

The Study on the Motivation and Religious Enlightenment of Mazu Believers in Drawing Divinatory Sticks in Taipei Kuandu Temple

Synging Chen^{1,*} Shihui Pan² Leo Tsui³ Jianjiang Zhang¹

¹College of Medicine, Ningde Normal University, Ningde, Fujian 352100, China

²College of News and Communication, Huanggang Normal University, Huanggang, Hubei, 438000, China

³College of Pharmacy and Medical Technology, Putian University, Putian, Fujian, 351100, China

*Corresponding author. Email: spchen0318@163.com

ABSTRACT

Taipei Kuandu Temple, the main worship of Mazu, was the earliest Mazu temple in northern Taiwan. When Mazu believers encounter dilemma, they longed for the resolution and entered Taipei Kuandu Temple to ask for divinatory sticks. Based on the field investigation of Taipei Kuandu Temple from January to July in 2020, the researcher asked 358 believers' motivation and religious enlightenment after they understood the text of divinatory stick. In this paper, we found that the Mazu divinatory sticks can hearten up the believers, and motivate them to overcome adversity. Some believers acquired financial or marriage advice from the Mazu divinatory sticks. In conclusion, the Mazu divinatory sticks of Taipei Kuandu Temple possess the social function to instruct the public to be patient and optimistic.

Keywords: Mazu, Taipei Kuandu Temple, divinatory sticks, religious enlightenment

1. INTRODUCTION

Mazu has been one of the major religious belief in Chinese coastal provinces. There are a lot of Muzu believers in Fujian and Taiwan provinces, where Muzu worship is the most intensively disseminated [1–2]. The belief of Mazu was brought by China Fujian immigrants more than 400 years ago [1–3]. The Muzu holy pilgrimage is the most important annual religious festival in Taiwan. Taipei Kuandu Temple, the main worship of Mazu, was built in 1712 (in 51 year of Kang-Xi Emperor, Qing dynasty) and it was built the earliest Mazu temple in northern Taiwan (Figs. 1 and 2).



Figure 1 Taipei Kuandu Temple on May 6, 2020.



Figure 2 Mazu (The Heavenly Saintly) is the key deity in the main hall.

Beseeching divinatory sticks in temple has been a religious convention for over one thousand years in Chinese society [4–8]. When believers who worship in Mazu encounter difficulties or make a major decision, they desire for the divine revelation of Mazu to turn bad luck into good fortune. Thus, they enter Taipei Kuandu Temple to draw the divinatory sticks which give them the hint to solve the problem. In general, the process of asking for draw divination sticks in Mazu temple is as follows (Fig 3):

1. Before asking something for draw divination sticks at a temple, the Gods of the temple should be worshipped in order according to the etiquette.
2. Wash your hands first, then light incense, and explain to Mazu the name, address and things you want to ask. To

know what Mazu means by throwing wooden divination blocks.

3. The principle of "one sign, one question", one signature can only ask one thing. The more accurate the scope is, the more accurate the signature will be.

4. Report to Mazu: name, lunar calendar age, time, day, month, year (eight characters), address, reason for divination sticks.

5. When taking out the sticks, slowly move the sticks with your hand, and then respectfully take out the sticks that you think is suitable for you.

6. After confirming the sticks number, ask Mazu whether it is this one or not, and throw wooden divination blocks to confirm with Mazu. If it is not Shengbei (one Yin hexagram and one Yang hexagram), it will be drawn again (Fig 4).



Figure 3 The divination sticks of the Taipei Kuandu Temple.



Figure 4 The wooden divination blocks. Left, Xiaobei (two Yang hexagrams); Middle, Shengbei (one Yin hexagram and one Yang hexagram); Right, Kubei (two Yin hexagrams).

1.1. Research method

This study takes the people of Mazu belief in Guandu Temple in Taipei as the observation object, and aims to create the applicability of Mazu belief culture as the starting point. From January to July 2020, researchers have visited Taipei Guandu Temple for 35 times a week, from 10:00 to 17:00 every day, interviewing 8-12 believers who got the service office every day.

This paper adopts the Qualitative Research of Religious Phenomenology, and the interview outline is divided into four parts, which are as follows:

(1). Basic information of believers (gender, age, educational background, occupation and residence).

(2). Why did the believers choose Mazu Temple today? Do believers go to other temples to ask for drawing sticks?

(3). The motivation of drawing sticks provided by believers (fortune, marriage, health, work, wealth, relocation, study, lost property, etc.).

(4). Using case analysis method to understand the religious enlightenment of the text to believers (believers can express freely, neutral evaluation, positive evaluation and negative evaluation).

1.2. Basic information of interviewees

Through nearly seven months of field work, a total of 358 believers were interviewed, including 133 male believers and 225 female believers. The majority of the believers were female, and the ratio of male to female was about 3:5. The age of believers is widely distributed, ranging from 14 to 82 years old, with the young and middle-aged groups being the most. The educational background of believers ranges from primary school, junior high school, senior high school (higher vocational), junior college, undergraduate and master's degree. Most of the believers are senior high school (or higher vocational) education. Believers mainly live in the northern part of Taiwan, including Taipei City (Beitou District, Shilin District, Zhongshan District), Xinbei city (Danshui District, Bali District, Wugu District, Taishan District, Linkou District, Sanchi District, Shimenli District) and even Taoyuan, Xinzhu, Miaoli and Yilan etc (Fig 5).



Figure 5 There are a lot of Mazu believers in Taipei Kuandu Temple every day.

1.3. The prayer motive of Mazu believers

Why did the believers interviewed in this paper choose to go to Mazu Temple for divination? Do believers go to other temples for divination? Most respondents said that the

reason why they would choose Taipei Guandu Temple for drawing sticks is that they have always been loyal believers of Mazu. Mazu of Taipei Guandu Temple is the most trusted God of them. Believers think that the Mazu sticks of Taipei Guandu Temple is the most effective. However, they will also go to other temples rarely. The interviewees have also been to the Taipei Xingtian Temple with Emperor of Guansheng as the main God, Taipei Longshan Temple and Xinbei Zhulin Temple with Guanshiyin (Avalokiteshvara) as the main God.

In this way, they hope to have religious enlightenment from more Gods and solve their confusion. From the results of the interview, we can see that the drawing sticks activities of Mazu believers may be influenced by the utilitarian nature of polytheism and religious belief. The real social phenomenon is that after draw sticks in multiple temples, the believers cross compares the suggestions given by the Gods and make the final decision freely. Lin Guoping (2006) has visited Okinawa, Malaysia, Indonesia, New York etc. and has analyzed “天竺灵签(*Tianzhulingqian*)”、“观音灵签(*Guanyinlingqian*)”、“关帝灵感签诗(*Guandilingganqian poems*)”、“诸葛武侯二百十五诗(*Zhugewuhou 215 poems*)”、“观音佛祖灵感诗签(*Guanyinfolingganqian poems*)”、“十二宫挂数(*12 Gongguashu*)” etc. He has investigated the overseas spread and influence of Chinese draw sticks' books. The situation of drawing sticks in temples by the ancestors of Okinawa in “上江洲家书(*Shangjiangzhoujia Documents*)” is similar to that of Taoist believers in China. The drawing and divination activities of Okinawa people are often combined with praying and divination, which is very rare in China [3]. For this point of view, we don't agree with Lin's view. The Chinese people's drawing and divination will also combine praying and divination, asking the Gods to give guidance to the future of believers, and pray that the Gods can play their divine power and bestow peace.

Our results of the interview showed that the motivation of Taipei Guandu Temple believers was that they asked for sticks for themselves, more than 80% of them (84%) asked for sticks for their relatives and friends. The motivation of the believers is related to the age group.

(1) The motivation of junior high school students and senior high school students to sign is to have a smooth examination and to make progress in their studies. Some senior high school students, university students and master's students who want to sign the contract said that their love was in an ambiguous state, belonging to the type of single love, or quarreled with a couple recently. They did not know whether to continue the relationship, so they asked Mazu for advice.

(2) Age 25 to 50, is mainly motivated by the difficulties of working and marriage, such as spouses' extramarital affairs, divorce, and fear of divorce from parents. Some people are unemployed for many months, but some are not able to transfer jobs. Some people are afraid of new jobs. Others

are worried about losing their jobs because of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). After asking Mazu of Guandu Temple to give guidance, believers who fail to work can be more comfortable and confident to accept the challenge.

(3) The motivation of believers aged 40 to 50 is mainly their marriage, including their spouse's affairs, their own affairs, and their children's luck in examinations.

(4) The motives of believers in their 50s to 80s are their own marriage, their children's marriage (their children still have no marriage object in their 30s), the choice of investing in a house, buying a stock fund, and their own health (how to treat the illness when they are not getting better, whether they should see Chinese medicine or western medicine when they are sick, and whether they should follow the doctor's advice to perform an operation to treat the disease). The believers besought Mazu to give religious enlightenment let them have the courage to face the difficulties of life.

According to the interview results, the believers' motives for asking Mazu are all inclusive and various life problems. These believers believe that Mazu can hear and understand their confusion and helplessness based on their trust in Mazu's divinity and inspiration. They can obtain life enlightenment, solve difficulties or make appropriate decisions through Mazu's divine power and the divine instructions by Mazu choose.

2. CONCLUSION

This study indicated that through the procedures of incense offering, prayer, drawing sticks, throwing divination blocks confirmation and experts' free release of sticks, the believers can find the solution to the problem, comfort their hearts and find their future direction. These data are consistent with other previous studies [6-8]. Through interviews with 358 believers in seven months, most of them agree with the Enlightenment of Mazu's sign. We are aware that believers, after understanding the meaning of Mazu, take the initiative to salute the statue. However, the "process of asking for sticks" beside the wooden tube with the sticks in the main hall of Guandu Temple does not require the believers to salute Mazu again after the signing is undone. We asked the believers about the reasons for the ceremony and got the reply that "I salute Mazu on my own initiative is to thank Mazu for the divinatory sticks and tell me how to do better". In Taipei Guandu Temple, each piece of the "*Hundred Mazu Divinatory Sticks*" was selected by 358 believers on average randomly. After the same stick was drawn by different believers, they interpreted the meaning of the signature differently. However, for the same thing, the believers should be grateful for Mazu's advice to them. Most of the believers said that the explanation was in line with the correspondence and answered his or her questions. They would take Mazu's enlightenment as an important reference for their future actions.

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