CHAPTER VI

GUANYIN: THE CONFIGURATION OF MULTIPLE IMAGES

Bodhisattva Guanyin retained the Indian characteristics in Chinese soil for such time as the Chinese socio-political conditions would permit. At the time of introduction of the religion, it was Buddha who was most important while the Bodhisattvas had only a secondary role to play. Hence they were depicted as the attending Bodhisattvas. There was no individual representation of Bodhisattvas. The triad would consist of Buddha with Padmapani and Vajrapani. The earliest such triad is in Western Qin in the caves of Binglingsi. Gradually sinicization of the Buddhist pantheon set in. Added to this was the introduction of new symbols and attributes of the Bodhisattvas. Although many of the Bodhisattvas had a feminine look, it was Guanyin alone who was transformed into a goddess and came to be worshipped as a female deity. She was and still is the most popular Bodhisattva. The patronage of Empress Wu to Buddhism and her obsession to be deified, helped to accelerate the process of depicting Guanyin in female form. Folktales and legends of Guanyin’s manifestation in the female form were one of the many reasons for the transformation of this Bodhisattva.

The Saddharma-pundarika Sutra also speaks of the various manifestations (found only in the Chinese
version of the Sutra because they are purely Chinese creations). The result was a plethora of Guanyin images in diverse forms not sanctioned by Buddhist texts in the period following Tang and particularly from the Song.

Taking various shapes and forms to preach was not restricted to Avalokiteśvara alone in the Saddharmapūndarīka Sūtra. In Chapter XXIII (Kern's translation p.401) Gadgadasvara preaches under many shapes he assumes. Yet it is Avalokiteśvara\Guanyin who has been shown in various forms.

My enquiry does not support the view of Diana Paul that "the origin of the female image of the Bodhisattva is usually associated with the introduction of Tantric Buddhist texts into China during the Tang Dynasty". Occurrence of female images preceded Tang Dynasty as is seen in Dunhuang murals of Sui Dynasty. This view is also supported by C.N. Tay in her paper on "Kuan-Yin, the cult of half Asia".

In the 33 manifestations of Avalokiteśvara/Guanyin in Saddharmapūndarīka referred to by Prof. Lokesh Chandra (which had become the popular cults in Sui (AD

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1Diana Paul, Women in Buddhism p. 250.

2C.N.Tay. "Kuan-Yin, the cult of half Asia., "History of World Religions, Vol. 16, No.2, p.151. She says " The iconographic transformation of Kuan-Yin from male to female, symbolic of maternal love and infinite compassion is traceable to the fifth century, during the north and south dynasties...." In support of this view the author has cited Fa-yuan chu-lin compiled in 668 which says that Guanyin manifested in feminine form in 479 to free the devotee P'eng Tzu-ch'iao from chains.
581-618) and Tang (618-907 AD) Dynasties), at least five of them namely White-Robed Guanyin, Guanyin of the fish basket, Leaf-robed Guanyin (Parṇāśabarī), Tārā Guanyin and Guanyin called the wife of Ma-lang can be definitely identified as female manifestations. According to him the 33 forms of Guanyin indicate the assimilation of Indian and indigenous deities and beliefs and is a continuing process. "The incorporation of Buddhist

3 Diana Paul has said that seven are female manifestations. op cit. p. 252

*Lokesh Chandra, The thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, IGNCA/Abhinav Publication 1988. He has provided the details of 33 manifestations seen in China, Japan and Korea, which are (of Matsunaga 1969:129)
1. Guanyin who holds a willow branch.
2. Dragon head Guanyin.
3. Guanyin who hold the Sutras.
4. Guanyin of complete light.
5. Guanyin of enjoyment.
7. Guanyin who sits on a lotus leaf.
9. Guanyin of the fish basket.
10. Guanyin as king of merit.
11. Guanyin of moon and water.
12. One-leaf Guanyin.
14. Guanyin of power and virtue.
15. Guanyin to extend life.
16. Guanyin of various treasures.
17. Guanyin of rock cave.
18. Guanyin who calms.
20. Anavatapa Guanyin.
22. Leaves-Robe Guanyin (Parnasabari)
23. Vaiḍurya Guanyin.
24. Tārā Guanyin.
25. Guanyin of the clam.
26. Guanyin of six hours.
27. Guanyin of universal compassion.
28. Guanyin called the wife of Ma-Lang.
29. Guanyin of prayer.
30. Guanyin of oneness.
32. Guanyin holding a lotus.
33. Guanyin of pure water.
goddesses into (Guanyin) and the natural propensity of women towards feminine forms, not to speak of several other factors, led to (Guanyin) in female form becoming dominant in China especially after the Tang and more after the Song Dynasty.  

Nancy Schuster Barnes says that the Mahayana Sutras "demonstrate dramatically that the man who clings to his maleness is not an enlightened being and the woman who does not worry about changing her sex is genuinely enlightened". She adds that this is a dramatic demonstration of "the meaning of emptiness". To support this view she cites the change of sex theme in the Vimladattasutra. The twelve year old Vimaladatta (Foshuo ligou shinu jing), the daughter of King Prasenajit of Kosala in reply to the accusation that she had not understood that no one can attain enlightenment with a female body, said "If I shall truly become a Buddha in the future, let my body change into that of a young boy." When this change occurred she said to the doubting elders that perfect enlightenment has nothing to do with the male or female body and those who have embarked on the path to the goal must leave all their sex based roles behind.

Schuster concludes that by imaging Bodhisattva as both masculine and feminine, he/she is "presented as the


ideal to be emulated by both women and men" and since
the Bodhisattva incorporates within his androgynous
self, aspects of both sexes, any attempt to insist that
the Bodhisattva is only masculine is misguided.

It is my view that all the occurrences and
incidents associated with Guanyin cannot be explained by
the androgynous aspects of deity. The view of some
scholars, that Guanyin is essentially asexual is also
not supported from what I had seen in Dunhuang murals.
It is true that in Dunhuang there are more asexual
images. But in Dazu Caves the sculpture is strongly
feminine and even the moustache and beard are absent.

In the Encyclopedia of Religions in Vol. 3 (pp.
138-139) mention is made that feminine deities first
appear within the Buddhist pantheon as handmaidens of
the Bodhisattvas. Thus Avalokiteśvara is surrounded by
Pāṇḍaravāsinī (white-clad), Tārā (saviouress), Bhṛikuṭi
(frowning) and Prajñāpāramitā (perfection of wisdom).
Tārā's appearance is said to be related to Tantric
developments. In the representations of the mandalā, it
is said that "fluctuation in sex is not uncommon in the
early stages of elaboration of the Mahayāna concept and
that in Chinese Buddhist tradition Guanyin merges with
Tārā so as to become a feminine deity." It is conceded
that no separate image of Tārā occurs anywhere in China
and all the attributes of Tārā seem to have been
incorporated in the concept of Guanyin in China. From
the reliefs seen in Kanheri and Kurkihar in India, it is
possible to conclude that the concept of Avalokitesvara having travelled to China earlier, all the attributes and functions of Tārā had already been taken over in China by Guanyin and hence the need for Tārā did not arise. On Tārā, I would restrict myself here, to say that no female form of Avalokitesvara is reported from Tibet. In fact Sir Charles Elliot goes further and claims that this confirms the idea that none was known in India.

A Nepalese inscription dated 792 supports the above view. "The chiefs of the Yogins call him the King of the Fishes (Matsyendra), the devotees of the female deities (śaktas) call him Śakti, the Buddhists call him Lokesvara. All honour to the being whose true form is Brahman." Avalokitesvara is here identified with the personification of the female cosmic energy.

7Sir Charles Eliot Hinduism and Buddhism Vol. III p.17

8 This is disputable as even some scholars on Tibetan Buddhism feel that the invocation Om mani padme hum is itself addressed to a form of Śakti called Manipadma.

9 Rolf Stein in his paper "Avalokiteśvara/Kouan-Yin- Exemple De Transformation d'un Dieu En Deesse-" in Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie 2 (1986): 17-80, in page 22 has given the date as 1682.
According to Alice Getty\textsuperscript{10} there is no "irrefutable proof" to solve the problem of the first appearance of female Guanyin.

The gradual evolution of the Indian goddess Ĥaritī, to female Guanyin which can be traced from Kashmir, through the Chinese Turkestan is cited as another reason by her. (Plates 142 to 144). Ĥaritī who had the qualities as "Giver of Children" lost her quality in China when this power was absorbed in the Guanyin cult then prevalent in China. Ĥaritī was then shown only as Yaksa invoked for curing diseases. This phenomenon is not restricted to Ĥaritī alone for many local beliefs and legends got absorbed with the Guanyin cult just as a mighty river takes over all the tributaries.

Woo-Bang Kang while discussing the stylistic

\textsuperscript{10}Alice Getty, \textit{The Gods of Northern Buddhism}, Charles E. Tuttle company, Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo. The various periods given by the scholars as discussed by her and others are

* Edkins- "the female form did not appear until after the twelfth century AD."
* R.F. Johnstone- "female Guanyin was known before the twelfth century.
* Paul Pelliot- Presence of the female form has been as early as the eleventh century.
* Poucher- Female Guanyin "may have been known" in China about the seventh century.
* Fenollosa- seventh century, as seen from a painting by Yen Lipen, a Chinese artist who lived in the seventh century.
* Kenneth Chen- Guanyin was looked upon as male through the Tang and Song Dynasties.
changes in ancient Korean Sculpture says\(^{11}\) that one of the stylistic characteristics of Avalokitesvara has been the body modelling. Originally expressed as a male, the form became feminized into a goddess like figure during the Gupta period. In Korea, while Buddha has been expressed in imposing and majestic forms, Avalokitesvara has always been shown in a sensuous form.

Idealization of human forms as a sacred devotional function is not restricted to Korea alone but in almost all parts of the world. According to Kang the idea of beauty especially feminine beauty is considered as a reflection of the divine and feminization along with multiplication are two methods of idealization of gods practised in Buddhism.

**Chinese Goddesses:**

Though the Chinese mythology has always been dominated by male gods and masters, the presence of female divinities has always been a part of Chinese folk belief.\(^{12}\)

Among them can be recognized four divinities whose collective popularity extends from ancient times to the present. These are Nuwa, the ancient Zhou Dynasty

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\(^{11}\) Woo-Bang Kang, "The Principle of Avalokitesvara and its Iconographical and Stylistic changes in Ancient Korean Sculpture", Symposium on Art Historical Studies 5. The Art of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara-Its cult images and narrative portrayals-organized by the Department of Science of Arts, Faculty of letters, Osaka University, Taniguchi Foundation-1986.

creatress, Xiwangmu, the Queen mother of the West; Guanyin the Goddess of Mercy and Tian hou, the Empress of Heaven. These four divinities have an interesting and significant relationship and collectively they represent a continuing "spiritual potency" and significance to the masses, religious and political groups.

Nuwa was most revered as the mother goddess. She created the first human beings, the nobles from yellow soil and base men from mud. She battled against floods and destroyed monsters. Nüwa was also associated with "match making" and was known as Shenmei. The wa character in Nüwa has been defined by the Shuowen as "the name of a holy and divine woman of ancient times who produced the thousand beings through metamorphosis."13 Nuwa not only creates beings, but also constantly changes shape, an attribute associated with Guanyin also.

Xiwangmu is a very popular figure and known as the Queen of the Taoist Immortals. She is represented as a beautiful lady attended by the "Daughters of Jade". She is associated with symbols of long life. In the Shanhai Jing (Xishanjing) she is depicted as a demon of plague who dwells on the Jade mountain. From the time of the Later Han, Xiwangmu had a consort Dongwanggong (Venerable King of the East). It was believed that a

great bird on top of the bronze column of Kunlun
shielded Xiwangmu with the right wing and Donwanggong
with the left.

There is a case of reverse transformation from
female to male in Chinese folklore. Gaomei was
originally a female divinity whose name probably meant
"Great or First Mother." Like Nüwa she was also a
match-maker and was generally considered as a male.
There used to be an imperial festival every spring for
the purpose of asking for children, thus endowing her
with the function of granting children.

There were also other famous 'water goddesses' like
the "the goddess of the Luo (Luoshen)" and also the two
goddesses of the Xiang river. In the Tang period the
last two goddesses were still being worshipped.

All these stories refer to miracles where a child
was born under peculiar circumstances. At a conceptual
level "Child giving" thus was not restricted to Guanyin
alone but was an attribute of earlier goddesses also.
But these very same miracles seem to have been
appropriated by Guanyin subsequently.

In another instance, the Songzi Guanyin is said to
be associated with Yaoji, the Taoist goddess, daughter
of Xiwangmu. In this form the "Princess of Fairy
Clouds" watches over women in their confinement and
cares for them during their childbirth.

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14 Yves Bonnefoy ed., Asian Mythologies, The
It is to be noted that Nuwa and Xi Wangmu both intrinsically Chinese, were totally integrated by the ruling hierarchy and rationalized in the context of the extant religious ideals. But the Buddhist divinity which was foreign in origin appeared to have overtaken both these feminine divinities as well as Tianhou. Forgiveness, mercy and compassion in the Chinese context were seen as primarily feminine characteristics. During the Tang Dynasty Guanyin has been portrayed as a female goddess and a companion to Amitābha or Amitofo, Lord of the Western Paradise. This led to the association with the Western Paradise and thence to the sharing of the characteristics with the Taoist Queen Mother of the West, Xiwangmu. Later the characteristics of goddess Tianhou were also absorbed by Guanyin and the latter was looked upon as a goddess of sailors and a protectress of those at sea.¹⁵

The conclusion drawn by Lee Irwin is that in Chinese society even an "imported deity" like Avalokiteśvara/Guanyin was subjected to "profound transformation" expressive of the underlying need for mythical feminine symbols in the context of dominant hierarchy.

¹⁵ As a goddess associated with the sea and the dangers of the ocean, the Putuo Guanyin became quite popular. This figure of Guanyin seen in Putuo Island is usually represented as a female figure seated in Buddhist fashion where she receives the prayers of the distressed. As a Sea goddess, she also conveys souls in the "Ship of Salvation" which she pilots to the Western Paradise.
The local folk traditions seem to have accepted the female transformation as consistent with the traditions of local goddesses. I would agree with this view.

This would lead to the conclusion that Guanyin became more popular in China as her all pervasive qualities offered solution to the problems faced by people in general in China and women in particular in view of a fixed sociological order of Confucian ideals and carried on for centuries.

My view is also supported by the following points made by Barbara Reed in the case of women.

-Women are in special need of salvation because of the impurities and inferiority of their female forms. In popular Chinese beliefs it is said that the blood of both menstruation and child birth is spiritually polluting. Guanyin responds to women who suffer because of their sex.\(^{16}\)

-In many legends, Guanyin helps women escape marriage. Marriage provided little security and the only hope was to bear a son and hope for his loyalty and generosity.

-Guanyin is said to possess powers to save women from sexual attacks, physical and emotional and social suffering.

-A gift of a male child was the hope of many female

\(^{16}\) This is not restricted to Chinese society alone. This belief is also prevalent in India. In China in a popular tale associated with Putuo island, Guanyin rescues a menstruating girl in need.
worshippers. After all, such a gift is promised in the Lotus Sutra (Saddharmapundarika).

Very many legends interwoven with local folklore on the miraculous powers of Guanyin abound in China. The interplay of such miracles with legends associated with pilgrimage sites gave further filip to the Guanyin cult. Added to these were the "visions" experienced by the devoted, local lore, literature and art which played an equally important role in the development of the cult. The book "Journey to the west" based on Xuanzang's visit to India in search of scriptures, recounts the enormous powers exhibited by Guanyin in saving the travellers from formidable obstacles and dangers faced by them. The legend of Miaoshan is well known. A few such examples are discussed hereunder. The legends are neither exhaustive nor representative.

The Legend of Miaoshan: This relates to the story of a girl who successfully resisted her father's attempt to get her married, sought her own destiny while bringing succour to the suffering people. There are many variations of the legend of Miaoshan. The story was first recorded in the Longxing Fojiao biannian tonglun chronicle, under the entry for the year 667 CE. A related story has been traced to a monastery in northern China where it was engraved in stone tablets in 1100 CE, by the local administrator Jiang Zhiqi. Eventually in

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17 I have relied mainly on the account given by Glen Dudbridge in The Legend of Miao-shan, Ithaca Press, Oxford University, 1978.
the baojuan tradition various popular texts have appeared and identified totally as the Chinese life of Guanyin. The most popular text however is the one written by the Buddhist monk Puming of Tianzhusi after a vision he experienced in 1103 CE.

The version given by Yu Chengxue which has all the main points, can be summarised as follows.

Guanyin was born with name of Miaoshan, the youngest daughter of King Miaozhuang. From her childhood, she followed the precepts of religion. When she came of a marriageable age, the King sought a husband for her. Miaoshan defied her father. Persuasions and threats from the King had no effect on the girl's resolution not to marry. In anger, the King sent her away to the White Sparrow Monastery with instructions that she should be compelled to obey.

The nuns tried their best and ill treated the girl to make her submit. This only strengthened her resolve. Since the nuns failed, the King set fire to the monastery. While all the nuns died, only the girl who sat erect reciting the sutra survived.

The King sent for his daughter in the hope she would change her mind. But finding her resolute, the king ordered her execution. As she was about to be beheaded, the sword broke into two and a tiger from nowhere bore her away.

In the forest where the girl was taken, she was tended by Yama with great respect. She saw all the
sinners and other suffering beings and recited sutras on their behalf, thus delivering them.

The princess was finally led to a place Hsiangshan where she made her dwelling. She pursued religious cultivation for some years. One day from afar she saw that the king was sick and not responding to treatment, and close to death. She took the form of an aged monk and told the king that he could be cured only by the arms and eyes of his closest kin. The king who regarded the two elder sisters of Miaoshan as closest, tried in vain to make them agree. But they refused.

Miaoshan who was in the form of an old monk said that he should seek advice from the "holy elder" from Hsiang shan. The holy elder, who was none other than his daughter, severed her own arms and her eyes and handed them over to the envoys. The king was advised to meet the holy elder.

When the king met the holy elder, she was indeed without arms or eyes and the body was covered with streams of blood. The king was grieved and was also startled to find that the holy elder resembled his third daughter.

The king besought heaven and earth to make his daughter whole again. Soon, the holy elder had arms and eyes by the thousand. And then Miaoshan bowed before him and urged him to practise good works.

Miaoshan ascended to the Western Paradise and entered the assembly of Buddhas. She perpetually keeps
the gate of deliverance open and observes the cries of all the world, past and present.

The legend of Miaoshan had a great appeal to women as it epitomized the independent female spirit and the courage to resist orthodox pressures from the family. Guanyin thus came to embody an appeal to women through her association with the legend by which the renunciation of dominant social values could be sanctioned.

The case of Guanyin of upper Tianzhōu: In the year 939, it was said that monk Taoyi while meditating saw a bright light coming from the stream. When he looked up he found a wooden piece with a strange fragrance. When the wood was cut, a "naturally formed Guanyin" appeared. The face of the image was compassionate and beautiful and adorned with jewels. In an unrelated story Qian Liu the founder of the Wu Yueh Kingdom dreamt of a woman in white who promised to protect him and his descendants if he was compassionate. After he became the King, he dreamt of the same woman and found that the only White-robed Guanyin was in Tianzhōu. He established a monastery and housed the image which became very popular. The Guanyin of Tianzhōu became known for her power in averting natural disasters and the oracles transmitted by the deity to the pilgrims in dreams. Some legends relating to Putuoshan given by Yu Chunfang
Yu gives ample evidence of miracles and stories contributing to the "domestication and sinicization" of Guanyin. The story in Putuo bao juan mentioned Guanyin of having appeared in the form of a poor monk before one Wang family seeking donations to build the Guanyin hall. Since the parents passed away, the responsibility fell on the two sons. One of them, had to sell all his jewellery, grain, land and also his son and daughter. The daughter eventually became an empress and the parents had the good fortune to go to the Western Paradise. The other son who refused to make any donation was still saved by Guanyin in view of his past good deeds. While the son Yuyin was out, Guanyin assumed the form of Yuyin and took up residence in the house. The real son soon returned and found that his place had been taken up by someone else. He took the matter to the court but of no avail. He remembered his other brother's devotion to Guanyin and set out for Putuo Shan which he reached after many trials and tribulations. He was aided by Guanyin who appeared in the form of an old lady. The wife of Yuyin who was driven to despair, tried to commit suicide by jumping into the ocean was only saved by Guanyin. She then became a devotee of the goddess.

In another story, a Guangzhou merchant on his way

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back from Japan in a ship dreamed of a giant who asked to borrow his ship to carry a huge bone. A big storm occurred and the ship in which the trader was travelling was about to sink. Then all of a sudden the storm subsided and the trader landed safely in Putao. The trader immediately set forth for the Guanyin temple where he saw the statue of a heavenly King whose leg had become detached and looked exactly like the giant bone that had appeared to him in the dream.

This study will not be complete without discussing some of the theories put forward by scholars on the sex transformation of Guanyin.

Alice Getty" has made a distinction between worshippers who "pray to the divinity as a goddess of mercy", while the priests and the more educated classes worship the god as a masculine deity.

The reason given by Getty for the latter, looking upon Guanyin as a male is based on the myth that Guanyin is believed to dwell on the right side of Amitābha in the Western Paradise of Sukhāvatī, where no women can enter without

\[19\] Alice Getty, The Gods of Northern Buddhism, Charles E.Tuttle Co. 1988, p.90

\[20\] Alice Getty has pointed out that in the arts the male form of Guanyin can be distinguished from the female form by the presence of a bird. But neither in the icons seen in India or in the Dunhuang murals there are depictions of birds to distinguish the sex.
attaining masculinity through merit.\(^{21}\)

Getty has quoted Professor Lloyd\(^{22}\) who had said in the book "Creed of Half Japan" that Kwannon was "non-sexual, or bisexual, while in "Shinran", Lloyd had again said "It is a mistake to speak of Kwannon as a female deity. Kwannon is the son of Amitābha, capable of appearing in many forms, male or female, human or animal, according to circumstances. But he is never manifested except as a means of practically demonstrating the divine compassion for a suffering creation."\(^{23}\)

It is true that the chapter on Guanyin (Chapter 24 or 25 depending on the translation) in Saddharmapuṇḍarīka mentions of Guanyin taking many different forms according to the circumstances. We have seen that this change of form to suit the circumstances is not restricted to Guanyin alone as Gadgadaśvara in

\(^{21}\)This has been referred to by Diana Paul also in *Women in Buddhism*,. She has quoted the famous thirty-fourth vow on the desired state of women in Pure Land which is reproduced below.

"O Bhagwan, if, after I have obtained Bodhi, women in immeasurable, innumerable, inconceivable, immense Buddha countries on all sides, after having heard my name, should allow carelessness to arise, should not turn their thoughts toward Bodhi, should, when they are free from birth, not despise their female nature: and if they, being born again should assume a second female nature, then may I not obtain the highest knowledge:

\(^{22}\)Ibid. Getty, p.90.

\(^{23}\)John Blofeld puts differently and says that the mere fact that Avalokiteśvara can take different forms including that of a woman does not make him a feminine Bodhisattva.
the chapter preceding the one on Guanyin is also mentioned as taking different forms.\textsuperscript{24}

The French Sinologist Maspero\textsuperscript{25} has suggested an explanation for the transformation of Avalokitesvara into a female form. Mahayana Buddhism had always considered enlightenment as the conjunction of wisdom and compassion.\textsuperscript{26} Symbolically, in Tantric Buddhism, wisdom is considered to be male and compassion female. With the introduction of Tantric Buddhism in eighth century made popular by many Tantric masters who were active at that time, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were provided with female consorts.\textsuperscript{27} The consort of Avalokitesvara is the white Tara, or in Sanskrit Pāṇḍaravāsinī (clad in white). From here two explanations are given by Maspero. One, that in the art of Tang Dynasty many paintings called Baiyi Guanyin (White-robed Guanyin) have been found. The inspiration for such white clad figures could have been from the concept of Pāṇḍaravāsinī. Two, that the white clad Tara

\textsuperscript{24} Also given verbatim in Chapter 2 of this study.
\textsuperscript{26} When I spoke to Mr. Sun Xiu Shen, the Research Scholar of Dunhuang Academy, he had a slightly different view. According to him Guanyin was Meditation and wisdom., \textit{Ding} and \textit{Hui}.
\textsuperscript{27} Kenneth Chen, \textit{The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism}, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey p.7. It is not clear whether Kenneth Chen agrees with the theory put forward by Maspero. But a reading of the whole paragraph in page 7 gives the impression that he subscribes to the theory.
or पाण्डरवासिनी was associated with the mandala Garbhakośadhatu, or the Womb Element Treasury. This connection with the womb could have led the "Chinese to evolve the concept of the deity as the giver of children". This is possible as the Lotus Sutra expressly mentions that a woman's wishes to get a son or daughter will be fulfilled if she prays to Avalokitesvara. This concept is also developed in the Songzi Guanyin.²⁸

Another possibility mentioned is that the concept of Songzi Guanyin developed out of the theory that Avalokitesvara was looked upon as the giver of children.

The core of Maspero's theory is based on the presumption that no female form of Guanyin existed prior to Tang period. My study from the visual point of view indicates that this position is not true. There is evidence to show that the female form of Guanyin was noticed even in the Northern and Southern Dynasties and Sui Dynasty. For example, such a figure is seen in Cave No. 420 in Dunhuang murals (Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, in 5 vols produced by the Dunhuang Academy).

The most authoritative pronouncement on the feminization of the Bodhisattvas has come from Prof. Duan Wenjie in the paper presented at the International seminar on "Cave Art of India and China" in New Delhi.

²⁸This is also implied in the Taoist goddesses worshipped in China. A detailed discussion on the ancient female goddesses has been made in subsequent paragraphs.
in November, 1991. An extract of the paper relating to feminization is reproduced below.

Cave art originated from India. In Indian caves, the body proportions, postures, actions and facial expressions of the figures were all created in a realistic manner, but at the same time, highly imaginative. The figures show a strong sex distinction in their physique and expression: the male figures with plump faces, big eyes, long brows, thick lips, full breasts, slim waists, broad hips and bare feet. The sex organs of male and female figures were also clearly shown. The Kucan figures had inherited this style but decreased the appearance of naked deities. After entering Gaocheng, the Indian Bodhisattvas lost their sex distinctions. The eight categories of supernatural beings present behind the Buddha also lacked distinctions of age and sex. This feature may be observed in the figures of a majority of the early Dunhuang caves. On the one hand it conformed with the Buddhist preaching that in Buddhakshetra there is no sex distinction, and on the other hand it also conformed to Confucian value system which shunned physiological idiosyncracies of the sexes and regarded the exhibition of nudity as an injury to customs and morality. From the Sui Dynasty onwards, the Bodhisattvas began to go through a clear process of

29This is at slight variance with what has been discussed earlier. Entry into Western Paradise is said to be only by becoming a male.
feminization. The faces of the deities became plump and changing.... The figures of Bodhisattvas painted by Zhao Gongyu were colourful, soft and beautiful, with mysterious clothes and beautiful eyes, like those of the ladies. People lamented that the real purpose of painting Bodhisattvas was lost. Both the Dunhuang and Heartland painters made the images of Bodhisattvas more feminine and worldly in order to "please the viewers." The Dunhuang murals bear witness to this trend.

Another point of Maspero that the Baiyi Guanyin is an evolution of the white clad Tārā or Pāṇḍaravāsini is also disputable as there should be some evidence of evolution of the white clad Tārā (Pāṇḍaravāsini) into the white clad Guanyin. An examination of most of the figurines of Dunhuang do not give any hint of white clad Tārā in any of the depictions. Even before Guanyin became a prominent figure in Dunhuang Murals, Buddha was shown as Bayifo. The inference cannot be drawn that Pāṇḍaravāsini is the inspiration for Bayifo. Pāṇḍaravāsini is one of the names for Pāṇḍara, consort of Amitabha. She is also called Pandaravasini.

Her form and nature are described thus:

"In the Vayu (north-west) corner on the orb of the moon there is a Pandaravasini originating from the (red) germ syllable Pam. She is red in colour and has the Padma (lotus) as her recognition symbol. She is the embodiment of the element of Fire. She belongs to the Lotus family and is full of attachment."

Images and paintings of this goddess are rare.

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30 B. Bhattacharyya in his book Indian Buddhist Iconography describes Pandara who is the spiritual consort of Amitabha. She is also called Pandaravasini. Her form and nature are described thus:

"In the Vayu (north-west) corner on the orb of the moon there is a Pandaravasini originating from the (red) germ syllable Pam. She is red in colour and has the Padma (lotus) as her recognition symbol. She is the embodiment of the element of Fire. She belongs to the Lotus family and is full of attachment."

Images and paintings of this goddess are rare.
of Amitābha Buddha.

Avalokiteśvara's association is not with Tara alone. In Mañjuśrīmulakalpa, Avalokiteśvara is associated not only with white Tara, but also Bhrikuti, Prajñāpāramitā, Tathāgata-locana and Usnisarāja (lady of the wisdom bump). Similarly female counterparts are noticed for other Bodhisattvas. Sarasvati was considered the female expression of Mañjuśrī. Pāṇḍaravāsinī is said to be the consort of Amitābha.

Songzi Guanyin (Giver of sons) is a native concept of the deity and unrelated to any evolution from other gods/goddesses. A typical example of Songzi Guanyin has been that of the Cox collection of the Qing Dynasty (Pl.137). Here the deity holds a little boy whose hands are folded in a gesture of adoration, in the ānjalī mudrā, with an expression which could be termed as "warm and tender", typical of the countenance of women.

There is another aspect to this form. Hariti, a Hindu Goddess, a protectress of Children was said to be originally an ogress. The legend, according to Samyuktavastu, said that once Hariti decided to capture and eat all the children in Rajgriha. When the bereaved parents approached the Buddha, he hid the youngest son under his begging bowl. When Hariti did not find her beloved son, she searched for him in all the four directions and was finally advised by the Vaiśravana, the Guardian king of the east, that she should pray to the Buddha. The Buddha converted her and she in turn
became the protectress of children. Ĥaritī cult was very popular in China during the Tang period and in Tibet. In Tibet she was considered not only as the "Giver of Children" but also as the "Bestower of Wealth". According to Alice Getty, in China, Ĥaritī was never looked upon as a "giver of children", but was invoked to ward off ill-health or to be cured of disease. But it appears that the reason could be that the functions of Ĥaritī were taken over and assimilated by Guanyin (Alice Getty) just as has been done in the case of ancient goddesses.

John Blofeld has explained the feminization of Guanyin in a manner akin to that of Maspero. According to him, the reasons should be looked from that of Tārā who is looked as "a beautiful female divinity able to manifest herself in twenty-one different forms for the sake of succouring sentient beings." In particular, Tārā has two main functions: a) rescuing human beings from woes and b) assist them in ridding themselves of the delusions binding them. Blofeld believes that these two are the very functions of Guanyin also, although it is seen that functions of Guanyin are multifarious encompassing so many different aspects of human life. Tārā is not widely known in China or Japan and it is unlikely according to Blofeld

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31 Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism.*, p.86

that "such an attractive being" supported by Buddhist texts would have been ignored by the Chinese unless they had some other means of portraying compassion. The Chinese "have always been disposed to envisage friendly divinities in idealized human form." Since the 'bizarre' forms of Avalokitesvara with eleven heads and thousand hands were alien to the humanistic Chinese, the winsome Tara now as a "sweet faced matron", now as a "winsome maiden" would have been more appealing. As Avalokitesvara the Bodhisattva of compassion could not be ignored, the "mediator and the artists" would have hit upon the idea of visualizing Guanyin in a form similar to Tara's; Blofeld cites three early paintings of Guanyin (Kwannon), where posture and mudras were similar to that of Tara. Appearance of Guanyin in the British Museum (he has not specified the details as to the place or period etc of both the Japanese and the British ones) also has the posture and mudras of Tara. These images belong to the era "where the forms of Tara and Guanyin began to merge".

The various forms of Avalokitesvara with thousand arms etc cannot be considered as "bizarre". Hajime

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33 This is not restricted to the Chinese alone. In Hinduism too, the benevolent gods have been given ideal human expressions.

34 The dictionary meaning of the "merge" used by Blofeld is "to combine, blend or unite gradually so as to blur the individuality or individual identity of." (The Random House Dictionary) If this is what is meant there should be transition stages of both Tara and white robed Guanyin.
Nakamura has pointed out that the Thousand-armed and thousand-eyed Avalokiteśvara figures are not monstrous at all. Rather these point to some kind of succession of various actions in time, indicative of the movement of various symbolism. I would add that it all depends on the viewer. The merger of Tārā with that of Guanyin according to Blofeld took place before the advent of the legend of Miaoshan, that is before 1100 AD. This presupposes that in China, the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed variety was only seen before the total feminization of Avalokiteśvara. A natural corollary could be that no "bizarre" forms of Avalokiteśvara can be seen after the emergence of female Guanyin and at any rate after the popularization of Miaoshan legend.

My study does not support these assumptions. Firstly, the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed variety of Bodhisattva are noticed in the Dunhuang caves even in the Yuan period and since the paintings in Dunhuang have been in situ there could be no question of mistaking the period of such paintings. In particular, in Cave

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36 This statement is not surprising, as the reaction of an oriental to that of a westerner would differ on seeing such forms with thousand hands and eyes.

37 This has been referred to in Chapter 5 where the legend of Miaoshan has been dealt with. According to Dudbridge, the legend is supposed to have begun in 1100 AD.
no. 3, the north and south walls portray the eleven headed thousand-armed and thousand-eyed Avalokitesvara.  

Secondly, it is also open to question whether all the depictions of feminine forms of Guanyin have the same mudrās as that of Tārā. Tārā was a late entry into the Buddhist pantheon. Initially the inspiration was Durga of the Hindu pantheon, being the consort of Śiva. Durga is also an independent entity by herself and sometimes as powerful as Śiva. It is not surprising that Tārā has also been endowed with similar attributes.

It is to be noted that there is no evidence of the appearance of Tārā before the fifth century A.D. The first translation of Saddharmapundarīka into Chinese in the third century does not mention Tārā. She is mentioned as an emanation of Avalakitesvara in the Mahāvairocana Sūtra (Da ri jing), translated into Chinese by Subhakarasimha who went to China in AD 724 and died in A.D. 735. If we are to accept Blofeld’s view that feminization of Guanyin is an evolution of Tārā, it has to be only after 724 A.D.i.e. after High

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38 For detailed description, see Dunhuang Art Through the Eyes of Duan Wenjie, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts/Abinav Publications., 1994 and also the Chinese publication where a more detailed account of Cave No. 3 has been given.

Tang. This is not the case.

The familiar form of Tara is with 'utpala' in her left hand and the 'vara' mudra in the right hand (boon giving). A slightly different view is expressed by Sir. Charles Eliot in his book "Hinduism and Buddhism". He has said that Guanyin is not a male deity like Krishna, but a "strong, bright spirit, like the Christian archangels above sexual distinctions. Female form of Guanyin according to him is found only in China which later spread to Japan. It was probably "facilitated by the worship of Tara and Hariti. The latter is frequently represented as caressing a child." In his view, the Chinese religious sentiment required a Madonna and it is not unnatural if the god of mercy who was reputed to assume many shapes and to give sons to the childless, came to be thought of chiefly in a feminine form.

Dr. Leo Wieger, in his well known book of Chinese religious beliefs and philosophical opinions has said that if Guanyin is shown with female characteristics, it is because of the virtue of the power to take an

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40 Mallar Ghosh explains the significance—that the water lily blooms after sunset while the lotus blooms in the day. The symbol of Avalokiteśvara and that of Tara encompasses both day and night and they thus complement each other to bring relief to the distressed throughout.

external form suitable for each of the missions. Guanyin then appears in China as a woman in worship by women, who ask her for fecundity. And that out of convenience, of decency, pregnancy cannot be "required of a man, say the Chinese woman." To support this view, Dr. Weiger has said that no text, or prayer is addressed to Guanyin as to a woman. He has also cited the fact that in the temples, the image is, either masculine, or feminine according to the public for whom the temple is especially meant for. When the "image is feminine, as a sign that the form is conventional, the bosom is never feminine." 42

It is true that no prayer or Buddhist text is specially addressed to Guanyin as to a female. But this does not explain many androgynous forms seen all over.

Another theory put forward is that from the time Buddhism entered China probably in the Western Han Dynasty, in due course it got mixed with Taoism, Confucianism, local customs, myths and legends. Thus what was Buddhism got transformed into "Chinese Buddhism". The myths and legends relating to female goddesses which were present already got absorbed in the

"Dr. Weiger in support of his views has given two illustrations of female Guanyin. The one on page 590 in Lesson 68 is said to illustrate "Female Kuan-shih-yin, Indian type and another on page 592, "Feminine Kuan-shih-yin, Chinese type." Both the illustrations are definitely feminine( though no pronounced features of feminine anatomy like the breasts are visible) and by Indian type, what he probably meant was that one could see the "Indian influence" in the illustration, as female Avalokitesvara is not known in India."
Guanyin cult and Guanyin being seen more as a female than male was a logical step.

The dominance of male gods and masters throughout Chinese history in anthology and religion cannot be denied. My study indicates that the female divinities sometimes attained the power and popularity of male gods. A reference was made to the paper by Lee Irwin on the "The Great Goddesses of China" wherein mention was made of the four goddesses "whose collective popularity" extends from ancient days to the present."

There is a school of anthropology which believes that the societal evolution began with the female having a more important role to play in the transition from "food gathering" to "cultivation." It is no surprise that ancient Chinese mythology included very many female figures who played a very significant role in the beliefs. The human tendency to continue to worship the ancient deities in some form or other tacitly or otherwise in the context of changed interpretations or beliefs cannot be overlooked even in the case of Guanyin in China.

Late Dr. Ehrenfels, a noted anthropologist in his research on mother goddesses in India came to the conclusion that the strongly male dominated patriarchal society in India was also preceded by a matriarchal society where the woman played a dominant role. The pockets of matriarchal society seen in India today are supposed to be the vestiges of what was once a widespread matriarchal society. Another point to be noted is that worship of female goddesses is prevalent/dominant in rice eating societies.