

# THE CHINESE TAROT DECK

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## INTRODUCTION TO TAROT

The complete seventy-eight-card tarot pack is divided into two sections: twenty-two Major Arcana and fifty-six Minor Arcana cards. The Major Arcana are allegorical cards and are also known as the Triumphs, the Greater Arcana, the Higher Arcana and the Atouts.

The Minor Arcana are divided into four suits: swords, staves, cups, and coins. In each suit, are four court cards: king, queen, knight and page; and ten numbered cards. Today's ordinary playing cards descend from the Minor Arcana of the tarot. The knight and page were combined to form the jack of the fifty-two-card deck and swords became spades; staves, clubs; cups, hearts and coins, diamonds.

Transliteration of Chinese to English spelling varies according to source, and was reformed in the early 1980s. For example, the city name of Beijing was formerly spelled Peking. The spelling used here for Chinese names is that most commonly found in published sources, the transliteration used before the reform.

## THE MAJOR ARCANA

**O THE FOOL** The Fool, in China, is seen as foolish and comic, but is also considered a kind and honorable person.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Folly. Lack of discipline. Immaturity. Irrationality. Frivolity. Delirium. Frenzy. Enthusiasm. Naivety.

**Reverse Meanings:** Bad decision. Apathy. Hesitation. Negligence.

**I THE MAGICIAN** The Magician holds a flaming sword and a bowl of steaming water. Magic is used in Chinese folklore for curing wounds and illness, and for gaining love and power.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Originality. Imagination. Self-reliance. Self-confidence. Deception.

**Reverse Meanings:** Weakness of will. Ineptitude. Insecurity. Delay. The use of one's skills for destructive ends.

**II HIGH PRIESTESS** Shi Tai is the Chinese title for an abbess. The High Priestess uses prayer beads to guide her in chanting a specific number of mantras, or meditational prayers.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Wisdom. Sound judgment. Serenity. Objectivity. Intuition. Self-reliance. Emotionlessness. Platonic relationships.

**Reverse Meanings:** Ignorance. Shortsightedness. Selfishness. Passion. Physical ardor. Acceptance of superficial knowledge.

**III THE EMPRESS** The Empress holds a peony, called Flower of Riches and Honors, and symbol of yang, the male principle, a reference to her consort, the Emperor. A phoenix is behind her, a symbol of peace and prosperity, used as an ornament by empresses of China.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Feminine progress. Fruitfulness. Accomplishment. Marriage. Children. Feminine influence. Ability to motivate others.

**Reverse Meanings:** Vacillation. Lack of interest. Lack of concentration. Infertility. Infidelity.

**IV THE EMPEROR** Two splendid dragons decorate the wall behind the Emperor, as symbols of strength and goodness. The five-clawed dragon was the emblem of imperial power.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Worldly power. Confidence. Wealth. Stability. Authority. Indomitable spirit. War-making tendencies. Male influence.

**Reverse Meanings:** Immaturity. Ineffectiveness. Indecision. Weakness of character. Failure to control petty emotions.

**V HEAVENLY MASTER** Chang Tao Ling, or the Heavenly Master, was the first great teacher of Taoism and was known as a great healer and magician. He holds a censer. On his robe is the symbol of yin-yang, the unity of male and female principles, an emblem of creation. Around the yin-yang sign are the eight diagrams, or hexagrams (some concealed), that denote the elements of nature and corresponding qualities: heaven, untiring strength and power; standing water (for example, lakes and swamps), pleasure and satisfaction; fire, brightness and elegance; thunder, movement and exciting power; the wind and wood, flexibility and penetration; water flowing (for example, rain and streams), peril and difficulty; hills and mountains, repose and interruption; and earth, capaciousness and submission. The diagrams also represent certain animals. The medallion protects its wearer from misfortune.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Ritualism. Mercy. Forgiveness. Inspiration. Compassion. Inactivity.

Reserve. Tendency to cling to ideas and principles even after they are outdated. Conformity.

**Reverse Meanings:** Foolish exercise of generosity. Impotence. Vulnerability. Frailty. Unorthodoxy. Renunciation.

**VI THE LOVERS** The Lovers card shows the Cupids of China, the god of harmony and the goddess of union. Twin lotus flowers on one stalk, a pair of bats, and a toad are all symbols of a happy marriage.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Love. Beauty. Perfection. Harmony. Trust. Romance. Deep feeling. Optimism. Freedom of emotion. Testing someone.

**Reverse Meanings:** Failure to meet the test. Separation. Frustration in love and marriage. Interference. Fickleness. Unwise plans.

**VII THE CHARIOT** A passionate warrior raises his spear against the forces of evil. A dragon draws his chariot.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Adversity, possibly already overcome. Conflicting influences. Vengeance. Success. Possibly, a voyage or journey. Escape. Rushing to a decision.

**Reverse Meanings:** Failure. Sudden collapse of plans. Unrealistic plans.

**VIII STRENGTH** Strength portrays Wu Sung, a legendary hero who slew a tiger.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Strength. Courage. Energy. Resolution. Defiance. Action. Zeal.

**Reverse Meanings:** Pettiness. Impotence. Sickness. Lack of faith. Abuse of power.

**IX THE HERMIT** In ancient times, scholars often retreated from the world, living in remote villages or in the mountains. There they would write literary works and play music. Boys often acted as their servants and scribes.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Counsel. Knowledge. Solicitude. Prudence. Vigilance. Circumspection. Self-denial. Withdrawal. Regression.

**Reverse Meanings:** Imprudence. Prematurity. Incorrect advice. Failure caused by dullness. Over-prudence resulting in unnecessary delay.

**X WHEEL OF FORTUNE** The Wheel of Fortune is the yin-yang sign and the eight hexagrams. (See V Heavenly Master.) Around it are four creatures: a tiger, symbol of dignity and sternness; a phoenix (see III The Empress); a dragon (see IV The Emperor); and a tortoise, symbol of the universe. Together, the four creatures form the quadrants of the sky.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Destiny. Fortune. Outcome. Culmination. Good or bad luck, depending on influences of nearby cards. Inevitability.

**Reverse Meanings:** Bad luck. Broken sequence. Outside influence not contemplated.

**XI JUSTICE** Wei T'o is a *bodhisattva* in Buddhism, a soul whose compassion is such that it postpones complete enlightenment and retains a personality in order to help bring others to enlightenment. Wei T'o is depicted in full armor, with a spear, as a defender of Buddhist principles.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Justice. Balance. Harmony. Equity. Righteousness. Virtue. Honor.

**Reverse Meanings:** Bias. False accusations. Bigotry. Severity in judgment. Intolerance. Unfairness. Abuse.

**XII HANGING GHOST** In ancient China, being treated badly, with no recourse to justice, was a reason for suicide. The Hanging Ghost is the soul of a person who was wronged. It exhorts people to be kind to one another.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Life in suspension. Transition. Change. Reversal of the mind and in one's way of life. Apathy and dullness. Abandonment. Renunciation. The changing of life's forces.

**Reverse Meanings:** Lack of sacrifice. Unwillingness to make the necessary effort. Egotism. False prophecy. Useless sacrifice.

**XIII DEATH** Yama, portrayed on Death, is the ruler of the Buddhist hell. The soul that passes before him is not doomed to stay in hell forever, but will pass through various trials before being reincarnated as a human or animal.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Transformation. Clearing away the old to make way for the new. Unexpected change. Alteration. The ending of a familiar situation or friendship. Financial loss. Beginning of a new era.

**Reverse Meanings:** Stagnation. Slow changes. Partial change. Inertia. Narrowly avoiding a serious accident.

**XIV TEMPERANCE** A monk prays in a temple. Buddhist nuns and monks begin monastic life by shaving their heads and making nine burns



on their scalps with joss sticks. The bell behind him is rung to mark periods of prayer and meditation, and it symbolizes stillness and veneration.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Moderation. Temperance. Patience. Accommodation. Harmony. Fusion. Management. Adjustment. Good influence.

**Reverse Meanings:** Discord. Conflict of interest. Hostility. Inability to work with others.

**XV THE DEVIL** A horse-headed demon and a bull-headed demon hold chains and a spear with which to torment the souls during their trials in hell. The horse-headed demon is also associated with the thunderbolt, the blow of which is like Buddhist doctrine, which dispels illusion and wickedness.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Subordination. Ravage. Bondage. Malevolence. Subservience. Downfall. Weird experience. Bad outside influence or advice. Black magic. Unexpected failure.

**Reverse Meanings:** Release from bondage. Divorce. Recognition of one's needs by another person. Overcoming severe handicaps.

**XVI THE TOWER** A tower is struck by the god of thunder and the goddess of lightning. The cock-headed god is winged and wields a mallet and chisel, and stands on drums. He kills the unrighteous, assisted by the lightning goddess, who flashes light to blind the victim.

**Divinatory Meanings:** Complete and sudden change. Breaking down of old beliefs. Abandonment of past relationships. Severing of a friendship. Changing one's opinion.

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