

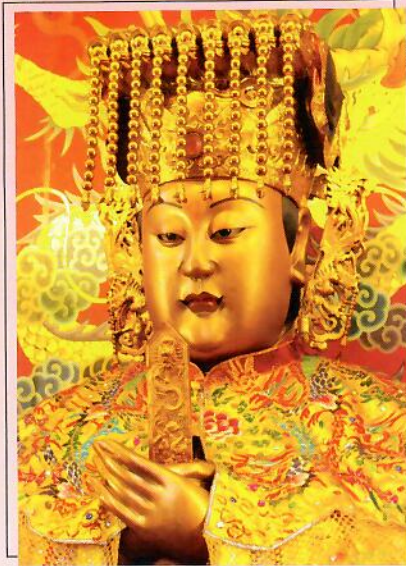
*This temple has been awarded three stars by
Michelin Travel Guide Taiwan*

Residence of King Ningjing, the last
descendant of the Ming Royal Family

TAINAN GRAND MATSU TEMPLE



One of the largest and oldest temples in Taiwan,
and the first officially-built Matsu temple



Tainan Grand Matsu Temple

Matsu, Goddess of the Sea, is worshiped as Heavenly Queen or Tianhou in Chinese. Among the approximately 400 Matsu temples in Taiwan, Tainan's Grand Matsu Temple, or Tainan Tianhou Temple holds a venerable and highly-respectable position, because it was the first official Matsu temple ever built, and the only one that was ever listed historically in the official record of rites. Moreover, its spectacular and rich architectural features, its statue of the Goddess and other historical relics make it a palace of folk art.

The Origin of Tainan Grand Matsu Temple

During the Xuande reign period of the Ming Dynasty (1426-1435), Wang San-Bao, a eunuch, sailed to the West. It is said that he introduced the deities of Matsu from Meizhou, Fujian Province, to Taiwan and built a temple called Tianfei Temple (literally, Heavenly Princess Temple).

At the end of the Ming dynasty there was a wise abbot who was born in Guangdong Province but who had grown up in Taiwan and had a close relationship with King Ningjing. The abbot persuaded the King to turn his home into a temple, and that was the birth of Tainan Grand Matsu Temple.





During the Zheng Administration of the Ming Dynasty

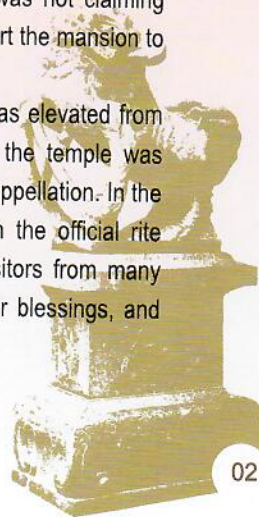
King Ningjing, Chu Shu-Gui, was a 9th-generation descendant of the founder of the Ming dynasty, Chu Yuan-Zhang. At the end of the Ming dynasty, he was invited by Zheng Jing, the son of Zheng Cheng-Gong, to settle in Taiwan in the position of "military supervisor". Subsequently, he became a royal symbol of the Ming court in Taiwan. To show his courteous reception, in 1664, the 18th year of Yongli reign period of the Ming dynasty, Zheng Jing built a magnificent mansion for King Ningjing. There were two halls in the mansion for worshipping the deity Xuantian Shangdi (God of Northern Heavens) and Guansheng Dijun (a famous general in the period of Three Kingdoms).

In 1683, the 22nd year of the reign of Kangxi in the Qing Dynasty, General Shi Lang and his army attacked Taiwan. Hearing that Zheng Jing, the last Ming governor of Taiwan, had surrendered, King Ningjing decided to sacrifice himself for Ming Empire by committing suicide. In fidelity to the king, all his five concubines hung themselves ahead of the king's death.

During the Qing Dynasty

After General Shi Lang occupied Taiwan, he stationed himself in King Ningjing's mansion and dismantled the attached "ZongRenFu" (administrative office for handling the matters of Ming court royals) to prevent people on the island from attempting any restoration of the Ming dynasty. In order to demonstrate that he was not claiming anything for himself, the General petitioned Emperor Kangxi to convert the mansion to be used of a Matsu temple, named "Tianfei Temple".

In 1684, the 23rd year of the Kangxi period, the deity Matsu was elevated from Tianfei (Heavenly Princess) to Tianhou (Heavenly Goddess), and the temple was renamed "Tianhou Temple". It thus became the first temple with this appellation. In the 59th year of the Kangxi period, the Tianhou Temple was listed in the official rite records, which further solidified its position. During those days, visitors from many other temples came to the Tianhou Temple. Some came to pray for blessings, and





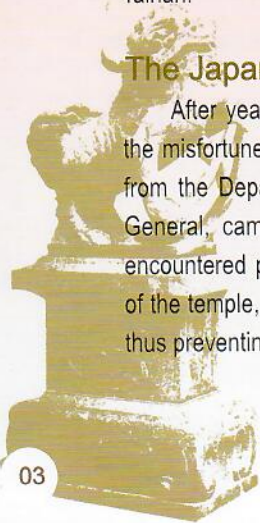
some to donate inscribed wooden plates to show their respect. Such practices led the Tianhou Temple to its golden age .

In 1765, the 30th year of the Qianlong period, a governing magistrate of Taiwan, Jiang Yun-Xun, renovated the whole temple for the first time. He also built an official hall (the current San-Bao Hall) for visiting officials to change dress and rest. In 1775, the 40th year of Qianlong, another Taiwanese magistrate, Jiang Yuan-Shu, raised funds to renovate the temple for the second time. The construction lasted for three years and the results of the renovation have been maintained in the temple's current appearance.

In spring of 1818, the 23rd year of Jiaqing period, the Tainan Grand Matsu Temple suffered from a fire that caused severe damage to the main hall and the side hall. During the reign of Daoguang, a three-phase restoration was carried out. This was the largest scale and the most delicate restoration in the history of the temple. The main ridgepole and carving from this restoration have been well-preserved until nowadays. Towards the end of the Qing dynasty, after the reign of Tongzhi, when everything was in decline, the government had no extra funds to renovate the temple and the temple grounds were unlawfully occupied, sheds were built and rented out for profit. Thereafter, the government erected a stele in front of the temple warning both soldiers and citizens against violating the law by occupying the temple ground. At present the stele is kept among others in a stele gallery near the South Gate of Tainan.

The Japanese Occupation

After years of decline, Tainan Grand Matsu Temple was in disrepair and facing the misfortune of being auctioned off. At such a critical point, a religious investigator from the Department of Culture and Education, an Office of the Taiwan Governor-General, came to Tainan to inspect historic spots. The investigator accidentally encountered potential buyers. After obtaining information on the historic background of the temple, the investigator sent a report to his superiors and stopped the auction , thus preventing a cultural crisis.





Up to the Present

In 1946, after the end of the Japanese occupation, when a great earthquake struck Tainan county, the temple was also affected. The south wall of the San-Chuan Gate started slanting and developed cracks. In 1971, in response to public demand, the official hall on the side was remodeled as San-Bao Hall for worshipping the San-Bao Buddhas (Three-Treasure Buddhas).

Although the Tianhou Temple building has been renovated several times, it has retained the same fundamental architectural structure since the third restoration during the reign of Jiaqing in the early nineteenth century. In accordance with the topography of the ground, the temple rises in height towards the back of the building, showing its spectacular and majestically impressive architectural structure. The worship hall, in particular, has the tallest roof truss in Taiwan. With the tall roof truss and overlapping roof tops, crowing the graceful proportions and elegantly curved appearance of the temple; Tianhou Temple is truly one of the best-designed temple





structures in Tainan.

In addition to the basic structure, the architectural details include abundant ornaments; such as stone inscriptions, wood carvings, color paintings, etc., which are all very impressive. The many historical relics on display in the temple, such as ancient stone tablets, inscribed wood plates, etc. are all valuable cultural assets which should not to be missed on any cultural tour of the city.

Because of its historical and cultural significance, Tainan Grand Matsu Temple has been listed as a historic site of the highest category in Taiwan and the Minnan area since 1985.

Introduction of Deity Statues in the Temple

Most of the deity statues are located in the main hall. Because the temple was built for Matsu, Goddess of the Sea, the other deities present are mostly related to water, such as the Dragon Kings of the four seas, and the Shuixian Deities. There are also some other deities closely related to ordinary people -such as the God of Marriage and the Goddess of Childbirth.

Deity Statues in the Middle

Statues in the middle include Matsu, two maidservants, and two assistants, "Qianli Yan" (the deity with penetrating sight), and "Xunfong Er" (the deity with penetrating hearing) on the left and right side, respectively.

Matsu: this statue is about four meters. She wears a crown with 9 beaded tassels and a splendid royal dress, with her hands holding an audience tablet in front of her chest. Her golden face looks composed and dignified. Her eyelids droop slightly as she overlooks all living beings with a solemn but benign expression. Standing next to Matsu are two attendants, of a similar height. With pink cheeks, dignified and virtuous facial expressions and court dresses, these two figures are in a style accordant with the Matsu statue.

The deities Qianli Yan and Xunfong Er: they are the two servants of



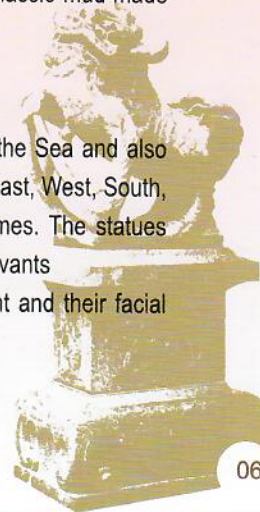
Matsu. In folklore, the two were monsters on Mt. Taohua in the northwest of Meizhou in China, each with extraordinary abilities of seeing and hearing. Unfortunately, they did all kinds of evil in the vicinity. To save the people from the two monsters, Matsu went and subdued them, thereafter using them as her guards. She relied on their abilities to assist her in patrolling the coast and protecting fishermen.

The appearances of these two deity statues are dark bronze in color, looking tall and strong. With vivid and realistic facial expressions, poses and clothes, the two statues look alive and fearsome. They are prime examples of the classic mud-made statues in Tainan.

Deity Statues on the Right Side

Dragon Kings of the four seas: they are the Gods of the Sea and also the Gods of the Rain. In folklore, the four Dragon Kings include the East, West, South, and North Dragon King, and each has more than ten different names. The statues shown here include the four Dragon Kings, two generals and four servants

The statues of the Dragon Kings are about half a man's height and their facial





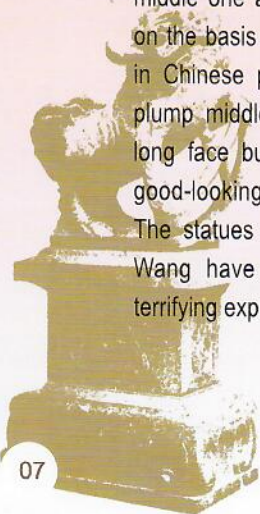
expressions are delicate and wondrous. For example, the statue of the East Dragon King has a dragon head and human body, intensifying its extraordinary appearance. The two generals and four servants with ordinary human faces set up a remarkable contrast to the Dragon Kings.



Deity Statues on the Left Side

Shuexian Deities: these are water-related deities that guard the safety of ships. The five statues here are five Chinese historical figures, including Da Yu, who had great accomplishments in regulating watercourses, Qu Yuan, patriot poet who killed himself by jumping into the river, Wu Zi-Xu, whose body was abandoned in the river, Xiang Yu, who committed suicide in the river, and Shou Wang, who had great strength and could move a boat on land.

The facial expressions of these five water-related deities can be categorized into two types: statues of Da Yu, Qu Yuan and Wu Zi-Xu (the front two and middle one at the back) were made on the basis of certain ideal features in Chinese people's mind, such as plump middle part of the forehead, long face but well-rounded cheeks, good-looking nose, and thick lips. The statues of Xiang Yu and Shou Wang have glaring eyes and the terrifying expressions of warriors.





Deity Statues in the Back Hall

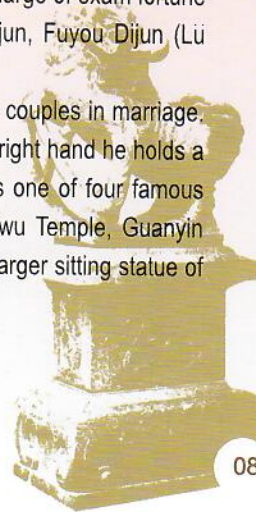
Sanguan Dadi(Three Great Emperor-Officials): the Sanguan Dadi deities are enshrined at the back of the main hall. "Sanguan" in Chinese means "three functions", as they are the gods of Heaven, Earth and Water. It is said that the Emperor-Official of Heaven bestows fortune, that of Earth bestows reprieve for misdeeds and that of Water solves difficulties.



Sacred Parents Hall

This hall initially was King Ningjing's chamber. King Ningjing's five concubines hung themselves here from the crossbeam in the front hall. Deities enshrined here currently include King Ningjing, Matsu's Father, Matsu's Mother and others with merits and virtues. In addition, five Wenchang Dijun deities that are in charge of exam fortune are enshrined here. They are Wenchang Dijun, Guansheng Dijun, Fuyou Dijun (Lü Dong-Bin), Zhuyi Shenjun, and Kuidou Xingjun.

Yuexia Deity(God of Marriage): this god matches couples in marriage. The statue (the smaller standing one) has a dignified look. In his right hand he holds a long walking stick with red silk yarn hanging from the stick. It is one of four famous marriage deities in Tainan (the other three are located at Dianwu Temple, Guanyin Temple and Chongching Temple). Right next to the statue are a larger sitting statue of the marriage deity and statues of two followers.





Fuder Deity (God of Land): this god is in charge of a small regional area. Chinese people believe that one must have land before he has any wealth, therefore, people call this deity the "God of Land", "God of Wealth", or "Fuder Deity".

Zhushan Deity (Goddess of Childbirth): this goddess is in charge of childbirth; she is the goddess protecting pregnant women, women in labor and infants.

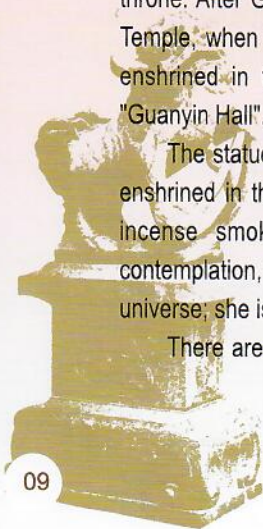
Deity Statues on Both Sides of the Main Hall

Guanyin Hall

The space in the back of the side hall was the military supervision office during Zheng's administration. It was in this hall that Zheng Jing reminded King Ningjing of his position as military supervision official, to prevent him from restoring the imperial throne. After General Shi Lang came to Taiwan he turned the mansion into Tianhou Temple, when Matsu was worshipped in the main hall and the Guanyin statue was enshrined in this military supervision office, which since then has been called "Guanyin Hall".

The statue of Guanyin Bodhisattva (Avalokitesvara, a.k.a. Goddess of Mercy) is enshrined in the center, its originally golden face has been blackened over time by incense smoke. With a solemn expression and eyelids dropping in deep contemplation, she looks as if she has already comprehended all the secrets of the universe; she is the incarnation of wisdom and realization.

There are statues of a girl and a boy located in front of Guanyin. The boy has a





high forehead, big eyes and full lips, and with palms held together as if in prayer. The innocent smile on his face inspires visitors. The girl has arched eyebrows, beautiful eyes and hair in a bun, holding an alms bowl in her hands, looking plump and elegant. The two statues reflect the true nature of young Chinese boys and girls.

San-Bao Hall

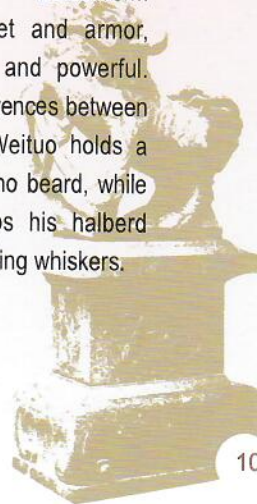
Along with the atrium, San-Bao Hall was built during the renovation done by Jiang Yun-Xun, Taiwan's governing magistrate in 1765. Nowadays we still can see an epigraph on the wall, marking the restoration of the Tianhou Temple and the construction of the dressing hall. In 1971 the original official hall was transformed into a temple hall to worship the San-Bao Buddhas; it was then renamed "Daxiong Baodian".

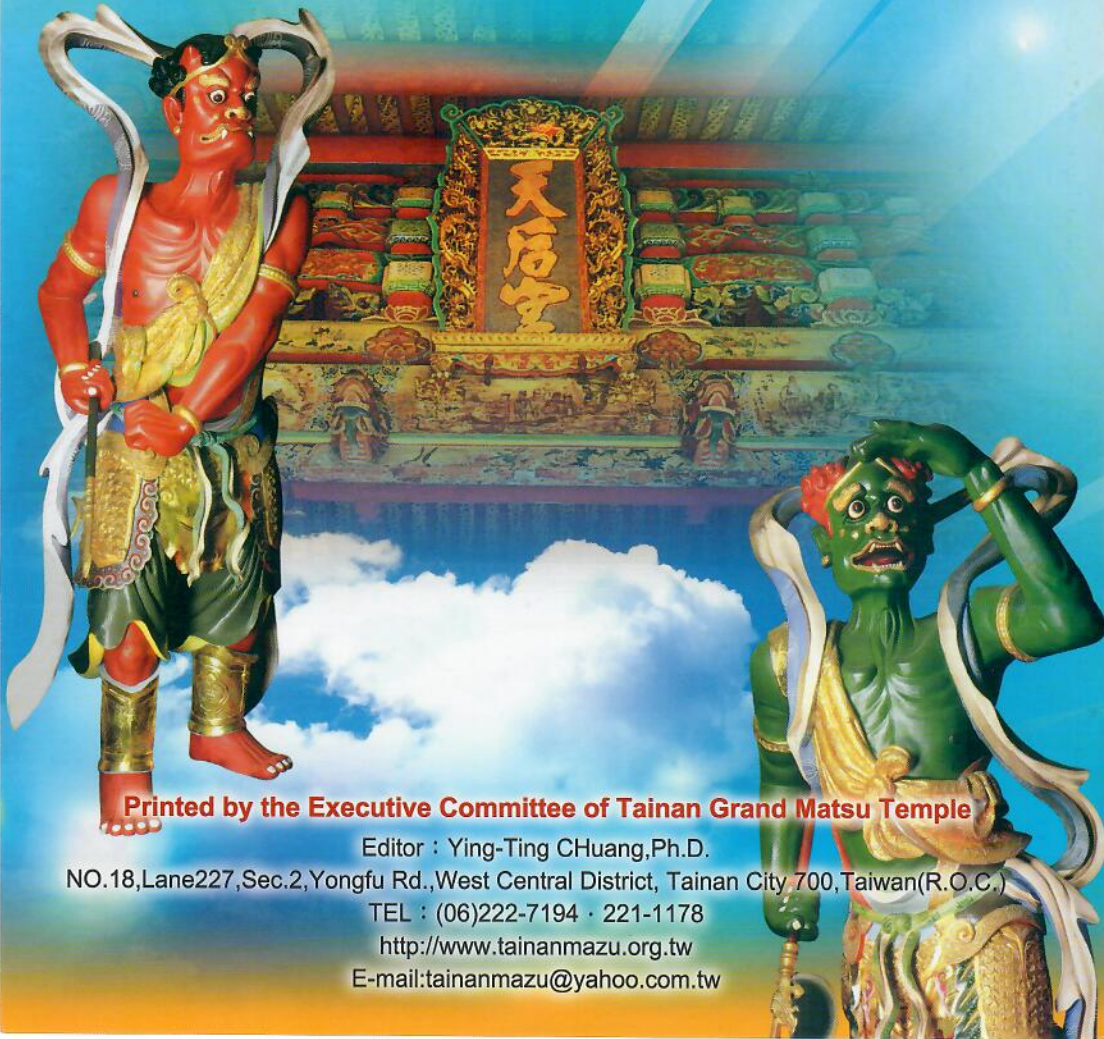
The San-Bao Buddhas are Amitabha Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha and Bhaisajya Buddha (the Medicine Buddha). Shakyamuni Buddha is the founder of Buddhism; he comprehends and accommodates all sufferings in the world with compassion. Amitabha Buddha and the Medicine Buddha give people hope for the other world after death and strength to fight illness, respectively. These three statues have a dignified and solemn appearance.

There are two guardian statues, Weituo and Guangong (Chelan Guardian),



standing in front of the San-Bao Buddhas. They are guardians of Buddhism. Wearing helmet and armor, they look tall and powerful. The major differences between the two are: Weituo holds a Vajra and has no beard, while Guangong grips his halberd and has long flying whiskers.





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