

Bixia and mother goddess worship

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_folk_religion

The worship of mother goddesses for the cultivation of offspring is present all over China, but predominantly in northern provinces. There are nine main goddesses, and all of them tend to be considered as manifestations or attendant forces of a singular goddess identified variously as Bixia (*Bixiá Yuánjūn* 碧霞元君, the "Princess of the Blue Dawn"; also known as *Tiānxiān Niángniáng* 天仙娘娘, "Heavenly Immortal Lady", or *Tàishān Niángniáng* 泰山娘娘, "Lady of Mount Tai", [x] or also *Jiùtiān Shèngmǔ* 九天圣母, [187] "Holy Mother of the Nine Skies" [xi] [188] or Houtu, the goddess of the earth. [189] Bixia herself is identified by Taoists as the more ancient goddess Xiwangmu, [190] Goddesses are commonly entitled *mǔ* (母 "mother"), *lǎomǔ* (老母 "old mother"), *shèngmǔ* (圣母 "Holy Mother"), *niángniáng* (娘娘 "lady"), *nǎinai* (奶奶 "granny"). The additional eight main goddesses of fertility, reproduction and growth are: [191]

- Banzhen Niangniang (癩疹娘娘), the goddess who protects children from illness;
- Cuisheng Niangniang (催生娘娘), the goddess who gives swift childbirth and protects midwives;
- Naimu Niangniang (奶母娘娘), the goddess who presides over maternal milk and protects nursing;
- Peigu Niangniang (培姑娘娘), the goddess who strengthens young girls;
- Peiyang Niangniang (培养娘娘), the goddess who protects the upbringing of children;
- Songzi Niangniang (送子娘娘) or Zisun Niangniang (子孙娘娘), the goddess who presides over offspring;
- Yanguang Niangniang (眼光娘娘), the goddess who protects eyesight;
- Yinmeng Niangniang (引蒙娘娘), the goddess who guides young children.



Temple of Mazu
Tianhou^[1] in Qingdao,
Shandong.



Temple of Houtu in Jiexiu, Shanxi.

Altars of goddess worship are usually arranged with Bixia at the center and two goddesses at her sides, most frequently the Lady of Eyesight and the Lady of Offspring.^[191] A different figure but with the same astral connections as Bixia is the Qixing Niangniang (七星娘娘 "Goddess of the Seven Stars").^[xii] There is also the cluster of the Holy Mothers of the Three Skies (三霄聖母 *Sanxiao Shengmu*; or "Ladies of the Three Skies", 三霄娘娘 *Sanxiao Niangniang*), composed of *Yunxiao Guniang*, *Qiongxiao Guniang* and *Bixiao Guniang*.^[192] In southeastern provinces the cult of Chen Jinggu (陳靖姑) is identified by some scholars as an emanation of the northern cult of Bixia.^[193]

Other goddesses worshipped in China include Canmu^[xiii] (蚕母 "Silkworm Mother"; or Cangu 蚕姑, "Silkworm Maiden"),^[189] identified with Leizu (嫫祖, the wife of the Yellow Emperor), Magu (麻姑 "Hemp Maiden"), Saoqing Niangniang (扫清娘娘 "Goddess who Sweeps Clean"),^[xiv]^[195] Sanzhou Niangniang (三洲娘娘 "Goddess of the Three Isles"),^[195] and Wusheng Laomu, the goddess that is the central idea of many of the folk religious sects.^[189]

Notes about the deities and their names

- i. The honorific *Tiānhòu* (天后 "Queen of Heaven") is used for many goddesses, but most frequently Mazu and Doumu.