

IMAGES OF ASIA

Temples of the
Empress of Heaven

Joseph Bosco and Puay-peng Ho



- A Yuen Long
- B Fanling
- C Kam Tin
- D Tsuen Wan
- E Yau Ma Tei
- F Nga Tsin Wai

- G Wong Tai Sing
- H Sai Kung
- I Joss House Bay
- J Tat Mun
- K Aberdeen
- L Causeway Bay

- M Tin Hau
- N Shau Kei Wan
- O Cheung Chau
- P Stanley
- Q Po Toi
- R Chiwan

Shenzhen

New Territories

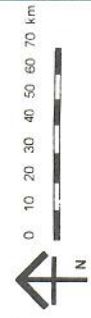
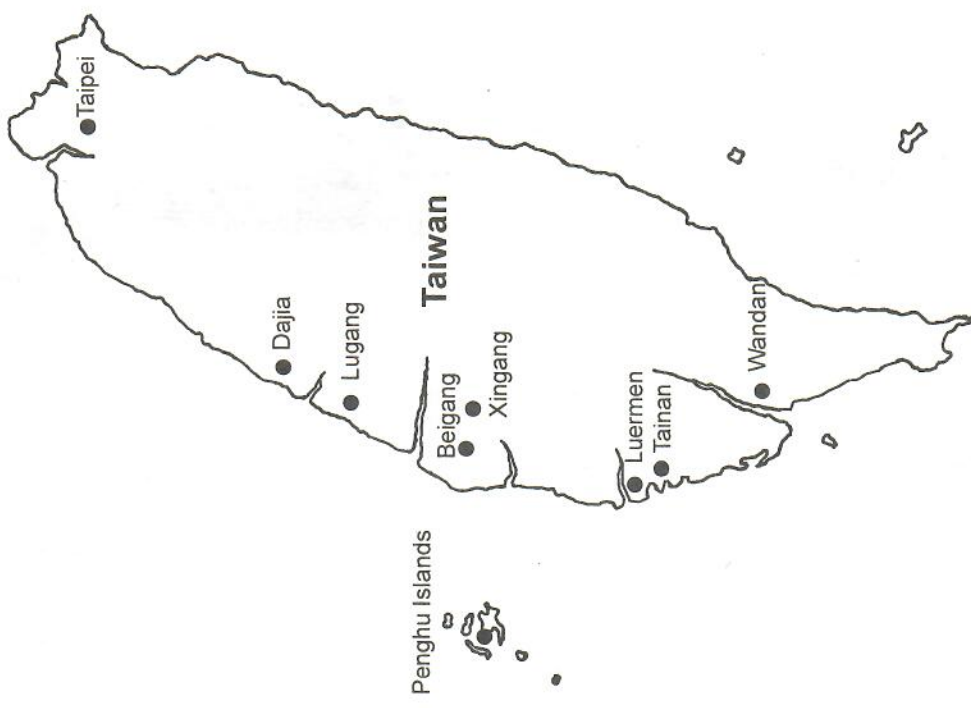
Kowloon

Lantau

Hong Kong



Major Tin Hau Temples in Hong Kong



Prominent Mazu Sites in Taiwan

IMAGES OF ASIA

Temples of the
Empress of Heaven

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Major

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JOSEPH BOSCO AND PUAY-PENG HO

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Introduction

Many non-Chinese visitors are puzzled when first entering a Chinese temple. Visitors often find few worshippers there, and they wonder what the few they do see are doing and how the temple would be used during a festival. Visitors who do chance to see a festival may have difficulty understanding what they are seeing. Even a casual visit to a temple prompts questions about the spatial layout, symbolism, and meaning of the decorative details, and the meaning of everyday worshippers' activities.

This book is designed to provide an introduction to the temples dedicated to the worship of one of the most popular deities in the southern Chinese cultural sphere. It is in some ways an introduction to the broader field of Chinese popular (or folk) religion, that mixture of beliefs which is the traditional religion of most Chinese. By focusing on one deity and its temples, we are able to simplify the topic for the reader while at the same time providing details of temples and festivals that may lead to further study. From this introduction to one deity's temples and cult, interested readers should have a foundation for learning about other deities' temples and the practices surrounding them.

For consistency, we use the term 'Tianhou' to refer to the Empress of Heaven. This is the romanization of her title in Mandarin Chinese (or Putonghua). In Hong Kong's Cantonese, she is called Tin Hau; a stop on one of the MTR subway lines is named Tin Hau because it is near one of her temples. In Taiwan and Fujian, she is popularly known as Mazu (sometimes romanized as Ma-tsu or Matsul); in the Hokkien language, Mazu is pronounced 'Ma-dzaw'. When our description focuses on regional differences, we

use the local term, but this should not suggest that these are different deities. Similarly, we use Mandarin terms when speaking generally but Cantonese (for Hong Kong and Guangdong province) and Hokkien (for Taiwan and southern Fujian) for names and terms that are regionally specific.

The southern Chinese cultural sphere includes the mainland Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong, the region of Hong Kong, and the island of Taiwan. In addition, it extends to the many South-East Asian Chinese communities, which were populated predominantly by emigrants from Fujian and Guangdong. The Tianhou cult thus transcends national or regional borders, but is most popular among southern Chinese.

It may be useful to note that the terms 'left' and 'right' in this book should be understood to mean stage left and stage right, or left and right from the point of view of the deity. This is backwards from the point of view of the visitor entering the temple but is the conventional way of describing Chinese temples.

This book focuses on several of the more popular and famous temples (especially Hong Kong's Yau Ma Tei and Joss House Bay temples and, on Taiwan, Tainan's Da Tianhou Gong), as well as some small and artistically and socially less significant ones. The reader is encouraged to visit the famous sites and to explore less well-known Tianhou temples. Hong Kong alone has over sixty Tin Hau temples, and Taiwan over five hundred. In mainland China, especially in Fujian, many of the temples being re-built are dedicated to Tianhou. She is a universalistic deity, representing larger communities and even all Chinese. Outsiders are always allowed to enter a Tianhou temple. You are allowed—indeed welcome—to buy some incense and to make an offering. Even just bowing three times in front of the statue is enough

as a sign of respect, but you are not obliged to bow if it violates your religion. A token monetary contribution in the box is also appreciated, but not required. In a time when so much traditional culture can only be seen in museums or in commercialized shows, Tianhou temples are a place where traditional Chinese religion and culture are still very much alive.

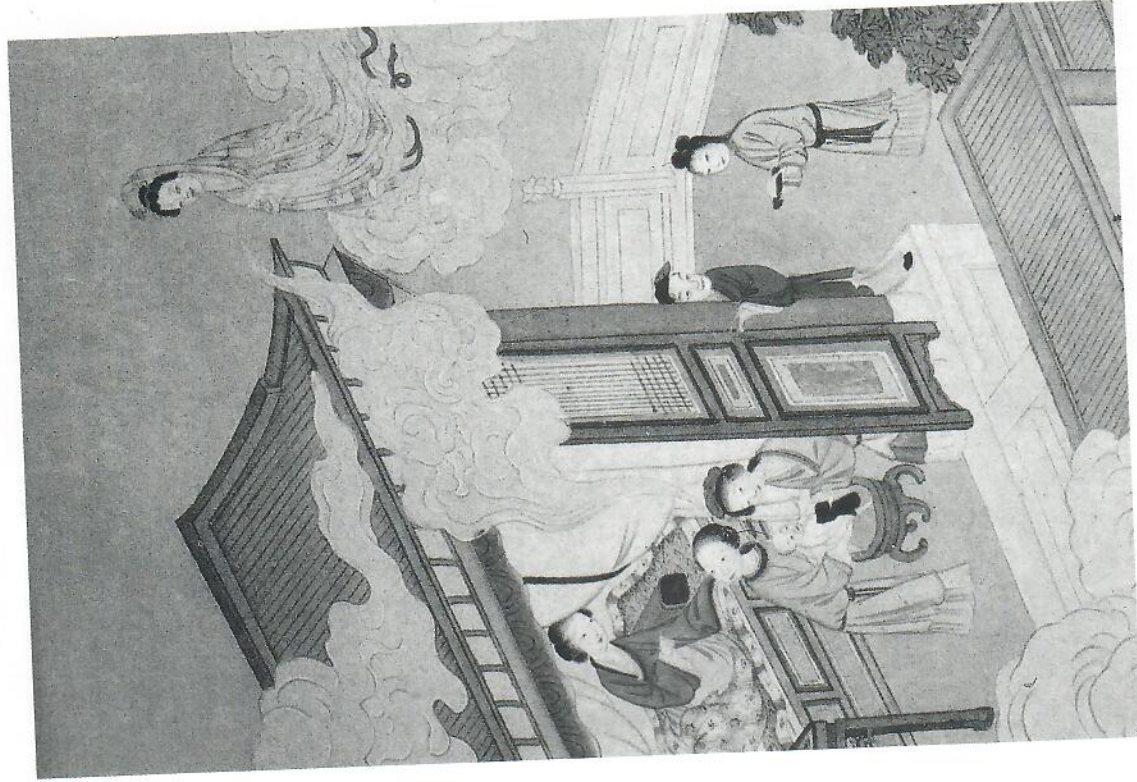
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The History of the Cult

THE CULT OF TIANHOU is based on the worship of a maiden named Lin Moniang, who is said to have lived from AD 960 to 987 in Putian county, Fujian province. There are numerous myths and legends surrounding her life, but they all agree on the general outline. She was born into a pious family, variously described as humble fisherfolk or as gentry. She is described as having had either one or four brothers, and sometimes as many as five sisters. Her conception was made possible by Guanyin, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, who gave her parents a magic pill (Fig. 1.1), and she was known as Moniang—'mute maiden'—because as a child she never cried. She studied religious texts, and when she was 16 years old a spirit came out of an old well and gave her a bronze magic charm. From that day on, she had magical power and could let her spirit travel outside her body.

Perhaps her most famous miracle is saving her father and brother (or brothers) from their wrecked ships during a storm (Fig. 1.2). Her spirit is said to have left her body at a weaving loom and pulled the ships to safety. In many versions, she is unable to save one of her brothers (in some versions it is her father), because her mother wakes her from her trance before she can save him.

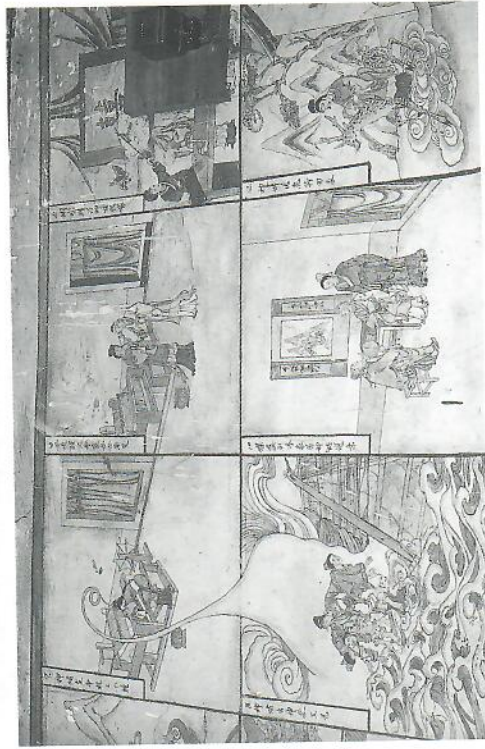
In the stories told about her, Tianhou subdues many monsters, from dragons that cause floods to demons that make mischief on bridges and boats. Two of the demons she defeats, Thousand League Eyes (who can see far and has a green face) and Favourable Wind Ears (who can hear over long distances and has a red face), become her loyal



1.1 Lin Moniang at birth, with the Goddess of Mercy Guanyin observing.

servants (see Plates 4a-b). Tianhou also overcomes the earthly equivalent of demons, pirates and bandits, by causing storms, shifting the wind, or otherwise helping government soldiers. Needless to say, these versions of her stories were most strenuously promoted by the Confucian gentry and the state, but Tianhou was also worshipped by smugglers, and in their versions of the stories she protects the common people. She also helps them to survive diseases and epidemics by providing special well water or magic pills.

Tianhou is in many ways a water deity. Thirty-five of the forty-eight entries in one collection of her stories, for example, deal with water. She ends droughts, heavy rains, and floods. She makes temporary ferries, repairs bridges, and protects merchants, officials, and soldiers who must ply the seas. Signs that temples should be built in her



1.2 Tianhou's miracles as illustrated on a Xiashan village temple wall, on Meizhou island. On the left side, she is saving her brothers and father from a shipwreck while sitting at a loom.

honour typically include blocks of wood or a censer (incense burner) floating ashore. This wood that magically floats to the shore is rescued and carved to form her image for placement in the new temple.

Tianhou is never married; in some accounts she dies from following a Buddhist vegetarian diet too strictly. She also dies young, either at 20 years of age or at 28 (the exact dates of her birth and death vary). In one official version, she ascends to heaven on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month: the time of the Chongyang festival, in which people climb mountains for good luck. On this occasion, the story goes, the celebrants suddenly heard harmonious music coming from the heavens. Looking up, they saw the resplendent Jade Emperor's sedan chair and the flags and weapons of an honour guard. Many gods arrived, and Tianhou stepped on a cloud and rose up, after which the clouds closed over her and the heavens could not be seen again. From this time on, unusual signs of Tianhou were often manifested, and a temple to her was first erected.

Chinese had worshipped other water deities before Tianhou's arrival. In Hong Kong one can still find temples to Hong Sheng, a male water deity who predates Tianhou. In parts of Fujian, there are other female water deities whose cults were absorbed by that of the Empress of Heaven. Beliefs in water dragons are also ancient and were often supplanted by worship of Tianhou. Tianhou first became popular during the Song dynasty (AD 960-1279). In order to understand her cult, we need to have a clear view of Tianhou's position in the development of Chinese popular religion.

Tianhou in Popular Religion

Chinese popular religion is made up of a mixture of Daoism and Buddhism, with the addition of adherence to Confucian precepts and ancestor worship. Confucian thought is more a philosophy than a religion. With the fall of the last Chinese dynasty in 1911 it lost its officials, but its values—especially an emphasis on hierarchy and certain familial relationships—have since been revived and maintained by some Chinese leaders. Many Chinese also consider ancestor worship as not a religion; instead, it is simply described as practices designed to show respect for the dead. Daoism has a priesthood, but these figures are called upon only to perform special rituals, and few temples are exclusively Daoist. Buddhism has its monks and nuns, and monasteries are exclusively Buddhist. But at most village temples, Chinese worship both Buddhist and Daoist deities, and they follow ideals of Confucianism and ancestor worship in the home.

When one asks Chinese what their religion is, many will say Buddhist, a few might say Daoist, but many will say they have none. This is especially true in mainland China, where popular religion is officially considered to be merely 'superstition'. Even people who periodically make offerings at temples may claim not to have a religion, because they view the term as including only the great traditions, such as Buddhism. Despite these restrictive definitions, most Chinese participate in what we can call popular religion.

Popular religion in the Chinese world mixes these strains of thought. Some deities, such as the Maitreya Buddha, the Buddha of the Future (usually portrayed, fat and laughing, in a seated or lying position), can often be found in popular temples alongside typical Daoist deities such as Guandi

(the god of wealth, loyalty, and war), Marshall Wen (the Plague God), or San Taizi (Nazha, the Third Prince). Indeed, most Daoist temples seem also to have a statue of the Buddhist Guanyin in them, although she is the feminine form of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Fig. 1.3).

Tianhou is clearly in the Daoist tradition, in that she learned charms and fought demons. Yet, she is also often associated with—indeed confused with—Guanyin, perhaps because both are female deities to whom people appeal for mercy and help. Since Guanyin helped Tianhou's parents conceive her, some even think of Tianhou as an earthly incarnation of Guanyin. Tianhou also has a Confucian layer to her cult; the imperial bureaucracy gave her titles and elevated her status in the celestial hierarchy in acknowledgement of her help to state officials and in recognition of her filial behaviour. Thus, her cult combines Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian elements.

The Tianhou cult arose during the Song dynasty, in an era of religious revival. The Daoist priests were powerful at the time, and the Daoist celestial hierarchy was clearly delineated. The Daoist pantheon was led by the Jade Emperor, and other gods held various offices under him in the celestial bureaucracy. During the Song arose a number of local deities, like Tianhou, who did not fit into the celestial hierarchy. These deities were much like Catholic saints: they allowed worshippers to request special favours through spirit patrons, bypassing the priests and celestial officials.

The logic of bureaucracy, however, does not allow special favours: one must follow the bureaucratic rules. But deities that are not part of the bureaucratic hierarchy can sometimes intercede on worshippers' behalf, granting ad hoc favours in response to direct appeals. In this way, Tianhou appears to have begun as a medium and fortune-teller; only a century later was her parents' identity dis-

cussed, and with it the myths of divine birth and filial piety. In the development of Tianhou's worship, the cult of a soothsayer was transformed into that of a god.

From the Song dynasty, during which she is said to have been born, through the Yuan (1279–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) and into the Qing (1644–1911), the last imperial dynasty, Tianhou was given increasingly higher and more exalted titles. At first she was known only as Powerful and Thoughtful Numinous Woman. Her first official title was Divine Kindly Lady, bestowed in 1156. In 1192 she was given the title of Divine Kindly Imperial Concubine, and in 1278, Kublai Khan himself named her Celestial Concubine.



1.3 A statue of Guanyin, with her guardian Wei Tuo in front, in the lin'an Gong in Tainan. Guanyin is often confused with Tianhou.

In 1409 the Yongle emperor (r.1403-24) added to her title so that it became Celestial Concubine who Protects the Nation and Defends the People. In 1684, in recognition of her aid in the conquering of Taiwan, the Kangxi emperor (r.1662-1722) elevated her to Empress of Heaven, and in 1839 she was also given the title, 'Heavenly Sainly Mother', an appellation often used in Taiwan. The state awarded her titles both in recognition of her miracles and popularity and also to buttress its legitimacy through association with her good reputation.

The many variants of her myth reflect in part the social position of the tellers, with the state emphasizing her adherence to Confucian values and the common people stressing her helpfulness and magical power. In many cases, the emperor gave her titles by which she was already being popularly referred, thus legitimizing local customs and trying to marshal local cultural forces, rather than truly leading the cult. The titles were given to her for meritorious behaviour as recognized by the state, such as helping troops fight rebels. More and larger temples were built to her, officials were required to worship at those temples, and in a few instances scrolls and plaques were donated to them by the emperor.

It is not a coincidence that Tianhou is a female deity. First, a female who does not marry is potentially dangerous, and thus powerful, because when she dies there are no male descendants to worship her soul. Even today in Taiwan it is not uncommon for temples to be established to worship the souls of women whose bodies have washed ashore. These spirits or water fairies are thought able to cause problems, but they also have the power to grant wishes.

Furthermore, Tianhou, like Guanyin, refused to marry, and was thus untainted by sexual intercourse or childbirth. Tianhou, however, even though she died at 28 years of age,

is usually represented as a maternally woman. In some places her popular name even refers to her as 'mother' or 'grandma', as in Macao, where the term 'Ah-ma' is used, in Taiwan and Fujian, where she is known as Mazu, and in other areas, where she is sometimes known as 'Ma-zu-po', a dialect version of 'grandma'. All these examples include the character 'ma', for mother. People also often say she is like a mother and protects her children as a mother would. In this respect, her premature death, like the Catholic concept of virgin birth, creates a 'virgin mother'.

The Spread of the Cult

Lin Moniang lived in Putian, but worshippers spread her cult along the length of the Fujian coast and south to Guangdong. According to one version of her myth, people erected a small temple to her after her ascent to heaven in 987. In 1098 a shiny brass incense pot washed up from the sea and was donated to the temple. Then a strange piece of wood floated ashore, and villagers were told in a dream to use it to make an image of Tianhou. Merchants and travellers who were helped by her donated money for a temple, and the first temple officially dedicated to her was built in 1122. By the early 1200s, her cult was said to be common in southern China.

One factor that has aided in the spread of the cult is the custom of fisherfolk carrying a statue of the goddess on their boats. Even today, she can often be seen in a small shrine at the bow. The Tianhou temple in Macao is said to have been established by fisherfolk from Fujian; its name, A-ma-ge, is said to come from the Fujianese pronunciation of her name, 'A-ma'. As early as 1266, a temple to Tianhou had been built in present-day Hong Kong. The Joss House

Bay temple was built by two brothers of Fujianese origin who traded between Guangdong and Fujian and wished to thank Tianhou for sparing their lives in a storm.

Chinese first settled on Taiwan during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and migrants brought the worship of Tianhou with them to the island. In many places in Taiwan, we can date the presence of a Chinese community by the date at which the temple to Tianhou was first dedicated. Indeed, Tianhou became virtually the patron goddess of the island, in part because she was the deity who protected migrants on the perilous journey across the Taiwan Strait, and also as she was the goddess who could help them control water for farming once settled on the land. Tianhou is also credited both with helping Koxinga expel the Dutch from Taiwan in 1662 and with helping the Qing forces conquer the island in 1683. First she helped the mainland troops to find a well with drinking water in a sandy coastal area, and in June 1683 she appeared with her generals as the Qing navy bombed the Penghu Islands on the first part of the invasion.

Tianhou is credited in official accounts with helping Qing forces to put down a rebellion in 1721. It is said that she raised the tide so naval vessels could travel inland on a river near Tainan to stage a surprise attack on the rebels. Furthermore, during the intensive Allied bombing of Taiwan during the Second World War, Tianhou was seen in many parts of the island catching bombs in mid-air with her apron and diverting them from temples and from residential areas so they would not hurt people. The Tianhou temple in Wandan, Pingdong county, displays the shell of an Allied bomb that landed near the temple but failed to explode because it landed in a room full of soft rice husks. Many believe this fortunate landing was not just luck.

Tianhou rose in the official celestial hierarchy to be

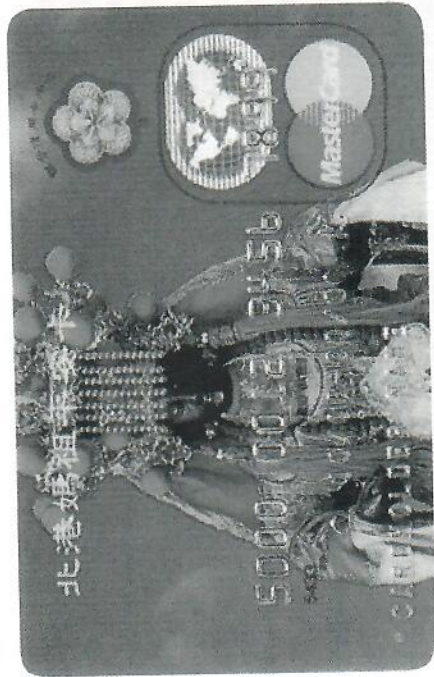
Empress of Heaven, but she is never represented or thought of as married to the Jade Emperor, the ruler of heaven. Her title is a sign of her high rank, comparable to the term 'emperor' (*di*) of males such as Guandi (Lord Guan, the god of war). Despite her rank, she is not a bureaucrat and can be directly approached by the most humble worshipper. She has remained most popular in Fujian, Taiwan, and Guangdong, and most of the temples dedicated to her are in southern China. Migrants from these areas have taken her cult with them when they have moved to other places. Fujian merchants in Tianjin in northern China built a temple to her as part of the work of the merchants' association. Migrants to South-East Asia (for example, to Singapore, Penang, Thailand, and Java) have built temples to Tianhou as well. There are even temples dedicated to the Empress of Heaven in San Francisco, São Paulo, Kobe, and Paris.

The Meaning of Tianhou Today

Today, Tianhou continues to be a major deity in southern China and South-East Asia. Thousands worship at her temples and host guests during her festivals, and while fewer people than in the past may participate in festivals by joining public processions, they are using their increasing wealth to rebuild temples and take pilgrimages to famous sites of worship. In Taiwan, her temples are among the three most common: According to a study from 1979, there were 670 temples dedicated to Wangye, the Plague God, 578 to Guanyin, and 510 to Mazu. In 1997 it was estimated that there were about 800 temples to Mazu in Taiwan, and 500 in mainland China. Over 100,000 Taiwanese per year reportedly travel to Meizhou, on the Fujian coast, to worship at the ancestral temple there.

Tianhou continues to be important in representing multiple levels of Chinese identity. She captures both the globalism of the pan-Chinese world, since all Chinese recognize her status, but at the same time she represents various local identities of southern Chinese, Fujianese, or Taiwanese. For southern Chinese overseas, Tianhou as a Chinese deity represents Chineseness. All Chinese worship her, and she is a reminder of China. Chinese communities in South-East Asia often use their Tianhou temple as their community focal point, and Tianhou festivals are Chinese festivals.

In Taiwan, Mazu is still thought to be the island's patron deity, especially for Taiwanese whose ancestors arrived before the Second World War. In contrast, the refugees from Communism who came with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949 (the so-called mainlanders) tended to be from northern or central China and were either not inclined to worship Tianhou or even seen to regard all popular religion as



1.4 Beigang Tianhou on a credit card, called a 'safe and sound card'.

superstition and a waste of money. As mentioned above, Mazu is credited with protecting Taiwan from Allied bombers. As a result, she is thought of as the protector of the native Taiwanese whose ancestors made the dangerous crossing from Fujian centuries ago (Fig. 1.4).

Some even argue that the Mazu worshipped in Taiwan is a Taiwanese deity, and that she represents an independent Taiwanese nation. But since she, like the migrants, came from mainland China, she also symbolizes a broader definition of Chineseness, and so she subverts the more extreme arguments of Taiwanese cultural distinctiveness. In 1980, the late president Chiang Ching-kuo, even though he was a Christian, donated a statue of Mazu to the Beigang (Pei-kang) Chaotian Gong, one of Taiwan's most famous Mazu temples. This gift was recognized as a gesture of reconciliation between the minority mainlanders (who then dominated the government) and native Taiwanese.

In 1997 the Meizhou temple's image of Mazu visited Taiwan (Plate 1), spending one hundred days and being displayed at several Mazu temples. Although nominally a cultural visit, political symbolism loomed large throughout, particularly since Mazu was credited with having helped the Qing dynasty to conquer the island and reunite it with China in 1683. Advocates of Taiwan independence objected to the visit, claiming it was imperialistic because it was referred to by mainland authorities as a 'patrol' of the island. In this way, national identity is debated through worship of Mazu.

At a more local level, a Tianhou temple represents the local face-to-face community. It is common in Hong Kong and Taiwan for village emigrants to return for temple festivals, and visiting a temple or participating in one of her festivals is seen as a statement of local identity. When in July 1994 the residents of the fishing village of Kungliao,

in Taiwan, protested against government plans to build a nuclear reactor near their village, they brought their statue of Mazu with them to Taipei to join their protest and placed her on a temporary altar in front of the Legislature. In Taiwan, a few of the older temples (such as those in Beigang, Tainan, and Lugang) are the destinations of millions of pilgrims and compete to be the most popular and powerful temples on the island.

In mainland China, temples are now being rebuilt even where they were completely destroyed. Most of the destruction occurred in the course of the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976, but many temples had been closed or put to other uses (such as for storage, schools, and offices) even before the advent of Communist rule in 1949. Many members of China's élites have been hostile to popular religion for close to a century; anti-traditionalism became pre-dominant following the May Fourth Movement in 1919, during which it was argued that old cultural patterns were holding back China's progress.

The Chinese government today seems willing to allow the rebuilding of temples in large part because it attracts overseas Chinese donations and investment, and serves to promote reunification with Taiwan and Hong Kong. Thus, the revival of popular religion and the reconstruction of temples is most prevalent in southern China, the region from which most Chinese emigrated and to which they return. The caretakers of many temples have found that once an initial renovation is completed, the donations from visitors are more than enough to continue funding further embellishments. The gains to be made from tourism and the hope of overseas Chinese investment make the reconstruction of temples attractive.

Temple Construction and Form

MOST BUILDINGS IN CHINA follow a simple layout and form not much changed in the 3,000-year history of the imperial era. A rectangular layout is used for the foundation of many building types, from houses to temples. A temple would share the architectural form of a house for the simple reason that temples are seen as homes for deities. The method of construction of each building is also remarkably consistent, with a timber structure supporting the roof and the whole encased by a brick wall on the exterior. In smaller buildings, the brick wall may also be a load-bearing structure. The roof is often sealed with grey ceramic tiles.

Regional variations in a building are usually the result of the variety of local materials, construction practices, and decorative preferences. Thus, a temple would be similar in form and construction to a house in the locality surrounding it, only differing in the amount of decoration visible on it. Likewise, in the vicinity of each other, temples to different deities may look very similar, differing in size and ornateness depending chiefly on the level of patronage they enjoy. Temples dedicated to a single deity, such as Tianhou, may differ in form dramatically from region to region: a Tin Hau temple in Hong Kong may appear to be quite different from a Mazu temple in Taiwan or a Tianhou temple in northern China. In short, temple architecture is most often locality specific, not cult specific.

Despite this general nature of Chinese temples, some aspects of the Tianhou cult make her temples distinctive. The iconography of the images housed within the compound is the only sure sign identifying the temple's deity, but temple setting and decorative schema can sometimes

also provide clues. In this chapter, the architecture of the goddess's temples will be introduced, beginning from the temple's setting and ending with the details of building decoration. At each level, aspects of the temple that relate to its identification with Tianhou will be highlighted. Knowing how to appreciate the architecture of Tianhou's temples will allow the reader to understand better the temples of other deities within each region discussed.

The Building of a Tianhou Temple

Because many of her devotees have been fisherfolk, most Tianhou temples are found in fishing villages. Village temples by the sea account for the majority of Tin Hau temples in Hong Kong. Some early Mazu temples were also built by the sea in Taiwan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by settlers from the mainland. These village temples often started out as a small structure and were rebuilt and enlarged as the temple's fortunes grew. These fishing village temples always face the sea and are usually located at the water's edge.

Tianhou temples, including most of the temples in Taiwan dedicated to the goddess, are also found inland in towns and farming villages. Inland temples were often built by traders from Fujian or Guangdong provinces, or by villagers who for one reason or another had adopted Tianhou as their patron goddess. Many traders from Fujian took with them an image of the goddess for protection on the land or sea. A temple would be built when the trader settled down in an adopted town, particularly when he was successful in his venture.

A number of temples in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao, as well as in towns and cities in northern China, are said

to have been built under these circumstances. An early example is the temple in Joss House Bay, said to have been built in the twelfth century by Fujianese traders passing by the bay. Some temples dedicated to the goddess in northern cities, such as the famous Tianjin Tianhou temple, were built by the Fujian merchant guild for a similar reason. These temples were often built close to the port or where southerners congregated. Temples built by a guild would be either a part of the guild compound or located next to the guild buildings.

There are other reasons why Tianhou was adopted in farming villages. In the case of Hong Kong's villages, some have argued that at the end of the forced evacuation of the coastal area in 1669 (ordered by the Qing emperor to help cut off and defeat remnants of Ming rule on Taiwan), villagers returned to the New Territories and adopted Tin Hau as the patron goddess of the village in order to seek official favours, as the goddess was given the elevated status of the Empress of Heaven (Tianhou or Tin Hau) early in the period of Qing dynasty rule. In single-lineage villages, where all males are descendants of one person, the ancestral hall—and not the temple—served as the physical and social centre of the village. A temple dedicated to a deity like Tianhou may have been present, but it was smaller than usual and often oriented in the same direction as the ancestral hall (see, for example, the Lung Yeuk Tau village temple near Fanling, Hong Kong).

Some temples were founded as official sites, and therefore were supported by state funds. The Da Tianhou Gong in Tainan was the former mansion of a Ming prince who came to Taiwan with Koxinga; the building was converted to a Tianhou temple after the conquest of Taiwan by the Qing army. It then served as the official temple where government officials would conduct rituals twice a month

on behalf of the emperor. Another official temple (although on a very low level) is one located in the walled village of Nga Tsin Wai Tsuen in Kowloon city, Hong Kong. It is said to have been built by the soldiers protecting the last emperor of the Song dynasty from the pursuing Mongolian army. In this case, the temple was located in the middle of the walled village and has long since lost its status as an official temple.

Temple Orientation

To understand a Chinese temple properly, it is best to start at the broadest level, the site setting and orientation. Cardinal orientation of a building in traditional China was considered very important. Major buildings, such as palaces, temples, and mansions, were most often built to face south, a tradition that has been traced back to the fifteenth century BC by analysis of the archaeological sites of palatial buildings.

The consistent southerly orientation for important buildings has been given many explanations. The most logical seems to be that since China is located in the northern hemisphere, facing south provides warmth for the building interior during the winter months. However, a preference for the south was given a cosmological explanation in texts from the sixth century BC. Access to the *yang* force (in the *yin-yang* duality) befits persons in power, such as the emperor and the gods. In these early sources, south is said to be the direction of the maximum *yang*, and so facing south allows the master of the building most readily to tap into the *yang* cosmic force. The preference for a south-facing site was later given greater significance as the manifestation of personal power. This symbolism is expressed in

placement of the throne or seat to face south, the favourable direction, while the subordinates are made to face north, the inferior direction.

In reality, however, not all temples in China face south. One reason for exceptions to the rule is the limitation of the terrain for temples located on hills. Another is that some temples are dedicated to deities who require a different symbolic orientation. One such deity is Tianhou. As she is the sea goddess, her temples are often oriented towards the sea, which may require them to face any direction, including the less favourable north. Tin Hau temples in Hong Kong are oriented in many directions: those on the northern shore of Hong Kong island, such as the Causeway Bay and Shau Kei Wan temples, face north, while those on the southern shore of the island, the Aberdeen and Stanley temples among them, face south. The Sai Kung temple, on the eastern side of the Kowloon peninsula, faces north-east, and temples along the western coast, such as those at Yau Ma Tei and Tsuen Wan, face west. In a farming village or town, the Tianhou temple may also not face south due to other considerations, such as *fengshui* requirements or the layout of the town itself. The Da Tianhou Gong in Tainan faces west, as do a number of Mazu temples in Tainan. For *fengshui* reasons, the Tin Hau temple in the village of Lung Yeuk Tau, in Hong Kong's New Territories, faces north.

The orientation of Tianhou's temples towards the sea and their location next to water is explained as necessary for the goddess to have a view of the ocean so that she can come swiftly to the rescue of distressed fishermen. Such an orientation not only symbolizes the goddess's relationship with the sea, it is also convenient for the purposes of ritual: both when departing for and returning from a journey or fishing expedition. Temples in Hong

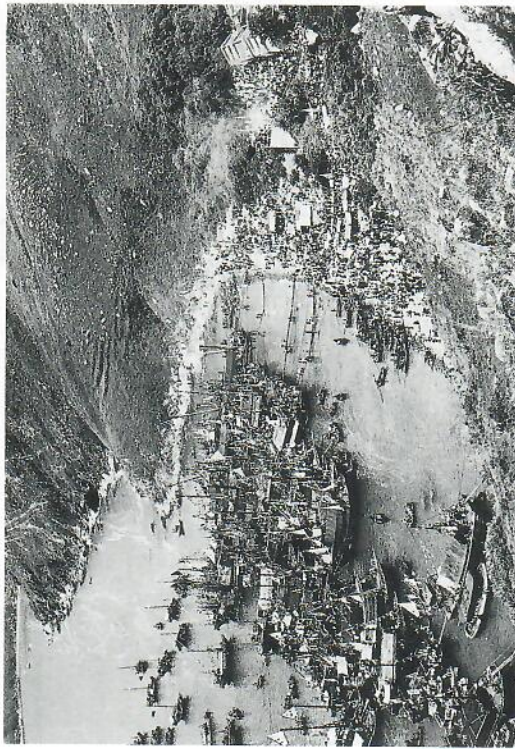
Kong, such as those in Causeway Bay, Yau Ma Tei, and Aberdeen, which once faced the sea, are now surrounded by skyscrapers, and due to successive land reclamation programmes they are clearly far removed from the shoreline. It is important to remember, however, that when they were first built, they were located in fishing villages close by the shore.

In today's Hong Kong, one has to visit the outlying islands in order to comprehend how most Tin Hau temples in the territory were originally oriented. Temples on Tat Mun, Po Toi, and Cheung Chau islands, and the temple at Joss House Bay (Fig. 2.1), still preserve their waterfront setting, which is the most direct manifestation of the nature and function of the temple. The Ah-Ma temple in Macao was once right at the water's edge, but it is now set back from the sea due to recent sea reclamation (Plate 2).

In Sai Kung, the temple's line of sight to the sea is preserved despite the construction of apartments on newly reclaimed land in front of the building. Devotees objected to the land reclamation and to the proposed apartment blocks to be constructed in front of their temple. After much negotiation the construction plan was accepted, on the condition that a sightline corridor from the temple to the sea be preserved through the new buildings. This example shows the importance of the sea-facing site orientation for Tianhou temples. Unfortunately, the temple in Sai Kung is the only place in Hong Kong where this all-important issue has been fought over and won by the supporters of a temple.

Stelae recording the building and rebuilding of a Tianhou temple in Chiwan, Shenzhen, on the shore of Deep Bay opposite from Hong Kong, underline the importance of such an orientation. It is said that in facing the sea, the temple was the first building returning fishermen would see,

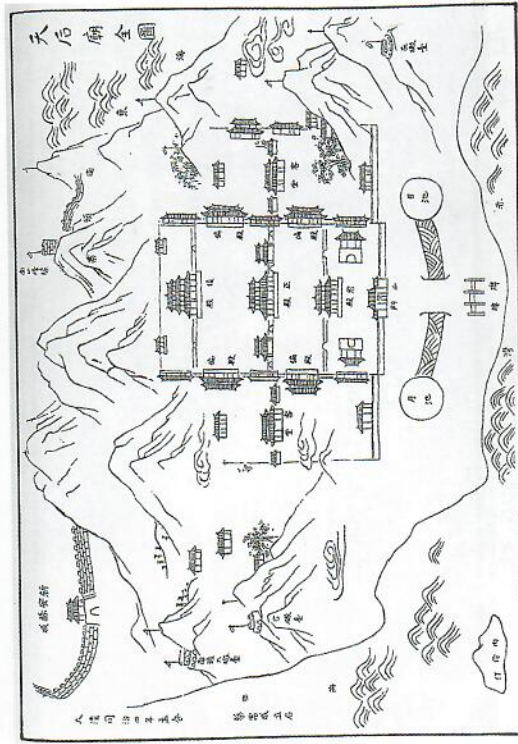
signifying that the temple offered more than just a house for the goddess but was also an important spiritual beacon for the fishermen. During the late Ming dynasty, when Chinese envoys were sent to the southern seas (to South Asia and South-East Asia), one of the ports of departure was near the temple at Chiwan. Before embarking on the treacherous journey, the envoy would pray at the temple for a safe journey. On returning safely, thanksgiving was offered there. These rituals were followed in a simpler form when fishermen left and returned.



2.1 The Joss House Bay temple, Hong Kong, during a festival, c.1950 (courtesy of the Public Records Office, Hong Kong SAR Government).

Siting and Fengshui Consideration

Fengshui, or geomancy, is a set of principles for the proper siting and orientation of houses, commercial buildings, temples, and graves to promote prosperity. Concern for the correct siting of the temple according to *fengshui* principles is not peculiar to Tianhou's cult; in traditional China, consulting the geomancy of any building site was necessary before construction could begin. Most organizers would have engaged a geomancy expert to look at the site to determine an auspicious orientation for the new temple building. The proper reading of the land would harness the

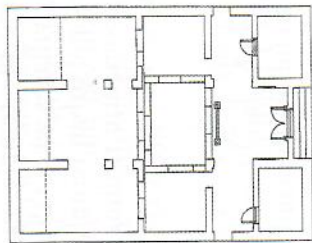


2.2 A diagram showing the *fengshui* considerations of the Chiwan temple, Shekou, in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, with the temple facing the sea and surrounded on the other three sides by mountains.

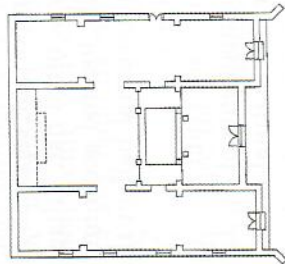
most auspicious natural forces and assure the prosperity of the temple and of the community sponsoring it. For Hong Kong's Yau Ma Tei Tin Hau temple, the geomantic reading of the site prescribed a direction of due west, facing the sea. The land formation around the temple was often less important, especially in fishing villages where the topography is often flat. Village temples and urban temples were usually located according to the geomantic reading of the main ancestral hall in the village, or the street pattern of the town.

In the selection of a temple site, the two most important components of the landscape are the land form and the water. The natural forces are said to follow the land formation known as the dragon vein. At the end of the vein should be a repository for natural forces, such as an open ground or a pond. In the case of a Tianhou temple, the sea is often the repository of auspicious forces. In this reading of the landscape, the idea is that auspicious forces will travel with the dragon vein and be deposited at the open area where the temple is sited. Many Tianhou temples in Hong Kong are sited this way, such as the temples at Yau Ma Tei, Sai Kung, and Aberdeen. The Tianhou temple at Chiwan was moved once from its original location in a search for a more propitious site. The site eventually chosen is described as having very good *fengshui* (Fig. 2.2): The temple not only faces the sea with a mountain to its back, but it is also said in the stele commemorating the renovation of the temple that there are islands in the sea that act as a bell, drum, and altar table (the necessary elements in a grand temple) in the geomantic reading. This formation is fully in line with the ideal *fengshui* setting.

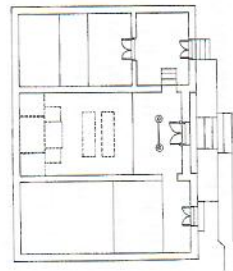
TEMPLES OF THE EMPRESS OF HEAVEN



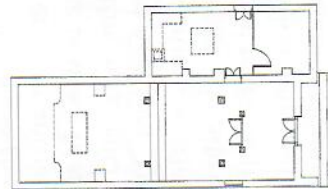
Yuen Long



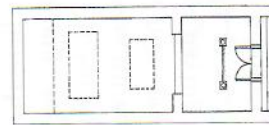
Tsuen Wan



Po Toi Island



Lamma Island



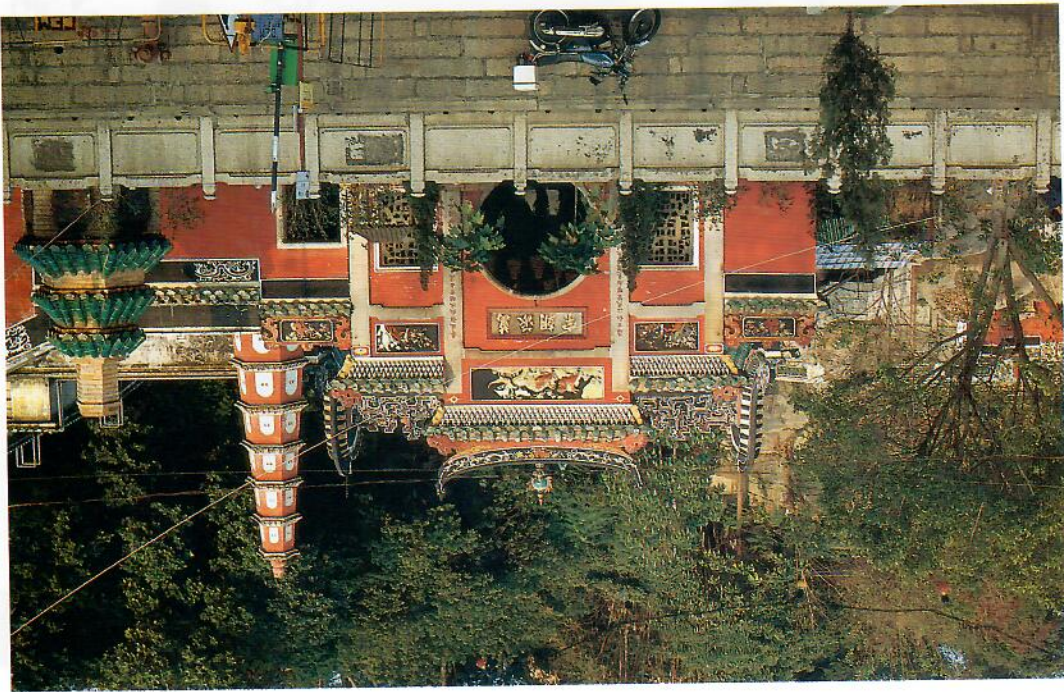
Cheung Chau



1. The Meizhou Mazu being taken off the aeroplane upon her arrival in Taiwan (with permission of the Central News Agency, Hong Kong Bureau).

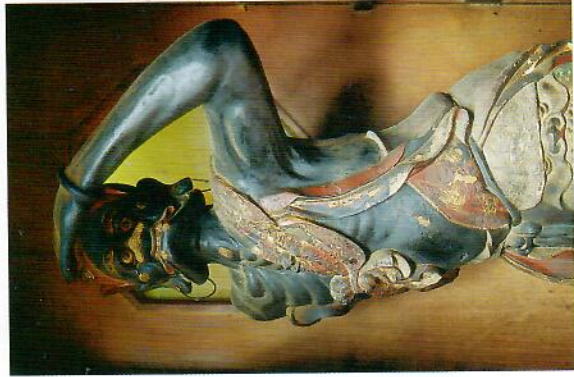
2.3 Plans of several temples in Hong Kong demonstrating the various sizes and types of spatial organization.

2. The Macau temple, known as A-Ma Ge. Some scholars think the name Macau comes from the Portuguese mispronouncing the temple's name.

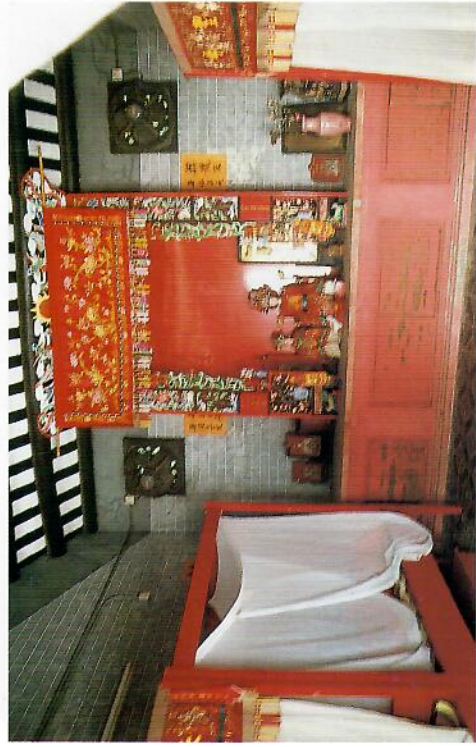


3. The interior of the main hall of the Yau Ma Tei temple, Hong Kong.





4a-b. The demon servants of Tianhou, Thousand League Eyes (top) and Favourable Wind Ears (bottom), from the Tianhou Gong in Lugang, Taiwan.



5. The bedchamber of Tin Hau in the Joss House Bay temple, Hong Kong.



6. A front view of the Tianhou Gong, Lugang, Taiwan.



8a-b. Decorations on a Taiwanese temple: deities on the roof ridge of the Tianhou Gong, Luermen, Taiwan (top) and the newly painted ceiling of the Wanhui Gong, Wandan, Taiwan (bottom).



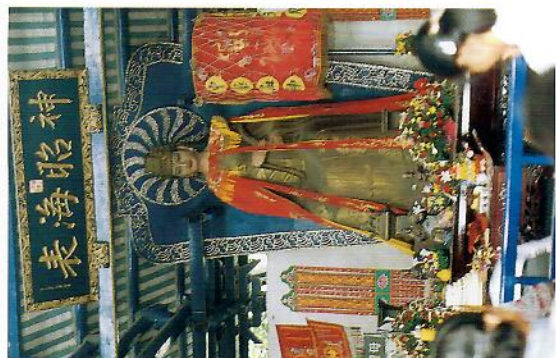
7. A front view of the Da Tianhou Gong, Tainan, Taiwan.



9a Images of Tianhou: from the Jingqiu Gong in Putian, Fujian.



9b-d. Images of Tianhou: from the Yuen Long Tin Hau temple, Hong Kong (top), the Tianhou Gong in Luermen, Taiwan (upper right), and the newly rebuilt temple in Shekou, in the Shenzhen (right).





10. Devotees with offerings to Tianhou at the Tianhou Miao, Shekou, Shenzhen.



12. The ancestral temple, Meizhou, Fujian.



11. A devotee asking for his fortune in the Tin Hau temple, Yuen Long, Hong Kong.



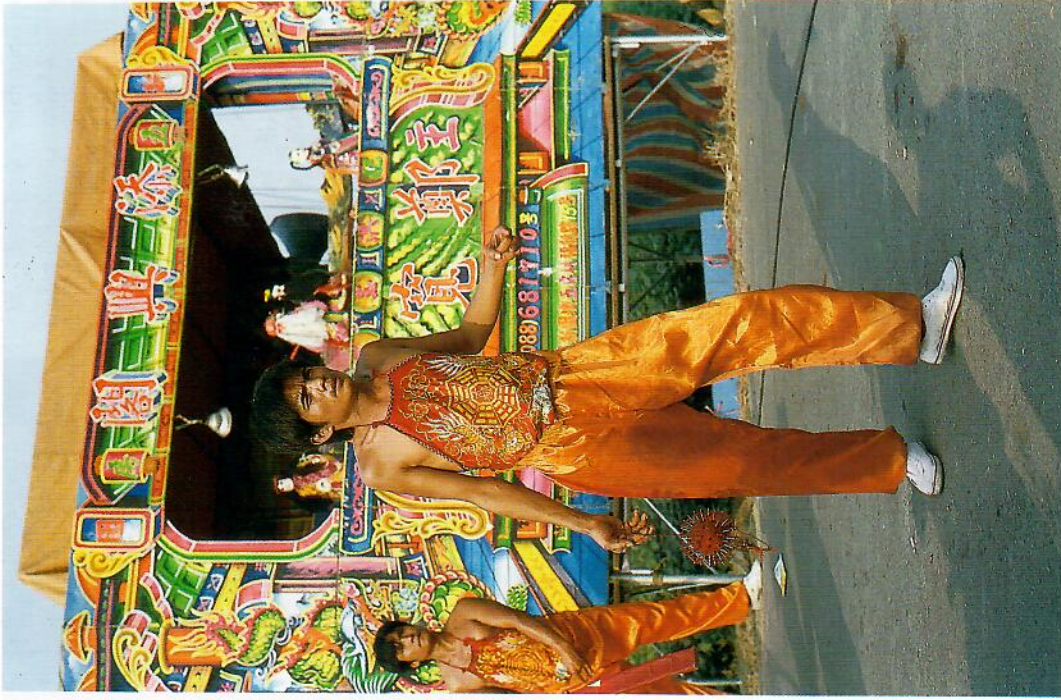
13. The Tianhou Gong, Luermen, Taiwan. This is one of the most elaborate Mazu temples in Taiwan.



14. A god's palanquin being carried by eight men in the traditional fashion through the streets of Lugang, Taiwan (photo courtesy of Kung Hsien-sen).



15. Pinwheels, often sold at festivals in Hong Kong, have auspicious sayings on them and are believed to bring good luck.



16. A shaman in trance during a Mazu procession in Wanda, Taiwan. In the background is a puppet show.

18. Boys push a mechanical parasol banner during a night procession in Wanda, Taiwan. Traditionally the parasol was carried and twirled by an adult male.



17. Fa-pau at the Yuen Long Tin Hau temple, Hong Kong.



19. Bajiajiang: ghostly generals on procession in Wanda, Taiwan.

Spatial Organization of the Buildings

Structurally, a Chinese temple may be regarded as a complex of buildings linked together to form a rectangular entity. These buildings are usually organized around one or more courtyards open to the sky, and a complex is often described in terms of the number of courtyards it contains. The more courtyards the complex includes, the bigger it is and the higher its position in the hierarchy of architecture. The simplest temple is one that consists of an individual building; the most complicated may be one containing nine courtyards within the complex. Many village temples in Taiwan and Hong Kong are comprised of a simple image hall facing a plaza with no courtyard. More commonly, a temple comprises a plaza, an entrance hall, a courtyard, and a main hall, all aligned along a central axis (Fig. 2.3). There may or may not be side verandas next to the courtyard.

More elaborately, a temple may have an added courtyard and a rear hall behind the main hall, as is seen in the case of the Da Tianhou Gong in Tainan. The rear hall is used as the bedchamber of the goddess, or as a hall dedicated to her parents or other deities. The addition of a third building along the central axis of the temple, resulting in a complex of three halls and two courtyards, is more common in Taiwan than in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, a temple is usually enlarged in the lateral direction, with added halls and courtyards on either side of the central group. In the Joss House Bay temple, for example, three such buildings were built, while in the Yau Ma Tei temple, five were built. These added buildings may be dedicated to other deities, or used as offices. In more elaborate temples in Taiwan, the original structure may have been expanded

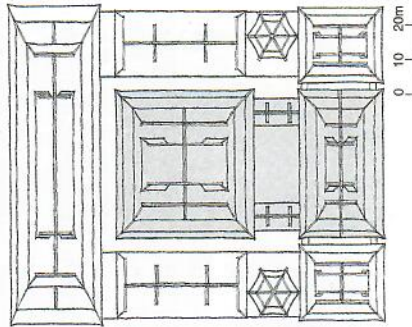


20. Tin Hau in a sedan chair in Cheung Chau, Hong Kong.

both along the central axis and laterally, as is seen in the Luermen Tianhou Gong in Tainan (Fig. 2.4; see also Plate 13).

The construction of a temple can take many years and involve much money. It is common, therefore, to build first a simple hall for housing the image of the deity. Such a hall is walled on three sides, leaving the front open to face the sea or the direction determined by the geomantic reading of the site. The temple at Yau Ma Tei began this way, with only a simple building facing a plaza. It is said in a commemorative stele still housed in the temple that in 1870 the north and south walls of the hall were extended to the west, and a front hall and two side verandas were added to the complex. The stele text explains that this enlarged temple would befit the increasingly high status of the goddess.

In Chinese architecture, a bay is the space between two structural columns. In the post-and-beam structural system long used in China, the size of a building is usually described by the number of structural bays in its façade. This number may range from one to eleven and is always odd, because odd numbers are *yang* in the *yin-yang* duality, and buildings are considered to be *yang* entities. The number of bays permitted was regulated by state sumptuary law, which limited display according to status. Buildings of seven or more bays were reserved for the imperial household, and most important



2.4 A plan of the Tianhou Gong, Luermen, Taiwan, showing the temple core (in grey) and additional structures.

buildings at the village and township level would have no more than three bays. During an 1873 renovation, further enlargement of the Yau Ma Tei temple took place. In this renovation the one-bay halls were enlarged to three bays wide, a development most likely attributable to the increased wealth of the community.

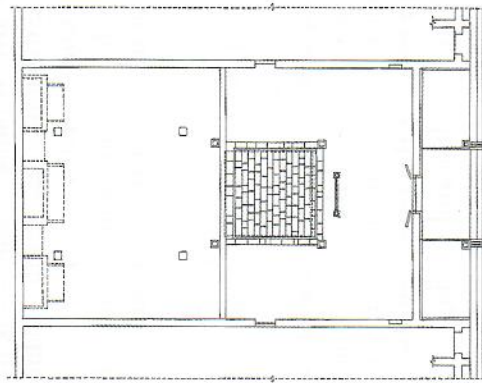
A year later, unfortunately, the temple was destroyed in a typhoon. A new temple was erected in 1875, and for reasons not stated in the stele, the building was moved to its current site three years later. The temple was subsequently renovated a number of times, as was the common practice in China, especially in Hong Kong, because wood deteriorates quickly in the wet climate. The front of the temple can possibly be dated to 1878, while the rear hall was recently reconstructed in reinforced concrete. Other smaller temples and a study hall have been added to the central Tin Hau temple to form a complex of five temples in a row. These structures were added at various times and are smaller than the Tin Hau temple in that they are all one-bay buildings without any veranda surrounding the courtyards. They are dedicated to various Daoist and Buddhist deities. The resulting extensive complex is comprised of five temples placed side by side, the most important of the five being the central temple dedicated to Tin Hau.

Building Form and Usage

The plaza in front of a temple has multiple uses. It can serve as a community gathering place, a threshing ground during harvest time, and a ritual space during festivities. At Yau Ma Tei, the plaza in front of the temple is always bustling with old folks gathered to chat and to play chess or other games. There are also fortune-telling stalls under

the banyan trees. During festivals, the plaza is transformed into a large open-air ritual space, where temporary bamboo sheds are set up to house various deities, to cover additional offering tables, and to create a stage for performances of Cantonese opera.

Like most Tianhou temples of the one-courtyard type, the temple at Yau Ma Tei consists of a front entrance building and a rear main hall (Fig. 2.5). In this temple, the front hall is a three-bay building, with a front veranda, the most elaborate temple form found in Hong Kong. The two side bays have a raised platform, which is used during rituals as a musicians' stage. Inside the entrance building is a ceremonial gate placed between the courtyard and the entrance door. This gate was intended to be kept shut except during major rituals. However, in the Yau Ma Tei temple now, as in other Tin Hau temples, the ceremonial gate is kept fully open. On the wall of the entrance building are niches containing the protector Earth God. (Every building,

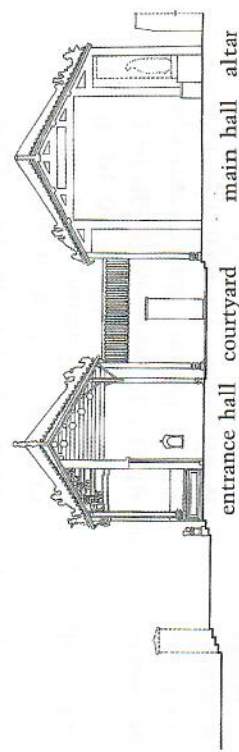


2.5 A plan of the Tin Hau temple in Yau Ma Tei, Hong Kong.

neighbourhood, and village has an Earth God, who is often worshipped at a small shrine on the ground, a side altar in a temple, or in his own temple. In the hierarchy of gods, he is the lowest deity in any place.) There are also stelae commemorating the building and renovation of the temple.

The courtyard between the entrance and the main hall is traditionally used for the laying out of offerings during major rituals (Fig. 2.6). However, it is now common for courtyards in Hong Kong and Taiwan temples to be roofed over, so as to provide extra space for the hanging of incense and for practising the usual forms of worship. On either side of the courtyard are found verandas; in the right veranda of many temples is a stall for selling incense and ritual paraphernalia. Sometimes a fortune-telling stall is also found in one of these verandas. In some temples ritual implements, including the drum and bell, a model boat, and, for use in processions, the sedan chair and regalia or insignia of the goddess, are also placed in one of these side galleries.

On occasion, individual altars for minor deities are set up in the verandas. These altars usually consist of a simple wooden niche with the image of the deity inside and a table where offerings are to be placed. Taiwanese



2.6 A section along the central axis of the Tin Hau temple, Yau Ma Tei, Hong Kong.

temples that follow the Fujian style might not have a central courtyard. Instead, a sacrificial pavilion connects the main hall and the entrance building. Between the pavilion and the side walls are two small courtyards.

The main hall is usually fully open to the courtyard, and it can also be reached from the veranda through arched openings. The main hall is the ritual centre of the temple complex. The approach made by the devotee through the entrance building and courtyard to reach the main hall is a sign of respect for the god or goddess enshrined there. The hall, whether it is a three-bay or single-bay structure, is often divided into three parts. In the centre, beneath a silk canopy, is the niche housing an image of the god or goddess (Plate 3).

In front of the niche is an altar table where a censer, the most important ritual utensil in the temple, is placed (Fig. 2.7). The censer represents the temple itself, and so the ritual head of the temple is known as the Master of the Censer. As a sign of the establishment or continuity of a legitimate lineage, a new temple will take ashes from

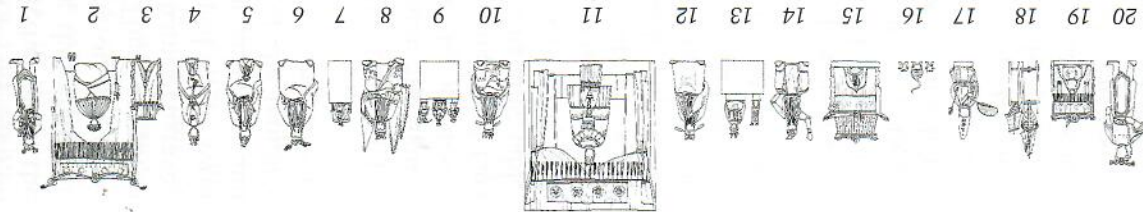


2.7 The censer in front of the altar at the Yau Ma Tei temple, Hong Kong.

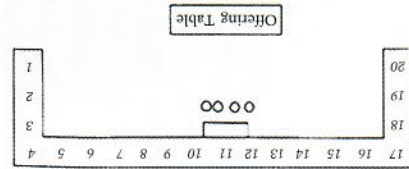
an older temple's censer and place them in its censer. The main icon and the censer are rehoused together when the building has to be vacated, such as during the rebuilding of the temple. Other utensils are also found on this altar, including candle stands and flower vases. These are given by devotees, and usually show the donors' names engraved upon them. These utensils are usually shaped in the form of archaic bronzes, which adds a sense of antiquity and solemnity to the temple. Smaller images of the temple's main god or goddess are also often placed on the altar in front of the main image.

In a Tianhou temple, further towards the front of the building, and sometimes free-standing beside the square altar table itself, is a pair of images of the goddess's servants, Thousand League Eyes and Favouring Wind Ears (Plates 4a-b). In the middle of the hall is a long altar table. The double altar arrangement is again a sign of the high status of the goddess in the sacred hierarchy vis-à-vis other deities housed in the temple complex. Still further towards the front of the building, or in the courtyard, is found an offering table, on which devotees place offerings for the goddess. To one side of this altar is usually seen a box with a slit opening on top for a devotee to insert monetary offerings for the goddess.

On each side of the main niche are usually two smaller niches in which subsidiary deities are housed. These auxiliary niches are also decorated with a silk canopy. In the case of the Yau Ma Tei temple, the niche on the left is dedicated to Guanyin, the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion. The one to the right honours Baogong, the Song dynasty judge of legendary wisdom who was later deified. In Taiwan, the two side altars typically house Zhusheng Niangniang, the Goddess of Birth, and Fude Zhengshen, the Earth God. Apart from the images contained in these



- 1 A general who brings luck
- 2 Kwan Yam, Goddess of Mercy
- 3 Dei Mou Neung Neung, Earth Goddess
- 4 Gam Fa Neung Neung, Golden Flower Goddess
- 5 Bak Dai, Emperor of the North
- 6 Hung Sing, a sea god
- 7 Sai Fong Fat Mou, Buddha of the West
- 8 Che Kung, the healer
- 9 Gwan Dai, God of War
- 10 Sing Wong, City God



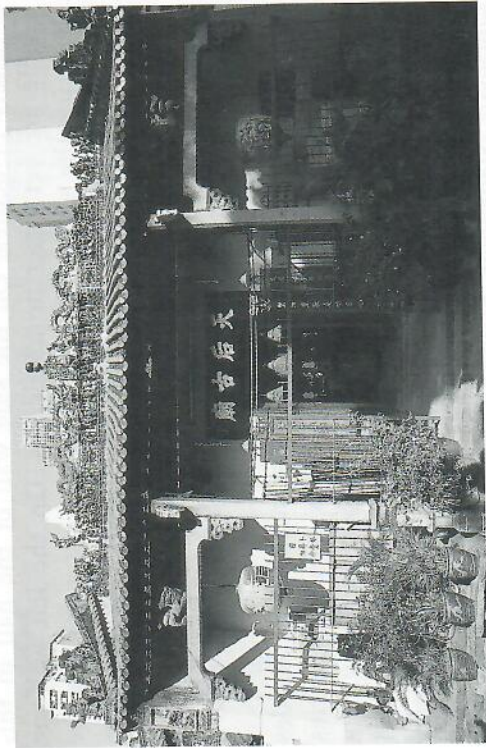
2.8 The layout of the various deities of the Tin Hau temple in Stanley, Hong Kong. The wide range of deities and their linear placement are unusual.

three niches, the main one and two auxiliary ones, other deities and spirits are worshipped in the same temple. In the Yau Ma Tei temple, for example, between the three niches, which correspond neatly with the three bays of the building, are two altars for the city god and for collecting a variety of deities. On the side wall of the hall in this temple are yet other minor deities. On the left wall are altars for the sixty *taisui*, each expressing a year in the traditional cycle, and on the right wall tablets for ancestors of devotees. Door gods are also worshipped in some temples. The Tin Hau temple in Stanley houses over twenty different deities (Fig. 2.8). They are placed along a long table on the back wall of the hall.

A Tianhou temple will thus house many gods besides Tianhou herself. The others are seen as subsidiary deities in the context of the Tianhou temple, but each may be a major deity in another context. In addition to Guanyin and the Earth God mentioned above, other common deities present in these temples are Jinhua Niangniang (who, like Zhusheng Niangniang, grants children to women), Wangye (the Plague God), and Taizi (the Third Prince). In Hong Kong, other gods found in a Tin Hau temple may include the common deities of the territory, such as Hung Sing (Hongsheng, a sea god), Bak Dai (Emperor of the North), Guandai (or Guandi, the God of War), the Man Mou gods (Wen and Wu, gods of literature and martial arts, respectively), Choi San (the God of Wealth), Wong Tai Sin (a popular god of medicine), all of whom are in the Stanley Tin Hau temple. In large Mazu temples in Taiwan, such as the Luermen Shengmu Miao near Tainan, it is increasingly common nowadays to find a multi-storey building erected in back of the main Mazu hall. One floor of this building is devoted to statues of deities of the Buddhist pantheon, while another is entirely Daoist.

- 11 Tin Hau, Empress of Heaven
- 12 Man Cheung, God of Literature and the Bureaucracy
- 13 Tam Gung, the sea god Lord Tam
- 14 Choi Bak Sing Gwan, a god of wealth
- 15 Wong Tai Sin, a god of medicine
- 16 A Demon-subduing tiger
- 17 Choi San, a god of wealth
- 18 Boats representing a wish for favourable winds
- 19 Tai Sei, a god of the traditional year
- 20 A general who protects against disasters

In addition to the hall in which the image of Tianhou is housed, some temples also have rooms decorated as her residential chamber. In the temple at Joss House Bay, Hong Kong, her chamber is located to one side of the main hall (Plate 5). In this chamber is a bed and wash-basin for the



2.9 A front view of the Tin Hau temple, Yau Ma Tei, Hong Kong.

use of the goddess. In other temples, the residential chamber may be to the rear of the main hall. Such an arrangement echoes that of a local magistrate's office, where the front hall was used as the office and the rear as his residence. The same was also true in the imperial palace, where the audience hall was located to the front of the residential palace. Some temples in Fujian and Taiwan, such as the Da Tianhou Gong in Tainan, have a hall, also located to the rear of the main hall, dedicated to the parents of Tianhou. Worship of the holy parents is seen to be appropriate because Tianhou died a virgin, and so her natal family should be worshipped.

Building Elements

There are two distinct traditions seen in the construction of a Tianhou temple in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In Hong Kong, the wall of the building is constructed with grey bricks (fired in a reduced-oxygen atmosphere and known as 'green brick' locally) on a granite foundation. The roof is supported on a wooden structure with timber or granite columns and covered with grey ceramic tile. The brick wall, usually of a cavity wall construction (with two skins of brick wall and a cavity between them), may be left either fair-faced or plastered over. Wall that is plastered is likely to be painted with the brick pattern to make it look like a fair-faced brick wall. The outer columns at the eaves, the lower tiers of the wall, and the pavement on the floor are usually constructed with granite for protection against the elements. The granite on the lower register of the wall is usually carried around the door to form the surround. The colour scheme is thus rather cool; only brightly coloured decoration adds life to the building (Fig. 2.9). There are usually no windows, except small apertures on the exterior wall.

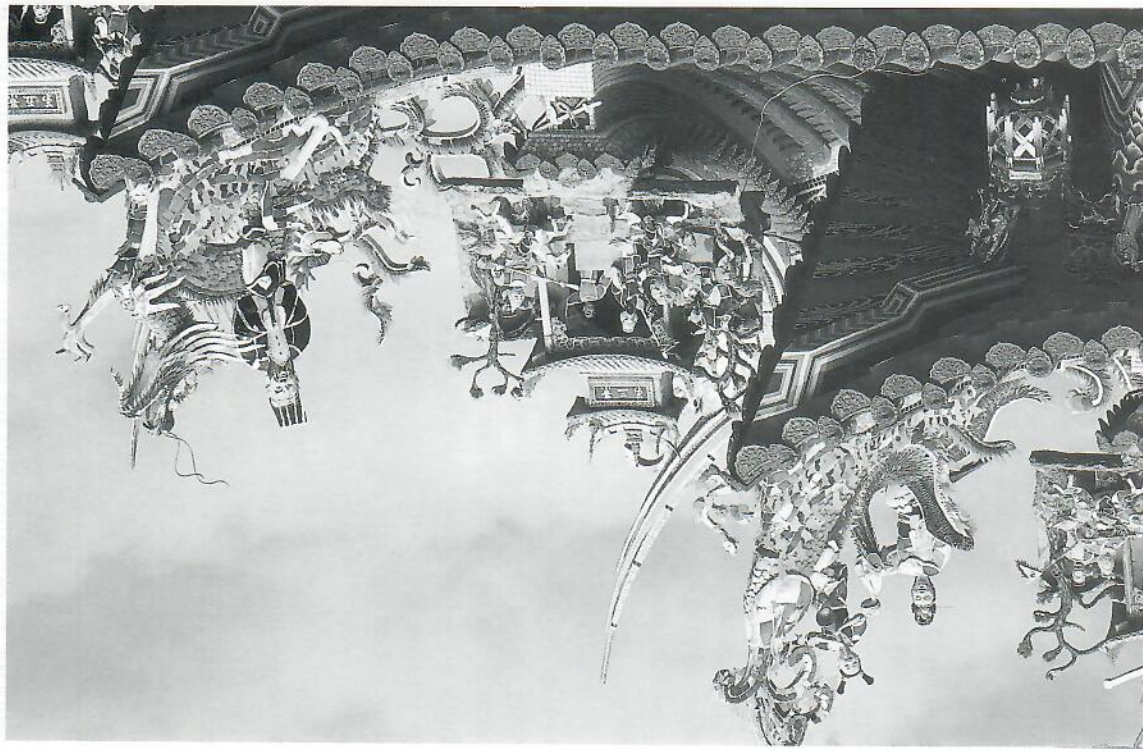
In Taiwan, temples are constructed primarily following the Fujian tradition. The most characteristic aspect of this style is the use of red brick and red roof tiles as construction materials, as well as extremely ornate roof ridges. The roof slope is also less steep than is seen on Hong Kong temples. Smaller temples, such as the Xing'an Gong of Lugang, the first temple in the town to be devoted to Mazu, is one bay wide and consists of an entrance gate, a sacrificial pavilion, two courtyards, and a main hall. The Tianhou Gong of Lugang, on the other hand, is a five-bay building with two courtyards between three buildings (Plate 6). In this

large temple, the wall is constructed with a mixture of brick and stone panels, and the roof structure is made entirely of wood, with a complicated bracketing system between the beams and the top of the columns. This is a classical construction method rarely seen in Hong Kong temples, because temples in the region tend to be more vernacular.

Decorations

It is not common to find decoration specifically related to Tianhou on temple buildings. Only on particular temples in Fujian and Taiwan, mostly rebuilt recently, can one find murals depicting the miraculous episodes of the goddess, or gigantic images of her attendants on the roof of the entrance building. Decorative motifs of Tianhou temples instead follow closely the regional decorative schema where the temple is located (Fig. 2.10). These decorations are normally found in the frieze, the eaves-board, roof ridges, timber structural members, and other minor elements of a Hong Kong temple. In Taiwan, the scale of ornamentation is greater than is seen in Hong Kong, so that all surface areas of the temple are decorated (see Plates 8a-b and 13).

The motif used in the decorations may be of flowers, plants, animals, or legendary figures. It might also include motifs of a literary or auspicious nature, such as a painting of the landscape or plants symbolizing scholarly taste. Auspicious motifs include peach blossoms for wealth and lions for protection. On the eaves-board of the Yau Ma Tei temple are carved orchids (for beauty, gentlemanly qualities, and refinement), plum blossoms (for purity), bamboo (for uprightness), and pine trees (for longevity). In the frieze



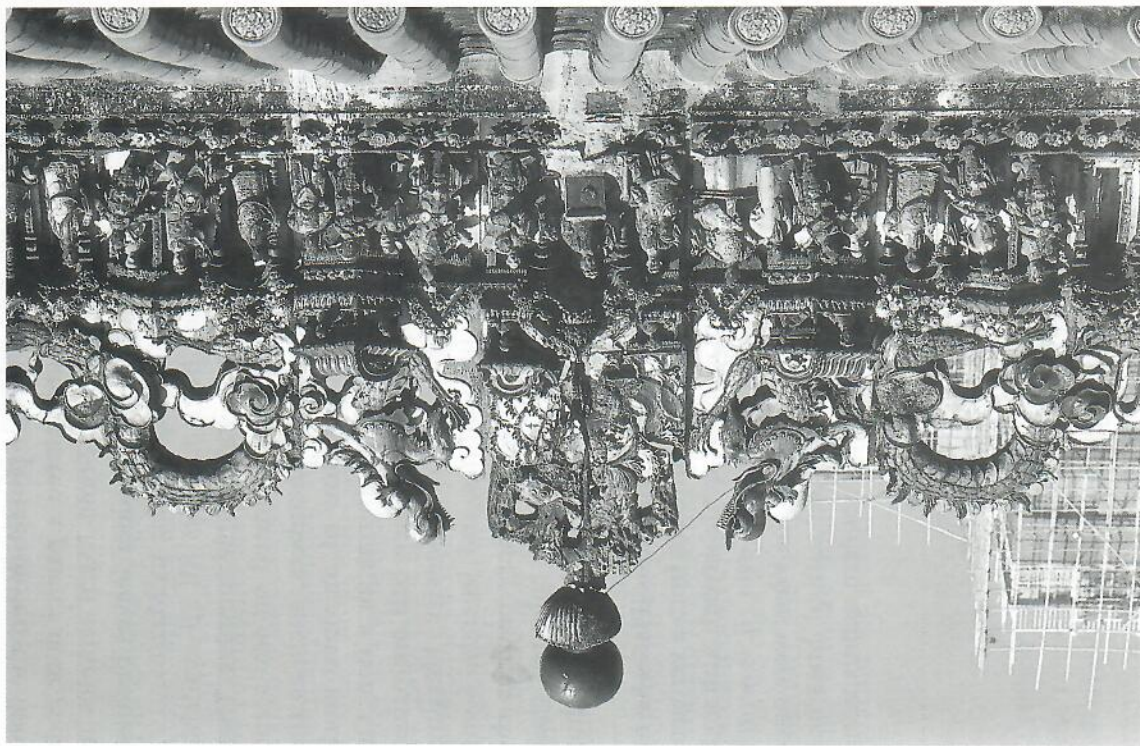
2.10 Roof decorations on the Tianhou Gong, Luermen, Taiwan.

are painted the Daoist figures Lü Dongbin and Li Tieguai, auspicious birds and flowers for wealth and happiness, and cranes and pines for longevity.

On the roof of the Yau Ma Tei temple are ceramic decorations manufactured in the famous pottery town of Shiwan (near Foshan, in Guangdong province) (Fig. 2.11). These were installed in 1914 after a typhoon had seriously damaged the original ridge. This set includes double dragons fighting for a fiery pearl in the centre, and legendary figures and stories on the lower register. There are also mythical dragon fish with their tails in the air, for the protection of the building from fire, and the sun god and the moon goddess on the lower ridges. These decorations are similar to those found on temples to Kwun Yam (Guanyin), Che Kung (Che Gong), a Song-dynasty military commander recognized as a curer of disease, and other deities in Hong Kong. They denote the wealth of the sponsors rather than the deities worshipped in the temple.

Many of the symbols and motifs found in Guangdong temples can also be found in Taiwanese temples, but with a different medium or colour scheme. In general, Taiwanese temples, following Fujian traditions, are much more ornamented and colourful than the pale-coloured decoration of Guangdong traditions. At Tainan's Da Tianhou Gong (Plate 7), for example, a pair of stone lions greets visitors at the entrance. They are the guardians of the temple. The lion on the right is a male and has a pearl under his right paw, and the one on the left is female and has a cub under her left paw.

Behind the lions is a pair of dragons coiling up the granite columns of the entrance hall. Like the lions, the three-clawed dragons (indicating the rank of an official) are protectors of the temple. Coiled dragons can also be found on the front columns of the three other buildings in the



2.11 Part of the ridge decoration of the Tin Hau temple, Yau Ma Tei, Hong Kong.

main temple complex. For further protection, on the door leaves of the entrance hall are painted a pair of door gods in the form of celestial generals. Some Mazu temples in Taiwan have dragons painted on the door leaves because dragons are sea gods and are thus similar to Mazu.

Floral, animal, bird, and human motifs fill all available surfaces of the buildings in a Taiwan temple complex. They may be carved in stone and wood, painted on walls and sculpted on the ridges. Structural members, such as the open brackets, may be in the form of an open-work dragon, or a flying angel holding an offering, or a lion. On the main ridge of the roof of the entrance hall are paired dragons, images of the three gods of longevity, blessing, and wealth, and figures from stories and legends. Some temples have double dragons chasing a fiery pearl as the central ridge motif. These are made with coloured glass and broken tiles cemented on a concrete form, and are thus very colourful and shining.

With its riot of colours and lavish decorations (Plates 8a-b), the temple appears to be completely different from a vernacular house, even if they share a similar spatial layout. Although such temples are often garish to Western eyes, it is worth remembering that medieval churches in the West were once brightly painted, and our taste for the natural hues and faded colours of antiquities is a very modern acquisition.

Temple Management and Use

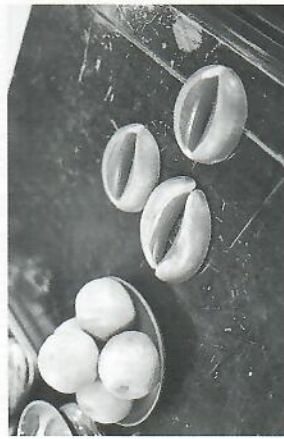
THE CHINESE TEMPLE serves primarily as a centre for individual worship, as well as a symbol of and focus for community identity. The temple itself is built and maintained by community leaders and decisions concerning it are often taken collectively. The community does not, however, normally assemble at the temple for collective worship. Instead, most worship consists of individuals making offerings at the temple in thanksgiving or to petition the god or goddess for favours. The pattern of this worship follows a general pattern, but it also allows for considerable individual expression and improvisation.

The frequency of worship varies among individuals. There are very few daily worshippers in Hong Kong, although some visit a temple once a week. In Taiwan, there are more regular worshippers; some even go to a Mazu temple daily to offer incense to the goddess. Others may worship the goddess on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month. The great majority of devotees only visit the temple once a year, during the goddess's birthday. During festivals, the temple comes alive with many people coming to make offerings and to participate in rituals celebrating the goddess.

Temple Management

Tianhou temples do not have pastors or priests who run the temple. In imperial times, there were a small number of temples run by officials with funds from the government; a few such formerly officially sponsored temples

survive in Tainan and Lugang in Taiwan, and in Chiwan in Shenzhen. Most temples, however, are run collectively by the local residents themselves. There are three types of individuals or groups who may manage a temple: the caretaker, the formal 'Master of the Censer' and his committee, and the financial managers or 'Board of Directors'. Caretakers are often relatively poor older men who spend much of the day at the temple cleaning, keeping the incense burning, stocking incense and other ritual objects for worshippers, offering basic help on divination, and, nowadays, making sure nothing is stolen from the premises. They are



3.1 Wooden blocks for divination in Wandan, Taiwan.

knowledgeable about how rituals should be conducted, and about the history of the temple. Their work is voluntary and is done out of sense of piety.

In temples managed by the Chinese Temples Committee in Hong Kong (for example, the Joss House Bay and Aberdeen Tin Hau temples), the position of the caretaker is opened to bidding. The highest bidder will pledge to give to the committee a sum from the income of the temple, which is mainly comprised of the donations of casual visitors. He or she will have added income in the form of profit from the sale of paper ritual goods and incense.

The Master of the Censer is a ceremonial position with a one-year term of office. The master is selected during the

Tianhou festival by divination. A common method is for each male head of household in the community to drop divination blocks (Fig. 3.1). If the blocks fall one flat side up and one down, meaning 'yes', he picks them up and drops them again, repeating this until he gets a 'no' (both facing the same way). Villagers count how many times each male gets a 'yes' and the man with highest number is selected to be the Master of the Censer for the coming year. The next highest finishing six-to-twelve men (depending on the local tradition) are selected to be committeemen. These positions are thought to bring luck for the year, so people are happy to serve, even though they are formally responsible for the year's budget and for the organization of the next year's rituals.

Because the Master of the Censer and his committee only serve for one year and are selected by lot and not according to financial or administrative ability, in many villages wealthy individuals, even though they hold no formal office, may have a greater say in the running of the temple. To provide more financial experience and continuity, some temples formalize this leadership by wealthy elite by having a board that runs the temple. All temples commonly set up such a board when large amounts of money need to be spent on renovation or reconstruction, but that board then typically disbands when the project is completed and the stone plaque memorializing the project is hung in the temple. Township-level temples that have annual or triennial festivals and processions involving many villages often have a board of directors made up of the prominent members of the township business élites. They generally donate the most money, urge others to donate a share, and oversee the bookkeeping for the temple.

In all fund-raising, be it for festivals or for reconstruction, two principles are used to decide who should give

and how much they should donate. One principle says that each male should contribute an equal share. This principle is being updated in some places by having females contribute a half or full share as well. This principle emphasizes the equality of all community members. The second principle says that wealthy members of the community should donate more. These extra contributions give the contributors prestige, and the ability of leaders to solicit a large amount of patronage for the temple also brings them prestige. Names and amounts are prominently displayed in the temples, first on red paper, later carved in stone tablets on the temple wall. Community members can also donate funds for specific items, such as sculptures, pillars, or furniture, and then have their name inscribed on the items.

The notable feature of this management system is its structure of self-governance. Members of the local élites



3.2 The image niche and altar of the Tin Hau temple in Stanley, Hong Kong.

and common people alike are able to manage the temple's affairs for the common good. The system still operates largely autonomously in Taiwan, although there are now laws and regulations that support the temple management system by preventing fraud. In Hong Kong, the Chinese Temples Committee oversees the financial and management affairs of all Chinese temples. Established in 1928, the committee checks financial matters and now in fact directly manages most Hong Kong temples, because with urbanization the traditional communities and the temples' management committees have often disappeared. The committee appoints the temple-keeper and is responsible for overseeing renovations.

In southern mainland China, temples have recently been rebuilt and festivals are held mostly in places where party cadres can protect the community from charges of promoting superstition. This task is easier when there are powerful local cadres, and where the temple serves to promote investment and tourism from emigrants. But even in the 1990s there are still periodic movements to tear down temples and ban 'feudal superstitions'.

In addition to villages, voluntary associations, such as fishermen's associations, martial arts clubs, co-provincial associations, and guilds, also worship Tianhou. Some have shrines, while others have a statue of the deity that is kept and worshipped in the home of the Master of the Censer. Since a new master is selected each year, the Tianhou statue moves each year. These associations participate in festivals much as a village temple does, but they represent a group of members rather than a territory. Because they are voluntary, these associations are often the most enthusiastic participants in festivals and processions.

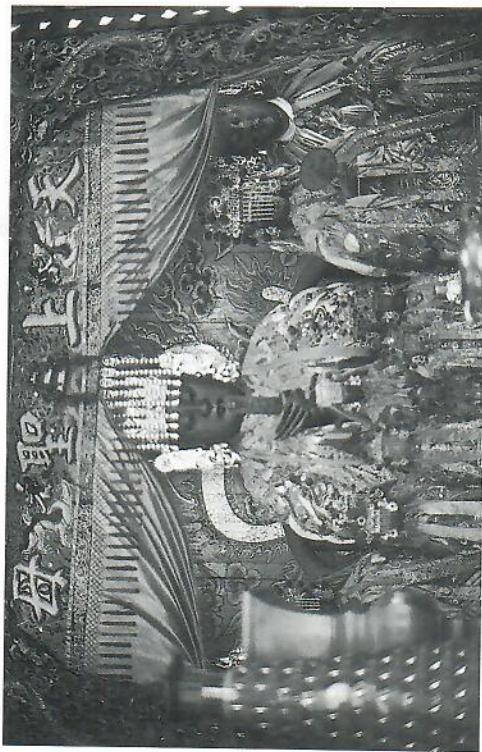
Iconography

There is usually more than just one image of the goddess to be found in a Tianhou temple. The main image is the one seated in the central niche of the main hall of the temple (Fig. 3.2). A smaller image of Tianhou is usually placed in front of the main image and, known as the 'moving' image, is the one carried in processions. In some temples in Hong Kong, during the celebration of Tin Hau's birthday this image is also invited to enjoy opera performances by being placed in a temporary niche opposite the opera stage. This relocation is performed (at, for example, the Stanley Tin Hau temple) because the opera stage is constructed out of alignment with the temple.

There are many even smaller images of Tianhou and other deities placed in front of the two main ones. These icons are placed in the temple either by the temple-keepers or by devotees. Many of the smaller images can be borrowed for rituals at home (for example, for weddings), but Tianhou's image is not commonly used in home rituals.

The image of Tianhou is always seated, carved from a piece of wood or stone, fully clothed in a robe and wearing a crown, usually showing only her face (Plates 9a-d). In Hong Kong, the Tin Hau image has a pink face. In Taiwan, there are pink-faced and black-faced Mazu. Some suggest the black face represents impartiality; the famous judge Baogong also has a black face, and Mazu showed her impartiality by helping both Koxinga, who expelled the Dutch from Taiwan in 1662, and the Qing troops who defeated Koxinga's descendants 21 years later. But many in Taiwan say simply that her face turns black from the build-up of incense after years of worship. Tianhou's robe is often made of yellow silk, to signify her imperial status, and is richly embroidered with floral motifs. These robes are donated by

devotees and have no standard pattern. Some may even have dragons embroidered on the robe; the dragon robe again suggests her imperial status, even though the robe does not entirely follow imperial iconography. Under the robe, carved on the wooden or stone image, is an imperial dress complete with a belt. On the dress is often an image of a dragon. The hands of the Tianhou in Taiwan often hold a tablet of the sort used by officials in an audience with the emperor, stressing her bureaucratic status.



3.3 A group of Tianhou images on the main altar of the Da Tianhou Gong, Tainan, Taiwan.

The head-dress of the goddess takes many forms. In Taiwan, it is common to find her wearing a lavish crown made of pearls and gold, with red pompons covering the top of the crown. Strings of pearl beads hang in front of the crown, partially covering her face. This again indicates her status as a heavenly queen. In Hong Kong and Macau, it is less common to find the strings of beads hanging from

the crown, but otherwise, the dress and crown are very similar to those found in Taiwan.

The Tianhou statue is often accompanied by two female attendants and her two demon servants (Fig. 3.3), these five images forming the basic group of Tianhou icons. The attendants are dressed as maids, standing to either side of the goddess and attending to her needs. The two servants, Thousand League Eyes and Favouring Wind Ears, are usually placed in front of the Tianhou altar (see Plates 4a-b). They are depicted with a fearsome facial expression, bared chest, and muscular arms and legs. Thousand League Eyes is placed to the left of Tianhou and depicted with his left hand over his eyes. Favouring Wind Ears is to the right of Tianhou and is depicted with his right hand pointing at his right ear. Some temples in Taiwan have two pairs of the demon servants, or multiple pairs located around the altar and at the entrance, sometimes with one set 3 to 4 metres tall for a man to bear as a costume during processions. In new temples, the pair of servants are also found placed on the roof of the entrance hall.

The Patterns of Normal Worship

Women often carry out ordinary worship, but only men manage the temple and organize the festive celebrations that take place there. Women make offerings to Tianhou on behalf of their family members and for the well-being of their families. Offerings are considered as gifts for Tianhou, rather than as bribes. It is a part of Chinese social etiquette to greet an elder or social superior with a gift, and offerings placed before Tianhou reflect this etiquette. Consisting mainly of foods, such as fruits, buns, and meat, offerings can also be seen as nourishment for Tianhou, which is a

sign of respect paid to the goddess. Indeed, the most important outward sign of filial piety in Chinese society is to offer tea and food for the nourishment of an elder. The act of making offerings to Tianhou should be seen in this cultural context.

When a devotee approaches a Tianhou temple, she or he enters to the right and proceeds to the central altar to lay down the offerings. During festivals, offerings are more elaborate and are placed on the ground (Plate 10). The devotee then lights a bunch of incense sticks either brought to the temple or bought there. Three sticks of incense are first offered to 'heaven' at the large censer outside. Then three more sticks are offered to Tianhou at the large censer inside the temple. The devotee will then go to the back of the temple and pray to Tianhou in front of her main image, bow three times, and stick three sticks of incense in the censer in front of the image. The remaining sticks of incense are then stuck in the censers of other deities and images in the temple in an anticlockwise order; minor figures like Tianhou's demon servants Favouring Wind Ears and the Door Gods receive one stick, while deities in side altars receive three.

Once all the proper deities have been worshipped, the devotee waits for the goddess to consume the offerings. At this point, the devotee may consult the goddess for her or his fortune. One popular method, available in many temples, is called *qiuqian* (*kauh-chim* in Cantonese): by the shaking of a canister holding strips of bamboo, gradually and seemingly magically one strip rises above the others and falls to the ground. The devotee may then confirm the fortune by dropping the moon blocks, and knows it is correct if they fall in the 'yes' position (one up and one down) three times. The number on the bamboo strip is matched with one of the written fortunes on the side

Festivals

wall. The fortune can then be interpreted by a fortune-teller (Plate 11).

Offerings are not left in the temple, but before they can be taken home the devotee must find out if Tianhou has finished with them. This is done by asking her by again dropping the divination blocks. Finally, paper spirit money is burnt in the oven located outside the building, or in the courtyard of the temple (Fig. 3.4).

This describes the general pattern of worship followed by devotees in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. Individual and local variation, however, can be found. In China, decades of Communist criticism against 'feudal superstitions' have reduced the number of worshippers. In Guangdong province, worshippers are mostly women, and many pass a set of clothes belonging to their children or grandchildren through the incense to symbolically ask for protection for children who did not come to the temple. At Tianhou's temple at Meizhou, off the Fujian coast, most visitors are tourists, not worshippers. But when one is able to see worship taking place, the patterns described above can still be recognized.



3.4 Burning paper money at the Yuen Long Tin Hau temple, Hong Kong.

TIANHOU'S FESTIVAL occurs on the twenty-third day of the third lunar month, usually falling in April or early May. This is the day during which most temples hold their processions and opera performances, and when most families come to worship at her temples. Pilgrimages to major sites are normally held in the months before the festival period, so that the Tianhou statue is back in her home temple when worshippers come on her birthday. In Taiwan and Fujian, it is common also to have processions in Mazu's honour at the time of the Lantern Festival, the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. Although Mazu is often associated with this holiday, the association derives from a blending of the Mazu cult with the cult of the Lady of the Water Margin (Linshui Furen, or Chen Jinggu), who is especially popular in northern Fujian and who celebrates her birth on the same day as the Lantern Festival.

Throughout the Chinese world, the temple has been the symbol and focal point of a community. This community can be a residential one, such as a village or neighbourhood, or it can be dispersed, as in the case of martial arts clubs or co-provincial associations (clubs for sojourners). In traditional China, villages typically had one main temple that held an annual festival in which all village families participated. In traditional cities, every neighbourhood had a temple that defined it as a community. Sometimes that temple was dedicated to the Earth God, but more often it centred on worship of another god, such as Guandi or Tianhou. At many sites where worship of Tianhou or Guandi was pre-eminent, there was also an Earth God shrine as a secondary temple.

These village and neighbourhood temples survive in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and in parts of South-East Asia but are rarely found in mainland China, where they were torn down or converted to schools in modernization drives, in many cases even before the advent of Communist rule in 1949. In urban Hong Kong and Taipei, new neighbourhoods with high-rise towers do not have local temples nearby. But many urbanites continue to worship the gods by going to older city temples, such as Wong Tai Sin in Hong Kong and Taipei's Longshan Si. The older Tianhou temples are still popular destinations for worship and divination, as can be seen in Hong Kong's Yau Ma Tei and Causeway Bay. Community temples are truly communal; each is open to any being, human or divine. Old men often meet there to chat, and old women come as representatives of their family to make offerings. Martial arts and other clubs meet there, and in Taiwan villages public kindergartens are typically built next to them. Temples also may serve as voting stations in Taiwan, their public location and deities' presence felt to be ideal assurances of honesty.

Temples can be thought of as forming a hierarchy. Village and neighbourhood temples represent the smaller, face-to-face community. These temples will often send their god out to visit higher-order temples during the latter's festivals. Below the level of the village are privately owned shrines, which sometimes also send their gods out to visit village and township-level temples. Any of these three levels—the private shrine, the village temple, or the township-level temple—can be dedicated to Tianhou. In fact, it is especially common for township-level temples to be dedicated to the goddess, because as a mother figure, she unites all her children; that is, her influence works towards the unity of the village temples.

At each level, there is nothing noticeably different about

the temples themselves—except perhaps that at the higher level they are generally larger. This is not always the case in Taiwan, however, where since the mid-1980s many villages have rebuilt their temples to an enormous scale with reinforced concrete. Nevertheless, the hierarchy is made clear when village temples visit higher-level temples during festivals: higher-level temples sponsor these events, and their palanquin is last in the procession.

Below the level of village temples and private shrines are family altars. Families in Taiwan, and increasingly in Fujian, often have one or more deities on their family altar next to the ancestor tablets. These deities from family altars may be brought out to greet processions, but they do not join processions themselves. Many deities are popular for family altars, including Guanyin, Taizi, and Guandi. Because Tianhou is a community deity, used in uniting different villages or neighbourhoods, she is fairly rare as a deity for family shrines.

What activities are held at a Tianhou temple's festival depends on whether the site is a village or higher-level temple. Village temples will have more modest festivals, often including only collective offerings by each family laid out on tables in front of the temple. Higher-level temples (often township temples) will likely have more elaborate affairs, including processions in which village temples and shrines send their gods to visit Tianhou, and entertainment for the gods (and the people). The entertainment includes troupes of performers in the procession and opera or puppet shows presented in front of the temple for its gods.

Offering entertainment in front of the temple is one way to show a festival's importance and patronage. In Taiwan, opera is more prestigious than are puppets, but most temples try to host at least a puppet show. Live musical accompaniment is best, but many puppet shows now

operate with as few as two persons, and with the help of recordings and electronic sound effects. In Hong Kong, famous Cantonese opera stars are booked for 3 to 5 days of performances, and temporary but very large opera stages are built in front of the temples (Fig. 4.1). Opera adds to the excitement of the festival, even if sometimes few spectators stay to watch a performance. The music and singing from the show, mixed together with the sound of firecrackers, the pungent smell of incense, and the jostling of crowds, all help create the sense of bustle and excitement that is a key part of a festival.

Although festivals express village and district solidarity, they are also times of competition and rivalry. Villages try to outdo one another in providing the most exciting spectacle. Districts hold processions to impress and intimidate rival neighbouring districts. Women participate in some processions today, but it was once exclusively a male preserve, and even today only males are allowed to pull or carry the palanquins. Most festivals are peaceful family events today, but heavy police presence (common in Hong Kong) indicates a history of tensions that can boil over into fights, especially when hundreds of young men are hot, tired, and walking around with martial arts weapons.

District Temples

Most of the higher-level temples are the focus of a multi-village community, such as a township, or an alliance of village temples. Participation in the common festival represents membership in the alliance. Such temples are often dedicated to Tianhou, making the Tianhou temple the highest or 'biggest' temple—and Tianhou the highest-ranking deity—in the district.



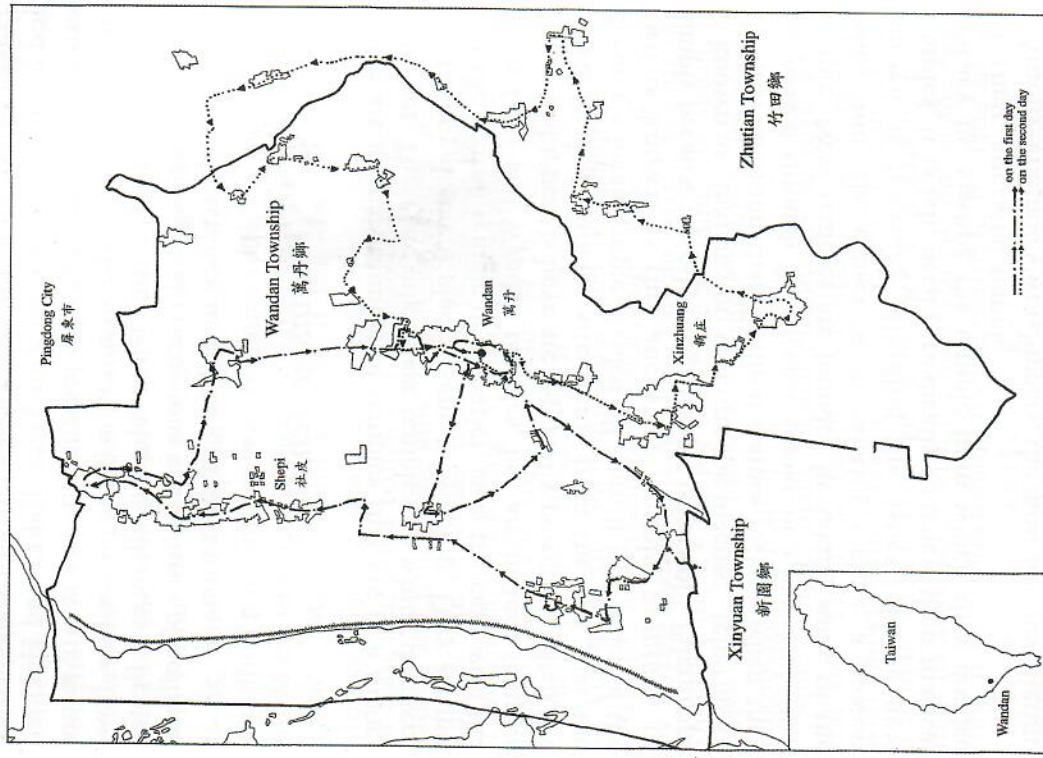
4.1 Opera plays to few spectators on the day following Tin Hau's birthday on Po Toi Island, Hong Kong.

Following the strict traditional Chinese bureaucratic metaphor, it may seem odd for a female deity to outrank local village deities, especially since most of the latter are male. But it is logical in that as a mother figure, she unites all the villages under her influence. Ultimately, Tianhou remains popular not as a result of her position as Empress of Heaven, but because she is able to intervene on her believers' behalf, rewarding sincerity and morality against an overly strict interpretation of bureaucratic rules. Symbolically, she is like a mother who protects her children from the father's wrath. She is a unifying deity, able in Taiwan and Hong Kong to unite all the temples and communities of a district, and in Malaysia often representing a city's Chinese community against the Malays. It is thus common for Tianhou to be the focus of processions involving village temples of an entire township.

One such district temple is the Tai Shu Ha Tin Hau temple in Yuen Long, in Hong Kong's New Territories. Tai Shu Ha is the focal temple for an alliance called the 'Eighteen Villages' (Shap Pat Heung), which actually receives the participation of more than forty temples and associations. This alliance of villages was established to counteract the powerful Tang (Deng in Mandarin) lineage of Kam Tin to the south. The villages at one time would bring out their village gods on palanquins and would process with them around the alliance's territory. Each village had a dragon dance or martial arts troupe that performed along the route. The intent was to show the alliance's power in its ability to muster many men.

This festival system is even more fully developed in Taiwan, where most communities are part of what have been called 'ritual spheres'. In Pingdong county's Wandan township, for example, the central Mazu temple, the Wanhui Gong, unites most of the township's villages against neighbouring townships (Fig. 4.2). To the south, Xinyuan township has a procession to Shennong, while to the north temples participate in other township-level processions to Pingdong city's Mazu temple.

To the west of Wandan township there is a wide river that limits contact. To the east is Zhutian township, where live many Hakka, a Chinese ethnic group. Wandan's population is almost entirely Hokkien, a separate group of ethnic Chinese. Interestingly, the Hokkien in Zhutian township who live in the six villages closest to Wandan participate in Wandan's Mazu procession in a sign of ethnic solidarity with that township's Hokkien. Local Hakka focus their attentions on a temple known as the Zhongyi Ci, which houses the spirit tablets of militiamen who died fighting against Hokkien. This temple was first built after the Zhu Yigui Rebellion of 1721-2, during which the local



4.2 A map of Wandan township showing the two-day procession route and ethnic boundaries.

Hakka helped Qing imperial troops put down a rebellion led by the Hokkien rebel Zhu Yigui. Hakka and Hokkien ethnic tension has long been present, although it is of minor importance today. The organization of the processions, however, still reflects a time when religious alliances reflected political alliances, and processions were shows of political strength and exercises in military mobilization.

Pilgrimage Temples

There are a small number of temples that are of a higher order yet. These are pilgrimage temples, to which devotees from many different places come to worship. They are not just the central temple of a district, as is the case with the Yuen Long and Wandan temples, but are instead temples that worshippers believe are especially powerful. Often the power of a pilgrimage site stems from the fact that the devotee's local temple divided off from it (the older of the two is known as the 'ancestral' temple, *zumiao*), or simply because the pilgrimage temple is very old. Pilgrimage is known as *jinxiang*, or 'entering the incense', referring to the revitalization that Tianhou statues receive when they are passed through the incense smoke of a powerful (*ling*) temple. New temples are founded by taking some of the ashes from the censer of an existing temple, a process known as *fenxiang* (dividing the ashes). These new temples, it is felt, need periodically to renew their magical efficacy by visiting the temple from which they divided off, their 'ancestral temple'.

Among Tianhou's worshippers, the most famous pilgrimage temple is the ancestral temple on Meizhou Island, off the coast of Putian county, Fujian province (Plate 12). Although the temple complex has had to be completely

rebuilt, it is said to be the place from where Lin Moniang came. Its claims are disputed, however, by the temple across the straits in Gangli, on the Putian mainland. Gangli's supporters claim that Tianhou rose to heaven from Meizhou, but that she actually was born and grew up in Gangli.

In Taiwan, the temple in Beigang (Pei-kang), called Chaotian Gong, is the most popular pilgrimage temple, receiving over 6 million pilgrims per year. It claims to be the most powerful Mazu temple, because its statue of Mazu came directly from Meizhou and because it has the most magical efficacy (in part *because* it derives from Meizhou). However, at least four other temples in Taiwan also claim to be the oldest, and ritually the most important, temple on Taiwan, and each of these are significant pilgrimage destinations. The Xingang (Hsin-kang) Mazu temple claims it—and not Beigang's—is the true successor of the original temple washed away in a flood. Similarly, enormous new temples in Luermen, the Shengmu Miao and the Tianhou Gong (Plate 13), both claim to be successors of the temple built by Koxinga when he landed on Taiwan after defeating the Dutch. Lugang's temple (see Plate 6) claims its statue of Mazu dates to the 1300s. All of these temples are popular pilgrimage destinations.

Some temples make annual pilgrimages to their ancestral site. The Dajia temple, in central Taiwan, makes a well-known annual week-long pilgrimage to Beigang. When a temple such as Dajia visits another, it is gaining power from its association with the older temple, but at the same time it is acknowledging its inferiority to it. This admission has recently begun to annoy the members of the Dajia temple who, starting in 1988, began for several years not to visit Beigang but to go directly to the Meizhou and Gangli temples in Putian, asserting that their temple is not inferior to Beigang.

In the month before Tianhou's birthday, there is a constant stream of groups coming to pilgrimage temples, with firecrackers, gongs, drums, and religious rites making a colourful and lively scene (Plate 14). Many individuals make the pilgrimage on their own or with their families, but most impressive are the collective pilgrimages of various Tianhou temples. The Dajia Mazu temple, for example,

takes a week to make the pilgrimage to Beigang and back, stopping at various temples along the route. The Longjing Gong of Duwei village, in Fujian province, has recently revived its village procession to Meizhou. Duwei villagers hid their ritual implements underground during the Cultural Revolution, when official policy dictated that they

4.3 Qing-period ritual objects of the Longjing Gong, Duwei village, Fujian.



should have been destroyed, and now the village is one of the few places in China to have Qing period ritual objects to use in processions (Fig. 4.3).

In Taiwan, temple committees often organize these trips, allowing area worshippers to participate at their own expense. In addition to bringing the worshippers' temple's Mazu to the ancestral temple, individuals can bring their own family Mazu statues for renewal. These are renewed by passing them through the incense smoke, which is sometimes

compared to recharging batteries. The trip combines religious and touristic motives; after worshipping in the temple, pilgrims often have time to go shopping, to eat a meal of local food, and to visit a museum. The touristic motives are especially important when Taiwanese visit Meizhou. Many of these trips are organized by travel agencies and take individuals from a wide geographic area, rather than members of one temple community.

Family Activities

The details of worship during Tianhou's festival vary, but there is a general pattern that is largely an elaboration of the activities of ordinary worship described in Chapter 3. Families worship Tianhou by burning incense and placing food offerings on tables at the temple. Since she is a Daoist deity, foods offered include meats, such as pork and chicken, but some worshippers with Buddhist inclinations offer only vegetarian foodstuffs, such as fruits. Bottles of oil are also common offerings. These offerings are laid out on tables while incense is burned for the various deities, and they are taken home when the worship is finished. In Hong Kong, suckling pigs are a common offering, and it is common to offer sets of paper clothes, including headgear, robes, and small paper shoes for her bound feet. These clothes are sometimes unfolded and laid out for a while and later burned, but usually they are often just burned as a bundle. There are regional differences in the type of paper money used and even the shape of the incense. In Hong Kong, fat sticks of incense are used more often than in China or Taiwan, and red candles are also used as offerings. The spiral-shaped incense that hangs from a temple's rafters is also characteristic of the Cantonese region and

not of Taiwan or Fujian. The last step of the worship is to burn paper money to Tianhou. Most temples have an oven for regular worship, but on festivals too much paper is burned, so additional bonfires are prepared.

Worshippers going through the Joss House Bay Tin Hau temple on the night of her birthday proceed as follows. Most take the ferry from North Point and have already bought the materials they need to offer worship. As soon as the boat begins its journey, they toss special round paper money to appease ghosts in the water. They also light incense sticks that are placed in a special bucket at the back of the boat. Once they arrive at the pier at Joss House Bay, they line up to enter the temple. So many worshippers are present that strict crowd control procedures are enforced, especially because there is always a danger of fire. Once worshippers reach the temple, the crowd flows quickly through.

Worshippers who have not brought their own incense and paper offerings can buy packages from vendors before the entrance to the temple. Once at the temple, worshippers light their incense from a tray of candles and place the sticks in various censers according to the principles outlined above for private worship. Because of the crowd, worshippers are only allowed to bring three sticks of incense into the temple, regardless of size. As you enter the temple, the temple's pinwheel vendor is on the left just inside. The next step is to stick the incense in the censer, around which there is a thick crowd. Because of the crowd, two staff members seated next to the censer take charge of inserting and removing incense sticks from the censer. There are so many large sticks of incense inside that temple staff only let sticks burn a few minutes before they pluck them out for burning outside. The temple is so full of incense that the smoke stings the eyes.

Worshippers then go to bow in front of the main statue. Some people have their fortune told inside; others consult the fortune-tellers in front of the temple. Worshippers are urged to move forward quickly, and they are guided out to the left side of the temple into a side room where three beds are located. Here, after making a small contribution, worshippers are given a red envelope containing tea leaves. They then reach under Tin Hau's Dragon Bed quilt and grab whatever small object they touch. This object is believed to be a portent; for example, ginger means the person will have children, and a red envelope means profits will come to them. Leaving the temple to the left, worshippers encounter a short queue to hit the drum and bell. Each is struck three times to make sure that Tin Hau notices the offerings given her.

The pinwheels that can be bought at the temple are said to bring good luck (Plate 15). Many have a couplet written on them, such as 'Peace to the Whole Family'. During the year, the pinwheels can be seen displayed in the backs of taxis and trucks. The spinning of the wheels in the wind is said to bring good luck, and many worshippers let them spin on their ferry ride home. Many worshippers bring the pinwheel back to the temple as part of their Chinese New Year festivities, where they burn it. Gourds of all sizes (representing medicine, and thus health) and cocks of bamboo and coloured paper (for good business) are also for sale at the rows of vendors outside the temple.

Worshippers all take one of the incense sticks home, but they are not allowed to carry it lit onto the boat because of the danger of burning themselves or other passengers. There is a large barrel of water on the pier where they are asked to dip it. They re-light it when they get home, in this way symbolically bringing home the fire from the temple. In Taiwan and Fujian, it is common for worshippers to

bring home paper charms to be placed on the family altar or in their automobiles to bring peace and blessings.

In Hong Kong, it is especially common for voluntary associations of various sorts to visit Tin Hau on her festival day. Often they will go with a dancing lion and drums (although in some places, such as on Cheung Chau, the police have forbidden lion dancing because it has led to fights among the different associations). These associations rejuvenate their Tin Hau by passing her through the incense of the main temple they visit. They bring offerings (such as a suckling pig, fruit, and paper clothes for Tin Hau) and select their new Master of the Censer while at the temple they visit.

It is clear that one of the main themes of these festivals is putting in requests for good luck. In many Taiwan temples this can be achieved by 'crossing the bridge of peace'. A wooden bridge is set up for use during Tianhou festivals, and a shaman in trance leads the person or family over the bridge in a ritual of changing one's luck. The bridge symbolizes the change from one state to another, and the shaman—a human possessed by a deity—mediates between the human and spirit worlds. People who feel they have had a run of bad luck can thereby try to improve their fortune.

Collective Activities

In addition to these forms of individual worship, many village temples perform a collective worship known in Hokkien as *khò-kun*, 'rewarding the troops'. Tianhou is thought to have guards surrounding her temple to protect her, and this ritual feeds and propitiates them. The troops' 'five camps' are marked out symbolically by a shaman in

trance, who walks through the village. Then, at a designated time in the afternoon, all village families send their offerings to be placed on tables in front of the village temple. These foods and drinks ritually feed the troops and serve as a send-off banquet for them.

Shamans are an important feature of popular religion in Taiwan (Plate 16). They offer private consultations throughout the year, but during festivals they perform publicly on the bridge of peace and at *khò-kun*. In addition, most shamans will accompany their temple's palanquin for most of its procession. They are in a trance at various times during the procession, performing in front of temples and at times even riding on top of the god's palanquin. They cut their tongue with knives and strike their back and head with swords, nail-balls, and large saws. They walk with wire piercing their cheeks. These displays of self-mortification show they are protected by a god and feel no pain. Their wounds are said to heal rapidly and without scars, thanks to divine protection. Rarely are shamans possessed by Mazu, but their performances during processions such as the Mazu procession will be watched closely by many spectators and are important in creating and supporting their reputations as shamans.

In Taiwan, most Tianhou temples hold their festivals on her birthday, but in Hong Kong some temples hold the festival at other times, so as not to compete with the more popular temples. The Sai Wan temple on Cheung Chau, for example, holds its festival several weeks before the twenty-third, the exact date varying each year. Some smaller temples book prominent Cantonese opera troupes for later dates when the troupes are available at a lower cost; even though it is late, hiring famous opera troupes gives them prestige. In Taiwan, Taiwanese opera is also popular; smaller temples hire handpuppet shows. All shows are

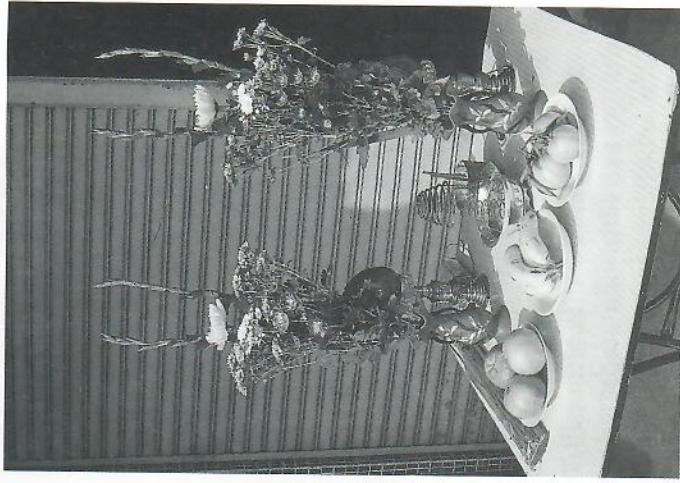
said to be for the entertainment of humans and gods, so the stage is placed facing the temple, so that Tianhou can see the show. In places where this is not possible because of a lack of space, an image of Tianhou is taken out and placed on a temporary altar facing the stage. The plays enact stories with moral lessons that also manifest the gods' presence in the world.

In Hong Kong, a major component of temple festivals is the competition for *fa-pau*, 'flowery cannons' (Plate 17). Constructed by special shops and ranging in height from 2 to 5 metres, the *fa-pau* are made of brightly coloured paper on a bamboo frame. Each has attached to it papier mâché statues and objects symbolic of good luck (such as red eggs, ginger, and pomelo leaves). Most importantly, it has an image of Tin Hau (either a picture on a mirror or a small statue in a box) in its centre. Each Tin Hau temple (or *fa-pau* association) has a set number of *fa-pau*, and a larger number of associations and village temples compete to win the *fa-pau*. At one time the competition involved shooting numbered coins into the air from small cannons, the number on the coin corresponding to the number on the *fa-pau*. But because fights could easily break out during the scramble for the coins, most temples have switched to other methods, such as a lottery. Winning the contest allows the victorious temple or organization to invite Tin Hau back home, thereby gaining her blessing and help. In addition, the winning temple or association holds a banquet the evening of the festival and auctions off parts of the dismantled *fa-pau*. The funds raised in this way help to pay for the following year's *fa-pau*, which winning village temples and associations must donate to the *fa-pau* association for the next redistribution. Thus, each year the previous year's winners provide new *fa-pau* for the festival.

Processions

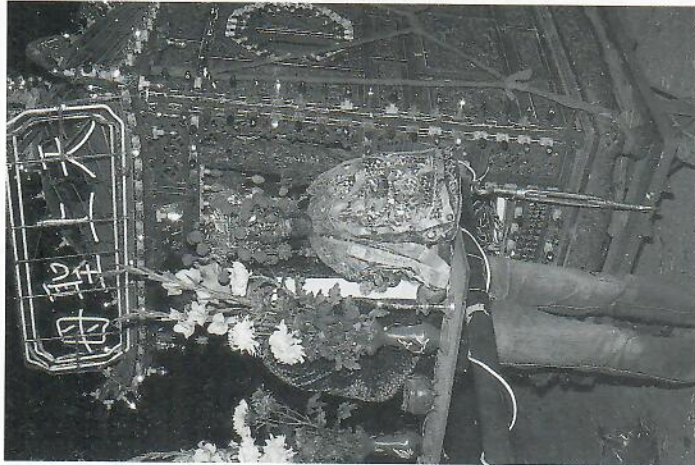
Processions are a common feature of Tianhou worship, especially in Taiwan. The statue of the deity is placed in a palanquin (or sedan chair) and paraded around the god's district. It is seen as a kind of inspection or patrol of the community under her protection and the bestowing of blessings on devotees. Since Tianhou is often a deity uniting a larger district, including many village and neighbourhood temples, Tianhou festival processions often involve all the temples in the main temple's district. The procession begins and ends at the Tianhou temple, and the goddess takes the position of honour at the end of the procession. The procession's deities visit

all the temples and as many residences as is feasible. Each family places in front of their house a square table on which are prepared offerings for the gods (Fig. 4.4).



4.4 A table with offerings placed on it in front of a family home in Wanda, Taiwan. Vegetarian offerings like this are increasingly popular.

As the palanquin passes by, many families will have one person bow three times and then stick one stick of incense into the palanquin's censer. They will also often light firecrackers, saving the long string of firecrackers for when Mazu herself goes by.



4.5 Tianhou being removed from her palanquin upon her return from a procession in Wandan, Taiwan

It should be noted that although Tianhou joins the procession in the form of a statue in her palanquin (Fig. 4.5), she is also believed to be present in her temple at the same time. Thus, even while the procession is ongoing, worship-

pers come to her temple to offer incense and to perform divination. As the procession makes its way back to her temple, the gods on other villages' palanquins greet her at the temple, even though her palanquin is at the rear of the procession.

If one were to observe such a procession from a single place along the route, one would notice that each temple has a banner, a performance troupe, and the deity's palanquin. The banner has the name of the temple and the name of the community or association the temple represents. In Hong Kong and Taiwan most of these banners are brocade. In Hong Kong's Yuen Long procession the banners are long, but in Taiwan and Fujian they are cylindrical parasols, twirled so the writing and decoration can be seen by all spectators (Plate 18).

Following the banner is a performance troupe. There are three types of troupes: comic, tragic, and martial. Comic troupes are most common in Taiwan; the plays they perform are usually about village morality (for example, dangers to maidens, or the risks love marriages present to family solidarity), which they teach and comment upon via humour. Examples of performers include: male stilt-walkers, many dressed as women and many of the others sexually harassing the ones dressed as women; 'fighting bulls' (papier mâché bulls that play-act a fight, which escalates into their owners rolling on the ground and playing acting a fight), whose actions illustrate conflicts among neighbours; and, in southern Taiwan, So Lan troupes, who represent the cortège of a bride on her way to the house of the elderly groom to whom she has been married for money, with the lament in song of her young lover played on a tape player over a portable public address system.

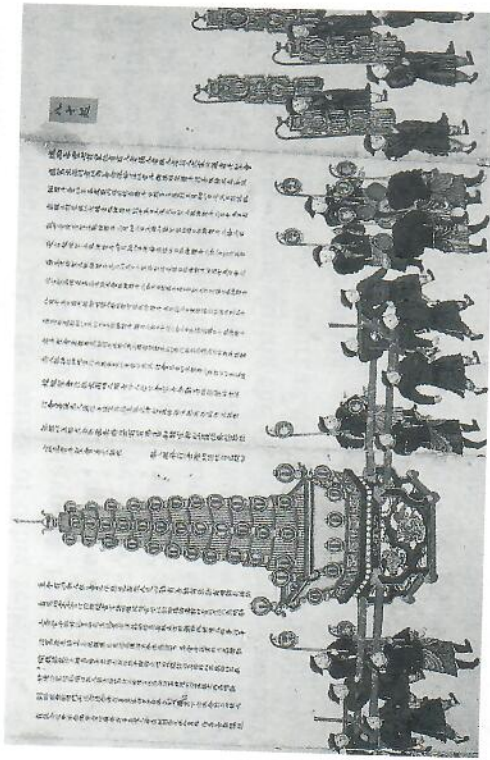
Tragic troupes rely on the representation of ghostly figures such as Qi Ye and Ba Ye (sworn brothers who

represent extreme loyalty) and the Eight Generals, *Bajijiang* (Plate 19). The latter have painted faces and dance in a special ritualized style in a light trance state. They dance and walk in procession in two lines, and many people who hope to improve their luck kneel down between the two rows as the generals pass. According to Donald Sutton (1990: 543), the movements of the tragic troupes address cosmic order: because the generals are neither gods nor humans but ghosts who are 'betwixt and between', they 'can effectively communicate the never-ending struggle between yin and yang, between disorder and order, which seems to lie at the heart of Chinese ritual.' Tragic troupes are more common in Taiwan, with the Eight Generals in particular more common in southern Taiwan.

Marital troupes are common throughout southern China, but they dominate processions in Hong Kong. They include dragon, lion, and *kei-lun* (*qilin* in Mandarin; sometimes called unicorn) dances, the centipede (a long kind of float with children in costumes raised in the air), and groups of men performing martial displays. These groups represent the corps of braves that villages once mustered for self-defence. Ideally it is said 108 people, or other multiples of 18, should perform together, 108 being the number of righteous outlaws in the famous novel *On the Water Margin*. It was once common during festivals for such groups to get into fights over perceived slights. Since the martial displays often use swords, axes, spears, and other weapons, fights between village troupes could be fatal. But these troupes express the solidarity of the village despite any conflicts within it.

The final element in each temple group is the god's palanquin itself (Fig. 4.6). In Fujian and Taiwan, these were once large and elaborately carved, and required 36 strong men

in four teams of eight to carry it on shoulder poles, just like the sedan chairs of the rich. Most villages have now placed the palanquin on dollies with wheels, so the palanquins can be pulled from one temple to the next. Few villages have a sufficient number of young men willing to do the difficult work of carrying the palanquin. In Hong Kong, the gods are carried in smaller carts on wheels (Plate 20). Many of the carts are metal, and can be pulled by one or two people. In processions in Taiwan, it is also common for men wearing large costumes of Tianhou's attendants Thousand League Eyes and Favouring Wind Ears to walk immediately before the palanquin, accompanying and protecting her. As each palanquin passes a temple, it is brought forward towards the temple and then pulled back three times in ritual greeting.



4.6 A traditional Tianhou festival procession in Tianjin as illustrated on a scroll. From the *Tianjin Tianhou Gong Xinghuitu*, painted in the late nineteenth century.

The last palanquin in the procession always belongs to Tianhou, and carries the image from the temple celebrating the festival. The palanquins of other villages each carry their principal deity, whether or not this is Tianhou (and only rarely will it also be Tianhou). Even if a village temple also has one or more statues of Tianhou on its altar, it is the primary deity that goes out on procession. The procession is modelled after the inspection tours of traditional officials. The tour stops and makes courtesy calls at the temples it passes along the way, and returns in the end to the Tianhou temple. In the order of performance and in starting and ending at the Tianhou temple, the village temples show that the Tianhou temple is ritually superior to their own.

Tianhou, as Heavenly Queen of high rank and as a mother figure, is the logical deity to unite various temples in a larger alliance. Like the saints of other religions, she is appealed to for special personal favours. Festivals are a time when requests are made for the coming year, and thanks are offered for favours received in the past year. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, festivals are still sincere and vibrant expressions of religious belief. In China, most festivals are more like cultural shows. The Meizhou temple holds elaborate processions during the week following Tianhou's birthday so that more tourists can see it, but the show is devoid of religious meaning.

In Chiwan, Shenzhen, the Tianhou temple has been entirely rebuilt with government funds but no festival is officially sponsored. Yet hundreds of worshippers (over 90 per cent female) descend on the temple for her birthday and hold their own festival, including chanting and dancing in the courtyard in front of the temple through the night. Although some aspects of the festival and procession are simplified

and changed as development changes people's way of living, people still seek Tianhou's help in dealing with life's problems, and they are likely to do so for many years to come.

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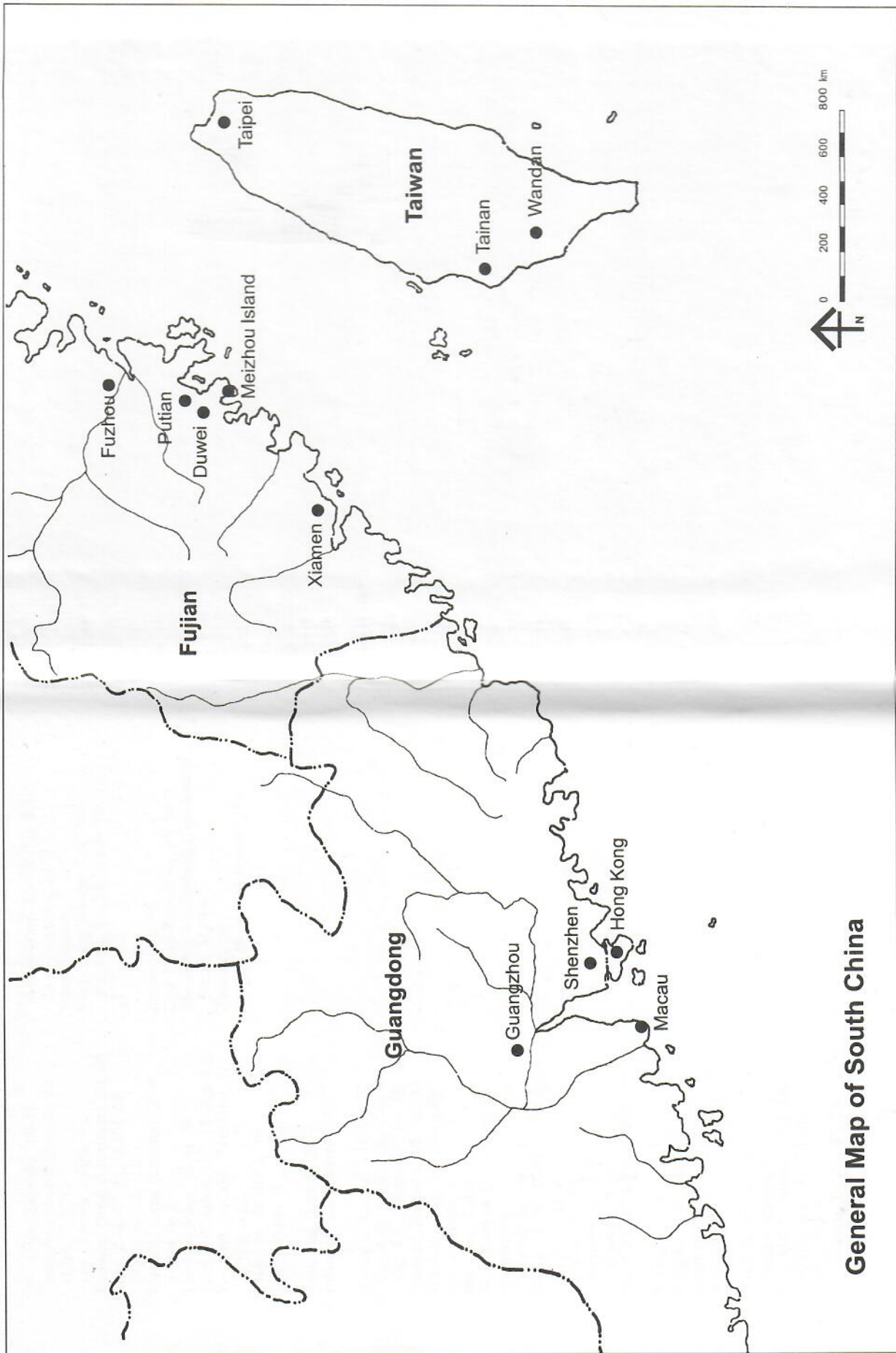
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General Map of South China

IMAGES OF ASIA

Known variously as Tianhou or Tin Hau, Mazu or A-Ma, the Empress of Heaven is one of China's most important deities. Renowned for her control of water and her willingness to help those in distress, she is worshipped by city dwellers, farmers, and fisherfolk alike.

Treating all aspects of the Empress's worship, this book begins with the myth of a girl from Putian, in Fujian province, whose magical powers allowed her to rescue her father and brothers from a shipwreck. It examines the history of her cult, her gradual rise in the Chinese pantheon, and the meaning of her worship today.

Drawing examples from Hong Kong, Fujian, and Taiwan, it explores the siting and decoration of her temples, common practices of devotion, and her unique festivals. Carefully researched, elegantly written, and vividly illustrated, *Temples of the Empress of Heaven* provides a rare glimpse into the workings of Chinese popular religion.

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