

# A Comprehensive Study of the Three-Stage Divine Mirror Female Surname Divine Examination Debate: "Female Deity" and "Taoism"

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**Abstract.** Over the years, a three-part divine beast mirror that was discovered in Tomb No. 1 of the Hejiashan cliff tomb in the heart of Mianyang, Sichuan, in 1989 has drawn a lot of scholarly interest. The author further concentrates on the female figure in the upper section of the motif, researching the identification and connotation of this figure using the ever-evolving techniques of artistic and archaeological investigation. To identify the characteristics of the female deity from the outside to the inside of the three-part divine mirror and to support the argument that the deity is associated with Taoism, this paper will compile pertinent research from a methodological perspective and use a combination of pictorial and sociological research methods.

**Keywords:** three-part divine mirror, female divine figure.

## 1. Introduction

A special type of bronze mirror with decoration and inscriptions, of which there are about 20 examples, without chronology, date from approximately the late Eastern Han to the Three Kingdoms period or later to the Jin dynasty, is a bronze mirror with two parallel horizontal lines dividing the mirror into three sections, with relief figures in relief. [1] A heavenly beast mirror, the best preserved and most extensively researched of the three discovered relics, was uncovered in 1989 from Tomb No. 1 of the Hejiashan cliff tomb in the heart of Mianyang, Sichuan, as depicted in Fig. 1.



**Figure 1.** A three-part divine mirror excavated from a cliff tomb at Hejiashan

With the attention of academics like Wu Hong and Nao Hayashi, the scholarly community was able to further discuss and analyze the three-part divine mirror's issues because they had not been sufficiently studied in the earlier years. As a result, the overall research on the three-part divine mirror was primarily focused on the years 2007 to 2011. The discovery of a three-part divine mirror in Sichuan and other locations has caught the interest of Chinese academics, and a similar discovery of a similar mirror in Japanese territory has caught the interest of Japanese academics. Picture-based research methods are used by academics like Li Song, Narayama Mitsuru, Xie Mingliang, and Chen Changhong. Socio-historical research methods are used by Su Kui and Wang Yu. Regional art research methods are used by Wu Hong and Jing An Ning. Focused on two Sichuan excavations, a three-part bronze divine beast mirror believed to have been discovered in 1976 from a Han tomb in Yang'an town, Qionglai, and kept in the Qionglai Cultural Relics Conservation and Management Institute, Sichuan province, and a divine beast mirror discovered in 1989 in Tomb No. 1 of the Hejiashan cliff tomb in the central district of Mianyang city, Sichuan; and a divine beast mirror discovered, as depicted in Fig. 2.



**Figure 2.** A three-part bronze mirror of the gods and goddesses in the Jingzhou Museum, Hubei

The current scholarly consensus is that the three sections of the bronze mirror represent the three worlds of heaven, earth, and man, but there is controversy over the system of images of the deities in the upper section of the bronze mirror, and as scholars have explored the images in depth, the true nature of the images of the deities in the upper section of the bronze mirror seems to have emerged, and the naming has changed from the traditional name to the more recent view of the 'Nine Sons Mirror'.

The three-part divine mirror has received less scholarly attention lately, although the connection between divinity and Taoism is still up for debate. The essay offers its insights based on prior research and produces a thorough assessment of the study of the three-part divine mirror, concentrating on the three-part divine mirror that was discovered in 1989 in Tomb No. 1 of the Hejiashan cliff tomb in the central area of Mianyang, Sichuan.

## 2. The image of the "female deity" in the three-part divine mirror

Early studies of the primary deity in the upper section of the three-part divine mirror were primarily based on regional art approaches or socio-historical research techniques, which resulted in individualized findings. Huo Wei stated that the image at the top of the bronze mirror reflects a system of gods and immortals with the colours of the Bashu civilization in his 2000 publication "A Study of the Mirror of Divine Beasts and Related Issues Unearthed from the Hejiashan Cliff Tomb in Sichuan. "The bronze mirror with the following inscription was found in the cliff tomb at Hejiashan, Mianyang. According to the original excavation brief, it was assumed that the deity seated to the right of the central again in the upper section of the mirror was the emperor Yao. Huo Wei scholars therefore used the inscription on the bronze mirror that was discovered in the cliff tomb at Hejiashan in Mianyang as the primary justification for the possibility of either Yao or Shun, with Shun's possibility being more likely.[2] Asserting that the umbrella cover on the "three-part mirror" is a symbol of Laozi and that the umbrella cover and turtle seat are the "seat of Huagai," a religious object used in Taoist practice, the scholar Wu Hong, drawing on the opinions of Huo Wei, mentions the three-part divine mirror as a Shu mirror and combines the bronze mirror with the Five Dou Mi Dao in his 2000 book "Regional Archaeology[3] and the Reconstruction of the Art Tradition The umbrella cover and tortoise base are referred to as the "seat of Hua Gai," a sacred object utilized in Taoist practice, and the three mirrors are regarded as the sign of Laozi. The Invisible God - The Bit and the Non-Iconic Representation of Laozi in Ancient Chinese Visual Culture, published in 2002, further explored the relationship between the bronze mirror and the Tao of the Five Dippers and made the case that the main deity in the aforementioned idol was a symbolic representation of the deified Laozi. manifestation, to emphasize the invisibility and secrecy of the Tao. [4] The author thinks that the Wu Hong scholar's hypothesis is debatable to some extent.


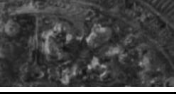




The supreme celestial emperor, Taiyi, who is hidden beneath the central Chinese cover in the upper portion of the image, is the three-part divine mirror, not Laozi, according to Wang Yu's 2011 thesis on the visual archaeology of the belief in Taiyi in the Han period.[5] In his 1973 book "On the motifs of the Chinese mirror II and III," the Japanese scholar Nao Hayami proposes that the "wage"—a symbol of the constellation of nine stars close to the North Star—is in the center of the upper section

and that the "kame"—below it—represents the northern sky with the North Pole at its center. The main deity seated to the right is the Emperor of Heaven (the North Pole of Heaven), surrounded by a group of images of the Emperor's concubines, ministers, and the stars. The turtle underneath represents the northern sky, which is centered on the North Pole.[6] According to Su Kui's "Preliminary Study of the Han Dynasty Shu Mirror," which is based on the "three principles and five rules" of morality and the "induction of heaven and man" prophetic worldview that was prevalent during the Han dynasty, as well as the opinions of scholars like Lin Minaiwu and Huo Wei, the main figure worshipped in the above "image of worship" is one of the celestial emperors, possibly an ancient "A celestial emperor, or perhaps an incarnation of an old emperor, is the major person adored in the aforementioned "picture of adoration," according to the text. [7] Takayasu Higuchi, a scholar, expressed skepticism on the "Emperor of Heaven," arguing that it should be positioned in the middle of the statue rather than to one side.[8]

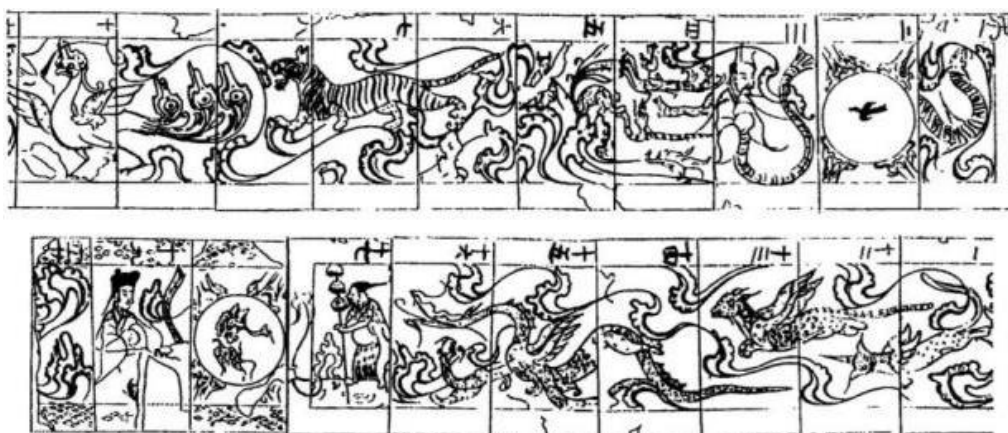
We discover that the theories put forth by the Emperors, Emperor Yao, Emperor Shun, the Laozi allegory, and the Eastern Emperor, Taiyi, have all been challenged and debunked by investigation. Consequently, who is this Lord God up there? The author conducted research as a result of related questions.

The scholar Narayama Mamoru proposes that the large deity seated on the front of the upper area of the bronze mirror is a woman holding a child in his 2007 book, "The Representation of "Sage" Pictorial Representations in the Sichuan Region in the Post-Han Period - A Pictorial Interpretation of the Three-part Divine Mirror." [9] Since then, a rising body of scholarly opinion has suggested that the primary deity is a "female deity." In 2009, Xie Mingliang supported Narayama Mitsushige's hypothesis that the woman carrying the child underneath the Hagai might be the "Mother Teacher" in his work titled "The Mother of Ghosts in China - Exploring the Origin and Transformation of its Images from Archaeological Sources." [10] Scholar Chen Changhong clarified the three-section divine immortal mirror's identification in his 2014 work, "The "Nine Sons and Mother" Images on Han Dynasty Bronze Mirrors: A Re-conceptualization of the "Three-section Divine Immortal Mirror." It is implied that the images of the upper area of the "three-section divine mirror" should be those of the "nine sons and mothers" by identifying the images and combining them with the inscriptions on the bronze mirrors, leading to the suggestion that this type of bronze mirror should be called the "nine sons mirror." [11] In Table 1, the author summarises some bronze mirrors in which the major god at the upper end of the three-part divine mirror is a "woman carrying a kid" or a "mother" image, and expresses her strong support for this viewpoint.

**Table 1.** The upper section of the three-stage divine mirror "Woman Holding Child" - a glance at the image of "Mother"

Serial No.	Excavation or collection	Images	The "Mother" figure
1	Mirror M1 from the Hejiashan cliff tomb, Mianyang		standing right, head in bun Draped in feathers, holding baby in her arms while nursing
2	Mirror excavated from M19, Baihuzui cliff tomb, Mianyang		standing right Draped in feathers, nursing her baby with both hands
3	Mirror excavated from Yang'an Town, Qionglai		standing right, head in a bun Draped in feathers and shoulders, nursing with both hands
4	Mirror from Xishan, Mianyang		standing right, wings on shoulders, nursing baby with both hands
5	Mirror from Weiyang District, Xi'an, Shaanxi		standing right, head in a bun Wings on shoulders, nursing baby in arms
6	Mirror from the Jingzhou Museum, Hubei		standing right, head in a bun Shoulders with wings, breasts raised

The "feathered body" and the "wings on the shoulders" in the above table are both representations of immortals. The concept of male left and female 'right' in traditional Chinese culture, as well as the act of 'holding' a newborn baby, is meant to justify the female surname God's status as 'mother'. The sage "stands in the south," according to the Su Wen - Theory of Yin and Yang. [12] Standing facing south was believed by the ancient sages to be right and submissive in terms of the human body. The left side of the human body is the east, which is the yang of growth and development, and the right side is the west, which is the yin of surrender, according to the "Heaven Corresponds to Man" and yin-yang theories. Men are the yang of aggression in the male-female relationship, whereas women are the yin of kindness. The man left and female right refers to the left being yang and the male being yang, and the right being yin and the female being yin. Due to the influence of "male superiority and female inferiority," "male superiority over female superiority," and other husband's power ideas in feudal society, all follow the tenets of "left is superior" and "east is great" in terms of respect for superiority and inferiority, seniority, and ranking. The "male left and female right" is a representation of authority and aristocracy. The yin and yang of the Fuxi and Nuwa bricks are reversed to the point of confusion and disorder in the imaging system, as the scholar He Xilin suggests in his review of the wall paintings in Bu Qianqiu's tomb in Luoyang in *Danqing of the Ancient Tomb - The Discovery and Study of Han Dynasty Chamber Murals*, as depicted in Fig. 4.[13] A development from yin to yang only occurs when the feminine force of the northern deities is correctly paired with the male power of the southern deities. As a result, the primary deity on the right can be seen as a metaphor for the "female deity."



**Figure 3.** Ridge-top wall painting in the main chamber of the Bu Qianqiu Han tomb, Luoyang (line drawing)

### 3. The identity of the "female deity" of the three-part divine mirror

If the "nine sons and one mother" hypothesis are valid, who is the "mother" in this case? In 2010 the scholar Li Song gave his answer in 'Walking back to images - misconceptions about map reading from two Han dynasty examples'. From the perspective of the function of the mirror and its user, he suggests that the three images reflect the 'order of heaven and earth', the 'gods and goddesses' and the 'ancient sages', and that the female deity seated on the front of the mirror is the god of fertility, possibly Nuwa. The female deity seated in the upper part of the mirror is a fertility deity, possibly Nuwa. In terms of the formal focus of the image, the overall connection, and the function of the image attachment, the argument uses the Seattle Collection mirror as an example. It is argued that the image in the above paragraph has a 'lid', but not necessarily a 'huge', and that the overall connection between the images is mainly the lid, the pillar, the ao, and the goddess. The "cover" is the sky that Nuwa mended, the "pillar" is the pillar of heaven that was broken by the Gong Gong, and the "ao" is the earth that Nuwa broke to create the four poles. They are all connected to the myth of Nuwa.[14]

Is there any other option for a "mother" except the "Nuwa" that the academic Li Song has suggested? Why does she appear in the upper portion of the three-part divine mirror if she is a female deity that

represents fertility or multiplying children? Mythological goddesses include Nuwa, the goddess of creation, Chang Xi, the god of the moon, Xi He, the goddess of the sun, Yao Ji, the goddess of the Wushan Mountains, Rayon, the goddess of silkworms, the goddess of war, the goddess of flowers, the goddess of drought in green .....And there are only two goddesses that can be corresponded to in the Han dynasty: Xihe and Nuwa.

### 3.1. Xi He

Primitive worship frequently included sun worship. The archetype of the goddess Xihe is first mentioned in the *Shanhaijing - The Southern Classic of the Great Wilderness*: "Beyond the southeast sea, between the sweet waters, there is the country of Xihe. There was a woman named Xihe, who bathed in the Gan Abyss on a square day. Xihe, the wife of Di Jun, was born in ten days." [15] There are also more Han dynasty portraits of Xihe holding the sun unearthed, as in figs. 4. Legend has it that the mother of the sun, Xihe, gave birth to ten sons and that the 'mother' was the god of fertility. In Liu Fen's book *The Perfection and the Fragmentation: The Different Cultural Implications and Philosophies of Life in Chinese and Western Mythology*, it is mentioned that Xi He is the typical image of a Chinese mother in "Xi He Bathing the Sun". [16] We know that in such a story, Xi He, the mother of the sun, sacrifices herself for her son and does her duty for her family and society, a typical image of a Chinese mother. Such an image of women is what Chinese ethics have always promoted and preached.



**Figure 4.** Provenance unknown The Sun and the Moon in the Hands of Xixi and Changxi

If the main audience for the bronze mirror was women, from the point of view of the user alone, there is nothing wrong with a classic, promoted image of a woman being placed on top of the mirror. But why was she in the main position? We must learn more about the historical social, cultural, religious, and philosophical perspectives.

In the *Book of Rites*, it is written that "The Great Brightness is born in the east and the Moon in the west, the division of yin and yang and the location of the couple." [17] It appears that the sun and moon were symbolic images of male and female, representing yin and yang, during the Han Dynasty, when Taoism was popular. One can wonder if the myth of Xihe's tenth day of life, which was handed down to the Han dynasty, had developed into a folktale claiming that the goddess had ten sons. The social standing of men skyrocketed once the matrilineal clan was eliminated, and having a boy at a time when reproduction was more challenging was not simple. It appears that Xihe left behind some signs of her presence in the centre position.

### 3.2. Nu Wa

According to the *Shanhaijing - The Great Wilderness West Sutra*, it is said that there are ten gods named Nuwa's intestines, who have transformed into gods and are found in the wilderness of Li Guang, crossing the road. (Guo Pu of the Eastern Jin Dynasty notes: "Nuwa, the ancient goddess and emperor, has a human face and a snake body, and changes seventy times in a day.") [18] It is said that Nuwa was the first human being of the Chinese people and was the rightful deity to bless the community. In the *Book of Customs and Traditions*, it is said that "when heaven and earth were created, there were no people. Nuwa formed a man by rolling yellow clay. She dug a rope into the mud and lifted it to create a man when the labour became too difficult for her to handle. The rich and the poor were therefore inhabitants of the golden soil, while the poor and the poor were inhabitants

of the rope. The goddess is also known as "Nuwa," and according to legend, "Nuwa pleaded to the gods and took on the role of a matchmaker for women, arranging weddings." As the mother goddess of the beginning and the creator god, Nuwa is especially honoured.[19] "In ancient times, when the four poles were abolished and the nine states were divided, the sky was not covered by both, the earth was not carried about, the fire was unending, the water was unending, the beasts ate the Zhuan people, and the birds of prey seized the old and the weak," according to the book *Huai Nan Zi* (*Huai Nan Zi*). In order to repair the sky, Nuwa created the five-colored stones, felled the ao to make the four poles, slayed the black dragon to aid Jizhou, and gathered reed ash to stop the lustful rivers. The four extremes were balanced, the lustful waters dried up, Jizhou was calmed, the cunning insects perished, and the Zhuan people survived. The sky was also repaired.[20] This is Nuwa's tale, also referred to as the Mother Earth. As the god of the North Pole and a symbol of fertility, the "mother" is on the "right" in the three-part heavenly mirror. In Chu's ancestor kings' temples during the pre-Qin era, Nuwa was a revered and significant sage who contributed to the temples' unique and unusual atmosphere. Following the Han Dynasty, Nuwa started to appear concurrently with Fuxi and stood for fertility and procreation. The three-sectioned divine mirror was used as a tool for looking at the face, which was carved with the god of fertility, to bless women with early childbirth and to prolong the incense. According to scholar He Xilin's book *Ancient Tomb Danqing - The Discovery and Study of Han Dynasty Tomb Murals*, Nuwa is the universe's yin god. [21] According to the aforementioned conjecture, we discover that only "Nuwa" would be the most suitable deity to serve as the principal deity in the upper section of the three-stage divine mirror.

#### **4. The relationship between the "female deity" of the three-part divine mirror and Taoism**

The term "female god" designates a female as the deity or supreme being, particularly a female supreme in myth and folklore. Most academics, including Yu Weichao, Huo Wei, Jing Anning, and Wu Hong, agree that the three-part heavenly mirror is a Shu mirror, which is thought to have developed during the heyday of Taoism. What is the relationship between Taoism and Nuwa if Nuwa is the female deity depicted in the upper stage of the three-stage divine mirror?

We must first identify Nuwa's iconographic characteristics. The study of Nuwa's image cannot escape the constraints of Fuxi, and the image of a human-headed snake with two gods crossing tails shown together seems to be a solidification of Nuwa's image. The majority of current scholarship sees Fuxi and Nuwa together as representing the cultural meanings of one yin and one yang. Fortunately, the monotheistic study of the god Nuwa is still pervasive in academia. The Tang Rui scholar discussed the entire system of Nuwa's images from the Han Dynasty to the present day in his article titled "The Historical Evolution and Contemporary Construction of Nuwa's Images," which was published in 2020. This system of images included flat images, three-dimensional statues, film and television images, and flat and three-dimensional images. The Western Han Dynasty tomb of Bu Qianqiu contains the earliest Nuwa image still in existence. This is where most historical research on Nuwa's images has its origins. According to Tang Rui scholars, all depictions of Nuwa in the Han dynasty are of human-faced snakes, some with and some without crossed tails with Fuxi. This conclusion is based on images of Nuwa found on tomb murals, portrait stones, palaces, and ancestral hall murals. According to him, Nuwa typically appears in three different compositional formats: one by itself, two with Fuxi, and three with Fuxi on either side of Xiwangmu and Pangu. A relatively small number of individually painted images of Nuwa have been seen, such as the one unearthed at Qikongqiao in Nanyang, Henan Province, holding a jade biscuit, and the one unearthed at the sarcophagus at Hejiang 31 in Sichuan, holding a moon wheel.[22] In summary, the unified image of Nuwa is that of a human body with a snake (dragon) tail, but controversy over the image of Nuwa has continued throughout the ages.

The analysis of the word "snail," which consists of the qualifier "female" and the phonetic part "lopsided," by American sinologist E. Scheffer, an expert on ancient Chinese goddesses, suggests

that Nuwa was originally a wet, smooth creature who lived in a wet area, likely as a frog goddess. Nuwa was most likely the goddess of frogs, according to the Chinese author E. Scheffer, who specialises in ancient Chinese goddesses. However, Nuwa may have originally been the god of puddles, wet, smooth creatures that lived in wet areas.[23]

Next, we search for a relationship between Nuwa and the Taoist female deity. In Taoism, the Old Mother of Mount Li is held in the highest regard. The Old Mother was changed into the ancient fairy of the upper eight caverns, according to the "Old Mother of Mount Li Xuan Miao Zhen Jing." Because of how the Douluo Heavenly God's form represents the Taoist body, it is also known by that name. It also goes by the name "Nine Spirits." Tai Miao Zhong Tian Fan Dou Lou Yuan Jun, as a result of taking a bath in the Nine Curves Hua Pond, which gave rise to the white jade turtle platform and the throne of the divine Xie, on which Dou Lou ascended and released her infinite light, giving birth to nine golden lotuses, and should be the mother of all the stars in the Big Dipper, guiding the seven elemental stars, covering the three worlds, and moistening. The Douluo Yuanjun is also known as the Mother of All Stars of the Big Dipper because she bathed in the nine curves of the Chinese pond, emerged from the white jade turtle platform, sat atop the Shen Xie throne, and gave birth to nine buds of the golden lotus. She also exercised comprehensive leadership over the seven elements of the star ruler, worked in the three worlds, and let virtue moisten the masses of life. [24] So why do you claim that Nuwa is Mount Li's Old Mother?

The Old Mother of Mount Li is referred to as the "Lady of Mount Li" in the Book of the Han Dynasty because she resided in the Mount Li region: "The King of Shou said that she was the Son of Heaven in place of Yu and that the Lady of Mount Li was also the Son of Heaven, which was not by the scriptures between Yin and Zhou." [25] The Lixian woman, known as Lao Mu, was considered to be a female immortal because she was also the son of heaven. The stone to repair the heavens was crafted here by Nuwa. "At the top of Mount Li there is the Temple of the Three Emperors, which goes without fasting, i.e., the Temple of the Wind and Rain Lost... and called the Temple of the Human Ancestor," according to Luo Tianchao's quotation from the Three Qin Records in the Class Compilation Chang'an Zhi during the Yuan Dynasty. He Guangyue clarified: "The worship of the ancestor Nuwa was transferred to Renzong Temple after the Yuan Dynasty because Nuwa is considered by the Chinese race to be the ancestor of humans. The township of Renzong in Lintong County gained its name from Renzong Temple, which is a settlement atop Mount Li's highest peak today." [26] The scholar Yang Liu notes that the Old Mother of Mount Li, also known as the Old Mother of Mount Li, is a female immortal portrayed by the cult of the goddess and is regarded by the people of Lintong as an incarnation of the goddess Nuwa, who, according to the Yin Shang dynasty legend, "King Zhou was intent, but the goddess was heartless." There are parallels between the mythology of Nuwa and the Old Mother of Mount Li, who likewise made up for Heaven with a stone and then punished a dishonest magistrate with the remaining stones. [27] It is stated that "there is relatively little colorful pottery, and its decoration comprises black or red broadband patterns, fish, frog, net, straight lines, triangular patterns, and bamboo leaf patterns" in the Main Harvest of the Second and Third Excavations at the Jiangzhai Site in Lintong, Shaanxi. The re-emergence of the frog totem offers important information and a chance to unravel the riddle surrounding the origins of Nuwa's traditions and the presence of the location of Nuwa's "succession at Lüi." The so-called frog totem of the Lüüshan Nuwa clan is a toad-like realistic drawing that was painted on the wall of a painted pottery basin and corresponds to the Nuwa, the Nuwa goddess of frogs, as identified by E. Scheufele.[28].

## 5. Conclusion

Through a rigorous examination of the images, the author has outlined the characteristics of the female deity image, which are very similar to those of the upper portion of the three-part divine mirror and possibly share some karmic linkages.

Based on this, the author further investigates the three-part divine mirror's identification of the female deity, taking into account social mores, folk customs, religious ideas, intellectual awareness, and inscriptions that correlate to Nuwa during the Han period (the rightful deity who blessed society). The author hypothesizes that she is most likely Nuwa based on her status and visual characteristics, while also searching for a relationship between Nuwa and the female Taoist deity and identifying Nuwa as the Taoist goddess, connecting the higher main deity with both the female deity and Taoism.

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