

## A BUDDHIST SPELL

by K. P. K. WHITAKER

The bronze plaque reproduced on Plates I-II is in the possession of Mr. J. A. J. Myren of the Victoria and Albert Museum who showed it to Dr. J. G. de Casparis for the purpose of identification. The history of the plaque, as told by Mr. Myren, is that it was brought to this country from somewhere in India about half a century ago. Dr. de Casparis passed it on to me hoping that since the Chinese characters are less worn than the Sanskrit inscription, the former would yield up the identity of the figure and the meaning of the inscription.

### I. The plaque proper

The Chinese characters, to be read from right to left, render a well-attested mantra addressed to Caṇḍā. They surround the central figure of Caṇḍā (a form of Durgā<sup>1</sup>), who is represented with sixteen arms and seated on a lotus throne. Her face shows none of the distinctive features which are usually associated with forms of Durgā as found in India. As the plaque is, no doubt, a ritual object there is likely to be a reason for the blankness of the face. Since the goddess Caṇḍā has two aspects, the kindly one and the ferocious one (善惡相), the blankness of the face would seem to serve better the requirement of a worshipper who when praying to the goddess expects to obtain a favourable or unfavourable answer by gazing at the ritual mirror, where either the kindly or the ferocious aspect of the goddess is alleged to appear<sup>2</sup> in due course.

The goddess wears a crown of some sort. It is not clear whether a sow's head<sup>3</sup> is represented. The design with two circles across her bosom looks like an ornament. About her shoulders there seems to be an entwining snake,<sup>4</sup> which is often present in Durgā representations. Some of the objects in her hands, but not all,<sup>5</sup> are identifiable.

The Sanskrit version of the mantra on the other side of the plaque is in the Nepalese *rañja* (Tibetan *lan-ts'a* or *lan-dza*<sup>6</sup>) script, which was

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 15, etc.

<sup>2</sup> See *T(aishō) T(ripitaka)*, Vol. 20, No. 1075, p. 173(c).

<sup>3</sup> See below, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 16, the list of objects.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Filliozat in *L'Inde Classique*, ed. by L. Renou (*et alii*), Vol. II, Paris, 1953, pp. 665, etc., and F. W. Thomas, *The Tibetan Alphabet* in "Festschrift zur Feier des zweihundertjährigen Bestehens der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen", II, Phil.-hist. Kl., Berlin, 1951, pp. 146-65, where also earlier literature is adduced.

𑖀	𑖄	𑖆	𑖇	𑖈	𑖉	𑖊	𑖋	𑖌	𑖍	𑖎	𑖏	𑖐	𑖑	𑖒
NA	MO	SA	PTA	NĀM	SA	MYA	CAN	DE	SVĀ	HĀ	VRĀM	OM	RAM	
南	無	𑖀	𑖁	𑖂	𑖃	𑖄	准	提	娑婆	訶	部林	唵	𑖑	
NA	MO	SAP	TA	NĀM	SA(M)	MYAK	CAN	DE	SVĀ	HĀ	VRĀM	OM	RAM	
nâm	miu	sâp	[tâ] <sup>1</sup>	[njam] <sup>2</sup>	sâm	{miäu [mâk]}	tsjuən	d'iei	sâ b'ua	χâ	b'au liam	[âm]	[lâm]	
𑖓	𑖔	𑖕	𑖖	𑖗	𑖘	𑖙	𑖚	𑖛	𑖜	𑖝	𑖞	𑖟	𑖠	𑖡
KSAM	BU	DDHĀ	KO	TĪ	NĀM	TA	OM	JRĪM	OM	MA	NI	PA	DME	
三	菩	𑖛 <sup>3</sup>	俱	𑖜	𑖝	𑖞	唵	𑖟	𑖠	𑖡	𑖢	鉢	𑖣	𑖤
SAM	BU	DDHĀ	KO	TĪ	NĀM	TA(D)	OM	JRĪM	OM	MA	NI	PA	DME	
sâm	b'uo	[d'â]	kiu	fi	[njam]	{tât [tân]}	[âm]	{ts'i [liam]}	[âm]	muâ	ngji	[puât]	nu at mieng	
𑖥	𑖦	𑖧	𑖨	𑖩	𑖪	𑖫	𑖬							
DYA	THĀ	OM	CA	LE	CU	LE	HUM							
你	他	唵	折	隸	主	隸	𑖭							
DYA	THĀ	OM	CA	LE	CU	LE	HUM							
[ni] ia	tâ	[âm]	tsjät	iei	tsju	iei	[χəu] <sup>5</sup>							

<sup>1</sup> This alternative Chinese reading is not included in *G.S.(R)*.

<sup>2</sup> The ancient values included in square brackets are not included in *G.S.(R)*, as they do not occur in the Chinese Classical texts considered by Karlgren, but have been reconstructed in accordance with Karlgren's reconstructions. Many of these occur in Karlgren's *Analytical Dictionary* of 1923.

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of transcription the variant 𑖛 for 𑖛 has been ignored.

<sup>4</sup> I considered 𑖛 a variant of 𑖛. This seemed doubtful to Professor Pulleyblank. I now think it may be a blurred 𑖛.

<sup>5</sup> I wish to thank Professor Pulleyblank for supplying this transcription, based on the entries in the *Kuang Yün* and the *I-ch'i'eh-ching yin-i*, the character 𑖛 being a variant of 𑖛.





In his *Elements of Hindu Iconography*,<sup>1</sup> T. A. Gopinatha Rao gives a detailed description of a series of nine goddesses, the Nava-Durgās, one of which is Caṇḍā. I set out his description in an abbreviated form.

"Durgā is often worshipped in the form of nine figures, one of them being set up in the middle and the remaining eight in positions corresponding to the eight points of the compass. They are all seated figures having a lotus as their seat . . . The image in the middle has eighteen hands, big breasts and thighs, and is adorned with various ornaments. This goddess, who is capable of granting all powers, has in eight of her left hands the tuft of hair of the *asura*, the *khetaka*, *ghanṭā*, mirror, *dhanus*, *dhvaja*, *damaru*, *pāśa*, the remaining left hand being held in the *tarjani* pose. The right hands carry the *śakti*, *tanṅka*, *śūla*, *vajra*, *śaṅkha*, *aṅkuśa*, cane, *bāna*, and *chakra*. Each of the eight other figures of Durgā has only sixteen hands. The names of these goddesses are *Rudrachandā*, *Prachandā*, *Chandōgrā*, *Chandā-nāyikā*, *Chandā*, *Chandavatī*, *Chandārūpā*, *Atichandikā*, and *Ugrachandikā*. The colour of the centrally situated Durgā is that of fire. The other Durgās are yellow of the gōrōchana, red, black, blue, white, grey, turmeric-yellow and pink. The central Durgā is in the *ālīdhāsana* posture, riding on a lion and holds in one of the hands the tuft of hair, as already stated, of the *asura* emerging from the cut-end of the neck of the buffalo-form of the *asura*. The other Durgās are seated upon *rathas* shaped like lotuses . . ."

Earlier in his book Rao gives a description of *the* Durgā. "The goddess Durgā may have four, eight or more hands, should have three eyes and be of dark complexion. She should have a handsome look with a well developed bust, stout thighs and big hip and be clad in yellow garments. The head should be adorned with a Karaṇḍa-makuta, and the body decked with all ornaments . . . Her breasts should be bound with a snake and a red bodice should cover the upper portion of her body . . ."<sup>2</sup>

As is evident from the first of the two quotations above, one must reckon with the fact that a plaque representing Durgā might be merely one of a set of nine figures. The presence of Chinese characters, however, make this assumption unlikely as it is a clear indication that the present plaque does not represent pure Hindu tradition.

The series of nine goddesses is by no means the only one with which Durgā is associated. Among hymns in praise of Durgā, we read of the hundred and eight names of hers in the *Durgāśatanāmastotra*, translated by Avalon.<sup>3</sup> In the same book of Avalon's we read of Durgā, wife of Śiva, equated with or invoked as Chaṇḍī (p. 56), Tārā (p. 50), Chaṇḍikā (p. 111),

<sup>1</sup> Madras, 1914, Vol. I, pp. 356-7.

<sup>2</sup> T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *ibidem*, p. 341.

<sup>3</sup> *Hymns to the Goddess*, by Arthur and Ellen Avalon, 2nd edition, Madras, 1952, pp. 75-82.

Mahādevī (p. 119), Mahākālī (p. 144), etc. The meaning of the name, Durgā, is given as follows: "Thou art called Durgā by all because Thou savest man from difficulty" (Hymn to Durgā, from the *Mahābhārata Virāta Parvan*, p. 142). Monier-Williams says this of Durgā: The inaccessible or terrific goddess, wife of Śiva, also called Umā, Pārvatī, etc. (Dict., p. 487b).

Durgā is further equated with Bhīmā or Māricī, wife of Mahēśvara, to whom human flesh was offered once a year in Autumn.<sup>1</sup> While Bhīmā is just the name of another form of Durgā, Māricī, who, as we shall see, is identified with Caṇḍā among Chinese worshippers, has distinctive features not included in the general representations of Durgā. According to A. Getty<sup>2</sup> "She is evidently the goddess Aurora of the Āryans, for the *sādhana* refers to her as riding in her chariot surrounded by a glory of flame-shaped rays. Her seven pigs were possibly inspired from the seven horses that draw the chariot of Sūrya, the Sun God . . . She has a yellow form, with three heads and eight or sixteen arms. The face at the right is red and the one at the left, a boar's head, is blue; on each face is the third eye. Her attributes are: the thunderbolt, hook, arrow, needle, branch of aśoka, bow, thread, and a hand in mudrā with the index raised . . . She steps to the right on a chariot drawn by seven pigs, or may be seated on a lotus supported by seven pigs".

#### b. Tibet and Japan

According to Jäschke,<sup>3</sup> Durgā entered Tibet as *dkar-mo* (the white one [*fem.*]) but according to some Tibetans she is *gdugs-dkar(-mo)* (the white umbrella one [*fem.*]) which in modern Tibetan pronunciation is a close approximation to Durgā. She has a third eye and is sometimes represented with a thousand eyes and a thousand arms and is taken as a form of Sphyar-ras-zigs (Avalokiteśvara). Avalokiteśvara is also referred to by A. Getty<sup>4</sup> under the entry Sitātapatrā Aparājītā, translated by her as the "Invincible goddess of the white parasol", with *gdugs-dkar-can-ma* (goddess of the white parasol) added as the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit form. Although Getty insists that this goddess should not be confused with Sitātapatrā, the "Revered One of the White Umbrella" who is Avalokiteśvara in his form with "1,000" arms and five rows of heads, carrying the White Umbrella, it is not surprising if Tibetan worshippers do not always distinguish between the two deities. Apart from giving *dkar-mo* as a name of Durgā, Jäschke also gives *gtum-po*<sup>5</sup> as name of the goddess Durgā (with Umā as a further alternative).

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, by W. E. Soothill and L. Hodous, London, 1937, p. 311a.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gods of Northern Buddhism* by A. Getty, Oxford, 2nd. ed., 1928, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> *A Tibetan-English Dictionary* by H. A. Jäschke, London, 1949, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *loc. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298 (b).

In the *Hevajra Tantra*<sup>1</sup> the Sanskrit name Caṇḍikā and Caṇḍālī are rendered as *gtum-mo* (the angry one) or *grol-mo* (the Saviouress). Furthermore a goddess named Cundā<sup>2</sup> (Tibetan: Tsun-da) occurs there as one of a series of female deities.

Māricī is rendered as 'od-zer-can-ma ("She of the brilliant rays"<sup>3</sup>) in Tibetan. In her Vajravārāhī ("Adamantine sow") form she is believed to be incarnate in every abbess of the monastery of Semding, one of whom is said to have had behind her ear an excrescence which resembled a sow's head.

Though Caṇḍā and Māricī reached Japan obviously through Chinese sources a brief note on them may be appended here before the identifications of Caṇḍā in China are dealt with in the next section.

In Japan Durgā as such does not figure prominently although Japanese Buddhists, as we shall see, must be aware of her name. The goddess of the white parasol is known as 白傘蓋 Byakusangai<sup>4</sup> but she never achieved the success enjoyed by the form of Durgā known as Juntei (Cundi) Kwanon 準提觀音, adopted by the Shingon sect as the female form of Avalokiteśvara.

Māricī, appearing here as 摩利支天 Marishi-ten, is believed to reside in one of the seven stars of the Great Bear. She is generally represented as seated on a lotus-throne, supported by seven pigs. She has three heads of which the one at the right is a sow's head.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned above, Cundi became a female form of Avalokiteśvara in Japan. "It is believed by the Japanese that the goddess is taken from Indian mythology and is Durgā devī, wife of Śiva. She is called Koṭī-śrī, or Saptakoṭī-Buddha-mātrī-Cunti-devī, or the goddess Cuntī, mother of 700,000 Buddhas . . . Juntei is sometimes represented as an angry goddess but is usually pacific. She has the third eye and eighteen arms, all the hands holding different symbols . . ."<sup>6</sup>

### c. China

All Chinese transcriptions (準提, 准提, 准胝 and 尊提) suggest that the form of Durgā under which this goddess reached China, was Cundi rather than Caṇḍā.

Cundi (Chun T'i 準提, to use the most common Chinese transcription) and Māricī 摩利支<sup>7</sup> have completely merged into one goddess, as

<sup>1</sup> *The Hevajra Tantra*, by D. L. Snellgrove, London, 1959, Vol. 2, li, 18 (p. 4) and Vol. I, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> A. Getty, *loc. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> A. Getty, *loc. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Māricī is explicitly described as female in only one of the dhāraṇīs under her name in the *Taiśhō Tripitaka*, 摩利支天菩薩陀羅尼經, by Amoghavajra 不空, TT. Vol 21, No. 1255, p. 260 (b).

is evident from her representation in Doré's *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*,<sup>1</sup> with three heads, the right one of which is a sow's head, and eight arms, the top pair of which hold up the sun-disc and moon-disc, thereby typifying her as Māricī, the Brahmanic Goddess of the Dawn. In fact Doré deals with Chun T'i in a chapter entitled "Māricī, Goddess of the Dawn".

Chun T'i was until recently worshipped widely in China and her temple Chun T'i An 準提菴 at Ju-kao 如皋, in northern Kiangsu in the care of Buddhist nuns is well known.<sup>2</sup> In the Taoist Pantheon Chun T'i has been identified with T'ien Hou 天后 "Queen of Heaven", which development has been facilitated by the fact that Durgā is a form of Pārvatī who is Mahādevī, the Hindu "Queen of Heaven" and Buddhist Mother of Buddhas. On the other hand, T'ien Hou is linked up with Māricī in so far as she is also styled Tou Mu, 斗母, "Mother of the Southern Measure" (Sagittarii), a stellar divinity.

However, the most unusual development in relation to Chun T'i is that in the Taoist Pantheon she also appears as a male deity. In the popular novel *Feng-shen yen-i* 封神演義, we witness the "Immortal Chun T'i" 準提道人 taking a leading part in the battle between the royal houses of Shang and Chou. Engaged in single combat with K'ung-sun he soars into the air and appears with eighteen arms and twenty-four heads. Among the objects listed in the novel<sup>3</sup> as being carried by him in his hands, we notice some which are identical with those identifiable on our plaque, reproduced on Plate I, and that of the postscript, reproduced on Plate III.

As T'ien Hou or T'ien Fei 天妃 ("Heavenly Concubine") Chun T'i is a protector of sailors and as such worshipped in particular in the maritime provinces. She is also prayed to by women who wish to have children.

While simply referring to Werner as far as T'ien Hou's reincarnation<sup>4</sup> is concerned, I wish to stress the syncretistic aspect of the iconography of Tou Mu, which is likewise described by him. She wears the Buddhist crown, is seated on a lotus throne, has three eyes, eighteen arms, and holds various objects in her many hands, such as a bow, spear, sword, flag, dragon's head, pagoda, five chariots, a sun-disc, a moon-disc, etc. . . .<sup>5</sup>

As further evidence of such syncretistic tendencies I wish to refer briefly to two books of fairly recent date. In an illustrated biography of T'ien Hou, the *T'ien Hou Chuan-hsiang* 天后傳像, printed in 1816,<sup>6</sup> it is related that T'ien Hou, incarnated as the youngest daughter of a Lin family, was first brought up as a Buddhist, then tutored by a Taoist monk

<sup>1</sup> Translated by M. Kennelly, Vol. VII, Shanghai, 1922, Fig. 55 facing p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> Doré, *loc. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>3</sup> See the list given by Doré, *loc. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>4</sup> See E. T. C. Werner, *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*, Shanghai, 1932, p. 503.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 512.

<sup>6</sup> No author. The reprint was made in Canton from a block kept in the Temple of Imperial Sacrifice in the district of Tungkuan (莞城御祭廟).

who, impressed by her "Buddha nature" (佛性), initiated her into Taoist Tantrism (元微秘法); thereafter she is said to have performed many miracles. As these proved beneficial to the provinces of Fukien and Chekiang she was posthumously honoured by imperial decrees.

The second book entitled *Hung-jen P'u-chi T'ien-hou Sheng-mu Ching-ts'an*<sup>1</sup> 弘仁普濟天后聖母經懺, published in 1839, is an elaborate imitation of a Buddhist dhāraṇī. It gives the story of the incarnation of the goddess T'ien Hou in Mei-chou 湄州.

In relating her many miracles and manifestations (76 in all), the author mingles freely Buddhistic terms with well known lines from the Book of Odes and alternates Buddhist mystic syllables (*bija*) with the opening line of the Book of Changes. A feature of special interest from our point of view is the inclusion of the syllable for fire 嚩 Raṃ, which we have witnessed in our spell.

The booklet is also of interest on account of the inclusion of a magic formula (解厄符), reproduced below, which is alleged to cure all illnesses.<sup>2</sup>

As a last example of syncretism, I adduce a Chinese charm obtainable nowadays in Hong Kong, printed in red, together with other charms, on a sheet of yellow paper. I owe a copy of this to the kindness of Dr. Liu

<sup>1</sup> Written by Li Ts'un-mo 李存默. The block of this book is said to be kept in the shrine of T'ien Hou (天后宮) in Shanghai.

<sup>2</sup> According to the text underneath the formula the worshipper is supposed to burn incense, write out the charm, and read it seven times; thereafter he must swallow, together with water from a well and myrrh, the charm which is to be ground (in a mortar): 凡疾病焚香書符念咒七遍用井水乳香磨吞。

Ts'un-yan, who reproduced it on the dust cover of his book *Buddhist and Taoist Influences on Chinese Novels*.<sup>1</sup> As will be seen from the reproduction of the charm below it bears a close resemblance to our spell, but represents at the same time an attempt to make use of it in a Taoist context in so far as one of the characters (三) has been drawn as the trigram *ch'ien* 乾 (☰) of the Book of Changes.



The text reads as follows:

南無囉娑南三坊<sup>1</sup>三苦<sup>2</sup>唵<sup>3</sup>囉<sup>4</sup> 唵喃恒<sup>5</sup> 唵囉<sup>6</sup> 囉祈<sup>7</sup> 囉生<sup>8</sup>  
囉泮<sup>9</sup> 虎<sup>10</sup> 娑娑<sup>11</sup> 阿<sup>12</sup> 囉娑<sup>13</sup>

The mis-spelled characters have been marked by superior figures and they call for the following comments:

1 坊	for 幻	8 生	for 主
2 苦	for 菩	9 泮	for 準
3 唵	for 陀	10 虎	for 囉
4 囉	for 囉	11 娑	for 娑
5 恒	for 恒	12 阿	for 阿
6 囉	for 他	13 娑	for 娑
7 祈	for 折		

The re-arrangement of the circular text also shows an indiscriminate placing in pairs of certain characters. In the original text, it will be remembered, the pairing indicates initial consonantal clusters.

The high percentage of errors in this charm suggests a rather corrupt state of the original and a complete disregard of accuracy on the part of the copyist. The fact that the name of Chun T'i (in the centre) is reproduced correctly was apparently sufficient to ensure the sale of the charm. That this

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1962.

is still sold in Hong Kong nowadays may be considered as evidence of its being a successful commercial venture.

### Postscript

After completing the article I received photos of a further plaque (see Plates III and IV) which were kindly placed at my disposal by Mr. W. Ward, who acquired the plaque in a Hong Kong curio shop.<sup>1</sup>

The central figure of this plaque keeps nothing of the athletic line of the goddess of the former plaque and its face is also left blank. The objects are clearer than those held by the figure in Plate I and the lotus seat is clearly in evidence. The Chinese characters are well cut, and show an identical version of the spell. The character 觀 is written in its usual form.

The mirror surface is surrounded by clearer Lan-ts'a characters which are more angular in their formation. The "n" in "namo" is normal here. The Lan-ts'a character which I read as Vrām (or Brām) on Plate II is clearly Bhrām here. There is also an extra Om before it. Like the first plaque the present includes seed-syllables (*bīja's*) which have not survived in any of the Chinese versions quoted above from the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*. The seed-syllable which is read as Jrīm on the first plaque seems to be Dhrīm here. The vocative of the goddess's name here is spelt with a "u" (Cunde), which suggests that her name must be Cundā or Cundi rather than Caṇḍā (as on the first plaque).



CENTIMETRES  
INCHES

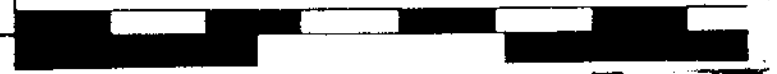


PLATE I

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Mr. Ward for his kindness. The origin of the plaque is unknown. All the owner of the curio shop was able to say was that it had been in his possession for a long time.





CENTIMETRES  
INCHES



PLATE II



PLATE III



PLATE IV