

Taoism

Beliefs

Taoism has never been a unified religion, but has rather consisted of numerous teachings based on various revelations. Therefore, different branches of Taoism often have very distinct beliefs. Nevertheless, there are certain core beliefs that nearly all the schools share.

Taoist theology emphasizes various themes found in the Tao Te Ching, such as naturalness, vitality, peace, "non-action" (wu wei), emptiness (refinement), detachment, flexibility, receptiveness, spontaneity, the relativism of human ways of life, ways of speaking and guiding behavior.

Tao

"Tao" is usually translated as road, channel, path, way, doctrine, or line. Wing-tsit Chan stated that Tao meant system of morality to Confucianists, but the natural, eternal, spontaneous, indescribable way things began and pursued their course to Taoists. Tao can be roughly stated to be the flow of the universe, or the force behind the natural order, equating it with the influence that keeps the universe balanced and ordered. Tao is associated with nature, due to a belief that nature demonstrates the Tao. The flow of qi, as the essential energy of action and existence, is often compared to the universal order of Tao. Tao is compared to what it is not, it is often considered to be the source of both existence and non-existence.

Tao is also associated with the complex concept of De "power; virtue; integrity", that is, the active expression of Tao. De is the active living, or cultivation, of that "way".

Wu wei

Wu wei is a central concept in Taoism. The literal meaning of wu wei is "without action". It is often expressed by the paradox wei wu wei, meaning "action without action" or "effortless doing". The practice and efficacy of wu wei are fundamental in Taoist thought, most prominently emphasized in Taoism. The goal of wu wei is alignment with Tao, revealing the soft and invisible power within all things. It is believed by Taoists that masters of wu wei can observe and follow this invisible potential, the innate in-action of the Way.

In ancient Taoist texts, wu wei is associated with water through its yielding nature. Water is soft and weak, but it can move

earth and carve stone. Taoist philosophy proposes that the universe works harmoniously according to its own ways. When someone exerts his will against the world, he disrupts that harmony. Taoism does not identify man's will as the root problem. Rather, it asserts that man must place his will in harmony with the natural universe.

Pu

Pu is translated "uncarved block", "unhewn log", or "simplicity". It is a metaphor for the state of wu wei and the principle of jian. It represents a passive state of receptiveness. Pu is a symbol for a state of pure potential and perception without prejudice. In this state, Taoists believe everything is seen as it is, without preconceptions or illusion.

Pu is usually seen as keeping oneself in the primordial state of tao. It is believed to be the true nature of the mind, unburdened by knowledge or experiences. In the state of pu, there is no right or wrong, beautiful or ugly. There is only pure experience, or awareness, free from learned labels and definitions. It is this state of being that is the goal of following wu wei.

Spirituality

Taoists believe that man is a microcosm for the universe. The body ties directly into the Chinese five elements. The five organs correlate with the five elements, the five directions and the seasons. Akin to the Hermetic maxim of "as above, so below", Taoism posits that man may gain knowledge of the universe by understanding himself.

In Taoism, even beyond Chinese folk religion, various rituals, exercises, and substances are said to positively affect one's physical and mental health. They are also intended to align oneself spiritually with cosmic forces, or enable ecstatic spiritual journeys. These concepts seem basic to Taoism in its elite forms. Internal alchemy and various spiritual practices are used by some Taoists to improve health and extend life, theoretically even to the point of physical immortality.

Pantheon

The traditional Chinese religion is polytheistic. Its many deities are part of a heavenly hierarchy that mirrors the bureaucracy of Imperial China. According to their beliefs, Chinese deities may be promoted or demoted for their actions. Some deities are also simply exalted humans, such as Guan Yu, the god of honor and piety. The particular deities worshipped vary according to geographical regions and historical periods in China, though the general pattern of worship is more constant.

There are some disagreements regarding the proper composition of this pantheon. But popular Taoism typically presents the Jade Emperor as the official head deity.

Ethics

The Three Jewels, or Three Treasures, are basic virtues in Taoism. The Three Jewels are compassion, moderation and humanity. They are also translated as kindness, simplicity (or the absence of excess), and modesty.

Sexuality

Compared to a traditional Western perspective, the Taoist view of sexuality is considerably more at ease. The body is not viewed as a dangerous source of evil temptation, but rather as a positive asset. Taoism rejects Western mind-body dualism; mind and body are not set in contrast or opposition with each other. Sex is treated as a vital component to romantic love; however, Taoism emphasizes the need for self-control and moderation. Complete abstinence is frequently treated as equally dangerous as excessive sexual indulgence. The sexual vitality of men is portrayed as limited, while the sexual energy of women is viewed as boundless. Men are encouraged to control ejaculation to preserve this vital energy, but women are encouraged to reach orgasm without restriction. Taoists believe that a man may increase and nourish his own vitality by bringing a woman to orgasm, thereby "activating" her energy and attuning it with himself. This is considered to be of benefit to both partners.

The Natural Environment

The Tao Te Jing says: 'Humanity follows the Earth, the Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows the Tao, and the Tao follows what is natural.' Taoists therefore obey the Earth. The Earth respects Heaven, Heaven abides by the Tao, and the Tao

follows the natural course of everything. Humans should help everything grow according to its own way. Therefore human beings should cultivate the way of no-action and let nature be itself.

Biodiversity:

Taoism has a unique sense of value in that it judges affluence by the number of different species. If all things in the universe grow well, then a society is a community of affluence. If not, this kingdom is on the decline. This view encourages both government and people to take good care of nature.

Scripture

The Tao Te Ching, is widely considered to be the most influential Taoist text. It is a foundational scripture of central importance in Taoism.

The opening lines, with literal and common translation, are:

- 道可道，非常道。
Tao (way or path) can be said, not usual way
"The Way that can be described is not the true Way."
- 名可名，非常名。
names can be named, not usual names
"The Name that can be named is not the constant Name."

Tao literally means "path" or "way" and can figuratively mean "essential nature", "destiny", "principle", or "true path". The philosophical and religious "Tao" is infinite, without limitation. One view states that the paradoxical opening is intended to prepare the reader for teachings about the unteachable Tao. Tao is believed to be transcendent, indistinct and without form. Hence, it cannot be named or categorized. Even the word "Tao" can be considered a dangerous temptation to make Tao a limiting "name".

The Tao Te Ching is not thematically ordered. However, the main themes of the text are repeatedly expressed using variant formulations, often with only a slight difference. The leading themes revolve around the nature of Tao and how to attain it. Tao is said to be unnamable and accomplishing great things through small means.

Feng Shui

Feng Shui is also known, as Kanyu is the art of placing and situating a building so that it is in harmony with its surroundings. According to Feng Shui cultural and social issues are influenced by natural, metaphysical and cosmological factors. To practically use Feng Shui one needs to understand the influence of cosmology on earth, should have a knowledge of how astronomy and astrology influence the placing of buildings, understand the Confucian classic, understand the weathering process and understand the forces of nature acting on buildings and their surroundings. It is also essential to have knowledge of the magnetic fields and how they influence man, knowledge on how to place buildings in order to tap 'chi' or the energy of the earth, understand the geographical land forms like hill, valleys, flat land etc. One must understand how environmental factors influence buildings externally and internally and must know how to place buildings so that the building has a comfortable physical environment

Feng Shui Symbols:

In Feng Shui there are many symbols that bring good luck and good fortune. Placing these objects in the house can bring you good luck. Some symbols have to be placed in specific positions within the house. Given below are a few Feng Shui objects that will bring good luck and good fortune.

Good Luck Coins: Gifting someone three coins tied with a red ribbon represents sharing wealth and luck. This act brings good luck and positive Feng Shui to both the giver and the receiver.

Three-Legged Moon Frog: The three-legged frog with a coin in its mouth should be placed inside the front and should face into the house. This will improve your good luck and prosperity. This is a very important symbol of wealth and fortune. This symbol is also associated with long-life.

Dragon Turtle: A golden dragon turtle will make your business prosperous and improve relationships with those around you. Place a golden dragon turtle in the prosperity corner (South-East) of your office facing the door. This Feng Shui symbol is the best representative of a long and prosperous life.

Golden Cat of Abundance and Protection: This is a unique Feng Shui statue. On one side of this two sided Cat, the Cat is

smiling and holding out its left paw up which represents good fortune and attracts money. On the other side the Cat is frowning and is holding a broom in its paw. This side symbolizes protection and broom is used to sweep away your troubles.

Golden Pigs: Pair of Golden Pigs brings great prosperity and happiness to a household. This is a symbol of honesty, initiative and diligence. It is best to use Golden Pigs when you are setting up a business or a new home.

Bells: Hang small metal bells outside your front door if it faces between the North and the West. Bells ring in good news and prosperity. You can place bells made of crystal and ceramic in other parts of the house.

Wealth Bucket: Fill a container made of metal with coins and place it in the North West corner of your home or office. Do not display the container; keep the container inside a cabinet or draw.

Fish: According to Feng Shui goldfish are descendants of Koi Carp and can live for over 100 years. Placing three gold fish in a bowl bring prosperity. It is believed that statues or pictures of eight Koi Carp bring good fortune into your home or business.

Three Simple Principles for Living:

If one honestly tried to master Feng Shui it would take years. It is not something that one can do by just reading a book. But the principles of Feng Shui are grounded in common sense and practicality. Thus following a few simple rules of Feng Shui you can improve the surroundings in which you live.

1. Observe and become aware about your surroundings. Always follow the rules of nature.
2. In Feng Shui it is important to harness positive energy and allow it to flow freely. To allow good flows of energy remove all obstacles and create more open space. Ensure that there is no obstacle especially when you enter a room, as it will obstruct the smooth flow of energy through the room.

According to Feng Shui when you arrange your room it should be done in such a way that you can see anyone who is entering the room. It is not possible in a particular room then place a mirror opposite the door so that it will enable you to see whoever is entering the room.

Shenism

Chinese folk religion is the ancient practice of the veneration of (and communication with) the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, the Heaven, and various stars, as well as communication with animals. It often espouses the dualistic opposed and complimentary principles of the universe: yin and yang and various devotions associated with different folk gods and goddesses.

Afterlife:

At the moment of death, Chinese believe one's spirit is taken by messengers to the god of walls and moats, Ch'eng Huang, who conducts a kind of preliminary hearing. Those found virtuous may go directly to one of the Buddhist paradises, to the dwelling place of the Taoist immortals, or the tenth court of hell for immediate rebirth.

After 49 days, sinners descend to hell, located at the base of the mythical Mount Meru. There they undergo a fixed period of punishment in one or more levels of hell. The duration of this punishment may be reduced by the intercession of the merciful Ti-ts'ang.

When the punishment is complete, the souls in hell drink an elixir of oblivion in preparation for their next reincarnation.

They then climb on the wheel of transmigration, which takes them to their next reincarnation, or, in an alternative account, they are thrown off the bridge of pain into a river that sweeps them off to their next life.

Human Nature:

The ancient Chinese believed in a dual soul. The lower soul of the senses disappears with death, but the rational soul (hun) survives death and is the object of ancestor worship.

Perhaps the most important Chinese concept related to the body and soul is the idea of ch'i. At its simplest, ch'i means breath, air or vapor, but in Chinese religious belief it is life energy or life-force.

It is believed that every person is allotted a specified amount of ch'i and he or she must strengthen, control and increase it in order to live a long life. (e.g. T'ai chi).

Ghosts, spirits and demons:

In Chinese thought, the world is populated by a vast number of spirits, both good and evil. Such spirits include nature demons (Yaomo), evil spirits or devils (Oni), and ghosts (Gui).

Evil spirits are believed to avoid light, so many rituals involving fire and light have developed, such as the use of bonfires, firecrackers, and torches. Evil spirits are also traditionally believed to travel in straight lines, which explains many curvy roads throughout China.

But not all spirits are evil — some are just unhappy. As evidenced by the practice of ancestor worship, most Chinese people believe the souls of the deceased endure after death and must be kept happy by offerings and honor.

If a spirit is not kept happy, perhaps because it had a bad death, an improper burial or has no descendants to perform the proper rituals, it becomes a ghost. Ghosts may attack human beings to prompt them to meet the ghosts' needs or at least to draw attention to their plight.

Ghosts receive the most attentions during Ghost Month, the seventh month in the Chinese lunar year, and especially during the Ghost Festival on the fifteenth day.

Heaven:

Heaven (T'ien) can be used to refer to god, an impersonal power, or both.

T'ien is closely associated with Shang-ti (Supreme Ruler), and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

Perhaps the most important concept of heaven is the Mandate of Heaven (t'ien-ming). According to this, rulers govern by divine permission and based on their virtue, not by any birthright. Importantly, this permission is revocable if the ruler is not virtuous enough.

Hell:

Hell is made up of ten courts, each ruled by one of the 10 Yama Kings and 18 levels in which wrongdoers are punished.

1. Chamber of Wind and Thunder – People who kill and commit heinous crimes out of greed are sent here.
2. Chamber of Grinding – Wealthy men who do no good and waste food are ground into powder in this chamber.
3. Chamber of Flames – People who steal, plunder, rob and cheat are sent here to be burnt.
4. Chamber of Ice – Children who ill-treat their parents and elders are sent here to be frozen in ice.
5. Chamber of Oil Cauldrons – Sex offenders such as rapists, lechers, adulterers are fried in oil in this chamber.
6. Chamber of Dismemberment by Sawing – Kidnappers and people who force good women into prostitution suffer the fate of being sawn in this chamber.
7. Chamber of Dismemberment by Chariot – Corrupt officials and landlords who oppress and exploit the people are dismembered by a chariot in this chamber.
8. Chamber of Mountain of Knives – People who cheat customers by earning more than they should, profiteers who jack up prices and cheat on the quality of goods are made to shed blood by climbing the mountain of knives.
9. Chamber of Tongue Ripping – Gossips who stir trouble and liars suffer the fate of having their tongues ripped out in this chamber.
10. Chamber of Pounding – Cold-blooded murderers are pounded in this chamber.
11. Chamber of Torso-severing – Scheming and ungrateful men have their torsos severed in this chamber.
12. Chamber of Scales – Crooks who oppress the innocent, people who cheat on the quality of goods and daughters-in-law who ill-treat their in-laws have hooks pierced into their body and hung upside down.
13. Chamber of Eye-gouging – Peeping toms who go around peeking and leering have their eyeballs gouged out here.
14. Chamber of Heart-digging – People with evil hearts have them dug out in this chamber.
15. Chamber of Disembowelment – Instigators, hypocrites and tomb-robbers have their bowels dug out in this chamber.
16. Chamber of Blood – Blasphemous crooks who show no respect to the gods suffer the fate of being skinned in this chamber.
17. Chamber of Maggots – Crooks who use loopholes in the law to cheat and engage in malpractice are eaten alive by maggots in this chamber.

18. Chamber of Avici – Crooks who have committed heinous crimes, brought misery to the people and betrayed the ruler are placed on a platform above an inferno. The unlucky ones fall off the platform into the inferno and burn while the lucky ones remain on the platform. These spirits are never to be reincarnated.

Ch'i (Qi):

Ch'i is a fundamental concept in Chinese philosophy and culture. Found in Chinese traditional religion and also Taoism, Ch'i literally means "air" or "breath," but as a concept it refers to the energy flow or life force that is said to pervade all things.

The quality, quantity and balance of Ch'i is believed to be essential to maintaining health and achieving a long life.

"Qi is the basic material of all that exists. It animates life and furnishes functional power of events. Qi is the root of the human body; its quality and movement determine human health. There is a normal or healthy amount of Qi in every person, and health manifests in its balance and harmony, its moderation and smoothness of flow"

Chinese medicine and acupuncture both utilize the flows of Ch'i to heal the body and spirit, most martial arts consider Ch'i a vital part of their study and practice, and its importance in Chinese mysticism of all kinds cannot be overstated.

Wu Xing, I-Ching, Daoxue, Divination, Horoscopes, & other Occult practices:

There are far too many particular forms of Occult practice in Chinese 'religion' from simple forms of divination using three coins and the Book of Changes (I-ching), to Spirit shamans (Wu) speaking with the dead, and Daoist sorcerers seeking the elixir of immortality.

However it is true to say that to some degree almost all Chinese people incorporate some occult practices in their day to day lives and consider them to be as unquestionably true as the West does the Periodic Table or the Laws of Thermodynamics.

Buddhism

Buddhism is generally believed to have spread to China in 67 AD during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220) from Hotan in Xinjiang to Central China.

During its development in China, it has a profound influence on traditional Chinese culture and thoughts, and has become one of the most important religions in China.

Today the most popular form of Buddhism in both mainland China and Hong Kong is a mix of the Pure Land and Chan school

Pure Land School

Pure Land Buddhism is based on the Pure Land sutras, principally the *Amitābha Sūtra*, and the longer *Infinite Life Sūtra*.

These sutras describe Amitābha and his Pure Land of Bliss, called Sukhāvātī.

In the Longer Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra, the Buddha describes to his attendant Ānanda, how the buddha Amitābha, as an advanced monk named Dharmakara, made a great series of vows to save all sentient beings, and through his great merit, created a realm called the Land of Bliss.

This land of Sukhāvātī would later come to be known as the Pure Land in Chinese translation.

Teachings and Practice:

The main teaching of the Chinese Pure Land tradition is based on focusing the mind with Mindfulness of the Buddha through recitation of the name of Amitābha Buddha, so as to attain rebirth in his pure land of Sukhāvātī.

Contemporary Pure Land traditions see Amitābha preaching the Dharma in his buddha-field, called the "Pure Land" or "Western Heaven", a region offering respite from karmic transmigration.

In such traditions, entering the Pure Land is popularly perceived as equivalent to the attainment of enlightenment. After practitioners attain enlightenment in the Pure Land, they have the choice of becoming a buddha and entering Nirvāṇa or returning to any of the six realms of existence as a bodhisattva in order to help all sentient beings in saṃsāra.

Although much emphasis is placed on the centrality of Amitābha Buddha in Pure Land Buddhism, he is not considered as a supreme god or a deity. The concept of a supreme being, as a world creator and deciding the fate of beings is contrary to Buddhist teaching in all traditions

The Pure Land:

The Pure Land is described in the Longer Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra as a land of beauty that surpasses all other realms. More importantly for the Pure Land practitioner, once one has been "born" into this land (birth occurs painlessly through lotus flowers), one will never again be reborn. In the Pure Land one will be personally instructed by Amitābha Buddha and numerous bodhisattvas until one reaches full and complete enlightenment. In effect, being born into the Pure Land is akin to achieving enlightenment, through escaping saṃsāra, the Buddhist concept of "the wheel of birth and death."

Chan (Zen) School

The origins of Zen Buddhism are ascribed to the Flower Sermon, the earliest source for which comes from the 14th century. It is said that Gautama Buddha gathered his disciples one day for a Dharma talk. When they gathered together, the Buddha was completely silent and some speculated that perhaps the Buddha was tired or ill. The Buddha silently held up and twirled a flower and twinkled his eyes; several of his disciples tried to interpret what this meant, though none of them were correct. One of the Buddha's disciples, Mahākāśyapa, silently gazed at the flower and broke into a broad smile. The Buddha then acknowledged Mahākāśyapa's insight by saying the following:

"I possess the true Dharma eye, the marvelous mind of Nirvāṇa, the true form of the formless, the subtle Dharma gate that does not rest on words or letters but is a special transmission outside of the scriptures. This I entrust to Mahākāśyapa."

Zen 'teachings' and practice:

In Zen Buddhism there has developed a way which concentrates on direct experience rather than on rational creeds or revealed scriptures.

Wisdom is passed, not through words, but through a lineage of one-to-one direct transmission of thought from teacher to student. It is commonly taught that such lineage continued all the way from the Buddha's time to the present.

Though wisdom is believed to pass directly from the mind of master to student many Zen masters have offered words of guidance to help initiates on the path, the most famous of these is the Bloodstream sermon.

The Bloodstream sermon:

"Buddhas don't save buddhas. If you use your mind to look for a buddha, you won't see the Buddha. As long as you look for a buddha somewhere else, you'll never see that your own mind is the Buddha.

Don't use a buddha to worship a buddha. And don't use the mind to invoke a buddha. Buddhas don't recite sutras. Buddhas don't keep precepts. And buddhas don't break precepts. Buddhas don't keep or break anything. Buddhas don't do good or evil. To find a buddha, you have to see your nature."

Principles and doctrine:

Zen asserts, as do other schools in Mahāyāna Buddhism, that all sentient beings have Buddha-nature, the universal nature of transcendent wisdom, and emphasizes that Buddha-nature is nothing other than the essential nature of the mind itself. The aim of Zen practice is to discover this Buddha-nature within each person, through meditation and practice of the Buddha's teachings. The ultimate goal of this is to become a Completely Enlightened Buddha .

The Zen tradition holds that in meditation practice, notions of doctrine and teachings necessitate the creation of various notions and appearances that obscure the transcendent wisdom of each being's Buddha-nature. This process of rediscovery goes under various terms such as "introspection", "a backward step", "turning-about" or "turning the eye inward".

The importance of Zen's non-reliance on written words is often misunderstood as being against the study of Buddhist texts. However, Zen is deeply rooted in the teachings and doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism. What the Zen tradition emphasizes is that enlightenment of the Buddha came not through intellectual reasoning, but rather through self-realization in Dharma practice and meditation. Therefore, it is held that it is primarily through Dharma practice and meditation that others may attain enlightenment and become buddhas as well.

Zuòchán:

As the name Zen implies, sitting meditation is a core aspect of Zen practice. During this sitting meditation, practitioners usually assume a position such as the lotus position, half-lotus, Burmese, or seiza postures. To regulate the mind, awareness is directed towards counting or watching the breath or put in the energy center below the navel (see also anapanasati).[25] Often, a square or round cushion placed on a padded mat is used to sit on; in some other cases, a chair may be used.

Other techniques:

There are other techniques common in the Zen tradition which seem unconventional and whose purpose is said to be to shock a student in order to help him or her let go of habitual activities of the mind. Some of these are common today, while others are found mostly in anecdotes. These include the loud belly shout known as katsu. It is common in many Zen traditions today for Zen teachers to have a stick with them during formal ceremonies which is a symbol of authority and which can be also used to strike on the table during a talk. Buddhists may also practice koan inquiry during sitting meditation, walking meditation, and throughout all the activities of daily life.

Koan practice:

A koan (literally "public case") is a story or dialogue, generally related to Zen or other Buddhist history; the most typical form is an anecdote involving early Chinese Zen masters. These anecdotes involving famous Zen teachers are a practical demonstration of their wisdom, and can be used to test a student's progress in Zen practice. Koans often appear to be paradoxical or linguistically meaningless dialogues or questions. But to Zen Buddhists the koan is "the place and the time and the event where truth reveals itself" unobstructed by the oppositions and differentiations of language. Answering a koan requires a student to let go of conceptual thinking and of the logical way we order the world, so that like creativity in art, the appropriate insight and response arises naturally and spontaneously in the mind.

Nirvāna :

The Buddha described Nirvāna as the perfect peace of the state of mind that is free from craving, anger and other afflicting states. It is also the "end of the world"; there is no identity left, and no boundaries for the mind. The subject is at peace with the world, has compassion for all and gives up obsessions and fixations. This peace is achieved when the existing volitional formations are pacified, and the conditions for the production of new ones are eradicated. In Nirvāṇa the root causes of craving and aversion have been extinguished, so that one is no longer subject to suffering.

The Dual path:

In addition, in Chinese Buddhism there is a related practice called the "dual path of Chán and Pure Land cultivation", which is also called the "dual path of emptiness and existence."

As taught by Venerable Nan Huaijin, the name of Amitābha Buddha is recited slowly, and the mind is emptied out after each repetition. When idle thoughts arise, the phrase is repeated again to clear them. With constant practice, the mind is able to remain peacefully in emptiness, culminating in the attainment of enlightenment.

MYTHOLOGICAL GODS

CH'ENG-HUANG

God of moats and walls. Every village and town had its own Ch'eng-Huang, most often a local dignitary or important person who had died and been promoted to godhood. His divine status was revealed in dreams, though the gods made the actual decision. Ch'eng-Huang not only protects the community from attack but sees to it that the King of the Dead does not take any soul from his jurisdiction without proper authority. Ch'eng-Huang also exposes evil-doers in the community itself, usually through dreams. His assistants are Mr. Daywatchman and Mr. Nightwatchman.

CHU JUNG

God of fire. Chu Jung punishes those who break the laws of heaven.

KUAN TI

God of war. The Great Judge who protects the people from injustice and evil spirits. A red-faced god dressed always in green. An oracle. Kuan Ti was an actual historical figure, a general of the Han dynasty renowned for his skill as a warrior and his justness as a ruler. There were more than 1600 temples dedicated to Kuan Ti.

KUAN YIN

Goddess of mercy and compassion. A lady dressed in white seated on a lotus and holding an infant. Murdered by her father, she recited the holy books when she arrived in Hell, and the ruler of the underworld could not make the dead souls suffer. The disgruntled god sent her back to the world of the living, where Kuan Yin attained great spiritual insight and was rewarded with immortality by the Buddha. A popular goddess, Kuan Yin's temple at the Mount of the Wondrous Peak was ever filled with a throng of pilgrims shaking rattles and setting off firecrackers to get her attention.

LUI KANG

God of thunder. Lui Kang has the head of a bird, wings, claws and blue skin, and his chariot is drawn by six boys. Lui Kang makes thunder with his hammer, and his wife makes lightning with her mirrors. Lui Kang chases away evil spirits and punishes criminals whose crimes have gone undetected.

PA HSIEN

The Eight Immortals of the Taoist tradition. Ordinary mortals who, through good works and good lives, were rewarded by the Queen Mother Wang by giving them the peaches of everlasting life to eat. They are:

TIEH-KUAI Li, of the Iron Crutch. A healer, Li sits as a beggar in the market place selling wondrous drugs, some of which can revive the dead.

CHUNG-LI CH'UAN, A smiling old man always beaming with joy, he was rewarded with immortality for his ascetic life in the mountains.

LAN TS'AI-HO, A young flute-player and wandering minstrel who carries a basket laden with fruit. His soul-searching songs caused a stork to snatch him away to the heavens.

LU TUNG-PIN, A hero of early Chinese literature. Renouncing riches and the world, he punished the wicked and rewarded the good, and slew dragons with a magic sword.

CHANG-KUO LAO, An aged hermit with miraculous abilities. Chang owned a donkey that could travel at incredible speed. The personification of the primordial vapor that is the source of all life.

HAN HSIANG-TZU, A scholar who chose to study magic rather than prepare for the civil service. When his uncle chastised him for studying magic, Han Hsiang-Tzu materialized two flowers with poems written on the leaves.

TS'AO KUO-CHIU, Ts'ao Kuo-Chiu tried to reform his brother, a corrupt emperor, by reminding him that the laws of heaven are inescapable.

HO HSIEN-KU, Immortal Maiden - A Cantonese girl who dreamed that she could become immortal by eating a powder made of mother-of-pearl. She appears only to men of great virtue.

P'AN-CHIN-LIEN

Goddess of prostitutes. As a mortal, she was a widow who was much too liberal and inventive with her favors, and her father-in-law killed her. In death her more professional associates honored her and eventually became the goddess of whores.

SHI-TIEN YEN-WANG

The Lords of Death, the ten rulers of the underworld. They dress alike in royal robes and only the wisest can tell them apart. Each ruler presides over one court of law. In the first court a soul is judged according to his sins in life and sentenced to one of the eight courts of punishment. Punishment is fitted to the offense. Misers are made to drink molten gold, liars' tongues are cut out. In the second court are incompetent doctors and dishonest agents; in the third, forgers, liars, gossips, and corrupt government officials; in the fifth, murderers, sex offenders and atheists; in the sixth, the sacrilegious and blasphemers; in the eighth, those guilty of filial disrespect; in the ninth, arsonists and accident victims. In the tenth is the Wheel of Transmigration where souls are released to be reincarnated again after their punishment is completed. Before souls are released, they are given a brew of oblivion, which makes them forget their former lives.

TI-TSANG WANG

God of mercy. Wandering in the caverns of Hell, a lost soul might encounter a smiling monk whose path is illuminated by a shining pearl and whose staff is decorated with metal rings that chime like bells. This is Ti-Tsang Wang, who will do all he can to help the soul escape hell and even to put an end to his eternal round of death and rebirth. Long ago, Ti-Tsang Wang renounced Nirvana so that he could search the dark regions of Hell for souls to save from the kings of the ten hells. Once a priest of Brahma, he converted to Buddhism and himself became a Buddha with special authority over the souls of the dead.

T'SHAI-SHEN

God of wealth who presides over a vast bureaucracy with many minor deities under his authority. A majestic figure robed in exquisite silks. T'shai-Shen is quite a popular god; even atheists worship him.

TSAO WANG

God of the hearth. Every household has its own Tsao Wang. Every year the hearth god reports on the family to the Jade Emperor, and the family has good or bad luck during the coming year according to his report. The hearth god's wife records every word spoken by every member of the family. A paper image represents the hearth god and his wife, and incense is burned to them daily. When the time came to make

his report to the Jade Emperor, sweetmeats were placed in his mouth, the paper was burned, and firecrackers were lit to speed him on his way.

TU-TI

Local gods. Minor gods of towns, villages and even streets and households. Though far from the most important gods in the divine scheme, they were quite popular. Usually portrayed as kindly, respectable old men, they see to it that the domains under their protection run smoothly.

YENG-WANG-YEH

Lord Yama King - Greatest of the Lords of Death. Yeng-Wang-Yeh judges all souls newly arrived to the land of the dead and decides whether to send them to a special court for punishment or put them back on the Wheel of Transmigration.

YU-HUANG-SHANG-TI

Father Heaven - The August Supreme Emperor of Jade, whose court is in the highest level of heaven, originally a sky god. The Jade Emperor made men, fashioning them from clay. His heavenly court resembles the earthly court in all ways, having an army, a bureaucracy, a royal family and parasitical courtiers. The Jade Emperor's rule is orderly and without caprice. The seasons come and go as they should, yin is balanced with yang, good is rewarded and evil is punished. As time went on, the Jade Emperor became more and more remote to men, and it became customary to approach him through his doorkeeper, the Transcendental Dignitary. The Jade Emperor sees and hears everything; even the softest whisper is as loud as thunder to the Jade Emperor.

This list is far from exhaustive, there are well over 200 major deities in Chinese religion, plus an incalculable host of, minor gods, spirits, demons, ghosts and immortals (and buddhas) all ruled over and subject to the Celestial Bureaucracy.

Chinese religion generally holds the Spirit world, Heaven and Hell to be as tied up in red tape and steeped in hierarchy as they are on Earth, only the agencies in charge change.