100 Chinese Gods

Written by Wu Lu Xing
Translated by Wang Xuewen & Wang Yanxi

Asiapac Books
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As a publisher dedicated to the promotion of works of Chinese philosophy, art and literature, we are pleased to present you 100 Chinese Gods, the second title in our 100 Series Art Album.

This volume provides an excellent introduction to 100 characters commonly honoured as deities and immortals in Chinese religions. Because of its nature as an art album featuring the unique xiuxiang bua (绣像畫) of Lu Yanguang, this book may not offer the depth of contents as some readers desire, but it offers the breadth in scope as well as individual portraits that are seldom found in publications on this topic.

The reader might note that well-known deities such as Shakyamuni or Gautama Buddha, Maitriya Buddha, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva or Guan Yin, and Manjusuri Bodhisattva are not represented here. Lu Yanguang has chosen to depict them in his other art album entitled 100 Chinese Monks.

As Chinese traditions may vary according to location and time, the contents here can at its best represent only a school of popular beliefs among Chinese today. Alternative views, if any, are included for the reader’s consideration. It is our hope that readers will find this art album a pleasure to read as well as a help to understanding the religious life of traditional Chinese worshippers.

We feel honoured to have the artist Lu Yanguang’s permission to the translation rights for his art album. Our gratitude, too, to Professor Wang Xuewen and Wang Yanxi for translating this book, and to Pan Shou for his foreword in calligraphy. Last but not least, we would like to thank the production team for putting in their best effort in the publication of this series.
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The old saying “drawing a circle on the ground to imprison oneself” means figuratively that the foolish seek vexation for themselves. In modern society, however, there are very clever people who are willing to imprison themselves that way. Such a man is Lu Yanguang, an artist who has “imprisoned himself” in pieces of drawing paper 23 cm by 23 cm, for 1,800 days and nights irrespective of the sweltering heat in summer and the severe cold in winter. He has never left the “prison” a single pace, even when he was not physically well.

Exercising his imagination over the eternity of Heaven and Earth, Lu Yanguang drew within the size of the drawing paper nearly 400 portraits of distinguished figures of the various dynasties, celebrated ladies, immortals, deities and heavenly generals, forming a grand collection of vivid portraits. However, the artist will have to take more pains in “the prison made by himself” before he can complete the arduous project of the series of 100 portraits.

Lu Yanguang shows distinguished talent in the creation of line drawing portraits. The portraits are not drawn with the traditional instrument, pen brush, but with a modern invention – the needle pen which is known as hard pen and is quite difficult to manipulate. Unlike the pen brush which can be handled more naturally at the will of the artist, the needle pen can only be used to draw right with the needle with constant strength. From the portraits drawn by Lu Yanguang, we can see the brilliant effect the needle pen has produced in his hand. Through extension, combination, overlapping, converging, dispersing, paralleling, and the matching of the round and square strokes, the lines produced by the needle have created a kind of beauty which is smooth, forceful and neat. The charm of the lines is like the rhythm of vocal music; the grandeur like percussion music; the indignation like stringed music; and the emotion like pipe music. It shows once again that the lines created by the orientals to delineate the contours are still producing great vitality. So far the composition forms of the portraits are concerned, Lu Yanguang has bravely absorbed modern plane designing techniques which he has skillfully applied to depicting figures and scenes, thus adding a new visual effect to the portraits. The historical subjects of his drawings are therefore full of strong modern flavour.

Chinese deities and immortals have always travelled traceless, mounting the clouds and riding the mist. Absorbing the essence of Heaven and Earth, they live in the boundless universe. They are actually the embodiment of the ideal of the ancient Chinese people to pursue freedom. How shall we depict their portraits? There is some leeway for imagination if we describe their appearances in words. However, it is more difficult to depict the deities by way of drawing, since all the strokes must be exactly there to bring out definite images. For that, Lu Yanguang cudgelled his brains in the “prison made by himself” and even burnt some of his drawings to avoid getting into the rut. He made every possible effort to bring forth the new and tried his utmost to make breakthroughs. After some “life-and-death” struggles, he got thinner and felt his clothes getting loose. All of a sudden, however, he found he had become the creator himself. Thus he has offered us a volume of new line drawing portraits, 100 Chinese Gods, with his skill to produce on pieces of white drawing paper new images, new realms, and new beauty.

Su Sen-tao
Shamian, Guangzhou
October 18, 1989
The line-drawn portraits of 100 Chinese Gods by Mr Lu Yanguang can only be based on the rich cultural heritage of a race with a long history. The portrayal of these legendary gods has been executed with a subtle combination of oriental and western artistic techniques. Images of the deities have been captured with imagery of their elusiveness. Some are grotesque in shape, but all are exquisitely refined in details. Each picture is like a tune. One hundred pictures, one hundred tunes. They share the same style but each has a rhythm of its own. One just cannot help being overwhelmed by admiration for the artist’s creativity in presenting such a wide repertoire of form and posture.

Madam Lim Li Kok feels that such a masterpiece of artistic work should not be confined to the Chinese Language reading public. She has arranged for an English version of the book to be published by her company, Asiapac Books, so that a larger circle of non-Chinese Language readers may also enjoy it.

I have been asked to write a message for this book. Instead, I have chosen to write a few words with my brush.

Calligraphy by Pan Shou
(Poet and Scholar)
Spring, 1994
The Jade Emperor  
(Heavenly Primogenitor)

In ancient days, it was taken for granted that there existed deities in the universe who ruled over everything. These deities, like human beings, were of various status. Among them, Heaven was believed to be the head and creator of other deities.

But even "Heaven" did not exist from the very beginning. There was a belief that the Supreme Deity was the one who created Heaven and Earth by his magic power. The Jade Emperor was said to be such a supreme deity.

In his book Essays on the Pillow, Ge Hong of the Jin Dynasty made the following remarks: "Before Heaven and Earth were divided, there was no sun, no moon and the whole thing was a blur in the shape of an egg. At that time, the Deity, Pangu – the essence of Universe – had been there, proclaiming himself Primordial Heavenly Sage. After the creation of Heaven and Earth, he stood above all in the centre which was called Jade Capital Mount, breathing celestial air up in the heaven and drinking water from the fountain down on the earth.

"Just then, there came into being on the earth a jade lady titled Primordial Saint Lady. One day, on the journey down to the earth, the Primordial Heavenly Sage came across the Primordial Saint Lady. The two (the essence of Heaven and Earth) intercourse, and later gave birth to the 'Three Kings' and the Five Emperors'. Since the Primordial Heavenly Sage dwelt in the Jade Capital Mount, he was called the Jade Emperor."

So in the legend, the Jade Emperor was incarnated from Pangu.

In the Jade Capital where the Jade Emperor lived, stood the Seven-Treasure Mountain, which formed a city area of 90,000 li\(^2\). On each side of the city were 20,040 gates, and surrounding the city were eight rows of precious trees with green leaves and red fruits. There were rich varieties of herbal plants as well as lotus blooming in the ponds nearby.

In the city stood the Seven-Treasure Palace which housed the Seven-Treasure Terrace with its three palaces – the upper, middle and lower palaces. The Upper Palace, also known as the Divine Fragrance Palace, boasted many winding arcades and layers of caves; jade doors studded with gold; and phoenixes dancing about its crimson gates. The grandeur and brilliance worked together to form a magnificent spectacle. The Jade Emperor lived here.

It was mentioned in the book The History of the Sui Dynasty that the Jade Emperor was also called Yue Jingxin. But little is known about the origin of the name.

Nowadays, people still worship the Jade Emperor in traditional Chinese customs. In Taoism, he is adored as the Heavenly Primogenitor.

1. Fu Xi, Sui Ren and Shen Nong.
2. The Yellow Emperor, Zhuanxu, Diku, Yao and Shun.
3. 1 li = 0.5 km
The Jade Emperor (Heavenly Primogenitor)
Laozi

At sunrise on the 15th day of the second lunar month in a year during the reign of Wuding, a white-haired, angular-headed baby was born from his mother’s left armpit in Lai Town, Ku county of the state of Chu. He had a yellowish face, a wrinkled forehead, long ears and square eyes. What amazed people most was his cheeks were full of whiskers. Thus people called him Laozi or Laodan as he is known in historical records.

In legends, however, Laozi had shown up many times long before the above mentioned time of his birth. Far back in the Early Three Kings’ time, he incarnated as Omnipotent Master; in the Middle Three Kings’ time, he personified Pangu. Later, in the periods of Fu Xi, Nu Wa, Shen Nong and Xuan Yuan, he also appeared in different forms. This time, however, his spirit vaporized and he became an embryo in the body of King Xuan Miao’s daughter, who was pregnant for 81 years before giving birth to Laozi.

In the 17th year of the reign of King Jing of the Zhou Dynasty, when consulted by young Confucius, Laozi advised him to be less aggressive. He said a great sage often appeared like a fool just as treasure was not to be revealed to others. After the interview, Confucius said to his disciples: “I know a bird can fly, a fish can swim and a beast can walk; but as to the dragon riding on wind and cloud, it is indeed beyond human knowledge. Isn’t Laozi a dragon?” The drawing Confucius Asking the Way of Rites presents a vivid picture of this meeting between the originators of Taoism and Confucianism.

In the reign of Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty, Laozi reincarnated as Guang Chengzi. When Emperor Wen sent for him to discuss Taoism, he declined, saying: “Taoism is so valuable and respectable. How can anyone wish to consult me on Taoism merely by sending for me?” So Emperor Wen had to pay him a visit.

On seeing Laozi, he complained: “I am the Emperor, and you are my subject. Why are you so conceited instead of showing due respect to me? I can make you rich or poor in an instant.” Guang Chengzi immediately took a leap up to the azure sky. Standing firm amid the white clouds, he said: “I neither touch Heaven above nor Earth below. How can you take me as your subject?” Only then did Emperor Wen realize that he was not an earthly being. He got off from the carriage at once and bowed to the immortal.

Today, the sculpture of Laozi can be seen in Taoist temples everywhere. Enveloped in the incense smoke, he is revered as Lord Laozi.

As a matter of fact, such a man did exist in history. His name was Li Er and he was a distinguished thinker. The title “Lord Laozi” originated in the Northern Wei Dynasty, but at that time there were no large-scale worship activities. During the reign of Emperor Gaozu of the Tang Dynasty, Laozi began to enjoy the worship of the people because he carried the same surname as the emperor. The succeeding emperors of the Tang Dynasty conferred venerable titles on him and built temples across the country in his honour. Thus the worship of Laozi continued up to the present time.
Laozi
The King of the East

The King of the East, also named Mu Gong or the Eastern Emperor, is honoured as the head of the male immortals and is a symbol of virile strength and energy. Together, he and his wife, the Queen Mother of the West, are adored as the venerable deities of Taoism.

Mu Gong was said to be born above the blue sea, governing the East, which often reminded people of a poem by Qu Yuan:

"From the East, I, the bright sun, am rising,
On the balustrade my light is shining.
I stroke my steed, about to ride,
Bringing dawn to earth in twilight.
In cloud-woven coats over trousers rainbow-like,
To the star Tian Lang I shoot an arrow long.
Bending my bow, from zenith downward I go.
With the Big Dipper, I ladle out the osmanthus liquor.
The rein in hand, I ride my steed flying high,
To the East again in dusk, it gallops soon out of sight."

The above poem, *The Lord of the East*, presents a magnificent view of sunrise and depicts the splendour of the Sun Deity who accordingly was regarded as the prototype of the King of the East because he was also "born above the blue sea, governing the East".

Later, with the evolution by Taoists, the King of the East attained higher status as a deity. It was even said that those who wanted to attain immortality should first worship him, then the Queen Mother of the West. Only after that were they permitted to ascend to the Ninth Heaven to pay obeisance to Lord Laozi and the Heavenly Primogenitor.

Legend had it that during the Han Dynasty, several children playing by the roadside once chanted:

"Dressed in green garments,
Entering the Heavenly Gates,
Kowtowing to the Queen Mother of the West,
Then to Mu Gong the Great."

People then failed to comprehend the meaning of the song. Only Zhang Liang arranged a sacrifice to Mu Gong and the Queen Mother of the West, and told people that the children were actually the jade boys sent by the King of the East. Consequently, Zhang Liang himself became an immortal.

Interestingly, Taoists even made up for him a list of personal information.

Name: Ni Junming
Wife: Queen Mother of the West
Profession: Keeping archives of male immortals
Appellation: Emperor Shao Yang in the East Hua Palace.

A family tree was also invented for him, according to which, he was the son of the Heavenly Primogenitor and Primordial Saint Lady, and this is quite removed from the original image of the Sun Deity.
The Three Heavenly Officials

In Taoism, the 15th day of the first, seventh and tenth lunar month are named Top Yuan, Middle Yuan and Bottom Yuan respectively, and are remembered as the birthdays of the Three Heavenly Officials: Heaven, Earth and Water.

Also known as Lords of Three Worlds and sons of the Heavenly Primogenitor, they determined the fortune or misfortune of the world, the promotion of deities, and the reincarnation of ghosts.

The Heavenly Official, the Ziwei Emperor, ranked one level below the Jade Emperor. His “superior to all but one” position kept him in so lofty a place that he could bestow blessing on people. So it is a Chinese custom that on his birthday, the 15th of the first lunar month, people would hold worship activities, burn a special paper symbolising money, and pray for his blessing.

The Earthly Official, the Qingxu Emperor, was able to absolve people from their sins. According to The Book of Taoism, on the 15th of the seventh month, the Earthly Official would examine the people and distinguish the good from the evil. Then he would assemble the heavenly immortals in the palace to determine the fate of the people and the ghosts. With this belief, sages and Taoist priests would chant prayers day and night to relieve the ghosts and criminals from their suffering. Because of this, Middle Yuan was also called the Ghost Festival. As it was said the dead would return home on this day, every household would offer sacrifices to their ancestors, burn incense and paper, and throw dinner among relatives, the scale of which was thought to be the most elaborate in Chinese religious rites.

The Water Official, the Dongying Emperor, supervised the interaction of good and evil on the earth. He was able to deliver people from calamities and help them out of troubles. So on his birthday, the 15th of the tenth lunar month, every family would offer sacrifices to him, burn incense and paper, and fire crackers for safety and health.

According to another tradition, the three deities were actually the three ancient emperors: Yao, Shun and Yu. Heavenly Official Yao, famous for his benevolence, loved his citizens but abdicated and passed on the crown to Shun; Earthly Official Shun, well-known for his filial piety, reclaimed the wasteland and showed great respect to his parents; Water Official Yu, famed for his sincerity, endeavoured to harness the Yellow River. It was said that Yu was so devoted to his task that he passed by his home three times but refused to go in.

Nowadays, when paying obeisance to them, people no longer worship before their statues but burn incense in a common oven for the Lords of the Three Worlds.
The Three Heavenly Officials
Xuan Wu

Xuan Wu is the Demon-Exorcizing Heavenly Sage in Chinese folklore. Also known as Zhen Wu, he is one of the great deities of Taoism.

According to ancient books, Xuan Wu "originated from celestial air, taking his body from the universe". Early at the time of the Yellow Emperor, he was incarnated as the son of Queen Shan Sheng of Jingle State. He was born from the queen's left rib at noon on the third day of the third lunar month, 14 months after the queen became pregnant. At the age of 14, when Xuan Wu was outside the palace enjoying the festival lanterns, he observed how difficult it was for human beings to be free from the burden of fortune, sex, liquor and temperament. He thus lived as a recluse in the Wudang Mountain, studying the Way of Taoism. When he finally attained immortality through practising Taoism, he was sent by the Jade Emperor to guard the North and was called Xuan Wu, since Xuan Wu in Chinese refers to the direction of the North.

Xuan Wu was nine feet tall and had a face radiant as the full moon with kingly eyes and eyebrows. He had black hair, handsome moustache and beard, and flawless complexion. He wore a jade coronet and a suit made of grass. Because of his remarkable insight and his courage at exorcizing demons, he was adored as the incarnation of the Jade Emperor.

During the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Shunzhi laid down the rites for worshipping Xuan Wu on the birthday of the emperor. The deity would be worshipped in Xianyou Palace, Rizhong Street, with the following tribute: "On the day of my birth, I would express my gratitude for the blessing of the Deity. Here, we would contribute fruits to show our respect. Please enjoy them." Thus, Xuan Wu became a deity controlling men's destiny for even the emperors prayed to him for longevity.

In fact, there had never been such a man as Xuan Wu. Reverence for him originated from the worship of the constellations. After the Warring States Period, people divided the 28 constellations into four groups and named them with four animals: Qing Long (Indigo Dragon) representing the East, Zhuque (Crimson Sparrow) the South, Baihu (White Tiger) the West, Xuan Wu (Turtle) the North. As the turtle and the snake were believed to be one bisexual animal in legend, they were regarded as the emblem of Xuan Wu.

During the Southern Song Dynasty, Xuan Wu was personified as a long-haired immortal dressed in ceremonial robe and wielding a sword. Later, due to the worship by Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty, temples in Xuan Wu's honour were very prosperous and most official departments had a shrine in which Xuan Wu was worshipped with a turtle and a snake by his side. The explanation to this unique custom was that Xuan Wu's life belonged to water, and since water could put out fire, people expected to be free from disasters by water and fire through worshipping him.

After the Yuan Dynasty, Xuan Wu assumed, in addition to fire and water, an even more important duty of determining the life-span of the people. Thus, he was worshipped by all, from the emperor to the common people.
Xuan Wu
Emperor Wenchang

Emperor Wenchang, or the Scholar Star, is a deity who presides over the Wenchang Office in charge of the register of the titles and ranks of scholars on earth. Emperor Wenchang, with Hui as his personal name, was originally the son of the Yellow Emperor. He was very skilful in fixing ropes and nets, and came to the earthly world in Shanyin, taking Zhang as his surname. He had a good mastery of medical knowledge and had once assisted Lord Zhou, the meritorious younger brother of King Wu, founder of the Zhou Dynasty.

After his death, he incarnated as the posthumous son of Zhou Wujin and was said to be a “friend of Zhang Zhongxiao” according to the Book of Songs. However, he was poisoned for his straightforward expostulation with King You of the Zhou Dynasty. His soul floated around the Snow Mountain, and he made great contributions in the administration of the state of Shu. As a result he came into being again as the son of Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty, this time named Ruyi with the title of Prince Zhao.

Unfortunately, he was murdered by Empress Dowager Li, and his wronged soul changed into a snake while she transformed into Qiong Pond. In order to take revenge on her, Wenchang borrowed water from all the seas and flooded the whole country of Qiong Pond. For too much killing, he was turned into a dragon in Qiong Pond to be bitten by small bugs and scorched by hot sands. Not until he became converted by Bodhisattva Wen Chu was he set free.

Since then, he came down to the earth many times and incarnated as Zhang Xun in the state of Zhao, as Xiao Zhong in the reign of Emperor Shun in the Eastern Han Dynasty, and as Zhang at the place of Yuexi in the Western Jin Dynasty. At the age of 73, having comprehended the Way of Taoism in a stone cave, he went to Xianyang in his transformation to call on the founder of the Later Qin Dynasty, Yao Chang, and accompanied him to Sichuan. The deity then said to Yao: “You have to go back since there’s no head in the state.” Subsequently, Yao Chang built a temple at Sichuan in honour of Zhang Xun who was venerated as Lord Zhang.

For generations, Wenchang had been a scholar and delved into the Confucian scriptures. He was thus assigned by the Heavenly Emperor to take charge of the titles, degree and official ranks of scholars taking the Imperial Examinations in the human world.

By his sides stood two immortal attendants. One of them was called Heavenly Deaf and the other Earthly Dumb. And he himself sometimes pretended to be deaf and dumb for he did not want to claim all the cleverness of the world. Several disciples built a temple in his honour, conferring on him the title of Lord Wenchang.

He also showed up in the Tang Dynasty to guard Emperor Xuan Zhong, who had fled to Sichuan to seek refuge from the insurrection. When the rebellion was put down, he was conferred the title of Prince Jin. Intellects of later generations worshipped him as Emperor Wenchang, while exceptionally learned scholars were regarded as the incarnation of the Scholar Star.
Heavenly Master Zhang

A man of powerful build with bushy black eyebrows, green and large triangular eyes, a red crown and a high-ridged nose, the ugly Heavenly Master Zhang is actually Zhang Daoling, the eighth generation descendant of Zhang Liang who made great contributions in the founding of the Han Dynasty.

He was born in Tianmu Mountain in the tenth year of the period Jinwu during the reign of Emperor Guangwu of the Eastern Han Dynasty. Before his birth, his mother dreamed of a well-dressed giant claiming to be the Star of Kui from heaven. He gave her a spray of rare flowers. Upon receiving it, she woke up and smelled an exotic fragrance wafting in the whole room. The smell lingered on for a month and his mother was pregnant after that. On the birthday of Zhang, the house was enveloped in yellow clouds, the court was filled with purple haze and the chamber was brightened by radiant light, along with lasting fragrance.

Zhang Daoling was so smart in his childhood that at seven, he had already gained a profound comprehension of the book Truth and Virtue by Laozi. When he grew up, he together with his disciples lived in the Heming Mountain to refine some elixir. He succeeded three years later and became an immortal. Under the guidance of the deities, he learnt how to fly and had a keen ear for sounds many miles away. Adept at transfigurations, he could become invisible or appear at different places at the same time.

During the reign of Emperor Shun, Lord Laozi alighted on the place where Heavenly Master Zhang lived and instructed him to eliminate the six demons who had done evil in Sichuan. Having studied diligently for a thousand days, Heavenly Master Zhang acquired many demon-exorcizing tactics. Shortly after, demon generals everywhere summoned millions of ghost soldiers to afflict the people with plagues. Zhang Daoling set up a Taoist dais at the foot of Qingcheng Mountain, ringing the bell and beating the drum to command heavenly soldiers to fight against the devils. Consequently, any weapons reaching the glazed dais on which he was standing would turn into lotus flowers. With a point of his finger, any missile fired by the ghosts would fly backwards. With a stroke of his magic brush, all the ghosts and demon generals knelt down to beg for mercy.

By exorcizing demons and curing ailments, Zhang saved countless people who in turn exalted him as their master. He gathered them together and established a Taoist assembly, requiring each member to pay five pecks of grain. Thus it was called Five-Peck-Grain Religion. Since then, he had been adored as Heavenly Master Zhang.

In history, there was in fact a person called Zhang Daoling who was the founder of Taoism. The Taoist disciples wove many stories about him in order to raise the position of Taoism. But later, thinking that Zhang Daoling did not match up to the sublimity of Taoism, they changed their founder to Lord Laozi and then to the Heavenly Primogenitor. In Journey to the West, Heavenly Master Zhang was actually demoted to be one of the four masters guarding the Divine Fragrance Palace.
Heavenly Master Zhang
Tai Sui

While strolling in the palace garden one day, Queen Jiang, the wife of King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty, was so intoxicated by the scene of the chirping birds, colourful, fragrant flowers and green trees that she accidentally stepped on a footprint left by a giant. As a result, she became pregnant and gave birth to a fleshy ball. With malicious intent, Daji, a favourite concubine of the king, reported to the monarch that the queen had given birth to a demon. Thus the fleshy ball was thrown out to the desert.

Fortunately the fleshy ball was shaded by crows and fed milk by deer. Later, it was found by Master Shen who saw it in auspicious clouds, radiating purple and golden rays. "This is an immortal embryo," he remarked. He then cut the ball open with his sword and found a baby inside. He brought the baby back to his water-curtained cave, named him Yin Jiao and had him nursed by the immortal Aunt He.

Yin Jiao grew up with a grudge against his father. Subsequently, he helped King Wu overthrow his father (who consequently burned himself), and killed his concubine Daji with his own hands. For his fidelity and courage in fighting demons, the Jade Emperor conferred the title of Virtuous Tai Sui on him.

In this account, Tai Sui was portrayed as a loyal and upright man. But in folklore, he was a hundred times more wicked and ferocious than any demon and evil spirit. To people, he was the symbol of terror. Hence, the saying: "Who dares to dig soil on the head of Tai Sui?", which survived till now.

There existed different versions of Tai Sui's true identity. Some believed him to be the deity of the year, some the deity of four seasons, some the deity in charge of 24 hours, and some the deity of the moon.

However, all these theories were weak in evidence. They actually originated from the fear he inspired and were related to the worship of the heavenly bodies.

Of these versions, nevertheless, the deity of the year seemed most probable. After the Warring States Period, people combined two ancient calendars, Left Turn and Right Turn, to create an image of Tai Sui moving on the earth, but in a direction corresponding to the movement of the Star of the Year.

Beginning from the Han Dynasty, people started to connect the path taken by Tai Sui during the year with the taboo on construction, moving and marriage, for it was believed that people who dug on the path might unearth a piece of wriggling flesh which would bring bad luck. As it was a taboo to dig soil on the head of Tai Sui, people would inquire a master for the direction of Tai Sui before any construction project commenced so as not to offend him.

Prior to the Song Dynasty, Tai Sui was not yet included in the national worship rites. However, the situation changed after the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. The rulers not only accepted him, but also built special altars to offer sacrifices to him, together with the moon deity and the sun deity. By then, besides being associated with the taboo on construction, Tai Sui was also believed to be in charge of the year.
Tai Sui
Heavenly Pagoda-Holding King Li

Heavenly Pagoda-Holding King Li is a household name throughout China. As legends had it, the Buddha Tathagata once bestowed on him an intricate all-powerful gold pagoda, each storey of which contained Buddhas radiant with splendour. When thrown up in the air, it would plummet and crush the demons.

The heavenly king was Li Jing, a distinguished general in the early Tang Dynasty. He had taken office as a magistrate of Moyi County by the end of the Sui Dynasty and later submitted to the Tang Dynasty when Li Yuan, the first emperor of the dynasty, conquered the city Chang'an. During the reign of Emperor Tai Zong, he served as Minister of Military Affairs and achieved a succession of military victories.

However, Li Jing's evolution into a heavenly king was related to Bishamon in Buddhism. When Bishamon was first introduced to China, he appeared in an image with a pagoda in his left hand, aiming at subduing demons and guarding the Buddha. Later, all kinds of portraits of the pagoda-holding king came into being, such as the picture of The Pagoda-Inviting King by Wu Daoyuan, Pagoda-Throwing King by Fan Qiong, and Pagoda-Holding King by Zhu You. At the same time, a story was told about Li Jing dropping rain on behalf of the Dragon King. Since then, Li Jing had been deified.

At the end of the Yuan Dynasty, Yang Jingxian wrote the following:
“A million heavenly warriors under his control.
The golden pagoda in hand he guards the North.
The heavenly King Li under Bishamon,
Among the people, his name is widely known.”

From the above lines, we know the heavenly king Li Jing had been combined with the Bishamon heavenly king. In the book Journey to the West, King Li actually became an established Chinese deity and was conferred the title of Demon-Subduing Great Marshal by the Jade Emperor.
Heavenly Pagoda-Holding King Li
The image and legend of Ne Zha are well-known to everyone in China. The most detailed account can be found in the book *Searching the Source of Immortals of the Three Religions* which records the following:

Originally, Ne Zha was the immortal Daluo in the court of the Jade Emperor. He was six zhang tall, wore a gold ring on his head, and had three heads, nine eyes and eight arms. With haze emitting from his mouth, rock under his feet and magic device in his hand, his roar would make the rain pour and the universe shake. That is to say, Ne Zha was an all-powerful immortal.

The Jade Emperor dispatched him down to the human world to subdue demons, so he was incarnated as the son of the Pagoda-holding King. After his birth, he once bathed in the East Sea, stamping on the Crystal Palace and ascending the Precious Pagoda House. The angry dragon king alerted his troops to arrest him, only to have nine of his dragons killed by Ne Zha. For that, the dragon king went to the South Heaven Gate with the intention of accusing Ne Zha before the Jade Emperor, but was intercepted by Ne Zha and hit to death. Shortly after, Ne Zha, with the Universal Bow and the Sky-Shocking Arrows, shot the son of Shi Ji, the head of all demons. In a great rage, Shi Ji summoned his army to capture Ne Zha but met his death by Ne Zha who wielded the demon-quelling pestle of his father.

Seeing his father, Li Jing, furious at what he had done, Ne Zha cut his flesh and broke his bones in order to save his father from disaster. He returned his flesh and bones to his father, and his soul floated to the Deity Primordial, who, appreciating his power to subdue the fiend, reincarnated him with a lotus flower—the stem as his bones, the root as his flesh, the fibre as his tendon and the leaves his clothes. Ne Zha was thus made an immortal.

Ever since then, Ne Zha, riding on a pair of wind-fire wheels and brandishing a Fire-Tip Lance, went wherever he wished, including rivers and seas, subdued demons of all kinds, and did many seemingly impossible things such as moving the stars. The Jade Emperor also named him First Leader of 36 Immortal Warriors, the heavenly marshal who guards the gates of Heaven.

Today, the birthday of Ne Zha is celebrated annually in a great style on the eighth and ninth days of the fourth lunar month.
Er Lang

Tradition has it that during the reign of King Zhao of the state of Qin during the Warring States Period, there was a dais outside the gate of Guan County of Sichuan, where Magistrate Li Bing led his soldiers and the local people to slay the evil River Dragon. Li Bing tried to tempt the Dragon out of the river, saying that he would offer him two of his daughters. The Dragon surfaced in the form of a bull, and Li Bing also transformed himself into a bull wearing a ribbon and struggled with the dragon on the cliff. As planned, all the archers on the bank shot at the bull without the ribbon and killed him.

Due to his brave deed, the local people held Li Bing in high respect and built a temple in his honour. Later in the Tang Dynasty, a splendid temple was put up in Guankou, called Er Lang Temple (Temple of the Second Son). Some said Er Lang was Li Bing's second son, who had disguised himself as one of the two daughters offered to the River Dragon. This belief became so widespread that many successive dynasties honoured the second son of Li Bing as king. *The History of the Yuan Dynasty* had on record that in the first year of the Zhishun Period, Li Bing was conferred the title, General Virtuous King and his second son, the Merciful and Miraculous Sage King.

In fact, Er Lang was introduced from India. Among the gods of India was a king of Bishamon (also called Northern King) who was a military god with a magic pagoda in his hand. His second son was called Dujian, also known as the Deity Er Lang. Legend has it that in the Tianbao Period of the Tang Dynasty, a city Anxi (now the Kuche County of Xinjiang Autonomous Region) was surrounded by five states such as Dashu and Kangju, and it was difficult for the army of the Tang Dynasty to get there. Worried about the situation, the emperor suddenly saw nearly 300 immortals coming to his help. The leader was Dujian, the second son of the Heavenly King of Bishamon. Since then, more and more temples were built in his honour throughout the country.

Because it is difficult for a foreign god to be accepted by the common people, he was then identified with Li Jing, a well-known general in the early Tang Dynasty. Later, through the fabrication of fictionists, he became Yang Jian who was a eunuch during the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. He was referred to as Yang in the short story collections *Jing Shi Heng Yan, Journey to the West and Creation of the Gods*, which all claimed that he was the God Er Lang in Guankou. Songs in the closing years of the Qing Dynasty such as *Chenxiang Saved His Mother* even described his image:

"With a dog and a falcon on the shoulder,
In three-ridged hat and brilliant gold armour,
Three eyes on his beard-sparse fair face,
A double-edged trident, the weapon he carries."

In recent centuries, the concept that the God Er Lang is Yang Jian is actually quite far-fetched. Besides this, other legends say that Zhao Yu of the Sui Dynasty and Deng Xia of the Jin Dynasty are also known as the God Er Lang.
Er Lang
The Great White Star

In the famous myth, *Journey to the West*, the Great White Star was a celestial immortal. When the Monkey King Sun Wukong created trouble in the Eastern Sea and disturbances in the world of darkness, it was he who, following the imperial edict of the Jade Emperor, went to persuade the Monkey King to accept the amnesty. Though loyal and devoted to the Jade Emperor, the old official was somewhat pedantic without adequate flexibility and tactics and was often mocked at by the Monkey King.

Actually, the Great White Star had a noble position. As stated in the book, *Heavenly Officials*, he was “the essence of the West, son of the White Emperor, with very promising prospects to become a noble lord or a great general”. There was even a story related to a romance in his youth. There lived a beautiful fairy Huang'e, weaving in the heavenly palace. When tired, she rowed a canoe up the Heavenly River to the shore of the Western Sea and frolicked there under a mulberry tree. One day, Venus, a twinkling star in the East changed himself into a handsome, brilliant young man and sat by the River, singing and playing the Chinese zither. The two fell in love and later gave birth to a boy named Shao Hao or Qiong Sang who later on founded the state of Shao Hao somewhere across the Sea in the East.

In contrast to his meritorious son, the Great White Star had achieved nothing spectacular. And in the book, *Journey to the West*, he was no more than a senile and humble official standing by the Jade Emperor’s side in attendance.

Actually, the Great White Star is another name for Venus. His other names include Qi Ming, Chang Geng and Ming Xing. In *The Book of Songs*, it is written: “Qi Ming is in the East while Chang Geng is in the West. Both are actually Venus.” Hence, daybreak occurs in the East and dusk occurs in the West. Due to lack of knowledge on the part of man, this heavenly body evolved into an immortal just like many others.
Generals Heng & Ha

"In the battle field, two generals are fighting. Who's bold enough to stop the clashing?
This general – a ferocious lion rushing downhill,
That general – a violent leopard charging at a tiger.
One is determined to found a dynasty new,
The other, adamant to safeguard the monarch old.
A pair of fierce opponents they were born,
Vying today to gain the upper hand."

The above scene was described in Chapter 74 in the novel, *The Creation of Gods*. Riding on golden-eyed monsters, the two valiant generals, Zheng Lun and Chen Qi, had a fierce battle. They were known as fighting warriors, General "Heng" and General "Ha".

Zheng Lun, a general in charge of food supplies for King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty had a god on the mountain, West Kun Lun, as his master. This master taught him how to snort out two rays of white beams from his nostrils like the sound of bells, capable of capturing people's souls. When King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty led his army to attack the Shang Dynasty, Zheng Lun used his magic tactic to cause his opponents to become unconscious before killing them. Later, seized by General Deng Jiugong of Zhou, he surrendered and joined the army of King Wu. He had duelled with General Jin Dasheng of the Shang Dynasty. Jin was an ox monster with a gallstone as big as a bowl. He ejected gall juice through the mouth with a thunderlike sound and hit Zheng Lun in the nostrils. Zheng Lun fell and was killed.

Chen Qi was also a convoy general of food supplies. Taught by a god, he had a yellow haze in his belly and could snatch men's spirits when he opened his mouth with a "Ha" to let out yellow gas. He won every battle against King Wu. After Zheng Lun had surrendered to the Zhou Dynasty, he had a furious fight with Chen, the scene of which was described vividly at the beginning of this article. Chen Qi's "Ha" called forth yellow gas from his throat and Zheng Lun's "Heng" produced two columns of white light from his nose. Both of them met their match in each other and neither could gain the upper hand. At the critical moment, Chen Qi was hit by Zhou General, Ne Zha, on the arm with his Universal Ring and was pierced to death by General Huang Feihu.

When the Shang Dynasty was overthrown, Jiang Ziya appointed both of them as gods to guard the Gate for Buddha, disseminating the religion and protecting the magic treasure.

Such a legend may seem ridiculous, but due to the influence of literary works, a lot of people have come to believe in these two gods.
Generals Heng & Ha
Powerful Warrior Guards

Powerful Warrior Guards are the gods guarding the four poles of Heaven. Since Nü Wa created mankind, people have been living under the same sky. But one year, half of the heaven suddenly collapsed and the surface of the earth cracked into many deep chasms with fire rampaging from the mountains and heavy flooding of waters. It was almost impossible for human beings to live.

Determined to mend the riddled Heaven, Nü Wa gathered large quantities of multi-coloured stones and melt them into liquid which she used to block up holes in the heaven. In case the heaven should give way again, she slew a huge turtle and set its four feet up as pillars to support the four corners of Heaven. These were called the Four Poles which were like four pillars supporting the roof. If the pillars broke, the house would collapse.

Later, the Heavenly Emperor sent four powerful warriors to guard the four poles so that they would not collapse. They were known as the Four Powerful Warrior Guards. They were all 30 zhang tall, ferocious-looking and extremely powerful. Demons of various kinds were afraid of them, and Heaven was thus kept safe.

In the past, on the eighth day of the 12th lunar month, villagers would hold large-scale sacrificial activities to get rid of plague. As a poem goes, “The drums sound, the spring grass sprouts,” villagers beat their small drums and wore masks to disguise themselves as the Powerful Warrior Guards, praying for luck in the coming year.
Spirit Official Wang

Spirit Official Wang was worshipped in most Taoist temples. He had a red face, a beard sticking up and teeth protruding from his mouth. Legend has it that he guarded the Heavenly Jade Palace and was one of the twenty-six heavenly generals.

Spirit Official Wang was actually a historical figure called Wang Shan who lived during the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. At first, he followed a wizard Sha Shoujian to learn the way to draw magic figures to cast spells, then studied Buddhism from a priest Lin Lingsu who, although favoured by Emperor Huizong, was an honest person. At that time, Cai Jing, a wicked minister, framed 120 officials including the famous minister Sima Guang as a "treacherous member" and inscribed their names on a stone tablet by the Palace of Supreme Purity.

One day, while accompanying the emperor in a feast, Lin Lingsu suddenly kowtowed to the tablet. The emperor was puzzled and asked him why. He replied that those with their names on the tablet were all gods in Heaven, and he dared not pay no obeisance. He had meant to warn the emperor not to demote honest ministers, but failed to do so. The emperor carried on holding Cai Jing in high regard, Lin Lingsu could do nothing except to leave the court.

Although Wang Shan himself was not an immediate disciple of Lin Lingsu, he learned a lot from Lin's moral conduct and magic. During the reign of Emperor Yong Le of the Ming Dynasty, a priest called Zhou Side inherited the magic arts of Wang Shan and practised them in the capital city. Emperor Yong Le therefore built a splendid temple, with the twenty-six heavenly generals' sculptures in it, with the sculpture of Spirit Official Wang placed in first position and conferred the title Heavenly General of the Jade Fire Palace. However, few people knew what magic power he possessed. As time went on, he was supposed to be a Fire God because of his title, "Heavenly General of the Jade Fire Palace". He was also said to be specially valiant in protecting the common people. Later, he was widely known as the Gate Deity of Taoist temples just as the Guardian Skanda in Buddhism.
Spirit Official Wang
In the past, people who wanted to exorcize evil spirits would put these words on the wall: "Lord Jiang is here, there's nothing to fear." Those merchants who went to fairs in the mountains also did this, because the fair was always held near a temple. It was believed that where there was a temple, there would be evil spirits. Like the living, the dead also liked to go to the fair. If the living committed any crime, they would be punished by officials; but in the case of evil spirits, only Lord Jiang could subdue them.

How people came to worship Lord Jiang was not known. Actually Lord Jiang was an accomplished general who helped establish the Western Zhou Dynasty. The books, *Three Tactics* and *Three Strategies*, collectively known as *The Art of War by Lord Jiang*, were alleged to be his posthumous works, but, in fact, they were written by people of later generations. Among so many stories about him, the one about fishing is most well-known. It is said that Lord Jiang liked to fish by the streams, using a hookless line, and he caught nothing in three years. When being questioned, he answered, "Those who are willing will bite the bait" and hinted there was profound meaning in his reply. Shortly after that, he caught a big carp with a book on the art of war in its belly. Thus he was appointed Prime Minister (by King Wen of Zhou), and no longer lived as a hermit. Lord Jiang made great contributions in helping the king to establish the Zhou Dynasty.

During the reign of Emperor Suzong of the Tang Dynasty, the imperial court conferred him the title, Prince Wucheng. In the Song Dynasty, a temple was built in his honour in addition to his title but little is known about how he rose from a general to be an immortal in charge of exorcizing evil spirits.
Lord Jiang
Zhu Rong

Zhu Rong was the Southern Emperor Yan who was in charge of fire. He was originally named Chong Li and got his present name from the city Zhu Rong where he lived. He had the face of a man and the body of a beast. Assigned the responsibility of being in charge of fire in the earthly world by the Heavenly Emperor, he often cruised in the sky, riding on two dragons.

Later, he kept away from all worldly affairs, studying Taoism and worshipping the kitchen god at home to cultivate immortality. Once, in a heavy flood, he was forced to move to Taiyuan, together with his two sons, He Zhong and He Shu, and his grandson Qian Jian. Out of generosity, Emperor Yao had a house built for Zhu Rong and received him every ten days, holding him in great honour.

One day, Emperor Yao told Zhu Rong that Gun, the man he had sent to harness the flood, committed an unforgivable crime, so he asked Zhu Rong to kill him. The truth was that having failed to control the flood many times, Gun stole the magic soil which could grow by itself from the emperor. Armed with a sword back home, Zhu Rong told his wife Wang Bo everything. She said: “Having cultivated Taoism for so many years, how can you slay a man?” Zhu Rong replied: “It's nothing serious. The place below the kitchen stove where we worship is full of bloodshed. Who knows how many innocent animals are killed within a day?” Consequently, accompanied by his grandson Qian Jian and scores of attendants, Zhu Rong chased Gun to Mount Yu located in the North Pole area, known as “Dark Hades” at that time. There they found Da Zhang, one of Gun's ministers who told them in tears that Gun had drowned himself. When Gun's body was fished out of the water, a yellow bear was seen crawling out from his clothes and jumping into the sea.

Zhu Rong watched and on seeing him, the bear dived into the water and never came out again. Zhu Rong then had Gun's body dressed in the best clothes and buried in a fine coffin.

One day when King Tang of the Shang Dynasty led his expedition army towards the Xia capital, a heavenly deity appeared and said to him: “The Heavenly Emperor has sent me to help you. Remember, when the northwestern corner of the city is on fire, it will be time for you to launch the attack.” The king was overjoyed as he realised that he had just encountered Zhu Rong.

Shortly after, he received reports that the northwestern corner of the Xia capital was on fire. Knowing that the fire was set by Zhu Rong, the king ordered an assault on the enemy. As a result, the city was conquered.

Zhu Rong later went to the South and lived in Mount Heng where he taught the people there how to use fire. Once, he heard of a place haunted by ghosts, so he gathered some bamboo stems and cut them into short tubes. When the ghosts showed up at midnight, the bamboo tubes were lighted and thrown around.

This was the original form of firecrackers and Zhu Rong was regarded as the inventor. Nowadays, high-quality firecrackers always come from Liuyang and Liling of Hunan province, because it is said that the local people are descendants of Zhu Rong's apprentices.
Zhu Rong
Music Deity Ling Lun

In ancient times, the Yellow Emperor led his people and triumphed over another tribe headed by Chi You, which gave rise to many legends about the inventions by the emperor and his officials. It was said the Yellow Emperor himself had many inventions such as the carriage which earned him another name, Xuan Yuan (meaning carriage in Chinese). He was also said to have invented the crown, the cooking pot, and taught the people how to build houses, etc. As to the inventions of his ministers, countless examples can be cited. Bo Yu invented the garment; Yi, the drum and Yi Shou, the mirror, etc. Among them, Ling Lun, an immortal also known as Hong Ya, created music, and to some extent, should be regarded as the originator of Chinese music.

Taking on the task given by the Yellow Emperor, Ling Lun went to the north side of the Kunlun Mountain, and finally selected some high-quality bamboo stems at Xie Xi Valley. Then he chose a straight hollow bamboo stem of even thickness and cut a pipe 3.9 inches long from between two joints. He blew the bamboo pipe and defined the sound as the tone of Huangzhong, the first of 12 tones. Then he made 12 proportional bamboo pipes and brought them to the foot of the Kunlun Mountain where he used them to distinguish the 12 kinds of tunes according to the singing of phoenixes. He heard the male phoenix cry six times and in turn the female phoenix answered six times. The difference in the pitches was in harmony with the defined tune of Huangzhong. Hence, he made 12 bamboo pipes of different lengths to regulate the 12 different tunes according to that of Huangzhong as well as the cries of the phoenixes. This was how music was created.

The Yellow Emperor who was pleased at the news, instructed Ling Lun and his assistants to cast 12 bells to harmonize the sounds of gong, shang, jiao, zhi and yu, the five basic sounds in the performance of the two pieces of music, Liying and Jiushao. So, when the sun rose to the position of the Kui Star, the whole orchestra, conducted by Ling Lun, played the eulogistic music of Xianchi in admiration of the Yellow Emperor, accompanied by the graceful dancing of beautiful girls. Both the music and dancing blended so well it created a brilliant spectacle.

During the Warring States Period, Zhao Jianzi was confined to the bed for seven days and nights because of an illness, but recovered immediately on hearing the melody in a dream. This story, of course, added more magical power to the grand music invented by Ling Lun.
Music Deity Ling Lun
The God of Thunder

The God of Thunder was known as the Heavenly God in charge of thunder.

In ancient times, the Yellow Emperor led a huge army in a fierce battle against a southern tribe, Chi You. Aided by the Heavenly Fairy, the Yellow Emperor won the battle and his men caught a wild bull weighing more than three thousand jin at Mount Liubuo in the Eastern Sea. He had it slaughtered and used its hide for an enormous heavenly drum. When it was beaten, the sound could be heard some five hundred miles away.

After becoming a deity, the Yellow Emperor set up a post for the God of Thunder who was "extremely powerful, with muscles bulging out. He had the face of a monkey with a long and pointed jaw and feet like eagle's claws with hooted nails. He had a wedge in the left hand and a hammer in the right ready to beat drums, five of which were attached to his waist and one under his foot." As to the origin of the image, there were many controversies, among which one belief held that before it rained, the God of Thunder would keep beating his drums and thunder would roar in the sky.

The image of the God of Thunder was changed by people of later generations. It was said that a filial son in the Tang Dynasty was struck by thunder while killing a chicken for his mother. After rising to Heaven, he was conferred the title of the God of Thunder by the Heavenly Emperor. He had the head of a monster, a mouth like a chicken's beak and two wings on his shoulders, with a dagger in the left hand and a hammer in the right. This image was adopted by almost all temples of thunder gods in modern times.

In the famous myth, Journey to the West by Wu Chengen, there was a Thunder Palace near the Hall of Miraculous Mist, in which the God of Thunder's generals and soldiers were stationed. When the Monkey King Sun Wukong fought his way into the Hall of Miraculous Mist, the Helpful Sage sent for thirty-six 'thunder' generals who surrounded the Monkey King. Although they fought with the utmost ferocity, the Monkey King was not in the least frightened—he parried and struck with his cudgel, resisting his opponents on all sides. Later, he transformed himself into someone with three heads and six arms. None of the 'thunder' generals could get anywhere near him. At last, Buddha came and subdued the Monkey King. Due to the involvement of the 'thunder' generals, we can see how people adored the God of Thunder's power.

But since the Warring States Period, many social functions had been ascribed to the God of Thunder. They were mainly positive ones such as carrying out the execution of the guilty with a thunderbolt on behalf of Heaven. Some even said he had the ability to distinguish the good from the evil. So in Chinese folklore, he was an immortal who upheld justice.

1. 1 jin = 0.5kg
The Lightning Goddess

According to the chapter on Gender in the book, I Ching, thunder was different from lightning, the former being masculine and the latter, feminine. Later, man respectfully conferred many female titles such as "Lightning Goddess", "Golden Light Sage Mother" and "Lightning Mother" on lightning. All her statues are well-poised with maternal grace in perfumed coat, crimson skirt and white trousers, holding a mirror in each hand.

Today, we all know lightning is a natural phenomenon caused by the violent discharge of electricity when there is a voltage difference between two clouds, the cloud and the earth or when the voltage in the cloud and the air reaches a certain level. However, to the ancient people, lightning was caused by a god and this belief gave rise to the term, Lightning Goddess. What was more amazing was that she was even given a name. Yao Zongyi of the Ming Dynasty mentioned in his book, A Private Journal: "In the front hall of the thunder section of the Taoist temple, stands the Lightning Goddess called Wen Ying." But there is little evidence about the origin of this name.

As the goddess in charge of lightning, she seldom acted alone. In some literary works, she was described as a subordinate to male gods. For instance, in Chapter 87 of Journey to the West, it was written "Deng, Xin, Zhang and Tao commanded the Lightning Goddess..." which reflected to some extent, women's inferior position in the society then.

The source of lightning was naturally ascribed to mirrors in the hands of the Lightning Goddess. However the book, Tracing the Source of Deities of the Three Religions, had a different explanation. The Lord of the East and the Jade Lady played a game – to shoot at a kettle. When either of them missed, Heaven laughed and a flash of light was released from his mouth, which became the lightning we see today. Hence, in this legend, even the "merits" of the Lightning Goddess were denied.
The Lightning Goddess
The Lord of Wind

The wind, though not seen, can be felt everywhere.
"On the banks, it sways willow twigs softly swinging,
In the garden, it stirs flowers and leaves gently dancing."
Described in the above lines is a breeze.
"Trees roaring when it sweeps over the mountains,
Boughs shaking as it rushes through the forests."
That is a gale.
"Dust and sands swirling up to the sky,
Seas and rivers churning in waves high."
This is a tempest.
Naturally, the ancient people were not able to understand the phenomenon caused by the flowing of air, but ascribed it to the power of the Lord of Wind. The Classic of Mountains and Seas had it that when battling with the Yellow Emperor, Chi You implored the Wind Lord and the Rain Master to blow a storm and pour a heavy rain.

The Lord of Wind is a title of respect for the wind-producing deity who was also called the Master of Wind. In such a vast country as China, people of different tribes had different beliefs of the wind god. Some regarded the bird as the wind god for its wings produced wind during its flight; some venerated the mount deity as the wind god since the higher the mountain, the stronger the wind became, and there was always wind blowing through caves in the mountains.

Since the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States Periods, a comprehensive system of the heavenly deities had been gradually developed. In central China, people worshipped a constellation as the wind god; but people in the South thought Fei Lian, a winged monster, was the wind god, since it had the body of a deer, the size of a leopard, the tail of a snake, and a head shaped like an ancient wine cup with horns.

After the Tang and Song Dynasties, the wind deity assumed a human form who was given various names such as Aunt Feng and Master Fang. The surnames were all homophones of the word Feng which means wind. Thus in most places the deity became a white-bearded old man with a wheel in the left hand and a fan in the right in a gesture to fan the wheel. And this image was actually imagined in the light of the features of the wind.
“Like the Heavenly River from sky pouring,
Or flying clouds above the sea dashing.”

Rain, though threadlike, can create a thunderous force when converged.

It was said in a legend that at the time of Emperor Shen Nong, rivers dried up and mountains collapsed through years of drought, and everywhere were devastated fields and withered crops.

Just then, there came a bare-footed wild man of grotesque appearance and dishevelled hair, wearing a straw cape and skin pants. Willow sprigs in hands, he talked crazily and danced wildly. The man claimed to be Chisongzi, the rain master under Emperor Shen Nong. But the legend did not explain how he could produce rain.

Among the many weather deities, the rain master was doubtless the most related to the lives of the ancient people. But there were many versions as to who he really was. Besides Chisongzi, Ping Yi of the Warring States Period was also regarded as the Master of Rain. Xuan Ming of the Han Dynasty was the deity of the North and since the North was associated with water, he naturally assumed the duty of the rain master.

But what was more puzzling was the association of Li Jing with rain in Collection of Historical and Current Books. Li was a renowned general in the early Tang Dynasty. He used to travel in the mountains and put up in villagers’ homes when tired.

One night, a woman came and offered him a bottle of water, saying: “Heaven has ordered a rain. You are requested to carry it out.” Then a servant brought to him an indigo horse, warning: “Let out three drops of water down the mane, but do remember not to let out more, just three drops.”

Li Jing mounted and the horse flew into the sky. He let out dozens of drops on end, and the area became a stretch of vast ocean the next day.

The Master of Rain was portrayed as a man of strong build with black whiskers and beard, his left hand holding a jar with a dragon inside and his right hand sprinkling water.

After the Wei and the Jin Dynasties, some people began to worship the dragon as the deity in charge of rain. And in recent centuries people only pray to the dragon king for rain. There is practically no more worship of the Master of Rain.
The Master of Rain
Chisongzi was the Master of Rain at the time of Emperor Shen Nong. With a slim body and a face as radiant as the rosy dawn, he always looked as if he was in his early thirties.

As the Master of Rain, he could decide when to rain or clear up. He named the dropping of rain every five days temporary rain; every 10 days, grain rain; and every 15 days, seasonal rain. Because of his extraordinary power, people regarded the rain he produced as “Divine Rain”.

Chisongzi was good at controlling his breath and directing the vital energy to circulate in his body. Abstaining from grain, he took only sesame for food and had a special liking for Chinese wolfberry. They were so tonic that they made his teeth emerge again after falling out.

He persuaded Emperor Shen Nong to take crystal, saying that it would enable him to go into a fire without being burned. After he resigned as the Master of Rain, he invited the emperor’s daughter, who adored him, to visit the four seas and famous mountains.

He once told Emperor Diku: “I have helped Emperor Xuan Yuan to attain immortality. With your meritorious deeds, it is quite promising for you to become an immortal. I now call on you just for that.” The emperor was overjoyed and said: “I rely fully on your guidance.”

“When the elixir is ready,” Chisongzi replied, “I will introduce you to the Jade Emperor and the King of the Ninth Heaven, who could teach you the way to immortality.”

The next spring, Xian Hei, the minister assigned by the emperor, succeeded in making the elixir and conducted the rehearsal of the great celebration in the palace. Sixty-four girls in eight columns danced in colourful costumes with various props in hands to the music made by 36 instrument players standing in six lines. Chisongzi spoke highly of the performance. While he was talking, a pair of phoenixes came down from the sky, hovering overhead and attracting countless colourful birds around them. For a while, the phoenixes alighted on a parasol tree. The emperor was overjoyed, for he knew the phoenixes had relations with immortals in Heaven and on Earth. Their presence must portend auspicious omen. So the emperor stepped down and paid obeisance to the West several times. From then on, the phoenixes and the birds stayed on the parasol tree.

On the day before the formal performance to the Heavenly Emperor, minister Xian Hei suddenly fell ill. Again, Chisongzi paid a visit and told the anxious emperor: “Tomorrow is the right day and minister Xian must be present. I have a treasure to cure him.” With these words, he took out a yellow pearl which shone as brightly as gold. The pearl was rubbed on the minister’s body and he recovered in no time.

When dawn came, the minister sang at the top of his voice, and the entire palace burst into ovation, together with the playing of music and the dancing of birds. After the performance, Chisongzi told Emperor Diku the way to attaining immortality and then bade him farewell.
Magu

In ancient China, there was a story about Magu presenting birthday gifts. Magu was a woman immortal with eternal youth. So whenever ceremonies were held to celebrate a woman's birthday, people would write down such words as "Magu Lady Presenting Birthday Gifts" or paint a picture of Magu holding peaches in both hands for luck and happiness.

Magu was widely known as the sister of the immortal Wang Yuan (also named Wang Fangping) in the period of the Eastern Han Dynasty. In the book *Collection of Historical and Contemporary Books on Supernatural Beings*, she was portrayed as being 18 or 19, with the hair on her crown coiled in a bun while the rest hung freely about her waist. Her richly-embroidered dress, though not made of brocade, shone brilliantly beyond description and could not possibly be found in the human world.

It was said that Magu had cultivated Taoism in Mount Guyu at the southeast of Mouzhou Prefecture. She could walk on the surface of water without wetting her shoes. Another legend had it that she was the daughter of Ma Qiu, a court official during the period of Shi Le, who supervised labourers in the construction of a city wall. Sympathetic with the labourers who worked day and night, Magu imitated the crow of a cock in an attempt to make all the cocks crow so that those on night shift might rest earlier. What she did was later discovered by her father who threatened to beat her up. Thus she fled to the Fairy Cave and practised Taoism there.

There were many tales about Magu's immortal deeds. In one account, she and her brother, Wang Fangping, paid a visit to a friend, Cai Jing, who had been brought back to life by her brother. On their arrival, Cai Jing's sister-in-law, who had just given birth, also came out to greet them. Magu said: "Please don't step forward. Stay where you are." She then asked for some rice and scattered them on the ground, saying that the rice could absorb the filth and waste blood from the woman's body. Just as she said, the rice was found to have become as red as crimson sands.

In another legend, Magu was said to have been killed by her husband for her disloyalty to Taoism. Her corpse kept floating along the river till it was taken out and buried, yet no tomb was erected for her. On overcast days, she could be seen treading amidst the haze. Where she was buried, killing and hunting were forbidden for violators would drown or lose their bearings. A local witch explained: "Magu had an unnatural death. She did not want to see other creatures slaughtered." Now, in the southwest of Nancheng County in Jiangxi, there stands Magu Hill which is called 28 Caves by Taoists. On the hill is the Fairy-Meeting Pavilion, the legendary site of Cai Jing's house that was once visited by Magu and her brother.

In the sixth year of the period Dali of the Tang Dynasty, Yan Zhenqing was the magistrate of Fuzhou in Jiangxi. According to *Legends of Immortals*, he wrote an article entitled *On the Days of the Immortal Magu* in two copies: one in large characters and the other in small characters. The former was kept in Linchuan but was burned in the Yuan Dynasty; the latter was kept in Nancheng City and was chiselled on a tablet for later generations.
Goddess of Earth

Goddess of Earth or HouTu was a great deity corresponding to the Heavenly Emperor and in charge of the earth. As recorded in The History of the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wu once said to his entourage: “I am going to worship the Heavenly Emperor, but no sacrifice has been offered to the Goddess of Earth. That is against the rites.” After that, temples were built in honour of the goddess and the emperor worshipped her in the same ritual as he did to the Heavenly Emperor.

In history, there were many controversies about the origin and identity of the Goddess of Earth. Some said HouTu was the name of a person; some believed it was the title for an official rank; still others regarded it as a deity’s name. According to the research of a contemporary, the image of HouTu evolved from Mother Earth who had been revered since the birth of civilisation. As grains were nurtured on Mother Earth and cultivated by women, Mother Earth was known as HouTu during the period of the matriarchy.

HouTu was also believed to be a woman in some other ancient records. A story in the book Anecdotes of Deities had it that Cui Wanan, an official governing the Guangling Prefecture, suffered from a serious disease. Having no way out, his family went to the HouTu Temple to pray for him.

The same night, Wanan had a dream in which he saw a woman wearing pearl earrings and pearl shoes, in layers of dress made of shells and jade, who told him: “I have a prescription to cure your disease.” Upon waking up, he obtained the medical herbs and decocted them according to the instruction of the woman. As a result, he recovered soon after. Thus, after the Tang Dynasty, the statues of HouTu were moulded into an image of a woman and venerated as HouTu Lady.

However, in some areas of China, HouTu is still believed to be a male deity of the earth. For instance, a book retorted the belief that HouTu was a woman with the following arguments: “In ancient times, the emperor was called Yuan Hou and the marquises Qun Hou. If we take HouTu as a woman, should Hou Kui and Hou Ji (two kings in ancient China) be women as well?” HouTu was thus converted to a man.

In the past, sacrifices would always be offered to HouTu when someone died. Since the heaven was Yang and the earth was Yin, HouTu, as a deity of earth, was designated another duty to rule the world of Yin or Darkness.
The City God

The City God, the deity guarding the city, is known to make a patrol on the Qing Ming Festival and on the 15th of the seventh lunar month. During these festivals, devotees would parade the streets with the statue of the City God. Houses would be decorated with lanterns and festoons, and people would offer sacrifices and throw dinners, creating a bustling scene everywhere. According to traditions, the 15th of the fifth lunar month is the god's birthday on which ceremony was also held in his honour.

In ancient times, the City God ranked seventh among the eight deities for ditches and canals. Since people later regarded the moat as the protection of the city, the City God gradually became the object of worship. However, until the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty, the worship existed only in writing without temples and statues erected in his honour. He became a deity for worship after the Song Dynasty, and in the early Ming Dynasty, altars were built and titles were conferred on him. The city god of a municipality was conferred the title of duke; the one in a prefecture city, marquis; and the one in a county town, earl. Though of different ranks, they had the same duty to lead the land-guarding deities within his territory. Late in the 20th year of Emperor Hong Wu, the altars of earth were thought not sacred enough and were replaced with the temple. The imperial court issued an edict that the architecture of all temples in honour of the City God should follow the pattern of the government building and have a seat for the judge.

Actually, the City God was not one specific person. In the Song Dynasty, Ji Xin was adored as the City God in Zhenjiang and Qingyuan; Guan Yin was worshipped in the areas of Longxing and Jiangji. Others like Ying Bu, Fan Zeng and Xiao He were also regarded as city gods in some places. Records in the book Notes in the Fragrant Teahouse said: "The divine image of the city god may change with time."

The book of New Anecdotes recorded a story that in the reign of Emperor Kangxi in the Qing Dynasty, the statue of the City God in Longxi had a dark face with a long beard and looked quite grave. Once, a thief came to pray that if he could succeed in burglary at night, he would slaughter three animals (ox, pig and sheep) and offer them as sacrifices. It turned out the thief did have his wish and he kept his promise.

A young scholar, Xie, learnt about it and wrote an article to condemn the City God. That night, his teacher dreamed that the City God was furious and threatened to punish Xie. As soon as he woke up, the teacher hastily rumbled through the drafts of his student, found the article and burned it in a rage. That night, the teacher dreamed of the City God staggering up and telling him that he merely meant to threaten his student. But his crime had been reported to the Heavenly Emperor who immediately removed him from office. In place of him, the young scholar was to fill the vacancy. Three days later, the student died all of a sudden. And people in the temple heard the whinny of horses and the announcement of the arrival of the new City God. After that, the image of the deity was changed from a man with a dark face and a long beard into a fair-faced youth.
The Deity of Land

The Deity of Land was originally named She. The day people offered sacrifices to him was called She Day. As nothing, whether grass, trees, birds and other animals, could live without the earth, his worship was next only to that of Heaven.

By nature, he was to be responsible for everything on the land, but later, he evolved into a guardian deity with the name of Fude (Blessings and Virtues) or Lord Fude, who was in charge of the happiness and misfortune of the people in a locality.

It was said the deity was actually Zhang Mingde of the Zhou Dynasty, and a servant of a senior official posted far away from his hometown. He once carried the official’s little daughter to see her father. On their way, they were caught in a snowstorm. The servant wrapped the girl with his own clothes, but he himself was frozen to death. At the point of his death, there appeared in the sky these words: “The Great Immortal Fude of the South Heavenly Gate”. The grateful official built a temple in his honour. By the time of King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty, he was conferred the title of Houlu. Later, he was named the Lord of Land.

Although listed as an immortal, the Deity of Land had limited power. Perceived as approachable and very kind, his image was a rotund and happy old man. Thus people named those with white hair and beard “Grandpa Land”. In Journey to the West, when the Monkey King Sun Wukong entered the Peach Orchard to inspect it, the Land Deity hurried to pay obeisance and got others to kowtow to the Great Sage Monkey King. We could see how humble he was.

The Deity of Land had a fairly low position in the world of deities. There were few temples built in his honour. His altars were often attached to other temples or located near a pavilion or bridge. In some places, people merely erected a one-foot-long plank with his local name on it.

Lang Ying of the Ming Dynasty recorded the following: Travelling incognito, Emperor Taizu met a young scholar and invited him to a restaurant. Finding no vacant seats there, the emperor took down the statue of the Land Deity from its altar, saying: “Do me a favour.” They then used it as a dining table. After the emperor left, the young scholar put the statue back to its original place.

That night the Land Deity told the young man in his dream: “The emperor ordered me not to sit on the altar table.” Since then, the statue of the Land Deity has been placed on the ground, another evidence of his humility.

According to traditions, the second day of the second lunar month was the birthday of the Lord of Land, on which he was widely worshipped by farmers. Another legend had it that every year on the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Land Deity would inspect the fields, blessing the peasants with favourable weather in the coming year. So, on the eve of the festival, farmers would hold sumptuous feasts, burn incense, and put in the fields reed stems clipped with paper money and incense to represent canes, as the Land Deity was so old that he might need a walking stick.
The Deity of Land
The Gate Deities: Shentu & Yulei

For the safety of the family, people in olden times used to stick the portraits of the Gate Deities on their gates and doors. Different images were adopted for the Gate Deities but the earliest were Shentu and Yulei.

Both Shentu and Yulei were mythical figures in The Classic of Mountains and Seas. As recorded, in ancient times, there stood in the vast Eastern Sea a mountain called Dushuo. On it grew a huge peach tree with its twisted branches and twigs covering an area of 3000 li. To the northeast of the tree was a ghost gate, the only passage for all the ghosts. Beside the gate stood two doorkeepers, Shentu and Yulei, guarding the gate. Evil and harmful spirits would be tied by them with reeds and taken to feed tigers.

When Emperor Huang heard of this, he had portraits of the two spirits painted on peach wood tablets and hung above the doors to keep off evil spirits.

Accordingly, people painted pictures of Shentu, Yulei and a tiger on their gates and doors. Using reed ropes, they hung figures of peach wood above the door to drive away evil ghosts. Peach wood was chosen as people believed it was the essence of the Five Woods and thus could subdue evil spirits. Another reason was peach wood was divine wood since the spirit of the peach tree had grown up at the ghost gate and was capable of taming the ghosts.

Though said to be recorded in The Classic of Mountains and Seas, the legend could not be found in the extant copy of the book. People got to know the above from the quotation made by the famous scholar Wang Chong of the Han Dynasty.

Today, in places where portraits of the Gate Deities are not painted, the names of Shentu and Yulei can still be found, which demonstrate the far-reaching influence of traditional ideas.
The Gate Deities: Shentu & Yulei
The Gate Deities: Qin Qiong & Yuchi Gong

Among the many ancient gate deities were renowned military officials like Yue Fei, Zhao Yun, Sun Bin and Pang Juan. But the most popular ones in recent times are generals Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong of the early Tang Dynasty, described thus:

"Wearing bright golden helmets,
And clad in suits of armour with dragon scales,
These true heroes with distinguished service,
Merely stand as gate-protectors for a thousand years."

The above lines in Chapter 7 of Journey to the West were linked with a story: The prime minister of the Tang Dynasty slaughtered in his dream the old dragon of the River Jing. Since then, Emperor Taizong always felt uneasy in his sleep, for he would hear the crashing of bricks and tiles, and ghosts and demons howling outside his bedroom door. As the emperor related this to his subjects, a famous general Qin Qiong, also named Qin Shubao, stepped forward and said: "I have slaughtered countless men in battles and have seen corpses piled up like mountains. What is a handful of ghosts? I am willing to guard the palace doors with Yuchi Gong for the safety of Your Majesty." The emperor agreed. After they stood on guard, all was quiet and peaceful.

Not having the heart to keep them staying up all night, the emperor ordered portraits of the generals to be painted and pasted on the doors and gates of all the 36 palaces and 72 compounds to subdue ghosts and demons. In the picture, both generals held golden axes in their hands, and hung swords, bows and arrows at their waists, looking ferocious and fearless as they really were.

Later generations carried on the practice and revered them as the Gate Deities. Some people chose to write their names instead of putting their portraits on both sides of the door. Popular in the noble families at first, the practice later spread widely among the common people.
The Gate Deities: Qin Qiong & Yuchi Gong
Zhong Kui

Zhong Kui (Kui meaning road in Chinese) has another name with the same pronunciation but a different character (Kui meaning sunflower). He is a god in charge of subduing evil spirits.

It was said that in the third year of the Kai Yuan period, on his return from a lecture on the art of war delivered on Lishan Hill, Emperor Ming Huang contracted malaria and was ill for nearly a month. One night, he met in his dream two spirits, one big and one small. The latter was flat-nosed and dressed in black clothes with one foot bare and the other in linen shoe; the former was clad in blue clothes and cap with one arm naked. All of a sudden, the small spirit stole a purple sachet and a jade lute belonging to the emperor, darting away around the palace. Instantly, the big spirit ran to catch him, gouged his eyeballs out and swallowed them. The emperor then asked who the big spirit was. He answered that he was Zhong Kui, a person who had failed in the Imperial Examinations for military posts, and he swore to exorcize all evil spirits around the world.

After waking up, the emperor recovered immediately and even felt stronger than before. He missed Zhong Kui but there was no chance to meet him. So he ordered Wu Daozi, a great painter in the palace, to draw a portrait of Zhong Kui. Wu Daozi was known to have painted a landscape on the wall of the palace for the emperor. He concocted a basin of ink, poured it onto the wall and covered it with a piece of cloth. Once unveiled, there were images of mountains, forests, human figures, birds and beasts on the wall.

This time the description by the emperor made the image of Zhong Kui so clear that Wu Daozi quickly said: "Let me have a try". With powerful inspiration he drew a vivid portrait of Zhong Kui. The emperor was pleased and rewarded him a hundred liang of gold. Ever since then Zhong Kui became a symbol for expelling evil spirits.

As a matter of fact, in ancient China, people called a kind of cudgel "Zhong Kui" which was wielded in a ritual to drive away plagues and evil spirits. As time went on, it evolved into a demon-exorcizing symbol.

During the period from the Wei and Jin Dynasties to the Sui and Tang Dynasties, many people adopted Zhong Kui as their name. From the end of the Tang Dynasty, people had always hung the alleged portrait of Zhong Kui on their doors. Only in recent centuries was the custom changed to hanging it on the wall of the hall on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month.

1. 1 liang = 50 grams
Zhong Kui
The God of Blessings

The Gods of Blessings, Happiness and Longevity were known collectively as the Three Stars, symbolizing happiness, wealth and long life. Their images could be found on bookcovers, vases and screens. In one chapter of *Journey to the West*, the Monkey King Sun Wukong, in order to save the ginseng tree of the Great Immortal Zhen Yuan, went to the blessed land of Penglai in the Eastern Sea to ask for an elixir from the three Gods.

The God of Blessings was the first among the three deities. There were different beliefs as to who he was. In the Song Dynasty, Zhen Wu was regarded as the God of Blessings but with the passing of time, people began to identify him as Yang Cheng.

Yang Cheng who lived in the mid-Tang Dynasty was the prefectural governor of Daozhou where, according to *The New History of the Tang Dynasty*, many dwarfs lived. Every year, some of them would be sent to the palace as tribute slaves to entertain the royal family. Thus, whenever the time came, old men would sob for their grandsons and parents wept for their children. Yang Cheng abolished this practice after he took office. When questioned by the court, Yang Cheng replied: “According to the book, *Six Institutions*, we have only dwarf citizens but no dwarf slaves in this place.” The emperor was greatly moved and withdrew the edict for dwarf slaves. As a result, the famous poet Bai Juyi wrote a poem, *The Citizens of Daozhou*:

> Wild with joy are the people of Daozhou,  
> Their families are no longer separated  
> And the dwarfs are now good citizens.”

After that, Yang Cheng was enshrined as the God of Blessings in the local region and was gradually worshipped by people all around the country. In some households, the word “happiness” written in bold calligraphy was pasted onto the wall. Sometimes a bat was drawn, symbolizing blessings, for “bat” and “happiness” are homophones in Chinese. So on festivities, people would burn incense and pray to the God of Blessings for happiness. During the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, however, he was mistaken for another person who was said to have lived during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty whose name was of the same pronunciation but written differently.
The God of Blessings
The Star of Longevity

“Long-lived as the divine turtle, its life is bound to end one day.” The above lines, written by a well-known historical figure Cao Cao, expressed succinctly the lament of the people because of the short span of life. Anyway, due to their longing for longevity, the ancient people gradually conjured a symbol of long life. That was how The Star of Longevity came into being.

Ever since Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty, unified the whole country under his rule, shrines had been built in honour of the Star of Longevity, originally one of the stars in the southern sky. According to The Book of Songs, “it actually refers to a star” and “there would be peace on earth whenever it appears”. Thus people set up shrines praying for luck and long life. However, the Star of Longevity was later personified by people as what we know today: a man of short build, with an ever-smiling face and a grey beard. He had a long head with a prominent forehead and ears so long that they dangled over the shoulders. He held a peach of longevity in his right hand and in his left hand, a dragon-head stick with a calabash containing the elixir.

The Star of Longevity was also known as the Immortal of the South Pole. In the section on Legends of Yimo in The History of the Southern Dynasties, it was recorded that “King Pi Qian, also known as the King of Long Neck was two zhang tall with a head three feet long and was an immortal”. The portrait of the Star of Longevity was based on this image.

Transfigured from a star, the Immortal from the South Pole in many legends naturally lived far away from the mortal world. In Chapter seven of the myth, Journey to the West, such description can be found: “An old man appeared in the misty sky, holding the mythic fungus. With a long head, large ears and a short stature, he was known as The Star of Longevity of the South Pole.” In this instance, instead of a peach, the old man had in his hand the mythic fungus, the magic herb reputed to be capable of preserving eternal youth and bringing the dead back to life. Few people had the honour of having it. The Star of Longevity offered the magic herb to Buddha with the hope that he would enjoy a long life. In one scene from the Chinese opera, Madam White Snake, Madam White set off for the South Pole to steal the magic herb in an attempt to save her husband Xu Xian. However, she was stopped by the Star of Longevity.

Though the Star of Longevity was a fictional figure, worshipped him was always connected with the veneration of aged people. As recorded in The History of the Later Han Dynasty, at the ceremony to worship the Star of Longevity, those above 70 years old were awarded a nine-feet long cane with a carved eagle head. Accordingly, nearly every image of the Star of Longevity had a long walking-stick of many joints, which is evidence of people’s respect for the aged.
The Star of Longevity
Peng Zu

Peng Zu, another symbol of longevity, was originally named Jian Keng. Born in the Xia Dynasty, he was said to be the great-great grandson of the ancient emperor Zhuan Xu. By the end of the Yin Dynasty, he was already more than 700 years old but showed no signs of senility. It was said he once presented the Heavenly Emperor a ladle of porridge stewed from chicken meat. In return, he was rewarded with a long life.

Peng Zu enjoyed a serene life and dedicated himself to the cultivation of Taoism. Admiring his great fame, King Mu of the Zhou Dynasty had intended to appoint him as his minister but Peng Zu politely declined. He had no interest in politics and had mastered the way of keeping good health to achieve longevity. He often took the elixir refined from crystals, mica powder and deerhorn to increase his stamina. As a result, his appearance was as ruddy as that of a youngster.

The King of Yin sent a girl engaged in collecting medicine herbs to Peng Zu to find out the way to longevity. Instead of revealing the secret, Peng Zu just said: “I was a posthumous child. My mother passed away when I was only three. During the insurrection of Da Rong, I fled to the Western Regions and stayed there for more than 100 years. I have survived 49 wives, 54 sons and have gone through many trials and tribulations and my health has deteriorated. I am afraid there is not much time left for me. What I know about longevity is too little to be publicised.” With these words, he left and was nowhere to be seen.

More than 70 years later, he was seen somewhere in Liusha in present-day Sichuan Province. Peng Zu had a disciple, Qing Niaogong, whom he taught the way to longevity for 471 years. After that, Qing Niaogong founded the theory of geomancy, with the belief that the location and surroundings of the ancestors' graves would have a bearing on the destiny of their descendants. Consequently, Qing Niaogong was thought to be the first man from China to have mastered the art of geomancy, also known as the Art of Qing Niao. He was widely respected as the founder of geomancy.

Peng Zu, a symbol of longevity in China, is often mentioned during birthday celebrations.
Zhao Gongming, the God of Fortune

In China, the God of Fortune was worshipped in almost every family in the old days. On some festivals, it was a custom to "invite the God of Fortune" and "offer sacrifices to him". Particular mention should be made of the Spring Festival, i.e. the Chinese New Year during which dumplings were offered as sacrifices. These were regarded as yuan bao (a piece of silver shaped like dumplings) awarded by the God of Fortune. And it was believed that those who had the dumplings could become rich and possess great treasures.

As to who the God of Fortune was, there were many explanations. Some said that he was named He Wulu, who lived in the late Yuan Dynasty and died in a battle against invaders. It was said that people who prayed to him could make fortunes wherever they went. This was how he had the name, "the God of Fortune". Others said that there were a civil God of Fortune and a military one. The former was Bi Gan, the prime minister during the reign of King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty and the latter was the well-known Marshal Zhao Gongming (also called Zhao Xuantan).

Legend has it that Zhao Gongming was from Mount Zhongnan and was a general during the Shang Dynasty. He fled to the mountains where he led a reclusive life cultivating Taoism. When he finally succeeded, he was summoned by the Jade Emperor and was made Marshal of the Divine Fragrance Hall. He wore an iron crown on his head, held an iron staff in one hand and had a swarthy face full of beard. He rode on a tiger, cruising in all directions and governing the Three Worlds. He had great power to control thunder and lightning, create winds and rain, exterminate plagues, subdue evil spirits, cure diseases and change the winds of bad luck. Under his command were eight courageous generals, six immortals, five thunder gods, many fierce soldiers and 28 generals. So, whenever people sought for justice or to make money in business, they would pray to Marshal Zhao and always had their wishes granted.

It was said that the fifth day of the first lunar month was the God of Fortune's birthday. As a custom, businessmen would cook fish and three kinds of livestock (cattle, pig and sheep) and offer these on the altar together with fruits. Incense was also burned and firecrackers lit. But from the Ming Dynasty, he was believed among some people to be a Muslim. Hence, pork was prohibited in the sacrifice in areas such as Beijing, Jiangsu and Sichuan. Some of his portraits had an attendant by his side with a face and hairstyle that were not Chinese. Actually, it was possible that the treasures brought back by the eunuch Zheng He as tribute to Emperor Yong Le of the Ming Dynasty impressed the Chinese so much that they combined the image of the Arabic Muslim with that of the Chinese God of Fortune. Hence, up to now, there is such a phrase, "Muslims presenting treasures".
Zhao Gongming, the God of Fortune
The Kitchen God

The poem *Offering Sacrifices to the Kitchen God* by Fan Chengda, a poet of the Song Dynasty, has the following lines:

"On the 24th of the 12th lunar month,
The Kitchen God would ascend to
Heaven with reports.
Lingering in his cloud carriage
driven by the wind,
He enjoys the abundant food and
liquor.
Fresh is the fish and well-stewed are
the pig heads,
Buns stuffed with beans are soft and
delicious.
Men offer the sacrifices while women keep their distance,
Paper money is burned and liquor poured for libation.
Pray ignore the quarrels and noises made by the maids,
And anger not at the dogs and cats touching dirty things.
Satiated and drunk you ascend to the
Heaven Gate,
Mention not the improper deeds in your report,
And bring back good fortune and luck when you return."

The origin of the Kitchen God can be traced back to the time of Emperor Yan (the Divine Farmer). It is said that his invention of the method to produce fire put him in an authoritative position. Before he died, he exhorted his people to worship the Kitchen God. At that time, the Kitchen God was a "divine" cockroach which often appeared in the kitchen and was portrayed as an insect "dressed in crimson with an appearance like a beauty". Later, the Kitchen God evolved into a deity with the name Zhang Dan. Actually, it also referred to cockroaches. By the time of the Southern Dynasties, the Kitchen God was said to be named Su Jili.

The Kitchen God was enshrined in a niche on the wall above the kitchen stove and listed together with other gods. He would report to the Heavenly Emperor on the 23rd or 24th of the 12th lunar month. Every household would clean their kitchen and put some sugar on the lips of his portrait so that he would deliver good reports to Heaven.

Some would even dab glutinous rice onto his lips to seal his mouth in case he spoke something bad.

The following couplet was also used in worship:

"Yellow goat makes you rich,
And indigo money can move the deity."

The words "yellow goat" were associated with a story in *The Later Han History*. One day in the 12th lunar month, a man called Yin Zhifang was cooking breakfast, when suddenly the Kitchen God appeared before him. He knelt down to be blessed, then slaughtered a yellow goat and offered it as a sacrifice to the Kitchen God. From then on, people started to offer yellow goats to the Kitchen God in their worship. But after the Tang and Song Dynasties, wine was offered instead with a view to making him drunk in case he spoke too much in Heaven. It was only after the Qing Dynasty that sugar was used as sacrifice.
Dongfang Shuo

Dongfang Shuo, styled Man Qian, lived during the Han Dynasty and was an outstanding court jester.

He was from Yanci of Pingyuan. When Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty started his reign, Dongfang Shuo was only 22 years old. He was not only brave and quick-witted, but also honest and upright. He wrote to the emperor: “I was brought up by my brother and his wife. At 12, I learned how to read and write and mastered everything within three years. At 15, I was trained in the art of swordsmanship. At 16, I was taught poetry and prose, and mastered a vocabulary of 220,000 words. Then at 19, I began to study The Art of War by Sun Zi and became an expert in all military strategies. Hence, I am fully qualified to be your minister.”

Though he sounded quite conceited, the emperor made him an official in Jinma Gate. Jeered at by his colleagues, Dongfang Shuo replied quietly: “I’m just a hermit hiding in the Imperial Court away from the world.” Sometimes when he got drunk, he would sit on the ground singing: “The mortal world is so turbid that I have to be a recluse in the Jinma Gate of the palace. As long as I am safe here, why should I flee into the mountains?”

His writing was marked with an easy and unrestrained style, full of humour, which he used to remonstrate with the emperor for the good and against the evil. The emperor called him “Jester Laureate”.

Guo Sheren, another favourite of the Emperor, was jealous and wanted to embarrass him. One day, Guo Sheren gave Dongfang Shuo a riddle:

“A visitor from Dongfang (the East), Singing along the way. From my door he keeps away, But sneaks in through the pane. Frolicking in the court, Then up into the palace hall. Dancing and buzzing away, Till it is patted and slain, For the master’s suffered from his bites.”

Dongfang Shuo immediately replied:

“A long beak and thin body, Hiding in the day and appearing at night. Addicted to the flesh and a victim of smoke, It is often hit and struck. Foolish as I am, I know it’s a mosquito, At a loss as to what to say, Guo is caught with his pants down.”

In this way, Dongfang Shuo not only gave the correct answer to the riddle but wittily silenced Guo.

On his deathbed, Dongfang Shuo told his colleagues: “Only Lord Taiwu knows my true identity.” Lord Taiwu, however, could not give an answer, so the emperor asked him to look at the heavenly bodies. A moment later, he said that all the stars were present except for Jupiter which had just reappeared after 40 years of absence. The emperor then uttered a long sigh: “Dongfang Shuo had accompanied me for 18 years, yet I did not know who he was.”

For his eloquence and witty humour, he was revered as the father of comic cross talk by later generations.
Dongfang Shuo
Wu Gang, the Deity on the Moon

Wu Gang was a deity in the bleak and chilly palace on the moon and was the only one to keep the lonely Chang’e company. There is little evidence on who Wu Gang really was. And there were many controversies as to why he kept hacking the bay tree incessantly.

Actually, Wu Gang was first mentioned in The Classic of Mountains and Seas. It was said his original name was Wu Quan and he was a native in West River County. His wife committed adultery with Bo Ling, the grandson of Emperor Yan and gave birth to three sons called Gu, Yan and Shu after three years’ pregnancy. Later, Wu Gang was given another name Wu Zhi, as evidenced in the following poem by Li He of the Tang Dynasty:

"Against the bay tree Wu Zhi spent a night white,
At his bare feet the dew splashed the rabbit wet."

Legend has it that Wu Gang was away for three years cultivating Taoism and left his wife Lady Yan alone at home. When he returned, he discovered the disgraceful relation between his wife and Bo Ling, and the three illegitimate sons. In great rage, Wu Gang caught hold of Bo Ling and killed him by suspending him above the ground with a spear pierced through his head. The terrible spectacle angered Emperor Yan, the God of the Sun, who at once exiled Wu Gang to the moon and ordered him to cut the immortal bay tree, which was 500 zhang tall and could sprout on its own immediately after each hack of the hatchet. Emperor Yan subjected Wu Gang to this punishment of cutting down the tree endlessly.

In his literary works, the great poet Qu Yuan had once questioned Bo Ling as to who he should be afraid of since he had the God of the Sun on his side. Feeling regretful for her husband’s sufferings, Wu Gang’s wife sent her three children to the moon to accompany their “father” for the rest of his lonely days and nights. Hence, Bo Ling’s three sons, Gu (toad), Shu (rabbit) and Yan (unknown), also lived in the palace of the moon forever.
Wu Gang, the Deity on the Moon
The Old Man Under the Moon

The old man under the moon was believed in Chinese legends to be the deity in charge of arranging marriages. However, nothing was known about his real name.

During the Tang Dynasty, an unmarried young man called Wei Gu once stayed at an inn in the city of Song. While taking a stroll alone at night, he found a strange man with white hair and beard with a green bag, proof-reading a book under the moonlight. Out of curiosity, Wei Gu went up and asked what he was reading. The old man said: “I am checking the marriage list of the people on Earth.”

Finding many red strings in his bag, Wei Gu went on to ask about their usage. He answered: “They are used to tie the feet of lovers. Even if they are enemies or are thousands of miles apart, I am still able to bring them together in marriage as long as they are destined couples.”

Wei Gu asked with curiosity: “Who, then, will be my wife?” The man replied: “She is the daughter of the old lady Chen who sells vegetables by the northern side of the inn.”

Fourteen years later, when Wei Gu assumed office as lieutenant of the Xiang prefecture, the prefectural governor Wang Tai gave him his 16-year-old daughter in marriage. Wei Gu thought to himself: “The old man’s prediction is but groundless bragging.”

After their marriage, however, his wife told him: “I am a niece of the prefectural governor. My own parents passed away when I was still a baby. And I was brought up by my wet nurse who made a living by selling vegetables.” Wei Gu asked about the place where her father died and who her wet nurse was. She said that her father had died in the city of Song and that her wet nurse was a lady named Chen from the same city.

Wei Gu could not help laughing upon hearing this. Lovers were indeed connected by a red string even though they were a thousand miles apart. He was not able to escape the old man’s match-making after all. When the magistrate of the city of Song heard this story, he named the inn “The Match-making Inn.” Since then, the old man who had predicted marriages was venerated as “The Old Man Under the Moon.”
The Old Man Under the Moon
The He He Brothers

During the Song Dynasty, people in the city of Hangzhou always made sacrifices to Brother Wan Hui in the 12th lunar month, praying for the early return of their family members who were far away from home. Brother Wan Hui, called the God He He, was dressed in green with a smiling face and dishevelled hair, holding a drum in the left hand and a hammer in the right. It was said that praying to him would enable relatives who had travelled far to come home safely.

Who was Wan Hui? According to Zheng Qi of the Tang Dynasty, Wan Hui was from Wen Xiang County and was born seemingly dull. He had a brother who served in the army in the city, Anxi. Since the family had not received any news from his brother for years, they thought he was dead and so wept day and night. Wan Hui comforted his parents and said: “Don’t cry any more. Let me go and take a look.” The next morning, he started off early and came back at night, saying: “Brother is all right.” Then he took out a letter written by his brother. Surprised by his ability to shuttle to and fro, covering a distance of ten thousand li within a day, his family called him Wan Hui (back from a place ten thousand li away) and people in the Song Dynasty conferred on him the title of Deity He He (unity), because he had united his family.

Later, he evolved into a god who blessed marriages. And so, the image of He He changed into two persons—one holding a lotus flower and the other a round box. The words, lotus and box, are pronounced as be in Chinese and are homophones of harmony and unity. In the old days, people would put up the portraits of the two gods during the wedding ceremony or in the hall the whole year round. The two gods were also known as the two sages or immortals, He He. The one carrying the lotus was Shi De and the one carrying the round box Han Shan, about whom there was a moving story.

Living in the same village, Shi De and Han Shan were very close, like brothers. Han Shan, who was slightly older, fell in love with a girl whom Shi De also loved. When Han Shan got to know about it just as he was getting married, he immediately had his hair shaved and became a monk in a temple near the Maple Bridge of Suzhou. Feeling uneasy, Shi De also gave up the girl and went to look for Han Shan. Shi De called on him with a lotus flower in full bloom. On seeing him, Han Shan came out immediately with a round box of vegetarian rice. Both of them were overjoyed at their reunion and danced happily. As a result, Shi De also stayed in the temple as a monk. The two of them started a temple which was the Temple of Han Shan, well-known both in and outside China.

When people wanted to pray for luck and harmony, they would recite the ever famous poem by Zhang Ji of the Tang Dynasty:

“The moon is low and crows cry under the frosty sky,
Dimly-lit fishing boats 'neath maples sadly lie.
The temple of Han Shan beyond the Gusu walls on the hill,
The sound of ringing bells reaches my boat, breaking the midnight still.”
The Sage, Lord Guan

Sage Emperor Guan, or Guan Yu, a chief general of Liu Bei during the period of the Three Kingdoms, was generally known as Guan Gong and revered as the god of protection and fortune.

Guan Yu was from the village Changping of Xie County, East of the Yellow River. He had inherited the traditions of his family since he was a child and liked to read two books, I Ching and The Spring and Autumn Annals. Hence, he grew up well versed in the virtues of honesty and faithfulness. Coupled with his valour and commanding appearance, he won admiration from people who saw him at first sight.

Lord Guan, Liu Bei and Zhang Fei became sworn brothers. He then assisted Liu Bei to establish the state of Shu, one of the three rival kingdoms at that time, the other two being Wei and Wu. In the course, he achieved a succession of victories. He bashed through five forts by slaying six enemy generals; attended a banquet held by the enemy almost single-handedly; drowned seven armies; outwitted and captured the famous General Huang Zhong. In all these, he showed great intelligence and valour. In addition, he remained loyal to Liu Bei and was steadfast despite Cao Cao’s various efforts to make him surrender. Because of his bravery and loyalty, his name became well-known from generation to generation. Later in his life, betrayed by a traitor, he was finally defeated in the city of Mai and was killed in Dangyang county, Hubei.

During the Tang Dynasty, people started to build temples in his honour, naming them The Temple of Guan Yu, and The Temple for the Military, just like The Temple for the Literary, in honour of Confucius. And Guan’s birthday, the 13th of the fifth lunar month was made a festival. (Guan Yu was born on the 13th of the fifth lunar month during the reign of Emperor Heng of the Han Dynasty.) The imperial court also issued orders that people had to offer sacrifices to him in both spring and autumn. The custom of worshipping Guan Yu was carried on in the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Because he was a virtuous man and credited with protecting the state and people, various honours and titles were bestowed on Lord Guan by emperors of many dynasties, from the Late Shu, Sui, Tang, Song and Yuan to the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In recent times the title, “Faithful Righteous Valiant Blessed and Mighty Sage Guan”, carved on tablets in many homes testifies to people’s respect for and worship of Lord Guan. It was conferred by Emperor Dao Guang of the Qing Dynasty.

Lord Guan was venerated by people not only as a hero and an immortal, but also as a god of protection and good fortune.
The Sage, Lord Guan
The Midwife Goddess

As a deity in charge of birth, the Midwife Goddess assumes a special duty to protect the pregnant, women in labour and newborn babies. She was thus most adored by women in olden days.

It was very dangerous to give birth to a child in ancient times when medical science was undeveloped. Furthermore, traditional Chinese morality regarded it a shame for a woman to be unable to bear a son for her husband. If so, she would lose favour in her husband’s home and could be driven back to her parents’ home. Hence, women prayed to the Midwife Goddess for a son as well as for easy labour.

Many varied legends about the Midwife Goddess had been told. Among them, the most widely accepted story was from the book *Records of Jiangning Prefecture*.

During the Song Dynasty, there lived a man, Xu Qingsou, whose daughter-in-law had been pregnant for 17 months but the child was yet undelivered. The whole family was in extreme anxiety until a woman, Chen from Gu Tian of Fuzhou, came to their help. She instructed Xu to arrange another room upstairs for his daughter-in-law and dig a hole on the floor of the room. She had the woman in labour moved upstairs and ordered the servants, holding cudgels in hands, to keep watch downstairs. Before long, the woman gave birth to a white snake which sneaked downstairs through the hole and was beaten to death immediately. The woman was saved and midwife Chen was offered plenty of presents for reward. She accepted nothing but a handkerchief on which she asked the host to inscribe the words: "Presented to Midwife Chen by Xu Qingsou".

Some time later, Xu was transferred to a post in Fuzhou. He at once sent for the midwife but failed to find her anywhere. Then he learnt about a local temple in honour of Madam Chen, who often disguised herself to help those in difficult labour. Xu Qingsou went to the temple and found a handkerchief hanging on the statue of the goddess. He soon confirmed that it was the one he gave to Chen. Quickly he reported to the imperial court, asking for a title for her. Consequently, Madam Chen became the Midwife Goddess responsible for childbirth and was adored by all people.
The Seventh Fairy

During the Three Kingdoms Period, the great poet Cao Zhi of Wei wrote the following poem:

"Born in a family humble,
Dong Yong inherited property little.
To support his family, he went on borrowing
And working for others as a hired hand.
Creditors crowded at the door demanding their money,
He knew not what to pay them with.
So touched by his virtues the Heaven
Sent a fairy to weave for him."

That was perhaps the earliest record about the love story between Dong Yong and the Seventh Fairy, the youngest daughter of the Jade Emperor. The romance was later developed into a touching story in the repertoire of Huang Mei Opera and Sichuan Opera.

Though poor, Dong Yong was a virtuous young man. When his father died, he offered himself as a slave to get money to bury his father. Moved by his filial piety, diligence and honesty, the Seventh Fairy fell in love with him. She then stole away from heaven to the earthly world and confided her love to Dong Yong under a pagoda tree. The congenial couple soon got married and went to live in Master Fu's home where Dong Yong did farm work and the Seventh Fairy did weaving to pay the debt they owed the master.

After 100 days, the indenture expired and they paid off their debt. The couple were going back home to start their own happy family life when the Jade Emperor sent a heavenly general with an edict to call the fairy back to Heaven at once. Afraid to bring harm to her husband, the fairy bade farewell to him under the pagoda tree where they were engaged earlier.

Sympathetic with the hard life of the common people, the Seventh Fairy had won their love and respect. In fact, there was a person called Dong Yong from Qian Cheng county in the Eastern Han Dynasty. The story of his life had some similarities with the legend except for the fairy. He was mentioned in the book Biographies of Filial Sons by Liu Xiang. His grave can still be found in Xiaogan county of Hubei province.

Who then was the Seventh Fairy? Actually she was a fabricated figure in Chinese operas. In ancient books, there was no Seventh Fairy but a Heavenly Fairy. She was mentioned in The Classic of Mountains and Seas which recorded: "The Yellow Emperor then dispatched the Heavenly Fairy Ba to the earth." Ba was the woman who stopped the storm caused by the Lord Wind and the Master Rain invited by Chi You. Ba was also mentioned in many ancient myths. As for the Seventh Fairy, she often appeared in the image of a demure and virtuous lady.
The Seventh Fairy
King Yama

The horrible Hell with its howling evil wind and overcast black haze was a world of goblins, savage ghosts, evil spirits, judges in charge of human life and generals snatching people's souls. The supreme governor of this world of demons was none other than King Yama.

King Yama was a household name among the Chinese. It was said the eighth of the first lunar month was his birthday when people would burn incense and offer sacrifices to him.

The name of King Yama had its origin from Buddhism. Yama meant "twin monarchs" in the Indian language. As recorded in Buddhist scripture, there were a brother and a sister reigning in Hell. The brother was in charge of men while the sister was in charge of women. When Buddhism was first introduced to China, Yama was translated according to its pronunciation as "Yanluo" without any interpretation of the meaning.

However some people believed he had been the King of Bishamon of ancient India. He had once led his army to battle against the king of another state. After his defeat, he swore to be the King of Hell in order to punish the criminals. Later, he did become the King of Hell. Yet little evidence could be found in Buddhist scripture as to the position of King Yama. Some said that among the ten kings of Hell, he was the fifth in rank. Some believed that Hell was ruled by 18 kings and King Yama was the supreme governor.

In accordance with this explanation, King Yama ruled all the 18 layers of Hell and each layer was managed by one of the 18 kings. The 18 layers of Hell were:

1. The Hanging-by-the-Sinews Hell,
2. The Hell of Injustice,
3. The Hell of the Pit of Fire,
4. The Fengdu Hell,
5. The Tongue-Extraction Hell,
6. The Flaying Hell,
7. The Grinding Hell,
8. The Pounding Hell,
9. The Hell of Drawing and Quartering,
10. The Ice Hell,
11. The Skin-Shredding Hell,
12. The Disembowelling Hell,
13. The Oil-Cauldron Hell,
14. The Hell of Blackness,
15. The Hell of Mountain of the Knives,
16. The Hell of the Pool of Blood,
17. The Avichi Hell,
18. The Hell of the Steelyard Beam.

King Yama was known to be an upright figure. It was said that he was originally the first of the ten kings of Hell, but was demoted to the fifth as he sympathized with wronged spirits and allowed them to reincarnate to take their revenge. After the Sui and Tang Dynasties, many righteous officials were said to have taken the position as the King of Hell after their death. Among them were Kou Zhun, Fan Zhongyan and Bao Zheng. That was probably because people, unable to get justice in real life, expected the King of Hell to be just and incorruptible, and capable of distinguishing good from evil.
King Yama
The Ox-headed & Horse-faced Gaolers

In legendary stories, there existed in the world of darkness two jail keepers, namely the ox-headed and horse-faced demons whose duty was to arrest criminals for King Yama. The ox-headed gaoler, with a trident in hands, had an ox head and a man’s body. The other one, with a spear in hands, was also human shaped except for a horse face. Both of them performed their duties together and were as congenial as brothers.

As a matter of fact, the titles of the demons had their origin abroad. In the Buddhist classics of India, there were records about the King of Bishamon bearing the title “King Yama” and the jail keepers being called “ox head and horse face”. Since the people of China had partiality for the ox, legends about the ox-headed gaoler far exceeded those about the horse-faced gaoler though both appeared at the same time.

A story was told of a man in Hongzhou named Zhang who was an inspector in charge of schooling. He was very mean to people, who, in turn, had a strong hatred for him. There happened to be another man also surnamed Zhang in the same place who had a frightening ferocious appearance. For his ghost-like features, he was called Demon Zhang.

One day, he was dressed up by some scholars as an ox-headed demon of Hell with the intention of frightening the inspector. So at the closing hour of the school one night, Demon Zhang crept into the room. Sensing the intrusion, the inspector flew into a rage and shouted: “Who is so daring? So you’re here to frighten me.” Just then, Demon Zhang rose suddenly, showing the ox-horns on his head. Badly shocked, the inspector gave a loud cry and fell dead on the floor. When Demon Zhang crawled out to the lobby, he said to himself: “I am really the ox-headed gaoler and was ordered to execute the man long ago. Since I lost the order label issued by King Yama when crossing the river, I have not dared to go back for 20 years. With the help of the scholars, my duty is now fulfilled, and I can report to King Yama.” With a bow to the corpse, he returned to the world of Hell.

On the other hand, some people held that the ox-headed gaoler originated from the legend that the deity Shen Nong had an ox head. This argument may not be convincing but it is mentioned here for the reader’s consideration.
The Ox-headed & Horse-faced Gaolers
The King of Ksitigarbha

According to legend, the King of Ksitigarbha was born on the 29th of the seventh lunar month. The day was marked by a custom of women taking off their skirts.

The skirts were made of red paper and undressing them could grant women the blessing of easy labour. As dusk approached, candles were lit, being lamps for the King of Ksitigarbha.

Earlier, the only governor of Hell worshipped by the Chinese was the God of the Eastern Mountain. With the spread of Buddhism, the King of Ksitigarbha began to be treated as the ruler of the Dark World.

There were several explanations for this. Some thought he was the prince of one of the states in Xinluo (ancient Korea). According to *The Collection of Ancient and Contemporary Books*, he was kind and talented, though ferocious in appearance. He was 7 chi tall with a weird horn jutting out of his head and was strong enough to fight against ten opponents. Though he lived in comfort and was fond of reading, he never felt superior and was always ready to help people.

During the period of Zhide of Emperor Suzong of the Tang Dynasty, he resolved to become a monk and so had his hair shaved. He left Ren Chuan port and settled down in a temple in the Jiuhua Mountain.

There, he ate the white earth from stone crevices with rice and enjoyed a long life of 99 years. After his death, he was conferred the title “King of Ksitigarbha”, and led the ten kings of Hell in judging the good and the evil among earthly beings. According to legend, the King of Ksitigarbha would open the gate of Hell on the first day of the seventh lunar month, letting out the lonely spirits and hungry ghosts to beg food in the earthly world. Those who suffered illness after offending the ghosts and spirits would pray to Ksitigarbha for recovery.

Some believed the King of Ksitigarbha was one of the ten great disciples of the Buddha. He had a Buddhist name, Maudgalyayana, and was the king of Magadha state in ancient India. The Yulan Basin Party in the Chinese lunar calendar was started by him. The word *Yulan* came from the Sanskrit word *Ullambana* which meant “hanging upside down” in Chinese, and the whole term means “divine tool to save people from hanging upside down”.

It was said that Maudgalyayana, seeing his dead mother among hungry spirits, gave her a bowl of food only to see it change into burning coal before she could eat it. The Buddha told him that his mother had committed serious sins. He could not save her by his own effort but needed the power of all monks.

Thus, on the 15th of the seventh lunar month, those who wished to free their parents from sufferings were expected to present a variety of fruits in the basin, praying for the Buddha's mercy.

Following the instructions of the Buddha, Maudgalyayana's mother was able to eat the rice. This explained the ceremonies held by Taoists and Buddhists on the day, when people burned incense, preached and offered all kinds of fruits and sacrifices to the Buddha and all his disciples.

1. 3 chi = 1 metre
The Night Patrol God

In the period of Emperor Ling of the Eastern Han Dynasty, there lived in Yi Zhou of Sichuan a scholar called Sima Chongxiang. Being poor and straightforward in nature, he had not been able to get an official post even at fifty.

One day, he got drunk. Feeling depressed, he took his Four Stationery Treasures (namely paper, ink, brush and ink-stone) and composed a poem, Song of Grievance, which began like this:

"Endowed with ability and genius,
Why not let me serve Your Majesty?"

It was getting dark when Chongxiang finished his verse. He lit the lamp and chanted the poem twice. In a fit of anger, he burned his manuscript on the lamp. The Night Patrol God witnessed the happening and reported to the Heavenly Emperor. Since then, Chongxiang continually made disturbances in the World of Darkness and finally reincarnated as Cima Yi to display his great wisdom in the Three Kingdoms Period.

The image created by Feng Menglong, a writer in the Ming Dynasty, was actually the same Night Patrol God in folklore. Records as early as The Classic of Mountains and Seas already made mention that there were 16 deities with inseparable arms making night patrol for the Heavenly Emperor. They corresponded to the 16 deities living in an overseas state in the South, who had small cheeks and bare shoulders, and patrolled at night but were invisible during the day. They did so because many evils occurred under the cover of the night and also because complaints and bitterness could be better vented at night.

Some people believed that the night patrol gods were a group of ghosts headed by Ye Zhong and You Guang, each of whom had seven brothers. Also named Er Ba Deities (in Chinese, Er Ba means two eight), they brought harm to people from time to time. However, whether good or evil, they were the servants of the Heavenly Emperor. Thus, in the book Creation of the Gods, the Night Patrol God was a man called Qiao Kun.

In Volume II of the book A Brief Account on the Ways and Things of the Capital City by Liu Dong and Yu Yizheng of the Ming Dynasty, keeping used water overnight was not allowed in case the horse of the Night Patrol God drank it.

We can see from the above that the image of the Night Patrol God had been widely accepted since the Ming Dynasty.
The Night Patrol God
The Gods of Plague

Plague, a collective term for any contagious disease, was so feared by people in the past that it was believed to be controlled by fiends—the three sons of the ancient emperor Zhuan Xu.

According to legends, the son living in the river was called the Ghost of Disease; the one in the pool was named the Ghost of Wang Liang, and the one hiding at the corner of rooms or behind doors liked to frighten children. Later, the three fiends were replaced by five ghosts.

It was recorded in the chapter on acupuncture in the book Su Wen: "When the five diseases came, people infected each other. No matter old or young, no one could escape. And the symptoms were very much alike." Thus, they were also called Five Plague Ghosts. In later centuries, the statues of plague gods also consisted of five images.

The book Tracing the Source of Immortals of the Three Religions had it that in the 11th year of Emperor Wen in the Sui Dynasty, there appeared in the sky seven or eight warriors dressed in green, red, white, black and yellow respectively, each holding various objects in hands: the first held a ladle and a jar; the second, a leather bag and a sword; the third, a fan; the fourth, a hammer; and the last, a fire kettle.

When the emperor asked who they were, the historiographer replied that they were the five direction warriors who were ghosts in the heaven and plague gods on the earth: namely Spring Plague God Zhang Yuanbo, Summer Plague God Liu Yuanda, Autumn Plague God Zhao Gongming and Winter Plague God Zhong Shigu. The fifth god, Shi Wenyue, was in general charge of all the epidemic diseases of the country. Their gathering in the sky might portend a great disaster. And it turned out that many people died of contagious diseases that year.

Emperor Wen immediately issued an edict to build shrines in honour of the five plague gods. New titles were also given to them: the one in green robe was named Xiansheng General; the one in red, Xianying General; the one in white, Ganying General; the one in black, Gancheng General; and the one in yellow, Ganwei General. Sacrifices were duly offered on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month.

Later, when the deity Kuang Fu visited the temple, he made the five plague gods his lieutenants. In the book Creation of the Gods, Lu Yue was authorised as the chief with the title of Hao Tian Emperor, and had six plague generals under his command.
The Gods of Plague
The Five Mountain Emperors

The Five Mountain Emperors is a collective term for the gods who reign over East Mount Tai, South Mount Heng, West Mount Hua, North Mount Heng and Middle Mount Song. In ancient China, they were worshipped by all people, from the emperor down to the common citizens. Sacrifices were offered and incense burned throughout the year in the temples built in their honour.

Many titles were conferred on the East Mount Tai Emperor, including Heaven - Equalling King, God of East Mount Tai, Heaven-Equalling Sage Emperor of East Mount Tai, and Master of Mount Tai Palace. Since ancient times, people had begun to offer sacrifices to Heaven and Earth on top of Mount Tai. *The Book on Immortals* recorded that great emperors such as Fu Xi, Shen Nong, You Xiong, Yao and Shun all held worship rituals on Mount Tai. The ceremony was regarded by later emperors as a significant national event.

"Having not fully enjoyed the happy life, one is suddenly taken back to Mount Tai." It was said that the Mount Tai Emperor, like the judge of Hell, could snatch people's soul and determine their life span. Thus he became an object of worship and the first of the tenth lunar month was said to be his birthday.

The emperor of South Mount Heng was named Chong Heihu with an appellation of "The Heaven-Administrating Primordial Emperor of South Mount Heng". He was said to be born on the 16th of the 12th lunar month, and was responsible for the relation between the positions of stars and the corresponding places on earth, and affairs concerning aquatic animals like the fish and dragon.

Given the title of "Golden Heaven Lucky Emperor of West Mount Hua", the Emperor of West Mount Hua, Jiangxiong, had his birthday celebrated on the sixth of the 11th lunar month. Since the Yellow Emperor had conducted worship on Mount Hua, all emperors of the later dynasties held West Mount Hua in high respect.

With the title of "Heaven-Guarding Miraculous Emperor of North Mount Heng", Cui Ying, the Emperor of North Mount Heng was born on the tenth of the eighth lunar month and enjoyed the reverence by emperors of different dynasties.

Wen Pin, the Middle Mount Song Emperor, also called "Mid-Heaven Sage Emperor of Middle Mount Song", was worshipped by all the emperors on his birthday which fell on the eighth of the third lunar month.
The Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain

In China, Mount Tai is honoured as the father of the mountains, the head of the five great mountains, the grandson of the Heavenly Emperor and the palace for immortals.

Since the Eastern Han Dynasty, Mount Tai had been personified as the Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain who was in charge of exorcizing evil spirits. It was said that after their death, people's souls would float to Mount Tai under the jurisdiction of the Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain. In Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Guan Luo told his brother: "I am afraid that there will only be the dead that can be ruled in Mount Tai."

Who was the Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain? Taoists believed he was a man called Jin Hong. According to Records on Immortals and Weird Things by Dongfang Shuo of the Han Dynasty, the wife of Shao Hai, a descendant of Pangu, got pregnant after swallowing two suns in her dream, and gave birth to two sons. The elder was named Jin Chan who later became the Emperor of Eastern Hua; the younger was Jin Hong who became the Emperor of the Eastern Mountain. During the reign of Emperor Fu Xi, he was given the title of Tai Sui and he controlled the archives of the immortals. At the time of Emperor Ming of the Han Dynasty, he was made the marshal of Mount Tai who could decide the social ranks of the people and the terms of officials, and supervised the records of the 18 layers of Hell and the life span of the people.

Another explanation held that the Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain was Huang Feihu, a figure in Creation of the Gods. He controlled people's fortune and administered the 18 layers of Hell in the world of the dead.

In later times, people living far away from Mount Tai also set up temples in his honour and called them Eastern Mountain Temples. After the Tang Dynasty, they were called Heaven-Equaling Temple, for Emperor Ming of the Tang Dynasty conferred on the Eastern Mountain God the title of Heaven-Equaling King.

With the spread of Buddhism, people started to worship the King of Ksitigarbha and King Yama as hell gods. But the Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain remained so influential that he was said to be the superior of King Yama.
The Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain
Lord Bing Ling

Lord Bing Ling is the third and most well-known son of the Great Emperor of the Eastern Mountain. According to records including *The History of Wei*, the deity of Mount Tai had five (or even seven) sons. Of them, Lord Bing Ling was a prodigal.

According to *The Collection of Ancient and Contemporary Books on Immortals*, General Lu of the prefecture Zhao married a wife who was very pretty. One day, back from the market, she suddenly felt a sharp pain in her heart and died instantly. In great sorrow, the general came to an official, Ming Chongyan, for help. The latter replied: "It was done by the third son of Mount Tai." He then drew three spells, instructing the general to burn the spell one by one until his wife revived. However, if she did not recover after the third spell was burned, she must have been truly dead.

Fortunately, his wife regained consciousness when he burned the third spell. She related that she had been carried by a cart to a palace where the third son of Mount Tai greeted her at the gate and asked for her hand in marriage. She refused. Shortly, a duty god knocked at the door and asked for Lu's wife, but was declined by him. A moment later, another messenger came for her and was also shut outside. Then for the third time, there came a superior envoy ordering him to free Lu's wife. Refused, the envoy created a storm which blew the house and people up to the sky. All but Lu's wife died when they crashed to the ground. She was then pushed back home by an invisible force and brought back to life.

How then did a dissipated man as the third son of Mount Tai become a god? *Old History of the Five Dynasties and Biography of Emperor Ming of the Later Tang Dynasty* recorded that Emperor Ming had sent for a monk of Mount Tai who was said to be good at medicine. After the interview, he was found to be a quack. But he claimed that the god of Mount Tai had ordered him to ask the emperor for a title for his third son. So Emperor Ming conferred on the third son the title of Courageous Great General. After frequent promotions, the third son became Lord Bing Ling by the time of Emperor Zhenzong of the Song Dynasty. In *Creation of the Gods* written in the Ming Dynasty, a fabricated figure, Huang Tianhua, was taken as Lord Bing Ling.
Among the ten guardians in the Eastern Mountain, the most well-known was Marshal Wen.

His name was Wen Qiong and was said to be from the Wenzhou County during the later Han Dynasty. His father, Wen Wang, was a Confucian scholar who had passed the imperial examinations. His only regret was that his wife Madam Zhang failed to bear him a son, so he prayed to the God of Earth.

One night, his wife had a dream. She saw a god in golden armour holding a huge hatchet in one hand and a bright pearl in the other. He said to her: "I am the God of Fertility, a general of the Jade Emperor. I am descending to Earth to be a man and would like to be conceived by you. Would you agree?"

Madam Zhang replied: "How could I, an ignorant woman, decline the offer by a deity like you?" With these words, she put the pearl in her bosom. True enough, she became pregnant. Twelve months later, in a chamber enveloped with an auspicious haze and filled with exotic fragrance, a child was born. He had 24 words under his left armpit and 16 under the right, which nobody could read. The boy was named Qiong.

He was so smart in his childhood that at seven, he learned astrology and at ten, mastered the Confucian Classics. However, he failed to make any meritorious achievements after he grew up. He did not pass the imperial examinations at 19 and failed again at 26.

One day, while he was sighing about his misfortune, a dragon flew into view and dropped a pearl by his side which he picked up and swallowed immediately. As the dragon turned back to snatch the pearl, Qiong held its tail firmly and turned the dragon around in a circle. Suddenly, his body began to change. He turned into a valiant warrior with a green face, red hair and blue skin – strong and agile. He eventually subdued the dragon.

Learning of his might and valour, the Lord of Mount Tai appointed him as a protector to guard the mountain. Having made a lot of contributions, he was conferred the title of The Great Golden Deity by the Jade Emperor and was given a jade ring, a jade flower and a token of authority on which the following words were carved: "A Free Heavenly Deity". Since then, he often came down from Heaven to patrol the mountains and became a so-called marshal.
The Lady of Mount Tai

The full title of the Lady of Mount Tai was "The Heavenly Immortal and Jade Fairy, Lady Bixia of Eastern Mount Tai". She was said to be the daughter of the Emperor of Eastern Mount Tai and in charge of blessing women with children. In the old days, women used to go to the temples built in her honour to pray for more children. Hence, she was named "the lady who delivers babies". Beside her statue often stood a maid holding a baby.

As to her identity, there are different opinions. Some said she was one of the seven daughters of the Yellow Emperor; some thought she was a fairy from Mount Hua; some even believed she was an ordinary girl from the Han Dynasty, who cultivated Taoism in Mount Tai and attained immortality there.

The earliest legend about the Lady of Mount Tai could be found in a book, *Notes on the World* written by Zhang Hua, a scholar of the Jin Dynasty. According to a story in the book, when Lord Jiang of the Zhou Dynasty served as the magistrate in Guantan County, the place was never disturbed by any storm throughout the year. One night, in a dream, King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty saw a woman weeping by the roadside. When asked, she claimed to be the daughter of the God of Mount Tai living near the Eastern Sea. Being married to a god in the Western Sea, she had to pass the Guantan County on her way back to her parents' home. Because of Lord Jiang's high esteem, she dared not pass the place by riding on a storm. The woman's image remained fresh in the king's memory long after he woke up. He then summoned Lord Jiang to his court. As expected, a storm arose in the county, brought about by the Lady of Mount Tai.

But how was she later called Lady Bixia? It was said that the title was conferred by Emperor Zhenzong of the Song Dynasty. Once, the emperor went to Mount Tai to preside over a worship ceremony. When washing hands in a pond on his way back, he found a stone statue floating on the water. He picked it up and washed it clean, and to his pleasant surprise, it was a statue of the Lady of Mount Tai. So he ordered a temple to be built in her honour and conferred on her the title, Lady Bixia.

Of course, the above story is not true. According to historical records, the lady already had such a title since the Ming Dynasty, but at that time, she was not the only deity with this title. Gradually, however, it became her exclusive title. And temples in her honour were built not only in Mount Tai but also in other regions of the country as well. Thus the eagerness of the common people to have more children was obvious, which of course, was a good wish.
Magistrate Cui

The book *Anecdotes of the Song Dynasty* records such a story: When Prince Kang hurried back from the state of Jin where he was taken as a hostage, he was so exhausted that he dozed off in a temple built for Magistrate Cui. In a dream, a deity told him: "In no time the men from the state of Jin will catch up with you. Leave quickly – I have a horse ready for you at the gate." Awakened, the prince mounted the horse and rode South. As soon as he crossed the river, the horse stopped and did not move any more. Only at that moment did the prince realise that it was actually an earthen horse.

Magistrate Cui enjoyed great popularity among the people. It was said that when he was alive, he administered affairs of the mortal world during the day and those of Hades at night. After his death, he was worshipped as the god in charge of the nether world, an aide to the Emperor of Eastern Mount Tai.

*Biographies of Immortals* has a collection of stories about him, one of which said that in the seventh year of the Zhenguan Period during the Tang Dynasty, being the magistrate of Luzhou County, Cui issued an edict to prohibit hunting and killing of animals on the 15th and 16th of each lunar month. A man caught a rabbit outside the town and was discovered by the guards when he tried to smuggle it through the city gate. During the trial, Magistrate Cui said: "Your deliberate violation of the edict could not be condoned, but you can choose where to be punished – either here or in Hell." Thinking that Hell was a faraway place from the mortal world, the man chose the latter. He was thus set free.

He had just fallen asleep that night, when he dreamed that he was arrested by an official in a yellow uniform and taken to a court to be tried by Magistrate Cui, who was dressed in the full regalia of a king. When his turn came, he was banished to Hell as a punishment. When he woke up, he was in a state of shock and regretted choosing Hell as the place of trial.

No doubt, the above was merely a fabricated story. In real life, Magistrate Cui was a local official during the Tang Dynasty. After his death, he was worshipped by the local people because of his benevolent rule. However, his name could hardly be traced and people of later generations always mistook him for Cui Jue of the Yuan Dynasty. And in the story, *Journey to the West*, he became Judge Cui of the Hell of Fengdu. The story from the Song Dynasty, *Prince Kang Crossing the River on an Earthen Horse*, was actually made up by Prince Zhao Gou to boost his own prestige.
The Mighty God of Miracles

The Mighty God of Miracles, Qin Honghai, was a god who opened up the mountain. After Gun was killed, the responsibility of controlling the flood fell on the shoulders of his son, Wen Ming. One day, he received an edict issued by Lady Yunhua, daughter of Emperor Yan and Goddess of the Wushan Mountain, to evacuate the people within the ten-mile radius to the mountains within three days.

Three days later, all the people had dispersed. The Heavenly Queen descended to Earth with a group of fairies. She sent for Wen Ming and said to him: “You have controlled the floods for many years and now, we would like you to watch a performance with us.”

A moment later, there emerged in the sky an auspicious cloud1 which moved towards them very quickly and came to a stop above the mountain in no time. A Taoist priest stepped down from the cloud. He was eight feet tall, clean-shaven with fair complexion. He had large bright eyes, a big nose and a wide mouth. He had an easy and graceful air about him. The God of Longevity introduced him: “This is Qin Honghai, born before the separation of Heaven and Earth, whose magic power is beyond imagination. He has been invited here to open up mountains.” Wen Ming was amazed. After a while, under the guidance of the Heavenly Queen, the gods and fairies rose to the sky. Some rode on carts or clouds and others on phoenixes. Wen Ming, too, ascended to the cloud on a white dragon.

On a stretch of flat land between Mount Taihua and Mount Zhongtiao, Qin Honghai became a few hundred zhang tall. His head reached where Wen Ming was standing above the clouds. Qin Honghai continued growing. His eyes became more than ten zhang wide and the bridge of his nose as high as a hill. Wen Ming only reached his chest. Then, Qin Honghai who was towering high in the cloud lifted his thousand-zhang-long arm to hold the mountain peak of Mount Taihua in his palm and kicked Mount Zhongtiao with his right foot. Pushing with one hand and kicking with a leg, in one single effort, he opened up the mountains. A chasm finally appeared in the mountains with a loud crack. Mount Zhongtiao was moved slightly eastward and Mount Taihua, westward. The waters which had been imprisoned in the deep mountains for many years surged forward, rushing and roaring towards the southeast.

1. A symbol of prosperity
The Mighty God of Miracles
The Dragon King

In ancient China, unicorns, phoenixes, turtles and dragons were collectively called the Four Spirits and their images were auspicious symbols. Among them, the dragon possessed an exceptional capability of seeding the clouds to produce rain. Thus, since the Han Dynasty, people had the custom of praying to the Dragon King for rain.

As the dragons described in the Buddhist classics were capable of producing rain, they were revered as dragon kings. And it was said that there were dragon kings of rivers, streams, lakes, seas, abysses, pools and wells in charge of droughts, floods and harvest of the localities. Hence, temples in their honour could be found all over the country, just like the temples of city gods and those of earth gods.

The legendary Dragon King had a human body but a dragon head. Dressed in imperial robe, he looked just like an emperor in the human world. Under his command in his palace at the bottom of the sea were ministers and generals of aquatic animals. In Chinese classic novels, the Dragon Kings often had conflicts with immortals in the earthly world. For example, in the story, Journey to the West, Monkey King Sun Wukong created a disturbance in the Eastern Sea. He forced the Dragon King to hand over the treasure anchored in the Heavenly River. In Journey to the East, the eight immortals had a ferocious battle with the Dragon King when they tried to cross the sea and finally burned the Eastern Sea. And in the Creation of Gods, Ne Zha scaled the Dragon King and turned him into a small green snake.

The above stories show both the awe and the scorn people had for the Dragon King. There are more than one dragon king in legends. According to a Buddhist scripture from India, there were eight dragon kings while another Indian Buddhist scripture held that there were ten, all with Indian names. However, in Journey to the West, there were four dragon kings with native Chinese names. They were Ao Guang of the Eastern Sea, Ao Qin of the Western Sea, Ao Run of the Southern Sea and Ao Shun of the Northern Sea. Known collectively as the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas, it was however, not known how they got the surname, Ao.
The River Lord

In the early times, as Emperor Dayu tried to control the floods, the River Lord had made his debut as a god governing the Yellow River. Legend has it that one day, while Dayu was examining the situation at the Yellow River, a tall man with a fair face and a fishlike body suddenly emerged and said: "I am the River Lord." With these words, he presented the emperor with a map of the rivers and gave him advice on how to control the flood, before he retreated into the water.

The River Lord was known as Feng Yi (also Bing Yi or Wu Yi). According to some sources, he was from the Tongxiang Town of Huayin County. Drowned when he was crossing the river, he was conferred the title of River Lord by the Heavenly Emperor.

The River Lord conducted his patrols with grandiose and majesty. Followed by 12 boys in attendance, the deity, with a red mustache, white garment and a black crown, rode a white horse, shuttling to and fro on the Western Sea like wind. Since the ancient times, people had been awed by his great power to dominate their destiny. According to records by the distinguished writer Su Dongpo of the Song Dynasty, Guo Ziyi, a famous general in the Tang Dynasty, was appointed to guard the area around the Yellow River when the river changed its course. Guo Ziyi prayed to the River Lord: "If you could stop the flood, I would offer my daughter to you as your wife." Very soon, the Yellow River went back to its original course, but Guo Ziyi's daughter died without being ill. Later, he moulded a statue from his daughter's bones and had it placed in the temple.

Despite this, some people in ancient times did not believe in the existence of the River Lord. In Records of the Historian, it was written that during Ximen Ba's administration of Ye County, he abolished the custom of offering girls as sacrifices to the River Lord. This demonstrated the people's dauntless spirit in their struggle against Nature.

With the introduction of Buddhism into China, the Dragon King in Buddhism gradually combined with the Chinese dragon deity to become gods of water. And a whole system of dragon kings that ruled the different rivers, lakes and seas developed. As a result, the River Lord gradually faded into oblivion.
The River Lord
The God of Waves

The grand tide at the estuary of the Qiantang River has long been well-known throughout the country. On the 18th of the eighth lunar month each year, the billowing waves rolled and thundered like thousands of running horses, and was said to be caused by the presence of the God of Waves.

The God of Waves was the apotheosis of a reputable general, Wu Zixu of the state of Wu in the Spring and Autumn Period. He had earned a living by playing the flute. Later, he helped King Fuchai of the state of Wu to defeat King Goujian of the state of Yue. To his disappointment, King Fuchai agreed to make peace with the defeated enemy in spite of Wu Zixu’s repeated remonstrances. Shortly after that, the king believed the slanderous rumours made by the treacherous prime minister and ordered Wu Zixu to commit suicide. Wu Zixu told his family members: “After my death, gouge out my eyes and hang them on the Eastern city gate so that I may watch the troops from Yue come to destroy our state.”

When he knew about this, King Fuchai was so angry that he had Wu Zixu’s remains put in a wine leather pouch and thrown into the river. Since then, it was said that due to his hatred for King Fuchai, the spirit of Wu Zixu always stirred up the water in the river, creating waves to frighten people. Till now, on the 18th of the eighth lunar month each year, there would be great waves from the East. In the distance, they looked like straight lines, but within a moment they rolled near with a height of several zhang high, and then turned into a semicircle rushing towards the West. Crowds of spectators from various places would be on the scene, as they believed the waves to be caused by Wu Zixu.

Thus, people in Guiji and Qiantang built temples in his honour and burned incense all the year round. Later, his influence extended from the states of Yue and Wu to the West of Chu. And temples were built for him even in Anhui, Fujian and Guangdong. As a result he became the God of Waves. But it was generally held that he was in charge of the Changjiang River and so there were also people who regarded him as the God of the Changjiang River.

1. Also known as the Yangtze River.
The God of Waves
Ma Zu

In the areas around Taiwan and Fujian provinces, one can find temples in honour of the Heavenly Queen, namely, Ma Zu, whose official title was the Heavenly Sage Mother. Because of the people's strong belief in her, Ma Zu was widely worshipped, second only to Guan Yin.

It was said that in her previous life, the Heavenly Queen had the surname Lin, named Mo Niang (or Silent Girl) and was from Putian of Fujian. Her forefathers were officials in Henan. Her great-grandfather had resigned from his official post and lived as a hermit. Her grandfather had once been the governor of Fujian and her father, being honest and charitable, was called "The Good Man Lin".

Legend has it that before the birth of Ma Zu, her parents once dreamed of being offered a pill by Guan Yin. Her mother swallowed the pill and a ray of red light shone into the chamber from the northwest. The house was illuminated and filled with an exotic fragrance. When Ma Zu was born, she was named Mo Niang the Silent Girl, because she had never cried as a baby.

Mo Niang was unusually bright from young. She once said at the age of seven: "Since I have a name which means silence, I ought to keep calm within me." When she entered a private school at eight, she could remember lessons after the first reading. At ten, she understood the Buddhist rituals and chanted scriptures day and night. At 13, she was already an elegant girl with much grace and poise. Later, she studied the *Secret Essence of Taoism* from an old Taoist.

One day when she was 16 years old, while playing with her companions, Mo Niang saw her own image in an old well. Suddenly a deity arose. Frightened, all her playmates ran away but she knelt down calmly and paid obeisance to the deity, who handed her a bronze object chiselled with spells. Having studied the quintessence of magic spells, Mo Niang was able to transform herself and could subdue evil spirits, helping people in the neighbourhood. Thus, she won their deep love and respect.

On the eve of the ninth day of the ninth lunar month during the reign of Yongxi of the Song Dynasty, Mo Niang bid farewell to her family and told them that she would go up to the mountain the next day. She got up early and having dressed up, set off for Mount Mei. She walked fast among the mountains as if on flat land and reached the destination in no time. Just then, beautiful music was heard in the distance and she ascended to Heaven slowly and gracefully.

After her ascension to Heaven, Mo Niang appeared from time to time. People often saw a lady in red flying above the sea to the aid of those in danger. People in Mei County thus built a temple in her honour, addressing her as the Bright Virtuous Lady. She was more commonly known as Ma Zu.

Even now in Taiwan, during the first to the third lunar month each year, hundreds of thousands of believers would go to the Heavenly Palace in Beigang Town to worship Ma Zu. Such a large-scale event is indeed a marvel.
The Limpid Water Master

The Limpid Water Master was also called "the Master of Mazhang". In the South of Fujian province, people called him "Wumian Master" and in Taiwan he was simply revered as "Master Lord".

Originally named Chen Ying, he got the name Puzu after he became a Buddhist disciple. He was born in Fujian province during the reign of Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty; and from young was a monk in the Great Cloud Temple. Later, he went to the Gaotai Mountain to practise and cultivate Buddhism in a thatched house he had built himself. Realising that it was impossible to make great progress without a good master, he left for the Dajing Mountain and became the disciple of the great monk, Ming Song. He finally understood the essence of Buddhism after three years. Before returning to Gaotai Mountain, his master bid him to do good and to help those in trouble. From then on, he always helped those in need and gave free medicine to those who could not afford it.

During the reign of Emperor Shenzong, there was a severe drought in Qingxi of Fujian province, and he was invited there to pray for rain. Soon, there was a timely downpour, so the local people built a fine house on Mount Penglai for the Limpid Water Master to live in.

Looking at the clear water in the brook flowing past his gate, he named his dwelling "the Limpid Water House" where he lived and practised Buddhism for 19 years. Due to his benevolence, he was highly revered by the local people, who always went to him for blessings and riddance of bad luck. On the 13th day of the fifth lunar month during the reign of Emperor Huizong, he got up early and dictated his will, then sat upright and died at the age of 65.

It was said that when he was alive, he had been to the Lang Mountain South of the Qingxi Stream. It became known as a sacred place for Buddhists and the Limpid Water Master would make his appearance there some years later. During the reign of Emperor Gaozong, there was a fire on the mountain that raged throughout the whole night. When the local people went to the stone gate, they found a bunch of white chrysanthemums, three pieces of ginger and fragrant smoke spiralling from the incense burner. The master could be seen sitting in the midst of the smoke. Thus the local people built a temple in his honour and named it the Limpid Water Temple.

At present, there are more than one hundred temples built in his honour in Taiwan. Taiwan has the most number of temples while the one at Wanhua in Taipei is the most flourishing.
The Limpid Water Master
The Great Emperor Zhang of Mount Ci

The Great Emperor Zhang was a deity worshipped by people in South China. And temples built in his honour could be found by the rivers or bays near Shanghai. Each year on the eighth of the second lunar month, assumed to be the Great Emperor Zhang’s birthday, a great deal of incense was burned and sacrifices were offered. In the past, those who lived in the busy and clamourous city of Shanghai, and bored by the daily routines of life, liked to participate in this event to celebrate his birthday. Actually it was more of an outing than anything else.

The Great Emperor Zhang was named Zhang Bo and lived during the reign of Xuandi of the Western Han Dynasty. It was said his father was Long Yangjun and his mother Zhang Wen. Once, they were strolling along Lake Taihu when there was a strong wind and rain, as well as lightning and thunder. Zhang Wen was enveloped in a colourful auspicious cloud. When the mist had dispersed, Zhang Wen told her husband: “I met a female deity just now who claimed to be my ancestor and she gave me a pill.” Soon after, she became pregnant and gave birth to Zhang Bo 14 months later.

Zhang Bo grew up to be a tall young man of strong build. A magnanimous man, he never showed any expressions on his face. He had a sharp nose, a handsome moustache and beard, with long hair flowing to the ground. He understood the laws of water and fire. After marriage, he moved to another place as he was told by a deity that it was unsuitable to stay in the original place. Guided by a divine beast that looked like a white horse and sounded like an ox, Zhang Bo and his family were led to the Wuxing town in Changxing County.

In the place where they lived, there was a river to be dredged up to Guangde. Zhang Bo told his wife that he would take part in the project and told her to bring meals to him only when she heard the sound of the drum from the work site. The wife did as she was told for several days. One day, however, a few birds pecked at the drum and his wife brought the meal to him, only to find that her husband had transformed into a huge wild boar, dredging the river with his snout. Realising that his true identity had been revealed, Zhang Bo dared not see his wife again. He turned himself into a mountain at Guangde while his wife changed herself into another mountain on the eastern side of the town, facing her husband. The local people built a temple to worship him and called it the Temple of the Great Emperor Zhang.

Thus, Emperor Zhang became a deity in charge of floods and droughts. He could also predict the future and bless the local people. Though strange, the above story is quite similar to the legend about the Great Yu who met his wife when he turned himself into a bear to control floods.
The Great Emperor Zhang of Mount Ci
Mount Zhong in Nanjing has another name, Mount Jiang, which refers to Jiang Ziwen or Emperor Zhuangwu. There was a temple in his honour on the mountain where he died and became a deity of the locality.

Jiang Ziwen was an official at the end of the Han Dynasty. Once, he got to Mount Zhong in pursuit of a criminal. The latter wounded him in the forehead, and he bled to death.

It was said that during the Three Kingdoms Period when Sun Quan founded the state of Wu, Jiang Ziwen was seen riding a white horse with a white-feather fan in hand, hurrying along the road followed by his attendants. Greatly scared, the villager who saw him tried to run away but was caught by Jiang Ziwen who told him: “I am to be the land deity of this area to bless and protect the local people. Tell them to build a temple for me, otherwise a calamity may befall.” Just as he said, that summer saw an epidemic which frightened the people and some of them secretly offered sacrifices to him.

Jiang Ziwen then said to the local witch: “I can bless Sun Quan and his subjects so long as a temple is built for me, or the people will be bitten to death by bugs.” Soon there emerged countless tiny bugs which got into people's ears and killed them. Frightened, the people reported it to the imperial court, but Sun Quan would not believe it.

Once again Jiang claimed: “There would be a big fire if no temples are built.” And indeed, there were several fires within a day and they nearly spread to the palace. The ministers had a heated discussion and held that the ghost would stop all disasters if he had a temple to live in, and that it was better to comply with his wish.

Consequently, the imperial court conferred on him the title of “Marquis” and built a temple in his honour. And Mount Zhong was named Mount Jiang. After that, plagues never troubled the people again, which reinforced their belief.

As Jiankang (present day Nanjing) was the capital of all the southern dynasties, the belief in Jiang Ziwen had been the order of the day for quite a long time, and Jiang became the guardian deity of the country. He was conferred the title of Emperor Zhuangwu in the Southern Tang Dynasty. From the Ming Dynasty, the capital was moved to Beijing, and the influence of the deity diminished, though he still held the title. However, the common people kept worshipping him as before.
Jiang Ziwen (Emperor Zhuangwu)
Qiu Chuji
(the Changchun Immortal)

In front of Changchun Guildhall in Beijing stood a stone tablet with the words “Changchun Jade Guildhall”. In the building was the statue of a Taoist priest who had a fair and amiable face with no moustache or beard, wearing a yellow crown and feather garment. This figure with dignified and sedate bearing was none other than Qiu Changchun, the respectable father of the jade industry.

His surname was Qiu and his personal name was Chuji, and he was the great master of Taoism in the Yuan Dynasty. With the style “Changchunzi”, he was better known as Taoist Changchun and became an immortal later.

Qiu was said to be from Dengzhou, Shandong Province. On his seventh birthday, a travelling priest with bright eyes and white teeth came to his house. He had grey hair but ruddy complexion and was in a Taoist robe and a black Taoist hat.

The priest told Qiu’s father that he would like to adopt his son as his disciple. Seeing the doubtful expression of his father, the priest waved his dust-brush around the child’s head three times and said they would meet again 12 years later.

As predicted, Qiu Chuji left home without saying goodbye when the time came. He went to Mount Kunlun of Ning Hai and found his teacher Wang Zhe, the Taoist priest who had visited his family 12 years before. Having mastered the quintessence of Taoist magic in three years, he bade farewell to his teacher.

He settled down in Mount Longmen of Longzhou to cultivate the way of Taoism and founded the Longmen Taoist School. Before long he was summoned to Emperor Genghis Khan of the Yuan Dynasty and conferred the title of The Great Master and put in charge of the Taoist religion throughout the country.

Some time later, while preparing his daughter’s dowry, the emperor issued an order to gather 100 jade craftsmen in the capital, Beijing, to sculpt 10,000 pieces of jade ornaments within one month. The craftsmen would be put to death if they failed to fulfil the task within the time limit. Seeing them in great sorrow, Qiu Chuji asked for an interview with the emperor, saying he would undertake the task himself. He did finish the work on time by chanting Taoist spells and thus saved the lives of the people.

Later, he travelled throughout the country and taught his skills to the local craftsmen. Strange enough, whenever a sculptor grasped one of the techniques, one of the jade ornaments he made in the palace earlier would vanish. Apparently the jade articles came from various parts of the country and were now returned to their original places.

Since then, Qiu Chuji was venerated as Father Qiu in the jade trade. On the 19th of the first lunar month, the birthday of Qiu Chuji, people, particularly jade craftsmen in Beijing, would go to the White Cloud Temple to worship him. Hence the day was also named Qiu’s Feast Day.
Qiu Chuji (the Changchun Immortal)
Kuang Fu of Mount Lu

Drifting back and floating forth, the clouds and fog in Mount Lu were ever so graceful and unrestrained, evoking melancholy as well as admiration from visitors. The layers of fog and clouds hid the true face of Mount Lu and concealed the traces of immortals and fairies.

Mount Lu was also called Mount Kuang, Mount Kuang Lu, and Mount Kuang Fu. Legend had it that there was a person called Kuang Xu with an alias Immortal Kuang, in the state of Chu during the Zhou Dynasty. He was born with signs of immortality, and had the desire to be a Taoist early in his childhood. In the reign of King Wu, he took Lord Laozi as his teacher and learned from him the way to longevity. Later, he built a thatched house at the Tiger Crook in the Nanzhang Mountain and lived as a recluse. The house had only a bed and several bamboo books.

One day, a stranger who claimed to be Liu Yue living on the left side of the mountain invited Kuang Xu to visit his home. He told Kuang that at the foot of the mountain was a huge stone behind which was his home. To keep the appointment, Kuang Xu came to the stone, but found no house there. When he knocked at the stone, however, it split open like a door. Two indigo-dressed fairy boys ushered him into a place of magnificent buildings. He was greeted by the host, who instructed him the quintessence of Taoism. Back home, he started to refine elixir in his thatched house.

At the time of King Cheng of the Zhou Dynasty, he became an immortal and flew to Heaven. Since then, the mountain was named Mount Lu (meaning thatched house in Chinese). In the Han Dynasty, Liu Che, Emperor Wu, climbed up Mount Lu to examine the destiny. Learning Kuang Xu had attained immortality there, he conferred on him the title of Great Brightness Lord of the South Pole and had a temple built in front of the thatched house. It was said that the immortal would comply with the requests of the people no matter what they prayed against, be it drought, flood or plague.
Kuang Fu of Mount Lu
An Qisheng

It was said that in ancient times, there existed in the remote sea three fairy islands: Peng Lai, Ying Zhou and Fang Zhang. Here, the birds and animals were snow-white; the palaces, built of silver and gold, housed some deities with their elixir. That was the land quite a few monarchs in the Warring States Period sought but never reached, for the fairylands were just like floating clouds — visible one moment, out of sight the next. And the boats were always driven off by a hurricane whenever they neared the islands.

After the attempted assassination by Jing Ke, the first emperor of the Qing Dynasty began to realise that he could not fully enjoy glory and wealth without having a long life. Hence, he sent for An Qisheng who was recommended as being an immortal who knew the way to the fairyland.

Born at the Town Langya, An Qisheng used to sell medicinal herbs on the seashore. He became an immortal and had lived for a thousand years when he was found by the emperor.

An Qisheng liked to eat dates which were as big as melons. The renowned poet Li Bai once wrote:

“I saw An Qisheng in person,
Who was having dates as big as melon.”

Someone had an opportunity to get the big date but found it too hard to eat. It was put into a pot to cook but was not done until after three days and nights. Its fragrance wafted far and wide during cooking. Upon smelling it, the dead came to life again, the ill recovered instantly and the healthy became immortals ascending to heaven.

The emperor invited An Qisheng to his palace and had conversations with him in private for three days and nights. They were so congenial that the emperor bestowed on him many treasures including gold and jade. However, when An discovered that the emperor intended to ask him the way to the fairyland, he put away all the presents in the Fuxiang Pavilion. In return for the emperor’s hospitality, he left him a pair of ruby slippers together with a letter before he started for no one knew where. In the letter were written the following words: “Come and see me some years later in the island Peng Lai”, the way to which, however, was exactly what the emperor had wanted to ask An Qisheng.

The emperor’s dream to be an immortal was shattered. And An Qisheng went on his way around the country and had been to, among other places, the White Cloud Hill in Guangzhou.
An Qisheng
Deity Sa

Deity Sa, originally named Sa Shoujian, was a Taoist of the Song Dynasty. He was from Xihe, Sichuan Province.

After a patient died from a prescription issued by him, he gave up medicine and devoted himself to Taoism.

Having heard that the 30th generation of Heavenly Master Zhang Xujing, Wang Shichen and Lin Lingsu South of the Yangtze River were masters of Taoism, he started off at once with the intention of learning from them. By the time he came to Shanxi Province, he had spent all his money. Then he met three Taoists who told him the three men he was looking for had died.

Seeing that he looked depressed, one of them said: “I am an old friend of the Heavenly Master and will write a letter for you to take to his family.”

He then taught Sa the way to produce dates by chanting spells. The second man taught him to produce thunder. The third man gave him a palm fan, saying: “A patient can recover immediately when fanned with this.”

So Sa left for Xinzhou, supported by the money he got from producing dates.

When he informed the family of Master Zhang’s death, everybody was grieved. Strangely, the letter was written in Master Zhang’s handwriting, saying: “Wang Shichen, Lin Lingsu and I happened to meet Mr Sa and each of us taught him an art of magic. You can pass on more to him.”

Since then, Sa Shoujian started making rapid progress in his Taoist power. Soon after, the local people in Tanchou were informed by a deity that an official in charge of criminals would come the following day. The next day, Sa Shoujian moved to the city god’s temple with a label certifying that he was in charge of criminals and prisons. A few days later, the local magistrate dreamed that the city god complained to him: “I feel uneasy since Mr Sa is living in my temple. Would you please persuade him to move away?” After waking up, the magistrate ordered Sa to leave at once.

Bearing a grudge, Sa Shoujian travelled several dozen li before he arrived in Xiangyin, where he saw boys and girls being sacrificed to the local deity in the temple. He flew into a rage and said: “So evil is the deity, his temple deserves to be burned.” Then he produced thunder in the sky, and burned the temple into ashes.

Years later, he came to Longxing County and was washing his feet by the river when he saw, in the water, the image of a deity with a square face, yellow headdress and gold armour, his left hand dragging the sleeve and the right holding an iron staff.

The deity said: “I am the Shantian deity of the temple in Xiangyin. Since you burned my temple, I have been following you for 12 years, waiting to take revenge. Unfortunately, I can’t find any fault in you. Since you have perfected cultivation in Taoism, I will be your lieutenant.”

One day, heavenly generals and soldiers suddenly appeared before him, saying: “Here is the imperial edict to summon you to Heaven to assume office.”

Since then, Sa Shoujian has been a heavenly deity and the city god a heavenly general under his command.
Straw-Cloaked He

Straw-Cloaked He was from Huaiyang in the Song Dynasty. He was always seen in a bamboo hat and straw clothes, and was never afraid of being stung by mosquitoes in summer and fleas in spring. In winter, he often made a hole in the frozen river to wash his straw coat in the icy water, putting it on immediately after washing before going on his way. When he reached home, he would take off the coat and hang it on a tree. Hot steam issuing from it could even melt the snow nearby.

His family was fairly rich as his grandfather had been a minister in the imperial court. After his father died prematurely, he lived in the city with his mother. Coming back home one day, he became crazy, crying and shouting for no reason. Unable to cure him, his family abandoned him. So he lived in the house by himself. He would go out at dawn and return at dusk, begging for his livelihood. Oddly, half a year later, he claimed that he had mastered the Way of Taoism.

He had a magical power. Whenever the sick asked for help, he would pluck a piece of straw from his cloak for the patient to decoct and drink, which would cure the illness instantly. If he refused to do so, it meant that the disease was incurable. Hence, he was worshipped as the Straw-Cloaked Immortal. When Emperor Xiaozong of the Song Dynasty got to know it, he sent for him several times but was refused. He then conferred on him the title of Immortal with Magical Ability, bestowing on him beautiful brocades, all of which were declined. Before long, He passed away while sitting in a Taoist temple.

Another man in the Song Dynasty, named He Li, was also regarded by some people as the Straw-Cloaked Deity. This belief was related with a treacherous minister, Qin Hui, who betrayed the country and had a loyal court marshal, Yue Fei, murdered. As a result, people bore a deep hatred for him. Legend had it that Qin Hui was brought to Hell by He Li to be sentenced by the King of Ksitigarbha, while the former should have been brought to Mount Jiuhua in Anhui Province. This explained the saying: “Qin Hui’s hidden conspiracy got exposed.”
Straw-Cloaked He
Emperor Gansheng

Emperor Gansheng, named Xu Xun, had an unusual birth. In her dream, his mother saw a golden phoenix with beautiful wings. Flying with ease and grace, the phoenix suddenly dived down, holding a pearl in its mouth. It opened its mouth and the pearl, dazzling and brilliant, fell right onto her palm. Pleasantly surprised, Xu Xun's mother loved it so much that she swallowed it at once.

Upon waking, however, his mother felt a pain in the belly and later gave birth to him.

Every year, on the 25th of the tenth lunar month, people would offer sacrifices to Xu Xun who is worshipped as a deity able to cure illnesses. In actual fact, Xu Xun was a man from Runan of the Jin Dynasty and was conferred the title of Emperor Gansheng after his death.

Xu Xun was smart from early childhood, and grew up a tall and handsome man. He was an expert in the fields of classic doctrines, history, music, geography and astronomy. In the first year of the Taikang period during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Jin Dynasty, he was assigned to be the magistrate in Jingyang County. Once there was an epidemic in the city which killed many people. Since he knew medicine, more than 1,000 people came to see him each day.

Xu Xun studied Taoism from the Taoist priest Wu Meng of Xi'an and acquired his quintessence. It was said that seeing the people unable to pay tax, he turned tiles into gold with magic power and paid off the tax for them.

After his resignation from his official post, he went to Mount Huanglong to refine elixir.

There was then an evil dragon in the mountain, which would in its rage bring about floods to destroy houses and ships. Xu Xun sent for deity soldiers, who had the dragon stuck onto a stone wall. After that, it never made trouble again. In another instance, another dragon was creating disturbance in Xi'an county. Xu Xun drew a spell on a huge rock and wrote an article to subdue the dragon, thus preventing it from doing harm.

Xu Xun was already 136 years old in the second year of the Ningkang period of Emperor Xiao Wu of the Jin Dynasty. On the first day of the 8th lunar month, two deities descended from Heaven. They claimed to be sent by the Jade Emperor who named Xu Xun "Historiographer Gao Ming" in charge of the deities in the whole country, and bestowed on him a purple robe, jade ornaments and two magic boxes. They even told him the day to ascend to Heaven.

Half a month later, as expected, Xu Xun heard the sound of heavenly music coming from above. Amidst the auspicious clouds, there appeared a dragon carriage with a large feather umbrella, by which stood many heavenly officials and fairy children, all of whom paid obeisance to him. Xu Xun got on the dragon carriage and went up to Heaven, bringing with him his family members and even chickens and dogs. It was really a spectacular scene.

During the Song Dynasty, Xu Xun was conferred the title of Deity with Magic Power and respected as Deity Xu by the common people.
Xu Fu

Xu Fu, styled Jun Fang, lived in the Qin Dynasty. Said to be the forefather of the Japanese, he still enjoys worship and sacrifices offered by people in Japan today.

When the first Emperor of Qin was advanced in years, he ordered his subjects to search everywhere for the elixir, hoping to become an immortal and enjoy his glory and wealth forever. Consequently, many priests came to the capital city boasting about their magic power so as to swindle the emperor out of his treasury.

At that time the despotic rule of the emperor had landed the people in a sorry plight. Thus, Xu Fu made use of the opportunity to pay a visit to the emperor and reported that somewhere in the remote sea were ten islands which had magic herbs that could make people immortal. He added that it was no easy thing to reach the islands in the vast ocean and would take tremendous time and effort to make all the preparations.

So the emperor granted him several large vessels and thousands of boys and girls. Leaving his country that would soon be in a tumult, Xu Fu led the fleet and started his voyage for the immortal herb. They sailed and finally settled down in what is now called Japan where the boys and girls grew up and had their children, generation after generation. Therefore, Japanese today are supposed to be the descendants of Xu Fu.

According to research, the place that Xu Fu first landed on was called Imari, on the Kyushu Island of Japan, where the name "The Ford of Qin" is still kept. When passing the place Takeo, Xu Fu once mounted a hill nearby where inkstones from the A'fang Palace of the Qin Dynasty were discovered in recent years. Xu Fu returned to Kyushu Island and stayed in the place Himuko of Takachiho after he lived in Chuchimurahiraya for nine years, evidenced by the Xu Fu Rock there. After that, he lived in Nimiyia for three years, a place now belonging to Wakayama County. Xu Fu Palace and Xu Fu Tomb can still be found there.
Fei Changfang

The ninth day of the ninth lunar month, a Chinese festival, is also known as the Double Ninth Festival, Double-Nine Day, Height-Ascending Day, or Double Yang Day, for in Taoism the number nine represents yang, essentially masculinity or positiveness.

It was said that this was the day the Yellow Emperor, Xuan Yuan, rose up to Heaven. Thus, people of later generations would ascend heights or make sacrifices to their ancestors on this day. The Double Yang Festival can be traced back to the Western Han Dynasty and is related to a man called Fei Changfang.

Fei was a native of Runan county and had been a low official in charge of the market. One day, an old man came to the city and rented a shop selling medicine. He hung a kettle by the door and would jump into it when the shop was closed. Fei Changfang was the only one to discover this from upstairs. Curious, he called on the old man, who invited him to jump together into the kettle. Only then did he find a splendid jade palace inside the kettle. The old man treated him to delicious food and wine. He told Fei over dinner that he had actually been a deity in Heaven but had been demoted to the human world due to a minor offence. Since the time of punishment had expired, he was going back to Heaven.

Seeing Fei's reluctance to leave his family, the old man cut a bamboo stem which he changed into the figure of Fei Changfang and hung it behind his house. Thinking Fei had hanged himself, the family fell into great sorrow, while Fei followed the old man to a mountain, cultivating Taoism for ten years.

Under the old man's instructions, Fei mastered the way to cure all diseases and to make ghosts work for him. Sometimes he was seen in different places hundreds of miles apart within one day.

There was a man called Huan Jing who was learning Taoism from Fei Changfang. One day, Fei told him: “A serious disaster will befall your family on the ninth of the ninth lunar month. You can avoid it if you carry a small red bag filled with cornel on your arm, then climb on top of the mountain and drink some chrysanthemum wine there.”

The day came and Huan Jing led all the members of his family to climb the mountain as instructed. When they came home towards evening, they found all their livestock and poultry dead. Ever since then, it has been a custom for people to ascend heights on the Double-Nine Day.

Although he mastered many magic arts, Fei Changfang failed to attain immortality. However, the unusual deed of the old man won the admiration of people of later generations. The practice of medicine was thus called "Saving lives with a kettle hung".
Ge Hong

The immortal Ge Hong of the Jin Dynasty, styled Yachuan, had shown keen interest in the magic arts of Taoism since his early youth. He wrote a book on Taoist doctrines, entitled Bao Pu Zi, which comprised 116 passages and was divided into the internal and external parts. And it is said his traces can still be found in Mount Luofu today.

Ge Hong had a lowly birth, being born in a poor family. In his youth, he used to cut firewood in the mountains in exchange for paper and ink. At night, he worked hard, reading and writing, and in time became a celebrated scholar. Unaccustomed to vanity, Ge Hong never pursued fame and wealth. He would rather study Taoism at home every day than associate with others. But whenever he had difficulties, he would travel any distance to consult the masters for an answer.

At that time, Zu Xuan had achieved the way of immortality and passed it on to his first disciple, Zheng Yin, whom Ge Hong soon venerated as his master in acquiring the quintessence of Taoism. Hearing prefector Bao Jing of the South Sea was an expert in Taoism and good at divination, Ge Hong then took Bao Jing as his master.

With the knowledge that Ge Hong was learned, Prime Minister Wang Dao invited him to serve the court, but was refused courteously. Later, however, Ge Hong asked to be a junior official in Jiaozi after he learnt that the place had the sand which could be used as raw material for elixir. Thinking that the post was too low for such a learned man as Ge Hong, the emperor did not agree until he explained his intention to refine elixir there. So Ge Hong assumed office and lived for seven years in Mount Luofu, where he refined elixir and wrote books on Taoism.

At the age of 81, Ge Hong wrote a letter to his friend, Deng Yue, saying that he was going to a remote place in search of a master. However, when Deng Yue hurried there to bid him farewell, he found Ge Hong dead, sitting calmly as if in sleep. His complexion remained the same as if he was alive and his limbs were just as resilient. His friend tried to move his body into the coffin, only to find nothing left except his clothes. So Ge Hong became an immortal, and temples in his honour were built by later generations.
Ge Hong
The Fast-Walking Immortal, Huang the Wild Man

Huang the Wild Man, one of Ge Hong's followers, was a farmer. After Ge Hong had attained immortality and ascended to Heaven, Huang accidentally found a pellet left by Ge Hong in the place where he had refined the pill of immortality. He swallowed it and became a fast-walking immortal who could walk swiftly as if flying.

Feeling lonely in the cave, he got a tiger as his companion. To protect the local people, he ordered the tiger to keep quiet and not to devour men. Since then, all the tigers in the Luofu Mountain had been mute and harmless. In a poem, the Ming Dynasty poet Chen Lian from Dongwan wrote:

"Wild Huang was once seen
Riding a mute tiger in the cloud."

When the great Song Dynasty poet Su Dongpo went sightseeing with his son in the Luofu Mountain, he too, wrote:

"At night, a mute tiger lay prostrate
At Yunxi Crook,
In the day, a bronze dragon with a
Ferocious look appeared."

Besides growing tea and strolling in the mountains, Huang spent his time healing people of their diseases. One day, he saw a woodcutter, who was unable to walk properly because of an ulcer in his foot.

Huang cut a piece of bark, placed it over the ulcerated area, and asked the man to close his eyes. When the woodcutter opened his eyes again, the ulcer was healed but Huang was nowhere to be seen. Another time, when he came across a hunchback, Huang told him to pick up a stone on the ground. As the man did so, his back was straightened and again, Huang disappeared. By the time of the Song Dynasty, more and more people knew about Huang the Wild Man, but only a few were lucky enough to meet him. Thus the medicine dispensed by him was known as "Lucky Medicine".

One day, Huang came back from the fair drunk. Using a piece of charcoal, he wrote this poem on the wall of a cave:

"The cloud has no intention of going
Back to the sea,
Spring is dying the trees and grass green.
I mind not the ups and downs in
The mortal world,
And I love the beauty of nature with
Its plum blossoms."

Having written that, he went to the seaside from the back of the mountain and stepped onto the vast waves, slowly fading away in the distance.
The Fast-Walking Immortal, Huang the Wild Man
Huang Chuping

Huang Chuping, born in Danxi during the Jin Dynasty, was an immortal, yet there is little evidence about his birth and death.

At the age of 15, when tending sheep in the mountains, he came across a Taoist priest who brought him to a cave in Jinhua Mountain to teach him the quintessence of Taoism.

Forty years passed. During this time, Huang Chuping's elder brother, Huang Chuqi, tried hard to find him. One day, Huang Chuqi met a priest who told him about a shepherd living in Jinhua Mountain. He hurried there without delay and true enough, found Huang Chuping.

He asked: "Where are all the sheep?"
Huang Chuping replied: "The sheep are at the eastern side of the mountain."
But when his brother rushed to the place, he found nothing except heaps of white stones. In great anger, he scolded Huang Chuping for making fun of him. Suddenly the stones started to move and rise up one after another. In no time, hundreds of thousands of sheep emerged from all over the mountain. Huang Chuqi was greatly surprised. He realised that it was the result of his younger brother's practice of Taoism. He then decided to stay on to learn the way of Taoism from Huang Chuping.
The Immortal Prefect, Bao Jing

Born in Shangdang, Shaanxi province during the Jin Dynasty, Bao Jing, the father-in-law of Ge Hong, served as the prefect of Nanhai Prefecture, Guangdong province. He was called the Immortal Prefect because of his mastery of Taoism.

Intelligent and industrious, Bao Jing delved into various historical classics and doctrines of all schools, particularly Taoism. In his youth, he once met the Immortal Yin Changsheng in Mount Dragon and had Yin as his teacher. After he had mastered the art of making pills of immortality and other advanced Taoist magic skills, he was sent home.

At that time, the Jin court was forced to move to Nanjing, and many nobles also fled to the South of the Yangtze River. Bao Jing moved his family to Danyang of Jiangsu province where he opened a small private school. Finding his student Ge Hong industrious in his studies and free from the desire for fame and wealth, he gave his daughter's hand in marriage to him. Later, Ge Hong moved to Luofu Mountain in Guangdong province and Bao Jing, too, was appointed as the prefect of Nanhai Prefecture in the same province.

Attending to administrative matters by day, Bao Jing would fly to the Penglai Tower on Luofu Mountain to discuss Taoism with Ge Hong at night and would only go back at daybreak. As time went on, his secret activity was discovered by the local villagers who found that Bao Jing flew in the sky with his feet on two swallows. The two swallows would hover nearby till it was time for Bao Jing to leave. Then they would fly to him and carry him back. The villagers trapped the two swallows with a large net but found only a pair of cloth shoes. When the villagers threw them away, the shoes turned into swallows again and flew away. Amazed, the villagers built a "Pavilion of Lost Shoes" behind the Penglai Tower.

Bao Jing resigned from his post and moved back to Danyang when he was old. He died there when he was more than 100 years old and was buried on a hillside. During the Su-Jun Rebellion, some rebel soldiers dug up Bao Jing's coffin with the intention of getting treasures. Instead, they found nothing except a sword. When they were about to take the sword away, they suddenly heard battle cries and neighing of horses nearby. Frightened, they dropped the sword and ran away. And as to why the coffin was empty, it was said that Bao Jing had become an immortal and ascended to Heaven.
The Immortal Prefect, Bao Jing
Qin Gao, the Immortal Who Rode a Fish

The famous Tang Dynasty poet Li He once wrote:
"Shine as the sun how I wish you may,
Get me a fish to ride on the waves."

It was said that riding a fish or in a boat made the difference between immortals and humans. And among the many immortals, there was indeed one who rode a fish. He was Qin Gao from the state of Zhao who was good at playing the qin, a Chinese stringed instrument. He cultivated Taoism and could come and go as fast as riding the boundless waves.

One day, Qin Gao told his disciples that he was going to the Zhuo River to look for the dragon's son. Flabbergasted, his disciples dared not say anything. Smiling, Qin Gao said: "There is nothing to be afraid of. After I've left, build a temple by the river and have the sacrificial offerings ready. Then take a bath, abstain from meat and wine, and wait for me to return." With that, he jumped into the water and slowly floated out of sight like a skiff.

His disciples did as instructed. On the appointed day, more than 10,000 people came with their children to witness his return. At noon, there were roaring waves from afar and Qin Gao was seen riding a red giant carp coming towards the shore. The spectators broke into deafening cheers at this wonderful sight.

Qin Gao stayed in the temple for more than a month before riding away on the carp, and was never seen again.

However, what was puzzling was that Qin Gao came back with a carp and not a dragon. In stories related to Taoism, immortals are often associated with birds, beasts, even fishes and dragons. On the one hand, this is something mystical. On the other hand, it also hints of the free, unrestrained world of the immortals.
Qin Gao, the Immortal Who Rode a Fish
Chen Tuan, the Cloud Immortal

Chen Tuan, also known as Tunan and styled Fuyaozi, was from Zhenyuan County, Bozhou prefecture of the early Song Dynasty.

He was unable to talk until he was five years old. He was playing by the riverside when an old woman dressed in black carried him in her arms to breastfeed him. He suddenly opened his mouth and began to talk. When he grew older, he was able to recite the classics and history books after one reading. At 15, he mastered the Confucian classics including the Book of Rites and various medical books. After the death of his parents, he told his relatives: “What I’ve learned in the past was but reciting the names and words of the dead. Now I do not want to drift with the tide any more. I am going to Mount Tai to learn Taoism from the immortals.”

Thus he distributed his family’s property to the poor and needy and was left with only a stone pan. Admiring his great learning and character, scholars and officials of both the Later Liang and Later Tang Dynasties took pride in having the opportunity to meet him. However, he disliked this greatly. He became so famous that Emperor Mingzong of the Later Tang Dynasty issued an imperial edict to invite him to the palace. When he saw the monarch, he only bowed with clasped hands but did not kneel down as required by Chinese rites. The emperor became even more respectful of him and granted him three court ladies. Chen Tuan turned down the generous offer and went to the Wudang Mountain, devoting himself to the cultivation of Taoism for more than 20 years before going to the Huashan Mountain.

He often shut himself indoors, sleeping for more than a month on end. Once, a woodcutter saw a corpse covered with dirt in the Huashan Mountain. However, when he came nearer and looked more closely, he realised it was Chen Tuan, who opened his eyes slowly and said: “I am having a sound sleep. Why would you wake me up?”

After Emperor Taizu of the Song Dynasty ascended the throne, he also sent for Chen Tuan, intending to make him an official. To his disappointment, Chen Tuan said: “I’ve long since given up both fame and fortune.” He then went to the Emei Mountain and died sitting in a cave. Even after seven days, his appearance remained unchanged and his body was still warm. And for months, colourful clouds enveloped the entrance of the cave.
Chen Tuan, the Cloud Immortal
The Yellow Stone Old Man

The Yellow Stone Old Man lived at the end of the Qin Dynasty and was the author of a wonderful book on the art of war.

The book, *Three Strategies of the Duke of Yellow Stone*, is said to be the oldest monograph on tactical warfare. It provides a comprehensive coverage on the art of government, military administration and control. At the core of this book is the concept of balancing the hard and the soft. It is believed that Zhang Liang, the celebrated advisor to Liu Bang, the first emperor of the Han Dynasty, became a brilliant strategist after reading the book.

Zhang Liang thought himself quite learned when he was a youngster. One day at dusk, he was taking a walk on the Pipi Bridge when he saw a strange old man sitting by the bridge, who arrogantly told Zhang Liang to put on his shoes for him. After Zhang did what he was told in spite of the humiliation he felt, the old man was delighted saying: “Here is a promising youngster that I can teach.” And he told Zhang Liang to come back again early next morning so that he could teach him the art of war.

Zhang Liang was late the next day, which made the old man fairly angry. He told the young man to come early on the third day. Unfortunately, Zhang Liang was again later than the old man. On the previous night of the fourth day, Zhang Liang did not sleep at all and waited on the bridge very early in the morning. The old man was moved by Zhang Liang’s sincerity and patience so he gave him the book on the art of war, saying: “Thirteen years later, you will see a yellow stone at the foot of the Gucheng Mountain, North of Qi and that is me!”

Zhang Liang worked hard at the old man’s book. In later years, he truly became a great help to Liu Bang and founded the Han Dynasty. Once, Zhang Liang and the emperor passed by the city of Gu and did see a yellow stone. At his request, a temple was built at the place of worship in honour of the Yellow Stone Old Man.
Xuanyuan Ji lived during the Tang Dynasty and was the author of *The Tai Xia Jade Book* comprising 12 chapters.

Emperor Wuzong, a believer of Taoism, died from the poison in the pill of immortality made for him by the Taoists. Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty was hence, strongly against Taoism, and the Taoist priests were either killed or exiled. Xuanyuan Ji was exiled to the far South in present-day Guangdong where he resided in the Luofu Mountain.

With bright piercing eyes and long flowing hair that reached down to the ground, Xuanyuan Ji claimed to be several hundred years old. However, he looked like an energetic middle-aged man. He often treated the sick villagers with medicinal herbs. In return, they invited him for meals at their homes. Sometimes he would also invite the villagers to his hut. On these occasions, he would bring out a small wine pot from his sleeve and fill the cups for the guests. How strange! Small as the pot was, it could always produce a free flow of wine no matter how many guests were present and how much they could drink. At that time, Wu Deyong, the army superintendent in Guangzhou, had been suffering from a foot disease for years and no doctor could cure him. He went to Xuanyuan Ji who cured him on the spot.

Wu Deyong reported this to Emperor Xuanzong and the latter issued an imperial edict, asking Xuanyuan Ji to go to the palace.

Seeing his dishevelled hair and old torn robes, a palace maid could not help laughing at Xuanyuan Ji who looked like a country bumpkin. However, before she could even stop laughing, the beautiful maid had turned into an old woman with grey hair and lumps on the face. Not until the emperor ordered her to apologise did Xuanyuan Ji was her original appearance restored.

Xuanyuan Ji magically produced oranges and lichee trees for Emperor Xuanzong. The emperor was so amazed that he wanted Xuanyuan Ji to stay in the palace. He declined the offer, so Emperor Xuanzong sent his guards to accompany him back to the South. Seeing the state of poverty the common people were in and the hardships they suffered, Xuanyuan Ji plucked leaves from tung and bamboo trees, then turned them into coins which he distributed among the poor. Altogether, he distributed hundreds of thousands of coins on his way from Chang'an to Jiangling. Back in the Luofu Mountain, he continued collecting medicinal herbs while writing *The Tai Xia Jade Book*. 
Xuanyuan Ji
The Taoist Zuo Ci

The Taoist Zuo Ci, styled Yuanfang, was from Lujiang during the Three Kingdoms Period. He practised Taoism in the Tianzhu Mountain, was good at transforming himself and capable of making use of ghosts to work for him.

The powerful prime minister Cao Cao learned of his superb mastery of Taoism and summoned him to the capital. He was confined in a well-sealed room and denied food and drink for a whole year. To the amazement of all, he looked just as before when he was released.

Later at a grand banquet, Cao Cao said: "We have so many dishes on the table. It is a pity the common perch from the Songjiang River is not available."

Hearing that, Zuo Ci got a fishing rod and fished in a brass basin filled with water. To everyone's amazement, he baited a perch from the basin.

Cao Cao then tried to baffle him again, saying: "It's a pity we don't have ginger from Sichuan."

"That's simple!" the Taoist said and instantly took out a large piece of yellow ginger from his broad sleeve.

One day, when Cao Cao went sightseeing in the suburbs with more than a hundred officials, Zuo Ci produced from nowhere a litre of wine and a jin of meat which he personally served to the officials. They actually got drunk and satiated. Astonished, Cao Cao became jealous of Zuo Ci's magic art and wanted to have him killed. But Zuo Ci already knew that Cao Cao had this notion of killing him. He disappeared into a wall and nobody could find him. After some time, he was seen in the city area. When Cao Cao issued the order to arrest him, one by one all the people in the city became Zuo Ci.

Some time later, Zuo Ci again appeared on the peak of Yangcheng Mountain. When Cao Cao led his soldiers to the mountain to arrest him, Zuo Ci turned himself into a goat and hid himself among the flock. Cao Cao had no other choice but to withdraw his warrant of arrest.

Just then, an old goat stood up and said: "Is it true?" Cao Cao hinted to his men to seize Zuo Ci. The whole flock turned into old goats unexpectedly and asked in chorus: "Is it true?" Cao Cao had to concede defeat and retreat with his soldiers.
The Three Mao Immortals

The Three Mao Immortals refer to the three brothers Mao Ying, Mao Gu and Mao Zhong of the Han Dynasty.

At 18, Mao Ying left home for Mount Hengshan where he studied the book Zhou Yi and books by Laozi. One night, he dreamed of the Heavenly Jade Fairy who told him: "A gentleman with the surname Wang living in the western part of the city has mastered the quintessence of Taoism. You should have him as your master."

Early the next morning, Mao Ying went to the western city and stayed there for three months, abstaining from meat and wine before he finally saw two immortal dragons flying above the north of the mountain, pulling a chariot on which Wang was sitting. Mao Ying was overjoyed when he saw Wang. Three years later, Wang brought him to the White Jade Turtle Mountain to see the Heavenly Empress who granted him the most profound Taoist classics. At the age of 49, Mao Ying returned to the North Vale of the Hengshan Mountain and later went home to see his parents.

Angry with him for failing to fulfill his duty as a son for so many years, Mao Ying's father raised a stick and was about to beat him. Mao Ying knelt down and said: "I am protected by heavenly soldiers, for I have been granted spells by my immortal master." His father thought he was talking nonsense and began to beat him, only to find that his sticks broke into pieces and flew like arrows, penetrating the walls and piercing the pillars. Only then did his parents believe what he said.

Some time after that, his two brothers both became officials. Mao Zhong was appointed Magistrate of Xihe, and Mao Gu, Magistrate of Wuwei. Hundreds of local people went to see them off. Mao Ying said smilingly: "Though I cannot become an official, I shall ascend Heaven as an immortal on the third day of the fourth lunar month next year. It will surely be an even more grand occasion." All those present thought he was talking nonsense.

The day came, however, when the meadows in front of Mao Ying's house suddenly turned into green silk tents with white felts on the ground. Guests gathered at the tables on which were served rare delicacies, wines and fruits. There was beautiful music and a special fragrance permeated the air. Before long, people in red costumes and jade belts appeared from nowhere preceded by spectacular guards of honour. Mao Ying said that they had come to welcome him. He then got on a chariot which slowly went up to the clouds.

When his two brothers learned that their eldest brother had become an immortal, they resigned from their posts and went to the Eastern Mountain to see Mao Ying. He descended from Heaven and told them: "You are no longer young and therefore can only be immortals on Earth." He then taught them the way to attain immortality and in time, they too became immortals and lived in Maoshan Mountain. The three brothers were collectively known as the Three Mao Immortals and there have been temples built in their honour from the Jin Dynasty up to the modern times.
The Three Mao Immortals
Bai Yuchan, the Ziqing Immortal

Bai Yuchan was born in Qiongzhou during the Southern Song Dynasty and his original name was Ge Changgeng. It was changed to Bai Yuchan when his mother remarried after the death of his father. Being the fifth generation head of the Southern Taoist School, he was conferred the title Ziqing Immortal by the imperial court, while he called himself the Unnominated Official of Heaven. His works on Taoism were later compiled into books by his disciples.

Bai Yuchan was able to recite the six classics and composed poems at the age of seven. At 12, he mastered the art of painting and calligraphy, and passed the state examinations for gifted children. He toured various places in Southeast China as a young man, but returned to the South when he failed to fulfill his ambition.

At Luofu Mountain, he met Chen Niwan, the head of the Southern Taoist School from whom he learned Taoism for nine years. In the end, Chen Niwan gave away the secret that Bai Yuchan had been a Thunder God in Heaven who was relegated to Earth for offending a favourite official of the Jade Emperor when he got drunk. However, he was destined to go back to Heaven in time to come. From then on, Bai Yuchan wore the Thunder God seal and carried Five Thunder Books in his sleeve which Chen had granted him. After Chen Niwan had become an immortal, Bai Yuchan was made the fifth generation head of the Southern Taoist School.

He became so famous that when Emperor Ningzong ascended the throne, he was called to the imperial court, conferred the title of the Ziqing Immortal, and stayed in the Taiyi Palace. Bai Yuchan, however, did not want the fame and glory of official Taoist priests, so he returned to Luofu Mountain with his disciples.

One day, Bai Yuchan was sailing across the Boyang Lake with three disciples when dark clouds gathered in the sky, making it impossible for the boat to go any further. Just as the boatman was about to moor the boat, Bai Yuchan cut a round moon from a piece of paper and had it hung on the mast. True enough, the paper moon shone brightly, illuminating the lake for the sailing boat.

Shortly after, he arrived in Nanchang. One day, while drinking and enjoying the moon together with a few Taoist friends, he suddenly jumped into the river. His friends were trying to rescue him when he came up to the surface and waved to them before sinking to the bottom. Everyone then knew that he had become an immortal.
Bai Yuchan, the Ziqing Immortal
Zhang Ziyang, the Zidao Immortal

The Zidao Immortal was well known in Taoism and the Quanzhen Taoist school regarded him as one of the Southern Originators.

Otherwise known as Zhang Ziyang, the immortal’s original name was Zhang Boduan. Born in Tiantai County during the Northern Song Dynasty, he was eager to learn from young and he cultivated Taoism in his old age. He met the Immortal Liu Haichan in Sichuan, and learned the quintessence of immortality. Then he changed his name to Yongcheng, also known as Shuping and styled Ziyang.

There was a Buddhist monk at the time who thought he had achieved the supreme realm of cultivation and could have absolute composure in which his soul was capable of leaving his body to travel hundreds of miles in a short while. He and Zhang Ziyang shared the same interests and became very good friends.

One day Zhang Ziyang asked the monk: “Shall we travel to distant places together?” The latter agreed and suggested that they go to Yangzhou to look at the flowers there.

However, they did not travel in the physical sense. Instead, they sat face to face with their eyes shut in a quiet room. Before long, their souls left their bodies. By the time Zhang Ziyang arrived, the monk had already been waiting there for some time.

Zhang Ziyang suggested that they pick a spray of flowers to bring back as mementos. Before long, Zhang and the monk were back in the room. They opened their eyes almost at the same time. While the monk was empty-handed without any flowers, Zhang Ziyang produced from his sleeve a spray of flowers he had picked in Yangzhou.

Puzzled, his disciples asked him: “Your soul travelled together with the monk’s. How is it that you brought back flowers while he did not?”

Zhang Ziyang replied: “I have had a comprehensive cultivation, so my being forms the human shape when it gathers and becomes air when it scatters. The monk, however, is eager to get quick results and did not have a complete cultivation. As a result, when his soul goes to a place, others cannot see him, and he cannot move or change things either. That is why he was not able to pick any flowers although he had arrived in Yangzhou first.”

Zhang Ziyang passed away at the age of 99 when he was seated in meditation. His disciples had him cremated and found hundreds of reddish-green sarira (small pieces of bone remnants after cremation, regarded as sacred) which everybody said were the kind of sarira as described in the Taoist classics.

In Chinese history, Buddhists, Taoists and Confucians tend to have disputes. It is indeed rare that Zhang Ziyang and the Buddhist monk travelled together to enjoy the flowers and discuss the way of things. Those who have really reached the highest realm in their cultivation will be able to share their learning and exchange ideas harmoniously, though they may belong to different religions or schools of thought. This is indeed an inspiration of life.
Zhang Sanfeng, the Xianhua Immortal

Zhang Sanfeng was born in Yizhou County, Liaodong, in the transition period from the end of the Yuan Dynasty to the beginning of the Ming Dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Yongle of the Ming Dynasty, the imperial court built a temple in his honour in Wudang Mountain, and during the Tianshun Period, also of the Ming Dynasty, he was conferred the title, Tonghua Xianwei Immortal.

Zhang Sanfeng had an extraordinary appearance with large turtle-shaped ears, round eyes, and a hard and stiff beard. With his hair coiled up on top of his head, he wore a bamboo hat and a torn patchwork coat, holding a knife in his hand. Since he never paid any attention to his appearance, people called him "the Slovenly Zhang".

Zhang Sanfeng behaved quite differently from the common people. When he went out, he could travel thousands of miles a day, and when he stayed indoors, he could meditate with his eyes shut for ten days on end. When he had meals, he could eat litres of rice in a minute, and he could also go without any food for months. At the end of the Yuan Dynasty, he lived in JinTai Temple in Baoji and died while sitting in meditation. His good friend Yang Guishan prepared a golden coffin for him, but he opened his eyes and stood up before he was placed inside.

After coming back to life, Zhang Sanfeng went to Sichuan and cultivated Taoism in a temple in Taihe Mountain. Five ancient trees stood in front of the temple. When he spent some leisure time under the trees, no animals or birds of prey dared to come near, and people marvelled at this miracle. Later, Zhang Sanfeng went to Wudang Mountain and told the local people that the mountain would be well-known throughout the country in future. His prophecy came true later.

Zhang Sanfeng lived in Wudang Mountain for 23 years before he left to roam about the country, and from time to time, appeared in places mysteriously, doing things which only immortals were capable of accomplishing.
Zhang Sanfeng, the Xianhua Immortal
The Goddess of Flowers

Flowers have enriched human life, adding to it colour, beauty, and grace. The book, *Stories that Awaken the World*, has the following description of flowers grown by an old man, Qiuxian:

“The plums are so elegant; the orchids send forth a delicate fragrance; the camellias show a special grace; the apricot blossoms look so charming in the spring drizzle; the chrysanthemums bloom proudly against the cold frost; the narcissus are pure and noble; the lotuses in the pond are graceful and charming; the peonies show incomparable beauty; and the pomegranates are fascinating without comparison....”

Because people admired the beauty of flowers, they conceived the notion that a goddess of flowers existed, which was actually a reflection of the concept that in everything, there was a soul. In the beginning, different trees and flowers had their own particular gods or goddesses. Gradually, the goddess in charge of all flowers appeared, and it was said that the 12th of the second lunar month was her birthday.

There were different ideas as to who the Goddess of Flowers was. According to the book, *On Seasons*, it was recorded that the disciple of Madam Wei was good at growing flowers and was known as the Flower Lady. However, there was another record that Nüyì was the Goddess of Flowers. However, these records were much too simplified. A detailed touching story about the Goddess of Flowers can be found in a collection of fantasies.

There was a kind of peonies a few zhang tall in the Helin Temple of Runzhou City. In late spring, when the peonies were in full bloom, people saw three girls in beautiful red dresses strolling under the trees. They were said to be flower goddesses capable of making the flowers bloom luxuriantly. Zhou Bao, the governor of the place once said to a Taoist priest Yin Qi: “The flowers in Helin Temple are really beautiful. I heard they do not have to bloom in a particular season. Now that the ninth of the ninth lunar month¹ is drawing near, is it possible to make the flowers bloom on that day?”

Yin Qi promised to do so without hesitation, and two days before the actual time, he went to the Helin Temple and put his Taoist magic to good use. At midnight, a girl appeared, saying: “I have been sent by Heaven to help you make the flowers bloom at the same time.” The next morning, the flowers began to bud and two days later were in full bloom as if it was spring. Everybody in the city marvelled at the beautiful sight.

¹The ninth lunar month corresponds approximately to the month of October.
The Goddess of Flowers
The Demon-Exorcizing Judge of the North Pole

Yan Zhenqing was a renowned official and an outstanding calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty. During the insurrection of An Lushan and Shi Siming, Yan Zhenqing and his brother Yan Gaoqing gathered an allied army of 200,000 to fight against the rebel forces. Later, during the reign of Emperor De Zong, he was sent to admonish another rebel leader Li Xilie. Though he failed to fulfill his task, he remained loyal to the emperor and was eventually hanged by the rebels.

Due to his outstanding virtue and great learning, he was venerated as an immortal, and named the Demon-Exorcizing Judge of the North Pole. Thus, his life was filled with many legends and myths.

Yan Zhenqing was very diligent in his childhood. He did very well in his studies and was a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations. At the age of 18, he suffered a serious illness and was confined to the bed for more than 100 days. One day, a Taoist priest named North Mountain Lord passed by and gave him some magic pills which cured him at once.

The priest told Yan: "It's not good for you to indulge in fame and official ranks. If you fail to be free from worldly concerns, try to keep your body whole after death, then you will be able to become a true Taoist."

With that, he offered Yan Zhenqing another pill. Before Yan Zhenqing was put to death by the rebels at 76, he said: "I would want to cultivate Taoism. For me, the most important thing is to keep the body whole. I would have no regrets of dying if you promise me that." He was then hanged.

After the riot was suppressed, his coffin was carried to the capital. When the coffin was opened before departure, his body was found to be the same as when he was alive — with smooth skin, dark hair, lithe limbs and springy muscles, his hands clenched and pierced by his nails. All who were present were shocked. On their way, they felt the coffin getting lighter and lighter, and on arriving at their destination, they found there was nothing left in it.

Yan Zhenqing was made Judge of the North Pole by Taoists, and he has been in charge of exorcizing demons ever since.
The Demon-Exorcizing Judge of the North Pole
**God of the Opera**

It was recorded in history that Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty had once selected 300 actors and several hundred court ladies to learn singing and dancing. Sometimes, he himself would teach them. Hence, they were called "the emperor's opera disciples". Later generations called them opera actors and actresses.

There were two deities of the opera; one was Xianggong and the other Laolang. Xianggong referred to Emperor Xuanzong's court musician, Lei Haiqing, whose skill in playing the pipa, a stringed instrument, was highly appreciated by the emperor. When An Lushan's rebel forces seized the capital of Chang'an, the court musicians were taken to Luoyang and forced to play for the rebel leader. Lei Haiqing gave them a flat refusal and condemned the rebels indignantly. As a result, he was killed. Moved by his loyalty and integrity, the actors and actresses in Fujian took the lead in building temples in his honour. However, they called him Tian Xianggong instead of using his family name Lei, Tian being part of the Chinese character Lei.

Some ancient books expanded on this, saying it referred to the three brothers of the Tian family: Tian Gouliu, Tian Hongyi and Tian Zhibiao, all of whom were said to be excellent musicians of Emperor Xuanzong. They were so good at playing music that "peach blossoms would begin to bloom when they beat the drum, the passing clouds would stop when they played the flute, plums would begin to bud when they sang, and the wind would be blowing when they adjusted the tune." They later helped Heavenly Master Zhang exorcise plague demons and were made deities in charge of singers and dancers.

As for Laolang, there were different explanations as to who he was. A fairly common belief was that Laolang was Emperor Xuanzong himself, probably because he liked operas and consequently became the guardian deity. The statue of the deity in the Laolang temple used to be a refined handsome young man with fair complexion. Liu Dengzhai wrote in *Poem on the Laolang Temple*:

"Pipes and strings the troupes are playing;
To see the Laolang Deity people are rushing.
Who is the deity may I ask thee;
It's Emperor Xuanzong with the surname Li."
Master Lu Ban, the Skilled Sage

On the 20th of the 12th lunar month, all the carpenters would offer sacrifices to the Skilled Sage who was none other than the famous artisan, Lu Ban of the Spring and Autumn Period. It was said this day was his birthday.

Indeed, Lu Ban deserved the veneration of the carpenters. According to an ancient book: "Whenever people see the beauty and excellent workmanship of any architecture, they will attribute it to the wonderful skills of Lu Ban."

Legend has it that he once came to the side of the Youshui River to the South of Zhaozhou City, and was determined to build a bridge across the swift current. Working together with his sister, Lu Jiang, they completed the bridge overnight. Carved on the rails of the bridge were rare flowers and herbs, animals such as the dragon, phoenix, lion and dog, the Cowherd and the Weaving Girl; and the Eight Immortals crossing the sea.

When the local people saw the bridge across the river the next morning, news soon spread. Gradually the Eight Immortals in Mount Penglai got to know the news. Interested in sightseeing, one of the Eight Immortals, Zhang Guolao rode his donkey and came to Zhaozhou to view the bridge. He put the sun and the moon in the left and right pockets of a long bag placed across the donkey's back and he also carried with him the waters of the five lakes, four seas and three rivers. On his way, he invited King Chai to join him. King Chai pushed along his single-wheeled barrow with a silver handle, on which were placed the five strange peaks and four famous mountains.

Coming to the bridge, Zhang Guolao asked: "Is the bridge strong enough?"

Lu Ban laughed loudly: "Big horses and mules have crossed the bridge. A small donkey will pose no problem."

But the bridge began to jerk as soon as Zhang Guolao and King Chai got on to it. Looking at the precarious situation, Lu Ban jumped into the river and supported the bridge with his hands, which became even stronger with the pressure exerted by the two immortals! When Zhang Guolao had crossed the bridge, he told Lu Ban who he was. Lu Ban felt very much ashamed for not recognising the two immortals. He dug out one of his eyes and placed it by the side of the bridge before he slipped away. From that time onwards, carpenters would use one eye to gauge the accuracy of their job with a plumb line before starting work. And Lu Ban became the guardian deity of the carpenters.
Master Lu Ban, the Skilled Sage
Goddess of the Toilet, Lady Zigu

On the 15th day of the first lunar month, housewives in China would worship the Toilet Deity. The custom was quite strange. On the previous day, the housewives would get a manure basket and decorate it with flowers and adornments. A silver hairpin was inserted at the opening of the basket before it was reverently placed by the side of the toilet. Then a table was put in front of it on which candles were lighted, incense was burned, and sacrifices were offered. The children of the family were also made to pay homage to the Toilet Deity.

The Deity was also called Lady Zigu (or Third Lady of the Toilet by later generations). Worship of Lady Zigu started from the Southern Dynasties. According to Notes of Strange Stories, Lady Zigu was from Laiyang and her name was He Mei. She was taken as a concubine by Li Jing, whose wife was very jealous of her and killed her in the toilet on the 15th of the first lunar month. The heavenly emperor pitied her and appointed her Deity of the Toilet.

Despite her title, Lady Zigu was not in charge of the toilet. Instead, she was a prophet of people's destiny. People tended to adorn brooms, plants or even chopsticks with clothes and flowers to invite the presence of Lady Zigu. Women would confide in her their worries or pray for their unmarried daughters.

According to some people, Zigu was a concocted name derived from Madame Qi, a concubine of the first emperor of the Han Dynasty who died in a toilet. Because of the similarity in pronunciation between the Chinese characters "Zi" and "Qi", the name became Zigu.

All the above are but legends. However, the great man of letters, Su Dongpo of the Song Dynasty did write an article, Questions and Answers by the Fairy, in which he recorded a vivid description of his dialogue with Lady Zigu. Later, he even mentioned that he saw her in person in Guangzhou. He said that she was very talented and versatile, and was able to "compose poems off hand with words and expressions beyond ordinary poets". However, people of later generations were of the opinion that these remarks of Su Dongpo "were not to be believed entirely".
Goddess of the Toilet, Lady Zigu
The Snake King

By the northeastern gate of the city of Suzhou, there used to be a Snake King Temple. On the 12th of the fourth lunar month, people would gather in the temple to celebrate the Snake King’s birthday—burning incense and praying for charms which they would bring home and stick on the doors and windows. It was said they could thus “keep away snake poison”.

This was not the only Snake King Temple. As recorded in *Miscellaneous Notes of Fujian*, outside the southern gate of the city Zhangzhou, there was a Nantai Temple, better known as the Snake King Temple among the common people. The deity worshipped in the temple was a high-ranking monk. It was said that those bitten by snakes could get healed if they prayed to the Snake King. Sometimes, dead snakes without heads or with bodies severed in two were found on the stone steps of the temple, and people would say they had been punished by the Snake King.

Snakes are poisonous reptiles capable of causing great harm, so people tended to harbour terror and consequently, veneration for snakes. Many deities in ancient myths were either with snake heads or bodies. Both Nü Wa and Fu Xi had human heads and snake bodies. It was probably because ancient people thought the snake was extraordinarily powerful and so not only deified it, but also took it as the symbol of superhuman strength. Besides, people also hoped to have a deity to control the snakes so that they would not harm human beings. This was how the Snake King came about.

There were different explanations as to who the Snake King was. People in the Suzhou area said his name was Fang Xuezheng, and people in Fujian said he was a monk. However, according to a book, *Qing Jia Lu*, the Snake King was Shi’e from Huating County of the Song Dynasty. Once, he picked up a small egg in the mountains, from which a snake hatched and Shi’e raised it in a bamboo tube with great care. Later, when Shi’e sat for the provincial examination in the city of Shen, the snake sneaked out of the bamboo tube.

Unfortunately, people caught sight of it, and shouting and crying in astonishment, they rushed upon the snake with sharp swords. But the snake grew very big suddenly and they could not kill it. The local magistrate sent soldiers to kill the snake, only to suffer disastrous defeat. When Shi’e came to know about it after returning home, he said: “This is my snake. Don’t be afraid.” He called out to the snake which grew smaller and went back into the bamboo tube.

Having lost face, the magistrate got very angry, saying that raising such a snake would spell more trouble. Hence, he sent men to have Shi’e killed. The snake was infuriated with the murder of its master and got out of the tube to take revenge. Many people were bitten to death. The magistrate had no choice but to plead with the emperor to confer on Shi’e the title of Guarding Marquis of the State and Sea. He also ordered a large steamed bun to be made and offered to Shi’e as a sacrifice. The snake crawled on to the steamed bun and died a slow death. Later, people referred to Shi’e as Minister Shi.
The Snake King
The Fox Fairy

Of all the animals, the Chinese seemed to be particularly interested in the fox. Some even said the fox would change into a beautiful woman when it reached 100 years old. However, it would turn into a loose woman after it attained 1,000 years. There were also people who believed that the fox was originally a lascivious woman in ancient times named Azi who later changed into a fox.

As a matter of fact, the lifespan of a fox is at most 15 or 14 years. It can never live to be 100 years old, let alone 1,000 years. It took a long time for the fox to be associated with the fairy. In the Five Classics, the fox was valuable only for its skin, as mentioned in The Book of Poetry:

“Hunting the fox for its fur
To make a coat for the lord.”

Some books described the fox as being cunning and suspicious, but nothing was mentioned about its transformation into a human figure. During the Han Dynasty, there were already records about a white fox digging a grave. When people tried to open the coffin, they found a den inside. In the years when the Taoist religion was just founded during the Eastern Han Dynasty, some books had the following records:

“Foxes, wolves and jackals can live to be 800 years old, and those above 500 years old are capable of transforming into human beings.” However, only from the Jin Dynasty did foxes “really change into human beings”.

In the book, Notes on Mysteries, Guo Pu of the Jin Dynasty wrote an incredible story: While taking a rest under a tree after working in the fields, Ren Gu of Jiyang was violated by a man in plume clothes, and in time gave birth to a snake. Ren Gu later became a eunuch, but the court officials accused him of being a demon and pleaded with the emperor to drive him out of the palace. The emperor, however, did not believe it, and not until he died did Ren Gu run away.

The story did not make clear whether Ren Gu was a man or a woman. Nevertheless the man in plume clothes was said to be the transfiguration of a fox. There were legends at the time that foxes, after living 100 years, could turn into witches and men, as well as beautiful women.

There were many more stories about fox fairies in the famous book, A Collection of Strange Stories. Most of the fox fairies in the book were kind-hearted, affectionate girls who tended to make sacrifices for the sake of true love. These fox fairies have had the sympathy of many ever since.

Among the common people, fox fairies were often mentioned in tales and were called “Great Fairies”. From the Tang Dynasty onwards, some people began to worship the Fox Fairy in their own houses. In the various official institutions of the Qing Dynasty, the Fox Fairy was worshipped as “the Fairy Guarding the Official Seal” for it was said that such worship could prevent burglary.
The Fox Fairy
Cripple Li with the Iron Stick

Cripple Li with the Iron Stick was one of the legendary Eight Taoist Immortals. It was said his name was Li Xuan and he was from Xiadi of the Sui Dynasty.

He was a stalwart man and had been living in a cave, cultivating Taoism since very young. Once, Lord Laozi and Master Wanqu qu descended on the mountain where he lived and taught him the most profound way of Taoism.

One day, before leaving for Mount Hua to keep his appointment with Lord Laozi, he told his disciple: "I'll leave my body here. Take good care of it for seven days. In case my soul fails to return by that time, please burn my body in the furnace."

Li then threw his iron stick into the air, which instantly changed into a dragon. He rode on it and went away.

Six days later, the disciple got news from home that his mother was seriously ill. Anxious to go home, he cremated his master's body before the seventh day. When Li's soul came back on the actual day, he was unable to find his body. Without any choice, his soul had to enter a body that had just been buried. It turned out to be that of a cripple. So from then on, Li became a cripple, limping about the country.

Legend has it that Cripple Li with the Iron Stick was the inventor of the dog skin medicinal plaster. It was said that in An'yang, Henan, there lived a shopkeeper known as Wang, famous for his medicinal plasters. He once met a beggar with dishevelled hair in rags. The beggar had a malignant boil on his leg and had come for Wang's plaster, famous for curing wounds. However, there was no sign of healing after three plasters had been applied. When the beggar came back to Wang to find out why, Wang's dog sprang on him. Unable to stop the dog, Wang beat it to death with a club.

The shopkeeper was determined to cure the beggar of his boil so as to regain his reputation. He sold his valuables to buy glossy ganoderma, pilose antler and so on to make medicine for a plaster. The beggar happened to be eating dog meat when the medicine was given to him. He applied the medicine to his boil and then put a piece of dog skin over it. After a short while, he removed the plaster, and indeed, his boil was healed. It struck the shopkeeper that dog skin could make a good plaster with marvellous healing effects. He was just about to thank the beggar when the latter disappeared. Only then did it dawn on him that the beggar was none other than the medicime immortal, Cripple Li, who had specially come to teach him how to make magic plasters. From that time onwards, dog skin plasters made in An'yang began to enjoy great popularity.
Zhongli Quan

One of the Eight Taoist Immortals, Zhongli Quan was also called Han Zhongli since he lived during the Han Dynasty.

He was from Yantai and people respectfully called him Master Yunfang. His father was appointed marquis by the emperor and enjoyed a powerful position.

At the time of his birth, the chamber was illuminated by a light which shone like raging fire. All the attendants and guards turned pale with fright. He was born with a round head, high forehead, thick earlobes, broad shoulders, deep-set eyes, a sharp nose, a square mouth and large cheeks. His face and lips were red as vermilion, and his arms were longer than those of ordinary people. He did not cry, neither did he eat nor drink. But on the seventh day after his birth, he suddenly jumped to his feet, saying: “I want to go and play in the Purple Palace and Jade Capital where the immortals live.”

When he grew up, he became a general. Once, he suffered defeat in a battle against Tibet and he fled all alone into a valley on his horse and lost his way. Towards evening, he still could not find his way out. At midnight, he met a foreign monk with dishevelled hair and a dirty face who was wearing a worn-out robe. He told Zhongli Quan to follow him. They walked for several miles before they came to a manor house. “General, this is where Master Donghua acquired the Way through cultivation. You may as well take a rest here.” With that, the monk left.

Zhongli Quan dared not disturb the people in the manor and roamed about by himself. It was some time before he heard someone say: “It must have been the blue-eyed foreign monk who let out the secret.” Then he saw an old man with a white deer fur coat draped over his shoulders and a green walking stick in hand, who said to him loudly: “Isn’t that General Zhongli Quan? Why not come in and stay in the house?”

Greatly surprised, Zhongli Quan knew the old man was no ordinary person. Having just got out of danger, he was fairly keen on getting away from worldly worries. He implored the old man to teach him the Way. To his delight, the old man taught him the quintessence of Taoism, and many other magic arts. When he looked back after bidding the old man farewell, the manor had already disappeared in no time.

Later, he met the Immortal Huayang from whom he learned an even more profound way of Taoism. And the Deity Wang Xuanpu also taught him the secret way to immortality. From then on, he wandered about the country, especially places such as Shandong and Mount Kongtong. Finally, he acquired the Supreme Way on the Si Hao Peak and became a true immortal.
Zhongli Quan
Zhang Guo Lao

One of the Eight Taoist Immortals, Zhang Guo Lao lived during the Tang Dynasty, his original name being Zhang Guo.

As an immortal, he lived at the Zhongtiao Mountain in Hengzhou, Shaanxi, and used to travel frequently between Pen and Jin, riding backwards on a white donkey, which could travel thousands of miles in a day. When he took a rest, he would fold up the donkey like a piece of paper and put it in a case.

He refused Emperor Taizong's and Emperor Gaozong's offers to take up an official post. When Empress Wu Zetian sent for him, he simply feigned death.

However, he was seen roaming in the mountains in Hengzhou some years later. In the 22nd year of the Kaiyuan Period, Emperor Xuanzong invited him to the palace, but Zhang Guo Lao "died" again. The emperor then sent two more officials, bringing the imperial edict with the emperor's seal on it to invite him a second time. Hence, Zhang Guo Lao arrived in the capital and stayed in the Mansion for Top Officials, where countless famous scholars went to see him.

The emperor often asked Zhang Guo Lao about deities, but he always kept silent. He could go without food for days, drinking only a little wine. He said he could only drink two litres at most, but one of his disciples could drink ten litres. No sooner had he finished than his "disciple", a young Taoist priest, flew down from the eaves of the palace. He drank the ten litres of wine the emperor gave him. When offered more wine, the young priest got drunk, and wine kept spurring out from the top of his head so his hat fell to the floor. Instantly, the hat changed into a golden cup that belonged to the Mansion for Top Officials, but the young priest disappeared. All the officials present were greatly amazed.

Zhang Guo Lao said he was born in the time of Emperor Yao, some 3,000 years before but he looked like he was only in his late sixties. Once, Emperor Xuanzong shot a large deer and gave orders to have it cooked. Zhang Guo Lao said: "This is an immortal deer that is already 1,000 years old. It was once caught and later released by Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. You can check the upper part of his left horn if you don't believe me." True enough, they found a piece of copper on which was written, "the 5th year of the Yuanshou Period" which was 825 years before their time.

The emperor once asked an official, Ye Fashan, who Zhang Guo Lao really was. He answered that Zhang Guo Lao was a white bat spirit at the time of the creation of the world. Before he could finish, he fell flat on the floor and died. Zhang Guo Lao said smilingly: "This young man talks too much. He may let out heavenly secrets if not punished." Not long after, Zhang Guo Lao resigned from his official post and went back to the mountains. At the beginning of the Tianbao Period, the emperor once again sent for him, but he died on the spot as soon as he heard the news. When his disciples tried to bury him, however, they found the coffin empty. The emperor then ordered that Louxia Temple be built in his honour.
Zhang Guo Lao
Lü Dongbin

One of the Eight Taoist Immortals, Lü Dongbin was also known as Lü Yan. He was from Yong’le County, Puzhou Prefecture of the Tang Dynasty. Both his grandfather, Lü Wei, and his father, Lü Rang, were officials.

When he was born, an exotic fragrance filled the room, there was heavenly music in the sky and his mother saw a white crane descending from above. It flew into the net around her bed and then disappeared. Lü Dongbin was born around mid morning on the 14th of the fourth lunar month in the 13th year of Zhenyuan. He had an extraordinary appearance, with a body like a tiger, cheeks like a dragon, eyes like those of a phoenix, and eyebrows slanting up above the temples. There was a mole on the tip of his left eyebrow, and the lines on the bottom of his feet were like those of a turtle. He was born like an immortal.

Lü Dongbin had been exceedingly clever since young. He liked to wear a scholarly head-dress and a yellow gown, somewhat like Zhang Liang, the celebrated advisor to the first emperor at the beginning of the Han Dynasty.

He met the Fire Dragon Immortal at Lushan Mountain, who taught him highly sophisticated sword skills. Later, he sat for the imperial examinations twice but failed. At 64, he met Zongli Quan, the Gentleman of the Cloud Chamber, whom he asked to be his master. The latter tried to test him, saying: “You still need a few hundred years of practice to become a true Taoist.” From then on, Lü Dongbin put aside his Confucian head-dress and garments, and led a hermit’s life. During this period, the Gentleman of the Cloud Chamber tested his attitude towards poverty, beauty, wealth, and death. Zongli Quan was quite satisfied with him, saying: “Now you are qualified for the Way of Taoism, but you still have to make three major contributions and complete 800 meritorious deeds. Then I shall guide you away from the human world to Heaven.” So Zongli Quan taught Lü Dongbin the golden touch and other Taoist ways. Lü Dongbin practised long and hard for ten years before Zongli Quan was summoned back to Heaven. After that, he wandered about the country for 1,000 years, suppressing demons and preaching Taoism.

In the second year of the Zhenghe Period, during the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, a demon appeared in the imperial palace, grabbing gold and other valuables as well as court ladies. Emperor Huizong dreamed of a Taoist priest who came to the palace and summoned the powerful deity Guanyu. Guanyu seized the demon and swallowed it up in no time. The emperor asked the priest for his name. He said his surname was Lü and then disappeared. Upon waking up, the emperor realised that he was none other than Lü Dongbin. From then on, the palace was safe and peaceful. The emperor was very grateful and ordered that the names of all the temples in honour of Lü Dongbin be changed to the Temple of Miaotong the Immortal.

Lü Dongbin occupied a very high place in Taoism. The Quanzhen School of Taoism venerated him as the Pure Founder. He was actually the central figure of the Eight Taoist Immortals.
The Immortal Lady He

The only lady among the Eight Taoist Immortals, Lady He was said to have been born with six radiant golden hairs on her head, in Zengcheng County, Guangzhou. Another legend has it that a deer had given birth to her, that she was adopted by a Taoist priest named He and so, she had this surname. Once, in her childhood, she met a strange person who gave her a peach. After eating it, she never felt hungry again, and what was more, she was able to tell the fortune of others. People in the countryside regarded her as an immortal and put up a building for her.

The Immortal Lady He lived by the Yunmu Stream during the reign of Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty. Around the age of 14 or 15, she dreamed of a deity who taught her to eat mica powder so that she could be light and become an immortal. She tried to take some mica powder and sure enough, she was able to walk very fast, as though she was flying. From then on, she went about vales and dales, leaving home early and coming back late, bringing various fruits to offer to her mother.

Her parents did not like her coming and going like that, and they were determined to choose a husband for her. On the evening of the wedding, however, she was nowhere to be found, except for a poem she had left on the screen:

"Indulging in worldly affairs, I'm blamed by Lady Magu.  
Between Heaven and Earth, the distance is so far.  
To enjoy the bright moon, I'm going to Canzhou:  
To appreciate the music, I'm riding on a yellow crane."

Also found were a pair of her shoes left by the well in her yard. Some time later, a Taoist priest came from Mount Luofu and told her parents that he had met their daughter there. She had asked him to get her shoes for her. Only then did her parents know that their daughter had gone to Mount Luofu to study the Way.

In the mountains, Lady He began to fast. Her words became puzzling and unfathomable, beyond comprehension. News about her spread to Empress Wu Zetian, who wanted to see her very much, so she sent for her. But on the way to the imperial palace, she disappeared suddenly.

During the Jinglong Period of the reign of Emperor Zhongzong, some people saw her flying to Heaven in broad daylight. However, in the ninth year of the Tianbao Period of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, she again appeared on the Lady Magu Altar, with colourful clouds whirling round her. During the Dali Period, she appeared once again in Xiaoshi Building, Guangzhou. The local magistrate presented a memorial to the emperor with a detailed account of her deeds.

It was said that the Immortal Lady He once wrote the couplet of a poem on the eastern wall of the Shuzhu Nunnery in Luofu. However, no one was able to match her poem with another couplet. The first two lines were:

"The waterfall a hundred feet high,  
flows like a rainbow white;  
Flutes and pipes chorus with the wind through the cypress and pines."
The Immortal Lady He
Lan Caihe

Lan Caihe is one of the Eight Taoist Immortals. People did not know exactly which period he lived in but some said he was an actor of the Five Dynasties Period. Legend has it that he was often seen in worn-out clothes, with a short black wooden belt around his waist. He had one of his feet in a boot while the other was bare. Heat and cold made no difference to him. In summer, he stuffed his clothes with cotton and in winter, he lay in the snow, perspiring and exhaling air like fog.

Lan Caihe often got drunk and went about the city begging with a wooden board three feet long. The old people and children were all enchanted by his songs. It was hard to tell whether he was really mad, but offhand, he could compose songs:

"Sing a song, Lan Caihe.
How long can the world last?
Beauty is but a tree in short spring;
The year comes and goes like shuttling.
Never to return are the ancient gone;
Greater in number are people born.
In the morn I rode the phoenix to the sky, clear and blue;
At dusk, I saw the fields flooded with waves, white and vast.
Grand scenes in the bright sun were shining from the sky;
Palaces of gold and silver were towering up high."

The songs had implications beyond the comprehension of earthly people. They could only be understood by immortals.

Whenever he had money, he would string the coins and pulled them along. He would not even care when he dropped the coins. Sometimes he would help the poor with all his money and not reserve a single coin for himself. Thus he led a carefree life, wandering about the country leisurely.

Lan Caihe was very good at preserving his youthful appearance. Someone who had seen him in his childhood became grey-haired after many years. But when he met Lan Caihe again, the latter's face was still youthful as a child's.

Once, Lan Caihe was drinking in the Haoliang Wineshop when he heard beautiful music from Heaven. He flew up immediately and rode on a white crane, wheeling in the sky. From above, he dropped his boot, clothes, belt and the board onto the ground, all of which disappeared before long. Meanwhile, he had disappeared into the boundless blue sky.

He once went to the Immortality Peach Party with the other seven Taoist Immortals. On their way back, all of them used their magic treasures to ride across the sea. The Dragon Prince, however, coveted the board Lan Caihe was standing on and determined to get it by force. This led to a fierce battle but in the end, the Eight Immortals burned the Eastern Sea. The Dragon King was defeated, so he asked the heavenly troops for help. The two sides were not reconciled until Guanyin's intervention.
**Han Xiangzi**

One of the Eight Taoist Immortals, Han Xiangzi was said to be the nephew of Han Yu, a great writer of the Tang Dynasty. He was quite unconventional and unrestrained when he was young. Once, he met Lü Dongbin, the famous Taoist Immortal, went touring with him to learn Taoism.

When he saw his nephew neglecting his studies, Han Yu encouraged him to study hard. To his surprise, Han Xiangzi replied that he had different aspirations from his uncle. Han Yu was very unhappy and told his nephew to write a poem to make clear his aspirations. Without hesitation, Han Xiangzi wrote two lines:

"I can have the wine brewed right away;
And make the flowers bloom
without delay."

The lines meant that he knew the magic arts, so Han Yu asked him: "How are you able to know all the laws of nature?" Instead of replying directly, Han Xiangzi instantly produced some good wine for him. And from the cake used for brewing the wine grew a green peony in full bloom. On one of the petals was a couplet:

"The clouds envelop Qinling Mount,
My home I know not where;
The snow covers Languan Pass,
My steed I cannot spur on."

When he saw that Han Yu could not understand the couplet, Han Xiangzi said that everything would be clear to him in the future. Some time later, Han Yu offended the emperor and was sent to Chaozhou. He was caught in heavy snow on the way to his new office, when he saw someone running up in spite of the snow. It turned out to be Han Xiangzi who said to his uncle: "Do you still remember the couplet on the peony petal?" Han Yu seemed to have realised something and asked what the name of the place was. Han Xiangzi replied it was none other than Languan Pass.

Now that his nephew's prophecy had come true, Han Yu had mixed feelings. Thus, he composed a poem using the couplet on the petal. The title of the poem was *To My Nephew's Son* Han Xiang at Languan Pass after my Demotion:

"In the morn I presented a memorial to His Majesty,
At dusk I was banished thousands of li away.
Intending to remove evils for the wise emperor,
I would not grudge anything, though old and weak.
The clouds envelop Qinling Mount,
My home I know not where;
The snow covers Languan Pass,
My steed I cannot spur on.
I know what you mean, coming from afar,
To gather my bones by the river when I am gone."

The two of them had a good talk in the inn that evening. Han Xiangzi comforted his uncle, saying: "You will come back to the capital soon. This trip will do you no harm. Instead, you will even get promoted." Han Yu asked whether they still had the chance to see each other and Han Xiangzi replied sadly that he could not tell.

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1. It should be "nephew" instead of "nephew's son" as mentioned in the poem.
Han Xiangzi
Cao Guojiu

Cao Guojiu is one of the Eight Taoist Immortals. Though groundless, legend has it that his name was Cao Yi, the younger brother of Empress Cao, mother of Emperor Ying Zong of the Song Dynasty. Hence, he was called Guojiu (emperor’s uncle). The empress doted on him and would put to death all those who spoke ill of her younger brother. Even Cao Guojiu himself felt ashamed of what the empress did by disregarding the law. So he went to the mountains to devote himself to the study of Taoism. He later met Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin, the latter of whom asked: “We heard you are now cultivating Taoism, but where is the Taoism you are cultivating?”

Cao Guojiu pointed to Heaven.

“Where is Heaven then?” came Lü’s second question.

Cao Guojiu then pointed at his heart.

“The heart is Heaven and Heaven is Taoism. You have got to know your true self,” commented Zhongli Quan, smiling. The three of them laughed and went wandering about the country.

The above story was obviously made up by scholars. It cannot be true since the three men lived in different dynasties. On the other hand, a story in the book, Ji Shuo Quan Zhen, seems more logical:

There was a young scholar named Yuen Wenzheng in Chaozhou county, Guangdong, who went with his wife Madam Zhang to the capital for the imperial examinations during the reign of Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty. Cao Jingxiu, the younger brother of Cao Guojiu, coveted the scholar’s beautiful wife. He murdered Yuen Wenzheng and tried to force Madam Zhang to comply with his wishes. Because she refused to give in, she was thrown into prison. Fortunately, the God Venus transformed himself into an old man and rescued her from the well. On her way to escape, however, she ran into Cao Guojiu, who knocked her unconscious with an iron staff. When she regained consciousness, she filed a complaint to the upright official Justice Bao. As a result, the two brothers were both put into prison. The younger one was executed and Cao Guojiu was bailed out by the emperor. Ashamed of what he had done, Cao Guojiu went to the mountains to study Taoism and finally became an immortal.
Liu Haichan

Liu Haichan is said to be one of the Eight Taoist Immortals, and the Quan Zhen School of Taoism worships him as one of the Five Northern Originators. He really enjoys great fame indeed.

It was said that his original name was Liu Cao and that he served as the King of Yan's prime minister during the Five Dynasties Period. One day, a Taoist visited his home and asked for ten eggs and ten gold coins. He piled up the eggs with the coins in between on the table like a Buddhist pagoda. On seeing that, Liu Haichan exclaimed in astonishment: “How precarious!”

The Taoist replied: “It is even more precarious for people to be wealthy and who are in high position.” With that, the Taoist broke all the coins in two and threw them away before he left. Liu Haichan was enlightened. He resigned from his position and visited all the famous mountains to learn about Taoism. Later, he met Lü Dongbin who taught him Taoism and the secret of alchemy, and he in time, became a Taoist immortal through cultivation.

During the reign of Emperor Kang Xi of the Qing Dynasty, a man who called himself A'bao came to the home of a merchant, Bei Hongwen, in the city of Suzhou, requesting to be a hired hand. The Bei family hired him for some manual work and A'bao proved to be very hardworking. He would not accept any pay and often would not eat or drink for days on end. So the people were quite puzzled. One day, the master told him to wash a chamber pot, and he was even able to turn the copper pot inside out as if washing the stomach of a pig. After washing up the pot, he restored it to its original shape. The people were amazed.

On the evening of the Lantern Festival, he and the master's child were found missing from the street. The master and his whole family were very worried, only to find him back at home with the child at midnight. He told the master: “This year, the lanterns here are not attractive, so I brought him to Fuzhou, where the lanterns are really grand.” People looked at each other in amazement and could hardly believe him. A'bao then took out a dozen lichee from the child's pocket and said to the master: “Please have a taste of the lichee we have brought back from Fuzhou.” Only then did people realise that A'bao was an immortal, since it was only produced in places much further south such as Fuzhou.

A few months later, A'bao caught a three-legged toad from the well and tied it with a colourful string. When the news spread, people all over the place heard that Liu Haichan was in Bei's home and were all eager to go there to see him. As a result, Bei's place was crowded like a market place. Riding on the toad, A'bao waved to his master and slowly rose to the sky.
Liu Haichan
Baogu

On the southwestern side of the Yuexiu Hill, Guangzhou City, is a Sanyuan Palace which is well-known far and wide. And in the western part of the palace is the Baogu Temple where a goddess, Bagu, sits on the altar. The daughter of Bao Jing, she is widely worshipped.

Bao Jing was the Nanhai Magistrate of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. A believer of Taoism, he ordered the construction of a Taoist temple, Yuegangyuan, on the Yuexiu Hill. Besides inviting Taoist priests to the temple, he himself also went there to preach the Taoist doctrine and to lecture on alchemy. He also carried out research on medicine and acupuncture together with other Taoist priests. His daughter, Baogu, insisted on accompanying him whenever he went to Yuegangyuan or on a tour. Hence, since young, Baogu had already learned a lot from the Taoist doctrine, as well as medicine and acupuncture.

Around AD 317, a marquis Ge Hong went to Guangzhou to take up an official post. Also a believer of Taoism, he was on very good terms with Bao Jing, whom he regarded as his teacher. He would come to Yuegangyuan to discuss Taoism with him. Bao Jing was very pleased with Ge Hong and decided to give his daughter’s hand in marriage to him. Ge Hong was good at acupuncture and was said to have drawn a diagram of the human body known as jingliao and had it carved on a stone tablet. (Till today, Sanyuan Palace still has a stone tablet of the jingliao.)

In AD 327, Ge Hong together with his wife, Baogu and disciple, Huang Chuping, went to the Lion Peak of Luofu Mountain to practise Taoism and study alchemy. Besides taking care of the daily needs of her husband, Baogu also helped him in his work on alchemy and treating the patients.

In AD 364, Ge Hong passed away at Zhaoziduan in Luofu Mountain. Baogu then went back to Yuegangyuan of Guangzhou, bringing Huang Chuping and others with her. She practised medicine among the people while continuing her cultivation of Taoism. She had inherited the medical skills from her father and acupuncture from her husband. Coupled with her own research and experience, she was able to have a mastery of medicine. She was often able to cure patients with just one treatment. She used the water from a well (now no longer in existence) in Yuegangyuan to prepare medicine. The well became known as Baogu Well and the miracle-working woman physician, the Immortal Baogu.

After her death, people built a Baogu Temple in her honour to worship her. During the reign of Emperor Wanli and Emperor Chongzhen of the Ming Dynasty, Yuegangyuan became known as Sanyuan Palace with the rebuilding of Sanyuan Hall and the Baogu Temple. When General Shang Kexi rebuilt the Sanyuan Palace at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, Baogu Temple had already collapsed. Not until recent years was the temple rebuilt in memory of this miracle-working lady physician who lived 1,600 years ago.

1. Jingliao: the main and collateral channels, is regarded as the network of passages, through which vital energy circulates and along which the acupuncture points are distributed.
Baogu
The White Snake Immortal

The Legend of the White Snake has been very popular in the history of Chinese operas, and the devoted love between Bai Suzhen (the White Snake Immortal) and Xu Xian as described in the opera is so touching that it often moves the audience to tears.

The legend was recorded in the famous short story collection, Jingshi Tongyan, compiled by Feng Menglong of the Ming Dynasty.

During the Shaoxing years of the Southern Song Dynasty, there was a young man, Xu Xian (also called Xu Xuan), in charge of a medicinal shop in the city of Hangzhou. He was once caught in the rain on a boat in West Lake, where he met a beautiful lady named Bai (White) and her maid Qingqing. Xu and Bai fell in love and got married. Later on, a series of strange things happened which shocked Xu Xian.

He met a monk, Fahai, from the Jinshan Temple of Zhenjiang, who gave him an alms bowl, and told him to capture his wife and her maid with it. Once captured, Madam White and her maid revealed their true selves – a white snake and a green snake, both of whom had practised for a thousand years to attain immortality. Fahai took the alms bowl with the two snakes in it to the Leifeng Temple and had a seven-storey pagoda built with bricks and stones to imprison the snakes. The pagoda was named Leifeng Pagoda on which he left the following words:

“The White Snake is not to be freed until the West Lake becomes dry,
The rivers stop flowing,
and the Leifeng Pagoda collapses.”

The legend of the White Snake, though first recorded in Jingshi Tongyan, had been spreading among the people for generations. Later, people included such plots as the White Snake stealing the magic herbs, flooding the Jinshan Temple, Monk Fahai hiding himself in a crab and so on. The Leifeng Pagoda was actually built by King Qianchu for his concubine Madam Huang during the Five Dynasties Period. It was built on Xizhao Hill to the South of the West Lake in Hangzhou. In his book, Miscellaneous About the Lake, Lu Giyun of the Qing Dynasty wrote: “The Leifeng Pagoda was built in the Five Dynasties Period. There used to be a Leifeng Temple below the pagoda, which had long become ruins. Legend has it that the pagoda was built to suppress the demonic White Snake and Green Fish in the lake.” In 1924, the Leifeng Pagoda collapsed.
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100 CHINESE EMPERORS

Illustrated by
LU YANGUANG

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About the Illustrator

Lu Yanguang was born in Kaiping, Guandong province in 1948. He is presently director of Guangzhou Art Gallery, vice-chairman of Guangzhou Artists’ Association and chief editor of Guangzhou Art Studies.

His published works since 1985 include Lu Yanguang's Album of Illustrations, Selected New Works of Lu Yanguang's Illustrations, Album of Lingnan Scenery and Legends, 100 Chinese Women, 100 Chinese Emperors, 100 Chinese Gods, 100 Chinese Scholars and 100 Chinese Monks.

A renowned artist, Lu Yanguang started his career by drawing illustrations and cartoons. Instead of the traditional Chinese style of brush painting, each character in this collection is a combination of the old – the dynastic eras of ancient China, and the new – Lu Yanguang’s refreshingly artistic technique of xiaoxiang hua (portraits in decorative style). His illustrations are characterised by a strong sense of speed and rhythm.

About the Writer

Born in 1944 in Guangzhou, Wu Luxing works as an editor for the Yang Cheng Wan Bao in Guangzhou. He is also the writer for the Chinese edition of 100 Chinese Emperors.

About the Translators

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Also an author, he has written several textbooks such as Business Oral Translation, Practical Written Communication, and International Trade English.

An experienced tutor, he has been a mentor to many MA postgraduates majoring in translation theory and practice.

Wang Yanxi was born in Hubei Province, China, in 1964. She earned her BA in Hubei University and her MA in the University of International Business & Economics, majoring in translation theory and practice. Her thesis On Poem Translation won favourable comments from experts. She has translated several short stories and articles.
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100 Chinese Gods

The 100 Series art album by Lu Yanguang is the first successful full-scale attempt to depict historical and legendary Chinese characters in drawings.

In this volume, Lu Yanguang exercises ingenuity in his approach to the difficult subject on deities. With much reverence, he has interpreted Chinese gods, goddesses and immortals with imagination and intelligence in the lines of his portraits.

The intention of his coverage is broad. So a comprehensive range of deities is represented here: from the superior Heavenly Primogenitor and Jade Emperor to the fearsome King Yama of Hell; from the compassionate Midwife Goddess to the ordinary men who through practising Taoism attained immortality and joined the ranks of Heaven.

Knowing these deities whom the Chinese pay obeisance to will help the reader to understand Chinese civilisation. Though spread all over the world, traditional ethnic Chinese maintain common belief in these deities, and their beliefs have also shaped their daily conduct and activities, consciously and unconsciously. This album serves as a useful quick reference book to a traditional Chinese culture that is rich in history and highly esteemed by worshippers in Chinese-based religions. It is also valuable because Lu Yanguang has employed a unique style of portrait-drawing which is seldom seen today.