

THE CHANGING FACE OF GUANYIN  
IN EAST ASIAN RELIGIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Guanyin occupies a prominent place in East Asian Religions, being honoured in both Buddhist and Taoist temples. This figure, often referred to as the Goddess of Mercy, is frequently depicted as a young barefoot maiden with long dark hair and flowing white robes. Surprisingly, however, this maiden started her career as a masculine bodhisattva. In addition many multi-armed and multi-headed forms of Guanyin can be found in different temples and a profusion of different attributes have appeared over time. This thesis looks at the degree to which other religious figures and cultural values have contributed to the development of the iconography of Guanyin.

In studying and comparing the various iconographic forms in the diverse parts of East Asia we can see how local beliefs and other religious figures have shaped Guanyin's imagery. We can also see that it is the malleability of this cult figure that makes this possible. It is for this reason that the cult of Guanyin has been so successful.

Part of the investigation into the influences that shaped Guanyin's imagery will involve a discussion of the 'sex change' This has been the subject of much debate. Several figures can be said to have influenced this feminine form, these include Hārītī, Shengmu and Tārā. What is remarkable about the cult of Guanyin and explains its success, is that because imagery changes according to the needs of devotees, so gender also changes.

This malleable quality of Guanyin is not restricted to gender but extends to other features and functions of Guanyin. These are determined by the beliefs of the various communities to which the cult has spread and evidenced by the interplay with the cults of other deities such as that of the Taoist goddess Mazu. In this particular case we can see first hand an example of the assimilation process at work.

This thesis is the result of much 'on site' research, all photographs being my own except where cited otherwise. I use the 'Pinyin' system of transliteration except where the Wade-Giles form is more commonly known, which I show in square brackets.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Worship of Guanyin has been referred to as the “Cult of Half Asia” (Tay 1976), the expression reflecting the immense popularity of this figure and the extent of its influence. Just why this is an appropriate term becomes clear when one visits the area under study, for in these diverse areas of China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan, Guanyin's presence permeates the landscape. There are mountains, rocks, tunnels, caves and beaches named after this popular cult figure; numerous temples and huge statues can be seen and even temples not specifically dedicated to Guanyin usually contain a statue or two. Guide books also steer tourists and pilgrims to the temples of the “Goddess of Mercy” who, they insist, offers women special protection from all kinds of ills and provides them with wise baby boys or beautiful daughters.

It is understandable, therefore, why scholars have paid much attention to Guanyin, many placing particular importance on the feminine symbolism especially given the patriarchal nature of the societies where this image is so popular. Other scholars have tried to determine the origin of Guanyin, or have analysed the various forms that have developed over the centuries. There has not, however, as far as I am aware, yet been an iconographical study devoted solely to Guanyin covering all the countries named above. This present work will, therefore, in the following chapters, study the worship of Guanyin in these areas of East Asia. It will in particular concentrate on the influence that other religious figures, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, have had on Guanyin's iconography. It will also show how regional variation has influenced the way that images have been portrayed. I hope, in this way, to add something of value to the understanding

of the assimilation process and to the work of previous scholars. The wide range of topics chosen by these scholars has made it clear there were many factors responsible for the changing face of Guanyin in East Asia. This chapter will review some of this work, under the topics which have claimed the most interest, in order to assess what conclusions have so far been drawn on the external influences which have shaped Guanyin's imagery.

## INDIAN ORIGIN

It is generally agreed that the cult of Guanyin owes its beginnings to the Indian cult of Avalokiteśvara. Yet, even the Indian cult has attracted much debate and speculation. Much of this speculation credits the formation of the 'original image' of Avalokiteśvara to the Brahmanical gods Śiva, Indra or Brahmā (see for example Malalasekera 1966: 410, n.11). However, it has been suggested by Marie Thérèse de Mallmann (1948) that this figure was originally a solar deity of Iranian Zoroastrian origin. To back this claim Mallmann cites the light symbolism which is evident in images of both cults. Giuseppe Tucci (1948: 174-175) rejects the connection with light and the Iranian origin and argues that any Iranian influence took place after the cult had already come into existence. John Holt (1991: 39) on the other hand, while agreeing with Tucci that there is little evidence for a Zoroastrian origin, claims that the light symbolism should not be dismissed so easily for it does strongly feature in the cult of Avalokiteśvara.

These contradictory views illustrate the problems associated with determining the origin of this deity.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, examination of the texts in order to establish the approximate date of the origin of Avalokiteśvara presents even greater difficulty with the number of interpolations and apocryphal texts that have appeared, making any systematic textual investigation impossible. However, Paul Harrison, Jan Nattier, Gregory Schopen, Lokesh Chandra and H. Kern have all

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<sup>1</sup>The term 'deity' is used loosely and for want of an appropriate alternative.

made valuable contributions to the understanding of the dating of early texts. In Chapter 2 a close examination is made of early images in order to establish the timing of any influences and while identification is not without its problems, Mallmann, Benoytosh Bhattacharyya and L.A. Waddell have all made significant contributions to this difficult task. This has been added to more recently by Carmel Berkson, Mallar Ghosh and Susan Huntington. While identification of images and the nature of any influence may not have universal agreement, what is agreed by most scholars is that, despite these influences, the figure of Avalokiteśvara evolved, in approximately the second century CE, from a princely attendant to the Buddha and became popular as the Buddhist bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Even the name *Avalokiteśvara* has attracted much debate. One of the most popular translations is “he who has perceived sound” (Tay 1976: 148). Mallman wrote at length (1948: 63-82) on the different ways that scholars have explained this name, and having considered, “The Lord who looks down from high” (Burnouf); “The Lord who is visible” (Kern); and “The one who contemplates the sounds of the world” (Mironov), she concurs with Renou that Avalokita is derived from the root *ava-ruc* which means to shine, rather than *ava-lok* which means to look or consider. Therefore, in line with her Zoroastrian theory Mallmann concludes that the name *Avalokiteśvara* is to be translated as the “Shining, Glittering Lord or (by extension) the Master of Light”.

This explanation, however, has not only been rejected by Tucci and others, but also more recently by Chün-fang Yü (1996)<sup>2</sup> who explains the ambiguity in meaning by the existence of two versions of the name: Avalokitasvara and Avalokiteśvara, possibly coming from different areas in India.<sup>3</sup> When these names were translated into Chinese, states Yü, Avalokitasvara was translated

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<sup>2</sup>Paper delivered at the Avalokiteśvara Symposium, University of Texas.

<sup>3</sup>For more detailed discussion on the different recensions of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* in relation to the name of Avalokiteśvara see Mironov (1927) and Chandra (1977).



as *Guanshiyin*, meaning “Illuminator or Perceiver of the World's Sounds” and Avalokiteśvara was translated as *Guanzizai*, meaning “Perceiving Lord”. There was always much confusion and debate about the two translations with Bodhiruci combining these two names to make *Guanshizizai* (The Lord who observes the World) and Xuanzang asserting that *Guanshiyin* was an error in translation. Guanyin is the name that is popularly used in China today and most of the Chinese people I spoke to in the course of my studies believe the name to mean “The one who hears the prayers (or cries) of the world's suffering.”

### THE COMPASSIONATE NATURE OF GUANYIN

It is, perhaps, because Guanyin's name represents relief from suffering that Guanyin has become popularly known as the bodhisattva of compassion. But why was it only Guanyin who had this reputation? There were, after all, several other bodhisattvas who were the objects of cult worship: Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, Kṣitigarbha, to name but three. These bodhisattvas were also believed to reside in, or have access to, a utopia or Pure Land and all had the power to answer prayers. But it was Guanyin who was described in various texts as being capable of saving devotees from any conceivable disaster.

Indigenous texts increased the belief in Guanyin's compassion, especially after the pilgrim Xuanzang returned from India to China with tales of Guanyin's miraculous intervention. The story of Xuanzang's travels was immortalised in the fantasy novel *Journey to the West* (Wu Cheng'en). Legends grew which described Guanyin's powers in saving devotees from the same disasters as described in the Lotus Sūtra. Many of these legends appeared in indigenous Chinese or apocryphal ‘sūtras’. Ching-fang Yü (u.n.d;1990b;1994), Robert Campany (1996) and Diana Paul (1979) give details of several of these stories which describe Guanyin going to the assistance of those in distress.

In Japan, also, indigenous texts appeared. The *Nihon Ryōiki*, *Hasedera Kannon Genki*, *Genji Monogatari*, *Konjaku Monogatari* and *Makuranososhi* all describe numerous occasions where Kannon<sup>4</sup> saves devotees from the perils that are described in the *Lotus Sūtra* and other texts. In the *Konjaku Monogatari* there are forty stories devoted to Kannon, many of which are referred to as sūtras and in the *Hasedera Kannon Genki*, Dykstra (1976) describes fifty-two stories about the power of Kannon. Many of these stories allude to the same eight great perils which were related in the *Lotus Sūtra*. These perils can also be seen in the *Nihon Ryōiki*, as related by Kyoko Nakamura (1973).

In many of these indigenous stories Guanyin appears as a woman to administer compassionate deeds and it is likely that because compassion is viewed as a feminine characteristic this has contributed to the feminisation of Guanyin. José Ignacio Cabezón (1992: 183-184) observes that in the Indian Mahāyāna texts there are several instances where wisdom is identified as female, and more specifically as mother, whereas the less analytic states, namely love, compassion and benevolence, are identified with the male or father. In China, however, the characteristic which specifically identifies Guanyin, namely compassion, is viewed as more suited to a feminine image. Diana Paul (Olsen 1983: 253-254) cites an example of this from an indigenous Pure Land text. In this story, which is in the form of a flashback to Guanyin's pre-bodhisattva existence, a family tragedy influences Guanyin's commitment to save all living beings. The mother of Guanyin is the inspiration for this resolve, but in this story Amitābha is the compassionate mother figure. While Guanyin is described as Amitābha's son, the text also describes Guanyin as a mother for those who have need of a mother.

In Chapter 3 examples will be given of Guanyin's compassionate assistance to devotees in China and Japan. This will illustrate how Guanyin's compassionate nature has been amplified by

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<sup>4</sup>The Japanese name for Guanyin.

assimilation with indigenous values.

## THE CHANGE OF SEX

Because Guanyin's assimilation into East Asia has resulted in some feminisation, and because this figure first appeared in India in princely form, there has been much scholarly debate on the reasons for, and the timing of, the sexual transformation or 'sex change'. David Kinsley (1989) considers this change was due to an association with two indigenous Chinese goddesses, Bixiayuanjun, the Princess of the Motley Clouds who is also known as Nai nai niang niang (Madam Lady) or Shengmu; and Mazu [Matsu]. He also considers that the Indian goddess Tārā had a bearing on the transformation.

The Princess of the Motley Clouds, whose cult dates back to the Han period, is associated with obtaining children. Because Guanyin is also associated with obtaining children this, according to Kinsley (1986: 29), motivated the introduction of a feminine form of Guanyin. Yet it is not correct to suggest that *Songzi Guanyin* (Guanyin who brings children) is purely a product of an association with an indigenous fertility goddess because the Indian 'male' bodhisattva was also known for providing women with children. There were also other 'associations' that could have influenced Songzi Guanyin to take on a feminine appearance. For example, Rolf Stein (1986) argues that this form of Guanyin is confused with the Buddhist mother goddess Hārītī and he quotes a specific example of this form in Canton (ibid: 20, n.5). Other scholars also agree that Hārītī has often been confused with Guanyin (e.g. Getty 1962: 99), while some compare this form to the Christian "Madonna and Child" (Watson 1984; Von Koeber 1941). Yü, however, wisely notes that the "religious basis for this iconography came from Buddhist scriptures, but its artistic rendering might have been influenced by the Virgin" (Yü 1990a: 81).

Yet, while there is a convincing argument for modern feminine images of Songzi Guanyin

to have been influenced by various ‘mother’ figures, it does not explain what has led to the feminisation of the majority of forms that are seen in Asia today. While it is clear that the child-giving **function** was more suited to a feminine form as seen in the images of the Princess of the Motley Clouds, Hārītī and the Madonna and child, it does not necessarily follow that all forms became female because of these associations. In Chapter 4 an examination of these ‘mother’ figures has been carried out in order to assess their influence on the feminine form of Guanyin.

The other indigenous association, noted by Kinsley, is that of Mazu. Kinsley bases this association on the fact that both Mazu and Guanyin are called upon to rescue those at sea, and both are often depicted standing in a boat (Kinsley 1989: 31). However, as one of the original functions of Avalokiteśvara was as a rescuer of those at sea and as this is also described in early Sanskrit texts, the association between the two is likely to be more complex. As I will describe in a separate chapter,<sup>5</sup> the relationship between Guanyin and Mazu appears to be related to two competing religious systems and the emergence of the character of Miaoshan.

The legend of Miaoshan<sup>6</sup> is one that is well known and used frequently to account for the transformation of Guanyin into a female deity. Princess Miaoshan is considered by many to have been an incarnation of Guanyin. One popular iconographical form depicts her seated on a rock or on a wave on the island of Putuo, accompanied by her ever faithful companions Longnü and Shancai.<sup>7</sup> Because Putuo Island, situated off the South East Coast of China, became synonymous with the name of Miaoshan and therefore the worship of Guanyin, John Chamberlayne (1962: 47-48) considers that the sexual transformation was due to the popularity of the pilgrimage to Putuo Island. Yet, while this association certainly played a part in the popularity of Guanyin, there is much to suggest that there were other non-Chinese influences that played a greater role in the

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<sup>5</sup>See Chapter 6.

<sup>6</sup>Detail of this legend is given in Chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup>The association with Shancai and Longnü and the island of Putuo is described in detail in Chapter 5.

change in sex of Guanyin.

The association with the Indian goddess Tārā is often cited as a reason for the sexual transformation of Guanyin. Diana Paul (1979) considers the possibility that Chinese Buddhists of the Tang dynasty believed that Tārā was a lower stage manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, and Aurel Stein (1921) in his examination of the cave paintings at Dunhuang, cites several works that show Guanyin seated in the same pose as Tārā. Stein also cites paintings of Guanyin that contain an invocation to Tārā, which would suggest either a confusion between the two deities, or an assumption that they were the same deity, regardless of gender or name.

One supporter of the theory that Tārā and Guanyin are both female emanations of Avalokiteśvara is John Blofeld (1978). Blofeld refers to Chinese teachers claiming to have come across images of Tārā whom the Mongols and Tibetans revere as a female emanation of Avalokiteśvara. He also claims that these teachers refer to some antique paintings which portray Guanyin as being identical with Tārā (ibid., 23).

Mallar Ghosh (1980) also is a firm expounder of the theory that Tārā is the emanation or personification of Avalokiteśvara's compassion. In addition to the Indian archaeological evidence, Ghosh cites textual evidence which describes Tārā as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. Some of this text was translated into Chinese in the eighth century.

Kinsley considers that it was from the eighth century that Guanyin came to be depicted in feminine form. His assumption rests on the translation of the Sanskrit *Pāṇḍaravāsīnī* (she who is clad in white) an epithet of White Tārā. This, states Kinsley, corresponds to one of the forms of Guanyin introduced into China in the eighth century (Kinsley 1989: 29). Joining this debate Rolf A Stein (1986) disagrees that this shows any influence for he maintains that although *Pāṇḍaravāsīnī* and Tārā are mentioned together in Tantric texts, they are distinct from each other.

Ernest Fenollosa (1912) identifies Chinese paintings of Guanyin of the early Tang dynasty

that are markedly feminine (although some of these forms do sport a moustache!). In addition R.F. Johnston (1976: 275) cites an essay in the Chronicle of Putuo that contains an elaborate description of Guanyin's personal appearance which suggests Guanyin was perceived as a feminine figure. This essay has been attributed to the poet Wang Po who died in 676 and although Johnston observes that the inferior literary style of the essay proves that it cannot have been written by Wang Po,<sup>8</sup> in his opinion it still suggests that Guanyin was recognised in female form long before the twelfth century as maintained by other writers (*ibid.*, 274).

Given the variations in opinion, as given above, it appears likely that the feminisation of Guanyin took place in stages, yet it is, perhaps, misleading to suggest there was a 'sex change'. Guanyin is believed by Buddhists to be neither male nor female for a bodhisattva transcends gender distinctions and may appear on earth in either male or female form. There is a passage in the *Lotus Sūtra* that expressly states that Guanyin will appear in female form when that form is appropriate to circumstances. Hence the sex of Guanyin continues to cause confusion with many forms being of non-specific gender.

It is clear that scholars are not united in their opinions as to the timing of, and the reasons for, the appearance of a feminine form of Guanyin in China. In Chapter 4, therefore, I will reassess these opinions in an attempt to determine which particular religious figures have contributed to the feminisation of Guanyin in some areas.

## SOCIAL STATUS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMININE DEITIES

While the reasons for the development of a feminine form of Guanyin claim much attention, one subject that has caused much debate is the popularity of the feminine form and, in particular,

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<sup>8</sup> Johnston regards this work to be more likely to belong to an unknown member of Wang Po's literary circle.

how this popularity spread so far and wide. There are some scholars who consider that the popularity of Guanyin is linked to the social status of women. In China, and in other areas of East Asia, menstruation, childbirth, sexual intercourse and death are deemed to be spiritually polluting and therefore prevent women from attaining spiritual enlightenment. Barbara Reed (1992) considers that women became devotees of Guanyin because Guanyin does not make distinctions between men and women on the grounds of impurity. By emulating Miaoshan, who rejected marriage and remained virginal, women have been given strength to reject marriage or alleviate their suffering in these roles (ibid.,166).

P. Steven Sangren (1983: 11) also considers the popularity of Guanyin and other feminine deities is linked to the social status of women. He claims that while female deities are perfect in their generosity and purity, which is owed to their standing as mothers, they must first overcome the stigma of pollution. In relating the story of Miaoshan, Sangren argues that in order to attain bodhisattvahood, Guanyin denied her role as daughter and wife. She then assumed the role of mother. Although admitting that the cases are different, Sangren considers that the ideas of purity associated with Chinese female deities, including Guanyin, are similar to the Virgin Mary and the Christian notions of purity. Yü (1990b: 264) also notes the symbolism of purity. She claims that (white-robed) “Guanyin is a fertility goddess who nevertheless is devoid of sexuality. She gives children to others, but is never a mother”.

Rita Gross (1993: 232-233) agrees that motherhood as a symbol is more highly regarded than the literal mother, who is regarded as someone whose spiritual development is minimal and whose sufferings make rebirth as a female undesirable. However, Gross argues that motherhood brings attachment, an emotion which traps one in endless samsara. She cites the *Therīgāthā*, where women, grief-stricken at the death of children, became nuns and therefore made the transition from attachment to detachment, from motherhood to the spiritual life.

Yet do East Asian devotees view Guanyin as a symbol of detachment or as a counterpart of the 'Virgin Mary'? Do they consider that her divinity partly rests on her standing as a mother who has never borne a child? While many women do identify with Guanyin as Miaoshan, this is not necessarily because they consider their bodies impure or polluting. There are other possible motives. Marjorie Topley (Wolf 1978) cites a marriage resistance movement in the nineteenth century that worshipped Guanyin. Topley also (ibid: 264) describes the *bu luojia* (women who do not go down to the family). In this arrangement women did not consummate their marriage and provided their husbands with a concubine through whom to have children. While Sangren argues that this arrangement allowed women to avoid the pollution associated with sex and yet retain the status of mothers in their husbands' descent lines, did these women reject marriage, or the consummation of marriage, to avoid the "stain of pollution"? Could not this marriage resistance be choice born out of the simple desire not to be married? It must be remembered that women traditionally have been subjected to arranged marriages and in many areas this exists to this day. In the *bu luojia* women found an ingenious way of avoiding what they saw as the disadvantages of marriage but at the same time they retained status in society and hopefully sons to look after them in their old age. In Asian society a woman, even today, often has no support in old age once her husband dies if she does not have children to support her. It is natural that these women following this way of life would choose Guanyin (Miaoshan) as a symbol of and even justification for their lifestyle. It does not, however, necessarily mean that Guanyin was the inspiration for such a way of life.

Whether Guanyin was the inspiration for women who rejected marriage or chosen as an appropriate patron, Guanyin in the form of Miaoshan was important to those who wished to defy the social norms. However, although Miaoshan was an example of a woman who rebelled against tradition and sought an alternative, Guanyin was not exclusively identified with Miaoshan. As Yü



(1990a: 85) states, if she had been, then her appeal might be only to rebellious women and therefore be limited. But Guanyin's appeal was certainly wider.

Some scholars contend that Guanyin's appeal is related to texts and legends that describe Guanyin as a masculine bodhisattva who can take on female form. This, they suggest, offers women a different signal, that women are no different from men and they have the spiritual capability of attaining release from worldly attachments in spite of their femininity. Both Nancy (Barnes) Schuster (1981) and Rita Gross (1993) discuss the theme of 'changing the female body'. Schuster uses as examples several sūtras translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci between 706 to 713CE. These sūtras are intended to show the importance of ridding the body of 'male' or 'female' delusions. Mastering emptiness is essential, for perfect enlightenment cannot be attained by a woman or a man. Schuster considers that the theme of the texts was probably developed in order to confront traditional Buddhist views of the spiritual limitations of women. It also challenges the earlier notion that women's bodies are visible evidence that they have not reached a high level of spiritual maturity and cannot therefore be candidates for Buddhahood.

Rita Gross also discusses women and Buddhahood with reference to the *Śrīmālādevīśimhanāda-sūtra*, in which Śrīmālādevī is said to have the 'lion's roar' of a Buddha. This means to have enlightenment and to be able to preach like a Buddha. Gross takes this argument one step further, claiming that Śrīmālādevī is a Buddha who has not had to trade in her female body, the issue of her gender not being raised.

Some devotees (especially women) believe that Guanyin has the status of a Buddha in some temples,<sup>9</sup> and as such exemplifies the belief that women can reach this high level of spiritual maturity. But while it is clear that Guanyin appealed to many **Buddhist** women, how was the popularity of Guanyin transmitted to non-Buddhist women and how did this influence the

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<sup>9</sup>See for example the discussion about temples on Putuo Island in Chapter 5.

iconographical image of Guanyin? B E Reed ( 1992: 162-163) purports that women themselves helped in the development of Guanyin as the most popular bodhisattva. They did this through the education of their young children and as donors for works of art. Later women (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist) became artists themselves and produced paintings of Guanyin depicting a beautiful young woman seated on a lotus blossom.

As this work is primarily an iconographical study I do not intend to venture too far into the status of women in relation to Guanyin<sup>10</sup> but in the following chapters we will see how art has been useful in developing and disseminating the feminine image of Guanyin.

In Chapter 5 I examine some particular feminine forms that have evolved over the years and the notion of Guanyin as a sea 'goddess'. Particular attention will be paid to the areas where these forms became popular. For this, I am grateful to the work of Yü who has done much research on the feminine form of Guanyin in China. Of particular interest to Chapter 5 is her examination of Nanhai Guanyin (Guanyin of the South Seas); Baiyi Guanyin (White-robed Guanyin); Miaoshan and Yulan Guanyin (Guanyin with the Fish Basket). Yü considers that at one time each form may have had its own cult and have been associated with a particular place, the most important of which is Putuo Island. I investigate in depth the role this island has played in the dissemination of the cult of Guanyin. It is by examining the development of Guanyin on this island, and in other localities, that gives us a clearer idea of the influence that Chinese indigenous values had on the development of the feminine form of Guanyin.

## LINKS WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

In the originally non-Buddhist areas of East Asia it is interesting that an essentially Buddhist deity has been taken so firmly to the hearts of the masses, particularly as Guanyin is seen

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<sup>10</sup>In the final chapter there will be a brief look at Women's Vegetarian Houses.

in Taoist temples. Taoists, however, do not have a problem with this and in fact have stories that describe Guanyin as having descended from Taoist parents. But what is particularly interesting about the Guanyin cult is that not only has it been moulded by contact with Taoist beliefs but Guanyin has also influenced Taoist practices. This is particularly clear when analysing the relationship between Guanyin and Mazu. For this reason I devote an entire chapter to Mazu and the connection between the two.

Mazu is also known as Tian Hou, the Queen of Heaven and like Guanyin is worshipped as a beneficent and compassionate goddess who saves devotees from misery and peril, especially from the dangers of the sea. Also like Guanyin, Mazu is regarded as a patron and protector of mothers and children. This has led many scholars to speculate that the cult of Guanyin (and especially the feminine form) has been influenced by that of Mazu (see for example Kinsley 1989:29; Chamberlayne 1962: 51). However, what is particularly interesting about Mazu is that while scholars are trying to establish that Guanyin has been influenced by Mazu, some Taoists are trying to establish a connection with Guanyin, claiming that Mazu is an incarnation of Guanyin. Others claim that the two were sisters. Not only do legends describe this relationship but images are also being adapted to the point that devotees sometimes assert that images of Mazu are in fact images of Guanyin. It is difficult, though, to determine just where these beliefs originated for little research has focused on Mazu, beyond identification with a young girl of the tenth century and repetitions of her life story and miraculous powers.

Yü (1990a: 84) states that Mazu, the Goddess of Azure Clouds and the Eternal Mother, all claimed to be either related to Guanyin in a mother-daughter relationship or to be incarnations of Guanyin. As Yü does not substantiate this statement, it is difficult to determine whether Mazu herself claimed to be an incarnation of Guanyin or whether this was an idea mooted sometime after she became a popular object of worship. I suspect the latter. My own research has led me to

conclude that this is a relatively recent development, the claim being made to raise the status of Taoist temples, thus enabling them to attract more official support.

Official support has long been important to the cult of Mazu who was originally a minor 'local' deity, being someone who was deified after death. Yü (1990a) and Valerie Hansen (1990) discuss the influence these local deities had on popular religion and how these local deities faced competition from the better known gods. This was the result of state authorities 'approving' deities which meant that many of these local gods were superseded by the approved deities. James Watson (1985: 292-324) discusses the adoption of Mazu as a symbol of "coastal pacification" in the twelfth century leading to her becoming the "leading goddess in South China". He notes how the state authorities favoured the approved deities and paid for the construction of elaborate temples for them. This created a division between the approved and unrecognised cults.

This governmental interference has continued until the present day, especially in Taiwan. Stephan Feuchtwang (1974) discusses the relationship between temples and the successive governments that have ruled Taiwan since the nineteenth century. He analyses the effect of government interference and concludes that possibly as a result of 'ideological influence' there has been an increased orientation towards lay Buddhist practices in most of the temples that he has investigated (1974: 263). Chapter 6 investigates the relationship of some Taoist and Buddhist temples to the present governments in East Asia. It questions the status of Mazu in relation to Buddhist temples dedicated to Guanyin, and considers the possibility that less popular Taoist temples are aligning themselves to Buddhist temples by creating a relationship with Guanyin. It also suggests that this relationship is causing much confusion about the identity of some images with the result that there is a possibility of a new 'face' in the making. Chapter 6, therefore, is a prime example of the degree to which a religious figure, in this case an indigenous cult figure, is able to shape and influence the imagery of Guanyin.

What conclusion can be drawn about this development in Guanyin's iconography? Does it show how the process of assimilation can change and manipulate imagery? Has, also, the above survey of previous scholarly work illustrated the degree to which assimilation with the various cultures of East Asia has contributed to the malleability of Guanyin imagery? We have certainly seen how various religious figures have been credited with influencing the sexual transformation of Guanyin and that scholars are divided in their opinions on the impulses behind these influences.

It is also clear that links with other religious systems, such as Brahmanism and Taoism, have influenced the iconographical development of Guanyin. However, as there does appear to be confusion over much of the iconographical symbolism it is necessary to investigate in greater depth each stage of this iconographical development, in order to fully comprehend the symbolism of the Guanyin imagery. It is also necessary to take into account the views of local people. They can give valuable insight into how the various images have been re-translated in the various parts of East Asia. In the following chapters I include some of the views from many helpful people whom I have met in the process of collecting information for this work. I relate these views to the many images of Guanyin in order to determine how regional variation in cultural values and influence from the various religious figures, has accounted for the everchanging face of Guanyin in East Asia.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE BODHISATTVA OF MANY FACES

I can appear with one, three, five, seven, nine, eleven and up to 108, 1,000, 10,000 and 84,000 sovereign (cakra) faces; with two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, twenty, twenty-four and up to 108, 1,000, 10,000 and 84,000 arms making various gestures (mudras); and two, three, four, nine up to 108, 1,000, 10,000 and 84,000 clean and pure precious eyes, either merciful or wrathful, and in a state either of still imperturbability (dhyanasamadhi) or of absolute wisdom (prajñā) to save and protect living beings so that they can enjoy great freedom. (*Śūraṅgama-sūtra*)<sup>11</sup>

Guanyin occupies an exalted position in East Asian religions, being honoured in Buddhist, Taoist and syncretic temples. Yet, just as an actor or actress changes costume and adopts the face of different characters, so Guanyin also assumes different faces to suit the many forms necessary to assist and save devotees. In addition, Guanyin can appear multi-headed and multi-armed symbolizing the ability to save many living beings at the one time. These different forms have been accepted and loved in all parts of East Asia. But why were so many forms necessary? What was the 'original' face of Guanyin?

As discussed in the previous chapter, contact and competition with other religious figures have influenced the iconographical development of Guanyin. This has led to a multiplication of forms with some being 'remodelled'. But what is perhaps surprising is that many of these forms evolved in the country of origin. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to give some Indian background to the cult of Guanyin.<sup>12</sup> It will attempt to determine the 'original' face of Guanyin and examine the influences that were at hand to aid the development of this multi-faceted deity,

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<sup>11</sup>Translated from a Chinese text by Luk 1969: 141.

<sup>12</sup>Some Nepalese iconographical examples will also be given.

who first became popular in India as the Buddhist bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

In determining the original face of Avalokiteśvara it is necessary not only to look closely at early Indian iconographical examples, but also to include some early Indian textual references which have influenced the development of the cult.<sup>13</sup> Yet, while it would be useful to be able to place these references in chronological order, this is virtually impossible given the difficulty in dating texts and the number of possible interpolations. The first part of this chapter, therefore, while outlining the problems associated with the dating of these texts, will concentrate on the factors that influenced the earliest images of Avalokiteśvara, which are of a more certain date. Textual examples will be used to illustrate how the cult of Avalokiteśvara developed and to account for its popularity. The second part of the chapter will examine a number of specific forms of Avalokiteśvara that originated in India. Some of these images were, without doubt, influenced by Brahmanical figures and were formed to combat religious competition faced by the Buddhists in the country of origin.

Before discussing the earliest forms of Avalokiteśvara, it is pertinent to briefly discuss the nature of bodhisattvas, how their forms evolved and how they were described in early texts. This will enable us to understand how Avalokiteśvara later became one of the most important and popular bodhisattvas.

## THE NATURE OF BODHISATTVAS

It is widely believed that bodhisattvas were regarded as personifications of the Buddha's virtues and just as Mañjuśrī (a popular figure in early texts) was the personification of *prajñā* (wisdom), so Avalokiteśvara was the personification of *karuṇā* (compassion). Yet the name of

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<sup>13</sup>Translations from Sanskrit have been used where possible in order to remove any Chinese influence that may have altered the meaning of the text. Where translations from the Chinese have been used care has been taken to ensure that there is no vast difference in meaning between the Chinese text and that which was originally intended.

Avalokiteśvara does not feature in early Buddhist texts. This is, perhaps, not surprising, for not only did it take time for the importance of *karuṇā* to be realised, but also, Buddhist text compilers introduced 'heroes' slowly, using tales or parables to raise the status of the various characters.

Initially Siddhārtha Gautama was the only hero, as can be seen in the *Vinaya* where various disciples are seen to make enormous errors in order that Gautama could show his mighty wisdom and knowledge. Other early Buddhist texts show his compassionate nature, especially in the *Jātaka*<sup>14</sup> stories where in the *Jātakamālā* and *Jinakālamālī*, for example, Gautama is described sacrificing his body to feed a hungry tigress.<sup>15</sup> But the introduction of the Mahayana texts saw bodhisattvas appear who, according to the texts, were capable of performing great deeds for the benefit of all beings.

Bodhisattvas are described in some of these texts as the sons of the Buddha but could be more accurately described as the Buddha's agents, for they do the Buddha's work of bringing all beings to enlightenment. The function of the bodhisattva is not merely to save devotees from disaster, but to save all living beings in order that they will have favourable rebirths and ultimately attain Nirvāṇa.<sup>16</sup> This is accomplished only by delaying their own entry to Nirvāṇa.

It was this manifestation of great compassionate selflessness that promoted the bodhisattvas to a status higher than the Disciples and Pratyekabuddhas. One Prajñāpāramitā text states:

...this wisdom of the Disciples and Pratyekabuddhas bears no comparison to the wisdom of a Bodhisattva even though developed for one day only...(because) ...the Disciples and Pratyekabuddhas do not think, not even one of them, that they should, after winning full enlightenment, lead all beings to Nirvana. (Conze 1975: 58-59)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Stories of the Buddha's previous lives.

<sup>15</sup>See also Emmerick 1970: 88-89 where this story is repeated.

<sup>16</sup>On the importance of favourable rebirths see below.

<sup>17</sup>In addition, the path of the bodhisattva is different from that of the Disciples or Pratyekabuddhas for once the latter have reached the stage of patience (*kṣānti*) they are too specialised and fixed to modify their approach and they are not able to fall into the bad destinies i.e be reborn in hell, as an animal or as a ghost. The bodhisattva on the other hand has made a vow that sometimes he will be reborn in bad destinies in order to convert the damned, animals and ghosts (Conze 1975: 58-59).



For many centuries Avalokiteśvara was just one of these many bodhisattvas who renounced his own freedom in order to save others from misery. But, as the importance of *karuṇā* increased, so the role of the bodhisattvas expanded and it was here that Avalokiteśvara began to be particularly associated with compassionate acts. It has been suggested (Malalasekera 1966: 409) that the lack of Avalokiteśvara's name in early texts demonstrates the superiority of *prajñā* to *karuṇā*, Avalokiteśvara's name becoming popular when the importance of *karuṇā* surpassed that of *prajñā*. However, the texts do not reflect this idea. Although they do reflect a changing attitude, as one would expect given the wide time frame and different regions within which the texts were written, no text classes *karuṇā* as being of higher importance than *prajñā*. Although *karuṇā* does take on immense importance within the bodhisattva ideal, it is only obtained through the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*). In another chapter of the *Large Sūtra of Perfect Wisdom*, which possibly dates to the 4th century CE,<sup>18</sup> it is stated:

...a Bodhisattva, a great being, having stood in the perfection of wisdom, by way of not taking his stand on it, should perfect the perfection of giving, by way of seeing that no renunciation has taken place, since gift, giver, and recipient have not been apprehended. (Conze 1975: 45).

As one would expect, all the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature places importance on a bodhisattva fully perfecting wisdom before truly understanding compassion.<sup>19</sup> Yet other texts also maintain this ideal. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* (*Lotus Sūtra*) for example describes how:

"These bodhisattvas, immense, inconceivable and beyond measure, endowed with magic power, wisdom, and learning, have progressed in knowledge for many kotis of aeons" (Ch.XIV.37, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, Kern 1884: 292).

It is clear from the examples given above that there were many bodhisattvas, all of whom were said

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<sup>18</sup> Avalokiteśvara's name only occurs once at the beginning of this sūtra, possibly indicating that this was an interpolation to justify his later popularity.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Conze sums up the teaching of *prajñāpāramitā* literature in two sentences "1) One should become a bodhisattva (or Buddha-to-be), i.e. one who is content with nothing less than all-knowledge attained through the perfection of wisdom for the sake of all beings. 2) There is no such thing as a bodhisattva, or as all-knowledge, or as a 'being' or as the perfection of wisdom, or as an attainment. To accept these contradictory facts is to be perfect" (Conze 1975: 7-8).

to be endowed with great wisdom in order to lead all beings to Nirvāṇa. So when did Avalokiteśvara become known for being the saviour par excellence?

## PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH EARLY TEXTUAL REFERENCES

At what point Avalokiteśvara became more popular than some of the many other bodhisattvas is uncertain. In fact the earliest textual reference to Avalokiteśvara is unclear. References to Avalokiteśvara can be found in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*, the *Mahāvastu*, the *Chengju guangming dingyi jing*, the *Druma-kinnara-rāja-paripṛcchā-sūtra*, the *Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra* and the *Prajñāpāramita-hṛdaya-sūtra* (*Heart Sūtra*), all of which have been claimed to have been written before 300CE. However, the dating of all these works is subject to debate. Paul Harrison (1996: 8) does not consider that the translation of the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* is a genuine work of Lokakṣema's, which puts its date in doubt. The *Mahāvastu* written possibly as early as 200BCE or as late as 300CE does contain an Avalokita sūtra but it is a possible interpolation. Furthermore, although Avalokiteśvara is mentioned briefly in a list of bodhisattvas in both the *Chengju guangming dingyi jing* and the *Druma-kinnara-rāja-paripṛcchā-sūtra*, because Avalokiteśvara does not reappear in these texts and because the order in which he appears in the *Druma-kinnara-rāja-paripṛcchā-sūtra* differs in various translations, it can be suspected that these were also later additions.<sup>20</sup> This leaves the *Prajñāpāramita-hṛdaya-sūtra* and the *Avalokiteśvara-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa*<sup>21</sup> (Exposition of the Magical Transformation of Avalokiteśvara)<sup>22</sup> chapter of the *Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra*. Jan Nattier (1992) gives very good reasons for the *Heart Sūtra* being a Chinese apocryphal sūtra, concluding that it was written in the fifth century at the earliest,

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<sup>20</sup>In addition, according to Harrison, Avalokiteśvara does not appear on the list of bodhisattvas in the *Druma-kinnara-rāja-paripṛcchā-sūtra* translated by Lokakṣema.

<sup>21</sup>This chapter is number 25 in Kumārajīva's translation. Hurvitz places it at Chapter 24 in the extant Sanskrit version (i.e. Nepalese recension), while Dharmarakṣa's translation enumerates it as Chapter 23.

<sup>22</sup>Often referred to as The Gateway to Every Direction.

and possibly as late as the seventh century (Nattier 1992: 166). Some doubts have also been cast over the date of the Avalokiteśvara chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

It has been suggested by several scholars (for example Mironov (1927); Chandra (1977); Yü (1996)), that there were two versions of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, one being represented by the extant Gilgit and Nepalese manuscripts and the other by the Central Asian manuscript fragments,<sup>23</sup> known as the Kashgar manuscripts. The version of the Gilgit manuscript resembles the text of the Nepalese, while the Central Asian manuscripts are quite different and are considered to be the earliest. These manuscripts, together with the Chinese translations of Dharmarakṣa<sup>24</sup> (286CE), Kumārajīva<sup>25</sup> (406CE) and Jñānagupta - Dharmagupta (601CE) can give us some important clues in the dating of the Avalokiteśvara cult in India. According to Mironov (1927: 257) the unknown author of the preface to the Chinese translation in 601CE, notes that the *gāthās* (verses) are missing from the *Avalokiteśvara-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa* of both Dharmarakṣa's and Kumārajīva's translations.<sup>26</sup> The preface continues to state that this omission in Kumārajīva's translation has been filled in by some "wise men". While this puts doubt on the authorship of the *gāthās*, it is puzzling that Dharmarakṣa's translation of this chapter is in question as a more recent examination of Dharmarakṣa's work has not questioned the authenticity of these verses.<sup>27</sup> Yet the authenticity of this entire chapter in other versions has also been questioned. Kern, who has used Kumārajīva's translation and Nepalese manuscripts for his English translation, considers that the original *Lotus Sūtra* consisted of twenty-one chapters, the remaining chapters being later additions (Kern 1965: xxi). Gregory Schopen (1978) also suggests that this chapter was a later addition to the Gilgit text, written when the popularity of Avalokiteśvara was already established.

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<sup>23</sup>Which Heinz Bechert considers are representative of an earlier Indian original (Chandra 1977: 6).

<sup>24</sup>Based on a text tradition similar to the Central Asian manuscript (ibid: 7).

<sup>25</sup>Using the "Nepalese-Kashmirian recension" which Bechert tentatively places in the fourth century CE (ibid):

<sup>26</sup>Although the prose section was translated by Kumārajīva.

<sup>27</sup>See for example Daniel Boucher's work.

From the foregoing observations it would appear that there is a large question mark hanging over the date of the *Avalokiteśvara-vikurvāṇa-nirdeśa* chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Even if we consider that this chapter was legitimately part of an Indian original, a version of which was translated by Dharmarakṣa, it would appear that there were versions which did not contain this chapter. This would suggest that the worship of Avalokiteśvara was limited to a particular geographical area until approximately the third or fourth century. Later his wider popularity necessitated inclusion in other versions of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

## EARLY ICONOGRAPHICAL IMAGES OF AVALOKITEŚVARA

Although these textual sources do not pinpoint the exact date when Avalokiteśvara was being worshipped, the archaeological finds are more helpful. Plate 1 represents an early iconographical representation of Avalokiteśvara dated to the Kuṣāṇa period (late first century - early third century CE) and shows Mediterranean or Iranian influence in the moustache and sandals.<sup>28</sup> He is seen here with a lotus in his left hand which is the typical Padmapāṇi form or 'Bearer of the Lotus'. Any Iranian influence in this period can be explained by the extent of the expansion of the Kuṣāṇa empire under Kanīška I and his patronage of Buddhism and other religions such as Zoroastrianism<sup>29</sup>(Huntington 1985: 125-126). Under Kanīška I, Buddhist art flourished and continued to do so for the next couple of centuries.

It is the Hellenistic and Iranian influence that has led Mallmann to speculate that the triad of Amitābha-Avalokiteśvara-Mahāsthāmaprāpta is based upon the triad of Zoroastrian cosmology, Amitābha having a counterpart in Ahura Mazda and Avalokiteśvara being equated with Mithra

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<sup>28</sup>This image is a typical example of the form known as *Padmapāṇi* (Bearer of the Lotus). Some scholars (e.g. Winternitz) consider this form evolved from King Vipaścit described in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa.

<sup>29</sup>However, in the Mathurā region, the southern capital of the Kuṣāṇa, works of the Indic style were produced (Huntington 1985: 126).



**PLATE 1**

Avalokiteśvara. Dated between late first century and early third century CE.  
(Huntington 1985:139)

(Mallmann 1948: 86-90). Yet iconographically there is little to suggest a parallel between Mithra and Avalokiteśvara. It is the light symbolism of Mithra's crown composed of the rays of the sun, that encourages Mallman to connect Mithra to Avalokiteśvara (see Plate 2). Yet while the motif of light<sup>30</sup> does become a persistent symbol in later images, early figures of Avalokiteśvara do not show this connection. If there are parallels to be drawn between Avalokiteśvara and Zoroastrian cosmology it should be with Ahura Mazda's daughter, Anahita. Anahita is the goddess of the waters and is described as "...strong and bright, tall and beautiful, pure and nobly born...(wearing) a golden crown with eight rays and a hundred stars, a golden mantle and a golden necklace..." (Hinnells 1985: 28). Samuel Beal in response to Xuanzang's reference to the "beautiful body" of Avalokiteśvara, remarks that "there can be little doubt that we have here a link connecting this worship with that of Ardhvisuraanihita" (Beal 1968: X, 225). As can be seen from Plate 3, Anahita often carries a water vessel or vase very much like the images of Guanyin. Yet the water pot or vase was not often portrayed as an attribute of Avalokiteśvara in India.<sup>31</sup> It was almost exclusively the attribute of Maitreya.<sup>32</sup>

Any parallel between Avalokiteśvara and Anahita is, of course, one that can be drawn between many gods and goddesses and certainly does not prove a derivation or influence in the early stages. Tucci, for one, is certainly sceptical of these associations noting that any Iranian influence took place after the cult of Avalokiteśvara was in existence (Tucci 1948-51: 174). However, as Holt points out, the light symbolism does figure strongly in the cult of Avalokiteśvara and Iranian sources may be responsible for a "further enhancement of Avalokiteśvara's mythic image... in which motifs of both compassion and light were forcefully combined" (Holt 1991: 39).

Yet, while an Iranian influence may be noticed in the style of some images, many images

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<sup>30</sup>The symbol of light, in fact, is an all embracing symbol of Amitābha's paradise .

<sup>31</sup> Except when Avalokiteśvara is portrayed with four or more hands.

<sup>32</sup> For later connections between Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya see Chapter 3.



### PLATE 2

Mithra (left) with a crown composed of the rays of the sun. Relief from Taq-i Bistan. (Hinnells 1985:99)



### PLATE 3

The goddess Anahita (left) with a vase of purification. Rock carving from Taq-i Bistan. (Hinnells 1985:107)



are clearly influenced by Brahmanism. Plate 4 shows a Buddha (unidentified) with Indra to his left and Brahmā to his right. The image in Plate 5 is from Ahicchatrā, possibly dated to 152CE, showing the seated Buddha with Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi. Vajrapāṇi like Brahmā is dressed as an ascetic and Avalokiteśvara like Indra is dressed as a prince. A prime example of this princely form can be seen in the fifth century painting from the caves at Ajanta (Plate 6). Huntington (1985: 155) notes that a deliberate overlapping is likely for mahāsattva bodhisattvas reside as kings of heaven prior to their final reincarnations and Indra and Brahmā are also kings of heaven. It is likely, therefore, that these figures served as prototypes for the paired bodhisattvas.

Yet while Avalokiteśvara may be compared to Indra, he may also be compared with Brahmā. While early iconographical forms show Avalokiteśvara with two hands, his right hand holding the lotus and the left hand in *varada-mudrā*, he can also be seen with four hands holding the lotus, rosary, and the jug of nectar (the fourth in the *varada-mudrā*), all of which were carried by Brahmā (See Plate 7 where three of these attributes are shown). It is interesting that later images of Avalokiteśvara show him dressed as an ascetic like Brahmā as opposed to his earlier princely form.

Although the early archaeological remains, described above, cannot be dated with exactitude, it would appear that images of Avalokiteśvara can be dated to approximately the second and third centuries CE. Many of these show a Brahmanical influence. Yet this borrowing from Brahmanical gods was not merely an artistic creation, for texts also show that Buddhist figures were ‘moulded’ to absorb the qualities of their Brahmanical counterparts: The *Kāraṇḍavyūha* describes how Avalokiteśvara created the universe; “from his eyes came the sun and moon from his forehead Maheśvara (Śiva); from his shoulder Brahmā and others, and from his heart Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu)” (Malalasekera 1966: 410).





**PLATE 4**  
Buddha (unidentified)  
with Indra (right) and  
Brahmā (left).  
(Huntington:1985:120)

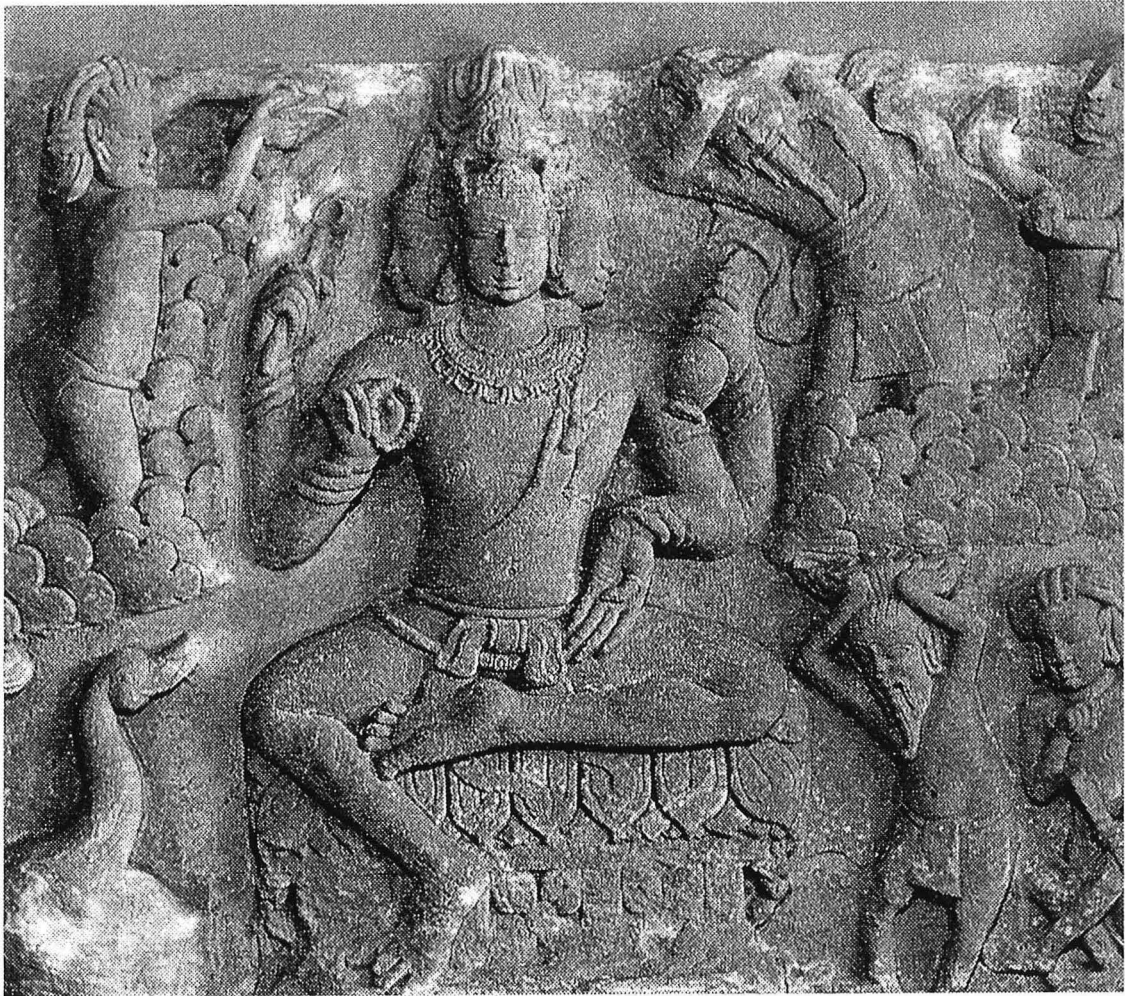


**PLATE 5**  
Seated Buddha with  
Avalokiteśvara (right).  
Ahicchatrā. Possibly  
dated to 152 CE.  
(Huntington 1985:153)



**PLATE 6**

Avalokiteśvara. Ajanta. Late fifth century.  
(Craven 1976:126)



**PLATE 7**  
Brahmā seventh century.  
Aihole.  
(Harle 1994:171)

## REASONS FOR AVALOKITEŚVARA'S RISE TO FAME

Yet, although Avalokiteśvara took on the attributes of other gods from competing religious systems, it took time to become a hero. This was because there were many other bodhisattvas vying for the position:

...those bodhisattvas who, by the power of their vows, have roared the roar of the Great Lion and are clad in armor, and will remain devoted to leading all living beings to complete nirvana, so that they will not enter nirvana themselves. (Gomez 1996: 97)

Bhaiṣajyaguru, known for his extraordinary healing powers, made twelve vows. The sixth of these declared:

...whichever beings are such as have inferior bodies, imperfect senses, dark coloring, are retarded, palsied, one-eyed, lame, hump-backed, leprous, maimed, blind, deaf, crazy, and others having diseases which arise in the body, may they all, after heard my name, come to be such as have complete senses (and) fully formed limbs. (Schopen 1978: 206).

So if other bodhisattvas could offer release from the same disasters as Avalokiteśvara, why did this particular bodhisattva become so popular? In the process of answering this question, it is necessary to ask what the devotees hoped to achieve by their worship. Mainstream Buddhism presented a system whereby emulating the Buddha the devotee would, by his/her own actions, reach Nirvāṇa through a series of favourable rebirths. Mahāyana Buddhism, however, although based on existing themes within the Mainstream system, recognised that this path was very difficult, for there was no assistance and it therefore took a great deal of effort and self-discipline. In addition, the prospect of a series of rebirths was a daunting prospect especially as there was nothing to guarantee that these rebirths would be favourable. Therefore any promise of short cutting this process or of ensuring a favourable rebirth was enticing. In the Paradise Cult it was believed that Amitābha was waiting seated on a lotus throne flanked by two bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara on his left side and Mahāsthāmaprapta on his right side. This 'paradise' (Sukhāvatī) was only one rebirth away and not in the far distant future. It was also promised that

this rebirth was to be in a land of eternal bliss. Yet, in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, it is clear that rebirth in Sūkhāvatī does not result from religious activity undertaken in regard to Amitābha. It results from hearing or recollecting the name of Avalokiteśvara (Schopen 1978: 282).

There is, therefore, good reason for Avalokiteśvara's monumental rise to fame for not only was Avalokiteśvara believed to assist in rebirth in Sūkhāvatī but was increasingly believed to assist in the present world.<sup>33</sup> He was also, according to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, capable of descending to hell to free those beings whose former life had condemned them to such an existence.<sup>34</sup>

Happy are those beings who recollect your name. Those having been reborn in the Kālasūtra (hell) and the Raurava (hell), in the Avīci (hell) and in the city of Pretas who recollect your name are freed. They are freed from much suffering due to evil. (Schopen 1978: 145).

Preventing rebirth in hell meant ensuring that there was no 'bad karma' associated with death for the type of death experience was considered to bear the consequences of one's past karma or merit. Devotees, therefore, feared that if they had not accumulated merit in their actions, death would be terrifying. This increased the importance of cult figures who protected devotees from *bhaya*s (fears) and *akālamaraṇa*s (untimely deaths). Schopen notes that in the Gilgit texts, what one text identifies as *akālamaraṇa*s another identifies as *bhaya*s, which suggests that these were closely linked. He also notes that in the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra*, concern for medicine and fear of death are interchangeable devices. Thus fear is dispelled, not necessarily the death itself.<sup>35</sup> The text, therefore, which raised Avalokiteśvara's importance is the *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka-sūtra* for it described Avalokiteśvara alleviating these fears and saving from perils:

All the hundred thousands of myriads of kotis of creatures, young man of good family, who in this world are suffering troubles will, if they hear the name of the Bodhisattva

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<sup>33</sup>Śākyamuni was already removed from the world of the living and therefore too distant. Amitābha also was not accessible. He was the goal but could not help in the present world.

<sup>34</sup>However, the Buddhist hell is not considered to be eternal.

<sup>35</sup>This text announces these untimely deaths which other texts (including the Avalokiteśvara-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa) take for granted. It also does not offer protection from these by a vow to Bhaiṣajyaguru, it merely states that these untimely deaths exist. This suggests that this Gilgit text is earlier than the *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka-sūtra*.



Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara, be released from that mass of troubles (Kern 1965: 406).

From approximately the fifth century Avalokiteśvara became known as the Protector from “Perils” or from the “Eight Great Fears” and it was this that firmly established the cult in India. At the cave temples of Ajanta, Kanheri and Aurangabad there are a large number of rock hewn images of Avalokiteśvara as a protector from these perils dating from the fifth century. This form was originally depicted as a princely figure complete with turban, with lotus in hand, standing against a background of the eight great perils: fire, shipwreck, robbers, fetters, demon, lion, serpent and elephant. These were the perils described in the *Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra*. This sūtra states that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara protects his devotees from every danger. At the uttering of his name, all fetters are loosened. If a man falls into a mass of fire, he is saved by remembering Avalokiteśvara. In the same way he is protected from the dangers of rivers, shipwreck, attack, etc. Avalokiteśvara is invoked with the uttering of "*Om Maṇipadme hum*", the protecting words of prayer. Plate 8 is an excellent example of this form at Aurangabad, where all eight perils can be clearly seen. The sculpture has been dated to the second half of the sixth century.

From the foregoing observations it is clear that Avalokiteśvara's rise to fame was due to the belief that he was capable of saving devotees from untimely deaths and the eight great perils of existence. Therefore, what this bodhisattva managed to achieve above other bodhisattvas was the means to dispel the fear of untimely deaths and protect against the untimely death itself. .

## OTHER FORMS SHOWING BRAHMANICAL INFLUENCE

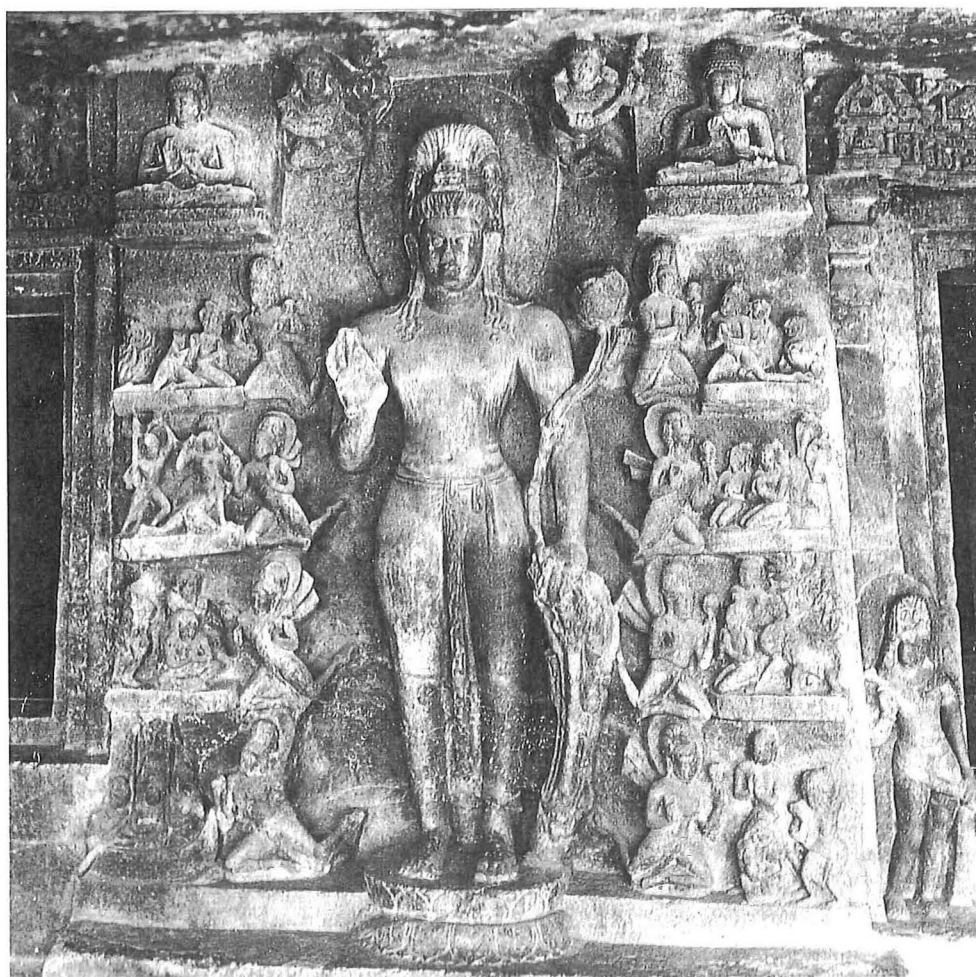
### **Tārā Avalokiteśvara**

This borrowing from Brahmanical figures did not stop with the early forms. Legends about

**PLATE 8**

Avalokiteśvara as the saviour from the Eight Great perils. Sculpture from the cave temple at Aurangabad.

(Berkson 1986:124)

**THE EIGHT PERILS**

As shown in the scenes on either side of Avalokiteśvara:

- |              |                           |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Fire      | 2. Lions and wild animals |
| 3. Slavery   | 4. Snakes                 |
| 5. Robbery   | 6. Elephants              |
| 7. Shipwreck | 8. Demons or illness      |

Avalokiteśvara's protection from untimely deaths led to the formation of other forms, many of which were heavily influenced by Brahmanical figures. One of the earliest of these forms is Tārā.<sup>36</sup> This figure can justifiably be claimed to be one of the forms of Avalokiteśvara, for Tārā was considered to be the female personification of Avalokiteśvara's compassion. This is supported by textual evidence, for the *Arya-Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (fifth-seventh century CE) describes Tārā as the personification of the *karuṇā* of Avalokiteśvara (Ghosh 1980: 11). Tārā is also mentioned as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (Ghosh 1980: 13).

Before being regarded as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, Tārā was a Brahmanical deity. Brahmanical textual material according to the Purāṇas and the *Rāmāyaṇa* suggests that her worship originated in a geographical area not too far removed from the cave temples of Western Deccan as discussed above.<sup>37</sup> The form that Tārā takes in the early stages of her Buddhist worship is as an attendant to Avalokiteśvara. One of the earliest representations of Tārā as Avalokiteśvara's attendant is to be found at Karle, the sculpture possibly dating to the fifth century (Huntington 1985: 165). Other representations at Kanheri and Aurangabad show Avalokiteśvara as a saviour from perils with two goddesses thought to be Tārā and Bhṛīkuṭī at his side.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>There is no official Tārā Avalokiteśvara form although Matsunaga does refer to a form by this name (Matsunaga 1969 : 135).

<sup>37</sup>The earliest textual evidence makes it clear that the Brahmanical Tārā was believed to be stationed on Kiskindhā mountain. The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki describes Tārā as living with Vāli in Kiskindhā. This is supported by the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* where Vāli is described as staying in Kiskindhā. The *Brahma Purāṇa* describes Kiskindhā as a holy centre on the banks of the river Godāvarī which originates from Brahmadri and "flowing south of the Vindhya mountain". Other references place her on the Vindhya mountain which is believed by Sircar to have referred to a mountain situated in the south and different from the well known Vindhya mountain range today. Other Purāṇas also describe Tārā as "daughter of the mountain" in the "southern quarter" or simply on the Kiskindhā mountain. What is not clear is the exact geographical area of Kiskindhā. Sircar takes it to be either modern Anegundi in the Dharwar District or of the Udaipur Division, Rajasthan. Kantawala places Kiskindhā in modern Kekind in Jodhpur State or in the ex-Hyderabad state. N Dey places it south of the River Kṛṣṇā. Sircar actually places the Rāmāyaṇic Kiskindhā in Mysore although Mysore is further south than the valley of Godāvarī. Wherever Kiskindhā was actually situated, the general area described above does appear to be South Western India and likely to have been in reasonable proximity to the cave temples (See Sircar 1967: 160; Kantawala 1964: 346).

<sup>38</sup>It would seem that Bhṛīkuṭī appeared at the same time as Tārā. Texts describe Bhṛīkuṭī as coming from the heart of the Buddha. Later the two forms merged and Tārā took over the role of both. These early forms influenced the later Tibetan thought that Avalokiteśvara had two companions as seen in the wives of Srong btsan sgam po.



Just why Tārā, a Brahmanical deity, ended up in the Buddhist pantheon can possibly be explained by the interaction between the Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptors working in neighbouring caves. Here there appears to have been a great deal of experiment and interchanging of ideas. At Aurangabad, Berkson (1986) notes that in one of the caves there is an attempt to combine these religions, for the Buddha is to be seen on the north wall, Durgā and Gaṇeśa on the west wall and the seven mothers on the south and west walls. It is likely that sculptors, employed by the various schools, combined ideas and resources and experimented with the forms of the Buddha, Durgā, Tārā and Avalokiteśvara.<sup>39</sup>

But why was it necessary to give Avalokiteśvara a female attendant, especially one who was already well known in the Brahmanical pantheon?<sup>40</sup> It is possible that Tārā's qualities of remarkable insight and intelligence were seen by the Buddhists as a perfect complement to Avalokiteśvara's compassion, at a time when it was understood that bodhisattvas have both a male and a female nature. The Brahmanical notion of the power of their gods being best represented by their active creative principle, does appear to have been a major influence on the Buddhist idea of a personified female energy of a particular Bodhisattva. However, while in Buddhist Tantric philosophy female energy is *prajñā* (perfect wisdom) which refers to the quality of being static, of realisation and quiescence, the Brahmanical śakti is active power. Hence in Brahmanism the male represents stillness and inactivity perpetually in wait for his śakti to generate life. This is represented in the androgynous image of Śiva at Elephanta which represents the union of *puruṣa*

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<sup>39</sup>It could be argued that this cave was appropriated by the Brahmans from the Buddhists, resulting in the combination of images. But Buddhist and Brahmanical co-operation did exist as evidenced at Nāgārjunakonda, where, in the 4th century, the wives of the Iśvākas, who were Vaiṣṇavas, made donations to the Buddhist monuments. The two religions went through various phases of competition over the next few centuries, from mutual acceptance to intense rivalry. This is evidenced by the numerous Brahmanical images trampling on Buddhist figures and vice versa.

<sup>40</sup>Evidence for this is purely textual as there are no known images of Tārā prior to her appearance in the Buddhist pantheon.

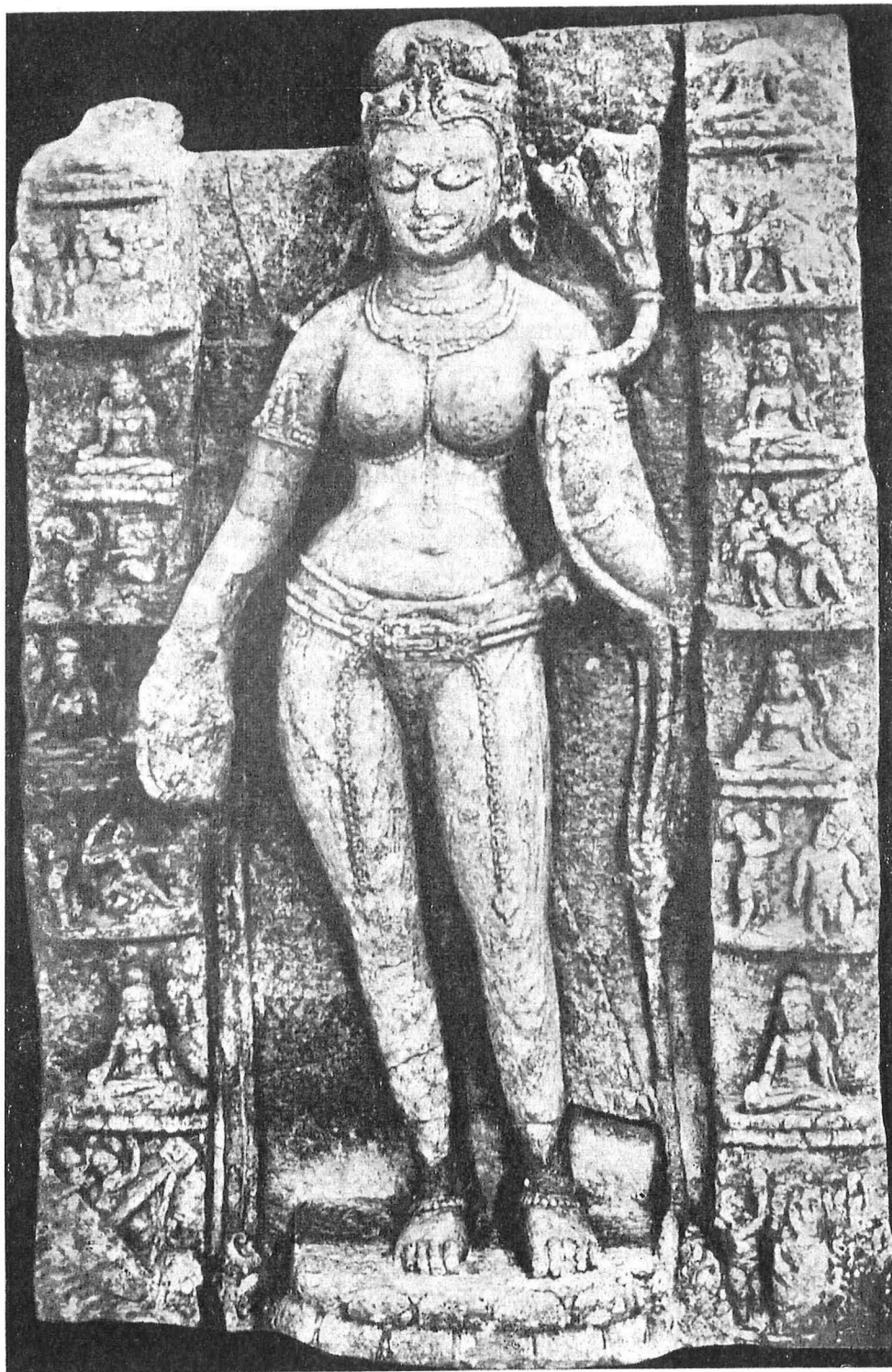
(the male half) and *prakṛti* (the female half). In Buddhism also the positive and negative elements come together in union which result in the achievement of the state of non-duality, although gendering is different.

Many images were modelled in the fifth and sixth century caves at a time when the notion of *śakti* as an essential complement to the god's power, was playing an important role in Brahmanical sculpture. However, not all scholars are in favour of a doctrinal reason for the introduction of Tārā. Ghosh (1980: 27) believes that the introduction of Tārā was most likely an attempt to create a Buddhist goddess endowed with the powers attributed to Durgā, so that she might successfully rival this Brahmanical goddess in order to elicit homage from the Brahmanical devotees. While this supposition cannot be supported, the linking with Durgā does help explain why many scholars have assumed that just as Durgā was the *śakti* of Śiva, so Tārā must be the *śakti* of Avalokiteśvara. The term *śakti* in relation to Buddhist gods is, however, misleading for it suggests a sexual partner. It is clear from the cave representations and later images, and from early Buddhist texts, that Tārā did not develop as consort, spouse, or sexual partner. She was represented as a personification of Avalokiteśvara's compassion to assist him in the role of saviour from the Eight Great Perils. This is particularly clear from the representation at Ellora, approximately sixteen miles NW from Aurangabad, where, for the first time, the function of Avalokiteśvara is relegated to Tārā who appears in her own right. Here Tārā is seen, with the stalk of a lotus in her left hand (her right hand is broken), standing against a panel on which Ghosh claims one can recognise the perils.<sup>41</sup>

One of the clearest early representations in eastern India of Tārā standing alone as a saviour from the Eight Great Perils is from Ratnagiri which is ascribable to the eighth century CE. Here Tārā is clearly seen (Plate 9) with the *utpala* in her left hand and her right hand in the *varada*

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<sup>41</sup>The panel is badly damaged but Ghosh believes that one can recognise the perils of shipwreck on the left and elephant, serpent and brigand on the right (Ghosh 1980: 23). Mitra also identifies these as the perils (1971: 182).



**PLATE 9**

Tārā as saviour from the Eight Great Perils. Eighth century. Stone. Ratnagiri.  
(Ghosh 1980: Pl. 9)

*mudrā* for dispelling the Eight Great Perils as described in the *Ārya-Tārā-sragdharā-stotra* by Sarvajñamitra, dated eighth century.

It is interesting to note that after Tārā had become a popular figure in the Buddhist pantheon she was ‘borrowed’ back by the Brahmanical Tantric sects and later became an important Hindu goddess (See Plates 10 and 11).

### **Ekādaśamukha Avalokiteśvara**

Many of the forms of Avalokiteśvara are multi-headed or multi-armed and this, also, is likely to have been borrowed or influenced by Brahmanical figures such as Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and Viṣṇu. One of the earliest examples of a multi-headed form is Ekādaśamukha (eleven-headed) Avalokiteśvara from the sixth century cave (41) at Kanheri in India (Plate 12). While the image at Kanheri has four arms, the *Avalokiteśvara-ekādaśamukha-dhāraṇī* states that this form should have two arms, one holding the *kuṇḍikā* (water pot) and the other being in *abhaya-mudrā* (Mitra 1980: 166). Śiva was often shown with more than one head or face, and this image of Ekādaśamukha is thought to have been influenced by Rudra, the eleven-faced fearful god, one of Śiva's earliest forms (Matsunaga 1969: 123). However, although this form may have been influenced by the Brahmanical god Rudra it also shows the continuing importance of relief from the ‘perils’. The *Avalokiteśvara-ekādaśamukha-nāma-dhāraṇī* declares that the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is like a medicine to all beings. He averts epidemic diseases, dispels sins and calamities, prevents bad dreams, wards off untimely deaths caused by water and fire, counteracts the effects of poison, and secures wealth, protection and happiness. Further, he who recites the *dhāraṇī* will see the Buddha at the time of his death and be born in Sukhāvatī after death (Malalasekera 1966: 416). The Buddhist symbolism of the eleven faces is usually taken to indicate that Avalokiteśvara attained supreme enlightenment through the practice of the ten ways



**PLATE 10**  
Tārā. Seventeenth century.  
Bhaktapur Museum.  
(Photograph Robin Whittaker)



**PLATE 11**  
Tārā.  
Bhaktapur Museum.  
(Photograph Robin Whittaker)





**PLATE 12**

Ekādaśamukha (eleven-headed) Avalokiteśvara. Late fifth - early sixth century. Kanheri.  
(Huntington 1985: 265)

of *prajñāpāramitā*, the eleventh being his own.<sup>42</sup>

### Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara

One of the best known multi-limbed images which remains popular across present day Asia, is the thousand-armed Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara. Indra, Śiva and Viṣṇu (see Plate 13 for a seventeenth century image of Viṣṇu Viśvarūpa from Nepal) were all believed to have one thousand arms each but it is usually thought that Śiva was the main influence on the Sahasrabhuja form. The thousand hands of Avalokiteśvara symbolizes his power to save all beings in the twenty-five spheres, each sphere being saved with forty hands. It is, therefore, sometimes said that one thousand hands are not needed for this image, forty hands are enough. An early image of this Avalokiteśvara has not been found in India, but in the preface of the Chinese translation of the *Nīlakaṇṭha* by Zhitong it is mentioned that a priest of central India went to China (618-26) and painted the image of Avalokita-sahasrabhuja-locana which was presented to the emperor along with a text on the rituals of this form of Avalokiteśvara. Afterwards, a priest came from northern India bringing a Sanskrit text of the *Sahasrabhuja-locana-dhāraṇī* which was translated into Chinese (Malalasekera 1966: 422).<sup>43</sup>

### Amoghapāśa Avalokiteśvara

Another form influenced by Śiva is the Amoghapāśa Avalokiteśvara. *Amogha* (unfailing) is another name for Śiva and the *pāśa* (noose) is one of Śiva's attributes (Matsunaga 1969: 129). This form is said to give benefit in this life and the next and again appears to have been made to enhance Avalokiteśvara's function as a saviour from perils. A person who chants the mantra and

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<sup>42</sup>The *Avalokiteśvara-ekādaśamukha-nāma-dhāraṇī* states that the *dhāraṇī* was explained by eleven crores of Buddhas which in Malalasekera's opinion could account for the eleven heads.

<sup>43</sup>The evidence of an early Chinese example of this form with the absence of any Indian image could suggest that this form originated in China. (See Chapter 3) However, as the absence of an Indian image does not necessarily preclude its existence, we must assume that this information is correct.



### PLATE 13

Viṣṇu Viśvarūpa. Bhaktapur.  
(Photograph Robin Whittaker)



### PLATE 14

Narasiṃha. Bhaktapur.  
(Photograph Robin Whittaker)



prays at a statue of this form will receive twenty kinds of benefit in this life and another eight at death (Malalasekera 1961: 476). This form symbolizes Avalokiteśvara's unfailing (*amogha*) ability to save all sentient beings using the noose (*pāśa*). The *Amoghapāśa-dhāraṇī-sūtra*, which was written in or before the sixth century, describes Avalokiteśvara as having one head and four arms (ibid.). The *Amogharāja-kalparāja* on the other hand describes the image as having either three heads and four arms or three heads and six arms.

### Hayagrīva Avalokiteśvara

Hayagrīva Avalokiteśvara is no exception to the forms influenced by Brahmanism. This form, usually portrayed with three faces and eight arms, has the unusual feature of a horse head in his crown or on top of his crown. Hayagrīva Avalokiteśvara is likely to have been influenced by Viṣṇu. In Purāṇic mythology Viṣṇu assumed the form of a horse-headed man in order to subdue Hayagrīva who appears as a demon (Matsunaga 1969: 126). Although Hayagrīva has had an independent existence in India and is worshipped in Tantricism as both an emanation of Amitābha and Akṣobhya (Bhattacharya 1968:165 and Matsunaga 1969:125), in the *Avalokiteśvara-Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* (*Kāraṇḍavyūha* is the prose version) a story is related about a man named Siṃha, who by accident was washed ashore on an island called Tāmaradvīpa which was inhabited by rakṣasīs, and saved himself with the help of a horse, named Balāha.<sup>44</sup> This horse is identified with Avalokiteśvara.

### Siṃhanāda Avalokiteśvara

While Viṣṇu, as a horse-headed man, is likely to have influenced images of Hayagrīva, he

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<sup>44</sup> Early Buddhist mythology also associates Hayagrīva with Śākyamuni. One particular Jataka story relates how several merchants are shipwrecked on an island and are welcomed with love and affection by some beautiful native women. These women, however, are rakṣasīs waiting for the opportunity to devour the men. The merchants are offered a means of escape on the back of the divine horse Balāha which is identified with Śākyamuni. The transfer of Balāha from Śākyamuni to Avalokiteśvara illustrates the growing popularity of the cult of Avalokiteśvara.

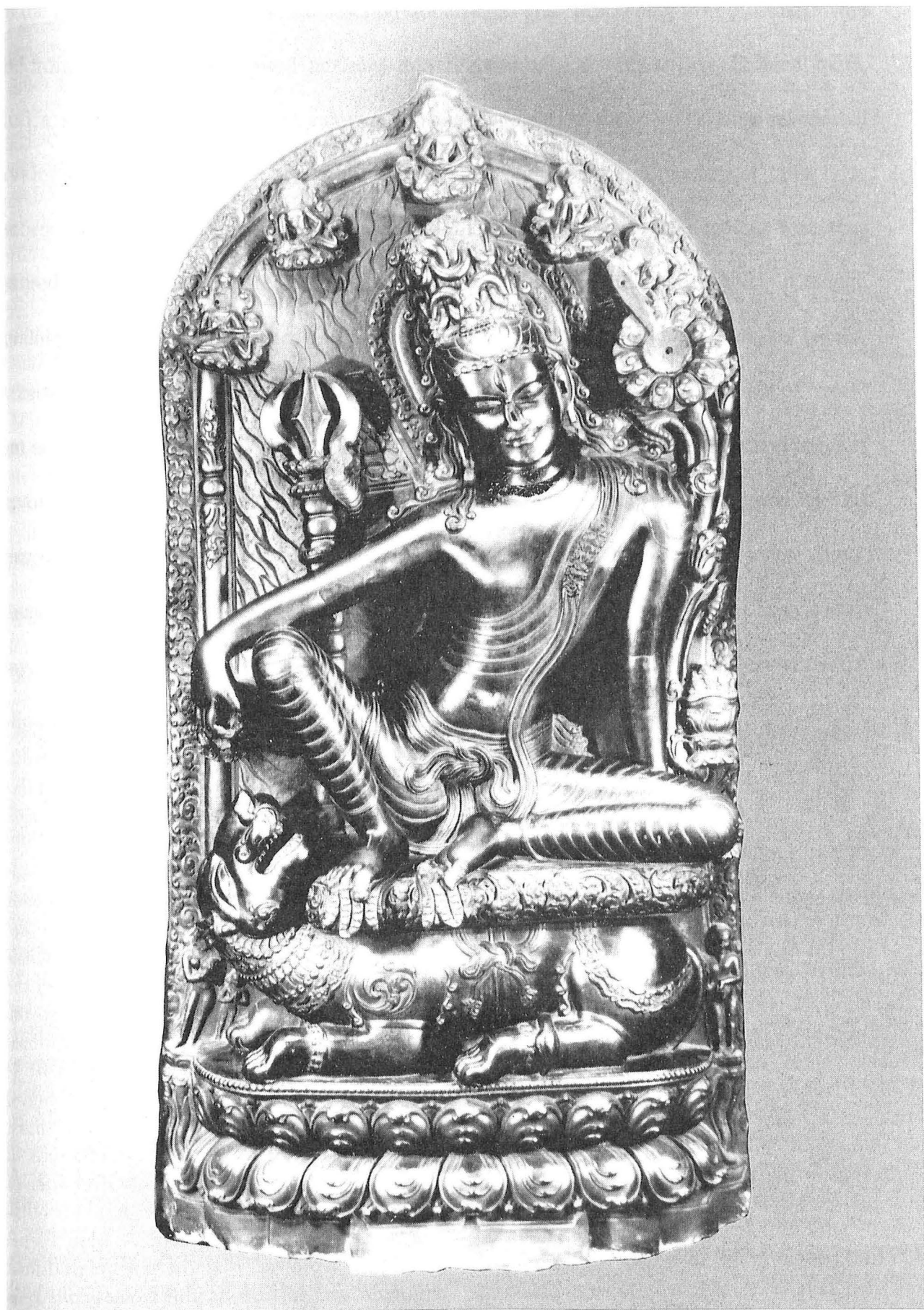
is also likely to have influenced *Simhanāda* (lion roar) Avalokiteśvara. In Hindu mythology Viṣṇu turned himself into half man half lion named Narasimha who defeated a certain demon king (Zimmer 1962: 180.n). More popular versions<sup>45</sup> state that this demon was unable to be defeated by man nor beast, by night or by day, or by any weapon. As Narasimha, Viṣṇu was neither man or beast. He then waited until evening, which was neither night nor day and then killed the demon with his bare nails (see Plate 14 for a modern Nepali image of Narasimha). In Buddhism the name *Simhanāda* is a direct reference to the teachings of the Buddha,<sup>46</sup> for the roar of the lion amongst the animals can be likened to the Buddha's teachings amongst his people. This form of Avalokiteśvara is also described as one that possesses self control of the world and symbolizes bravery and courage in accordance with the roar of a lion (Mallman 1948: 176). Four *sādhana*s describe this form of Avalokiteśvara seated on a lion in the position of royal ease (*lalitāṣana*), clad in a tiger skin and without the bodhisattva ornaments (see Plate 15). In his right hand there should be a white trident entwined with a white snake and in the left hand a lotus bowl full of flowers. He should also have, from his left hand, a lotus rising on which there is a burning sword (Bhattacharyya 1968: 127). The *Avalokiteśvara-simhanāda-nāma-dhāraṇī* describes how the Buddha, whilst residing in the palace of Avalokiteśvara on the mountain called Potala, gave instructions on how to recite the *dhāraṇī*. The chanting of this *dhāraṇī* is said to cure diseases, dispel sins and ensure birth in *Sukhāvātī* after death (Malalasekera 1961: 424).

From the foregoing observations it is clear that the 'original' face of Avalokiteśvara was as a princely attendant to the Buddha with two arms, the left holding a lotus flower, who was known as *Padmapāṇi* (lotus bearer). Although there has been some speculation about an Iranian origin, it is clear that this figure was influenced by Brahmanical gods. This deduction is justified

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<sup>45</sup>See for example Finlay, Everist and Wheeler 1996: 241.

<sup>46</sup>The Sakya clan had the lion as its totem (Huntington 1985: 395).



**PLATE 15**

Simhanāda. Twelfth - thirteenth century. Sultanganj.  
(Harle 1994: 213)

on the basis of Buddhist texts which describe Brahmanical gods descending from Avalokiteśvara and from the number of ‘borrowed’ attributes from Brahmanical gods such as Śiva, Brahma, Indra, Rudra and Viṣṇu. Tārā was also drawn into the Buddhist pantheon. The large number of Avalokiteśvara forms were necessary to elicit homage from the Brahmanical faith. By incorporating the attributes of these figures with those of Avalokiteśvara, devotees were thus assured that Avalokiteśvara could provide all the functions of their Brahmanical gods. Although Avalokiteśvara started his career as one of the many bodhisattvas who could assist sentient beings, he became one of the most important Buddhist figures. This is likely due to the number of ‘faces’ that are described in texts, and seen in images. This multi-faceted nature, that saves and protects devotees, caused new forms to be created, for as Avalokiteśvara's reputation grew and his compassionate acts became known, new forms were made to represent these compassionate deeds. These new forms were given attributes to symbolize the many roles the particular form was to play. This resulted in a profusion of forms particularly in East Asia as will become evident in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER 3

### A NEW HOME AND A NEW FACE

From the evidence presented in the previous chapter, it is clear that the multi-faceted nature of Guanyin is not peculiar to East Asia - it materialised in India. But what is particularly interesting about the transfer of this cult to China is that once on Chinese soil the forms of Guanyin were given a decidedly Chinese character. While this is a natural part of the assimilation process, what is unusual is the degree to which forms were given new attributes and features. Some new faces also appeared and a proliferation of legends arose to explain the forms. Why was it necessary to give Guanyin a new face and new character?

This chapter will look at three issues. First it will examine the beginnings of the Guanyin cult in China and the degree to which local influences shaped the forms that were to be inherited by Japan, Korea and the rest of East Asia. Secondly it will examine the way in which some of the Indian forms were interpreted, why they were welcomed in their new homes and why some new forms evolved. Finally it will show how the idea of relief from the 'perils' appealed to Chinese and Japanese tastes and why this resulted in an abundance of new stories.

#### EARLY CHINESE DEVELOPMENT OF GUANYIN IMAGERY

From the time that Guanyin first appeared in China the attributes and features began to alter. The earliest examples of Guanyin imagery can be evidenced at the Chinese cave temples at Yungang, Longmen, Maijishan, Dazu and Dunhuang. The caves at Yungang show the first phase

of Buddhist activity where, in just thirty-four years of activity before the capital was moved to Luoyang, it produced approximately fifty-one thousand statues. Here the five massive Buddha statues show that an attempt was made to create the Indian type that sculptors had heard described. The garments also show a Gandhara influence which had been copied from Hellenistic or Roman styles (Rawson 1992: 152-153). The caves of Maijishan also show Central Asian influence, being situated just off the main route between China and Central Asia.

However, although the caves at Yungang and Maijishan give us a good examples of early Guanyin images, it is to the Longmen caves we must turn, for it is in these early caves of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-535) that we see how Guanyin was given a truly Chinese personality after the Central Asian influence had been absorbed.<sup>47</sup>

The Longmen caves were begun at the beginning of the Northern Wei period when the court was transferred from Pingcheng (near present Datong). They reflect imperial patronage in their style and subject matter. These caves, although showing the early style in the high ceilings with carved figures in window-like niches, eventually absorbed the foreign influences until a distinctly Chinese character emerged (Rawson 1992: 152-153). The first major difference between the representation of Guanyin in these caves and those of eastern India is that there is no sign of the theme of the 'eight perils'. This is, perhaps, difficult to understand as the *Lotus Sūtra* had been translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa in 286CE, and then by Kumārajīva in 406CE before the Chinese cave sculptures were completed. Just why the saviour from perils form of Guanyin was not immediately transferred to China along with the other themes of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and why the perils made a late appearance can, however, be explained by observing the stages of worship in these Chinese cave temples.

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<sup>47</sup>The caves at Dunhuang also show examples from 366-1300CE. As these caves are geographically situated near the junction of northern and southern tracks on the Silk Route they show the influence of Central Asian traditions, although later work does show a connection with the Tang capital at Xian.

In the early stages of worship at Longmen it is clear that Guanyin was not an independent cult figure, as seen in the cave temples of India, but an assistant to either Śākyamuni or Amitābha. The influence of the *Lotus Sūtra* is clear. Śākyamuni had the most inscriptions dedicated to him in the early period with forty-three references between 495 and 535CE. Maitreya had thirty-five during this period and Guanyin had nineteen.<sup>48</sup> The popularity of Maitreya is, perhaps, not surprising for according to the *Lotus Sūtra*, Maitreya was to become the next Buddha after Śākyamuni. The popularity of Maitreya reached a peak a 'millennium' after the Buddha Śākyamuni's death, suggesting that many devotees were hopeful of an earthly appearance (Davidson 1955: 51).

However, the direction of religious fervour changed dramatically after the sixth century. Between the years 600 to 750CE, interest in both Maitreya and the Buddha Śākyamuni shows a great decline. Only eleven dedications to Śākyamuni occur during this period and Maitreya is noted in only twelve inscriptions, in contrast to the thirty-five given him during the sixth century (Davidson 1955: 64). It would appear then, that when Maitreya failed to appear, devotees turned to another to fulfill their hopes. The Sukhāvātī paradise of Amitābha seems to have captured the imagination of Buddhist devotees. During the one hundred and fifty years between 600-750 there are recorded no less than one hundred and twenty inscriptions mentioning the name of Amitābha and dedications to Guanyin also increased to forty-three. The simultaneous rise in esteem of the two appears to be the result of the blending of the powers of Guanyin with Amitābha's paradise. Sculptures in the caves at Longmen testify to the devotion to Amitābha and Guanyin during the Tang dynasty.

From the increased dedications to Guanyin and Amitābha in the seventh and eighth century it is clear that both figures were worshipped for their powers to carry the believer to the Pure Land

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<sup>48</sup> For a more comprehensive account of the influence of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the cave temples at Longmen and the references to the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas see Davidson (1955: 51-78).

and for bestowing benefits in this world. One example of help being requested in this world is in the Yaofang Cave. Inside the cave, Amitābha sits upon his throne with his attendant bodhisattvas. Unfortunately both bodhisattvas are so badly damaged that it makes identification almost impossible, but the figure on the left hand side of Amitābha is likely to be that of Guanyin. This cave has prescriptions engraved on both sides of the corridor to the entrance. These could be used to cure malaria, hysteria and quench thirst as well as cure many other diseases. As in India, illness and disease were important issues for devotees and it is important to note that one of the functions of Guanyin, as Amitābha's assistant, was to provide relief from such ailments. In China and Japan, as we will see later in this chapter, this function remained of prime importance.

One interesting feature of early iconography at Longmen is that in the crown of the image of Maitreya, in the Guyang cave,<sup>49</sup> one can clearly see a seated Buddha ( see Plate 16). This is one of the identifying attributes of Guanyin, and one that was clearly seen in the crown of Avalokiteśvara in Indian cave temples. There is a similar image in the crown of Maitreya at the caves of Dunhuang dated to approximately 420-430CE (see Plates 17 and 18). The Dunhuang statue, like the one at Longmen, is shown sitting cross-ankled which is usually considered to indicate Maitreya imagery in China.<sup>50</sup> Although there could be reason for doubting the identity of the Dunhuang image, which due to the lack of identifying inscriptions could possibly be identified as Guanyin, the identity of the image in the Guyang cave at Longmen is more certain. Miduno and Nagahiro (1941: 8) identify this image according to the inscriptions inside the cave which make it clear that this is Maitreya. Inscriptions identify twenty-nine Maitreyas seated cross-ankled, eleven Guanyin images standing and twenty-four seated Śākyamunis, of which sixteen have their hands clasped together

It is possible that the Buddha in the crown of Maitreya symbolises the Buddhas of the past.

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<sup>49</sup>This cave has been dated between 494-524CE and therefore is the earliest sculpted cave at Longmen.

<sup>50</sup> In Japan Guze Kannon is identical to Maitreya images in Korea.



**PLATE 16**

Maitreya. Guyang Cave. Longmen.  
(Miduno/Nagahiro 1941: Fig 1)



**PLATE 17**

Maitreya. Mid fifth century. Dunhuang.  
(Akiyama/Matsubara 1969:33)



**PLATE 18**  
Detail of Plate 17.

Often Maitreya is seen with a crown on which there are discs containing these seven Buddhas and possibly, for the ease of the sculptors, this was reduced to using one figure to symbolise all seven. See Plate 19 and compare it, for example, with Plate 18. This possible iconographical deviation is not inconsistent with the artistic licence shown in the Buddha in the crown of Guanyin.<sup>51</sup> The so-called *Amitāyur-dhyānā-sūtra*<sup>52</sup> makes it clear that this Buddha should be standing (Mallmann 1948: 22), whereas the Buddha in Guanyin's crown is usually shown seated (as already noted). This clearly indicates that sculptors did not always follow the prescription laid down in the sūtras. While there is no doubt about the identity of the Maitreya image at Longmen, Maitreya imagery has often been confused with Guanyin images and has been the subject of much debate.<sup>53</sup>

While images of Maitreya at Longmen show differences from those usually seen in India, so too the images of Guanyin show a marked change. The first main iconographical variation in the early Chinese forms of Guanyin is the absence of the lotus which in India was usually seen in the right hand of Guanyin. This was replaced by the water bottle or vase in China. What is curious about the vase is that it appears to have been borrowed from Maitreya. In India this attribute usually only appears in multi-armed images of Guanyin, whereas it is the usual attribute of Maitreya (see Plates 20 and 21). Just how Guanyin acquired this attribute from Maitreya is unclear. Cornelius Chang (1977: 54) considers that these attributes are different and the vase

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<sup>51</sup>Because of damage to the images of Guanyin at Longmen it is not always possible to make out whether the Buddha is displayed in the crown.

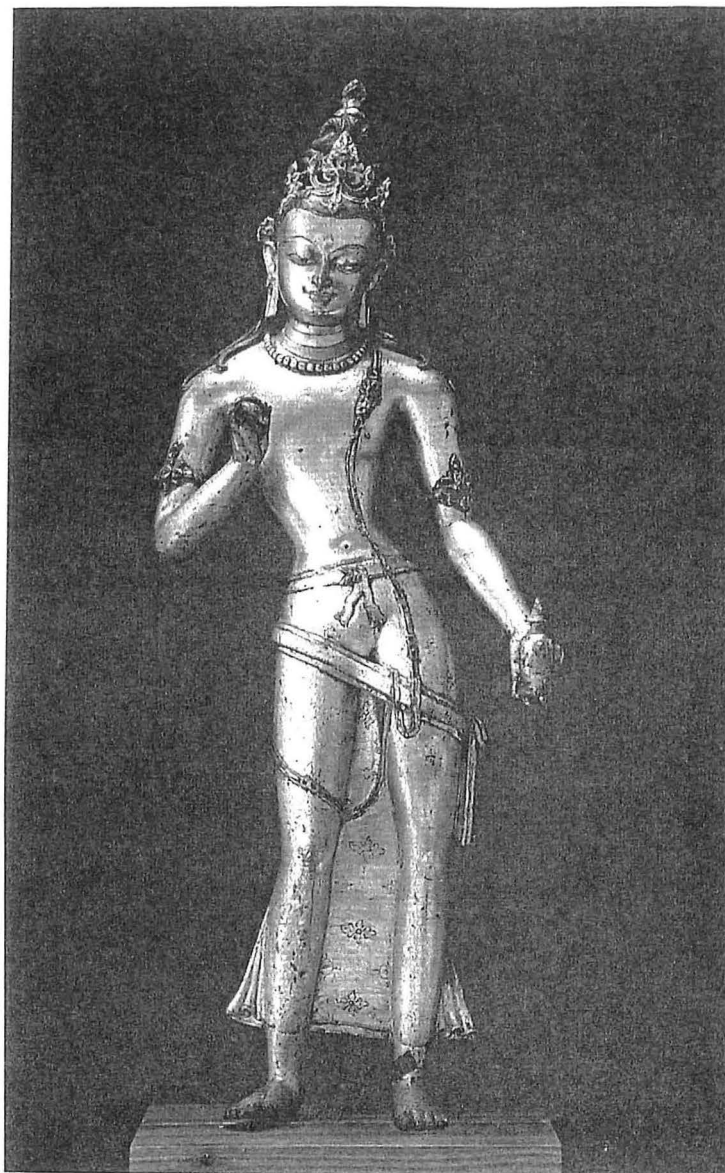
<sup>52</sup>Although Robert Buswell (1990) gives convincing evidence for this to be an apocryphal sūtra, it is still surprising that the sculptors did not always follow the prescription.

<sup>53</sup>One other image at Longmen which has been the subject of debate is the huge 17.14m main statue which is considered, by most authorities, to be Vairocana. This assumption is based on an inscription dated 723CE (Swann 1963: 105). However, another inscription dated 672 describes Empress Wu giving twenty strings of cash for the image to be made (Willets 1965:181), and as Amitābha was the most popular Buddha at this time some scholars consider this image is not Vairocana but Amitābha. (Swann 1963: 107) This argument certainly appears valid when one considers that these images were sculpted between 672-675CE during the height of Amitābha devotion. Swann considers that these statues could originally have been an Amitābha triad which was dedicated again in 723 when Vairocana became popular. The identity of the main image has, of course, a bearing on the identity of the attendant bodhisattvas, for if the main image is Amitābha then the figure on his left is Guanyin. If not, it is Mañjuśrī. Zhang Shengli, my Luoyang guide, insisted that this attendant image is Guanyin and that the main image is Amitābha whom the locals call Losana. This is particularly significant in the study of the changing face of Guanyin for, if Swann is correct, it shows that local people can change the faces of deities by assimilating previously popular deities under the names of their new favourite figures .





**PLATE 19**  
Head of Maitreya image.  
(Priest 1943: Pl. IX)

**PLATE 20**

Maitreya with vase.

Ninth - tenth century.

(Sponberg/Hardacre 1988:ii)

**PLATE 21**

Maitreya with vase. Second century. Ahicchattra.

(Huntington 1985:155)

carried by Maitreya is the *amṛta-kalaśa*, the container of the never-ending water of life, whereas the vase usually carried by Guanyin is the *kunḍikā*, a water vessel carried by ascetics (see for example Plate 22). However, Chang (1977) states that this vessel usually has a tall neck and a funnel on one side for refilling whereas the *amṛta-kalaśa* is oval and lidded. He bases the characteristics of the *kunḍikā*, on the description given by Yijing (Chang 1977: 153). As seen in the above Plates the *amṛta-kalaśa*<sup>54</sup> was not always oval and lidded and the *kunḍikā*, does not always have a handle. It appears, therefore, that the *amṛta-kalaśa* and the *kunḍikā*, have become fused over time. Both types seen in the above Plates of Maitreya are similar to the types seen in the hands of Guanyin and represent the function of providing devotees with the never-ending water of life.

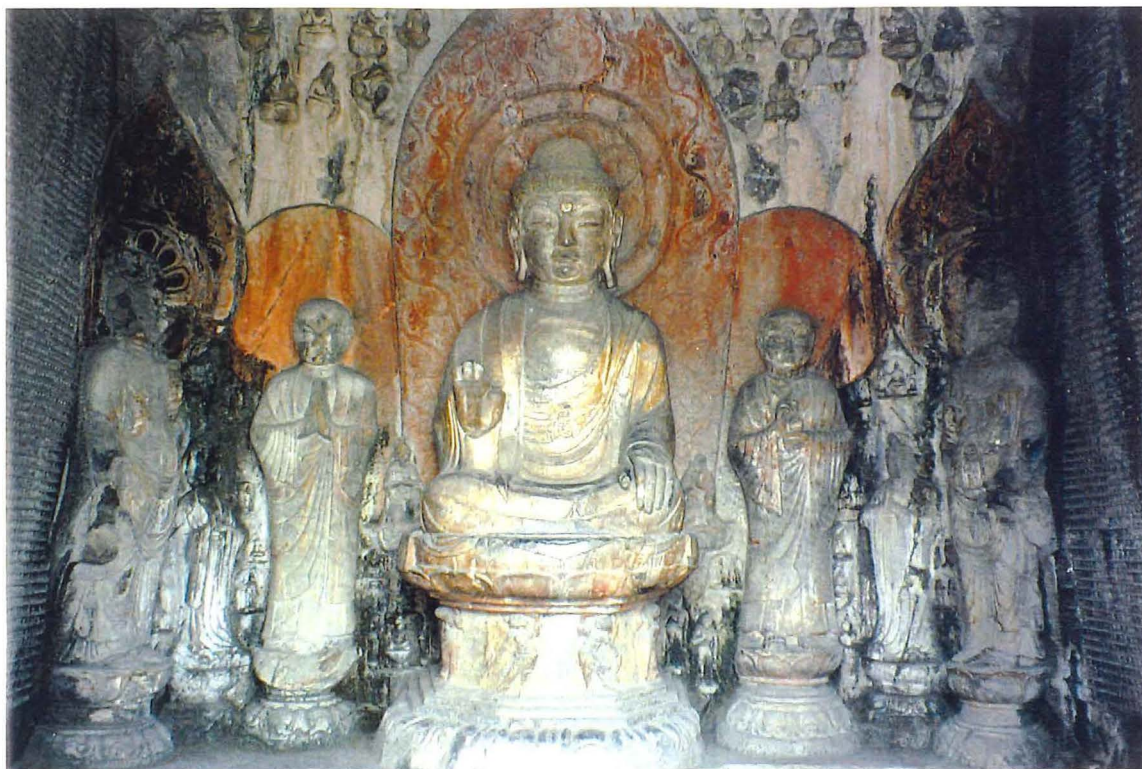
Just why this attribute disappeared from the hands of Maitreya at Longmen at approximately the same time that it appeared in the hands of Guanyin is not so easy to determine, but a study of some of the early images at Longmen gives one possible answer. As noted above, in the Guyang cave there are several images of Maitreya, Guanyin and Śākyamuni. The Maitreya images are seated cross-legged on a throne supported by two lions. Although many are damaged the images appear to be of similar style with the left hand resting on the left knee and the right hand in the *varada mudrā*. There is no *amṛta-kalaśa* in Maitreya's hand but it appears in images of Guanyin who, in this cave, is the attendant of Śākyamuni (see Plates 23 and 24). It would seem that although Śākyamuni is the main Buddha, Maitreya also has the status of a Buddha (of the future). As Buddhas are not usually given attributes this would suggest that Guanyin has been given Maitreya's *amṛta-kalaśa* to symbolise his ability to save devotees. Guanyin in this form is the intermediary between the devotee, Śākyamuni and Maitreya's Tushita heaven.

As Guanyin's popularity increased he gained independent status and many individual figures

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<sup>54</sup> This type is also seen in the hands of various Indian deities, including those of water goddesses.





# PLATE 22

Amitābha group (On the left of Amitābha a disciple holds the *kundikā*).

Late seventh century.

Wanfodong Cave, Longmen



# PLATE 23

Śākyamuni with Guanyin to his left.

Guyang cave, Longmen.





**PLATE 24**  
Guanyin.  
Guyang Cave, Longmen.

of Guanyin were added to the outside walls of the cave temples.<sup>55</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that although many independent figures emerged, the form is quite consistent with the earlier images. These images were always standing, in flowing robes with the bodhisattva ornaments and usually holding the *amṛta-kalāśa* in the left hand and the right in the *varadamudrā*, although occasionally the fly whisk is seen in the left hand. Although many statues of Guanyin are damaged, they are nevertheless good examples of the early Chinese form. Plate 25 in particular is representative of the Tang dynasty which saw more regal-looking figures emerge.

The basic shape of the vase did not change much over the centuries and although some sculptors did portray it with a handle, as in the Sui Dynasty (589-618) image of Guanyin shown in Plate 26, it was the tall necked vase without a handle that was inherited by Korea, Japan and the rest of East Asia.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMAGERY IN EAST ASIA - WITH INDIAN ANTECEDENTS

From the evidence discussed above, it is clear that the vase replaced the lotus flower which had been the usual attribute of the two-armed form of Avalokiteśvara in India. Was this a general pattern? Did any of the Indian characteristics survive? The answer to this question can be found in temples across East Asia where it is clear although some did survive, most forms have been given new characteristics. In the Buddhist temple at Naksan on the east coast of Korea, there are 'seven forms'<sup>56</sup> of Guanyin in the main Potala hall. All seven of these forms have an Indian origin.<sup>57</sup> They are listed on the outside of the temple as: Ārya-Avalokiteśvara, Amoghapāśa,

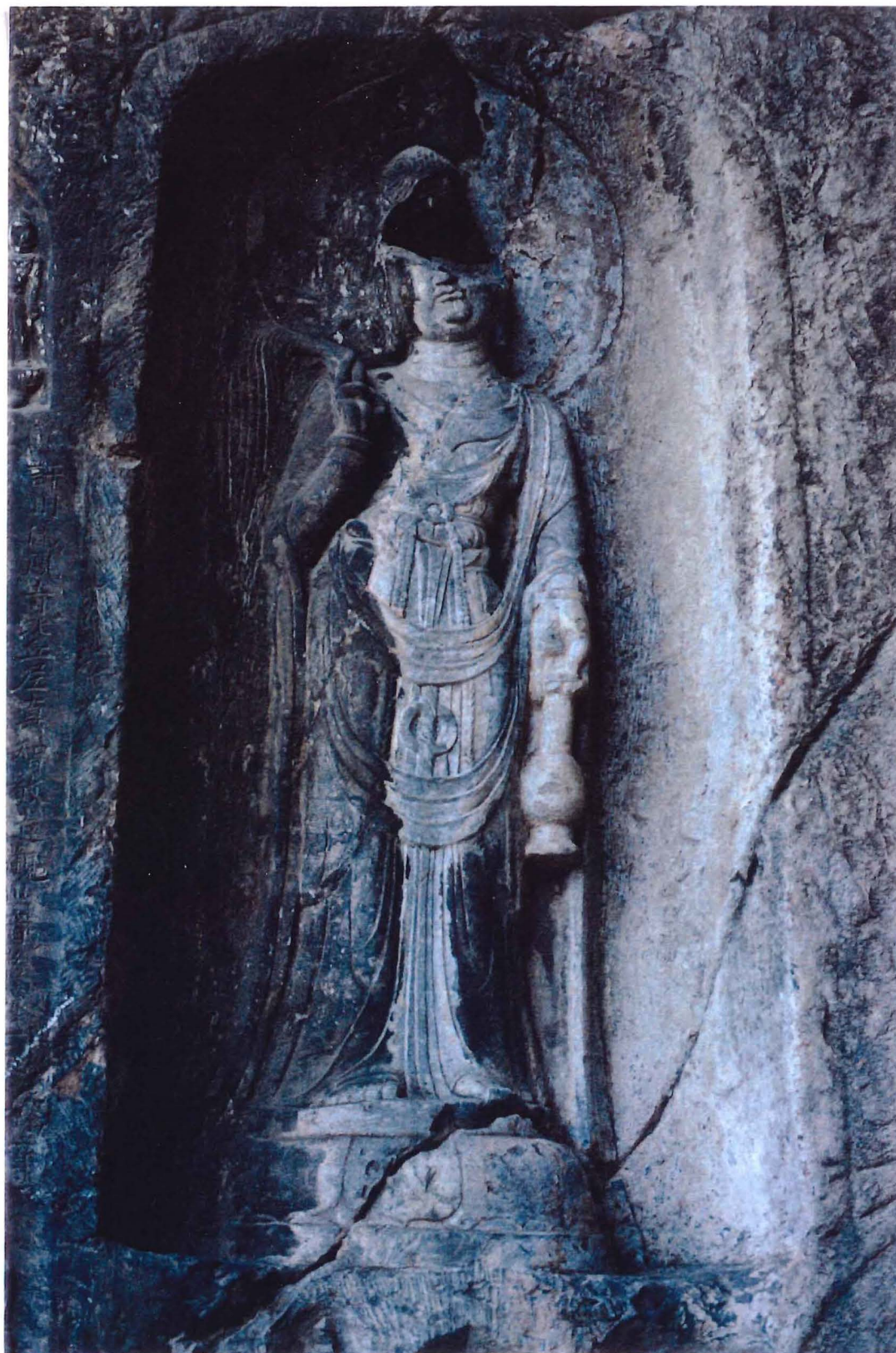
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<sup>55</sup>Also at the nearby Gongxian caves, which are similar in style to those at Longmen, dating mostly to the Northern Wei period, the popularity of Amitābha and Guanyin is also clear. Here, as at Longmen, it is significant that later additions to the outside walls of the caves are statues of Guanyin. These combined with those at Longmen emphasise the growing popularity of Guanyin as an independent cult figure.

<sup>56</sup>In addition to these images are thirty-two Avalokiteśvara "incarnated" images (this refers to the thirty-three forms in which Guanyin can appear to save sentient beings) and one thousand five hundred Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva images.

<sup>57</sup>The Naksan-sa also has a massive forty-nine foot white-robed statue holding a vase. This statue looks out to sea from a large courtyard.





**PLATE 25**  
Guanyin.  
Outside Wanfodong Cave,  
Longmen.



**PLATE 26**

Guanyin. Gilt bronze. Late Sui Dynasty.  
(Priest 1943: Pl. LXIII)

Hayagrīva, Ekādaśamukha, Sahasrabhuja, Cintāmaṇīcakra and Caṇḍī. These images, five of which have been discussed in the previous chapter, together with Simhanāda who was also discussed, will be examined below giving examples of their counterparts from the various parts of East Asia, where possible.

**Ārya Avalokiteśvara** (Ch. Guanshiyin, Jap. Shō Kannon).

This form represents the ‘original face’ of Guanyin which has been discussed in Chapter 2. As can be seen from Plate 27, the Naksan image is shown seated in the lotus position (*Padmāsana*) with the right hand in *vitarka-mudrā* and the left hand holding a lotus stem rather than the full bloom lotus flower. However it does have Indian features in the long ear-lobes which represent nobility due to the weight of the jewels which used to stretch the nobles’ ears.<sup>58</sup>

Although, as we have seen in the caves at Longmen, the vase has in most cases replaced the lotus flower there are still some images of Guanyin with the lotus in hand in temples across East Asia. One example of particular interest is to be found in the Buddhist temple at Keelung in Taiwan. Here two images of Guanyin stand in the main hall of Śakyamuni, one holding a lotus and the other with the vase (Plates 28 and 29). What is interesting about the image holding the lotus, is that the vase is shown in the headdress of Guanyin instead of Amitābha. It would appear that the sculptor, aware that the vase has become such a fixed emblem of Guanyin, needed to ensure its continuity. This illustrates that those commissioning the images of Guanyin in East Asia view the vase as an essential attribute (see Plates 30-33), especially in the large white-robed images.

This indispensable nature of Guanyin's vase is due to local beliefs. The vase is believed to contain water that has great rejuvenating power, which makes this attribute a symbol of Guanyin's

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<sup>58</sup>When I was in Shanghai I was given an interesting reason for the Buddha having long ear-lobes. According to this tale Siddhārtha Gautama was once a very handsome man and many women were interested in him. When he renounced the worldly life the Buddha stretched his ears to make himself ugly so women would no longer be interested in him.





**PLATE 27**  
Ārya Avalokiteśvara. Naksan.



**PLATE 28**  
Guanyin with lotus  
(and vase in crown).  
Keelung, Taiwan.



**PLATE 29**  
Guanyin with vase.  
Keelung, Taiwan.

life-saving and nurturing ability. Guanyin is often portrayed holding not only the vase but also a willow branch which is believed by the Chinese to be associated with the healing process. Water which has been merely touched by a willow branch is supposed to be endowed with miraculous healing properties (Johnston 1976: 276). As seen from Plate 33 devotees frequently place dried twigs or branches next to, or in, Guanyin's vase. It would appear that as Guanyin rejuvenates the twigs, the devotee will be healed of their ailments.<sup>59</sup>

We see, then, that the 'original' form of Guanyin has undergone an enormous change. The huge White-robed Guanyin statues seen in the last few Plates have little in common with the princely bodhisattva we saw in Chapter 2, but it is important to note that the characteristic of healing and nurturing is still very much in evidence.

**Amoghapāśa Avalokiteśvara** Ch. Bukongchuansuo, Jap. Fukūkensaku.

The Amoghapāśa (unfailing noose) Guanyin at Naksan has three heads, four arms and the noose in his upper left hand, which does not correspond to the textual prescriptions described in Chapter 2. Note also the vase in the lower right hand of this image (Plate 34). This statue has particularly East Asian features in the smiling serene face. Although this is clearly recognised in Korea as one of the most important forms, Amoghapāśa is not very common in China although it does appear to have been once highly regarded as evidenced by a tenth century Chinese maṇḍala (Plate 35). This shows Amoghapāśa, with four arms, in the centre and a smaller aspect at the south cardinal point. This image having only one head, corresponds to the *Amoghapāśa-dhāraṇī-sūtra*.<sup>60</sup> It has the pāśa in the lower right hand and a lotus in the upper right hand, while the vase

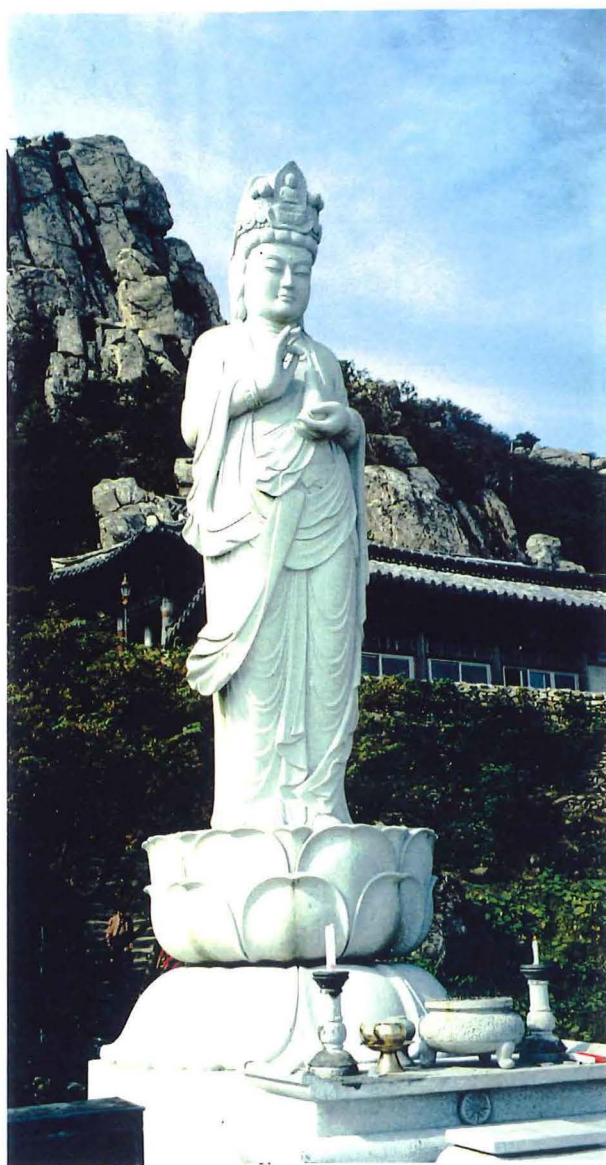
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<sup>59</sup>Yü (1994: 154) considers that it was the *Qing guanshiyin pusa fudu tuoluoni jing* (*Dhāraṇī Sūtra of Invoking Bodhisattva Guanshiyin to Subdue and Eliminate Harmful Poisons*) translated in the Eastern Jin (317-420) that provides the basis for replacement of the lotus by the willow branch. However, as discussed above it appears to be the vase that has replaced the lotus although it does appear to represent the healing powers of the willow water.

<sup>60</sup>According to Matsunaga the first chapter was translated in 587 by Jñānagupta during the Sui Dynasty and proved extremely popular (1969: 129).



**PLATE 30**  
Guanyin with vase.  
Stanley, Hong Kong.



**PLATE 31**  
Guanyin with vase.  
Poriam Temple,  
Namhae Island, Korea.



**PLATE 32**  
Guanyin with vase.  
Ordination Temple, China.



**PLATE 33**  
Guanyin with vase.  
Shuang Lin Chan Temple.  
Singapore.





**PLATE 34**  
Amoghapāśa Avalokiteśvara. Naksan.



# PLATE 35

Amoghapāśa Avalokiteśvara.

Chinese Maṇḍala. Tenth century.

(Photograph Musée Guimet)

is held in the left lower hand and a rosary in the upper left hand.

### **Hayagrīva Avalokiteśvara** (Ch. Matou Guanyin.<sup>61</sup> Jap. Batō Kannon)

The Naksan image of Hayagrīva has eight arms, three faces and with a horse head on top of the crown (Plate 36). This corresponds to the usual prescription for Hayagrīva. Knowledge of this form of Guanyin emerged in East Asia in the seventh or eighth century with the translation of Tantric texts into Chinese. One of the earliest references to it in China occurs in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* translated in 724 (Matsunaga 1969: 125-126).

This form can be seen in many Japanese temples today where he is usually regarded as the protector of animals although in some temples Batō Kannon is known for providing women with babies. One particular story<sup>62</sup> from the Shosan Temple describes how, approximately five hundred years ago, a woman by the name of Shima-gozen went to the Kannon Hall near the Shosan Temple<sup>63</sup> to pray for a baby. She repeated these prayers one hundred times. Finally a woman, an incarnation of Kannon, came to her and asked her to swallow a Chinese coin which had been made from a Buddhist image. She immediately became pregnant and when the baby was born he had something in his left hand. The baby did not open this hand for seven days and when he did it was to reveal the coin that Shima-gozen had swallowed. This child grew up to be a famous priest making his mother very happy and as thanks to Kannon, Shima-gozen decided to collect coins made from Buddhist images in order to make an image of Batō Kannon. Unfortunately she died before her dream could be realised but her son completed the task. He had an image of Batō Kannon made from the three hundred coins which had been collected. When finished this Kannon

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<sup>61</sup>This form of Guanyin is rarely seen in China.

<sup>62</sup>Personal communication from Yukako Kito as related by the priest of Shosan Temple located by the Hida River in Gifu Prefecture.

<sup>63</sup>The Kannon Hall is on an island in the Hida River. It is looked after by the Shosan Temple.





**PLATE 36**  
Hayagrīva Avalokiteśvara. Naksan.

resembled the original image<sup>64</sup> which has three faces of a threatening appearance, six arms and a white horse head on the crown. This statue, however, known as Koyama Kannon, is larger than the original, being 1.33cm in height whereas the original statue is only 6cm in height. Because of the value of the coins used to make this image a replica was made out of wood (see Plate 37). This statue and the original statue, are only on public display every seven years. Although Batō Kannon is extremely popular in Japan, this form is not common in the rest of East Asia.

**Ekādaśamukha Avalokiteśvara** (Ch. Shiyimian Guanyin. Jap. Jūichimen Kannon)

Shiyimian Guanyin is another form that is not widely seen in Chinese temples, except in the thousand-armed form. Ten of the eleven heads of the Naksan image are piled high like a crown, the eleventh head being that of Guanyin. This image, like the one at Kanheri discussed in Chapter 2, has four arms, the upper left holding the lotus, the lower left in *varada-mudrā* and both top and lower right arms in *vitarka-mudrā*<sup>65</sup> (see Plate 38). One interesting feature of this image is the standing rather than the seated Buddha in the crown, indicating that the sculptors have been careful to follow the correct prescription laid down in the texts.

Eleven-headed images are common in Japan and many stories have arisen to explain their origin. One such story from the Hasedera Kannon Genki<sup>66</sup> (Dykstra 1976: 116), describes how a large piece of wood once drifted to the Takashima district of Omi province during a flood, and its presence brought evil effects on the local villagers. A man of Katsuragi of Yamato province dragged the log to Tōma district with the intention of carving a statue of Kannon, but he died before being able to finish the work. Later a strange disease swept the area and the local people, believing the log to be the cause of their misfortune, discarded it near the river Hase. When he

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<sup>64</sup>The original statue is believed to have been made approximately nine hundred years ago following a vision by a man named Kiso Yosinaka who saw a dragon carrying a Batō Kannon on his back. As Batō Kannon was his wife's charm, he decided to build a temple at the place where he had this vision.

<sup>65</sup>The thumb touching the tip of the forefinger.

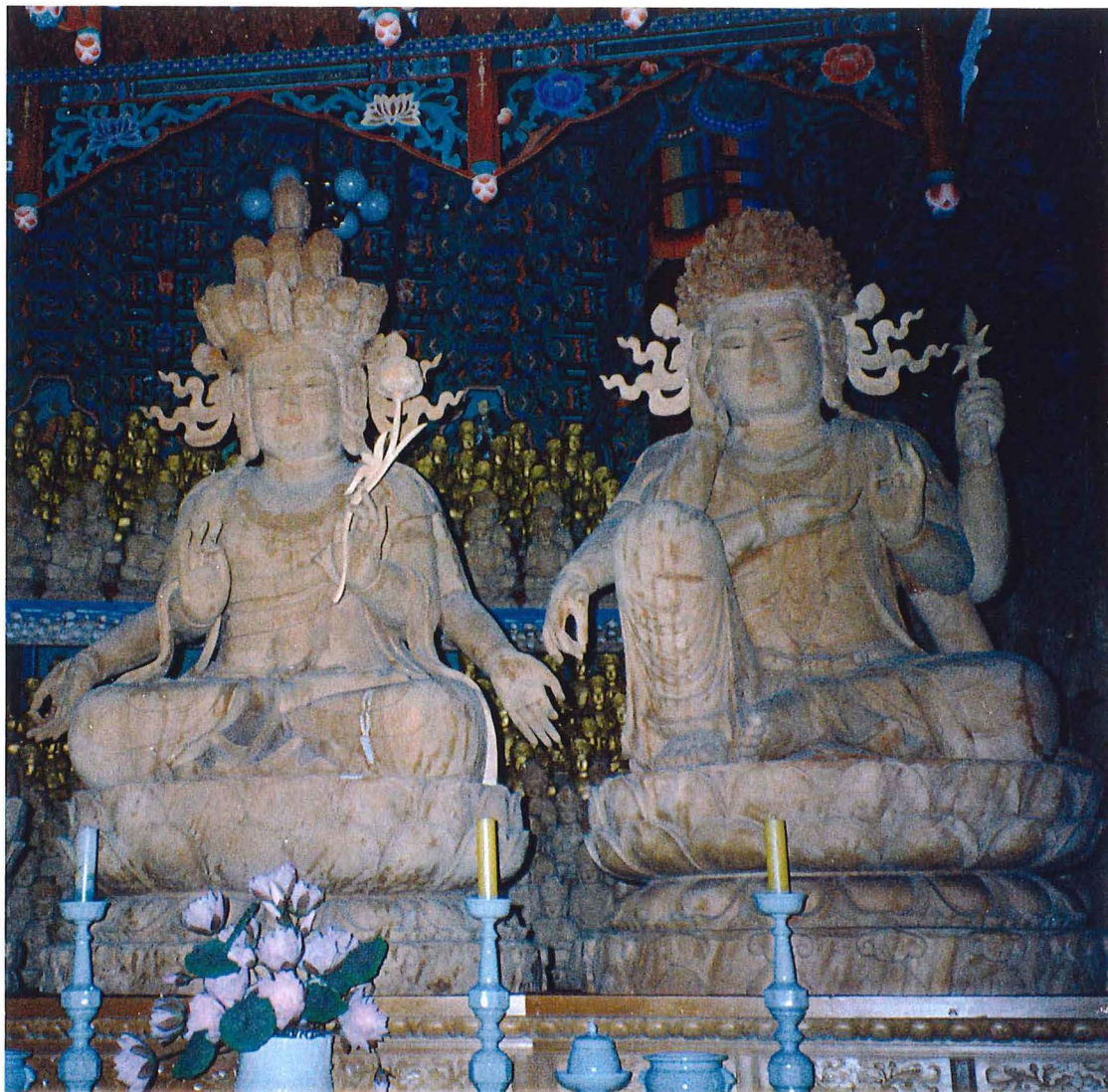
<sup>66</sup>*Miraculous Records of the Hasedera Kannon.*





**PLATE 37**  
Batō Kannon. Shosan Temple, Japan.





**PLATE 38**

Ekādaśamukha Avalokiteśvara and Cintāmanicakra Avalokiteśvara. Naksan.

heard this, Priest Tokudō vowed to make a statue of Kannon from the piece of wood and, with the support of Emperor Shomu, he finally completed his task. Priest Gyōki performed an inauguration ceremony for the Eleven-headed Kannon in 733. The statue stood 7.9 meters high and became immensely popular and the object of pious veneration. The temple of Hase<sup>67</sup> is one of the “thirty-three places” sacred to Kannon in and around Kyoto. The two volumes of the *Hasedera* collection contain fifty-two stories about the miraculous power of this particular statue.

Another interesting legend about the Eleven-headed Kannon is the story of the monk whose secular name was Mimana no Kanuki. He was especially gifted in carving and vowed to carve a ten-foot statue of the Eleven-headed Kannon for the Miroku-dera which was built by his ancestors. However, as he was already old and did not have any assistance, he died before he could complete the statue. But after two days he was restored to life and calling his disciple to him declared that he must have the statue completed. He died again two days later, on the day that the statue was finished (Nakamura 1973: 263-265).

#### **Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara** (Ch. Qianshou Guanyin. Jap. Senju Kannon)

Ekādaśamukha these days appears to have been incorporated into the Sahasrabhuja form. Many of the thousand-armed forms have eleven heads and this is believed by devotees to symbolize that Guanyin can see in all directions at the one time and be able to extend help to all those in need. Plates 39 and 40 show this Ekadaśamukha/Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara.

By far the most usual Sahasrabhuja Guanyin images are those with one head. Although one image from Guangzhou is unusual in that as well as an image of Amitābha placed in the crown, this image has a figure of Amitābha placed on top of the head (Plate 41). As described in Chapter 2 the image and ritual of this Guanyin is claimed to have been introduced into China at

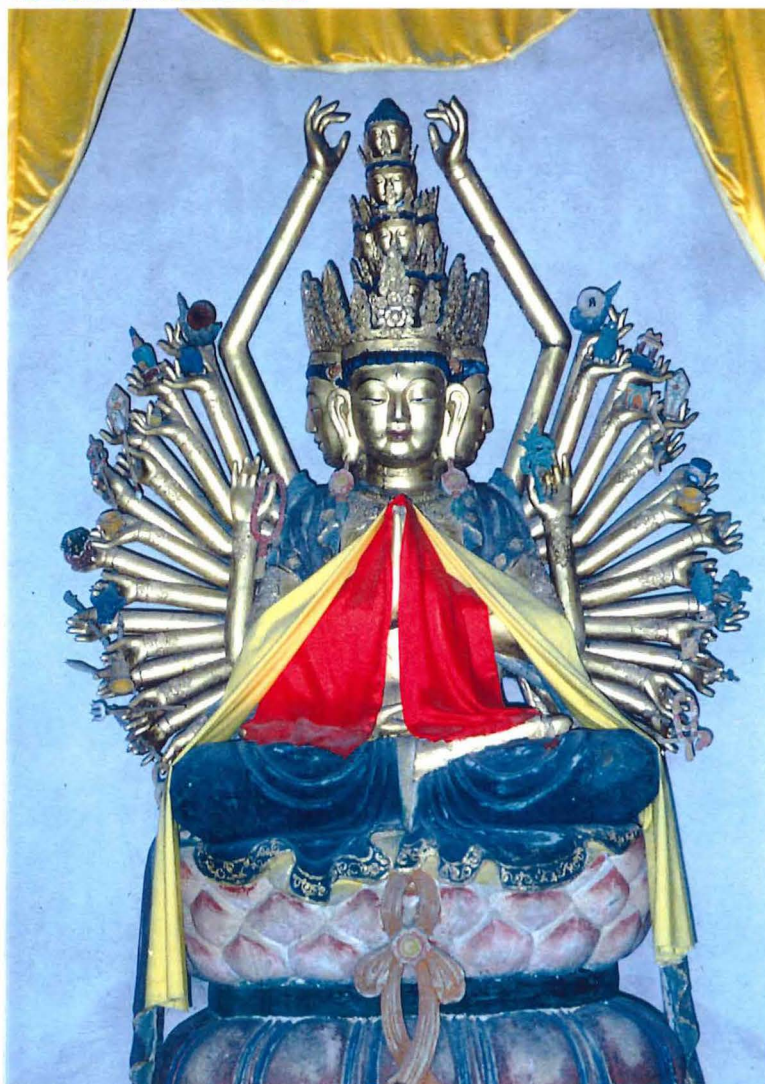
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<sup>67</sup>Said to have been founded in the seventh century, it was rebuilt in 1650 after it was destroyed by fire.





**PLATE 39**  
Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara.  
Three Sacred Buddhas Hall.  
Ningbo.



**PLATE 40**  
Sahasrabhuja  
Avalokiteśvara.  
Tanzhe Monastery,  
Near Beijing.





**PLATE 41**  
Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara.  
Guangxiao Temple. Guangzhou.

approximately the beginning of the Tang dynasty. At Longmen there is an image in Wanfogou cave dated to the Tang dynasty which is recorded by the Chinese as being of the thousand-armed form. It is, however, badly damaged and although clearly multi-armed, it is difficult to tell whether it represents this form.

Almost every Guanyin temple in East Asia now has an image of this thousand-armed form, the popularity being due to the tremendous power that it is believed to hold. Plate 42 from the Chongsan Temple in Taiyuan, is a good example of this form. One Chinese text, the *Qian shou qian yan guanshiyin pusa dabei xin tuoluoni* (Malalasekera 1966: 422) mentions that anyone meditating on this form of Guanyin will get rid of fifteen kinds of irregular death and will obtain fifteen kinds of good birth. Yet another Chinese text mentions that rituals performed will result in release from sufferings caused by diseases, demons, poison of insects, difficult labour and stillbirth.

One of the largest images of Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) that I have seen is in the Shuang Lin Chan Temple in Singapore where the thirty ton Guanyin has forty-eight arms (with an additional nine hundred and fifty-two palms totalling one thousand), the hands of which hold attributes which symbolize the functions this particular image can perform. Singapore has another impressive image in the Brighthill temple. This statue has fifteen heads (Plate 43).

Some devotees meditate on the symbols, held in the hands of the thousand-armed images, to cure them of illness. One example of this can be found in the *Nihon ryōiki* (Nakamura 1973: 237-238) which is the story of a blind man who, devoted to Kannon, meditated on Nichimanishu<sup>68</sup> and recited the mantra in order to restore his sight. One day two strangers came to cure his eyes and his sight was restored. This was due to the blind man's devotion to Kannon.

In Japan there are many images of the thousand-armed Kannon which are officially recognised as Japanese national treasures. Of these the most spectacular is in the Sanjusangen-do

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<sup>68</sup>A jewel of the sun found in the eighth right hand on the thousand-armed Kannon.





**PLATE 42**  
Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteśvara.  
Chongsan Temple, Taiyuan.





**PLATE 43**  
Sahasrabhuja Avalokitesvara.  
Brighthill Temple. Singapore.



in Kyoto. This temple was built in 1164 and rebuilt in 1266 after it had been destroyed by fire. Inside the hall are one thousand images of Kannon, each different (Plates 44 and 45). It is said that devotees make dedications to the image which they believe most resembles themselves.

The *dhāraṇī* of this form of Guanyin were clearly held to be as sacred as the images. One further legend also from Japan describes the fate of an official who hit an ascetic who was reciting the *dhāraṇī* named the “1000 arm sūtra” (Nakamura 1973: 239-241). Having hit the ascetic the official bound the text with a rope and dragged it along the ground behind his horse. When he reached his home he found that he was unable to dismount his horse. At the same time he flew through the sky until he was suspended over the spot where he had hit the ascetic. At noon the following day he fell to the ground and his body was broken into pieces.

#### **Cintāmaṇicakra Avalokiteśvara** (Ch. Ruyilun Guanyin. Jap. Nyōirin Kannon)

Cintāmaṇicakra Avalokiteśvara is known as a feminine form. At Naksan, it is represented seated with six arms with the lower right arm holding the cintāmaṇi<sup>69</sup> (wish-fulfilling) jewel, while the right middle hand supports the side of her face (see Plate 38). The cintāmaṇi is usually identified as a pearl but is also referred to as the flaming jewel, in which case it is usually depicted as a round object surrounded by small flame-like points. When the cintāmaṇi is seen in the hand of Guanyin it represents the relationship between Guanyin and the Bodhisattva Prajñāpāramitā. Guanyin is therefore able to grant the wishes of those who invoke Prajñāpāramitā. The Chinese cult of this form appears to have originated in 709CE when Bodhiruci translated the *Padmacintāmaṇi-dhāraṇī-sūtra* (Matsunaga 1969: 126)

Knowledge of this form appears to have reached Japan before China for, according to Matsunaga (1969: 126-127), Nyōirin Kannon appeared in Japan in 605 under Empress Suiko. The

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<sup>69</sup>Cintāmaṇi (jewel of wishes) appears in the *Guhyasamāja* (300CE), related to the Buddha Ratnasambhava (jewel born).



**PLATE 44**  
Sanjusangen-do.  
Kyoto.



**PLATE 45**  
Sanjusangen-do.  
Kyoto.



**PLATE 46**

Nyōirin Kannon. Heian period.  
(Yashiro 1958: 81)

early Heian period (early ninth century) Nyōirin Kannon from the Kanshin-ji Temple, as seen in Plate 46, is a typical example of the way that this form has become well known. It is in an almost identical pose to the Naksan image although in her left middle hand she holds the *dharmacakra* (wheel of Buddhist Law) instead of the trident and in her lower right hand she holds the rosary.

In Taiwan I came across an image which represents the jewel of wishes in quite a different way. Plate 47 from the Fokuangshan Monastery near Kaohsiung, shows an image of “Ruyilun Avalokiteśvara”. This form instead of holding the *cintāmaṇi* jewel, holds the Ruyi sceptre. The Ruyi, as seen here, could have been derived from the Indian ‘wishing tree’ which was sometimes gifted to Buddhist monks and gradually became known as a symbol of luck or having desires fulfilled (LeRoy Davidson 1950: 146). But it is more likely to have derived from the Taoist symbol of the fulfillment of desires (Von Koerber 1941: 9-10). This would explain why this form is peculiar to China. It is also a good example of how local cultural values can alter the iconography of a well known figure.

#### **Caṇḍi Avalokiteśvara (Ch. Zhunti Guanyin. Jap. Juntei Kannon)**

Caṇḍi Guanyin is another feminine form, also known as Caṇḍra, Cundī or Cundā and as such is known as the Mother of all Buddhas. The Indian textual origin of this form appears to be the *Cundā-dhārāṇī* which was translated into Chinese by Divākara in approximately 685CE during the Tang Dynasty (Matsunaga 1969: 127). The iconographical origin of Caṇḍi, however, is less certain and there appears to be a great deal of confusion as to how this figure should be represented. Matsunaga (ibid., 128) suggests that when appearing in her own right this form has between two and twenty-six arms but when appearing as Cundī Guanyin, the form appears with eighteen arms.

There appears, however, to be two different ways of representing Caṇḍi. Frédéric (1995: 174) states that if, as in the Naksan image (Plate 48), she is seated, she has eight arms and when

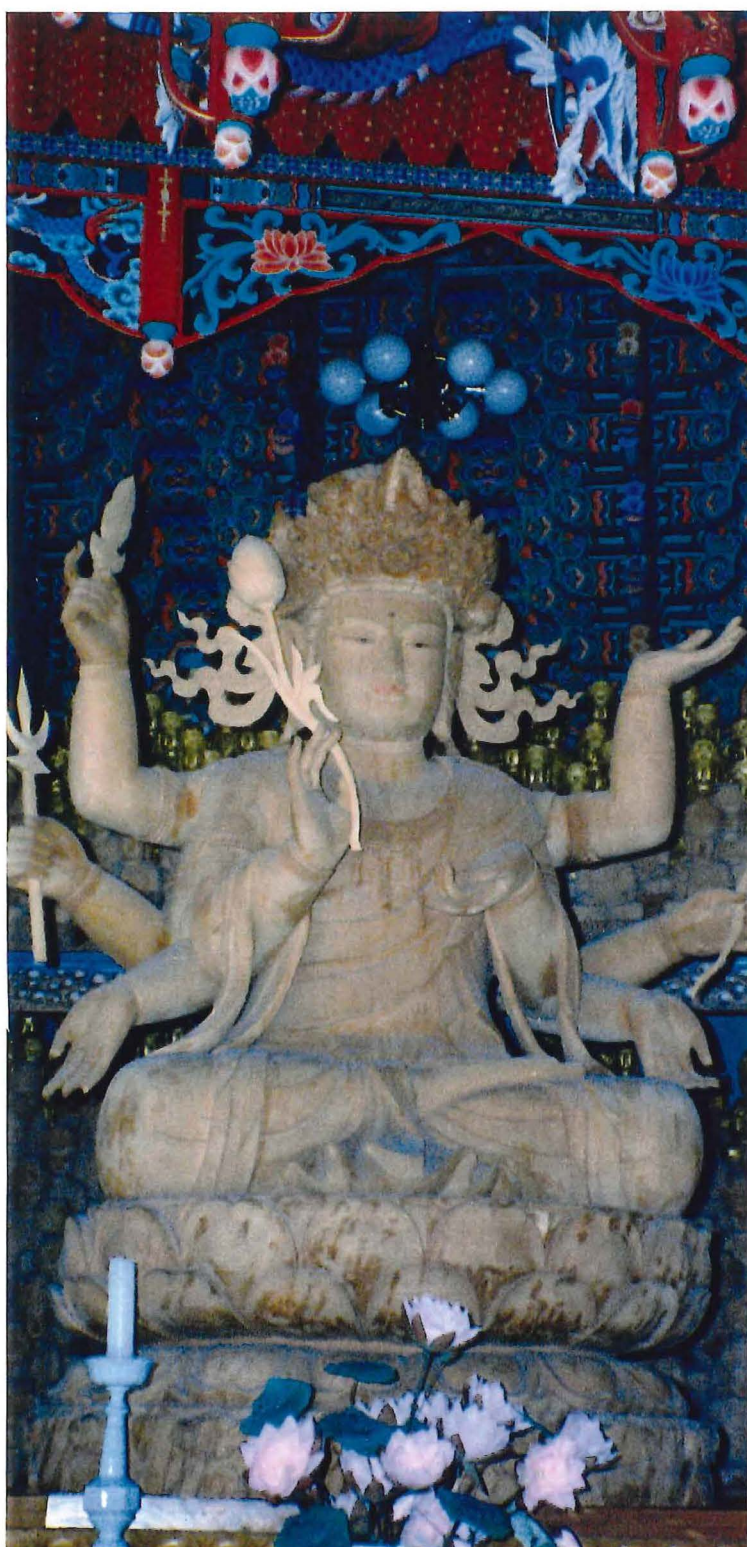


**PLATE 47**

Ruyilun Avalokiteśvara.

Fokuangshan Monastery, Taiwan.





**PLATE 48**  
Caṇḍi Avalokiteśvara.  
Naksan.

standing, she has eighteen arms<sup>70</sup>. Although Caṇḍi in the Naksan temple is eight-armed, I have come across several eighteen-armed forms in different parts of East Asia. The two examples shown in Plates 49 and 50, from the Guan Im Tong Temple in Malacca and the Guanyin Temple in Waterloo Street, Singapore, have identical attributes in the top hands. A sword in the right hand and a pilgrim's staff ornamented with flames in her left hand. It has been suggested that the Hindu deity Durgā has influenced this deity for Caṇḍra, one of the forms of Durgā, also appeared with eighteen arms. According to Van Oort (1986: 13) although this form is worshipped by Chan Buddhists, other temple priests deny that Caṇḍi is related to Guanyin.

**Simhanāda Avalokiteśvara** ( Ch. Shizihou Guanyin. Jap. Shishiku Kannon)

The seven forms as described above are not, however, the only forms of Indian origin that can be seen in East Asia. Another image that has been given a Chinese character is Simhanāda Guanyin (Lion Roar Guanyin). The lion is the traditional mount of Wenshu (Mañjuśrī) who also is very popular in East Asia, but as described in Chapter 2, the textual prescription for this form is without ornaments and clad in a tiger skin. It is usually, therefore, the lack of ornaments that distinguishes Simhanāda Guanyin from that of Wenshu. However, images have changed over the years and there has been confusion and mis-identification in both Indian and East Asian images. Plate 51 shows examples of this, for these images from the Guanyin Temple at Stanley in Hong Kong, although attired in the traditional bodhisattva garb, are worshipped as images of Guanyin. Neither of these images, however, conform strictly to textual prescription. While one holds an Indian style vase (oval and lidded) the other holds the Ruyi sceptre. What is particularly interesting about this temple is that while devotees worship these more masculine-looking statues as Guanyin, they also worship the huge White-robed Guanyin, of a particularly feminine appearance, that stands

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<sup>70</sup>See Frédéric (1995: 174) for a description of these attributes.





**PLATE 49**  
Eighteen-armed Caṇḍi Avalokiteśvara.  
'Guan Im Tong' Temple.  
Malacca.



**PLATE 50**  
Eighteen-armed  
Caṇḍi Avalokiteśvara.  
Guanyin Temple,  
Waterloo Street, Singapore.





**PLATE 51**  
 Simhanāda Avalokiteśvara,  
 Guanyin Temple,  
 Stanley, Hong Kong.



**PLATE 52**  
 Guanyin seated on an elephant.  
 Guanyin Temple,  
 Stanley, Hong Kong.

in the temple courtyard. Thus it is clear that devotees accept there is more than one face to Guanyin.

## IMAGES WITHOUT INDIAN ANTECEDENTS

### Guanyin seated on an elephant

Next to the images of Guanyin astride a lion at Stanley there is an image of Guanyin seated on an elephant. Traditionally the elephant is the mount of Puxian (Samantabhadra). However, devotees at the temple in Stanley assured me that this also was Guanyin. There is, however, one way to tell the difference between images of Guanyin and Puxian. The elephant mount of Puxian always has six tusks whereas the elephant on which Guanyin is seated only has two (see Plate 52). On Putuo Island, situated off the south-east coast of China, I came across another image of Guanyin seated on an elephant (Plate 53). This image shows Guanyin holding what could either be a wish-fulfilling pearl or, more likely, a night-illuminating pearl. This latter pearl, according to a Chinese legend, was given to Guanyin in order that texts could be read by day or night.

It is an indigenous Chinese legend that has confirmed Guanyin's association with both the lion and the elephant. In this story<sup>71</sup> Miaoshan's sisters, who have been converted to Buddhism, become the Bodhisattvas Wenshu and Puxian (Maspero 1963: 356). A green lion and white elephant pardoned by Miaoshan are then given to the two sisters as mounts (Werner 1934: 286). The lion and elephant and the two sisters then gradually progress until they reach true perfection. While images of Puxian and Wenshu are still depicted on their traditional mounts (*vāhanas*) there are numerous images that can be clearly identified as Guanyin, astride either a lion or an elephant. Guanyin's traditional mount, however, is a *hou* which looks like a lion, although it has the body of a horse (Plate 54). These animal mounts are most certainly Chinese and have emerged due to the influence of indigenous legends.

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<sup>71</sup>For details of this story see Chapter 5.





**PLATE 53**

Guanyin seated on an elephant.  
From Putuo Island.





**PLATE 54**  
Guanyin seated on a Hou.  
Beijing.



**PLATE 55**  
Guanyin with a peacock.  
Temple of the Golden Gate,  
Near Taipei.

### Guanyin with a peacock

One other form of Guanyin, associated not with an animal but with a bird, is Guanyin with a peacock. This image is quite unusual and one which I have only come across once, in the Temple of the Golden Gate, near Taipei in Taiwan (Plate 55). The symbolism is not clear but some devotees agreed that the peacock's feathers could possibly represent the eyes of Guanyin's compassion, in a similar way to the thousand eyes, seen in the hands of the thousand-armed images. In several other temples I have seen peacock feathers placed near Guanyin statues and this is either symbolic of the many eyes seeing all distress, or simply to ensure Guanyin's efficacy, for the peacock is regarded as a lucky symbol. It also appears, from very early times, to symbolize immortality, as seen on funerary objects (Huntington 1985: 158). This would seem appropriate for in this temple the image of Guanyin with the peacock is placed next to the 'Reclining Buddha'. This form of Guanyin can also be linked to Amitābha for his *vāhana* is the peacock (Mukhopadhyay 1985: 113; Getty 1974: 37).

### Sūtra Guanyin

The last of the forms to be discussed here, which does not appear to have an Indian antecedent, is Sūtra Guanyin. The origin of this form is extremely vague but the sūtra appears to represent the Buddhist canon which contains the law, the Tripitaka (Frédéric 1995: 72). This is an extremely popular form of Guanyin in Taiwan (see Plates 56 and 57) and in some cases the sūtra has replaced the vase in the popular large white-robed forms (see Plates 58-59). The sūtra is usually represented by a scroll or occasionally by an open book. This is also one of the attributes of Mañjuśrī who is frequently depicted holding the 'scroll of knowledge' or *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* in his left hand (Frédéric 1995: 194; 331, n. 29). As this is not the first borrowed attribute of Mañjuśrī it is clear that this figure played a large part in the development of Guanyin's iconography.



**PLATE 56**  
Sūtra Guanyin.  
Temple of the Golden Gate,  
Near Taipei.



**PLATE 57**  
Sūtra Guanyin.  
Fokuangshan Monastery,  
Near Kaohsiung.





**PLATE 58**  
Sūtra Guanyin.  
Thousand Buddhas Monastery.  
Shatin,  
Hong Kong



**PLATE 59**  
Sūtra Guanyin.  
Overlooking Keelung Harbour,  
Taiwan



## INDIGENOUS LEGENDS PROMOTING FAITH IN GUANYIN

It is clear from the legends associated with some of the forms described above that many of these were written to promote the image's efficacy and to explain the existence of a statue or a temple. 'Founding myths' described how Guanyin had first performed a miracle at a particular temple and in many cases had, herself, asked for the temple to be built. This was often to raise alms for the construction of, or repairs to, a temple. These legends give a specific place and temple as the birth place of a particular statue. Sometimes several temples give almost identical stories regarding a Guanyin image. These myths and temple legends describing the efficacy of Guanyin increased and indigenous or 'fabricated' texts<sup>72</sup> also appeared describing miraculous events.

This final part of the chapter will describe some of these legends and show how many were written to give the images a local origin. The reason that so many fabricated or apocryphal texts came into being at this time appears to be an attempt to give Guanyin a history and to 'prove' that miracles had been occurring in a particular locality for a very long time.

It would appear that some were modelled on the Jataka tales. It was, perhaps, felt that as Śākyamuni had such tales describing his life, so Guanyin, should have tales of his /her own. It is also clear that although China did not produce any sculpted<sup>73</sup> scenes of the perils that were seen in the Indian cave temples, this by no means suggests that this function of Guanyin was forgotten. As the popularity of Guanyin increased, stories relating to the 'perils' described in the *Lotus Sūtra* were being formed.

One such tale, (Campany 1996: 91-92) set in Luoyang, describes a man by the name of Changshu who revered the Buddha and who liked to chant the *Guanshiyin-sūtra*. When a fire

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<sup>72</sup>Some of these texts were called sūtras.

<sup>73</sup>For paintings showing this theme see Chapter 4.

broke out in the house adjacent to Changshu's home, he and his family began to remove their belongings. However, Changshu quickly realised that he was running out of time and urged the family to stop what they were doing and to chant the *Guanshiyin-sūtra*. Soon the fire had completely destroyed the neighbouring house but had not touched Changshu's house. A group of ruffians set out to prove that this was not a divine event by secretly burning down the house. Three times they threw bundles of burning sticks at the thatched roof and three times the flames went out.

If anyone wants to hurt you  
And pushes you into a great fire-pit,  
If you contemplate on the power of Avalokiteśvara,  
The fire-pit will change into a pond. (Kubo and Yuyama 1991: 304).

This story emphasised trust in the *Guanshiyin-sūtra*. By setting this legend in Luoyang the text compilers also assured the Chinese devotees that Guanyin appeared to the local people. In the same way another legend set in Liang Province (modern Gansu), described how a widow named Li was jailed for harbouring a female slave (Campany 1996: 86-87). Li was a pious Buddhist and from her cell she recited the *Guanshiyin-sūtra* for over ten days. Suddenly Guanyin appeared and told her to get up and leave. Finding that her shackles were unfastened she also suddenly found herself at home. She was not rearrested.

If you are imprisoned with a neck chain,  
Your hands and feet fettered,  
If you contemplate the power of Avalokiteśvara,  
They will disappear and you will be released (Kubo and Yuyama 1991: 305).

This legend, while giving a Chinese provenance, rewards devotion to Guanyin and also rewards the act of compassion towards a woman who needs refuge. It also brings Guanyin close to the Chinese people by appearing face to face with the devotee. This was one feature of Chinese devotion to Guanyin. Devotees began to believe that it was possible to meet Guanyin in real life. This was not a deity who remained in some far-off distant place.

Another story describes how Guanyin will help even those who were considered to be undeserving of assistance. It describes a cruel and violent man, who, having encountered a tiger in the forest, shot and injured it. Another tiger chased him and pinned him down. He remembered a monk speaking of Guanyin and meditated on the bodhisattva. The tiger released the man and he became a devout man vowing to undertake the lay precepts (which would have included not killing living beings).

If you are surrounded by evil beasts  
Whose teeth and claws are fearfully sharp,  
If you contemplate the power of Avalokiteśvara,  
They will run away swiftly...(Kubo and Yuyama 1991: 305).

In this way not only was the man rewarded for devotion to Guanyin, but Guanyin is seen saving a damned soul who would not otherwise have deserved a favourable rebirth.

Another tale, in the *Gao wang guanshiyin jing* (Yü u.n.d.,19), describes a man being saved from imprisonment and impending execution by Guanyin. In a dream this man is told to chant a sūtra, which Guanyin reveals to him, before he goes to his execution. He is to repeat it one thousand times but has only managed nine hundred repetitions by the time he is taken from his cell. He manages the other one hundred on his way to the executioner finishing the one thousand just as the sword strikes his neck. When the sword breaks in two the executioner makes two more unsuccessful attempts after which the man is pardoned. When he next worships his image of Guanyin, he notices three cut marks on the statue's neck. This story is clearly influenced by the lines from the *Lotus Sūtra* which explain that when:

... your life is to be ended by execution.  
If you contemplate the power of Avalokiteśvara,  
The sword will be immediately broken into pieces (Kubo and Yuyama 1991: 305).

A similar story appeared in Japan. The *Nihon ryōiki* (Nakamura 1973: 231) describes how a man was saved from the executioner. This man was a soldier who had been protected while serving on the 'frontier' by a Kannon image made by his wife. Later he was involved in the

rebellion of Nakamaro (706-764CE) and was sentenced to death along with twelve other men. When the other men had been executed and his turn came, he had a vision that the wooden image of Kannon appeared to him and protected his body. Moments later the execution was stopped and he was exiled to Hinano (present Nagano-ken). He was recalled soon after and appointed assistant governor of Tama district. The scar from the executioners sword could still be seen on his neck. It is interesting to note that in both these stories reward is given for worshipping statues of Guanyin.

The *Nihon ryōiki*,<sup>74</sup> from which the above story is taken, is the earliest collection of Buddhist legends in Japan, being compiled by the monk Kyōkai in the eighth century. Kyōkai describes how one night, feeling remorseful about his past life, he dreamed that he was visited by a novice monk who taught him how he could erase his past karma. Kyōkai interpreted this to be a visitation from Kannon who had come to teach him how to cultivate wisdom. Among the stories devoted to bodhisattvas and buddhas there are seventeen devoted to Kannon<sup>75</sup> signifying Kyōkai's special attachment to this bodhisattva. Of these tales, two describe Kannon's assistance on water. The first describes an Elder who could not cross a river until an old man (an incarnation of Kannon) appeared with a ferryboat (Nakamura 1973: 115). The second describes a man taken prisoner by the Chinese and sent to an island with seven other Japanese men. Having acquired an image of Kannon, which they all worshipped, they decided to build a boat. When it was finished, they installed the image of Kannon on board and continuing to worship the image, set themselves adrift. The boat drifted to Tsukushi (present Kyūshū) and a temple dedicated to Kannon was built to commemorate the event.(Nakamura 1973: 128).

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<sup>74</sup> The full title is *Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* (Miraculous Stories of Karmic Retribution of Good and Evil in Japan).

<sup>75</sup> Compared with six to Miroku (Maitreya) three each to Amida (Amitabha) and Śakyamuni and two to Yakushi (Bhaiṣajyaguru).



If you drift upon the great ocean and meet danger  
 From dragons, fish and demons,  
 If you contemplate the power of Avalokiteśvara,  
 You will not be swallowed by the waves (Kubo and Yuyama 1991: 304).

This story, while placing particular importance on the Kannon image, also describes the construction of a Kannon temple in which, no doubt, the image was placed.

It is clear from the above examples that fear of the perils of fire, shackles, wild beasts, execution, water and sickness were transmitted to China and Japan. But it is perhaps the novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en that is one of the most surprising stories about Guanyin. This novel is based on the journey to India made by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang in 629CE. It is written in a lighthearted and fanciful manner, but it does acknowledge Guanyin as the saviour from the same perils that were described in the *Lotus Sūtra*: 'She delivers from the eight disasters, Saves all living beings, Great is her compassion' (Wu 1984: 136).

The popularity of this sixteenth century novel is due to the combination of religious devotion and the indigenous beliefs of magic and spells. Along the journey Xuanzang is protected by Guanyin, who, it is told, visited the Jade Emperor to borrow four Duty gods, the six Dings and Jias and the Revealer of the Truth, to look after the priest on his pilgrimage. Guanyin also appoints Monkey as a disciple to look after Xuanzang's needs. The priest and Monkey are however not entirely compatible making for some amusing episodes. Xuanzang encounters many of the eight perils. One of these describes how Xuanzang is saved from fire when some monks plan to murder him and Monkey in order to steal the magic cassock. To counter this disaster Monkey borrows an anti-fire cover to spread over the priest, his horse and his luggage, thereby ensuring their safety while the monastery in which they were sheltering burned down around them.

It is stories such as the *Journey to the West* that gave the eight perils local character and identity. They also provided a foundation on which could be built new 'perils'. To the 'Eight Perils' can be added a ninth peril, that of childlessness, for the fear of not having children has

always been of great importance for women. Not that this function was ignored in the *Saddharmapundrika* for although not listed as one of the perils, the role of giver of children was one of the original compassionate acts of Guanyin:

If any woman wanting to have a baby boy pays homage and makes offerings to the Bodhisattva, she will bear a baby boy endowed with good merit and wisdom. If she wants to have a baby girl, she will bear a beautiful and handsome baby girl who has planted roots of good merit and will have the love of sentient beings.” (Kubo and Yuyama 1991: 301).

Numerous legends illustrate Guanyin's compassion in granting a baby to those couples who beseech her for a child to make their life complete. One of these stories (Yü 1996: 102) describes how Ding Xian of Yibin, Nanyang, was fifty years old but had no son. He had heard about the efficacy of a particular sūtra dedicated to White-robed Guanyin. He decided to print this sūtra and to distribute it without charge. Ding also had a six-foot statue made which was placed in a shrine dedicated to Guanyin. Not long after the image was enshrined Ding dreamt of a woman who presented him with a white carp. On the following morning a son was born wrapped in white placenta. He later had another son after distributing more copies of the sūtra and paintings of Guanyin. This story is clearly intended to show the efficacy of the sūtra and the reward for devotion to Guanyin. It is also interesting to note that in this story Guanyin appears as a woman. This is likely due to the role of giver of children being more suited to a feminine figure.

From the above analysis of the images and legends of East Asia it is clear that when Guanyin first appeared in the Chinese cave temples it was not as an independent figure as was seen in India - it was as an attendant to Śākyamuni and later Amitābha. It is also clear that the attribute of the the lotus was quickly replaced with the vase. This reflects the influence of local beliefs for the vase was believed to contain purifying or rejuvenating water. This water was also believed to be connected to the efficacy of the willow tree. As the popularity of Guanyin increased, this figure assumed independent status. Imagery that had previously been revered in India found its way into East Asia but it is clear that many of the images that had originally been influenced by Brahmanism,

were slowly given East Asian identities. Founding myths also helped give Guanyin a local character, for these temples had 'histories' to show that a particular temple had been saving devotees from distress for a considerable amount of time. This increased patronage. Devotees would hope that by frequenting that temple they too would be fortunate to receive Guanyin's assistance. Miracle tales also appeared which not only described how Guanyin had appeared to a particular devotee, but also gave devotees assurance that this figure belonged to them. It did not matter in which part of the world they lived, Guanyin would save them from any manner of disaster that might befall them. Many of these stories also show that the notion of Guanyin as a saviour from perils has survived. Although in slight variation to those seen in India, legends of Guanyin's saving powers have influenced images and depict Guanyin's compassionate assistance in China, Japan and the rest of East Asia. One noticeable feature of these legends is that in some Guanyin appears as a female. In more and more legends written after the Tang dynasty, Guanyin appeared as a female figure to help those in distress and this was also reflected in the iconography. Statues and paintings of Guanyin became more noticeably feminine especially when Guanyin was depicted as a giver of children.

## CHAPTER 4

### FROM PRINCE TO GODDESS: THE 'SEX CHANGE' RECONSIDERED

It is clear from the previous chapter that Guanyin was initially perceived as a masculine bodhisattva and represented in princely attire. As indigenous texts and legends increased, more and more tales began to describe Guanyin as a feminine figure who came to the aid of devotees. Paintings and sculptures also began to portray her as a young barefoot maiden with long dark hair and flowing white robes. But how did Guanyin come to be depicted as a feminine figure? What influences were at hand to aid this 'sex change'? These questions have been the subject of much scholarly debate over the years, but this debate has not produced an adequate answer to this enigma. Because there appear to have been inconsistencies and several incorrect conclusions drawn, a reassessment of the subject seems justified. This chapter, therefore, will look closely at previous scholarly opinion of the sex-change. The first part will reassess the arguments that credited Tārā with influencing the feminine form of Guanyin. The second part will investigate the Buddhist and non-Buddhist influences that led to the formation of Songzi (Child-giving) Guanyin. It is the feminisation of this form, many scholars feel, that led to other images of Guanyin being feminised.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF TĀRĀ ON THE FEMININE FORM OF GUANYIN

In Chapter 2 we saw how Avalokiteśvara was portrayed in princely form and that he was frequently accompanied by the goddess Tārā. This figure, I argued, was the feminine form of



Avalokiteśvara who was perceived as the personification of Avalokiteśvara's compassion in order to assist him in his role as saviour from the Eight Great Perils. But what influence could this figure have had on the iconography of Guanyin in China? Is there any evidence that Tārā was the inspiration behind the majority of images in East Asia becoming more and more feminised? I contend that there is evidence to show that Guanyin's iconography is partly indebted to Tārā.

While this view is not shared by all scholars, some do concede that this transformation or 'sex-change' could be due to Tārā, claiming that after she became popular in Tibet, the Chinese superimposed some of her qualities onto the male Guanyin. One would expect, therefore, that in India and in Tibet the figures of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā would be clearly differentiated as male and female and in China and the rest of East Asia Guanyin would be now perceived as female. Nothing could be further from the truth. On a recent postcard from Nepal, a Tibetan Thangka depicts a figure that could be either Avalokiteśvara or Tārā (see Plate 60). On the back of the postcard is the description: "Religious Tibetan Painting depicting Chenresig or Avalokiteswara, Goddess of Compassion". Does this mean that the Nepalese now view Avalokiteśvara as a feminine figure or are they confused? The answer does not become any clearer when we look at what is happening in China for we see that some Chinese specialists also describe Avalokiteśvara as a feminine "goddess": In the handbook for the Yonghe Gong Lamasery in Beijing is the description of "...the figure of Avalokitesvara (a Goddess of Mercy)". In addition the 1994 *China* tourist guide gives a drawing of Avalokiteśvara (see Fig 1)<sup>76</sup> which is in fact described in *The Treasured Thangkas in Yonghegong Palace*, as White Tārā (Plate 61).

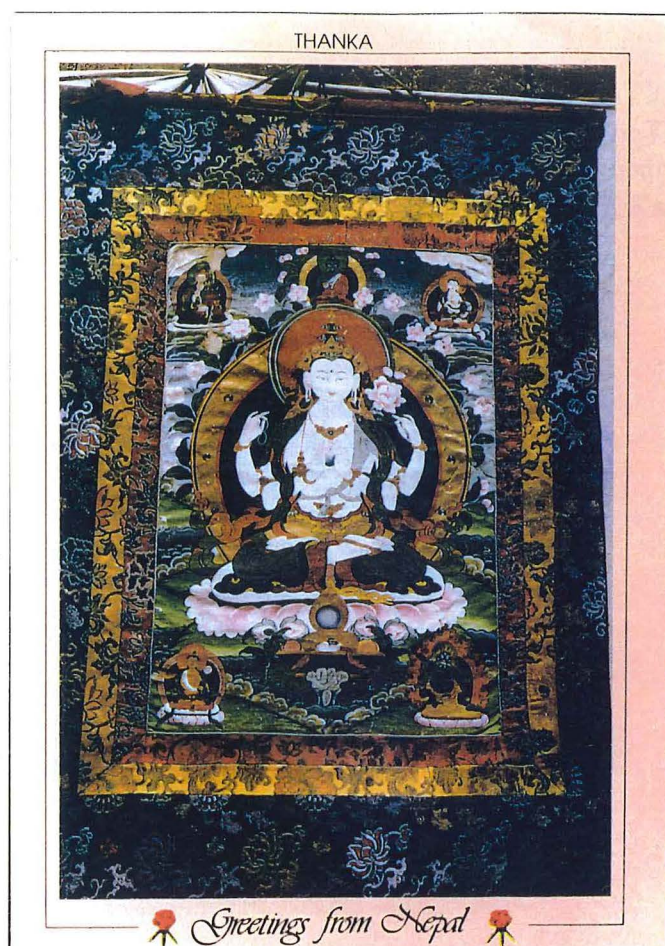
Yet not everyone is confused. At the Fokuangshan Monastery in Taiwan there are, amongst the museum images of Guanyin, two plaques of Green and White Tārā (see Plates 62 and 63). The novice Buddhist nun who showed me around the museum told me that these Tārās are forms of

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<sup>76</sup>This illustration, while not identical, is clearly taken from one of the paintings of Tārā.



**FIG 1** White Tārā.  
(China - Tourist Guide)

**PLATE 60**

Postcard from Nepal depicting  
“Avalokiteswara, Goddess of  
Compassion”.

**PLATE 61**

White Tārā Thangka.  
Yonghegong Palace,  
Beijing.  
(1994 Catalogue)





**PLATE 62**  
White Tārā.  
Fokuangshan Monastery,  
Near Kaohsiung.



**PLATE 63**  
Green Tārā.  
Fokuangshan Monastery,  
Near Kaohsiung.



Avalokiteśvara.<sup>77</sup> In addition, on Putuo Island, which is the heart of Guanyin devotion, there is an image in the Yangzhi Shrine Temple<sup>78</sup> which is very regal-looking and has a similar appearance to Tārā (Plate 64). This statue which was made by artisans in the Ming Dynasty 1368-1644 was modelled, on the instructions of an abbot retired from Huiji temple, after the 'original' Guanyin. I was told that this is why the image is very Indian and dressed just like an Indian woman. Does this mean that to the educated Buddhist, Tārā is the feminine form of Avalokiteśvara while lay devotees (and casual observers) are confused about the similarity between the two cult figures? If this is the case, has this confusion, such as exists today, been responsible for the feminisation of Guanyin in East Asia?

Those scholars who do concur that Tārā has influenced the feminine transformation of Guanyin are of the opinion that it was White Tārā who had the most influence. Yet, while White Tārā does appear to have played a part in the feminisation of Guanyin, it was Green Tārā who inherited part of Avalokiteśvara's life-saving role, which, as described in Chapter 2, influenced her early images. This can be verified by Indian texts. The *Aṣṭabhaya-trāṇa*<sup>79</sup> states that Tārā is green and displays the *varada-mudrā* with her right hand and carries a blue lotus with her left. She should also be shown in the *ardhaparyāṅka* (dancing or trampling attitude) with one face and two arms. In the *Aṣṭabhaya-trāṇa-tārā-sādhana*<sup>80</sup> she is described as green in colour with eight arms. In her right hands she carries a string of beads and a jewel and displays the gestures of *varada* and *abhaya*. With her left hands she carries a blue lotus, water vessel, a book and shows the gesture of granting protection. She is also described as being surrounded by eight other Tārās who each

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<sup>77</sup>One interesting feature of this Monastery is that they use the Sanskrit names for referring to their images. Hence the name Avalokiteśvara is used not Guanyin or Kwanseum-posal (which is the name used locally). This is possibly due to the local tendency to refer to Kwanseum as a feminine deity. This monastery strongly upholds the doctrine that a bodhisattva is neither male nor female.

<sup>78</sup>This is a retirement place for monks and nuns on Putuo Island. It is different from others temples in that it is like a home. It has rooms for the retired monks, abbots and nuns all in the same complex and it is also a clinic.

<sup>79</sup>Written by Dīpamkaraśrījñāna (Malalasekera 1966: 229)

<sup>80</sup>Written by Sarvajñamitra (ibid).



**PLATE 64**  
Guanyin.  
Yangzhi Shrine, Putuo Island.

protect from one of the fears. It is interesting to note that the goddess who bestows freedom from the fear of water is white in colour with one face and two arms.<sup>81</sup> These separate forms, depicted with different attributes and colours,<sup>82</sup> illustrate that Tārā had different forms to symbolize her particular roles.

But it was both the Green and the White forms of Tārā that became popular, especially in Tibet<sup>83</sup> where Tārā has come to enjoy independent status and there is evidence that Tibetan art influenced the feminisation of Guanyin. In the Buddhist paintings found at Dunhuang<sup>84</sup> Indian, Tibetan and Chinese styles are recognisable. One of the most popular themes was of Guanyin as a saviour from those in distress, standing or sitting surrounded by small scenes each depicting one of the 'perils'. Despite the common theme, the perils range from four to seven in number. This variation is likely to have resulted from the similarity of some of these perils and the various ways that they could be depicted. No doubt, also, donor preference would have influenced the number of perils shown. These paintings are believed to have been executed in the Tang period at a time when artists were becoming more creative and softer more feminine-looking bodhisattvas appeared. But what is interesting about this period in art and about these paintings, is that although the bodily form and features became more feminine, many of them show a thin moustache. This is particularly evident in the paintings of Guanyin. One theory<sup>85</sup> advanced for this is that artists gave the bodhisattvas female forms to conform to current tastes but gave them

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<sup>81</sup>She is also described as carrying an iron fetter or chain with her right hand and pointing a finger with her left hand. This could be a translation error as these attributes would seem more fitting for the form who frees from fetters and chains.

<sup>82</sup>These Tantric forms saw Tārā with red, blue and yellow forms which were usually distinguished by their fierce features. The White and Green Tārās are always shown with benevolent features.

<sup>83</sup>In Tibet the Green and White Tārās have come to symbolize the two wives of Sroṅ btsan sgam po.

<sup>84</sup>The Dunhuang caves are believed to date from the latter half of the fifth to the fourteenth century with the greater part finished before the year 1000CE and many of the paintings date to the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. These paintings were recovered from a recess in one of the caves, probably having been hidden away soon after the close of the tenth century CE. Dunhuang was not only on the great east-west trade route across Asia but also at the intersection point of the high road between Mongolia in the north and Tibet in the south. This location exposed the city to not infrequent attacks, and it was probably some incursion which led to the hiding away of the paintings.

<sup>85</sup>See for example Gengyu/Wenkun 1981: 243

moustaches so as not to go against the Buddhist doctrine of a bodhisattva being neither male nor female.<sup>86</sup> What better way to allow free expression in art and remain within the parameters of the doctrine!

There is much evidence to support the theory that artists embodied both male and female forms by taking some of Tārā's attributes and some of Guanyin's attributes and characteristics. Hence some of the paintings found at Dunhuang show Guanyin with very similar attributes to those of Tārā. In addition, one painting from Dunhuang depicts Tārā as a saviour from perils (Plate 65). Although the details in the painting are not clear, the main image is represented in typical Tārā pose with right knee raised and right foot resting on a small lotus; the left leg is bent across. Both hands hold open blue lotus flowers and the whole figure has been gilded (Waley 1931: 150). All these features are typical of Green Tārā. Yet, although Stein has identified this figure as Tārā, both Petrucci and Binyon are of the opinion that this is Guanyin, identifying all nine figures as male. Waley on the other hand asserts that at least one of them is most certainly female. There is good reason for considering this to be Tārā for at each side of the main figure are four smaller figures most likely representing her emanations.<sup>87</sup> This painting, therefore, could very well represent the *Aṣṭabhaya-trāṇa -tārā -sādhana* as described above. One of these figures is white in colour, most likely representing White Tārā. Between these smaller figures are six of the 'Perils'. Not all are clear but in one a man is being pushed over a cliff, one is circled by fire, one shows three men being pursued by wild animals while in another a man is kneeling in prayer before a lake on which a sail boat lies. While the painting is purely Tibetan in style, all men are dressed in Chinese costume.<sup>88</sup>

The mixture of Tibetan and Chinese influence is evident in other paintings that have both Chinese and Tibetan inscriptions. This illustrates that the Chinese and Tibetan artists and priests

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<sup>86</sup>I have discussed this with a Buddhist nun who agrees that the moustache is likely to have been used to neutralise the feminine features.

<sup>87</sup>Tibetan artists frequently depict Tārā with eight emanations.

<sup>88</sup>See Stein 1986: 46



**PLATE 65**

Tārā.

Painting on silk. Eighth - ninth century.  
Dunhuang.

(Stein 1978: Pl. XXX1)

not only worshipped side by side but worked together on dedicatory inscriptions. One *maṇḍala*<sup>89</sup> which shows, more than any other, the fusion of Chinese and Tibetan influence is one that depicts a Thousand-armed Guanyin with Mahāmayurī riding on a peacock and Maricī riding on a phoenix. These figures are regular assistants of Green Tārā in Tibetan iconography (Stein 1980: 1413). This could well suggest that devotees<sup>90</sup> saw Tārā and Guanyin as emanations of the same deity.

Yet another good reason for believing that devotees saw Tārā and Guanyin as male and female emanations of the one deity is in a Dunhuang woodcut of Avalokiteśvara which Arthur Waley (1925: 151) claims bears upon it a Tantric invocation to Tārā. Unfortunately this is not depicted by Waley but he suggests that this, in the minds of worshippers (not technically trained in Tantric theory), meant that (a) Tārā was another name for Avalokiteśvara, (b) that Avalokiteśvara was like Tārā “a lady”. This is supported by a drawing of Avalokiteśvara, also from Dunhuang, that contains an invocation to Avalokiteśvarī, suggesting that the worshipper considered the deity to be feminine (Stein 1980: 1474). It would appear, therefore, that devotees considered that Avalokiteśvara could be represented with a feminine form, or that Tārā was an emanation of Avalokiteśvara.

That Tārā and Guanyin are both female emanations of Avalokiteśvara, is an idea put forward by John Blofeld (1978: 23). Blofeld's Chinese teachers, on a visit to Mongolia, came across images of Tārā whom the Mongols and Tibetans view as a female emanation of Avalokiteśvara. Later one of his teacher's came across some antique painting in which Guanyin was portrayed as being identical to Tārā. Blofeld also claims to have seen in Japan three early paintings of Kannon (Guanyin), that show Guanyin in the same “...posture and the mudras formed by the fingers of both hands...” as Tārā.<sup>91</sup>

Blofeld, however, does not name, date, or identify in any way these paintings, nor does he

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<sup>89</sup>This painting is too indistinct to reproduce here. See Stein Chlvi Plate LXIII

<sup>90</sup>Judging from their dedicatory inscriptions most paintings were commissioned by devotees.

<sup>91</sup>In Japan Kannon is sometimes depicted as a male bodhisattva and sometimes as female.

depict them. He also refers to a painting in the British Museum, details of which appear to have been derived from Getty's work. This painting is said to be a Chinese Temple painting showing Guanyin with her Chinese attendants Shancai and Longnü but in the posture of Tārā (Getty 1962: 82). Although I have been unable to identify the exact work, Plate 66 shows a painting<sup>92</sup> from Dunhuang which could possibly be the one described by Blofeld and Getty. This shows a very feminine Guanyin sitting in the pose of Tārā with two attendants. However, if this is the same painting, Blofeld and Getty are failing to comment on the suggestion of a moustache and beard on the face of Guanyin. The two attendants are described by Stein as being the good and evil geniuses,<sup>93</sup> who appear to be the forerunners of Shancai and Longnü. Side scenes show seven calamities: execution, fire, water, thunder and lightening, snakes and wild animals. Hence it would appear that devotees were turning to Guanyin and Tārā alike for preventing the perils of their existence.

There are also other paintings from Dunhuang that show Guanyin in the same posture as described by Getty and Blofeld, although none contain Shancai and Longnü. It is possible that Getty and Blofeld were confusing Shancai and Longnü with the Sage of the Air and the Nymph of Good Virtue, seen for example as Guanyin's attendants in another painting from Dunhuang (Plate 67), or that their painting was later than the tenth century when Shancai and Longnü became popular acolytes. Whichever is the case, the information given by Blofeld shows that there was good reason for at least some Chinese Buddhists to consider that Tārā and Guanyin were emanations of Avalokiteśvara.

Diana Paul (1979: 251) is one supporter of the theory that Guanyin was worshipped as a male god in China, until White Tārā was assimilated with him by Chinese Buddhists who superimposed Tārā's qualities onto Guanyin. Paul states that the Chinese Buddhists believed that

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<sup>92</sup>The donors are dressed in tenth century costume.

<sup>93</sup>Described elsewhere as the Sage of the Air and the Nymph of Good Virtue.





**PLATE 66**

Guanyin.

Painting on silk.

Dunhuang.

(Photograph British Museum)



**PLATE 67**

Thousand-armed Guanyin with "Sage" and "Nymph of Virtue".

Painting on silk.

Dunhuang.

(Stein 1978: Pl. XL11)

White Tārā was a lower stage manifestation of Guanyin. She claims that in the Tang dynasty when Tantric Buddhist texts were introduced into China from Tibet, the Chinese Buddhists believed that Tārā was a lower stage manifestation of Guanyin. This theory is supported by the *Mahāpratyāṅgirā-dhāraṇī* which was translated into Chinese by the Tantric teacher Amoghavajra who lived between 704-74 (Ghosh 1980: 14). Here Tārā was elevated to the highest deity and represented as a white-coloured goddess of noble appearance.

Maspero also claims that Guanyin's feminine form is of Tantric origin. He suggests that White Tārā's Sanskrit name of Pāṇḍaravāsīnī (one clad in white) has been translated by the Chinese with literal exactness. Guanyin, states Maspero (1963: 353), is therefore represented clad in a white dress, holding a white lotus flower.<sup>94</sup>

There is, however, much to suggest that White Tārā and Baiyi (White-robed) Guanyin had separate origins. As discussed above, Tārā and Guanyin had similar roles and they were depicted in similar, if not identical, postures. But the colour of the two figures does not appear to have been an issue, both were depicted in a number of hues. Tārā was known to have a white form but so also was Guanyin. In addition, the sex of the early White-robed Guanyin figures is ambiguous which would suggest that any feminine influence came later. There does not appear to be, therefore, any reason to suggest it was **White Tārā** who influenced the feminine or the Baiyi form of Guanyin. We will now look closely at one form that does appear to be closely connected to the White-robed form, that of Shuiyue (Water-moon) Guanyin.

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<sup>94</sup>Both Rolf Stein (1986: 28) and David Snellgrove (1987: 151) however, consider that Pāṇḍaravāsīnī and Tārā are separate figures and should not be confused, although Snellgrove does admit that the origin of both Pāṇḍaravāsīnī and Tārā may be regarded as forms of Avalokiteśvara. Stein claims that scholars confuse several figures who should all remain separate, namely: Pāṇḍaravāsīnī; White Tārā; reclusive monks who wear white robes and White-robed Guanyin who is also confused with a 'Water Moon' figure.

## THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE SHUIYUE AND BAIYI FORMS OF GUANYIN

The cult of Shuiyue Guanyin existed in the eighth century. Cornelius Chang cites records that describe the paintings of Zhou Fang who lived in the eighth century. The earliest dated extant painting of Shuiyue Guanyin, executed in 943, was found in the collection of paintings from Dunhuang. This is actually a painting within a painting for it forms the bottom right hand part of a large painting of the thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Guanyin. It is identified by an inscription in the cartouche as Shuiyue Guanyin indicating that at the time that it was painted, this form was well known in China. Other examples of this type were also found at Dunhuang, one being almost identical suggesting that one was copied from the other (see for example Plate 68). However, while these may very well be the earliest surviving examples of this form, there are records that suggest there were once paintings of a much earlier date. Chang (1977: 146-147) maintains that there is ample literary evidence to indicate that there were many paintings of Water-moon Guanyin by painters working near Xian. Chinese records describe one artist by the name of Zhou Fang who was active between the years 780-810 and painted three known Water-moon Guanyins.<sup>95</sup> These paintings represent the earliest known forms of this type.

Unfortunately although the description of these paintings clearly points to the water-moon type, the colour of Guanyin's clothing is not specified making it unclear whether this figure was clothed in white. Yet there is a clue in one of the descriptions: "Later, making slight changes in this style, he (Zhou Fang) painted a fully-dressed Bodhisattva with a robe and crown, thereby making him unlike the common people. Thus, he created a rather strange but majestic portrait of the Bodhisattva of the water-moon type. The robe was drawn in simple but firm lines and soft, beautiful colours". This description suggests that this mode of dress was unlike that of previous

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<sup>95</sup>Chang's information comes from Chang Yen-yüan, *Lidai Minghuaqi*, *juan 3*, which consists of a ten-volume treatise on painting and painters, completed in 847.

**PLATE 68**

Water-moon Guanyin.

Painting on paper. Ninth - tenth century.

Dunhuang.

(Stein 1978: Pl XXIV)



water-moon paintings. As Stein (1986: 28) suggests, some early forms of Guanyin were confused with meditators dressed in white robes which would have been in keeping with the common people. It is likely, therefore, that in the eighth century Shuiyue Guanyin was depicted wearing a white robe with which the people and artists were familiar.

The cult of the White-robed Guanyin and that of Shuiyue Guanyin certainly appear to have been influenced by each other. As Yü states (u.n.d.35), the White-robed Guanyin representations of the Song dynasty were very similar to those of the Shuiyue form. Both depicted Guanyin in a natural setting surrounded by bamboo and water, although the moon was often absent from the depictions of White-robed Guanyin. Because these forms of Guanyin have little in common with White Tārā, there is good reason to conclude that the White-robed form of Guanyin is not the result of an association with this deity. There is, however, much to suggest that the **sex-change** is the product of confusion between Green Tārā and Guanyin who were often seen in the same role. As the popularity of the Shuiyue and Baiyi forms of Guanyin increased, this confusion was transferred to these forms.

Chün-fang Yü (1990a: 72) considers that even if Baiyi Guanyin was originally introduced into China through Tantric ritual texts (i.e through the popularity of Tārā), her eventual success in China was possibly due to some indigenous texts that identify her as a fertility goddess. More recently Yü (1996: 97-105;1997:160) has provided evidence dated to the eleventh century to suggest that Songzi Guanyin is a variant of the Baiyi Guanyin.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF SONGZI GUANYIN

This, therefore, brings us to the question of how Songzi Guanyin developed and what influences were at hand to aid this development. First we will look at the evidence of Yü and then compare it with the views of other scholars. Yü claims that the form of Guanyin, as we now know

her, dressed in a white robe and holding a child, dates from the eleventh century. For evidence Yü cites the *Baiyi dabeì wuyinxin tuoluoni jing* (The Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the Five Mudrās of the Great Compassionate White-robed One) which appears to have been chanted from the eleventh century in order to receive long awaited babies. This dhāraṇī, it should be noted, does not credit Guanyin with granting children but describes Guanyin responding to the needs of the world and granting the fulfilment of wishes ‘No matter what one wishes to obtain’. To cement her argument Yü cites a stele dated 1082, penned by Qin Guan, on which this dhāraṇī is engraved alongside a representation of a White-robed Guanyin holding a baby. Yü does not reproduce this stele but it can be found in Toshio Ebines's work (see Fig 2). What Yü does not state here, but as described above is stated in an earlier unpublished paper (Yü u.n.d., 34-36), is that the White-robed Guanyin has a close affinity with the Shuiyue Guanyin. Later, in the twelfth century this Water-moon Guanyin became associated with Nanhai (South seas)<sup>96</sup> Guanyin. As the Shuiyue form can be seen, as described above, in some images dated to the tenth century, the stele as cited



**FIG 2** Stele dated 1082

by Yü could be Shuiyue Guanyin. The problem with this theory, however, is that Shuiyue

<sup>96</sup>Identified with Putuo Island lying off the south east coast of China.

paintings dated to the tenth century do not contain a child or a bird. But there is textual authority for the iconographical inclusion of a child. The *Dafang guangfo huayan jing*, which was translated into Chinese between 418-421 (Chang 1977: 156), and the forty juan version of the *Avatamsaka* translated by Prajñā in 798CE (Yü 1990b: 222), describe the pilgrimage of a young boy named Sudhāna. Both sūtras describe how he meets Guanyin, surrounded by water and trees, sitting on Mount Radiant. In later texts Mount Radiant was changed to Mount Potalaka and eventually became associated with Putuo Island. This association took place from approximately the tenth century. But while there is textual support for a young child appearing in the tenth - eleventh century, the bird is more problematical. The textual authority for a bird appears in the *Ying ke bao juan* (Precious scroll of the Parrot) where Guanyin brings a parrot back to life as a reward for his filial piety. In gratitude the parrot asks to be allowed to forever accompany Guanyin. This apocryphal sūtra has not, however, been dated. Nanhai Guanyin is usually shown with Shancai and a bird (usually carrying a rosary) sitting by water with bamboo trees in the background. The earliest extant iconographical evidence for this representation is the twelfth century (Yü 1990b: 237). The figure seen in the stele, therefore, could very well be an early example of Nanhai Guanyin, except that usually Nanhai Guanyin does not have a child sitting on her knee. While the child-giving function of Guanyin did become associated with this form, it is usually considered to be later than the date of this stele (Stein 1986: 19).

Copies of the text associated with this stele, cited by Yü, are dated between 1428-1609 and appended to the text dated 1609 are stories of Guanyin's efficacy in granting children upon recitation of the sūtra. Some of these stories contain dates, the earliest being 1147. However, we cannot be sure whether these are genuine or apocryphal stories. Also appended to the 1609 text is a postscript written by Yan Daoche who questions why this sūtra was not introduced into the canon collection. He suggests that it could be because after it was transmitted to some

“gentlewomen” in China by Indian Tantric monks, it was kept secret until the many miracles associated with it made it known. The addition of this postscript, however, suggests that this sūtra was a latecomer and was being given a history to ‘prove’ that for several centuries it had been responsible for helping grant the wishes of childless couples. As the earliest verified date of this text, according to Yü, is 1428, can we be sure that the representation on the stele dated 1082 is Songzi Guanyin? Is it not possible that this is a ‘forged’ stele justifying the existence of the texts?

Until we know the provenance of this stele and can verify its authenticity, we must take it at face value. Thus if we accept that it is genuinely dated to 1082, it appears to be the earliest example of a white-robed Songzi Guanyin and, perhaps, also of the Nanhai form. But have we conclusively established that Songzi Guanyin has developed from the Baiyi and Shuiyue forms? It is necessary to look at the opinions of other scholars regarding the influence of other religious figures.

In modern images Songzi Guanyin is usually represented as a woman wearing a large white veil which often covers her hair. Sometimes she is shown seated on a lotus with a child on her lap while in other representations she is standing holding a child in her arms (see Plates 69 and 71). Scholars have assumed that as ‘giver of children’ Guanyin must be feminine, questioning the suitability of a ‘male’ bodhisattva for this role. Yet, as described previously, this function is perfectly compatible with the *Lotus Sūtra* which describes Guanyin granting children to childless couples. Also, as Rolf Stein (1986: 21) states, it is not obligatory to have a female deity as a giver of children for there have been many examples where male gods have been worshipped for this purpose. Mile (Maitreya), seen standing next to Guanyin in Plate 70, is a perfect example for he is also known as a protector of children. In Japan, Jizō-Bosatsu (Ch. Dizang), seen with Koyasu (Easy Deliverance) Kannon in the cemetery of the Red Cross





**PLATE 69**  
Songzi Guanyin.  
'Lin Fung Miu' Temple.  
Macau.

**PLATE 70**  
Songzi Guanyin with Mile.  
Street shrine, Lamma Island,  
Hong Kong.



**PLATE 71**  
Songzi Guanyin. Beijing shop.



Hospital in Kyoto<sup>97</sup> (Plates 72 and 73), is also known as a child-giving and child protecting figure.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear from these representations that Guanyin is portrayed as a feminine figure who is known as the 'goddess' who can provide children to childless couples.

David Kinsley (1989: 29) considers the stimulus for a feminine form of Guanyin was Bixiayuanjun (the Princess of the Motley Clouds<sup>99</sup>) whose origin dates back to the Han period (25-220). He bases this assumption on the fact that this Chinese goddess is, like Songzi Guanyin, associated with obtaining children. This goddess is often simply called Shengmu (Holy Mother), or Nai nai niang niang (Madame Lady) and is generally regarded as the daughter of the great Emperor of the Eastern Peak, an important Taoist figure. The cult of Shengmu used to be very popular throughout the whole of China where, as the protectress of women and children, she gave children and generally presided over childbirth. She has been represented, according to Maspero (1963: 350), with a special headdress made of three birds with outspread wings; one bird facing to the front, the others facing left and right. Also associated with this goddess are two assistants, the Lady of Good Sight, who holds in her hand an enormous eye and preserves children from diseases of the eye and the Lady who Brings Children, Songzi niang niang, carrying a new born baby in her hands. She is also attended by various goddesses of childbirth.<sup>100</sup>

Shengmu certainly appears to have inspired some iconographical representations of Songzi Guanyin for, according to Maspero, when Guanyin is seen with her white robe partly covered by an embroidered cape or replaced by a Chinese woman's dress, this is simply Shengmu who has been

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<sup>97</sup>The cemetery contains the bodies of babies who have died because of miscarriage or abortion. Behind Kannon and Jizo are the names of these babies given by their parents.

<sup>98</sup>It is interesting to note that in each of these examples the male figure is placed next to the female figure, perhaps as justification for the function of protecting children.

<sup>99</sup>Sometimes translated as the 'Princess of the Streaked Clouds' or the 'Princess of the Purple and Azure Clouds'.

<sup>100</sup>The following six functions of these goddesses are named by Maspero: the Princess who Mysteriously Nourishes and Strengthens the Shape of the Embryo; the Princess who Causes the Rule to be Observed and Protects Infancy; the Princess who Grants Joy and Protects the Accouchement; the Princess who Guarantees Tranquillity and Kindness to Childhood; the Princess who Guides and Directs Childhood; the Princess who Gives to eat and Nourishes Childhood. Maspero 1963: 350





PLATE 72  
Koyasu Kannon with Jizō.  
Red Cross Hospital  
cemetery, Kyoto.



PLATE 73  
Detail of Koyasu Kannon.

adopted and given the name of Guanyin (Maspero 1963: 358)<sup>101</sup>. In the Temple of Lin Kai Miu<sup>102</sup> (Stream of Mourning Temple) in Macau, there is such an example as described by Maspero. This figure is worshipped as Guanyin but is certainly different from the usual representations (Plate 74). Here Guanyin is dressed in a Chinese-style gold garment and instead of the usual bare feet this figure has clog shoes. In an adjoining hall are eighteen brightly painted clay goddesses of childbirth, surrounded by small children. Each goddess is different, no doubt signifying the various functions (see Plates 75 and 76). Images such as this, seen in syncretic temples, would at first glance appear to justify the claim of Kinsley that images of Songzi Guanyin are rarely found in Buddhist temples, being usually found in homes or shops instead. Because of this, Kinsley asserts, Guanyin is approached more as a fertility goddess than a bodhisattva and has little to do with Buddhism. Yet, while the Guanyin figure in the Lin Kai Miu may be the product of an association with an indigenous fertility goddess, can this be said of all the forms of Songzi Guanyin, especially when the Indian 'male' bodhisattva was also known for providing women with children? While Kinsley does concede that Buddhist precedents can be found for this role of Guanyin, in both Avalokiteśvara and Hārītī, he concludes that the continuities between Guanyin and Shengmu are much greater than with Buddhist figures (Kinsley 1989: 271, n.17).

Not all scholars agree with this view. Several consider that early forms of Songzi Guanyin have been confused with Hārītī. Hārītī is the one feminine Indian Buddhist figure who is associated with childbirth. According to Buddhist mythology Hārītī was originally a Yakṣiṇī and mother of five hundred demons. Daily she would steal a child from the town of Rājagṛha with which to feed her family. When the townspeople implored the Buddha to do something to help them, he decided to hide one of Hārītī's children. This sent the mother into a frenzy as she

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<sup>101</sup>This changing of the name to suit the religious trends of the day appears to be a factor in the changing face of Guanyin and one that will be discussed again in Chapter 6.

<sup>102</sup>This temple is dedicated to [Ua Kuaong], god of fire.





**PLATE 74**

Guanyin.

'Lin Kai Miu' Temple,  
Macau.





**PLATE 75**

Goddesses of childbirth.

'Lin Kai Miu' Temple, Macau.



**PLATE 76**

Goddesses of childbirth.

'Lin Kai Miu' Temple, Macau.

searched the world for her lost child. In so doing she realised what grief she had been causing other mothers.

Chamberlayne considers that child-giving images in Guangzhou and other areas of South China are often those of Hārītī (Chamberlayne, 1962: 118) and this is also the opinion of Maspero (1963: 352) and Stein (1986: 19-20). Stein gives an example of two Portuguese men seeing a statue of this form in Guangzhou. However, the temple where this image may be found has not been named and when I was in Guangzhou in September 1994 I failed to locate any such child-giving statue except a modern porcelain image of Songzi Guanyin. This would indicate that either the image referred to by Stein is from a small back street temple of little popularity or it has suffered the ravages of time under a speedily expanding modern Guangzhou.

We do have some evidence, however, to suggest that Hārītī was being worshipped in China between the tenth-eleventh and the seventeenth centuries. Plate 77 shows an image which I came across in Japan in 1995, when I was kindly invited to see the private collection of Maria Kannon<sup>103</sup> at the Nanban Christian Culture Centre, in Osaka. This statue, made of bronze, and dated to the tenth-eleventh century was taken to Japan from China by a Christian Japanese man named Yukinaga Konishi in the Edo period (1600-1867). It is by studying this image and other child-giving images in Japan that give us a clearer idea of the development of Songzi Guanyin in China.

The statue at the Christian Culture Centre has been identified, not as Hārītī, but as the Queen Mother of the West, another indigenous Chinese cult figure. The identification rests partly, it seems, on the attribute of the peach in the hand of the child. However, the Queen Mother of the West has never, as far as I am aware, been represented in this way. Susan Cahill (1993) has produced a book outlining the worship of this cult figure but makes no reference to her ever being

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<sup>103</sup>See below for more details of 'Maria Kannon'.



**PLATE 77**

Kishimojin.

Tenth-eleventh century,  
Nanban Christian Culture Centre,  
Osaka.



represented holding a child. This statue appears to be a typical example of Kishimojin (Hārītī) and therefore, shows that Hārītī was being worshipped in China in the tenth-eleventh century as a child-giving deity. According to Frédéric (1995: 179), Kishimojin is the ogress form<sup>104</sup> of Hārītī popularised in Japan in the Kamakura period (1185-1333) by Nichiren. Frédéric also considers that this figure was possibly introduced by Buddhists to offset the popularity of the Shinto deity of easy childbirth, named Koyasu-sama or Koyasu-gami. Kishimojin is usually represented seated on a chair, holding a pomegranate in her right hand and with a baby on her knee. The origin of the pomegranate relates to the conversion of Hārītī to Buddhism when, instead of feeding her children with human blood, she gave them the juice of pomegranates<sup>105</sup> (Frédéric 1995: 327, n.97). This figure of Kishimojin with a baby sitting on her knee is associated and sometimes confused with Koyasu Kannon.<sup>106</sup>

It is the figure of Koyasu Kannon that is usually associated with the childgiving function in Japan although there is a Jibo (Kind mother) Kannon<sup>107</sup> of which details are scarce. The origin of Koyasu Kannon is also unclear. Tradition holds that while Empress Kōmyō (701-760) was praying to Amaterasu, Kannon appeared before her and gave her a tiny image of herself. The Empress put this image inside the thousand-armed image of Kannon and worshipped it every day until her delivery. She then safely delivered a healthy baby girl who became Empress Koken. Koyasu Kannon is now enshrined in the three-storeyed pagoda at Kiyomizudera in Kyoto. Near the temple visitors can purchase statues of Koyasu Kannon which, as can be seen from Plate 78 do not resemble Kishimojin. How, then, did this form of Koyasu Kannon become popular in Japan and how is it related to Kishimojin?

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<sup>104</sup>But given a mild aspect over the centuries, Frédéric, p.179.

<sup>105</sup>Because of the great number of seeds the pomegranate is regarded in both China and Japan as a symbol of posterity.

<sup>106</sup>According to Getty, Koyasu Kannon is never shown with a pomegranate in her hand.

<sup>107</sup>I was told that this figure also used to be a goddess of the sea and for this reason was always made of wood so that it was light enough to be carried on boats (personal communication from Yukako Kito). See below pages 222-223.

The confusion, or rather, **fusion** of these figures with Kannon, is likely to have occurred in the Edo period. At this time Japanese converts to Christianity were persecuted for their beliefs and, rather than give up their faith, sought other, but similar, figures to worship. The mother and child figures of Koyasu Kannon, Kishimojin and Koyasu-sama provided a suitable alternative. 'Maria Kannon' has been so nicknamed because she fulfilled the needs of the persecuted Christians by providing a substitute for the Virgin Mary. One particular Edo period image at Chichibu (Plate 79), clearly combines the features of the Virgin and child with Koyasu-sama, who was mainly venerated in the provinces of Kantō (environs of Tokyo) and Chiba by local women who asked her for healthy milk after childbirth (Frédéric 1995: 179). This Maria Kannon holds the child close to her naked breast and it is clear that this image is quite different in concept from the 'Virgin and Child' and also the usual Koyasu Kannon images.

Many Maria Kannon images in this period, however, were more conventional and many were clearly derived from Kishimojin figures. Plate 80 shows a wooden carving from this period that is believed to have come from the church of the *Hall of the Heavenly Lord* in Nagasaki.<sup>108</sup> Note the round object in the statue's left hand which appears to be the pomegranate. This identifies the image as having been influenced by Kishimojin. Thus it appears clear that Maria Kannon was born from an amalgamation of Kishimojin, Koyasu Kannon<sup>109</sup> and local figures such as Koyasu-sama. This figure, an iconographical substitute for the Virgin Mary, was given the pseudonym, 'Kannon', to legitimise her existence.

Some Maria Kannon figures, however, appear to have been influenced by the Chinese childgiving figure. The Tokyo Museum has a large collection of Maria Kannon images,<sup>110</sup> many of which are clearly derived from the Chinese form. Plate 81 shows a porcelain image of Maria

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<sup>108</sup>See note 110 below.

<sup>109</sup>Because Koyasu Kannon is revered today with her own birth story this separates her from Maria Kannon.

<sup>110</sup>Most of these images were seized by the Nagasaki Magistrate Office in 1856 (Museum catalogue 1972).



**PLATE 78**  
Koyasu Kannon.  
Near Kiyomizudera, Kyoto.





PLATE 79  
 Maria Kannon.  
 Chichibu, Japan.





**PLATE 80**  
 Maria Kannon.  
 From the 'Hall of the Heavenly Lord',  
 Nagasaki.



**PLATE 81**  
 Maria Kannon.  
 Tokyo Museum.

Kannon which although represented holding a child, also has Shancai and Longnü, by her side.<sup>111</sup> These statues were clearly made in China and exported to Japan. This is natural during the 'period of persecution' owing to their similarity to the Virgin and Child, but Stein (1986: 18) notes that porcelain images were being exported to Japan during the sixteenth century, before the persecution period. This suggests that the childgiving images in Japan were heavily influenced by what was going on in China between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Yü (1990a: 81) considers that in China there was a strong influence of Christianity on the Child Giving Guanyin by Christian missionaries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But rather than missionary activity influencing images of Guanyin, it appears to have been trade activity. Ivory images of the Virgin Mary were commissioned from Zhangzhou, on the south east coast of China, by the Spanish in the mid-sixteenth century after they had conquered the Philippines. These figures were styled after the Gothic ivory images which were to be seen in Europe (Watson ed.1984: 39-41). The Chinese sculptors saw the opportunity for expanding the market by modifying the images to look like Guanyin. By removing the cross from the rosary and replacing it with a tassel, by taking away the dove or orb from the child's hand and making the features 'Chinese', Mary was easily turned into Guanyin (see Plate 82). This influence has led to the speculation that it was the iconography of the Virgin Mary that was responsible for the long white veil and the child in the arms of Guanyin. Certainly there was a profusion of white porcelain figures of Guanyin produced in Fujian province and modern figures in white porcelain can still be seen in Southeast Asia to this day. The image shown in Plate 83, from my own collection, bears a cross which has obviously been influenced by Christianity. Yet production of this type of image indicate that images of Songzi Guanyin were already in existence and the sculptors knew they would have a ready market for these new-style Guanyin figures.

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<sup>111</sup>See later this chapter for more details of these acolytes.



**PLATE 82**  
Guanyin Ming dynasty.  
(Photograph British Museum)



**PLATE 83**  
Guanyin showing Christian influence.  
From Hong Kong.



What then can we conclude about Songzi Guanyin? Kinsley and Maspero gave us convincing arguments for Songzi Guanyin being influenced by Shengmu and by studying images of Guanyin in various temples we see that some, at least, do show such an influence. Stein on the other hand suggests that Hārītī was once worshipped in southern China and again we have seen that Hārītī (Kishimojin) was introduced into Japan as a childgiving deity, later being confused with Kannon. While the figure of the Virgin and Child also played a part in the development of Guanyin's iconography, Yü also gives us evidence of Guanyin being portrayed as a white-robed child-giving figure in a water setting similar to that of Shuiyue Guanyin.

It does appear possible that a white-robed form of Guanyin holding a child did exist from the eleventh century. But it is also possible that this was either Shuiyue Guanyin or an early form of Nanhai Guanyin which was mistakenly associated with Guanyin's childgiving function. Other childgiving deities such as Hārītī and Shengmu were also confused with Guanyin. Therefore, the Songzi Guanyin, as we know her today, is a combination of all these figures including Baiyi Guanyin. There does not appear to have been any direct Tibetan influence on this form. There is, therefore, no evidence that the figure of White Tārā influenced Baiyi Guanyin although there is a strong likelihood, from what we have discussed above, that the Tibetans saw Green Tārā and Guanyin as manifestations of the same deity. The similarity between the two appears to have caused confusion between devotees and artists alike. This appears to be an ongoing problem. In the next chapter we will see how, in one particular area of China, the femininity of Guanyin has been accepted by even the Buddhist monks.

## CHAPTER 5

### GUANYIN, GODDESS OF THE SEA

While some early forms of Songzi Guanyin appear to have originated with a white-robed female sitting on an island and surrounded by water, the form now known as Nanhai (South seas) Guanyin is generally considered to have become popular between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries with the association of Putuo Island as the island home of Guanyin. Paintings of Nanhai Guanyin frequently depict her as a sea goddess, riding on waves or on a fish. This form is believed to bring protection to anyone who travels on the South China Sea. Yet, as seen in the previous chapter Nanhai Guanyin appears to have developed from a water-moon form which did not symbolize protection from the sea. So where did the notion of a goddess of the sea originate? Is there any iconographical evidence to indicate that Guanyin was worshipped in this form before Nanhai Guanyin came into existence?

Belief in Guanyin's efficacy as a saviour from the sea goes back to the beginning of the cult and the protection from the Perils as described in the *Lotus Sūtra*. There was not, however, in the early stages of the cult, any particular image associated with this function. Various forms with a maritime theme have appeared over time, Aoyu (Big fish) Guanyin, depicts Guanyin standing, or riding, on a large fish, Yulan (Fishbasket) Guanyin, holds a basket of fish in her hand and a form known as Guanyin Crossing the Sea, rides on a small boat amongst the ocean waves. Nanhai Guanyin appears to have absorbed elements from each of these forms. This is, no doubt, because of the mutual association with the sea but it is also likely that as these forms developed, they influenced each other and eventually merged. This chapter will, therefore, look at three points.

First it will look, in turn, at each of the forms with apparent connections to the sea, in order to establish their original function and how this has been interpreted in modern day East Asia. It will then investigate the reasons for Guanyin's associations with Putuo Island and finally it will examine the legends and images associated with this island to determine how features of the earlier 'sea' images came to be incorporated into Nanhai Guanyin's iconography.

## FORMS OF GUANYIN WITH EARLY SEA CONNECTIONS

It is difficult to determine exactly what the earliest form of Guanyin with sea connections might have been. As discussed in the preceding chapters, emblems are used to symbolize the particular function of a deity and in many cases the significance of the emblem is not clear. The intended role of an image is not always made clearer when legends are examined, for in many cases the legends have been written to explain how the particular image received its attributes rather than explaining what they are believed to represent. For this reason the following examination of Yulan and Aoyu Guanyin and Guanyin Crossing the Sea, while relating some known legends, will also take into account local interpretations of the efficacy of the images.

### **Yulan Guanyin**

One image with a sea association (in the form of a fish) is Yulan Guanyin. This form is usually depicted with a basket in her right hand containing one or several fish. Sometimes a large basket is shown over Guanyin's right arm. Guanyin's dress and remaining attributes vary from image to image. A statue of this form has come to my notice dated 718CE (Van Oort 1986: 27). This statue (seen in Plate 84) is made of marble and inscribed "The master priest (abbot) of the Jing guang [Ching-kuang] temple of the Yangge [Yang-ko] mountain has respectfully made this statue for the sovereign of the country, the 28th day of the 3rd month of the 6th year (of the reign



**PLATE 84**  
Yulan Guanyin.  
Hebei 718CE.  
(Van Oort 1986: Pl XXXV)



period) Kaiyuan (718CE)". This temple is apparently still in existence and located in Hebei, an area known for its marble statuary. This statue could be feminine as there is a suggestion of a bustline, but it could equally be regarded as male. It could also be an early white-robed form of Guanyin. If this form of Guanyin can accurately be identified as Yulan Guanyin, this could be the earliest surviving example of this form and possibly the earliest extant feminine form.<sup>112</sup> The form of Yulan Guanyin has been interpreted differently by scholars. Yü states that Yulan Guanyin is related to the story<sup>113</sup> of a beautiful young woman, known as 'Mr Ma's wife', who one day arrived in Golden Sand Beach in Shaanxi, carrying a fishbasket. The woman then offered marriage to any man who could memorise certain Buddhist texts. However, although a wedding was arranged to successful Mr Ma, the woman died before her marriage could be consummated.<sup>114</sup> A monk later established that this woman was in fact a bodhisattva.<sup>115</sup> Although early versions of this story did not identify the bodhisattva with Guanyin and some versions did not mention a fishbasket, these details were later added and the legend became associated with Guanyin. Yü states that poems and paintings testify to this story being related to this form.<sup>116</sup> Yü also suggests that the theme of sexual favours being offered and then denied serves as a teaching device to help people overcome sexual desire.

Yet even if we grant that there is a relationship between this legend and Yulan Guanyin, what is the symbolism of the fish and the fishbasket? Yü suggests that one reason for the fish and fish basket emblems could be that a fish, in particular a carp, represents good luck to the Chinese,

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<sup>112</sup>I have attempted to locate the present whereabouts of this statue. The previous owner of the statue Mr Dumolin died in July 1995 and Madame Dumolin was unable to advise its present whereabouts. It had not been in their collection for some time. Madame Dumolin did, however, verify the details of the statue as given here.

<sup>113</sup>As described by Yü: 1990a, 1990b, 1994

<sup>114</sup>This story has been connected to a similar tale, set in eastern Shaanxi during the period 766-779, describing a woman from Yanzhou (Yü: 1990a, 1990b, 1994, 1996).

<sup>115</sup>The woman's bones were chained together which is believed to be a sign of bodhisattvahood.

<sup>116</sup>Matsunaga (1969: 131-134) describes the attributes relating to 'Ma Lang Guanyin' as a lotus in the right hand and a female skull in the left hand. Matsunaga also states that Guanyin of the fishbasket, is based upon the legend of a Chan devotee whose daughter Lingzhao was believed to be a manifestation of Guanyin. However, Yü's research on this subject is more extensive and therefore more convincing.

for by swimming upstream in the Yangtze River it becomes a dragon.<sup>117</sup> Stein (1986: 59), on the other hand, in keeping with the stories described above, considers that the fish is symbolic of suppressing sexual desire. For this he quotes several plays which have the suppression of sexual desire as their theme. In one, a fish (carp) seduces a man and is transformed into a beautiful woman, then abuses the privilege. After being pursued by the king's army it is Guanyin who captures it and places it in the basket. However, in another play, the basket appears to symbolize the calming of the elements, for the fish, although kept in a basket, is alive. If it is released into the water it brings on lightning, thunder and winds.

It is this keeping control over the fish that appears to be one of the key issues here. When I was in China I noticed several images of Yulan Guanyin where the fish was being held on the basket by Guanyin's finger. It could be, therefore, that the true symbolism of the basket is as a means to entrap and subdue evil, whether it be sexual behaviour as we saw in the above stories, or bad weather which could ruin trade. In this way Yulan Guanyin would be a perfect icon for those who wished to earn their living by, or from, the sea.

When I visited China in the autumn of 1995 I attempted to ascertain how popular this form is in China today. Most of the images that I came across in different parts of East China were being sold to locals and overseas Chinese tourists and pilgrims. The image shown in Plate 85 is from Beijing (Hebei) and shows two almost identical images of Guanyin with a fish lying on top of a basket. In one, Guanyin's finger appears to be holding the fish on the basket but in the other it does not. But in images from Zhengzhou, Luoyang, Shanghai and Fuzhou it is clear that Guanyin is holding the fish. This would indicate that the fish is alive and Guanyin is entrapping it in the basket (see Plates 86 - 88). Wherever I asked the meaning of this form of Guanyin, I was told that worshipping this form would ensure that the devotee had luck, happiness or abundance. In

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<sup>117</sup>Yü also suggests that as Guanyin had become associated with the *ullambana* (Ghost Festival) the shortened sound *yulan* represents either fish basket or nectar and a basket of Doughnuts (1990b: 252).



**PLATE 85**  
Yulan Guanyin.  
Beijing.



**PLATE 86**  
Yulan Guanyin.  
Luoyang.



**PLATE 87**  
Yulan Guanyin.  
Fuzhou,  
China.



**PLATE 88**  
Detail of plate 87.



Fuzhou I was told that if you earn, for example, one hundred dollars per year in salary and at the end of the year still have fifty dollars left, that means you have abundance, plenty for your needs. This explanation is not inconsistent with the subduing or entrapping of evil for it ensures that a person's fortune or living will not be ruined.

Although this form of Guanyin is not commonly worshipped in the rest of East Asia, I did come across Yulan Guanyin in Hong Kong and Taiwan. One image was tucked away in a back corner of the Guanyin temple at Stanley in Hong Kong (Plate 89) and the other was found in a small temple at Baishan Wan Beach near Taipei in Taiwan (Plate 90). These discoveries were particularly interesting for while Yulan Guanyin's connection to the sea is disputable, each of these images is located in a temple that looks out to sea. The temple at Baishan Wan, in particular, has a large Baiyi Guanyin standing on the roof of the temple looking out towards the sea<sup>118</sup> as well as a beautiful Nanhai Guanyin which will be discussed below. This indicates that it is considered fitting for Yulan Guanyin to be placed in a temple that needs protection from the harmful elements of the sea.

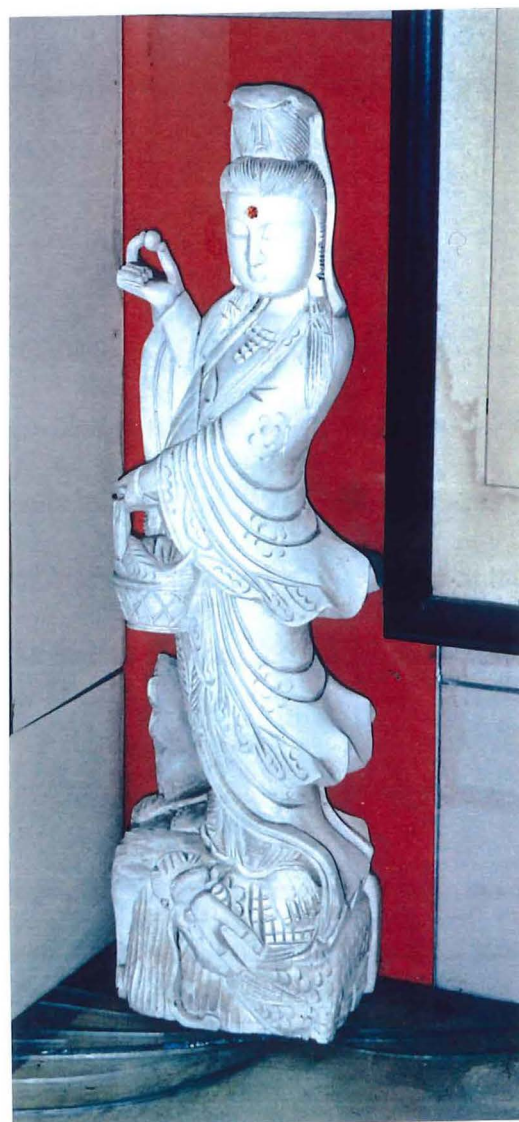
While protection from the sea has little in common with the legend of Mr Ma's wife, the forms of Guanyin carrying a fish basket were likely, as both Stein (1986) and Yü suggest, to have existed before the legends were known. Thus the legends were created to explain the forms. The original form would most likely have been created to symbolize an activity or to protect from a particular disaster as we have seen in previous chapters. Johnston (1976: 291) suggests that certain artists of the Song dynasty showed Guanyin clothed in the clothes of a fisherman's daughter holding a fish or basket of fish in her right hand. This is significant, for it suggests that paintings

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<sup>118</sup>The temple in Stanley, Hong Kong has such a statue in the courtyard. This is not an unusual sight as huge statues of Guanyin are often seen in coastal areas of East Asia. Most statues of this form are white-robed and are situated facing the sea to guard all who sail on her waters. In fact, whenever there is an image of this form on a hillside or in a temple courtyard, Guanyin always faces the sea. Being one of the most popular images and one considered to protect from any danger, Baiyi Guanyin is an obvious choice as a guardian to protect the temple.



**PLATE 89**  
Yulan Guanyin.  
Stanley,  
Hong Kong.



**PLATE 90**  
Yulan Guanyin.  
Bai Shan Wan Temple,  
Taiwan.

of Guanyin in a fisherman's daughter's garment<sup>119</sup> holding a fish or basket of fish in the right hand are representative of Guanyin as a goddess of the sea.

In order to determine whether this form did originally represent a sea deity, it is necessary to look at the trades and occupations within the areas associated with the earliest known image of Yulan Guanyin. I refer back to the image from Hebei. Hebei, although situated inland, was at this time served by waterways and a canal system linking the Yangtze with the Yellow River and the Beijing region. These waterways were ideal for fish breeding and mulberry raising, which went hand in hand with silkworm production. Silk had been produced in the Hebei region since the third century CE.<sup>120</sup> Men usually tended to the fish ponds in such areas while the women tended to the mulberry groves and to the silk worms.<sup>121</sup> No doubt protection from harmful elements, as they went about their daily tasks, would have been important to these men and women.<sup>122</sup> It is possible, therefore, that the Hebei image of Yulan Guanyin was associated with fish, water and trade, although not the sea.

### Guanyin Crossing the Sea

Yet, while Yulan's Guanyin connection to the sea is ambivalent. 'Guanyin Crossing the Sea' does have a clear iconographical connection to the sea, which is much stronger than that of Yulan Guanyin. The Chinese image seen in Plate 91 was made in the Song (960-1279) or Yuan (1279-1368) dynasty and is to be found amongst the painted clay figurines and statues at the Shuanglin Monastery at Taiyuan. Although this statue has Indian features in the long ear lobes and the ūṛṇā

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<sup>119</sup>This would be in keeping with the Pumen Chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* which describes Guanyin taking on the station of those she wished to help.

<sup>120</sup>See for example Barraclough 1981: 81

<sup>121</sup>Married women were not considered suitable for the rearing of the worms or care of the cocoons, due mainly to notions of uncleanness during pregnancy and childbirth when it was believed they would harm the silkworms (Topley 1978: 71). It was usually the men, therefore, who looked after the worms and the fish, while the women tended the mulberry groves.

<sup>122</sup>Stein (1986: 62-63) relates a story about the goddess of the silk worms who took the form of Ma-ming (Voice of horse). Stein considers this is connected to the story of Mr Ma's wife.





**PLATE 91**  
Guanyin crossing the sea.  
Shuanglin Monastery.  
Taiyuan, China.



in the middle of the forehead, it does not appear to have an Indian antecedent. It is possibly connected to the Amidist cult where it can be compared to the “Ship of Salvation” in which Guanyin carried devotees to the Pure Land (Johnston 1976: 103). Zhang Hua, my local guide, told me that worshipping this image will change one's fortune. Zhang also told me that fishermen pray to this Goddess of the Sea for protection.

### **Aoyu Guanyin**

Yet while ‘Guanyin Crossing the Sea’ has a strong iconographical connection to the sea, Aoyu Guanyin is where the notion of Guanyin as goddess of the sea is quite distinct. Paintings of Aoyu Guanyin are a popular theme in China and the rest of East Asia, and depict Guanyin standing on, or riding on, a large fish or sea dragon. Plate 92 shows a poster sold widely in Singapore. I saw exactly the same painting on the front cover of a tape of Guanyin songs being sold to pilgrims on Putuo island. But this Aoyu Guanyin is not just a product of ‘pop art’. Huge images of this form of Guanyin, standing on large fish can be seen in monasteries in Luoyang, Kaifeng, Shanghai and Hangzhou to name just four (see Plates 93 and 94 for two of these images). In all these representations the image stands against a large frieze which usually backs images of Śakyamuni, Wenshu and Puxian. All the fish on which Guanyin stands have the appearance of a sea monster which has either large teeth or tentacles.

The significance of these images varies slightly. At the Jade Buddha Temple in Shanghai I was told the creature was a crocodile and when Guanyin stands on a crocodile it means that she can subdue the creature and therefore release suffering. It also means that she can help poor people. I was also told that the fish and crocodile symbolize the same thing for they both travel quickly. To subdue these creatures means to have control and to help the poor. In Shanghai, I was told, most people own an image of this form of Guanyin plus an image of Guanyin standing with a vase in her hand. In the shop attached to Jade Buddha Temple I saw many images of Aoyu

**PLATE 92**

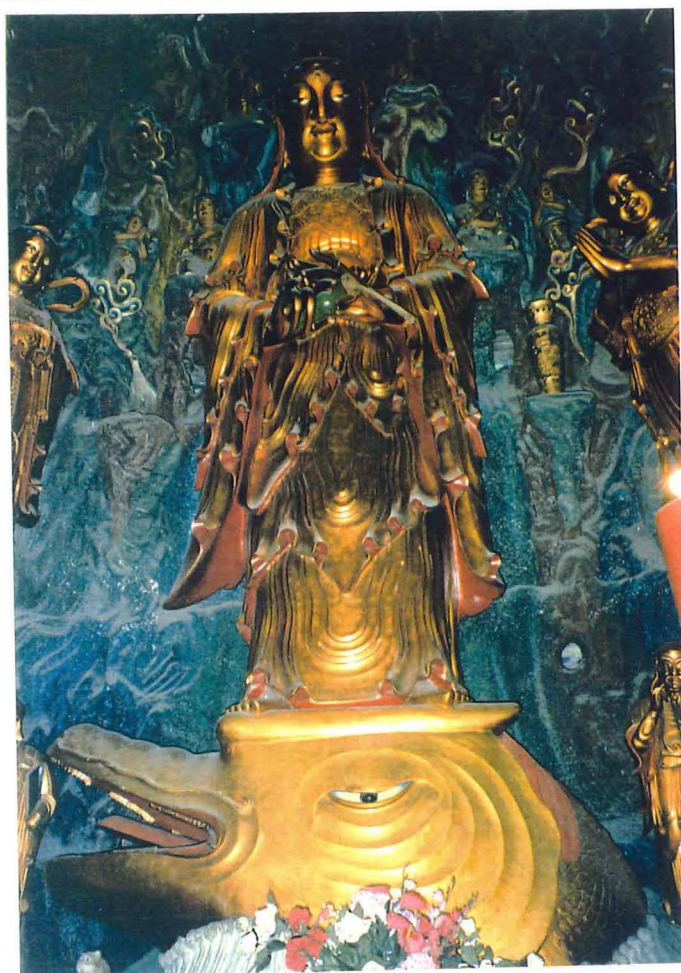
Aoyu Guanyin.

Poster sold widely in East Asia.





**PLATE 93**  
Aoyu Guanyin.  
Xiangguo Monastery,  
Kaifeng.



**PLATE 94**  
Aoyu Guanyin.  
Jade Buddha Temple,  
Shanghai.

Guanyin as well as many images of Yulan Guanyin. There were also some images of Guanyin standing on a crocodile with a fish basket in her hand. This confirms that these forms have combined into one composite image.

In the Lingyinsi (Monastery of the Hidden Souls) in Hangzhou, I was told by one young woman that her grandmother believes that Guanyin standing on the fish represents the calming of the earth under the sea. Worshipping this image will, therefore, prevent earthquakes. It would certainly appear from these observations that Yulan and Aoyu Guanyin are closely connected and represent the suppression of evil and bad fortune especially in connection with the sea.

Johnston (1976: 292) considers that the reason why Guanyin is regarded as a fish goddess is because the waters around Putuo Island are considered as an inviolable sanctuary for fishes. Disaster is supposed to be in store for all fishermen who defy the commands of Aoyu Guanyin by letting down their nets in those holy waters. This rule, however, apparently received no official support.

Putuo Island is certainly where the influence of Guanyin as a goddess of the sea is at its peak. This is where Nanhai (Southseas) Guanyin is to be found. This form appears to be a development from the Aoyu Guanyin and Yulan Guanyin for it is associated with the sea, fish, and particularly with Putuo Island which became an important pilgrimage centre during the Tang dynasty. But before looking in more detail at this island and the role that Guanyin plays, it is important to establish how and at what stage in her development Guanyin became associated with this island.

#### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE UPPER TIANZHU MONASTERY, PUTUO ISLAND AND THE STORY OF MIAOSHAN

Before Putuo Island became the focus of Guanyin devotion, there were other mainland



pilgrimage centres, such as Wutaishan in Shanxi, the home of Wenshu, Mount Emei in Sichuan, the home of Puxian, and three other pilgrimage centres devoted to Guanyin - the Upper Tianzhu Monastery in Hangzhou, Nan Wutaishan situated to the south of Mount Zhongnan to the south of Xian and Xiangshan Monastery, south of Mount Song in Ruzhou, Honan. These had already become well known before Putuo emerged as an important centre in the tenth century (Yu 1992: 191).

The Upper Tianzhu Monastery was, in particular, an important Guanyin pilgrimage centre and it appears that it was from here that Guanyin made her leap to Putuo Island. This Hangzhou monastery was known for Guanyin's efficacy in averting natural disasters: granting rain in 998 and 1000, saving the people of Hangzhou from flood in 1065 and from locusts in 1016. The image of Guanyin which was credited with these miracles appears to have been the White-robed Guanyin. Yü describes several founding myths associated with monasteries in the Hangzhou area, all of which refer to the White-robed form. One related to the Upper Tianzhu Monastery describes how a white-robed woman appeared to Qian Liu [Ch'fen Liu] (851-932) and told him that she would protect him if he was compassionate. She also told him that he would find her on Mount Tianzhu twenty years later (Yü 1990b: 259-260).

At Tianzhu monastery then, Guanyin does not appear to have been associated with the sea. Yet the popularity of Putuo Island is closely connected to both Tianzhu and to the other mainland pilgrim centre of Xiangshan. Both these centres are connected to the story of Miaoshan which later became associated with Putuo Island. The cult at Xiangshan appears to have begun with the meeting between a local official and the abbot of the temple in 1100 (Yü 1992: 193). Jiang Zhiqi (1031-1104) served as the prefect at Ruzhou briefly and met Huai zhou [Huai-chou] the abbot of the Xiangshan monastery early in 1100. The abbot reportedly gave Jiang a book called *Life of Dabei Bodhisattva of Xiangshan*. The book, it was claimed, had been brought to the abbot by

a mysterious monk who went to Xiangshan as a pilgrim.

Glen Dudbridge (1978,1982), who has done much research on the origin of the cult of Miaoshan, concludes that Jiang Zhiqi was the bearer of his own text to Hangzhou. The original composition date, according to Dudbridge, was 5/10/1100. Less than three years after leaving the prefecture of Ruzhou, Jiang served as prefect of Hangzhou from 23/11/1102 until sometime between 3/9/1103 - 31/10/1103 (Dudbridge 1982: 591-592). It seems likely that after visiting a Guanyin monastery in Ruzhou in 1100 he visited Hangzhou in 1102-1103 and passed on his Miaoshan composition to the community at the Upper Tianzhu Monastery.

There are many versions of the story of Miaoshan, all of which describe her as a pious young woman who, preferring to live a religious life, defied the orders of her father, the king, to marry. In spite of being punished by imprisonment in a nunnery and made to perform arduous tasks, Miaoshan would not relent. Instead she began to perform miracles, the news of which angered her father so much that he ordered the nuns to be killed and Miaoshan to be executed. She was, however, spirited away to Xiangshan where she lived the life of a hermit until hearing of her father's illness. When a monk told the king that he needed the eyes and arms of one "free of anger" Miaoshan gladly gave up her arms and eyes for a cure. Miaoshan and her father were then reunited whereupon Miaoshan appeared with one thousand eyes and one thousand arms (*sahasrabhuja*), before she finally reverted to her former self and died. Popular versions of this story explain the *Sahasrabhuja* form as being the result of a confused order to restore her arms and eyes whereby, instead of being given two arms and two eyes, she was given one thousand of each.

One later (sixteenth century) version of the story is, according to Werner (1934: 256-279), a reference to the sex change of Guanyin. The three sisters born to the Queen were formerly male brothers, Buddhists who caused death to some looters by refusing them food.<sup>123</sup> This version is

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<sup>123</sup> It would appear that their punishment was to be born into women's bodies as women have traditionally been considered to be less worthy than men.

more fanciful with episodes of kidnapping, of usurping the throne and a grand battle, after which everyone lived happily ever after. One feature of this sixteenth century version is that Miaoshan is described as giving her sisters a lion and an elephant as mounts. This explains the images of Guanyin sitting on these animals (as described in Chapter 3) for the transfer of these traditional mounts of Wenshu and Puxian to the sisters caused their association with Guanyin.

The Miaoshan story has regional variation as attested to by a story<sup>124</sup> connected with a seventeenth century image in Kaifeng. The four-sided thousand-armed Guanyin shown in Plates 95 and 96 was, it is claimed, made out of a single Gingko tree which took from 1736-1794 to carve. The story told to me by a local man is as follows: There was once a king who had three daughters, Baihua, Baiyu and Baigu. When the king became ill a doctor prescribed the arms and eyes of a relative. The older daughters refused to give their limbs but the youngest daughter Baigu gave her eyes and arms but died because of her injuries. News of this reached the Emperor who was so moved by the story that he decided to give Baigu a state funeral and built a magnificent tomb for her. By the side of the tomb a Gingko tree was planted, because this was Baigu's favourite tree. The tree grew very big and after two thousand years it was cut down. The people believed that Baigu went to heaven and became Guanyin. They also believed that Guanyin's spirit was in the tree so they made an image of her from the tree and gave it one thousand arms and eyes to symbolize the sacrifice that she had made. It is four-sided so that Guanyin can see in all corners of the earth.

What is particularly interesting about this story is that it kept alive the association with the thousand arms and eyes. Most scholars consider that the story of Miaoshan was written to explain the existence of the thousand-armed image of Guanyin,<sup>125</sup> but the association was dropped from

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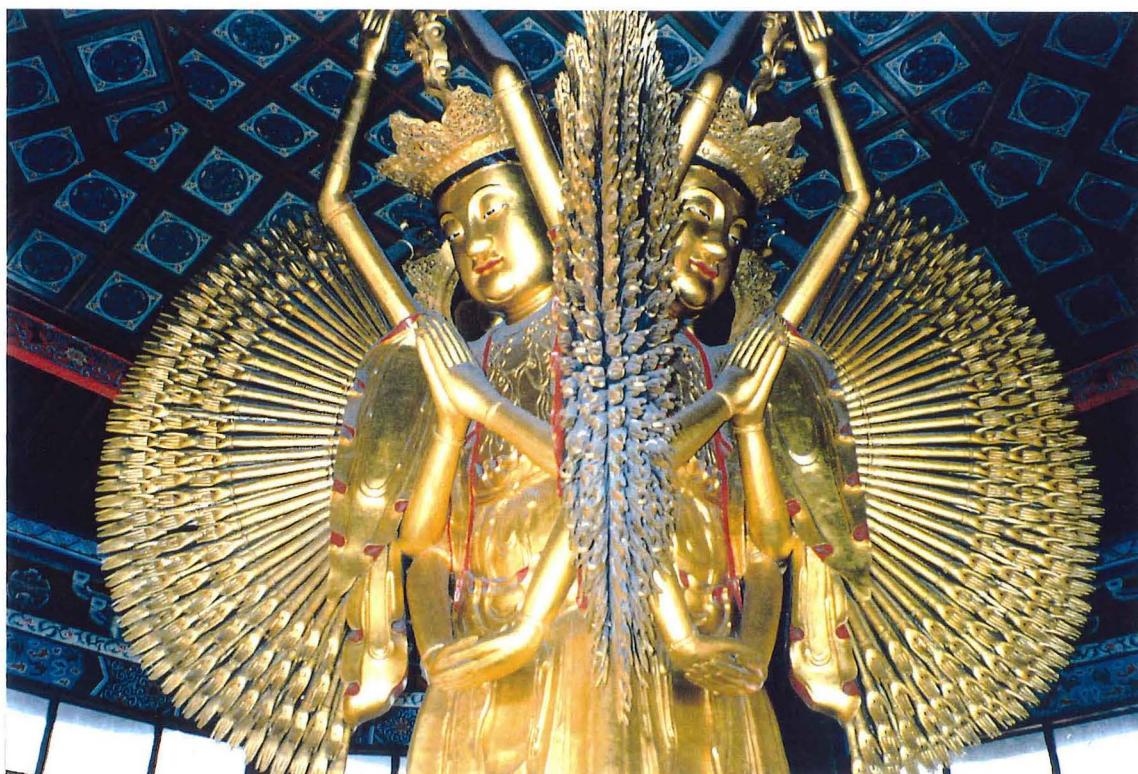
<sup>124</sup>Told to me in Kaifeng.

<sup>125</sup> In the next chapter another argument is put forward to explain the basis for this story.



**PLATE 95**

Thousand-armed four-sided Guanyin.  
Xiangguo Monastery, Kaifeng.



**PLATE 96**

Thousand-armed four-sided Guanyin. Xiangguo Monastery, Kaifeng.



later accounts. Different versions of the story of Miaoshan have remained popular until the present day, the reason being that it combined religious ideals with filial piety which have always been of the utmost importance to the Chinese people. But what happened to the monastery which exploited the story?

The Upper Tianzhu Monastery appears to have gained government recognition after Hangzhou became the capital of the Southern Song (1127-1279), with the temple receiving frequent visits and favours from the emperor. It is not clear how much influence the Miaoshan story had on this attention but certainly Guanyin's reputation widened. Xiaozong (r.1163-88) praised Guanyin as *Tianzhu Guangda Linggan Dashi* (Tianzhu's Great Being of Broad and Extensive Efficacious Responses) and patronage by emperors in the following dynasties continued (Yü 1992: 198). Guanyin's reputation of protecting from natural disasters also increased. She was credited with granting rain in 1135, 1374, 1455, 1477, 1503, 1539, 1542, 1545, and 1626. In 1588 she was believed to have saved people from the plague (Yü *ibid.*). Yet, while in 1580 and 1608 we see Guanyin saving the people of Hangzhou from drowning in a flood,<sup>126</sup> there is nothing to suggest that Guanyin was particularly known in this role. So when and how did Miaoshan become associated with White-robed Guanyin and Putuo Island and how did the notion of a sea goddess materialise?

One catalyst in the association of Miaoshan with Baiyi Guanyin was that some versions played down the association of the thousand arms and eyes. Miaoshan was described as a normal woman holding a green willow branch in one hand and a bottle containing water or ambrosia in the other, typical attributes of White-robed Guanyin from the eighth century. As the importance of Tianzhu as a pilgrimage centre increased and as the story of Miaoshan gained in popularity, it is likely that Miaoshan was perceived as a white-robed female. This would be natural as a white-

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<sup>126</sup>Which is no more than one would expect from Bodhisattva Guanyin who delivers from the Eight Great Perils.

robed figure had been worshipped at Tianzhu for some time.

One further factor in the association of Miaoshan with Putuo Island was the textual descriptions of Guanyin which placed her next to water in a natural setting. As described in the previous chapter, when Mount Radiant, described in the *Dafang guangfo huayanjing*, is later associated with Mount Potalaka, Putuo Island becomes Guanyin's island home. There was also the association of a young boy named Shancai and a girl named Longnü. Shancai became associated with the young pilgrim Sudhana who was mentioned in the *Dafang guangfo huayanjing*. The *Nanhai Guanyin quan zhuan* (Complete Biography of Guanyin of the Southern Seas), describes how Miaoshan was given two attendants, Shancai and Longnü. This was, no doubt, to explain Guanyin's iconography which had been established since at least the Song dynasty<sup>127</sup> but it also firmly tied Miaoshan to Guanyin's two acolytes.

Yü considers these attendants are the Buddhist counterparts of the Taoist Golden Boy and the Jade Girl who were depicted as the attendants of the Jade Emperor since the Tang dynasty. Yet while these Guanyin's acolytes have been associated with these Taoist attendants, this is because one later version of the Miaoshan story conferred the titles of Golden Youth and Jade Maiden on them (Werner 191934: 287). This is, no doubt, to legitimise the position of Guanyin and her acolytes in Taoist and syncretic temples. It is more likely that Shancai and Longnü have developed from the Sage of the Air and the Nymph of Good Virtue seen in many tenth century paintings from Dunhuang as described in Chapter 4. Also as described in Chapter 4, the origin of the two acolytes appears to be textual. One local tale<sup>128</sup> relates how Shancai was the youngest of five hundred sons. After he was born, a fortune teller told his parents that it would be good for him to be a disciple of a Buddha. When he was twelve years old he set out on his search. Guanyin

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<sup>127</sup>At Dazu there are three dated triads - 1141, 1142 and 1148. (Yü 1990a: 64).

<sup>128</sup>This story was told to me on Putuo Island.

was the twenty-eighth Buddha<sup>129</sup> he visited but she did not accept him. Instead she changed herself into an evil person to test the boy's strength. Shancai was not afraid and on his fifty-third visit, Guanyin, moved by the child's persistence, accepted him as her attendant. The moral of this story, I was told, is not to give up. In another story (Yü 1990b: 231) Guanyin tested the boy's sincerity by throwing herself from a cliff. Shancai, without hesitation, also jumped from the cliff and when asked to look down at his corpse below he was immediately freed from his mortal body. Longnü appears to have her origin in the *Lotus Sūtra* where, as the eight year old dragon girl, she offers a precious gem to the Buddha, is then changed into a man, and immediately achieves Buddhahood. In popular legends, Longnü is the Dragon king's granddaughter who presents Guanyin with a night-illuminating pearl so that Guanyin can read sūtras at night. This was in gratitude to Guanyin for saving the Dragon King's life.

The association of Miaoshan from the Upper Tianzhu Monastery at Hangzhou<sup>130</sup> with Putuo Island was reinforced in a seventeenth century version of the Miaoshan story which claimed that Guanyin herself wrote the story of Miaoshan and placed it in the cave of Chaoyuan dong (Cave of Tidal Sound) on Putuoshan in 1416 (Dudbridge 1978: 69). However, in a preface of the Miaoshan story dated January 1667, Guangye Shanren describes how the author made a pilgrimage to Putuo, was saved from shipwreck and in the cave named above, was given the text of Guanyin's story and finding it written in a "difficult Indian script", he reproduced it in an intelligible form so that it would be available to others. Dudbridge states that Guangye Shanren himself is the author of the text, the content of which points to a mid-seventeenth century rendering especially as some of the proper names found in the text appear to have been copied from the sixteenth century *Nanhai guanyin quan zhuan*.

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<sup>129</sup> Many devotees, especially on Putuo Island, consider that Guanyin has the status of a Buddha.

<sup>130</sup> Hangzhou became linked to Putuo through waterways which linked Hangzhou with Ningbo. Ningbo in turn was on the southern route which had contact with ships calling in at Putuo on their voyages. This activity increased during the Ming dynasty.

## PUTUO ISLAND AND NANHAI GUANYIN

The formation of Nanhai Guanyin, as a goddess of the seas, took effect once Guanyin became associated with Putuo Island. Tales of visions increased the popularity not only of Guanyin but also of her acolytes. One particular story describes how, during the Ming dynasty, General Halaye came to worship at the Buddha's Sound Cave.<sup>131</sup> While he was there he saw a vision of Guanyin but when it disappeared he became angry and shot an arrow into the cave (Plates 97 and 98). A little boy,<sup>132</sup> appeared and caught the arrow but he also disappeared. When General Halaye went to search for the arrow he could not find it, but later, when he went into the temple above the cave to pray, he saw the arrow under the arm of Guanyin<sup>133</sup> (see Map 1 for the position of this cave and the other main sites).

Although the Buddha's Sound Cave attracted many pilgrims hoping for a vision of Guanyin, this was not the only site with a reputation for being able to see Guanyin. Another story dated to 1080, describes how Wang Shunfeng was caught in a storm on his way to Korea. When a large turtle appeared under the boat and it was unable to move, Wang, being very frightened, prayed to Guanyin. Suddenly in a brilliant light Guanyin emerged from the Cave of Tidal Sound (Yü 1994: 159). Because Guanyin was believed to appear at this cave pilgrims congregated there. Every spring, monks from all over the country went to the island with images cast in gold and silver. They would throw these images into the water as offerings to Guanyin in front of the cave. Some pilgrims would commit suicide by jumping into the water or they would burn their fingers to induce Guanyin to appear to them. The problem became so acute that the government had to forbid the practice. A stele was engraved forbidding people to sacrifice their lives by burning their fingers

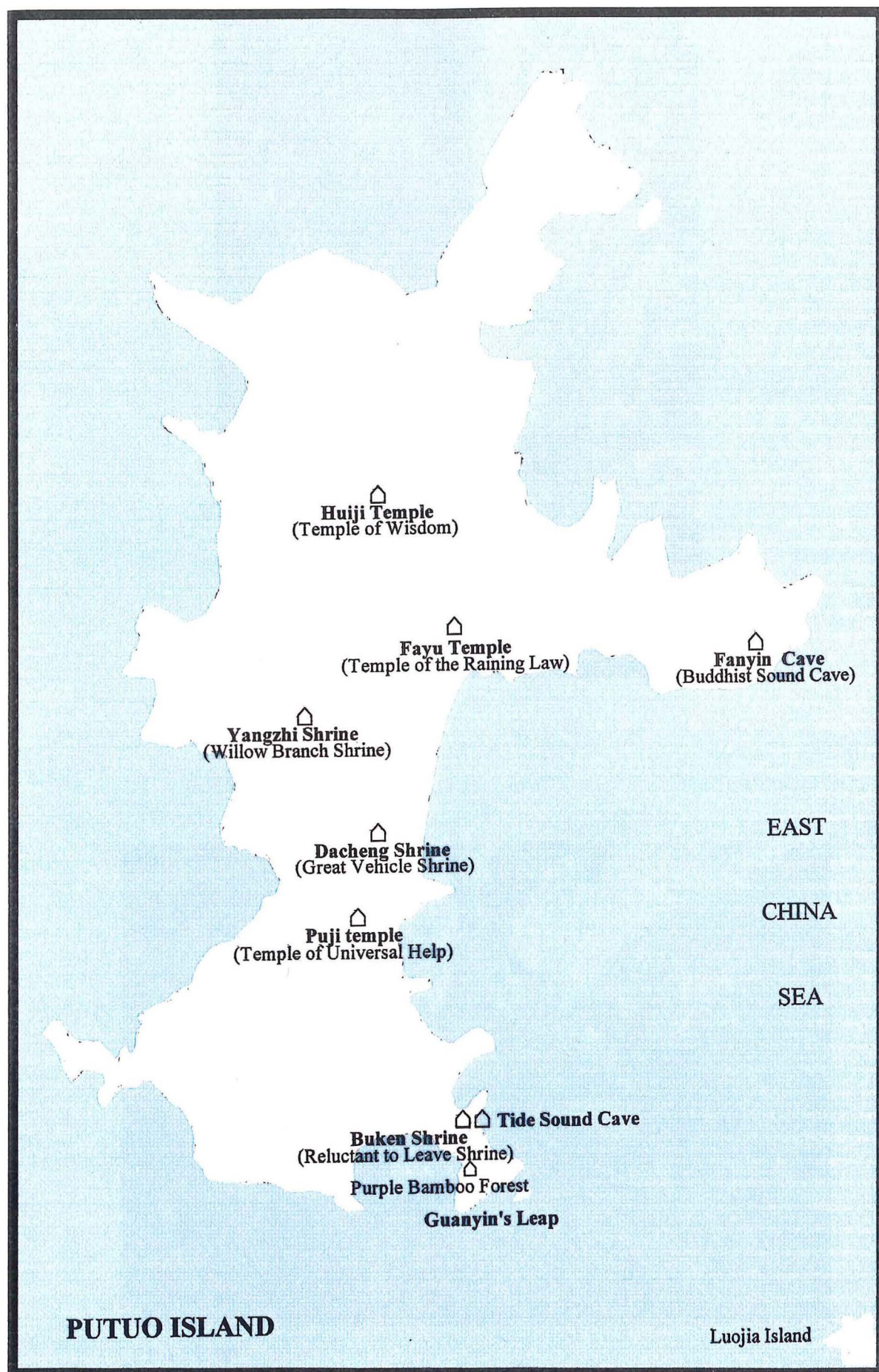
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<sup>131</sup>So called because only Buddha can make such a loud sound. The situation of this cave and other sites has been detailed in Map 1 at the end of this chapter.

<sup>132</sup> It is thought that this boy was Shancai.

<sup>133</sup> See Yü 1992: 220-221 for another version of this story which is set at the Cave of Tidal Sound.





MAP 1





**PLATE 97**  
Buddha Sound Cave.  
Putuo Island.



**PLATE 98**  
Shrine at Buddha Sound Cave,  
Putuo Island.

in order to pray for the presence of Guanyin. A pavillion was also erected near the place where devotees sacrificed themselves (see Plate 99).<sup>134</sup>

Not only did the two caves compete for supremacy but the two main monasteries also competed for patronage. The Puji (Southern) Monastery had, as its claim to fame, the “First Hall in the World” to Guanyin. The legend describes the Japanese monk Hui E<sup>135</sup> who wanted to take an image of Guanyin from Wutai Mountain in Shanxi Province to Japan, in order to introduce Guanyin to his disciples. As the boat reached Putuo there was a storm, the surf riding high on the waves turned into many lotus flowers. The day was cloudy and the sea was black and the boat became stuck in the lotus flowers. The monk prayed “if you don't want to see my Japanese people then show me the way out”. Suddenly an ox appeared and ate out a line to the Cave of Tidal Sound. When the storm had subsided, the monk sent the image to the nearby fisherman's hut, which became the first Guanyin temple. Later the Puji Temple was built to house this image which became known as the true body image of Guanyin. This image supposedly did not stay on the Island but was taken to the Kaiyuan Monastery in Ningbo (Yü 1992: 216). However, local people believe that the present image is the one and only true body image (Plate 100).

Although the Puji Monastery claims to have the true body image of Guanyin, the Fayu Monastery, built in 1580, also has a magnificent image of a ‘Sea Island’ Guanyin standing on a fish<sup>136</sup> (Plate 101). On the right is the Heaven Palace, and on the left the Dragon Palace. Above Guanyin, who has Shancai and Longnü in attendance (see Plates 102 and 103), is Śākyamuni and the whole frieze is a series of stories. I was told that the fish represents the evil which turns over ships and causes death. By standing on the fish Guanyin keeps it peaceful. Thus finally we see how Guanyin has become a sea goddess through the association of suppression of evil, control and

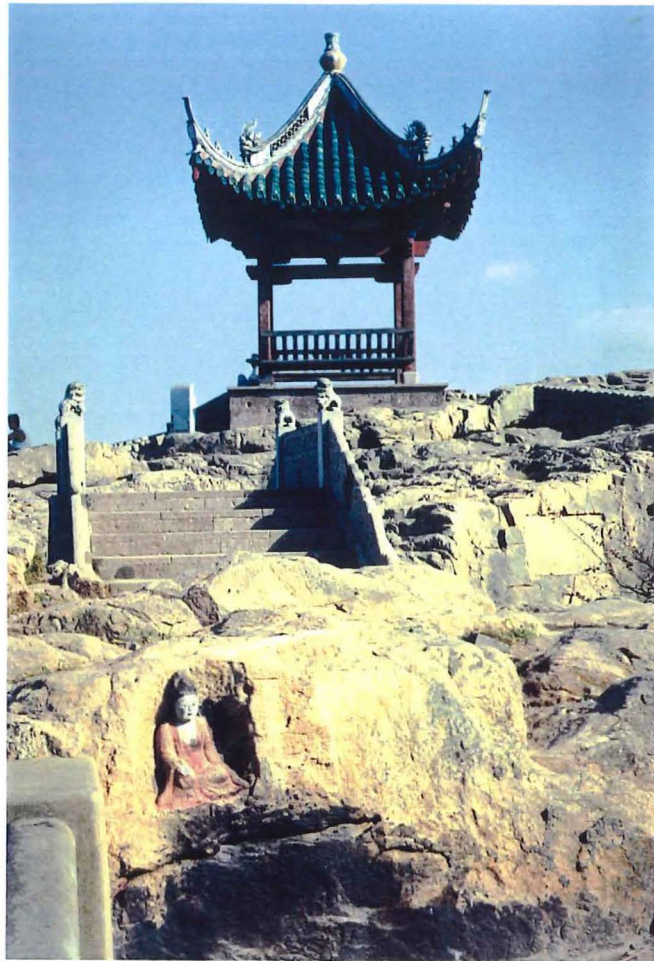
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<sup>134</sup>The images have been carved into these rocks by the local people.

<sup>135</sup> Yü names this monk Egaku which is the Japanese name of Hui E.

<sup>136</sup>This statue is situated in the Great Hall which used to be the Imperial Palace in Nanjing City in Jiangsu Province in the Ming Dynasty. It was shipped to Putuo Island and reconstructed.



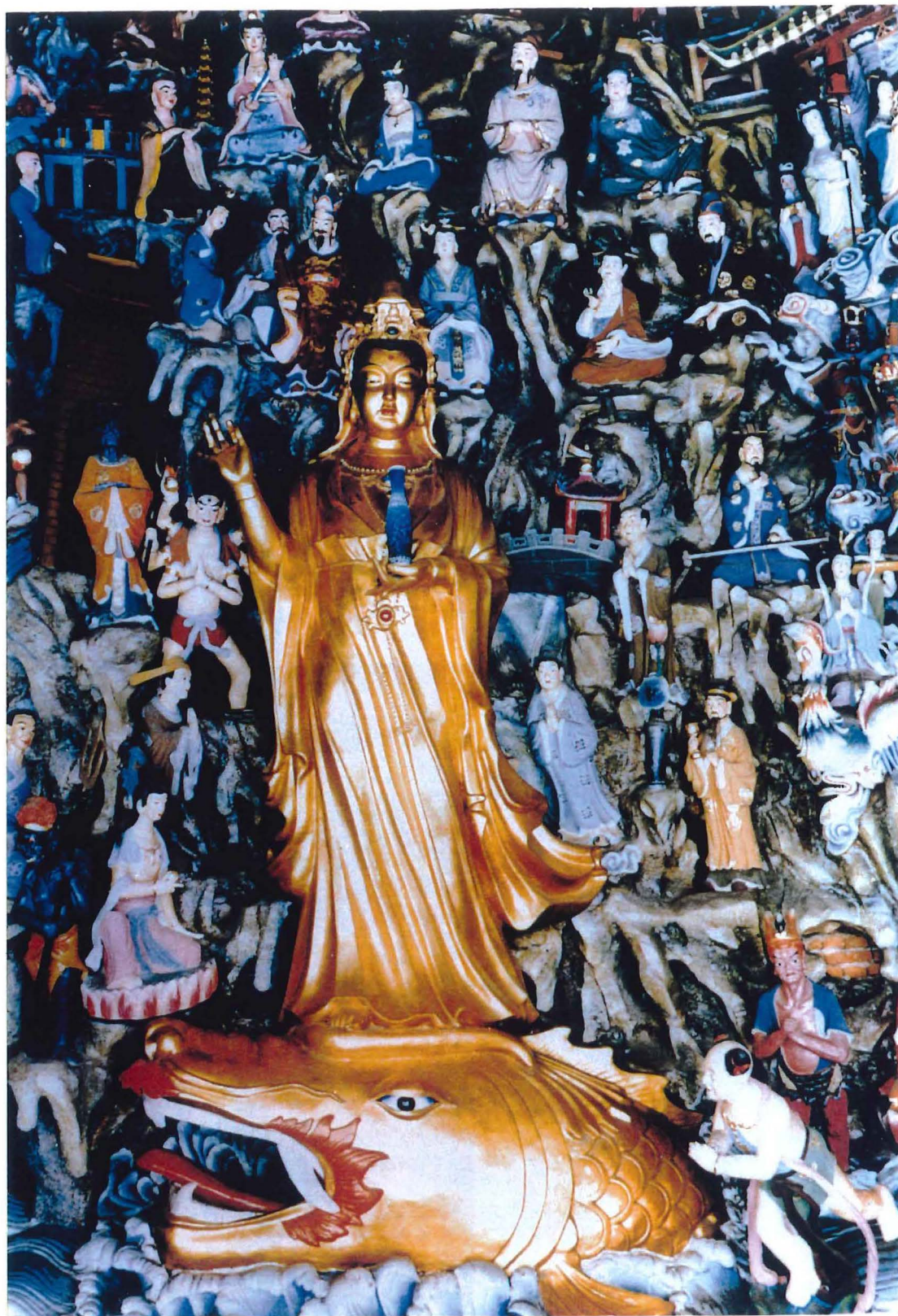


**PLATE 99**  
Sacrifice Pavilion.  
Putuo Island



**PLATE 100**  
“True body image” Guanyin.  
Puji Temple,  
Putuo Island.





**PLATE 101**  
Sea Island Guanyin.  
Fayu Temple,  
Putuo Island.



**PLATE 102**  
 Shancai.  
 Fayu Temple,  
 Putuo Island



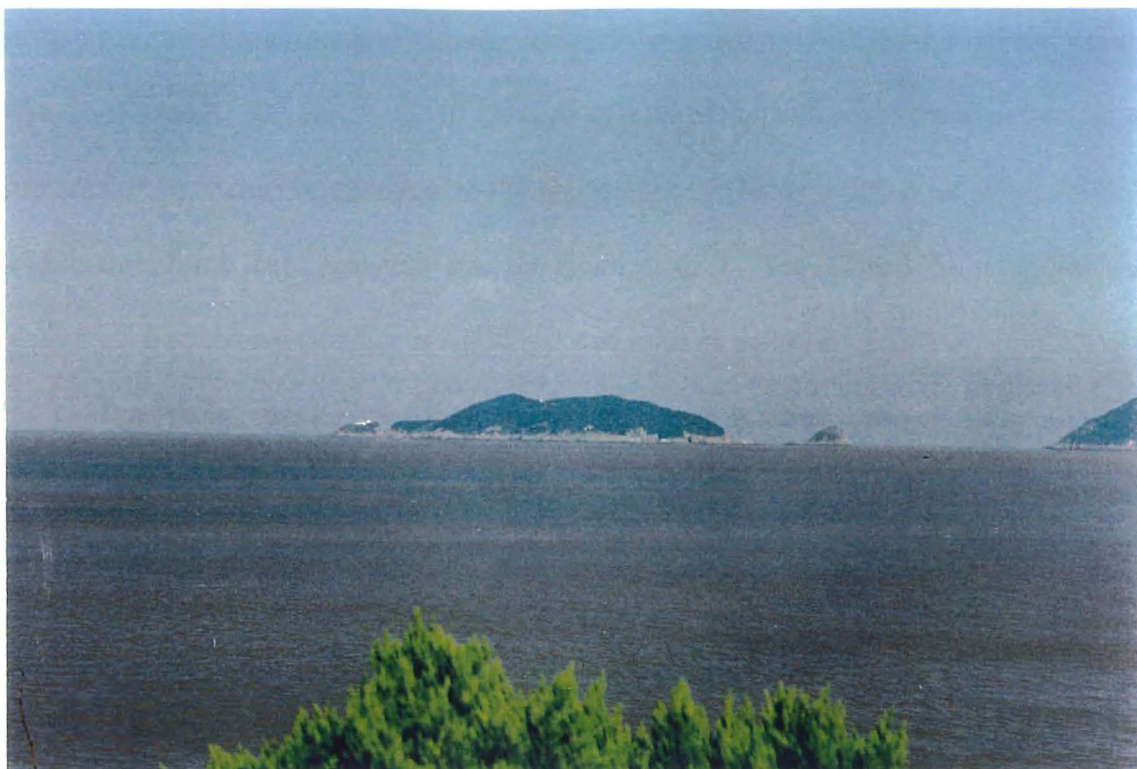
**PLATE 103**  
 Longnü.  
 Fayu Temple,  
 Putuo Island

the island setting of Putuoshan. There is, however, one further important feature of the worship at Putuoshan that firmly entrenches Guanyin as a sea **goddess**. While it is clear that in various legends and visions associated with Putuoshan Guanyin is perceived as a feminine figure, this is one place that **officially** accepts that Guanyin is a feminine deity. Miaoshan was said to have been born on the nineteenth day of the second lunar month. This has become officially recognised and celebrated in the monastic calendar. But on Putuoshan additional days are celebrated. The nineteenth day of the sixth lunar month is celebrated as the day that Guanyin learned the Buddhist doctrine. Also the nineteenth day of the ninth lunar month is celebrated as the day on which Guanyin became a goddess. While the official literature records this day as the day that Guanyin became a nun, it nonetheless shows that Guanyin is accepted as a feminine figure on Putuo Island. I was told that on this day special celebrations are held in the temples and many people go to worship there.

Two legends portray the arrival of Guanyin, in feminine form, on the island. One of these describes how Guanyin first went as a bodhisattva to Luojia Island but became a goddess and with one step arrived on Putuo Island. The place where Guanyin first set foot on Putuo has become a favourite spot for tourist and overseas pilgrims. It is called Guanyin's leap and is a rock formation in the shape of a foot. The other legend describes how Guanyin first came to Putuo Island as a young girl and loved to swim in the sea. One day when she was swimming she was seen by the general. The general told the heaven's king who was angry. However, Guanyin threw some sand onto the sea which became Luojia Island. This was to make the king think that the general had made a mistake. This legend is intended to explain the existence of Luojia Island for local people believe that the shape of the island resembles Guanyin swimming or lying in the water (see Plate 104).

One other image made to appear as if it is sitting in water is in the Purple Bamboo Temple





**PLATE 104**  
Luoja Island



**PLATE 105**  
Guanyin.  
Purple Bamboo  
Temple,  
Putuo Island.



situated in the Purple Bamboo Grove. Behind the image of Guanyin is a painted seascape of water and islands. On either side of Guanyin is a mirror to emphasise the idea that Guanyin is surrounded by water and also to give the appearance of Guanyin sitting on waves. This, I was told, is to indicate that Guanyin is also the Goddess of the Sea (Plate 105). It is here that one really feels that Nanhai Guanyin is a goddess and ruler of the south seas.

True to her name, Nanhai Guanyin can be seen in other areas of the south seas. For example at Bai Shan Wan in Taiwan, which has already been mentioned above, I came across a beautiful statue of this form (Plate 106). This image has all the attributes of the Shuiyue Guanyin with the bamboo, the full moon, the rosary, and the vase of immortality and combines the traditional features of Baiyi Guanyin.<sup>137</sup> Shancai and Longnü, shown separately in Plates 107 and 108, are excellent representations of Guanyin's acolytes. The temple itself is at the most northernmost tip of Taiwan but still part of the South China Sea and this image and those of Yulan Guanyin and the statue overlooking the sea, described above, indicate the importance at this temple of Guanyin as a sea goddess.

The iconography of Nanhai Guanyin is also very much in evidence today in other parts of East Asia. For example, in the Naksan Temple in Korea, discussed in Chapter 3, there is, on the wall of one of the main halls, a painting of this form of Guanyin (Plate 109). In addition, on the outside wall of the nun's quarter there is a painting of Guanyin with Shancai riding on the waves near Putuo Island (Plate 110). These paintings are, of course, appropriate in a setting that is near the sea and contains a 'Potala Hall'.

From the above evaluation of the various sea-going forms of Guanyin it would appear that it was at the beginning of the eighth century that Water-moon Guanyin was conceived in a Chinese setting associated with Mount Potalaka. Images of Yulan, Aoyu, and Shuiyue forms of Guanyin

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<sup>137</sup>In this case the robes have been gilded as gold symbolizes power. This is a common feature of images including the white-robed type.



**PLATE 106**  
Nanhai Guanyin.  
Bai Shan Wan Temple,  
Taiwan.



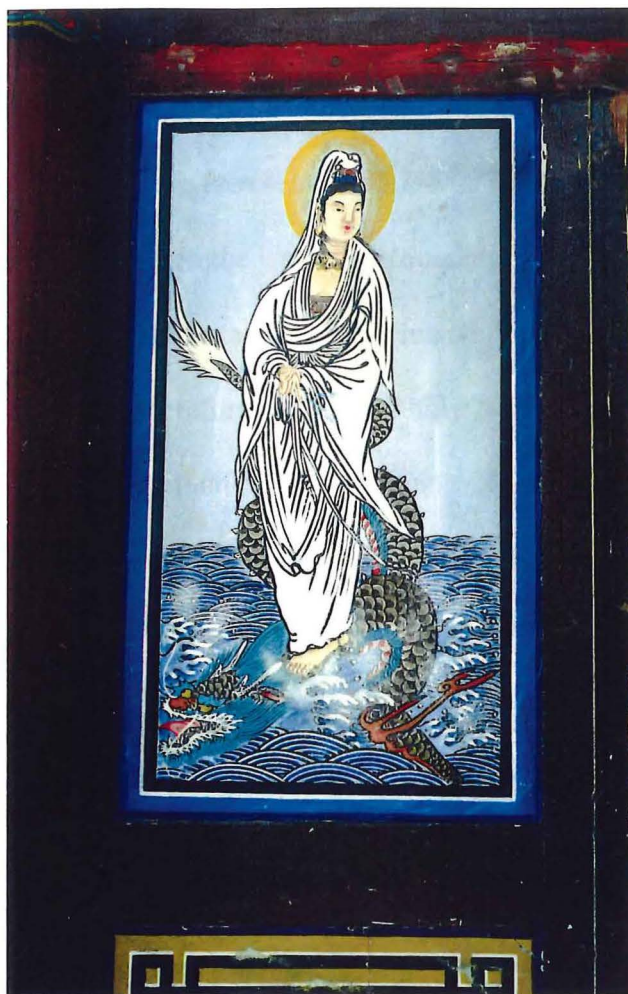


**PLATE 107**  
Longnü.  
Bai Shan Wan Temple,  
Taiwan.



**PLATE 108**  
Shancai.  
Bai Shan Wan Temple,  
Taiwan.

**PLATE 109**  
Nanhai Guanyin.  
Naksan.



**PLATE 110**  
Nanhai Guanyin with Shancai.  
Naksan.



combined sometime between the eighth and twelfth centuries and when the cult of Miaoshan became associated with Baiyi Guanyin in the twelfth century it absorbed elements of Shuiyue Guanyin. The result of this union was Nanhai Guanyin. We then see a sea goddess in all her glory, riding high on the waves to protect all those who travel on the waters surrounding Putuo Island. This particular form incorporates the features and attributes of Aoyu Guanyin and 'Guanyin Crossing the Sea'. The function of 'Sea Goddess', therefore, did exist before Nanhai Guanyin came to be known but in a much more limited capacity than Nanhai Guanyin. Nanhai Guanyin can be seen in modern iconography riding on waves, standing on large fish and sea monsters in order to subdue evil or merely sitting by water with her trusted acolytes Shancai and Longnü and a white parrot who brings her a rosary. In these guises Guanyin can prevent shipwreck - one of the Eight Great Perils, calm the evil under the sea to prevent earthquakes and generally guard against any evil which might hinder her devotees from making an adequate living.

## CHAPTER 6

### MAZU: A NEW FORM OF GUANYIN?

The prowess of Guanyin as a saviour of those at sea is matched only by another goddess of the sea by the name of Mazu. Mazu shares equal popularity with Guanyin in some East Asian countries, and in fact surpasses Guanyin's popularity in others. Of particular interest to this study are the reasons for Mazu being increasingly linked to Guanyin, occasionally being described as Guanyin's incarnation, her sister or her pupil. This relationship is perplexing for although each deity is worshipped in her own right, in some parts of East Asia the two cults have become so entwined that it would appear that Mazu has become one of the forms of Guanyin. In examining the reasons for this relationship certain questions arise: Is this yet another step in the process of assimilation of Guanyin's cult with Chinese popular religion? If so, being a more recent example than those given in the previous chapters, does it give us a clearer picture of some of the factors involved in such assimilation?

These questions will be used to form the basis of the following discussion on the relationship between Mazu and Guanyin. Firstly, we will examine the emergence of the Mazu cult within the context of a more developed, yet pliable, Guanyin cult. In the process it will be necessary to outline the changes that were occurring in Southern China during the period when the two cults first came into contact, in order to determine the timing of any relationship and whether there were factors that could have influenced a fusion of the deities. Secondly, we will examine the Mazu cult in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and China, in order to examine what local

policies and conditions have contributed to a merging of the cults.

It is difficult to determine the earliest connection between Guanyin and Mazu and whether one cult had a particular influence on the other which could have led to a merging of the cults. According to local history<sup>138</sup> Mazu was a real person born in 960CE in the Xianliang port of Meizhou Bay, Fujian Province in China. Legends describe that on the night before her birth a star appeared in the north-west which turned into a red glow and shone over Meizhou Island when she was born. This convinced her parents that this was not an ordinary baby and as she did not cry until she was one month old she was given the name of Lin Mo, *Mo* meaning silence. During her life, according to local legends, Lin Mo was able to predict weather changes, cure the sick and save people from drowning. The most famous legend describes how one day, sitting at her weaving loom, Lin Mo had a vision that her father and two brothers were caught in a storm at sea. In this vision Lin Mo grasped hold of her father with one hand, one of her brothers in the other hand and the second brother with her teeth. At this point her mother being alarmed at Lin Mo's trance-like state called to her, whereupon she opened her mouth to answer and lost her brother who drowned. After her death in 987CE Lin Mo was deified owing to her continued acts of compassion.

Several scholars suggest that the Mazu cult was fashioned after that of Guanyin, or even invented to offset Guanyin's popularity. But although various legends describe Lin Mo's parents as pious Buddhists and Lin Mo as being devoted to Guanyin, which would suggest an early relationship, there is no evidence to support these legends and no evidence of a temple dedicated to Guanyin in the Fujian area. There is no reason, therefore, to suggest that the Mazu cult was in any way influenced by the Guanyin cult. There is, in fact, no evidence for the cult of Guanyin appearing in the vicinity of Mazu's cult until much later. This certainly suggests that the cult of

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<sup>138</sup>Personal communication with Xu Xingtang whose source of reference was *Meizhou Mazu* published in Putian in 1978.

Mazu developed independently from that of Guanyin and this is supported by the evidence of early Mazu temples being built in close proximity to one another, away from Guanyin devotion.

The site and the timing of the first temple dedicated to Mazu is difficult to establish. Local legend puts it firmly on Meizhou Island with the extant temple booklet<sup>139</sup> stating that the first Mazu temple was built there in 987. This temple, it is claimed, was enlarged in 1023 after a mariner named Sanbao donated a large sum of money in gratitude for Mazu's assistance in transporting goods overseas. According to the booklet, it was this enlarged temple that was given the official name of Meizhou Zumiao (*Zumiao* meaning head temple). There is no historical evidence to support the claim that Mazu's original temple was built on the island although there has been speculation that devotion to Lin Mo was superimposed onto the cult of another goddess of the sea who already had a temple on Meizhou (Ter Haar 1990: 357 n.18). However, the temple booklet written to "help people and future generations to learn about Mazu's devotion" claims that there were some errors made when Lin Mo's history was first recorded (Zhang 1994: 4). The booklet reports that Lin Qingbiao, who wrote *The Record of the Goddess*, copied his information from *A Scripture Collection of the Goddess* but changed Lin Mo's great grandfather's place of "seclusion" from Meizhou Island to Xianliang gang. Later a certain Jiang Weiyan in *The Discovery of the Earliest Literature on Mazu and its Implications*, pointed out that according to the 1444 edition of the Lin clan register, Lin Mo's father lived temporarily on Meizhou Island and Lin Mo was born there. There is no reason for the claims of the temple to be disputed as all other dates given in the booklet, which include the dates of Mazu's investitures and recorded 'miracles', can be supported by historical records. A temple dedicated to Mazu is recorded as being in existence in the Xinghua Prefecture, which includes Meizhou Island, in the period 1119-1125.<sup>140</sup> The main concern of this

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<sup>139</sup>Compiled by Zhang Qinghan for the Board of Directors 1994.

<sup>140</sup>It is not clear whether the Prefecture of Xinghua was meant or the town of Xinghua which was situated on the shore of the bay in which Meizhou Island lies. For more details on the distribution of temples by circuit and prefecture see Hansen 1990: 196-200.



part of the chapter, however, is not to establish the site of the first temple but to discuss the spread of the cult of Mazu and its connections to that of Guanyin.

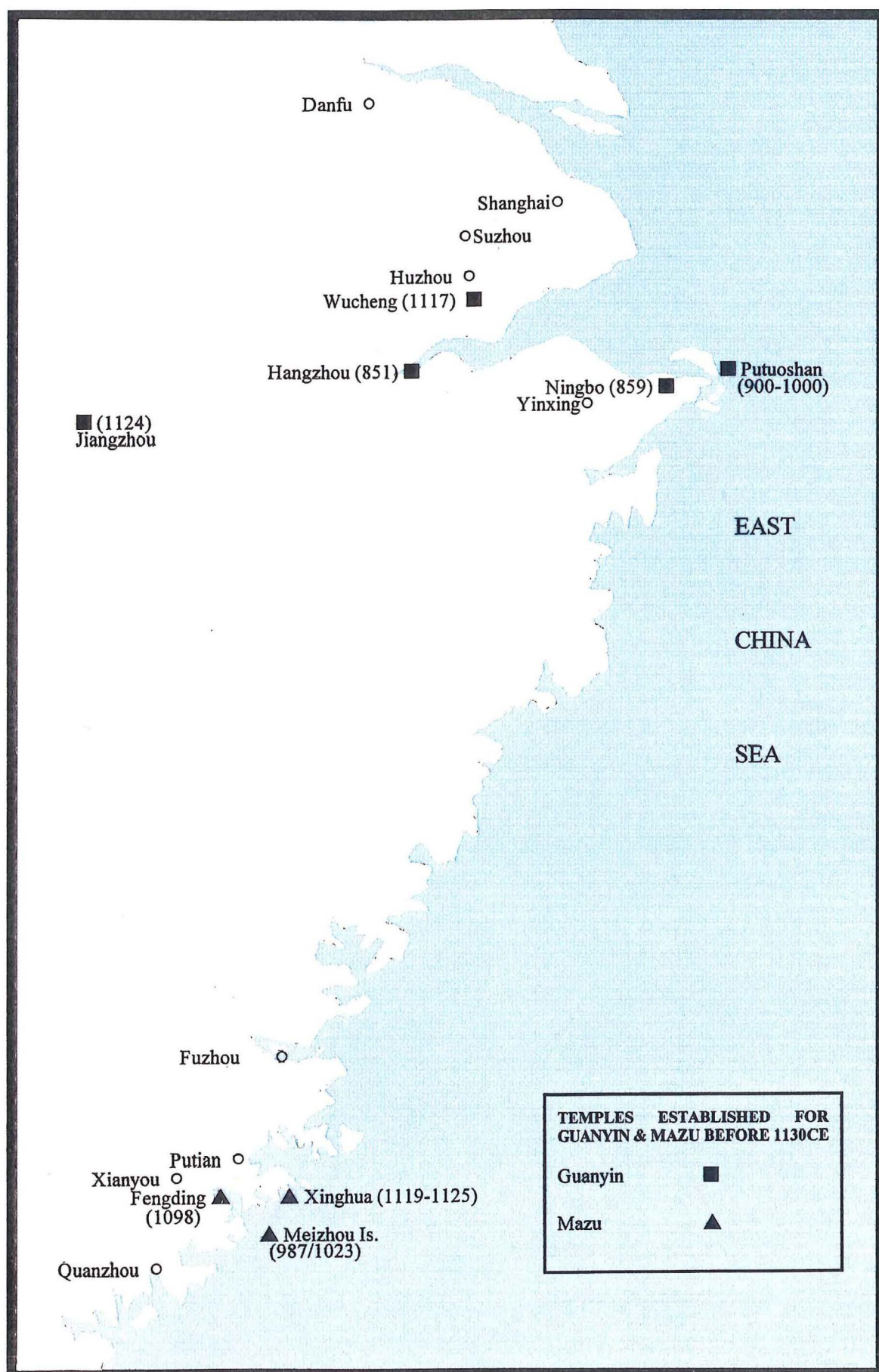
In order to obtain an impression of the spread of the cult of Mazu and its proximity to that of Guanyin, the dates of the temples prior to 1130 have been collected in Map 2.<sup>141</sup> It is clear from this map that in the early days of Mazu's cult her temples were situated in, or close to, the Xinghua Prefecture and those of Guanyin were situated close to Putuo Island and Ningbo.

Map 3 shows that in or before 1132 a temple dedicated to Mazu appeared in Ningbo which is very close to Putuo Island which had become the centre of Guanyin devotion from the beginning of the tenth century. Putuo Island was becoming the focus of the Guanyin cult because it claimed to be the Potalaka, the home of Guanyin. What is particularly important to establish is why Ningbo appears to be the first centre for a temple built away from Mazu's home county. According to Yü there was a temple dedicated to Guanyin in Ningbo from the middle of the ninth century (Yü 1992:240, n.18). Did devotees build this temple as direct competition to Guanyin? Or is it coincidence that it was to Ningbo that devotees first took the cult from Xinghua Prefecture province? According to Hansen the spread of local cults was determined by the occupation of the devotees, and as Mazu was associated with the occupational group who made their living on the sea, it was the ocean-bound officials from Putian who visited other cities and took the cult of Mazu with them. This is supported by Ter Haar (1990: 374) who asserts that all early temples founded outside Mazu's locale were established by seafarers and merchants from Fujian, and the temple at Ningbo was founded by a ship's captain who took incense from Xinghua.

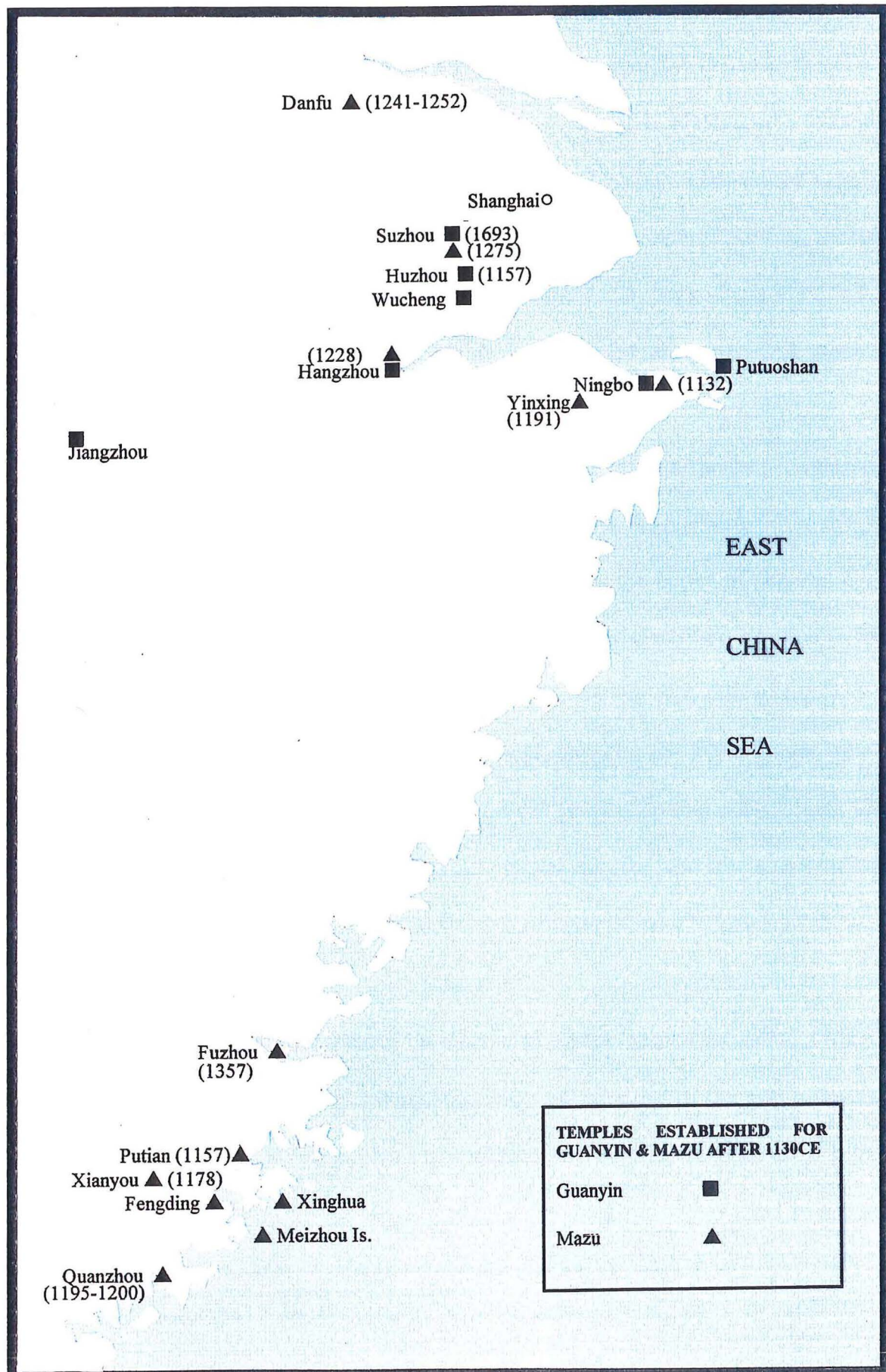
It appears therefore that it was Mazu's association with seafarers and merchants that was responsible for the spread of her cult and for the early founding in the sea port of Ningbo. Once established here the cult spread along the waterways linking Ningbo with Hangzhou and Hangzhou

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<sup>141</sup>The dates show that a temple existed at the time given which was not necessarily the date of its construction.



MAP 2



MAP 3



with Lake Tai. The cults of Mazu and Guanyin therefore appear to have come together in the Hangzhou/Ningbo area at the beginning of the twelfth century.

From this time forward there is likely to have been competition between the cults. It is clear from one of the 'miracle' stories that the two deities were being worshipped side by side by different groups. A story in the *Xuanhe fengshi*,<sup>142</sup> describes how on the homeward journey of a voyage to Korea, broken rudders put a fleet in danger.<sup>143</sup> The narrator Xu Jing, an imperial emissary, prayed and soon a light appeared which Xu judged to be the goddess Mazu "who had previously performed other miracles". Under Mazu's protection the sailors were able to repair the rudders and continue their journey.

What is particularly interesting about this story is that on the same journey the narrator Xu had previously described some of the sailors worshipping Guanyin and receiving favourable winds. It is clear from Xu's description that he was sceptical about the power of Guanyin although convinced of the power of Mazu. It is unclear whether this scepticism was due to lack of knowledge of Guanyin or because of loyalty to Mazu but the 'miracle' now belongs firmly to Mazu having been embellished over the years: Mazu it is said, saved the life of the Korean official Lu Yundi by appearing in a storm, clinging to the mast and guiding the ship safely home. This act appears to have been officially recognised in 1122 by the emperor who erected a plaque in her honour and granted her temple at Jiangkou the title of *Shun ji miao*<sup>144</sup> (Temple of Favourable Help).

Just how much one cult influenced the other is, to a large extent, speculation. While there is no evidence for the cult of Mazu having been fashioned after that of Guanyin or invented to offset Guanyin's popularity, there are certainly similarities between the two cults and it is possible

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<sup>142</sup>A local history or gazetteer - an original source used by Hansen (1990:33).

<sup>143</sup>For more details of this journey see Hansen (ibid.,)

<sup>144</sup>See for example the accounts by Duyvendak 1939: 344 and Weitoff 1966: 320.



that once the two cults came together in the early twelfth century they 'borrowed' certain characteristics from one another. For example, if Meizhou Island was not the site of the original temple, there is the possibility that it was designated Mazu's island home just as Putuo was the island home of Guanyin. There is also a suggestion that Mazu was once called Longnü (Dragon Girl) because of her ability to ride on the waves. As already described in the previous chapter, Guanyin was given an attendant of this name from the beginning of the twelfth century. However, Longnü's association with Mazu appears to be a later association as we will see later in this chapter and beyond a few similarities there is no evidence to suggest that Mazu was given any of the attributes of Guanyin.

Yet there is much to suggest that after Mazu had 'encroached' on Guanyin's territory, Guanyin was given a particularly Chinese character that mirrored that of Mazu. At the beginning of the twelfth century Guanyin was, as she has remained, a malleable cult figure capable of taking on any character that the society of the day desired. As we have already seen, although firmly established at the Upper Tianzhu Monastery in Hangzhou as the White-robed Guanyin, this popular figure was suddenly transformed into Miaoshan. As Miaoshan, her life bore similarities to Lin Mo. After similar auspicious signs accompanying her birth Miaoshan, like Lin Mo, was described as growing to be a quiet, religiously inspired child. Like Lin Mo, Miaoshan did not marry, in fact expressly refused to marry. However, the most striking similarity is that Miaoshan also saved the life of her father. Although the merciful act of giving up her eyes and arms had different circumstances from the life-saving act of Lin Mo, it portrays the same filial piety that has been of the utmost importance throughout the history of China.

This is not to suggest that it was merely competition from Mazu that influenced Guanyin to adopt a particularly Chinese character, for there were economic factors that influenced this change. In the Song dynasty, most temples who owned land paid land taxes. As Buddhist

monasteries had vast quantities of land contributed as alms by Buddhist followers from previous dynasties, they suffered the most.<sup>145</sup> In addition the government required that monasteries construct a certain number of public works with minimal or no payment. Although monasteries earned income from their land it was frequently not enough to pay their taxes, and in such cases the monastery might apply for a tax exemption. Because government regulations required that a Buddhist monastery had to have more than thirty rooms before it could receive government recognition, one assumes that tax exemptions would only be granted to large monasteries.

Buddhist monasteries therefore had to work hard at improving their size and status. As there was great dependence on contributions from devotees, the monasteries were faced with ensuring that the resident deity continued to appeal to the devotees. Portraits and statues were thought to be inhabited by the gods so it was important for them to be properly cared for. It was therefore important to ensure that the deity, its clothing and the surroundings, were satisfactory. The more beautiful the temple the more likely the deity was to perform miracles. The more miracles that were performed, the more likelihood of the temple increasing in size and importance and receiving government recognition.

An inscription from the Heavenly Peace Monastery in Huzhou describes the way in which keeping temples and images in good repair was of benefit to the devotee.<sup>146</sup> Guanyin, the inscription reports, appeared to a person named Zhang<sup>147</sup> who had been ill for three years and could not move her arm. One night in a dream a white-robed woman told Zhang that she too suffered from a similar complaint and if her arm could be healed she would ensure that Zhang's shoulder would also be cured. When asked where she lived the white-robed woman replied that she lived

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<sup>145</sup>For a detailed account of Buddhist monasteries and their landholdings see Tien Ju-K'ang 1990: 83-98 and Hansen 1990: 57-61.

<sup>146</sup>This inscription has been translated by Hansen in full 1990: 169. See also 1990: 33-36.

<sup>147</sup>Hansen states that the sex of this person is not clear while Yu who also refers to this legend (1990b: 263) clearly interprets the sex of this devotee as female. Yu does not give any details on the following discussion about the image.

in the corridor of the Heavenly Peace Monastery in Huzhou. When Zhang was taken to the monastery the next day and the statue of Guanyin inspected, it was found that the right arm of Guanyin had been damaged by a piece of falling wood. When Guanyin's arm was repaired, Zhang's illness was cured.

This inscription dated 1157, as well as recording the events that led to the building of another hall, continues to describe an argument between Lui Yizhi, the author of the inscription, and the monk Jujiu<sup>148</sup> as to the need for a Guanyin image. Liu argued that because Guanyin has thirty-three manifestations she can do anything and go anywhere, therefore there is no need for an image as it would give her a “deceptive concreteness” which might mislead people. The monk on the other hand pointed out that as Guanyin is worshipped in the heart of her believers, she already has a place. He added that monks and lay people go in front of the statue to pray, to tell their troubles and burn incense and ask for help. As Hansen contends, the monk Jijui realises that if a (Buddhist) monastery is to attract followers it cannot adhere to traditional doctrine. It must offer a deity that is similar in terms to the gods which are familiar to them.

Government officials had as much faith in the abilities of the gods as did the commoners and as pressure from the non-Han people from the north increased, the central government turned more and more to these gods for help. One new development in the eleventh century was the granting of titles to recognise the achievements of the gods.<sup>149</sup> Although previous dynasties had rewarded a few gods with titles, before the Song it was usually only heroes and people of noble birth that were given official recognition. Now local gods began to be recognised. Of the thousands of these local gods in China, most were formerly men and women who were deified as gods and goddesses after death. Many of them had been aristocrats, generals or emperors and had

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<sup>148</sup>The name of the monk is given as Zhongtau by Yü.

<sup>149</sup>See Hansen 1990:9-10 for a more detailed discussion on these local gods. For an account of the possible motivation behind the awarding of titles see Watson 1985: 292-324.

either lived in or visited the area in which they were worshipped. Their claim to divinity was based solely on their power shown in miracles. Also included among these local gods were deified low-born humans who had died prematurely.

It is clear why the story of Miaoshan was created. It depicted Guanyin in much the same terms as the local gods which were winning government recognition and widespread popular support. Ter Haar suggests that the appeal of these local gods as deified mortals, was, that as they usually had met untimely deaths they became hungry ghosts. These ghosts were believed to be very powerful because they had not received the necessary *rites de passage*. Although they were feared because of their power, once their intervention had been received, fear turned to awe and respect (Ter Haar 1990: 371-372). Miaoshan was, by her untimely death, a hungry ghost.<sup>150</sup>

The idea of deifying commoners met a lot of criticism in the Song for many traditionalists claimed that they did not fulfill the requirements for a divinity (Hansen 1990: 37). By making Miaoshan a princess, the fabricator of the legend was being prudent, for although of noble birth Miaoshan was so ill-treated that she immediately gained sympathy. Especially so when, in accordance with the doctrine of filial piety, she saved the life of her father, the one who had caused her suffering. The story of Miaoshan, clearly invented to encourage patronage, was likely therefore to have been as a direct result of the increasing popularity of local gods such as Mazu.

Once these gods were recognised by the court, their cult fell under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Board of Rites, which saw to it that they were treated according to the rules and regulations of *sidian* (sacrificial statutes), where official temples were distinguished from those of popular religion and from specifically Buddhist or Taoist temples.<sup>151</sup> This system had the effect of reducing the literally thousands of deities that were worshipped in temples throughout the empire to a handful of 'approved' deities, although local gods were never completely eradicated.

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<sup>150</sup>For details of the hungry, homeless spirits of unmarried girls see Wolf/Witke 1975: 148-154.

<sup>151</sup>For a more detailed account of this system see Feuchtwang 1978:104 and Watson 1985: 293-300.



Many of these approved gods enjoyed special privileges, including the construction, at state expense, of elaborate temples in centres of government.

One feature of this government recognition was the bestowing of titles on the 'approved' deities. Mazu was given her first official title in 1155 when she was credited with finding an unpolluted underground spring which saved the population from the Black Death Epidemic (Weitoff 1966: 319). This was before Guanyin received her title from Xiaozong (as described in the previous chapter). But titles continued to be bestowed on Mazu. Having received the rank Dame under the title of *Linghui Furen* (Divine Kindly Lady) in 1156, she was in 1192 promoted to the rank of *Linghui Fei* (Imperial Concubine).<sup>152</sup> It appears that the first temple in Hangzhou to honour Mazu was built in 1205-1207.<sup>153</sup> What is particularly important to the understanding of the interaction between Guanyin and Mazu and possible rivalry, is that government officials throughout the Southern Song do not appear to have been concerned with the religious tradition of the temple on which they bestowed privileges. The power and efficacy of the god were the most important factors to determine which gods would receive funds and assistance in building a temple. The way to elicit help was, apparently, to grant the gods recognition in the form of plaques and temples.

From the evidence described above, the conclusion must be drawn that there are no specific factors which could explain the merging of the Mazu and Guanyin cults in the early days of contact. Although there were similarities in the first few centuries of the Mazu cult taking hold, there is no evidence for Mazu having been created to offset the popularity of Guanyin or having been regarded as one of the forms of Guanyin. It must be noted, however, that government

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<sup>152</sup>The rank of *Tian Hou* (Empress of Heaven) was awarded in 1737.

<sup>153</sup>According to Maspero (n.d., 330) there is an inscription in the temple at Hangzhou dated 1228 that throws some light on the temple at Meizhou. The inscription states that a supernatural light appeared in the night above the coast of Meizhou and the inhabitants all dreamed together that a girl said to them, "I am the goddess of Meizhou and I must be given dwelling here". In consequence of this miracle they built a temple to her on the edge of the sea. This is unsubstantiated.

regulations and new trends caused a certain amount of competition which was likely to have influenced the direction of these cults.

Notwithstanding this competition, there is evidence that a relationship of tolerance did exist between Guanyin and Mazu. Well after Putuoshan was firmly established as the island home of Guanyin, Mazu made an appearance on the island and had a shrine built in her honour in one of the main halls. This may have had something to do with the fact that the Buddhists on Putuoshan were used to allowing other religious systems to co-exist for Putuoshan had previously been a Taoist haven.<sup>154</sup> As Fitch (1929: 60) comments, because of Guanyin's position of superiority she could not afford to be jealous!

The shrine to Mazu used to be in the pavillion at the entrance to the Northern Monastery<sup>155</sup> and the shrine to Mazu was built sometime in the Ming Dynasty. Johnston (1976: 366) relates a story that on the day that the Northern Monastery was completed a 'fairy' ship was seen on the eastern horizon. Emerging from the sea mists it rapidly approached the island and then disappeared from sight while it was still at some distance from Qian bu Sands. All who had seen the vision were confident that it was the ship of the 'Queen of Heaven' who was signifying her willingness to guard Putuo and visiting pilgrims.

It is possible that this legend was a founding myth explaining how Mazu came to be associated with Putuo Island and Guanyin, but it also serves to illustrate the tolerance that existed between Buddhism and Taoism. There were other shrines to Taoist deities such as that of the god of war. It was also on Putuoshan that I was told that South East Asian people take their Mazu images to Putuo Island to get them empowered by Guanyin so that they in fact become Guanyin, or so that Mazu can meet her sister.

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<sup>154</sup>There was no evidence of a struggle with any previously Taoist religious authority, for more details see Yü 1992: 204-205.

<sup>155</sup>Johnston (1976: 268) claims that there used to be another shrine in the front hall of the Fuquanshen Temple near the Temple of Guandi god of War.

This gave me the answer to a question that had been bothering me for some time - why were some images of Mazu being worshipped as Guanyin? When I was on Cheung Chau Island near Hong Kong in September 1992 I found that the Guanyin temple on 'Kwun Yam Wan Beach' in fact contained an image of Mazu, not Guanyin. (Plates 111 and 112) James Hayes (1985: 220, n. 56) cites a nearby tablet commemorating the construction of the road leading to the Guanyin temple (1840-41) and as the appearance of the temple exactly matched the description given by the Hong Kong Tourist Board, I was confident that it was the Guanyin temple. Two years later I came across a temple in a back street of old Hong Kong. On entering the temple I discovered an image of Mazu but the caretaker noticing my interest smiled and proudly introduced me to Guanyin (Plate 113). When later I quietly questioned some local people who had come to worship in front of this image, they also declared this to be an image of Guanyin. This I could only assume was Mazu posing as Guanyin! (See for example Plate 114 which is a Mazu image from a small temple on Cheung Chau Island). It would appear therefore that in Hong Kong and surrounding islands some images of Mazu have been taken to Putuoshan to be empowered by Guanyin and are now worshipped as Guanyin.<sup>156</sup>

Yet the cult of Mazu in Hong Kong appears to be one of the strongest apart from that on Meizhou Island. Mazu is especially important in Hong Kong where so many people make their living from the sea.<sup>157</sup> Boatpeople place their trust in her mercy with her shrine being placed in a prominent place in their boats and many legends contain hints that she had a special relationship with spinsters and other unmarried women. In the New Territories, Watson states that a number of women maintained that Mazu had killed herself rather than marry a man chosen by her family. Some versions state that she often appeared after her death in a red dress which is an unambiguous

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<sup>156</sup>In Macau also one can find images of Mazu being worshipped as Guanyin. In the Kun Iam Tong, on the Avenida do Coronel Mesquita, there is a statue which because of the fringed headress (changed every year) suggests a Mazu image and yet it is worshipped as Guanyin.

<sup>157</sup>For details of the construction of the first Hong Kong temple dedicated to Mazu see Jen Yu-Wen 1965.



**PLATE 111**  
Guanyin,  
'Kwun Yam Wan'  
Cheung Chau Island,  
Hong Kong.



**PLATE 112**  
Detail of Plate 111





**PLATE 113**  
Guanyin.  
Hong Kong.



**PLATE 114**  
Mazu.  
Cheung Chau Island,  
Hong Kong.

symbol of suicide in Chinese peasant society.<sup>158</sup> In 1952 Buck recorded eighteen temples on the island and nearby mainland dedicated to Mazu with Guanyin having only seven dedicated to her (1952: 25-27). According to the Hong Kong Tourist Board (1993) there are now over twenty-four Mazu temples in the district. If Mazu has such a superior position in Hong Kong, then why are images being worshipped as a form of Guanyin? Are Mazu temples as popular as the numbers would indicate? Back in 1952 in spite of the greater number of Mazu temples Buch states that Guanyin temples together with Baogong, generated most of the temple income. This would indicate a possible difference in the socio-economic status of the groups of devotees. Elaborate festivals take place every year on Mazu's birthday indicating her continuing popularity, although there are obvious economic reasons for these festivals being encouraged judging by the huge crowds of tourists and pilgrims that they attract. It would appear, therefore, that in spite of the popularity of Mazu there are economic advantages for drawing Guanyin worshippers to the Mazu temples, thus encouraging temple managers to create a relationship.

In Hong Kong there is a visual symbol of the relationship between Mazu and Guanyin. On the beach at Repulse Bay there are huge statues of Mazu and Guanyin standing side by side overlooking the sea (Plates 115 and 116). Together they guard the coastline and protect all those who travel on the waters of this area.

These two figures also stand together in the Guanyin temple in Georgetown, Penang in Malaysia. Here I came across almost identical statues of Mazu and Guanyin standing side by side in the rear hall dedicated to childbirth (Plates 117 and 118). The only way of distinguishing them was by the colour of their cloaks. Guanyin wore pink and Mazu her customary red. I gathered that both Mazu and Guanyin were equally regarded as being able to provide women with babies.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Watson states it is not uncommon for a red wedding dress to be worn by women committing suicide. (1985: 297) This is one explanation why images of Mazu are usually dressed in red.

<sup>159</sup> A Malaysian friend told me that it is quite usual for women to take their one year old daughters to meet their 'godmother', either Guanyin or Mazu, who will protect them through their life.





**PLATE 115**  
Mazu.  
Repulse Bay, Hong Kong.



**PLATE 116**  
Guanyin.  
Repulse Bay, Hong Kong.

**PLATE 117**  
Guanyin.  
Guanyin Temple.  
Georgetown, Penang.



**PLATE 118**  
Mazu.  
Guanyin Temple.  
Georgetown, Penang.



Although in the front hall Mazu images were being worshipped as Guanyin, in this rear hall the Mazu image has retained her name but taken on the appearance of Guanyin. This would indicate that there is a distinct possibility that in the not too distant future there is likely to be an official 'Mazu Guanyin' and in fact I consider this image to be the prototype.

It is not only in Malaysia and Hong Kong that the relationship between Mazu and Guanyin is evident. One legend in Taiwan tells how Mazu's mother was impregnated by a concoction from Guanyin, another states that Mazu was an incarnation of Guanyin. When I visited Taiwan in October 1994 I asked several people whether they had heard that Mazu was an incarnation of Guanyin. Several had heard the legend but did not know any details. However, one young man visiting the Mazu Temple in Beigang [Peikang] told me that he had heard the story just recently from his friend's grandfather. This grandfather was coincidentally on the board of the Mazu Temple Committee which to me suggested that the linking of Mazu to Guanyin could be politically motivated.

By taking a closer look at the history of the Mazu cult in Taiwan, it is clear that political interference is likely. This interference dates back to the days when the Qing dynasty took over the administration of the eastern Taiwan region.<sup>160</sup> On discovering that there were no temples for any of the deities in the state pantheon, they took images of Mazu, Guandi and Guanyin from the mainland and installed them in Ilan as a means to 'civilise' the Taiwanese in this area. This also happened in Taibei and Lukang. However, in both these towns the Mazu cult had been well established by settlers from Fujian Province by the time the Qing government asserted authority. This led to a dual system of Mazu worship where, for example, official dates for her birthday did not correspond with traditional festival days. Both in Taibei and in Lukang, despite the magnificence of the official buildings, the unofficial temples are the ones frequented by the local

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<sup>160</sup>My discussion on this point follows that of Watson 1985: 300-301.

people. In Lukang the official Mazu temple is a magnificent stone building on which government officials spared no expense. Yet, from the day of its inauguration in the eighteenth century to the present, it has hardly been used by local people. Lukang's unofficial Mazu temple is located only a few streets away and in contrast to the state temple, it has become one of Taiwan's leading pilgrimage centres.

It is understandable that the local people prefer the unofficial temples. Many of these temples are those which Feuchtwang (1974) describes as "compatriot" temples, which can be defined as those which have been formed by people who came from one district or prefecture of mainland China.<sup>161</sup> One characteristic of this type of temple, as in all local temples, is that the people join together round the incense burner. The incense dust is that which has been taken from the original shrine on the mainland and this serves to link the people to their ancestors as well as to each other. These compatriot temples usually have branch temples in other towns which thus link communities, separated by distance, to each other. A frequent means of displaying this link is by elaborate festivals and for processions and pilgrimages to make their way between these branch temples and the original temple. Compatriot temples can be Buddhist, Taoist or 'Folk' temples.

During the Japanese occupation of Taiwan (1895-1945) Taoism was suppressed because it was associated with Chinese patriotism.<sup>162</sup> As a result many Taoist temples were forced to register as Buddhist. No doubt this also applied to other compatriot temples. The aim of the post war government also appears to have attempted to undermine the compatriot parochialism that marked many areas of Taiwan. One means of control has been through festivals and processions which require police permits. The high cost of these activities has from time to time resulted in the government discouraging the issue of permits, particularly in the 1960's and 1970's.

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<sup>161</sup> For a more detailed definition of compatriot temples see Feuchtwang 1974: 275-277.

<sup>162</sup> See the Free China Review 1993: 487.

Another form of control is through the requirement that a temple, or any other association, must be registered with the competent local authority. This means having a formally constituted management committee which is responsible to the government for taxes, for the management of temple property, to build, rebuild or organise repairs to buildings and chattels.<sup>163</sup> While having a government official on one of these committees can be an advantage, making it easier to gain permits for processions, these officials do have to uphold the values of the government and therefore are an effective way of controlling the direction of a temple. But the system works both ways for these management committees are an effective way of an official becoming notable, for to be seen sponsoring or contributing to the building of a temple is a way of displaying wealth and power. Hence many committee members are not only on more than one temple management committee but are also local government officials.

This control by infiltration explains how the government can influence a temple in a certain direction, but it does not explain what has caused the link between Guanyin and Mazu. However, by following the development of a number of temples in Taiwan it is possible to determine how this link has emerged.

The Longshan temple in Wanhua district Taipei was formed in 1738 by settlers from Quanzhou in Fujian. According to legend, these settlers hung a pouch of incense on a tree. During the night the incense took on a special brightness which they took to indicate the presence of Guanyin.<sup>164</sup> The decision was made to build a temple to commemorate the event and funds were gathered from local people. This temple therefore appears to originally have had a compatriot nature. Some years later the temple was extended and a shrine built to Mazu. This would not be

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<sup>163</sup> These managers are distinct from the festival managers whose position is not as exclusive. For more details about management committees see Feuchtwang 1974: 277-280

<sup>164</sup> Another legend refers to a merchant who left a buddha hanging on a tree. When he went back to look for it he discovered that it was emitting a strange light. He discussed this with the villagers who decided that it indicated the presence of Guanyin. Together they decided to build a temple.

surprising in a syncretic temple but the Longshan temple is essentially a Buddhist temple which does make this shrine unusual. However, as Feuchtwang comments, by extending a temple and adding shrines, the temples constituency widens and therefore the potential scope for its management committee. The temple also loses its local character.

This appears to be an aim of the present government to turn local temples into what I shall term 'community temples'. These community temples are not only those that are frequented by all inhabitants of a town or city, but are also those that put back something into the community. Sponsorship is more likely for a temple that is a nonprofit-making organisation and benefits the community through charity work. Being classed as a 'nonprofit-making' organisation means that taxes do not need to be paid. It also means that official sanction for temple activities is much more easily obtained (Feuchtwang 1974: 286)

Encouragement to expand the temples appears to be the method the present government is using to turn local temples into community temples. In 1975 encouraged by the slogan "establish the biggest temple in Southeast Asia", the temple of the Heavenly Mother in Tucheng sent twenty-one people to travel throughout Taiwan in order to pay their respects and establish good relations between the gods and the temples. The aim was also to encourage pilgrimages to the temple. The idea worked. From receiving no pilgrims at all it now receives ten thousand coach loads each year.<sup>165</sup>

It is, perhaps, this desire to attract more and more worshippers and pilgrims to the temples that is influencing the creation of a relationship with Guanyin. Buddhism still attracts a high percentage of devotees and many not committed to Buddhism are ardent supporters of Guanyin. What better way of drawing some of Guanyin's worshippers into the Mazu temples than to claim that Mazu is an incarnation of Guanyin!

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<sup>165</sup>I assume that this means ten thousand people. Sinorama, July 1992.:85



In today's competitive society the temple management committees and boards of directors are committed to expand the temples. Small local temples want to become large temples and large temples want to upgrade to even larger temples. Therefore temple ceremonies have become a means to this end. The holding of grand festivals combined with the power of media coverage can enable small local temples to become large national temples. It is this fact that has no doubt led to the present government relaxing restrictions on expensive festivals and pilgrimages.

One temple had a unique fifteen day festival that certainly brought together Guanyin and Mazu. This was the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of Penghu's Mazu temple.<sup>166</sup> A banquet was held at which Mazu entertained a number of "guest" deities. These guest deities included Guanyin and in fact the first two evenings were spent at the Guanyin Pavillion in Makung township. At the banquet the food was set before the gods and taken away a few minutes later while waiters hurried about filling wine glasses. Naturally Guanyin was served with vegetarian food! As well as attendants there were representatives from other temples and committee members (Sinorama 1992: 95-97).

Many other temples rack their brains to think of ways to attract pilgrims.<sup>167</sup> As well as the deities' birthdays and other religious ceremonies, they hold festivals which are quite often unusual as nothing is excluded. One temple has a singing and dancing party and there is a growing concern amongst scholars that too much entertainment will leave the temples without substance and without religious merit. It would also appear that although donations from worshippers are getting larger and larger, the intention of bringing the community together is not working quite as well. With the range of devotees expanding from local to national, local participation in the organisation of temple festivals and processions, is declining. Some temples are doing all they can to prevent this. The Zhaodian temple in Beigang pays half the cost of Mazu's birthday celebrations and the

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<sup>166</sup>As described in Sinorama 1992

<sup>167</sup>The following information is based on the article in Sinorama, July 1992.

other half is paid by the local community and trade guilds. Everyone is encouraged to put forward performing floats for the procession and the special local tradition of the [Yi Ko] Yige flower chariots is being preserved.

One result of competition between temples to expand the constituency is that bickering and arguments are taking place. One such argument centres around which temple received the first Mazu statue to be taken from the mainland. One battle of succession is taking place between the Nan Dian and the Jin An temples of Suao. Another is between the Zhaodian Temple Beigang and the Fengdian temple at Xingang which have competed for many years as to which held the original Mazu statue. According to Bruce Wen, a Taoist and devotee of Beigang's Mazu, the Xingang temple has produced fake evidence to legitimise its claim of holding the original Mazu statue. Another argument is in regard to which temple has the best relationship with the ancestral temple on Meizhou. The Zhaodian temple has therefore established a 'kinship' alliance with Meizhou and in 1992 paid for two granite statues of Mazu each measuring over sixteen metres in height. One has already been placed on the highest peak of Meizhou Island and can be seen from the mainland (Plate 119). The other 'twin' statue has been placed on the roof of the local indoor market where, from behind the temple, it watches over the entire city (Plate 120). A wooden replica of these statues was in 1993 placed in the Zhaodian temple and surprisingly enough it was placed in the hall dedicated to Guanyin (Plates 121 and 122). The exact reason for this I failed to establish but it was most likely linked to the fact that the management committee of this temple asserts that Mazu is an incarnation of Guanyin.

It would appear therefore, that competition between the temples has led to the need to invent a relationship between Mazu and Guanyin. Government legislation has caused a vying for supremacy and because Buddhist teachings send the 'correct' messages to the community there



**PLATE 119**  
Meizhou Mazu.  
Meizhou Island.





**PLATE 120**

Twin Mazu statue.  
Near Zhaodian Temple.  
Beigang, Taiwan.



**PLATE 121**

Guanyin.  
Zhaodian Temple.  
Beigang, Taiwan.





**PLATE 122**  
Mazu. Wooden Replica.  
Guanyin Hall, Zhaodian Temple,  
Beigang, Taiwan.

is a subtle bias towards Buddhist-orientated temples.<sup>168</sup> There is also a marked tendency to grant the status of 'tourist attraction' to non-profit making organisations such as the Buddhist temples.<sup>169</sup> Being designated a tourist attraction means that temples receive more funding and co-operation from the government. As Buddhist practices include devotion to Guanyin, it is natural that they attempt to link Mazu with Guanyin. As an incarnation of Guanyin, the status of Mazu and therefore her temples will increase. My own research has led me to conclude that this is a relatively recent development, the claim being made to raise the status of Taoist temples, thus enabling them to attract more official support.

There is evidence that the relationship between Mazu and Guanyin is starting to infiltrate China. When I made enquiries in China I found that the further south one travelled the more likelihood there was to find a belief in such a relationship. One young man in the north remarked that Guanyin did not need to have Mazu as an incarnation for she was already everywhere! In the south, however, more people believed in such a relationship.

What of Meizhou Island itself? Surely being the heart of the Mazu cult there is independence from Guanyin? This is not the case. As Meizhou Island has become a great cultic and pilgrimage centre the majority of the pilgrims come from Taiwan, the perpetrators, it would appear, of the notion that Guanyin and Mazu are related. Is this why in the temple booklet it is Guanyin's act of compassion that provided the Lin family with their sixth daughter?

Her parents had five daughters, so they were hoping for a son. They prayed to Guanyin day and night hoping that she would give them a son. There were a lot of devils and monsters creating mayhem for the fishermen at Meizhou. Guanyin was merciful and compassionate so she wanted to save the fishermen. Since Lin Yuan's ancestors had done many good deeds, Guanyin ordered the incarnation of Longnü to the Lin family in order

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<sup>168</sup>One example of this is the Xin Xing gong. The present temple was built in 1957 and the Mazu Association formed to run it, however, the management is pro-Buddhist and issues invitations to Buddhist priests. Feuchtwang has noticed an increased orientation towards lay Buddhist practices in all but one of the eight temples that he has studied. (Feuchtwang 1974: 290)

<sup>169</sup>Three others still run by private associations have not been designated as tourist attractions. Feuchtwang 1974:??.

to get rid of the monsters and devils (Zhang 1994: 16-17)

While this legend does not state that Mazu is an incarnation of Guanyin, the connection is made clear. The reference to Longnü is, however, very interesting for this does not appear to be a recent development. Buck (1952) made reference to it in his study of Mazu in Hong Kong and my contact in China, Xu Xingtang, has confirmed that Mazu was once called Longnü. We have then, a new dimension to the Guanyin and Mazu relationship, that Mazu is an incarnation of Longnü. Not that Guanyin is ignored.

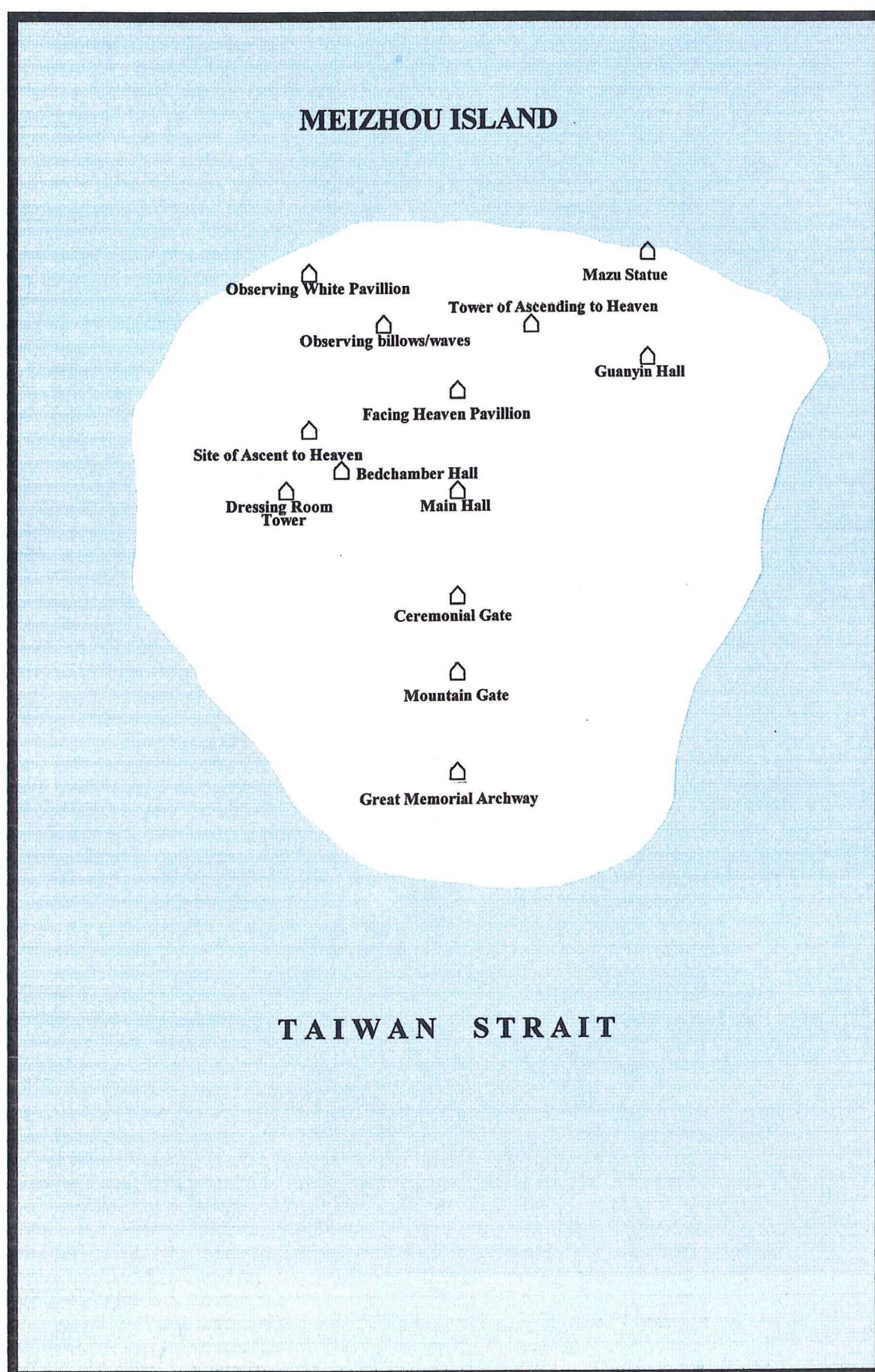
In the middle of the Meizhou Temple complex is a hall built to honour Guanyin.<sup>170</sup> When the caretaker and several worshippers were asked why Guanyin was being worshipped in the Mazu temple, the answer was that Guanyin was Mazu's teacher. The large gilded image of Guanyin sits holding a sutra, (Plate 123) which implies that Guanyin teaches Mazu Buddhist teachings.

The majority of the temple complex is, however, devoted to Mazu (see Map 4 for positioning of the various halls). Most of these have been built in recent years. The original temple was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. A woman by the name of Lin Chongzhi (nicknamed Xia Ba) was a devoted follower of Mazu and according to the temple booklet, on the night of 15 January 1977 Xia Ba dreamt that a 'local deity' told her to build a small temple. The temple was small and easily built. Then again in another dream (again on 15 January) she was told to repair Lian Ci Gong, she did as she was told. In her third dream, (on yet another 15 January) two soldiers took her to the Mazu temple and told her to reconstruct it. At the same time that she saw Mazu she saw a boy and a girl appear through a window in the sky. This she took to be *Kai Tian Men* (the opening of the heavenly door). Since that dream Xia Ba has been determined to rebuild the temple on Meizhou Island (Zhang 1994: 1-2). Because the temple was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution this was not an easy task. Together with

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<sup>170</sup>Built in 1994 with money donated from Taiwan Zhang 1994.





MAP 4





**PLATE 123**  
Guanyin.  
Guanyin Hall,  
Meizhou Island.

some older women on the island, she raised money and with donations from the locals they started their work on the Chen Dian and managed to obtain the main column from the old temple which a carpenter told them was in a community warehouse. Xia Ba's daughter used her position in the communist party to take out some chairs for a cinema and 'stole' the column. The rebuilding, it is reported, has not run smoothly:

After the collapse of the Gang of Four the government relaxed the policy on freedom of religion but for the Mazu temple it was different. There was a lot of argument between the public and the defence unit of the frontier garrison about the temple. The chief of the defence unit ordered the destruction of the temple. Xia Ba, Xu Jimei and Lin Wenhao worked together tirelessly to revoke the order. They felt that it was time to continue with the rebuilding, as Mazu has asked. (Zhang 1994: 3)

So we see again government interference in the maintenance of the Mazu cult. Is it because of the attitude of the government that this temple, the seat of the original Mazu cult, is claiming a relationship with Guanyin? The temple, because it is not officially recognised, receives no money or support from the government. However, although not recognised, the temple is now tolerated because of the money that is taken into China by the Taiwanese who flock there every year.

The present temple is impressive. The huge statue can be seen as one approaches the island and the present buildings are extensive (Plates 124 and 125). This is due to the extensive donations made, especially by the Taiwanese (Plate 127 shows a painting of Mazu that has come from one of the temples in Taiwan).<sup>171</sup> The main hall is usually crowded with worshippers and here the main statue is believed to be empowered by the spirit of Mazu herself (Plate 126). Next to the main image are many statues of Mazu that have been brought from other countries to be empowered by the spirit of Mazu (see Plates 128 and 129). Some are left here for several months, some several years. The longer it is possible to leave the statue the stronger the spiritual power

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<sup>171</sup>Meizhou Island has been open to the Taiwanese since 1976. At first small fishing boats made the journey but after 1980 the Taiwanese started visiting the island in large numbers.





**PLATE 124**  
Mazu Statue.  
Approaching Meizhou Island.



**PLATE 125**  
Looking towards the main buildings, Meizhou Island.





**PLATE 126**  
Main Hall.  
Meizhou Island.



**PLATE 127**  
Small side hall,  
Meizhou Island.





**PLATE 128**

Mazu images being empowered by Mazu.



**PLATE 129**

Mazu images being empowered by Mazu.

will be. I was told that for the best effect a statue should be left for at least one year. There is no fixed charge for leaving the statues at the temple but a donation is usually made according to one's means. Local people come here to pray on the date of Mazu's death, which I was told is one of the few facts that they know about Mazu, that and the date of her birth. When questioned some women said they were not interested in history, just with praying.

One earnest prayer of the local women is for the safe return of their husbands and in the Suzong Lu, the dressing room of Mazu, there is a statue of Mazu with an elaborate hairstyle in the shape of a sail. Women sometimes copy this hairstyle when their husbands are going on a sea journey (Plates 130 and 131). This hairstyle has become part of the traditional dress of a Mazu devotee. The other part of the dress, worn on festival days, is red and black trousers. Mazu is traditionally shown wearing a red dress. However, because they are not Mazu, devotees wear half red and half black trousers. The costume is completed with a blue Chinese-style jacket (Plate 132). I was told that although this is the traditional costume of Mazu devotees for festival times, it should only be worn by women who have living husbands, to prove that their prayers worked!

Mazu is important to women, for not only does she protect their husbands while earning a living at sea but she is also known, like Guanyin, as a provider of children. Older women come to Mazu especially to pray that their daughters-in-law will have babies. It is this similarity between the two deities that gives a clearer insight as to why Mazu has come to be worshipped as a form of Guanyin.

In conclusion, it is clear that in various parts of East Asia the spirit of Guanyin is being worshipped within the body image of Mazu. This relationship can be considered as another step in the process of assimilation but one for which we have not seen a precedent. In the past chapters we have seen cult figures merge owing to similarities in their perceived function, we have also seen



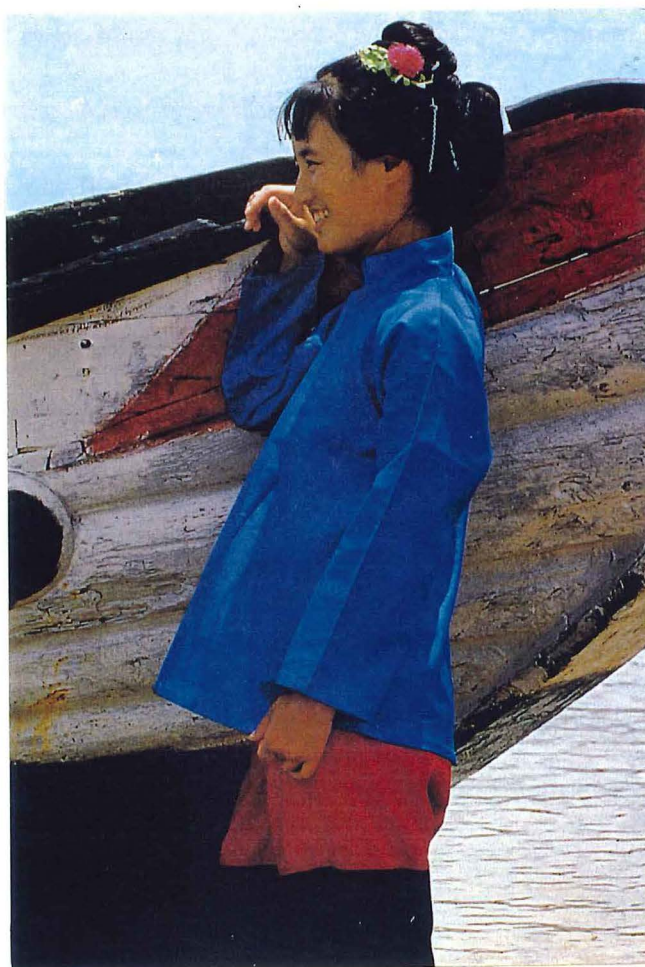


**PLATE 130**  
Mazu with sail hairstyle.  
Dressing Room Hall.





**PLATE 131**  
Dressing Room Hall.



**PLATE 132**  
Local girl with sail hairstyle.



how competition from other religious figures has given Guanyin new attributes and functions. But we have not seen, until now, other religious specialists claim that their figures have a relationship to Guanyin. We are witnessing, therefore, an attempt by some non-Buddhist temple managers to raise the status of their temples by giving Mazu a Buddhist character. This appears to have been as a direct result of government policies and economic necessity. This was a two way process, however, for the popularity of, and competition from, local gods saw Guanyin given more human qualities which mirrored in many respects those of Mazu. Certainly the direction of both cults was influenced by government policies which created competition between the temples, but this alone does not explain the merging of the two deities. But the process of assimilation proper appears to have commenced during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan which saw non-Buddhist temples being forced to register as Buddhist temples. The fact that Mazu images were, and continue to be, accepted into Buddhist temples shows the tolerance and acceptance of Mazu. It is important to note, however, that in Buddhist temples these Mazu images retain their original identity. The impetus therefore for the 'Mazu Guanyin' lies with non-Buddhist temples managers who have been encouraged by pro-Buddhist government policies to find new means to widen their constituencies and to give their temples and Mazu a more Buddhist character.

While Mazu temple managers search for new ways to link Mazu to Guanyin, the cult continues to enjoy great popularity and independence in the majority of areas. It is clear that the direction of this cult, and to a large extent that of Guanyin, is not in the hands of either temple managers or the devotees, but is dependent on the policies of the governments of the day which in turn reflect the PRC policy on "superstition". This demonstrates that assimilation is not merely a religious phenomenon but a result of political policies. It also illustrates that while images of Guanyin have clearly been influenced by their assimilation with other religious figures, other religious figures have also been influenced by Guanyin.

## CHAPTER 7

### REFLECTIONS AND SPECULATIONS

It is clear that the face of Guanyin has changed considerably over the years until images, such as those represented by Mazu, bear no visual relationship to the Indian prince who first entered China. It is this malleable quality of Guanyin imagery that has enabled this popular cult figure to acquire a unique character in each corner of Eastern Asia. Guanyin, by the means of the many different faces, soothes, calms and allays fears and brings children to childless couples. In addition, in accord with the original function of saving devotees from the many perils of this world, Guanyin extinguishes fires, stills turbulent rivers and oceans, calms winds and storms, frees the accused from executioners, blinds demons and spirits, frees the imprisoned and enslaved, and disarms one's enemies. On a less religiously inspired note Guanyin also influences the tourist trade, for tourists flock to see temples of note for Guanyin's is described in the guide books as being the most popular.

But what has really made Guanyin the most popular deity in all of East Asia? Is it, perhaps, because Guanyin imagery is all pervasive and a constant reminder that she (for we must surely now be permitted to refer to her in feminine terms) is ready at all times to help those in need? There is no other figure who dominates the landscape quite as much as Guanyin's as this friendly face watches over devotees and visitors alike. But how much has this face changed over the centuries?

In what way have we seen other religious figures and cultural values contribute to the development of the iconography of Guanyin? In this final chapter we will review the changes that

have been made over the years. We will look at the past, in terms of the conclusions that can be drawn from the history of the changing imagery. We will also look at the direction the cult is taking in today's society to see if there is any evidence to suggest that other religious figures and cultural values are a continuing factor in the changing face of Guanyin in East Asian religions.

From the beginnings of the cult of Guanyin in East Asia we have seen how other religious figures, some Buddhist, some non-Buddhist, have influenced, moulded and have generally contributed to the development of the iconography of Guanyin. Even in India Guanyin, or Avalokiteśvara as he was then known, was influenced by other religious figures. While there are some convincing arguments to suggest an Iranian or Mediterranean influence, it is clear that the figures most responsible for adding to the development of Avalokiteśvara were Brahmanical figures. Thus the multi-armed, multi-headed figures of Ekadaśamukha and Sahasrabhuja can be attributed to the competing figures of Śiva, Rudra and Viṣṇu.

In the later multi-armed and multi-headed images, we saw that figures such as Amoghapāśa Avalokiteśvara were also influenced by Śiva, Amogha being one of the names of Śiva and the pāśa being one of Śiva's attributes. These multi-limbed forms included forms of a non-human appearance such as Hayagrīva who owes much to the Brahmanical Viṣṇu who subdued the creature Hayagrīva. Siṃhanāda Avalokiteśvara also possibly has origins that can be traced to an influence from Narasiṃha. This figure was a half man half lion who was known for his incredible power and strength. The Buddhist equivalents of these Brahmanical heroes provided devotees with Buddhist figures who had all the attributes and power of their Brahmanical counterparts. Frequently they were given more attributes and thus more power.

Feminine Buddhist forms such as Tārā and Hārītī set the stage for a sexual transformation of the cult once it reached China. But once on Chinese soil the translation of Avalokiteśvara's name to Guanshiyin or Guanyin made it clear to devotees that here was a figure who typified

compassionate assistance in their hour of need. Initially China received Guanyin in much the same terms as their Indian predecessors, as a male deity or gender free bodhisattva, but because compassion was perceived as more suited to a feminine figure or mother figure, Guanyin was gradually viewed as a feminine figure. This transformation was facilitated by Tibetan images which presented Tārā, previously a Brahmanical goddess, as a feminine form of Guanyin. Because the two figures were almost identical in pose and had similar attributes, lay devotees, most likely confused by the similarity, saw Tārā and Guanyin as one and the same figure. While this confusion cannot be said to be general as many educated Buddhist religious specialists were in no doubt as to the separate nature of Guanyin, the trend to portray Guanyin in feminine terms continued until in present day East Asia the majority of iconographical representations of Guanyin portray a feminine figure.

This feminine transformation cannot, however, be blamed on one influence alone. We have seen how many indigenous feminine Chinese deities such as Shengmu, contributed to the development of Guanyin iconography as little by little certain features and attributes of these indigenous goddesses were given to Guanyin to add to her status in the East Asian communities.

This status was greatly enhanced by apocryphal sūtras which provided Guanyin with a local history in order to 'prove' that she had been assisting devotees in their very area of residence for a very long time. These apocryphal sūtras and legends increased Guanyin's iconographical attributes and we have seen how in the story of Miaoshan, Guanyin borrowed the lion and elephant from Wenshu and Puxian to give to her sisters. These sisters have in the course of time been forgotten and their mounts identified with Guanyin. Thus in modern day East Asia statues of Guanyin sitting on either an elephant or a lion are a common sight.

Other attributes can also be explained by contact with other religious figures for Songzi Guanyin's motherly image was greatly enhanced by contact with the Virgin and Child imagery being



made in China during the sixteenth century. The naked male child in the arms of Mary was so in keeping with the Chinese tradition of the importance of male children that images of Guanyin were made in almost identical form to the Christian counterparts. This also saw the cross being placed on some images of Guanyin..

The influence of this Christian figure was also responsible for the Maria Kannon image in Japan which persecuted Christians had made as a substitute for their Virgin figures. This was at the time not difficult, for local figures such as Koyasu sama, Koyasu Kannon and Kishimojin were popular child-giving figures. But what is interesting about the Maria Kannon figures is that they did not have a lasting influence on the iconography of Koyasu Kannon. Unlike China and other parts of East Asia modern Japanese images do not show a Christian influence. It is interesting to note that one extant painting of Jibō (kind mother) Kannon was executed in 1888 possibly as a reaction to the influx of foreign influence on the Japanese child-giving figure. This Jibō Kannon shows all the typical iconographical features of a bodhisattva in the long flowing robes, the bodhisattva ornaments and despite its motherly nature it even has a moustache (Plate 133).<sup>172</sup> The liquid that flows from the vase held in Kannon's hand contains a baby. This explains why many people pray for babies to the white-robed form holding the vase.

There was also an amalgamation of some forms. Yulan Guanyin represented the suppression of evil which could ruin trade. Aoyu Guanyin was known to assist those at sea. Later these forms merged with Shuiyue Guanyin and Baiyi Guanyin Nanhai Guanyin appeared. Although most forms continued to enjoy a separate following.

But while many images took on features and attributes of other religious figures we have also seen how other competing figures have borrowed features and attributes from Guanyin. Within the political systems (both local and national) Taoist temple committee members have

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<sup>172</sup>Unfortunately not all the details are clear.



**PLATE 133**  
Jibō Kannon.  
Late nineteenth century.  
Kanō Hōgai.

searched for new ways of raising the status of their Mazu temples. Mazu now has strong links to Buddhist ancestors. In fact, to many she is an incarnation of Guanyin or of Longnü. To others she is Guanyin's sister. Not only has this 'history' provided Mazu with a 'legitimate' right to be associated with Guanyin but her iconographical features are changing to the degree that it is sometimes difficult to tell the two apart. This means that while Mazu may be taking on Guanyin's features and attributes, Guanyin is gaining another face. In the course of time and particularly in the next few centuries, if this relationship continues, the two forms will merge to produce, as we have seen happen in the last few chapters, a new form of Guanyin. Will this form be known as 'Mazu Guanyin'?

What evidence is there to show that this assimilation and absorption of other religious figures and cultural values is a continuing factor in the changing face of Guanyin in East Asian religions? One only has to walk down any street in Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Taiwan, Korea or Japan to discover the popularity of Guanyin imagery. In the backstreets of Singapore one can find row upon row of statues filling shop fronts. These are not tourist souvenirs, these are for local devotees and pilgrims from other countries. There are also many shrines and portable altars to be seen in shop windows (Plate 134), these emphasise that devotees may call on Guanyin from the comfort of their own homes. These statues and altars also emphasise that the 'face' of Guanyin is an ever present symbol of her miraculous saving powers. In Hong Kong, Japan and China another symbol of Guanyin's saving power is the number of teas named after her (Plate 135). It is to be remembered, after all, that one of Guanyin's functions is to cure all ailments and on the walls of one of the caves at Longmen we saw that one of the prescriptions was to quench thirst.

Recent stories show that the 'perils' have not been forgotten. John Blofeld (1977: 110-115) describes a recent story that combines another two very similar perils (robbery and being pushed

**PLATE 134**  
Shrines and portable altars.  
Hong Kong.



**PLATE 135**  
Guanyin teas from  
Hong Kong, Japan and China.



from a mountain) and which occurred in Hong Kong. A Taiwanese official who had been devoted to Guanyin as a child stopped worshipping her when his mother died. The circumstances of the mother's death were such that he did not consider Guanyin had looked after her. This woman was devoted to her husband and had provided him with two concubines to give him the sexual pleasure that she could no longer provide. At first there was no jealousy between the women, that is until the husband became infatuated with one of them and helped her usurp the mother's position in the household. Realising that her husband no longer loved her the woman lost all interest in living and died within one year. The young man consequently hated his 'second mother' especially when he married and she tried to cause trouble between him and his new wife. His opportunity for revenge came when he went on a family picnic on the day of the Pure Bright Festival. The family stopped for their meal on a hillside and while later strolling, he came across the woman. Realising that no-one else was around, he decided to kill her and remove and throw away her jewellery to make her appear the victim of a robber and murderer. At the same time that he had focused on the rock with which to commit this act, the woman turned around and realising what he was about to do, calmly faced him and said: 'Jiu ku jiu nan pusa lai' (Come, bodhisattva who saves from suffering and harm). This prayer to Guanyin so infuriated the man that he opened his mouth to laugh and went to seize her. Immediately he found himself paralysed, unable to move a muscle. Smiling the young woman left. When movement returned to him all thoughts of killing the woman had vanished.

If any evil one chases you  
And pushes you from Mount Diamond,  
If you contemplate the power of Avalokiteśvara,  
Not even a single hair will be hurt (Kubo and Yuyama 1991:304).

As Blofeld comments this woman "...had triumphed over death for no other cause than absolute conviction of the compassionate Bodhisattva's desire to save every kind of sentient being whatsoever" (Blofeld 1977: 114) . Even evil people will be saved by Guanyin although evil is usually transformed into good and in this case the young man's second mother subsequently

became a much nicer person.

As new ailments befall devotees, new ways of portraying Guanyin will continue. There is no reason to suspect that this will change as Guanyin heads for the twenty-first century. One good recent example of how these changes eventuate is to look at the boke fūji Kannon cult in Japan. As we saw above, pilgrimages are important to devotees and the Imakumano Kannon Temple is the fifteenth temple of Shikoku Sanjusan Kannon (Thirty-three Kannon of Western Japan). The principal image in this temple is Juichimen Kannon. This Kannon is called Kannon of Wisdom and is famous for the relief of headaches. But there is another Kannon in the temple known as boke fūji Kannon.<sup>173</sup> This Kannon is for blessing old people and is prayed to for the prevention of senility. Japan has a serious senility problem and so fifteen years ago boke fūji Kannon was made at the Imakumano Temple (Plate 136). Usually, as seen in Chapter 3, legends of the efficaciousness of a particular image for a particular 'ill' leads to the image's popularity. The opposite situation is true of the image at Imakumano temple where the image was made for a particular purpose as a response to a 'new age' (or rather old age!) problem. Hence there are not, as yet, any legends associated with this image. But as Kannon heads into the twenty-first century there are likely to be stories that describe Kannon's assistance in curing alzheimers disease, or making someone's parent ten years younger! This after all would only be building on existing folk cures, such as the eating of pumpkin on winter solstice to prevent senility. At the temple one can buy pumpkin charms with an image of Kannon printed on one side. One can also buy pillow cases which have been purified by a priest and are called boke fūji pillow cases.

Still in Japan, we can see another example of how Kannon has been given a new face, not this time from a religious figure but from a courtesan by the name of Okichi. Okichi, whose real name was Okichi Saite was born in 1841 and died in 1892, but it was not until after the Second

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<sup>173</sup>Personal communication with Yukako Kito.



**PLATE 136**  
Boke Fūji Kannon.  
Imakumano Kannon Temple,  
Japan.

World War that Okichi became famous through a play made about her tragic life. This young, beautiful Geisha girl at the age of sixteen years of age was ordered by the shogunate to become mistress to the first American Consul General to Japan, Townsend Harris, who was in Japan to negotiate the treaty of commerce between Japan and America. Okichi's presence was intended to aid negotiations. Okichi was shunned because of her association with an American and she began to drink to ease her pain. Later when Harris was sent back to America she returned to the Geisha scene for a while before managing a brothel in Shimoda. She never found happiness again drinking to hide her despair. At the age of fifty-one Okichi committed suicide by drowning in a river. Because of her life-style no-one claimed her body until a Buddhist priest from the Hofukuji Temple took her body and buried it. When Okichi became famous through the drama about her life, a Kannon statue was donated to the temple to pray for Okichi's soul. This was in the mid 1940's. At the same time an artist by the name of Tatsuo Tsutsumi made another Kannon statue for Okichi's departed soul. This can be seen in Chohrakuji Temple. This Kannon, however, is unlike any other Kannon, for it is nude (see Plate 137). Just why this statue was made this way is unclear. One theory is that the artist wanted to make this statue different from the statue in the Hofukuji Temple to draw people's attention to it. Another theory is that the nudity symbolises her life as the lover of Harris and the sacrifice she had to make. Whatever the reason for the nude statue, Okichi was deified by this image. And while it is certainly a far cry from the demure 'flat chested' images that were initially seen in China, one cannot help be aware of the similarity of the legends of seduction and prostitution that were seen in Chapter 5 in connection with Yulan Guanyin. In both stories the combination of beauty and prostitution symbolize the divine overpowering sexuality.

In various parts of East Asia other religious figures are still being assimilated into the figure of Guanyin. On the outskirts of Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China, there is a Hindu carving that





**PLATE 137**  
 Okichi Kannon.  
 Chohrakuji Temple,  
 Shimoda, Japan.  
 (Photograph Yukako Kito)



**PLATE 137a**  
 Okichi Kannon.  
 Chohrakuji Temple,  
 Shimoda, Japan.  
 (Photograph Yukako Kito)

has been taken from a temple and inlaid into the wall of a house. The local people apparently worship it as Guanyin. As can be seen from Plate 138 it is unlike the usual representations of Guanyin but it does certainly reinforce that many people do see Guanyin as a feminine figure. Nearby at Cao'an (Thatched Nunnery) a Manichaest carving is also worshipped as Guanyin (Plate 139).

As new images of Guanyin are made, some are being depicted as a modern Chinese woman. Plate 140 for example shows 'Mother Guanyin' nursing her child. Can scholars look at this statue and claim that the child Guanyin holds is never her own?

As discussed in Chapter 4 mother images of Guanyin have always been very popular and also in China I came across a carving of the constellations - the twins. This carving (Plates 141 and 141a) is prayed to by local women in order to have twin babies a boy and a girl. It is worshipped as Guanyin because it represents motherhood.

While motherhood is important to Asian women, there are some for whom a different life is preferable. Vegetarian homes are for those who have chosen not to marry and have children. The origin of these homes appears to go back to the nineteenth century where women organised themselves into sisterhoods and took vow not to marry. These halls were residential establishments for lay members of the Buddhist faith and for members of several sects who entered the Guangzhou region as a result of government suppression in China. These halls had an altar which was usually dedicated to Guanyin. Sexual equality was stressed and here men and women sat together in prayer. One sect was run entirely by women who sold religious literature aimed at conversion. One of these stories was about Miaoshan who was used as a role model for those who chose not to marry. Vegetarian houses still exist today. Plates 142 and 143 show one in Singapore that is run entirely by women. An image of Guanyin can be seen on the altar.

It is clear that Guanyin has played an important role for women in East Asia but more

**PLATE 138**

Hindu deity worshipped as Guanyin.  
Quanzhou, China.

**PLATE 139**

Manichaeist deity worshipped as Guanyin.  
Cao'an (Thatched Nunnery),  
Quanzhou.





**PLATE 140**  
Guanyin as mother.  
Mangshan,  
China.  
(Clayre 1984:90)





**PLATE 141**  
"Twin" carving worshipped as Guanyin.  
Gongxian Caves,  
Luoyang.



**PLATE 141a**  
Detail of Plate 141.



**PLATE 142**  
Women's Vegetarian House.  
Angmohkeok, Singapore.



**PLATE 143**  
Women's Vegetarian House.  
Angmohkeok, Singapore.

importantly she is accessible to everyone. Although essentially a Buddhist bohisattva, Guanyin has captured the heart of the masses in each corner of Eastern Asia, whether they be Buddhist, Taoist or lay Chinese or Japanese. Even non-Asian people have found solace in Guanyin's compassion and regard this deity as one to which they can turn in times of trouble.

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