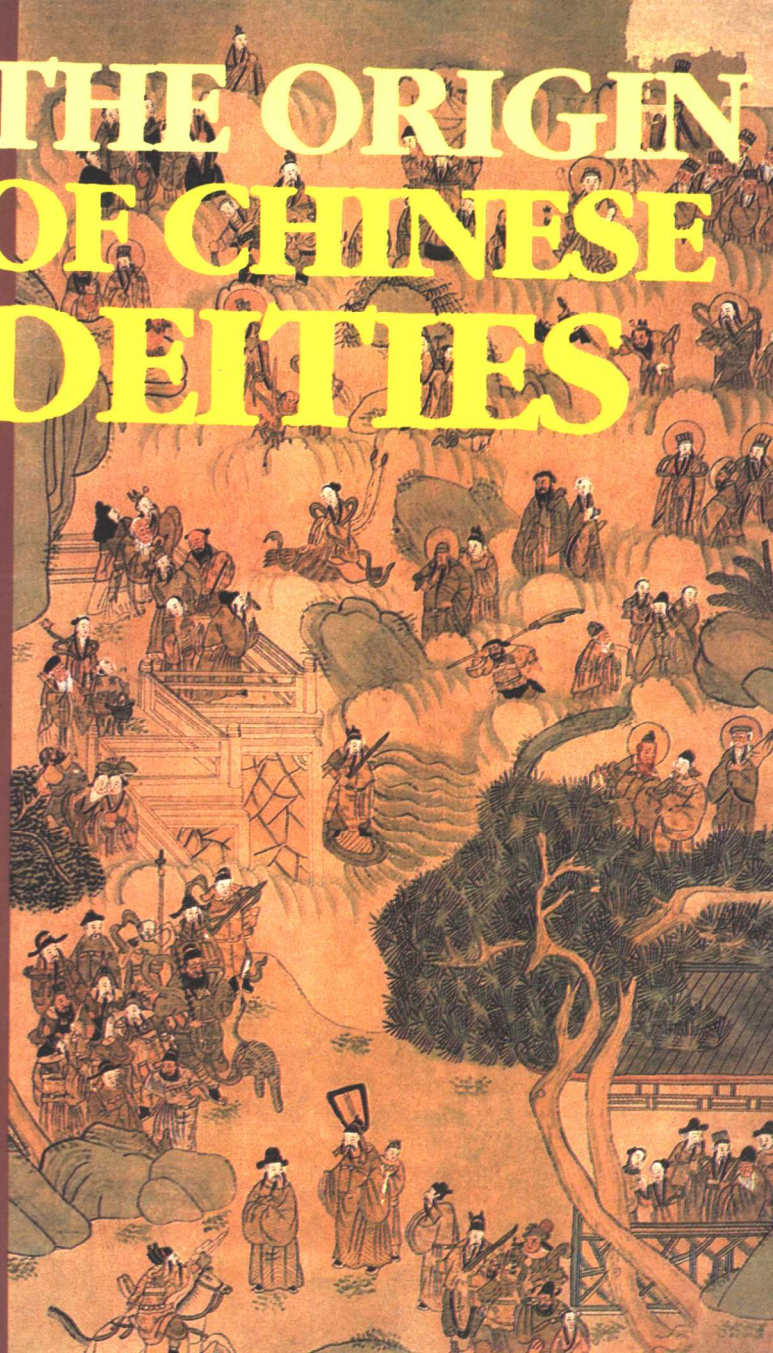


THE ORIGIN OF CHINESE DEITIES

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING



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Cheng Manchao

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Avalokitesvara—Saviour of All in Distress



Zhong Kui—the Ghost-Tamer

福臨門



The God of Wealth

The Kitchen God



Door Gods



Lord Guan—the Demon-Subduer



The Dragon King





Goddess of Heaven—Goddess of the South China Sea





The Eight Immortals

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Foreword

The so-called god did not exist before the appearance of the human race. It gradually took shape as the human species multiplied. Men not only needed food and materials for survival, they also required a spiritual prop in their lives, thus creating the god. China, with a long history, has a rich tradition of creating gods. Innumerable gods, demons, immortals and spirits were created and spread far and wide among the people. This book selects twenty-nine Chinese gods to deal with, one by one.

Men desired peace. They wanted to win promotion and get rich, to achieve longevity and they hoped for a spouse to give birth to a son. As a result, they fabricated various ideas of gods and deities to provide sustenance in their illusions. A survey reveals that China had a wide spectrum of folk beliefs, including divinities, spirits, totems, prodigies, omens, divinations, taboos and sacrificial rites. Some of the gods dealt with in this book took their origin in men's worship of nature. As they could not explain many awesome and inspiring phenomena in the natural world, they began to worship these as su-

pernatural beings. This gave rise to the existence of the gods of heaven, earth, fire, wind, rain, mountain and river. As human society developed, the ruler associated himself with the gods of the masses, creating the notion that the emperor had been invested by Heaven with the power to rule. Gods came in increasing numbers, with official titles, power, clothing, insignia of rank, and retinue, all similar to those used in the world of men. Finally, gods turned out to be everywhere and able to do everything. There was the Jade Emperor in Heaven, the King of Hell underground, the Dragon King in the water, the Village God, the Kitchen God, the Door God, the God of Wealth, the Mountain God, the City God and others. The god was not subjected to the natural law, but could exert profound influence over the human society. Both the authority of the sovereign and the religious authority simultaneously ruled the society. The gods discussed in this book were not all created by the ruler, nor were their titles granted by him. Some were outstanding personages who were deified after temples were built by the people to enshrine and honour them. These included Lu Ban, master founder of carpentry; Sun Simiao, King of Medicine, and hydraulic engineers Li Bing and his son. To these gods, especially at the initial stage, worshippers came to pay homage with more considerations to commemorate them than superstitious beliefs. Some other gods were neither worshipped by the masses, nor titled by the

rulers. They were simply created by writers with a gifted pen, such as the Eight Immortals and Jiang Taigong.

As a matter of fact, the appearance of the gods and the custom of worshipping them reflect one aspect of China's "popular culture." This is because the faith in the deity is not only a religious phenomenon. It constitutes an important, integral part of Chinese folk culture and customs, exerting a widespread influence over China itself, overseas Chinese, and even Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia and the Malay Archipelago. It is helpful to explore the gods, from which one can see Chinese folk culture incorporate things of diverse nature. It preserved tradition while not rejecting foreign things providing they suited the taste of the local people. The study of folk beliefs is important to the study of archaeology, history, sociology, psychology, and folk literature.

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AVALOKITESVARA— SAVIOUR OF ALL IN DISTRESS

If you visit a Chinese temple or monastery, you will often see the image of Avalokitesvara. Wooden gilded statues of this Buddhist bodhisattva with a thousand eyes and hands are found in the Guangji (Universal Blessing) Temple of Beijing, the Guanyin Temple of Qinhuangdao, the Guanyin Hill of Yangzhou, and the Xiangguo (Grand Minister) Temple of Kaifeng. As the most popular deity among the Chinese people, he has been regarded as a saviour of all in distress, or a bestower of happiness. Legends represent him as a sage who upholds justice, drives out evil, bestows children on the childless and fortunes on the needy, and often appears in people's dreams exhorting them to do good works and abstain from doing evil. Many people believe these stories and enshrine his image in their homes for regular worship.

The Origin of Avalokitesvara

The Sanskrit term Avalokitesvara is translated into