



## Myths and Legends of China

temple, and after an execution the presiding magistrate would stop there to worship for fear the ghost of the criminal might follow him home. He knew that the spirit would not dare to enter Kuan Ti's presence

Thus the Chinese have no fewer than three gods of literature—perhaps not too many for so literary a people. A fourth, a Taoist god, will be mentioned later.

### *Buddhism in China*

Buddhism and its mythology have formed an important part of Chinese thought for nearly two thousand years. The religion was brought to China about A. D. 65, ready-made in its Mahayanistic form, in consequence of a dream of the Emperor Ming Ti (A. D. 58-76) of the Eastern Han dynasty in or about the year 63, though some knowledge of Buddha and his doctrines existed as early as 217 B. C. As Buddha, the chief deity of Buddhism, was a man and became a god, the religion originated, like the others, in ancestor-worship. When a man dies, says this religion, his other self reappears in one form or another, "from a clod to a divinity." The way for Buddhism in China was paved by Taoism, and Buddhism reciprocally affected Taoism by helpful development of its doctrines of sanctity and immortalization. Buddhism also, as it has been well put by Dr De Groot,<sup>1</sup> "contributed much to the ceremonial adornment of ancestor-worship. Its salvation work on behalf of the dead saved its place in Confucian China, for of Confucianism itself, piety and devotion towards parents and ancestors, and the promotion of their happiness, were the core, and, consequently, their worship with sacrifices and ceremonies was always a sacred duty."

<sup>1</sup> *Religion*, p. 177

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It was thus that it was possible for the gods of Buddhism to be introduced into China and to maintain their special characters and fulfil their special functions without being absorbed into or submerged by the existing native religions. The result was, as we have seen, in the end a partnership rather than a relation of master and servant, and I say 'in the end' because, contrary to popular belief, the Chinese have not been tolerant of foreign religious faiths, and at various times have persecuted Buddhism as relentlessly as they have other rivals to orthodox Confucianism.

### *Buddha, the Law, and the Priesthood*

At the head of the Buddhist gods in China we find the triad known as Buddha, the Law, and the Church, or Priesthood, which are personified as Shih-chia Fo (Shâkyâ), O-mi-t'ô Fo (Amîta), and Ju-lai Fo (Tathagata), otherwise Fo Pao, Fa Pao, and Sêng Pao (the *San Pao*, 'Three Precious Ones')—that is, Buddha, the prophet who came into the world to teach the Law, Dharma, the Law Everlasting, and Samgha, its mystical body, Priesthood, or Church. Dharma is an entity underived, containing the spiritual elements and material constituents of the universe. From it the other two evolve Buddha (Shâkyamuni), the creative energy, Samgha, the totality of existence and of life. To the people these are three personal Buddhas, whom they worship without concerning themselves about their origin. To the priests they are simply the Buddha, past, present, or future. There are also several other of these groups or triads, ten or more, composed of different deities, or sometimes containing one or two of the triad already named. Shâkyamuni heads the list, having a place in at least six

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The legend of the Buddha belongs rather to Indian than to Chinese mythology, and is too long to be reproduced here<sup>1</sup>

The principal gods of Buddhism are Jan-têng Fo, the Light-lamp Buddha, Mi-lo Fo (Mañiêya), the expected Messiah of the Buddhists, O-mi-t'o Fo (Amitabha or Amîta), the guide who conducts his devotees to the Western Paradise, Yueh-shih Fo, the Master-physician Buddha, Ta-shih-chih P'u-sa (Mahastama), companion of Amitabha, P'i-lu Fo (Vairochana), the highest of the Threefold Embodiments, Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, Ti-tsang Wang, the God of Hades, Wei-t'o (Vihârapâla), the Dêva protector of the Law of Buddha and Buddhist temples, the Four Diamond Kings of Heaven, and Bodhidharma, the first of the six Patriarchs of Eastern or Chinese Buddhism.

### *Diamond Kings of Heaven*

On the right and left sides of the entrance hall of Buddhist temples, two on each side, are the gigantic figures of the four great *Ssü Ta Chin-kang* or *T'ien-wang*, the Diamond Kings of Heaven, protectors or governors of the continents lying in the direction of the four cardinal points from Mount Sumêru, the centre of the world. They are four brothers named respectively Mo-li Ch'ing (Pure), or Tsêng Chang, Mo-li Hung (Vast), or Kuang Mu, Mo-li Hai (Sea), or To Wên, and Mo-li Shou (Age), or Ch'ih Kuo. The *Chin kuang ming* states that they bestow all kinds of happiness on those who honour the Three Treasures, Buddha, the Law, and the Priesthood.

<sup>1</sup> See *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*, by Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy



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Kings and nations who neglect the Law lose their protection They are described and represented as follows

Mo-li Ch'ing, the eldest, is twenty-four feet in height, with a beard the hairs of which are like copper wire He carries a magnificent jade ring and a spear, and always fights on foot He has also a magic sword, 'Blue Cloud,' on the blade of which are engraved the characters *Ti, Shui, Huo, Feng* (Earth, Water, Fire, Wind) When brandished, it causes a black wind, which produces tens of thousands of spears, which pierce the bodies of men and turn them to dust The wind is followed by a fire, which fills the air with tens of thousands of golden fiery serpents A thick smoke also rises out of the ground, which blinds and burns men, none being able to escape

Mo-li Hung carries in his hand an umbrella, called the Umbrella of Chaos, formed of pearls possessed of spiritual properties Opening this marvellous implement causes the heavens and earth to be covered with thick darkness, and turning it upside down produces violent storms of wind and thunder and universal earthquakes

Mo-li Hai holds a four-stringed guitar, the twanging of which supernaturally affects the earth, water, fire, or wind When it is played all the world listens, and the camps of the enemy take fire

Mo-li Shou has two whips and a panther-skin bag, the home of a creature resembling a white rat, known as Hua-hu Tiao When at large this creature assumes the form of a white winged elephant, which devours men He sometimes has also a snake or other man-eating creature, always ready to obey his behests

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### *Legend of the Diamond Kings*

The legend of the Four Diamond Kings given in the *Fêng shên yen* is as follows. At the time of the consolidation of the Chou dynasty in the twelfth and eleventh centuries B C, Chiang Tzū-ya, chief counsellor to Wên Wang, and General Huang Fei-hu were defending the town and mountain of Hsi-ch'ü. The supporters of the house of Shang appealed to the four genii Mo, who lived at Chia-mêng Kuan, praying them to come to their aid. They agreed, raised an army of 100,000 celestial soldiers, and traversing towns, fields, and mountains arrived in less than a day at the north gate of Hsi-ch'ü, where Mo-li Ch'ing pitched his camp and entrenched his soldiers.

Hearing of this, Huang Fei-hu hastened to warn Chiang Tzū-ya of the danger which threatened him. "The four great generals who have just arrived at the north gate," he said, "are marvellously powerful genii, experts in all the mysteries of magic and use of wonderful charms. It is much to be feared that we shall not be able to resist them."

Many fierce battles ensued. At first these went in favour of the *Chin-kang*, thanks to their magical weapons and especially to Mo-li Shou's Hua-hu Tiao, who terrorized the enemy by devouring their bravest warriors.

### *Hua-hu Tiao devours Yang Chien*

Unfortunately for the *Chin-kang*, the brute attacked and swallowed Yang Chien, the nephew of Yu Huang. This genie, on entering the body of the monster, rent his heart asunder and cut him in two. As he could transform himself at will, he assumed the shape of Hua-hu Tiao, and went off to Mo-li Shou, who unsuspectingly put him back into his bag.

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The Four Kings held a festival to celebrate their triumph, and having drunk copiously gave themselves over to sleep. During the night Yang Chien came out of the bag, with the intention of possessing himself of the three magical weapons of the *Chin-kang*. But he succeeded only in carrying off the umbrella of Mo-li Hung. In a subsequent engagement No-cha, the son of Vadjrâpani, the God of Thunder, broke the jade ring of Mo-li Ch'ing. Misfortune followed misfortune. The *Chin-kang*, deprived of their magical weapons, began to lose heart. To complete their discomfiture, Huang T'ien Hua brought to the attack a matchless magical weapon. This was a spike  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, enclosed in a silk sheath, and called 'Heart-piercer'. It projected so strong a ray of light that eyes were blinded by it.

Huang T'ien Hua, hard pressed by Mo-li Ch'ing, drew the mysterious spike from its sheath, and hurled it at his adversary. It entered his neck, and with a deep groan the giant fell dead.

Mo-li Hung and Mo-li Hai hastened to avenge their brother, but ere they could come within striking distance of Huang T'ien Hua his redoubtable spike reached their hearts, and they lay prone at his feet.

The one remaining hope for the sole survivor was in Hua-hu Tiao. Mo-li Shou, not knowing that the creature had been slain, put his hand into the bag to pull him out, whereupon Yang Chien, who had re-entered the bag, bit his hand off at the wrist, so that there remained nothing but a stump of bone.

In this moment of intense agony Mo-li Shou fell an easy prey to Huang T'ien Hua, the magical spike pierced his heart, and he fell bathed in his blood. Thus perished the last of the *Chin-kang*.



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### *The Three Pure Ones*

Turning to the gods of Taoism, we find that the triad or trinity, already noted as forming the head of that hierarchy, consists of three Supreme Gods, each in his own Heaven. These three Heavens, the *San Ch'ing*, 'Three Pure Ones' (this name being also applied to the sovereigns ruling in them), were formed from the three *aus*, which are subdivisions of the one primordial *au*.

The first Heaven is Yu Ch'ing. In it reigns the first member of the Taoist triad. He inhabits the Jade Mountain. The entrance to his palace is named the Golden Door. He is the source of all truth, as the sun is the source of all light.

Various authorities give his name differently—Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun, or Lo Ching Hsin, and call him T'ien Pao, 'the Treasure of Heaven'. Some state that the name of the ruler of this first Heaven is Yu Huang, and in the popular mind he it is who occupies this supreme position. The Three Pure Ones are above him in rank, but to him, the Pearly Emperor, is entrusted the superintendence of the world. He has all the power of Heaven and earth in his hands. He is the correlative of Heaven, or rather Heaven itself.

The second Heaven, Shang Ch'ing, is ruled by the second person of the triad, named Ling-pao T'ien-tsun, or Tao Chun. No information is given as to his origin. He is the custodian of the sacred books. He has existed from the beginning of the world. He calculates time, dividing it into different epochs. He occupies the upper pole of the world, and determines the movements and interaction, or regulates the relations of the *yin* and the *yang*, the two great principles of nature.

In the third Heaven, T'ai Ch'ing, the Taoists place Lao



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water (by immersion), are supposed to cure sickness. This idea dates from the Han dynasty, being first noted about A D 172.

The second, *San Yuan*, dating from A D 407 under the Wei dynasty, identified the Three Agents with three dates of which they were respectively made the patrons. The year was divided into three unequal parts: the first to the seventh moon, the seventh to the tenth, and the tenth to the twelfth. Of these, the fifteenth day of the first, seventh, and tenth moons respectively became the three principal dates of these periods. Thus the Agent of Heaven became the principal patron of the first division, honoured on the fifteenth day of the first moon, and so on.

The third phase, *San Kuan*, resulted from the first two being found too complicated for popular favour. The *San Kuan* were the three sons of a man, Ch'ên Tzū-ch'un, who was so handsome and intelligent that the three daughters of Lung Wang, the Dragon-king, fell in love with him and went to live with him. The eldest girl was the mother of the Superior Cause, the second of the Medium Cause, and the third of the Inferior Cause. All these were gifted with supernatural powers. Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun canonized them as the Three Great Emperor Agents of Heaven, earth, and water, governors of all beings, devils or gods, in the three regions of the universe. As in the first phase, the *T'ien Kuan* confers happiness, the *Ti Kuan* grants remission of sins, and the *Shui Kuan* delivers from evil or misfortune.

The fourth phase consisted simply in the substitution by the priests for the abstract or time-principles of the three great sovereigns of ancient times, Yao, Shun, and Yu. The *literati*, proud of the apotheosis of their ancient

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rulers, hastened to offer incense to them, and temples, *San Yuan Kung*, arose in very many parts of the Empire

A variation of this phase is the canonization, with the title of *San Yuan* or Three Causes, of *Wu-k'ò San Chên Chün*, 'the Three True Sovereigns, Guests of the Kingdom of Wu' They were three Censors who lived in the reign of King Li (Li Wang, 878-841 B C) of the Chou dynasty Leaving the service of the Chou on account of Li's dissolute living, they went to live in Wu, and brought victory to that state in its war with the Ch'u State, then returned to their own country, and became pillars of the Chou State under Li's successor They appeared to protect the Emperor Chên Tsung when he was offering the *Fêng-shan* sacrifices on T'ai Shan in A D 1008, on which occasion they were canonized with the titles of Superior, Medium, and Inferior Causes, as before, conferring upon them the regencies of Heaven, earth, and water respectively

### *Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun*

Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun, or the First Cause, the Highest in Heaven, generally placed at the head of the Taoist triad, is said never to have existed but in the fertile imagination of the Lao Tz'ist sectarians According to them Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun had neither origin nor master, but is himself the cause of all beings, which is why he is called the First Cause

As first member of the triad, and sovereign ruler of the First Heaven, Yu Ch'ing, where reign the saints, he is raised in rank above all the other gods The name assigned to him is Lo Chung Hsin He was born before all beginnings, his substance is imperishable, it is formed essentially of uncreated air, air *a se*, invisible and without

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perceptible limits. No one has been able to penetrate to the beginnings of his existence. The source of all truth, he at each renovation of the worlds—that is, at each new *kalpa*—gives out the mysterious doctrine which confers immortality. All who reach this knowledge attain by degrees to life eternal, become refined like the spirits, or instantly become Immortals, even while upon earth.

Originally, Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun was not a member of the Taoist triad. He resided above the Three Heavens, above the Three Pure Ones, surviving the destructions and renovations of the universe, as an immovable rock in the midst of a stormy sea. He set the stars in motion, and caused the planets to revolve. The chief of his secret police was Tsao Chun, the Kitchen-god, who rendered to him an account of the good and evil deeds of each family. His executive agent was Lei Tsu, the God of Thunder, and his subordinates. The seven stars of the North Pole were the palace of his ministers, whose offices were on the various sacred mountains. Nowadays, however, Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun is generally neglected for Yu Huang.

### *An Avatar of P'an Ku*

According to the tradition of Chin Hung, the God of T'ai Shan of the fifth generation from P'an Ku, this being, then called Yuan-shih T'ien-wang, was an avatar of P'an Ku. It came about in this wise. In remote ages there lived on the mountains an old man, Yuan-shih T'ien-wang, who used to sit on a rock and preach to the multitude. He spoke of the highest antiquity as if from personal experience. When Chin Hung asked him where he lived, he just raised his hand toward Heaven, iridescent clouds enveloped his body, and he replied: "Whoso wishes to know where I dwell must

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rise to impenetrable heights" "But how," said Chun Hung, "was he to be found in this immense emptiness?" Two genii, Ch'ih Ching-tzū and Huang Lao, then descended on the summit of T'ai Shan and said "Let us go and visit this Yuan-shih To do so, we must cross the boundaries of the universe and pass beyond the farthest stars" Chun Hung begged them to give him their instructions, to which he listened attentively They then ascended the highest of the sacred peaks, and thence mounted into the heavens, calling to him from the misty heights "If you wish to know the origin of Yuan-shih, you must pass beyond the confines of Heaven and earth, because he lives beyond the limits of the worlds You must ascend and ascend until you reach the sphere of nothingness and of being, in the plains of the luminous shadows"

Having reached these ethereal heights, the two genii saw a bright light, and Hsuan-hsuan Shang-jên appeared before them The two genii bowed to do him homage and to express their gratitude "You cannot better show your gratitude," he replied, "than by making my doctrine known among men You desire," he added, "to know the history of Yuan-shih I will tell it you When P'an Ku had completed his work in the primitive Chaos, his spirit left its mortal envelope and found itself tossed about in empty space without any fixed support 'I must,' it said, 'get reborn in visible form, until I can go through a new birth I shall remain empty and unsettled' His soul, carried on the wings of the wind, reached Fu-yu T'ai There it saw a saintly lady named T'ai Yuan, forty years of age, still a virgin, and living alone on Mount Ts'u-o All and variegated clouds were the sole nourishment of her vital spirits An hermaphrodite,

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at once both the active and the passive principle, she daily scaled the highest peak of the mountain to gather there the flowery quintessence of the sun and the moon. P'an Ku, captivated by her virgin purity, took advantage of a moment when she was breathing to enter her mouth in the form of a ray of light. She was *enceinte* for twelve years, at the end of which period the fruit of her womb came out through her spinal column. From its first moment the child could walk and speak, and its body was surrounded by a five-coloured cloud. The newly-born took the name of Yuan-shih T'ien-wang, and his mother was generally known as T'ai-yuan Shêng-mu, 'the Holy Mother of the First Cause'."

### *Yu Huang*

Yu Huang means 'the Jade Emperor,' or 'the Pure August One,' jade symbolizing purity. He is also known by the name Yu-huang Shang-ti, 'the Pure August Emperor on High.'

The history of this deity, who later received many honorific titles and became the most popular god, a very Chinese Jupiter, seems to be somewhat as follows. The Emperor Ch'êng Tsung of the Sung dynasty having been obliged in A.D. 1005 to sign a disgraceful peace with the Tunguses or Kitans, the dynasty was in danger of losing the support of the nation. In order to hoodwink the people the Emperor constituted himself a seer, and announced with great pomp that he was in direct communication with the gods of Heaven. In doing this he was following the advice of his crafty and unreliable minister Wang Ch'in-jo, who had often tried to persuade him that the pretended revelations attributed to Fu Hsi, Yu Wang, and others were only pure inventions.

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to induce obedience. The Emperor, having studied his part well, assembled his ministers in the tenth moon of the year 1012, and made to them the following declaration: "In a dream I had a visit from an Immortal, who brought me a letter from Yu Huang, the purport of which was as follows: 'I have already sent you by your ancestor Chao [T'ai Tsu] two celestial missives. Now I am going to send him in person to visit you.'" A little while after his ancestor T'ai Tsu, the founder of the dynasty, came according to Yu Huang's promise, and Ch'êng Tsung hastened to inform his ministers of it. This is the origin of Yu Huang. He was born of a fraud, and came ready-made from the brain of an emperor.

### *The Cask of Pearls*

Fearing to be admonished for the fraud by another of his ministers, the scholar Wang Tan, the Emperor resolved to put a golden gag in his mouth. So one day, having invited him to a banquet, he overwhelmed him with flattery and made him drunk with good wine. "I would like the members of your family also to taste this wine," he added, "so I am making you a present of a cask of it." When Wang Tan returned home, he found the cask filled with precious pearls. Out of gratitude to the Emperor he kept silent as to the fraud, and made no further opposition to his plans, but when on his death-bed he asked that his head be shaved like a priest's and that he be clothed in priestly robes so that he might expiate his crime of feebleness before the Emperor.

K'ang Hsi, the great Emperor of the Ch'ing dynasty, who had already declared that if it is wrong to impute deceit to a man it is still more reprehensible to impute a fraud to Heaven, stigmatized him as follows: "Wang



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Tan committed two faults the first was in showing himself a vile flatterer of his Prince during his life, the second was in becoming a worshipper of Buddha at his death "

### *The Legend of Yu Huang*

So much for historical record The legend of Yu Huang relates that in ancient times there existed a kingdom named Kuang Yen Miao Lo Kuo, whose king was Chung Tê, his queen being called Pao Yueh Though getting on in years, the latter had no son The Taoist priests were summoned by edict to the palace to perform their rites They recited prayers with the object of obtaining an heir to the throne During the ensuing night the Queen had a vision Lao Chun appeared to her, riding a dragon, and carrying a male child in his arms He floated down through the air in her direction The Queen begged him to give her the child as an heir to the throne "I am quite willing," he said "Here it is" She fell on her knees and thanked him On waking she found herself *enceinte* At the end of a year the Prince was born From an early age he showed himself compassionate and generous to the poor On the death of his father he ascended the throne, but after reigning only a few days abdicated in favour of his chief minister, and became a hermit at P'u-ming, in Shensi, and also on Mount Hsiu Yen, in Yunnan Having attained to perfection, he passed the rest of his days in curing sickness and saving life, and it was in the exercise of these charitable deeds that he died The emperors Ch'êng Tsung and Hui Tsung, of the Sung dynasty, loaded him with all the various titles associated with his name at the present day

Both Buddhists and Taoists claim him as their own,

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the former identifying him with Indra, in which case Yu Huang is a Buddhist deity incorporated into the Taoist pantheon. He has also been taken to be the subject of a 'nature myth'. The Emperor Ching Tê, his father, is the sun, the Queen Pao Yueh the moon, and the marriage symbolizes the rebirth of the vivifying power which clothes nature with green plants and beautiful flowers.

### *T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu*

In modern Taoism T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu is regarded as the first of the Patriarchs and one of the most powerful geni of the sect. His master was Hung-chun Lao-tsu. He wore a red robe embroidered with white cranes, and rode a *k'uei mu*, a monster resembling a buffalo, with one long horn like a unicorn. His palace, the Pi Yu Kung, was situated on Mount Tzû Chih Yai.

This genie took the part of Chou Wang and helped him to resist Wu Wang's armies. First, he sent his disciple To-pao Tao-jên to Chieh-p'ai Kuan. He gave him four precious swords and the plan of a fort which he was to construct and to name Chu-hsien Chên, 'the Citadel of all the Immortals.'

To-pao Tao-jên carried out his orders, but he had to fight a battle with Kuang Ch'êng-tzû, and the latter, armed with a celestial seal, struck his adversary so hard that he fell to the ground and had to take refuge in flight.

T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu came to the defence of his disciple and to restore the morale of his forces. Unfortunately, a posse of gods arrived to aid Wu Wang's powerful general, Chiang Tzû-ya. The first who attacked T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu was Lao Tzû, who struck him several times with his stick. Then came Chun T'î, armed with his cane. The buffalo of T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu

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stamped him under foot, and Chun T'í was thrown to the earth, and only just had time to rise quickly and mount into the air amid a great cloud of dust

There could be no doubt that the fight was going against T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu, to complete his discomfiture Jan-têng Tao-jên cleft the air and fell upon him unexpectedly With a violent blow of his 'Fix-sea' staff he cast him down and compelled him to give up the struggle

T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu then prepared plans for a new fortified camp beyond T'ung Kuan, and tried to take the offensive again, but again Lao Tzū stopped him with a blow of his stick Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun wounded his shoulder with his precious stone Ju-í, and Chun-t'í Tao-jên waved his 'Branch of the Seven Virtues' Immediately the magic sword of T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu was reduced to splinters, and he saved himself only by flight

Hung-chun Lao-tsu, the master of these three genui, seeing his three beloved disciples in the *mêlée*, resolved to make peace between them He assembled all three in a tent in Chiang Tzū-ya's camp, made them kneel before him, then reproached T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu at length for having taken the part of the tyrant Chou, and recommended them in future to live in harmony After finishing his speech, he produced three pills, and ordered each of the genui to swallow one When they had done so, Hung-chun Lao-tsu said to them "I have given you these pills to ensure an inviolable truce among you Know that the first who entertains a thought of discord in his heart will find that the pill will explode in his stomach and cause his instant death"

Hung-chun Lao-tsu then took T'ung-t'ien Chiao-chu away with him on his cloud to Heaven.