

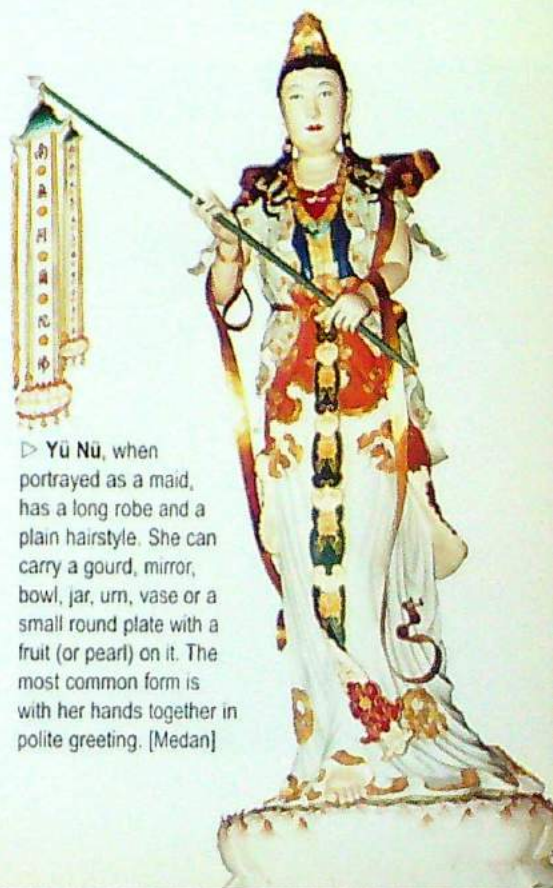
Images of the aides to major deities not infrequently appear on altars without the major deity whom they serve. Images can be either flanking the major deities or deities concerned or, more rarely, stand alone. The two best known are the Jade Maiden, Yü Nü, also known as the Dragon Girl (*Lung Nü*) or the Virtuous Girl (*Liang Nü*). She is a youthful figure, but not too young, usually paired on altars with the Gifted Youth, Shan Ts'ai. He is sometimes known as the Golden Boy (*Chin T'ung*), when his image stands alone. Both the Jade Maiden and the Gifted Youth are, as the whim seems to take temple and monastery staffs, aides and disciples of the Jade Emperor, of Kuan Yin and also of other bodhisattvas.

Yü Nü has been noted as an aide to Lung Mu (see page 140). In other unconnected legends, she is said to be the deified daughter of Tung-yüeh Ta-ti (see page 180) or the servant of the husband of Hsi Wang-mu, the Queen Mother of the West. It is commonly accepted that this deified daughter is an incarnation of Kuan Yin (see page 89) herself. However, in folk legend she is the daughter of the Dragon King (see page 139), who was presented to Kuan Yin in gratitude for the latter's aid to one of the denizens of the oceans.

Her role according to Taoist liturgy is to carry messages while Shan Ts'ai is the guardian of the incense. A common belief is that they act as guides in the Under-

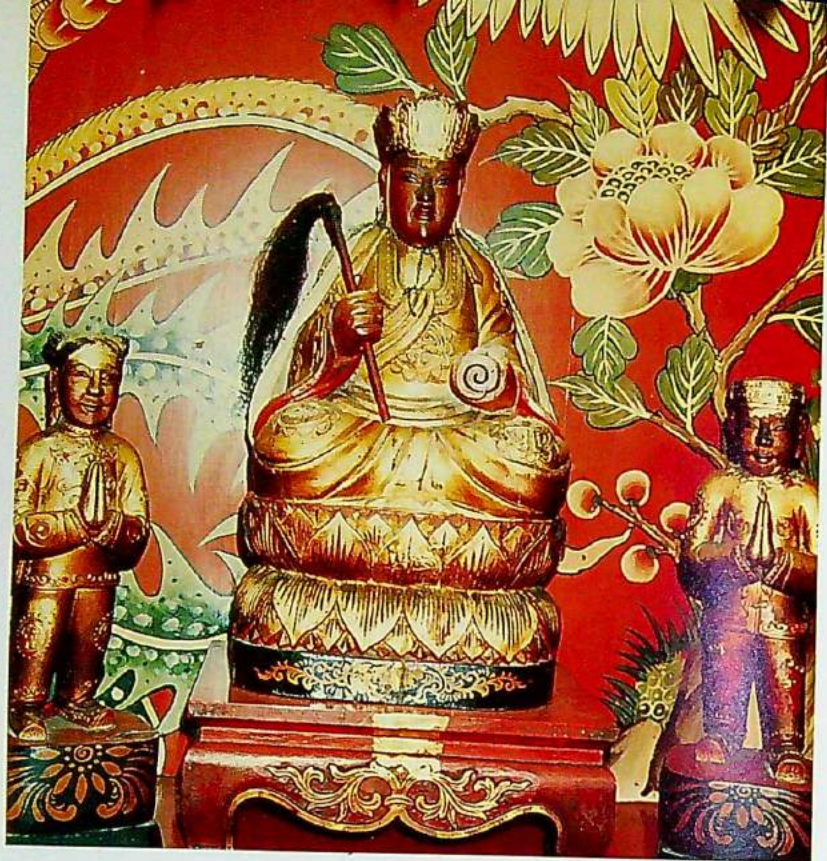


△ Hsi Wang-mu is also known as Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu, the Golden Mother of the Green Jade Lake. As a bestower of long life, she is often shown with a peach in her left hand. [Taiwan]



▷ Yü Nü, when portrayed as a maid, has a long robe and a plain hairstyle. She can carry a gourd, mirror, bowl, jar, urn, vase or a small round plate with a fruit (or pearl) on it. The most common form is with her hands together in polite greeting. [Medan]

▷ The Dark or Mysterious Lady of the Ninth Heaven, Chiu T'ien Hsüan-nü, seated on a lotus and flanked by Yü Nü and Shan Ts'ai (see page 53). [Thailand]



▽ P'an Ku's image usually represents him as dwarfish, primeval and dark-skinned. He is bare to the waist and dressed in a simple skirt and necklet of leaves or an animal skin. He is bald with incipient 'horns' on his forehead, his bare feet often rest on two small creatures, and he is frequently shown carrying a mallet and chisel. [Taiwan]



world and help virtuous souls to cross the Immortal Bridges of Silver and Gold over the River of Inevitability, which is reached some six to seven weeks after death. Half life-size paper images of the pair are deployed during the mortuary ceremonies forty-nine days after death, Shan Ts'ai carries a pipe or cigarettes; Yü Nü bears tea or a glass of wine.

MYTHICAL HUMANS

The second group connected with the Creation of the World consists of beings who, though mythological, are regarded as having been humans.

P'an Ku

A mythological hero, P'an Ku is the Creator who chiselled out the Earth, or the whole Universe, put chaos in order, separated Earth from the Heavens, and is the progenitor of humanity. P'an Ku was a huge giant who slaved for 18,000 years chiselling rocks as they drifted across the skies, helped only by a dragon, phoenix, unicorn, tiger and tortoise. As he toiled so he grew and grew, until with a mighty thrust he pushed up the Heavens, and pushed out space to encompass the whole of the Universe.

He died as the task was reaching a climax and his body became the features of the Earth. His head became the mountains, his breath the wind and clouds; his voice became thunder, his left eye the sun and his right eye the moon,

and his four limbs became the four quarters of the Earth. His blood ran as rivers, his veins and muscles were the strata of the rocks, and his flesh the soil. His skin sprouted and became vegetable patches, forests and paddy fields, while his bones and teeth became the minerals. His sweat became the rain and to complete creation humanity sprang from the parasites on his body.

THE THREE ANCIENT EMPERORS

Another legend tells how P'an Ku created the Universe alone, but much more was left to be done. So the Three – the Celestial Emperor, T'ien Huang; the Emperor of the Earth, Ti Huang; and the Emperor of Mankind, Jen Huang – came to straighten things out. They ensured that rivers only ran down hill, that trees and plants remained rooted and did not move around, and that precious metals stayed hidden in the ground to enhance their value. They made sure that creatures with blood and bone learned how to eat and drink, and how to conform. Humans were shown how not to sprout feathers or grow claws or a tail, and animals and birds how to retain their forms.

Chiu T'ien Hsüan-nü

The Dark or Mysterious Lady of the Ninth Heaven, Chiu T'ien Hsüan-nü, is a mythical deity of both orthodox Taoism and popular religion, and an ancient empress of Chinese prehistory. Chiu T'ien Hsüan-nü is now one of the major



goddesses of marriage and fertility, the patron of marriage go-betweens, and was worshipped China-wide until 1949. However, she has never achieved the glamour and popularity of many of the other lady divinities. By the time of the Han, a well developed myth had already connected her with the quelling of a flood by patching a hole in the Heavens, and with the construction of the world.

She is important because she was the disciple of Hsi Wang-mu and, in turn, the teacher of the Yellow Emperor (see page 57). She was a Taoist teacher-philosopher frequently referred to simply as the Dark Lady (*Hsüan-nü*), one of the ancestors or ancient rulers of China, and worshipped as such by country folk. Her name appears on a level with those of the ancient sovereigns.

According to one version she was the sister and wife of Fu Hsi (see page 56) under the name of Nü Wa, an incestuous relationship reviled by some Chinese. She was also briefly his successor. They are said to have married after the great flood to continue the human race. In the legendary history of the fall of the Shang, *Feng-shen Yen-i* (see page 60), she used magical means to draw King Chou Hsin into the worst depravities with his concubine until he was destroyed. He had caught a glimpse of her and then wrote a lewd and blasphemous poem on the wall of her temple about her, which she considered to be an impious act!

She appears to have been first recorded as a male with a snake's or snail's body and human head. During the Han dynasty, she changed to female with portraits of her as a woman connected with immortality, sex and war. In Han art, Fu Hsi is depicted with his snake's torso entwined with hers. Mention in early text of her descriptions of sexual mores and techniques have led to the present day view that she had been so offended by the way people immorally lived together, she became the patroness of marriage go-betweens and is prayed to for the success of a planned marriage. She is claimed to have been responsible for the custom by which people of the same surname have been forbidden to marry.

San Kuan Ta-ti

The Three Great Primordial Rulers, also known as The Controllers of Heaven, Earth and the Waters, **San Kuan Ta-ti**, are also known as **San Yüan Ta-ti** and **San Chieh Kung**. They are of mythical origin and, revered China-wide, are the source of all happiness and forgiveness of sins, able to avert calamities and sickness. Their images have also been noted in a number of popular religion temples in Hong Kong, Taiwan and South-East Asia.

Legend has it that the Jade Emperor sent them down to Earth to govern it, and observe the good and evil thoughts and deeds of humanity. This role as recorders

Images of the **San Kuan Ta-ti** in temples are usually identical and indistinguishable, emperors in the archaic imperial regalia, with the flat-topped crown and bead screen, sitting holding a tablet grasped in both hands before the chest. **T'ien Kuan** (the Controller of Heaven) is the central deity, flanked by **Shui Kuan** (the Controller of the Waters) on his left hand and **Ti Kuan** (the Controller of Earth) on his right.

Frescos depict them as mighty emperors, lords of a golden age, with T'ien Kuan sitting on a carpet of cloud, Ti Kuan on a horse and Shui Kuan on a dragon flying through clouds. [Taiwan]

Images of **Fu Hsi** generally portray him as a primitive man, dressed in leaves, although one or two images depict him as a seated standard mandarin figure. The version as a primitive man usually shows him sitting on a rock clutching the Eight Trigram charm or a Tai-chi sign of Yin and Yang. His hair is unkempt, while his face is clean shaven. [Taiwan]





△ Nowadays Shen Nung is usually portrayed as one of the 'primitives', sitting on a rock or seat, dressed only in leaves and grass either wound round his neck, waist and calves, or as a bolero and skirt of leaves. Occasionally he is shown clothed in a tiger skin. In paintings and images he is round bellied, with wide eyes, a bald head with ear-piercing tufts, a cloven pate, two 'incipient horns' or bumps, a red beard and is holding a large red medicinal pill. Quite frequently he is depicted clutching an ear of corn or millet. He is nearly always shown with black skin due to the effect of the poisonous herb, though some claim that he has a pink or red face when he is the patron of farmers, rice vendors, etc. Images of Shen Nung in South-East Asia can have red, white or black faces. [Taiwan]

was voiced in most of Hong Kong temples in which these deities have been noted. The Trinity, with their responsibilities, are:

- The Ruler of Heaven, **T'ien Kuan**: a stellar deity who is only outranked by the Jade Emperor, bestows happiness, freedom and prosperity;
- The Ruler of Earth, **Ti Kuan**: a stellar deity who is the judge of the sins of humanity and grants remission to those who mend their ways;
- The Ruler of Water, **Shui Kuan**: a stellar deity, the controller of floods and dispeller of evils and pestilence, who will free people from an unhappy destiny and sickness.

The Trinity evolved sometime around the second century AD. Some seventy

temples in Taiwan, mostly in the north and central areas of the island, have this Trinity as the main deities.

THE CULTURE HEROES

The next group consists of the culture heroes, deities who, as humans or in a re-incarnated human form, brought about the civilizing of Chinese society.

Worn out, the Three Ancient Emperors disappeared and were replaced by the Five Rulers, the **Wu Ti**. They have been named variously as Fu Hsi, Shen Nung, Shao Hao, Huang Ti (2674–2572 BC), Chuan Hsu (2490–2412 BC), Ti Ku (2412–2342 BC), Yao (2333–2233 BC, see below) and Shun (2233–2183 BC, see below). Of these Shao Hao, Chuan Hsu and Ti Ku have not been noted on altars.

The Celestial Ministry of Health

Three legendary figures, known as emperors, are regarded as the founders of Chinese medicine, and all three are almost certainly dynasties rather than individuals. As ancestral gods of Han Chinese, they also form the First Bureau of the three that make up the Celestial Ministry of Health. Details of members of the other two bureaux will be found from page 108 onwards, in the chapter on the Deities of Health and Medicine.

FU HSI

A primeval ruler and sage, **Fu Hsi** was the first of the Three Emperors, the so-called founder of China, credited with the establishment of kingly rule, of marriage laws, and the computation of time by inventing a form of calendar using a knotted cord. Tales maintain that he was the head of the Taoist Celestial Ministry of Medicines, that he created different ranks within the state and also organized the clans and introduced family names.

He is also credited with the invention of the Eight Trigrams, the *pa-kua*, on which is based the concept of balance and reaction of *Yin* and *Yang*, and with developing a system of fortune telling using these trigrams which has governed the lives of a great many Chinese ever since. He planned and established the basis for social order; he taught the people to hunt and fish (he invented the fish net having watched spiders); he taught them to smelt iron and herd livestock, and invented silk thread and musical instruments. He is also said to have taught people how to cook food.

Various dates of birth and death have

been given, ranging from 2953 and 2837 BC. His mother is said either to have trodden in the footprint of a giant or seen a shooting star and so conceived miraculously; she carried him for twelve months before he was born in Shensi province. Despite having instituted the basis for marriage, he is said to have married his sister, Nü Wa (see page 55).

SHEN NUNG

The God of Husbandry, the First Farmer and Founder of Natural Medicine, Shen Nung, is both a Taoist and a popular religion deity, and is the second of the Three Emperors. He succeeded Fu Hsi and in his turn passed on the throne to the Yellow Emperor (see below). Shen Nung was an early deity, already deified by the Han dynasty at the time of Christ, and listed as one of the *Shang-ti* (high gods) of the Han royal house. Some Chinese histories maintain that Shen Nung was defeated in battle by the Yellow Emperor who assumed the throne, adding that Shen Nung was buried at Changsha. His dates are usually given as 2838–2698 BC.

He is the legendary first agriculturist, one of the best known of the Chinese culture heroes and worshipped China-wide. His myth includes the folk memory of the change from hunter-gatherer to agriculture in the Neolithic period. He taught the art of cultivation of the five basic grains. He was the first to analyse the beneficial and harmful properties of herbs, and listed the efficacy of herbs by testing hundreds of them on himself, either on their own or in combinations.

Finally one day, so it is claimed, one killed him, whereupon his body turned black. He is said to have had a transparent stomach so that whatever he ate could be observed. He is regarded as a medical deity by many, and is also the patron of farmers and native herbalists China-wide.

As a sagacious primeval emperor, he is also credited with inventing many farming implements, introducing people to ploughs made of wood, and to the methods of planting and cultivating rice. He taught people not only how to cultivate but also how to rotate crops and raise domestic animals. He also established the concept of markets to exchange produce and is said to have invented pottery and the axe. In some places he is the patron of dung dealers, rice vendors, restaurant owners and pottery makers. There are Chinese who

do not believe him to be a mythical character, but rather an immortal who assumed human form and came down to Earth out of pity for humanity. Like the other two Sage Emperors, Shen Nung was either the founder of a dynasty, possibly lasting for seventeen generations, or the embodiment of an era rather than being a distinct individual.

HUANG TI

The Yellow Emperor, **Huang Ti**, the third of the Three Emperors, is considered by the Han Chinese to be their direct forebear. He was the founder of China in the heartland of the Yellow River basin, who extended the frontiers in the east to the sea, in the north and west to the deserts and mountains, and to the Yangtze in the south. The Yellow Emperor succeeded Shen Nung and is usually claimed historically to have reigned the hundred years between 2697 and 2598 BC, dying at the age of 111.

He was conceived miraculously after his mother saw lightning strike a star. She gave birth to him after a pregnancy of twenty months on the banks of the River Chi from which he took his surname. He was believed to have achieved immortality and to have ascended to Heaven on the back of a dragon in broad daylight, together with all his ministers and seventy of his ladies.

Ko Hung claimed that Huang Ti became an Immortal after the vital fluids of 1,200 women had been compounded with a further nine ingredients into a pill of immortality. In his struggle against the forces of chaos he was aided by Chiu T'ien Hsüan-nü (see page 54) with her divine powers. Once successful he was able to turn to the matter of governing China and establishing cultural, social and political institutions.

He is revered not only as the inventor of civilization, the most famous of the culture heroes of Chinese mythology but also for his numerous cultural talents. He is regarded by many Taoists as the First Master, the first human to ascend to transcendency, who taught the way to immortality, and by general devotees of popular religion as the ancestor of all Chinese, though not of individual clans. He is said to have had twenty-five sons, and one classic enumerates no less than twelve clans descending from his sons, several of which were prominent among the feudal houses of the Chou era.

He is said to have founded Taoism



△ **Huang Ti** is believed to have invented clothing and is therefore always portrayed dressed in robes, unlike Fu Hsi and Shen Nung. An occasional comment will be encountered in Chinese books that the particular year, say 1911 the first year of the Republic, was also the 4,609th of the Yellow Emperor. [Taiwan]

▽ **Emperor Yao**, the first of the **San Huang** [Unprovenanced]





△ Emperor Shun, the second of the San Huang or Sage Kings. In Malaysia, he is known as Chung-hua Kung. [Malaysia]

▽ Emperor Ta Yü, the third of the San Huang or Sage Kings. He is also known as Yü Ti. [Taiwan]



(some thousand years before Lao Tzu, see page 69) or to have been taught by an old sage, one of the many incarnations of Lao Tzu. He domesticated cattle and horses, invented the wheeled vehicle, pottery, pestles and mortars, bows and arrows, armoured boats, and instituted copper coins.

He developed yoga as a form of physical religious alchemy (having himself received instruction from three female Immortals), and acupuncture as a curative. He taught people to build houses, how to make bricks and utensils, including metal, and was the first smith. He is also said to have pioneered Chinese medical science and discussed physiological and pathological problems leading to the medical classic *Nei-ching* (Internal Medicine).

San Huang

In Chinese legend the **San Huang**, commonly known as the Three Sage Kings and regarded as perfect men, are semi-mythical rulers who mark the dawn of Chinese history and the ending of the mythical era. Ancient Chinese realms were not very large – it is now thought that the largest were the kingdoms of Yao, Shun and Yü. In Chinese histories they were the first and most sagacious of rulers who are strongly believed to have lived, if not as individuals, then each as a line of rulers of China during the third and second millennia BC.

Images of Shun and Yü are frequently seen on Chinese altars, whereas images of Yao have only been noted in northern China. Although these deities are predominantly images in popular religion temples, the group is also regarded by some as Confucian and is revered by Chinese cultural conservatives.

The first of the San Huang, **Yao**, the Lord of the Golden Age, reigned from 2357 BC for some seventy to ninety-eight years after which he abdicated in favour of Shun. His cult centre was in Linfen in Shansi province, though the temple dedicated to him there is now a museum and no longer a working temple. His image on the main altar, in the bright, solid colours used in northern China, depicts him as an awesome ruler sitting on a throne flanked by four youthful-looking officials or aides.

Yao was a soldier of some renown. He is said to have deliberated with Shun before attacking the states of Tsung, Kui

and Siu-ao. He not only pacified the south, but also expanded his kingdom to the north and to the west. According to legend Yao had nine sons, all of whom he considered unsuitable to take over the throne. He sought a successor and only found him 'with Heaven's assistance', when he encountered a peasant farmer ploughing with two oxen. The farmer held a basket instead of a whip and explained that, rather than strike the oxen to greater efforts, he beat on the basket. This sounded to each ox as though his partner was being beaten and so each made greater efforts. Yao gave Shun two of his daughters as wives and tested him with an official post to judge his ability to rule. Then he abdicated in Shun's favour.

Shun was the second of the San Huang. His father was widowed early (in some versions he was also said to have been blind), and married a second wife by whom he had another son. The father developed a great dislike for Shun and several attempts were made on his life. Once they set fire to the storehouse in which Shun was working, and they tried to suffocate him in a well he was digging. He escaped the first time by using his hat as a parachute and the second time through a convenient tunnel. Despite this, Shun continued to exhibit such exemplary conduct towards his father and step-mother that he eventually won them over and has since been included in the twenty-four examples of filial piety. He is said to have served the Emperor Yao for twenty-eight years, draining and clearing the land, growing the five grains and driving off wild animals, before being made emperor on Yao's death.

Shun, like Yao before him, lived simply. After visiting T'ai Shan to offer up sacrifices on its summit, he moved his capital a little further south in Shansi province where he ruled from 2317 to 2208 BC. He is said to have died aged 100, during an inspection tour of the southern provinces. Others believe that he died on an expedition against aboriginal tribes south of the Yangtze. He was buried at Chiu-i Shan in Hunan. A temple in his honour stood there for many centuries.

In legend, **Ta Yü** (the Great Yü), third of the San Huang, was the hero who controlled the Great Flood and saved China. The first emperor of the Hsia (c. 2205 BC), he is renowned in Chinese histories as the minister who drained the

land, saved China from much of its chronic flooding, opened up the rivers and made agriculture possible. He was also well known as the Holy Emperor of the Hsia Dynasty, **Ta Hsia Sheng-ti**. According to mythology, Yü is also said to have three apertures in each ear, although more popular myths claim that he had the body of a snake with the head of an ox, a human face and a tiger's nose.

There are various claims that he was a descendant of the Yellow Emperor; that his birth into a family of commoners was miraculous as his mother had been a virgin and his conception supernatural; and that as a minister of the emperor Shun he was so devoted to the task of controlling the flood waters and rivers that he passed his home three times during his travels without once stopping.

Yü was promoted from commoner to prince and eventually was chosen to be the successor to the emperor Shun and is usually said to have reigned from 2255 to 2205 BC, having previously been joint-regent for nineteen years. He was one of the limited number of deities retained by the KMT during their various iconoclastic campaigns. His images have been noted across central China.

Images of the Great Yü, unlike those of the other two of the San Huang, have been noted alone as the main deity on a number of altars in Taiwan, usually as the Water Immortal, Shui Hsien (see page 137), or one of the five Water Immortals. The Water Immortal is worshipped by sailors as the protector of all who navigate the seas.

Deities of the *Feng-shen Yen-i*

During the era leading to the downfall of the Shang described in the *Feng-shen Yen-i* (see page 60), Heaven was in turmoil, with no one in charge. The deities were being 'killed' and returning to Earth as humans, where they were readily employed as soldiers on both sides in the wars that led to the overthrow of the Shang and rise of the Chou dynasties.

At the end of the wars, posts and titles were awarded to the heroes and worthies at canonization ceremonies when a great number of deities were created to rule over human destiny. We learn much of what devotees believe about the origins, powers and roles of their mythological deities from popular legends. They provide us with a partial understanding of

Chinese legends, revealing the deities, warts and all.

CHIANG TZU-YA

Marshal Chiang T'ai-kung, known also **Chiang Tzu-ya**, is 'the Father of the Gods', one of the major popular religion and Taoist deities. He was worshipped China-wide and is still revered in a few temples in Taiwan, South-East Asia and Hong Kong. He is regarded nowadays as the General commanding all Celestial forces and, as such, a powerful protector of homes and shops.

Chiang, said by some to be of peasant stock, rose during the twelfth century BC to become a general renowned for his bravery, later to be appointed a chief minister under the Chou dynasty. He had been a Taoist philosopher and seeker after immortality who had been commanded to leave his mountain retreat and return to the world where he would be appointed counsellor to Wen Wang, the first king of Chou. He was appointed premier by Wen Wang and invested him with the honourable title of T'ai-kung (Noble Duke). Wen Wang's son, Wu Wang (the eventual victor in the *Feng-shen Yen-i*), was ordered by his father on his deathbed to obey Chiang in all things.

Chiang Tzu-ya had reserved the post of the Jade Emperor for himself in the deification of the gods. However, when he was offered the post, he paused with customary courtesy and asked people to 'wait a second' (*teng-lai*) while he considered. When he called this out, an opportunist named Chang Teng-lai stepped forward, prostrated himself and thanked Chiang for creating him the Jade Emperor. Chiang was stupefied and unable to retract his words. He was, however, able quietly to curse Chang Teng-lai, saying 'Your sons will become thieves and your daughters prostitutes.' Chang Teng-lai became the Jade Emperor, but was unable to prevent Chiang Tzu-ya's curse from working.

T'AI SUI

The President of the Celestial Ministry of Time, the Ruler of the Year and the God of the Cycle of Sixty Years, T'ai Sui was an early deity honoured by the official religion and the official class in imperial China at the beginning of Spring as well as by Taoists. The cult goes back as far as the Han dynasty and is linked with the planet Jupiter which moves through the twenty-eight constellations during its twelve year orbit of the Sun.

▽ Chiang Tzu-ya's standard image shows him as an old man, sitting or standing, holding a small triangular flag of authority bearing the single character *ling* (by order) in his right hand. He has a white beard and white hair tied into a top-knot, and is dressed in robes bearing the Eight Trigram pattern. He has no unique identifying characteristic, but is sometimes depicted astride a mythical animal. [Shensi province]



▷ This mural shows the sacred mandate, that had been issued by Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun, being read out by Chiang Tzu-ya on the Terrace of the Investiture of the Gods. The spirits of the dead heroes and worthies are shown below listening. The mural comes from a rural temple on the border between Shensi and Kansu provinces.

▽ This mural shows Chiang Tzu-ya (far left rear) riding a mythical beast and pursuing the three-headed and six-armed Yin Chiao (later deified as T'ai Sui, see page 59). The latter has a weapon in each of his six hands. Also shown are Erh Lang (see page 62) riding a white horse and Li Na-cha (see page 63) speeding on his firewheels. The mural comes from a Taiwanese temple in Tainan.

The Feng-shen Yen-i

The *Feng-shen Yen-i* (The Deification of the Gods) is an epic romance first written down during the Ming dynasty. This collection of myths begins with the legendary kings or emperors who forged the first kingdoms in the lands that would eventually become China. They continue through the legendary wars leading to the downfall of the Shang and the rise of the Chou dynasties to the stories of dynastic emperors, their mandarins and generals.

The greater part of the *Feng-shen Yen-i* describes the campaign of King Wu of the Chou dynasty against King Chou Hsin of the Shang dynasty during the twelfth century BC. The latter is vilified as a moral degenerate under the spell of a wicked concubine, Ta-chi (the nine-tailed fox-spirit). It describes the struggle between the forces of King Chou and King Wu.

There are major clashes of armies and individual duels between heroes, but eventually King Wu gains the victory, while the Shang king Chou Hsin and Ta-chi, his concubine, are destroyed. The date of the wars between the two armies is generally accepted to be c. 1120 BC.

At the end of the wars, the prime minister Chiang Tzu-ya, the main hero of the forces of King Wu, was ordered to

hand out honours and titles. He received the sacred mandate issued by Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun (see page 69) which was read out on the Terrace of the Investiture of the Gods to the spirits of the dead, who were mostly the generals from both armies. He appointed the majority of the mythical beings involved, even his enemies, as deities. Victors and conquered were all awarded posts in the Celestial hierarchy.

Chiang Tzu-ya had kept the post of Jade Emperor for himself, but a passing opportunist grabbed that post (see page 59) so, having completed his task, he found himself left out. Thereafter he was by tradition the Chief Minister of the Spirit World, and brought Heaven back to its former state before it fell into turmoil as deities were killed.

Many of these deified heroes are now to be seen on altars, deities in their own right, with responsibility for specific roles as wealth, health or patron deities. Myths recorded in the *Feng-shen Yen-i* describe and blend the primordial deities and those of pseudo-history, the latter including a number of popular and often major deities. When temple keepers relate legends about the deities on their altars, these are often unknowingly taken straight from the *Feng-shen Yen-i*.





▷ Images of T'ai Sui alone on altars nearly always portray him as a seated clean-shaven youth holding a bell or a scroll in his right hand. He is usually dressed in a green or gilt apron covering his chest and just below his waist only being secured by a cord around the back of his neck, and with a girdle around his waist. Another unusual feature is T'ai Sui's footwear. Normally he wears sandals, but occasionally only one foot is shod. [Vietnam]

▽ The standard image of Erh Lang portrays him as a young and virile soldier, dressed in armour, standing and holding a trident or a bow and peachwood arrows in his raised right hand. He has a third eye in the centre of his forehead, or to use the Chinese expression 'between his eyebrows', and is usually depicted with his left hand extended at waist height pointing with two of the fingers.

He is accompanied by the Heavenly Dog (T'ien-kou, see page 184), a small white dog who is shown recumbent or seated. Erh Lang's dog is the same animal seen with Chang Hsien (see page 121). Erh Lang is the patron deity and protector of all dogs. [Taiwan]



He was worshipped in the eleventh century AD and first offered official sacrifices during the Yüan dynasty. He is generally thought of as the Supreme Ruler of the Year and of the Seasons. He is one of the fiercest gods in the pantheon, who must be placated whenever soil is disturbed for any reason.

Yin Chiao was born a lump of formless flesh which so horrified his father, the evil King Chou Hsin of the Shang, that he ordered it to be abandoned outside the city walls. The lump was recognized as an Immortal, the caul split open and the child removed. He was brought up and nursed by one of the Pa Hsien, Ho Hsien-ku (see page 76).

When he came of age, he was told about his birth and of how his mother had been thrown out of the window on orders from King Chou as a punishment for bearing such a 'monster'. Yin Chiao was determined to destroy not only his father, but also the Imperial Concubine, Ta-chi (the nine-tailed fox-spirit), the royal favourite who had caused the death of Yin's mother by her calumnies. Yin was presented with two magic weapons by T'ien Fei (an early title of T'ien Hou, see page 137) – a gold club and a battle-axe.

To start with, Yin Chiao fought on the side of his father, King Chou. Later he switched sides and fought for the good King Wu. He was then unfortunately

decapitated by a general after being sandwiched by the Buddha Jan-teng between two mountains.

At the end of the great battles between the Shang and the Chou, the resuscitated Yin Chiao volunteered to execute his father and Ta-chi, and was proclaimed Prince Ching-ming. He was rewarded by the Jade Emperor with the titles of T'ai Sui and Marshal Yin for his bravery and filial piety. He was deified by Chiang Tzu-ya and given the presidency of the Ministry of Time.

Nowadays T'ai Sui is a popular religion stellar deity, the Lord of Time, and an arbiter of the destiny of humanity (known to some foreigners as the god of astrology). He is worshipped to avert calamities. Despite the importance of this deity, he is worshipped on as few occasions as possible because he is so alarmingly unpredictable.

Whereas in Fukienese communities in Taiwan and South-East Asia his single image stands alone, an awesome deity, in Cantonese communities his image either stands alone or more commonly in a group of sixty – each image serves for one year, in rotation, within the Chinese sixty-year cycle.

ERH LANG AND HUA KUANG TA-TI
Erh Lang Shen, literally 'the Second Born', is the title of Yang Chien, nephew of the Jade Emperor. He is primarily

thought of by devotees in southern Chinese communities as a hero of the *Feng-shen Yen-i*. His cult is popular among the Ch'aochou and Fukienese in Taiwan and South-East Asia, but apparently not among the Cantonese. He is prayed to as a deity who can help those in trouble and need; he also drives away demons and wards off their influences.

A popular tale tells of how Erh Lang and his dog helped to capture Monkey (see page 100), after the latter had made Heaven too hot for himself. The dog eventually became a dragon and entered a well in the temple courtyard at Kuan-k'ou in Szechwan province – it has never since run dry. In the same courtyard, sick people rubbed themselves on the cast iron image of the dog to obtain a cure.

Opinions differ over the origins and function of **Hua Kuang Ta-ti**, a popular religion deity. A number of Chinese are quite certain that Hua Kuang is Yang Chien, also known as Erh Lang (see above). The three are confused in many minds, although most temple keepers say that they are three different deities with similar functions and several characteristics in common. It should be remembered that Yang Chien (Erh Lang) has a dog while Hua Kuang does not.

It is said nowadays that Hua Kuang is not prayed to for a specific benefit, but because he is a powerful deity and, more specifically, with the ear of the supreme deity, the Jade Emperor. Several temple keepers in Hong Kong explained that Hua Kuang is rarely prayed to by individuals for themselves, but rather by the community as he is the God of Fire, protecting them against such perils. He is also regarded as a particularly powerful demon destroyer – again he protects the community rather than individuals against their deprecations.

In Cantonese communities he is the patron of goldsmiths and silversmiths, of scaffolding workers, and of incense and funeral paper shops. Some religious paper and funeral paper shops in Hong Kong display large prints of Hua Kuang as their patron on their shop shrines.

A shopkeeper there explained that he can prepare and make paper houses, horses, cars and the like only with Hua Kuang's guidance because the living do not know what the dead relative really requires and order the gifts without being able to give him specific instructions. He obtains detailed instructions by means of

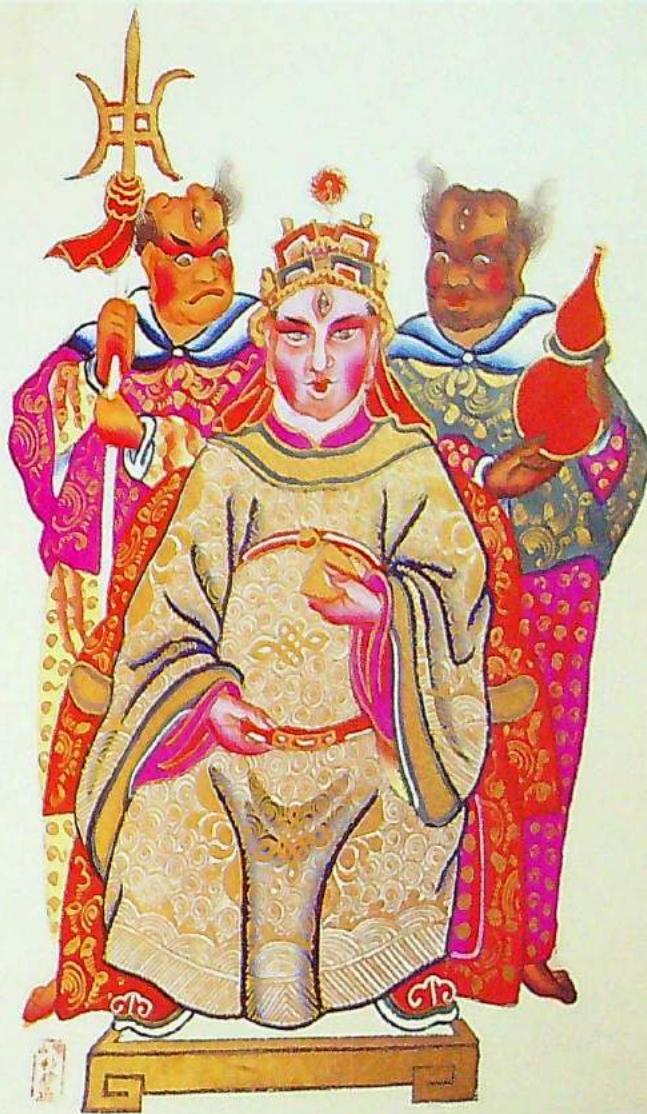
messengers to the Underworld who seek out the soul of the particular deceased to discover what are his or her specific requirements. These messengers are minions of Hua Kuang who help translate their wishes into thoughts within the head of the shopkeeper.

LI NA-CHA

The Third Prince. **Li Na-cha**, the *enfant terrible* of Chinese mythology, is an exorcizing spirit, a popular religion deity as well as being recognized by heterodox Taoists, famous for his exploits described in the *Feng-shen Yen-i*. Although his images were occasionally noted China-wide in popular religion temples, he is by far most popular with the Fukienese and Ch'aochou people. He is possibly better known to devotees as the Third Prince Na-cha, **Na-cha San T'ai-tzu**. He is one of several Chinese deities whose identity

▽ Standard images of **Hua Kuang** have four characteristics which, standing or sitting, together identify him. He is clean-shaven, has a third eye in the centre of his forehead, he holds a pyramidal lump of gold in his left hand, and a sword or spear in his right. In this print, he is attended by two tamed-demon assistants.

Quite frequently he is to be seen without either the sword or spear, and very occasionally he holds an ingot instead of the 'pyramid', and wears heavily decorated armour. When he does not hold a weapon, usually the first finger on his left hand is crossed over the second finger in a mystic sign as it rests palm down on his knee. [Five-colour block print]





△ Li Na-cha is one of the most frequently seen deities on altars and altar tables – often on the latter where he stands on his firewheel or wheels, holding a javelin high in the air. He has two roles within temples: the primary one being to guard the entrance against demonic intrusion; the secondary one is to control the tamed demon soldiers of the army of the main deity. As a protector he faces the temple entrance with his back to the main deity.

The swirling ribbon or scarf behind his head implies flying through the air, as do the firewheels under his feet. [Taiwan]

has changed from the original Hindu deity – in this case Nata, the third son of Vaisravana – via Buddhism to Chinese popular religion, although no Chinese peasant would accept this could be so!

The numerous legends surrounding the life of Na-cha are probably better known to Chinese peasants than recent imperial history. A powerful mythological deity of the Former Heaven in his own right, Na-cha was dispatched to the human world by the Jade Emperor to subdue and destroy demons. Incarnated as the son of Li Ching, a local king, he grew up as the third son, full of mischief. He was carried by his mother for three and a half years and was born in a lump of flesh from which he had to be extracted. His magical powers and great

strength were noted from his first days. His supernatural powers and weapons, including his firewheel(s) and spear, were gifts from T'ai-i Chen-jen.

He comes across as a sharpster and a troublemaker; in particular by killing the third son of the Dragon King (see page 139). Some of his images depict him astride a dragon. The Dragon King was so infuriated at the ease with which Na-cha got away with this murder that he appealed to the Jade Emperor for justice and swift retribution. The Jade Emperor's soldiers arrested Na-cha's parents in the absence of Na-cha. Na-cha requested that he be allowed to substitute himself for his parents despite his tender age. When his parents were released, he committed suicide to save his father from disgrace.

Na-cha was informed that he could be re-incarnated after having been nourished on three year's worth of sacrificial offerings. His mother, at his request, built a temple in his honour which became popular, and he proved to be very effective in responding to prayers offered to him. His father was furious and had the temple destroyed. So the Immortal T'ai-i (see page 71), at the request of the Jade Emperor, made him a new body out of lotus flowers, just in time for him to join his father and brothers to fight for and establish the Chou dynasty.

Images of Na-cha are carried through the neighbourhood on temple feast days, followed by devotees dressed as the Third Prince. Afterwards they will perform ritual acts of self-injury or fire-walking. In Fukienese community temples, each of the five spikes used by mediums to pierce their cheeks and limbs during a trance (see page 19), bears on its blunt end a carved head of a deity – the main spike in the centre is Na-cha.

CHAO KUNG-MING

Marshal **Chao Kung-ming**, also known as the Marshal of the Dark Altar, **Hsüan-t'ai Yüan-shuai**, and the General of the White Tiger, is one of the most favoured and widespread of the popular religion Wealth Gods. Having captured and tamed a tiger which became his steed, he was awarded the title of the Dark Altar Marshal who subdues Tigers. Marshal Chao is renowned for his power over the White Tiger (see page 185), who brings bad luck, and is thus presented with offerings and pleas for the White Tiger to be kept under control.

Marshal Chao was one of King

Chou's generals. According to one version, he was destroyed by T'ao-hua Hsien-nü (see page 51). However, the most common story tells how Lu Ya, an extremely clever Taoist sorcerer, advised Chiang Tzu-ya to make a straw figure and to draw a diagram of the stellar group of the Dipper together with a Seven Arrow charm. This was to be hung over the vitals of the straw man and burnt three times a day for twenty-one days. Chao fell dead many miles away at the moment the last charm had been burnt on the twenty-first day. He reappears in the ninety-ninth chapter to be deified.

He is best known as the Military God of Wealth, **Wu Ts'ai Shen**, when he is responsible for a constant and regular source of income, but not for winnings. So he is revered by merchants and is the special patron of money changers. Marshal Chao is said to command a vast army of tamed demonic soldiers under twenty-eight Generals.

He is also said to have among his subordinates several Immortals and the Wu Lei (see page 49). Between them, they control thunder, lightning, wind and rain. They also have powers over plague demons, and can reverse a run of bad luck. In Mao Tse-tung's famous essay, *Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society*, he describes the petty bourgeoisie falling into three sections: the first section were those with some surplus money or grain, who wanted to be rich and were devotees of Marshal Chao.

HSÜAN-T' IEN SHANG-TI

The Supreme Lord of the Dark Heavens, **Hsüan-t'ien Shang-ti**, is known by a number of unique titles within Chinese communities. He is possibly best known to foreigners as the Northern Emperor, **Pei Ti** (in Cantonese *Pak Tai*), also the title that he is known by in Cantonese speaking areas such as Hong Kong and Macau. He is also known, in parts of Taiwan for example, as the True Warrior, **Chen-wu**, where some devotees strongly deny that he is the Northern Emperor.

Hsüan-t'ien Shang-ti is a major, awesome, popular religion deity of an exorcist cult, a stellar god formerly worshipped throughout China and known to many Chinese as one of the most powerful ministers of the Jade Emperor. Over recent centuries, he has become more a general protective god whereas originally he was one of the spirits of great antiquity who ruled one quarter of

the universe as the Dark Warrior, **Hsüan Wu**. This was the term used for the northern sector of the twenty-eight Lunar Mansions. It was associated first with the Tortoise, then with the Tortoise and Snake. The spirit of Hsüan-wu became an enshrined deity during Sung times. His title was changed to **Chen-wu** during the Sung to avoid using the taboo name of the Sung imperial line Hsüan Lang.

A popular legend described how he was conceived by the empress Pao Yueh-kung, the wife of the emperor Ch'ing Ti. She dreamed that Lao Chün came to her one night in a dragon carriage bearing a male baby from whom were emanating brilliant rays of every colour. She asked Lao Chün for the child: soon she found herself with child and eighteen months later gave birth to a son. He grew to be a valiant youth with intelligence and compassion. Succeeding to the throne when his father died, he realized the instability of existence. He abdicated and retired to the hills where, after 800 incarnations, he became the first of many golden Immortals.

Later he was appointed Guardian of the North by Shang-ti and posted to T'ai-ho Shan in Hupei province. During the Shang-Chou Wars, he commanded the Twelve Heavenly Armies, raising his black banner to stop Mo Wang, the Demon King, from ravaging Earth. He defeated the Serpent and the Grey Tortoise, two magical allies of the Demon King, emerging the victor, barefoot and dishevelled. He overcame the demonic forces and confined them to the depths of the cave at Fengtu.

Although the *Feng-shen Yen-i* says the Northern Emperor commanded twelve armies, devotees often claim that it was twenty-four or thirty-six armies, basing their belief on the number of generals portrayed on the side wall altars in his temples. The thirty-six Celestial Generals (the **T'ien-chiang**) were heroes who fell in battle during the Shang-Chou wars.

In legend he is supposed to have cleared Heaven and Earth of all resident demons, and now even those in the Underworld who can and do haunt the Earth, fear his very name. According to his devotees, the hordes of malevolent and dangerous spirits roaming the Earth from the Underworld can only be held in check and destroyed by the Northern Emperor's large force of spirit soldiers organized into spirit armies.



△ Chao Kung-ming's image is very easy to identify, and his complete characteristics are unique. He is either standing, sitting or riding a tiger, often black or with black stripes on a yellow background and never white; he has a fierce black face and protruding eyes and a copious black beard. He wears armour and holds, raised in his right hand, a magic knotted steel whip. [Malaysia]

▽ Hsüan-t'ien Shang-ti's portrayal is relatively standard - a seated, black bearded and dishevelled middle-aged man who, in his civil version, is dressed in plain robes with his hands on his knees. In the military version, he wears armour and holds a 'whip' or magic sword with which he destroys demons. In both versions he is nearly always depicted with the Snake and Tortoise (or Turtle), either around him or under his bare feet. [Amoy]



▷ Lao Tzu (see page 69) is the junior member of the San Ch'ing and is also known as the Greatest Holy One (T'ai-ch'ing) and as the Supreme Pure or Shen-pao. He is also widely known as T'ai-shang Lao-chün. Here he is shown riding on his green buffalo.

The temple keeper was unable to identify the deity with a sword on his left. Both statues stood on the altar table before the main altar of the temple, which is dedicated to the Jade Emperor. [Taiwan]

▽ Each Taoist sect and sub-sect has its own Masters (*Tsu-fu*), revered by devotees as such. In a great many instances, their images will appear on altars in the sect or sub-sect temples.

Liu P'ei-chung (1911-74) brought the Kunlun Mountain Sect, of which he was the Master, to Taiwan from Shantung. The sect is a meditative Taoist body whose membership in Taiwan is growing fast. His image, shown here, appears on the sect's altars together with that of Hung-chün Lao-tsu (see page 70). [Taiwan]



Taoist Deities

Tao, meaning the Way, is said to have originated at the end of the Han dynasty. According to some legends, the philosopher Lao Tzu revealed the Tao to Chang T'ien-shih, who was then a hermit in Szechwan province. This deed of Lao Tzu's, in AD 142, invested Chang Tao-ling as the first Patriarch of the Cheng-i P'ai (sect). The doctrines were ultimately derived from the absolute Tao, usually referred to as the 'primordial breath' (*hun-tun*). This was transmitted through the deities, Lao Tzu and then on through one of the Immortals depending on the sect.

In early days the objectives of Taoist devotees used to be the union with the Celestial world in immortality, and the ability to communicate with it. These aims are often known as transcendence and divine fervour.

Taoism is a Europeanized word for the mystic, liturgical or transcendent type of Tao, although it is also the title mistakenly given to popular religion (the primitive or degenerate form with its belief in a multitude of deities). The beliefs and practices of institutional Taoism and popular religion overlap. In practice, the latter has adopted elements of Taoism, as it has of Buddhism and Confucianism, and has become tainted by sorcery and myth. It is this blend, referred to here as popular religion or belief, which comprises the greater portion of this book.

Taoism teaches two fundamental concepts: the first that before the Creation of the Sun, Moon, Earth, stars and the universe there was the period of the Great Chaos, and the second that complementary opposites exist in everything, referred to as *Yin* and *Yang*. However, to the average devotee, Taoism requires one to maintain a good relationship with the deities who control human fate, and this requires the observance of certain popular hallowed paths of conduct and leading a moral life. It offers talent and proficiency in dealing with the supernatural.

This is only marginally different from popular religion, though as Taoist devotees become more involved and advanced they will seek higher traditions. Devotees range from the religious specialists who have made Taoism their lifetime study to the newest recruit, the lay person who

sees the religion as a system of exercises, both mental and physical which, together with a moral life, will eventually lead to a place in the Celestial world.

Taoism, the native Chinese religion, has been described as 'a unique and extremely interesting combination of philosophy and religion, incorporating also proto-science and magic'. The deities of orthodox Taoism are regarded as masters whose teachings can lead devotees to immortality through either yoga, breathing and exercises, or chemical and herbal mixtures. Religious specialists can specialize in divination or oracular interpretation while others might devote themselves to medicine, calligraphy, herbalism, poetry or music. The majority pursue higher knowledge and, eventually, the quest for immortality.

The superior Taoist religious specialists describe their own beliefs and practices as orthodox, while they say that those of the followers of Chang T'ien-shih and devotees of popular religion are heterodox. On one hand is the officially sponsored, received or established doctrine; on the other the popular version which is different from the beliefs held by the rulers. In Chinese the terms used are *Cheng* and *Hsieh*, with *Cheng* meaning upright, correct, orthodox, right and proper; whereas *Hsieh* means depraved, heterodox, impious, and dissident.

Each sect and sub-sect has its own



▷ The San Ch'ing Tao-tsu are usually depicted as old men sitting cross-legged, with benign faces, long ear-lobes, Taoist topknots, long wispy beards and dressed in red or blue Taoist robes decorated with various religious or stylized patterns. All bear an object, quite often a jade *ju-i* sceptre crooked in one arm and held in the palm, or a tablet held in both hands before the upper chest. In some temples they are portrayed sitting on recumbent animals.

These three scrolls were displayed as a backdrop during a major festival. There are temporary altar tables erected in front of them. [Hong Kong]

▽ Another version of the Taoist Mountain (see also page 14) which shows the main deity in the temple on the peak (in this case Tou Mu, see page 93). She is flanked and attended by a series of Immortals.

[Hunan province]



Masters, revered by devotees as such. These Masters transmit their teachings from generation to generation with many incarnations reaching back into the mythological past. Such transmission is usually claimed to have come through Lao Tzu, who in some sects is said to have been the final incarnation of a legendary spirit, and passed on again, often through other incarnate beings, in later centuries. The most common genealogy is through Chang T'ien-shih (see below).

THE TAOIST PANTHEON

Orthodox Taoists accept that there are deities, but that they exist only in the mind and in space. The gods of the Taoist pantheon are abstract, identified as True Ones and Heavenly Worthies. They are stellar beings, members of the Celestial bureaucracy, who cannot be invoked as they are powerful and superior.

In contrast, the deities of popular religion are not part of the Taoist pantheon proper. They are predominantly terrestrial spirits of the dead, human souls deified by popular demand, and are normally prayed to for material favours. Because they are beyond the pattern of Taoist immortality, they are therefore ghostly souls. The goal of these popular deities is to earn sufficient merit by their actions and work for humanity so as gradually to progress beyond their human-ghost state.

According to devotees there are five classes of orthodox Taoist deity:

- *Kui-shen*: human disembodied spirits, having no place to rest;
- *Jen-shen*: humans who have succeeded in freeing themselves from the infirmities of the flesh;
- *Ti-shen*: humans who have gained immortality in this world (Earth);
- *Shen-hsien*: Immortals who have left this world and live in the land of the blessed; and
- *T'ien-hsien*: they have attained purity and won eternal life in Heaven.

The division between ordinary people and those with supernatural qualities is indistinct. Ordinary beings may become Immortals and spirits, but the latter have very human qualities including lacking the holiness as understood by Westerners. Their legends have been handed down in written form and oral accounts by both priests and devotees – these go back to the dawn of time. They are so many and varied that Taoists were regarded as the very best storytellers.

San Ch'ing Tao-tsu

The Three Pure Ones, San Ch'ing Tao-tsu, are a sacred trinity, the supreme deities of the orthodox Taoist pantheon, ruling the entire Cosmos from the highest Heaven. While many would accept that the concept of a trinity has been borrowed from the Buddhist Trinity of the Three Precious Buddhas, others fairly claim that they existed long before Buddhism was introduced into China. It is probable that the three Taoist deities were known at an early stage, but were only brought together into a trinity as an imitation of the Buddhist trinity. Two of these deities – T'ien-pao and Shen-pao – are quite frequently depicted alone in their own right, on altars in Hong Kong and elsewhere. The Trinity as a whole, however, is virtually always depicted on three scrolls suspended above temporary altars during special Taoist rituals. When used inside a temple, it is considered to be the main altar during these rituals.

In the Doctrine of the Three Pure Ones, they are the symbolic personification of the three life principles: breath, vital essence and spirit (*ch'i*, *ching* and *shen*). They are said to live in separate Heavens corresponding to the three original divisions of the cosmic ether. Their images are also seen on a number of altars in heterodox Taoist temples where the Three are prayed to as a group for help in coping with life's problems.



YÜ-CH'ING

The senior deity in the Trinity is called Yü-ch'ing (the Jade Pure) or T'ien-pao, (the Heavenly Pure). He is the highest Taoist deity who is in charge of the Heaven of the Heavenly Ones. This primordial Celestial lord, a powerful and early deity, existed for thousands and millions of years within the primordial void before he formed the Heavens and Earth. He is the spirit of the breath of life.

The Chinese do not have a God as conceived by Christians, Muslims and Jews. However, a number of Chinese will tell you that a nameless cosmic force created the universe and the Earth, and still controls it. This force, known in Taoist temples as Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun (the Heavenly Elder of the Primeval Origins), at some stage became personalized as the First Cause with an ideal image of an elderly 'saint', the spirit without beginning or end. He is also the source of all truths, and his doctrine leads to immortality.

Taoist legends claim that Yüan-shih was either the son of P'an Ku (see page 54), or a reincarnation of the Northern Emperor (see page 65). Others claim that he is the Supreme Ultimate created from Yin and Yang, the first principle, with no beginning and no end. Occasionally he is referred to as the Jade Emperor (see page 51), but the *Feng-shen Yen-i* says that he preceded the Jade Emperor as the Ruler

of the Universe, resigning in despair at humanity's behaviour. Certainly in many areas of Taiwan he is popularly believed to be the Jade Emperor, though not always with real conviction.

SHANG-CH'ING

The Highest Holy One. **Shang-ch'ing**, or **Ling-pao** (the High Pure) is the second member of the Trinity, in charge of the Heaven of the Perfect Ones. *Chen-jen*. Sometimes referred to as **T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu** (the Patriarch of Heavenly Influence), he is one of the disciples of Hung Chün. As **Ling-pao T'ien-tsun** (the Heavenly Elder of the Spiritual Treasure), he is said to have devised the rules for controlling the interaction of *Yin* and *Yang*, as well as the doctrine for the Heavens and Earth. He mediates between Heaven and Earth. He was one of the first patriarchs of orthodox Taoism, the Patriarch of the Chieh Chiao P'ai (the Intercepting Sect), and a follower of Hung-chün Lao-tsu.

T'AI-CH'ING OR LAO TZU

The junior member of the San Ch'ing is known as the Greatest Holy One (**T'ai-ch'ing**) or the Supreme Pure (**Shen-pao**), symbolic of Earth and humankind. As **T'ai-shang Lao-chün** (Great Supreme Venerable Lord), or **Tao-te T'ien-tsun** (Spirit of the Way of Virtue), he is the source of vital essence, ruler of the *Yin* principle and in charge of the Heaven of Immortals, lowest of the three heavens.

Although neither a mythical primordial nor prehistorical deity, **Lao Tzu**, as he is known in the West, is claimed to be the human incarnation of a mythical being. By expounding the doctrine of **Ling-pao**, he founded Taoism. Lao Tzu literally means 'Old Child' though it is read by Chinese as 'Venerable One' or 'Old Master'. While the *Shen-hsien Chuan* (Biographies of the Spirits and Immortals) places Lao Tzu in first place within the Chinese pantheon, even before the Jade Emperor, he is only third in the supreme Taoist Trinity, where he is called the disciple of Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun.

Lao Tzu is considered to be one of the two pre-eminent Chinese sage-philosophers of pre-Han antiquity, the other being K'ung Tzu (Confucius, see page 82). It is generally claimed that he was a religious teacher with exceptional gifts, a philosopher whose ideas were corrupted over the centuries by traditional magic to become the popular religion of China. Lao Tzu, therefore, is not only the major

▽ **Shang-ch'ing's** images or likenesses, as with Yü-ch'ing and T'ai-ch'ing, are seen in temples with a wider sense of Taoism, one which appeals to the more mystic. On both scrolls and in image form, they are represented as either a scantily dressed, aged men with a top-knot and grey beard sitting on a lotus, or as a seated emperor either holding his beard and belt with his hands or making mystical signs. Occasionally they are shown as a black-bearded, middle-aged man, seated cross-legged and dressed in Taoist robes. They wear the tiny Taoist crown, and hold a small gold or black ball or pill in the left hand while making a mystic sign with the right. In a number of temples, they are portrayed sitting on recumbent animals. [Unprovenanced]





△ Although Shang-ch'ing is one of the most powerful of the Taoist supernatural beings, his image has been seen in popular religion temples where he does not appear to be prayed to directly by devotees for favours. His personal characteristic noted on many of his images is the *ju-i* sceptre, which he holds either in both hands or with one hand, while the other makes a mystic sign, as here. [Hong Kong]

▷ In a Taoist temple near Taipei, Hung-chün Lao-tsu is portrayed as a Taoist sitting cross-legged, holding his black beard with his right hand and with a pin through his hair drawn up into a top knot. [Taiwan]

deity of traditional orthodox doctrine, but has also become an important deity of popular religion.

Legend claims he was born in about 600 BC in Lu-i (Eastern Honan) some fifty years before the birth of K'ung Tzu. After eighty-one years in his mother's womb, he was born from her left armpit under a pear tree, whereupon she died. The aged child immediately walked and talked. In another version, he was already an old man of seventy or eighty with large long ears and grey hair – an incarnation of the Taoist supreme being. He lived for some 120 to 200 years.

There are many legends and myths, such as the accounts of his conversations with K'ung Tzu. It is often claimed that they met and that K'ung Tzu was enlightened by him. It is also said that K'ung Tzu, though snubbed by Lao Tzu, was far from furious, likening Lao Tzu to a dragon. Myth has made K'ung Tzu, a moralist, into a kind of pupil of Lao Tzu, a philosopher. In all probability, Lao Tzu never existed as a single entity – his life and works were a compilation from a group of collators or interpreters of previous writings rather than by one person.

His departure from Earth again is renowned in legend. He was the keeper of the archives at the capital of the Chou dynasty in Loyang and, having foretold the fall of the dynasty, he retired in disguise to a state somewhere to the west in a cart pulled by a (green) buffalo. He was bored with human existence as it was and simply opted out. Recognized at the frontier post in the Hanku Pass by an official, Lao Tzu was begged to write down his philosophy for posterity. It is believed that he thereupon wrote the eighty-one short chapters of the philosophic work *Tao-te Ching* (the Classic of the Tao and Virtue) before finally disappearing into oblivion, some say astride his buffalo.

Lao Tzu's main doctrine was the understanding of the meaning of Heaven. To him, humans are merely part of nature. Everything which violates and dominates nature is evil and the return to nature is the only salvation.

Lao Tzu's characteristics, which are not always depicted in statues of him, are his old age, with his white hair drawn up into a top-knot, a fan (or sometimes a fly switch) in his left hand, large pendulous ears, a buffalo on which he is riding either astride or side-saddle and his blue robe. He is also portrayed astride a chilin

(the mythical unicorn-like creature) or sitting on a throne or rock.

Other Taoist Deities

The great Taoist Master, **Hung-chün Lao-tsu**, is the personification of the vital principle in nature before the creation of the World. He is the Great Ancestor, a mythical character referred to in the *Feng-shen Yen-i* (see page 60) as Master of the Patriarchs, and said to have trained Lao Tzu, as well as most of the earliest Immortals and teachers. He is the primary deity of most Taoist cults and his image is to be seen on altars in a number of Taoist temples together with the San Ch'ing (see page 68).

His images in Taiwan vary. In a Taoist temple near Taipei, he is portrayed as a Taoist sitting cross-legged. In a large modern popular religion temple near Chiahshien in the foothills above Tainan he is shown as an imperial figure in the archaic flat-topped crown with its bead screen hanging before the eyes, sitting cross legged on a lotus, and with a long luxuriant black beard. In Singapore, however, he is shown as a wiry, primitive elderly man, dressed simply in a necklet and skirt of leaves and nothing else, and holding a gnarled staff in one hand and a buffalo horn in the other.

T'AI-I T' IEN-TSUN

The Celestial Worthy of the Great Unity, **T'ai-i T'ien-tsun**, is an early orthodox Taoist deity who was worshipped China-wide, and helps devotees to achieve immortality. He is one of the more senior and significant orthodox Taoist deities, a beneficent deity and one of the Twelve



Immortals of Heaven as recorded in the *Feng-shen Yen-i*. His symbol, a ferocious lion, is often used on a scroll to represent his power. About 100 BC or thereabouts he appears to have been regarded as the supreme deity and was greatly revered during the second and first centuries BC. The title would appear to have been created during or about the Sung dynasty by Taoist priests, and today devotees pray to him for longevity and prosperity. According to the *Feng-shen Yen-i* and other sagas of the gods, he lived during the great era of the Five Sages and was the medical adviser to the Yellow Emperor (see page 57).

Some devotees claim him as a major Taoist deity of the Great Bear, the personification of the philosophical concept of the Great Unity, responsible to Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun (see above), and equal to the Jade Emperor in rank.

In recent centuries, Taoists believe that he, like Kuan Yin, listens for the cries of sufferers in purgatory whom he saves. In the guise of T'ai-i Chiu-k'u T'ien-tsun, the Taoist equivalent of Ti-tsang Wang (see page 91) and one of his many manifestations, he then ferries the souls of those whom he has saved, over to the Great Heaven. His image is therefore prayed to during Taoist masses for the dead. It stands on the portable altars in orthodox Taoist temple courtyards, erected temporarily for the major festivals of the dead held during the seventh lunar month. Subordinate to him are the two Controllers of Life and Death, the Lords of the Northern and Southern Dippers, Nan-tou Hsing-chün and Pei-tou Hsing-chün (see page 103). His image in Tainan is flanked by these two deities on a side altar.

T'AI-PAI CHIN-HSING

A mythological Taoist Immortal, T'ai-pai Chin-hsing literally means the Evening Star, Venus. In the *Feng-shen Yen-i*, he is described as an aide in the entourage of the Jade Emperor, although in a Taoist pamphlet he is described as *jen-chih* (a human official) with the surname Li. A Taiwanese god-carver identified him as T'ai-pai Hsien-weng, the patron of wine makers, and he is also known as Chiu Shen, the Wine Spirit.

In the *Hsi-yu Chi* (see page 98), T'ai-pai Chin-hsing was the Immortal sent to persuade Monkey (see page 100) to accept the pardon that had been offered him. Unfortunately, the Immortal was



such a didactic old man that Monkey ran rings round him.

Mentioned in several storytellers' tales, one story claims that the deity spied a young weaving maid on the banks of a river and, entranced by her beauty, changed himself into a handsome youth and seduced her. Their child, Shao Hao, later founded a terrestrial kingdom far to the east. Another version tells how T'ai-pai Chin-hsing was charmed by two Heavenly weaving girls and led them off to a cave where they remained for forty-six days! Heaven was scandalized when this was uncovered during a Celestial inquiry into the cause of a lengthy drought. T'ai-pai Chin-hsing, who was responsible for rain, once discovered and escorted back to his post, quickly brought rain to the parched region. The weaving girls saved their skins by retiring to remote palaces.

WANG LING-KUAN

The Spirit Official Wang, Wang Ling-kuan, also known as Wang T'ien-chün (General or Marshal Wang), is a second or third rank deity, the traditional protector of Taoist scriptures, whose image used to be seen China-wide at the entrance to Taoist temples. He is now also the guardian of popular religion temples. The first image met on entering the large popular religion temple in Havelock Road in Singapore is Wang T'ien-chün. He is flanked by two other generals, Heng and Ha (the Blower and the Snorter), who are heroes from the *Feng-shen Yen-i*.

◁ Images of T'ai-i T'ien-tsun are relatively standard with his characteristics including the Taoist top-knot, the hair drawn up on top of the head, a small cup in his left hand and a long black beard. He is dressed in long flowing robes. These are sometimes gaudy but more often no colour or decoration is used because many images are gilded all over. Smaller images, used during Taoist masses for the dead, portray him sitting side-saddle on a recumbent lion. [Taiwan]

▽ In Tainan county, T'ai-pai Chin-hsing's image in a large Taoist temple portrays him as a white-haired old man holding a jade *ju-i* sceptre in the crook of his left arm; while an image in the T'ien Hou temple in Kaohsiung city, depicts a black-bearded scholar-official, sitting holding a *ju-i* sceptre in his left hand. However, he is also shown holding other things, such as this image with a fly switch. [Taiwan]



▽ Images of Wang Ling-kuan usually stand facing the main altar, but in at least one major temple in Singapore, he stands facing the main entrance with his back to the main altar. He is readily identifiable as a soldier, wearing 'tiger' armour and a small Taoist crown. He usually has a reddish face, red beard and three eyes. The two normal eyes are round and protrude slightly while the third eye is vertical and in the centre of his forehead. His mouth is partly open in anger, and he has 'ear-pressing tufts'.

He holds a 'whip' (magic sword) above his head in his right hand, but his unique characteristic is the magical sign he is making with his left hand. It is held forward at waist height, the middle finger is extended, pointing vertically, with the other fingers and thumb entwined. This is a protective sign against demons and ghosts, known as the 'Golden Light'. Variations include black hair and whiskers, his feet on firewheels, an iron club instead of the magic sword, a large seal or 'chop' in his left hand.

[Central China]



He is the Taoist equivalent of the Buddhist Chia Lan or Wei T'o (see page 91), and is popular among villagers as a potent destroyer of demons. His cult has been banned on several occasions by Chinese emperors. The guardian against all forms of demonic attack and evil influences, his image used to be seen in wayside shrines in western China in particular protecting people, and especially pilgrims, during their travels. The *Feng-shen Yen-i*, relates that he was deified as the Heavenly Marshal of the Ministry of Fire, **Yu-shu Huo Fu T'ien-chiang**. To others he is one of the Twenty-four or Thirty-six Commanders of the Celestial Armies (see page 65).

According to one legend he was a nameless deity with red hair and a face the colour of iron in the temple at Hsiangyin in Hunan province. A certain Sa Shou-chien who had studied Taoism under Hsü Ching T'ien-shih, lived in the temple and one night dreamt that the unnamed deity asked him to go away as his presence made the deity uneasy. Sa left, but first gave a few sticks of incense to some devotees telling them to burn them after they had finished their devotions. As they did so, lightning struck the temple which was burnt to the ground.

When the nameless temple god reported this to Heaven, he was given sharp red eyes with golden pupils, a magic whip and a warrant permitting him to punish Sa should the latter commit any misdeed. He was ordered to follow Sa wherever he went. For twelve years Sa lived a blameless life until one day wishing to cross a river he found a boat, but no boatman. He rowed himself across and then left money for the boatman. The unnamed god could continue no longer, and became Sa's disciple under the name Wang Shan and later became Wang Ling-kuan.

HUANG TA HSIEN

Some deities are regarded as major local deities without devotees realizing that their cult had been imported from elsewhere in China, where the deity had been extremely popular many years before. One such is **Huang Ta Hsien**, the Great Immortal Huang. Although he is a popular Taoist deity, attended by large numbers of devotees who daily crowd his temple and the fortune tellers' stall at the entrance in the suburbs of Kowloon now named after him (in Cantonese *Wong Tai Sin*), he is believed by a number of his devotees to be a Buddha.

Huang Ta Hsien is prayed to especially for good health and for cures from illness. He is said to have an Immortal's skill with medicine and herbal drugs boosting his reputation as a healer. Free herbal medicines are provided at a dispensary within the cult complex for devotees, prepared from prescriptions provided by the deity. He is renowned for his open handedness and his willingness to grant requests to all and every devotee. His popularity in Hong Kong is based not only on his medicinal skills, but also on his powers as a general protective deity. For instance, he is looked upon by removal firm employees as their patron and is offered daily incense and tea by them before they start work.

An 'autobiography' available in the cult centre claims that, in about AD 940, a fifteen year-old shepherd boy named Huang was looking after his sheep at Ch'ihung Shan in Chekiang province. He followed an Immortal who taught him how to refine cinnabar, thus producing the elixir of immortality. At the age of eighteen he began his miraculous healing of the sick. Many years later his elder brother found him in a cave on Chinhua Shan and demanded back the sheep Huang had had with him at the time of his disappearance. Huang pointed out a hillside covered with white rocks which he promptly transformed back into sheep.

KUANG-TSE TSUN-WANG

One of the major local Fukienese deities is **Kuang-tse Tsun-wang** (the Lord of Extensive Compassion). He is to be seen on the altars not only around the cult centres of Nanan and Ch'üanchou in Fukien province, but also on altars of immigrants to South-East Asia and Taiwan from those areas. The deity's main title is popularly claimed to have been bestowed on him by a Sung emperor as a reward for curing his mother, the dowager empress. His images are to be found wherever immigrants from Ch'üanchou and Nanan have settled.

One of many legends tells how an ordinary young man, surnamed Kuo, an excellent servant to his master, through knowing a geomancer managed to obtain a good piece of land (geomantically speaking) where he was able to bury his father and thus ensured that he would be deified after death. The unusual factor in this cult is the inclusion of his parents and of his consort, all revered in their own right and not just because they are



◁ The standard image of Huang Ta Hsien, the Great Immortal Huang, who is popular in Kowloon. His cult-centre temple does not contain an image of him, although they have been noted on side altars in a number of temples in Hong Kong. They are also popular on household altars. [Hong Kong]

神像

related to the main deity. Images of his parents have also been noted on their own separate altar in the rear hall of Kuang-tse Tsun-wang temples.

His consort, considered to be a fertility deity in her own right with the title of Sheng-wang Mu, is supposed to have been the daughter of a priest in a Kuang-tse Tsun-wang temple in Fukien who had been made pregnant by the deity and joined him on the altar, or a spirit sent by Heaven to marry him. She is said to have borne him four (some say seven and even thirteen) sons. All are Celestial spirits, not deified humans, and therefore they

have no names, only titles. They are referred to as heirs and princes, T'ai-pao. However, in the Hsi-lo T'ien in Tainan (his cult centre in Taiwan) he is said to have had thirteen sons – only the fourth has an altar of his own in a secondary hall. His seventh son, Ch'i T'ai-pao, is his favourite and is said to be his heir apparent.

Kuang-tse Tsun-wang is prayed to for the usual blessings and as a protector against natural disasters. Nowadays, he is also regarded as a healer of the sick and by a large number of businessmen as a Wealth God. In Taiwan he is the patron of



△ An unidentified image of a Taoist deity. He is sitting side-saddle on a mythical animal and is typical of the style and decoration of images from central and northern China. [Unprovenanced]

▷ The standard image of Kuang-tse Tsun-wang is unique and therefore easily recognizable even out of context. He is portrayed as a clean-shaven youth, sitting, dressed in robes (often over armour), with his right leg raised parallel to the ground at knee height with the sole of his right foot pointing towards his left knee but not resting on it. His hands are clenched and resting on his knees; his face is often a dark red and he has protruding round eyes. His leg is poised as shown as this is the attitude he was in when he was being borne off to Heaven. His master, to prevent his departure, grabbed his left leg.

Some versions depict him with a small lion under his left foot; others with his right hand clasping his girdle and his left hand resting on his left knee. Alternatively, his left hand can be clasping the girdle with the right hand resting on the crook of his right knee. Several images have been noted with white faces. [Taiwan]

devotees from Ch'üanchou, but in particular of Ch'üanchou geomancers and pharmacists. He is the patron of those who bear the same surname, Kuo, and is renowned for his accurate predictions, particularly of business prospects. In one small temple in Singapore he is specifically the protector of children.

Although Kuang-tse Tsun-wang has under his command many tens of thousands of spirit soldiers, tamed demons, they are not represented by images. They are guardians of the Kuo clan, of villages and of districts, wherever people require their help; however, they need feeding and paying, a commitment performed by devotees who provide offerings of food and spirit money. Kuang-tse also requires offerings, and being a good red-blooded 'human' spirit he expects meat in all offerings. Festivals in honour of Kuang-tse Tsun-wang are held annually on his birthday, the twenty-second day of the second lunar month, and also on the seventeenth or eighteenth, or the twenty-second or twenty-third of the eighth lunar month, the various dates given for the anniversary of his ascension to Heaven.

PA HSIEN

The *Hsien*, usually translated as 'Immortals', were superior human beings – Taoist adepts who had achieved immortality by alchemy, asceticism, study or by being canonized by a superior deity. The group of Immortals which has overshadowed all others is the band known as the Pa Hsien, the Eight Immortals. The group has only been recognized since the thirteenth century AD, having developed individually over previous centuries. Their adventures are retailed in legends now 'frozen' in print and on celluloid.

The Eight are a colourful, cheerful, mixed bunch, heroes and heroines of a multitude of adventures, travels and escapades, together and individually. Nowadays, as well as being patrons of certain connected trades and guilds, they also appear in advertisements. Their exciting experiences are simultaneously both worldly and spiritual. They include flying on birds or alone through the air for thousands of miles in a second, walking on clouds, slaying demonic creatures and ridding the world of evil. They indulge in drunken orgies, set fire to the ocean, make themselves invisible, and dance in and out of the Palace of Heaven.

Three of the Pa Hsien – Lü Tung-pin, Chang Kuo-lao and Li T'ieh-kuai – figure in traditional 'fighting hero' stories. They are boisterous individuals, occasionally shockingly garbed, despite which they are all credited with great powers. The other five are not normally regarded as deities. They live on Earth, retain their human personalities and enjoy life, but in an ideal situation as they do not suffer worldly cares or disease. Their benign influence has been sought over the centuries by peasants who invoked both individuals of the Pa Hsien



and the entire group to use their magic to counter all evil influences. Devotees also believe them capable of raising the dead and transmuting any substance into gold.

Individual statues of the Pa Hsien with their common attributes are, after Kuan Yin (see page 89), the most frequently seen Chinese deities in curio and antique shops. Temples are rarely dedicated to them: only two such temples have been noted where images of all Eight stand together on the main altar – outside Terendak near Malacca in Malaysia and in Sian city in Shensi province in



northern China. Images of the Eight tend to be seen individually or in pairs on secondary altars. In many popular religion temples the Pa Hsien are represented as a group on the embroidered baldaquin hanging before the main altar table, or in the temple frescos painted on side walls of main halls. The Eight are frequently to be seen as decoration in homes, displayed on special anniversaries, especially to celebrate a fiftieth birthday.

A popular scene shows the Pa Hsien crossing the sea in a boat or each standing on his or her emblem, illustrating what is probably their best known story. Hsi Wang-mu (see page 53) only threw a party once every three thousand years, when the peaches of immortality were in fruit. The Eight, having drunk far too much, were afraid to ride home on the clouds in case they fell off. Lü Tung-pin suggested that they should show originality by travelling either by boat or on their own particular attribute.

Light-hearted and light-headed they set off, Li on his crutch, Chung-li on his feather fan and so on. The others also floated successfully, though Lan Ts'ai-ho was captured by the son of the Dragon King (see page 139) of the Eastern Seas. The young dragon had been intrigued by Lan's musical clappers (or flute), and had had her sucked down to the depths.

When the others had sobered up and had realized that Lan Ts'ai-ho was a prisoner of the Dragon King's son, they threatened to burn down the Dragon King's palace if she was not released immediately. The battle began and the seas were soon burnt dry. They rescued Lan, but could not find the clappers/flute taken by the Dragon King's son. Meanwhile, the Dragon King's forces had begun to pour water back into the ocean to drown the intruders who only just managed to reach dry land in time.

Furious, the Eight used their magic to tip a mountain on its side into the sea and thus filled it up. The battle raged on, the Dragon King's son was killed and the clappers/flute recovered. The Dragon King appealed to the Jade Emperor, who sent his Heavenly Generals to sort out the trouble and restrain the Pa Hsien. It was only when Kuan Yin appeared to act as mediator that the fighting ceased.

The Eight, who are sometimes portrayed riding mythical animals, are claimed to be easily identifiable by their individual attributes. Regrettably, these



△ The Lord Ritual Master or Lord Master of the Powers, **Fa-chu Kung**, is the title of a deified local hero – a Mr Chang from the Anhsi area of southern Fukien province. He is a patron deity of emigrants from Anhsi and Yingch'un counties to Taiwan and South-East Asia and was also the patron of tea merchants in Yingch'un up to 1949. Although he is a local Fukienese deity, his image has been noted in Singapore and Malaysia in particular on Hakka, Hainanese, Ch'aochou and Cantonese temple altars where Chinese ethnic communities 'borrow' each other's more powerful and efficacious deities.

His devotees believe that he is one of the most powerful deities, able to cure sickness, cause or stop rain at will, and protect them from plagues and other pestilences. In former times his image, with its black face and a red snake wound around his arm, was carried around the bounds of each of his 'parishes' during the annual festival as a rite to ward off epidemics. Although he is a 'human' (*jen-shen*) and not a Celestial god (*t'ien-shen*), he is considered to be so powerful that some are too fearful to mention his name or title and believe that they cannot approach his image with a plea except through a spirit medium.

Fa-chu Kung is consequently regarded as a major intermediary between spirit mediums and the most powerful deities of Heaven. His devotees believe that that he can have the wicked punished and the good rewarded, and that he travels twice a month to Heaven where he reports on the good and evil within his 'temple parish'. [Fukien province]

are frequently confused by a number of god-carvers. They are:

- **Chang Kuo-lao**: a recluse, an old scholar and a former adviser to emperors, who rides a white mule, but sitting facing backwards; carries a bamboo cylindrical musical instrument with clappers;
- **Lü Tung-pin**: a scholar or priest with a two-edged sword slung across his back, carries a horse-hair fly switch in his hand; worshipped by the sick;
- **Chung-li Ch'uan**: clutches a fan of feathers with which he fans the souls in the Underworld and returns them to life; a Han dynasty scholar, bare bellied and fat, the chief of the Eight and an ex-general;
- **Li T'ieh-kuai**: a lame beggar with an iron crutch, a patron of druggists, holding a gourd; he assists physicians and is particularly compassionate with those in physical distress;
- **Lan Ts'ai-ho**: of indeterminate sex, but usually regarded as a woman; holds a flute to the mouth, or a basket of flowers; assists florists;
- **Ho Hsien-ku**: holds a large ladle or a lotus flower; was a herbalist's daughter who now helps with home management (only revered by women);

▷ Four of the Pa Hsien: clockwise from the top right: Lü Tung-pin, Chung-li Ch'uan, Ts'ao Kuo-chiu and Han Hsiang-tzu. [Unprovenanced]

▷▷ **Chang Kuo-lao**, the old scholar who rides a white mule, but sitting facing backwards. This paper image was hanging from a temple facade during a festival. [Taiwan]

▽ **Han Hsiang-tzu**, the handsome young man who holds a flute and is the patron of musicians. This is another paper image seen in front of a temple near Taipei. [Taiwan]



- **Han Hsiang-tzu**: a handsome young man who holds a flute and is the patron of musicians; he assists Lü Tung-pin; was a nephew of the scholar Han Yü (see page 84); and
- **Ts'ao Kuo-chiu**: wears official robes and cap and carries a pair of castanets; a renowned geomancer, patron of mummies and actors in Swatow (Ch'aochou); also the patron of historians; brother to an empress.

LÜ TUNG-PIN

Probably the best known and most popular is the Patriarch Lü, **Lü Tung-pin**, literally 'Lü, the Host of the Grottoes'. He was a semi-legendary figure probably born towards the end of the eighth century AD, usually portrayed as a Taoist scholar-doctor with a two-edged sword slung across his back. He is claimed by some to be a noted sorcerer who is still roaming the Earth today. How Lü became an



Immortal, and who he originally was, is shrouded in mystery. Taoists in general regard him as one of their greater Immortals, particularly renowned for his transmutation of flesh from the dead to the living and back again. His image is very frequently to be seen alone on altars as the Taoist mainspring. He is a patron of modern Taoism, revered by many Chinese sects as **Tao-chiao Hsien-shih** (Primary Master of the Taoist Beliefs).

He is one of the two of this group who are worshipped individually. By the nineteenth century Lü was the patron of barbers, jugglers and magicians, of physicians, druggists, herbalists, and of ink

tures, revels and debauches put him on a par with Chi Kung and for this reason lovers never take their problems to him as he is too amorous to be trusted with such secrets. The Immortals are not saints and Lü Tung-pin would appear to be one of the more lascivious.

During World War II he was regarded by the Taiwanese as one of the major spiritual guardians against death and destruction from the American bombing raids on Japanese positions. Lü, Kuan Yü and Ma Tsu were renowned for the successful diversion of bombers away from Taipei in particular and are even credited with having defused falling bombs.



slab makers, of bookshop owners, of mining and commerce in some areas, and of fencers.

Although a popular deity propitiated by devotees for 'male offspring who eventually will become state officials', most worship him for his magic powers with which he rids the world of evil influences, particularly sickness. He is also a deity who often possesses spirit mediums. A famous temple in Canton was the centre for his oracular revelations imparted by sand table. Lü has been borrowed by some Confucianists who have made him one of their patrons of scholars and the Patron of the Literati. He was prayed to by students who believed that he would reveal quotations for forthcoming examination questions in their dreams.

However, there is another side to Lü. Scandalous stories circulate about his wild indulgences. His amorous adven-

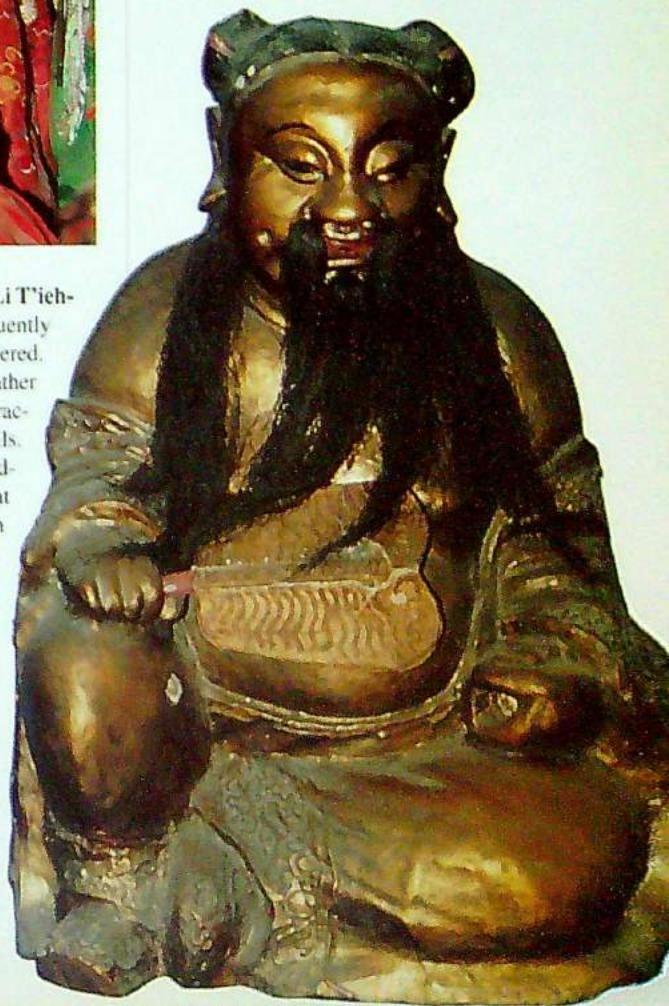
LI T'IEH-KUAI

The second of the Pa Hsien is Li T'ieh-kuai whose image is seen frequently on its own and is popularly revered. 'Li with the Iron Crutch' is a rather pathetic figure, a fictional character with no biographical details. He was a well-built and handsome man, and so good at magic during his life on Earth that Lao Tzu frequently summoned him either to Hua Shan or to Heaven to aid him or to hear him lecture. However, once while visiting Heaven, a disciple or acolyte named Yang-tzu was ordered to guard his terrestrial body, while it was empty of his spirit and apparently dead, but he left it to tend his dying mother.

◁◁ **Ho Hsien-ku**, the lady who holds a large ladle or a lotus flower. She now helps with home management and is only revered by women. [Malaysia]

◁ **Ts'ao Kuo-chiu**, who carries a pair of castanets. He was a renowned geomancer, the patron of mummers and actors in Swatow (Ch'aochou) and was the only aristocrat in the group, being brother to a Sung dynasty empress. [Malaysia]

▽ **Chung-li Ch'uan** clutches a fan of feathers with which he fans the souls in the Underworld and returns them to life. A Han dynasty scholar, he is the chief of the Pa Hsien and is an ex-general. [Canton]



▷▷ Lü Tung-pin's characteristics are such that it is relatively easy to recognize him though one or two other deities have similar features, similar enough to cause possible confusion. He has a long thin face and a black beard; he wears green or blue robes sometimes decorated with *pa-kua* signs (usually the sign of a Taoist priest) and a flat 'tile' scholar's cap. He carries one or more of the following: a fly switch, a gourd of medicines or in which he incarcerates captured demons, a sheathed demon-slaying sword (usually slung across his back, and often the mark of a magician), an umbrella and a large straw hat (also usually slung across his back). [Taiwan]

▽ Li T'ieh-kuai's basic image depicts him as swarthy with bushy, untidy, woolly hair and beard, clothes in tatters and with one foot on an iron crutch, standing on clouds. He carries a gourd, said to be the container for his medicinal potions or the symbol of the pilgrim, and wears a golden headband. He is here portrayed riding on a tiger. [Unprovenanced]

Due to an unfortunate misunderstanding, Li's body was cremated. When his spirit returned, there was no body for him to re-enter. Hunting quickly for someone recently dead, he could only find the corpse of an emaciated lame beggar in a nearby wood which he promptly possessed.

He is always shown on altars, on temple baldaquins and murals as the beggar with his crutch and gourd signifying his ability to cure the sick. One of his first acts after he had entered the beggar was to revive Yang-tzu's dead mother. A mysterious vapour rises from his gourd, variously described as his spiritual self or magical herbal concoctions. At night he hangs his gourd on a hook, jumps in and emerges fresh next morning.

He is a missionary at heart, eager to teach the Tao and, as a cripple, represents the sick, lame and weary. He has a special responsibility to help people without being asked, but is prayed to by the deformed for a cure and by beggars for wealth. Because of his healing powers he

is the patron of Chinese herbal druggists and is portrayed on their sign board, with his iron crutch being the emblem used in herbalists' shops. He was already popular by around 1150. Despite his infirmity he was always in a good humour and appeared blissfully ignorant of his hideous appearance.

One devotee in Hong Kong related a personal experience. A distraught devotee had come to learn from Li T'ieh-kuai through a medium of the death of his son. Two months earlier the man's wife and his two sons had fallen into the sea – the mother and younger son had been saved, but the eldest boy had been drowned. Li T'ieh-kuai answered the devotee's question by forked stick writing on a sand table. He said that he, Li, had rescued the two but, having only had two hands, had been unable to do more – the devotee should be grateful that his wife and one son had been saved.

Founders of Sects

There are three major Taoist popular belief sects or *p'ai*: the Cheng-i P'ai, the Lu Shan P'ai and the Mao Shan P'ai. Each has its own forms of ritual and magic. All Taoist cults and sects are known for their specialities and their own forms of ritual and magic, and despite jealous claims by each to have its own form, their rituals overlap and even have identical magic. For example, despite the Cheng-i sect's jealous claim to the Five Thunder magic, it is not uncommon for Mao Shan practitioners to have identical magic ascribed to them.

THE CHENG-I P'AI

The first Taoist sect, the Cheng-i (literally the Orthodox One, see page 66), which enjoyed the patronage of emperors, was founded by Chang T'ien-shih. Chang is now regarded as a deity by many devotees and his image stands on numerous popular religion altars. The sect, known as the Heavenly Masters, continues to this day although not as an organized body. The title and role are hereditary in the Chang family – the sixty-fourth Master currently lives in Taiwan.

Cheng-i was greatly influenced by Buddhism and observed many deities and festivals which had nothing specifically Taoist about them. It also developed a triad of supreme deities, the San Ch'ing (see page 68). Their philosophic beliefs emphasize rituals, exorcism, divination and purifications developed from other





▷ Portrayed as a Taoist worthy, **Wang Chung-yang** is sitting holding a fan in his right hand, dressed in golden robes decorated in turquoise and dark blue with lozenges of lighter blue incorporated into the pattern. He has a black beard and wears a flat 'tile' cap, but has no unique identifying characteristics. [Hong Kong]

▽ **Chang Tao-ling** or **Chang T'ien-shih** (Chang the Heavenly Master) founded the Cheng-i Pa'i during the second century AD. He is considered to be the 'founder' of popular religion and is said to have had the teachings passed to him by Lao Tzu. Traditionally Lao Tzu was also said to have passed to Chang a description of the Taoist pantheon at that date and ways of controlling certain deities for Chang and his successors.

Others claim he was himself an incarnation of Lao Tzu. Traditionally he is shown in robes bearing the Yin/Yang signs and wearing a tiny Taoist crown. He has a black beard, ear-pressing tufts and a third eye. He carries a seal or bowl of lustral water in his left hand. [Unprovenanced]



religions. Religious specialists of the Cheng-i school, who are not organized into institutions, officiate at ceremonies such as the renewal rites, the *Chiao*, held in rural areas every three to ten years. They make use of talismans and holy water to cure the sick, they sacrifice to the dead ancestors and use charms and amulets to drive away evil spirits.

The major difference between the Ch'üan-chen and Cheng-i sects, is that the latter employs magic spells in its rituals, whereas Ch'üan-chen is Taoist in name only and owes much to Buddhism and Confucianism. Ch'üan-chen devotees believe that destiny can be changed by human actions, that your previous life may have influenced the current one, and that reward and retribution depend upon the merits and demerits that one earns.

THE CH'ÜAN-CHEN P'AI

The Taoist Patriarch **Wang Chung-yang** founded the Ch'üan-chen P'ai (Perfect Truth Sect) during the Southern Sung dynasty. His seven disciples, enlightened ones, were known as the **Pei Ch'i-chen** (Seven True Ones or Immortals of the Northern School). However, in some places, notably Taiwan, it is believed that he and Ch'iu Ch'ang-ch'un (see below) were only members of the Pei Ch'i-chen, and not the founder and senior member respectively. He and his seven disciples lived during the eras of the Southern Sung and Yüan dynasties. The Pei Ch'i-chen taught that meditation and exercises were the path to perfection (and immortality) through internal transformation of mind and body.

Wang Chung-yang was born in Tawei village in Hsienyang, Shansi, in 1113 after being carried in his mother's womb for twenty-four months and eighteen days. His family, which was the richest in Hsienyang, used every means within their power to help the poor during famine years. Unfortunately for the family, they were robbed by other starving people who had failed to find money in their home, and lost all that they had, becoming penniless.

According to a temple biography he sat but failed the imperial examinations when he was nineteen. However, as he was also skilled at arms, he attempted the military examination and became a soldier. He was enlightened at the age of forty-seven when he left his family to join the patriarchs Han Chung-li and Lü Tung-pin (see page 76) who not only



accompanied him in heavy drinking, but also taught him Taoist truths.

A little later another patriarch, Liu Hai-ch'an, gave him water from the River Chin to drink which induced him to drink nothing but water thereafter, though it was said that he always looked drunk. He died in 1170 at the age of fifty-eight. He is described as having been a strong man with elongated eyes – longer indeed than his mouth, with a loud voice and a full, beautiful beard.

THE T'AI-CHI CH'UAN P'AI

Chang of the Three Peaks, **Chang San-feng**, a Taoist mystic, Patriarch and Grand Master of T'ai-chi Ch'uan, was deified during the early Ming dynasty. He established the school of T'ai-chi Ch'uan, a complete system of therapeutic physical exercises which brings one's mind into touch with *T'ai-chi* (the Ultimate), the art of performing all exercise movements slowly with perfect balance, commonly known to foreigners as 'shadow boxing'. He was also, it is claimed, the founder of the Wutang, the school of martial arts.

Chang was born in Feng'ien in what is now Liaoning province and, according to legend, died at a very young age. However, just as he was about to be buried, he rose up and lived for a further sixty years. Following his resurrection he trained to be a monk in a religious order at Wutang Shan. He was famous locally for his ability to foretell the future. When he was approached by devotees he would mumble and whisper, but what he did say was always a sound disposition of the

doctrine of the Three Religions (*San-i Chiao*). After years of study he was summoned by the Ming emperor Hung Wu to come to his aid. Ming histories record that this emperor built several costly Taoist monasteries on Mount T'ai-ho in Hupei, dedicated to the Northern Emperor. Reputedly this was because he had heard a prophecy by Chang that the mountain would pass through a period of great prosperity.

THE LUNG-MEN P'AI

Also known as Ch'iu Ch'ang-ch'un or the Perfect One of Eternal Youth, Ch'ang-ch'un Tsu-shih was a master of alchemy and is renowned as the founder of the Lung-men (Dragon Gate), a sub-sect of the Ch'üan-chen sect, of which he was an early Patriarch. He was the last Immortal to rule the Ch'üan-chen in Shantung. He is also one of the Pei Ch'ichen (see opposite). He is probably best known as the Ch'üan-chen Master who won imperial support for his sect.

Born in Teng Chou in Shantung province in about 1146, he lived during the troublesome time of the Southern Sung. According to tradition, he left home at the age of nineteen to seek perfection in Taoism in the fabulous Kunlun Mountains. He became a hermit, and lived in extreme poverty with only two possessions, a coir (coconut fibre) raincoat and bamboo hat, for seven years. Later Ch'iu Ch'ang-ch'un's fame spread to the capital, and both the Chin-Tatar emperor Shih Tsung and Genghis Khan invited him to visit them. Ch'iu so impressed Genghis with his teachings that it is said that he stopped killing from that day forward.

His image is to be seen on two altars in Taoist monasteries in Hong Kong on a secondary altar in a main hall dedicated to Wang Ch'ung-yang, who was his teacher. Lü Tung-pin is the only deity on the other secondary altar. These three Immortals are known collectively as the San Tai (Three Generations), with Lü the eldest, Wang the middle, and Ch'iu the junior third generation.

THE MAO SHAN P'AI

The Mao Shan sect, renowned for its seances and medium trances, was founded in the fourth century AD according to Mao Shan priests. Its priests consider themselves to be the highest ranking of the Taoist orders. The original sect appears to have been meditative – only later did it fall into line with other sects

when the popularity of spirit writing, charms and other forms of religious activity developed. The Mao Shan was the most powerful Taoist sect during the T'ang and maintained its great prestige down to at least 1949. According to devotees the powers of the Mao Shan P'ai are no less than those of the Cheng-i P'ai (see above). As the Mao brothers, according to their sect history, were born some two hundred years before Chang, Mao Shan devotees say that this proves that their sect is the senior of the two. Inter-sect rivalry still exists.

The main sect centre, perched on the highest of the three peaks of what used to be called Chuch'u Shan and now colloquially as Mao Shan from the village of that name at the base of the mountain, still operates but with only one priest, aged seventy-seven in 1993. The temple has the original images of the three Mao brothers, all other images were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

Popular tradition often connects the Taoists of Mao Shan with black magic, with altars in small popular religion temples before which priests perform arcane practices and rituals with excessive enthusiasm, thus encouraging devotees to savour the magic thereby induced. It is, however, recognized that members of the Mao Shan practise meditation and rituals from the basic texts of the Yellow Court Canon and the Ta-tung classic. The *Tao-ts'ang* (Taoist Canon) also contains a major treatise on Mao Shan.

The Mao Shan brothers, the eldest in particular, are regarded by devotees as powerful exorcists, demon destroyers who have the enormous powers necessary to rescue people from demonic attack (ie causing sickness, ill-fortune, etc.) Alchemy was a speciality of the Mao Shan during their early years when they were seeking the elixir of immortality – there is special mention of an infusion being prepared from magic mushrooms grown on the mountain.

The San Mao (Three Mao Brothers) manifests itself mainly in popular religion temples where there are spirit mediums who call upon the Brothers for advice and for San Mao protective amulets and charms. These are dispensed by the temple staff on behalf of the mediums. The charms are renowned as extremely effective, even when images of the San Mao Brothers are not present in the temple.



△ Images on altars, mostly on the altars of Kung Fu halls in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, portray Chang San-feng as a Taoist adept with a tiny crown, blue or yellow wrap-over loose fitting robes, a straggly beard and holding a fly whisk. [Singapore]

▽ Portrayed seated, dressed in blue or golden robes, with a black beard, Ch'ang-ch'un Tsu-shih is wearing the tiny Taoist crown and holds a fly switch in his right hand. In private images, his blue robes are often decorated with *pa-kua* signs. [Hong Kong]





△ This is a standard image of K'ung Tzu, located in a temple in Kaohsiung city. It is not at all similar to the image in the memorial temple in his home town of Ch'ü-fu. [Taiwan]

▽ The Chinese characters for K'ung Tzu's Eight Virtues are shown below.

	Hsiao – filial piety
佛	Ti – brotherly reverence
像	Chung – loyalty
神	Hsin – honesty
像	Li – politeness, propriety
	I – righteousness
	Lien – integrity
	Chieh – chastity

Confucian Deities

The teachings of K'ung Tzu (Confucius) are aimed at promoting certain virtues and goals with which society can confront social and political crises. These ideals, if supported by loyal subordinates, filial children and intelligent rulers will form the basis of a stable social and political order. Moral acts by rulers and scholar-statesmen were the guidelines for his society. K'ung Tzu's teachings were known as *Cheng-chiao* (orthodox or correct teachings) or *Ju-chiao* (teaching of the learned). His thought – including respect for authority, filial piety, self-improvement and social harmony – have more than anything else moulded Chinese opinion over the centuries.

Long hours of debate, mainly by Christian missionaries, have gone into the question whether or not Confucianism is a religion. Some regard it as a non-religious humanism, others describe its tenets and rituals in religious terms. But however you regard it, the offering of sacrifice to K'ung Tzu and the ancestors may be seen as a display of filial obedience as laid down by K'ung Tzu himself, rather than a form of religious worship. It was, and to many still is, a matter of long-standing custom.

Confucian temples contain only tablets dedicated to K'ung Tzu and his disciples. However, a number of popular religion temples, sometimes referred to as Confucian temples because the images on the main altar were all Confucian, contained statues of K'ung Tzu and his major disciples.

K'ung Tzu

The most famous of all Chinese philosopher sages, K'ung Tzu or Confucius (c. 552–479 BC) lived just before the beginning of the period known as the Warring States (475–221 BC), a time when decadence in the social structure had become obvious. He saw his mission in life to save the ideals of tradition, and had no intention of founding a religion.

K'ung Tzu compared the evil of a government which overtaxed the peasants with what it did for them, and although he sympathized with the poor he noticed how thriftless and indifferent they had become. He wandered, studied

and learned; he travelled and became more discontented with his era. He saw clearly that a king should provide an example to his kingdom and that ordinary people needed training and discipline. He gathered disciples and when his lord went into exile for twenty years, K'ung Tzu went with him. When they returned, K'ung Tzu was promoted to Chief Minister.

He had strong views about the role of women. As far as he was concerned their function was merely domestic and, although married, he had little time for them. One of his better known anecdotes claimed that, 'Women and uneducated people are the most difficult to deal with. When one is familiar with them, they become impudent (lose their respect for you) and when one ignores them, they resent it.'

K'ung Tzu taught that there are Eight Virtues. They are frequently seen written in very large individual characters painted on the internal side walls of the main halls of temples:

<i>Hsiao</i>	filial piety
<i>Ti</i>	brotherly reverence
<i>Chung</i>	loyalty
<i>Hsin</i>	honesty
<i>Li</i>	politeness
<i>I</i>	righteousness
<i>Lien</i>	integrity
<i>Chieh</i>	chastity

Images of the Sage are normally very similar to the image in the Memorial Temple in K'ung Tzu's home town. The usual characteristics are his unique cap, a

basis on which ethics and social order of imperial China were founded.

- **Yen Tzu** was a kinsman, and one of the favourite disciples, of K'ung Tzu. Born in 514 BC, he died at the early age of 32, and was canonized in the thirteenth century. He ranks first among the Four Assessors of the Great Sage.
- **Tzu Ssu** was a bold, impulsive and outspoken man. He was a mandarin in Wei who, having refused to forsake his prince, died fighting rebels in 479 BC, as K'ung Tzu had predicted.
- **Tseng Tzu** was also known as Tseng Yen, Tseng Ts'an and Tseng Fu-tzu. He has an individual festival celebrated on the third day of the tenth lunar month.

Later Confucian Scholars

The images of various other famous Confucian scholars have been noted on popular religion temple altars.

Chu Hsi, also known as **Chu Wen-kung**, was a neo-Confucian philosopher, born in Anhui in 1130 during the Sung dynasty. He is probably best remembered for his commentary on Confucian classics. His book, *Hsiao-hsüeh* (Rituals for Family Life), was influential throughout China as the standard authority consulted by high and low alike. Images of Chu Hsi portray him as a standard scholar-official, usually holding a scroll book, and with a black beard, but without any unique characteristics. In a large temple in Tainan, where he is one of many deities, he could easily be mistaken for an Earth God.

At the height of the T'ang dynasty's prosperity, **Han Yü** (AD 768–824), otherwise known as **Han Wen-kung**, travelled from Honan where he had been born to the capital at Ch'angan to compete in the official examinations. Having come from a poor and humble family when he was posted as a junior official he petitioned the emperor to reduce the taxes levied on the poor peasants. The emperor was irritated and had him demoted to a lesser post. Legend relates how when Han Yü was thirty-eight, the emperor offered a reward for an elixir of life. Han was horrified and wrote an essay denouncing such superstition and suggested that all books about magic should be burnt.

He was staunchly Confucian, strongly opposed Buddhism and superstition, and also memorialized the emperor about a

supposed bone of Buddha over which the Court had gone mad: 'Buddha has been dead a long time, and here is the Son of Heaven bringing this stinking bone of a dead barbarian into the interior of his palace.' Most Chinese scholars over the past thousand years have read his memorial *Lun Fo-ku piao* (usually known as 'A Scholar Speaks'). The emperor ordered his execution and Han was only saved by the intervention of other officials.

He was banished to Ch'aouchou for his 'impertinence' where, within a very short time, he had established a school for the primitive settlers and the natives. He is remembered as the great official who brought law and order to this remote area of the then-barbarian south China. In legend, he was begged by the people of Ch'aouchou to rid their neighbourhood of the crocodiles which plagued them. He wrote out a warning which was thrown into the river together with an offering of a goat and a pig, after which crocodiles were never again seen in the area.

He regained the emperor's confidence and was recalled to the capital where, not long afterwards, he was sent to persuade some rebels to surrender after the army had failed to quell them. He succeeded in doing so after offering a practical



△ **Chu Hsi**, the twelfth century neo-Confucianist philosopher. He was the author of *Hsiao-hsüeh* (Rituals for Family Life). [Taiwan]

▷ **Han Yü**, also known as Han Wen-kung, was the T'ang official who was outspoken in his objections to foreign religions, including Buddhism, and superstitions. [Taiwan]



demonstration of the value of Confucianism. He died at the age of fifty-six.

Having been so violently opposed to superstitious practices, it is ironic that he is now regarded by some as a deity and his image seen on a number of temple altars. In Tainan and in Pingtung in southern Taiwan his images depict him as a seated scholar-official dressed in Tang dynasty robes with a winged hat, a black beard and holding a *ju-i* sceptre in the crook of his right arm. In Pingtung he is also holding an open book in his left hand.

Chou Kung, who died in 1105 BC, was regent and counsellor to the son of Wu Wang, founder of the Chou dynasty. He used his own son as a model and companion for the young king and reputedly beat his own son whenever the young king made a mistake.

In imperial times Chou Kung was often claimed to be one of the greatest Chinese and was frequently named by K'ung Tzu as an example of a paragon. He is revered for his virtue, common-sense and pragmatism. The *Farmer's Almanac* devotes several pages each year to Chou Kung's interpretations of dreams under the title of 'Old Man Chou'. He is approached in temples by devotees who seek his guidance in personal problems through the divining blocks.

Legend claims that Chou Kung was miraculously conceived. After the birth his mother, fearing there was something

inauspicious in his conception, exposed him on the road side in the depth of winter. He survived, was taken home, nursed and grew up to be a leader of his times.

Chinese histories relate that he was the author of the classic, *I Ching* (Book of Changes), as well as being the inventor of divination blocks and the third of the pre-eminent sages. He drew up a legal code and devoted himself to the welfare of the state.

In Kat O, an island off the north-eastern tip of the New Territories of Hong Kong a small shrine dedicated to this deity, recognized locally as Chou Wang, contains a small image of the deity to whom locals pray when they suffer from insomnia. His image, which pre-1949 used to stand in a temple on T'ai Shan in Shantung province, portrayed him as an old man with a long white beard, sitting holding a tablet in both hands before his chest. It was a striking image of a large-boned, strong man – bluff and good-natured with a magnificent head and a face full of intelligence.

His was a common image in northern Chekiang province where he was honoured for his work constructing a sea wall along the upper reaches of the Bay of Hangchow to control the river's bore. A ceiling painting in the main hall of the temple of the I-kuan Tao sect at Nanhua near Tainan portrays Chou Kung wearing a Western-style crown with a halo, but dressed in Chinese robes.

▽ Chou Kung is here portrayed in one of the murals in the large dome of the temple which forms the cult centre of the I-kuan Tao sect in Nanhua. [Taiwan]





Buddhist Deities

Indian Buddhism spread only gradually to China. It gained influence during the period of late Han, but did not supplant native Chinese deities, differing as it did from earlier beliefs in China because it renounced the world as dust and illusion caught in the cycles of re-incarnation.

Over the centuries, it mutated into a radically different form of Buddhism, leading to images of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, Lohan and the enforcers and attendants of the Indo-Buddhist Underworld appearing on Chinese altars alongside earlier deities. As a result of market forces, Taoist counterparts of Buddhist deities were 'created' resulting in a muddling of Taoist and Buddhist cults, and Celestial and Underworld bureaucracies. It encouraged the concept of the non-filial, celibate clergy and introduced new Heavens as well as the Courts of Hell containing human spirits.

There is a temptation to regard any deity referred to as *Fu*, a Buddha, as **The Buddha** – the founder of the faith, the deity who taught what today is referred to as Buddhism. He is known by his personal names of Gautama or **Sakyamuni** (Shih-chia-mu-ni Fu) and lived during the sixth century BC. 'A' Buddha is one who has understanding and has achieved the highest degree of sainthood, one who is ready to enter Nirvana.

In general terms Buddhism is divided into Mahayana (northern) Buddhism and Hinayana (southern) Buddhism. Mahayana is mixed with elements of Taoism and Confucianism and is dominant in India, China and Japan; Hinayana is dominant in South-East Asia: Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Laos.

To simplify to extremes, the Hinayana School emphasizes meritorious deeds by individuals, as opposed to Mahayana which concentrates on prayers to a deity. Mahayana possesses a vast pantheon of Heavenly Buddhas and bodhisattvas whose promises include not only hopes of salvation and protection from dangers, but also understanding and foresight. A comparatively new religion, Lamaism, developed out of Mahayana, first in Tibet and later in Mongolia. The occasional Lamaist image appears in southern China, but there used to be dedicated Lamaist temples in Peking and Sian.

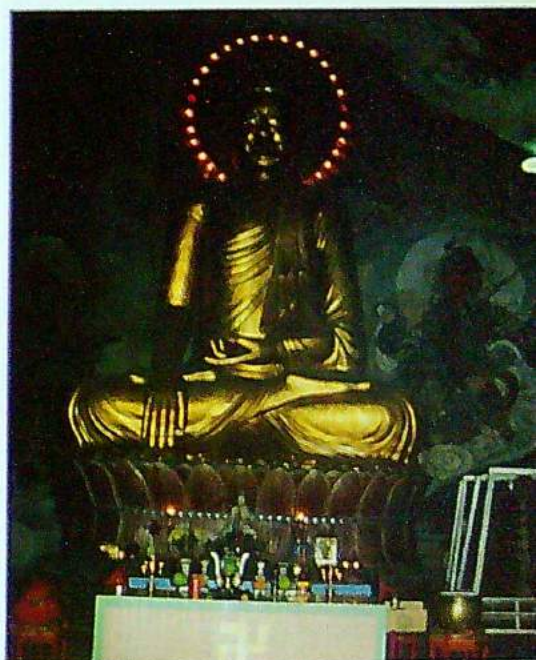
Numerous *tsung* (schools) have grown up within Mahayana Buddhism. The Ching-t'u Tsung (Amidist or Pure Land School), also known as the Lien-hua Tsung (Lotus School), is one of the main traditions of Northern Buddhism. It was the first to propagate the idea of a Western Paradise – all souls who enter it avoid the trauma and horrors of rebirth on Earth. This is the Chinese explanation of the Indian concept of Nirvana. Other schools include the Ch'an Tsung (Zen or Meditation School). A number of minority schools have been established since the Ming, each with a founder (normally called *Tsu-shih* or Patriarch).

Sakyamuni, The Buddha

Bearing in mind that there have been countless Buddhas over the eons, only one stands out as **The Buddha**. His image has been noted in seventy-four temples and monasteries in Hong Kong and four in Macau. He is also claimed to be the main deity in over 330 temples, monasteries and nunneries in present-day Taiwan. He is, however, very rarely to be seen in popular religion temples or on household altars.

Sakyamuni was incarnated as Prince Siddhartha, the heir apparent to the king of Kapilavasta, a petty Indian ruler. He married and had a son, but was sheltered by his father from the realities of death,

◁ The Meditative Buddha is the most common pose. In this, **Sakyamuni** sits in deep meditation on a lotus blossom, dressed in a flowing monk's robe with his eyes half closed. The firm yet wonderfully mild lines of his mouth depict peace, harmony, understanding and sympathy. His legs are crossed in the lotus position, soles resting uppermost on his thighs, and his hands rest one on top of the other, palms upward, on his lap. A characteristic feature is the black hair in tight curls which cover the top of the head and are usually described as 'snails'. Like most other Buddhas, he has pendent ear lobes, and occasionally a jewel in the forehead and a swastika on his bare chest. [Shanghai]



△ The second pose in which **The Buddha** is shown – the Witness – has his left hand lying flat upon his legs with the right hand stretched downward, palm towards the body and touching the ground. [Singapore]

▽ Another type of image of Sakyamuni (The Buddha) is the standing new-born baby. This is the image that is washed by Buddhist priests during the annual ceremony on the Buddha's birthday in May. [Unprovenanced]



Two other forms of Sakyamuni (The Buddha) to be seen are:

- △ a reclining or sleeping figure [Vietnam],
- ▷ an extremely thin ascetic, often with unkempt hair and beard. [Unprovenanced]

disease and old age. When he was twenty-nine, he saw an elderly beggar and realized that no one can escape their destiny. Leaving his palace, wife and son, he searched many places and many ways for the truth. Finally, seated at the foot of a Bo tree near to what is now the Indo-Nepalese border, he attained enlightenment at the age of thirty-five. He preached on the way to attain enlightenment for the next forty-five years and died around 480 BC in Kusinagara. He showed by his personal example the way to religious salvation.

There are three fundamental types of seated Buddha. Most common is the Meditative Buddha, showing Sakyamuni in a pose called *Ch'ien Pai Yi Hua-shen* (the Hundred Billion Human Manifestations). This image of the Buddha was based upon Indian models carried to China through central Asia and modified on the way. The second, the Witness, has his left hand lying flat upon his legs with the right hand stretched downward, palm towards the body and touching the ground. In the third, Teaching, the right arm is half raised to bring the hand to the level of the breast with the palm outward. The left hand hangs downward by the side or grasps and supports the robe.

In one relatively common trinity of Buddhas, his image stands in the centre flanked by O-mi-t'o Fu on his right and Yao-shi Fu on his left. This trinity is the main group in at least fourteen monasteries in Hong Kong. Another common group depicts him with Kuan Yin on his right and Ta Shih Chih on his left.

O-mi-t'o Fu

The Buddhist deity O-mi-t'o Fu, is often written as Omitofu, Amida, Amitayas and in the original Sanskrit, Amitabha. He is the fourth Dhyani (cosmic) Buddha of the very popular Ching-t'u Tsung (Amidist or Pure Land School), whose chief tenet is eternal salvation by faith. The cult of Amida, the Buddha of the Western Paradise, which developed in China, is widespread in Mahayana Buddhism. There is no hint of this Buddha in early Buddhism or in Hinayana Buddhism, and his coming marked a turn in Buddhist thinking.

O-mi-t'o Fu did not come to prominence in China until about the seventh century AD, although it is claimed that an image of him in Loyang, the then capital, was made for devotees to worship during

the middle decades of the fourth century. His image has acquired one of the principal roles in Ching-t'u Buddhist temples and monasteries, the place of honour on the left hand of Sakyamuni.

He has variously been described as a collective image and concept which includes all Buddhas and the Absolute; as the ninth son of one of the major Buddhas; or as the son of a 'pre-historic' Buddha. Still others claim that The Buddha was only one of O-mi-t'o Fu's last incarnations. He is a spiritual figure of speech, the saving mercy which makes possible the release of the whole of creation from sin, sorrow, punishment and suffering. O-mi-t'o Fu is a gentle compassionate figure emphasizing the promise of simple and direct means of salvation; his devotees are concerned with the attainment of the Western Paradise where souls are immortal, rather than the annihilating Nirvana.

Images or framed prints portraying O-mi-t'o Fu are kept by devotees either in the living room or near to the bed. Traditionally he was a meditating Buddha with his hands on his lap in meditation. Nowadays, most of his standing images depict him with an extraordinarily long right arm.

Although there are variations, his story is as follows: Over a period of several thousand years there were eighty-one Buddhas beginning with Dipankara and ending with Lokeshvararaja. A monk



named Dharmakara, intending to become a Buddha, approached Lokeshvararaja, chanted the usual praise to The Buddha, and asked him to become his teacher. Dharmakara meditated for some time and then made forty-eight vows whereby he undertook to become a Buddha only on condition that he could save all living things and establish a Kingdom of Perfect Blessedness where all living creatures might enjoy perpetual happiness and wisdom. His eighteenth vow was the

Sutra) relates how Dharmakara subsequently, through his vow to save all living creatures, gained such merit that he became a bodhisattva and later, O-mi-t'o Fu, a Buddha. He was subsequently referred to as the Buddha of Boundless Age and Light (**Wu Liang-shou Wu Liang-kuang**). The most common prayer to him – *Na-mo O-mi-t'o Fu* – universal among Chinese Buddhists of the Ching-t'u Tsung, is a cry of happiness, thanksgiving and supplication, uttered in times

▽ Stones like this one, bearing the name of **O-mi-t'o Fu**, are often seen near bridges or at the side of roads. They have been erected in memory of a person who died an unfortunate death, before their due date, to help the soul through to the Western Paradise. Everyone who reads the stone unconsciously prays for the deceased person. [Hong Kong]



◁ Modern images of **O-mi-t'o Fu** are usually easily recognizable. He has a large head, long-lobed ears, noble features, an urna (bump of wisdom) on his forehead, and a slender body with slightly rounded shoulders.

Traditionally he was a meditating Buddha with his hands on his lap in meditation.

Nowadays, most standing images depict him with an extraordinarily long right arm, hanging down to his knee; his left either bears a stylized lotus blossom which is often taken to be a flat topped pagoda or incense pot, or is held palm out at waist height.

This statue is enormous – the glass case at its feet contains the embalmed body of the founder of the temple! [Hong Kong]

most significant: 'Let all living things call my name when I become a Buddha, and have faith in me, and provided they have not been guilty of the five unpardonable sins nor slandered or vilified the true religion, the desire to be born into my Heaven will surely be fulfilled.'

The *O-mi-t'o Fu Ching* (O-mi-t'o Fu

of peace and war, in sadness, sickness and joy. Many believe that uttering it but once in belief is the key to salvation.

Kuan Yin P'u-sa

Originally a major Buddhist deity, **Kuan Yin P'u-sa** (literally 'hearing the cry') is the Bodhisattva who Watches and Listens

▽ The majority of Buddhist deities had Indian and even Hindu origins, and Kuan Yin is no exception. Her history as a bodhisattva goes back to Buddhism in India and beyond, where she was a male deity with the original Indian title of Avalokitesvara meaning 'The Lord who looks in every direction'.

Kuan Yin's image is so common that it does not seem unusual to Chinese laymen until they have pointed out her bare feet, low cut dress, flat chest and bare neck, and they recall that feet and neck are erogenous zones and never bared. Their response is usually to point out that she is, of course, a deity. When it is explained that Kuan Yin's original images were masculine, the majority of Chinese are sceptical, but intrigued now they have observed these obvious male characteristics. [Unprovenanced]



▷ This is a god-carver's reference sketch for an image of Kuei Wang (see page 96). he is said by some to be Ta Shih Yeh, the green-faced demonic disguise that Kuan Yin adopts when moving around in the Underworld.

(for the cries of anguish of humans in distress). The cult is a common factor in all Chinese religious sects and schools, and was possibly introduced as early as the third century AD when the relevant sutras were believed to have first arrived in China. By the tenth century, worship of Kuan Yin was widespread. In Chinese Buddhism, she is one of the five Celestial bodhisattvas and also one of the four great bodhisattvas of Mahayana. There are some who regard Kuan Yin as an incarnation of the Buddha.

Commonly known to foreigners as the Goddess of Mercy, Kuan Yin is by far the most popular of the deities on Chinese altars, trusted and loved by both men and women, though primarily worshipped by women. She is the personification of the Merciful who hears those who call upon her, and helps them even to leading them to the peace and happiness of the Western Heaven of O-mi-t'o Fu. The twenty-fifth chapter of the Lien-hua Ching (Lotus Sutra) extols her virtues. Kuan Yin frequently is accompanied by her two aides (see page 53). One is a youth, Shan Ts'ai; the other is a maid, Yü Nü Niang-niang, who stands on her right. Kuan Yin's popularity is also reflected by the number and variety of prayer books, tracts and other hand outs devoted entirely to her work, life, manifestations, etc.

Because of her immense popularity, Kuan Yin has long since been transformed from a purely Buddhist deity to a radiant popular religion goddess. She is the giver of male children to the childless, and a loving source of help in times of need, particularly domestic worries usually connected with children. Kuan Yin is a saviour with boundless compassion; a comforter of the sick, lost, senile, frightened and unfortunate; a deity consulted about family problems and sickness, a healer to whom women turn to help them conceive, to bring them through the dangers of childbirth, and for their children during their illnesses.

She also protects seafarers, farmers and travellers. Her blessings are relied on for prosperity in business, for health and happiness, and her images are much in evidence everywhere – both on altars and in virtually every living room.

Among her many and varied tasks, Kuan Yin has one very important role, caring for the souls of the dead in the Underworld. Taoists also invoke her during the rituals performed after burial

to free the soul from the Ten Courts of Judgement in the Underworld. The function of Ti-tsang Wang (see page 92) as the friend and protector of souls is also attributed to Kuan Yin, who additionally has all the attributes of Ti-tsang and is just as familiar a visitor to the Underworld, to comfort and save, as he is.

Offerings to Kuan Yin usually consist of tea, fruit and money. In many places it is said that it would be inappropriate to offer her meat of any kind as she is a vegetarian, though in other communities this taboo is limited to pork. However, even in these areas there are some who say that they do offer her pork on her birthday claiming that 'she enjoys a bit of pork as much as anyone'. Tiny cloth or paper shoes are placed on her altars in two temples in Hong Kong as thank offerings for the safe delivery of a son, and small squares of beaten gold are also donated and hung round the neck of Kuan Yin images, again as thank offerings.

Pictures of Avalokitesvara from the ninth century on often depicted the bare-foot Buddhist figure carrying a pennant over his shoulder as the guide of souls through Purgatory. This image developed over the centuries into first Kuan Yin in her asexual form, then later into the green-faced, demon-featured Ta Shih Yeh. He is Kuan Yin, compassionately seeking the remission of sins for those in Purgatory, disguised to avoid being assaulted in the Underworld by souls beyond redemption.





◁ In her form as Princess **Miao Shan**, **Kuan Yin** is depicted standing or sitting on a lotus, usually with her thousand arms, but always holding either a vase, lotus flower or pearl, or with her hands held together in prayer or blessing. [Hong Kong]

Many stories are told of her origin. One of the most popular is about **Miao Shan**, the Third Daughter of a ruler of a Chou dynasty kingdom, who refused to marry and eventually was permitted by her father to enter a nunnery. She was given the most degrading duties in the nunnery, imposed at the request of her father. When these failed to break her resolution, her father ordered her execution rather than allow her to sully the family honour. However, the sword broke into a thousand pieces against her neck. Her father then ordered that she be strangled, and her soul fled to the Underworld.

She passed through Purgatory in a flash due to her essential goodness and on reaching Paradise she chose to return to life to help others. One day she heard that her father was incurably ill and so sent him a potion compounded of her eyes and flesh. He was immediately cured and was so grateful that he accepted the doctrine of Buddha and ordered a statue to be made of his daughter 'to be perfect in every detail' (*ch'üan-shou ch'üan-yen* or 'complete with arms and eyes' hers having been removed to prepare the medicine). The sculptor misheard and made her image with 'a thousand arms and a thousand eyes' (*ch'ien-shou ch'ien-yen*).

Wei T'o

The Deva Protector of the Dharma, **Wei T'o**, guards the sanctuary of all Chinese Buddhist temples. He stands with his

back to the main entrance in the inner temple hall facing the main altar and back-to-back with **Mi-lo Fu** (see above) who greets visitors with his smiling welcome. **Wei T'o** is also to be seen guarding many a popular religion temple. He is also the Guardian of the Buddhist Law responsible for discipline in monasteries and nunneries. His likeness appears on the last page of Buddhist scriptures, again as the protector of the writings. There is a belief that, if a monk breaks his vows of abstinence and vegetarianism, he will fall sick when he passes **Wei T'o** on his return to the monastery, and thereby earn himself prompt punishment by his superiors.

Wei T'o's temper is renowned. In his zeal for righteousness he is apt to be too severe and strike down the guilty before they have time to repent. Even though the rage he flies into is righteous and he destroys many demons who attempt to creep into temples, it has been decreed that he will always stand so that he can see The Buddha's calming face, and The Buddha together with **Kuan Yin** can keep an eye on him. If a wall comes between the entrance and the main deity, **Wei T'o** will stand on the same side as the deity and away from the entrance.

Ti-tsang Wang

The Saviour of Souls in the Underworld, the Bodhisattva **Ti-tsang Wang**, is a major Buddhist deity. His promise of salvation and resurrection after death for both the rich and the poor guarantees him

▽ **Wei T'o** is one of the comparatively few deities who can be identified without difficulty. He is shown as a clean-shaven, young soldier. His antiquated uniform, armour and helmet, and his ponderous boots are survivals from the centuries when soldiers stood guard over their senior officers.

He has a spiked helmet (sometimes bearing a spread-wing bird), with a flowing sash around his head. He stands on clouds or waves and holds what looks like a club, cudgel or knobby sword (known as a 'diamond sword' or thunderbolt) used to destroy demons and other enemies.

[Temple mural, northern China]





△ The most common grouping in which Kuan Yin's image is to be seen is in the Trinity of the Ching-t'u Tsung (Pure Land School). This grouping is known colloquially as the Hsi-fang San Sheng (Three Saints from the West). It includes O-mi-t'o Fu in the centre, Ta Shih Chih on his left hand and Kuan Yin on his right. This Trinity is widely revered as deities who can save people after death by bringing them to the Western Heaven.

The images often cannot be differentiated, but their usual characteristics are that Ta Shih Chih holds a lotus flower with a long stem, Kuan Yin holds a vase and O-mi-t'o Fu has a swastika on his chest. [Eastern China]

▷ **Ti-tsang Wang's** image with lowered eyes and graceful, compassionate countenance is comparatively standard though it does have a number of alternate forms. He is typically portrayed sitting cross-legged and barefoot on a lotus flower, dressed in a loose fitting robe and wearing a biretta. Often there is a begging bowl on his lap, resting on his upturned, overlapping palms, although here he holds a rattle-stick as well. In a number of places he is shown sitting side-saddle on his mythical steed, known colloquially as a lion. This image, flanked by his disciples, Tao Ming and Min Kung, is in the Ch'en family shrine in a cemetery in Manila. His image is often confused with Mu Lien (see page 100), but they are separate deities who are often portrayed side by side on altars. [Philippines]

unrivalled popularity. He himself overcame death and has devoted himself to helping others to do the same. He is the compassionate and merciful bodhisattva, protector and friend of the dying and dead, and in particular of dead children, who was sent by O-mi-t'o Fu to offer solace to the dying, and support and comfort to the poor and hungry. Ti-tsang is the Saviour and not the bureaucratic chief of the Underworld.

Ti-tsang Wang has free access to every part of the Underworld (see page 178) where he circulates preaching the Buddhist Law. When he encounters a truly repentant soul, he approaches the Judge in whose section the soul is currently being judged and seeks to have the punishments reduced. A supplication is made to Ti-tsang on the death of a relative for his assistance in leading the soul speedily through the judgement courts and hells of the Underworld. The petition pleads for remission of sins and deliverance, but only after the grieving relatives who remain in the human world have put a reasoned case to him.

Few legends are told about Ti-tsang's life, though one well-known story relates how he reached the Underworld. As originally there were no oxen, people had to pull their own ploughs. Ti-tsang in his usual kind and thoughtful way asked the Jade Emperor (see page 51) for draught animals to help with the ploughing. The

Jade Emperor refused because cynically he realized that humans would work the ox without respite and then kill and eat it, and use its hide. After much persuasion, and with Ti-tsang standing surety, the Jade Emperor reluctantly agreed. However, humanity acted just as the Jade Emperor had predicted and he was so furious that he banished Ti-tsang to the Underworld for ever. This story shows how the older native religion fused with imported Buddhism.

Ta Shih Chih

The Bodhisattva of Power and Strength, **Ta Shih Chih**, is the second most important bodhisattva in Chinese Buddhism. He represents the Buddha-wisdom of O-mi-t'o Fu (see above) and is the Lord of Strength and the Lord of Success. He broke the weary circle of *karma* (birth, death and rebirth) with his great power and has once and for all provided an objective, atonement. He accomplished the greatest act of redemption: however, he cannot mediate the salvation of the individual, only Kuan Yin can do this.

Little is really known about him. The popular version is that he was sent to



Earth in human form by The Buddha to assist people through difficult times. Some claim that he is the son of O-mi-t'o Fu. Although he is regarded as a protector of humanity, he is also well known for the pleasure he took in receiving alms. He is a comparative newcomer to China – traditionally he is supposed to have arrived from India at the monastery at Nan Shan in Kiangsu province.

In the Ching-t'u Tsung trinity, the **Hsi-fang San Sheng** (Three Saints from the West), Ta Shih Chih stands on the right hand of O-mi-t'o Fu. While he seems to have a far less significant place than O-mi-t'o Fu and Kuan Yin, the Three are commonly prayed to as a group for assistance on behalf of a newly deceased person.

Chun-t'i P'u-sa & Tou Mu

A Tantric (Lamaist) female bodhisattva, Chun-t'i P'u-sa, is often confused with both Kuan Yin and the Taoist stellar deity, Tou Mu (see page 105). This section covers both Chun-t'i and Tou Mu – despite the ambiguities, they are separate and distinct deities.

Several other separate deities also bear the title Chun-t'i in Chinese; they

are also confused by devotees. There have been instances when two almost identical images stand in close proximity on an altar, one identified as Chun-t'i and the other as Tou Mu; and yet in other places a single image is referred to by both of these titles as alternatives for one and the same deity. Statements such as one god-carver made when asked about Chun-t'i is an excellent example of the confusion. He never doubted that Chun-t'i and Kuan Yin were sisters, born of the same parents and brought up together in Fukien province.

CHUN-T'I P'U-SA

The Bodhisattva of Light (or the Dawn), **Chun-ti P'u-sa**, is worshipped by Ch'an Buddhists as a merciful goddess, and is regarded as a manifestation of Kuan Yin. However, many temple keepers say that Chun-t'i is not connected with Kuan Yin in any way. Their association goes back to the original relationship of Chun-t'i with Kuan Yin's original version, the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. Both promised to save humanity and bring them to deliverance before they themselves entered Nirvana.

According to the *Feng-shen Yen-i* (see page 60), Chun-t'i was summoned to Heaven to acquire the necessary skills to take on K'ung Hsüan, one of the contestants for the dynastic throne, because she had attained the required degree of perfection on Earth. She was whisked aloft in a rainbow and, having acquired the skills necessary, reappeared in a cloud of fire with twenty-four heads and eighteen arms. Throwing a silken cord around her adversary's throat, she turned K'ung Hsüan into a one-eyed red peacock on which she rode off to the Western Heavens. Despite many miraculous and fabulous duels, she was always victorious over all her opponents.

Chun-t'i is the main deity in only one temple in Hong Kong and Macau. She is the only Buddhist deity surrounded by popular religion images on a very crowded altar. She is also a major image in the Monastery of the Ten Thousand Buddhas at Shatin where she is depicted standing, in long Buddhist robes, with bare feet and the bodhisattva crown, remarkably similar to one form of Kuan Yin. She has her normal two arms held palms together in prayer, her two middle fingers extended and the remainder bent, with a temple inscription describing her as 'the Mother of the Buddha, represented with one



△ **Chun-t'i** is usually shown, in typical Lamaist style, with eight or eighteen arms and hands, each hand holding a necklace, cudgel, jar, golden arrow, halberd, or bell, etc. The main two hands are held palms pressed together, before the chest, in prayer. The uppermost hands hold discs of the Sun and Moon respectively; the remainder hold various attributes including a seal of office, a sword, shield and fly switch. She is sometimes represented with three heads, though usually she has one head with three faces, one of which is a sow. Chun-t'i often has a third eye in the centre of her forehead; this is usually a Taoist form, but is interpreted as a metamorphosed caste mark. [Unprovenanced]



▽ This plump image with his broad, good-natured smile has lost all trace of its Indian origins which depict him as thin, serious and austere. Early images of **Mi-lo Fu** are close to the style of Central Asian images. They have long ears, a smiling face, large hands held out in blessing and welcome, standing dressed in a close-fitting robe, slim and barefoot. [Hong Kong]



▷ In Hong Kong, the standard image of **P'i-lu Che-na Fu** depicts him seated cross-legged on a lotus throne in the mystic pose of meditation, wearing loose robes and wearing the bodhisattva's biretta. His hands are held together in prayer in front of his chest, fingers of both hands bent and enmeshed, with the forefinger of each straight and only touching at the finger tips. [Hong Kong]

thousand eyes and arms, who saves all beings from bitter suffering'.

TOU MU

In Lamaist (Tantric) Buddhism, **Tou Mu** is a common deity with her three eyes and many arms; she is considered to be an incarnation of Avalokitesvara, known throughout China as **Kuan Yin** (see page 89). This doubtless explains the confusion with **Kuan Yin** in central and southern China. In northern and central China in Tantric Buddhist temples, the Lamaist goddess **Maritchi**, who rides in a chariot drawn by seven pigs, is also identified as **Chun-t'i**. In the south, where Tantric Buddhism hardly penetrated, images identified as **Chun-t'i** are said by priests to belong to the Brahmanic cult of **Maritchi**.

The simplest way to differentiate between images of **Chun-t'i** and images of other similar deities, according to god-carvers, is to examine the position of the pair of hands held together in prayer. If the middle finger of each hand is extended and the rest bent, or all fingers are extended except for the middle finger of each hand which are bent, then the image should be **Chun-t'i**. Unfortunately, images of **Tou Mu** in Hong Kong and Macau, identified and worshipped as such, have identically bent fingers!

Mi-lo Fu

The Buddha of the Future or the Buddhist Messiah, **Mi-lo Fu** is the successor to **Sakyamuni** (The Buddha), and is the third most important of Chinese Buddhist deities. His original Sanskrit name is **Maitreya**. **Mi-lo Fu** is at present in the **Tushita Heaven**. In obedience to **Sakyamuni**'s instruction he will descend to establish the great era of peace. Among the many legends about the origins of **Mi-lo Fu**, he was said to have been an Indian prince who, after his death, was met by **Sakyamuni** and asked to take his place in the next *kalpa* (era). Legend also claimed that **Mi-lo Fu** once allowed himself to be reborn as a **Lohan** and is depicted as an addition to the usual group of Eighteen. In one monastery in Hong Kong's New Territories, he is actually one of the Eighteen.

Mi-lo Fu faces you as you enter a Buddhist temple or monastery looking out across the courtyard. Normally he does not possess a temple of his own, although he is the main deity in two small popular religion temples in Hong Kong.

He sits on a plain meditation seat in the entrance hall of temples where he welcomes visitors, and is flanked by the **Ssu Ta T'ien-wang** (Four Heavenly Kings) who protect the temples as well as the followers of the Law.

During the Wei dynasty, belief in **Mi-lo Fu** was popular and images of him and **Sakyamuni** dominated cave sculpture of the era. His cult began to die away during the seventh century. He is the unlikely patron of gold and silversmiths – according to legend he was the first jeweller. He is said to have stolen gold and silver ingots from Buddha when he was sent down to Earth and created *objets d'art* which he sold to keep body and soul together. Often he has a small sack clutched in his left hand. He makes such an odd figure that it is strange to see him as The Buddha's nominated successor.

P'i-lu Che-na Fu

Better known to foreigners by his Sanskrit title of **Vairocana**, **P'i-lu Che-na Fu** is a Heavenly Buddha usually simply known as **P'i-lu**. He is an abstraction, the concept of the wide and magnificent, beyond all human understanding. He is recognized by some Buddhist schools as the spiritual or essential embodiment of the Buddhist truth. It is also claimed that he is associated with resolute activity and wisdom, and is the most important of the Five Buddhas associated with the





Diamond World (one of the Universes). His image was to be found in China in Buddhist establishments of the T'ien-t'ai Tsung, as one of the three-fold incarnations of Buddha, referred to as the Three Precious Ones. Vairocana is the second, representing the Buddhist Law and his image is to be found wherever the Law is proclaimed. The other two are Sakyamuni, the centre of the triad, and Lochana who represented the clergy, the society of monks.

The Lohans

Lohan is the Chinese for the Sanskrit word, *Arhat*, the Worthies or Enlightened Beings of Indian Buddhism – a term used for one who has reached enlightenment and is saved for all eternity. Normally in China there are **Eighteen Lohans**, although the full total of images representing the hundreds of thousands who have qualified, is usually extended to 500. Still occasionally referred to in Western works as *Arhats*, they are also known by the Japanese term *Rakan*.

They are semi-deities, saints who have achieved enlightenment through their Buddhist practices and reached the end of the Eight-fold Path. They are not only perfect themselves, but can also ensure perfection in others. They are free from disease and death and are credited with powers with which they can protect the

true followers of Buddhism. They are the guardians of Buddhists, both lay and priestly, and saved by the grace of Buddha who entrusted them with the protection of his teachings.

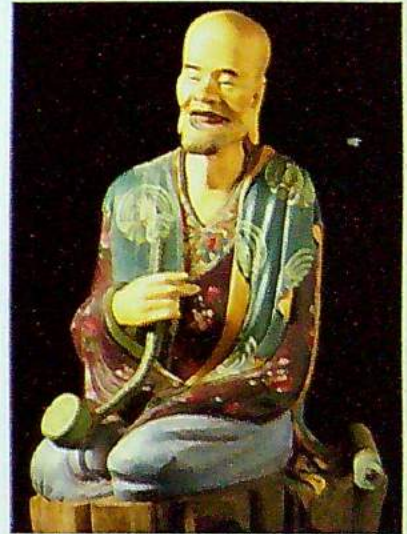
The usual description of the Lohans says that they were monks of Mahayana (Northern) Buddhism of extraordinary spiritual attainments who have all but attained Nirvana, and have supernatural powers. The Lohan are awaiting the arrival of Mi-lo Fu, who will return to Earth tens of thousands of years in the future. The Lohan will then collect all the relics of Sakyamuni for final cremation, whereupon they will all pass into perfect Buddhahood and into Nirvana.

Lohan are only very rarely noted on altars alone. When they are, it is usually in a popular religion temple. A Buddhist temple can have groups of either eighteen or 500 Lohan. Images of Lohan are never set up on the main altar, they are never the main deities of a temple, nor are they worshipped individually or as a group. Indeed, Lohans are only very rarely offered prayers or requests, apart from the standard single stick of incense dutifully placed before every altar. They are simply accepted as a benign presence down the side walls of the Buddha hall.

Kasyapa and Ananda

Kasyapa and Ananda, or Chia Yeh and A

◁ In Chinese temples where he is also a popular religion deity, **Mi-lo Fu** is shown as a caricature monk with his round, Michelin-man stomach, a wide smile, bald pate and coarse features.



△ ▽ The Lohan represent the ideal towards which Buddhists are taught that all should strive to attain. They are models of perfection for monks to emulate.

Above is a carving of an unidentified Lohan with an ivory head and wooden body [central China]; below is an image of the Lohan who suppresses Dragons. [Canton]





△ Only two of the Ten Disciples have a specific convention regarding their appearance: A Nan (Ananda) is always young and handsome; Chia Yeh (Kasyapa) is always an elderly man. [Hong Kong]

▽ The Lohan are represented as middle-aged and elderly men, each supposedly with a recognizable theme, life-like pose or symbol. Their images portray them as monks meditating, laughing, praying, cleaning out an ear or holding a small object or animal. Some stand, others wade through clouds or sit holding books or flowers; others kneel or stand, waving their arms about in violent argument. Great efforts are made to give them unique expressions. [Taiwan]

Nan, were The Buddha's favourite disciples out of the first ten. Although they had not attained complete enlightenment, they were his spokesmen. They are also two of the Eighteen Lohan. In Indian Buddhist precedence, Chia Yeh was the First Patriarch of Western (Indian) Buddhism, while A Nan (said to be Chia Yeh's son) was the Second.

Chia Yeh is also the third Manushi (human) Buddha of Mahayana Buddhism. He is the leader of monks, and his full title in Chinese is **Ma-ho Chia Yeh**; he is also known as **Yin-kuang**, because of the light emitted from his body. Shown as an old man with long eyebrows and a very lined face, his image on Chinese altars stands on Sakyamuni's left. In Taoist legend, he is said to have been invited to the annual 'Banquet of the Gods'. There have been several Chia Yehs in early Buddhist history – their legends are now inextricable. One version says he was a saintly Hindu priest who came to China in AD 60.

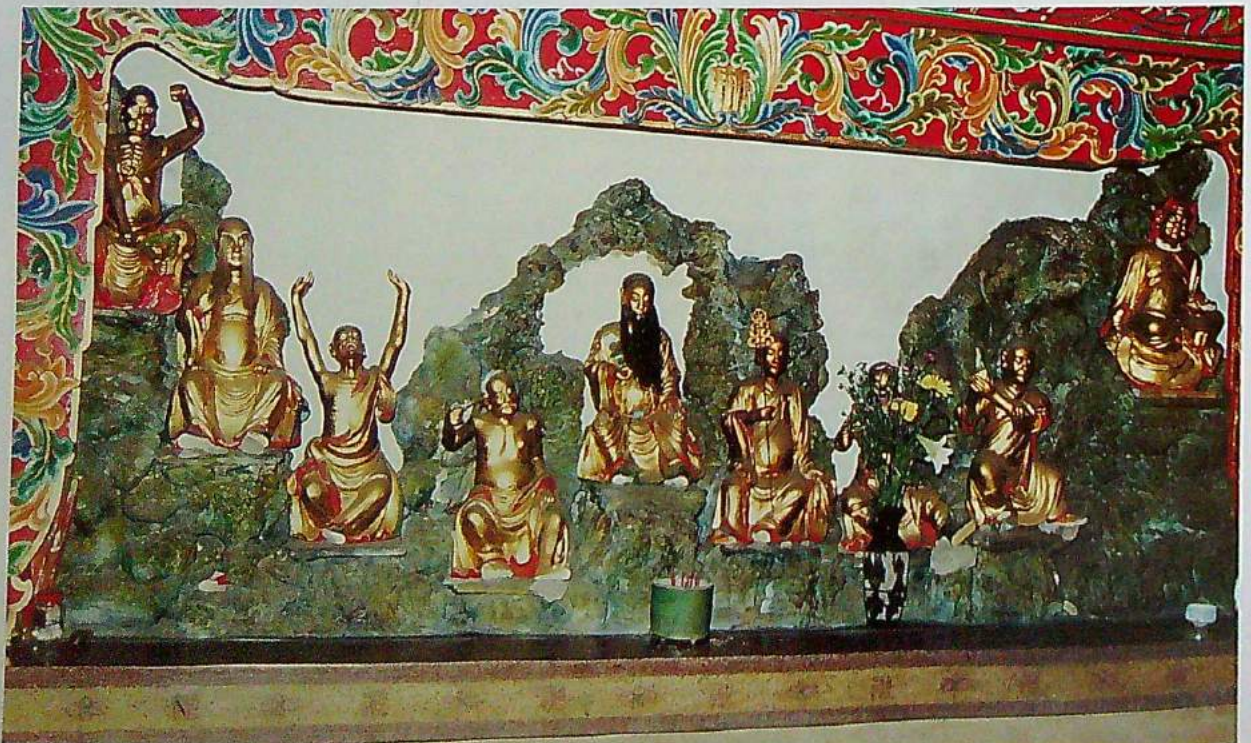
Other legends say that A Nan was a younger brother or cousin of Sakyamuni. He is best remembered for his excellent memory, having memorized all of Sakyamuni's sermons. He was a compiler of Buddhist scriptures, known for his writings and as the keeper of the Sutras. His images in central China often show

him with a scroll in his hand. Images of them have not been noted alone.

A legend relates that one night A Nan was confronted by the King of Demons, Kuei Wang. He said that, in three days' time, A Nan would be degraded to take over the appointment of the King of the Demons, who had a very narrow throat and belched flames. Appalled, A Nan fled to seek The Buddha's advice and aid. Buddha advised that the King of Demons should be fed and at the same time he should recite Buddhist sutras as this would help force the food down the narrow gullet. He told A Nan that was how all Hungry Spirits should be fed. This proved effective, and saved A Nan from being degraded, but more to the point, is also said to have led to the annual ceremonial offerings of sustenance to the roaming Hungry Ghosts.

Wen Shu & P'u Hsien P'u-sa

Both are Indian Buddhist deities transported to Chinese Buddhism. Both have gained native rights in China, each one having been declared the major deity of one of China's sacred mountains. Primarily Buddhist deities, they have been adopted by Taoists as two of the Twelve Taoist Immortals under the command of Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun (see page 69). In one temple they even have a



Taoist Third Eye. Both are benevolent deities, associated with happiness and good fortune.

The Bodhisattva of Transcendental or Divine Wisdom, **Wen Shu P'u-sa**, was one of the five great contemplative bodhisattvas and one of the twelve divine Buddhist teachers. In Sanskrit he is known as Manjusri (meaning 'Wonderful Virtue').

Full of kindness and the personification of knowledge and thought, he is prayed to by monks and scholars to dispel their ignorance; he also solves difficult religious questions. The Buddha



informed Wen Shu that his duty was to turn the Wheel of the Law for the salvation of the Chinese people, and that he was to live on Shansi's sacred mountain. After arriving there his preaching of the Law subjugated every demon within the area. As he had been able to conquer death, he was specially invoked when death threatened. Wen Shu was the patron deity of Shansi province and the tutelary deity of that province's sacred mountain, Wu T'ai Shan.

The Bodhisattva of Universal Grace and Compassion or of Divine Favour, **P'u Hsien P'u-sa**, is one of the four or five great contemplative bodhisattvas and one of the twelve divine Buddhist teachers, known in Sanskrit as Samantabhadra. He lived on Chiu Kung Shan (Mountain of the Nine Palaces). Originally an Indian Buddhist deity, he was claimed by the Lama or Tantric school of Buddhism as the founder of yoga; in Tibet he was called Kuntuzombo. His popularity in India was nowhere near as great as in Chinese Buddhism.

Ta-mo Ta-shih

Possibly better known as **Bodhidharma** to foreigners, **Ta-mo Ta-shih** was an Indian Buddhist missionary in about AD 526 who became the First Patriarch of Eastern (Chinese/Japanese) Buddhism. He had been the last Patriarch of Western Buddhism and twenty-eighth in direct line from The Buddha. Taoist priests claim that Ta-mo was an Immortal from the Taoist Western Heaven.

When Ta-mo arrived from India, his teachings led to peaceful contemplation which killed the missionary zeal of his followers. Though some claim that he



brought with him Buddha's scarf and bowl, he taught that images and relics were of little value and that religion came not from books but from inward concentration on the spiritual. He also taught that people should seek and find Buddha in their own hearts, not in books.

Although he preached the doctrines of the Dhyani school in India, his teachings led to the foundation of the Ch'an Tsung (Zen or Meditation School) in China. In addition to advocating meditation, he also taught that the abstract concentration of energy into one's mind to develop a sense of emptiness. He discouraged formal education for the priesthood.

Legend has it that during his long contemplative stillness he is said to have lost his legs which dropped off from lack of use. Another tale relates how when facing a blank wall in silent contemplation for nine years he was horrified one day to find that he had fallen asleep. He promptly cut off his eyelids which fell to the ground and grew into tea bushes, thus bringing to China its national beverage.

◁◁ The standard image of **P'u Hsien** is easily identifiable as it nearly always shows him sitting on a white elephant, often with three pairs of tusks. [Taiwan]

◁ **Wen Shu** is usually shown sitting on a lion. The White Elephant and the Transcendent Lion were originally demons, tamed by these bodhisattvas and made to serve them. [Taiwan]



△ Images of **Ta-mo** usually portray him standing, often on a bamboo stem, or sitting in the lotus position, carrying a fly whisk. His bare bony chest and large round eyes, thick eyebrows and frequently a pencil-thin moustache are all characteristic. He is black-skinned, with one foot bare and the other wearing a sandal. The other sandal is held in his hand. Sometimes he is shown wearing Indian robes. [Unprovenanced]

Hsi-yu Chi

The novel *Hsi-yu Chi* (The Record of the Journey to the West), a literary treasure better known in the West as *Monkey*, is based loosely on the genuine historical pilgrimage to India of the T'ang monk, Hsüan-tsang, between AD 629 and 645 to bring back the Buddhist scriptures. The story of Monkey ostensibly took place during the reign of Emperor T'ang T'ai Tsung. A satire of traditional Chinese society, it portrays an inter-relationship between the various religions and beliefs, how they all came together in Northern or Mahayana Buddhism. In the legend, where Taoist deities failed miserably to control Monkey, the Buddhist deities were decidedly successful.

The story begins with a wild and cunning ape emerging from a stone egg. He entered human society and became the King of the Apes by emerging unscathed from a cave behind a waterfall. He was told that the Buddhas, the Taoist Immortals and the Confucian deities had all passed beyond change, but he was mortal and must die. However, he could escape this fate if he went to meet the three groups. After nine years, he at last met one of Buddha's disciples, Subhoti, and attended the daily lectures given by him. After many more years, he attained a higher understanding and mastered the secret arts of magic. He could make himself invisible, ride the clouds, and became such a menace to his fellow pupils that he had to be banished.

He returned to his apes, conquered their enemies with his magic and became even more intolerably arrogant. In one escapade, he was taken off to the Underworld while drunk and led the demons a merry chase. When he had sobered up he approached the Ten Judges who record deaths, and looked up his name to find that he was to die at the age of 342. He took a brush and scored out his and his relatives' names, and so became a genuine Immortal.

Representatives of the Underworld immediately approached the Jade Emperor (see page 51), and complained that Monkey was causing great confusion. The Jade Emperor thought first of sending his armies to overwhelm him, and then realized it would be better to appoint him to a minor position in the Heavenly bureaucracy. So he appointed Monkey to the sinecure post of the 'Heavenly Groom'.

When Monkey realized how menial the position was, he rebelled and declared war on Heaven. He repelled all expeditions sent against him and was finally appointed to a Celestial position as 'The Great Sage, Equal to Heaven', commonly known as the Great Saint.

All went well for a while. He was appointed to supervise the Peach Gardens in which the Peaches of Immortality grow. One taste brought immortality and the greatest wisdom to the eater. Every 3,000 years, Hsi Wang-mu (see page 53) celebrated her birthday with a peach feast to which she invited all the gods. One such party was due but, furious at being the only dignitary not invited, Monkey sabotaged it by consuming the lot. Drunk, he wandered off to Lao Tzu's home (see page 69) where he found Lao Tzu's pills of immortality. Monkey purloined them and fled back to Earth.

The Jade Emperor was speechless with rage and sought the help of The Buddha. The Buddha encouraged Monkey to show off. When he had somersaulted to the edge of the world and back, he was asked by The Buddha where he had been and what had he seen. Monkey proudly explained that he had been to the edge of the world and there had seen five pillars stretching up to the sky. He had urinated at the base of the centre one to prove he had been there.

The Buddha gently explained that he had never left The Buddha's hand and that the pillars were The Buddha's fingers. To prove it he asked Monkey to smell the base of the centre finger! Monkey refused to believe this and was told to somersault again back to the edge of the world. That time The Buddha closed his hand and trapped him, and then handed him over to Kuan Yin for punishment. She had him bound and confined under a high mountain to repent.

Centuries passed. When his sentence was nearly complete, Kuan Yin offered him deliverance. Monkey had to pledge himself to accompany the pilgrim monk Hsüan-tsang on his journey to India, to secure the Mahayana scriptures for China. Monkey agreed. After they overcame numerous dangers and difficulties, often by incredible magical feats and with constant aid from, and remonstrance by, Kuan Yin, Hsüan-tsang on his white horse, Monkey, Piggy and the monk Sha all returned to the Chinese capital to be welcomed by the emperor of China.

▷ Monkey's standard image depicts him, sitting or standing, in every way human apart from his face which is markedly simian. Most images portray him with a peach of longevity in one hand and a cudgel or staff in the other. He is usually portrayed dressed in armour with high boots, though occasionally he wears scholar's robes, and is barefoot.

Virtually all images show him wearing a tight fitting diadem or circlet with the two ends curled up and touching, in the centre of his forehead. This was placed there by Kuan Yin to keep him under her control. He cannot remove it and if at any time he strays from the straight and narrow the diadem tightens and spikes inside it pierce his head. The pain becomes unbearable and remains so until he reverts to the path of virtue. [Amoy]



▽ In a great number of temples, **Sun Hou-tzu (Monkey)** is accompanied by a ping-pong bottle – a thin glass bulb inverted in a bottle of water – which announces with a resounding ping his spirit's arrival in the temple. When atmospheric pressures change (or when the spirit of the Great Sage enters the image) the thin glass top of the bulb reacts with a loud ping. The reaction of devotees to the signal of Monkey's presence is a wonderful sight. Ch'aochou devotees in particular regard Monkey as a major go-between between themselves and the more powerful gods. Devotees of the Great Sage who gain the power to act as his medium, are regularly employed in temples to speak with his voice. [Boat People's image, Peal River]

Ch'i-t'ien Ta-sheng

The fabulous and incorrigible **Monkey King** whose adventures have thrilled the Chinese for centuries is one of the most resourceful of the Chinese heroes. He is known colloquially as The Great Sage, the Equal of Heaven (**Ch'i-t'ien Ta-sheng**), as Sun the Monkey (**Sun Hou-tzu**), or as Sun who Ponders the Mysteries (**Sun Wu-k'ung**). He is also a popular temple deity, to be seen alone on numerous altars and also on a few altars together with the other three predominant characters from the novel *Hsi-yu Chi* (see page 98) – Hsüan-tsang, the Buddhist pilgrim monk, the sensuous and gluttonous Piggy and the old stolid and practical monk, Sha. Another member of the group

who usually goes unrecognized is the White Horse on which Hsüan-tsang rode to and from India. He is said to have been metamorphosed into the Dragon King of the Western Seas.

The monkey-headed hero is a powerful popular religion Buddhist saint, one who is known to be wilful and yet helpful, one who is artful and does the unexpected. Very many Chinese regard him as a defender and protector of the Buddhist doctrine; however, he is only rarely seen on Buddhist altars though occasionally his image might be noted in one of the side halls. He is prayed to by the sick in particular, by expectant mothers and gamblers, and is a major spirit medium deity. He can control all demons, transport himself anywhere in a flash, assume any shape or form he so wishes, and to bestow wealth and health on devotees.

Mu Lien

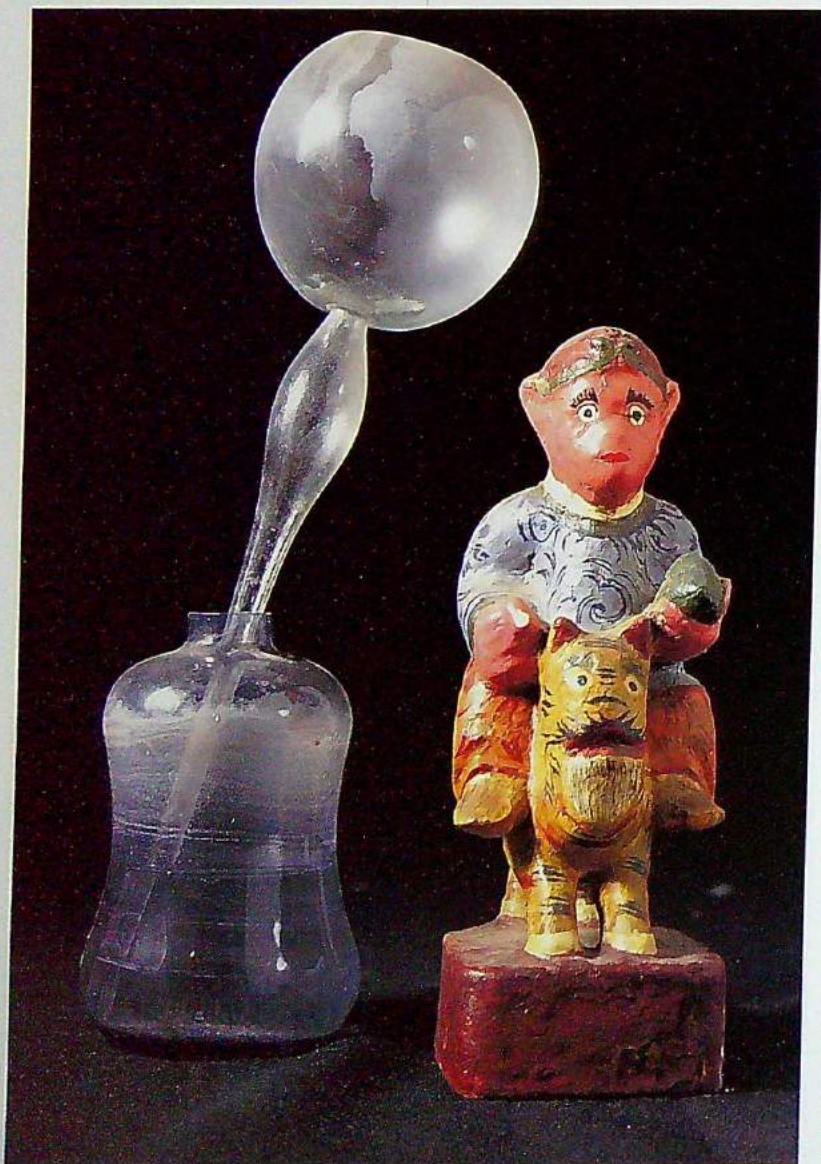
The Indian monk Mu Lien was one of the chief disciples of the Buddha. A very popular religious story tells of how Mu Lien descended into the Underworld to save his sinful mother from purgatory. The pious mother, a scrupulous vegetarian, fell sick and was cured by one of her sons who prepared a meal which contained a little meat. The mother refused to believe it and swore that, if she had eaten meat, demons would drag her away to the deepest hell. Immediately they arrived and bore her off. Mu Lien could not prevent this.

He then dreamt of his mother in the Underworld, and saw the pitiable state she was in. On awakening, he determined to go himself to the Underworld to rescue her. He eventually reached her and offered himself in her place. This was refused by the Judges but, at the time of her greatest suffering, The Buddha revealed himself and explained how a mass performed by a body of monks could save her.

Mu Lien immediately arranged for such a mass and redeemed his mother. From then on, masses have been said for the Buddhist dead. In addition, since that time, the *Yu-lan-pen* feast has been celebrated annually as the day of return of the Hungry Ghosts (see page 185) to Earth for a month from the Underworld.

Chi Kung

There are only a few 'living' Buddhas, of whom Chi Kung is the best known. **Chi**





Kung Huo Fu, better known simply as **Chi Kung** (literally the Lord who delivers from Earthly Misery), is an extremely popular, as well as Buddhist, deity worshipped China-wide. He is still much favoured in Taiwan and South-East Asia.

Chi Kung was an eccentric Buddhist monk from the Sung dynasty who always spoke out on behalf of the weak and was much loved by the common people. His escapades now fill a popular four-volume novel, a lusty tale describing his mystical, magical and disreputable doings with a distinctly libellous ring. As one Chinese put it, he is loveable because he drifted into everyday situations in which an ordinary person could mentally picture themselves being involved, and then extricating himself with magic.

There are two different and entirely distinct styles to Chi Kung: firstly, the revered deity, a remarkable religious folk hero with supernatural abilities, whose image appears on thousands of altars both in temples and in homes, and secondly, the scallywag monk. To the Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist he is a major holy figure; to his popular religion followers he is a comfort, but to ordinary people, he is a loveable, bawdy eccentric. Typically, when missing from prayers his fellow monks knew that he would be down in the village carousing with his friends and consuming plates of dogmeat, possibly the greatest of his personal weaknesses. During his earthly existence, he was always late and as a punishment was made to stand in the corridor or squat on a beam. As a result, he was often portrayed sitting high up on a beam of the main hall in temples in northern China.

According to legend he was born into the Li family and his mother during her pregnancy dreamed that she had swallowed the sun. Despite being a talented student, he could not be bothered with pomp and officialdom. He was a spendthrift who became first a beggar and later a monk who, not surprisingly, was regarded as unbalanced. He entered the Lingyen Monastery at Hangchou at twenty-one after completing three years mourning for his parents. He performed many magical deeds, such as producing enough planking to rebuild a burnt-out monastery. He passed through prison walls and is said to have been able to change himself into a young or old man, a woman, bird or animal at will. A typical story describes how he stood on his hands during meditation while all the other sat cross-legged. The Abbot was furious, but Chi Kung contritely explained that he had to resort to this method to ensure that he kept awake.

◁ **Mu Lien** is most usually represented, like **Ti-tsang Wang** (see page 92), as a middle-aged monk carrying a begging bowl and a long alarm staff (to frighten small creatures and insects from his path to avoid them being unwittingly trodden on and killed). [Taiwan]

▽ Images of **Chi Kung** are unique and unmistakable, very popular in Chinese homes and can be seen in every style and form. His images depict him as an unshaven, smiling, youthful-looking, middle-aged monk with either a rugged or an innocent face which is always full of character. He is often portrayed looking Heaven-ward. He is thin, ascetic, with a wispy beard, and wears patched and tattered robes. He is often shown barefoot, carrying one slipper in which he can travel at the speed of light, and a fan with which he can perform magical feats. He seems to be the only deity whose images are sacred on altars and irreverent when used decoratively. As the latter, he is often modelled as a 'teapot' (wine decanter). [North-central China]





Stellar Deities of Fate & Destiny

Many of the dominant stars and constellations are regarded as the residences of superior deities whose influence is for good, although there are also just about as many baleful stars. The powerful and good stellar deities are revered by devotees who fear that their lives are being more influenced by the baleful ones, either to maintain their good fortune or to change a run of bad luck for the better. Although a person's destiny is fixed before birth, fate can be cheated.

There are a number of ways to learn what that fate might be and how best to face it. If after prognostication you have learned what the fates hold in store and do nothing about it, then you are deemed foolish in the extreme. There are also various petty deities who can thwart fate and bend it for a price, often by reversing or altering the mind of another person in favour of the devotee.

Controllers of Destiny

There are two major stellar officials, the sons of Tou Mu (see pages 93 and 105), who determine human destiny, and are worshipped in particular by or on behalf of someone who is very ill requesting an extension to their life. Both are revered for their control over one's life and longevity. They are **Nan-tou Hsing-chün** and **Pei-tou Hsing-chün**, the stellar deities of the Southern and Northern Bushels (otherwise known as the Measures or the Big and Little Dippers). It is not uncommon for their images to occupy individual secondary altars flanking the main altar of a secondary hall where the Jade Emperor is the main deity.

Pei-tou Hsing-chün has the responsibility of keeping the register of one's life span and noting the due date on which one is to die. Nan-tou Hsing-chün on the other hand plans and records one's destiny and is responsible for noting merits and demerits earning additional months or years of life, or subtracting them if need be. A notice in one Taiwanese temple pithily puts it 'Pei-tou controls deaths and Nan-tou controls life'.

Legend tells of a boy, informed by a

fortune teller that he would die at the age of nineteen, who asked how he could avoid this. He was told to take some cooked meat and some warmed wine to the top of a nearby hill where he would see two old men playing chess. He was not to interrupt them, but just let them eat and drink as they wished. If, however, the opportunity arose he was to tell them his problem. This the boy did – the old men checked their records and found that the prognostication was correct. As a reward for the food and drink however, they altered the nineteen to ninety-nine and warned the boy that the fortune teller was to tell no one else their due date of death. Later, the boy found that the two old men were Nan-tou and Pei-tou Hsing-chün.

TZU-WEI TA-TI

The Great Stellar Deity, the Great Emperor of the Purple Heaven, the North Pole Star, **Tzu-wei Ta-ti** is the keeper of the book of destiny, a controller of blessings, and a very potent destroyer of demons. He is revered for his power to ward off evil influences and spirits. In Cantonese communities, this deity is regarded as a major deity in his own right without being linked to any other, whereas in other Chinese ethnic communities Tzu-wei Ta-ti is simply one of the identities of the senior deity of the San Kuan Ta-ti (see page 55).

His standard image in Cantonese temples portrays him as a youth astride or sitting side saddle on a reclining mythical beast, possibly a lion. He holds a conch shell in his left hand, and is dressed only in trousers and a cape which hangs round his neck and down his back. He wears



△ **Pei-tou Hsing-chün** is often shown in demonic form with ear-pressing tufts, either red or dark hair, and a dark or black face. He can hold a tablet, sheathed sword or fly switch. Both wear small Taoist crowns, and can wear *pa-kua* robes, making mystic signs with their left hands. [Taiwan]

◁ **Nan-tou Hsing-chün** is usually shown as a white-haired Taoist deity sitting on a throne with either a scroll, an open book and brush-pen, or a *ju-i* sceptre (as here). [Taiwan]

▽ **Tzu-wei Ta-ti**'s usual image in Cantonese temples shows him as a clean-shaven, pop-eyed youth on a reclining mythical beast, possibly a lion. He holds a seal aloft in his right hand, a talisman saying, 'The Star Looks Straight On'. His unique feature is a flag pole behind him on which is fixed a sheathed sword. [Five-colour block print]





△ Images of Wen Ch'ang usually portray him in one of two forms. He is the bearded, handsome official or prosperous scholar, either sitting on a throne and dressed in blue robes or astride a white mule or horse (the Jade White Horse: Yü-ma), with his arms folded. In very early carvings he was occasionally depicted leading his mule, T'ung Lo-tzu. Apart from his mule and his retinue of assistants, his image on its own has no unique characteristics.

In this group from left to right are: Chu-i (Red Robes), Chu-i's assistant who carries his marking brush, the groom, Wen Ch'ang on his mule, Chin Chia (Golden Armour) who carries the news to the examinee who gained the highest marks, and K'uei Hsing who is the Patron of Examinees (see opposite).

In central China, Wen Ch'ang's images were often dressed in imperial yellow robes, with a *ju-i* sceptre cradled in his left arm. Many porcelain images of Wen Ch'ang in northern China were noted by Western visitors in the early part of this century portraying him in brilliant green robes and with a mandarin square bearing the rank insignia of a flying stork.

shoes and has neck length hair which is held in place by a tiara from which two objects, like insects' feelers, protrude upwards. Images vary from astride his lion or tiger, to a standard image of a mandarin sitting on a throne and only identifiable as Tzu-wei by the label before his image.

The *Feng-shen Yen-i* (see page 60) tells how Po I-k'ao (1231-1135 BC), the elder son of Wen Wang, was canonized by Chiang Tzu-ya as the god of the star, Tzu-wei, after his execution. Po had taught Ta-chi, the notorious concubine of Chou Hsien, to play the lute. She fell in love with him and, having failed to entrap him into marriage, accused him of impropriety to Chou Hsien, who immediately judged him innocent. In a later incident, a monkey, introduced into the palace by Po, snatched strawberries from Ta-chi's hand. This aggravated Po beyond control. In a passionate rage, he struck the concubine with his lute, and was then executed.

Literature & Examinations

Some stellar deities can influence the lives of individuals in a positive manner even though they are not normally regarded as star gods by devotees. One such deity is Wen Ch'ang Ti-chün.

Although foreigners expect Kung Tzu to be the God of Literary Tradition and Literature, it is Wen Ch'ang who presides over the Department in which the registers of titles, ranks and grades of scholars on Earth are maintained.

Wen Ch'ang was revered China-wide as a deity of the State religion. In effect he was the patron deity of China's ruling elite. He was believed in China, and still is in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and South-East Asia, to be able to foretell the results of examinations and especially the Chinese imperial state examinations. His role, as seen by the aspiring scholars, was to supervise the filling of official posts, promotions within the bureaucracy and the maintenance of records and registers of scholars. It was usual for state officials to render worship at the spring and autumnal equinoxes and offer an ox, sheep or pig to him.

Wen Ch'ang as a cult deity would appear to have developed pre-fourth century AD from a local Szechwanese nature deity, Tzu-t'ung Chün (Tzu-t'ung is a small town in northern Szechwan). His cult there can be dated to the twelfth century. There were, however, popular religion temples in which an image of Wen Ch'ang was the major deity. As the only

way to social success in imperial China was through education, with skill in writing and prose the key, boys used to be taken at a very early age to a Wen Ch'ang altar for his blessing. Some pregnant mothers even used to hang his picture over their beds to ensure that their sons would become famous scholars.

Among his attributes was the ability to help scholars. By the Sung dynasty he was visibly the deity involved in predicting examination results. In imperial times all the principal cities of the empire contained a Wen Ch'ang temple where reverence and ritual observance was reserved for officials and scholars, while hopeful parents of aspiring pupils were barred. He is still one of the major deities, revered by hopeful students and scholars.

He is said to have had seventeen incarnations on Earth, once every hundred years or so, as famous, virtuous and gifted scholars, the one most frequently so identified being Chu Hsi (see page 84). His most distinguished rebirth was as a snake which revenged the wrongs done to his ancestors. He then met The Buddha who forgave him his sins, allowed him to slough off the serpent's coils and return once more as a man.

TOU MU

In Peking a century ago, **Tou Mu** (usually considered to be the Mother of the Nine Sons, and widely worshipped as the stellar goddess of the Northern Dipper) was identified as the mother of the God of Literature and prayed to by scholars. They asked her to beg her son to help them pass their examinations. It is unclear whether she was correctly identified, whether she is a separate deity in her own right, and which of the deities is regarded as her son, Wen Ch'ang, K'uei Hsing, or whoever. Although primarily a Buddhist goddess named **Chun-t'i** (see page 93), she has been adopted by Taoists as a kindly stellar deity - Tou Mu the Goddess of Fate - who lives in the constellation of the Great Bear or Plough.

K'UEI HSIANG

The stellar deity of Examinations, **K'uei Hsing**, one of the five minor deities of the group under Wen Ch'ang, is a popular religion deity in his own right, worshipped throughout China. He was a great favourite of aspirants to literary honours. K'uei Hsing is one of the gods of the Pole Star; his stellar flag bears the seven white stars of the Great Bear on a black triangular field. K'uei Hsing takes

a more active part in academic examinations, one of his roles being the dotting of the examination papers with vermilion ink using his brush pen to indicate a pass; another was the distribution of the actual degree scrolls. He used to be specially revered by scholars immediately before they entered the imperial and provincial examination halls.

In Kuangtung province his image was often on a separate altar in Wen Ch'ang temples, in ancestral shrines and in village shrines where aspiring scholars were able to pray for academic success. K'uei Hsing's image nearly always portrays him on a sea creature suggesting that he was the scholar who unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide, whereas Chung K'uei does not have the same attribute. Nevertheless, many Chinese believe Chung K'uei and K'uei Hsing to be one and the same deity.

Destroyers of Demons

The two major demon destroyers in the Chinese pantheon are **Chung K'uei** and **Chang T'ien-shih** (see page 78). Their services are called upon by devotees suffering from any form of troubles and sickness caused by demons. In Taoist mythology, Chung K'uei is a member of the Celestial Ministry of Exorcisms. Though he is not a stellar deity, he is described here because of the frequent confusion between him and K'uei Hsing.

Chung K'uei is a major 'Protector against Evil Spirits', but his image is rarely observed on temple altars in image form. He is portrayed stamping on the five evil creatures on some of his paper charms. Chung K'uei, according to legend, was a physician from Shensi province who lived during the eighth century AD. Both he and K'uei Hsing are said to have been unjustly deprived of their rightful places in a public examination as a *Chuang-yuan*, a graduate with the highest honours, because of their ugly appearance. Chung called attention to the injustice by committing suicide on the steps of the imperial palace, where he became a roaming spirit.

Later, his ghost appeared to an emperor who was being driven mad during his dreams by a demon in red trousers. Chung K'uei destroyed and ate the demon and was rewarded by being canonized. The confusion is that the story of the emperor's refusal to meet the ugly scholar, is told about both deities.



△ **K'uei Hsing's** image is unconventional, flowing, easily recognizable and unique. He is a fearsome ugly dwarf, with a human body stripped to the waist, and a green or blue demonic face. He holds a seal or a writing brush raised in one hand and a book or ink slab in the other. He stands on one leg on the large head of a fish, a dragon or sea monster emerging from the seas. It saved him when he tried to drown himself. [Hangchou]

▽ **Chung K'uei** is a personal protector, a family household deity, usually portrayed on paper charms as a fierce elderly man, with a black face, protruding eyes and curly black beard. He is dressed in red or green battered and torn robes, and much worn boots and decrepit hat of the style worn by officials and graduates of the T'ang period. He is wielding a mystic sword and accompanied by a bat. [Five-colour block print]



▽ Chang T'ien-shih (see page 78) is the First Heavenly Master, but is also one of the major demon-destroyers of popular religion. [Hong Kong]



△▷ There are two groups of Thirty-six Generals. The most common are images of the commanders of spirit armies under a major deity. The tablet above on an altar in Hong Kong lists all of them. A separate and unconnected group of stellar deities of good omen, known as the T'ien-kang. [Taiwan]

In June 1966, Mao Tse-tung wrote a letter to his last wife, Chiang Ch'ing, in which he expressed his doubts and suspicions about Lin Piao and his motives, some five years before Lin mounted his abortive coup. In it he remarked that his friends 'had made him even more divine than any gods' at the May Conference in Peking. Mao suggested that they were seeking the assistance of Chung K'uei to lay a ghost, and that he had become the Chung K'uei of the Party in the 1960s.

SAN-SHIH LIU KUAN-CHIANG

Individual images or murals of the Thirty-six Generals, San-shih Liu Kuan-chiang, line the side walls of main halls of a number of Chinese temples, particularly in Taiwan and South-East Asia. They are heroes and heroines from ancient and often mythological periods of Chinese history. They are now regarded as the commanders of armies of tamed demonic spirits under the overall command of the main deity of the temple. In most instances, this is either the Northern Emperor (see page 65) or the medical deity, Pao-sheng Ta-ti (see page 110).

The Thirty-six Generals are personified either as standing warriors or worthies, and quite often each is astride a mythical creature. Some wear armour, others are in robes, some have weapons, others are simply portrayed standing on

firewheels, but all are different. In a few cases it is possible to identify the deity from his attributes together with his surname. The great majority, despite their unique attributes, remain unidentified. A popular charm available in popular religion temples, the Despatch-General Charm, is used to summon the Thirty-six Generals from the spirit world to ward off impending threats from demonic attack.

Deities of Happiness

The Three Stellar Deities of Happiness, Affluence and Longevity (or Wealth, Fortune and Posterity) are frequently seen in homes and in Chinese take-away shops. The Fu Lu Shou San Hsing are portrayed as a group of three stylized old men, seen in image, icon and decoration, in all Chinese communities, pictures of whom are extremely popular as symbols of all that Chinese wish for themselves.

The Three Stellar Deities individually are: the God of Happiness and Fortune, Fu Hsing; the God of Affluence and Official Rank, Lu Hsing; and the God of Longevity, Shou Hsing. Fu is a tall dignified figure in court costume, carrying a *ju-i* sceptre. Lu is also a tall, dignified figure in court costume, usually carrying a small boy. Since most devotees could hardly regard themselves as potential state officials, Lu Hsing is revered as the





bestower of sons and grandsons. In some places he is identified as Fen-yang Wang. **FEN-YANG WANG**

A T'ang hero and a god of happiness, **Kuo Tzu-i** is known as the Prince of Fen-yang (**Fen-yang Wang**), an old name for Anhui province and was worshipped China-wide. In life, he was one of the most renowned Chinese generals, greatly distinguished following service with four T'ang emperors. He lived to the then great age of eighty-four, dying in AD 781. He was blessed with innumerable progeny, the offspring of his eight sons and seven sons-in-law, all of whom occupied high official posts. He is also known as **Shang Fu** (Father of the Realm). Fen-yang Wang was appointed by President Yuan Shih-k'ai in 1916 as one of the Assessors for Kuan Yü (see page 147).

In some places he is revered as **Lu-shen** and is to be seen stage left in the **San Hsing** (see opposite), where he substitutes for Lu Hsing. Then he is portrayed as an elderly scholar-official, standing, dressed in blue robes, and leading or holding his eight-year-old son.

Huo-te Hsing-chün

The Fire Spirit, **Huo-te Hsing-chün**, is an impersonal nature god and though he has been identified as each of several mythological beings, he is usually best known as the God of Fire Planet, Mars. Most districts in China had their own temple or altar dedicated to the God of Fire where he appeared under a variety of names. He was regarded as the deity who controls and prevents fires, rather than the legendary person who invented fire. Most devotees accepted that his powers would prevent fire and destruction.

In many places he was feared as an avenger rather than a benefactor, and a man whose house burned down was spurned by neighbours as unlucky, punished by the God of Fire. The question in their mind was, if he has been so punished, why should neighbours risk punishment for befriending him? Such a man would be ostracized for three days.

Chuan-hsin T'ung-tzu

The Youth who brings about a Change of Mind, **Chuan-hsin T'ung-tzu**, is a Cantonese cult deity. He is prayed to when a decision unfavourable to the devotee, has been reached by someone else, in the hope that the decision-maker will change his mind in favour of the devotee. Often it is a deserted wife or a sacked man who offers incense and oil before him, although others include the wife whose husband spends much of his time out drinking and gambling, or distraught parents seeking ways naughty children can be made filial and obedient.

Images of Shou Hsing are easily the most frequently seen of the three **Fu Lu Shou San Hsing**, and are easily recognizable. He is a venerable old man with a bald head and a very high forehead, carrying a staff and a peach, and often accompanied by a crane or a deer. The group of three are very popular with overseas Chinese restaurant and take-away owners as colourful decoration. Images are usually pottery or porcelain. [Singapore]



There is no standard image of **Huo-te Hsing-chün**. An image on the main altar in the Taipei temple where he is the main deity portrays him as a typical scholar-official with red skin and a black beard, sitting holding a magic sword resting against his right shoulder. [Taiwan]

There is no standard image for **Chuan-hsin T'ung-tzu**, but two identifying characteristics seen in the hands of these images in both Hong Kong and Macau have been a red heart and a child's toy windmill on a stick. [Macau]



Health & Medicine

According to the *Feng-shen Yen-i, T'ien-i Yuan* (the Celestial Ministry of Health) is made up of three bureaux. The First (see page 56) includes the founders of Chinese medicine and Ch'i Po (Earl of Ch'i), who was one of the three ancient medical sages and joint author of the major work on medicines, the *Nei Ching*, with Huang Ti.

▷ Sun Ssu-miao's standard image in mainland China usually depicted him flanked by his dragon and tiger. In some instances he held a large ring or hoop with which he controlled the tiger, and in the other hand he held the pearl given to him by the dragon as a reward. Sun may be depicted holding a red pill, or even a lancet, in place of the pearl.

Images of Sun as Yao Wang with his two creatures were very common indeed in Hunan and neighbouring provinces, with the dragon swirling up from behind and above the head of the doctor, Sun, and the tiger either recumbent or with the doctor astride it. The tiger is regarded in some temples in Malaysia and Taiwan as a medical deity in its own right and revered alone on altars as the Black Tiger General. [Hunan]

▽ One of Sun Ssu-miao's assistants, complete with umbrella and bag of medicines slung over his shoulder. [Hunan]



The Second Bureau is run by Yao Wang, the King of Medicine. The Third Bureau includes deified worthies and specialists, who tend to be human deities, the spirits of famous doctors and herbalists. The departments within the Third Bureau are Medicine, Smallpox and Epidemics.

There are also the deities who control the causes of epidemics, such as plague and cholera, who are known generically in Taiwan as the Pestilence Wang-yeh. They are regarded with greater wariness as they are connected with the lowest echelon of the Celestial bureaucracy: the tamed demonic spirits and forces.

There are thousands of Chinese deities revered as protectors against disease, as patrons of medical specialities and as deities who provide, if not a cure, comfort and relief from pain and sickness.

The Second Bureau

The generic term for deities revered within different communities as the celestial spirit doctor is Yao Wang (literally the King of Medicine, though probably better translated as the King of Internal or Herbal Medicine). He is personified by several famous superior physicians of antiquity. In a number of temples the



▽ Images of Pao-sheng Ta-ti (left) in general represent him as a black-bearded, middle-aged man dressed in court robes and an imperial crown, and sitting on a dragon throne. Generally the cuff of his left sleeve is clutched by his right thumb, with only this thumb visible. In most temples he has small animals under his feet, said to be lions.

Images of Ch'ing-shih Tsu-shih (right), despite being a popular folk religion deity, are easily identifiable firstly by the robes and hat of a Buddhist monk, and secondly by his (usually) black face and comparatively large hooked nose and jutting chin. His face is pinched and drawn, looking remarkably as if he has lost all his teeth. His images show him sitting cross-legged, and are often swathed in silken robes donated by devotees annually on his birthday. He is also portrayed holding a fly switch or a bowl and rattle staff. [Taiwan]

deity on a major altar is simply known as Yao Wang and regarded as an unknown but potent and infallible doctor of old. The two main contenders for the title are Shen Nung (see page 56), the patron deity of farmers and herbalists, and Sun Ssu-miao, who is the Doctor of Internal Medicine.

In a small rural temple in southern Malaysia, three doctors were revered under their own names, but the trinity was known as the Yao Wang. They were Wu Chen-jen who cured the wife of the Jade Emperor, Sun Chen-jen who cures diphtheria, and Hsü Chen-jen, the ophthalmologist. Despite relatively categorical but contradictory views given by temple keepers the deity referred to as Yao Wang in some temples has no personal identity, sometimes because it has been lost in time and in other places it would appear that devotees regard Yao Wang as an impersonal deity in his own right.

SUN SSU-MIAO

The Doctor of Internal Medicine, Sun Chen-jen, is often referred to by his personal name, Sun Ssu-miao. He is one of the Kings of Medicine and lived during the T'ang dynasty. As a major deity, he has been mistakenly identified on a small number of altars in South-East Asia as

the southern Chinese medical deity, Pao-sheng Ta-ti (see page 110).

Sun Ssu-miao was regarded as a *Chen-jen* (sage), one of the 'Ten Celebrated Doctors' of China. He is said to have lived on air and wine and was a specialist in massage, dietetics, acupuncture and diagnostics, in addition to his skills as a herbalist. Another writer during the nineteenth century considered Sun to be far more of a specialist in fevers, in particular diphtheria, and as such was approached by devotees in Singapore and Malaysia.

Sun collected many existing prescriptions and, adding from his own experience, published *The Thousand Golden Remedies*, his magnum opus. This used the taking of liver to cure night blindness, iodine compounds for thyroid complaints, beans for beriberi, and many others. He diagnosed by examining the colour of the tongue and taking the pulse, and taught that one drug alone was insufficient; drugs had to be mixed and boiled.

In Anking on the Yangtze, legend claimed that Sun's father, practising medicine, was called upon by a man with an incurable disease. Sun's father gave him some arsenic but first he boiled it, which cured the patient. Another man called to



◁ In various Buddhist temples the Buddhist deity, Yao-shih Fu, is regarded as the major medical deity with, among others, Sun Ssu-miao (Yao Wang) as one of his assistants. These are modern images, made since the Cultural Revolution. [Szechwan province]

▽ Hua T'o's images do not appear to have any unique identifying characteristic apart from the most modern carvings seen in Taiwan which portray him holding a silver or gold scalpel in his right hand.

In Macau he is depicted sitting, flanked by his two assistants, one of whom is holding a book marked 'Prescriptions' and the other a gourd of medicine. In Johore Bahru his image depicts him as a Taoist priest, sitting, holding his book of prescriptions and making a mystic sign with his left hand. In Hong Kong and other places he has been portrayed as a Taoist priest with the flat 'tile' cap and robes, black beard and dark robes bearing the *pa-kua* signs, sitting holding either a fly switch or a fan, and in a few places a red pill between his fingers. [Macau]

ask for a poison to put his son out of his misery, and Sun's father gave him an innocuous herb, the root of the liquorice which the father had to serve to his sick son, cooked but only to be served with fish. The son promptly died.

Sun Ssu-miao, having learned that liquorice mixed and cooked with fish is poisonous, was very curious how a poison could become beneficial after cooking while an innocuous herb became deadly when mixed with another dish. Sun, after his father's death, travelled the country collecting herbs and practising medicine until he achieved great fame. It is often repeated that his body was transparent so that he could examine the effects of the drugs on his own body. He is credited with tasting more than seventy herbal mixtures each day, many of which were probably poisonous.

Sun retired to T'aipo Shan where he learned the secrets of Yin and Yang and the science of immortality from Chiu Chen-jen, the famous Taoist hermit who lived there. He gained great renown and reward for protecting a snake from a shepherd who was trying to kill it. The story tells how Sun came across a shepherd looking for a meal, who was beating to death a small blue snake. The doctor saved the snake's life by offering the shepherd all his clothes in exchange for the snake's freedom. After healing its wounds he set it free. Some days later Sun was invited by some horsemen to accompany him and was taken to a most spectacular city where he was entertained by a distinguished person who explained that he had invited Sun to thank him for saving the life of his son. He pointed to a small boy dressed in blue robes and revealed that he was the Dragon King and the boy was his son, the prince so nearly beaten to death by the shepherd. The Dragon King presented Sun with thirty volumes of precious prescriptions never seen before by human eye.

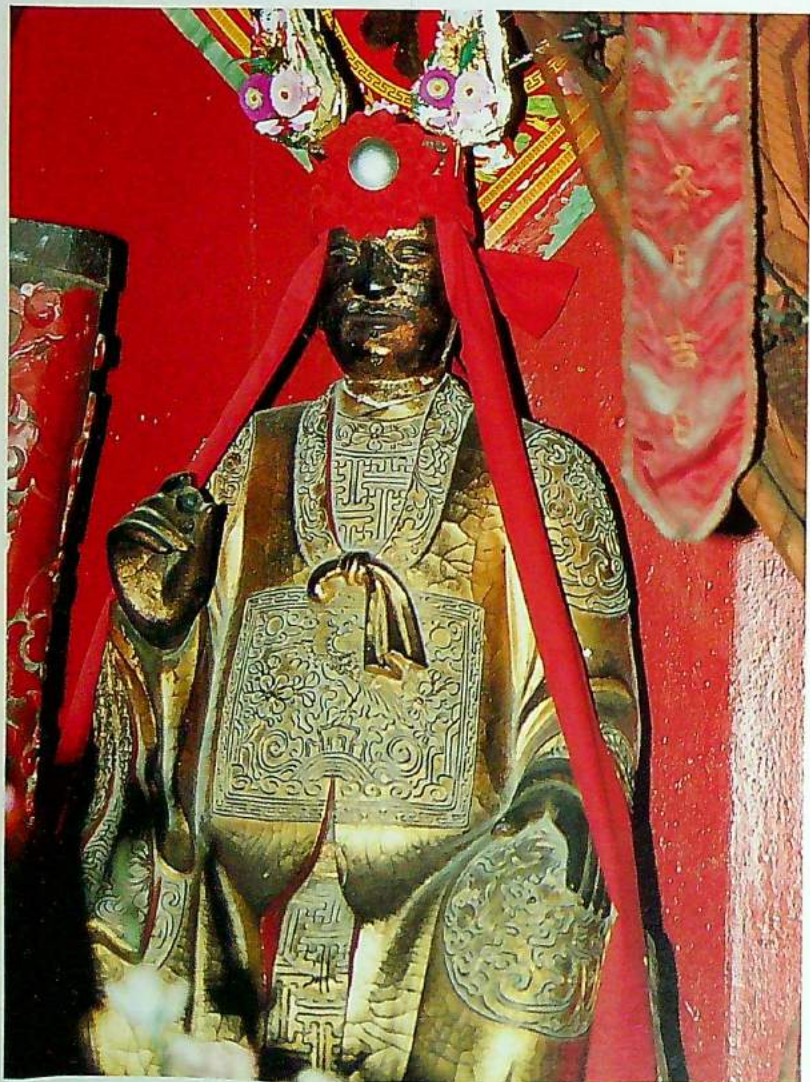
Sun is said to have died in AD 682 after a long and successful career as court physician. His body remained in perfect preservation for a whole month. Only when it was about to be put in its coffin was it found to have disappeared leaving only his grave clothes behind.

Sun must report to Heaven three times each lunar month, and formerly in China on those days temple attendants made no attempt to contact him with requests for prescriptions. It was also believed that a prescription provided by Sun, for a potion to be drunk only on the lunar New Year's Day, would give immunity from all pestilences for the coming year.

PAO-SHENG TA-TI

The Great Emperor who Protects Life, **Pao-sheng Ta-ti**, is one of the major popular cults of the southern Fukienese and Ch'aouchou communities in Taiwan and South-East Asia as well as in the province of Fukien itself. His image was also noted on a number of temple altars in eastern Kuangtung province prior to 1949 and the cult may now be as thriving there as it is in Fukien.

Traditionally the Great Emperor was the Sung dynasty local herbalist doctor, **Wu T'ao** or **Wu Pen** (c. AD 979-1035). Wu T'ao is said to have lived a virtuous life during which he acquired extraordinary powers having had left to him by



Hsi-wang Mu a set of secret prescriptions, exorcisms and talismans. He was a Taoist Master, a vegetarian who never married and a philanthropic doctor who died at fifty-eight, having worn himself out in the service of his fellows.

It is said he wrote a major medical encyclopaedia and was a specialist in acupuncture in addition to his other skills. He also performed magic spells, such as spraying spirit water from his mouth on corpses or human skeletons, bringing them back to life. It is not surprising that his paramount role as a deity is to heal the sick.

Known throughout Ch'uanchou, as the expert doctor who used his skills to cure the ordinary people, he gave his services free to the poor and first became a local deity by popular acclaim very shortly after his death. As his fame as a successful herbalist spread beyond Fukien, several centuries later he was officially deified by Imperial Decree. He is said by some to have been accompanied by a former petty official (Fei-t'ien Ta-sheng) who helped with his medical services.

Legends about his origins, powers of magic and his ability to cure the sick abound. He was regarded not only as a powerful mediumistic protective deity who provided effective prescriptions, he was also believed able to stave off floods or bring much needed rain. He is said to have saved the city of Changehou from plague, and again later from starvation during a prolonged drought.

He was also summoned to Court where, in about 1030 he cured the Empress Wen. Alternatively, it was in 1408 when the wife of the Ming emperor suffered from sore nipples or a boil on her chest which no one else had been unable to cure. The story adds that he was required to pass a test before he was allowed to approach the empress. He was offered a silken thread that had been tied to a column in the hall (or on the knob of a door) but behind a screen and then asked to take the empress's pulse.

Wu correctly diagnosed that the thread was tied to a column (by the pulse of the dragon in the stone) and not the empress's wrist as he had been told it was. They next tied the silk to the paw of a kitten. Again Wu was able to identify the pulse as non-human. It was only then that he was allowed to treat the empress.

Pao-sheng Ta-ti is the patron deity of herbalists in Taiwan. His cult, first

established at the Lungchiu An monastery not far from Amoy, was carried by immigrants through the ports of T'ungan, Amoy and Haich'eng to the southern seas. His images have also been noted on altars in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia, in addition to Singapore where his cult as a medical deity is almost as popular as it is in Taiwan. In many of these temples, mediums are possessed by the spirit of Wu T'ao. In some, 5-10 smaller images of the deity stand on the altar table before the main altar for devotees to borrow and take home to help a sick person.

Specialists of the Third Bureau

According to Chinese legend, Hua T'o Tsun-shih was born in Hsüchou in Kiangsu province, where he first perceived the concept of surgery. One of the Ten Celebrated Doctors, Hua T'o believed in the bold use of the knife to save lives and therefore is the patron of Chinese surgeons and massage manipulators, and also of spirit mediums who cure the sick. Each practitioner keeps a tablet dedicated to him in their surgery or on their altar.

As a surgeon, possibly his greatest claim to fame lies in his skill in the use of anaesthesia during brain and abdominal surgery. Before operating, he gave his patient a white powder which effervesced in wine, producing a potion which when drunk alleviated the pain. It has even

▽ The Kings of the Three Mountains. San Shan Kuo-wang, is a Hakka protective cult, who are quite frequently portrayed as one composite image. They have become the special patron deities of Hakka immigrants to South-East Asia, Taiwan and Hong Kong from the area of the Three Mountains in Eastern Kuangtung province. Originally the three deities were anonymous mountain spirits. Their cult centre was and still is at Chieh-yang Hsien and their temples nowadays are the meeting places for immigrants from Swatow and Ch'aochou.

The Three are regarded nowadays predominantly as medical deities prescribing herbal medicines, though devotees do seek many other benefits from them. Prescriptions are usually obtained either through mediums possessed by one of them or by devotees throwing fortune spills before the images of the Three, which are then interpreted by members of the temple staff and made up at herbal medicine shops.

In a number of temples the three deities have been identified as generals bearing the surnames Lien, Chao and Ch'iao, each with his own colour and banner: white, green and red respectively. The right hand deity with a red face is patron of the peak called Ming Shan; the deity on the left with a black face is patron of the peak called Tu Shan; while the senior deity in the centre with a white face is the patron of the central peak called Chin Shan. [Taiwan]



▽ In Peking, Anhui and Chekiang provinces, and probably others too, devotees who had recovered their sight or had their eye ailments cured subsequent to prayers to Yen-kuang P'u-sa, brought eyes made of paper or silk which were hung before the image of the goddess. In Kansu province, she was a goddess of great importance, with painted eyes hanging round her neck, each donated by devotees who had been cured.

In Peking, Yen-kuang P'u-sa was one of a triad of Niang-niang, claimed to be the sixth daughter of the Jade Emperor (see page 51). She was worshipped by pregnant women in particular, to avoid having their babes born with ophthalmia. [Kiangsu province]

been claimed that it brought on numbness and insensibility. Images of Hua T'o have been noted on numerous altars in Chinese communities in Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia and even Australia (a typical Hong Kong carving style in Brisbane), as well as in thirteen temples in Hong Kong and six in Macau.

Legends about his abilities leave us in no doubt that he was a doctor of great competence who lived and was deified during the period described as the Three Kingdoms, and has been worshipped China-wide. He would appear to have had one great advantage over other surgeons. He was able to peer into the human body through the skin, but only in the naked state, and sketch the diseased part. He is reputed to have been able to remove, clean and wash, and replace

damaged intestines. The *Feng-shen Yen-i* tells how the King of Wei, T'sao T'sao, suffering from terrible headaches, was approached by Hua T'o who offered to open his skull and wash his brain. The Emperor, both apprehensive and angry, ordered that Hua T'o be executed.

KO TA-HSIEN

The Great Immortal Ko, **Ko Ta-hsien**, also known as **Pao P'u-tzu**, the master diagnostician and a leading Taoist philosopher and foremost pharmacist of his age, is probably better known by his personal name, **Ko Hung**. He was worshipped China-wide, though he was more popular in central, east and north China than in the south. His charms and plaques have been frequently noted in Taiwan and South-East Asia. He is said to have lived either between AD 281-361 or AD 253-333 and became the primary ancestor of the Taoist T'ien-t'ai P'ai.

He enlarged upon the techniques of alchemy and incorporated Confucian ethics into Taoist philosophy (in effect 'consideration' for the people by the ruler, for the staff by the master and for others by the masses). He was an early compounder of colours and dyes, famed as an alchemist and occult expert, and is patron of dyers, diviners and jugglers.

Born into a poor family in Tanyang, just east of Nanking in Kiangsu province, Ko Hung grew up stammering badly and caring little for pleasure, fame or wealth. He opted out of human social activities and is said to have been so poor but studious that he cut firewood to buy paper and ink. He studied the works of antiquity, practised breathing exercises, and lived as a mendicant wandering from one holy site to another.

He is best remembered for his translations of earlier medical books into verse, the better to be called to mind, and for his experiments to produce the elixir. Although he was said to be able to understand the weather by reading the clouds and wind, and understood the diseases of plants, contrary to usual practice he made no attempt ever to cure people.

Despite this Ko Hung was depicted on the altars of the Tung-yüeh Temple in Peking as one of the Ten Ancient Doctors, and his image is the main deity on the main altar of the temple dedicated to him on a hill at Hangchou overlooking the West Lake. It is said that the temple is built on the site of his grave. His only image noted outside mainland China is in



Hong Kong, where it stands on an altar in a 'temple' run by Swatow immigrants in a herbal dispensary in the back streets of Kowloon. The majority of the 'temple' space is used for the storage of display boxes of medicinal herbs which are sold by the temple keeper to make up the prescriptions written on a sand table by the spirit of the Immortal Ko.

The image portrays him as a typical standard carving of a Taoist, dressed in gilded robes and with a black beard and the flat Taoist tile cap. He is seated, holding a fly switch in his right hand, but with no unique features and could easily be mistaken for the commonly seen gilt image of Lü Tung-pin (see page 76).

His wife, **Pao Ku**, who was a famous practitioner in her own right of acupuncture, stands beside him in the renovated temple at Lo-fu Shan, some sixty miles north-east of Canton. Her image has been noted alone, on a side altar in a temple in Canton, where she was revered as the patroness of acupuncturists.

CH'ING-SHUI TSU-SHIH

The Patriarch of Clear Water, **Ch'ing-shui Tsu-shih**, is a popular local Fukienese healing deity who watches over the health and welfare of the community, though one story claims that he was originally worshipped by agriculturists probably due to his acclaimed ability to cause rain during droughts. Although revered in temples dedicated to him he is nowadays more widely worshipped in other temples as a secondary deity. The cult has now become interdenominational being worshipped in popular religion temples using Taoist rituals.

Ch'ing-shui Tsu-shih is consulted about treatment for infirmities, and is also offered regular reverence for the protection of health by the hale and hearty, and for peace of mind and tranquillity. In some places he is believed to be particularly efficacious for the treatment of deafness, insanity and blindness. In a great number of popular religion temples where his image is housed, there are mediums who speak with his voice providing answers to queries, prescriptions and protective talismans. Exorcists also operate before his images.

There are many legends about Ch'ing-shui. He appears to have been born in Yangchun in Fukien province in 1044 and to have died in about 1124. One story says he was a Sung military adviser, Ch'en Ming-chao, who fought a losing

battle against the Mongol invaders and fled south with the defeated dynasty.

Another maintains that he was Ch'en Chao-ying, born as late as 1084 in Honan province. He distinguished himself in battle for the Southern Sung during an expedition into south China. He settled in Fukien province and, as a determined opponent of the Mongol invaders who had usurped the throne, he travelled around Fukien and Chekiang disguised as a Buddhist monk, plotting against the occupying forces. Although he had little success, he finally settled in Anhsi where he exhorted the local Chinese to resist Mongol rule and restore a Chinese emperor. After his death he was deified and revered as a patriot. His followers, and later devotees, supported the forces which eventually brought the Ming to power. The first emperor of the Ming bestowed a posthumous title on him, as Lord Protector of the Country (**Hu-kuo Kung**). Ch'ing-shui is still honoured as a loyal anti-foreign hero.

YEN-KUANG P'U-SA

The Bodhisattva of Eyesight, **Yen-kuang P'u-sa**, is a popular religion deity who cures deformities and diseases of the eyes. She is one of the specialist deities of the celestial Ministry of Medicine, looked upon as an acolyte of Pi-hsia Yüan-chün. In north China she was possibly better known as **Yen-kuang Niang-niang**, the Goddess of Eyesight.

She was also worshipped in the rest of China and especially central China where eye diseases were endemic and a scourge, but the region where her popularity was by far the greatest stretched across the arid and dusty northern areas of China, where blindness led to poverty. In many parts of northern China, touching her image was said to be sufficient to obtain a cure. Pre-1949, she was usually represented as an elderly woman with an eye on each outstretched palm.

Pestilence & Plague Gods

From the earliest pioneering days of the colonization of southern China by northern Chinese, epidemics have ravaged southern populations. Devastating epidemics of plagues, fevers and contagious diseases linked with lowered resistance in the hotter and humid south left the settlers in deep fear of smallpox, paratyphoid, cholera, dengue and malaria. Contemporary medical expertise was completely out of its depth, leaving the



△ A charm to ward off demonic forces, with a *pa-kua* disc and an image of **Chiang Tzu-ya** (see page 59). [Hong Kong]

▽ **T'i-shen** (Substitute for a Person) images: carved from a 'prescription' by a spirit medium, they cure a devotee's ailment caused by an 'unpaid debt' from a previous life, by absorbing the 'debt'. [Singapore]



▷ Individual Pestilence Wang-yeh normally have no unique recognizable features. All are believed to have died violent deaths, with none from natural causes. Some were victims of manslaughter, others committed suicide.

There are a great many local variations in image and style. Their effigies, often ferocious, consequently tend to solemn colours. Some are portrayed as standard military mandarins and others civil scholar-officials; some have fierce faces, others normal natural ones.

A number of Pestilence Wang-yeh wear a normal coronet instead of what tends to be the more common scholar's cap. All are portrayed sitting on thrones, rarely with anything in their hands though occasionally one has a drawn sword held at waist height. Most have their feet resting on small animals, usually stylized lions. One god-carver explained that it is important for the feet of a senior or powerful deity to rest on something other than the ground; it is simply not done for them to stand on the earth.

It is quite common for the group of Pestilence Wang-yeh on altars to have different coloured faces, although examination has shown that a specific named Wang-yeh in one temple is unlikely to have the same coloured face as the Wang-yeh in another temple despite having exactly the same name and title. Some have single colour faces, natural, strong pink, red, blue, black, green, etc. Others have striped faces such as yellow on green or red on black. Some have red beards, others black, while still others are clean shaven.

The specific iconographic features in each case is agreed upon by the local temple committee, who have often requested the specific deity's opinion by spirit communication using divining blocks. [Taiwan]

immigrants only their deities to turn to for protection or cure. The settlers brought with them the idea that sickness was caused by the forces of evil. These invisible armies of demons led by demon generals had to be repelled and, if possible, destroyed. As these forces were from the other world the best counter was the use of the righteous and virtuous spiritual forces from the other world.

WEN SHEN

Devotees conceptualized a Ministry of Epidemics within the Chinese pantheon

incorporating the various sickness-countering deities. Each bore not only its personal name and title but also local colloquial titles, the best known of which is probably the **Wen Shen** (Sickness Spirits). Several deified humans have been accepted within different areas of China as the Ruler of Epidemics, especially cholera.

There are also the Five Emperors who control the Department of Epidemics in the Celestial bureaucracy. They are seen in some places individually, but in most



areas as a group of Five. Foreigners have described the Five as plague and pestilence deities affecting both humans and crops. However, crop scourge deities are usually different and are not known as Wen Shen.

Wen Shen were regarded differently in various parts of China. Nowadays in Taiwan they are the controllers of forces of tamed demons who can destroy plague-causing demons. In other places they are the deities responsible for the plague-producing demons, who release and recall them as ordered by the Jade Emperor.

WANG-YEH

All Fukienese deities bearing the title of **Wang-yeh** (best translated as 'Their Excellencies') tend to be regarded as protectors of the community against attacks by sickness demons. However, in practice the Wang-yeh fall into one of two categories: the first is the Pestilence Wang-yeh who protect the community from sickness; the second are the Non-Pestilence Wang-yeh who are individual deified folk heroes and worthies from the higher echelons of the popular religion pantheon. Their role is to protect the local community against all forms of demonic attack. They also perform the general functions of the regular local deities.

The best example of a Non-pestilence Wang-yeh is Koxinga (see page 161), a local protective deity whose image is to be seen in a number of temples, but only in Taiwan. In general, Pestilence Wang-yeh are known only by their surname and have only one, though multi-version, legend, whereas each Non-pestilence Wang-yeh has not only a full name but also a local individual legend.

Pestilence Wang-yeh are primarily found nowadays in temples within Fukienese and Ch'aozhou communities, especially in Taiwan and South-East Asia. A number of devotees believe that the task of the Pestilence Wang-yeh is to police the world and control demons. A small minority regard them as healing gods, while the majority believe their role is to ward off and even attack demon forces and influence. If this is successful, it leads to a cure. In general they are all regarded as disease spirits or semi-deities.

They are referred to as Wang-yeh not only to avoid voicing the dread word 'demon' and offending them, but also to honour them with the hope of buying

them off. A few temple keepers claim that the Pestilence Wang-yeh are subordinate to Tung-yüeh Ta-ti (see page 180).

Being awesome deities, the Pestilence Wang-yeh are only worshipped when devotees require to disperse or destroy malignant and demonic forces. As these deities are only approached by worshippers seeking aid and not advice, the use of fortune slips and forms of communication such as divining blocks is rare. However, seances are sometimes held in Pestilence Wang-yeh temples so that the medium can find the cause of a specific disease – what the actual demonic attack consists of – so that devotees may take all the necessary precautions.

Generally it is agreed that the Pestilence Wang-yeh consist of thirty-six or 360 spirits each bearing a different surname. Pestilence Wang-yeh are usually seen in groups of three or five. The most common group of three have the surnames Chu, Li and Ch'ih. They were three talented musicians who were ordered to play at Court, after the T'ang emperor had heard of their unsurpassed skills. During the performance the sublime music caused many of the emperor's ministers to swoon. The emperor suspected that the three musicians were demons

▽ The most common surnames in the numerous groups of five **Pestilence Wang-yeh** are Li, Ch'ih, Wu, Chu and Fan. They are said to be the deified souls of the five leaders of 360 scholars summarily executed during the reign of T'ang Ming Huang. This group are popularly referred to in Taiwan as the **Nan K'un-shen Wang-yeh** because of their presence on the main altar in an old temple near Tainan, said to be the first Wang-yeh to be established in Taiwan.

The legend of the five scholars claims that they had been unsuccessful at the imperial state examinations during the reign of T'ang T'ai Tsung (AD 627–649), and had stayed on in the capital living on what they could earn playing music. The emperor summoned them to the palace to play for him. At the same time, the Taoist Master Chang T'ien-shih (see page 78) was received by him in an audience. The emperor, wishing to test his magical powers, ordered the musicians to play in the cellar while he told Chang T'ien-shih there were five demons below. Using his secret arts, Chang killed all five. T'ai Tsung, appalled and ashamed of the deaths he had caused, deified all five. [Taiwan]





△ Sui Ching Po is depicted as a seated, bearded mandarin, with no specific recognition features who, fortunately for identification purposes, is usually accompanied by a heavily decorated tablet bearing his title and describing him as a hero. [Macau]

▽ A Pestilence Wang-yeh spirit or plague boat made of wood, is laden with captured demonic spirits and pushed out to sea or set afire on the shore during the fifth lunar month festival. This one is waiting for its final voyage. [Taiwan]



in disguise, and had them killed. The three wronged souls appealed to the Jade Emperor who deified them as the Three Wang-yeh, with responsibility to watch over human activities, to report on their good and evil deeds, and investigate all demonic activities.

SPIRIT BOATS

Generally speaking the deployment of Wang-yeh temples has followed the progress of the spread of Fukien people within Taiwan and South-East Asia. The areas in which they are most densely spread in Taiwan include the Pescadores and Tainan, and to a lesser extent the Chia I, Yunlin and Kaohsiung coastal areas. The origins of these temples is related to the traditional practice of *fang Wang ch'uan*, the 'setting forth of the Pestilence Wang-yeh spirit boats'.

At regular intervals, sometimes every ten years, a miniature boat is launched bearing one or more Wang-yeh images, the escort for the evil spirits of plague expelled from the area. The Wang-yeh images, immediately they have reached another landing place, are declared 'holy' again and a new temple built on the spot for the images. Meanwhile, back at the old, original site some miles up the coast or river, one or more new images are carved to occupy the old temple.

While the Wang-yeh boat festival is still observed in some parts of Taiwan, it seems to have died out in South-East

Asia, with a memory of it being seen in Malacca in the mid-1930s.

Regularly, every year or so, during the fifth lunar month festival, a plague boat made of paper or, in large communities, of wood, is laden with captured demonic spirits and pushed out to sea or set afire on the shore. This is a three-day event during which the Wang-yeh are entertained and feasted before the boats are despatched in flames together with their passenger demons.

Unlike other deified Chinese, actual images of the Pestilence Wang-yeh (ie disease semi-deities) are sometimes floated out to sea or burnt during the festivals to carry away the pestilence demons associated with them.

SUI CHING PO

The Pacifying Duke, Sui Ching Po, is a Cantonese deity, a suppresser of disease and demons, and a protector of travellers. He is prayed to whenever an epidemic breaks out, be it 'flu or something more serious. The Pacifying Duke was born during the southern Sung, into the Ch'en family in Kuangtung province. His personal name was Ch'en Ch'ung-chen. He was promoted to command a brigade during the reign of Sung Li Tseng and posted to Tun T'ien in Eastern Kuangtung. He energetically suppressed the roving bands of bandits there leading to his popularity with the peasants.

According to one temple keeper his first image came to Hong Kong at the invitation of a Wanchai group of businessmen whose lives, as well as those of their families and friends, were threatened by a frightening plague epidemic in 1894. The keeper in another temple claimed that his image was brought from Sze Yap in Kuangtung during an earlier epidemic of plague in 1869.

His reputation has gone from strength to strength throughout Cantonese-speaking areas. In 1933 cholera broke out in Macau and an image of Sui Ching Po was taken across from Hong Kong on a highly decorated junk. On arrival the image was paraded through the streets of Macau and the cholera epidemic ceased. However, of late he has lost much of his popularity, according to the first temple keeper, due to the introduction of modern wonder drugs from the west and whereas forty years ago he had been the main deity on the altar he has now been relegated to being one of many on a crowded secondary altar.

Deities of Marriage & Child Rearing

To the majority of Chinese the most important consideration in life is family. Although it used to be a matter of shame to fail to continue the line, this seems to be of less importance nowadays. But there have been many reports of couples in mainland China, who are only permitted to have one child, getting rid of a daughter to try again for a son.



Match-making

This was the first step to marriage and several deities help parents to seek out compatibility in prospective brides and bridegrooms. This is in spite of the widespread belief in the role of Yüeh Lao Hsing-chün, the Old Man of the Moon. He is a popular religion stellar deity, the Divine Match-maker, who joins together those destined to marry.

The effigies of two deities, a matron and an elderly mandarin, each holding several babies, are to be seen on side altars or secondary altars in temples in Taiwan, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Images of Hua Kung and

Hua P'o (see page 118) have been seen in some half a dozen popular religion temples in Hong Kong and Macau, with the two images being linked by red threads. These deities are prayed to by devotees who seek a bride or bridegroom for themselves, for their children or their grandchildren.

The concept of binding a couple in marriage with a red cord has developed from the age-old belief that Yüeh Lao, the Divine Matchmaker, seals the match between a couple destined eventually to marry either just before or just after they were born into this world, using a red thread, and to some Chinese Yüeh Lao is



△ An impersonal minor popular religion spirit, known as **Mei-jeñ** (literally a 'go-between') is asked by parents and by individuals for a good match for their sons, daughters or for themselves in marriage. She is only provided with offerings when her services are required. Both her images, unique to Macau, show a lady with bobbed hair dressed in a long robe over which she wears a short, knee-length, travelling coat.

◁ **Yüeh Lao** is regarded by many Chinese as the popular religion stellar deity who joins together those destined to marry. He is a mysterious figure, rather than a major deity, who creeps about secretly at night tying red cords around the legs of new born boys and girls. Some Chinese claim that he joins intended couples before they are ever born, others that he does it shortly after. He binds them with an invisible red thread from which, once it is knotted linking a couple, there is no escape, despite human wishes and schemes. His decisions are irrevocable. For this reason, opposition from the two partners concerned to an arranged marriage was often avoided and attempts were rarely made to circumvent destined marriages. Nowadays his image tends to be approached more by young men and women, who present him with a red cord for confirmation of his approval of their choice of marriage partner. Young girls pray to him on moonlit nights for a good and faithful husband. He is often called the God of Marriage by foreigners. [Singapore]



△ Chi Hsiang-ko is shown as an articulated image, a marionette of a boy of about five years of age, usually dressed in fabric pyjamas or children's clothes. [Malaysia]

▽ Hua Kung and Hua P'o (the Lord and Lady of the Flowers) are popular religion fertility deities seen on altars under various titles. Their role is to ensure that the baby arrives at the right place, to the correct parents and at the right time. A load of souls arrives from the Underworld on the Flower Boat are regular intervals. This boat is guided by Kuan Yin, and is sometimes referred to as Kuan Yin's Boat. Hopeful couples pray to Hua Kung and Hua P'o that they will be favoured on the next delivery.

Hua Kung. According to some devotees, Hua Kung holds one end of the red thread which he ties to the leg of the boy while Hua P'o ties the girl's leg with the other end. Over the years, they gradually draw the thread taut bringing the now mature man and woman together.

Conception & Birth

Once married, the next stage is to produce the son and heir. Chi Hsiang-ko is a marionette of a boy of about five years of age. His title roughly means the Brother of Good Omen, and he is revered in some places by the childless and is said to be an extremely potent fertility god, although you cannot communicate with him, as he is too young and unable to talk properly. Childless couples pray before him and promise gifts if and when they produce a child of their own. These gifts are usually red packets containing cash which are stuffed into the top pocket of the deity's pyjama jacket.

In other places Chi Hsiang-ko is the deity to whom parents resort when a child is very sick. Clothes from the sick child are placed on his image and left there for twenty-four hours. Then they are recovered by the parents and put back on to the sick child. The belief is that the sickness has been transferred from the child to the image.

The image sits on the front edge of the main altar or on side altars all dedicated to other and unconnected deities. It has been noted in temples in Malaysia in particular, but also in Singapore, Java and Sumatra. Although the image of Chi Hsiang-ko has been seen in temples in which other Chinese communities predominate, it is said to be primarily a Hakka cult. However, it has not been noted in Hong Kong or in Macau.

Pregnancy

There are a number of deities, mythological goddesses and legendary women, who not only provide care for pregnant women and eventually their offspring, but are also responsible for allocating children to parents in the first place. Probably the main deity connected with children revered by women is the Goddess of Mercy, Kuan Yin (see page 89), especially the image of her holding a child on her knee, known as **Sung-tzu Kuan Yin**. Kuan Yin and a great number of other goddesses, together with their many minions, are approached by devo-

tees for a safe pregnancy, for the birth of a son and heir, for a safe delivery, for protection after birth for the mother and child, and for the child to be brought up to be healthy, wealthy and wise.

CHU-SHENG NIANG-NIANG

The most important of these goddesses is the Midwife Goddess, the goddess who arranges births. She is known in Fukiene and Ch'aochou communities as **Chu-sheng Niang-niang** (the Lady who Registers Births) and in Cantonese communities as **Chin-hua Fu-jen** (Madame Golden Flower). She is regarded by many as the special protectress of pregnant women, women in labour and new-born babies. She is prayed to, not only for easy and safe labour, but also for a son. Chu-sheng Niang-niang is responsible for the allocation of boys and girls to worthy parents and for protection of the mother and child. In the majority of temples in which Chu-sheng Niang-niang's image is present, it is accepted that she has no specific name and legend. A temple custodian in Tainan city explained that she is not the same goddess as Lin-shui Fu-jen (see below) as a great many devotees believe.

Her role in the Spirit World's bureaucracy is to decide upon the parentage of every child, its date and time of birth, its weight and its fate. After it has been decided that a soul is ready for rebirth, she must sketch out the broad outlines of the individual's next life. Her two main aides, nearly always males, have a writing brush and pad to record and register the details, and a pair of scales to ensure that the proportions of bone, flesh, blood, brain and body organs are correct. Childless couples are possibly the most common devotees to be seen praying before Chu-sheng Niang-niang and, in Taiwan, they burn special charms for her called *Hua-t'a*. Pregnant women offer prayers before her image requesting safe delivery after a safe pregnancy.

CH'IH-T'OU FU-JEN

A popular religion goddess only seen in northern Taiwan, often in temples dedicated to Ti-tsang Wang (see page 91). **Ch'ih-t'ou Fu-jen** is revered by ladies, mostly Fukiene from Ch'üanchou communities. She provides protection to women during childbirth, and often shares an altar with Chu-sheng Niang-niang (see above).

According to legend she is the Lady of the Lake of Blood in the Underworld, the



place where any woman who dies during childbirth ends up as part of her purgatory. Devotees pray to this goddess to seek assistance on behalf of dead women to obtain forgiveness and to help escape being thrown into the Lake. In addition, women who expect a difficult delivery pray that she will help them to avoid ending up there. In the Paoan Kung in Taipei where her image stands on a side altar, she is also prayed to on behalf of victims of car crashes who, it is believed, also end up in the Lake.

Her images portray her as a standard matron wearing gilded dragon robes and a tiny Taoist crown, with her hands concealed within the sleeves of her robe apart from the thumb of one hand, which protrudes. She has bound feet.

A group of elderly ladies in Taipei claimed she was a Ch'üanchou woman. In 1853 when local Ch'üanchou and Changchou communities were fighting each other, some Changchou people tried but failed to force their way into a Ch'üanchou village which is now part of greater Taipei. After a large and noisy celebration at the Lung Shan Temple in Taipei, the Ch'üanchou people, weary and happy, went home to sleep.

The Changchou people took advantage and mounted an attack, but when they reached the Temple, they encountered a pregnant woman cooling herself by the temple pool who raised the alarm. Although the Changchou tried to silence her, her alarm saved the village. She died of her injuries and was buried with great

honour. No one recorded her name and she is revered simply as the Lady of the Lake of Blood.

CHIN-HUA FU-JEN

Madame Golden Flower, **Chin-hua Fu-jen**, is a popular religion deity, a fertility and child protection goddess commonly worshipped by Cantonese. Her cult centre was formerly at Honam, across the river from Canton city. She is the patron deity of expectant and new mothers, who ensures a safe, speedy and trouble free delivery during childbirth, and the gift of sons. She is also worshipped by ever-hopeful barren women. A mother brings her month-old baby to Chin-hua Fu-jen to thank her for its safe delivery, and again to celebrate its first birthday over the Lunar New Year.

The most popular legend begins with her birth into the Chin family in Canton a thousand years ago. She grew up communing with the deities, pouring out her heart to them and seeking peace and protection for herself and her family. It was claimed that she had powers of communication with the spirits of the dead. An arranged marriage, separating her from the deities, led to her suicide. In one version she drowned in the river at Honam during the Dragon Boat races; or she committed suicide in a lake or, as a shaman, she drowned in the Lake of the Immortals which preserved her body.

When her body was recovered from the river the air was suffused with perfume. While her corpse lay in its coffin awaiting burial, a sandalwood image in



△ **Chin-hua Fu-jen** is a patron of expectant and new mothers, who can grant a request for sons. [Hong Kong]

◁ **Chu-sheng Niang-niang** with two of her maids. [Foochou]

▽ **Chang Hsien** is usually shown carrying a stringless bow without an arrow and often accompanied by one or more children. He almost always has a white face, a straggly black beard, colourful robes and a scholar's cap. He can be confused with Erh Lang (see page 62), but the latter usually has a dog at his feet. [Five-colour block print]





△ Images of Lin-shui Fu-jen portray her as a matron either sitting on a throne or standing, usually holding a shaman's tools – a sword raised in her right hand and a buffalo horn held in the other. With the sword she drives off demonic forces, while with the latter she summons spiritual aid from her assailants whenever the need arises. She has been depicted with bound feet and in several places with one foot raised and resting on a firewheel on which she travels at the speed of light. In at least three places in Taiwan she is shown astride a white horse. Her image is very often surrounded or flanked by her maids, each caring for an infant. Whereas in legend she has thirty-six senior midwives and seventy-two junior ones as her assistants, their images range from the commonest groups of two or twelve to the unusual twenty-four or thirty-six. [Taiwan]

▷ Chin-hua Fu-jen (see page 119) is often attended by twelve maids (some are shown here). They include wet nurses and nannies performing a variety of tasks ranging from holding the child out to urinate to teaching it to walk or talk. Each nurse performs a function caring for and protecting children from birth to puberty. A Singapore god-carver explained, in answer to a comment that the image only had a pair of maids instead of the customary dozen, that the trend was to follow the pattern of life – servants were expensive and even the well-to-do were cutting down their staff. [Hong Kong]

her likeness rose from the waters and remained there motionless until it was removed and carefully preserved. A temple was built to house it and a cult sprang up around its worship. In the early sixteenth century after the temple and its image had been destroyed, a clay image was fashioned and the temple rebuilt.

There is also a simple rite whereby a child who has a weakness of some kind – an affliction, mental or physical, a poor 'fortune' or other character weakness – is offered to Chin-hua Fu-jen for 'spiritual adoption'. This is done by the child or youth, or its sponsor, making an obeisance before Chin-hua Fu-jen's image and explaining the problem to the deity. The child is then presented with a charm or amulet by the temple keeper, bearing the title of the goddess and the birth characters of the child. The child wears this until it reaches its sixteenth birthday when the charm is returned to the temple with a substantial offering.

Chin-hua Fu-jen's image can be seen on secondary altars in Macau and Hong Kong, and in Cantonese communities in South-East Asia. She has also been noted on several altars within Hainanese communities in Malaysia and Singapore. Her role is very similar to that of Chu-sheng Niang-niang (see above). Uniquely, she is offered a bunch of fresh onions during one festival.

Infants & Children

The Matron of the Bed, Ch'uang Mu (literally the 'Bed Mother'), is actually

the special patron of very young children. She is never portrayed in image form nor are her icons or titles displayed on or above altars. She is revered as the invisible spirit who watches over babies at night and is invoked when they are sick. Her duties begin on the third day of a child's life and continue on a lessening scale until the child reaches puberty. Some more old-fashioned mothers place a small tablet dedicated to Ch'uan Mu or paste her icon under the bed of their daughter-in-law to invoke fertility, though none appears to consider worshipping the deity necessary. No temples or altars have been noted dedicated to the Bed Mother.

LIN-SHUI FU-JEN

The Lady from Lin-shui, **Lin-shui Fu-jen**, is the principal deity of the popular religion Lü Shan sect, revered by the Fukienese. Her full name is **Ch'en Ching-ku** (the Quiet Maiden Ch'en). Formerly a local Foochow deity, her cult has spread to South-East Asia and to a lesser extent to Taiwan. A number of Fukienese devotees describe her as **Pi-hsia Yüan-chün**, daughter of T'ai Shan Yeh, usually the title given to the major northern Chinese maternity goddess.

In general Lin-shui Fu-jen is prayed to for all aspects of child upbringing, and women also pray to her for supernatural help in childbirth and in times of distress. She is also believed to help women who are unable to conceive. This was a major problem as all wives feared either being divorced or supplanted by a concubine.



She is regarded as both the protectress of pregnant women during their delivery, and the special protectress of infants and children, invoked when they are sick. She is prayed to and provided with sacrificial offerings in gratitude after a child has reached the end of their first month. A temple keeper in Tainan city claimed that Chu-sheng Niang-niang was responsible for providing a son. Once the mother-to-be is pregnant, she protects the woman and her unborn child until birth when the responsibility passes to Lin-shui Fu-jeu.

She is unknown outside Fukienese communities, where her legends are complex and very varied. One claims that she was born in AD 767 into the Ch'en family of shamans who lived in Kut'ien near Foochou. They range from her death in childbirth, hence her role as a protectress of women, to drowning after a complex series of Taoist spells defeated a demonic attack, which led to her role as an exorcist patron.

Yet another legend tells how, after she had died, she returned to the human world where she captured and destroyed a snake or dragon that lived in the cave near the village of Lin-shui, from which she gets her title. Every year the creature had demanded and devoured a virgin. Miss Ch'en killed it and cut it into three pieces to ensure that its power was utterly destroyed. Finally, having reputedly destroyed a sea monster, she also became the patron of river transportation workers in northern Fukien.

CHIEN-TZU SAN NIANG

Several deities can be approached to help control intractable children. One of these, **Chien-tzu San Niang** (the Third Maid who Admonishes Children), has been noted in Macau, where both images depict her as a young woman dressed in gaily coloured robes, but without any specific identifying characteristic.

A child who constantly misbehaves is dragged before this deity by his parents who explain the problem to the goddess and place the child's future in her hands. Should the child continue to be a trial to its parents, punishment is taken out of their hands with the responsibility for punishment of the child resting firmly with the goddess.

CHANG HSIEN

A lesser Taoist deity of popular religion, **Chang Hsien** is said to have lived in Szechwan province during the fifth century AD. He is the guardian of children

and of pregnant women and drives off the evil spirit T'ien-kou (the Heavenly Dog, see page 185) with his bow and peach-wood arrows. T'ien-kou is believed to attack the souls of children before and after birth and is also regarded as the major cause of sterility.

His cult dates from the Sung dynasty when Emperor Sung Jen Tsung dreamed of a handsome youth with white skin and black hair, carrying a bow. The youth told the emperor that T'ien-kou was flying by, threatening the Sun and the Moon, while on earth it had been devouring children. Chang (for it was he) defeated the dog and the emperor ordered his likeness to be exhibited across the empire to continue to frighten off the malignant dog.

LÜ MA

Images of horses without riders are often seen in the Under Altar in South-East Asia. They represent messengers responsible for carrying letters (pleas or charms) from devotees to Heaven. In Hong Kong and Macau, these images are called **Lü Ma** (Green Horse). They are prayed to by the elderly – usually for their young sons abroad – while wives pray for their husbands on long trips.

In Macau and Hong Kong images of Green Horses usually have their forelegs and sometimes their heads and necks ensnared with long, fine red cords. These are charms placed there by wives who pray that their travelling husbands will return soon or be faithful to them, or that an erring husband will return to his wife. Pairs of red chopsticks are also bound to their forelegs expressing the request that a wish for a son should be sent to the local goddess of fertility.



△ **Hua-fen Niang-niang**, Miss Pollen, is a Cantonese popular religion deity to whom women pray to retain their youthful looks and powers of attraction. Devotees, giggling, say that she can make the ugliest girl beautiful to her lover, if she wishes. She is also prayed to in one Kowloon temple by wives whose husbands are abroad, to retain their beauty and keep their husband's love. In temples where the image is on an open altar, offerings usually consist of old-fashioned make-up, blocks of face powder and powder puffs. She wears strings of fake pearls. [Vietnam]

▽ Nowadays **Lü Ma** (Green Horse) is prayed to by devotees wishing to stop rumours and prevent or patch up quarrels. In some temples, where he is known as 'the money horse', he is also prayed to that he may bring wealth and winnings. [Hong Kong]



Wealth Gods & Success in Business

There are three separate attitudes towards the gaining of wealth that are reflected in Chinese worship of the Gods of Wealth. Many Chinese people make a visit to a Wealth God to seek financial stability and sufficient money to raise a family, retire in comfort, and eventually leave a decent legacy to their children.

The first group is epitomized by those who emigrated from the Chinese mainland to South-East Asia seeking their fortunes, who returned with the funds to retire to their ancestral villages in peace, well being and happiness.

▷ Civil Wealth Gods (Ts'ai Shen) like this one, are habitually portrayed as mandarins wearing scholar-official robes and a hat, usually with side wings, sitting with a *ju-i* sceptre crooked in one arm and a *tael* or 'shoe' of gold or silver in the other hand. [Taiwan]

Military Wealth Gods are fierce in appearance. Normally they carry a *tael* of silver or gold, but sometimes they hold a sword and have a tiger either under one foot or alongside (see page 126).



Most people do not ask for a jackpot, but are careful to request modest prosperity. It is as if they are asking, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' The second group includes the gamblers who seek an

immediate fortune at cards, mah jong, or the race track. The third group, again seeking a speedy fortune, are the prospectors, be they seekers after gold or an immediate turnover by speculation on

the markets. Most Chinese appear to be gamblers to a greater or lesser extent, and in general they accept winning or losing with complete equanimity. However, the concept of wealth to the majority is comparative – they desire to gain a better and more assured standard of living, rather than amassing a great fortune.

Ts'ai Shen

The generic title for all the many Wealth Gods is **Ts'ai Shen**. Their ubiquity reflects not so much the greed of devotees as the burden of desperate poverty over the centuries. The margin to carry peasants through bad times was small and human effort alone was sometimes insufficient to fill the rice bowl. Daily prayers to the Wealth God bore witness to the dependence peasants felt on divine



help or good fortune to carry them through. In Cantonese communities, however, it is said that some of the gods of wealth should only be worshipped when one's luck is out. In general, they only provide wealth to those whose luck permits it.

There is a great sale of pictures of Ts'ai Shen at the Lunar New Year, particularly on the last day of the old year in preparation for his birthday. His old

picture was removed on the second of the first lunar month and ceremoniously burned in the courtyard, with the new picture pasted up in its place. Somewhat surprisingly, some local gaudy carvings standing among the usual handsome gilded lacquer Buddhas in a Buddhist nunnery in Hong Kong's New Territories included a Ts'ai Shen. One of the nuns confessed, with a giggle of embarrassment, that the deity had quite frequently brought them much needed funds.

According to a Taiwanese god-carver there are two Gods of Wealth: Civil and Military. The Civil Wealth God is **Ts'ai-po Hsing-chün**. The Military Wealth God or **Wu Tsai Shen** is either Kuan Yü (see page 147), or more usually Chao Kung-ming (see page 64). In Hong Kong the two deities most requested for financial aid are **T'ien-shang Tsai Shen** and **Ts'ai-po Hsing-chün**. Both are asked for monetary gain in daily routines.

Some temple keepers feel strongly that because Ts'ai-po Hsing-chün is a Celestial deity, he must not be involved in gambling. He is, they claim, prayed to when one's luck is in, whereas **Ti-fang Tsai Shen**, the Wealth God of the Locale who is the taller of the two **Wu-ch'ang Kuei** (see page 173), is prayed to when one's luck is out, and especially for help in betting on horse-racing or other forms of gambling.

Images of a Fortune **Wu-ch'ang Kuei** are virtually impossible to differentiate from the standard Tall Demon without having their identity revealed by a member of the temple staff. Both can be dressed in sack cloth, have strings of coins suspended around their necks, smoke an opium pipe and wear a tall 'dunce's cap' bearing the phrase 'Fortune at a Glance'. To complicate matters further, in a number of Malaysian and Singaporean temples, images of the Tall and Short Demons are labelled **Ts'ai Shen Yeh**. The Fortune **Wu-ch'ang Kuei** is offered incense, fruit and either red-coloured buns or meat, while the Tall and Short Demons are offered cooked or uncooked meat, but not coloured meat, along with boiled unflavoured rice.

Very many other heroes and worthies from both legend and history, national and local, have been looked upon as Ts'ai Shen. They include **Mi-lo Fu** (see page 94), who is regarded as a wealth god in some monasteries.



◁ Δ Images of a Fortune **Wu-ch'ang Kuei** are virtually impossible to differentiate from the standard Tall Demon without having their identity revealed by a member of the temple staff. The Fortune **Wu-ch'ang Kuei**, frequently referred to as **Ti-fang Ts'ai Shen**, stands in or near the under altar.

▷ Pi Kan was said to have a heart with seven apertures, a phenomenon only found in the heart of a genuine sage. [Taiwan]

▽ Ts'ai-po Hsing-chün's images have no unique individual characteristics and can only be identified in context on a labelled or identified altar. His image generally portrays him as a standard scholar-official, sitting clutching a *tael* (shoe) of gold or silver in one of his hands. His image is sometimes accompanied by images of youths carrying trays bearing *taels* of gold or silver, but so are several other wealth gods. [Hong Kong]



Ts'ai-po Hsing-chün

This name literally means the 'Stellar Deity of Wealth and Silks', that is 'expensive gifts'. Stellar deities are the governors of fate influenced by their particular star – this deity's star is one of the seven of the Northern Bushel (Plough).

Ts'ai-po Hsing-chün is never prayed to for a regular source of income, only for larger business profits. He is an impersonal popular religion deity of comparatively low standing who protects property and wealth. He is extremely popular with those who feel their luck is in and who wish to make spectacular gains in business. Primarily a deity revered by Cantonese in Hong Kong, Macau and South-East Asia, his image has also been noted on two altars in Taiwan where he is regarded as a Civil God of Wealth.



Pi Kan

The image of the wealth god Pi Kan has only rarely been noted outside the Chinese mainland. Although he was looked upon in a few areas of China as a military wealth god, in most places he was regarded as the only god of wealth, therefore a civil god. Possibly he was the earliest of all the wealth gods.

Pi Kan is possibly best known as the sage whose heart was cut out. Related to Chou Hsin, the debauched tyrant of the *Feng-shen Yen-i* (see page 60), he was the Great Admonishing Minister to him. To gain revenge against Pi Kan who had had her fox kindred slaughtered, Ta-chi, Chou's fox-spirit mistress, told Chou Hsin that she knew Pi Kan was highly intelligent because he had seven apertures to his heart. Chou Hsin wished to know how she knew this to which she replied, 'If you do not believe me, my Lord, cut open his chest and see for yourself'. Chou Hsin ordered Pi Kan to be killed and the seven apertures were there as predicted. Ta-chi had her revenge and that night she ate Pi Kan's heart.

Liu Hai Hsien

The Immortal, Liu Hai, is a popular religion wealth god whose image or picture is believed to be auspicious and conducive to good fortune, and wealth in particular. His picture is popular on business establishment doors and walls. Although his image has not been noted on public temple altars in Hong Kong or Macau, they have been seen on a few in Taiwan and South-East Asia, usually

pushed in with many unconnected deities on crowded side altars, as well as in a number of temples in south-eastern and central China. However, small images of Liu Hai are very popular on private altars, usually the household altar. A great number of such images have been seen in curio shops in Hong Kong and elsewhere. These range from cast iron through jade, glass, wood and ivory to bronze. In pictures and charms he is sometimes accompanied by the Ho Ho twins (see below).

In Peking during the 1930s the cry among vendors outside hotels catering for foreigners, when they saw a tourist approaching, was, '*Liu Hai lai-le*' ('Liu Hai is approaching'), basically meaning that here comes a 'money-god'.

A symbol of wealth, he was the patron of commercial acumen and success. He was also the patron of needle-makers. His likeness, pasted on the walls of needle-workers' shops, was renewed annually on his feast day.

The most common legend claims that Liu Hai was a proficient student of Taoist magic and also a minister of state to the first emperor of the Liao dynasty. He was fortunate enough to possess a magical, three-legged toad that could carry him in a flash to any place he so wished and which he had obtained from a well deeply endowed with yin influence. Liu Hai was later visited by Han Chung-li, one of the Pa Hsien (see page 74), who sat down before him and piled eggs one on top of the other with a gold coin perched precariously between each. Liu Hai laughingly said that it was a risky

thing to do, whereupon Han told him that it was less risky than being a minister of state to an emperor who was a usurper. Liu heeded Han's warning. After first censoring the emperor for having destroyed the old dynasty, he resigned and went off to the hills where he sought Taoist perfection. During his travels he obtained pills of immortality from Lü Tung-pin, another of the Pa Hsien, and became an Immortal.

Ho Ho Erh Hsien

The standard image of the Immortal Twins of Harmony and Union, **Ho Ho Erh Hsien**, shows them as two short, plump laughing boys with their hair divided into two short pigtails, or as two young men standing side by side, sometimes clutching each other around the shoulders. One carries a *tael* (shoe) of silver and the other a casket or basket of coins, both symbolizing wealth. Ho Ho charms, available at religious paper

goods stores, are beneficial when promoting new business. They help eliminate obstacles, particularly bureaucratic ones. Any gift bearing the likeness of the Twins or their title is more auspicious.

Several tales are told explaining their origins. They were, so one story goes, boys who worked so hard turning stone into lime and wood into charcoal that they made their fortunes, showing shrewd business acumen in partnership, hence becoming symbols of partnership.

Another claims that they were two youths, living in the same village, who were as close as blood brothers. The elder, Han-shan, fell in love with a girl whom Shih Te also loved. Unfortunately Han-shan only discovered this just as he was about to marry her; whereupon he promptly left home and became a monk in the temple at Feng-ch'iao Chen, near Soochow. Shih-te was in a quandary. He wished to marry the girl and yet his main allegiance was to Han-shan. He therefore



△ The standard image of Liu Hai portrays him as a smiling pot-bellied youth holding, riding or standing beside a three-legged toad. Some of his smaller images are amulets or charms.

◁ The Ho Ho Erh Hsien are often associated with other wealth gods on altars and on icons. Boat People's images of them quite often show them as separate boys, seated or kneeling, holding an open scroll bearing felicitous phrases. Variations in their images are common with one or both youths carrying peaches, symbolizing longevity and joy; a lily or lotus flower, or a small casket, each being felicitous symbols.



△ Wu Lu Ts'ai Shen, the Wealth God of all Five Directions, showing four of his five faces (one on top of his head). [Taiwan]

▽ Chao Kung-ming, the Military Wealth God, astride his tiger. [Five-colour block print]



gave up the girl and went off to seek out Han-shan in his temple. They were so overjoyed at their reunion that they shouted, sang and danced and remained on at the temple where they both lived out their days.

Although connected with the gods of wealth, no wedding is complete without their likenesses depicted on a scroll, as they are also considered to be fertility deities. They symbolize happiness in general and specifically for newly weds. One temple keeper recalled that his mother had told him that the Twins originally came from Soochou where they were prayed to by both bachelors and spinsters for the perfect partner. A rather raunchy temple keeper added with a laugh that the Twins have a secondary function. They prevent husbands going off with the girls. Ladies pray to the Twins, offer them incense and oil, and tie a long red thread around the necks of the pair symbolizing binding husband and wife together. They were also the patron deities in general of merchants, and in particular in the north, of lime burners, potters, fan makers and leaf tea sellers.

Wan-shan Ts'ai Shen

Noted once in one of the many halls of the Kuan-tu complex at Peitou near Taipei, Wan-shan Ts'ai Shen is regarded locally as the most efficacious and powerful wealth god, and by many as the only wealth god. Identified as the deified spirit of Shen Wan-shan, he is portrayed as a seated official clutching a large shoe of gold in his left hand. He has a black beard, but no unique characteristics.

Shen is renowned for the financial support he gave to Chu Yüan-chang, helping him to overthrow the Yüan dynasty and gain power as the first Ming emperor. For this support Shen was given the title of **Chao-ts'ai Wang**, Prince of Wealth, and down the centuries he has been regarded as one of the gods of wealth, Ts'ai Shen Yeh.

PATRON DEITIES

Virtually all trades and professions during imperial times had their own patron deity to whom they offered reverence and at the annual festival celebrated with offerings. A number are still revered today by members of specialist guilds and trades. Some patron deities were recognized China-wide, others were local, and in a number of instances different

deities were revered by groups of the same trade or profession. Too numerous to include, only a few are described here.
LU PAN

The President of the Heavenly Public Works Department, **Lu Pan**, is a popular Taoist deity and patron of most skilled trades connected with the building trade. These include bridge and house builders, stone and wood workers, brick and tile makers, plasterers, varnishers, painters, plumbers, decorators, earth construction labourers, mat and awning makers, table and chair makers, artists, god-carvers, irrigation and dam workers, wheelwrights and surprisingly, umbrella makers. As the patron of boat builders, he is prayed to and offered sacrifices in particular whenever a new junk or sampan is launched.

Lu Pan is said to have been a man of great versatility, and numerous imaginative inventions have been attributed to him. Among these was the umbrella (although some attribute it to his wife) and the self-propelled wheelbarrow. He invented a ladder of sticks and ropes with which to scale city walls, he also drew maps, and invented the wheel used to draw up water. He is said to have made the first boat, and invented oars and paddles. Craftsmen are said to possess an indispensable secret book, the *Book of Lu Pan*, in which his skills are described.

Lu Pan was worshipped China-wide and his cult is still strong in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and South-East Asia. He has been revered for many centuries as the originator of architecture, and is sacrificed to whenever a new building is completed. He is frequently referred to as the Skilled Sage, **Ch'iao-sheng Hsien-shih**, although in legend his true name is said to have been Kung-shu Tzu. He lived at about the same time as Confucius. In some stories, he was chopped to pieces by crowds angry at his magic; in others, he was borne off to Heaven in a chariot or on pink clouds – a standard departure for deities.

Among the many well known tales about Lu Pan is the story of the master builder who had been sabotaged by a colleague and had his best and only timbers cut too short. Lu Pan appeared and showed by means of a rice bowl, chopsticks, four fish and a slip of wood how to overcome the problem. This was the first fish-ended roof beam, a uniquely Chinese construction.



◁ Lu Pan's image has no specific and unique identifying characteristics. He is portrayed as a standard scholar-official, usually seated and dressed in classical rather than official robes. In Taiwan, however, it has become customary to show him holding a short, multi-coloured, stubby stick in his left palm, resting against his left shoulder. This is said to be his 'ruler'. His two aides or the objects on the altar before him are a better clue to recognition. The aides can carry a ruler, plane, set square, plumb line, measuring stick, chalk and string, books or a trowel. These objects are sometimes laid out on the altar before him. [Malaysia]

▽ Images of Ts'ang Chieh often show him as a barefoot, bearded middle-aged man with shoulder length hair and dressed in robes of leaves with a leaf necklet – showing he lived during the mythical era of Chinese prehistory. Most startling of all, he is portrayed as having four or six eyes, one pair immediately above the next. He is said to have them in order to understand both Heaven and Earth. [Taiwan]

PATRONS OF WRITING

Ts'ang Chieh, otherwise known as Chih-tzu Hsien-shih, shares a minor altar in Macau with Chü Sheng, with whom he is said to have been the co-inventor of writing. Chü Sheng is the senior of the two deities and is said to have elaborated the art of forming characters by imitating the footprints of birds in mud. Ts'ang is said to have been the friend and minister of Fu Hsi (see page 56).

He realized the need to record thoughts and, using reeds to make brushes and soot to make ink, he formed characters. Thereafter, so the story goes, evil people were less keen on being seen since their ill deeds could now be recorded and passed on to the Courts of the Underworld. According to the *Feng-shen Yen-i*, Chü was Recorder to the Yellow Emperor (see page 57). Their images are to be seen in an old temple in Macau with several side halls. They stand in a hall dedicated to Shen Nung (see page 57) used as a junior school classroom.

The lacquered image of Chü Sheng, on the left hand of the image of Ts'ang Chieh, shows him as a black-bearded mandarin with a flat topped crown sitting on a throne and with no special identifying characteristics.

Ts'ai Lun, a native of Honan province, was chief eunuch of the emperor Han Ho Ti during the first century AD. He is said to have been the inventor of paper, made from tree bark, cloth, hemp and old fishing nets. He died in AD 144 and his invention there afterwards was referred to as Lord Ts'ai's paper. He was ennobled as the Marquis of the Dragon Pavilion. He was the patron of paper

makers in north China, but was unknown to the peasant papermakers on Aplichau island off southern Hong Kong, who were unable to think who their particular patron was. In Szechwan province he was also the patron of dyers in addition to





△ Yüeh Fei, the soldiers' patron deity, [Hangchou]

▷ Marshal T'ien Tu's image is unique and usually easily identifiable. He is portrayed as a seated young man dressed in gilded robes, with his hair drawn back into a queue and often has two long pheasant feathers in his cap. Occasionally he is represented as half bald, the front half of the top of his head having been shaved. He has a crab painted on his forehead or around his mouth, round protruding eyes and clutches a small, lightly rolled scroll in his right hand. In other forms, he holds what looks like a lump of gold in his right hand and holds his left hand at chest height with the second and third fingers pointing upward, a posture said to be much used by actors. Very occasionally he has firewheels under one or both of his feet.

He is often attended by images of his assistants: entertainers such as wrestlers, musicians, boxers and tumblers. He also has a small piebald dog at his feet called the Dragon Dog. In some temples the dog is pure black, and is frequently dressed in a theatrical jacket and trousers of red, yellow and green. The dog is depicted kneeling, carrying a small wrapped package containing Marshal T'ien Tu's official seal. [Fukien province]

those who made and sold paper. Legend claims that at first no one would use his new invention. So he feigned death, having first spread the word that paper money burnt to the dead would bring them back to life. After such paper money had been burned for him, he 'returned' from the Underworld and the use of paper never looked back.

PATRONS OF SOLDIERS

Although Kuan Yü (see page 148) is the patron of disciplined forces, and so often called the God of War by foreigners, Chinese soldiers have another patron deity. Yüeh Fei is a popular religion protective deity formerly worshipped China-wide. He was the most famous general of the Sung era and a national hero, revered for his loyalty and remembered for his great bravery and patriotism. He is also known as Yüeh Wu-mu Wang.

In north China during the first half of this century, foreigners described him as the God of War, when he was actually a much favoured wealth god worshipped in particular by vendors and merchants. Peking shopkeepers used to shake their abacus three times each morning as his offering, knowing that without this gesture they would take no money that day.

Yüeh Fei was a faithful and loyal general of the first emperor of the Southern Sung, who tried to protect his country against the ever increasing incursions by the hordes of Chin-Tatars. As no official contemporary biography was written, little is known about his life. He was born into a farming family in Honan province in 1103 and lost his father early on in one of the devastating floods caused by the

Yellow River overflowing its banks. He was brought up by his mother and went to study the military arts under a famous teacher when he was twenty. His mother oversaw the tattooing of his philosophy on to his back: 'Absolute Loyalty to the Country'. Yüeh Fei was a filial son who neither ate nor drank for three days after the death of his mother.

When the Northern Sung collapsed following the Chin invasion, he was twenty-three. Not long after, he had his own large army which he ruled with strict discipline. Yüeh is said to have been the first to have formulated and used archery tactics against the massed Tatar horsemen and to have slaughtered them by the thousand. Irrespective of how bravely he fought, plots hatched against him by the emperor's treacherous Chief Minister, the evil and jealous Ch'in Kuei, led to his downfall and execution.

PATRONS OF PERFORMERS

There are two different deities bearing the same title **San T'ien Tu Yüan-shuai** (Marshal T'ien Tu) – both have the unique characteristic of a crab painted on the forehead or around the mouth.

One is found in Singapore, as well as in Fukienese communities everywhere, and is the patron of public entertainers in Fukien, Chekiang and Kiangsu provinces and in Fukienese and Ch'aochou ethnic communities. He is the patron of actors, musicians, wrestlers and of puppeteers and marionette handlers. He helps actors remember their lines and assists all, including wrestlers and fencers, to excel in their craft. The other, often known as **San T'ien Tu Ch'ien-sui**, is a fertility



and health deity found in Singapore and Malaysia only. He is usually regarded as a medical deity specifically involved with mentally retarded children.

Eventually, it emerged that there are in fact three separate deities. One, known as the Third Brother, was the best known being the most popular. He was assumed to be the one and only San T'ien Tu Yüan-shuai. Marshal T'ien Tu's title does describe him as a third brother, but the other two brothers have never been heard of, nor have their images ever been noted according to very many temple keepers.

In the most commonly repeated legend, T'ien Tu was a young prince named Lei Hai-ching. He was obsessively keen on practical jokes and opera, and lived for pleasure. Having used his position to force a married woman to spend the night with him, he woke to find that she had painted a crab around his mouth in indelible ink. Some say this was to punish him, others to ensure that his lasciviousness received wide publicity. The prince got away with it the first time by telling his friends that he had painted the crab on his own mouth for amateur theatricals. However, when he forced her yet again to spend the night with him, she painted another crab on his forehead which he was unable to explain away.

PATRONS OF SILK WORKERS

Stories about the Goddess of Silkworms, who is patron of all silk workers and of the rearers of silk worms in particular, are some of the better known Chinese legends. She was prayed to for the protection of the mulberry and silk harvest, and was popular in the lower Yangtze basin where the mulberry and the silk industry thrive. She has not been noted in any temples in Taiwan, Hong Kong and South-East Asia as these places no longer have a silk industry.

There are a number of contenders for the title of this goddess. The primary goddess, Lei Tsu, is also known as Ts'an Nü. She is possibly better known as Hsi Ling. It is claimed that she was the first to introduce the rearing of silkworms and the use of the loom. She, together with other minor deities, were worshipped in Kiangsi and Chekiang provinces (the main silk centres) as protectors of the silkworms and mulberry trees. She is the patron of silk workers, cultivators and salesmen, although her image was not often seen. She was mostly shown on paper charms.

The other contender is a goddess popular among the peasants, **Ma-t'ou Niang**, the Girl with the Horse's Head. She was a young woman who lived during the third century BC, whose father was kidnapped by a gang of thugs. Her mother offered her daughter's hand in marriage to whoever brought back the father, but no one responded. One day, the father's horse heard of the offer, broke out of his stable and disappeared. A few days later the father reappeared on his horse.

Whenever he saw the daughter, the horse kicked out furiously to make his presence felt. This reminded the mother of her promise. The father refused to accept that her promise was applicable to animals. Later the father lost his temper, killed the horse and laid out its skin to dry. When the daughter passed it, it wrapped itself around her and disappeared into the Heavens.

Ten days later the skin was found at the base of a mulberry tree; the daughter had changed into a silk worm and was in the process of spinning herself a silken gown. Her parents were in despair but then they saw their daughter descend towards them through the clouds, riding a horse and attended by a number of servants. She assured them that she had been rewarded by the Jade Emperor, who had made her one of his concubines for her filial piety and virtue. Whereupon she disappeared again into the clouds.

PATRONS OF SHOEMAKERS

Sun Pin was deified some time after his death in about 341 BC, when he became the patron of shoemakers and leather workers in central and northern China. He is known as Ancestor Sun, **Sun Tsu**. Devotees claim that Sun Pin wrote the classic *Sun-tzu Ping-fu* (The Art of War).

He is probably best known to Chinese as the general who concealed the stumps of his legs with sheathes of leather and fishskin after his feet had been amputated. He was a native of Ch'i, a kingdom now part of Shantung province, and in legend was a student of Kuei Ku-tzu, with Pang Ch'un. When Pang, who was jealous of Sun, became the Prime Minister of the kingdom of Wei, he 'exposed' Sun as a traitor, but his death sentence was commuted to having his feet cut off. Sun feigned insanity and escaped to the neighbouring kingdom of Ch'i, which later fought Wei. Sun, wearing his fishskin boots, led its army, riding a black cow and destroyed Pang's army.



△ Another contender for the role of patron of silk workers is **Ch'en Shih**, the tutelary goddess of silk production in much the same area as Lei Tsu. She was the Senior Wife of the first emperor of the Han dynasty, Han Wu Ti. [Shaohsing]

▽ **Sun Pin**, patron of shoemakers, is probably best known to the Chinese as the general who concealed the stumps of his legs with sheathes of leather and fishskin after his feet had been amputated. [Taiwan]





Agricultural & Nature Deities

The majority of the deities of agriculture and of natural phenomena are mythological gods and not deified humans. Although the most popular deity worshipped by farmers is Shen Nung (see page 57), the earliest China-wide agrarian state cult was dedicated to the tutelary Gods of Grain and Soil, the **She Chi**. They were the spirits of the fertility of the soil. They are the earliest recorded agricultural deities, and were only worshipped by the emperors and their officials, and not by the common people. Their cult is said to have been well established by the time of the Chou dynasty (1050–256 BC).

Earth Deities

The first reference to the local tutelary deity, **T'u-ti Kung** (the Earth God), would appear to have been recorded during the Han dynasty. Nowadays, he seems to have largely displaced the **She Chi**. Though there are still scores of small shrines in rural areas in both Hong Kong and Macau dedicated to the **She Chi**, not all bear his title, nor for that matter any title or inscription whatsoever. Some shrines are relatively large and, compared with the homes of local residents, are well built and expensive. Most, however, consist of a simple inscribed stone.

The Empress Mother of the Earth, **Ti-mu Niang-niang**, is a popular religion goddess – devotees are very confused about her. Most believe her to be powerful, with direct access to the Jade Emperor (see page 51), and to be responsible for the natural links between Heaven and the Earth such as rain, wind, storms, sunshine and frost. **Ti-mu** causes trees, crops and flowers to grow and so is prayed to for good harvests. The less literate believe her to be the consort of either the Wealth God (see page 123) or **T'u-ti Kung** and refer to her as **T'u-ti Ma**. She is particularly popular among the Ch'aochou people who pair her with **T'ien-fu**.

These two deities, together known as **T'ien-ti Fu-mu**, are the all-inclusive powers of nature. They are hardly ever depicted in image form, but nearly

always as a fused title as 'The Father and Mother of Heaven and Earth' on both the tablet and the external incense burner on the main external altars outside the main entrance to Ch'aochou community temples, facing inward. They are revered every time a devotee approaches the temple, and on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month.

Although **Ti-mu** is a spirit medium's contact in some Fukienese communities from whom they request advice and prescriptions for the sick and troubled, this is not the case in Hong Kong or Macau where there are few Fukienese residents. Nine times a month gods from various temples in the vicinity of Puli in Taiwan are invited to the **Ti-mu** temple, where scores of sick and anxious devotees await advice. Each of the gods, with **Ti-mu** in particular, communicate both messages and prescriptions through mediums by means of esoteric characters written in the sand tray. Her image stands on the main altar and can only be approached by devotees who must be wearing the prescribed robes.

SPIRITS OF SPECIFIC PLACES

The God of the Local Mountain, **Shan Shen**, is an impersonal deity who, like the Spirit of the Well, the God of the Bridge, and others, is a nature spirit of a specific place. He is an Earth God responsible for his own particular parish, mountain or well. Like all Earth Gods, these deities have no individual names

◁ The Earth God (**T'u-ti Kung**) is not looked upon as a powerful or fearsome deity. He is a Celestial deity, the lowest ranking official in the bureaucracy of the Celestial pantheon, and is the tutelary deity of one sector of a large village or suburb; the protector of the well-being of both town and country dwellers.

Virtually every temple and certainly every community has an altar dedicated to the Earth God. Legends almost always describe him as a former human, now a local spirit still possessing human attributes and aspirations. One of the most common claims is that he was a servant who preserved his master's money from thieves, lost his life in the process, and was deified as the Earth God. [Amoy]

▽ Stone tablet to the **She Chi**, in a side hall of the T'ien Hou temple in Kowloon. [Hong Kong]





△ Other impersonal elemental deities relating to particular places include the Spirit of the Well, Ching Shen. A shrine to such a spirit is shown above. [Hong Kong]

▽ Images of Feng Po in mainland China usually represent him as an elderly man carrying a sack of wind which he pointed in the direction he wished wind to blow. In Taiwan, he is often portrayed as a severe scholar-official with a black beard, seated and holding a gourd in his left hand and a *ju-i* sceptre in his right. [Shanghai]



and are mostly primeval spirits. They are not the named gods of the major mountains such as Omei Shan, T'ai Shan and others; they are simply the Spirit of the Mountain, Stream, Bridge, etc and are very rarely identified with an historical or mythical being. Though relatively uncommon, they have been noted in all Chinese communities in southern China, including Hong Kong and Macau. There are also a great many popular spirits of specific trees, usually old and gnarled.

Shan Shen is the spirit official of the woods and forests on the hills and the keeper and controller of the hills, responsible for the wealth contained within them. The peasants pray to him so that he will reveal the treasures concealed in the woods or hills. Before they venture on to the hillsides to gather firewood or medicinal herbs, peasants and herbalists pray to the Spirit as the protector of peasants who might otherwise be harmed by the creatures on the hillsides.

The spirit of a specific place is nearly always represented by a dressed stone dedicated to and bearing the title such as 'The Spirit of This Mountain' (*Pen Shan Shen*). However, in several Cantonese temples, Shan Shen is portrayed by a middle-aged scholar-official, sitting, with a black beard and holding a small axe in each hand.

Weather Deities

This group of deities includes the gods and goddesses of Rain, Thunder, Lightning, Wind, and so on.

FENG SHEN

The Spirit of the Wind, Feng Shen, is a nature deity first recorded several millennia ago, and was almost certainly a Han dynasty weather god. He would appear to have assumed human form during the T'ang or Sung dynasties. He is usually known as the Wind Duke, Feng Po. Like so many of the early, and in particular the nature, gods Feng Shen was referred to in a number of the major legendary stories. In the *Shan-hai Ching*, Ch'ih Yu begged the Wind God and the Master of Rain to bring on a storm with gales and torrential rains, to help him in his struggle with the Yellow Emperor (see page 57).

His image has been noted in Taiwan, but not in Hong Kong or South-East Asia. He was be prayed to by seafarers in the days when sea journeys depended upon favourable winds. They sought not only his help, but also his protective powers.

YÜ SHEN

The Rain Spirit, Yü Shen, is an impersonal nature spirit invoked during drought. Also known as the Rain Duke, Yü Po, and the Rain Master, Yü Shih, he has been noted in image form in several temples in Taiwan, but only once elsewhere – in Hong Kong where he is represented by his title inscribed on a dressed stone on a hill top in the New Territories. In mainland China the Master of Rain was of terrifying aspect, inspiring dread, and was responsible for the formidable power of storm and typhoon. Lung Wang, the Dragon King (see page 139), as well as being a water deity, is widely believed to be in charge of clouds and rainfall.

Despite being an impersonal deity, four separate, minor, Ming historical worthies have been claimed by their devotees to be the deified personification of the Rain Spirit. In Taipao near Chia I in central Taiwan, the four major weather gods flank the main altar of a temple.

Ch'ih Sung-tzu was a primitive man dressed in skins and straw who, during the reign of Shen Nung (see page 57), appeared out of the hills during one of the worst droughts imaginable. He danced wildly, waving willow sprigs and, with his magic, caused the rains to fall. His images in imperial times in mainland China often showed him holding a jar from which he sprinkled drops of water as he passed overhead. In a number of temples, he was also portrayed holding a small dragon, symbol of the rain clouds.

LEI KUNG

The Duke of Thunder, Lei Kung, is an early nature deity, a stern god who is generally benevolent and averts evil. He is feared as being particularly merciless towards those who kidnap children and oppress widows and orphans. The list in temples of the evildoers against whom he takes action is seemingly endless. The list used to include only capital crimes. Nowadays, however, it includes the filial impious, liars and cheats, and physical discomfort for truants and lazy students. Children were told that he would not harm them unless they told lies.

For at least the last 150 years Lei Kung has had the reputation for punishing wrong-doers into the second and third incarnation. Good and virtuous people were never killed by thunder (not lightning, please note, which is disregarded by many Chinese peasants), only the unfilial, the adulterer and those who

waste good food. Should a Chinese be struck down by the noise of thunder bolts, it is very likely to be for infidelity, but it could be a punishment for sins committed in previous incarnations. A child struck down is assumed to have been guilty and unpunished in an earlier life. Although many fear his power, it is generally believed that he cannot punish on his own authority. He only does so after receiving instructions directly from the Jade Emperor (see page 51).

During the late Ming and the Ch'ing dynasties, images of Lei Kung were sited on high places, such as a roof of a temple, to ward off lightning. They were carved into walls or made of pottery, porcelain, bronze or wood. An interesting example is the carving in the southern face of the hexagonal gateway through the Great Wall at the Nank'ou Pass.

In parts of south China, where it was believed that Lei Kung might wreak revenge on the newly dead for past sins (destruction of the body would imperil the deceased's chances of rebirth and immortality), coffins were concealed or camouflaged as haystacks.

He also has the power to obtain pardons for anyone who genuinely repents.

For many centuries, Lei Kung has answered people's prayers and requests for cures for all diseases, injuries and sickness, and has developed into a deity whose charms cure minor wounds, stomach aches and perhaps hasten the delayed birth of a baby. During the early part of this century around in Peking, it was believed that he would not cure anything more severe than scratches and bruises.

His origins go far back, possibly to animist beginnings, though from the iconographical detail, half-man half-bird, his cult has been strongly influenced by the Garuda, the Hindu mythical eagle who was Vishnu's steed, which was brought to China by Buddhism. In earlier pictures and images he was portrayed more as a human with a cock's head and feet, and with bat's wings.

Lei Kung is assisted as a nature deity by Tien Mu (Mother Lightning), the Lightning Goddess, in distinguishing between good and evil people and in punishing the evil. She is believed to be his wife. She flashes the two mirrors she carries, causing lightning, and occasionally, fires. In some places she is understood to flash her mirrors simply to guide her husband, the Thunder God, whereas in



△ A stone tablet dedicated to 'The God who causes the Clouds to form and the Rain to fall' (see Yü Shen opposite), which stands on a hillside in Hong Kong's New Territories. It would appear to have been carved some two years before the British occupied Hong Kong island and some sixty years before they took over the New Territories.



◁ Lei Kung's standard image is unique and is possibly the most easily identifiable deity in the Chinese pantheon. He is represented as half-man/half bird with a human body and arms, chicken's feet and claws, a monkey's head (apart from his bird-like beak) and, uniquely, he has a pair of wings. Occasionally he is portrayed with a third eye. He holds a hammer and chisel, and may have a string of drums slung around his neck. Normally he is dressed only in a loincloth or trousers down to just below his knees, and his skin is entirely blue or green.

Occasionally, in place of the hammer and chisel he carries a gourd. In a number of images he is depicted standing on a pair of drums. In some pictures, but not as an image, he has a snake in his mouth; in many images he has a Taoist top-knot or coronet. On the altars of junks in the Pearl River delta, his images have black or multi-coloured faces. [Eastern-central China]



△ Tien Mu is the wife of the Thunder God, Lei Kung. [Taiwan]

▽ This lifesize image of the Water Buffalo, Niu Chiang-chün, is accompanied by a herd boy. There are also offerings of spring water and fresh grass, placed before them. [Taiwan]



Fukien province it was thought that her purple lightning killed, her red lightning lessened the heat of the day and her white lightning diminished the wind and rain.

Farmers' Deities

A number of deified worthies are revered for their role in helping the peasant farmer to produce a harvest and get through another year. They ranged from rainmakers to irrigators, and from animal fertility deities to the destroyers of ravaging insects and other pests.

The Gentleman the Sainly Chu, **Chusheng Lao-yeh**, is a popular fertility deity revered by raisers of animals. Although portrayed as a scholar astride a black pig, he is prayed to for fertility in all beasts and birds raised by farmers. He is not necessarily the protector of animals, as most individual species have their own protective deity, such as the deity of the pigsty, cowshed, barn, etc. His cult was popular in Szechwan, Yunnan, Kuangsi and Hunan provinces. In Hunan and other areas of central China, his image often showed him standing on the back of the pig.

Two engineers, father and son, left behind them the monumental irrigation system for the waters of the Chengtu plain in Szechwan province, their dykes having guided the fertilizing waters across the plain for some two thousand years. The waters of the Min river were rejuvenated by the bold project organized by the father, **Li Ping**, who at the time, 215 BC, was the Ch'in dynasty prefect of Chengtu. The river emerged from deep gorges in the mountains and at once split into two channels running nearly due south. Li Ping was determined to dam it and divert the waters to the east and north-east and adopted ingenious devices to take the strain off his artificial dam. However, silt settled and the bed of the river rose, and to overcome this problem Li Ping demanded that the river be dredged annually. His words, 'Channels to be dug deep and the banks to be kept low', have been reiterated down the centuries, with work being carried out at an annual festival to ensure that the waters were kept under control.

The Great Emperor Chang, **Chang Ta-ti**, was a local Chekiang or Anhui provincial cult. He is the deified worthy, **Chang Po**, born in one or other of the provinces just before the time of the birth of Christ and responsible for digging a

canal across the province of Anhui. The cult was popular in the areas of rice cultivation across Anhui, Kiangsu and Chekiang provinces where sufficient and timely rains were essential. He was regarded in the Hangchou area as an agricultural deity with the ability to prevent or put a stop to droughts.

In legend he was a magistrate who, after throwing all his personal belongings into a flooding river to appease the river god, finally threw himself into the flood waters, causing the river god to relent and the floods to recede.

Alternatively, he was a Han dynasty official born in Anhui, deified during the T'ang by popular demand after he had performed a number of miracles, including rain making, assisting scholars to pass their examinations, curing the sick and raising spirit armies to help human enterprises.

Buffaloes

There are two separate shrines in Taiwan dedicated to the Water Buffalo, the spirit of Spring. One near Tainan city where he is known as the Spring Buffalo, **Ch'un Niu**, and the other just to the north of Chia I where he is called the Buffalo General, **Niu Chiang-chün**. The images of the Water Buffalo are life size, each with a herd boy. There are also offerings placed before them consisting of spring water and fresh grass. The festival near Tainan is celebrated annually at the beginning of Spring. Originally in north China the festival was connected with agricultural rites when an ox was slaughtered. As time passed, an image was substituted for the ox though the practice of slaughtering a buffalo persisted in Fukien province until about 1911 – the carcass was divided among junior officials.

The images of the herd boy attending the image of the buffaloes looks exactly like the illustrations in the annual *Farmers' Almanacs*, as a young boy with his hair drawn up into two buns. Like T'ai Sui (see page 59), the stellar deity of the Year, the young boy used to be dressed in such a way as to foretell the weather and harvest for the coming year. This usually was by opposites. A red cloth around the waist meant sickness and mortality instead of its usual connotation of happiness. Nowadays, the Buffalo General is revered to protect the farmers' beasts of burden from epidemic disease and cattle pests.

Horses

There is more than one type of deified horse. There are the patrons of horses, who are deified humans; the Horse Spirit which again can be a deified human or it can be the spirit of a horse; and finally the horse as such, used for transportation and not in itself a spirit. These are the steeds for major deities, the carriers of messages and pleas to Heaven, or they can bear souls back to human existence.

The majority of deities involving horses are colloquially referred to as the King or Patron of Horses, **Ma Wang**, though there are also deified humans with the surname Ma who confusingly also bear this same title. There is also a confusion between Ma Shen and Ma Wang as both can be colloquially referred to by the other title.

The Horse Spirit, **Ma Shen**, is a representation of a concept and is not a deified human or mythical person. It is an unusual image in southern Chinese communities, noted only in a few popular religion temple altars in Indonesia where it is portrayed by a lively horse held by a groom with a red face. The image, occasionally in its own small shrine, normally stands on the front edge of the major altar in the main hall and is in no way connected with the main deity or any other of the deities on the main altar.

In legend Huang Wen-tan was deified by the Jade Emperor as Ma Shen,

although the name of Huang has never been referred to in any of the Ma Shen temples. Huang was injured after his horse, possessed by evil spirits, bolted as he was dismounting. Huang died and the Jade Emperor, taking pity on him, deified him and presented him with a sword with which he could decapitate demons, a seal to destroy evil powers, a mirror to blind evil spirits and a fire gourd to help him speed to assist possessed horses and destroy evil spirits with a burst of flames, even at a range of 10,000 li (a vague term meaning a great distance and range). These items include those which his image is supposed to bear in his four, six or twelve arms.

The King of Horses, sometimes called **Ma Shen** or **Ma Kung**, was predominantly a deity found in northern China where horses were bred and provided a major means of transportation. Centuries ago horses in times of war were worth their weight in gold and generals offered sacrifices to the Horse Spirit annually on the twenty-second day of the second lunar month.

Ma Wang was the patron deity of carters, grooms and later, during the period of the Western Concessions, the patron of jockeys. He was worshipped by all military officials, and families who maintained carriages, and his image usually stood alone in its own small shrine at the back of the stables.



△ A messenger horse with its groom (see also **Lü Ma**, page 121). [Malaysia]

△△ Injured after his horse bolted, Huang Wen-tan died. The Jade Emperor, taking pity on him, deified him as **Ma Shen**. He received a sword to behead demons, a seal to destroy evil powers, a mirror to blind evil spirits and a fire gourd to destroy evil spirits with a burst of flames. His image is supposed to bear these in his four or six arms. [Taiwan]

◁ **Chu-sheng Lao-yeh** is usually portrayed as a scholar astride a black pig, although sometimes he is shown standing on its back. He is prayed to for fertility in all beasts and birds raised by farmers. [Kunming]

Deities of the Seas & Rivers

These divide into two different groups: the deities who protect against floods or drought and are essentially agricultural, and the protective deities for sea-going devotees. Especially in northern and central China, there were many local Water Immortals and Water spirits whose basic role was, for example, to protect duck farmers. The spirits of the major rivers and seas are to a large extent considered to be protective deities who watch over sailors. Others were spirits of the tides and river bores.

▷ In many temples, the image of **Ta Yü** (the Great Yü) stands alone on a secondary altar and is known as the one and only Water Immortal. He was the hero who controlled the Great Flood and saved China (see page 58). [Taiwan]



The Immortals of the Waters, **Shui Hsien Tsun-wang**, are a group of five separate deities who are often worshipped individually in their own temples although, in many temples, the image of **Ta Yü** (the great Yü) stands alone on a secondary altar and is known as the one and only Water Immortal. There are images of the five on altars in Taiwan, but not necessarily the same five in each temple.

They are the protectors of deep sea sailors, fishermen and traders. In all there appear to be nine different spirits identified as Water Immortals, with different permutations on the five. However, **Ta Yü** and **Li Po** (see page 153) have been noted in every group. In the majority of cases, the images seem to play the same role for fishermen as does the Earth God (see page 173) of the area, to farmers. To other devotees, these deities would



appear to require propitiation just in case....

Images of individual lone deities, simply known as **Shui Hsien** (the Immortal of the Waters), have been noted in several small seaside temples in Hong Kong. Each temple keeper has a different idea what the role of their deity is. **Shui Hsien** is occasionally known as **Shui Shen** among the Boat People where it is used as an alternative title for **Ta Wang**.

The Water Immortal, **Shui Hsien**, in the T'ien Hou temple in Kowloon's Walled City, was identified by the temple keeper there as the maternal uncle of T'ien Hou (see below). He added that **Shui Hsien** was saved by T'ien Hou during a major typhoon when his fishing boat was flooded and sinking. **Shui Hsien** (who appears not to have a personal name) prayed to an unnamed goddess to save him and his crew of seven, all members of the one family. Thereupon the unnamed goddess, acting as an intermediary, approached T'ien Hou who was still a girl in her family home in a dream. Using her teeth, she grasped her uncle and saved him, but was unable to rescue the other seven as they had been drinking wine and were intoxicated.

T'ien Hou Sheng-mu

Probably the best known of all the seafarers' protective deities is the goddess **T'ien Hou Sheng-mu**, the Heavenly or Holy Mother, the Empress of Heaven. She is also popularly known in Fukienese communities as **Ma-tsu** (literally the Maternal Ancestor, though perhaps better translated as 'Granny'). A popular religion tutelary goddess for all those who wrest a living from the seas and, in particular, the patron deity of deep sea fishermen, she is especially worshipped along the southern and eastern Chinese coastal provinces. First recorded during the twelfth century, she has not just been the protector of fishermen; in many areas she has been a vengeful and active goddess who used her heavenly powers to destroy pirates and their boats, and drive off enemy incursions. However, many women look upon her, a Holy Virgin, as their patron and maternal protectress, and as a fertility deity who cures barrenness.

Her cult centre is located on Meichou island off the coast of P'ut'ien district south of Fuchou where she was born, the daughter of a poor fisherman. Originally a minor deity emerging on the coast of Fukien during the tenth century AD where she was known as the Divine Woman, **Shen-nü**, she became one of the most popular of the Chinese deities. Her cult was sanctioned by imperial order by the Central Board of Rites in 1720 when she was awarded the title of T'ien Hou.

By 1960 there were as many as 383 temples in Taiwan alone in which she was the main deity. Her cult was gradually spread along the coasts of Kuangtung

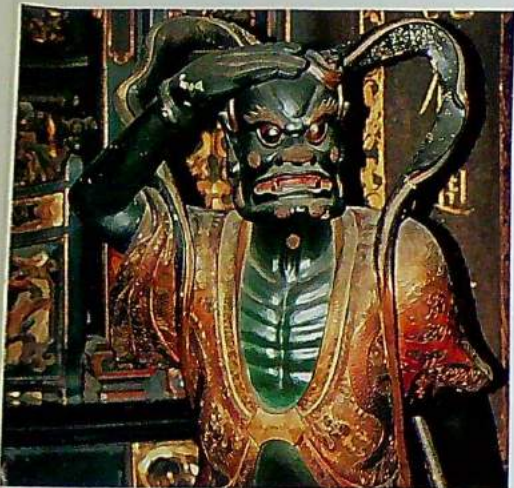
▽ In Taiwan, T'ien Hou has two forms: as **Meichou Ma-Tsu**, she is depicted with a black face; when she has a pink face, she is simply **Ma-Tsu**. She has had many other names as well. The best known of these are **Shen-nü** (the Divine Woman) and **T'ien-fei** (the Concubine of Heaven). [Taiwan]



◁ Standard images of **T'ien Hou** portray her as a seated dowager with tiny, bound feet, wearing either a flat-topped crown, the front and back of which extends beyond the head, or a decorated tight fitting bonnet. She carries either a fly whisk or a slab-sided plaque or tablet (possibly a form of sceptre) cradled in her left hand and resting against her shoulder. [Macau]

▷ T'ien Hou's two demonic subordinates and faithful servants listen for storms and watch for obstructions hidden by night, fog, and in squalls. The first is **Shun-feng Erh**, Fair Wind Ears, who is depicted as a demon, stripped to the waist, with red skin, a demonic face and head, and often has one hand pointing to one of his ears. [Taiwan]

▽ The second is **Ch'ien-li Yen**, the lynx-eyed Thousand Mile Eye, who is very similar to the first, but with green skin and often shields his eyes with one hand as he peers into the distance. [Lukang]



and Chekiang from Fukien until it was known right along the China coast and the navigable rivers of the southern provinces. Offerings are always made before setting sail, and in many cases on return to give thanks for a safe journey.

There is a vast corpus of legend about T'ien Hou's life and activities – many local versions involve historical people to re-inforce devotion and reverence. A number of other guardian deities of the Southern Ocean have been gradually absorbed by her cult: even male deities who changed sex during absorption.

Fukiense and Kuangtung coasts landing at numerous ports (where local legends explain, miracles occurred) as far as Macao, reaching the port after safely passing through great storms which had wrecked all the other ships in the fleet. In Macao it is said that she was carried off to Heaven in a blaze of coloured light; all other versions claim that she ascended to Heaven from her home in Meichou.

Most coastal villages contain a temple dedicated to her with many of her temples in Hong Kong standing at the entrance to fishing harbours and on the



The most popular legend tells how a young woman, the youngest daughter of a poor fisherman with the surname Lin, had five sisters and one brother. The boy was puny and the parents had prayed to Kuan Yin for a strong son only to have yet another daughter who was, at first, a great disappointment to her parents. However, she was precocious, showing outstanding abilities, and by the age of thirteen had been introduced to the Taoist scriptures. She was known to remain motionless for hours on end in an ecstatic trance, meditating while her spirit went roaming through Heaven and Earth. She is also said to have been taken down the

foreshore in the centre of fishing villages. Sailors pray to her for a safe journey, a good catch, for fine weather. A temple in Keelung, a naval port in northern Taiwan, has a model of a destroyer in a glass case on the front of the Ma-tsu (T'ien Hou) altar, dedicated to her.

Her shrine on every large fishing junk tends to be on the port side forward of the 'quarter-deck' together with other sea patron deities and the families' soul images, usually with an image rather than a print or tablet. Images of T'ien Hou inside their junk shrine should face forward but if land based, they should face the sea.

Lung Wang

A single major legendary Dragon King, Lung Wang, has developed over the centuries into separate Kings, one for each of the Four Seas, with hundreds of other Dragon Kings controlling the watery depths of rivers and lakes within mainland China. In a number of temples the temple staff explain that though there are the Dragon Kings of the Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern Seas, only one common image for all four stands on the altar, nearly always the Dragon King of the Eastern Seas.

Dragon Kings not only are the guardian spirits of oceans, rivers and lakes, but in some areas they are believed to be the direct cause of earthquakes, fogs and damage to river banks. They are also responsible for the rain clouds and so for agricultural fertility resulting from adequate and controlled annual rainfall. As they are the moving spirits of storms and rain, they are also blamed for floods and catastrophes caused by a deluge.

The Lung Wang was also the patron deity of ferrymen and of water carriers in imperial China. The guild of water carriers was normally housed in the local temple dedicated to the Lung Wang. A common belief was that the Lung Wang punished those who wasted water.

Prayers to the Lung Wang must have been most fervent. A Western traveller saw the officials, from the *tao-t'ai* down, going to the Lung Wang temple in Luchou on the Yangtze where they kowtowed and besought the Lung Wang to send rain. The drought had lasted a long time and to bring rain the town's south gate had been closed (south is the 'hot' direction), and processions had been held, all without success. To impress the Lung Wang, a life-size paper demon had been made which was walked around town by a human porter inside it, but still to no avail. People poured buckets of water over the paper image of a Lung Wang and all killing of animals was forbidden, still without rain. Finally the rains came and fell in such large quantities that crowds of devotees went to the temple of the Lord of the Sun (T'ai-yang Kung) to bring fine weather.

Other Ocean Deities

In the days before radar and long range forecasting, controlling the winds was one of the main tasks of several deities, and offerings by both Boat People and

travellers were obligatory before a lengthy boat journey.

T'AN KUNG

Duke T'an, T'an Kung, is a local Pearl River popular religion deity formerly worshipped mainly by the Hakka people. Nowadays he is a popular deity among fisher folk and each year his annual festival is celebrated by a large number of Hong Kong's fishermen's associations. It is usually simply claimed that T'an Tao, a lowly cowherd, met and conversed with Immortals and when he died became a powerful spirit himself. From early childhood he performed miracles; he could foretell the future, heal the sick with his charms, though his greatest power was over the weather.

A number of legends are told about him, such as the time when he led his grandmother's cows to an upland pasture on Chiu Lung Shan (Nine Dragon Mountain) where tigers were known to roam. When he failed to return one evening, a search party found him playing with the tigers in a glade. Nowadays it is generally assumed that the Chiu Lung Shen meant is Kowloon Peak. However, the original home of the youth was Chiu Lung Shen in eastern Kuangtung province at Hui Lung.

In particular he is the patron of inshore and river boat people on the Pearl River and its tributaries, and especially of Hong Kong's lighter-men. In addition to being able to conjure storms or quell them, he is said to have wonderful healing powers, curing the sick while they sleep. He also has powers of prophecy which are passed on to devotees in their dreams.

T'an Kung's reputation rests on evidence of dreams and visions, though his curative powers have been tested on many occasions, not least in 1921 with a successful procession on Hong Kong island, when a dog was sacrificed to him during an epidemic. The latest was in 1961 during a cholera epidemic in Hong Kong when another epidemic-dispelling procession was organized.

SHUI-WEI SHENG-MU

The Holy Mother of Shui-wei, Shui-wei Sheng-mu, is primarily a Hainanese local deity who, in Hainan, was a protective deity prayed to mainly by fishermen. In South-East Asia where her cult has been established in Hainanese communities, she has also been adopted by devotees of other Chinese ethnic groups, and in Singapore she is worshipped as a



△ Images of Lung Wang either portray the deity as a seated mandarin usually with a coloured face, white beard and white eyebrows, or as a creature with a fearsome dragon's head on a muscular human body. The human rides a dragon attended by two or four demonic aides. With the dragon's head he stands on what are either waves or clouds holding an unsheathed sword, or a small triangular flag of authority in one hand and a *ju-i* sceptre in the other. [Shekwan pottery]

▽ T'an Kung is usually shown as a pink-faced clean shaven youth, sitting, dressed in bib, trousers and an apron, or a *yin/yang* robe, and holding a fly switch in his right hand. His hair is rolled into two long rolls, on each side of the top of his head. [Malaysia]



▽ **Shui-wei Sheng-mu's** images have no unique identifying characteristics. She is a motherly matron, sitting on a throne, attended by several assistants. In several places she is portrayed wearing a cap bearing one to five birds with open wings; in most places she has a *ju-i* sceptre held in the palm of her right hand resting against her shoulder. [Singapore]



△ **Lung Mu's** images can easily be confused with those of T'ien Hou. She has no special identifying characteristics and is usually portrayed as a dowager, wearing a flat-topped crown and silken robes. [Hong Kong]

▷ **Chü Yüan**, one of the Water Immortals. [Taiwan]

goddess who heals the sick by both Fukienese and Ch'aochou devotees, the ethnic groups which dominate the Chinese community in the island state. Her shrines have been seen in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia (even in a Chinese temple on the island of Bali), Vietnam and Cambodia, but not in either Hong Kong or Taiwan. The goddess is offered perfume, talcum powder and handkerchiefs on her birthday, all taken home again by the devotees once the Holy Mother has blessed them.

The legend describing the Holy Mother's origins has been related with little variation in all the areas where her shrines have been noted. A fisherman named P'an, who lived in Wen'ang county in eastern Hainan island many years ago, kept hauling in a piece of wood while fishing. How ever many times he cast the net, he pulled in the same piece of wood. It finally dawned on him that there was more to it than caught the eye and he called out in a loud voice that he would take the wood home with him and have it carved into a holy statue if the next two casts of his net brought him large hauls of fish.

Despite landing exceptionally large hauls, he forgot his promise and used the wood to make a door for his pigsty. His son remarked that every time he passed the pigsty he thought he saw a remarkably beautiful woman combing her hair sitting on the bough of a tree. This reminded the fisherman of his promise but, being poor, he was unable to build a shrine for the deity. Wondering what to do next he consulted a spirit medium who located where the shrine should be built.

Then the goddess herself appeared before a local builder and ordered bricks and timber to be delivered to the site. After delivery, he was unable to find anyone to whom he could present his bill. He described the lady who had ordered the materials and when he heard that it was the goddess herself, he tore up his bill and donated the materials to the shrine.

River Deities

Many Chinese folklore tales describe how friendly water dragons have impregnated maidens at the river's edge or befriended a spinster. The offspring, if born human, would become a hero or follow his father into the watery kingdom. Many of the women so 'raped' committed suicide or left home in despair. If she

committed suicide, then it was accepted that her spirit was wedded to or honoured by the dragon and in many places a minor cult would spring up revering her spirit. Usually such cults faded and disappeared after a generation or two.

LUNG MU

The cult of **Lung Mu**, the Mother of the Dragon, is one of the successful ones, a spinster who became a local dragon's foster parent. The story, as related in Hong Kong, tells how a virgin in the town of Yüehch'eng, chaste, virtuous and merciful, out of the kindness of her heart saved and nurtured a young snake. As it grew, so it was her constant companion. When she died, it curled its body round her grave. It remained there for several days until, amid a thunderstorm and heavy rain, it ascended into the skies and became a dragon. The grave meanwhile disappeared and the local populace started to revere her.

Lung Mu is a local Cantonese popular religion cult formerly centred on southern Kuangtung province. She was prayed to for protection by boat and river crews, and by landspeople for protection against the terrible annual floods. Originally she was the Guardian Spirit of the West River. Nowadays she is prayed to for protection against typhoon winds and deadly landslides caused by torrential rains. Her shrines were common along the river banks; she is to local river folk what T'ien Hou is to sea-going crews.

CH'Ü YÜAN

One of the Water Immortals is identified as one of China's first great poets from the third century BC. **Ch'ü Yüan** was a great favourite at court and a loyal minister of the State of Ch'u until he was replaced by a rival through court intrigue, and banished. He wandered in exile for six years but, realizing that he would never change the path of his aggressive



ruler, he decided to commit suicide in an final attempt to persuade the ruler from persisting in a long drawn-out war with neighbouring states. He sold his property and gave the money to the poor. Before a nearby fisherman could prevent him, he had clasped a stone to his chest and jumped into a river flowing into the Tungting Lake in Hunan province. Annually on the lunar double fifth, rice is thrown into the river for the spirit of the loyal minister. The Dragon Boat Festival symbolizes the search for his body.

CH'U PA-WANG

One of the major images on the main altar of the Water Immortal Temple in Tainan city is **Ch'u Pa-wang**, the Chief King of Ch'u. He is identified as Hsiang Chi, a nephew of Hsiang Liang whose revolt he supported against the Ch'in dynasty. The temple keeper maintained that Hsiang Chi had been the first king to destroy pirates and, as such, was now a major deity of the Water Immortals, together with other heroes of the sea.

Hsiang Chi (322–202 BC) was said to have been seven feet tall and endowed with great strength. He was appointed to serve in the northern army of Ch'u while his great rival Liu Pang commanded the southern army. The two armies marching to relieve Chu-lu were led to understand that whichever commanding general first entered the capital of Ch'in should receive the Principality as his reward.

The commander of the northern army showed a tendency to delay, so Hsiang Chi, on a plea that the commander was a traitor at heart, cut off his head. He then relieved Chu-lu himself, heavily defeating the Ch'in forces. In 207 BC, he persuaded the Ch'in general to surrender the whole of his army which Hsiang Chi then had massacred.

He left behind a name for unscrupulous cruelty, although in Chinese operas such as *Pa-wang Pieh Chi* (The Brave King parts with his Favourite), he is presented as the hero who despite his victories is eventually cornered. He first cuts the throat of his favourite concubine, before finally cutting his own. The opera ends with his faithful horse jumping into the river and drowning rather than live after the death of his master.

CH'AO SHEN

The River Duke, **Wu Yüan**, also known as Wu Tsu-hsü or Ho Po, together with **Wen Chung**, were two generals who now together rule the tides as the **Ch'ao**

Shen (Spirit of the Tide). Enemies in life, they became the joint deities of the Ch'ientang river. Wu was identified with the bore and Wen with the river. As they had opposed each other for centuries, this accounted for the ebb and flow of the tides. Wen Chung was a minister of the king of Yüeh, the enemy of the king of Wu. After deification Wen became the spirit of the tide at Hangchou, the capital of Yüeh.

On the other side, Wu Yüan fought bravely for the king of Wu, but was finally killed by him. According to some, Wu committed suicide. His body was sewn into a leather sack and thrown into the river near Soochou. Wu Yüan promised that at dawn and dusk he would come on the tide to watch the ruin of the state of Wu. The classics relate how the great tides came with a wrathful sound and with a swift rush which could be heard fifty li away. Wu is now the spirit of the tidal bore at Hangchou and can be seen sitting in a funeral cart drawn by white horses in the middle of the tide's head.

Boat People's Deities

The Tanka people, better known as the Boat People of southern China, used to live their whole lives aboard their boats. Nowadays, they live more and more in the coastal towns of Hong Kong; formerly they were commonly seen in villages on offshore islands and along the foreshore. They used to be found in floating colonies of sampans and junks along the coasts of southern China, but more especially within the whole of the Pearl River estuary. Years ago they were easily recognizable by their dress, dialect, customs and social behaviour. Although they are now, outwardly at least, indistinguishable from land-living men and women, they still retain their own customs, one of which is their ancestral memorials.

They live hazardous lives venturing far out into waters where typhoons can strike. So they worship unique deities connected with fishing, weather forecasting and protection as well as a number of deities incorporated into their temples from the general popular religion pantheon. The best known of these are T'ien Hou, and Kuan Yin (see page 89), whose images are everywhere. Tzu-wei Ta-ti (see page 103), who is revered for his power to ward off evil influences and spirits, is popular with the Boat People of the Pearl River estuary.



△ **Ch'u Pa-wang** is the main title of the Water Immortal who in life was Hsiang Chi. His cruelty was notorious, despite being the hero of several Chinese operas. [Taiwan]

▽ **Wu Yüan** is the spirit of the tidal bore at Hangchou and can be seen riding the wave in his funeral cart, drawn by white horses. [Taiwan]



▷ A selection of Boat People's ancestral images for the Pre-pubescent Children. The pair on the left are the standard images of the girl and boy astride their respective steeds – a crane and a horse. The boy on the extreme right appears to be wearing a homburg and is riding a very ornate bicycle.

▽ A Boat People's ancestral image for the Mature Woman. She is carrying a baby on her right arm and a fly whisk in her left hand.



Ancestor Images

Chinese, virtually everywhere, retain tablets in memory of their departed ancestors, certainly going back three generations. While the Boat People have adopted this custom and place similar tablets on the altars of their fishing junks, their unique custom also requires a standardized image representing each of the family's departed to be placed on their family altar.

Whereas Chinese do not make tablets for deceased teenagers and children because they are not ancestors, the Boat People have special images carved to house the spirit of the departed of every age. These images, which are regarded by many foreigners as deities and therefore included here, are the containers of the soul of the departed and are not revered, worshipped or provided with offerings by the living.

The images elevate the dead from the sordid, monotonous and constricted lives of mortals to the reaches of their highest aspirations. The deceased are portrayed as powerful military or civil officials

arrayed in sumptuous robes and armour, and point clearly to what Boat People would most wish to be in life.

These soul images are usually crudely carved, garishly painted and portray men, women and children standing alone or on or astride various animals or sitting on thrones. The size and detail of each ancestral image is decided by the Boat People's shaman who has discussed the likeness to be carved with the dead person in a trance.

Ancestral images have a standard and stylized form for each of the six categories of human. The first two are the Elderly Man and Elderly Lady – people who died at a good age, usually over fifty. Both are normally portrayed sitting on thrones and dressed in the robes of a wealthy peasant or perhaps even of a minor functionary with the official, stylized badges of rank (a large embroidered square sewn to the front of the robe at chest height bearing various birds for civil officials and animals for military). However, as it was illegal for people to adopt a legitimate rank during imperial



times, the mandarin squares often depicted innocuous creatures, such as a rabbit.

The Mature Man and the Mature Woman have many variants. They represent men and women who died between puberty and reaching a 'good age'. The Mature Male is represented by a standing figure, usually in armour covered by robes or in academic robes, and holding his right hand above his head. He also has two creatures, one under each foot, ranging from fish to dragons.

The Mature Woman stands with one arm by her side and the other held across her body holding an infant or an object. These range from bowls to birds, fish, a flower basket, a scarf or a stringed instrument. She has also been noted dressed in a European cocktail dress.

The last pair are the Boy and the Girl who died under the age of puberty. The Girl is always portrayed astride a white crane. The Boy, usually astride a horse, has also been noted standing on one horse, or two with one foot on each. The variants include riding a single or multiple tigers, a fish, or a bicycle.



◁ Boat People's ancestral image for the Pre-pubescent Girl, who is always shown riding on a white crane.

▽ Boat People's ancestral images for the Elderly Man and Elderly Lady

▽▽ A selection of Boat People's ancestral images for the Mature Man.





Deified Worthies

The Chou dynasty, which came to power with the downfall of the Shang, was the longest-lived of the Chinese dynasties. It was a feudal system during which hereditary lords increased their power at the expense of the rulers, a period regarded by later Confucian scholars as the Golden Age of rule. It came to an end in 255 BC when it was overthrown by the Ch'in, one of the states comprising China at the time. In 221 BC, the Ch'in ruler declared himself *Huang Ti* (Emperor), as Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. His dynasty lasted until 206 BC, when it was succeeded by the Han. Our word for China comes from that dynastic name: Ch'in.

The Han (206 BC-AD 219)

The Han dynasty separates into two periods, the Earlier Han (206 BC-AD 9) and the Later Han (AD 25-219). It is the era regarded by northern Chinese as a time of brilliance when classic Chinese culture was founded. They call themselves Men of Han. The Cantonese, on the other hand, regard the T'ang as such and refer to themselves as Men of T'ang.

The Han dynasty was founded by Liu Pang who overthrew the detested Ch'in dynasty and established a new line. The greatest of all Han emperors was the fifth emperor, Han Wu Ti (140-86 BC), during whose reign China extended her boundaries almost to those of today. His successors were weak; in AD 9 the throne was usurped by Wang Mang who ruled for about sixteen years before the throne reverted to the Later Han.

CHIU T' IEN SHENG-TI

The Sainly Emperors of the Nine Heavens. **Chiu T'ien Sheng-ti**, is a group of nine deities to be seen on several temple altars in Taiwan, though it is more usual for only three images of the nine to be portrayed. They are usually numbers one, three and four, of whom number three, **Li Mu** is the main deity. **Li Mu** was a general of the state of Chao during the third century BC, renowned for his defence of the northern frontiers against the incursions from barbarians from central Asia. The cult is said to have arrived in Taiwan from Fukien province shortly after the Revolution of 1911. The cult has its centre at Yingko, in northern

Taiwan, where all nine deities are represented on the secondary altar of the temple dedicated to Sun Pin.

HSIAO HO

An image of **Hsiao Ho**, the former Han dynasty prime minister who made a major contribution to the establishment of the Han, stands in a temple in Yunlin county in central Taiwan. He was one of three heroes; the other two were Chang Liang and Han Hsin. Stories about Hsiao Ho and Han Hsin are well known, largely due to Chinese operas in which they appear. He is prayed to for protection as well as being reported to about all major clan family changes.

Hsiao Ho was born in Kiangsu province in 220 BC where he became a lowly scribe to the local prefect. He attached himself to Liu Pang and became his friend and adviser for life. Hsiao Ho, among other things, advised the emperor to move his capital to Ch'angan (Sian). He also laid down most of the laws of the Han and has been revered by lawyers and magistrates in many parts of central and northern China. In AD 193 Hsiao, when seriously ill, was visited by the emperor to ask whom he should appoint as prime minister after Hsiao was dead. Hsiao recommended Ts'ao Ts'ao, even though he and Hsiao had never got on - the moral being that nation comes before self. The laws laid down by Hsiao were maintained by Ts'ao after Hsiao's death.

TUNG-FANG SHUO

A roughly carved, small image, encrusted with incense soot, stood on a side altar in

< In legend **Kuan Yü** was described as 2.7m (9ft) tall, with a 60cm (2ft) long black beard, rose carmine lips, bloodshot eyes and a demeanour which struck terror into the hearts of all who beheld him. His face was 'as red as a jujube' and his eyebrows 'like sleeping silkworms' were almost vertical, while his eyes were 'like those of a phoenix'.

Kuan Yü has a number of forms and attributes. He can be shown standing, dressed in armour, with a severe face, and holding in his right hand a very long-handled sword (the Green Dragon). Here he is shown astride his horse, the Red Hare. [Hong Kong]



△ In legend, **Li Mu** was one of Sun Pin's (see page 128) nine students, all of whom were protectors of the state and deified as the Sainly Emperors. He is known on his own either as **Chiu T'ien Sheng-ti** or **Chiu T'ien Sui-yeh**, and in the group as **Chiu T'ien San Sheng-ti**. [Taiwan]

▷ **Wang Kung** was a doctor. He is believed to be able to cure illnesses and stop epidemics, and is a very popular local deity among the Hakkas. With his brothers, the group is known as **Kuan Chang San Wang**. The other two were a geomancer and a shaman respectively. [Malaysia]



▽ Images of **Hsiao Hu** have been noted in Taiwanese temples in Tainan city and in Lukang, and also in a few villages in Chia I and Yunlin counties. As the patron of calligraphers his image was also noted in Anking, on the Yangtze, and in Suifu in Szechwan. His cult centre was near Soochou. [Taiwan]



a corrugated iron temple (a converted garage) on the wharf side in Georgetown, Penang. This was identified as Tung-fang Shuo, a glib-tongued jester at the court of Han Wu Ti. Tung-fang entered his service in 138 BC, and became one of his favourite associates and advisers. He is said to have excelled in witty argument and to have encouraged the emperor in his leaning towards a belief in the supernatural. He fostered a belief that he was an Immortal, and even that he had been reincarnated a number of times beginning during the time of the Emperor Yao. He is believed to have originally been a blind entertainer who made such witty speeches and told such amusing stories that his popularity spread throughout the capital.

The story is told that Tung-fang's last words on his death bed were, 'Only the Lord T'ai-wu knows my real identity.' The emperor, intrigued, asked Lord T'ai-wu to explain and was disappointed to learn that he had no idea. The emperor suggested that T'ai-wu sought the answer from the Heavens, whereupon T'ai-wu guessed the answer. He told the emperor that the star Venus had been absent from the Heavens for more than forty years and had just that day reappeared. The emperor was disconsolate, having had

the company of Tung-fang for eighteen years without knowing his true identity.

His image appears to have portrayed him as an aged and bearded, seated scholar-mandarin but without any individual characteristics. The elderly temple keeper who was also the owner and creator of the temple explained that the deity was known locally as **Tung-fang Hsien-tsu** (the Primary Ancestor Tung-fang). He was not worshipped for any special benefits and was rarely revered individually by devotees. His image has only been noted in one other temple, on a minor altar in a rural temple near Miaoli in central Taiwan where he is known also as Tung-fang Sheng.

In the past, his images generally portrayed him as a tall, ascetic Immortal, dressed in robes, holding one or more peaches, accompanied by a deer. In southern China, Tung-fang Shuo was regarded as the patron of gold and silversmiths because of his link with the planet Venus (the Golden Star). In north China he was the patron of the blind, and of blind storytellers in particular.

KUAN CHANG SAN WANG

History relates that Wang Mang, the nephew of the empress dowager, usurped the throne and, having overthrown the

Earlier Han, established his own dynasty which he named *Hsin* (new). He was overthrown and killed in AD 23 when the Han dynasty was restored as the Later Han. His short reign, so the temple legend claims, decimated the population of north China causing refugees to flee to Fukien and Kuangtung provinces. This area was still inhabited by the aboriginal Miao people, who fought hard to drive off the encroaching Han refugees who were pouring into their lands.

Among the refugees fleeing south were three sworn brothers: Wang, Kuan and Chang. They fought the Miao and in the end successfully drove them off the land they had settled, dying in the final battle. Hakkas in Taiwan worship the middle brother, Wang Kung.

MA YÜAN

The Vanguard General (*Hsien-feng*), also known as Ma Yüan (14 BC–AD 49), led a further southern expansion of the Han empire into Tonkin (northern Vietnam), having helped to defeat Wang Mang in AD 25. He has been popularly worshipped from about the fifth century AD by Han settlers in southern China. The support of the spirit of such a general, who symbolized courage and confidence in the comparatively newly conquered south, was required by Chinese to counter threats from the original occupants, the climate and the general misgivings of the migrants. Although this was the original reason for his worship, in recent centuries it has been, in general, replaced by worship for his magical efficacy in providing satisfactory solutions to daily problems.

Kuan Yü

Of all the heroes and worthies of the era of the Three Kingdoms (see page 148), and possibly in all of Chinese history, Kuan Yü (c. AD 160–219) is the best known and revered throughout all Chinese communities. An historical hero and warrior, he is known by a great number of names and titles, such as Kuan Ti, Kuan Kung and his personal name, Kuan Yü. He is all things to all men, not only prayed to for protection and prosperity, but also to solve all problems: personal, domestic, national and universal.

Legends surrounding Kuan Yü have become hackneyed and irresistible subject for prints, story tellers, opera and plays. They have provided every peasant with an astonishing familiarity with the pseudo-history of the Three Kingdoms.

Popular literature has dramatized his heroic exploits to restore the legitimate government of the Han against usurpers, a self-imposed task in which he failed.

Legend claims that Kuan Yü was a simple bean curd hawker who had to leave home after rescuing a girl from the local magistrate's clutches, killing him in the process. He fled and joined the army. Near Peking he heard a butcher named Chang Fei challenge passers by to lift a stone weighing 180kg (400lbs) off the mouth of a well in which his meat was kept. Anyone able to do so could keep the meat. Kuan Yü lifted the stone and took the meat; he was promptly pursued by Chang Fei who attacked him. They fought fiercely until Liu Pei stopped the fight. All three took an oath in a peach garden, to live and to die together, and this has become the ideal of friendship.

Many stories are told of Kuan's fidelity. One told of how two of Liu Pei's wives had been captured by the forces of Wei, while being escorted by Kuan. They were allotted a single room to be shared together with General Kuan. Kuan stood up all night outside the door of the room holding a lighted candle.

Kuan Yü fought in numerous campaigns under the banner of Liu Pei until he was captured by his arch-enemy, King Sun Ch'üan of Wu. Having refused to defect, he was executed at Maich'eng near Hsiangyang in Hupei. The tomb containing his body with a golden head stood at Tangyang near where he was decapitated. His head was buried by his enemies at Loyang in Honan.



△ Ma Yüan is particularly revered as a river god in Kuangsi province under the title of the Wave-conquering General. [Taiwan]

▽ Kuan Yü, in literary form, is portrayed as a severe soldier, dressed in armour and a green or blue robe, sitting with his legs fairly wide apart. He often holds the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in his left hand while his right hand grasps or strokes his black beard. Here he is accompanied by Kuan P'ing, his adopted son (right), and Chou Ts'ang, his sword and armour bearer (left). [Taiwan]



▷ None of Liu Pei's images has any unique characteristic. In the cult centre, his image shows him as an emperor dressed in robes and the flat-topped crown, sitting, holding a tablet in both hands before his chest.

Deified images of Liu have been noted in a number of popular religion temples throughout China, occasionally alone but more usually in the group with Kuan Yü and Chang Fei, known together as the Three Sworn Brothers, or as the Three Worthies. [Szechwan province]

▽ Chang Fei is the third of the sworn brothers who are the heroes of the novel, *San Kuo-ch'ih Yen-i*. He was also known as the Tiger General of Shu. [Szechwan province]



THE THREE KINGDOMS (AD 221-280)

The period from AD 221 to 280 is remembered as the Three Kingdoms, an era of warfare and diplomacy following the fall of the Han. Each of the three – Wei (capital Loyang in the north), Wu (capital first at Wuchang and later in Nanking, both on the Yangtze) and Shu (capital Chengtu in Szechwan) – fought for supremacy. Most Chinese know about this period from opera and stories based on an early Chinese novel *San Kuo-ch'ih Yen-i* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

San Kuo-ch'ih Yen-i describes the exciting times and events within the kingdoms of Shu, Wei and Wu in the third century AD. Shorn of its endless digressions and repetitions, it is the story of an ultimately fruitless struggle to restore the rule of the Han dynasty over the whole of China.

It begins as the Han emperor calls for men to fight the rebel Yellow Turbans in AD 185. Among these volunteers three stand out: Kuan Yü, Chang Fei and Liu Pei. They swear an oath of brotherhood to live and die together. While the rebellion is being defeated, the evil minister Ts'ao Ts'ao seizes power from the emperor. A pragmatist, Ts'ao Ts'ao hardly ever allows honour to impede his progress to the throne of Wei. In contrast, Liu Pei (whom we are invited to admire) holds honour and duty above all other virtues and regularly throws away advantages to keep his honour intact.

Ultimately, the oath of brotherhood is the cause of the destruction of the Han empire. Having eventually taken the throne of Shu rather than allow Ts'ao Ts'ao a free path to the empire, Liu Pei attacks his ally, the kingdom of Wu, because it has executed Kuan Yü. The empire is split irreversibly and remains under alien, non-Han Chinese rule for several hundred years. Among other major characters, Chu-ko Liang, a military strategist of genius, is possibly the best known. All four are now deified heroes with their images on altars China-wide.

Liu Pei

Liu is the main character in the most famous of all Chinese novels, *San Kuo-ch'ih Yen-i*. A straw sandal-maker, Liu Pei led a volunteer army to quell the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans. A distant relative of the Han emperor, he fought to restore his power. In AD 221 he became the ruler of the kingdom of Shu. Liu founded the Western or Later Han dynasty, and died in his palace in Fengchieh on the Upper Yangtze, after he had been defeated by the armies of Wu. Liu entrusted his sons to the care of his loyal adviser and minister, Chu-ko Liang, instructing him to choose the most talented to succeed him as ruler. Much of Liu's success has been attributed to the sagacity and prowess of this great counsellor.

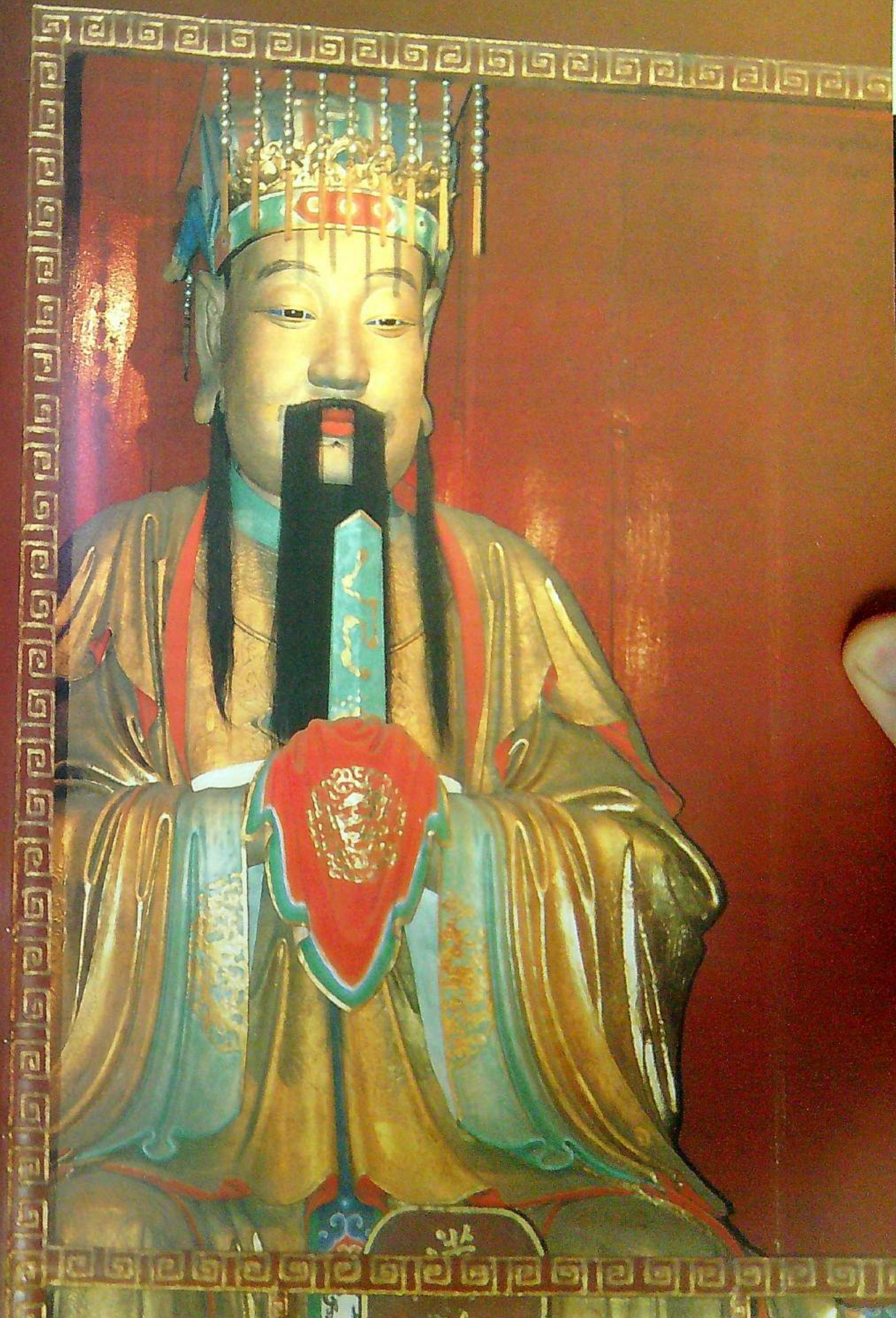
In his cult centre in Chengtu where he is buried, together with his two wives, a temple dedicated to him contains the images of the renowned three sworn brothers with Liu Pei as the main deity on the central altar, Kuan Yü on his left and Chang Fei on his right. His famous counsellor, Chu-ko Liang, and other heroes of the period were also popularly represented. He was the patron of basket and straw sandal-makers throughout China.

Chang Fei

The Tiger General of Shu, Chang Fei, was the third of the famous trio and is revered as the man who kept his word. Born in Honan province, he worked as a butcher until AD 184 when he followed the banner of Liu Pei: Renowned for his great courage and impetuosity, he performed many heroic exploits. On one occasion, when Liu had suffered a severe defeat, Chang stood on a bridge and defied the whole of Ts'ao Ts'ao's army.

He swore revenge against King Sun Ch'üan of Wu after Kuan Yü's execution. In AD 220, while engaged in a campaign against Wu, he ordered two of his generals, Chang Ta and Fan Chiang, to lead the attack. They were afraid, and so they got Chang Fei drunk and cut off his head which they threw into a river. The head then appealed to fishermen to give it a decent burial.

The temple dedicated to Chang Fei was built on the banks of the Yangtze at Yunyang, where his head is said either to have been preserved, or to have been interred. In the main hall the three sworn brothers, Liu Pei, Kuan Yü and Chang Fei were represented by large images.





△ **Chang Kun** only gained fame during the twelfth century when the Chin-Tatar invaders drove the Sung court south and his spirit came to their rescue. [God-carver's sketch]

▽ **Chu-ko Liang**, the military genius of the *San Kuo-ch'ih Yen-i*. Most portrait pictures, murals, and decorative (rather than temple) statues of Chu-ko Liang show him sitting in his wheel-cart (somewhat like an invalid chair with a cover) holding his feather fan in one hand and an open book in the other, as he watches an enemy army. [Szechwan]

Kuan Yü was a China-wide cult-hero, a model of courage and loyalty, who is still revered in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Chinese communities in South-East Asia. The best known of all popular religion deities, he is second only in popularity on altars to Kuan Yin. He is interdenominational, being worshipped by Buddhists as a temple protector, by Confucianists as a patron of literature, and by Taoists as a powerful exorcist.

He is **Wu Ti**, the Military Emperor, in the duo together referred to as **Wen Wu** (Civil and Military: in Cantonese *Man Mo*). They represent the two halves of imperial bureaucracy, the two sectors for which separate examinations were held for official appointments. Their images can be found side by side on the main altar of many temples – **Wen Ch'ang** (see page 104) is the 'Civil' representative.

Kuan Yü symbolizes the virtues and values of loyalty, justice and courage, and so is the protector of peace and the Patron of Loyalty. His image is very commonly seen on altars of disciplined bodies of men, such as soldiers, policemen, firemen, etc. In Hong Kong, Macau, and in formerly British-run colonial police forces in Malaya, Singapore and Shanghai, an image or coloured print of Kuan Yü was installed in a shrine in the Detectives' Room in police stations and his aid invoked when detectives were confronted with particularly difficult

cases. He is habitually and incorrectly referred to by foreigners as the God of War. Many claim that his most important function is as a spirit control for mediums and an exorcizer of demons. In life he had killed many men and this lifestyle has been continued in the Spirit World where he destroys demons with equal verve and complete lack of qualms.

He inspires martial deeds and is a deity of justice; he is prayed to for sons by the deserving, long life for the aged, and acts as a guide for the dead through the Underworld where he is so awesome that demons flee before him. He brings fame to deserving scholars and guarantees peaceful journeys for travellers.

Kuan Yü is also patron of commercial honesty and is the patron of secret societies, not just for his fidelity, but also for his supernatural powers. Apart from that, he was the patron of the Ch'ing dynasty, a god of wealth and the patron of merchants and businessmen in general.

CHU-KO LIANG

Another of the heroes of the *San Kuo-ch'ih Yen-i* was the military genius, **Chu-ko Liang**. He was revered throughout China and was the source of inspiration for many temple murals. The Chief Counsellor to Liu Pei, he was not only a poet, statesman and engineer, but reputedly the greatest military strategist of his era even though he was not a soldier. He is said to have possessed supernatural wisdom. While he dedicated his life to the house of Shu, his ultimate hope was the restoration of the Han. He died without achieving this aim. Born in Shantung province in AD 181, he lived for ten years in a hermitage in Hsiang-yang in Hupei. Liu Pei visited him thrice in order to persuade Chu-ko Liang to join him. He was only twenty-six when he left the hermitage to serve Liu Pei. He died in AD 234 having spent the rest of his life serving Liu Pei and his successors. He is possibly best known in temples as **K'ung-ming Hsien-shih** or as the Military Duke, **Wu Hou**. He was also the patron of cake vendors in northern China.

A well-known story relates how he managed by calculated deception to save his city, which had few soldiers, from a siege. He sat relaxed and reading (or playing music) near the open gates of the fortified city, having invited the enemy commander to join him inside for refreshment. The enemy general, fearing a trap, raised the siege and withdrew.



The Chin (AD 265–419)

The deified third century AD general, **Chang Kun**, who lived in the kingdom of Wu, is better known as **Ling-an Tsun-wang**. He is a heterodox Taoist judicial deity, said by some to have been the City God of Huian city in Fukien, and is now the main protective patron deity of the Ch'üanchou people. Down the side wall of the main hall in the temple dedicated to him in Taipei are the same Celestial officials usually found in temples dedicated to the City God. This, so the temple keeper maintained, is because he controls an area as does a City God, in this case the Mangka, the old city of Taipei.



Chang Kun, a comparatively junior general under Sun Ch'uan, was honest, intelligent and brave, dying in bed in Hui-an in Fukien. A number of supernatural phenomena connected with him have since taken place there helping the people of the area in times of trouble. He was first honoured with a temple in Hui-an after his spirit effectively eradicated a major plague in the district.

In addition to his courage in battle he was renowned as a benevolent administrator of the Ch'üanchou area of Fukien province where his cult first developed, later spreading to Taiwan and South-East Asia. He is said to have done much to improve the lot of Chinese immigrants from north China who settled in the Ch'üanchou area during the third century.

Legend tells of how the spirit of Chang Kun with his Celestial army, bearing a flag upon which his name was emblazoned, came to the aid of the Sung

army as they and the court were fleeing southwards in 1127. The spirits stopped the Chin-Tatar advance and enabled the Sung forces to regroup and win a battle, their first victory over the invading Chin. The Sung emperor sent a delegation to Hui-an to confirm that there was such a *shen* as Chang Kun. He then awarded Chang the title of **Ling-an Tsun-wang**, and ordered that a tablet bearing the new title be hung over the temple entrance.

As Ling-an Tsun-wang is considered to be a Pestilence Wang-yeh (see page 115) by a number of people, despite being an identified historical hero, his image is paraded annually on his festival



together with the spirit officials from the side walls of his temple. This is an unusual and possibly unique combination.

NORTHERN & SOUTHERN DYNASTIES (AD 420–588)

One of the Governors of Yungchou in Shensi province during the period of the Northern and Southern dynasties was named **Hsiao Yen**. He deposed the Ch'i emperor after his elder brother died at the hands of that emperor. He established the Liang dynasty and became its first emperor in AD 502. He died in a monastery in AD 549, prisoner of a usurper. Hsiao Yen had always been a devout Buddhist and, following the precepts of the Buddha, he even made sacrificial offerings of dough rather than take life.

Hsien T'ai Fu-jen (Madame Hsien) was the wife of Feng Pao, an official of the Liang dynasty who became prefect of Kaoling (the capital). He died in AD 558.

◁ Images of **Hsiao Yen** have been seen among the Eighteen Lohan (see page 95) simply labelled 'First Emperor of the Liang' portraying him as a seated Buddhist monk.

Another of his images has also been noted as one of the Eighteen Lohan in a small temple in Singapore. At first glance, it looks like a typical Buddhist monk-like figure. On closer examination, however, it can be seen that he is wearing imperial robes and is bearded. [Taiwan]



◁ **Hsien T'ai Fu-jen's** image has only been noted on two altars in southern Malaysia. The image is of a standard matron, and in both temples it stands alongside images of T'ien Hou (see page 137) and Shui-wei Sheng-mu (see page 139). [Malaysia]

△ Images of **Hsüeh Fu Chiang-chün** are usually standard portrayals of a black-bearded general sitting dressed in armour, without any particular identifying characteristic. In at least two temples in Singapore he is depicted standing, with one foot on a ball and holding a sword (or magic whip) aloft in his right hand, while making a mystic sign with his left hand. In both instances he is wearing a tiger-head cap. In three temples in South-East Asia, his image has a multi-coloured striped face. However, in this example, he is shown wearing an imperial crown and trampling demons underfoot. [Taiwan]

▽ Historically **Ch'en Yüan-kuang** is remembered as a meritorious local official, an important but local general, killed in battle but not widely famous or a major contemporary figure. He was first deified as the Changchou City God, though now regarded as the 'first ancestor', founder not only of Changchou but also of the Ch'en clan throughout South-East Asia. [Malaysia]



▷ In Taiwan, where **Li Po** is a minor deity in every temple in which his image was noted, he is nearly always portrayed as an old white-haired and white-bearded Taoist worthy. Here he is shown with one of his assistants [Hong Kong]

▷▷ **Chang Hsün** was born in Honan province in AD 709 and entered a public career after he graduated as a *chin-shih* and fought against the Turkic-speaking tribes. He is possibly best known to Westerners as the soldier who complained that it was impossible to fight the barbarians according to fixed rules because they would attack him before he was ready. [Taiwan]

Graduates of the imperial examinations could receive passes in three grades:

Hsiu-ts'ai – Bachelor (set at district level)

Chü-jen – Master (set at provincial level)

Chin-shih – Advanced Scholar (awarded only in the capital, Peking)

However, the man who achieved the top marks of the entire year's intake, won the title *Chuang-chün*, meaning the First Scholar of the Empire.

Before her marriage she had been taught at home by an extraordinary teacher who not only instructed her in secret practices but also military strategy and tactics. Even though she commanded troops in battle, having first trained them, she also often tried to persuade her relatives to be kind and considerate. She advised her husband, sons and grandsons to maintain



Hsüeh Fu Chiang-chün, is usually identified as **Hsüeh Jen-kuei**, though several stories told about him and his family so overlap that it would be impossible to be categorical about the identity of this deity. The title has also been assigned to his son and to two of his grandsons. Born of a poor family in Shansi province in AD 614, Hsüeh Jen-kuei won the trust of the



loyalty to the emperor, and herself took up arms and fought against various groups of rebels. Dying at eighty-nine, she was granted the posthumous title of **Hu-kuo Sheng-mu** (Saintly Mother who protects the State) and given a state funeral. She was buried in Tienpai county, commonly known as Kaoling, in the extreme south-west of Kuangtung province where a temple was raised in her honour leading to today's cult.

SUI AND T'ANG (AD 589-907)

The Sui dynasty brought an element of stability and in AD 589 reunited all of China under one ruler after several centuries of division, known as the Northern and Southern Dynasties. The Sui lasted only twenty-eight years before it too fell to another usurper who founded the great T'ang dynasty in AD 618. This lasted for nearly 290 years. There were several unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the dynasty, not least the revolt led by An Lu-shan in AD 755. Some of the heroes and worthies of the time have been deified and are still revered as protectors.

HSÜEH FU CHIANG-CHÜN

The deity noted on a number of altars in Taiwan and Singapore as General Hsüeh,

T'ang dynasty emperor during several revolts and was awarded with a military command. In AD 658 he won a great victory over the Koreans and another over the Khitan Tatars, but one year later he was disastrously defeated by the Turfans and condemned to death. He won his way back into favour, his death sentence was commuted to being cashiered. He then retrieved his fame by winning a decisive victory over the Turkic-speaking tribes. He died at the age of sixty-nine.

K'AI CHANG TSUN-WANG

The Saintly King who opened up Changchou, **K'ai Chang Tsun-wang**, is a Fukienese provincial deity, the patron of emigrants and their descendants in Taiwan and South-East Asia from and around Changchou, a city just inland from Amoy on the southern coast of Fukien, though the cult centre was and still is at nearby Changp'u. He is the deified spirit of the T'ang dynasty general, Ch'en Yüan-kuang (*Tan Goan-kong* in Fukienese), who was either killed in battle defending the city against marauding bands of robbers in about AD 711 or died worn out by his exertions to settle the area in peace and prosperity, but not before he had colonized the prefecture of

Changchou. He was buried on a hill near the prefectural capital and, as he had been so popular with the poor of the city, they petitioned the emperor that Ch'en should be deified together with two (or four) of his generals.

LI PO

Li T'ai-pai (AD 701-62), otherwise known as Li Po, is probably China's most famous poet. He is also known by a number of names and titles, and rejoices in the nickname of the Wine Immortal. Chiu Hsien. Although he spent a short period in the capital at Changan, most of his life was passed wandering. A Taoist, with a notorious love of wine, best known for his romantic death, he is also still remembered first as one of the legendary band of poets and literati known as 'the Six Idlers of the Bamboo Brook' and later of another group, the 'Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup'.

His story is impossible to pin down. Introduced to the T'ang Ming Huang emperor who, charmed with Li Po's poems, not only prepared a bowl of soup for Li Po with his own hands, but also appointed him to the Hanlin Yüan (college), a gathering of the most brilliant scholars of the empire. Li Po upset a number of the leading members of the Court, but managed to keep in with the emperor with his quickly penned verse. However, he was finally forced to leave the capital by the notorious imperial concubine, Yang Kuei-fei, who feared his barbed verses.

Driven from the court by intrigues, Li Po was given a golden disc as a farewell gift by the emperor which let him drink free at any wine shop in China. He spent the rest of his life wandering around the Empire drinking. He died, so it is officially claimed, in Tangtu in Anhui by drowning. He drunkenly leaned over the side of a boat trying to embrace the reflection of the moon. Several writers have assumed that Li Po actually committed suicide, or died of sickness while staying with the county magistrate, and the story of his death by accident under the influence of wine is merely a legend.

He has been a patron deity of rice wine merchants for many centuries with his image on altars in temples in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia, where he is revered as a Taoist worthy, but without any specific attribute apart from, according to one temple keeper, being the god of rice wine. In some temples he is one of

the Water Immortals (see page 137), though usually he is either a minor image on a secondary altar or part of a group of unconnected deities on a side altar. In paintings Li Po is frequently depicted with a tame white deer which is said to have followed him night and day.

WEN-WU AN TSUN-WANG

Two unique deities, the heroes **Chang Hsün** and **Hsü Yüan**, seen on altars in Chekiang, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South-East Asia, are frequently confused both by devotees and professional god-carvers. They are known to Ch'aouchou devotees as the Civil and Military Lords of Peace (**Wen-wu An Tsun-wang**) or as **Wen-an Tsun-wang** (Chang Hsün) and **Wu-an Tsun-wang** (Hsü Yüan). They also have the titles respectively (possibly within Ch'üanchou communities only) of **Pao-i Tsun-wang** and **Pao-i Ta-fu**.

▽ Although images of the heroes Chang Hsün and Hsü Yüan (shown here) are seen together on the same altar in a number of temples, they are also seen individually as the lone main deity on an altar.

There are further complications where the temple keepers deny that their particular individual deity is in any way connected with the other deity who is not present. When they are together as joint main deities, their images are very similar and cannot easily be separated.

They are usually portrayed as standard military figures sitting on thrones and holding unsheathed swords, but without any unique identifying characteristics. They quite frequently have a pair of military and civil aides flanking their altars. In one instance in Tainan, Chang has an 'army' of six miniature images of military and civil aides on the altar table before his main altar. [Hangchou]



▷ **K'ai Min Sheng-wang** and his consort are usually represented as standard images without any unique characteristics. However, individually he is portrayed as a seated mandarin scholar with a black beard, pink face, and with an open book in his left hand and a writing brush in his right. As he was well known for his love of white horses he is frequently known simply as the Third Lord of the White Horse. [Amoy]

▽ The Sixth and last Patriarch of Eastern Buddhism, **Liu Tsu**, is best known by his name in religion, **Hui Neng**. He founded the Ch'an Tsung (Sudden Enlightenment School) and is regarded as the 'true founder' of the Chi-su Chiao Tsung (Vegetarian School).

Born into the Lu family in Kuangtung province in AD 637, he was employed as an illiterate youth as a common labourer in the kitchen of the Fifth Patriarch. There he amazed monks and nuns with his miraculous ability to understand the chanted sutras. In AD 676 he took holy orders in the Kuanghsiao Ssu in Canton, and insisted on working in the fields until old age prevented it. He created the saying, 'One day no work, one day no food.' He studied under the Fifth Patriarch, Hung Jen, in Hupei province, and was chosen by him to be the Sixth Patriarch.

Hui Neng did not feel the need to proclaim a successor as the Buddhist Law was well established in China by that time. He died in AD 713 in the Kuo-en Monastery in Kuangtung. Liu Tsu has been adopted by Buddhists as the protective genius of the province of Kuangtung and was, for example, successfully prayed to for rain in 1900 during a prolonged drought. [Canton]



Referred to hereafter as Chang and Hsü, they are two protective deities, canonized heroes from the T'ang dynasty, worshipped particularly by the Fukienese and around Hangchou.

The most common history of the two heroes describes how Chang and Hsü, loyalists during the reign of T'ang Ming Huang, opposed the rebel An Lu-shan. They died heroically – most say they killed themselves rather than be captured by the enemy – defending the provincial city of Suiyang in Honan province, which fell to the enemy after a siege of forty-nine days in AD 757. Some claim that the heroic defenders were betrayed by cowards after the food gave out.

K'AI MIN SHENG-WANG

The Sainly King who Settled the Min District, **K'ai Min Sheng-wang**, is identified as Wang Shen-chih (AD 862–925) who was governor of Fukien province. He was noted for his handsome appearance, prominent nose and square mouth. According to historical records, Wang Ch'ao founded the Han settlement of Fukien province (Min). After he had put down a serious rebellion against the T'ang ruler in the mid-880s, he was appointed the Inspector of Fukien. Later, to everyone's surprise, he was appointed *Chieh-tu Shih* (Military Commissioner) of Foochow. Although historians regard Wang Ch'ao as the founder of the Min, his younger brother, Wang Shen-chih, is worshipped as the first King of Min.

Legend in Taiwan claims that Wang Shen-chih was born in Honan province in about AD 895, and succeeded his brother, named Wang Ch'ao, as the Military

Commissioner of Foochow. He was followed south by numerous Honanese seeking their fortunes.

After the T'ang dynasty was replaced by the Liang in AD 907, the first Liang emperor appointed Wang Shen-chih the Prince of Fukien (Min Wang). Later, when China was in a state of great disorder, Wang Shen-chih's son took the opportunity to declare himself the ruler of the Kingdom of Min, initiating the period known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. Wang Shen-chih is revered in Penang as the Wang clan's ancestral deity and patron. His image bears the canonization title of **Chung-i Wang** (the Loyal and Virtuous Prince).

Liang Dynasty

After the collapse of the T'ang in AD 906, a series of short-lived minor dynasties, including the Liang, followed. These were succeeded by the Sung in AD 960.

A legend which has been attributed to several different dynasties including the T'ang, describes the Five Immortals or **Wu Hsien**, otherwise known as The Five Rams, as the patron deities of Canton city. The popular Canton version explains how the Five were shepherds who, two thousand years ago, descended from Heaven wearing five-coloured robes and riding rams to where Canton now stands. They bore the five grains of cereals which signify plenty.

They turned into five rocks known as the 'five stone rams' and a supernatural voice speaking out of the clouds claimed that, so long as they were worshipped, prosperity would continue. In addition to

the five rocks in the temple in Canton there were five images of mandarins dressed in white, yellow, blue, black and red, each with ears of rice in their hands to prove that famine would never strike the city. The Five, according to one legend, include Hua Kuang (see page 63).

Another legend simply claimed that all Five descended in a blaze of light across the sky one night about a thousand years ago, remaining in Canton to protect the city and were worshipped together with the Jade Emperor in the temple of the Five Immortals in Great Market Street until 1878 when the temple was burnt down. It was rebuilt in 1889 and was again referred to in foreign guides to the city with the main deity 'Shang-ti' in the main hall and the 'Five Genii' in the rear hall.

The Five used to be worshipped by devotees who returned to the temple to give thanks for restored health. They wore the red dress of Ch'ing prisoners, also chains around their necks, fetters on their ankles, and iron cuffs on their wrists, all indicating humility.

Although famous within Cantonese-speaking communities, these deities do not appear to be worshipped on altars in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan or in South-East Asia.

However, one temple keeper in Hong Kong believed that the five images on the front of the main altar in his temple, known as the **Wu T'ung**, were almost certainly the Five Immortals of Canton – today there are only two stone rams in the forecourt. Canton is still referred to as the City of the Five Rams, pictures of which are to be seen on products made in that city. The Five Immortals were prayed to for safety and health, and particularly for protection during times of plague.

The Sung (AD 960–1279)

This period is divided into the Northern Sung (AD 960–1126) which had its capital at Kaifeng, and the Southern Sung (1127–1279) which had its capital at Hangchou. The dynasty was constantly threatened from invaders, the Hsi Hsia from the north-west and the Liao and Chin-Tatars from the north-east. The Sung were driven from Kaifeng by the Chin-Tatars, who had defeated the Liao and, having first occupied Peking in 1115 where they had established their dynasty, they then moved on southward capturing Kaifeng and the Sung emperor in 1127.

The son of the Sung emperor fled further south to Hangchou where he set up his Court. There the Sung remained ruling southern China, until the last emperor fell to the Mongols in 1278.

SAN CHUNG-KUNG

The Three Loyal Dukes, **San Chung-kung**, are renowned as generals who died fighting against the Mongols (they had invaded southern China in 1274). **Wen T'ien-hsiang** (1236–1283) was a Hakka, a native of Kiangsi province. The Mongol forces captured Hangchou in 1276, the capital of the Southern Sung, together with the emperor and the empress dowager who were taken to Peking. After its fall, the Court was persuaded by Wen that the two imperial heirs, the last of the Sung, should be sent south to Foochou to ensure their safety. Wen then raised an army and held back the Mongols on behalf of the new emperor. He was sent against his will to negotiate with the Mongols and was detained by them, although later released. Some say he escaped disguised as a beggar.

Although they all suffered badly and his wife and son died during an epidemic, he was rewarded by being ennobled shortly before the Mongols captured him. At first he was treated as a guest, but when he refused to serve the Mongols, they took him back to Peking. After three years in gaol, when he still refused to serve the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan, he was executed. In gaol waiting for death he composed his well-known 'Song of the Righteous Ch'i'. His unswerving loyalty to the dynasty enabled him to live through the horrors and diseases of close confinement.

Lu Hsiu-fu (1238–79) was a native of Kiangsu, a man of integrity who, when Hangchou was about to fall, was sent to negotiate a settlement, but failed. After its fall, Lu met up with **Chang Shih-chieh** in Wenchou to rally support for the imperial cause, but had to flee on south to Foochou where they joined Wen's forces. The senior heir was there enthroned as the Sung Ching Yen emperor.

The new emperor was forced to flee further south until he reached Kowloon. Having captured Canton, the Mongol fleet destroyed Chang's army, driving the Sung Court into the sea. Then a typhoon struck the fleeing Sung fleet; the ship carrying the young emperor was sunk. He was rescued, but later died from shock and exposure in mid-1279.



△ The **San Chung-kung** were involved in the Southern Sung's retreat to the south coast of China ahead of the invaders. They are worshipped as faithful, loyal soldiers and servants of the emperor, who still maintain their integrity in the spirit world and help devotees wherever they can. Wen is the most important and is frequently shown wearing a yellow jacket, while Chang and Lu wear red and black coats respectively. [Malaysia]

▽ **Hou Wang** was one of two Sung dynasty generals (Lu was the other), the commander of the personal bodyguard of the last emperor of the Southern Sung who rode south to the vicinity of Hong Kong. He escorted the eight year-old emperor, who was fleeing before the Chin-Tatar invaders. [Darwin, Australia]





△ Ma En, one of the deities also known as Ma Kung, was a Sung general. [Taiwan]

▽ Ch'e Kung's basic image depicts him as a general holding an axe in his right hand at waist height, sitting on a throne. He has the large round eyes of a hero, a straggly wispy beard and moustache, and wears an elaborate head dress with two long pheasant feathers trailing from it. There are a few variations in his appearance in one or two temples. These do not include where he has lost his feathers or has been beribboned and decorated by grateful devotees. [Hong Kong]



Lu and Chang stood firmly against any talk of surrender and ensured that the younger boy was made emperor. Chang became the Junior Guardian, while Lu was Grand Counsellor. The next year the Mongol forces, having built up their strength, forced the last Sung forces into a final battle. When all was lost, Lu took the boy emperor on his shoulders. Having watched his wife and children commit suicide in the Canton river, he jumped in and died with his emperor. Chang was also drowned in 1279.

Their images, usually together on one altar, have been seen in Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore only. Although all three have close connections with Kuangtung province they are seen mostly on Fukienese community altars and only rarely on Cantonese.

HOU WANG

Literally the 'Prince Marquis', Hou Wang is a local Hong Kong hero and now prayed to for the well-being of the people in general and also for personal favours. He is also known as Yang Hou, Count Yang, and is revered for his heroism, and for giving his life for his emperor. His personal name was Yang Liang-chieh. Yang is said to have been the elder brother of the young emperor's mother and was therefore his uncle. He organized a holding force to allow the fleeing Sung emperor to get away, but before he could follow, he died in Kowloon from the illness which had kept him there.

A temple, immediately to the north of

what until recently was Kowloon Walled City, is claimed by the temple keeper to be the one and only Hou Wang temple erected in 1730 – all the others are only cashing in on the power and popularity of the deity. The keeper of the Hou Wang temple in Macau claimed that the two main Hou Wang temples bickered interminably over which was the true cult centre. Macau devotees claimed that Hou Wang raised horses and troops in the Sai Shan area of Chungshan county to the north of Macau, and therefore his main image, set up immediately after the fall of the Sung, is the true one; whereas Kowloon city devotees know their image is the true one because he raised troops and horses in Paoan county of which Kowloon once was part.

MA KUNG

The following rather confused picture of the identity of Ma Kung (Duke Ma) simply reflects the divergent views of devotees, god-carvers and temple keepers. The problem lies in the apparent inability of Fukienese devotees to agree the identity of this deity who, in most of Taiwan, is also known as Ma Shih-yeh or Ma Shih-kung. As Ma Kung, images in temples have been identified variously as: Ma Fu, Ma En, Ma Yin and Ma Jen.

Ma Fu was a Soochou man, originally a water chestnut hawker, who worshipped at the Temple of the Sung Grand Counsellor (Sung Hsiang-kung) every morning. One day, for reasons unstated, he leapt into the river and drowned himself. Sung Hsiang-kung recruited his spirit to be one of his Express Couriers.

Some time later, a shaman in Fukien discovered that Ma Kung had become one of the aides to a group of Wealth Gods, the Wu T'ung Shen. When a late Ming Governor of Nanking had given orders for the destruction of the Wu T'ung statues in the local 'unorthodox' (ie not officially sponsored) temple and the images had been concealed in a lake. Ma Kung was believed to have been responsible for saving them.

Ma En was a Sung dynasty general, killed in action serving under Yang Wenkuang during a punitive expedition into Fukien in 1053. He is one of the deities who now bears the title of Fu-shun Chiang-chün. His death is remembered not only for his superhuman bravery, but also because his body remained erect on his horse after he had been killed in the fighting, and scared the enemy into

headlong flight. The legend related about **Ma Yin** in his temple on the Chungshan Road in Taichung, is so similar to that of Ma En that there is little doubt that they are the same deified hero. Like Ma En, he was a Sung dynasty general before whom the enemy fled when they saw his upright body still in the saddle.

A few devotees claim that **Ma Jen** is the Sung dynasty general and/or an aide to the Wu T'ung Shen and that his image should only be in temples where Wu T'ung is the main deity. One of the legends told about Ma Jen claims that he helped control and eliminate a dreadful epidemic which struck Changchou during the tenth century and he is therefore regarded by many as a Pestilence Wang-yeh (see page 115).

CH'E KUNG

Duke Ch'e, **Ch'e Kung**, also commonly known as the Great Marshal Ch'e, is a deity seen nowadays in popular religion temples in Hong Kong and Macau, and on minor altars in Singapore and Malaysia only. Though many of Ch'e Kung's devotees are Hakka, he is primarily a Cantonese deity from whom they seek luck, progeny and protection from epidemic diseases. In Macau he is also

prayed to by gamblers who wish their luck to change for the better, and by families who wish that compulsive gamblers in their family be cured of their addiction.

Duke Ch'e, said to have risen to be a general during the Sung dynasty and honoured by his emperor for his successful suppression of a rebellion in south China, was born at Nanchang, the capital of Kiangsi province.

Legend also claims that, towards the end of the Ming dynasty, several centuries after he had been deified by the emperor for his loyalty and success in war, his spirit suppressed an epidemic which had spread across the southern province of Kuangtung and was particularly virulent around Shatin (in Hong Kong's New Territories).

A unique feature of Ch'e Kung altars is the windmill, a four-bladed brass fan without a motor, set before the image. These are manually jerked round three and allowed to freewheel. The longer the blades revolve, the better the luck. As part of the charge for the overall ritual, a small fee is charged for use of the fan. Hawkers at the annual celebrations sell paper windmills for devotees to take home with them.

◁◁ Complications over definitive identifications arise from the universal belief that **Yang Yeh** is one of the two major deities of the cult, the other being the Fifth Son (shown here). Images of Yang Yeh, alone or with his wife, Yü Lao Tai-chün, and with one or more of his seven sons, can be seen on Fukienese community altars in Taiwan and South-East Asia. [Taiwan]

◁ A key figure of the Sung era was the poet, Su Shih, who is probably better known as **Su Tung-p'o**. He was one of the eight famous men of letters of the T'ang and Sung era, living from 1036 to 1101. [Pescadores]

▽ Usually portrayed in his military role, as a general astride a tiger, usually black, with a sword raised in his right hand, **Hung Hsien Ta-ti** is dressed in gilt armour and carries a bowl or gourd in his left hand.

A god-carver in Singapore explained that Hung is a deity mentioned in the *Feng-shen Yen-i* and is therefore not prayed to for the usual benefits such as profit, health, gambling, etc, but he is petitioned for unexpected benefits. [Singapore]





△ A Yüan dynasty Chinese commander, Liu Ch'eng-chung, who served in the Huai River basin, was known as the Brave General, **Meng Chiang**. During a particularly devastating plague of locusts he led his troops out to kill as many of the pests as possible to save the peasants' crops. After the Yüan dynasty capitulated, Liu drowned himself and local people built a temple dedicated to him. Thereafter, whenever a swarm of locusts appeared, farmers would pray to him to ward them off.

He is now referred to as Liu Meng or in Shanghai as **Liu Kung Meng Chiang-chün** (shown here). In north China, he was known as the King of Insects, and was characterized by his bottle gourd into which he imprisoned the scourges.

One of the temples dedicated to Liu Meng near Shanghai was destroyed in 1861 during the Taiping Rebellion. In 1877, when the same area was about to be plagued by a scourge of locusts, the local magistrate fasted, prayed to Liu Meng for assistance and the pests were driven into the sea by droves of crows, sparing the area from devastation.

In Paoshan Hsien in Kiangsu province between 1854 and 1887, plagues of locusts devastated the area. With Liu Meng's help, repeated miracles dispelled or destroyed the swarms which earned him six successively more senior divine titles from the emperor. [Shanghai]

YANG FU TA-SHIH

This is the title by which several members of the same family are individually known. It is also the group title of the whole family in a few temples. All the family, including the mother, served as generals. As a family, they are renowned as the heroes of the *Yang-chia Chiang*, the 'Romance of the Generals of the Yang Clan'. It describes the struggle between the Sung dynasty and the invading hordes from central Asia. The fearless Yangs were dreaded by the tribesmen from beyond the Great Wall.

Yang Yeh, the father, is also known as the Holy Prince of the Yang Family, the Head of the Yang Family and Yang the Saintly Prince. General Yang Yeh defeated the Mongols near Hengshan in Shansi early in the Sung dynasty. One of the most powerful supporters of the Sung, he later tried to save the emperor from the invading hordes, together with his heroic sons. With his wife, he chose to die rather than surrender. Three of their sons died with them. The Fifth and Sixth made their separate ways home after many adventures. After falling in battle fighting the enemies of the Sung, Yang Yeh was awarded the title of the Marshal who Protected the Sung, **Sung-pao Yüan-shuai**. His body was recaptured by a valourous captain who had used a secret weapon to defeat the enemy. He caused fire to flow from a pot, thereby scorching the hillside. Having exhumed the general's corpse, he returned to the capital at Kaifeng where it was buried in state.

A popular opera, *Hungyang Tung* (At the Hungyang Cave), describes how the Commander-in-Chief of the Sung forces, General Yang Ch'i-yeh (the Seventh Son), was encircled by the Mongols, and seeing no other way out, defied capture by knocking out his own brains. The Mongols recovered his remains and, honouring his bravery, built a mausoleum in the Hungyang cave, but buried his body in a secret place. Eventually the bones were recovered, but not before several of the Sixth Son's comrades had been killed or committed suicide. These deaths led the Sixth Son to despair and also die.

SU TUNG-P'Ö

Well known for his poetry, **Su Tung-p'ö** was also a celebrated scholar statesman who has been deified by popular acclaim. It is likely that he was deified by imperial order after his death, an honour coming into vogue at that time, though this is not

recorded. Born in Szechwan, Su received most of his education from his mother, owing to his father's long absences from home. At the age of twenty-one, he entered the state examinations and headed the list of competitors. He rose in public office and was prominent among the strenuous opponents of Wang An-shih.

His first fall from grace in 1079 was from ministerial office when he was downgraded to be governor of Hangzhou Fu. In 1086 at the start of a new reign he was restored to favour, but again incurred imperial displeasure, this time being exiled to the semi-barbarous island of Hainan in 1097.

During his exile he complained that Hainan was wild and its 'frontier' people, settlers from the mainland, were without culture. He took a genuine interest in their welfare, however, as well as the welfare of the original non-Chinese inhabitants. He was permitted to return from banishment in about 1100 and died shortly after in Fukien. He was the first great name in Chinese history connected intimately with Hainan, and his memorial temple in Haikou in Hainan island is now a museum. Within the grounds of the temple is the spring which he had dug during a severe drought.

HUNG HSIEN TA-TI

The Great Emperor the Immortal Hung, **Hung Hsien Ta-ti**, has only been noted in Ch'aozhou community popular religion temples in southern Johore and Singapore. He is prayed to by devotees for protection, patrolling as he does the various neighbourhoods astride his tiger, righting wrongs. He is also believed to answer all prayers and provide other individual benefits depending upon the needs of devotees.

He is said to have been a native of Tapu county in eastern Kuangtung province who lived long ago. Highly intelligent, he lived with his poor parents and collected rents for a living. He was well known as a kind hearted youth who went out of his way to help others. One day while collecting rents his last call was the house of a very poor widow, who was unable to pay her rent until the New Year when she would be able to sell her chickens. Hung agreed not to call again until then. A heavy rainstorm broke out and the widow suggested that he should wait until it had blown over.

Hung fell asleep and dreamt he saw an old lady in black with many children,

followed by a lame old man leaning on a stick. The old lady told Hung that she was the widow's hen and that a few days ago she had hatched all these chicks. Now, she said, the widow wanted to kill her to provide Hung with a good meal. She did not mind being killed and eaten, but feared for her chicks. Then the old man with the gammy leg explained that he had been savaged by a hunter who was out hunting tigers and he too begged Hung to save the old lady, revealing that Hung was the incarnation of the Lohan who Subdued the Tiger (**Fu-hu Lohan**).

At that moment Hung awoke to hear a screech from the old hen. He rushed into the kitchen and found the old widow about to kill her. Hung stopped her and said that he would pay her rent. On the way home he encountered a tiger sitting at the edge of the forest. Fearing that he would be killed, Hung did not try to fight the animal but simply sat down in the road to await his fate. The tiger, however, walked towards him and knelt. Hung saw that it only had three legs and realized that not only was the tiger the old man in his dream, but also that he really was the Fu-hu Lohan. He mounted the animal and was carried off to Heaven on its back.

THE MING (1368–1643)

Chu Yun-wen was the son of the eldest son of Chu Yüan-chang, the first emperor of the Ming. He succeeded to the throne when his grandfather died in 1398 and adopted the reign title of **Ming Hui Ti**. His first act was to try and foil his uncles and deprive them of their powers, but only managed to reign a few years before being overthrown by one of his uncles in 1402. The uncle became the third emperor, **Ming Yung Lo**, and one of the most renowned rulers of the Ming.

Meanwhile the former emperor was believed by many to be dead. However, an image of the second emperor of the Ming, dressed in Buddhist robes, occupies the main altar of the rear hall of a Buddhist temple on Lion Mountain in northern Yunnan province where, until 1949, he had incense burnt before him for six hundred or so years by pilgrims who had climbed the mountain to pray before the Buddhas within the temple proper. His image is flanked by images of two officials, and unless one knows the story behind it, one would assume it to be a Buddhist deity.

The story is that Hui Ti, rather than



commit suicide, donned the garb of a monk and fled first to Szechwan province. Hounded by imperial forces, he fled on south to Yunnan, following instructions left to him by his grandfather, where he sought sanctuary on Lion Mountain. There he lived out his life as a Buddhist monk. After some forty years, he is supposed to have returned to Peking where he lived in seclusion until his death in 1440. Although he was recognized in Peking by a palace eunuch, he was not identified because the eunuch was afraid to expose the former emperor.

Cheng-ho

Numerous stories claim that the Yung Lo emperor sent out search party after search party after Hui Ti disappeared, hoping to kill him and prevent him from causing any trouble. Some of these search parties were major expeditions, such as several of those of the eunuch admiral, **Cheng-ho**, who was supposed to seek him in South-East Asia.

When the Mongols withdrew into central Asia, communications between China and the West lapsed. The Ming Yung Lo emperor made great efforts to re-open trade routes in what became a short golden era of exploration, and to expand the much diminished foreign trade by despatching seven major expeditions to the Southern Seas between 1405 and 1431, commanded by eunuchs from the Imperial Court in Peking. The most famous of the admirals to command these expeditions was Ma Cheng-ho, the son of a Chinese Moslem Hadji from Yunnan

△ Born in 1371, **Ma Cheng-ho** was recruited to the Imperial Court at about the age of ten as a eunuch. He became a soldier and fought for the prince he served. When that prince became emperor, he became one of his most trusted aides. Cheng-ho died in 1433 after a unique career. [Malaysia]

▽ **T'ai-pao Kung**, the Great Protector, is a killer of disease-causing demons, whose images are easily recognizable as he is treading a cat underfoot. Tai-pao was the last of thirteen brothers of the Chang family – the other twelve had all been killed by demons. Having studied under Fa-chu Kung (see page 75), he returned with two aides to rid his village of the constant threat from the demons. Trying to avoid being massacred, the evil spirits changed themselves into cats. T'ai-pao was not taken in, and promptly killed all the cats in the village. The evil spirits instantly turned back into their demonic form, but were stone dead. [Fukien province]



▽ Hai Jui's image has only once been noted on a temple altar, a side altar in a small temple in Singapore dedicated to the Nine Emperors, and used by Chi'ochou Chinese. His image, which depicts him as a seated mandarin with no unique characteristics, is attended by aides. [Singapore]



▷ Koxinga is sometimes flanked by images of his subordinate generals, usually in pairs, the most common of whom are Kan Hui (shown here), Chang Wan-li and Ho Yu. In a number of temples, especially where he is referred to as a non-pestilence Wang-yeh, one side altar in the main hall of his temple is dedicated to his army of spirit soldiers. Depicted by two or three rows of images of 'dynastic' soldiers under an officer known as 'the general', Koxinga's army of spirit soldiers is believed to be able to protect humanity from the depredations of the demonic forces constantly threatening us. [Taiwan]

province, whose seafaring expeditions are justly the pride of Chinese navigators. He is remembered by many by his title, **San Pao Kung** (Three Jewelled Lord). After death, he was known as **San Pao T'ai-chien** (Three Jewelled Eunuch).

Each ship carried a complement of approximately five hundred men and as many as sixty-two ships took part in one of the expeditions. Incidentally, the patron deity of the expeditions was T'ien Hou (see page 137). After one voyage he attributed his speedy recovery from a formerly incurable illness to herbs found on Taiwan. This in turn generated much talk about the famed, but as yet hazy, island among the court at Nanking. It has also been alleged that Cheng-ho was the first to bring opium to China.

The 100-chapter account of the expedition, called *Hsi-yang Chi* (Journey to the Western Seas) written by Lo Mouteng in 1597, includes in the historical narrative many imaginative additions, and reveals Cheng-ho as the leader of a vast armada responsible for the deaths of many thousands of innocent people. In one episode, Cheng-ho's fleet sails far to the west and reaches, in uncharted waters, lands which turn out to be the Underworld. The deceased wife of one of Cheng-ho's deputy commanders has remarried one of the spirits there. Cheng-ho, in response to a threat from the King of the Underworld, orders his priests to offer up prayers and offerings to conciliate the Lord of the Underworld and is thus permitted to return to China.

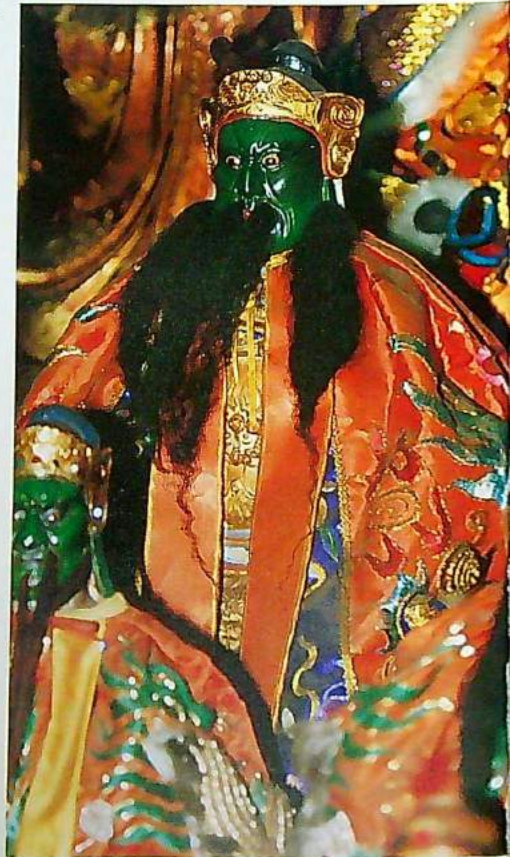
Cheng-ho became a popular Taoist protective deity with oracular powers. His aid is sought for guidance on auspicious dates, the selection or sanctioning of marriage partners, promoting fertility, family prosperity and healing sickness. At least six temples in the Southern Seas commemorate the Admiral and contain his image.

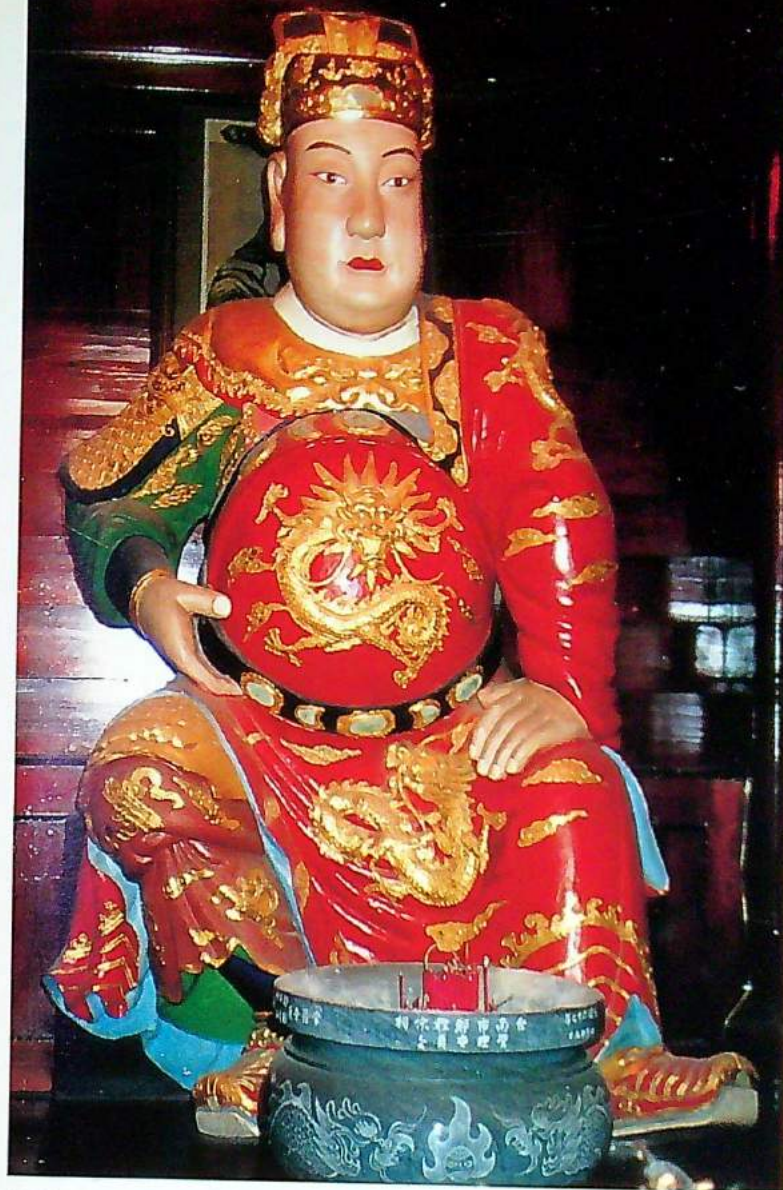
HAI JUI

A Ming official whose reputation as a just and impartial magistrate was based on his belief that laws should be enforced at all levels, his criticisms of extortion and abuse of public revenue made **Hai Jui's** name a byword for immeasurable honesty for later generations. He was born in Kiungchou in Hainan and died a natural death at the capital, Nanking in 1587. His tomb is in the western suburb of Haikou, at Pin-t'ien on his native Hainan. He is the hero of a twenty-volume novel

known as 'The Story of the Scarlet Robe'. He is a popular hero of historical significance who went through his official life in defiance towards any superior whose moral values were in question. Permanently fired by zeal, a high point in his career was the memorial he submitted to the Chia Ch'ing Emperor criticizing the emperor's lifestyle and attitude, and accusing him of being directly responsible for the evil times. Hai Jui bought his coffin and had said farewell to his family before submitting it. He was imprisoned and many times the Emperor considered ordering his death. Instead he was released at the death of the Emperor and was re-employed, only to be impeached once more. He returned to Hainan in forced retirement, prior to being employed again for the last time during which he died in Nanking.

A Peking opera, *Hai Jui Dismissed*, was attacked by Yao Wen-yüan, the Communist political writer in 1965. Mao used Hai Jui as a symbol for his fallen rival, P'eng Chen. In 1966, P'eng, who was then Mayor of Peking, was the first high-ranking party member to be purged during the Cultural Revolution in China.





CH'ING DYNASTY, 1644-1911

The Ming, a native Chinese dynasty, was weakened after nearly three hundred years of rule by increasing corruption. It was brought to an end by the Manchu invasion and the capture of Peking in 1644. Various princes of the Ming royal family continued their struggle for another twenty years against the new Ch'ing dynasty, particularly in southern China.

The Manchu or Ch'ing dynasty ruled China from 1644 to the Revolution of 1911 and the start of the Republic. The Ch'ing were regarded by Han Chinese as foreign usurpers (they were descendants of the Mongols). However, none of the deities from the era were particularly anti-Manchu, apart from those in Taiwan where several revolts arose against the foreign dynasty.

Cheng Ch'eng-kung or Koxinga

The Holy Prince who opened up Taiwan (K'ai T'ai Tsun-wang) is the usual title

of Cheng Ch'eng-kung (1624-62), better known as Koxinga. The certain historical reality behind the Koxinga legend is relatively sparse. He was the son of a Chinese with a Japanese mother, the daughter of a samurai. He apparently had only one ambition, to overthrow the Manchus and to restore the fallen Ming dynasty. Although he did not achieve this, the Ming Lung Wu emperor awarded him the exceptional honour of allowing him to adopt the imperial surname, Chu, for his support of the Ming cause.

The Manchus were firmly established in Peking in the late 1650s, but still had not gained a secure grip over the southern coast of China, nor over Taiwan. Koxinga's father, Cheng Chih-lung, lost heart after the Lung Wu emperor committed suicide. He was defeated and captured by the Manchus at Ting-chou, and was treated as a guest in Peking by the Manchu emperor who had accepted his secret overtures. However, when the

◁ Cheng Ch'eng-kung (1624-62) is Taiwan's most famous hero who, while he did not become an emperor, established a mini-dynasty ruling Taiwan for some twenty or so years. Knowledge of the historical reality behind Koxinga is relatively sparse and the stories that devotees tell are mostly myth. He is known in Chinese histories as the Lord of the Imperial Surname, Kuo-hsing Yeh, which has been corrupted into Koxinga. This image in the clan's cult centre shows him as he actually was, clean-shaven. [Taiwan]

▽ Admiral Shih Lang was a fleet captain who first sailed under the Ming with Koxinga's father. He went over to the Manchus in the very early 1660s, and his defection is said to have caused Koxinga's death. Koxinga had Shih Lang's father, son, nephew and brother all put to death for his disloyalty. As an admiral in the Manchu fleet, Shih Lang fought a decisive battle off the Pescadores in 1683 destroying the Taiwanese fleet. Koxinga's grandson offered to surrender to save further bloodshed and thus it was that Shih Lang was revenged. Shih Lang's image, a new one based on a contemporary sketch, replaced the former image stolen in 1990 from the Shih clan temple in Lukang. [Taiwan.]



▷ **Wu Feng** who sacrificed himself to head-hunters. The KMT authorities in 1987 decided, as a result of appeals from minorities in Taiwan, that Wu Feng should no longer be regarded as a hero because of the sensibilities of Taiwanese hill tribes. His equestrian statue was removed from the traffic roundabout near Chia I railway station. However, the images in the temples remain, although they are no longer publicized in tourist brochures. [Taiwan]

▽ There are a number of temples in Taiwan with other images dedicated to Koxinga's subordinate 'generals'. Some of these were merely village headmen who had fought for or supported Koxinga in his campaigns and who were deified by local popular acclaim, by the headman's descendants, or by local villagers who wished to be associated with the hero. One such 'general' is **Hsieh Te-ming**, claimed to have been a senior officer during the Koxinga campaigns in Taiwan. However, according to devotees in a rural area near Tainan, 'he was a local villager who led men from their area'. [Taiwan]



Manchu emperor realized that Koxinga was not going to hand over his fleet to the new dynasty. Cheng Chih-lung was executed in 1661. His son was left to try to liberate China from Manchu domination. The new nominal Ming emperor, who was desperately resisting the Manchus, conferred the title of Marquis of Weiyuan upon Koxinga, who had repeatedly rejected Manchu overtures. Later he had received yet another title: the Peace-preserving Prince, **Yen-p'ing Wang** (as he is best known in southern Taiwan).

By 1660 Koxinga realized that he had to fall back on Taiwan as a base, but first he had to destroy the Dutch fortified settlement in Tainan. In 1661 he left his son to hold Amoy and sailed to Tainan where, after a six month siege of Fort Zeelandia, he accepted the Dutch surrender.

He then spent the next year building Tainan into a prosperous base from which he could recapture the mainland, establishing a Chinese way of life based on Ming culture, laws and customs. He died suddenly from unknown causes in May or June of 1662, spitting blood. He is said to have been on the point of invading the Philippines when he died.

According to legend, his last days were spent in sorrow over the death of his father at the hands of the Manchus, and fury over the adultery of his eldest son, and at some of his generals and admirals in Amoy who had been insubordinate. His eldest son continued the Cheng family regime, which ended after Shih Lang had destroyed the Cheng fleet in 1683. Cheng's grandson, Cheng K'o-shuang, surrendered Taiwan to the now well-established Manchu Ch'ing dynasty.

Koxinga is regarded as a Chinese national hero – the first to repel a Western occupation of Chinese territory – and a culture hero to the pioneering emigrants from southern China who faced the wild land and terrifying aborigine tribespeople on the island of Taiwan. He has, however, been looked upon by foreigners as a bloody pirate chief.

Soon after his death he evolved into a deity with numerous legends about him. He is revered in Taiwan not only as the Chinese warlord who drove the Dutch colonists from the island in 1662, but also as the local Fukienese leader of resistance against the Manchu conquerors of China. Koxinga has been used as an historical precedent not only by the KMT in exile in Taiwan since 1949, but also by



the Manchu dynasty against whom he fought. They incorporated him into their Confucian pantheon as an anti-foreign (ie anti-Japanese) hero. Even the Japanese, occupiers of Taiwan for more than half a century, involved their own religion in his cult in Taiwan to encourage Taiwanese integration.

Famed in drama and folklore as well as history, Koxinga is all things to all people. He is the patron deity of all Taiwanese, prayed to for public and group benefits such as protection from harm and assistance during drought or floods, rather than for personal benefits. He is often simply revered, offered incense and oil without any specific plea being put to him. Koxinga's image has been noted as the main deity on the main or a secondary altar in at least eighty temples in Taiwan, where he is also probably the best example of a Non-pestilence Wang-yeh (see page 115) on the altars.

His image on altars is either a portrait image matching the image at the cult centre in Tainan city – now more a museum than a temple – or a standard image of a seated mandarin with beard and moustache in semi-armor without any individual identifying characteristics.

Other Ch'ing Deities

Now a local deity, **Wu Feng** was a minor Chinese official, an interpreter for the native peoples in central Taiwan, who, according to the Chinese, reformed and brought them into line with the modern world, assisting them to abolish many of their barbarous customs.

Wu Feng was born in Pingho county of Changchou prefecture in Fukien in 1659, the son of a merchant who travelled widely in Taiwan and learned several of the native hill people's languages. He was appointed interpreter in 1683, and tried hard to get the hill tribesmen to end their head-hunting. Each year their promises to stop were broken. Once a year the Tsou tribe in particular embarked on head-hunting expeditions – the heads were offered to appease the tribal gods.

Wu was determined to stop the practice and promised them one more sacrifice if they would guarantee to give it up. They were assured that the last victim, dressed in red, would ride a white horse at dawn towards their village. They lay in wait, ambushed and killed the victim only to find that it was their friend, Wu Feng, who had sacrificed himself for their future. The bowman who fired the fatal arrow committed suicide and the shock to the tribe ensured that they gave up head-hunting.

As recently as 1930, the Japanese authorities in central Taiwan warned visitors not to go far out of Chia I and other central Taiwanese towns because of the threat from head-hunting cannibals.

WANG EN-KUNG

Wang Fen was born in Ch'üanchou in Fukien province in the mid-eighteenth century and moved to Taiwan with his father while still a mere child. They settled in the port of Lukang. In 1786, another major revolt took place in Taiwan – it is known by the name of its leader, Lin Shuang-wen.

Wang joined the rebels and rose to a command with the title of the Peaceful Seas General, P'ing-hai Ta Chiang-chün. Though very successful at first, when the rebels were finally defeated, he refused to surrender and cut his own throat. His head was sent to Peking. Later, when the authorities wished to placate the locals of Lukang, it was returned. He was honoured by his fellow townspeople for his valour and loyalty to their cause and is known as **Wang En-kung** (Wang the Merciful and Just).

There is a small temple in Lukang dedicated to Wang Fen where a small image of Wang stands on the main altar. In the secondary halls on either side is an altar dedicated, stage left, to the goddess Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu (see page 53) and, stage right, an altar bearing a tablet dedicated to the Twelve Heroes. They were local Lukang men who died during the reign of Ch'ing Kuang Hsu, about the turn of this century and not long after Taiwan had been occupied by the Japanese. According to the temple keeper, Wang was deified and is a *shen*, as is Yao-ch'ih Chin-mu, whereas the Twelve are *kuei*, and 'it is well known *kuei* cannot share an altar or a hall with *shen*'.

WANG TE-LU

Born in Nanchang in Kiangsi, **Wang Te-lu** lost his grandfather in the revolt led by Chu I-kuei in Taiwan in 1721. The family first settled near Tainan in southern Taiwan, and subsequently in Chia I. During the Lin Shuang-wen rebellion (1786–7), Wang was an imperial military officer who mustered volunteer forces. He was appointed garrison commander of Chia I central command to help to suppress the rebellion.

Later he was awarded the fifth rank and promoted within the imperial naval forces. He and Li Ch'ang-keng fought the dreaded pirate chief, Ts'ai Ch'ien. After Li was killed in action, Wang took over the Chekiang fleet which, together with the fleets of Fukien and Kuangtung



△ A shrine was built over the site where **Wang En-kung** and his head are buried. This group of soldiers are some of the Twelve Heroes. They stand on a small, neglected altar next to the temple telephone. [Taiwan]

◁ The Wang ancestral temple in Tai Pao near Chia I contains only a few spirit tablets, the main one being dedicated to **Wang Te-lu**. The hall also contains paintings of Wang and his wife, and of the naval action in which he took part defeating Ts'ai Ch'ien. [Taiwan]

▽ One of Yap Ah Loy's mobsters, named Sheng Ming-li, has been identified in several temples as **Ssu Shih-yeh** (Fourth Secretary) in a series of four, each of whom bears the title of *Shih-yeh* (ie Assistant in a *Yamen*). In all other temples, Sheng is referred to as **Hsien Shih-yeh** (the Immortal Secretary). [Malaysia]



▷ **Su A-kuai's** image, the large main deity in the temple dedicated to him in Chu-lin, portrays him as a clean-shaven young man, sitting surrounded by some eight or nine images of standing soldiers. Each uniquely has a firearm at the ready. They are holding firearms because the temple committee decided that as they all fell to firearms and were using them themselves, it would be more appropriate. [Taiwan]

▷▷ Images of **Liao T'ien-ting**, who was a layabout and a thug, portray him as a man of indeterminate middle age, probably in his mid-thirties. He is dressed in a gilded robe and trousers, with his hair tied up in a top-knot, clean-shaven, with large ears of the Buddhist deity. Variants on the same major altar show him bare to the waist, dressed only in trousers which have been tucked into his socks; with a loose fitting blouse pulled tight by a scarf wrapped round his waist; or with a skull cap and an open jacket exposing his bare chest above black trousers. [Taiwan]

provinces defeated Ts'ai Ch'ien in 1809, so ridding the coast of major pirate forces for a generation. Wang was appointed Viscount, became the Governor of Chekiang province and retired to Amoy where he died in 1842, being posthumously appointed Count.

Legend claims that Wang's father had been a noted scholar, especially of geography. On his death bed, he had revealed



to his family that, on the night when Wang Te-lu had been born, two stars flew into the temple of the Seven Maidens, next door. It had been a sign that Wang Te-lu would become great and the old father required the family to remember to revere the Seven Maidens for ever.

Late 19th and 20th Centuries

The spirits of a number of worthy and not so worthy people, who have lived and died within the last hundred or so years, have been regarded as protective deities. They range from powerful local chiefs through the long-service soldier, a private, now referred to as a Marshal, to the boy whose spirit returned in a dream and a Japanese policeman.

SSU SHIH-YEH

Better known by the Cantonese pronunciation *Yap Ah Loy*, Yeh Te-lai was appointed the Kapitan China of Kuala Lumpur in 1868 with the right to tax tin and opium, and judge lawsuits between Malays and Chinese. His private army of 2,500 Chinese fought many battles, against Chinese and Malay rivals, each more bloody than the last, leading to the siege of his forces in Kuala Lumpur in 1871-2. After his temporary defeat, there were

more battles until 1873 when he was reinstated as Kapitan China in Kuala Lumpur. He died in 1885.

Yap was clever and forward looking, a good employer and businessman, a driver who succeeded during an era of 'frontier townships'. Considered to be the founder of the modern city of Kuala Lumpur, he is hardly acknowledged by the Government of Malaysia.



Although he has not been deified, he was instrumental in the deification of two of his henchmen as *Shih-yeh* (Secretaries). He shares their altar, as a framed photograph, while his henchmen are represented by individual images. Each of the series of four also bears the title *Shih-yeh* (Assistant in a *Yamen*). The best known temple dedicated to them is in Kuala Lumpur itself, built in 1883 from funds donated by Yap.

In every temple, it has been claimed that the First Secretary (T'ien Shih-yeh) is Lao Tzu, the Taoist master (see page 69), and that there has never been a Second Secretary (Erh Shih-yeh). One man, named Sheng Ming-li, has been identified in several temples as **Ssu Shih-yeh** (Fourth Secretary). Another man, Tan Chung-lai, is also usually identified as the **Ssu Shih-yeh**. A third man, named Hsing Jen-te, has been identified as the Third Secretary in two temples, but the keepers know nothing about him.

SU A-KUAI

The head constable in the Yunlin *yamen* (in central Taiwan) during the mid-1870s, named **Su A-kuai**, was ordered to round up and destroy a rebel force from the Eight Trigram Association under Ts'ai

Wan-sheng. This was operating in the Yunlin area and was regularly raiding a village called Chulin. The area had still not been fully pacified at this time. There was a pitched battle where both sides fought hard with many dead and wounded. Su himself was badly wounded and made his way to a well beside a farm just outside Chulin where he died. At this point the thirty-six remaining men swore an oath to die rather than retreat. They were all killed and were buried under the mound behind the present temple.

The battle took place in 1877 when Su was thirty-four. Thereafter, a small red flame was seen at midnight flickering in the breeze in the tree above their grave. The local people raised a tablet to the flame, the Lord of the Red Flag, **Hung-ch'i Kung**. From then on local villagers offered incense and food to the spirit, and have been protected by it. Their crops have thrived, they have not been afflicted by sickness among their stock and have not been struck down by any dreadful disasters, due entirely to the protection afforded by this spirit. The villagers have continued to pray before the shrine without fail.

In the twelfth month of 1949, a spirit medium was informed that the deity was really called **Hung Hsien-shih**, the Red Immortal Scholar and an image was carved of him and placed in the temple. In 1978, again following instructions from a medium, the title was changed once more, to **Sheng-i Yüan-shuai** (the Righteous Saint Marshal).

LIAO T' IEN-TING

Regarded as a martyr in present day Taiwan, **Liao T'ien-ting** is revered in at least two temples. In practice his cult has grown from a typical wayside shrine dedicated to a thug who died before his time, to an active cult of an 'heroic' shade, revered for his amoral character. He is provided with incense, oil, food and drink offerings, and is one of the few spirits given lighted cigarettes as offerings. Liao has also been adopted as the patron deity of Taiwan's gangsters.

The legendary story of Liao as a hero is well known throughout Taiwan where, so it is now claimed, during the Japanese occupation he robbed the rich and gave to the poor, creating a great deal of trouble for the Japanese military police force. A high reward was offered for his capture and in the end he died young, some say at the hands of his own relatives when they

found that he was causing the clan great harm from Japanese retribution. There are several versions of his death – one claims that he was killed by a shovel blow to the head administered by his mistress who was in the pay of the Japanese. No accurate dates are available though he would appear to have died in about 1920 when he was about thirty-five.

LUNG-SHIH T'AI-TZU

The modern and very local cult of **Lung-shih T'ai-tzu**, the Prince descended from the Dragon, was established in a suburb of Kowloon, during the late 1960s. It is a piggy-back cult, dependent on the major local cult of Lung Mu (see page 140).

The story began with a boy, born in 1949 in Shamshuipo, named Huang Hsin-tsai. The son of refugees who fled Canton that year and died soon after his birth, he was left in the hands of a lady who became the temple keeper. In 1960 the boy, still living with the lady, fell ill – his legs and abdomen were badly swollen. She nursed him carefully and he recovered. Then, in 1962, he ate something which did not agree with him and, despite a visit to the Wong Tai Sin temple, he died. She was accused by neighbours of neglecting the boy, but was exonerated by the child who appeared in a dream to explain he was now the stepson of the goddess Lung-mu and had the

◁ The gilded image of **Lung-shih T'ai-tzu** portrays him standing dressed in long flowing robes and wearing the small Taoist crown. He is holding a bowl in his left hand and a large pill in his right between the forefinger and the middle finger. Before the image is a small photograph of the boy before he died. [Hong Kong]

▽ In the 1920s, when a contagious disease caused great anxiety among the villagers, the local headman dreamt that **Morikawa Seijiro** appeared warning him of the potential devastation likely from the disease. The villagers immediately made an image in the likeness of the policeman, dressed it in the blue dress uniform of the Japanese police force with its peaked cap and red band. His uniform is depicted with epaulettes; and three stars on the forearm denote his rank. [Taiwan]



▽ Ying-chi Fu-jen's image, as the main deity, portrays her as a standard statue of a middle-aged lady swathed in silken robes and with a huge decorated crown. She does not appear to have any unique characteristics; however, the half dozen or so small images in front of her main image portray her astride a white horse (see page 20). [Taiwan]

▷ A trio of minor deities, the San Hsien-ku, consists of three virgins who are believed to have lived some two hundred or more years ago. They were the Misses P'ang, Chang, and Ho. They vowed never to marry, and to live and die together. [Hong Kong]

power to cure people on behalf of the goddess. Once a year the boy, now regarded as a *shen*, is said to have provided the lady with a basin of tiny pills to distribute to cure sickness. He also appeared in dreams to help her answer difficult questions put by devotees.

MORIKAWA SEIJIRO

A Japanese police captain, Morikawa Seiji, was posted to Fulai, an impoverished Taiwanese village where he helped the locals with personal and financial aid, and taught students Japanese without seeking repayment. A new tax was announced in 1902 on the bamboo rafts used by fishermen. As it was beyond limits of reasonable taxation, the policeman petitioned Tokyo for it to be waived. His plea was refused and so he killed himself.

When in the 1920s a contagious disease caused great anxiety among the villagers, the local headman dreamt that the policeman appeared warning him of the potential devastation. The villagers immediately made an image in his likeness. Revering it, they begged the policeman to pacify the plague demons. This he appears to have done and his spirit was invited to reside within the image on the village temple, dedicated to the Pestilence Wang-yeh (see page 114). Morikawa Seiji is regarded as the local god of pestilence and epidemics.

SPINSTERS AND WIDOWS

A great many of the local peasant cults consist of men, women or children who lived out their insignificant lives within the community before being deified as popular neighbourhood deities, following dreams by neighbours or words spoken by mediums possessed by spirits. The belief that the spirit of the nonentity was in some way beneficial to the community sometimes, but not always, led to the gradual acceptance of the new deity.

Women in China tended to be honoured only when they reached a certain age and standing within the family. Some, however, achieved even higher status by remaining chaste and 'virtuous', refraining from marrying again when widowed, and even more so if they brought up their late husband's children by another wife or concubine.

Such spinsters and widows were usually honoured by a tablet or plaque inscribed by a local or even national dignitary, though some were honoured by the erection of a permanent arch known as a *pailou*. A few became deified spirits after death, usually revered as protectors. In remote villages before the advent of modern communications, a dream leading to the deification of a local girl or woman would be a major event, especially if she proved an effective protectress.





◁ The image of Yüeh-hui P'u-sa has been noted just once, in the temple of the I-Kuan Tao (a wealthy modern Buddhist school, an offshoot of the White Lotus Society) at Nanhua in southern Taiwan. Although she is referred to as a p'u-sa (a bodhisattva), she was a lady who moved back to China from Hong Kong where she had been born and lived.

She died at the beginning of this century, having lived an exemplary life, and is said to have been one of the wives of the Eighteenth Patriarch of the I-Kuan Tao, although her devotees know her as one of the Four Great Bodhisattvas – in her case, of the West. [Taiwan]

The majority of deified maidens, interestingly, would appear to have died shortly after puberty and rarely after the age of twenty-eight. Such deceased unmarried women were regarded as unfortunates, becoming shades in the Underworld, potential *ku-hun* (Hungry Ghosts, see page 186) without descendants to sacrifice to and care for them. However, as those who used their spiritual powers after death and proved useful to the community, they soon became to be regarded as deified spirits. A few of the many thousands of deified spirits of spinners and widows, are described here.

YING-CHI FU-JEN

Madame Ying-chi, *Ying-chi Fu-jen*, was the second daughter of Mr Chang, an eminent member of the small central Taiwanese village of P'umei. She was born during the fifteenth century AD and was known both as Yun-niang, the Cloud Maid, and Ying-min. While her mother was bearing her the whole house was permeated with a mysterious fragrance. Much loved by her parents, she was taught poetry while still very young and as she grew she preferred to discuss metaphysics rather than doing her needlework. She tirelessly listened to the

teachings of a local Taoist preacher of renown and, having absorbed his lessons, she was able to prophesy the future with surprising accuracy. Her kindness to all became a byword and her desire to help people was manifested by curing a sick child simply by holding it in her arms.

One day, when she was eighteen years of age, she suddenly left home, tidied up her hair, dressed herself neatly, sat in meditation and passed away. Thereafter her spirit repeatedly revealed itself in many ways but always to help people. Her neighbours built a small temple in her honour where she was revered, and where all requests were competently met. She has been worshipped in P'umei for over four hundred years.

SAN HSIEN-KU

There are a number of deities referred to as the Three Immortal Maidens, *San Hsien-ku*, who are sororities of three 'saints'. One such is a local Cantonese female vegetarian cult trio of deities which also has divergent versions within its own ranks. Another trio, which seems now to have disappeared from Hong Kong island and Kowloon, but whose tablet has been noted once in a village in the New Territories, consists of three

▽ The Jade Maiden, *Yü Nü Niang-niang*, was born as the result of an appeal to T'ien Hou (see page 137). [Taiwan]





△ Lin Ku-niang's cult thrived and she is widely revered in southern Thailand. She is the only Chinese deity with a special urn from the Thai King – well known for his tolerance and encouragement of other faiths. [Thailand]

▽ The image of Yao Ta Sheng-mu, originally so swathed in red silken robes that it was impossible to see if it had any unique features, was uncovered during one visit to the temple. It depicts her as a seated youthful matron holding a semi-open fan in her right hand. [Hong Kong]



virgins who are believed to have lived some two hundred or more years ago, the Misses P'ang, Chang, and Ho. They vowed never to marry, and to live and die together. A sea pirate named Chang Pao-tzu, famous for his activities along the coastal area of what is now Hong Kong, was attracted by their beauty. When his advances were spurned by them, they died either by their own hands or were killed by the pirates.

YÜ NÜ NIANG-NIANG

A local cult in a temple at Kuan Tu between Taipei and Tamsui in northern Taiwan is dedicated to the Jade Maiden, **Yü Nü Niang-niang**. During the reign of Tao Kuang, a fisherman named Lin Shantao lived near Kuan Tu with his young wife. After three years of marriage without any child, they went to the local temple and prayed to T'ien Hou (see page 137). Soon the young wife was pregnant. A girl was born in 1825; the room in which she was born was filled with fragrances and the clouds in the sky were tinged with every conceivable colour. The babe did not cry for a number of days and the parents realized that their baby was no ordinary mortal. So, although her personal name was Mien, they called her the Jade Maiden. Her full name then became **Lin Yü-nü**.

The child became a vegetarian in her third year, went to a temple to pray with her mother at five and was highly intelligent. In 1840 a drought in northern Taiwan caused great suffering and the newly appointed magistrate dreamt that a young girl named the Jade Maiden could summon the much needed rain. He found her and had her brought to the *yamen* where she prayed and the rains came. From then on she called for rain whenever it was needed and also provided information on the location of shoals of fish. She died at the age of 22 in 1848 and flew straight to Heaven but has reappeared a number of times since, the last appearance being in 1970.

LIN KU-NIANG

Images of Miss Lin, **Lin Ku-niang**, have only been seen on altars in Ch'aochou communities in southern Thailand where she is a local popular religion deity. They portray her as a simple, barefoot, young peasant woman, sitting with her large working hands resting on her knees, dressed in peasant clothing of cotton jacket and trousers. Orphaned, she left her home village near Swatow in eastern

Kuangtung province to join her only living relative, her brother, in a village near Songkla in southern Thailand.

When she arrived she found to her disgust that her brother was about to marry a local Muslim girl and be converted to Islam. She attempted, without success, to persuade him not to do either. Miss Lin knew that she could not live with her brother and his bride, and in a desperate moment threw herself into the Patani River where she drowned.

The brother tried to build a mosque, but at each attempt it was destroyed by lightning, although Miss Lin's grave was undamaged. Finally he gave up Islam and built a shrine over her grave in Miss Lin's honour.

YAO TA SHENG-MU

The Great Saintly Mother Yao, **Yao Ta Sheng-mu**, is a very local Hakka popular deity to be seen on altars in the New Territories of Hong Kong around Tsun Wan, across the narrow neck of sea on Ching I Island, and in one small temple at Ngan Tam Mi near Mai Po, where an image of the goddess sits alone in the centre of the village temple altar. The Hakkas, mostly immigrants from around Polo near Canton where her cult centre was located in Mo village, nearly all arrived in the New Territories about the same time, at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, bringing their cult with them.

Legend claims that Miss Yao lived and died a chaste and virtuous woman in Kuangtung province during the Han dynasty. After her death the residents of her village raised a shrine in her memory, which became the centre for reverence after people who prayed before it received untold benefits and blessings. The cult spread around the local villages.

The Saintly Mother is prayed to for all individually sought benefits. As her temples are all in remote rural areas it is understandable that she is believed to be particularly benevolent towards farmers who approach her for the usual blessings, propitious dates, wealth, healing and good crops. She is usually personified on altars simply as a title written on a framed red paper or wooden tablet and once only as an image.

I-CHU HSIAO KU-NIANG

The Maiden of the Sub-prefect, **I-chu Hsiao Ku-niang**, is the title displayed on the embroidered frontlet before the image of a Miss Liu Man. Miss Liu Man was

the daughter of Liu Heng-chi, a Sub-prefect of Changhua area, killed during the revolt of Lin Shuang-wen in the eighteenth century. For a reason no longer recalled, she committed suicide.

She is portrayed as a standard image of a young woman, without any special identifying features, on a secondary altar in the rear hall upstairs in the City God Temple in Changhua in central Taiwan. She shares it with Chu-sheng Niang-niang (see page 118), but is in no way connected with her.

slung around her arm two or three very small handbags (or purses).

In the mid-1960s, still in the same temple, she was transferred to another small shrine, again alone, but this time she had a large cardboard box under the stand of her image in which, according to the temple caretaker, was a dead, embalmed parrot. No reason for its presence was known, and the temple keeper denied all knowledge of the parrot's background. The image and box were still there in 1983 even after the temple



LIU HSIU KU-NIANG

This local Singaporean cult has several interesting aspects highlighting how minor cults develop and change.

Miss Liu's story is lost in time. Her image first stood in the popular religion temple next to the big Buddhist temple at Kim Keat in Singapore. The image was swathed in orange silken robes donated by devotees who also placed single sticks of incense before her. She had no festival, no special identifying features and no legend, although she was positively identified as Liu Hsiu Ku-niang (Miss Liu Hsiu) in the early 1960s.

At that time she had cheap packets of face powder placed before her by girls who believed that she could make them more physically attractive. She also had

had been refurbished, though in 1986 the image had moved to the large Buddhist temple next door. Her image was now draped in red silken robes which proclaimed that she was a Miss Lin. She still had the miniature handbags, but the parrot had gone. The temple staff said they knew nothing about her, except her name was Lin. The Liu ancestral altar consists of four portrait images of dead Lius who had lived and died in Singapore, and who had donated the land for the temple. Two of these images are shown on page 187.

The unanswerable questions are: why did Miss Liu move to the Buddhist temple? Why to the Liu family ancestral altar? Why did her name change from Liu to Lin? Why the purses? And what was the story behind the embalmed parrot?

◁ By 1986 the image of Liu Hsiu Ku-niang had moved to the large Buddhist temple next door, to the family altar in the rear of the hall dedicated to the Liu family. Their portrait images stand beside her (see page 187). Her image was now draped in red silken robes which proclaimed that she was a Miss Lin. She still had the miniature handbags, but the parrot and its box were nowhere to be seen. [Singapore]



△ This deity does not actually fit into this section, but his wife's normal human reactions are worth recording to help balance the picture. Ting Lan is a minor deity, with a heavily decorated face and known to the staff as Ting Lan Ch'ien-sui, Prince Ting Lan, one of the Pestilence Wang-yeh (see page 114).

Ting Lan, who lived during the Han dynasty, is well known to most Chinese as an example of filial piety. When his parents died he kept wooden images of them and paid them respects every day, taking his filial piety to extremes. One day, when he came home from a visit, he found that his wife, who ridiculed his devotion, had stuck pins into the effigy of his mother and drawn blood. Ting promptly divorced his wife whose behaviour from that time on has been related as a cautionary tale. [Taiwan]



The Local Spirit Bureaucracy

The senior local deity is the City God, who has a hierarchy of minor local deities either responsible to him or simply reporting to him. The most popular of these minor deities are the local Earth Gods and the household Kitchen Gods who were among the most ancient of the deities within the pantheon of popular religion. They certainly date back to before the start of the Han dynasty, about 206 BC. The Earth God originally was one of the numerous gods of the soil, a personification of the fertility of the land.

Ch'eng Huang

The City God, **Ch'eng Huang**, the tutelary deity of the capital and of all provincial and major county walled cities and towns, was the spiritual city magistrate responsible to the Jade Emperor (see page 51) in Heaven. His temple was regarded as the celestial *yamen*, the counterpart to the terrestrial city *yamen* with its human mandarin responsible to the emperor in Peking. The local mandarin (or magistrate) of imperial China combined many functions: he was at once judge, police chief, coroner, treasurer and tax commissioner for a large and usually populous area. Like all officials, he was supposed to have an exhaustive acquaintance with everything within his jurisdiction, and an unlimited capacity to prevent things that should not happen.

The City God performed the same duties 'on the other side' controlling *kuei* (spirits of the dead who can be either good or bad) and demons with his retinue of tamed demons. The temporal government controlled the masses by fear of the law; the City God controlled their morals by the threat of unspeakable punishments after death. A magistrate arriving at a new post gained a measure of supernatural sanction by sacrificing before the City God, taking an oath that he would be honest and just, and asking that the god should punish him if he violated his oath. The magistrate occasionally asked the aid of the City God in difficult cases 'in the belief that a man's crime can escape human eyes, but not those of the gods'.

Although Taoists claim the City God as their creation, despite the cult having Confucian and Buddhist influences, the deity's origins appear to date to before Taoism. His title is referred to in classical Chou dynasty texts, originally as the protective deity for all within the town's walls and moats.

The City God was, and to some extent still is, popular because of the splendour of his regime, and his influence in the Underworld (see page 179 onwards). His putative powers over malign spirits also gave him power over disease. In very round terms his main functions in Hong Kong and Taiwan are now seen as:

- safeguarding the interests of the inhabitants of his community and its area of jurisdiction;
- controlling malignant spirits;
- bringing good fortune to inhabitants and merchants in particular;
- bringing rain and preventing floods during the dry and rainy seasons; and
- staving off pestilence, epidemics, and all other manifestations of evil spirits.

More importantly, he is said to be responsible for providing the Underworld authorities with a comprehensive report on the actions, both good and bad, done during the lives of all humans who live within his community. This report – a character reference which accompanies the dead person to the Underworld – is compiled by his staff for authorization from reports provided by the local Earth God, in co-operation with the Kitchen God of the deceased's home. According

◁ City God (**Ch'eng Huang**) images appear to have no standard or unique characteristics and are all somewhat similar. Out of context, they are one of the many standard figures of a seated scholar-official – the mandarin with a black beard, official robes and cap, and in many instances with the scholar-official's winged cap. He is occasionally portrayed with the official tablet (*hu*) held in both hands before his chest, and less frequently, with a flat-topped crown.

Very occasionally, the holder of the City God is identified as a deceased local hero. The only one noted today, and shown here, is the City God of southern Tainan. He is Chu I-kuei, a local hero who led a revolt against the Ch'ing (see also page 163). [Taiwan]

▽ **Wen P'an-kuan**, the Civil Judge (see also page 172), who is an important subordinate of every City God. [Hunan]



▷ The City God's complete court consists of a number of officials, escorts and retainers – six to eight of his immediate staff are commonplace as conventional images in the majority of City God temples. These include the two investigators – one who works days, **Jih-hsün Ch'a**, and the other nights, **Yeh-hsün Ch'a** – who carry out investigations on behalf of the City God. The entire entourage is dominated by his two major aides, known in both English and Chinese as 'Judges'.

The first is the Civil Secretary, **Wen P'an-kuan**, who, according to some, keeps the records. Others say that he, together with the Military Secretary, **Wu P'an-kuan**, advises the City God on the merits and demerits recorded against each soul. Still others say that the military 'judge' is the protector of the first. These are usually large standing images set at ground level on either side of the City God. This temporary festival altar dedicated to the City God was set up in a marquee. The backdrop shows the City God and his retinue; the portable images are in front. [Singapore]

▽ A gilded image of **Niu-t'ou**, the buffalo-headed demon assistant to the City Judge. [Unprovenanced]



to some, this is written on the forehead of the soul so that, when he appears before the City God and the Judges in the Underworld, it is easy to read and cannot be lost.

It is now commonly accepted that the City God merely endorses the report before it is forwarded to the Underworld, but it used to be thought that the City God had forty-nine days to prepare it. During that time he went through the various aspects of the good and evil perpetrated by the deceased during their human life in great detail. The City God is regularly asked to intercede with the Ten Judges (Ming Fu Shih Wang, see page 181) in the Underworld on behalf of a dead person. A copy of the final report is said to be sent to the Jade Emperor, whose staff check carefully that the soul has had his or her full allotment of days of life.

All City Gods are in direct communication with Yen-lo Wang (see page 180). If appealed to in a case of injustice, the City God will right the wrong and punish the transgressor unmercifully. He can do this in numerous ways commonly by sending a sickness to the home of the culprit, a warning of worse to follow.

The City God has another popularly credited role as arbiter. He is believed to be able to perceive the true perpetrators of crime and also the real, often ulterior, motive for a devotee's plea for his endorsement and his submission to the Jade Emperor of disputes, which other less perspicacious deities are unable to do. Private quarrels are, therefore, brought to him for arbitration.

As he is the link between humans and higher gods and is always busy, the City God is disinclined to lend an ear to the everyday trivialities which worry his devotees. They can be dealt with by other, less awesome gods. However, a person who has been falsely accused may place his case before the City God to ask his opinion. This is less common now than it was during the nineteenth century, but it is still occasionally done. His worshippers say that they prefer to approach him early in the day if they can, as he is so overburdened with work that later on his decisions are more confusing and less precise than those of the morning.

Nowadays the image of the City God can be seen in popular religion temples in towns which, under normal circumstances, would not warrant a City God temple. Often he is the main deity on a secondary altar, though he still does have his own major temple in a number of towns and cities in Taiwan. Walls of City God temples were often decorated with murals or framed charts illustrating the Courts of the Underworld, with details showing souls of the deceased undergoing punishments. Also pictured were the City God's demonic assistants and their implements of torture in use.

When disaster befell a town, the City God was often peremptorily deposed and a new candidate recommended to fill his post. The image was usually retained and, after rededication, it was assumed to house the spirit of the new incumbent. Named, formerly human, spirits (as opposed to impersonal spirits) usually

controlled the fortunes of their cities for varying numbers of years, often until it was decided by the city elders that the spirit had served long enough. The former City God incumbent would usually be assumed to have been promoted within the Celestial hierarchy.

The usual reason given for the change was that the previous office-holder had become out of touch, so a new worthy, respected by the current inhabitants, must be appointed in his place. Apart from continued efficacy, the usual criterion was simply whether or not the incumbent could still be remembered by the living. This tended to be for thirty to thirty-five years, about how long it takes for the memory of a worthy of a former generation to fade. Some incumbents, however, proved so popular or so effective that their term of office was left open-ended.

The City God's Assistants

In many temples, the City God's image is surrounded by images of various assistants, both deified human petty officials and tamed demonic warders and lictors. Otherwise they stand within the temple precincts. The official minor functionaries of the human world who enforced public order – gaolers, policemen and petty clerks – were not paid, but earned their living from moneys slipped to them by litigants and other visitors for services rendered. The City God's retinue mirrors the imperial bureaucracy, with similar records, submissions, petitions, rods and canes, and the need to be compensated financially.

MA-MIEN AND NIU-T'OU

The two gaolers, **Ma-mien** (Horse Face) and **Niu-t'ou** (Buffalo Head), each carry a dung fork with which to force souls to move through the courts. They are also shown as standing figures at ground level flanking the City God and his two Judges. This pair of tamed demons would prefer a diet of human flesh and blood, but, fortunately for humanity, they can be satisfied with incense and offerings. Images of the pair of escorts are often to be seen standing at floor level before altars to one of the major Underworld deities in Tung-yüeh Ta-ti temples (see page 180) in Singapore and Taiwan, and also in City God temples before the row of images of the Ten Judges.

WU-CH'ANG KUEI

In a number of temples there are also larger than life-size images of the **Wu-**

ch'ang Kuei, the **Unpredictable Demons**, standing just inside the main entrance. They are a pair of tamed demons commonly seen throughout Chinese communities in South-East Asia and Taiwan, who are known by innumerable titles, nicknames and euphemistic honorifics. The most popular are the Tall and Short Demons, the White and Black Demons, Generals Hsieh and Fan, and **Ta Erh-ko Yeh** (the Elder and Second Brother).

The pair are despatched on orders from the City God when the due date of a person's death arrives, to seek out and identify the correct human through the local spiritual official, the Earth God. Then they appear before the human and the Tall Demon announces that the time has come. The Short Demon binds the soul and drags it before the City God. The Short Demon carries the tablet of authority and the chains to arrest the soul whose due date of death has arrived.

The Tall Demon, as can be imagined, receives considerable attention from devotees, often relatives of the very sick, and in a few temples he is provided with cigarettes which are to be seen continually burning having been forced in between his lips. More popularly, his mouth is smeared with a black substance to win his favour and bribe him to keep away. This used to be opium and is still said to be opium, though the substance appears to be more of a sweet sticky mess. In northern and central China, only the Tall Demon is found.

T'u-ti Kung

The Earth God, **T'u-ti Kung**, is the ubiquitous local territorial deity revered by residents of his small area (see also page 131). He is one of the most frequently seen deities. As a popular religion deity, he is not state sponsored, nor is he usually worshipped by outsiders or visitors. His image is to be seen within all Chinese communities, and pre-1949 there must have been many millions in every town and province China-wide. He is also widely known as **Fu-te Cheng-shen**, the Upright Spirit of Fortune and Wealth.

There are still a great many tiny T'u-ti shrines in Taiwan, usually small and unimpressive, scattered across the countryside in fields, at the point where footpaths cross, under trees, by wells, on mountainsides and in the centre of villages. Travellers kowtowed to any T'u-ti or roadside shrine, asking for protection.

▽ God-carvers, realizing that **T'u-ti Kung**, the Earth God, is an honorary official, nearly always depict him wearing the head-dress of the well-to-do gentry, with influence but not official rank as such. A number of Earth God images do portray the deity wearing an official cap.

It is generally accepted that the Earth God holds an honorary minor official rank, so his blue robe quite frequently bears a mandarin square across the chest (the badge of office or official grade). The bird or animal portrayed indicated the grade. As it was illegal in imperial times to show him wearing a genuine badge, it was usually a duck or rabbit, as neither creatures are represented in the official rank lists.

In the great majority of households, the Earth God is represented only by a small red-painted tin, often a cigarette tin, filled with incense ash into which the household offerings of incense sticks are stuck twice a month. [Malaysia]





△ Kan-t'ien Ta-ti is shown in some temples in framed prints as a white-bearded soldier. He is dressed in armour, and has his left foot resting on a recumbent tiger when he is the main deity. His other attributes are a long, narrow-bladed, unsheathed sword held in his right hand pointing upwards; on his back is the frame of four flags signifying his military rank as a commanding general. His left hand is held at chest height with the palm facing to his right, a mystic sign. [Thailand]

▽ In some areas, noticeably in rural Hakka villages in the New Territories of Hong Kong, the main protective deity of the locality resides in a large rock or tree and is known as A Po (the T'u-ti). He is represented by a pointed rock or small rough stone or, in a number of areas, merely by a tablet bearing the Earth God's title painted on it or carved into it. [Hong Kong]

As guardians of the peace, they equated in many minds with police responsible for a fixed area to the next higher authority. The local T'u-ti is supposed to protect you as you pass through his neighbourhood. It is believed in Hong Kong that the Earth God is not to be found in remote areas away from habitation; it is only when new settlers move in and build that an Earth God comes with them.

Geomancers were employed by the first Chinese settlers to pinpoint the best location for the Earth God shrine. In South-East Asia, a minimum of forty to fifty households were necessary to support a T'u-ti shrine. However it is common practice nowadays in Taiwan, Hong Kong and South-East Asia to revere the T'u-ti as the protector of the household plot. So, when a family moves, it leaves behind the Earth God of that house, and invites the Earth God of the new house plot to protect them in their new home.

People appeal to their Earth God for anything that affects their lives and livelihoods. In times of peril and stress the Earth Gods have been known to have been taken from their shrines and shown the cause of the problems to enable them to understand fully what the devotees are suffering, be it frost, drought, flood, caterpillars, locusts, mildew or whatever.

Devotees must report to the Earth God, as the local representative of the Celestial bureaucracy, all events of any significance both public and private (whereas only private matters are reported to the Ancestors in the Ancestral Halls). He keeps the records of the local community and can be approached by devotees to settle boundary disputes, and give permission for houses to be built or for old ones to be pulled down.

Yet another role is that of the Wealth God. As such he is approached when a devotee loses a valuable object because he has 'far-seeing eyes'. He is said to protect the wealth of a family and home from robbers. In this form he is portrayed holding a *tael* ('shoe') of gold or silver, and is prayed to for prosperity. Some businessmen revere him in their place of work as the Earth God and he is also asked to help with business ventures. In Malaysia among most Chinese communities, offerings must be made to the T'u-ti when a new home or factory is to be constructed before the first spadeful of earth is removed. One of his lesser tasks, possibly to encourage children to eat up, is to include in his reports all who waste food.

KAN-T' IEN TA-TI

The Great Emperor who Influences Heaven, Kan-t'ien Ta-ti, is predominantly a Ch'aouchou local cult, familiarly referred to by some as the Military Earth God (Wu T'u-ti), and prayed to by most of his devotees for a cure for any illness, especially in South-East Asia. In many temples he is regarded as the most senior of all Earth Gods, with the Earth Gods all having to report through him. His devotees, particularly in Swatow (Ch'aouchou) communities, also regard him as the patron of men who labour on hillsides, at road digging and moving earth, who blesses and in particular protects them in what is often dangerous work.

Tsao Chün

The God of the Hearth or the Cooking Stove, Tsao Chün, is usually called the Kitchen God by foreigners. He is, without doubt, the most widespread of the deities to be found in Chinese homes, though not the most popular (that is Kuan Yin). However, he has nothing to do with either food or cooking. He is the family tutelary deity in charge of the family's destiny, and a Celestial inspector, the domestic representative of the Jade Emperor (see page 51) who oversees the behaviour of members of the family.

He silently observes the conduct of the family over the year, their morals, care for natural resources and diligence, then presents his report to Heaven at the lunar New Year. This enumeration of deeds meriting reward or retribution is believed to greatly influence the family fortunes during the forthcoming year.

The Kitchen God is believed to be responsible for ensuring that the Earth



God has the full, accurate facts about the family before writing a report on the merits and demerits of the person who has just died. Although the Kitchen Gods aid the Earth and City Gods in their reports on newly dead souls, they are directly responsible to and representatives of the Jade Emperor to whom they personally report once a year. They are not members of the standard Celestial bureaucracy. They are, therefore, regarded as much more senior than the Earth Gods, who only report to the local City Gods, and are also feared as powerful deities.

As the hearth, cooking fire or stove is the centre of each family, that is where the Kitchen God lives, represented by a plaque bearing his title or, nowadays more rarely, a print or icon. Some households contain several sons and their families and therefore there are a number of stoves within one courtyard, each with its own Kitchen God. Most peasants knew that the Kitchen God inflicted heavy retribution on those who wasted food and on wives who committed adultery. Before country people became as sophisticated as they are today, newly weds at one stage during their marriage celebrations made obeisance to the Kitchen God.

He is offended by vulgarity, noise and waste, and can be annoyed by busy mothers scolding a child, offended by a dropped pot or pan, alert to vulgar words or actions and furious at the waste of

food irrespective of how little. The Kitchen God also notes when a family has vowed to abstain from meat and then fails to keep their word. Children, after they have been away, on returning home first greet their parents and elders, then they kneel before the ancestral tablets and finally the Kitchen God.

There are a number of local and nationally observed taboos connected with the deity. Women may not bind their feet nor wash nor sing, neither may they comb their hair in his presence, nor may they swear, quarrel or sharpen knives. In rural areas, girls and women do not bathe in the kitchen as it would embarrass the deity. He is not supposed to be worshipped by women though he is constantly in their domain and is surreptitiously offered incense by superstitious housewives as he is easily angered.

The family places offerings before his tablet, slip of paper or image on full and

◁ An image of the Kitchen God, **Tsao Chün**, from a Buddhist monastery. These distinctive, Yaksha-like images preside over the monastery kitchen and pantry to ensure that no meat product enters the establishment. [Taiwan]

▽ **Tsao Chün** is most commonly represented by a reddish-orange, coarse paper bearing his title or likeness. These printed icons in cheap, gaudy colours are freely available over the New Year for a couple of coppers, to be pasted up in kitchens. They depict him as an elderly scholar with a long white beard, standing or seated. Larger establishments will have a proper images, such as this one. [Hong Kong]



▷ This pair of scholar-officials act as the **Men Shen** (Door Gods) for a temple in the Tainan county of Taiwan. Most visitors to a temple will miss these paintings because the the doors are wide open all day, showing the other side.



▽ A tablet for the Kitchen God, **Tsao Chün**, which would normally hang on the wall above the kitchen stove. [Unprovenanced]



new moons. The paper slips or icons are renewed each lunar New Year. In Taiwan nowadays there are two Kitchen Gods in many households – a permanent one of wood, and a paper slip which is renewed annually. The wooden image is a comparatively recent innovation and not encountered before 1968.

On the night of the twenty-third of the twelfth lunar month, seven days before the Lunar New Year, the matriarch prepares small dishes of sweets to be placed before the paper bearing the Kitchen God's title above the stove. Such offerings, made before his departure for Heaven, are to help him on his way and include locally grown fruit, wine and incense. Images of the Kitchen Gods in homes were also scrubbed clean on the twenty-third of the twelfth to remove all the grease and soot which had accumulated during the year.

Finally the boys of the family are ordered to kneel and kowtow three times to pay him the family's respects, whereupon the icon or paper is then burned and then it is understood that he has departed for Heaven. The higher the ashes fly, the happier the Kitchen God is supposed to be. Before he departed, the household was swept. In some households, his picture was fed sticky toffee or had its mouth smeared with liquid sugar (or even opium), either as a reward or bribe for a

good report or to prevent him speaking clearly when presenting his report.

The influence of the Kitchen God on Chinese society has been considerable and many tales are told about his origins and his assistance to humanity. Among these there is the story of how Lu Mengcheng, a famous Sung minister of state, was trying to pass his examinations as a poverty-stricken young man and wished to sacrifice to the Kitchen God to request his aid. Having no money he bought some meat on account from the butcher. He took it home, cooked it, and was about to offer it to the Kitchen God when the butcher burst in and claiming that Lu could pay his bill, took the meat and the soup.

Lu pleaded with the Kitchen God, having first apologized for having nothing to offer him, begging him to beseech the Jade Emperor on his behalf to enable him to pass the next examination. The Jade Emperor, having examined the books, noted that Lu was not due to pass for a further three years. The Kitchen God begged the Jade Emperor to allow Lu to pass the coming examination because, he said, if he does not pass immediately he will die of starvation. In deference to the Kitchen God's wishes the Jade Emperor arranged that Lu should pass, but cut three years off Lu's life span to compensate.

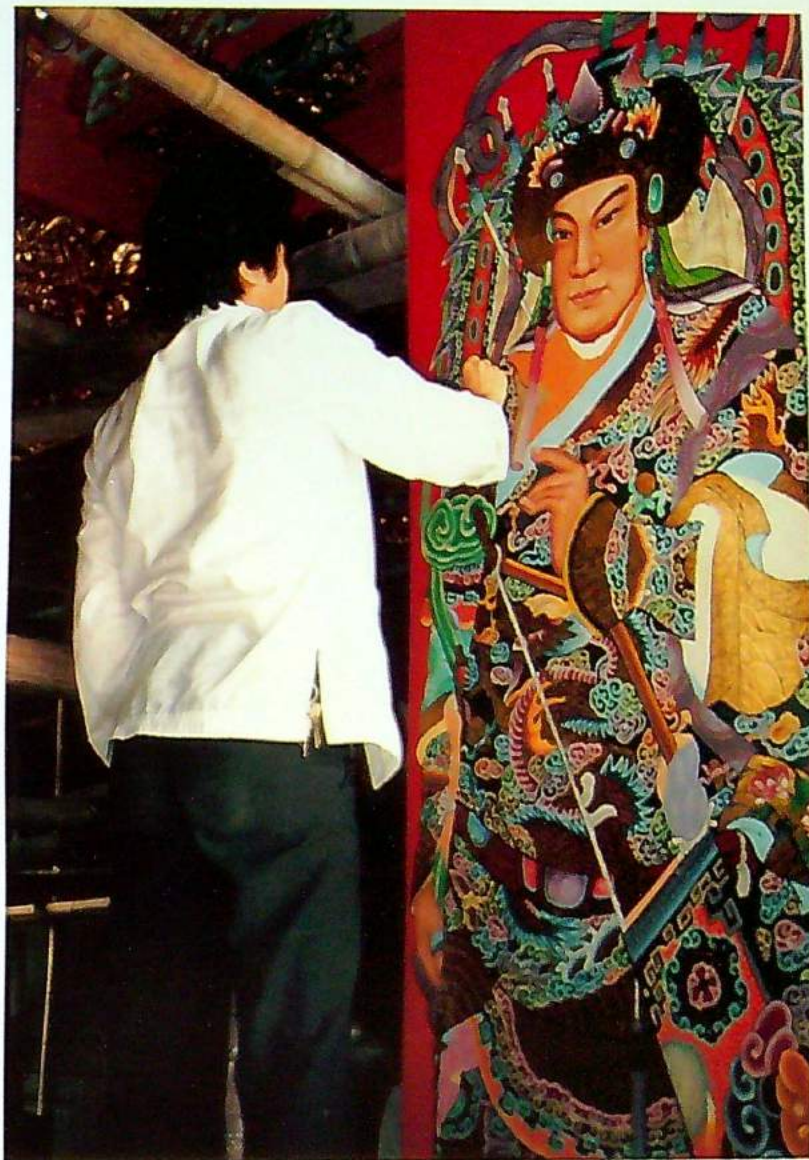


Men Shen

The Door Gods or Door Generals, **Men Shen**, otherwise regarded as the Spirit Guardians of the Entrance, are either painted or carved on temple doors or are printed on paper and pasted on the outside of front doors. They usually consist of a pair of spirits facing each other, and can be fierce, or not so fierce, soldiers dressed in armour; a soldier and a scholar; or two mirror images of soldiers or scholar-officials facing each other.

The majority of Door Gods have no legend, but the most common story in northern China about them describes how two mighty heroes, Generals **Shen T'u** and **Yü Lei**, took up arms against the tens of thousands of wandering demonic spirits and successfully undertook their extermination. Huang Ti (see page 57), in whose time they lived, gave orders that the entrance doors to his palace were to be painted with their portraits to keep out marauding and malign spirits.

Yü-ch'ih Kung was one of a number of adventurers who was a sworn brother of, and served under, Li Shih-min (later the T'ang T'ai Tsung emperor, AD 622-649) during his rebellion against the tyrannical Sui Yang Ti, who was overthrown in AD 618. Yü-ch'ih Kung was a non-Chinese armorer from Central Asia. Many tales have been told of Yü-ch'ih's great strength and of his skill as a warrior. Having helped to overthrow the Sui, he



was created the Duke of O. He is the patron of blacksmiths, as it is said that he was one when young.

Nowadays Yü-ch'ih Kung is one of the numerous temple Door Gods, and is usually paired with Ch'in Yüan-shuai, another general serving during the first days of the T'ang. They are normally presented either as a painting on a scroll or on the front face of one of the temple's main doors, and shown as fierce, heavily armoured soldiers holding a long-handled axe or sword and standing in a threatening pose. The same story is told about both generals - that they stayed on watch guarding against demons and thus permitted their emperor to sleep peacefully without being troubled by dreams sent by demons.

◁ A military Door God (**Men Shen**) from a temple in Malaysia.

△ A painter at work on a new image of a Door God in a temple in Taipei. [Taiwan]



國於丙寅年五月吉置

大帝

The Underworld & the Dead

Most Chinese have acquired from temple paintings, legends, and morality books and prints, a reasonably similar mental picture of the Underworld and of the awesome Ten Courts or Tribunals in which souls of the recently deceased are judged and punished. Popular belief regards it as a bureaucratic realm deep inside the Earth, with deified officials dressed in the robes of a city magistrate of imperial times, and with court scenes reminiscent of the *yamen*. The Chinese believe in an Underworld where a person is purged of the sins committed during their life before being reborn, usually back into the Human world, although they may be despatched straight to the Celestial paradise or retained in the Underworld as gaolers, depending upon the merits and demerits earned during their terrestrial existence.

Nowadays, ordinary souls are depicted as ravaged, suffering humans, while shades without descendants are gaunt and wretched with an evil expression. To many Chinese devotees, the Underworld is one stage in progression towards the Celestial Heaven and sentences in the Underworld, much as in the Christian purgatory, are not for eternity. The role of the Underworld Judges is to purify and save souls, not to ensure that they suffer eternal damnation. The concept of purgatorial hells within the Earth derived from early Indian Buddhism.

Eternal damnation is alien to the less-educated Chinese person who, believing in the cycle of rebirth, expects to live again even though they might exist in the body of an animal or insect. They are naturally apprehensive about death and the unknown, and the parting from their loved ones forever. Buddhism attempted to allay the fear of death by providing hope for a rebirth into the human world. They know they can earn remission by performing kind or public-spirited deeds, or by entering a monastery or nunnery. All devotees hope, sooner or later, to reach the Western Heavens where existence will be a state of eternal bliss until, at some distant point in the future, all

would be dissolved into the dazzling light of the Ultimate Reality (Nirvana).

The roles of the Courts of the Underworld are fairly standard in the minds of devotees. Dead souls are escorted to the Underworld where they are judged in each of the Courts and then purged of their sins. Each Court is responsible for specific misdemeanours and each soul is charged with the sins committed in each Court in turn, and purged of those sins before being sent to the next Court.

Three major deities predominate within temples connected with post-mortuary matters in Chinese communities; they are Ch'eng Huang (see page 171), Yen-lo Wang (the Superintendent of Punishments) and Ti-tsang Wang (see page 91).

Kuan Yin (see page 89), Ti-tsang Wang and perhaps Mu Lien (see page 100) are the only deities connected with the Underworld who are not feared. The first two are compassionate bodhisattvas who tour the Underworld speaking out in favour of those who call on them and repent. These two redeemers have indescribable quantities of merit earned over the millennia which they are able to transfer to others to help them to atone for their sins.

◁ **Tung-yüeh Ta-ti**, the Great Emperor of the Eastern Peak, is also known in northern China as Tai Shan Yeh. He is generally portrayed as a standard image of a seated emperor, dressed in imperial robes wearing the flat-topped crown with its small bead screen. He holds a small tablet before his chest and has no unique characteristics which might differentiate him from the images of the Jade Emperor (see page 51) or some of the City Gods (see page 171).

Here he is portrayed surrounded by many of the assistants and department heads of the City God. These include the green-faced, short Wu-ch'ang Kuei, the long-eyebrowed, tall Wu-ch'ang Kuei, the head of the Su-pao Ssu (in front of the main deity's right foot) and the Civil and Military Judges flanking him (see later in this chapter for these deities). [Taiwan]

▽ The image of **Tung-yüeh Ta-ti** and his consort (very unusual to find her) stand on the main altar of a popular religion temple near Hangzhou. They are modern, having been carved after the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76. [Chekiang province]





△ There are eight 'halls' or courts, and two administrative courts, totalling ten, in the Underworld with one senior Lord who rules over all Ten. Each court is controlled by a Judge or King. This anonymous Judge is one of them. [Hunan province]

▷ Yen-lo Wang is responsible for the Ten's impartiality as judges, for fair sentences and as lenient sentences as can possibly be handed down. He not only punishes but also rewards, especially those who repent whilst still on Earth, observe his birthday with a vegetarian fast and regularly give alms. He then dispatches the souls straight to the Tenth Court for rebirth.

Popular belief reflects vernacular tradition and in the story of Monkey (see page 98) for example, Yen-lo Wang was obliged to take action following Monkey's continued misdeeds. Yen-lo Wang had him bound and taken down to the Underworld where he promptly broke free and tore out the relevant pages in the Book of Life (the Register of Death Dates), bearing his own name and those of his relatives, and returned to Earth triumphant having removed himself from the clutches of death. [Taiwan]

Tung-yüeh Ta-ti

The Great Emperor of the Eastern Peak, **Tung-yüeh Ta-ti**, is the Lord of T'ai Mountain (T'ai Shan Yeh) and so is the supreme ruler of the Underworld. He is the primary deity, the object of reverence, for most pilgrims who make the journey to T'ai Shan in Shantung, one of the five sacred mountains of China. As Supreme Lord of the Underworld, he has a very large bureaucratic organization responsible to him for the maintenance of the Book of Life, the register of the due date on which the soul of every living person must be summoned to appear before the Judges of the Underworld.

Tung-yüeh Ta-ti is widely accepted as completely impartial, and in many of his temples he has hanging before his altar a large abacus on which he computes the merits against demerits earned by each soul during its lifetime. Most devotees live some distance from the comparatively few temples in which images of Tung-yüeh Ta-ti are revered. To the majority of Chinese therefore, the local City God looms as large in their religious lives as does Yen-lo Wang (see right). Because Tung-yüeh Ta-ti is so majestic, awesome and powerful, he is usually only approached as the goal of a pilgrimage.

As Tung-yüeh Ta-ti is believed to

mete out punishments and rewards to mortals in accordance with the reports he receives, he is prayed to by relatives of the recently dead for leniency and light punishment in purgatory, and also by individuals who wish to avoid severe punishment in the Underworld.

Yen-lo Wang

There is an ambiguity over who and what **Yen-lo Wang** is and does. He is accepted by the great majority of devotees as the senior Judge or King of the Courts of the Underworld and so, by extension, is then assumed by them to be the Lord of the Underworld. However, there are several other major deities who are also looked upon as this Lord. Yen-lo Wang's position as the senior official within the Ten Courts requires him to submit monthly returns to the Jade Emperor containing the names and details of sentence and the outcome of all souls who pass through the Courts. Copies of the reports are sent to Tung-yüeh Ta-ti through Feng-tu Ta-ti.

Consensus agrees that Yen-lo Wang is the supreme Judge of the Courts of the Underworld and not the Lord of the Underworld, and so is no more than the most senior of the Ten Judges, ruling over the Fifth Court. Yen-lo Wang is not the Satan of the Christians and Muslims.



He is an honourable soul, still working off his sentence in purgatory himself and whose task is to defeat evil and ensure that souls are properly purged and pure before being reborn. This he does through his bureaucracy by keeping a close record of all merits and demerits earned by humans during their lives. The crimes which bring the soul into his Court are mainly those committed against the Buddhist religions and sexual crimes such as incest.

One legend claims that, although he possesses a grand palace, life is not a bed of roses. As he is one of the damned himself, during every twenty-four hour period he is seized thrice by demons, laid flat on a scorching hot metal surface and a stream of molten copper is poured down his throat. After each session he is freed and allowed to amuse himself with female demons until the next punishment is due.

Feng-tu Ta-ti

The Great Emperor of Feng-tu, **Feng-tu Ta-ti**, is a major Underworld deity. He is believed by devotees to be either an incarnation of Yen-lo Wang or, more likely, the official who relays the reports from the Ten Judges to the overall Lord of the Underworld, Tung-yüeh Ta-ti.

In the Tung-yüeh temple in Tainan, a member of the temple staff claimed that **Feng-tu Ta-ti** is in charge of all 'humans' as one of the three subordinate officers of Tung-yüeh Ta-ti, relaying reports to him. The other two subordinates are Yen-lo Wang and Ti-tsang Wang.

Legend claims that Hsiang Chi, better known as **Ch'u Pa-wang** (see page 141), was deified and raised to be **Feng-tu Ta-ti**. He had rebelled against the Ch'in and proclaimed himself ruler of the Hsi Ch'u; he committed suicide in 201 BC after he had been overthrown himself.

Ming Fu Shih Wang

Popular belief accepts that the souls of the dead are taken to the Underworld after their brief period of life on Earth, for their lives to be judged by the Ten Presiding Judges or Kings of the Underworld, the **Ming Fu Shih Wang**. After that, the soul is purged and cleansed to await rebirth.

The Ten Judges are usually to be seen lining the side walls of the main hall in which the main deity is Ti-tsang Wang or the City God. The overall ruler of the Ten



Courts is generally accepted to be Yen-lo Wang. It is generally agreed that there are eight 'halls' or courts, and two administrative courts, totalling ten, with one senior Lord who rules over all Ten. Each court is controlled by a Judge or King, and the identities of all but one are universally accepted, the exception being confusion over the Judge of the Fifth Court.

The First Court under **Ch'in Kuang Wang** is responsible for the reception and initial assessment of souls. On arrival they are placed on scales, or according to some suspended from meat hooks, and weighed to obtain the balance between merits and demerits accumulated during their human lives.

If merits outweigh the demerits, the souls are escorted straight to the Tenth Court, the Despatch Department, under Chuan-lun Wang and then conducted to the Terrace of Oblivion. **Meng P'o Niang-niang**, Mother Meng, is a deified virgin controlling the Terrace of Oblivion where she prepares a potion which every human soul who has passed through the Courts of the Underworld is required to drink. This wipes out any memories of

△ **Feng-tu Ta-ti** is the official who relays reports from the Ten Judges to Tung-yüeh Ta-ti. Feng-tu is a town on the Yangtze river in Szechwan province where salt has been mined for centuries. One of the deep saline wells is believed by the locals to have no bottom and to be the entrance to the Underworld. [Taiwan]

▽▽ The Ten Judges of the Underworld can be portrayed in many forms. These examples are from Shanghai (below); Hunan province (bottom left). Pao Kung with the *yin/yang* sign on his forehead is bottom centre [Amoy].

▷▷ Chang Lao-po is said to have been promoted to an Underworld Judge. Devotees provide him with the names of others who might better take the place of their relatives in purgatory! [Hong Kong]



the previous existence before the soul is reborn into a new life. She has a team of aides who scour the hillsides for the herbs she requires to prepare her potions. PAO KUNG

Many Chinese believe that all Ten Judges are incarnations of Yen-lo Wang, but only one, the Judge of the Fifth Court, bears this title. Pao Kung (Duke Pao) is known and revered China-wide as the Lenient Judge, who is said to have been demoted from being the Judge of the First Court to the Fifth Court for being too lenient. There is a quite irreconcilable conflict of identity between Pao Kung and Yen-lo Wang as both are claimed by the majority of temple keepers to be the Judge of the Fifth Court. A number of devotees in southern Chinese communities look upon him as a separate deity; throughout the rest of China most devotees consider him a human incarnation of Yen-lo Wang.

Legend claims that Pao Kung was Pao Cheng (AD 999–1062), a native of Hofei in Anhui province, who served under Emperor Sung Jen Tsung. Appointed Prefect of Kaifeng (the then capital) in 1023, he later became an Imperial Secretary and Inspector. He is the hero of at least ten operatic plays dating from the Yüan dynasty, and is the Chinese equivalent of Sherlock Holmes, solving difficult cases with the inspiration of Heaven. These stories of his impartiality and absolute incorruptibility became so well

known that he became a deity without imperial sponsorship.

Pao Kung has a distinctive black-skinned forehead with a Yin/Yang sign and in some temples the Judge of the Fifth Court bears this sign. There are also a number of temples where the images of the Ten Judges include Yen-lo Wang with his image decorated in the unique style of Pao Kung. However, the Judge of the Fifth Court in most temples in Hong Kong and Macau, is shown with a pink face and no Yin/Yang sign.

CHANG LAO-PO

A popular religion deity revered in Ch'aochou communities, Chang Lao-po is revered so that he will cure disease and provide protection from evil and guidance on *feng shui* problems. However, he is also a key figure in the Underworld bureaucracy. This belief has not been noted anywhere except in Hong Kong – it was brought there by immigrants in 1949.

Chang is said to have been a brilliant scholar born during the Sung dynasty near Ch'aochou, a sworn brother of the great hero Yüeh Fei (see page 128). In 1176, the barbarian invaders continued their advance south. Chang, deeply upset and fearful for the safety of his country and fellow people, jumped to his death into the Liung river in eastern Kuangtung. Before he jumped, however, he prayed that somehow his death would help relieve his fellow countrymen from the ravages of invasion.

To honour his loyalty, fidelity, piety and kindness, Tung-yüeh Ta-ti gave him a high position in the Underworld making him responsible for summoning the souls on the day ordained for their death.



After his death and in the Underworld, he volunteered to save others and, according to a Hong Kong temple keeper, 'like Jesus, he saved people from an everlasting death'. In Tzu Wan Shan near Kowloon, a gilded image of Chang stands on a small side altar flanked by two assistants carrying chains, named Tung-lai and Ch'un-lai. The temple keeper explained that they chain the souls of the newly dead and hustle them off to the Underworld for judgement.

Court Officials

Finally, the series of department heads, officials controlling the various offices of the City God's *yamen*, range from a popular six to twenty-four in rare instances. Their departments are responsible for the authorization of an extension to human lives, the recording of merits and demerits of humans within their parish, and so on. Their titles, almost without exception, consist of three characters, the final one being *Ssu* indicating an administrative division, office, bureau or department.

Some are comparatively commonplace such as the *Su-pao Ssu*, the Office of Speedy Retribution, and the *Yin-yang Ssu*, the Office of the Positive and Negative Principles. The chief of the latter, his face divided vertically into half white and half black, is believed to be on

duty night and day in charge of the souls' escorts, as the primary secretary of the City God. He is responsible for the maintenance of the book of life and death which contains all the dates on which local people are due to die; for ensuring the safe and satisfactory despatch and reception of the souls from the City God's *yamen* to the Underworld, with his minions accompanying and finally obtaining a receipt for them.

Niu-t'ou (Buffalo Head) is one of a pair of escorts, lictors in the retinue of one or other of the Ten Judges of the Underworld, most frequently that of Pao Kung. He is a buffalo-headed demon (see also page 172). The other escort is *Ma-mien* (Horse Face), a horse-headed demon. Both are responsible for the escorting of souls of newly dead humans through the Courts to attend judgement.

DEMONS

Many images of demonic spirits can be seen on altars, usually standing beside the major deity concerned. Most of them are tamed and now act as servants to major and even minor deities. Some are very well known, such as the pair of weather forecasters serving T'ien Hou (see page 137), or the *Wu-ch'ang Kuei* (see page 173). A few are only seen occasionally with their master, such as *Lü Tung-pin's*

◁◁ A demonic soldier from an army of the Pestilence Wang-yeh (see page 114). [Unprovenanced]

◁ *Nieh-hun Chiang-chün* is portrayed as a standing demonic figure with red, ear-piercing tufts and also a single protuberance rising vertically from the top of his head, whereas T'ui-hun Chiang-chün has two smaller protuberances rising from above his forehead like incipient horns, together with a bump in the centre of his forehead. [Taiwan]

▽ *T'un-ching Ta-chiang*, the General who Swallows Spirits is portrayed as a demon, standing holding a tiny demon in his arms. He is an assistant to Lung Chün. [Taiwan]



▽ The Tiger General, **Hu Chiang-chün**, is a common enough title. It is mainly used for the under altar images of the Black Tiger which some say is the tiger steed of Hsüan-t'an Yüan-shuai (see page 64). Such tigers are usually portrayed alone; they can be so heavily coated with incense soot that they are blackened. They vary from ferocious images to an almost 'tame pussy cat'. [Medan]



▷ Images of **Yeh Ch'a** (Yaksha) portray them as well-built human figures, standing with contorted faces and large round eyes, flattened noses and large mouths drawn back and down. They usually hold a ring aloft in their left hand and carry either a spear or a long handled sword in their right. They have straight black hair caught up in a form of coronet, and are dressed in loose-fitting peasant clothes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. [Unprovenanced]

▷▷ The deities of the other three Quadrants along with **Pai Hu**, the White Tiger, are the Green or Azure Dragon of the East (**Ch'ing Lung**, shown here), which is paired with the White Tiger; the Red or Vermilion Bird of the South (**Chu Ch'iao**) and the Black Warrior of the North (**Hsüan Wu**). [Mao Shan, Kiangsu province]

demonic servant; others are untamed and are shown being disposed of either under the foot of a demon-destroying deity or, with **Chung K'uei**, being swallowed.

The General who Assesses and Investigates (dead) Souls, **T'ui-hun Chiang-chün**, is a tamed demon whose image has been noted once only, on the leading edge of the main altar in the Tung-yüeh Ta-ti Temple in Tainan city



dedicated to both **Ti-tsang Wang** and **Feng-tu Ta-ti**. He is paired with another tamed demon, **Nieh-hun Chiang-chün** (the General who pacifies the (dead) Souls), whose image also stands on the same altar. They are both aides and assistants to **Ti-tsang Wang**. Neither **Nieh-hun Chiang-chün** nor **T'ui-hun Chiang-chün** are offered incense or offerings in their own right though they, in common with all the images of deities and tamed demons, do have smouldering sticks of incense placed before them by devotees who do not wish to cause offence to any spirit, however menial.

The Great General who consumes Demons, **Shih-kuei Ta-chiang**, is a minor deity, a tamed demon, paired with the Great General who swallows Spirits, **T'un-ching Ta-chiang**. The two are assistants to **Lung Chün**, who is the main protective deity on an altar in Tainan city

YEH CH'A

The Yakshas, **Yeh Ch'a**, are malevolent demons who assist certain gods. Invisible to the human eye they roam the Earth, sky and lower heavens at will. **Yaksha** is a Buddhist term in the Lotus Sutra for one of the eight classes of supernatural beings. To Indian Buddhists they are either malignant and violent, devourers of human flesh, or are the attendants to



Kuvera or **Vaisravana**, the god of wealth, and are non-malevolent guardians. They are not prayed to, have no individual festivals or altars, and their existence is on the whole denied by temple keepers. However, certain Fukienese temple custodians not only accept that they exist, but have an image of a **Yaksha** on one of their lesser, crowded altars.

PAI HU

A demonic and much feared stellar deity, the **White Tiger**, **Pai Hu**, is a Taoist Spirit. Known as the Commander of the West (one of the Four Quadrants, **Ssu Kung**). **Pai Hu**'s special season is the Autumn, when his blighting influence is felt. He is particularly feared as the devourer of foetuses in the womb. The true **White Tiger**, normally a larger than life-size image of a youthful general, standing, dressed in armour and wielding a magic sword, is accompanied by a

crouching white tiger with black stripes. They are not usually offered more than an obligatory stick of incense.

As with many Taoist popular deities, the White Tiger is the apotheosis of a human, Yin Cheng-hsiu, who was the son of a high ranking official under the last ruler of the Yin dynasty. The *Feng-shen Yen-i* says he was sent to negotiate with Chiang Tzu-ya, but was seized and executed while trying to avenge his father's death. He was later canonized by Chiang Tzu-ya as a stellar deity.

T' IEN-KOU

The Heavenly Dog, T'ien-kou, is an evil spirit, a baleful stellar deity. He is kept under control by two separate deities, Chang Hsien and Erh Lang, with whom he is portrayed both in image and on cheap paper prints. He has a reputation for ravishing the souls of children both before and after birth, and is widely accepted by a great number of peasants to be the prime cause of sterility in both men and women.

The Heavenly Dog is also the cause of much concern when he attacks and eats the moon. He can only be diverted from this dreadful act by concerted noise and the row created by peasants during a lunar eclipse has to be heard to be believed. The Heavenly Dog is restrained by either Chang Hsien (see page 121) or Erh Lang (see page 62) – both of them own weapons made of peachwood, a major deterrent to non-terrestrial spirits as peachwood is the only material to which they are susceptible.

KUEI OR SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

The Chinese word, *kuei*, is usually translated into English as demons or ghosts. The *kuei* are disembodied spirits – the spirits of the dead – but the term is only very rarely used for your own family or clan: they are *tsu-shih* or 'ancestors'. You would never use the term *shen* (spirit) for members of your own family – this would not only be arrogant, but perhaps might even bring bad luck.

The *kuei* can be described as ghosts, disembodied spirits, evil spirits, demons and shades. They are sad creatures, who are either spirits of the dead which have been unable to enter the Underworld or those allowed out of the Underworld for a short visit back to the human world during, for example, the annual month of the Hungry Ghosts.

The first group have become *kuei*

usually because they have died before their due date of death due to an accident or suicide. They are left to roam the human world waiting for their due date as recorded in the book of life and death. The main point is that *kuei* can harm the living.

Souls passing through the Underworld require sustenance and welfare: they can suffer without them. Those without next



of kin to feed and clothe them may, in revenge, cause unknown troubles to be heaped on whoever they might encounter. This requires the living to offer up incense, food, money and clothing whenever there is the slightest chance of 'lost souls' coming their way. Money and clothing are sent by the usual means to the dead – the specially purchased paper money and the paper clothes are borne aloft, and to the Underworld, by incineration. This is always done out-of-doors for *kuei* and never in a temple or home incinerator.

△ This stone tablet, set into the wall above the grave of one or more unknown people, is dedicated to the *Ku-hun* (Orphan Spirits). The practice of propitiating the unknown, roaming ghosts in Taiwan probably developed in the early years of Chinese settlement, when immigrants from Fukien and Kuangtung collected together the bones of their dead to send back to the mainland. It then became common practice to collect together any group of bones, even animal bones. They hoped, by offering placatory sacrifices, to allay any trouble the roaming spirit connected with the bones might make. [Taiwan]



△ A small temple in the back streets near the Lungshan Temple in Taipei is dedicated to the Ta Chung-yeh where they are represented by a single deity carved as a seated, black-bearded human, dressed in armour. The temple keeper said that they are *Yin-shen* (dark spirits), prayed to locally by ladies to prevent their errant husbands from straying, to find lost objects and to cure sickness. All offerings must be vegetarian. [Taiwan]

Ta Chung-yeh

The Great Multitude of Honoured Ones, Ta Chung-yeh, is the collective title of ghosts in the Underworld who are in a transitional stage between their demonic form and becoming a *shen* (spirit), so are still roaming the world. They are revered in Fukienese communities and, apart from odd tablets seen in Malaysia and Sumatra, only noted in Taiwan. The Ta Chung-yeh are the ghosts of those killed in battle, by thieves, fire or water; that is, humans who died before their due date of death. In one temple it was suggested that the Ta Chung-yeh are only ghosts who had been killed by some form of weapon.

It is the custom to offer them the same offerings as one would offer a good spirit, whereas demonic spirits are merely propitiated. They are still feared to some extent as they are still not proper *shen*, despite which they are sometimes portrayed in image form and have an annual festival. Untamed and feared demons are recorded only as generic titles on tablets.

There are at least two dozen temples dedicated to the Ta Chung-yeh in Taiwan, mainly in the northern, north eastern and west central coastal plain, and these are noticeably larger than the temples of the Yu-ying Kung.

The Unknown Dead

In general, there are no images of 'orphan' or 'lost souls' on Chinese altars nor are they referred to by title on tablets or plaques. However, shrines to 'the spirits of the dead' are to be found in every community in Taiwan, but not in Hong Kong or Macau, and only rarely in South-East Asia. A small number of these shrines – one or two are the size of a garage – contain a main stone tablet bearing the title. Incense and candles are burnt before it. These stone tablets have been placed over individual or mass graves of the unknown dead, or in some places mass graves of the known dead, and are cared for by local subscription.

KU-HUN

'Orphan' or 'hungry' ghosts, the *Ku-hun*, are the spirits of the dead who have no descendants to care for them. By extension the souls of those who fell in battle, were killed by animals or murdered, if their bodies were never found, are also lost souls of one form or another. Some are remembered as a group but not individually, such as soldiers killed during a battle; others are unidentified bodies or

bones turned up during construction work, rooted up by animals or found on the foreshore, drowned.

YU-YING KUNG

The Responsive Lords (literally the Ones who Answer Petitions), the *Yu-ying Kung*, are the spirits of the unidentified people whose skeletal remains are uncovered at the wayside, such as roaming beggars and bodies washed up on the foreshore. Their bones are placed under wayside shrines which are small but more decorative than the similarly sized Earth God shrines, and provided with incense and propitiatory and placatory offerings by those who fear that the ghosts of the unknown dead might be either aggressive or resentful.

There are few images of the *Yu-ying Kung* as they are not deities, merely ghosts whose titles are recorded on tablets in the shrines built on or near the resting place of their bones, often a small cemetery. The *Yu-ying Kung* are also known, among other titles, as the *Wan Shan Yeh*. In a number of places, they are revered as spirits to be specially propitiated by gamblers to change their luck for the better. Images of the *Wan Shan Yeh* have been noted in the small shrine which stands beside the *Nan-k'un Shen Wang-yeh* temple, portraying him as a seated, black-faced standard mandarin.

In Makung, the main town on the Pescadores, a deity referred to as *Wan Shan Wang-yeh* is also portrayed as a standard mandarin with a black face.

I-MIN KUNG

The euphemistic title of 'The Righteous Lords', *I-min Kung*, refers to the Taiwanese cult of roaming spirits of the dead who have neither widows nor descendants to revere and provide sustenance by way of offerings to them. Primarily this is a Fukienese cult though, to a marginally lesser extent, it is also Hakka and Cantonese. It is a common cult in Hsinchu and central Taiwan though in practice *I-min* shrines can be found in all parts of Taiwan. They should not be confused with the *Yu-ying Kung*.

In general these lost spirits are the souls of the earliest, now long forgotten, immigrants to Taiwan who did not make it. They lived and died in frontier conditions without wives or children to carry out post-mortuary rites, and who often fell sick and died alone, died of exposure or were killed in fights with the natives and left to rot by the tracks in the forests.



The veneration of those killed in local inter-ethnic group wars, in the rebellions in Taiwan against mainland Chinese rule, and in the struggles for land against the natives is an important aspect of this cult. In times of fear or calamity the dead 'heroes' are prayed to for aid.

Another devotee suggested that I-min is a collective term for local volunteers who died fighting on the side of the government, or what is judged to have been a righteous cause. Others have claimed that the I-min Kung are the spirits of those killed by robbers, thugs and bandits. This may well be so, but the I-min Kung are predominantly the spirits of those killed while fighting for a cause.

Those killed in inter-ethnic group clashes between a clan in one village and another clan in a neighbouring village were looked upon and remembered as heroes in their own homes. A good example of what is accepted as the real I-min Kung is the group remembered in a temple in Yunlin who lost their lives resisting the Japanese occupation in 1895. All are buried and revered anonymously.

The Known, but Individually Unidentified Dead

The island of Hainan, off the south coast of China some 250 miles west-southwest of Hong Kong, is larger than Sicily. It lies entirely within the tropics and was until recently part of the Chinese province of Kuangtung. It used to be the

traditional penal colony during the seventh to the eleventh centuries AD and was the place where many exiles ended their days. Pockets of settlers mainly from Fukien arrived on the northern seaboard in the century before Christ. The local language is now closer to Fukiense than Cantonese (as spoken in Kuangtung).

The Hainanese revere a number of exclusively local deities, among which are the tablets to the 108 Brothers. This group, the **I-pai Ling-pa Hsiung-ti**, whose group title as such is to be noted only on tablets, and never as images, is only to be seen on secondary altars in Hainanese temples in South-East Asia. They are not *shen*, but *yin-shen* (dark spirits), the ghosts of those who died a violent death before their due date.

In Penang, the story centres on a junkload of Hainanese immigrants heading for South-East Asia who never arrived. One version claims that they were mistaken for pirates and wiped out by the 'French' [*sic*] navy off Annam or the 'British' off Malaya; alternatively they were drowned during a typhoon off the southern tip of what is now Vietnam, or were annihilated by Chinese government forces immediately to the north of Hainan where again they were mistaken for pirates. The third story is that they were the original immigrants from Fukien province who arrived in Hainan to settle, but who died from disease or at the hands of the native tribesmen.

◁ The **I-min Kung** have many and varied titles, mostly euphemistic, with the concepts varying slightly from county to county in Taiwan. In general they are either angry and frustrated spirits who have to be appeased or are willing spirits eager to help the community in return for sustenance. However, you ignore or overlook them at your peril. In general it is accepted that such unappeased spirits of the lonely and uncared-for dead haunt the human world and are one of the causes of illness, death and other disasters. [Taiwan]

▽ A number of **Ancestral Images**, which are in no way connected with the Boat People's images (see page 142-3), have been noted on Fukiense and Hunanese altars. They are portrait images of the deceased which stand together with, or instead of, the normal ancestral tablets. These are members of the Liu (Low) family who paid for the construction of the temple in which the images now stand. [Singapore]



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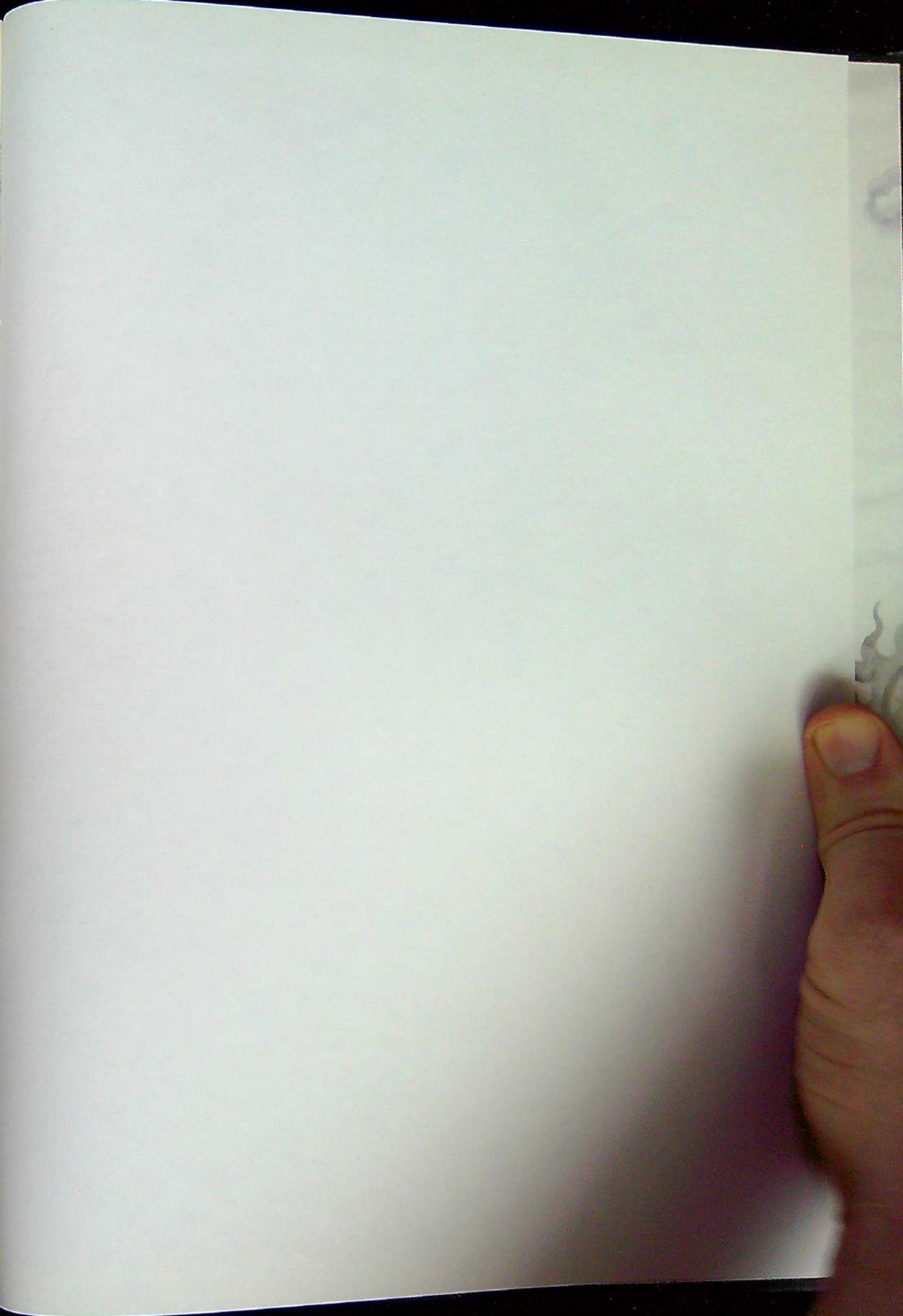
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CHINESE GODS

KEITH STEVENS

C&B

CHINESE GODS

Door Gods, Hungry Ghosts, the Heavenly Dog who eats the moon, the Wealth God who rides a tiger, and the thousand-armed sex-change goddess – these are just a few of the extraordinary deities who feature in the enormous pantheon of Chinese popular religion.

With knowledge gleaned from a lifetime's enthusiasm for the subject, and numerous photographs, Keith Stevens guides the reader through this enthralling introduction to Chinese folk history, religious custom and belief, including:

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• Deities of nature and agriculture, oceans and rivers

• A selection from the thousands of deified worthies ranging from the Ming-prince Koxinga to a Japanese policeman

• Local spirit bureaucracy and the deities, demons and ghosts of the Underworld



ISBN 1-85028-409-1



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