

A Chinese Temple Keeper Talks About Chinese Folk Religion

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In December 1968, I collected a number of Chinese moralistic tracts, *shann-shu*,^[1] in Hong Kong. When I examined them in detail a month later, I noticed that a large number of them were printed from wood-blocks stored in a Hong Kong temple called Tsorng-Shann Tarnng.^[2] When I wrote to the temple to inquire about the *shann-shu*, I received an answer from the custodian¹ of the temple, Mr. Yeh (the Cantonese pronunciation is Yip),^[4] who is now eighty-four years old. He said that his father was one of the founders of the temple about eighty years ago, and he has inherited the custodianship from his father. Our correspondence continued for several years² during which time I raised a number of questions about Chinese religion. Eventually Mr. Yeh selected several

1. Chinese folk religion temples usually do not have resident clergy or monks (large Buddhist temples will often have resident monks or nuns). They are generally managed by a "board of directors" that can run from an elaborate hierarchy of several dozen men of standing in the community in a large wealthy temple to a few interested and concerned men in a small neighborhood or village temple. The day to day affairs of the temple are usually handled by a custodian^[3] (who may often receive a small remuneration for his work) who takes care of everything from sweeping the floor, to writing receipts for contributions, to preparing the requisite ritual objects for a rite, to interpreting the oracle slips drawn in divination rituals.

2. In August 1975, I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Yeh in Hong Kong and visiting his temple. Mr. Yeh moved to Hong Kong from southern Kwangtung Province about thirty years ago. He is retired and lives in a crowded apartment with his wife, son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. He seems very proud of the temple and is a very pious adherent of his religion. The "temple" is actually a crowded one room shrine on the fourth floor of an old building on Victoria Island. The temple is dedicated to Yuh-hwang Shanq-dih^[5] (the supreme deity of the pantheon of gods). A room adjacent to the shrine is piled high with stacks of freshly printed *shann-shu*. Mr. Yeh said they now print all *shann-shu* by photo-offset or movable type since block printing is too old fashion.

of my queries and, in June 1972, sent me his responses in the form of a little thread-stitched handwritten booklet—in appearance very much like a late nineteenth century *shann-shu*. Mr. Yeh does not speak or read English. His letters are written in Chinese in an elegant old fashioned letter style, and the booklet itself is written in a formal terse literary style.

This booklet might be loosely considered as a kind of “interview” and, as such, can give an example of a temple keeper’s explanations about Chinese folk religion. I have talked to many temple custodians in folk religion temples in Taiwan, both in small and in large temples. With few exceptions their responses to my questions about Chinese religion have been of the same calibre as Mr. Yeh’s. Therefore, I think Mr. Yeh’s booklet can be instructive in helping us form some idea of the level of religious knowledge of a man who handles the day to day affairs of a folk religion temple.

Altho most of what he says in the booklet is quite ordinary, and even superficial, I still find it interesting to see how someone of his experience in folk religious affairs still insists on squeezing Chinese religion into the traditional “Three Doctrines”^[6] explanation. This conception of their religious beliefs is very tenacious among most Chinese (and unfortunately among many foreign students of Chinese folk religion) in spite of numerous contradictions, incongruous practices, deities of peculiar provenance, and so forth. He shows little interest in (and is disdainful of) areas deviating from the traditional explanation, and evades discussing religious practices outside of the Three Doctrines framework (see section 2). The Three Doctrines explanation is maintained intact by stretching the category of Dawism to such an extent that it becomes the repository for anything that does not fit the other two more clearly definable categories.

If we work with a narrower definition of Dawism (even such a definition is not an easy feat given the excessively free use of the term “Dawism”) we will begin to see many other contributions to Chinese folk religion, for example, from practices that we might tentatively label “nature worship,” shamanism, spiritualism, and so forth, including the pervasive cult of the dead in its many forms.

The Three Doctrines explanation is more than just traditional piety, for it reinforces the emotional and intellectual ties to the Great Tradition of Chinese culture and helps maintain the pious belief about the purity and homogeneity of Chinese culture. Of course this is useful for the maintenance of the Chinese cultural tradition, but as students of the folk religion we cannot allow this to detract us from examining the folk

religion as it is actually practiced and actually believed. Our interest must be tuned to the Little Tradition as a legitimate area of study for its own sake and not as a deviation or perversion of the Great Tradition. It is long overdue for all students of Chinese folk religion to discard all such restricted and unsuitable analytical schemes in their own studies even tho it is still the common explanation among native adherents.

Mr. Yeh's responses are quite simple and pious. They are not analytical nor can we reasonably expect them to be, since he is not a scholar looking in from the outside but a lifelong adherent and keeper of a sacred institution. Still his explanations are surprisingly superficial. It is possible that he is talking down to me as an ignorant foreigner. However, our previous correspondence was extensive enough that he certainly must have learned that I am familiar with the basic tenets of Chinese folk religion. Judging from my discussions with numerous other temple keepers and from my brief meeting with Mr. Yeh, I suggest that the superficiality of his responses is due to his own limited knowledge. He is a pious literate man, but he is not particularly familiar with the details of folk religious practice. The bookishness of many of his responses suggests that he may have had to do some spade work in either dictionaries or in *shann-shu* before being able to produce even the superficial remarks in his booklet. He quotes several books but the quotations are short, and therefore easily memorized, or are quite likely quoted in various *shann-shu*.

For example, in his remarks about spirit-money (section 10) he does not distinguish between the uses of gold (for the deities) and silver (for the ancestors) spirit-money. He only mentions Guan-dih as the most common deity found in shops (section 4), but neglects to mention the many other patron or guild gods that are found in connection with specific occupations or crafts. In homes (section 5) he does not mention the very important ancestral tablets and altars. Not does he mention Guan-yin^[7] (the Goddess of Mercy, of Buddhist origin) that is very commonly found in homes. He records only the Hann Dynasty names of the Gate Gods (section 11) but these names are seldom used nowadays. The more common names of the Gate Gods are those of two seventh century generals, Chyn Chyong^[8] and Yuh-chyr Jinq-der.^{3[9]} He places the God of the Hearth (section 12) on a much higher plane, and with far greater powers, that he is commonly held to be on (could this be

3. For a popular account of these two generals' transformation into Gate Gods, see *Monkey*, trans. by Arthur Waley, New York: Grove Press, 1958, chapter 10.

because Mr. Yeh is “pushing” the distribution of the Hearth God’s tract?).

In spite of the shortcomings, I have translated Mr. Yeh’s responses in full for two reasons: the first is to present a brief example of a fully involved literate adherent’s way of discussing some aspects of Chinese folk religion for those students who may not yet have had the opportunity to hear such explanations first hand. The second is to remind and encourage students of Chinese folk religion to be wary of traditional or superficial explanations that can sometimes be more distracting than enlightening.

If one has the time and opportunity to carefully observe the various religious practices of a particular group of Chinese people, to ask detailed questions about observed facts, and to pursue the investigation rigorously and systematically, it is quite possible to obtain results that are both reasonable and illuminating.⁴ Such results may often not fully coincide with the pious tradition. Sometimes the reason(s) for a particular practice or belief may not be clearly understood by the adherents. It may simply be asserted that “this is what we do at this time.” Here is where the investigator’s own resources, both as field observer and as historian, must be used to develop a reasonable theory that explains the observed facts and also relates them, preferably thru cause and effect, to other aspects of the immediate group’s history and culture.

My translation follows Mr. Yeh’s booklet just as he wrote it. The footnotes are all my own because some additional commentary seems appropriate, since he uses some terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers.

4. An excellent example of meticulous field work and careful reasoning is: Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973.

Answers to Your Queries

By

YEH JAW

1. Chinese Religion
2. Folk Religion
3. In Chinese Temples
4. In Stores and Shops
5. In Homes
6. [New] Year Pictures
7. Pictures of Gods
8. Scriptures
9. Charms
10. Spirit-Money
11. Gate Gods
12. The Hearth God
13. The Lunar Calendar
14. Tiger Heads

1. Chinese Religion

Chinese religion is divided into Three Doctrines^[6]: Ruism,⁵ Buddhism, and Dawism. Ruism is concerned with creating order in the

5. The term *ru*^[10] is usually mis-translated as "Confucianism." This is not correct since the word has nothing to do with Confucius even tho *ru* is the label attached to the teachings of Confucius, his followers, and those who claimed to be his followers. *Ru* seems to be part of a word family whose root sense is something like "pliable, flexible, bendable." I suggest that the literal sense of *Ru-jiaw* is something like "Doctrine of the Accommodators" (To avoid the incorrect term "Confucianism," I use the non-translation "Ruism" in parallel with Dawism and Buddhism).

During the twelfth century a new form of thought developed on the foundation of earlier Ruist thought. Its name(s) is usually mis-translated as "Neo-Confucianism." However, the Chinese name(s) also has nothing to do with Confucius, nor with "newness" (neo-). The early name for this school of thought is *Daw-shyue*^[11] and means "Study of the Way" (this is *not* to be confused with Dawism!); the later and more common name is *Lii-shyue*^[12] and means "Study of the Lii" (*lii* is a complex term having an underlying sense of "internal structure and pattern" and is probably to be understood here in the more abstract sense of "principle").

world, Buddhism with leaving the world, and Dawism with withdrawing from the world. Altho these doctrines are different, their underlying principles are one and the same. A Dawist book⁶ says: "Like the red flowers, white bulbs, and green lotus leaves, the Three Doctrines originate from one school of thought."

Our religion takes Ruism as its starting point, and Ruism takes Confucius⁷ as its patriarch. The Master's surname is Koong, his given name is Chiou, and his courtesy name is Jonq-ni.^[15] He was born during the Jou Dynasty and was a citizen of the State of Luu.^[16] During the three months when he was regent for the Prime Minister of Luu, there was complete order in the state. But when the Lord of Luu did not come to court for three days⁸ Confucius quit his office. Thereafter he traveled thru the various states in China. He wanted to change their decadent habits and transform them into unpolluted customs, and to spread his idea of "Grand Unity."^{9[17]} But his Way was so great that most people could not comprehend his ideas, and thus he could not carry thru his ambition. Later on he returned to Luu and at a place called Apricot Altar^[18] set up a school to teach his doctrines. There he received students and followers. Of these there were seventy-two worthies who fully comprehended the Six Arts^[19] (that is, Procedural Form, Music, Archery, Charioteering, Writing, and Mathematics). His other three thousand disciples also enjoyed their full measure of fame. Besides this, he edited the *Canons of Odes and Documents*, prepared definitive texts on Procedural Form and Music, collated the *Changes of Jou*, and composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals* so that with praise and blame he could maintain justice.¹⁰ His merit was truly great!

The only term that can probably be translated as "Confucianism" is the late 19th and early 20th century *Koong-tzyy jiau*,^[13] a doctrine that attempted to develop a religion out of *Ru-jiau* and *Lii-shyue* in competition with Christianity and as an alternative to Buddhism.

6. I cannot identify this book.

7. Confucius is a Latinized form of *Koong-fu-tzyy*^[14] "Master Koong."

8. He was engrossed in dallying with some beautiful girls presented to him by the ruler of another state.

9. Usually described as a doctrine of "universal harmony."

10. These refer to the sacred canonical texts of the Ruist tradition: the *Canon of Odes*,^[20] the *Canon of Documents*,^[21] the antecedents of the three later canons on procedural form (*lii*^[22]), the lost *Canon of Music*,^[23] the *Canon of Changes* (in ancient times called the *Changes of Jou*^[24]), and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.^[25] The traditional interpretation of the latter text has tried to to show that the use of specific vocabulary items was for the purpose of praise or blame (For a criticism of this see George A. Kennedy, "Interpretation of the Ch'un-ch'iu," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 62.1 [1942], 40-48).

Confucius was born on the thirty-seventh day [of the day-cycle] in the eleventh moon, during the winter of the twenty-first year of the reign of King Ling of the Jou Dynasty, and died on the second day [of the day-cycle] in the fourth moon, during the summer of the forty-first year of the reign of King Jinq of the Jou Dynasty.¹¹ He enjoyed seventy-three years of life.

After he was gone the princes and kings of successive dynasties venerated the sagely Confucius as The Master Teacher of a Myriad Ages^[26] because of his bountiful merit and great achievements. Therefore throughout a hundred ages, whoever has heard of him, no matter whether it was the great or the lowly, all have looked up to him with admiration. You can just visualize what kind of man he was!

Chinese monks and nuns regard Śākyamuni Buddha^[27] as the founder of their doctrine, and also call him Śākyamun[i] Buddha.^[28] When he was young his name was Siddhārtha.^[29] Our Buddha was born in India in the person of a prince. But he did not admire glory and profit, and did not love the five customs¹² and the evil world.

His father was King Śuddhodana^{13[31]} and was the ruler of Kapilavastu.^[33] His mother was Madame Māyā.^{14[34]} When he was sixteen years old he married Yaśodharā^[36] and gave birth to one son.¹⁵ When he was nineteen he cut off his family ties, shaved his head, and went out to seek salvation as a monk. In great misery he cultivated spiritual perfection in the snowy mountains and then attained a great enlightenment. Subsequently he traveled to the four quarters, preaching the Dharma¹⁶ for over forty years. He had multitudes of followers and I know not how many of them achieved salvation. When he was eighty years old he attained *parinirvāna*.^{17[39]} The *Diamond Sūtra*^[40] says:¹⁸ “No matter whether one is born from an egg, born from a womb, born

11. The years correspond to 551 and 479 B.C. There is some uncertainty in the months and days (see *DKJT* 6933.79). Since there were no such days (of the day-cycle) in the stated months of 551 and 479 B.C., these dates cannot be converted to a “western” calendar.

12. I cannot identify the “five customs.”^[30]

13. Mr. Yeh has incorrectly written the name as [32].

14. She is more common known as Mahāmāyā.^[35]

15. His son was named Rāhula^[37] (also written [38]).

16. The *TRUTH* of Buddhism.

17. The final death of the physical body as one attains the state of *nirvāna*—release from the miseries of transmigration and existence.

18. Quotation from the second paragraph of the *Diamond Sūtra*. See also the translations in F. Max Müller, *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 49, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894, pp. 113–114; and Edward Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958, p. 25.

out of dampness, born thru a [miraculous] transformation, is possessed of form, or lacks form, is possessed of thought, or lacks thought, or is not one that is possessed of thought, or is not one who lacks thought,¹⁹ I will cause all of them to enter nirvāna^[41] and will save them." His compassion was joyously bestowed without limit and without bound. His meritorius virtue was beyond conception.

Later on, starting from the Hann Dynasty, [his teachings] were brought to China and the Way of the Buddha spread everywhere, and has continued on right to the present. Therefore China has, for the most part, venerated Ruism, Buddhism, and Dawism as the Three Doctrines. This has become the common custom and is what is found everywhere. The rest is not worth discussing!

The Dawism of China starts with Lii Eel, whose personal name is also said to be Lao Dan,²⁰ and whose courtesy name is Bor-yang.^[43] One tradition says he was from Kuu County in the State of Chuu,^[44] and another says he was from Haur City in Jou.^[45] During the time of the Eastern Jou Dynasty he was made Notary Beneath the Pillar.^{21[46]} He composed the *Canon of the Way and Its Power*^{22[47]} in five thousand words, as well as the *Canon of the Yellow Courtyard*,^{23[49]} etc. After that

19. All organisms including insects (born in damp places) and the deities and demons (miraculously born); both material and immaterial beings (the highest deities); all organisms with or without sense organs (living beings and deities) as well as neither with nor without sense organs (the very highest immaterial deities).

20. Mr. Yeh has incorrectly written the name as [42].

21. An official title, apparently some sort of recorder.

22. This refers to the book that in pre-Tarng times was known only by the name of its putative author, Lao-tzyy^[48] (Master Lao), who is the same as the Lii Eel referred to here. According to recent reports from China, a 15,000 word *Lao-tzyy* text has been discovered.

23. A (set of) Dawist text(s) which purportedly concern the practice of "nourishing life"^[50] (physical regimen as a route to immortality). Michael Saso has pointed out that the *Canon of the Yellow Courtyard* is actually a manual of ritual meditation ("Red-Head and Black-Head: The Classification of the Taoists of Taiwan . . .," *Bull. of the Institute of Ethnology*, 30 [1970], 77). Altho some sources attribute the text(s) to Lao-tzyy, the extant work(s) date from the sixth century at the earliest (see *ZH* 3354A and *DKJT* 47926.675). Any attributions to the mysterious Lao-tzyy should be regarded as pious rather than as historical. The Dawist Canon (*Daw-tzang*^[51]) contains ten texts with "Canon of the Yellow Courtyard" in their titles (K. M. Schipper, *Concordance du Tao-tsang: Titres des Ouvrages*, Paris: E.F.E.O., 1975, nos. 331-2, 401-3, 432, 873, 1400-3). K. M. Schipper has recently published a critical edition of and concordance to the *Canon of the Yellow Courtyard*, and shows that its antecedent (or earliest sections?) dates from the early fourth century (*Concordance of Houang-t'ing King, Nei-king et Wai-king*, Paris: E.F.E.O., 1975).

he went towards the west, went thru the Harn-guu Pass,^[52] gave his books to the Commandant of the Pass, and went on down the road. There are stories that he could raise the dead and restore flesh to dry bones.

His Way and his means are profound, and are the mystery of the response and transformation of the Three Pure Ones.^{24[53]} Therefore adherents of the Doctrine of the Transcendents^{25[60]} thru successive ages have steadfastly clung to his teaching and most everyone has venerated his ideas. In later ages people called him The Grand Superior Prince Lao^{26[56]} and regard him as the founding father of Dawism.

2. Folk Religion

Folk religion for the most part takes Ruism, Buddhism, and Dawism as its basis. Altho there are a myriad religions in the world, none can measure up to these three.

3. In Chinese Temples

In Chinese temples we offer sacrifices to the Former Worthies, the Former Sages, Loyal Ministers, and Meritorious Gentlemen. We regard the deity of the main shrine in the temple as the presider of the temple. Standing below and to the sides of the deity on the left and right will be two great generals, or sometimes four, etc. I think the great gods in the temples were surely people who, during their lifetimes, performed enduring acts of merit on behalf of the country and the people. After they were gone they received the commendation of High Heaven and were installed as sages or as gods, so that everywhere their glory will be

24. A triad of gods that are frequently referred to in Dawist ritual: The Primal Beginning Heavenly Venerated One,^[54] The Grand Superior Prince of the Way,^[55] The Grand Superior Prince Lao^[56] (see note 26). They are also referred to as The Jade Pure One,^[57] The Supreme Pure One,^[58] and The Grand Pure One^[59] respectively (*ZH* 32A and *DKJT* 12.1011).

25. Referring to those who have sought immortality thru numerous means such as alchemy, yoga, breath control, "nourishing life" (see note 23), etc. The term *shian*^[60] is frequently translated "immortal" or "fairy" but I am not partial to these usages.

26. This is the title of the narrator of the *Tay-shang gaan-ying pian*^[61] ("The Book of Response and Retribution of the Grand Superior"), the most popular moralistic tract in Chinese folk religion. There are many translations of this work into English, for example: D. T. Suzuki and P. Carus, *Treatise of the Exalted One on Response and Retribution*, La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., revised ed. 1944.

manifest.²⁷ Therefore people erect temples, and set out fragrant fires and overflowing offering vessels. Then they offer up sacrifices to commemorate their illustrious purity for a thousand autumns, and to their eternal remembrance, for they will surely be worthy of people of later ages exalting their virtues and requiting their merit!

4. In Stores and Shops

Since stores and shops are places where merchandise is sold, the common practice is to venerate the images of the deities. The most common deity is The Sagely Theocrat-Prince Guan^{28[62]} (a loyal minister of the Hann Dynasty) since we look up to and admire his loyalty, propriety, humaneness, and bravery, and the tremendous spirit and constancy that he exhibited during his lifetime. This means that on the one hand we regard him as a model of human life. On the other hand we see his ability to suppress evil demons thru his righteous spirit as a means of protection for people and prosperity for business.

5. In Homes

In homes we make offerings to the great deities as the main presiders [of the household]. After that we regard our predecessors of successive ages as their assistants. Every morning and evening we offer up incense and candles. During the winter season we make offerings of pork, chicken, duck, fruit, wine, etc., and perform worship to display our sincerity and respect so that we do not forget the Way of "the roots of our

27. It actually seems that most of the Chinese folk religion deities originated as people who "died improperly," that is, either too young, or unmarried, or without children, or were executed, or died violently, etc. Their deification seems to be a way of working off the pollution of improper death by aiding the living, rather than as a reward for an especially virtuous life. For interesting theories concerning the origins of folk religion deities, see Philip C. Baity, *Religion in a Chinese Town*, Taipei: Orient Cultural Service, 1975, pp. 238-269, and C. Stevan Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974, pp. 193-206.

28. This refers to Guan Yeu^[63] who died in the third century A.D. Foreigners commonly call him the God of War. This is very misleading since he is not a Mars-type deity. The emphasis in his veneration is on the more admirable aspects of the martial calling: loyalty, trustworthiness, integrity, intelligence, bravery, as well as prowess in arms. He should more appropriately be called the God of the Martial Virtues. His reputation for trustworthiness (as a protector of agreements and contracts) may be the reason he is venerated by many shop keepers. Note that his interest in history and literature (he is frequently depicted reading a copy of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*) has led many Chinese scholars to regard him as a God of Literature.

trees and the springs of our rivers²⁹ and thereby exhaust the Heavenly appointed callings of our descendants.

6. [New] Year Pictures^[65]

[New] Year pictures signify the New Year season. Whatever is hung or pasted up anywhere must absolutely display good sentiments. There is nothing else to it.

7. Pictures of Gods

Over four thousand years have past since the beginning of China. From the age of the original Chaos³⁰ right up to the present day there have been many Loyal Ministers and Meritorious Gentlemen, and many brave knights and heroes. The events of their lives were so very striking to people, that after they were gone their glorious reputations continued on for a hundred generations. Therefore there were painters, whose art was inspired by the gods, who specialized in painting pictures of gods depicting these former people and extolling their excellent virtues in order to elicit the respect of later people.

8. Scriptions

Letter papers are called scriptions.^[66] This character is commonly written [67]. These are colorful and costly small strips of paper. In ancient times verses for chanting were written on them, or they were sometimes used as document papers.³¹

9. Charms

Charms^[68] are prognostications.^[69] When Gentlemen of the Arts^{32[70]} expel ghosts and gods, they use cinnabar ink to write an inscription and then fold it up into the form of a document. These are also commonly called charms. This word also refers to bamboo [strips] with inscriptions written at the top. They are then split into two parts which can be rejoined into a single [strip]. Each person will retain one part and

29. Alluding to *Tzuoo juann*,^[64] Jau 9 (*Chun-chiou jing-juann jyi-jiee*, 22.6a, SBBY edition); James Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, reprint Taipei, 1963, p. 625.

30. Referring to an ancient Chinese cosmogony that the world originated in an undifferentiated Chaos which then turned into order (Cosmos).

31. This paragraph seems to be the result of miscommunication between myself and Mr. Yeh.

32. Specialists in arcane arts.

when the parts are joined they are regarded as verifications of identity.³³ Sometimes they were made of gold or jade. We also use charms and prognostications along with incantation-water³⁴ to cure disease.

10. Spirit-Money

Spirit-money^[71] is also called thin [leaves].^[72] In general it is something made of precious metal pounded into extremely thin strips. This is commonly referred to as spirit-money, for example, gold spirit-money or silver spirit-money. In the temples of the gods or in houses it is offered up to our ancestors, etc. The gold paper and silver paper that is consumed in the fire is also commonly referred to as "gold and silver paper."³⁵

11. Gate Gods

Gate Gods are also called Gate Officials.^[73] One is named Shern-twu^[74] and the other is named Yuh-liuh.^[75] *The Feng-swu tong* [-yih]^{36[76]} says: "In high antiquity there were two brothers, Shern-twu and Yuh-liuh, who had the innate ability to catch ghosts. Whenever they spotted a ghost who did not comply with what was reasonable they would catch it and feed it to the tigers. Therefore at the end of the twelfth moon of the year on the night before the dried meat sacrifice,³⁷ we drive them [i.e., the evil influences] away. Then we make pictures of [Shern-] twu and [Yuh-] liuh and suspend them along with reeds and ropes on gates and doors in order to ward off malevolent influences." Nowadays we also commonly make sacrifices to the Gate Gods.

([78] is pronounced like [79])³⁸

33. This ancient use of *fwu*^[68] as identification tallies is well known from old texts.

34. Water that has been sanctified and imbued with numinous power thru the use of incantations.

35. The term "spirit-money" refers to a large variety of paper sheets which are used for specific purposes: some types are offered only to the deities, some only to ancestors, some for specific rituals or functions, etc. Many kinds of spirit-money have a small piece of very thin foil (the specific meaning of [71] is 'foil') pasted in the center, however I doubt that the foil is ever made of real gold or silver.

36. A record of common customs compiled about 175 A.D. The quotation is a paraphrase from *jiuann* 8, page 62 (*Fong-swu tong-yih tong-jean*. Peiping: Centre franco-chinois d'études sinologiques, index no. 3, 1943).

37. This refers to the day coinciding with the third *shiu*^[77] day of the day-cycle after the winter solstice (this day varies from year to year). Some sources explain it as the eighth day of the twelfth moon (see *DKJT* 30009.0.1 and .14.1).

38. Mr. Yeh's note.

12. The God of the Hearth

The God of the Hearth is the same as the Lord of the Hearth^[80] and is one of the gods of the Five Sacrifices.^{39[81]} In his Heavenly appointed capacity he resides in the Northern Dipper.^[82] From there he comes into the world and takes up his post in the kitchens where he oversees the good and evil affairs of mankind. He is in charge of matters of life and death. This is a very important god in regard to all matters of rewarding good and punishing evil, dispersing calamity and accumulating good fortune, admonishing the world and enlightening the people. He is lenient to the myriad creatures, is possessed of a most compassionate heart, and earnestly exhorts people to be good. All people in the world should venerate and reverence him, and take heed not to deceive themselves!

There is also a *Canon on the Lord of the Hearth* and I have enclosed a copy for your perusal.⁴⁰

(The correct form of the character is [84])⁴¹

13. The Lunar Calendar

The Chinese lunar calendar was first used in the Shiah Dynasty.⁴² Confucius formerly spoke of "Enacting the seasons of Shiah" and from this we can see that he was praising it. According to the lunar calendar there are twelve moons [months] per year. The twelve moons are divided into four seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter. When a moon has thirty days we say "the moon is large"; when it has twenty-nine days we say "the moon is small." A moon never has thirty-one days in it. We have intercalary moons^[86] and not intercalary days. These are set at [approximately] one intercalary moon during a three year period, or two intercalary moons during a five year period.⁴³ The moon [itself] is always

39. A set of mandatory yearly sacrifices to five important deities (*Lü jih*, *Jih-faa*, 14.3b, SBBY edition).

40. Mr. Yeh sent along a nine page (double leaves) *shann-shu* printed from wood blocks carved in 1896 and preserved in his temple. The book is titled *The True Canon of the Lord of the Hearth Illuminating Goodness*.^[83] For a translation of another, much longer, Hearth God canon see: D. C. Graham, "The Original Vows of the Kitchen God," *Chinese Recorder*, 61 (1930), 781-787; 62 (1931), 41-50, 110-116.

41. Mr. Yeh has corrected my use of the common abbreviation [85] for this complicated character.

42. The legendary first Chinese dynasty whose dates are traditionally said to be 2205-1767 B.C.

43. The intercalation cycle of the lunar calendar requires seven intercalary months spaced throughout a period of nineteen years. This is an average of

exactly full and round on the night of the fifteenth day of the moon, and never deviates from this. Therefore altho the Way of Heaven does not speak, the myriad creatures still flourish!

Furthermore, every year is divided into twenty-four nodes.⁴⁴ That is, within each season there are six nodes, these are

- | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|
| spring: | 1) inception of spring |
| | 2) rains |
| | 3) stirring of insects |
| | 4) vernal equinox |
| | 5) clear and bright |
| | 6) grain rains |
| summer: | 7) inception of summer |
| | 8) the small filling (grain in bud) |
| | 9) awn and seeds (grain in ear) |
| | 10) summer solstice |
| | 11) lesser heat |
| | 12) greater heat |
| autumn: | 13) inception of autumn |
| | 14) settling the heat |
| | 15) white dew |
| | 16) autumnal equinox |
| | 17) cold dew |
| | 18) frost falls |
| winter: | 19) inception of winter |
| | 20) lesser snows |
| | 21) greater snows |
| | 22) winter solstice |
| | 23) lesser cold |
| | 24) greater cold |

2.7 years between intercalary months. Compare this with the solar calendar which requires one intercalary day every four years (i.e., February 29th). For more details on the lunar calendar see: Wolfram Eberhard, *Chinese Festivals*, New York: Henry Shuman, 1952, pp. 32-38; and Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1959, vol. 3, pp. 390-408.

44. These are divisions of the year according to the rotation of the earth around the sun (i.e., a *solar* calendar). The duration of a nodal period is fifteen to sixteen days.

Chinese farmers plow and plant according to these twenty-four nodes⁴⁵ and always rely on the nodes as their norm. If not, then it will be extremely difficult to obtain good results from their plowing and weeding.⁴⁶ Therefore altho the myriad creatures depend on men for their growth, still they need the “breath” of Heaven and Earth—with mutual needs and mutual harmony they will come to fruition. They can in no way separate themselves from the “breath” of the Yin and Yang⁴⁷ of Heaven and Earth and solely rely on a single side. No matter how good their seeds are, it will all be to no avail. The *Canon of Changes*^[24] says: “The unity of Yin and the unity of Yang is called the Way.”⁴⁸ Therefore the myriad creatures cannot be separated from the Yin and Yang. If they are separated from the Yin and Yang then they cannot live and grow!

14. Tiger Heads⁴⁹

As regards this question, it is probably from something you have seen in streets and alleys where women and children are burning paper with pictures of tiger heads, paper [spirit-] currency, gold spirit-money, silver spirit-money, etc. These practices to disperse calamity and relieve danger are mostly done on the starting days of “inception of spring” and

45. This is correct since the occurrence of a node will vary, at most, one day from year to year. The lunar calendar (which many Chinese still incorrectly insist on calling the “agricultural calendar” [87]) is a ritual and religious calendar. It is useless for agriculture since the occurrence of any given day, for example New Year Day, will vary from ten to thirty days per year in relation to the solar calendar (the sun makes things grow, not the moon!).

46. Mr. Yeh’s text is slightly garbled here.

47. The dual correlative forces of the universe which appear in such forms as heat/cold, light/darkness, etc.

48. Quotation from the appendix to the *Yih jing*, called Shih-tsyr,^[88] 7.3b (*Jou yih*, SBBY edition). Cf. James Legge’s translation in *The I Ching*, New York: Dover, 1963, p. 355 (reprinted from *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 16, 1899).

49. This refers to paper prints and wood engravings of a tiger with a seven-starred sword in its mouth and an “Eight Trigrams”^[89] symbol on its forehead. I have never been able to get clear information about the meaning and/or use of this image. The usual explanation is simply that it keeps evil influences away. The use of the tiger head may possibly be derived from the ancient custom mentioned in *Feng-swu tong-yih* (*jiuann* 8, page 62; see note 36 above) where people painted tigers over their doors to ward off evil influences, since the two brothers Shern-twu and Yuh-liuh used to feed evil ghosts to the tigers. For an example of a paper tiger head print see: Shiy De-jinn, *Taiwan Folk Art*, Taipei: Shyong-shy Publishing Co., 1974, page 3; see also page 184 for an “Eight Trigrams” symbol. Mr. Shiy captions the tiger head simply as “[New] Year picture”.

“stirring of insects.” Such women and children have been excessively influenced by superstition. This is not correct practice.

Old friend, every day please chant over and over the Six Syllable watchword of the Buddha. Then your whole heart shall be without confusion and will surely be filled with efficacy. Therefore for every repetition of the Buddha’s name you will augment your blessings without limit. Reverently remember the Six Syllables which are (the more often you chant them the more miraculous it will be):

NAM-MO A-MI-TWO FOR^[90]

Hail to Amitābha Buddha!⁵⁰

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| [1] 善書 | [21] 書經 |
| [2] 從善堂 | [22] 禮 |
| [3] 管理 | [23] 樂經 |
| [4] 葉 | [24] 易經, 周易 |
| [5] 玉皇上帝 | [25] 春秋 |
| [6] 三教 | [26] 萬世師表 |
| [7] 觀音 | [27] 釈迦牟尼仏 |
| [8] 秦瓊 | [28] 釈迦文仏 |
| [9] 尉遲敬徳 | [29] 悉達 |
| [10] 儒 | [30] 五俗 |
| [11] 道学 | [31] 浄飯王 |
| [12] 理学 | [32] 浄梵王 |
| [13] 孔子教 | [33] 迦毘羅城 |
| [14] 孔夫子 | [34] 摩耶 |
| [15] 孔丘, 仲尼 | [35] 摩訶摩耶 |
| [16] 魯 | [36] 耶輸多羅 |
| [17] 大同 | [37] 何羅怙羅 |
| [18] 杏壇 | [38] 羅睺羅 |
| [19] 六藝 | [39] 圓寂 |
| [20] 詩經 | [40] 金剛經 |

50. The Amitābha Buddha is the prominent buddha of the Pure Land branch of Buddhism. He is not the same as the Śākyamuni Buddha discussed in section 1, since according to the doctrine he is a buddha of an earlier age. This six syllable invocation is the most common expression of reverence among Buddhists who follow the Pure Land doctrines, in which it is asserted that salvation can be attained merely by *sincerely* evoking the name of Amitābha.

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|------|------------|------|--------|
| [41] | 涅 槃 | [66] | 牋 |
| [42] | 老 聃 | [67] | 箋 |
| [43] | 李耳, 老聃, 伯陽 | [68] | 符 |
| [44] | 楚, 苦縣 | [69] | 籙 |
| [45] | 周, 亳邑 | [70] | 術 士 |
| [46] | 柱下史 | [71] | 箔 |
| [47] | 道德經 | [72] | 蒲 |
| [48] | 老 子 | [73] | 門神, 門官 |
| [49] | 黃庭經 | [74] | 神 荼 |
| [50] | 養 生 | [75] | 鬱 墨 |
| [51] | 道 藏 | [76] | 風俗通義 |
| [52] | 函谷關 | [77] | 戌 |
| [53] | 三 清 | [78] | 墨 |
| [54] | 元始天尊 | [79] | 律 |
| [55] | 太上道君 | [80] | 竈神, 竈君 |
| [56] | 太上老君 | [81] | 五 祀 |
| [57] | 玉 清 | [82] | 北 斗 |
| [58] | 上 清 | [83] | 竈君明善真經 |
| [59] | 太 清 | [84] | 竈 |
| [60] | 仙 家 | [85] | 灶 |
| [61] | 太上感應篇 | [86] | 閏 月 |
| [62] | 關聖帝 | [87] | 農 曆 |
| [63] | 關 羽 | [88] | 繫 辭 |
| [64] | 左 傳 | [89] | 八 卦 |
| [65] | 年 畫 | [90] | 南無阿彌陀仏 |