THE POPULAR RELIGION GODS
OF
THE HAINANESE

KEITH STEVENS

Introduction

This article is a study of the popular religion gods¹ to be found on the altars of Chinese folk religion temples on the island of Hainan as well as in ‘Hainanese temples’ within the confines of former colonial territories in south-east Asia. I will be endeavouring to isolate the purely Han Chinese Hainanese deities from those of their surrounding neighbours, the non-Han minority peoples on Hainan itself as well as from emigrant Han Chinese communities in south-east Asia. The latter includes emigrants who speak the Han linguistic groups of Hakka, Hokkien [and its sub-groups including Minnan and Hengwa [Xinghua²], Cantonese [and two of its sub-groups] and Guangxi, as well as the smaller groups such as Chaozhou [Swatowese].

The tropical island of Hainan, literally “South of the Ocean,” lies off the south coast of China and was formerly part of Guangdong province. In 1988 it became a province in its own right. 150 miles in length and 100 in breadth it is one sixth the size of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, half the size of Ceylon and four times the size of Cyprus, with its main port of Haikou and the provincial capital, Qiongzhou, both on its the northern coast.

Separating the island of Hainan from the mainland is the Qiongzhou Straits with the 170 mile long Leizhou peninsula in Guangdong province leading into the mainland proper. The proximity of the Leizhou peninsula has led to a small number of the deities with a Guangxi base being incorporated into Hainanese legend and carried by emigrants to all parts of south-east Asia, often without the connection being realised. Devotees in distant parts have assumed that these deities were unique to Hainan even to accepting place names within the legends as Hainanese when they were quite clearly from the Leizhou - Guangxi border region.

Historically, Hainan island was one of the later regions to be
colonised by ethnic Han Chinese. It was occupied during the reign of Han Wu Di, a century or more before the Christian era, albeit for centuries merely in pockets around the seaboard with the non-Han ethnic groups, mostly Li and Miao, having been pushed back into the hinterland, the central mountainous area.

Being the southern limit of China the island of Hainan is semi-tropical with early settlers from the Chinese mainland tending to be involuntary settlers, not necessarily outlaws or banished political exiles but colonists despatched by the government who intermarried with the aboriginal Li. Ethnically the Han Chinese stock, referred to as Hainanese [or Hoilam in Hainanese], came largely from the province of Fujian, speaking Qiongwen [commonly called Hainanese] a sub-group of Minnan, though there are also many Cantonese and Hakka Han Chinese within the population and even pockets of pure Cantonese or Hakka Chinese. The result of the hotchpotch of immigration over the centuries is referred to as a whole as Hainanese, and their culture and social mores reflect elements from all of their original ethnic groups. Hainanese people, as would be expected, cannot be differentiated by foreigners from other Han Chinese. However, the Cantonese, the Chaozhou and Fujian Han Chinese are never slow to point a finger at the Hainanese who they claim to be clannish, insular and very suspicious people. Many go as far as to claim that they are slow, dim-witted and gullible. Certainly, they are different though to a non-Chinese the difference is not immediately apparent. My experience is that they are not only friendly but extremely welcoming to foreigners, and especially diligent as house-servants.

Hot and remote, it was pioneer frontier territory - far from the capital and major cities, used during dynastic times as a penal colony or at least a refuge for political exile for Chinese officials, a backward area with agriculture and fisheries as the only form of subsistence. The first official was exiled there during the Han, about the time of Christ, though the peak periods of such exiles were during the Song and Ming dynasties, with some like Hai Rui, Su Dongbo and Cao Yu, being renowned throughout China. Fortuitously their presence on the island accelerated the development of cultural life, and when joined by their families and entourages, they left their mark on the culture of Hainan.

Although there are guide and travel books about most areas of
China. Hainan would appear to have been neglected. Before 1949
Hainan was an area which few foreigners appear to have visited, though
for much of the latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th foreign
consuls, customs officers and traders endured their existence, parti-
cularly in the northern port of Haihou [Hoihou], the American
Presbyterian Mission, the first body of missionaries, only began its
work 'saving' Hainan in 1881. Despite the latter, there would seem to
be no missionary writings describing the temples and "idols" as did
Father Doré in Zhejiang and Jiangsu, Shryock in Anjing and others
across northern and central China. The old church in Qingzhou Fu,
some three miles inland and to the west of Haikou, by 1890 had been
converted in a Temple of Longevity, and another church elsewhere in
Hainan, had also become a Chinese temple known as the Temple of the
Cross.

In 1882 Mr Jeremiasen, an independent Danish missionary, made
an unmolested circuit of Hainan on foot 'proving the friendliness of
the people.' He then crossed the island north to south and east to west.
Westerners who travel through "darkest" China today and write or talk
about being the first foreigners within some remote spot, forget or
overlook such Christian missionaries who roamed across all areas of
China more than a century and a half ago. Even today there are foreign
tourists who regard themselves as among the first to set foot in the
more remote areas of Hainan. However, what Jeremiasen and others
have overlooked are the individual Portuguese and German missionaries
whose graves, dated in the 1680s, have been identified on Hainan. Most
foreign visitors today also forget or, more likely, have probably never
even heard of the eminent Chinese banished to the island during the
ey days of the periods of forced settlement of the 13th and 14th
centuries.

An aspect of journeys to Hainan a century or so ago, now also
long forgotten, was the basic problem of getting ashore from the steamer
from Hong Kong. This was often the worst part of the journey. The
steamer from Hong Kong touched bottom some three miles or so out to
sea leaving the trip ashore to the main port of Haikou by shallow draft
sampan across mud flats under less than a foot of water. This required
bargaining with the laoda [captain] of one of the many sampans which
offered their services to transship passengers ashore. The native boatmen
in a very round-about trip through the intricate channels, sliding over
muddy plats, eventually reached the first “gun-house,” as the crumbling fort was known to the Chinese. Finally, the passengers reached the Custom House and on to whatever accommodation they had reserved or could find in this very primitive European backwater.

Chinese immigrants from Hainan, along with those from Fujian, Guangxi and Guangdong, flocked down to the foreign colonies of south-east Asia. Though integrated into the greater Han Chinese population of Singapore and Penang, as well within towns and cities in North Borneo, Java and Sumatra, even today Hainanese have remained in one or two linguistic pockets such as is to be found in the area of Rengam and Kluang in southern Malaysia,

Only a few of all the Chinese temples visited in South-east Asia have been categorically identified as exclusively founded by Hainanese immigrants. Others, predominantly Hokkien, have a Hainanese altar stuck away in one corner, erected by the few local Hainanese, though two temples stood out, both in southern Malaysia, in which the images of the deities were predominantly uniquely Hainanese though the temple custodians, the devotees and the other images were all Hokkien. The picture gained from Hainanese staff and devotees in temples containing uniquely Hainanese images, revealed the following minimum of temples being predominantly, if not entirely, Hainanese - six in Singapore, two in Penang, one in Kuala Lumpur, one in Seremban, and two in or near Kluang in southern Malaysia; on Sumatra, one in Medan and two in Palembang; on Java, one in Jakarta, one in Ciribon and one in Semarang. There are several in Ha Tien in southern Cambodia and others scattered across southern Thailand. The strangest of all was the lone, small Hainanese temple on Bali.

Hainanese temple altars bear the usual accoutrements and have the same layout as altars in other Chinese communities though, to generalise, with less clutter, particularly on altars in Hainanese Huiguan [community club houses]. Major China-wide deities, such as Guan Yin, Guan Gong, Hua Guang, City Gods, Earth Gods and the Wealth Gods, are the same as in every Chinese community. There are also a number of predominantly Cantonese, Chaozhou and even Minnan deities in many of the Hainanese temples both in Hainan and in South-east Asia, adopted from other immigrant ethnic groups, including Jinhua Niangniang, Caibo Xingjun, Fazhu Gong, Qi Tian Da Sheng, Longwei
Shenggong and Li Shan Shengmu. Also noted in Hainanese temples in the vicinity of Kluang are Under Altars, usually connected with Cantonese temples, though again presumably “borrowed” by Hainanese. Only two such Under Altars have been noted - both are typically at floor level and contain spirits of tamed demons unfit to be honoured with places upon the main or side altars. Finally, not too uncommon in Malaysia and Singapore where ethnic communities live cheek by jowl, a dark-skinned deity in the Hainanese temple in Jalan Pindu in Singapore was identified as General Supramaniam, placed there by a local Tamil and with the usual tolerance of Chinese devotees, though not revered by them, he has incense placed before him by passing Chinese devotees who realise and accept that he is a foreign deity and not of the Chinese pantheon.

From 1949 until the late 1980s folk religion images were banned and removed from altars within China and therefore Hainanese deities have had to be researched mainly within overseas Chinese communities. To carry out the necessary research on Hainanese temples and gods it has been necessary to visit as many of the temples run by and in Hainanese communities outside China, mainly concentrated in Singapore, southern Malaysia and Cambodia. The regular visits to temples in Singapore over a period of years revealed changes within the temple community which would not have been apparent under normal circumstances. Accepting that the circumstances were unique in that the Singaporean authorities forced the resettlement of old and especially ‘temporary matshed or corrugated iron’ temples to the suburbs in the targeted population relocation of the sixties and seventies, a good example of the change was the resiting in 1984 of an atap hut temple, the oldest Hainanese community temple, in Lorong Ah Soo to a custom-built complex in Hougang Avenue 5. The layout of the altar images in the new Hainanese temple was unchanged as reflected in black and white photographs taken in Lorong Ah Soo in the late fifties and colour photographs taken in Hougang in 1985. The four custom-built temples, one of which is the Hainanese re-located temple, consist of a terraced row of four brick buildings, similar to two-car garages but with high ceilings and much wider than a standard garage.

In the years up to the 1950s not only did the diversity of language amongst the overseas Chinese in south-east Asia [Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien and Chaozhou, as well as Hainanese] impose a real barrier
between Han ethnic groups but also both inter-ethnic fratricide and distrust, prevented legends of one ethnic group about their deities being passed to another. The stories of the minority Hainanese are therefore known to few non-Hainanese Chinese.

**Folk Religion Deities on Altars in Hainanese Community Temples**

Deities worshipped by Hainanese, both in their temples and on their household altars, can be categorised into eight groups:

The first are the deities revered China-wide such as Guan Yin, Guan Gong, the City God, the Earth God, the Gods and Goddesses of Climate and Time and the patrons of trades and professions. As these are not uniquely Hainanese deities I will not refer to them again.

There are two exceptions: the first is a deity identified as either the popular and frequently noted deity, the Thunder God, Lei Gong, or Lei Zu, the President of the Ministry of Thunder. He has been noted on two Singaporean Hainanese temple altars where he was only known as the Chief Leader of All the Heavens, Wantian Zhushi 萬天主師, His title was displayed on the temple list in two other Hainanese temples, one in Pontian in southern Malaysia, and the other near Kranji in northern Singapore. His image depicted him with his usual attributes a bird’s beak, an axe or hammer held aloft and a chisel in his left hand. In one of the two temples, in Paya Lebar Crescent, he was riding either a tiger or a Qilin 麒麟 a mythical beast, and according to the temple custodian he is the only deity permitted to do so. He was identified by temple keepers as Lei Gong and his image co-located with that of Doutian Fushuai 杜天副帥, said to be Lei Zu. However, in the other temple, at Rumba Bomba Circus, he was also portrayed astride what looks like an unusual tiger and here he was identified as Lei Zu.

The second is Ma Zu Qiong 媽祖瓊, the Respected Mother of the Hainanese. Although Tian Hou, the patron goddess of seafarers along the entire coast of China, is revered throughout Hainanese communities, she is also known in a number of Hainanese temples by this unique title. The usual title by which Tian Hou is known in most Hainanese temples is Nantian Shengniang Tian Hou, The Saintly Lady of the Southern Heavens, 南天聖娘天后.
Second: deities only to be seen on Hainan island and not carried abroad by emigrants

Third: major deities uniquely Hainanese

Fourth: secondary deities uniquely Hainanese

Fifth: deities shared with other ethnic Han Chinese groups

Sixth: Images on altars of aides to Hainanese deities

Seventh: deified Hainanese locals in both Hainan and South-east Asia

Eighth: unidentified images in Hainanese temples believed by the temple custodian to be uniquely Hainanese.

2: Uniquely Hainanese gods

Deities not noted beyond the shores of Hainan island

These are the deities to be seen only on Hainan island and have not been carried abroad by Hainanese emigrants:

a] The Five Marquises, Wu Gong 五公, were all exiled to Hainan, four by Qin Gui [1090-1155], the Prime Minister of the Southern Song who is best known as the Minister who ordered the execution of Yue Fei, the hero who became the patron of soldiers. All five are revered in a shrine in the southern suburbs of Haikou where Hainanese honour the memory of the ‘five patriotic officials of the Tang and Song sent into exile’ on their island. It was first built in 1617 and is dedicated to the Five: Li Deyu, Li Gang, Li Guang, Hu Chuan and Zhao Ding. Four of these officials, that is apart from Li Deyu, were exiled for their opposition to the traitor Qin Gui. Their images portray them today, reconstructed following their destruction during the Cultural Revolution, as almost identical standing officials, dressed in red robes and all with black beards.
Li Deyu 李德裕 died in exile in 849, in Hainan some 57 years before the end of the Tang dynasty. He was born in AD 787, the son of a minister of state, and rose to become a great minister. In his heyday he was pre-eminent in China serving six emperors faithfully, including being chief minister to Tang emperor Wu Cong. Impeached as the President of the Board of War he was banished to Hainan where his spirit withered. He was not only a fine scholar but also favoured Daoism in the rivalry with Buddhism to influence the Court. He would appear to have had a comparatively close friendship with the Mao Shan sect of Daoists and is even thought to have encouraged the persecution of Buddhism and the imperial eunuchs. He was also an untiring opponent of eunuch influence. His achievements as a poet were recognised as was his contribution to horticulture.

Li Guang 李纲 was born in Fujian province in 1085 and died in a monastery in Hangzhou in 1140, having been an Imperial Censor and Minister of State. He is renowned for his opposition to the encroachment of the Jin Tatars and in particular the peace proposals by which Qin Gui earned his unenviable notoriety. In 1126 he commanded troops defending the capital and succeeded in defeating the Jin Tatars with great slaughter. He was impeached in 1127 after only a matter of months as Minister of State for irregularities in connection with the purchase of horses and levies of troops, and was exiled for a while before moving to a monastery where he lived out the rest of his life.

Li Guang 李光 [1077-1159] was born in Yuezhou in Zhejiang. He was also a scholar-official, but of the earlier Northern Song. He also appears to be feted in Hainan for sharing Hu Quan’s rigorous opposition to any kind of accommodation with the Jin invaders and his dislike of Qin Gui. The latter earned him demotion to Jianning military district, and later still another demotion. He was, however, rehabilitated to his original position in 1158 but died the following year while travelling to Jiangzhou.

Hu Quan 胡铨 [1102-1180] was a scholar-official of the Southern Song, from Luling in Jizhou, Jiangxi province, who received his appointment in the second year of Jianyan emperor. Before taking up his duties, the Jin armies crossed the River and Hu raised his own army to defend the area. He too is famous for is a stubborn opposition to any kind of peace dealings with the Jin invaders. He petitioned for the
execution of Qin Gui, the famous “traitor,” as well as Wang Lun and Sun Jin, and the hanging of their heads in the streets to show to the public. For this, he was demoted to a post in Fuzhou (in 1138), from where he was transferred to Xinzhou in Guangdong province in 1142. Six years later, he was falsely accused by a man called Zhang [a member of Qin Gui’s ‘Death clique’], because of a couplet he wrote called Haoshijin, and was moved to the Jiyang military district. He retired to the Pearl Cliff to write a manual for officials, and set up a school. After the accession of the new emperor, he returned to the fray, holding a number of important posts before retiring in 1171. He died in 1180 at the age of 78.

**Zhao Ding** 趙鼎 was a Minister of State and a steadfast opponent of Qin Gui and his policy of making peace with the Tatars, for which he was banished to various places. He was born in Shanxi and died in a distant post at Jiyang, on the south-west tip of Hainan, in 1147.

b] The Three Marquises, San Gong, is a separate group of deities, scholar-officials of the 9th and 10th centuries AD whose images or tablets have only been seen on altars in Hainanese temples on Hainan Island. The three are Li Deyu [one of the Five Marquises: q.v.], Lu Duoxun 魯多遜 and Ding Wei 丁謂.

The second of the Three, Lu Duoxun, also a senior official exiled to Hainan, died some 136 years after Li Deyu. He was born in Henan province and he too became President of the Board of War in 979. Lu served a later dynasty, the Northern Song, and was also banished to Hainan following court intrigue. His poetry achieved the distinction of being remembered and quoted.

The third, Ding Wei, was also a high official of the Song and the only one of the three to survive his banishment. He returned home from Hainan to die in 1040. Ding was born in Jiangsu province and rose to become a Minister of State. He was degraded and banished following accusations of witchcraft and of oppressive rule. He also wrote a large collection of poems whilst in Hainan.

c] Su Shi 蘇軾 is probably better known as Su Dongpo 蘇東坡, and is referred to in Hainan as Su Gong. He is one of the eight famous men of letters of the Tang and Song eras and lived from AD 1036-
1101. Though well known for his poetry he was a celebrated scholar statesman who has been deified by popular acclaim. However, though not recorded as such, it would be unlikely for him not to have been deified by posthumous imperial decree, an honour coming into vogue at that time.

He was born in Meixian in Sichuan province and died in Changzhou in Fujian shortly after being permitted to leave exile on Hainan island. His father was a distinguishd scholar and owing to his father’s long absences from home Su received most of his education from his mother. At the age of 21 he entered the state examinations and headed the list of competitors. He rose in public office and was prominent among the strenuous opponents of the political economist, Wang Anshi. His first fall from grace in 1079 was from ministerial office when he was downgraded to be Governor of Hangzhou Fu. In 1086 at the start of a new reign he was restored to favour but again incurred imperial displeasure, this time being exiled, first to Huizhou in Guangdong and finally to the semi-barbarous island of Hainan in 1079 where he was appointed to the petty office of sub-prefect of Yaizhou. During his exile having complained that Hainan was wild and its “frontier” people, settlers from the mainland, without culture he took a genuine interest in their welfare as well as the welfare of the original non-Chinese inhabitants. He was permitted to return from banishment in ca. 1100 and died shortly after. He spent the four years of his exile in Hainan in Wenchang, in the north-east of the island, and was the first great name in Chinese history connected intimately with Hainan. His memorial temple in Haikou in Hainan island is now a museum. Within the grounds of the temple is the spring which he is said to have had dug during a severe drought.

d) **Zhu Chuping** 朱初平 was a magistrate in Hainan who had preceded Su Shi in the post as magistrate by some twenty years.

3: **Major Hainanese Deities noted in all Hainanese communities**

*These are uniquely Hainanese Gods*

a] Images of the Marquis of Wenzhou, **Wenzhou Houwang** 溫州侯王 have been seen only on altars in temples founded and run by ethnic Hainanese. According to devotees he is uniquely worshipped...
by the Hainanese and especially those from the Hainanese county of Wanning where he is primarily prayed to by the sick. He is claimed to be extremely efficacious and able to cure or heal any sickness or injury. He usually sends his Black or White Horse Generals to help devotees and only leaves the Heavens himself for very important cases. His image has only been seen in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Borneo, Bangkok and Phnom Penh where his festival is generally celebrated on the 15th of the fifth lunar month. However, he must never be prayed to for prosperity.

Two entirely different legends describe the origins of this deity, one more popular in Singapore and southern Malaysia, and the other in Thailand and Cambodia. In neither is the Marquis identified by name and he therefore remains unidentified.

He is also referred to as:

the Lord of the Seas, Wenzhou Haizhu Houwang 温洲海主候王

Tongzhu Houwang 崤主候王 The Marquis Lord of the Aboriginal People

Shanqin Houwang 山欽候王 The Imperial Marquis of the Mountains

The first legend claims that a petty king in China was waved by an individual who, in the city of Wenzhou on the coast of Zhejiang province, north of and nearly opposite the island of Taiwan, was awarded the title of Marquis. This happened a long, long time ago. The ruler of Hainan, as a separate state, so the legend continued, had an image of the Marquis brought to the island of Hainan and placed in a specially built temple where he has been worshipped ever since.

The second story relates that the Marquis was, variously, a Ming governor of Hainan island or a minister of an ancient dynasty against whom, through jealousy, evil ministers plotted. They killed him and threw his body into the sea where it turned into a log and floated away. A fisherman found it, realised that it had spiritual properties and so carved it into a statue which he revered and quickly became wealthy.
The Marquis is usually represented on altars by tablets though where there is an image it conventionally portrays him as a scholar-official, sitting wearing a scholar’s winged cap. He has a pink face, a black beard, a rolled scroll in his left hand and a plaque bearing the characters ‘May the State Prosper and the People Enjoy Peace’. He is usually accompanied by two aides, generals on horseback:

Yinma Jiangjun 銀馬將軍 The Silver Horse General [mounted on a white horse]

Jinma Jiangjun 金馬將軍 The Gold Horse General [mounted on a black horse]

In the temple in Hougang Avenue 5 in Singapore where the main deity is Shuiwei Shengniang, the side altar stage left is dedicated to Wenzhou Houwang whose image stands on the left hand of and paired with a deity simply known as Da Laoye whose image is remarkably similar to that of Wenzhou Houwang. Da Laoye has two guardians mounted on horses and armed with long handled swords. They are Generals Gan and Meng [see below 4e - list of deities in temple loose-leaf records]

b) ‘The Holy Mother of Shuiwei,’ Shuiwei Shengmu 水尾聖母, is primarily a Hainanese local deity who, in Hainan, was a protective deity prayed to mainly by fishermen. In South-east Asia where her cult has been established within Hainanese communities, she has also been adopted by devotees of other Chinese ethnic groups. In Singapore she is worshipped as a goddess who heals the sick by both Fukienese and Chaozhou devotees, the two ethnic groups which dominate the Chinese community in the island state. Her shrines have been seen in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia [even in a Chinese temple on the island of Bali], in Vietnam and Cambodia but not in either Hong Kong or Taiwan. It is claimed that the oldest Chinese temple in Thailand is dedicated to Shuiwei Shengmu, at Paknam Pho. Other old temples dedicated to her have been noted in Korat and the surrounding area. Her images have no unique identifying characteristics. She is a motherly matron, sitting on a throne, attended by several assistants, and in several places she is portrayed wearing a cap bearing one to five birds with open wings. In
most places she holds a sceptre in the palm of her right hand resting against her shoulder.

She is said in some places to be particularly efficacious in helping children do well at school, and also for adults to pass tests, examinations and interviews. She is also prayed to separately by ladies, young and old, with the request that they may never lose their good looks and is offered perfume, talcum powder and handkerchiefs on her birthday, all taken home again by the devotees once the Holy Mother has blessed them. Her festival is celebrated on her birthday though this date varies from area to area, the most popular dates being the 4th or 25th of the second lunar month, the 4th of the fifth lunar month and any two days between the 10th and 16th of the tenth lunar month.

Her full title is Nantian Shuiwei Shengmu 南天水尾聖母, The Holy Mother of Shuiwei of the Southern Heaven. She has also been referred to as Nantian Shantian Shuiwei Shengniang 南天閃電水尾聖娘, Shuiwei Niangniang 水尾娘娘 and Shuiwei Shengniang 水尾聖娘. Colloquially however, she is simply known as Shengmu, the Holy Mother.

The legend describing the Holy Mother’s origins has been related with little variation in all the areas where her shrines have been noted. A fisherman named Pan 潘 who lived many, many years ago in Wenchang county in eastern Hainan island kept hauling in a piece of wood whilst fishing and never mind how many times he cast the net he pulled in the same piece of wood. It finally dawned on him that there was more to it than caught the eye and he called out in a loud voice that he would take the wood home with him and have it carved into a holy statue if the next two casts of his net brought him large hauls of fish. Despite landing exceptionally large hauls he forgot his promise and even used the wood to make a door for his pigsty. His son remarked that every time he passed the pigsty he thought he saw a remarkably beautiful woman combing her hair sitting on the bough of a tree. This reminded the fisherman of his promise but being poor he was unable to build a shrine for the deity and, wondering what to do he consulted a spirit medium who revealed where the shrine should be built. The goddess, in the guise of a village woman, appeared before a local builder and ordered bricks and timber to be delivered to the site but after delivery he was unable to find anyone to whom he could present
he heard that it was the goddess herself he forwent his bill and donated the materials. The temple was built on the side of the hill above Wenchang town, called Shuiwei Po, which became the cult centre.

Marginal variations of the story heard in Penang and Cambodia include the following: a number of fishermen aboard a junk threw out their net and drew in an enormously heavy but small log, requiring the joint effort of the whole crew. After their communal vow to have the log carved and having hauled in two large catches, they were so embarrassed at not being able to afford to have the log carved and to raise a shrine to house it they left it on the edge of the village where it was incorporated into the walls of a pigsty. Pigs however began sickening and dying, and only when Pan saw a glowing light over the pigsty did he recall the log and their promise. He burnt incense, asked forgiveness and all became tranquil and normal. People claimed to have seen an exquisitely beautiful young woman on the branch overhanging the pigsty and came to realize that it was the spirit of the log. They collected funds, had a temple built and the log carved into the shape of the woman they had seen on the branch. The temple became the cult centre for the Holy Mother who is also known as:

Paihai Shen 排海神 The Spirit who Controls the Seas.

According to Wilmott Shuiwei Shengmu, the main deity in the Hainanese temple in Phnom-penh, changed her name to being simply Shengmu because the Cantonese connotation of the term ‘Shuiwei’ was associated with bad fortune in business and kept many people from frequenting the temple.

4: Uniquely Hainanese Secondary Deities

[though a few are also revered China-wide by Han Chinese]

a] The One Hundred and Eight Brothers -

Yibai lingba Xiongde 一百零八兄弟

The tablet to the 108 Brothers is exclusively revered on secondary altars in Hainanese temples in South-east Asia only. The Brothers are
not orthodox spirits shen 神 but dark spirits. Yinshen, the ghosts of those who have died a violent death before their due date.

Chinese usually describe this group, in English, as the 108 Martyrs. They are never portrayed as images and tend to be regarded more as public worthies, folk hero “ethnic group” ancestors rather than deities. The tablet is very similar to the ancestral tablet and simply states that it is the ‘Tablet to the One Hundred and Eight Brothers’. It is venerated and although the spirits of the brothers are occasionally asked for advice by devotees they are not usually prayed to for major requests or protection, although in Java in one temple the tablet was prayed to by seafarers before they set out on a long journey. Their festival, simple and not in any way lavish, is generally celebrated on the 15th day of the tenth lunar month, though in Singapore it is held on the 3rd of the eighth lunar month.

The question is, who were the One Hundred and Eight Brothers? Three separate versions of the story of their demise have each been recounted with great solemnity, conviction and confidence by temple keepers in Java, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, and even in a Chinese temple in Bali. In Penang the story centres on a junk-load of Hainanese immigrants heading for South-east Asia which never arrived. One version claims that they were mistaken for pirates and wiped out by the ‘French’ [sic] navy off Annam or the ‘British’ off Malaya again having been mistaken for pirates. Another version suggests that they were all drowned during a typhoon off the southern tip of what is now Vietnam, and yet another that they were annihilated by Chinese government forces off the Leizhou peninsular immediately north of Hainan when, again, they were mistaken for pirates. The third story is that they were the original immigrants from Fujian province who arrived in Hainan to settle but all died in Hainan from disease or at the hands of the aborigines. A twist to the version heard in Penang claimed that the typhoon which sank the junk in the South China Seas drowned all but one of the one hundred and nine aboard, one small boy being saved after days of drifting on wreckage. He then died in Malaya at a ripe old age.

One hundred and eight is a secret symbolic number used by secret societies, and one of the Triad gangs in British Malaya was known as the ‘One Hundred and Eight Society.’ with a devotee in Seremban
claiming that the Society used to worship ‘openly’ in Hainanese temples before convening a meeting. One hundred and eight is also a Buddhist number, the number of the beads in a rosary, the number of passions and delusions, and the number of tolls of the monastery bell at dawn and dusk. A further connotation of the number 108 is reflected in the number of times temple keepers claimed that the Brothers were the 108 heroes at Liang Shan Po in the classic novel, Shuihu Chuan, ‘The Water Margin,’ but when pressed, in every case they admitted that this had been no more than a guess.

The Brothers are also known as:

Yibai You Ba Gong 一百有八公

Yibai You Xiongdi 一百有八兄弟 and

Yibai Lingba Xiongdi Zhonghun 一百零八兄弟忠魂

b) Lu Bode 路摯德 and Ma Yuan 马援 are two generals revered in Hainanese temples, often on the same altar, with both bearing the same honorific, the Wave Conquering General, [Fupo Jiangjun]13.

The first general, Lu Bode, subjugated large areas of what today is Guangdong province during the Earlier Han [ca. 120 BC]. A native of Pingzhou, he served with distinction under He Chubing who became the president of the Board of War. In BC 120 he subjugated large portions of what is today Guangdong and Guangxi, and received further honours.

The second general, Ma Yuan [14BC - AD 49], was also awarded the title of the Wave Conqueror for the pacification of the southern region some hundred years later. Popular in Guangdong province he used also to be particularly honoured in Guangxi where he was revered as a river god, ‘The Wave Conquering General - Fupo Jiangjun’ and in Hengzhou in Hunan he used to be the main deity in a small temple where he was worshipped as the protective deity at the local river rapids.

Ma Yuan, also known as the Vanguard General, Xianfeng 先锋,14 led a further southern expansion of the Han empire and has been popularly worshipped from about the fifth century AD by Han settlers
in southern China. Although he is particularly remembered in the south of China as the General who conquered the Yue people [Tonkinene] in about AD 39, the Hainanese in South-east Asia regard him as one of their special heroes with his image on side altars in several Hainanese community temples in Malaysia and Sumatra. Support of such a powerful spirit of a general who symbolised courage and confidence in the comparatively newly conquered south was vital to bolster the spirits of the Chinese settlers and to counter threats from aborigines, the climate and the general misgivings of the migrants so far from the Han homelands of central and northern China. Although this was the original reason for the worship of this deity, in recent centuries it has been lost and, in general, replaced by worship for his magical efficacy in providing satisfactory solutions to daily problems.

He began his career under the Xin dynasty ruler, the usurper Wang Mang but stimulated by ambition he later took up arms against him. During one campaign when briefing his generals he produced a “cloth model” by tracing out the lie of the land in a large tray of rice pointing out the routes and lines of advance his assembled generals should take. He aided Liu Xiu in re-establishing the Han dynasty by defeating the forces loyal to Wang Mang. Ma was then appointed Governor of what is now Gansu province, in the north-west, from where he led an army down to Tonkin to put down the revolt against the Chinese overlords.

Ma Yuan, well known in Guangzhou for his great height and bravery as a general, was particularly renowned for his campaign in Annam where he had pacified the country and brought back to Guangzhou city a number of Tonkinene bronze drums which he had melted and cast into statues of horses. Apart from the award of the title ‘The Conquering Wave’ he had the honour of having his daughter joined in marriage with the heir apparent.

A certain Lady Zhu headed the insurrection against the Chinese in Annam and was captured and sentenced to death. She had been stripped of her finery before execution and was dressed in her barest clothes. Ma Yuan took pity on her and gave her one of his robes to cover her bare limbs which is said to have led to the Tonkinene ladies’ custom of wearing trousers and a long covering dress with wide sleeves.

Despite his age he volunteered with his ardour and ferocity
undimmed, and taking command of an army, first in face of a threatened invasion by the dreaded Huns of Central Asia, and again later, in AD 48, to pacify the wild aboriginal tribes of Hunan. However, he died during the campaign in Hunan.

Reverend Henry referred to Fupo Jiangjun, as a Cantonese deity who had temples scattered along the vicinity of the Pearl and West Rivers where he was worshipped by boatmen and travellers. The reason for his popularity apparently was because it was widely believed that Fupo and his army had crossed the range between Hunan and Guangdong, conquering south China, using double-decker troop carrying boats to ferry his troops from the hinterland of Hunan to Guangzhou. The boats had to be portered across the mountains against all odds.

Mesny noted that a number of temples in Guangxi honouring Fupo had kept alive the memory of his martial deeds and exploits. A temple on the West River near the great rapids was striking for its perfect preservation. It was kept in repair, wrote Mesny, by boatmen who regarded the deity in some special manner.

In Taiwan Ma Yuan is the main deity in some half a dozen temples where he is known as Fushun Jiangjun 輔順將軍.

c] The Great Emperor, the Plum Blossom Immortal, Mei Xian Dadi 梅仙大帝, is a minor Daoist cult Immortal whose image has only been noted on the altars of three temples, all within the Hainanese communities in Kranji, Singapore. His title however appears on the temple deity list together with other deities in five temples in southern Malaysia. Temple keepers agree that the Plum Blossom Immortal was a famous doctor who, according to a god carver, bore the personal name of Zhang Chuang 張創, lived somewhere in China many centuries ago, and is now particularly revered by pregnant women who he protects from malignant forces. He also helps them by ensuring that the babes themselves are small and therefore do not cause any injury to the mother during birth.

Images of the Plum Blossom Immortal have no unique characteristics and vary considerably from temple to temple. Two depict him seated, and at first glance looking somewhat like Guan Gong,
dressed in robes and a scholar’s tile cap. The eyes are rounder than those of Guan Gong and they have a pink face, though they are sitting holding an open book in the left hand as does Guan Gong. The other versions are, in general, standard seated scholar-officials, with black beards and holding, in one case a seal in his left hand, and in the others a sword or fly switch in his right. In four of the images he is wearing Daoist robes decorated with the bagua signs. In every temple his image is flanked by two anonymous military attendants.

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His festival is celebrated annually on the 20th of the ninth lunar month and his full title copied off one of the temple notice boards is Shangqing Sanwu Mei Xian Yuan Zhangui Dongxian Zhang Dadi 上清三五梅仙院斩鬼洞仙張大帝.

The Loyal and Fierce Marquis, Zhonglie Houwang 忠烈侯王, was a secondary image on the main altar in a rural hut-temple in Singapore. He was paired with Wenzhou Houwang and sat on an ornamental chair on Wenzhou Houwang’s left hand identical with the one Wenzhou Houwang is holding in his right hand [May the State Prosper and the People Enjoy Peace]. Little was known about Zhonglie Houwang apart from a hazy memory from one of the temple elders that he had been a famous village headman many, many years earlier, his personal names now lost in time.

e) A page in a loose-leaf book kept by the temple custodian in a small atap Hainanese temple in Lorong Ah Soo in Singapore listed the titles of the five deities [*] and nine minor spirits or aides [#] revered by devotees, some understood to be portrayed in image form on the temple altars whilst the majority were simply known by their titles and
prayed to for their efficacious powers. The titles are the typical flowery honorifics which are usually well nigh impossible to render into English. The list is as follows: -

The Five Officials Wang, the Ministers¹⁹ and Highest Lords of the Dragon Terrace [*] 五封掌職高龍臺王五官

The First Official Wang of the Highest Peak, Capable of Flying to Heaven [#]
飛天上嶺王一官

The Other Four Efficacious Spirit Officials Wang [#]
有感靈神王四官

The Chief Yamen Guard [#]
隔心頭目把衙老大

The Twelve Spirit Generals Escorting the Wang Officials [#]
隨從官吏十二神將

The Marquis, the Commander-in-Chief who Inspects and Protects the Country [*]
玉封顯應糾察都督護國安邦候王

The Strong, Brave, Powerful General who Protects the People [*]
玉封靈應巡察從兵剛勇庇民將軍

The Marquis who Inspects the Three Agencies and Adjudicates and Protects the People [*]
玉封英文糾察三司護國庇民顯靈候王

The image of this deity was the only image to be identified on the altars by one of the temple custodians. It portrayed the Marquis as an
official, sitting in full armour, with a black beard and a light brown face. He was attended by generals Gan and Meng.

The Marquis, the Kind and Merciful, Virtuous and Brave Commander-in-Chief who Pacified the Mountains and Rivers [*]

玉封耀武威德仁慈绥鎮河山義勇都督候王

General Gan, Commander of the Left [#]

左指揮甘大將

General Meng, Commander of the Right [#]

右指揮蒙大將

Door Guardian in charge of 1,000 Buildings, of the Left [#]

左千門官

Household Guardian in charge of 100 Households, of the Right [#]

右百戶官

Celestial and Terrestrial Soldiers, Yin [Darkness] Soldiers and Yang [Light] Soldiers [#]

天兵，地兵，陰兵，陽兵

[ Names on lists of deities in Hainanese temples usually claimed to be one or other of the images on one of the altars but whose details, corroboration and in most cases not seen elsewhere, include:

Shengzhi Taizi 聖旨太子 Prince of the Holy Decree [Singapore]

Xiannu er niang 仙女二娘 The Second Maiden of the Immortal Women [Seletar: Singapore]

Zhengxun Furen 正順夫人 The Upright and Auspicious Matron [Singapore]
5: Shared with other Han Ethnic Groups

[though regarded by Hainanese as Unique Hainanese Deities]

a] Madame Xian, Xian Tai Furen 先太太人 is a deity whose image has only been noted on two altars in Hainanese folk religion temples, within fifteen miles of each other, in southern Malaysia, in Rengam and Kluang. The image is of a standard matron, and in both temples it stands alongside images of Tian Hou, the patron deity of seafarers, and Shuiwei Shengmu.

Madame Xian was the wife of Feng Bao 馮寶, an official of the Liang dynasty who became prefect of Gaoliang 21 and who died at the age of 44 in AD 558. Before her marriage she had been schooled at home by an extraordinary teacher who not only taught her secret practices but also military strategy and tactics. Despite having trained and commanded troops in battle, she also frequently showed her alter ego trying to persuade her relatives, and in particular her brother, to be kind and considerate. Her brother was markedly different from her. He used the skills she had imparted to him to attack neighbouring areas causing great misery and hardship and though it took time she eventually managed to persuade him to stop causing trouble to others. The peace that then reigned brought many over to her side and her exploits came to the notice of Feng Rong, the prefect of Gangzhou, who arranged for her to marry his son, Feng Bao.

Although Feng Bao, as prefect of Gaoliang, was fair and strict his orders were still not being carried out and Madame Xian, now his wife of some years, first warned her husband’s subordinates and then drafted orders which stated that anyone who committed a crime, even blood relations of officials, would be punished severely. From then on laws were applied with great fairness and criminals deterred.

A few days later Li did rebel and sent an army undr General Dou Shi to take over power in the capital. Madame Xian pondered that if her husband joined battle against Dou Shi there would be bitter fighting and many casualties. She realized that Dou Shi was a poor general who was locked in combat with the emperor’s forces and would be unable to assist Li Qianshi in Gaozhou; therefore, she and her husband should devise a way to defeat Li by strategy. She told her husband that he
should send a message to Li that he was sending a woman, his wife, to report as he himself was incapacitated. She would take with her lavish presents borne by a thousand soldiers all disguised as porters and women with their weapons concealed within the gifts. Everything went as planned and when Madame Xian and her entourage entered the city she gave the order to attack. The city was taken and a great victory achieved. Li abandoned Gaozhou and fled to Ningzhen.

In the year of her husband's death the Chen Wu Di emperor rewarded Madame Xian by creating her nine year old son, Feng Pu, the Governor of Yangchun (Yangchun Taishou) with Madame Xian as his guide and mentor.

When, in AD 570, Ouyang He summoned Feng Pu, the Yangchun Taishou, to Nanhai to entice him to join yet another rebellion, Feng Pu's first reaction was to inform his mother who advised him saying that having been loyal to the throne for three generations her son should not to become involved. Then she, herself, led troops to attack Ouyang, captured him and sent him to Qiankang [present day Nanjing] where he was beheaded. The Chen emperor Xuan Di conferred the title of Xuan Hou on Feng Pu, reflecting his mother's loyalty and bravery. When Feng Pu died he left his three sons, Feng Sheng, Feng Huai and Feng An in the care of his old mother.

In AD 588, the Sui emperor Wen Di planned to invade the Kingdom of Chen with a force of some half a million men concentrated in Jiangnan [the area south of the River (Yangze)]. Chen's defensive force was established in Lingnan with Madame Xian appointed commander by popular demand. She and her three grandsons were the great defenders of the Kingdom of Chen. Sadly, in the spring of 589 Jiangnan fell to the Sui emperor and the Chen emperor was captured. The Sui emperor asked the defeated Chen emperor to issue an edict to Madame Xian informing her that the destiny of a rule is decided in Heaven and that his kingdom had fallen. He ordered Madame Xian to submit to the Sui emperor and to serve him as loyally as she had the Chen dynasty. Enclosed with the edict was a rod made from a rhino horn which when examined by Madame Xian, confirmed that the Chen dynasty had in fact fallen. She agreed to surrender and peace returned to the area.

In AD 589 Wang Zhongzhuang of Panyou rebelled and attacked
the imperial troops defending Lingnan area. Madame Xian sent Feng Sheng to help them but as the rebel general and Feng Sheng were old friends, Feng Sheng delayed his attack on the rebels. Madame Xian was furious and had Feng Sheng cast into gaol. She then despatched Feng An but found it necessary for herself to don armour and lead the troops against the rebels. Within a couple of months it was all over. The rebels surrendered. The Sui emperor pardoned Feng Sheng and appointed him to be the Governor of Luzhou, and at the same time appointed Feng Huai to be Governor of Guangzhou and at the same time appointed Feng An as Governor of Gaozhou. He also appointed Feng Bao, Madame Xian’s long deceased husband, the posthumous Area Commander-in-Chief of Guangzhou and Marquis of Jiaoguo so that he could appoint Madame Xian as Duchess of Jiaoguo. He also granted her the seal of her title to enable her to administer six prefectures. The empress presented Madame Xian with a tiara, jewellery and robes which Madame Xian placed in a chest in the main hall to display them to the family as a reward for three generations of loyalty and filial piety. She then advised the future generations to continue to do their duty.

In AD 591 a number of places rebelled against the dynasty due to the corruption and tyranny of the Area Commander-in-chief of Panyou. Madame Xian proposed that she should arbitrate, and listed the crimes of the Area Commander-in-Chief to the emperor and peace was restored.

She died at the age of 89 and was granted the posthumous title of Huguo Shengmu 護國聖母 and given a state funeral. She was buried in Tianbai county, commonly known as Gaoling where a temple was raised in her honour leading to today’s cult.

b] A deity who, though not Hainanese, is revered by them in several temples in South-east Asia, is the Lord of the White Horse, Baima Laoshi Gong, 白馬老師公 possibly better known simply as Laoshi Gong 老師公. He has only been noted in three temples, in Singapore and Malaysia, though an image of him did appear on sale in a Kowloon curio shop some years ago. He is the main deity in two of the three temples, both on the west coast of central Malaysia, one north of Klang and the other to the south.

Apart from in the two temples in Malaysia, other temple keepers
have been unable to explain his origins, history or any other details. In Malaysia we were told that he had been a hero, killed in the Leizhou peninsular immediately to the north of Hainan [or ‘in Leizhou city (nowadays Leicheng) in western Guangdong province’], and that he had been a general, the eldest of three brothers, who had long ago earned great merit working for the common good and was deified. In Singapore, where again he is depicted as one image in the centre of a comparatively crowded secondary altar, it was claimed that he had been a general, killed several centuries ago saving a major unidentified town from invaders. His festivals are celebrated on the 17th of both the first and third lunar months.

One of the two temples in Malaysia contained three images on the main altar, the usual image of Baima Laoshi Ging together with two standard seated images of mandarins. These were identified as the First, Second and Third Laoshi Gong and were understood to have been brought to Malaysia by immigrants from Hainan some forty years ago. The temple keepers and devotees of both these temples were predominantly Chaozhou Chinese. Nowadays devotees of this cult in Singapore, however, are predominantly Hengwa [Xinghua] from Fujian province.

Lapshi Gong is prayed to for ‘household affairs’ in one of the two temples in central Malaysia, whilst in the other, run by a popular medium who spoke with the voice of Laoshi Gong and is claimed to be extremely gifted, the deity is believed to be able to cure most illnesses. The deity was being treated with exceptional reverence during the latest visit by the author, when a ritual was being performed before the altar requesting a cure for a very sickly looking infant held by its anxious mother.

Among the Hengwa Hokkiens in Singapore he is rarely revered as a separate deity. He is prayed to and offered incense and oil as one of the collection of deities on the altar, though the temple keeper added that a number of gamblers specifically pray to him. The temple keeper also said that he had not been aware that the deity had any such speciality when first he had taken over the temple in the early sixties. The custom of gamblers seeking divine help was fairly recent and had he presumed, developed after someone had had a win following a petition to the deity.
Laoshi Gong has a unique image. He is portrayed as a general sitting on a folding camp stool, in the process of drawing his sword from its scabbard with his right hand. The sword is partially withdrawn from its scabbard which is hanging on his left side and clasped by the left hand. His helmet has a large pointed spike on top [like the German *pickelhaube*], and he has four flags protruding from the rack in which they are secured across his back, above his shoulders indicating his rank. The camp stool is an interesting feature. It is a typical folding stool, with a full tiger skin carefully arranged, draped over the back of the stool, the whole image and stool with skin being carved from one block.

**Lin Fu Taishi Gong** 林府太師公, is usually simply referred to as Taishi Ging or Taishi Ye. He is a minor deity in two temples, one in the Hainanese temple, off Balestier Road in Singapore where he was referred to as Lin Fu Xiangye, Prime Minister Lin 林府相爺, with his annual festival celebrated on the double eighth. The other is a Hokkien temple in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, where he is a minor deity having been placed there by members of the small Hainanese community. He is also known in Ampang as Marshal Lin, Lin Fu Yuanshuai 林府元帥 or Lin Fu Dashi 林府大師 and, during the annual festival of the major Hokkien deity Nine Emperors, is represented by his incense urn when carried in procession with three other deities. They are all accompanied by spirit mediums who are possessed by these deities, including Lin Fu Dashi. In both of these temples he is renowned for his ability to cure [internal] diseases and, especially in Ampang, he is also prayed to for wealth and good business. Temple custodians identified the deity as one of their clan ancestors, Lin Xiyuan 林希元 who, according to biographies, was born in Fujian during the Ming, and died in about AD 1561. He became an official who argued long and hard against the power of the palace eunuchs, and was renowned for the help he provided to the populace during a major famine. Amongst his many achievements were his successes in the field of education in Guangdong province, and the use of a military force to destroy a band of robbers. He is also claimed to have pacified a number of outlaws. During the troubles in Annam he organised a pacification force, built up an intelligence network only to find that he was not required to act, either by the emperor or by the situation. He was dismissed, accused of usurping his authority and returned to his home where he wrote poetry and Confucian dissertations. He studied for many years and wrote source books for
examination candidates, he also became an entrepreneur in and around
the port of Xiamen [Amoy] at a time when taking part in foreign trade
was illegal. He owned a fleet of cargo junks known as 'ferryboats' in
order to circumvent the law. His supercargoes contracted business for
him, in particular in South-east Asia, and he became sufficiently wealthy
to ignore the law forbidding trade with foreigners and contacts with
local coastal pirates.

d) The Saintly Lord of the Dragon’s Tail, Longwei Shenggong
龍尾聖公 has only been seen on the altar in two temples both Hainanese
and both in Singapore where he is said to be prayed to for protection
and general benefits. However, several devotees claimed that a medium
had discovered that Longwei Shenggong should be specifically
approached by those whose parents are thought to be suffering in Hell
as the deity had proved to have contacts and had even succeeded in
being their saviour.

He appears to have no personal and unique legend. His image
portrays him as a standard seated mandarin with a wispy black beard
but no unique characteristics, and is either the main deity on a secondary
altar or a minor deity on the secondary altar, co-located with Shuwei
Shengmu in one temple, and in another he was accompanied by his
consort, Longwei Furen 龍尾夫人.

e) An image of Hai Rui, another minister banished to Hainan,
has only once been noted on a temple altar, a side altar in a small coastal
temple in Singapore dedicated to the Nine Emperors, and run by and
for Chaozhou Chinese. His image, which depicts him as a standard
seated mandarin without any unique characteristics, is attended by aides.
Hai Rui, also known in temples as Hai Rui Gong 海瑞公, was a Ming
official whose reputation as a just and impartial magistrate was based
on his belief that laws should be enforced at all levels irrespective of
rank or blood, and his criticisms of extortion and abuse of public
revenue made his name a slogan for immeasurable honesty for later
generations. He is the hero of a lengthy novel ‘The Story of the Scarlet
Robe’ in twenty volumes. Hai Rui was born in Qiongzhou [Kiungchou]
in Hainan and died a natural death at the capital, Nanjing in 1587. His
tomb is in the western suburb of the northern port of Haikou, at Pintian
on his native Hainan where he is still revered and offered supplicatory
prayers by devotees.
Having been deified by popular acclaim he is now prayed to for fair and just decisions in the Spirit World. He cannot be bribed or corrupted and is approached by people who feel that they have had a wrong done to them which cannot otherwise be righted without aid from the Spirits.

He is a popular hero of historical significance. He went through his official life in defiance towards his superiors whose moral values were in question. Permanently fired by zeal, a high point in his career was when he stood up for right against the Emperor. The memorial he submitted to the Jia Qing Emperor criticised the Emperor’s life style and attitude, and accused him of being directly responsible for the evil times. Hai Rui had bought his own coffin and had bade farewell to his family before submitting it. He was imprisoned and many times the Emperor considered ordering his death. Instead he was released at the death of the Emperor and was re-employed only to be impeached once more. He returned to Hainan in forced retirement, prior to being employed again for the last time during which he died in Nanjing. Whilst in Hainan Hai Rui memorialised the throne on the subject of clashes between Chinese immigrants and the native aborigines on Hainan. Three uprisings in 1501, 1541 and 1550 had taken more than ten thousand Chinese soldiers months to subdue, and Hai Rui’s proposal that a road be built through tribal territories to bring the whole area under control was not undertaken.

Hai Rui’s ancestry included non-Chinese blood from the northern borders, though memories of him tend to reflect his time in Nanjing and his birthplace, Hainan where he spent his time in exile. Legend relates that he sas sent to serve in the Chaozhou area of southern Fujian as a Confucian instructor at the local magistracy. He solved many problems for the locals and was very popular. Chzozhou devotees of his cult today tell of a group of corrupt officials and tyrannical landlords who oppressed the people. They were opposed by Hai Rui who was at that time still only a lowly official. He courageously opposed the minister who supported the officials and according to legend he committed suicide to make the point to the Emperor.

In the 1960s the then mayor of Peking, Wu Han, first wrote an essay in which the target of his thinly veiled criticism of the ‘Emperor as being self opinionated and unreceptive to criticism’ would have been
obvious to any Chinese with an ounce of nous. Two years later he wrote a play, Hai Rui Dismissed, purporting to be about Hai Rui. This was seen as a covert attack on Mao Zidong's purge of Marshal Peng Dehuai who had openly blamed Mao for the 1959 famine. The purge of the Peking hierarchy led by Yao Wenyuan, a Communist political writer in 1965 [who was later one of the Gang of Four], is usually seen as the overture to the Cultural Revolution in China, Hai Rui being used as a symbol for Peng Dehuai, Mao's fallen rival.

f] In a Hainanese community temple dedicated to the Jade Emperor near Bukit Mertajam in northern Malaysia two images flanked the main deity, on his left hand his Fourth Daughter and on his right hand, and aide to the Fourth Daughter, Luo Yanhua, about whom nothing more is known other than she is claimed to be a unique Hainanese deity. Her image has not been seen or recorded anywhere else.

g] Although Lishan Laomu is primarily a Chaozhou local folk religion cult goddess she is also worshipped widely in Hainanese temples where she is regarded as a Hainanese cult. Lishan Laomu is her more popular title rather than Lishan Shengmu, though considering the ambiguities in legend, title and the initial character, it is open to question whether we might have more than one deity here. Three different characters for Li, all homophones, have been noted. The first means black, the second pear, and the third black horse. The first is the more popular version in central Malaysia and Hong Kong. The second appears to be the character preferred by the Hainanese, and the third has only been encountered in Taiwanese temples. She was referred to in a Saigon Hainanese temple as either Yimei Niangniang or Yide Niangniang.

An elderly lady temple keeper in Kowloon approached the deity and "introduced" me to Lishan Shengmu as 'a foreigner who wished to disperse the mists of his ignorance.' She told me that Miss Fan, a Daoist nun, had been summoned by Tian Hou to Heaven to be trained to become an Immortal and is now a caring spirit known as Lishan Shengmu, the Saintly Mother [or Matron] Lishan.

In an interesting but typical misconception an odd title of a deity was noted in a temple in Lincoln Road in Singapore where the custodian who claimed to be Hainanese also claimed that all the deities were
uniquely Hainanese. In practice of the seventeen only one was Hainanese and that bore the odd title. It was Li San Shengmu, literally the Saintly Mother Li the third. This is obviously Li Shan, misheard with the ‘san’ assumed to be the ‘Third’.

The most widespread claim is that Lishan Shengmu or Lishan Laomu was a ferocious lady general of the Tang dynasty known for her love of fighting, and is now a popular character in Chaozhou plays. However, to many Chinese she is better known by the maiden name of Fan Li-shan as merely the wife and mother of two famous generals, Xue. Several stories told about her contain in addition to common factors, others involving unconnected genuine historical heroes, some from entirely different eras. The composite story of the best known legends about Miss Fan begins with her warrior father giving her a ‘sword to execute Immortals’ and a ‘whip to beat the spirits’ after she had completed her military training and prior to her going off to help General Xue Dingshan to pacify the west. In one version she joined up with him, served and fought alongside winning his trust and favour. In another Xue met and fought her on the battlefield. She defeated him but, because he was a handsome general, and with a bit of persuasion, she married him. A photocopied broadsheet distributed by the temple keeper in a small immigrant settlement shrine above Kowloon claimed that the Lishan cult had been popular in central China, and that her story, described in the ‘Conquest of the West,’ ostensibly written by Xue Dingshan himself, explained that she had been the wife of Xue, later transformed into an Immortal as a reward for her miracles and achievements.

There is also a Lishan Laomu who is also a definitive goddess appearing in the great novel The Journey to the West the story of the fantastic journey made by Xuanzang, together with Sun, the Monkey, Sha the monk and Pigsy. In part of the story it appears likely that Lishan was Monkey’s elder sister, a courtesy title rather than a blood relationship. She, together with her three daughters, all Bodhisattvas, named Truth, Love and Pity, transformed themselves into beautiful women in order to tempt the Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang and his entourage of Monkey, Pigsy and Sha with their beauty. She changed herself into a widow and proposed to Xuanzang who rejected her. She and her daughters teased Pigsy, who after many adventures found that they were merely figments of his imagination. This goddess would
seem to be in no way connected with the wife and mother of the Tang dynasty generals.

Although her image is popular in South-east Asia where it is to be found as the main deity on secondary altars in both Chaozhou and Hainanese temples, it has also been noted in Taiwan, and in Hong Kong in four temples and a further one in Macau. She is the main deity in one Hong Kong temple, and the main deity on secondary altars in the other three and in Macau.

She is accompanied in many instances by two anonymous aides or maids, though in a Hainanese temple in Malate in Manila they are known as Li Laoxian Gu 梨老仙姑, and in Medan in Sumatra in a Hainanese temple by two guardian generals, General of the Iron Ox, Tie'niu Jiangjun 鐵牛將軍 and the General of the Bronze Ox, Tongniu Jiangjun 銅牛將軍. [see below 6 a]

**Weng Zhong** 翁仲 is yet another deity regarded by Hainanese as uniquely theirs even though his image was noted in several places across central China during the late 19th century. Weng Zhong lived during the Tang and is only known for one remarkable incident. He was suddenly showered with gold. He was born in Gansu province and was a poverty stricken scholar who lived alone - however, his windfall, the cause of which has never been explained, has led him to be regarded by some devotees to revere him as a God of Wealth. His image has been seen in a temple near Haikou in northern Hainan, simply portraying him as a scholar, standing, dressed in his robes and holding a tablet in both hands before his chest. His full name was Weng Zhongru 翁仲孺.

### 6: Images of Aides to deities

a] As we have seen the Iron Ox General, Tie’niu Jiangjun 鐵牛將軍 is a tamed demonic spirit and guardian of the major deity Lishan Shengmu. He has only been noted once, paired with her other tamed demonic spirit guardian, the Bronze Ox General, Tongniu Jiangjun 銅牛將軍, on the main altar in a specifically Hainanese community temple in Jalan Rindu in Singapore, now long pulled down for urban development. This may, of course, be an entirely Chaozhou cult but revered also by the Hainanese devotees of the local community and
perhaps taken over within their own ethnic temple.

The Iron-ox General is a black-skinned demonic figure dressed in pantaloons and anklets, standing, with a tiger skin draped around his waist, and with a bolero covering his shoulders. He has a narrow plain coronet, and is holding a heavy chain in his left hand and an axe raised above his head in his right.

The Iron-ox and Bronze-ox were both live oxen transformed by Lishan Shengmu into human, albeit demonic form, to be her guardians and to protect the gateway to her mountain. They have powers in their own right which include, it is claimed, the prevention of natural disasters, and in particular flooding.27

b) In Fujian province prior to 1949 it was not uncommon to see the Eight Youths, young boys running round the procession when the palanquin containing the image of the deity was being borne around his parish. The boys were regarded in most places as the incarnate soldiery of the spirit armies of the deities. In others they were underworld generals whose exorcising dance was performed to rid the vicinity of demons. In Taiwan groups of young men regularly meet in certain temples and practice exorcist drills which they then perform for the public during annual ceremonies. Their other function is to act as bodyguards to the major deity in their temple when he is taken out in his carrying chair to process around the town. These youths are known in Taiwan as the Eight Underworld Generals 八家將. They are skilled in martial arts, have their faces painted in specific patterns using a number of bright colours, somewhat similar to the actors in Peking opera but generally regarded as demonic faces, and are dressed in a uniform of jacket and trousers and in a few temples, according to one temple keeper, they wear red bands, similar to those worn by the Boxers of the 1900 Rebellion, identifying which unit they belong to. The markings and forms of these youths tend to be identical with the Ba Jia Jiang, the statues lining the walls of Underworld temples in Taiwan. Such statues have also been noted in several Hainanese temples in South-east Asia where the group of Eight is known as Ba Ban Gong 八班公, The “Eight Bosses”.28 Whereas the total, Eight, would appear to be somewhat immaterial to most devotees and temple keepers, in Singapore the Eight represented the large number of gaolers in each of eight of the Ten Courts of the Underworld responsible for purging
souls [that is the Second to the Ninth as the First and Tenth Courts are basically administrative.]

c] Yinya Ya Shuai 銀牙亞帥. The Silver Tooth Vice-marshal, has been noted only in one temple, a popular religion rural shrine in a Hainanese community in Paya Lebar in Singapore now long gone due to urbanisation. It is a unique image, a stark and fierce black-faced soldier holding two magic “swords” [whips] one in each hand and sitting astride a mythical animal, possibly a Qilin. He is portrayed as demonic and may well be an aide to a major deity, the main deity on the altar being Lei Zu. He was not venerated in his own right, though devotees did place incense before his, and every other image in the temple.

The Silver Tooth Vice-Marshal is co-located in several Hainanese temples with the White Tooth General, Baiya Zhongjiang 白牙中將, who is also a minor deity, an assistant and escorting-general to Doutian Yuanshuai [Lei Zu] and also known as Baiya Jiangjun 白牙將軍. His image has been noted only in Singapore and Seremban on folk religion altars where he is portrayed standing on one foot, with his right foot raised behind as if running, and holding a flag bearing the character, 令 líng [By Order] in his left hand. He has a stark white face. His image in a Hainanese community temple in Payar Lebar Crescent, now long removed for a housing development scheme, was referred to together with the Silver-Tooth Vice-Marshal as one of the pair of deities to the main deity on the altar, Doutian Fushuai 都天副帥. In another temples he was co-located on a Hainanese community altar with Wantian Zhushuai who was less starkly white-faced. His image, primarily revered in Hengwa Hokkien communities in Singapore and Malaysia, was portrayed as the main deity in the Under Altar at the side wall of the main hall of the Nine Carps Temple [Jiuli Xian] in Singapore as a seated scholar dressed in a white robe and scholar official’s cap, holding a triangular flag in his right hand and a red globe in his left.

The temple custodian knew nothing of the origins or legends of either the White Tooth Marshal or the Silver Tooth Vice Marshal.

7: Deified Locals

a] Two separate women have been individually revered on altars
within their memorial temples in Hainan. They may or may not be regarded as deities as details are not available, and may perhaps be simply ladies honoured for a specific reason.

The first is Huang Dao po [characters not available], who is said to have lived during the 14th century in Hainan and was proficient at cotton spinning. She travelled to central China where she taught the art of spinning to local women. There was [and may still be] a memorial temple to her in Qiongzhou in Hainan but once more, without any details.

The second is Taihua Furen 泰華夫人 who has only been noted once. Her tablet has been seen on an altar in Hainan, and apart from it being the spirit of a human, who is again said to have lived during the 14th century, again nothing further is known.

b] Liang Qinzhong, a Hainanese boy of seventeen, was struck and killed by lightning in a small kampong in Tanglin in Singapore in 1963. Shortly after it happened the ladies of the Hainanese community in the kampong in which Liang had lived attributed remarkable events to his spirit, and whenever they prayed before his tablet their wishes were fulfilled. Quite quickly a cult developed and devotees came from all around. An attap hut shrine, dedicated to Shuiwei Shengniang, was altered to make way for a secondary altar on to which was placed the tablet dedicated to Liang Taiye 梁太爺, together with a portrait image of the youth. Above the image of Liang hung a sketch of him dressed in scholar’s robes with a flash of lightning entering his breast. He was believed to have obtained power [ling] from the bolt, and continued to answer devotee’s pleas to their satisfaction. One of the walls of the attap hut was hung with framed testimonials, many bearing a photograph of the person who had been helped by the deity. His festival was held annually on his birthday, the 12th of the seventh lunar month. This cult disappeared from Tanglin once the kampong had been demolished during the early seventies to make way for a new housing estate.

8: Unidentified Images believed to be uniquely Hainanese

There have been a number of deities, noted either on lists of the gods within a temple or on the front face of their socle which remain unidentified. These include:
a) Changhua Laoye Shen 昌化老爺神 seen in Singapore on a Hainanese wayyang street theatre altar connected in some way with the major China-wide deity Hua Guang Dadi.

b) As with small folk religion temples in all southern Chinese communities there are very minor deities on their altars about whom nothing is known. The following stand on a side altar in a small Hainanese temple on the Tampenis Road in Singapore and are largely ignored though they are prayed to by a few devotees, more in passing rather than specifically for protection:

main deity: The Marquis of the Heaven of the buddhas, Fo Tian Houwang 佛天侯王 Soldier astride a red horse, wearing green and gilt armour, with a pink face, black beard and a sword raised in his right hand.

flanked by: Shata Zunwang Qi Guan 波塔尊七官

Soldier astride a white horse, with green-gilt robes, black beard, brown face and sword raised in his right hand.

and Yongmeng Yatou Wang San Guan 侵猛衙頭王三管

Soldier astride a black horse, with green-gilt robes over his armour, black beaded and a sword raised in his right hand.

**Conclusion**

There are some seventy to eighty major Han Chinese folk religion deities to be found in every part of China, and Hainan is no exception. However, in Hainan as in every local community, be it province, county, town or village, and even ethnic group, there are also local deified heroes and worthies not seen beyond their immediate area.

Taken all in all, the range of deities on Hainanese altars is much the same as in all the other southern Chinese Han ethnic group temples. Hainanese communities, however, do have a number of uniquely Hainanese cult deities both on Hainan island as well as within Hainanese communities in south-east Asia. Although their legends are unique to
Hainan island as well as within Hainanese communities in south-east Asia. Although their legends are unique to Hainanese they are similar in style and format to those told in other ethnic groups.

Sadly, most of the rural temples on Hainan island itself have little left of their original images following the ravages of the Cultural revolution. It is fortunate that we do still have several Hainanese communities in south-east Asia where little has changed over the past century. However, intermarriage between Hainanese devotees and those of other Han ethnic groups has meant that to identify cults as uniquely Hainanese has become that much more difficult.

NOTES

1 Popular or folk religion is an amalgam of Buddhist, Daoist and local beliefs ignored by Confucianists, Buddhists and Daoists as well as by the majority of educated Chinese.

2 Hengwa is sometimes referred to as the Puxian sub-group.

3 Hokkien is the Fujian linguistic group word for Fujian people as well as their language. Minnan is the area of southern Fujian province from which many immigrants to Taiwan and South-east Asia originated and is a linguistic sub-group of Hokkien.

4 Buddhist and Daoist images on such altars have not been included in this article, even though a number have been seen on folk religion altars in Hainanese temples, as they are all revered China-wide.

5 Ma Zu is primarily the Fujian community title for Tian Hou.

6 Both Third and Fourth are deities that have been noted on Hainan island and within Hainanese overseas communities.

7 An entirely different deity, the Saintly Matron of Wenzhou, Wenzhou Shengmu would appear not to be connected in any way with Wenzhou Houwang. Nor has she been noted on altars within the overseas southern Chinese communities. She has only been noted by William Mesny who saw an image of her in Zhejiang province in 1896 [doubtless connected with the local coastal city of Wenzhou], and suggested that as her surname appeared to have been Lin she may well be Tian Hou, the patron goddess of seafarers.
A common saying and not specifically linked with this deity.

It was explained that there are three Laoye [San Laoye] of whom Da Laoye is the senior.


The phrase ‘shuiwei’ in Cantonese is a slang expression [slow water] for ‘business is slow.’

The important fact was that all 108 had either reached their prescribed time of death and were therefore deified as saints [shen] by the Jade Emperor OR they died their violent death before their due date and were roaming ghosts who had to be pacified and placated. Here we have some devotees regarding them as spirits and asking advice and others who look upon them as dark spirits who require propitiatory offerings and no more.

Ma Yuan was the second general to be awarded the title of the Fupo, Wave Conqueror for the pacification of the southern region. The first was Lu Bode 路博德 who, during the Earlier AHan [ca. 120 BC], had subjugated large areas of what today is Guangdong province.

Xianfeng is a title which has been noted in connection with three entirely unconnected deities.


Zhonglie was a common posthumous title used during the early Qing.

Atap is the generic name for the wooden-sided huts with the dried-leaf roof so common in Singapore and Malaysian rural areas until the 1970s. Atap consists of the dried leaves of the nipa palm.

Lit. Office Keepers.

This is the only title which has been noted elsewhere though probably not identical with the Hainanese deity. General Gan 甘將軍 is one of the Eight Bodyguard Generals, known as The Day Patrolling General 日遊巡.
This is present day Maoming in western Guangdong province, not too far from the Liaozhou peninsula leading down to Hainan.

A city in south eastern Guangdong province, halfway between the Liaozhou peninsula and the Pearl River.

Note that there are two different deities, Longwei Shenggong worshipped by the Hainanese and Longwei Shengwang worshipped by the Chaozhou people. The latter is, to all intents and purposes, a local Earth God.

Laomu, Old Mother [or Elderly Matron], is a title often mentioned in popular stories. In *Xue Dingshan's Campaign to the West* Laomu was Fan Lihuw's teacher who, in eight years, taught her the art of moving mountains and raising armies from a handful of beans.

An elderly Chaozhou man in a Kowloon temple confided that Lishan ['Fan Lihua' he called her] is a fictional character to support the story of the two generals Xue, and that much of their legends have little or no historical basis.

Xue Dingshan’s father, Xue Rengui, also a general, was an early Tang hero who not only also led an expedition to the west, he also served in the Korean campaign of Tang Tai Cong. Xue Dingshan, otherwise known as Xue Gang, is claimed to have saved the life of his emperor and is now a Fukienese cult deity, the face of whose image is characterised by extraordinary and colourful decorations.

William Mesny relates that recumbent iron images of oxen were believed to be a protection from floods when these images were placed along the banks of river courses and lakes likely to overflow. He noticed several along the banks of the Grand Canal in 1874 and was told that they had been placed there by Liu Bowen Mesny’s Chinese Miscellany: Vol. IV: Shanghai: 11 February 1905.

As in Taipan, the Senior Boss.

The shrine and its images disappeared, doubtless into a high rise flat, though it could have gone the way of so many minor cults and disappeared due, perhaps, to the aged temple keeper’s demise.
The Five Officials, Wu Gong 五公, on the main altar of their Memorial Temples at Haikou [photograph courtesy of Geoffrey Roper].
Su Shi 蘇軾, probably better known as Su Dongpo 蘇東坡, the scholar-statesman and poet, whose image has also been seen here in a village shop-house temple at Makung on the Pescadores Islands.
The main altar of a modern temple in Hougang in Singapore with the images and tablets transferred here when the former old temple was demolished to make way for public housing. In the centre is Shuiwei Shengjiang, stage left is Wenzhou Houwang and stage right, the tablet to the 108 Brothers.
Three goddesses on the main altar in a Hainanese temple in Rengam, Johore southern Malaysia. The main deity in the centre is Tianhou Yuanjun, stage left is Shuiwei Shengmu 水尾聖母 and stage right, Xian Tai Furen 先太夫人.
A tablet on a side altar in a Hainanese temple in Seremban, Malaysia, dedicated to the 108 Brothers.
Image on a small temple in Macau of Ma Yuan 馬援, the wave Conquering General, [Fupo Jiangjun 伏波將軍] who is also known as the Vanguard General, Xianfeng 先鋒.
A sketch from a Singapore god carver’s notebook of The Great Emperor, the Plum Blossom Immortal, Mei Xian Dadi 梅仙大帝.
An image in the collection of the author of the Lord of the White Horse, Baima Laoshi Gong, 古馬老翁 possibly better known simply as Da Laoshi Gong 大老師公, and the primary one of the Three Laoshi Gong.
A close-up of two of the three Laoshi Gong and identified as the Second and Third Laoshi Gong said to have been brought to Malaysia by immigrants from Hainan some forty years ago. They have been rehoused on the side altar of one of the new temples in Hougang in Singapore.
Lin Fu Taishi Gong 林府太師公, is usually simply referred to as Taishi Gong or Taishi Ye. Here he is a minor deity in the Hainanese temple in Cantonment Road in Singapore where he was referred to as Lin Fu Xiangye, Prime Minister Lin 林府相爺.
Yet another minor deity on a side altar rehoused in a new temple in Hougang in Singapore. It is the Saintly Lord of the Dragon's Tail, Longwei Shenggong 龍尾聖公 whose image is in the centre and flanked by the Third Prince, Li San Taizi on his right hand and an unidentified deity swathed in a silk robe on his left.
Hai Rui, 海瑞, was a Ming official with a reputation as a just and impartial magistrate and one of the ministers banished to Hainan. This image with his aides stands on a side altar in a small coastal temple in Singapore dedicated to the Nine Emperors.
This image of Yinya Yashuai 銀牙亞神, The Silver Tooth Vice-marshal, stood on an altar in a popular religion in Paya Lebar in Singapore now long