period, the views of T'ang and Han dynasty Confucian scholars towards the role of law in society, the efforts of a French scholar to revise the legal codes for the Meiji government, changes in crime rates in Japan since World War II, differences in techniques of framing and perspective utilized in Chinese painting and Japanese woodblock prints, and so forth. What is lacking is any sustained effort to connect these facts to any of the main subjects of the book. One wants to know instead about such things as the nature and administration of justice in the Tokugawa period and changes that may or may not have occurred in the early years of Meiji; popular attitudes towards law and social order; the social system in which these regulations were developed, and the role of communities (or other institutions) in informally enforcing them; or the use of folk art as a medium for disseminating information to the populace. Innumerable questions of this sort will spring to the mind of almost any reader studying the plates (and are implied by the book's title). Unfortunately, questions such as these are not posed by the authors, and the smattering of information in the text provides only occasional insights.

In sum, this book presents to a Western audience an aspect of early Meiji life that to my knowledge is no where else documented. The book's greatest merits are the well-reproduced and inherently intriguing plates, and the authors are to be commended for making these available in an attractively produced volume. However, the book is unlikely to satisfy either specialists or casual readers; neither audience will find that the text lives up to the authors' stated intention of providing a useful introduction to the social, cultural, legal, and historical milieu in which the *Kaii Zaimoku Nanajū Kajō* was created.

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CHINA

LIU SENHOWER 劉文三. *Taiwan shenxiang yishu* 台湾神像藝術 [The God statues of Taiwan]. (Yishijia tsengkan 藝術家叢刊 No. 18.) Taibei: Yishijia chubanshe 藝術家出版社. 235 pp. NT $150.

Over the centuries Chinese culture has given birth to a panoply of deities. Continuous reference to the existence of these deities in popular literature, art and song, has inextricably entwined them with the lives of most of China's people.

Many of the deities so spawned were connected with life crisis situations. They were approached by worried and anxious people who asked for divine assistance in curing an illness or delivering one from harm. The Goddess of Childbirth, *Jusheng Niangniang* 註生娘娘, who could secure the safe delivery and birth of children, was one of these, before whose altar expectant mothers gathered. In a similar manner, entire village populations might approach the Gods of Pestilence *Wangye* 王爺 to eradicate a plague from the community.

Still other deities served to mark the passage of time in the human life cycle. In most peasant villages the Kitchen God *Caoshen* 灶神 not only helped protect a household against fire, but his annual leave-taking every New Year to report to the higher deities on the conduct of the people in his household was an occasion for giving the house a thorough cleaning in hopes that his report would be a favorable one. The New Year also marked the passing of the old year and thus was an automatic birthday,

since a year was added to each person's age at New Year.

In imitation of the government officials who administered the counties and villages of China, the City God *Chenghuangye* 城隍爺 and his retinue sat in supernatural control over the deeds of the human populace. Most cities had a large temple dedicated to the City God. Like a human official who might be judged incompetent, a City God could be replaced by a new deity if enough symbolic signs, such as repeated flooding or pestilence, warranted such action.

Today China's cities and its vast countryside have been denuded of the numerous roadside shrines and elaborate city temples that once gave so much color to Chinese culture. A number of the largest older temples remain, usually as museums or tourist attractions, and fortunately more and more are being restored and opened to the public. A suprisingly large number of the smaller temple buildings still stand, though they are usually used as nursery schools or offices for local government administrative officials. Some are filled with squatters who claim they have nowhere else to go, and they face a government which is forced to agree with them. Although I remain convinced that China's many popular deities continue to exist in the minds of many Chinese citizens, I must admit that in my visits to China in the past seven years I have been able to find very few outward signs of the presence of these deities.

This situation is reversed in Hong Kong and Taiwan. There one can find small altars even in many shops, while neighborhood shrines and drawings of the more colorful deities are everywhere. In Taiwan, in spite of its entry into the age of technology and the international marketplace, the numbers of temples and shrines dedicated to these deities appear to actually be increasing.

Liu Wensan's book, *The God Statues of Taiwan*, can be taken as a testimony to the continued vitality of these deities on Taiwan. He did not have to search far to gather the information presented in the book because the deities were everywhere. Indeed, his book suggests that he had to be quite selective in order to keep his topic to a workable size.

Liu begins by discussing how it is that the deities have come to be so important to the lives of so many people. He examines the idea that these deities were created by human beings and that they were given their supernatural powers by human beings. But once created, the deities took on a presence and an authority of their own, causing their creators to worship them. The deities, he says, have human frailties and personality quirks, but this is only because human beings also have "godness" within themselves. At the bottom of it all, he concludes that these deities, who can be so terrible in their judgement of humans, can only be called into existence through the minds of human beings.

The core of Liu's book is the sections on thirty popular deities worshiped throughout Taiwan. Each of these deities has a long history told through folktales, stories and legends. Many were once historical figures who later were honored as deities. The girl Lin Moniang 林默娘, who became Goddess of the Sea *Matzu* 媽祖 and protector of fishermen is from that category. The brave statesman and general Liu Bei 刘備, became the God of War, Wealth and Literature *Guandiye* 関帝爺.

Each historical account of these deities varies somewhat, and for each deity discussed Liu tends to recount several of the best known legends. One of the contributions of his book is that it clearly sets forth these accounts of how the characteristics of each deity took shape through legend and story, there by helping to preserve them.

A second major contribution of Liu's book is the well-placed photographs, many of them in color, which illustrate the physical representations of each of the deities

being described. Liu is particularly fascinated with these god statues as artistic objects, and he is particularly concerned that the skills needed to produce the statues are rapidly disappearing. He discusses how few young people want to spend years as a carver's apprentice in order to produce a god statue with its required and detailed decoration. He also tells how modern machines using plastics are able to stamp out inexpensive, if undistinguished, statues in a much more effortless manner. He includes a short section on the carving of god statues, on the woods used, and on the men who have devoted their lives to the art.

Liu is himself a collector of these god statues. He has gathered them from all over Taiwan and the majority of photographs in the book are of statues from his own collection. He is quite correct in pointing out that in the poses they assume and in the expressions with which they watch, and perhaps brood over, the affairs of humans, these carved figures display a mixture of both human and supernatural characteristics.

The motivating force behind Liu's efforts to produce this interesting and unassuming book is his conviction that China's popular deities are a subject worthy of study and appreciation. He has documented the ways they exist on Taiwan. In the future his study will be a useful guide for comparison with the forms which the popular deities will take when they reemerge in China. I am sure that will happen.

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SEAMAN, GARY. *Temple Organization in a Chinese Village.* (Asian Folklore and Social Life Monographs, No. 101) Taipei: The Chinese Association for Folklore, 1978. 167 pp. US $5.50

For a period of three years from 1970 to 1973, Professor Seaman frequently visited a small market town located in the lush mountains and deep valleys of central Taiwan. During much of 1973 he lived in the local village temple, and there he took copious notes of his conversations with local villagers, of gossip among the temple worshipers, and he recorded in detail the seances of the local spirit writing cult. The result of his careful observations and, in fact, his integration into the temple community's activities, is this excellent and useful book.

Seaman was able to repeatedly observe the ritual gatherings at which a selected individual was possessed by a particular god, and through possession by the god, was able to convey the god's answers to questions posed by local residents. The person possessed, who has undergone training for the experience of having the power of a deity transmitted through his body, holds a peach branch over a tray of sand. A stylus attached to the end of the branch is used to scratch Chinese characters in the sand and these constitute the words of the god. As Seaman describes it, "After a short while, the peach branch begins a subtle vibration, trembles, and begins to make wobbly circles in the air. The stylus falls down with a thump onto the sand . . . The god writes out his name and title on the sand planchette. Another salute [by beating drums and gongs] is given and the seance begins in earnest" (86).

But the seance, in spite of its central character being the possibly erratic possession of one temple member by a deity, is actually a regularized and highly structured affair. It is carried out on set evenings, beginning about 7:30 P.M. The person possessed is assisted by as many as a dozen other temple members; people who interpret the meaning of the characters written in the sand, people who record the god's answers,

people who transmit questions asked of the god by temple visitors, etc. Seaman spends thirteen pages (82–94) describing a typical seance.

Of course we learn about the philosophy of the spirit writing cult, its evolution through the ages, and even some of its written precepts. But Professor Seaman does even more; he weaves the activities of the spirit writing cult into the social and political life of the town's citizens. It seems the leading member of the spirit writing cult in the town is also a local strongman who wields considerable political and economic influence in the area. His network of cronies can swing elections, buy votes, pass out bribes, or beat up local rivals they encounter. Being a member of the spirit writing cult will not only help one to receive guidance from the gods, it can be of quite practical use as well.

The political intrigues of the spirit writing cult, as well as the adventures of its leader "Boss Ng," are described in an historical dimension. This discussion traces the cult from the period of the Japanese occupation until 1945, through the confusing times of the late 1940s, and into the period of KMT rule from the 1950s until today. Professor Seaman has done a masterful job of setting forth the historical development of the spirit writing cult in this community during the past forty-plus years.

This is a rich study that touches on many points which will be of interest to anthropologists, sociologists and scholars specializing in folk religion. It is exciting to learn so much about the heretofore guarded secrets of the spirit writing cult, and it is equally rewarding to end up knowing so much about life in the market town where Seaman lived. The observations he presents are sophisticated and convincing and, in spite of its modest length, this book contains a wealth of information.

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INDIA

BECK, BRENDA E. F. *The Three Twins: The Telling of a South Indian Folk Epic.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. Viii+248 pp. 27 plates, 4 appendices, bibliography, index. Hardbound US $22.50 (£13.50 in the U.K., US $28.13 in the rest of the world). ISBN 0–253–36014–5

The study of Indian folk epic—the non-Sanskritic variety of the great epic tradition of the subcontinent—has by and large remained neglected. The attention the classical epics such as *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* have received from anthropologists, folklorists and scholars of literature is unparalleled and cannot be compared with the few attempts that have been made recently by some young scholars to study the less known, non-Sanskritic traditions of Indian folk epics sometimes associated with "Little Tradition."

Brenda Beck's present work on a popular South Indian folk epic is yet another big step toward understanding the strength of the folk epic tradition of India. Some studies on similar regional folk epics have been made earlier by Roghair (Andhra), Lapoint (Rajasthan), Claus (Karnataka); many more are awaiting the sharp tools of folklore scholars.

Peter Edwin Hook's (1979) interesting study seeks to define a "literary area" (*Literaturbund*) in South and Central Asia. Inspired by Colin Masica's pioneering work on the systematic definition of a "linguistic area," Hook attempts to show the