



The Significance of Mazu Worship in Southern Fujian for Contemporary Women's Exploration of Self-Worth

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Abstract. The traditional way for women to seek divine guidance by drawing Kau chim and interpret Kau chim poem and story in Mazu worship in southern Fujian has a limited effect on temporary women's growth and self-worth exploration. This paper puts forward a new interpretation of traditional interpretation Kau chim poem and story in Mazu worship from the feminist perspective, aiming to encourage women to cultivate spiritual independence and pursue self-worth. As a goddess, Mazu's spiritual core is consistent with the feminist principle of "self-choosing social gender", suggesting that contemporary women's worship of Mazu should be integrated with their self-worth exploration, transforming from relying on Mazu's formal guidance to inheriting and developing Mazu's spiritual essence.

Keywords: Mazu worship; Female growth; Feminism; religious rites

1 Introduction

Current research on Mazu culture focuses on the significance of Mazu worship from the macro perspective, such as the spread and development of intangible cultural heritage, tourism and religion, and the promotion of national soft power. Studies examining Mazu culture from a feminist perspective and its significance to women's personal development are rare. This paper seeks to explore a new way of interpreting Kau chim poem in Mazu worship from the feminist perspective and uses the method of historical speculation to analyze the Kau chim poem, encouraging contemporary women to engage independent thinking and self-exploration in the belief and custom of Mazu worship, seeing the female power and spiritual connotation in Mazu essence through Mazu's image, and cultivating their own subjective consciousness in practice.

2 Mazu's Identity Image and Worship Reasons

According to the record of Chifengtianhouzhi[1], Mazu, Lin Moniang, was a commoner on Meizhou Island. She was the daughter of ordinary people before her death. She could predict good and bad luck and had magical power. More and more people gradually

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became believers of Mazu because they were instructed by Mazu or benefited from Mazu's rescue. It can be seen in the record of *Compilation and Drawing of Mazu Literature History* that "At first, she made a living by witchcraft, and she could predict people's fortunes. After her death, people built a temple for her on this island" [2]. Witches and doctors did not separate during the feudal period. Mazu was originally a witch doctor in a folk village. After her death, villagers remembered Mazu's kindness in treating the people and saving people at sea and built temples to commemorate Mazu's divine virtue. Then, since Song Huizong, the rulers of various dynasties have conferred titles for Mazu, and the emperor conferred the queen of heaven (that is, the goddess of the sea) on Mazu. At this point, Mazu's identity changed from a folk "witch in villages" to a "queen of heaven" with royal identity. Because southern Fujian is along the coast and there are numerous hills, more men are required to farm or go fishing in the sea there. This way of making a living is the guarantee of productivity, and this is the hardest hit area of looking up to men and down on women under the farming culture. "The idea that the officials in the past dynasties are noble and the people are menial is deeply rooted, and the low status of the commoner (Mazu) has formed a huge contrast with her huge groups of believers. Therefore, the celebrity status is often attached, fabricated or deduced, so Mazu's identity is inferred to be behind the official family" [3]. With the rapid development of the number of her believers, Mazu's identity was found to be the sixth daughter of Lin Yuan, who was the Duxunjian during the fifth dynasty of Fujian kings. Mazu's function was also expanded from the initial witch doctor to protect the fishermen at sea, pray for the elimination of epidemic and protect the country.

Folk people seek help from Mazu when they are suffering from diseases or facing difficult problems in actual production and life. From its name, Mazu is like a mother in the hearts of folk people and has deep maternal virtue. In the Mazu Tempel of Taiwan Province, there is a picture of a couplet that directly expresses the virtue of Mazu. "The sea was calm and the fishermen sailed safely. People live and work in peace and contentment, and the world praises her mother's virtue" [4]. This corresponds the witch to the image of mother. On the one hand, it is a tribute to the mother's selfless dedication to her children without reservation, and on the other hand, it shows that the image of Mazu is equal to the closest connection in life-mother. The first thing that people think of under suffering is the salvation of their mothers. The broadness of motherhood also comes from the generalization that "being a mother is strong". In the test of life, mothers dare to face and think about ways to deal with problems, and Mazu has gradually become a source of believing in people's sense of security because of her initial image as a mother. From the sculpture image of Mazu in the Song Dynasty, we can see that she is still a simple woman image. Mazu braved the storm and fought bravely against the sea to protect the coastal people, so she also had the image of a goddess who saved the shipwreck, saved the flood and drought, and guided the way. During the development of Mazu belief from the folk to the official, the feudal rulers reshaped the deity of Mazu's "assisting the government to protect the country", and the images of goddess of sea and goddess of war best reflected Mazu's image of protecting the country [5]. Because Mazu has a wide range of believers and a large mass base, it is also beneficial

to the stability of imperial power to a certain extent. After being conferred by the emperors of the past dynasties, her image has changed into the image of “Tianhou” who held power.

As mentioned earlier, in the past, because of low productivity, doctors and wizards were not separated, and because of the backwardness of science and technology and the lack of ability to conquer nature, the ancient people were influenced by the idea of Taoism and nature, and thought that the operation law of everything was modeled on nature, and the relationship between man and nature was integrated, so people were in awe of heaven and earth. When one felt that one’s ability was limited, many problems needed outside help. In the long run, Mazu, who could help people relieve their physical and mental sufferings, became the object of dependence of the people. “As far as human beings’ existing abilities and means are concerned, neither technology nor rationality can compete with the ‘great’ natural forces. In order to survive, people must create ‘supernatural’ power. We don’t have to laugh at the ignorance of ordinary people. In fact, this is a survival strategy for the weak to resist the strong” [6]. The people’s trust in Mazu has gradually evolved from simply predicting good or bad luck and helping the villagers solve their physical illnesses to a psychological dependence that they first think of seeking Mazu’s divine help when encountering life difficulties. This psychological dependence brings positive mentality to believers, especially the courage to face difficulties and hope for the future. As the philosopher Santayana said, “Prayer does not bring anything material, but at least it cultivates some spiritual aspects of people. It won’t bring rain, but before the rain comes, it can cultivate a kind of hope, a kind of submission, and a kind of mood to cope with any possible result, that is, to develop a vision” [7].

The psychological connotation of God-making is complicated, which is not only a single psychological dependence, but also a one-way prayer of believers. It also includes the interaction between believers and Mazu, which shows that believers offer incense, food, and piety to Mazu, and Mazu gives compensation to believers. For example, in folk Mazu Tempel, people can often see banners and paintings presented after praying for Mazu. According to folk stories, fishermen saw Mazu’s miraculous appearance at sea when they encountered a big storm and Mazu calmed the storm to save fishing boats from danger, which made Mazu have an inductive interaction with believers, and there were many religious experiences of Mazu’s miraculous appearance. According to the Compilation of Historical Materials of Mazu Archives in Qing Dynasty, on November 12th, 52nd year of Qianlong, Li Shiyao, Governor of Fujian and Zhejiang Province, presented a finished map of Tianfei Temple in Xiamen Port, Tongan County, Quanzhou Prefecture, and a memorial to the emperor Qianlong. He wrote in the memorial, “I found that there are Tianfei temples in all prefectures and counties of Fujian Province and Haikou, and a temple in Xiamen port is particularly effective...I want to pray for smooth sailing, so I came here to burn incense myself. I think this temple should be rebuilt immediately, and I hereby request the emperor to write a plaque and hang it here...” [8] Mazu believers have Tianfei temples in all prefectures and counties of Fujian Province and Haikou, a temple in Xiamen Port is especially spiritual, and there are many believers who are officials in the court to promote Mazu belief, so Mazu belief changed from folk belief into official certification. From the political function of

religion, the purpose of deifying and worshipping those who have made contributions to the country and practicing loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness is to provide religious support for the national political and ethical order, thus effectively maintaining the traditional social and political order and moral education [9].

3 The Form of Mazu Worship and Feminism

Because Mazu, as the image of the goddess of sea and the goddess of war, escorted fishermen to defend their country, men in the coastal areas of southern Fujian and made grand ceremonies or pious sacrifices before going fishing in order to sail safely back and pray for the blessing of Mazu Goddess. The ancient women, as the birthers, prayed to Mazu for the success and safe production of son and children because of her image as a witch doctor. Their hope is simple. In their dialogue with Mazu, they get the Kau chim paper “written” by the goddess and seek for the interpretation of the result of the Kau chim given by the president of the temple, to guide their life choices. People have found some rationality in their long-term experience in production and life, so they liberated these things from the shackles of superstition and formed a traditional habit. These habits, whether they are preserved in behavior, orally or psychologically, are directly or indirectly used for life purposes, which is the popular belief [2]. In the worship of Mazu’s belief in the customs, the form that people used to talk to the goddess has still been preserved to this day, and this kind of worship can still be seen in many Mazu Tempel today. The process of Mazu’s worship ceremony ranges from lighting incense to telling the goddess, praying for blessings, asking for drawing Kau chim, throwing an inquiry, and asking the holder of temple for help to interpret the Kau chim story.

For example, there is a four-step Kau chim application process posted in the Chaozong Palace of Tianhou Temple in Shapowei, Xiamen, which is extracted as follows (Figure 1):

1. Before asking for Kau chim, burn incense respectfully, pray to the Mazu for instructions, and state your personal data (name, zodiac sign, date of birth, gender, occupation) and matters for questioning (only one thing can be asked for when there is only a Kau chim stick). Ask Mazu if she can give you a Kau shim sticks to help the believers solve the puzzle or guide the maze. If so, please give a Shengyao.
2. You can draw a fortune stick when you get the consent of the goddess by throwing poe divination. If you don’t throw the Shengyao, it means that the goddess doesn’t agree to give a Kau chim stick at present, and you can come back another day.
3. After drawing a fortune stick, ask the goddess whether it is the Kau chim stick; If it is not, it needs to be drawn again, and you should get shengyao through the given stick.
4. When you get the confirmation that the answer to the question asked by you is the stick, you can get the Kau chim story relevant to this stick from the temple management.

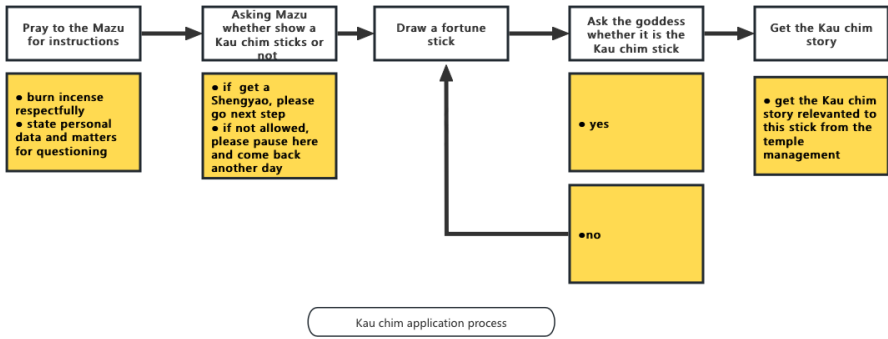


Fig. 1. Kau chim applkation process

According to the allusions and poems recorded in *the interpretation of Kau chim in Chaozong Palace*, the temple official gave the corresponding results to the petitioner in combination with the results of the previous cancellation of the lot. In addition to Kau chim poems, there is also a divination in *Zhouyi*, and at the same time, two allusions are attached from historical records such as drama stories of past dynasties or *Five Thousand Years of China*, taking the events and experiences of the protagonist in the allusions as a kind of dialogue and guidance between the goddess and the petitioners.

For example, in the 45th stick interpretation, there are two allusions, namely, *Confucius Meets Children*. In this story, Confucius was already the consul general of Zhongdu at that time, but the monarch of Lu did not tackle with political affairs, so Confucius decided to take his disciples around the world. On the way, he met children who built a castle with sand to play a war game, which blocked the way of Confucius and his party. Confucius then asked these children to make way. As a result, a child replied seriously: Only cars have ever bypassed the town, but there is no reason to move the city to let the carriage pass. Confucius felt very reasonable when he heard the child’s words, so he let the carriage be pushed to the side of the road casually and carefully bypassed the small earthen city passing by. There are two inspirations in this allusion. First, Confucius was not complacent about his achievements at that time, but still listened to children’s opinions with an open mind and put himself into practice and saw that the essence of education was the interaction between people. Second, if the difficulties on the way cannot be removed, we can find another solution from the children’s words, and this solution is also another perspective to see what happened. This perspective not only teaches Confucius, but also enlightens future generations through thousands of years. If we fail to advance in dealing with one thing, we can get rid of inertia thinking and achieve our goals from another perspective. Maybe the ending is like Confucius crossing the road. But different paths are different experiences in life, and the establishment of different ways of thinking.

Due to the continuation of the long-term patriarchal feudal thought of looking up to men and down on women, a special period of economic and ideological construction after the founding of New China, until the reform and opening up, most ordinary women did not have opportunities to go to school, they could not get inspiration through

an allusion topic, and they did not communicate with different social groups except the family, so they lacked help and guidance from other perspectives. Under this specific background, asking Mazu for advice is a way out for women to explore and redeem their own life difficulties. However, if we only ask the temple official whether the outcome predicted by the lot is the result of binary opposition, and interpret the lot only as the result, women will choose whether to take the event or not with the result shown. This way not only has great limitations on the exploration of women's self-growth, but also misunderstanding the essence of Mazu worship.

4 From Women to Independent Women: The Contemporary Value of Mazu Worship

In the first period of the feminist movement in the 19th century, the famous feminist writer Muller pointed out, "The so-called intellectual difference between men and women is only the natural result of their differences in education and environment, and it does not indicate the fundamental difference in nature, let alone extreme inferiority" [10]. There is no difference between men and women in essence, and they are graded because of acquired reasons such as education. The obstacles to modern women's ideological independence come from the influence of women's education methods and evaluation systems. In this environment, women have long received unconscious social mainstream evaluation, which leads to the lack of internal mental strength of modern women. In the long run, they can't jump out of the self-restrained thinking framework formed in family, school, or social education, and think and explore the problems they encounter with more possibilities.

Their worship of Mazu aims to get a psychological support and comfort. After Mazu is widely accepted as a female image, it forms a maternal force that represents femininity, tolerance, and broad tenacity in binary opposition. In infancy, children's understanding of their mothers is as omnipotent as "God", and there must be a godlike mother in the baby world to ensure the smooth operation of the baby world. This coincides with the helpless women who imprison themselves and appear powerless to break the predicament psychologically. Currently, Mazu is like the redemption of weak and helpless women, maintaining the operation of their world. The worship of Mazu only stems from the desire for redemption, which is a kind of psychology that relies on the help of external forces. In the helpless and desperate situation in life, they dare not have the resolution to decide for themselves and the courage to stand up for themselves.

At the crossroads of life, women usually ask Mazu for advice by asking for divination and interpretation of Kau chim stick. However, they did not pay attention to the process thinking and the establishment of independent consciousness, but directly sought the interpretation of the results by the temple official. Schopenhauer pointed out that "women by nature mean obedience, we can regard it as the fact that every woman in a completely independent unnatural position should be directly attached to a man and make herself accept his rule and domination. This is because she needs a husband and a master" [10]. This mode of interpreting dialogue makes women hope to find a way of

self-liberation in Mazu worship, and at the same time voluntarily leave alone their independent thinking and decision-making ability, so that women repeatedly learn the thinking and behavior patterns of being dependent on others. Asking for drawing Kau chim and interpreting the Kau chim with results as a guide is a worship mode lacking self-awareness. In the end, it is difficult for women to explore a path of feminism's true self-salvation and growth in Mazu worship[11].

The image of Mazu is the carrier of its spiritual core. There is an intriguing detail in Chifengtianhouzhi, "The father is over 40 years old. Every time he thinks about his son's poor health, he will burn incense and pray for a whole day, hoping to have capable descendants to make the family more prosperous. Wang gave birth to a daughter[12]. The neighbors were surprised. Her parents were disappointed. However, because she is special, they love her very much." His father had hoped to give birth to a son, but he was disappointed when he saw that Mazu was a girl, which undoubtedly resonated with people living in southern Fujian who think that "The birth of women is disappointing"...However, whether she is a female Lin Moniang or she was named Tianfei Mazu after her death, people will not be disappointed because of her gender evaluation. Or the emperor conferred the title on her, and as for change, she just did what she wanted to do in her own life[15]. She really lived herself and perfected her humanity in every interaction with others. People's worship of Mazu also shows that they abandoned Lin's father's disappointment with Mazu's gender as a woman, and Mazu really achieved "celebrating for Lin clan", which proved that it is not necessary to choose men to have the ability and power to prosper the family. Mazu's deity embodies her undifferentiated love. She is merciful to relieve the physical and mental hardships of fellow villagers[12]. She burned down her house in the storm to send a signal to the wrecked ship, and fought against sea monsters to save the people from the shipwreck...What Mazu did has nothing to do with ties of blood, gender or identity, which is the ultimate human brilliance in every choice she made[13].

Mazu is a deity tempered by her own real-life experience and preserved in the image of Tianhou. This spiritual carrier speaks in the form of a statue, which tells her story silently. This admonishes women to get their strength back, face it bravely and create actively in every experience, and rely on their own strength to promote their inner thoughts every time[14]. Before reaching the so-called destiny, women have the strength to overcome all difficulties. Women need perseverance and courage from the heart to break through difficulties and grow. Mazu achieved godliness as a woman, breaking people's prejudice, and narrow cognition of gender. Feminism's "self-choice of social gender" is consistent with Mazu's spiritual core[16-18].

5 Conclusion

In the new era, women in China, especially in economically developed regions, enjoy nearly equal educational opportunities, which have catalyzed the rapid development of feminism. More women are waking to their potential. Mazu worship should also have a more profound enlightenment to the exploration of contemporary women's self-worth. For example, in their dialogue with Mazu, women in the new era can also have

new ways to interpret the traditional religious inquiry activities of asking for divination and acquire their power. There is an allusion in every lot instruction obtained in Mazu Temple. Modern women can provide themselves with new growth models and opportunities through the medium way of drawing Kau chim by providing reference and new ideas with the solution of the events they are facing at present in an allusion. They no longer rely on the temple official or the interpreter to give the results merely by comparing the Kau chim documents as in the past, but think and ask themselves questions in the interpretation of historical events: What are the similarities between my current environment and the environment in the allusion? How does the protagonist in the allusion get the result in history? Should I imitate the protagonist or have other choices or different coping styles in my own situation? etc. The method of historical speculation is used to analyze the autograph and talk to Mazu. The dialogue with Mazu is an appearance, in which the deep dialogue is women's self-dialogue, exploring their true inner thoughts. The new way of interpretation enables women to see the value of themselves and the cause of the event, that is "what can I do now", to guide the case owner to think about the causes of the event. Or the aspiration and wisdom from the *Kau chim's* Stories can guide women's predicament or current doubts. This way of self-exploration enables contemporary women to see the spiritual core contained in Mazu's image, so that they can ignore the external judgment and focus on the current things in every tempering, breaking self-limitation and thus obtaining perfection.

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