**Xinying Taizih Temple**

**In a Nutshell**

Xinying’s Taizih Temple was founded in 1688 by Chinese immigrants who settled in this area. It was the first temple in Taiwan to enshrine the god Nezha—also known as the Third Prince or Marshal of the Central Altar—and is viewed as the ancestral temple to all other Nezha temples on the island. At present, there are two temple buildings. The older and smaller of the two was erected in 1883, and is a grade 3 historic site. The new temple, just behind it, was completed in 1992.

**Nezha**

Nezha is one of the oldest deities in the Chinese pantheon. He is often portrayed as a child or youth with Herculean strength who speeds through the celestial and earthly spheres on his wind-fire wheel protecting the people and defeating evil wherever it springs up. He is usually depicted with a wheel underfoot and carrying a fire-tipped spear and the Wheel of the Universe in his hands.

Any number of stories and legends have sprung up around Nezha, and he even shows up in famous novels such as Investiture of the Gods and Journey to the West. It is said that he was the son of a famous military commander from the Shang Dynasty (around 1000 BCE). When Nezha’s mother gave birth to a ball of flesh after a three-year pregnancy, his father, thinking it a demon, sliced it open with his sword. To his surprise, a young boy leapt out. The child was already able to walk and talk, and was possessed of superhuman strength.

As a youth, Nezha had not yet mastered his powers and was somewhat disaster-prone. Among other incidents, he inadvertently set fire to the Eastern Sea and then accidentally killed the Dragon Prince of that realm in a playful wrestling match. The prince’s furious father threatened to inundate the whole region with a tidal wave in revenge. To save the people, Nezha committed suicide. Later, as a fledgling god, he engaged in a series of challenges and battles in both the mortal and celestial realms, slaying demons and vanquishing evil wherever he went. Eventually, accompanied by his brothers Chinzha and Muzha, he defeated the evil King Zhou of Shang and attained godhood, rising until he was named Marshal of the Central Altar, chief god of the celestial armed forces.

These days, Nezha is worshipped as a powerful, if somewhat unruly, protector of the common people, especially children. He is also the patron deity of gamblers as well as taxi, truck, and bus drivers, who often keep a small image of him in their vehicles to ensure a safe drive.

**The Old Temple**

The old temple is designed in the southern Chinese style. Its tile roof is topped with a beautifully upswept swallowtail ridgeline and decorated with mosaic dragons and phoenixes. In the place of honor at the center of the roof is a Qilin carrying a fiery pearl.

The front pavilion doubles as a worship area. Stepping beyond this brings visitors into the main hall. The walls on either side of the entry sport relief murals of a dragon and tiger. It is customary to enter on the dragon side and exit from the tiger side.

Inside the temple, visitors will find several small statues of the chief god, Nezha, on the altar table. The temple’s most venerable effigies reside in the shrine at the back.

To the left of the main shrine is a very old and rather famous carved effigy of Lord Tiger, patron deity to both children and businessmen. The primitive style of this carving and of the reliefs in the entryway form a nice contrast to the elegant, sophisticated Chinese paintings that cover the interior of this small temple building. Especially notable is a painting of the large, green-beaked Peng bird, said to be able to fly 10,000 miles; the bird and accompanying saying proclaim a bright, unlimited future for anyone willing to make the effort.

**The New Temple**

In 1992, an enormous new Taizih Temple was built behind the old one to accommodate the ever-increasing number of worshippers here. The new temple building is topped by a gargantuan 12-ton gilt-bronze statue of Nezha.

First floor

The temple doors are decorated with door gods, fierce warriors who protect the premises and ward off evil. The cavernous, 42x36 meter interior is intentionally dark, creating an air of mystery and reverence. In the shrine are effigies of Nezha and his brothers Chinzha and Muzha. The shrine to the left houses Fude Zhengsheng, god of land and wealth, and to the right is Zhusheng Niangniang, the goddess of fertility and childbirth.

Second floor

On the second floor, visitors will find a shrine to the eight-armed Mother of the North Dipper. Arranged around her are the 60 Taisui, or Star Gods. The Star Gods are upper-level deities involved with the workings of the Cosmos.

The 60 Taisui represent each year of the 60-year Chinese calendar cycle. They assist the Emperor of Heaven in controlling the mortal world, and each of these Star Gods has his own attributes that define his particular year. The Star God from a person’s birth year is important to their fate. This level of the temple also houses 6000 blessing lights. For a small annual donation, worshippers can have a blessing light lit in their name to help bring them good fortune in work, love, and life. Also on this level is Wenchang Dijun, the god of culture and letters. Students pray to this deity for success in their exams.

Third Floor

The third floor houses the shrine to the Jade Emperor, chief of all the deities. On the altar in front of him are three smaller effigies—the sage kings Yao, Sun, and Yu, founding gods of China. The sage kings were the first kings of China, who lived around 2200 B.C. Historians dispute whether they were real or mythical. Each is credited with making great contributions to Chinese society, including a formal system of government, writing, and irrigation. Yu may have been the founder of China’s first dynasty.

Fourth Floor

Although the formal shrines end on the third floor, possibly the most intriguing room in the entire temple is on the next floor up. Here, visitors will find an amazing collection of over a thousand small god effigies that have been returned to the temple over several decades by people no longer able to keep them at home altars. Since god effigies are consecrated, holy objects into which the spirit of the god itself has been imparted, they cannot simply be thrown or given away. If a family moves into an apartment and no longer has an altar for offerings, the effigy is kept at the temple, where incense offerings continue to be made to it every morning and evening.

**Nezha’s Annual Birthday Bash**

Because Xinying Taizih Temple is Taiwan’s ‘flagship’ Nezha temple, nearly every single Nezha effigy in every temple in Taiwan traces its line of descent back here. These descendent gods all return regularly to pay their respects, meaning that on weekends, the large square in front of the temple is generally full of god effigies and visiting worshippers. This is especially true during Nezha’s birthday celebrations, on the ninth day of the ninth month in the lunar calendar. Nezha’s annual birthday bash is a loud, joyous event known for its spectacular fireworks, parades, and temple performances as well as its fantastic street food, and visitors are welcome to join in the fun.