

# Chinese New Year Lanterns and Their Magic Significance.

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## Introduction.

The preparatory work for this study, both field and book work, by the author was done during the years of the second world war, when he was on the staff of Fujen University in Peking. At that time a Museum of Chinese Ethnography and Folklore was in the making at our university. Our aim was to continue the program which Chinese scholars had started long before the second world war but which in the vicissitudes of the political strife of the young republic was prematurely brought to an end before it could bear fruit. ① The present writer arrived in China in the autumn of 1939. The year before, the northern half of the country had been occupied by the expeditionary forces of the Japanese army, outwardly at least, daily life went on peacefully. Most colleges could continue their classes, among them our Fujen University. With a permit issued by the Japanese authorities, travelling within the occupied area was also possible. And so a resumption of ethnographic fieldwork on a limited scale was possible even during the wartime conditions of China. We did what we could and hoped for peace so that we could travel with freedom and expand our research work all over China. Meanwhile in anticipation of such times the training of native cooperators was also a task to be done in the context of our long-range program. A country like China, with a long history and many regional and local variants, calls for hundreds of trained ethnographers and folklorists, and for a huge network of research centers, there must also be research associations if we want to emulate the achievements of parallel activities of Western countries. However, like preceding endeavors also ours were cut short, this time by the Communist revolution. ②

The present writer confined his own fieldwork to the city of Peking and its vicinity, only occasionally looking around in the towns and villages of Shantung and North Honan. In fact, an investigation of the life and lore of the one million people of Peking could keep a research worker busy for almost a lifetime, especially if he works also in the historical dimension. ③

The science of Folklore has many facets. ④ Among them the exploration of religious ideas and beliefs. In China the religious background is found everywhere; in philosophy, ethics, political science, and even in medicine. We exclude here the behavior pattern that has been imposed on the Chinese masses by those now in power, we assume, however, that beneath this official pattern the old ways of life are not yet forgotten.

China remains still in modern times a pre-industrial, predominantly agricultural society. Her cities and towns are administrative and commercial centers. We have farmers, traders, and the members of officialdom. The rhythm of rural life is decisive also for those classes that are not themselves engaged in agricultural activities but who are associated with the farming population.

Already in the ancient religion, which the Confucianists have revived, the New Year festival is the most important religious event in the whole year. Later generations have not only preserved the basic structure of the classic New Year celebration but also added many new features, these being however only elaborations

of old themes. The old classics only describe how the ruling class celebrated New Year. We may however assume that the common people, having the same outlook on life, laws and the ways of the Universe as the rulers had, were following suit. Rulers and ruled belonged to the same racial and cultural stock and were a homogeneous block.

The Chinese New Year festival can be considered a compendium of the Chinese religion. We know from classic sources that fire magic always belonged to the celebration of the beginning of the rural life cycle. The old fire in the house had to be extinguished at the end of the year and only with a newly kindled fire could the new cycle be started. The underlying idea is that the life of man must be coordinated with the ways of nature, these being determined by the power of the sun-light. Any disharmony of the conduct of man with nature is dangerous and will invite disaster.

## A. The New Year's Lanterns.

To be sure, the modern Chinese will not be aware anymore of the original connection of fire and light with the great event in the Universe when the sun is weakened at the winter solstice and needs strengthening. But still there can hardly be a doubt that the enormous cultivation of the lantern art and the lavish display of all kinds of lanterns at New Year does have metaphysical roots. There are special lantern markets which open about a week before the New Year. The most frequent customers are parents with children, a beautiful lantern is what a child expects as a New Year present.<sup>⑤</sup> Lanterns are bought not only for the amusement of children but also as presents for newly-wed couples, as a magic device for getting offspring.<sup>⑥</sup> There are round lanterns which can be rolled on the ground without extinguishing them.<sup>⑦</sup> Another favorite toy lantern is the so-called "running horse lantern" (*tsou-ma têng* 走馬燈).<sup>⑧</sup>

### I. Lanterns as house decorations on New Year's Day.

Lanterns are hung up in the house on New Year's Day and two weeks later during the Lantern Festival. The lanterns of the latter are the more refined and richer in variety. The festive atmosphere of New Year's Day would not be complete without a display of lanterns. Nowadays the electric light has taken away much of the splendor of the old colorful lanterns. Formerly candles were used for the lanterns. They were then the only source of light in the long winter nights, and so everything was done to embellish this source. These decorative lanterns helped to lighten the happy mood at family festivals. At New Year such lanterns were hung up along the walls, at the entrance gate, in the guestroom, on the walls in the courtyard, over the doors to the rooms and under the eaves of the roof. The lanterns in the rooms are called "lanterns of great happiness" (*hung-hsi têng* 鴻喜燈); those over the house-door and in the guestroom, "palace lanterns" (*kung-têng* 宮燈). Palace-lanterns were hung also in the courtyard, together with lanterns made of horns of oxen and sheep. In the corridor glass-lanterns are also used.

1) "Lanterns of Great Happiness". - This lantern is so called because it is hung over the two characters for "Great Happiness" which are written on red paper that is pasted on the wall. The lantern is about 2 ft. high, 1 foot wide, and 5-6 inches deep. The frame is made of wood; its walls, of glass or silk gauze. If the lantern has glass walls, the side which is attached to the wall on which it is hanging is coated with mercury. This is to reflect the light. On the frontside of the lantern the characters for "double happiness" (喜喜) or for "great happiness" are written in bright red. If the wall is high enough, the lantern of great happiness is hung in the center, flanked by rhomboid lanterns inscribed with the characters for "luck" (福) and "long life" (壽). In front of all rooms horn-lanterns are hung on the eaves of the roof.

2) "Palace Lanterns". - Because of their refined and complicated construction these lanterns were formerly used only in the palaces and mansions of wealthy people. The frame is made of red or black sandal wood and is constructed into a

polygonal cylinder. The walls of the lanterns are of silk on which landscapes, flowers and birds or famous personalities from well known novels are painted. The palace lanterns are hung up outside the house; inside, they would only hang down from the ceiling over the house-altar, but this in great numbers. If such lanterns are used in the open air outside, they are often wrapped in a cloth of bright-red. In some villages about 30 Km. away from Peking the writer of these lines saw this kind of lantern in mat-shelters in which the gods were worshipped during the Lantern Festival. They were hanging there in great number; on their lass-walls episodes from current tales were painted. Since their construction involves considerable expense, these lanterns are now getting rare; those still existing are what is left from ealier times.

3) Horn lanterns. - The horns of rams and oxen are sliced into thin lamellae, which are then softened over a fire and then fixed together into lanterns. These horn lanterns are all ball or plum shaped. They give off an opaque light; sometimes pictures or the usual characters for luck, double happiness (for married couples), and long life are painted on them. Because of the great expenses horn lanterns are hardly made anymore and are being replaced with ordinary glass lanterns.

4) Gauze lanterns (*sha-têng* 紗燈). - These are the most commonly used lanterns because their production is much cheaper than that of the palace or horn lanterns. They are shaped like balloons and can usually be folded. Their construction resembles that of a paper-umbrella. The ribs on both ends are held together with a bamboo ring. Chinese gauze lanterns differ from Japanese paper lanterns in that the Chinese lanterns have the ribs running vertically, whereas the Japanese lanterns consist of horizontal rings over which the paper is pasted. The ribs of the Chinese lanterns are consequently all of equal length; the rings of the Japanese lanterns are smallest at the ends, and largest in the center.

On the gauze lanterns we find the usual characters of "Great Happiness", wherefore they are called "great happiness lanterns". Often the symbol for "luck" (*fu*) is painted on them, or flowers, birds or landscapes. On lanterns for use in Buddhist temples the characters for 'abbot' (*fang-cheng* 方丈) are written. Candles are used as a source of light.

5) Bushel-shaped lanterns (*tou-fang têng* 斗方燈). - These are hung up in the central courtyard, along the wall of the main room and of the side rooms. They are decorated with the usual auspicious characters, rarely with pictures. In old and rich families they are adorned, like the palace lanterns, with scenes from the novels "Dream of the Red Chamber", "History of the Three Kingdoms", "History of the Hundred-and-eight Oath Brothers". In ordinary houses only the frames of such lanterns are preserved. Then just before the New Year cheap paper is bought, pasted over the frame and decorated with inscriptions.

The "bushel-shaped lantern" probably evokes the idea of *tou-chün* (斗君), which is a star in the constellation of the Great Bear. People pray to this star for long life, promotion, and income. Because of the name of this god, the incense-burner before his altar has the form of a bushel. At New Year all incense, whether for Buddhist deities or others, are bushel-shaped. Sacrifices to the bushel-star are known since

the T'ang era. By making sacrifices people hoped to obtain the riches which the Buddhas would not grant. Somehow the use of lanterns in the form of a bushel may be connected with the worship of that auspicious star.

6) Stand-lanterns. - Upright standing lanterns (*ch'u-têng* 蠡燈). The wooden stand is about 4 ft. high. The walls of the lanterns can be of glass or red cotton-paper (*hung-mien chih* 紅綿紙). The lanterns are rarely inscribed. They are placed at the house entrance, in the courtyard or at the entrance to the main room. Some of these lanterns stand on an iron support and have a roof of iron. Stand-lanterns can withstand wind and snow.

7) "Lanterns which vex the wind to death" (*ch'i-sze-fêng têng* 氣死風燈). - These are large gauze lanterns which hang from a construction of three bow-shaped sticks which are tied together at the top, to form a kind of tripod. The name of the lantern indicates that the wind will try in vain to topple them or blow them away or blow their light out.

8) "Lanterns of the sorrowful heart" (*tsai-hsin têng* 災心燈). - Lanterns of this name are lighted in Chengtu in Szech'uan in the belief that all inhabitants of the house will be spared sorrows in the coming year. The lanterns are also called "lanterns of the gods" (*shen-têng* 神燈) because they are lit at the first hour of the year to get the blessing of the gods when they are supposed to be descending into the house. Another name is "lantern of Kuanyin", Kuanyin representing here all other gods because she is the most helpful and kindhearted among them. In Chengtu this lantern is placed before the shrine of the gods in the main room. It is lighted daily in honor of the gods with the intention to ask the gods to prevent all evils during the year. The lantern consists of a glass oil-container which is about eight tenths filled with water. Over this, peanut oil or rape-seed oil is poured. Then they insert a wire as a wick-holder, the wick being placed in a hole on the wick-holder. When the oil has burned up, the lantern goes out by itself, needing no attention. If the lantern should burn longer, more oil is poured in and less water. Often some red color is mixed with the water so that the lantern shimmers red. At New Year such lanterns are displayed in great numbers. Their recent name "lanterns of the sorrowful heart" is probably a corruption of the original name "lantern of the star of misfortune" (*tsai-hsing têng* 災星燈), the *hsing* 'star' having been changed to *hsin* 'heart'. In North China no such lantern is known (Nagao).

9) "Lantern of Heaven" (*t'ien-têng* 天燈). - It seems this lantern is used everywhere in China, from Ch'inghai in the West to Manchuria in the East. On the top of a high pole a branch of a pine-tree is fastened. To this is hung a lantern which is lit every evening from New Year's Day to the end of the New Year's period. It shines in the night as a friendly star. Many Chinese explain that this light is thought to be a friendly act towards the lonely traveller (Nagao). Another explanation is that the light should be a signal for the gods to descend from Heaven into the houses, therefore the name "lantern of Heaven". In Ch'inghai the lantern is called "lantern of the High Heaven" (*kao-t'ien têng* 高天燈). The lantern is an offering to T'ien lao-yeh, Old Grandfather Heaven, as a prayer for peace, happiness and prosperity for the coming year. Families still without an offspring hope that the

Heavenly Grandfather will bestow one. The pole with the lantern is erected on the thirtieth of the twelfth month. It must be higher than the roofs of the surrounding houses. Its top is decorated with branches of a pine or a cypress tree, which are themselves symbols of fertility. In the lantern a small oil-lamp is burning. The lantern is taken down every evening.

We know from literary sources that in farming villages people plant poles with lanterns between their fields. If the flame of the lamp burns high, the harvest will be plentiful. A report says that in the morning of New Year's Day fuel-wood is tied to a huge pole, and thus making a high torch. Then people look at the fire to see whether it is white or red. White signifies that there will be plenty of rainfall, whereas red is an omen that a drought will come. People fight for the remaining ashes; these they put in their houses, on the boards on which silkworms are kept. This is supposed to increase the output of silk-threads during the year. From the fire burning on top of the high pole, farmers expect a year with a good harvest and a handsome income from the sale of their silk-threads. ⑤

The above described nine kinds of lanterns probably do not yet exhaust their number. These lanterns serve first of all to decorate the house and to intensify the solemn atmosphere of a festival. We can however discern an at least remote connection with fire magic. Such a connection becomes more evident from other customs in the whole New Year celebration complex, of which the lanterns are but a part. The magic significance of fire and light becomes more evident from a study of the customs and practices at the Lantern Festival.

## II. The lantern festival on the fifteenth day of the New Year Month.

People begin to prepare for the festival on the tenth. The festival proper lasts from the thirteenth to the seventeenth, its peak being reached on the fifteenth. On the thirteenth the lanterns are hung up, *shang têng* 上燈. In Peking they call this "to exhibit the lantern flowers", *san têng-hua-erh* 散燈花兒, or "to exhibit the figures" *san hsiao-jen* 散小人. In the last decade of the Manchu rule the lantern festival was also officially celebrated. In Kuang-hsü 26 (1900) both public" (*kung* 公) and "private" (*sze* 私) lanterns were still known. The public lanterns, the most beautiful ones, were lavishly displayed at the ministries and other governmental offices. They were made of silk gauze and decorated with pictures, with multicolored tassels hanging down from them. The display of lanterns must have been enormously impressive and gorgeous. The lanterns were hanging all the way from the entrance to the main hall. Outside the entrance was an arch of honor (*pai-fang* 牌房), erected exclusively for hanging up the lanterns. Gauze lanterns were hanging there in several tiers. Seen from a distance the arch of honor looked like a mountain of lanterns. A "mountain of lanterns" (*têng-shan* 燈山) is already mentioned in the *Mêng-hua-lu* 夢華錄 of the Sung time.

"Private lanterns" were still seen on business shops during the time of the Republic. The most beautiful ones were hanging on tea-shops, pastry-shops, silk-shops, and on shops dealing with gold and silver hairpins and other such head-decorations. Both the lanterns on official buildings and those on trading shops were all truly



fantastic show-pieces. But the common citizenry also did its best to show off charming lanterns decorated with popularly known historic scenes. At the entrance door and in the courtyard huge crowds would gather before the numerous "running horse lanterns" (*tsou-ma têng* 走馬燈) which were in fact a combination of lanterns with shadow-plays. Especially well-done lantern shows could be seen in some temples, for instance at Chia-hsing-szu (嘉興寺) outside Ti-an-men and at the Taoist temple Po-yün-kuan (白雲觀) outside the Southwest City. At the latter, a center of ecclesiastic Taoism, a truly memorable lantern show attracted visitors annually up to about twenty years ago. No information has reached us about how things stand there now.

The lantern markets which were held in Peking from the tenth to the fifteenth day of the first month were, as can be seen from the old descriptions, genuine folk festivals of the highest rank. Since the Boxer troubles, however, much of the lantern splendor has gone. First the lanterns on the governmental buildings disappeared entirely, then the display of such on shops and private houses lost its previous glory. In the following paragraph we will try a classification of still known lanterns.

The imagination of the people has invented an immense number of lantern types. There exists a theater play called "A Visit to the Lantern Show" (*kuan-têng* 觀燈). The *dramatis personae* are a Buddhist monk, a blind man and a woman. About it Emil Krebs writes (transl.): "The piece merely serves to enumerate a number of fanciful lantern types such as were used at the lantern festival".<sup>⑩</sup> In this play 60 names of lanterns are recorded, of them 18 representing birds, 8 fishes, 20 other animals, and 14 human figures.<sup>⑪</sup> Other lanterns are mentioned only by general names, like glass-lanterns, horn-lanterns, wedding-lanterns, and others.

If we try to classify the New Year lanterns, the principle of classification can be either the material of which the lanterns are made or the form which they are given. As to the material, lanterns are usually made of wood, paper, glass, or horn. In our enumeration and description, we will include some lanterns which are made of an extraordinary material, like ice. Of the other lanterns only their form and what they represent are of interest to us.

1) Geometrically shaped lanterns.<sup>⑫</sup> - Some lanterns are quadrangular, others hexagonal. Their frames are of wood, their walls of gauze. Some lanterns are about 1 foot broad and 5-6 ft. high, while others are 5-6 ft. broad and 1 foot high. A pair of such lanterns is generally hung up at the entrance of temples and shops and along the roads leading to arches of honor (*pai-fang*) temporarily erected for the festive occasion. The wide lanterns are arranged transversely on top of the tall ones. Inside the lanterns are lighted candles. In the tall ones these candles are in tiers. On the gauze of both types of lanterns are sceneries, figures and events from well known novels, such as "The History of the Three Kingdoms" (*San-kuo-chi* 三國誌) and "Travel to Western Countries" (*Hsi-yu-chi* 西遊記). There are also spherical lanterns, the characters for long life and happiness being painted on them in red. These lanterns are rarely used inside rooms. Other lamps are lozenge-shaped, with the characters for happiness and joy also painted on them. These are hung up on both sides of the door. They are called "happiness (character) lanterns" *fu-tzu têng* 福字燈 or also "bushel (-shaped) lanterns" (*tou-têng* 斗燈).

2) Lanterns in fancy forms. - Lanterns in the shape of human beings or of animals.

a) "Sheep lanterns" (*yang-têng* 羊燈). It is a charming sight indeed when lanterns with movable heads and tails are lined up on the street. These lanterns are constructed from kaoliang stalks, over which white paper is pasted and then the whole is trimmed with paper fringes. Horns, tail and legs are skilfully made. The lanterns are usually 1-2 ft. high; sometimes however they are of life size. A candle is burning inside, a hole on top permitting heat and smoke to escape. Head and tail are made movable by hanging them on a hook placed inside the frame of the lantern. They have a wooden stick as axis; to it is attached a hardened clay ball to keep head and tail in balance by their own weight. The sheep stands on a frame of kaoliang stalks. Little wheels attached to the frame makes the whole movable. The use of "sheep lanterns" at New Year's has a religious significance. The sheep is one of the domestic animals which play a role in the Taoist doctrine of the elements. The sheep signifies spring. In Chinese symbols of luck, we frequently find three sheep standing on a mountain over which the sun is rising. Among the pair of inscriptions on red paper which the Chinese paste on the door-frame at New Year, we often find the sentence "*san yang k'ai t'ai* 三陽開泰, literally, "the three suns open (an era of) prosperity". In sound symbolism *yang* 羊 sheep stands for *yang* 陽 sun, force of nature. In the Book of Changes (*I-ching* 易經) is *t'ai* 泰 the trigram of the first month, having three *yang* strokes 三. *T'ai* means peace, prosperity, greatness. The prayer or spell thus expressed in the spring couplet on the house-doors says: May the first month be the beginning of a prosperous period, or: May the first month inaugurate a new period of growth and prosperity.® Sheep and spring are already related in the Book of Rites (*Li-ki* 禮記). All in all, the sheep lanterns have a cosmological meaning.

b) "Running horse lanterns" (*tso-ma têng* 走馬燈). - These lanterns can be called simplified shadow theaters. A lantern of medium size is about 13 inches high, its breadth measures a little less, while its ground-plan is about 10×6.5 inches. Only its back is all open, the two smaller sides being entirely covered with paper. On the front side less than half of the lantern is covered at the bottom, there being only a small stripe on top. Thus the larger part is left open. Behind the covering paper is built a mechanism with an axis, to which paper figures, are attached. The whole is put into motion like a merry-go-round by the warmth of a candle flame. The figures are nowadays rarely running horses (which gave the lanterns their name), but by far mostly scenes from theater plays. When the writer of these lines was purchasing running horse lanterns for our Ethnographic Museum at Fujen University, he asked the peddlers for the names of the most frequently seen scenes on the lanterns with the result that thirteen names could be ascertained, namely:

- 1) "The Small Cowherd" (*hsiao fang niu* 小放牛), an amorous idyll. A boy is tending his cows outside the city-gate when a girl comes his way and asks directions. The boy answers, at the same time asking the girl to sing a song for him. In a stage-play of the same name the boy and the girl dance together.
- 2) "The Girl Visits the Grave" (*hsiao nü shang fen* 小女上墳). A candidate for the Imperial examination, Liu Lu-ching, starts off for the capital but does not return

for a long time. Back at home, his wife dutifully waits for his return. Finally, after having met with success in the examination hall, her husband returns to find his wife attending his ancestral tombs. He recognizes in the aged woman his faithful wife.

- 3) "A Farce" (*ta hua-ku* 打花鼓). A theater play frequently performed during the lantern festival. Its main persons are the "big-headed monk" and the "dull son". Such farces are not without some obscene talk and insinuations, a significant point in the light of fertility magic at New Year. ③
- 4) "A Visit to Relatives" (*t'an ch'in-chia* 探親家). The wife of a farmer has given her daughter in marriage to a man from the city. One day the woman starts on a journey to visit her daughter. The donkey which she is riding is driven by her dull son. Upon arrival in the city the mother must listen to the complaints of the mother-in-law about the daughter's laziness. To the amusement of the spectators, a clash ensues between the two old women.
- 5) "The Joy of the Red Phoenix" (*hung-luan hsi* 鴻鸞禧). A poor young man named Mo Chi went to Peking to present himself for the Imperial examination. It being a long way he was near death from exhaustion by hunger and cold. In this condition he fell down in front of the door of one Chin Lao-ta, the head of the beggars' association. Chin Lao-ta was not at home; so his daughter, out of sympathy, brought the young man some warm water and food. When her father came back he scolded her, but calmed down at the thought that the girl might eventually marry the young man. The marriage materializes. After one year the young man passes the examination and he and his wife live happily forever after.
- 6) "A Woman Goes to the City" (*lao ma shang ching* 老媽上京). Riding a donkey driven by her husband, a woman goes to the city to find work. The theme is continued in the following play.
- 7) "The Return of the Woman" (*lao ma hui chia* 老媽回家). The woman of the above (No. 6) has found a job in the house of a rich man, with whom she soon falls in love. Her husband does not want to give her up, and arrives on a donkey to bring her home. Her lover runs after her, trying to wrestle her from her husband.
- 8) "A Play with a Little Cart" (*hsiao ch'e-hui* 小車會). A comedy. An old man is pulling a cart which is made of wood and reed. On the cart sits a man dressed as a woman. He has artificial legs and appears to be sitting on the cart. His real legs are hidden behind the drapery of the cart and he is walking with them on the ground. This is a case of transvestism, again significant in the light of fertility magic.
- 9) "The Donkey Driver Wang Hsiao" (*Wang Hsiao kan chiao* 王小趕脚). A woman Erh ku-niang rents the donkey of Wang Hsiao to return home to her husband. On the way she and the donkey driver engage in lascivious joking. This permissive relationship between the two sexes as pictured on New Year lanterns is not something accidental.
- 10) "The Smashing of the Flour Jug" (*ta mien-kang* 打麵缸). The harlot Chou La-mei goes to the local mandarin to ask him for a husband. The mandarin marries her to Chang Ts'ai, one of his officials. Chang Ts'ai has to proceed to Shantung to collect

taxes there. During his absence the secretary Wang goes to the apartment of Chou La-mei. After a while Ssu Lao-yeh, another official, also appears in the room of the woman. Just in time Wang hides himself in the oven. Now the mandarin himself enters and Ssu Lao-yeh hides himself in the flour jug. Chang Ts'ai comes home and the mandarin creeps under the bed. When Chang Ts'ai goes to the oven to warm up some wine, he finds the secretary Wang in it. He grasps a club to beat Wang, but with it he accidentally smashes the flour jug. Thus Ssu Lao-yeh becomes visible who then pulls the mandarin out from under the bed. Finally an agreement is reached that the three culprits satisfy Chang Ts'ai with a sum of money.

- 11) "Five Piglets Save Their Mother" (*wu-chu chiu mu* 五猪救母). An old woman had only one son. This son was a butcher and had no love for his mother. One morning as he was about to slaughter a pig, he saw how the five piglets surrounded their mother lamenting. When the butcher came near the pig, the piglets all knelt down as if to beg for the life of their mother. They also tried to bite through the rope with which the pig was tied up and even attempted to wrestle the knife from the hands of the butcher. This behavior of the piglets reminded the butcher of his own lack of filial piety. He gave up his profession and was a good son for ever after.
- 12) "The Liberation of a Woman" (*nü chi-chieh* 女起解). The young harlot Su san in the district of Hung-t'ung was sold to one Shen Yen-lin as a concubine. This man however was poisoned by his main wife P'i Shih. The local judge was bribed and accused Su San of the murder. After a while, the old official Ch'ung Kung-tao sent Su San to T'ai-yuan to where he accompanied her. On the way Su San complained to the old gentleman about her misfortune. The latter, himself childless, adopted her as his daughter. The play describes the events on the way to T'ai-yuan.
- 13) "Two Are Going to the Palace" (*erh chin kung* 三進宮). The empress Li is sitting alone in her courtyard, afflicted with grief because she has been cheated by her father Li Liang. The generals Hsü and Yang are passing by. Emperess Li engages them in a conversation and points out to them that her father has been as bad as Wang Mang, who had been plundering the country. She then asks the two generals to help her to take counter-measures. Hsü and Yang had been called traitors by the emperess Li because they had warned her with bitter words. But now they comply with her wishes and the youthful Yang Po is given the Imperial seal and reign.

From the few abstracts above we can see that poignant love situations play their role in the pictorial representations on the running horse lanterns. This is in harmony with the tendency prevailing in theatrical performances as they are popular at New Year's time. Besides plays we find on the lanterns skilfull devices showing how a fish changes to a dragon or how a wife, to the great amusment of the onlookers, beats her husband who is kneeling before her with a stick.

These charming lanterns with a mechanism which makes figures move around are not only found in Peking. We saw such lanterns, in much bigger size than those in Peking, in North Honan. According to Nagao (II, 350, f.) moving lanterns are made

by the girls in the villages around Mukden and sold on the market before New Year. Almost a whole industry has developed there among the rural population. The most beautiful lantern made there by the country-girls is called "A fish changes to a dragon" (*yü lung pien-hua* 魚龍變化). First a frame is built from some kaoliang stalks, over which white paper is pasted. Inside the frame two small wheels, also made of kaoliang stalks, are fastened. With an ingeniously devised mechanism and the warmth of a candle flame a kind of shadow theater is produced. On the outer side of the lantern a "dragon-door" (*lung-men* 龍門) is painted. On the paper the shadow of a paper carp is moving on the waves. It rises, enters the dragon-door and comes out on the other side of the door as a dragon who then rises through the clouds up to heaven.

Country-girls also make many other kinds of lanterns, such as palace-lanterns, wall-lanterns, bushel-lanterns, lotus-lanterns, and others. The construction of the running horse lanterns is similar to that of the lanterns depicting the fish-and-dragon play. Over the outer surface of the wall-lanterns are attached human and animal figures which are fastened to the ends of movable axles. A sometimes very intriguing machinery inside, made only of kaoliang stalks and put in motion with the warmth of a candle-flame, produces marvellous spectacles outside. There is for example a lantern on which children play shuttle-cock. Or a crack in a jug is repaired with clamps. Amusing is the lantern on which a hen-pecked husband and his wife are the *dramatis personae*, this lamp being named "One who is afraid of his old wife" (*pa lao-po-ti* 怕老婆的). On other lanterns hens are picking up grains, or yarn is spun on a spinning wheel. There are as many axles protruding from inside as there are figures outside, for each figure there is an axle, and inside a whole system of levers.

3) "The lanterns of the Twelve Animals" (*shih-erh shu-têng* 十二蜀灯). - The twelve animals are the rat, the bull, the tiger, the hare, the dragon, the snake, the horse, the sheep, the monkey, the cock, the dog, and the swine. These lanterns are made either in the shape of one of these animals, or one of these animals is painted on the lantern. All twelve lamps together make a unit or set. They are rather costly to make and so are not often to be seen. In Manchuria the lanterns of the twelve animals are made of wheat flour and each lantern is put in the place which fits it most. The lanterns of the bull and of the horse are hung up in the barn, that of the dragon is put on the water-bucket, that of the rat in the store-room, and so on. The use of wheat flour for making the lamps has also to do with fertility magic.

4) Sand Lanterns (*sha-tzu-têng* 砂子燈). - These lanterns are either round-shaped or hexagonal or octagonal, and are filled with sand. On their outside human figures are painted. Before hanging them up on the wall the lanterns are first shaken. The sand running out puts the figures into motion, which lasts as long as there is sand inside.

5) Wheel-lanterns (*ch'ê-têng* 車燈). - These are lanterns which have wheels so that they can be pulled. The above mentioned sheep-lanterns come under this category.

6) Miscellaneous lantern forms. - On the lantern-market which starts on the fifth

of the first month, besides the above-classified and described lanterns, a great variety of lanterns is displayed. There are "fan-lanterns" (*shan-mien-têng* 扇面燈), "sound-stone lanterns" (*ching-tzu-têng* 磬子燈), "pavilion lanterns" (*ting-tzu têng* 亭子燈), lanterns formed into multi-storied houses or into temples. There are also motor-cars, street-cars, steamships. The lanterns shaped as dragon-boats are very beautiful. They are called "land-boats" (*han-ch'uan* 干般), boats moving on land. These lanterns look like a boat and a dragon at the same time. They are called land-boat because somebody stands in it and carries it around. It consists of a wooden frame, covered with draps, and is used only for the lantern festival. The so-called lotus-lanterns are also built in boat-form, their planks being covered with lotus-flowers, and their bow being decorated with a dragon-head. Small human figures are aboard. ⑩

Other lanterns look like a goldfish tank (*yii-kang têng* 魚缶工燈) or like a flower-basket (*hua-lan-erh têng* 花籃兒燈). Dragons, tigers, and lions are also available as lanterns. In Manchuria are lion-lanterns which are built in the same way as the sheep-lanterns. The hair of the lion is made of green paper-fringes. Goldfish-lanterns are frequently seen, and have protruding eye-balls. They are also called "dragon-eye-balls fish-lanterns" (*lung-ch'ing yii-têng* 龍睛燈). The tail of the goldfish lantern is movable, like that of the sheep-lanterns. Other animals which lent their shape to lanterns are the phoenix, the peacock, the magpie, the sparrow. Entomological prototypes are the butterfly, the spider, the grasshopper, the cicada. ⑪ The frog and its connection with the moon also comes in. ⑫ Of fruit forms we find the mandarin-orange, the persimmon, the sugar-melon, the pomegranate, and the pumpkin. ⑬ Only one half of the pumpkin is made; the plane formed by the cut is red, while the skin is green. There are also lotus-leaf lanterns. In Manchuria also sounding lanterns are made. These have wheels. They are in the form of a sedan-chair and are in gorgeous colors. When the wheels rotate, cords are hit inside and made sounding. ⑭ In Amoy there are egg-lanterns. First, the children play with real duck-eggs. During the course of their play all the eggs find their owner; then they are carefully opened and emptied. Then the children make them into little lanterns with which they stroll around. This is a favorite pastime for children during the lantern festival.

#### 7) Lanterns of special material and with special forms.

a) Ice-lanterns. - Ice is sculptured to a human figure, inside which a lighted candle is placed. The light shimmers through the ice. Also "rocks" are made of ice and then illumined. Such lanterns have become rare; formerly they could be seen in temples and big shops. In Jehol ice-lanterns were made by first making an octagonal or hexagonal or round container of wood as a skeleton for the lantern. Water is poured into this container very slowly. Because of the great cold in Jehol the water-drops freeze fast and soon form a curtain inside the wooden frame. For New Year's night the ice-cylinder, with a burning candle inside, is hung up under the eaves of the roof. It is a very charming lantern. In the district of Heilung in the province of Heilungkiang in Manchuria they take a block of ice and cut out the figure of Shou-hsing, the "Star of Long Life", in the form of a bearded gentleman, about 5-6 ft. high. On the back of the figure two or three holes are cut out. Into these are placed small oil-lamps. Then the whole figure shines like crystal. Tiger-lanterns also

are made of ice. In their belly is a lighted lantern. The ice-tiger is called "white tiger" and is placed opposite the "green dragon", a lantern made of wheat sprouts.

b) Wheat-sprout lanterns. - The nucleus of this lantern consists of ice, on the surface of which wheat is sprouting. The sprouts on the surface and the light from inside combine to produce a fairy-like effect. To make a wheat-lantern, first straw and cotton are used to form popular human or animal figures. The inside of these are hollowed out so that lamps could be placed in them. At the same time well-grown wheat-kernels are then inserted into the prepared figure; and so after some time the figure is covered with green. During the lantern festival the green figures are exhibited in the courtyard or outside the house-door and lighted. The beauty of these lanterns can be further increased by first growing cabbage or turnips in a room and then planting some of their leaves among the wheat-buds.

There are many rural songs about the ice- and wheat-lanterns with a satirical undertone: just as the ice-lamps are soon eaten up by the wind, so do the politicians of the Ch'ing dynasty come and go.

A still more elaborate form of the wheat-lanterns are the "dragon-wheat-lanterns". The form of a dragon is made from wire, this is then covered with cotton soaked in water. Wheat-kernels planted in the cotton soon begin to sprout and you soon have a green dragon. These lanterns form a pair with the white-tiger-lanterns. One can also see two dragons facing each other with a ball between them.

More figures are taken from the repertoires of popular art, for instance, the monkey or the "luck bestowing heavenly mandarin" (*T'ien-kuan hsi fu* 天官賜福). There are rice-wine bottles and flower-pots. The stalks of the latter are of iron or tree-branches, while the leaves are of paper. The blossoms are of ice. A light burns inside the bottom of the ice-basin.

c) "Nine-lotus lanterns" (*chiu-lien têng* 九蓮燈). - To make such lanterns, first a scaffold 3-4 fathoms high is made. On it light lanterns of paper are hung, their number being fixed at 9,981. Seen from a distance this looks like a gathering of stars.

d) "Lanterns of the nine Hoangho turns" (*Hoangho chiu-ch'ü têng* 黃河九曲燈). - This lantern display also is of a grand scale and requires the cooperation of the whole village. It is said that this lantern show was seen in Shantung until modern times. On a flat ground of about 2,400-3,000 square-feet a hut is built of kaoliang stalks. Around it a fence with nine turns is constructed of bundles of kaoliang-straw. This stands for the nine turns of the Hoangho river. If stretched out, this fence would measure about one Chinese mile (*li*). On this fence lanterns are hung and lighted. In villages around Peking the fences are said to have been 3-4 *li* long. Their construction was an event which stirred up the imagination of poets of good standing.

8) Processions with dragon-lanterns and customs connected therewith. ☉

These processions need much preparation and organisation and are a big affair in community life. They are undertaken by various groups of society and according to the means available. Even in military camps they were popular. First, the president of the dragon-lantern association goes with the visiting card of his association to the locality where the procession will be staged. He contacts all those who are interested

in it. The visited persons then take steps for the preparation of food and drinks for the entertainment of the actors. Those who are to perform for the attainment of a good harvest expect a handsome honorarium.

The construction of the dragon-lanterns. - Bamboo sticks are split, heated over fire and bent. Many basket-like parts are made and combined, in such a way that the skeleton of the dragon is about 4-5 fathoms long, sometimes even 10 fathoms. ② This skeleton is covered with cloth on which a scale pattern is painted.

Some additional scales on the trunk of the dragon are made from a blue colored cardboard. Head and tail are attached. On large lanterns the head is a link by itself; the trunk consists of about 5-7 links, while the tail is of one link. The eyes are blue with a golden margin. The head protrudes about one foot. The two horns are golden or silver, far longer than oxen-horns. From the tip of each horn a red tuft hangs down about one foot. In the white mouth a red tongue moves about. A green beard hangs down from the temples. The blue tail is flat like that of a fish.

The number of the basket-like links of which the dragon's body is composed depends on the size of the dragon. To each link is attached a supporting stick of about 5 ft. in length. For each stick a carrier is provided. The dragon is carried around on these sticks. Inside each link candles on iron nails can be lighted. These candle-holders are movable so that they do not topple over and set the whole lantern afire. In front of the dragon, an embroidered ball attached to a stick with an iron fork is carried. The ball which can move in the fork, symbolizes the sun-ball. The carrier of the ball and of the dragon are all dressed in green, only the hair-ball on their caps is red.

Then the troupe begins to rehearse the procession. The first man carries a banner, then follow others who beat a gong, then the man with the sun-ball comes and finally the dragon. Men with drums and cymbals form the rearguard. The dragon knows several gaits: one is called "ascending from the ocean to the clouds (*chu hai hsing yün* 出海行雲), while another one is "winding the body around a pillar" (*fan shen pan chu* 翻身蟠柱). There are several other gait performances.

There are regional differences in the construction of the dragon. Dragons of an enormous size has Ch'ü-chou (衢州) in Chekiang. They are called "great cloth dragons" (*ta pu lung* 大布龍). Alone, the head of one is 1 fathom high and 5-6 ft. broad. About ten men are needed to carry the dragon. In villages along the lower estuary of the Yangtse River, children make "grass-dragons", The children themselves gather the grass needed to make them. In the body of the dragon they plant many incense sticks, which they burn during the procession. In villages in Kuangtung children carry an "incense-dragon" (*hsiang-ho lung* 香火龍) made of straw, which is about 5-6 fathoms long or even more. The slithering of the dragon is made possible because it is composed of many links, each of which has to be carried on a separate stick. All over the entire body incense sticks are planted and lit during the procession in the evening. The burning sticks look like little stars. The eyes of the dragon are lighted with small oil-lamps. South China knows many such variations.

Great skill is required of the dragon carriers in synchronizing their movements so that the bends and turns of the long dragon-body look natural. Also, the ball carrier



must be team-minded because the dragon is trying to catch the ball, which must be prevented. Much practice is needed of all players.

In the North the grim winter-cold keeps the people indoors. In the South the first green vegetables come on the market already at New Year. When the music of the approaching dragon procession is heard, all families burn incense on their house-altars and wrap some money in red paper. When the dragon has arrived, that money is given to the assistants of the procession. Thereupon the dragon makes his *kotou* in the direction of the house and moves on.

In Szechuan a sham-battle is fought with the dragon. Fire-crackers are exploded in the face of the dragon. They call this "to burn the dragon-lantern" (*shao lung-têng* 烧龙灯), or "to burn the dragon" (*shao lung* 烧龙). The fire-crackers are of an unequal size, consisting of bamboo tubes into which the explosive mixed with iron splinters is put. When spurting out in the explosion, these splinters are red-hot. This bombardment of the dragon is no trifle for the carriers. In spite of the danger of their being hit and burnt, they must keep the movement of the dragon in harmony. The dragon players are naked up to the waist, so that the hot splinters cannot burn their clothes. As to their skin, they do not mind the bruises; and as seasoned experts they know how to keep their bruises to a minimum. The novices must reckon with serious burns. To throw their fire-crackers, people stand on a scaffold or a stool and charge at the players from a distance of only 2-3 ft.; but still the players do not retreat. Instead, they raise the head of the dragon up towards the attackers. Most exposed to the fire attack are those players who carry the head of the dragon. Those with the tail are the safest. They are very cheerful and provoke much laughter with their jokes and jests. The onlookers however like to aim at them, and are happy if one of the tail-carriers has been hit and burnt by a fire-cracker. Sometimes a device is built into the mechanism of the dragon which permits the carriers to detach the tail in a critical moment.

9) Dragon lanterns and popular belief. - In the district of Hsien-t'ien in Hunan, when the dragon procession is over, the villagers gather and burn the dragon. This is called "sending off misfortune" (*sung tsai* 送灾). All misfortune in the village is transferred to the dragon and burnt with it. This custom is practiced everywhere. To save expenses, frequently only a miniature dragon is made and burnt.

Furthermore, the "washing of the dragon" (*hsi lung* 法龙) is widely practiced. At the conclusion of the lantern festival, that is, on the 17th day after the New Year, people go to a river or to the sea and wash all the paper off from the body of the dragon. The belief prevails that if the dragon is stored away with all the paper and trimming on it, misfortune will also stay. Misfortune has been transferred to the dragon and must be washed away. There are still other customs and beliefs connected with lanterns, but we shall deal with them below in the ethnological interpretation of the New Year lanterns and connected customs.

10) Processions with dragon lanterns and connected customs. - We will deal here with lion-dances, stilt-walking, and the "land-boat". In many processions we find not only dragon-lanterns, but also various other types of lanterns. The organisation of lantern processions is still more complicated than that of dragon processions. In

Hupei they call the lantern procession "gathering for the play with lanterns" (*wan têng hui* 頑燈會).

a) Organisation of lantern processions.

First, a festival committee is formed. This is called (*t'ou-chia* 頭家), "head-houses", and consists of five to ten members. This committee then finds a house for its meetings, (*tso-chia* 座家), "sitting house". There the preparations for the processions are made and banquets given. Every year a different house-owner must open his house for this purpose; to refuse would run against an established custom. The committee meets daily, lanterns are built and other preparations made. An important item on the agenda are the expenses. The committee members collect contributions from all the families in the district within which the procession is to be made. The amount is not fixed, but no difference between rich and poor is recognized. The first time the collectors make their round they only ask which amount will be forthcoming, and then enter that in a book. This is called "to note down the contributions" (*hsie-chüan* 寫捐). Later the cashier goes from house to house "to collect the contributions" (*shou chüan* 收捐). Part of the money is used to throw a banquet for the participants of the lantern-dance and to purchase candles. Because the same dragon- and lion-lanterns and the same musical instruments are used every year and only minor repairs are necessary, not much money is needed for the performance proper.

The district which organizes the dances is not very large. In cities, usually one street makes a unit. Sometimes several streets are combined. There is, for instance, an East Gate association, a West Gate association, and the like. An association may consist of one hundred or several hundred houses. That makes from several hundred up to one thousand persons. In the country-side, usually one village makes a unit; sometimes several villages combine. If outside a city several processions run into each other by chance, clashes among them frequently occur.

Competition in the skilful making of lanterns also exists. If an association has wealthy members, it can afford expensive lanterns and beat other associations in the competition. To lose in a competition is shameful, and brings mockery and derision. Sometimes calumnies against an adversary are posted on placards, occasionally resulting in bloody skirmishes. Lantern contests are most frequent in cities; clashes however are rare there. The skirmishes which frequently occur between different groups in the countryside are called "fights with arms" (*hsieh-tou* 械鬪). In the countryside members of the same clan (*hsing* 姓) usually live within the same area, and their relationship with other clans is often beset by rivalry and friction. As long as all are kept busy by their work in the fields, no animosity comes into the open, but old enmities easily break out during community enterprises such as the lantern procession. Also, personal feelings of revenge may be at the bottom of quarrels, so that the joyful atmosphere of the lantern festival sometimes turns into an occasion for fist-fights. Such fights may happen during a visit to a temple or during the procession. Roads in the countryside are few and narrow. When a road is occupied by a procession, no other procession should come along the same road if a fight for the road is to be avoided.

Before an association starts with its procession, its members first proceed to the

temple, and since the god there is inclined to lend his ear to those who come first, it can easily happen that two associations run into one another on their race to the temple.

On the 13th day the association calls on the village temple (*shê-miao* 社廟) where the Earth-god (*t'u-ti-shen* 土地神) is worshipped. If an association was lucky to arrive there first for the incense burning, it worships first, the other associations which may have arrived in the meanwhile, must wait for their turn. It is a wise precaution to have all strong men take part in the lantern processions, not as lantern carriers, but as a reserve force, armed with sticks and clubs. When a procession starts it looks as if it were going to war.

b) Preparation of decorative lanterns.

These are lanterns with no specific form or meaning, carried along only to lend color to the procession. The committee members gather in their headquarters and mend the lanterns if necessary. The adult men, at least one from each family, are called to the meeting place. Also experts in theater playing are hired. Nobody is paid an honorarium, their only reward being the food and drinks of the banquet extended to them. Musicians and actors are willing to participate because they too want to worship the village god. After the temple visit and the following banquet, the cashiers of the association give an accurate account of the expenses. The account is written on yellow paper and hung up in public within the temple precincts. Nobody dares to embezzle any amount of money for fear of divine punishment.

c) Preparation of the dragon-lanterns.

We have already dealt with dragon-lanterns above; in the present context no new viewpoints come in. There is no fixed rule for the color of the dragon-lanterns. It happens that the dragon-lanterns of a city are of certain colors, for instance, green at the East Gate, black at the North Gate, yellow in the center. These colors are determined by the Five Elements. At the very head of the procession a ball is carried on a stick, "the ball with which the dragon plays" (*lung hsi chiu* 龍戲球). The ball is red. The dragon is followed by a jester. His hair is all woven into small plaits; his face is black, only the contours of his nose being white. He is clad in hides, but a fan is attached to his loins to produce the comic contrast commented upon by the words "cold and hot do not match" (*lêng juo pu ho* 冷熱不和). The jester dances around behind the tail of the dragon. By raising and lowering his head he accompanies the dancing movements of the dragon in a jolly way. The jester is called "quality of the tail" (*wei-tzu chih* 尾子質), one that is worth only as much as the tail is. Things which come at the end and are hardly worth anything are called *wei-tzu* 'tail'. Wine from the bottom of a wine-jug is called "wine-tail" (*chiu-wei-tzu* 酒尾子), oil from the bottom is "oil-tail" (*yu-wei-tzu* 油尾子). "Tail" always refers to something of inferior quality and is not to be sold; applied to a person, it means "worthless" and "dumb".

d) Lion dances (*p'an shih* 盤獅).

Though no lanterns accompany the lion dances we treat them here because in Hupei they belong to the lantern festival. Only the head of the lion is made of wood or of paper-mâché. The lower jaw is movable; the face is painted. All things

acquired for the lantern festival are brought to the office of the association. On the head of the lion are nine balls, all made of silk cloth. Hanging from under the chin of the lion's head and functioning as a beard are many hemp-threads. The body of the lion is made rather simply. Its backbone consists of a stick over which a thick hemp-cloth is hung. From the head on back to the tail, 19 balls are fastened; short green hemp-threads make up the hair. The tail consists of a stick wrapped in cloth.

Usually two players are needed for the lion dance. One person handles the lion's head. He manipulates the lower jaw of the lion with both hands. Another player covers himself with the hemp cloth which helps form the body of the lion. He finds himself in a somewhat uncomfortable position because he cannot stand upright. With one hand he holds the girdle of the man with the lion's head; with the other hand he holds the stick of the lion's tail which he skilfully keeps in motion. Dancing in unison with the man in front of him is very demanding. People like to say: "At a dragon dance do not play the head; at a lion dance do not play the tail".

For both kinds of dances a few customary rules exist. When dragon and lion meet on the street, the dragon has the right of precedence. At a dragon dance a man with a ball walks in front. At a lion dance a man made up as a Lohan, that is a Buddhist saint, walks in the lead; The combination of a Lohan with a lion is based on the story "The Lohan descends on the lion" (*Lo-han hsiang shih* 羅漢降獅). The carrying of a ball in front of the dragon is based on the generally known representation of two dragons playing together with a ball. The ball is combined with the dragon also when (for simplicity's sake) there is only one dragon, but one Lohan must never be combined with two lions.

The dance with dragon lanterns always takes place on open ground, for the dragon must never enter living quarters. The dragon belongs to water, and if he would enter a house, a flood would follow. The lion, however, can freely enter houses and is welcome there since he possesses the power to expel evil. People like it if the lion jumps about in their court-yards and rooms. People then explode fire-crackers in his face in order to increase his strength. The hair of both the dragon and the lion is used for magical purposes.

e) Stilt walking (*kao-chiao* 高蹻).

In Hupei and many other areas stilt walking is part of the program of the lantern festival. Such additions give us important hints for the interpretation of the lantern festival. The stilts are from several feet up to one fathom high. Men in fancy dress accompany the lantern procession on stilts. Their noses are painted white, which shows that we have to do here with comedians. In the countryside a comedian is called "white nose" (*pai pi-tsu* 白鼻子). Players in female attire sing suggestive songs. In Hupei the most popular song themes are "I am waiting for my lover with burning desire" (*wang lang lai* 忘郎来), "Ten lovers" (*shih ai-lang* 十愛郎), "Songs from the city of Ma" (*Ma-cheng ko* 麻城歌), "Longing for the lover in the four seasons" (*szu chi hsiang-hsi* 四季相思), "Ten cups of wine" (*shih pei chiu* 十盃酒), "The melody of Szu-chou" (*Szu-chou t'iao* 泗州調), "Playing with ivory domino stones" (*ta ya-pai* 打牙牌), "Eighteen touches" (*shih-pa mo* 十八摸), ⑤ Not only is the text of the songs lascivious, but the movements of the players are also full of liberties; kis-

sing and immodest touching are done in public. Decency is grossly disregarded (Nagao I, 427).

The minimum number of stilt walkers is two: a man and a woman. In "great plays" (*ta hsi* 大戲) a great number of stilt walkers take part. By "great plays" is meant the cultivated theatrical art of Peking and Hankou. The low-class play with smutty jokes is called "play with beautiful drums" (*hua-ku hsi* 花鼓戲). In the "great plays" are enacted: "Szu-lang is looking for his mother" (*Szu-lang t'an-chiu mu* 四郎探母), "Mu Lien seeks his mother" (*Mu-lien chiu-mu* 目蓮求母). The actors are very much hindered in their movements of course, as their position on the high stilts is not comfortable at all. Sometimes they even dispense with the theatrical performances; they display the make-up only for a "great play". The stilt walkers usually go from house to house singing songs. It is customary to give them presents, mostly fruit wrapped in red paper. The little packages (*pao-erh* 包兒) are small wooden boxes, 8×4×2 inches, weighing about 1 pound. The name of the shop which sells such packages is written in golden letters on the red paper of the wrapping. In Hupei shops have such packages ready for sale any time of the year.

f) The "land boat" (*han-ch'uan* 旱般).

The name could also be translated "dry boat", Again we have to do with an ethnologically interesting phenomenon that helps in the interpretation of the significance of the lantern festival. The boat is made of kaoliang stalks, wood, bamboo, and gauze. There is a hole in the center of the bottom of the boat. A man stands in this hole and carries the boat around on a strap, holding it about as high as his hips. As the feet of the man are not visible, it looks as if he were riding in the boat. Usually there are several boats around to perform dances which are called "running with land boats" (*p'ao han-ch'uan* 跑旱般). The female element and transvestism also play a role in this performance. The men in the boat are variously disguised. It often happens that two children sit in the boat beside the man. One of them is made up as a jester, while his father is comically painted. The other child is dressed up as a woman, dons a cap decorated with pearls and wears gaudy clothing. The most important themes of the songs are "Excursion to the West Lake" (*yu Hsi-hu* 遊西湖) and "Plucking lotus flowers" (*ts'ai lien* 採蓮).

There are many regional variations of the land boat. To mention only two, the "land-dragon-boat" (*lu-lung ch'uan* 陸龍般) in Kuantung is more complicated in its construction than the usual gauze-covered boats are. The planks of the boat are decorated with beautiful wood-carvings. The boat is about one fathom long, that is twice as long as land boats usually are. It is several feet broad and correspondingly high. The boat runs on wheels. All kinds of lanterns are carried in the boat.

Sometimes a beautifully dressed little girl is sitting in the boat. The boat is taken along in the lantern processions. Also, lanterns formed as two-storied houses are carried in the boat.

In Hupei we find another variation of the land boat. The boat there is called "lotus plucking boat" (*ts'ai lien ch'uan* 採蓮般) (Nagao II, 429). It is 5-6 ft. long and some feet high. Over the hole in the center of the boat is erected a sort of seat with four posts, in which a person can "sit" (in fact walk). The person who is carry-

ing the boat with both hands wears female attire. By showing small feet under the garment of the "woman", the impression is given that the person is sitting in the boat. The boat is followed by the boat-master. His job is to make jokes. While the boat wanders from house to house, the "woman" sings songs about plucking lotus-flower.

9) The procession with festival lanterns.

An immense crowd of spectators lines the streets. For the long procession a definite order is observed. At the head march some men with gongs; then comes a big drum, followed by a small gong and other musical instruments. All in all, ten instruments are played. On both sides of the band are several men marching with rifles. From time to time, either at the head or at the rear of the procession they fire a few shots. Behind the musicians walks a group with flags, on which dragons and lions are depicted. The flagstaves look like halberds. The iron points are sharp, the staffs are of hard wood. If the procession gets disarrayed, the flagstaves serve to restore order. The group with the flags is followed by a group carrying a portable incense-burner which is made of wood, quadrangular and about one cubic foot large. It is carried by some boys. On this burner is a small bronze sandalwood-burner (*t'an-hsiang lu* 檀香炉) which fills the air with fragrance. The incense-burner must be carried with piety and devotion, because the incense burnt in it is a prayer to the gods for a good harvest. Behind the incense burner walk two detachments of soldiers, first young and strong fellows in infantry uniform and armed with various weapons but without lances, the so-called "fighters with short weapons" (*tuan-ta tui* 短打隊). Lances are carried by a troop on horseback, the "fighters with long weapons" (*chang-ta tui* 長打隊). These soldiers are fancifully made up.

11) Some regional variations in the celebration of the lantern festival.

a) Swimming lanterns. - In Kuangtung lanterns are set adrift on rivers on the night of the 15th day of the New Year. These are lotus-lanterns (*lien-têng* 蓮燈), which in many other provinces are set adrift on the 15th of the seventh month. These lotus-lanterns are made of oil-paper with much care. Their petals, white or red, are fastened to a heavy wooden basis; inside the lotus-flower burns an oil-lamp. With these lanterns people want to worship the river-god, at the same time consoling the souls of those who have died of starvation (*o-kuei* 餓鬼). People who want a first-born male descendant try to catch one of the drifting lanterns. A white lantern is an omen that a boy will be born; a red lantern foretells the birth of a girl (Nagao I, 455, f.)

b) Gathering for "catching carp" (*mo-li-tzu têng-hui* 摸鯉子燈會). - In Ta-pu in Kuangtung lanterns in the form of carp are used. The clans (*hsing* 姓), that is all the people with the same family name, live together; for instance, all Wangs live in the same place. Their living area is fenced in by a wall, within which there are about 200-300 persons. At New Year's 20-30 young people are chosen, and each is given a beautiful carp-lantern. With their lamps they make their rounds to the settlements of the other clans. At the bottom of the carp-lantern there is a handle, about 2 ft. long, for holding the lantern. There are no candles in the lanterns, but a paper-tinder, about 2-3 inches long, is soaked in kerosene and lit. The frame of the

lanterns is made of wire. The same lanterns are used for many years. From the 10th of the New Year to the lantern festival, processions are made with these lanterns. The young men light their lanterns and start the procession with gongs and drums, making as much noise as they can. When they arrive at the living quarters of a clan different from their own, they first perform several dances on an open ground. Then they continue to dance in front of the temple of that clan. They are welcomed with exploding fire-crackers. When their performances are over, they are entertained with fruit, cookies, salt-meat, and rice-wine. The whole affair is called "catching carp" (*mo li-tzu* 摸鯉子) (Nagao I, 463). The procession with carp lanterns should be entertaining and serve to promote good neighborly ties. If during the past year a child has been born into a family, then at the lantern festival members of other clans come "to catch carp". The family with the new-born baby hangs up as many small lanterns as there are children. The lanterns are called "new fishes" (*hsin yü* 新魚). While looking at the lanterns the visitors say their congratulations to the family.

c) Peculiarities of the lantern festival in Chekiang. - Besides the dragon-lanterns there are also fish-, tortoise-, crab-, and lobster-lanterns (Nagao I, 463). They are smaller than the dragon-lanterns and are carried by children on a long handle. Other lanterns look like umbrellas. On the gauze of the umbrella are pasted various figures of colored paper, also landscapes, flowers of the four seasons, birds, and other animals, even inscriptions copied from monuments. All these figures are illuminated from inside the umbrella.

Theatrical performances with lanterns, called "local theater" (*ti-hsi* 地戲), also exist. For one play two or three actors are needed. For the play "The fisherman catches oysters" (*yü-weng pu pang* 漁翁捕蚌) the shell of a huge Venus-shell is made of bamboo. This shell opens and closes. Inside the shell there is a child dressed in red; the lower half consists of green silk trousers. The face of the child, made up as a woman, is painted white; the head is decorated with flowers. Inside the shell there are some candles and a glass-mirror. The impersonator of the fisherman is a boy who makes all kinds of movements to catch oysters.

"The play with the flower-drum" (*hua-ku hsi* 花鼓戲) is also known in Chekiang, here played by a man and a woman. Another well known play is "Two Buddhist monks and a Taoist monk beg for alms". There are also monkey theaters and other entertainments. The most important thing in all these plays are the lanterns. A street-peddler with a pole over his shoulder carrying burning lanterns comes along. A peculiarity here is the lantern which is named "Grand Secretariate Lantern" (*t'ai-ko teng* 台閣燈). On a plank over a wooden stand are arranged some human figures which represent theater roles. Many such stands with figures are carried around. If only two men carry a stand, it is called "Small Grand Secretariate". If carried by 4-8 men and loaded with many figures, it is called "Big Grand Secretariate". On the small Grand Secretariate is the form of a mountain, covered with multicolored grass and flowers. In the center on a small bench is sitting a small child of three to four years, beautifully dressed. This stand is carried by two men in disguise, with another one preceding them, beating a gong. If there is only a square table on the stand,

there is no child. Instead, there are figures of gauze, a pavilion, a treasure-tower, antique tripods, birds or other animals. There are also well known figurative representations, for instance, "The red phoenix rises up to the sun, or "Crane and deer come together with the spring".<sup>㉔</sup> Of human figures we find "The Eight Genii celebrate the birthday (of Hsi-wang-mu)" (Nozaki, No. 47), "Promotion in the official hierarchy and nobility rank" (Nozaki, No. 136), "The two genii Ho Ho" (Nozaki, No. 93), "Five boys succeed in the examination" (obtain scholarly rank) (Nozaki, No. 113). All these symbolic representations are depicted as lantern. Sometimes 4-8 men carry a portable stage on which two or three men are acting out a play from the theater; sometimes four or five children are doing this. Besides the actors, various lanterns are also carried on the portable stage.

There are differences in the construction of lanterns between the city and the countryside. It often happens that organisations of lantern players from outside give performances in the city. The organisation must first, however, pay a visit to the yamen to ask for permission to perform. This given, a dance in honor of the magistrate is performed, for which the performers receive a present, usually a package of candles, money and sweets. For special accomplishments in the lantern association silver coins, specially minted, are given as a kind of trophy. Formerly the period for dragon dances and lantern processions lasted until the last week of the second month. Today only the two or three days before and after the 15th of the first month are reserved for these festivities.

d) Lantern-festival customs in Hopei.

There is a "lantern-festival with a turtle-mountain" (*ao-shan teng-hui* 鰲山燈會).<sup>㉕</sup> The name of this festival is already mentioned in a source of the Southern Sung.<sup>㉖</sup> According to an old belief a turtle carries a mountain on its back. The mountain is inhabited with gods and genii. At the lantern festival they build a replica of this mountain and decorate it with all kinds of legendary and mythical figures.<sup>㉗</sup> Because of the high costs involved the turtle-mountain construction is possible only as a community enterprise and undertaken to obtain a fertile year.

When a lantern festival is to be celebrated, people first form an organisation consisting of about 90 members; about 50 players and some administrative personnel are needed. Then a locality must be found for the performances. On an open space a shelter of shilf-mats is built. On a wall inside the shelter a mountain is built from paper, with caves for genii and temple groves in which gods are worshipped. The hall in the center is dedicated to "all gods of Heaven and Earth", on the right and the left are enthroned respectively the wind-god and the thunder-god. Between the genii mountain and the Buddhist temples are stretched about ten ropes. Lanterns are attached to these ropes and made to dance. On both sides of the mat-shelter showy lanterns are hung. Many things can be seen represented on the lanterns of the turtle-mountain: for instance, "a fish changes to a dragon" "the God of War and the God of Wealth", "the hall of the five-fold happiness", "the pomegranate and the hundred sons", "five boys enjoy themselves together", "peach-blossom boat", "the hall of the clear moon-shine", "honorary monument for filial piety", "pavilion of peonies", "fish-basket", "grapes", and many others. The illuminations shown on



the turtle-mountain lanterns are full of tricks and surprises, the movement of the human and animal figures are lifelike. As an example we can describe how "a fish changes to a dragon". On the rope appears first a big red fish with a tail split into five parts, such as goldfish have. The fish is suspended between the two walls of the hut. Using an ignition-cord a small fire-cracker inside the fish is exploded; the fire comes out like burning flowers. Then a big explosion follows and the skin of the fish falls down. But on the cord there appear now five dragons, which wind and turn like living dragons. The play is accompanied by suitable music. The performances with these marvellous lanterns last from the 14th to the 16th day of the first month. Most spectators from far and wide come on the 15th day, all in their best dress.

Fighting games (*wu-shih hui* 武士会). - Such games are a popular amusement during the lantern festival. The fighters are armed with all possible weapons from the Chinese arsenal. In between are men who fight with their bare hands. Their breasts and back are bare, while their heads are adorned with red and blue silk-cloth. Their girdles are of some other color. A number of men come with flowers in their temple-hair and on their loins. The place reserved for the sham-battles is usually so crowded with spectators that the crowd has first to be pushed back to make room for the combatants. First, a man lays out on the ground a long rope with an iron ball fastened on one end, thus defining the space needed for the games. The onlookers have to stay out of the circumscribed area. Then each of the fighters picks up his weapon, and all of a sudden the fight flares up. With consummate skill all kinds of fist-fights and boxing are exhibited. Then follow performances with swords and lances and other iron weapons. The iron glitters and flashes so that the spectators almost become giddy. The next game is played between three men, each with a lance, and one man armed only with a simple stick. With his bare hands another man fights a man with a lance. An unarmed man seizes from another one his double-blade (two swords in one sheath). All this happens without any shouting or pushing.

The "lantern-inspector play" (*têng-kuan hsi* 燈官戲) in Mukden (Nagao I, 471-477).-

The players impersonate a magistrate who is inspecting the lantern festival. The players are usually servants and petty officials of law-courts and other public agencies. The "inspector's" make-up is as follows: a fur-coat (but turned inside out), a head-dress, and a mandarin-cap with a red tassel on top. On the nose are some old-fashioned eye-glasses, and in one hand a long pipe. He is an easy-going gentleman of old. His wife is represented too. She wears a jacket with long sleeves, red or green trousers, a head full of hairpins and red shoes. Pods of Chayenne pepper serve as ear-rings. In spite of the cold of the winter the old lady holds a fan made of a banana leaf. She is accompanied by her maid-servants, all with faces powdered white. Her body-guard consists of officials of low rank, all dressed in green. There are also some old scholars in her suite as advisors. The "inspector" sits in a make-shift sedan-chair carried on two poles. His wife follows him riding a donkey; the literati also ride donkeys. In a wagon follow the concubines of the mandarin. The cortège goes everywhere. Ahead of it officials are sent out to deliver the card of the mandarin to the house owners. The master of the house has to receive the high guest with due

respect. The inspector admonishes him to give proper attention to the lanterns. Merchants who did not care to hang up lanterns are fined. As a fine, they have to give them some lantern-festival-dumplings or money. Everything begins with fun and ends with fun. The cheerful play belongs now to the past. Maybe in some remote corner of the countryside it is still alive.

## B. The magic significance of the New Year lanterns.

In view of the enormous spending on New Year lanterns, the extraordinary variety of the lanterns, and the paramount position they occupy in the whole complex of New Year festivities, we can say that among the Chinese a true lantern cult exists. Anthropology and cultural history know of no other people on earth in the past or present among which glass- and paper-lanterns occupy such a dominant position in the celebration of New Year as among the Chinese. The Japanese have learned lantern construction from the Chinese, but in their otherwise elaborate celebration of New Year's lanterns play no significant role. The phenomenon of the Chinese New Year lamps and lanterns arouses the interest of the ethnologist and calls for an explanation. To be sure, the majority of the people who celebrate the lantern festival with so much enthusiasm are no longer aware of its original and intrinsic meaning, but still we find enough clues to unearth its basic significance. Outwardly the lanterns are toys, the most cherished toys of all. ㊦ The lantern festival with its processions and performances brings relief from the monotony of daily life in the villages. ㊧

In noting the impressive surface of the gaudy display of lights, colors, and tricks in the Chinese New Year lanterns and looking deeper, we do not hesitate to formulate the statement: these Chinese New Year lanterns are, or were, light and fire magic practised at the beginning of spring-time to ward off evil and to increase the fertility of man, animals and plants.

### 1) Human fertility.

In Central and South China lanterns are presented to childless women at New Year's and at the lantern festival (Nagao I, 127, ff). In Hsing-hua in Kiangsu, childless women are given the so-called "children-lanterns" (*hai-erh têng* 孩兒燈) which are issued at the temple of the Children Bestowing Kuanyin (*Sung-tzu Kuan-yin miao* 送子觀音廟). The lantern is made of clay, in the form of a child with hands and legs. The light shines through a hole in the chest and belly. Such a lantern-present is always gladly accepted and the giver is thanked with a good dinner. The lamp is placed in the guest-room or in the sleeping-room, and care is taken that it never goes out. If by accident the lamp is damaged, this is taken as an omen that the child born later will be a cripple. In Fukien, if one year after a wedding no child has been born yet, the young wife receives, among other New Year presents, from her relatives back in the village a lantern on which the picture of Kuanyin is painted, a "lantern of the children bestowing Kuanyin". Two additional lanterns with symbolic paintings or inscriptions are also sent together, that is the "lantern of the successful examination candidate riding on horseback" (*chuang-yüan chi-ma têng* 狀元

騎馬燈) and the "lantern of the heaven-given offspring" (*T'ien-hsi lin-erh têng* 天賜麟兒燈). In their symbolic language these two lanterns supplement the first one. The three lanterns are accompanied by several other symbolic presents, 1) melon-seeds, 2) roasted rice, 3) mandarin-oranges, 4) bean-curd (*tofu*) and oysters. The Chinese names of these objects form together a sound-symbolic sentence. The melon-seeds signify "many children" (*to-tzu* 多子). The word for roasted rice sounds, in the Fukien language, as "coming joy" (*ch'ieh-hsi* 且喜). The word for mandarin-oranges stands for "child of luck" (*chi-tzu* 吉子). Bean-curd, in Fukien *tou-yu*, stands for "there is (will be) fight" (*tou-yu* 鬪有). The word for oyster, *li*, is in Fukien spoken *ti* 'younger brother'. Thus the presented objects are the expression of the wish: may in this house children competitively arrive (may there be competition - a fight - among the children who arrive in this house). The four additions to the lanterns are called "the four big kinds (of presents)" and are symbolic votive presents for obtaining many boys.

Many people add some other symbolic presents: garlic, a white pear-blossom and a red plum-blossom. The Fukien pronunciation of the word for garlic - in Mandarin *suau-tzu* - sounds similar to *sun-tzu* 'grand-child'. We have then the wish: may the offspring grow as strongly as garlic. The word for pear is pronounced somewhat like *lai* 'to come'. The white blossom stands for a boy, may a boy come. The red blossom stands for a girl, the plum-blossom is a symbol of beauty.

If during the coming year a child is born to the young couple who received the symbolic presents, no further presents of this kind are given the next year. If it happens however that the couple is still without child, then a lantern is presented them. This is called the "lantern on which a grand-child sits in a basin" (*sun-tzu tso-pen-têng* 孫子座盆燈). The picture painted on the lantern shows how a baby is bathed in a basin. If after another year still no child has arrived, a "sweet-potato lantern" (*yii-t'ou têng* 芋頭燈) is sent implicitly expressing the wish that children would arrive and be as luxuriant as the leaves of the sweet-potato. In the fourth year a "flower-pot lantern" (*hua-pen têng*) with a picture of a flower-pot on it is presented. The meaning of it is: in the flower-pot the old earth is exchanged for new earth, otherwise the plant could not grow. A flower-pot presented to a childless couple contains new earth: "may the woman be blessed with new forces of life". The messenger delivering the lantern gets 133 or 333 coins (cash). The number three (*san*) is in Fukien pronounced *sheng*, which also means 'to give birth'. If in spite of these presents still no child is born, the presents are repeated from the "lantern of the children bestowing Kuanyin" on.

In Fuchou lanterns petitioning children are also issued by temples. ⑤ The priest in the Temple of the Great King is given a hint that lanterns of a certain kind are desired for a certain family, Thereupon, the god of the temple orders through his servants four paper-lanterns to be made in the shape of boys. On the evening of the 15th day of the New year, they are delivered to the house of the childless couple, and handed over in the name and with the best wishes of the Great King. The present of the god is considered auspicious and gratefully accepted.

A variation of the above described custom is the following procedure. If the

lantern-present from the temple has not yet produced its desired effect after one year, the temple is visited again, this time to ask for a lantern to be carried on a handle (*ti-têng* 提燈). Thereupon the priests send during the night of the 15th day in a procession with much noise four lanterns with a handle in the shape of four babies. On the lanterns the sentence "prayers offered will surely be answered" (*chi-chiu pi ying* 祈求必應) is expressed through pictures and sound symbolism. A child holds a flag, *chi* 旗 'flag', *chi* 祈 'prayer'. Another child holds a ball, *chiu* 球 'ball', *chiu* 求 'to ask for'. The third child holds a writing brush, *pi* 筆 'writing brush', *pi* 必 'surely'. The fourth child holds a seal, *yin* 印 'seal', *ying* 應 'to answer. These words are frequently seen inscribed in temples. Some money is expected by the priest for the four lanterns sent from the temple. Poor families keep only one or two lanterns, the others they return. The most highly prized are the two lanterns with the writing brush and the seal, symbols of the wish that the eventually coming boy will become an official, the most cherished hope and ideal of Chinese parents.

Above we have described the presentation of lanterns to childless couples. Many more such descriptions could be added, but space forces us to summarize. In Shao-hsing in Chekiang "lanterns which expedite child-birth" (*sung-ts'ui-tzu têng* 送催子燈) are given. On the lantern is painted a Kirin (unicorn), a known symbol of human fertility. In the district of Shao-hsing lanterns are presented to newlywed women, the inscription on the lanterns "may noble sons be born continuously" indicating their purpose. In Changsha in Hunan, childless women see to it that the dragon of a lantern procession walks around them at least once. In Tatung in Shansi, childless women steal lanterns from families with many children in order to achieve pregnancy. On the other hand, the disappearance of a lantern results in a decrease of luck and invites misfortune, and therefore care is taken that no lanterns are stolen.

In this connection it may be mentioned that the lighted lantern in the bed-room has a bearing on pregnancy. It is an old belief that in the room of a woman who wants a child the lamp must burn all night. Especially during the nights of the main festivals of the annual life cycle of the Chinese must this rule be adhered to strictly. If the lamp burns brightly, children will come without interruption. A point of special interest is the belief that the lamps and lanterns owe their child-giving power to the spirits of the dead who gather around the light. Lamps are lighted in great number especially on the eves of festivals, because at such times the spirits assembled under the light are more numerous than on other nights.

The belief in the efficiency of the spirits of the dead is also the reason why they take home the lanterns which have been set adrift on water during the lantern festival in the 7th month (*yü-lan-pen hui* 盂蘭盆會) (Nagao W, 237, f.). The drifting lamps are meant as consolation for the wandering spirits of the dead. Childless couples pick up one of these lanterns in the hope of obtaining a child. The Chinese are of the opinion that a spirit can become a man again in the womb of a woman and be reborn as a child. The spirits hang on to the bottom of the drifting lamp. The relatives and friends of a childless woman hire somebody to row out in a boat, catch a floating lamp and bring it to the house where a child is wanted. In that house the lantern is then placed under the marital bed and kept burning. Because of

their extraordinary efficiency, such lanterns are highly appreciated. The most efficient ones are those that come drifting first, the so-called "head-lanterns" (*tou-têng* 頭燈). The spirits are believed to wait anxiously for the day of the lantern festival and to be fighting among themselves as to who will board a lamp first, and of course the stronger spirits will get a lantern first. If pregnancy is effected through a strong spirit, the child born will be a strong and efficient boy.

Families who wish to set a lantern adrift to not eschew the troubles and costs of adorning the lamp. People think they owe this to the reputation of their house, therefore the contest to outfit the most beautiful lantern. However, the families that commit a lantern to a river do all they can to prevent others from getting possession of the first lantern. The lanterns that are supposed to swim on top of others are built like a boat, of which the bottom is made of a board so that the lantern cannot take on water and capsize. Also, strings are attached to the lantern so that it can be guided from the riverside, and so that it cannot be appropriated by another party. This is possible only if a previous agreement has been reached by the family owing the boat-lantern and another family. The conquered lantern is brought to its destination in a solemn procession, with music and drums and a huge crowd following it. The receiving family goes all out to welcome the lantern. In the home, the lantern is put into a water-basin and placed under the bed of the woman. They let it burn until it goes out by itself.

In the case of these floating lanterns, it is the spirits of the dead that are the intermediary agents who bestow fertility. Though less obviously, the spirits of the dead may also act in all other cases of fertility produced through the magic of lanterns. "Lotus-flower lanterns" (*ho-hua têng* 荷花燈) up to the number of seven are placed on the altar of Buddha at Buddhist ceremonies. If one can obtain one of them and bring it to the room of a woman desirous of a child, the woman will be blessed with a child without fail.

When a dragon-lantern procession is over, people try to get the candles that are left over. If by virtue of such a candle a family has gotten a child, that family must, as a token of gratitude, make a generous contribution towards the expenses of the dragon-procession of the next year. Furthermore, a visit to the temple to which the efficient dragon-lantern belongs is also obligatory, moreover the dedication of candles and a sum of money is expected of the fortunate couple. ㉔

In Kuangtung people hang the head of the dragon-lantern on a beam in the house to obtain offspring. The birthday of a boy is celebrated with rites that are intended to increase the number of boys. Families with one boy hang up a lantern and make much noise around it with drums, gongs and fire-crackers, in the hope that in due time many more boys will be born and bring much life into the house.

The magic means to effect pregnancy, the fire must not necessarily be shut up in a lantern. In Unshan in Shantung, the bride, when being dressed, sits on a chair under which a bucket with a burning oil-lamp in it has been placed. ㉕ In Tzumi near Tsingtao the bride, after having descended from her palanquin, must warm her hands and feet over a fire-basin. In Fuchou a bonfire is made in front of the ancestor tablets. ㉖

## 2) Fertility of animals and plants.

In Chü-chou in Shantung, lanterns are hung up on trees in order to increase their fertility. In Amoy, on New Year's eve twelve pieces of burning bamboo are laid out on the ground, each piece being given the name of a month in the order in which the bamboo pieces were taken out from the fire in the courtyard. Then people watch to see on which pieces the fire dies out and in which order. In this way they foretell which months will be rainy and which fine. ③ We have a report from East Shantung on weather divination for the twelve months of the year. ④ Instead of burning bamboo pieces, they use twelve oil-lamps, one for each month.

In many cases just naked fire brands are used to increase the forces of nature. In some places on the 15th of the New Year month they carry the fire-god out of the village. Running men carry burning kaoliang straw far enough until the bundles are all burnt down. ⑤ This is done, the reporter says, as a magical means against danger from fire. It may be that it is now understood as such, but it seems to us, that the original meaning was the same as that of the bonfires kindled in the fields at the New Year. We know of two folksongs from Kiangsu which clearly say that the bonfire should give fertility to the fields. ⑥ As they do in East Shantung, they light their torches in the village and carry them out to the fields. Many bundles of rice-straw are laid out there, and imitations of cotton-fruit, made of wheat-flour, are stuck into the fields near the houses (Nagao I, 543).

We shall once more refer to the lantern festival as celebrated in Amoy. On the eve of the lantern festival, on which a fire is made also in the fields, people go from house to house to collect fuel. ⑦ Everybody gives something, no matter what, if only it burns, old furniture or baskets. The fuel is piled up in an open place, preferably in front of a temple, and set on fire the next day before sunset, to the sound of gongs and cymbals which make a terrific noise. When the pile has almost burnt down, a Taoist priest, carrying with him a small tiger-figure and barefooted, sometimes his chest is bare too, jumps over the fire. The excitement of the people knows no bounds; all are in an ecstasy. The gong beaters beat their instruments as if they wanted to smash them to pieces. Many people grasp a statue from the temple and jump over the fire with it, twice or even three, four times. Others just walk through the fire, regardless of serious burns. Others, less carried away by the general madness, jump only after having moistened their faces, hands and feet. If one jumps too short and falls into the fire, the spectators find this amusing and laugh heartily. The mass psychosis lasts for several hours. People then take the ashes home with them, in the belief that with them they can bring fertility to their domestic animals. As de Groot was told, these ashes contain part of the power of the sun. The fire is the symbol of the vernal sun. As de Groot puts it, "this explains why the pile of combustibles is preferably made in front of the Temple of the Great God of Procreation (*Pao-sheng Ta-ti* 保生大帝), whose power becomes most apparent at the end of wintertime when everything returns to life and new plants and animals are born". ⑧ This god of procreation is also honored by a spring bonfire in Fukien. The bonfire is made on the 15th of the third month, preferably in front of a temple of the god. As de Groot reports, people jump into this fire also for the purposes of pu-

rification, and not just for the purpose of obtaining fertility. When the fire has burnt down, the assistants of the priest collect the ashes which are then brought into the houses as a means to arouse the fertility of the animals.

De Groot, the explorer of the annual festivals of Amoy, speaks of a cult of the sun-light. According to him, the fires during the summer solstice (Sonnwendfeuer, St. John's fire) in Europe and the fire festivals in China have the cult of the power of the sun as their religious and magic background. The interpretation of the Chinese New Year lanterns and fires would be easier for us if we knew more about the Great God of Procreation which we encounter in Amoy. In Amoy and neighborhood, the cult of this god is practiced on a grand scale. Rather than simply think of sun worship, as de Groot does, we prefer to see in the god worshipped a vegetation god, as the name of the god suggests: "life preserving great emperor". Originally the connection seems to have been made between fire and fertility, because even the ashes are taken home as a means to produce fertility. It is hardly to be assumed that the primary function of the fire is purification, since the fire itself is purified with rice and salt.

Our essay has presented ample evidence to show that in the Chinese New Year celebrations lanterns occupy a predominant role. There exists a true lantern art, and the Chinese use these lanterns to embellish their houses and streets. They also display them in dances and processions. This is done for aesthetic satisfaction; but at the bottom of the lantern art is working a strong belief in the magical power of fire and light. This belief is still in many cases directly and clearly expressed; in other cases it is overlaid with literary and artistic imagery. Even in such cases, when the realization of cherished cultural values is aimed at, this expression may be considered as an extension of the basic belief in the life-giving power of fire and light.

### Footnotes

- ① For details about folklore research work in China before the Pacific War cf. Chao Weipang: *Modern Chinese Folklore Investigation*. In: *Folklore Studies*, Vol. I, Peking 1942, pp. 79-88, and Vol. II, pp. 55-76.
- ② The new masters of China seem to be keenly interested in folklore, they work however from different premises, cf. Yen Chun-chiang: *Folklore Research in Communist China*, in: *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. XXVI, 2, Tokyo 1967.
- ③ cf. Wilhelm Grube, *Zur Pekinger Volkskunde*, Berlin 1901.
- ④ In the English language we are still at a loss when it comes to finding an adequate word for everything the field of research comprises. In the Anglo-Saxon world many scholars stick to the word 'lore' and confine their research to oral traditions, that is folktales, riddles, adages, folksong texts, children's ditties, etc. Much of the research goes on along the lines of Aarne-Thomson, classifying folktale motifs in an Index, studying the worldwide diffusion and ramification of tales. However the need of widening the scope is felt and the literal meaning of 'folklore' is no longer permitted to determine the object of research. We need only to look into the contents of the British journal *Folklore* to find that many traditions and customs which are not clad in words form the focus of interest of researchers. The French say "arts et traditions populaires" to circumscribe that focus; the

Germans and the Dutch simply say "Volkskunde", and the Swedes have their journal *Folk Liv*. Several attempts at coining a new word for what we want to study in our folklore science have been made, but none of them has yet found general acceptance. There is till no English word at hand so brief and precise as the German 'Volkskunde'. In Japanese and Chinese we say 'science of folk customs', *minzokugaku* 民保学, but when using this term we must generously include in 'customs' also those oral traditions which come under 'folklore'. The terminological situation of our science is such that each individual writer must first make clear what he himself means by 'folklore' before he goes on to write about it in English. Thus the present writer finds himself in good company. Cf. Jan Harold Brundvand: *New Directions for the Study of American Folklore*, in: *Folklore*, Vol. 82, London, Spring 1971; pp. 25-35

- ⑥ We sent out a questionnaire in which one of the questions was: Which present is at New Year's most expected by children? In the answers the lantern led. De Groot writes in his "Les fêtes annuellement célébrées à Émoui (Amoy). Étude concernant la religion populaire des Chinois" (Paris 1886, I, pp. 139, ff.): "... toutefois au début il ne s'agit guère que d'articles de pacotille, destinés à l'amusement des enfants".
- ⑦ Lewis Hodous: *Folkways in China*. London, 1921; pp. 41, ff.
- ⑧ Mentioned for Fuchou by Doolittle: *Social Life of the Chinese*, p. 385. At the present time no further bibliographical data are available to this writer. It is a Chinese reprint.
- ⑨ The details on the various kinds of lanterns we have taken from Nagao Ryûzô: *Shina minzoku-shi* 永尾龍造・支那民俗誌 Vol. 1. Mr. Nagao belonged to the Cultural Department of the Manchurian Railway Company and was engaged for many years in fieldwork on Chinese folklore. His findings were to be published in twelve monumental volumes, but unfortunately the greater part of the manuscript fell prey to a fire which broke out in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where it was kept. Only volumes 1, 2 and 6 appeared. These three volumes are a treasure store of information. Vol. 1, with 672 pages covers customs and beliefs manifested on New Year's Day. Vol. 2, with 889 pages, is devoted to the rest of the New Year period. Vol. 6, with 859 pages, presents customs and practices concerning children. These three volumes were published in 1940, 1941, and 1942 respectively. The loss of the manuscript for the nine remaining volumes is a tragedy not only for the author but also for the science of Chinese folk lore and life.
- ⑩ *Ching-chia-lu* 清嘉錄 *chüan* 12, p. 17v.-18r.
- ⑪ Contained in Chinese Shadow-plays, transl. by Wilhelm Grube, München 1915; pp. 356-358.
- ⑫ This piece is very popular and is enacted in professional theaters or in rural open air theaters. Its content, condensed, is as follows: a blind man leaves his house and hails two Buddhist monks who are both lame. The monks are discussing how they might be able to see a lantern show. The blind man joins them. The monks can move only if supported by the blind man. The latter learns about the beauty of the lanterns only from the description of the lame monks. The play was probably known already in Sung time. The talk and the costumes of the three men arouse much laughter.
- ⑬ In their presentation and classification we follow Nagao II, pp. 330-366. Nagao is to be given the credit for having collected such an abundance of material about New Year. No other explorer has done so much.
- ⑭ An extensive study of spring-couplets, *ch'un-lien* 春聯, has been published by Ilse Martin: *Frühlingsdoppelsprüche von 1942 an Pekingener Haustüren*. In: *Folklore Studies*, Vol. II, Peking 1943; pp. 89-174.
- ⑮ More about this farce in Matthias Eder: *Das Jahr im chinesischen Volklied*. In: *Folklore Studies*, Vol. IV, Peking 1945; p. 48, note 2.



- ⑮ Nagao I, p. 357, fig. 132.
- ⑯ cf. Tsuji's 辻, article in the January issue of the journal *Mammô* 滿蒙 under the title *Manshû no toshi no ichiba* 滿洲の年の市場
- ⑰ cf. Wolfram Eberhard: Lokalkulturen im alten China. Teil 2: Die Lokalkulturen des Südens and Ostens. Peking, 1942.
- ⑱ Described by Tsuji, l. c., p. 207.
- ⑲ Tsuji, l. c., p. 207.
- ⑳ cf. Nagao II, 399, ff.
- ㉑ cf. L. Newton Hayes: The Chinese Dragon. Shanghai, 1922, with a figure of a dragon lantern. The note to it says: "Before the Republic was established dragon lanterns were not unfrequently seventy-five to a hundred feet in length".
- ㉒ The text of these songs was not available to us. Szu-chou is a place in Hupei. "Eighteen touches" has an obscene meaning.
- ㉓ In China these are current symbols of luck. The picture with the phoenix shows the sun with a Wu-tung-tree (*Paulownia imperialis*) and a phoenix. It is an expression of the desire for a high position and happy career. The picture with the crane and the deer shows trees with the new foliage of springtime. With this symbolic expression people wish a young couple long lasting youth and longevity. The same representation is also found on birthday presents and on objects in the nuptial chamber. About symbolic language in art see Nozaki Nobuchika: *Kisshô zuan kaidai* 野崎誠近・吉祥図安解題 3rd ed., Tokyo, 1940.
- ㉔ *Ao-shan* is called a mountain in the sea, the whole of which is carried by a turtle. On turtle-mountain lanterns see Nagao II, 335, 467, 469, 470.
- ㉕ namely in the *Kan-shun sui-shih-chi* (乾淳歲後記), where it is said that the Emperor went to see these lanterns.
- ㉖ L. Hodous: Folkways in China, London, 1929; p. 44: "Another custom highly favored in former times, but now fallen in desuetude, was that of erecting the 'whale mountain'. In a spacious public court a wooden structure resembling a mountain was built. Artificial grass, flowers and trees covered the ranges. Tea houses illumined with lanterns were perched on its crags, or tucked away in its ravines. In the woods animals of all kinds roamed. The whole was illumined with varicolored lanterns and was a spectacle of unsurpassed beauty".
- ㉗ Doolittle, l. c., p. 385, describing folklife in Fuchou, has the following to say about lanterns: "The sale of fancy paper lanterns, preceding the Feast of the Lanterns, commences usually about the tenth or eleventh and reaches its culmination on the evening of the fourteenth or fifteenth. During the daytime there is more or less sale of these toys, but the evening is the time when the largest quantity is exhibited to tempt purchasers, and when the streets are more densely crowded with spectators and buyers. Sometimes it is almost impossible to make one's way along the street. Many shops seem to do very little business except the sale of these toys for several days before the fifteenth".
- ㉘ R. F. Johnston: Chinese Magic. In: Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, pp. 259-269, where we find the following statements: "Ceremonies which one time were carried out with punctilious care and with something like religious awe have in many cases become mere village games and pastimes of which the original significance is partly or wholly lost. Such are the lantern dances and the stilt walking of the children of North China at the full moon of the first month of the year".
- ㉙ Doolittle, l. c., p. 386.
- ㉚ cf. Okumura Yoshinobu: *Manshû Nô-nô* (*Niang-niang*) *kô* (奥村義信・滿洲娘娘考), Hsing-king, 1939; p. 111.
- ㉛ Georg Stenz, Beiträge zur Volkskunde Süd-Schantungs, Leipzig 1907; p. 87.

- ② Doolittle, 1. c., p. 383, f.  
 ③ De Groot, Fêtes II, 611.  
 ④ A. Volpert, Volksgebräuche bei den Neujahrsfeiern in Ost-Schantung. In: *Anthropos*, Vol. 12-13, 1917/18, p. 1118, f.  
 ⑤ Stenz, Beiträge, p. 45.  
 ⑥ cf. M. Eder, Das Jahr im chinesischen Volkslied. In: *Folklore Studies*, Vol. IV, p. 57, f.  
 ⑦ De Groot, Fêtes I, 133-139.  
 ⑧ De Groot, Fêtes I, 134, transl. M.E.

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