CHAPTER 4

The Community: Gods and Temples

The ancestral cult is basic to Chinese religion because it is the one universal institution and because it molded Chinese society into its traditional form. And yet despite this form, in which the interests, responsibilities, and loyalties tended to be focused inward to the family and lineage rather than outward to the public realm, there did exist, in fact, important extrakinship social groups, such as the local community, the nation, and the occupational guilds. The family therefore did not claim the individual one hundred percent. Furthermore, in China as elsewhere, there were many individuals whose needs drove them to seek satisfaction outside the kinship and secular institutions. Such persons would join a private religious club, become lay devotees of Buddhism or Taoism, or actually take the tonsure and become monks or nuns. The religious expressions of the individual will be discussed in Chapters 6–9; here we shall consider the religious life of the community as it has been manifested in the popular cults.

The popular religion with its deities, as it is described below, dates from around the end of the Han dynasty, about 200 CE. The character of popular religion in earlier ages is obscure. But in general, the difference between the two stages is the admixture of Buddhism and institutionalized Taoism that began in the latter half of the Han period.

THE GODS

General Characteristics

Regardless of the origin or significance of the deities, they are nearly all humanized by the popular religion. That is to say, they have acquired biographies that tell of their human lives—lives marked by omens, precocious superhuman powers, and signs, of course. Thus they are not merely anthropomorphic, but they were actually human in their earlier term, just like the ancestor gods. This is not to say that all deities were historical

persons. Many were originally merely personifications of natural phenomena such as wind, rain, rivers, mountains, and stars, while many were legendary figures. Still others have been fabricated out of whole cloth and may be called fictitious, such as certain characters in a novel of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) called *The Canonization of the Gods*. Some are survivals of antique nature worship; some are Taoist masters who attained immortality and the ability to work big magic; some are Indian Buddhist importations or Chinese Buddhist creations; some are famous statesmen or generals or just and merciful magistrates; and some are men or women of the people who manifested strange, miraculous powers. There are deities whose popularity has endured for centuries all over the country, and there are many more who gained only local fame, passing into oblivion after a short time.

The popular trio of stellar gods of longevity (left); official position, implying wealth and honors (center); and blessings, especially sons (right). These are often found on the central ridge of the temple's roof, but they are found as decorative themes in other contexts as well. Shou *(longevity) is probably the most omnipresent motif in all Chinese arts and crafts. The figure is of an old man with a white beard who is still in ruddy good health; his forehead and belly bulge with the vital breath* (ch'i) *indicating attainment of Taoist immortal transcendency; he holds the calabash, representing the crucible of the Taoist elixir (and much else), in one hand and the peach, symbolizing immortality, in the other.*

The Western observer, accustomed to serious theological explanations for deity, might find this seemingly casual and unsystematic pantheon bemusing. The polytheism of Chinese religion is such a stumbling block to understanding that we will briefly deal with it here:

> To those who do not come from this tradition of a single jealous God, the diffusion of divine power is logical and obvious. The manifestations of power are infinite and various; nothing would seem more natural than to attribute their causes to many diversified deities. In this world, which is necessarily the model for the supramundane dimension, one approaches different persons for different sorts of results. According to such a view, the power that causes the river to flow is a different power than the one that governs disease, just as the function of the farmer differs from that of the metalsmith.
>
> This being so, we can comprehend why deity in China is anthropomorphized and why it is multiple. We can go beyond the sort of superficial depiction of "idolatry" that assumes not only gross ignorance, but a sort of baseness of character in Chinese worship. Objectification of divine power in statues of mud or bronze or wood representing many differently named deities is not a naive belief in the divinity of inanimate objects, but a visual representation of the accessibility of superhuman aid—the aid requested being within the province of power of a particular deity.[1]

The gods are alive because they have manifested themselves through their works. Their spiritual power, called ***ling*** in Chinese, is the evidence of their existence. This is why, to borrow an apt phrase from Maspero, "people become gods every day in China."[2] Any claim or attribution of *ling* that gains a certain public currency may result in deification of a person. Rumors having spread and credibility having been established through confirmation that the spirit responds to prayers, a temple will be put up through public subscription. From then on the growth or decline of the cult is a matter of the god's efficacy. This means that the death of the gods is also commonplace. When public confidence in the power of a deity has waned, he will be neglected and eventually forgotten.

This continuing process of obsolescence is responsible for the fact that although there are innumerable gods whose names and biographies may be found in the extensive hagiological literature of Taoism and Buddhism and on the rolls of the State religion, in the actual religious life of the people at any one time or place there is a fairly limited number of gods. The interest of the local community in their gods is a matter of their usefulness and hardly extends to historical information about them—except, of course, insofar as that information as popularly known fixes their particular area of spiritual power, their specific sort of *ling*.

It is this specialization in power, rather than origins or titles, that identifies the deities as individuals. They are not personifications of abstract virtues or passions or activities like Greek gods but rather are more like human officials who have the power to grant or withhold favors within the limits of their own jurisdiction. Many of them are indeed designated as officials in the spiritual hierarchy, counterparts to the bureaucrats in the old imperial tables of organization. Such deities may be known as individuals by name, but more often they are simply known by the titles of their offices. The vast spiritual bureaucracy is well organized on paper, but

again the people know little and care less about the systematic formalizations in the books.

A Sampler of the Gods from Taiwan Province

To illustrate some of the generalities expressed thus far, we shall in this section describe the major deities of the popular religion in present-day Taiwan.[3] According to a religious census published in 1960, there were in Taiwan, for a population of about 10 million, well over four thousand temples of all sorts.* Enthroned as chief deities in these temples were eighty-six different gods. Although this seems to be a large pantheon, a relatively small number of deities commanded by far the greatest share of popularity. There were nine with over one hundred temples each; these we may call the major deities. Another nineteen had at least twenty temples apiece. The other fifty-eight gods in Taiwan are of only minor importance in the popular religion.

The deities are not necessarily individuals. They also include groups and "multiples." An example of a group would be the "Kings of the Three-Mountains Country" (see p. 60). By "multiples" is meant deities identified by title or office rather than as individuals. The local earth gods would be examples of this type. Of the nine major deities, six are individuals, two are multiple, and one is a group.

1. *Wang-yeh.* "Royal Lords." Tutelary gods of immigrants from Fukien province, across the Taiwan Strait, whose descendants comprise four-fifths of the local population (by "local population" we mean to except those "mainlanders" who fled to Taiwan when the mainland fell to the Communists after World War II). These gods illustrate the vagueness about biographical facts mentioned above: One opinion is that they are the souls of loyal ministers of the Han and T'ang dynasties, but another opinion holds that they are the souls of 360 scholar-officials of the late Ming dynasty. Several may be enshrined in a single temple. They both bring and prevent pestilence.
2. *Kuan-yin Fo-tsu.* "Goddess of Mercy." No doubt the most popular deity in all of China; every foreign account of Chinese culture mentions her. Originally *Kuan-yin,* or Kuan Shih Yin, was a bodhisattva called, in Indian Buddhist texts, Avalokiteśvara, one of the two assistants (or avatars) of the Buddha Amitābha. The Buddhist origin is indicated in the title *Fo-tsu,* meaning literally "Buddha-ancestor" and also is used to indicate the Patriarchs of Buddhist sects. Although still one of the major figures found in purely Buddhist temples, *Kuan-yin* was long ago taken to the hearts of the masses and transformed into a compassionate mother figure. In the popular religion she is the embodiment of loving kindness, giver of male children to childless wives, and source of help in time of need.

*A more up-to-date figure is well over five thousand temples for a population nearing 17 million, in 1977. This sufficiently indicates the remarkable efflorescence of religion in Taiwan during less than twenty years.

3. *T'ien-shang Shêng-mu.* "Holy Mother in Heaven." Despite this title, she is in no way similar to the Holy Mary of Catholicism. She provides a classic example of the process by which "people become gods every day in China." The beginnings of the cult are obscure, but the generally accepted story is that she was born in the year the Sung dynasty was founded (960 CE) on the island of Meichou just off the coast of Fukien province. Her birth was attended by auspicious portents. She was an exceptionally pious girl, and at the age of thirteen she met a Taoist master who presented her with certain charms and other secret lore. When she was sixteen she manifested her magical power by saving the lives of her father and elder brother, whose boat had capsized. Other tales of her supernatural intervention were told by grateful recipients of her mercies. When she died, still a young girl, a temple was erected in her community, seeking to attract her continuing favors.

   As decades and then centuries passed, stories of miracles wrought by the goddess accumulated up and down the southeastern seaboard, and she became a familiar guardian spirit, particularly among seafarers. By the mid-twelfth century the imperial court itself had learned of her reputation for spiritual power and gave her official recognition as a deity of national importance. This meant that the State incorporated her worship in the schedule of sacrifices to be performed by the bureaucracy throughout the land.

   The cult continued to grow until the goddess became one of the major deities of southeastern China and the most important deity of sailors, fishermen, and all who must hazard their lives upon the waters. She received high titles by imperial decree; for example, in 1409 she was called *t'ien fei,* "Imperial Concubine of Heaven," who "protects the country and shelters the people, looks after [those who call on her] with mysterious *ling,* and saves universally by her great kindness." This imposing title was elevated by the K'ang Hsi Emperor in 1683 to *t'ien hou,* "Consort of Heaven." To the people, she is more familiarly known as *Ma-tsu,* a Fukienese word for grandma.

4. *Fu-teh Chêng-shên.* "True God of Blessings and Virtue." The local earth god (***t'u-ti***) found everywhere in China, this "multiple" deity is most numerous because every tiny residential area, even every home, has its own god. Because of his prominence in the Chinese religion, every work on the subject has discussed the *t'u-ti.* His temples are commonly small and unimpressive; he may even have to make do without a shrine. But the humbleness of his shrines is rather an indication of his closeness to the people than of any contempt for him. It is the earth god who is, in fact, most intimately involved in their lives:

   > They are the gods of their district, so they protect, care for, and control the locality. The people have come to appeal to them for everything which affects their lives. All births and deaths are

reported to them. In cases of danger to the community, they are taken from their little temple, and placed where they may see all that is happening. In this way they are thought to better understand the conditions, and be more ready in their assistance. They are thought especially to protect their worshipers against mildew, locusts, and caterpillars, or to permit the crops of the one neglecting them to be destroyed. As the people believe a faithful heart will gain their favor, and bring a rich harvest, they are continually found in worship before their shrines. . . .

In addition to the Earth Gods of the locality, there are little *t'u-ti* of the home. These little images are found in nearly every household. They usually are kept on the floor under the altar board; thus they are as close to the Earth as possible. They are supposed to control the particular spot on which the building rests, and thus be a protection to the house and its inmates.[4]

5. *Shih-chia Fo.* Śākyamuni Buddha. Although he occupies a position of central importance in purely Buddhist establishments, he has not usually been so popular in the community religion. His current prominence in Taiwan is a phenomenon of post–World War II years.

Local earth god receiving sacrifices by representatives of every family within his area of jurisdiction. This is a sacrifice of the winter solstice, 1971, in the small town of Shui-li, Taiwan..

6. *Hsüan-t'ien Shang-ti.* "Emperor-on-High of the Dark Quarter." Also commonly known as *Pei-chi Yu-shêng Chên-chün*, "Protecting Holy True Lord of the North Pole [Star]," he is the sole survivor in the living religion of the spirits who in high antiquity ruled the four quarters of the universe. In more recent centuries his function has become generalized as a protector, as in the case of many warrior-type figures in the popular pantheon, and this function is reflected in the title by which he is best known as a national deity throughout China: *Chên-wu Ta-ti*, "Truly Martial Great Emperor."

   He is reported in the official histories to have appeared to Emperor Hui Tsung (reigned 1101–1126) of the Sung dynasty, an accomplished painter, and the likeness sketched by the emperor is the prototype of his modern image:

   > Usually an armed squire is placed behind him, carrying his black banner; the god himself is set on the back of the tortoise encircled by the serpent, and floating on the waters, as is fitting, since he is the ruler of the North, and water is the element corresponding to the northern quarter.
   >
   > This tortoise and this serpent upon which he rests are interpreted in totally different ways by the various Chinese authors: To some they are two celestial officers placed under his orders; according to others, they are, on the contrary, enemy demons whom he has conquered, and whom he is treading under his feet. In point of fact, the wreathed serpent and tortoise are the god himself in his first shape, more ancient than the present anthropomorphic personage. They are met with from the time of the Han dynasty as the symbol of the Northern region of the world in the funeral chambers of the second century, where they face the Red Bird, the symbol of the South, and are opposed to the White Tiger (the West) and the Green Dragon (the East).[5]

7. *Kuan Shêng-ti-chün.* "Holy Emperor-Lord Kuan." The warrior-protector par excellence; Western authors generally call him *Kuan Ti*, "Emperor Kuan." He will serve as a good example of the historical personage deified. In the romantically pictured epoch of the Three Kingdoms (220–265 CE), Kuan Yü (to use his mortal name) was one of a famous trio of generals. His character and exploits were popularized in the great work of historical fiction entitled *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, written during the fourteenth century. The extraordinary success of this novel was not confined to those sufficiently literate to read it but was spread among the entire populace through the medium of the storytellers and the stage. It is quite accurate to say that it not only supplanted the official records of the period in the Chinese mind but gave every rustic an astonishing familiarity with the pseudohistory of Kuan Yü and his companions and foes. Through the centuries his cult as a martial hero, protecting against evil spirits, has become ever more popular. In addition to his basic protective function, he is also a patron saint of literature and of commerce.

8. *Pao-shêng Ta-ti.* "Great Emperor Who Preserves Life." Here is a deity who, although of major importance in Taiwan, does not seem to be known nationally. He is a specialist in healing the sick, a role that is also played by several other gods. In his mortal life he was a doctor of Ch'üanchou prefecture in Fukien province, and his devotees in Taiwan are descendants of Ch'üanchou immigrants. His mortal name was Wu Pên, which accounts for another appellation by which he is commonly known, *Wu Chên-rên*, "Wu, the True Man"—*chên-rên* being a technical term in Taoism for those who have perfected themselves in the arts of immortality. He is said to have cured an empress of the Sung dynasty, as well as a tiger whose throat was obstructed by the bones of a woman he had eaten. The grateful tiger became a guardian spirit in Wu Pên's temples after the latter had been deified. It will again illustrate the indifference to historical fact to mention that *Pao-shêng Ta-ti* is also said by some Taiwanese to be the soul of an entirely different man, likewise a physician, but alive during the T'ang dynasty, half a millennium earlier than the time of Wu Pên.
9. *San-shan-kuo Wang.* "Kings of the Three-Mountains Country." The country to which the title refers is the homeland of Hakka immigrants, in Kuangtung province. The Hakka are a distinctive minority group of Chinese who make up about one-fifth of the local Taiwanese population. These tutelary deities were brought by the Hakka during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The kings are a group of spirits of three mountains that are said to have assisted the imperial troops in putting down an insurrection in the region during the T'ang dynasty. In gratitude for their help, they were canonized by imperial decree. This may serve as a good example of animism in the folk religion extended further into the religion of the State.

TEMPLES AND THEIR FUNCTIONING

The deities are housed in temples that may be called palaces. That is to say, they are the official residences of their exalted inhabitants, rather than gathering places for a congregation. Temples vary from unpretentious to grand, from one-room structures no bigger than a dog kennel to complexes of halls arranged row on row and separated by spacious courtyards. Despite a thousand variations, they share a similarity in appearance because all Chinese buildings, sacred or secular, derive from the same architectural principles. The temple is therefore just a more or less elaborately ornamented version of the Chinese "basic building":

1. It is in a compound surrounded by a wall.
2. The main entrance is in the south face of the wall. Since hoary antiquity, all Chinese buildings wherever possible have been oriented along a north-south axis; the master—emperor, household head, or

god—sits in the north facing south. The entranceway is a triple gate of which each doorway is closed by heavy double wooden leaves. The whole of this entranceway is recessed within the wall and covered by a truncated version of a building roof. It is raised above ground level, and one enters by ascending several stone steps. The doors are painted with the guardian figures of warrior-generals who stand in protective stances to keep out evil spirits.

3. Stepping through the gate one finds oneself in the gatehouse. From here one looks into a square of buildings with a courtyard in the middle. The buildings running longitudinally on the east and west are subsidiary, used for the daily living purposes of the temple's caretakers or perhaps for housing subordinate deities in the side chapels. The main hall (or halls, if there are several) runs transversely and is commonly divided into a large room in the center flanked by side rooms on east and west. The center room may be distinguished by a double roof, and its entranceway is similar to the main gate.
4. All of the buildings are raised off the ground on platforms of pounded earth faced with stone and are entered by ascending stone steps.
5. The buildings are essentially wooden frames, whose most important features are the rows of sturdy round pillars defining the size and outline of the structure and the unique system of beams and brackets that supports the roof. The walls, whether external or internal, play no structural role but are in effect screens. The outside walls are commonly brick, and the inside walls may be brick or wood and may or may not reach the ceiling (since there may or may not be a ceiling).*
6. The most striking part of the temple is the roof, that unmistakably "Chinese" feature. Instead of simply sitting on the walls like the typical Western roof, it looks to be, as it structurally is, independent of the building itself; therefore, one has the impression that it is light and free despite its relatively massive proportions. The eaves extend well out beyond the walls, forming a sort of canopy over the building. In northern China the curve of the eaves is moderate and the ends are short, giving a rather sober effect. On southern temples, however, the eaves soar outward and upward in great arcs, with long-stretching tips. Along the ridge and the eaves are ornamental pottery figures of mythical birds and beasts and legendary humans. Again, these are more numerous and exuberant in execution in the southern style. Finally, whenever financial resources permit, the roof will be covered with special colored tiles.

*The description in this paragraph will have to be modified, at least for Taiwan, in reference to the construction of temples since the 1950s. Now concrete with reinforcing steel rods is used for temples as well as secular buildings, and the unique beauty of the traditional wood construction is no longer found.

7. The colorfulness of the roof is matched by the walls, posts, and interior decoration of the building. The Chinese preference is for strong colors—red, blue, green, gold, white, black. The posts are bright Chinese red, and the doors likewise. Down the pillars and across horizontal plaques here and there are pious mottoes and quotations from the sacred books inscribed in gold. The ceiling, if there is one, is also for ornamental purposes, serving as a gorgeously painted canopy over all or part of the room. Otherwise the complex structure of the rugged beams with their specifically Chinese bracketing system is left exposed.
8. If the compound contains more than one hall, the first one will likely be used to house lesser deities, and the principal deity will be enthroned in a rear hall. His dignities are again a matter of the financial resources available. At the very least, the icon will be the size of a doll, seated on a table, with the altar before him bearing the customary sacrificial utensils. At the other extreme, the deity will be represented by an image life-size or larger, not only painted and gilded but garbed in beautifully embroidered robes and fitted with a glittering crown. He will sit on a throne within an elaborately carved wooden shrine, covered by a resplendent baldachin (or canopy). On his left (the place of honor in China) and right hands will stand smaller figures as his attendants. If he is a god of high rank, these attendants may themselves be important deities.

A major temple, Taipei, Taiwan. Note the elaborately decorated roofs and pillars.

The most important object in a Chinese temple is the incense brazier, from which the smoke goes upward into the numinous realm carrying the petitions of worshipers. This is a particularly ornate example, with dragon handles, tiger feet, and other symbolic decoration. Antique graphs give the name: Precious Hall Reaching to the Clouds (Ling Hsiao Pao Tien)*. In small graphs just above is the name of the large temple complex: Palace of Guidance* (Chih Nan Kung)*, a famous Taoist center of "dream divination" in the Taipei suburb of Mucha.*

9. If the temple is of any size, there will be deities other than the principal god enthroned there. These may be ranged along the sides of the main hall or may be housed in separate chapels. In the popular religion, a temple is apt to have quite a mixed company of the gods, including those from the Buddhist and Taoist pantheons as well as the particular deities favored by the local community.

The smallest temples, as we have mentioned, are no more than tiny shrines. Such temples, housing the local earth god or other spirits that may be humble in rank but very close to the daily lives of the people, are found everywhere, in the busy streets of a town and out in the fields of the countryside. Their occupants must often be contented with a plain brick altar

and no ornamentation whatever; in fact, the deity himself may be represented by no more than a tablet or even just a rude inscription.

Temples are so conspicuous everywhere in China that one is at a loss to account for the claim of so many foreign writers that the Chinese are an irreligious people. Even aside from the ubiquitous small shrines just described, every village and every small subsection of a town or city will have its community temples, generally the largest and most ostentatious structures in the neighborhood. Such a temple functions not only as a religious center for the community but often as a schoolroom, meeting place for community business, playground for youngsters, and threshing floor at harvest time. The construction of temples was a major expense to the local people, and the fact that the people would give so much of their meager income is in itself impressive proof of their sincere belief in the efficacy of the deities.

Community temples would be under the overall management of a local committee and might or might not have the permanent services of a resident priest. The priest might belong to the Taoist order whose vocation was noncelibate and whose function was the practice of magic and exorcism.* Or they might be served by lower-level religious "technicians," such as mediums or shamans.

The doors of a temple stand open at all times. Individuals may come at any time to bring their personal problems to the god. One lights several sticks of incense and places them in the brazier on the altar, bows or prostrates oneself before the altar, burns mock paper money, and offers sacrificial edibles. The god is asked for help on a wide variety of matters (see Chapter 2). Very often he is consulted about the advisability of taking some course of action. This is done by several divinatory techniques, of which a common one is to throw on the floor two pieces of wood shaped like the halves of a fat banana that has been sliced lengthwise. The positive or negative response of the god is indicated by the manner in which the pieces land on their flat or rounded sides. The altar is provided with a vase containing many long, narrow bamboo slips, each numbered. The supplicant shakes the vase until one slip protrudes above the rest. Taking this slip to the attendant, the latter gives the inquirer a printed oracle from the set numbered in accordance with the bamboo slips. In many temples there is also a fortune-teller who is frequently consulted for the reading of horoscopes and who serves as amanuensis (secretary) for the illiterate.

Besides these commonplace, everyday functions, there are certain times when the temple is thronged with people and abustle with activity. One biographical fact about the god will be known to all—his birthday. This is the festival of the god, marked by ceremonies, processions, feasting, and theatricals. We quote from the eyewitness account of an experienced observer:

> On August 2, 1930, at the town of Li-t'o, west of Yachow [in Szechwan province], the writer witnessed a *T'u-tsu-hui*, or a festival on the birthday of the god of earth, or the Lord of Earth. There was a procession along the city streets, which were literally packed with sightseers and worshipers. Along the way there were many offerings of pork and beans,

*See Chapter 6.

> and much lighting of candles and incense and burning of spirit money. Many who participated in the parade had their faces painted with odd streaks of gold, and black and white paint, and wore caps on which mottoes were written. People of both sexes and of all ages marched in the parade, some of them carrying small sticks of decorated wood. It is believed that the festival causes the crops to prosper, heals diseases, and wards off calamities.
>
> In the parade were two pavilions in which were hats, shoes, candles, and many dresses and gowns. Then came a large, red-faced god, with a fan in his hand, carried in a pavilion or large sedan chair on the shoulders of coolies. Three bombs, or short guns, were occasionally set off to announce the coming of the god, and a band played typical Chinese music. Following the god were scores of common people, each carrying a wooden placard. As the god passed by, he was loudly hailed by the spectators, some of whom carried in their arms infants whom they wished the god to bless and protect. Following those who carried the placards were musicians with gongs, timbrels, and horns. Next came Ch'uan Chu, the Lord of Szechwan, who was dressed in yellow silk embroidered garments. In the center of his forehead he had a third eye which enabled him to see good and evil, and such invisible creatures as demons. As Ch'uan Chu passed along, people bowed their heads to the ground in reverent worship. After the god came a squad of soldiers to preserve order.
>
> In the parade were people who were strikingly dressed; some had their faces painted. They participated in the procession in performance of vows.
>
> When they were sick, or were faced with some dreadful calamity, they prayed to the god for relief, and promised that if they were helped they would participate in this way in the procession on the birthday of the god. The number of people who thus took part in the procession each year seems to the common people to prove the efficacy of the god.
>
> A witness of this procession could see clearly that the people were emotionally thrilled and deeply impressed; that emotions of reverence, awe, and wonder were aroused; and that unconsciously the people received a vivid impression of the greatness of the gods, and were made more loyal to them, the priests, and the religion. The techniques used are admirable for making such impressions on the minds of the simple people, and are evidently the result of centuries of experience.[6]

It is interesting to note that the Chinese case is no exception to the general rule that theatricals are originally closely connected with religion. Although the contents of the plays that have been popular on the boards in China for the past several centuries are not in themselves religious, the performances are thought to entertain the gods as well as their human audiences. Therefore, no festival should be without its theatricals, and in a temple of any pretensions, there will be a place for these, even if it is only a small courtyard.

Because the Chinese drama requires very little in the way of properties, there is no difficulty in the arrangements. A makeshift stage is quickly erected, and cloth backdrops are suspended on bamboo poles. The audience clusters at the front and sides, standing to watch and listen, coming or going at will. A band of perhaps a half dozen instruments, with percussion predominating, supports the singers and directs their highly stylized movements. The stories are all well known to the most rustic audience, consisting of traditional plots from history and fiction, and they always

Wooden vase containing divination slips, a standard feature of all temples of any size in Taiwan. This rather pleasing antique-looking example has the name of its temple, the Palace of the Turquoise-blue Hills, and the word ch'ien, *meaning bamboo slips. Above these labels is the omnipresent word for longevity* (shou). *Other symbols include two knots indicative of the shape of the swastika because of their four ends. The swastika in turn is used for the graph* wan, *or 10,000—that is, innumerable—implying the hope that one's wishes may come true in all things. (Ch'ing Shan Kung, Wanhua, Taipei, Taiwan)*

emphasize the triumph of the conventional morality. The principal actors are appreciated for their skill in the prescribed pantomiming, for their acrobatic feats in the case of plays of military action, and above all for their singing—the drama being something of a blend of ballet and opera. Naturally the troupes that play the countryside and perform for the temple festivals are but crude facsimiles of the artists popular in the great cities of culture; but then, their rural audiences (and the gods themselves) probably enjoy them at least as much as the pampered critics enjoy the most refined productions.*

*In a recent technological "breakthrough" in Taiwan, the deity, enthroned in his temple, is provided with a television set for his entertainment.

Chinese Religion

An Introduction

FIFTH EDITION

Laurence G. Thompson

Professor Emeritus
East Asian Languages and Cultures
University of Southern California

Wadsworth Publishing Company
I(T)P™ An International Thomson Publishing Company

Belmont • Albany • Bonn • Boston • Cincinnati • Detroit • London • Madrid
Melbourne • Mexico City • New York • Paris • San Francisco
Singapore • Tokyo • Toronto • Washington

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN HISTORY

Chinese Religion

AN INTRODUCTION

Fifth Edition

LAURENCE G. THOMPSON