



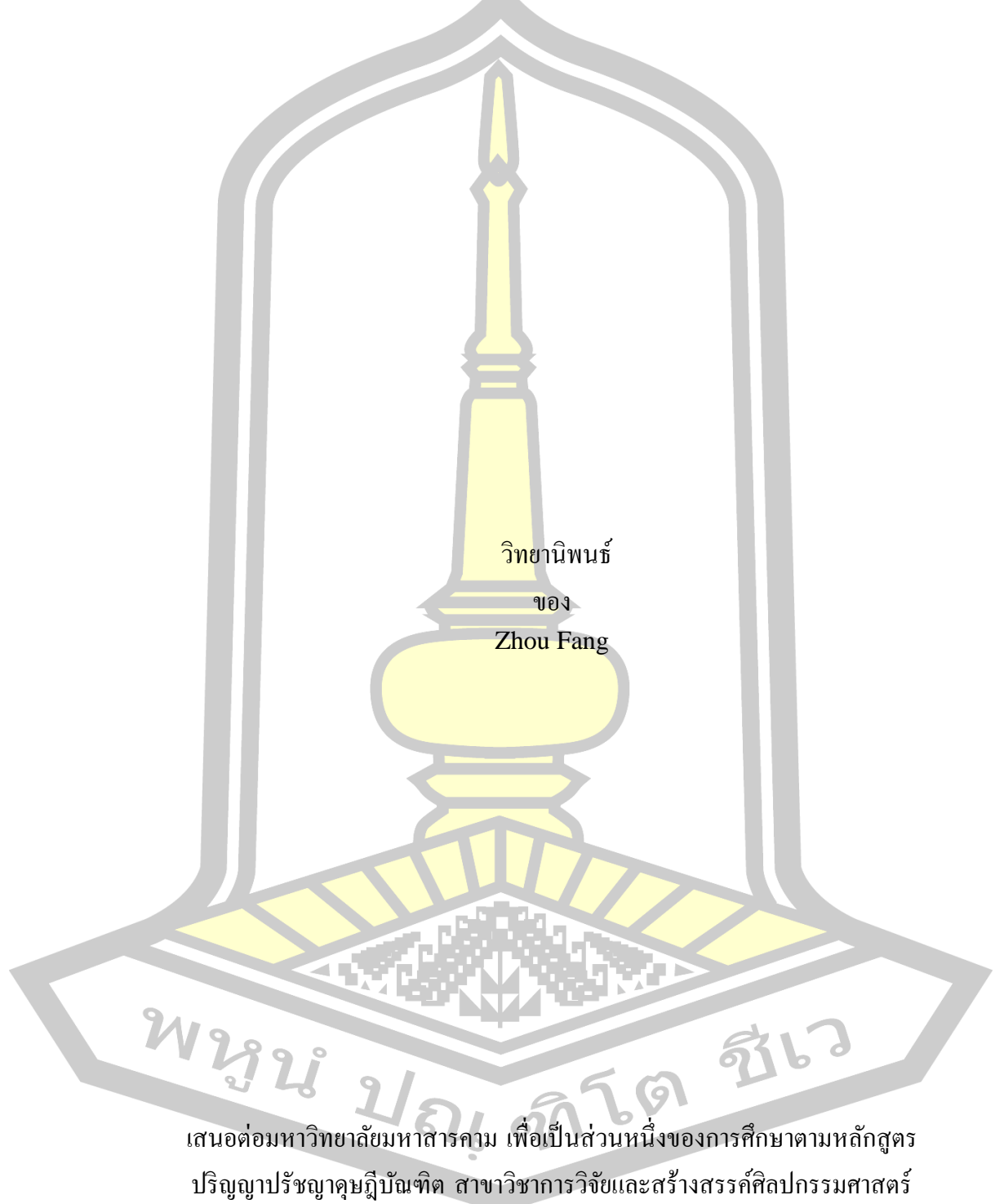
Contemporary Mazu Painting: Symbolized and Idealized Interpretation of Mazu  
Culture in Fujian Province, China

Zhou Fang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation  
December 2024

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ภาพวาด Mazu ร่วมสมัย: การตีความเชิงสัญลักษณ์และอุดมคติของวัฒนธรรม Mazu ในมณฑลฝูเจี้ยนประเทศจีน

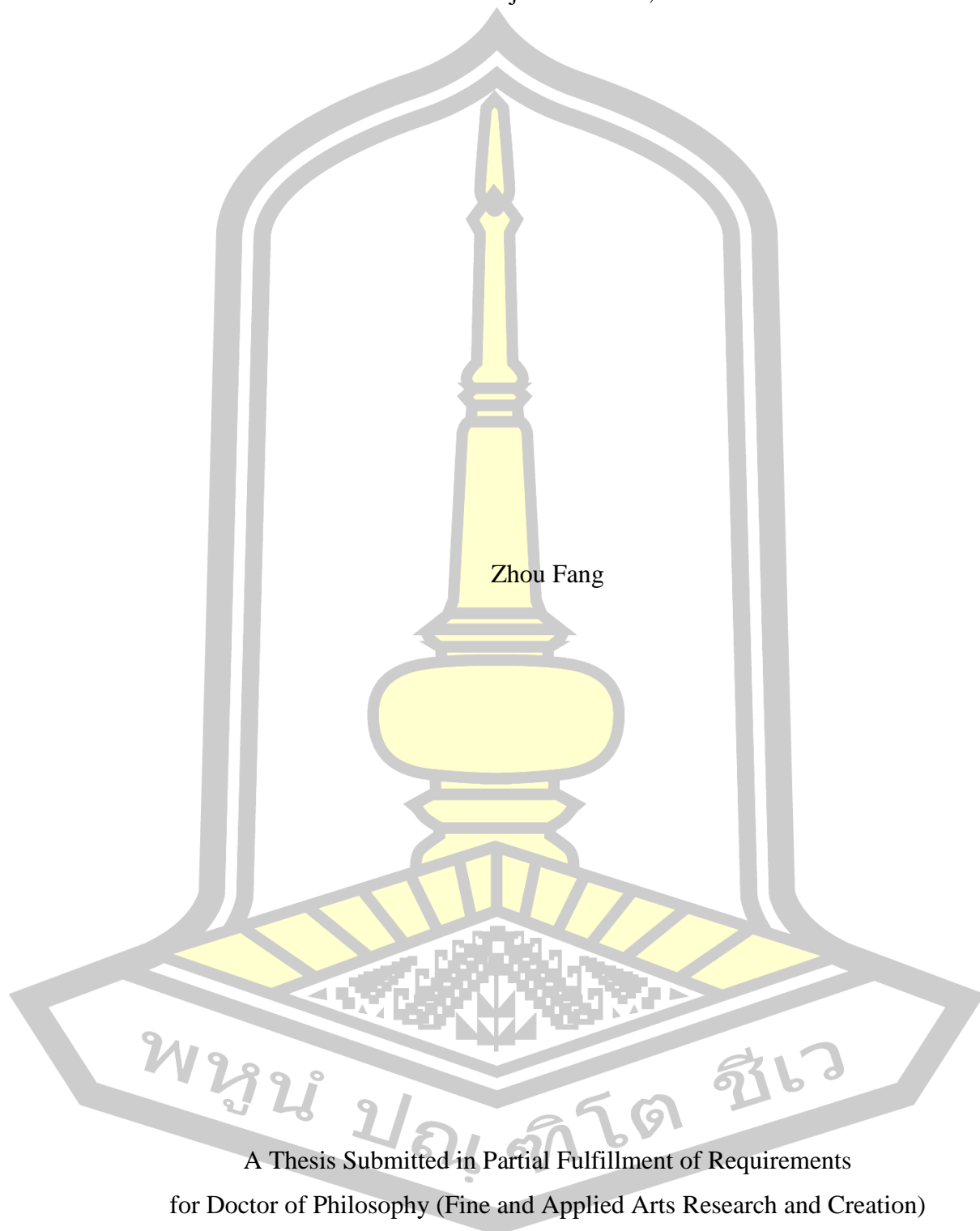


เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร  
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Contemporary Mazu Painting: Symbolized and Idealized Interpretation of Mazu  
Culture in Fujian Province, China



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
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December 2024

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### ABSTRACT

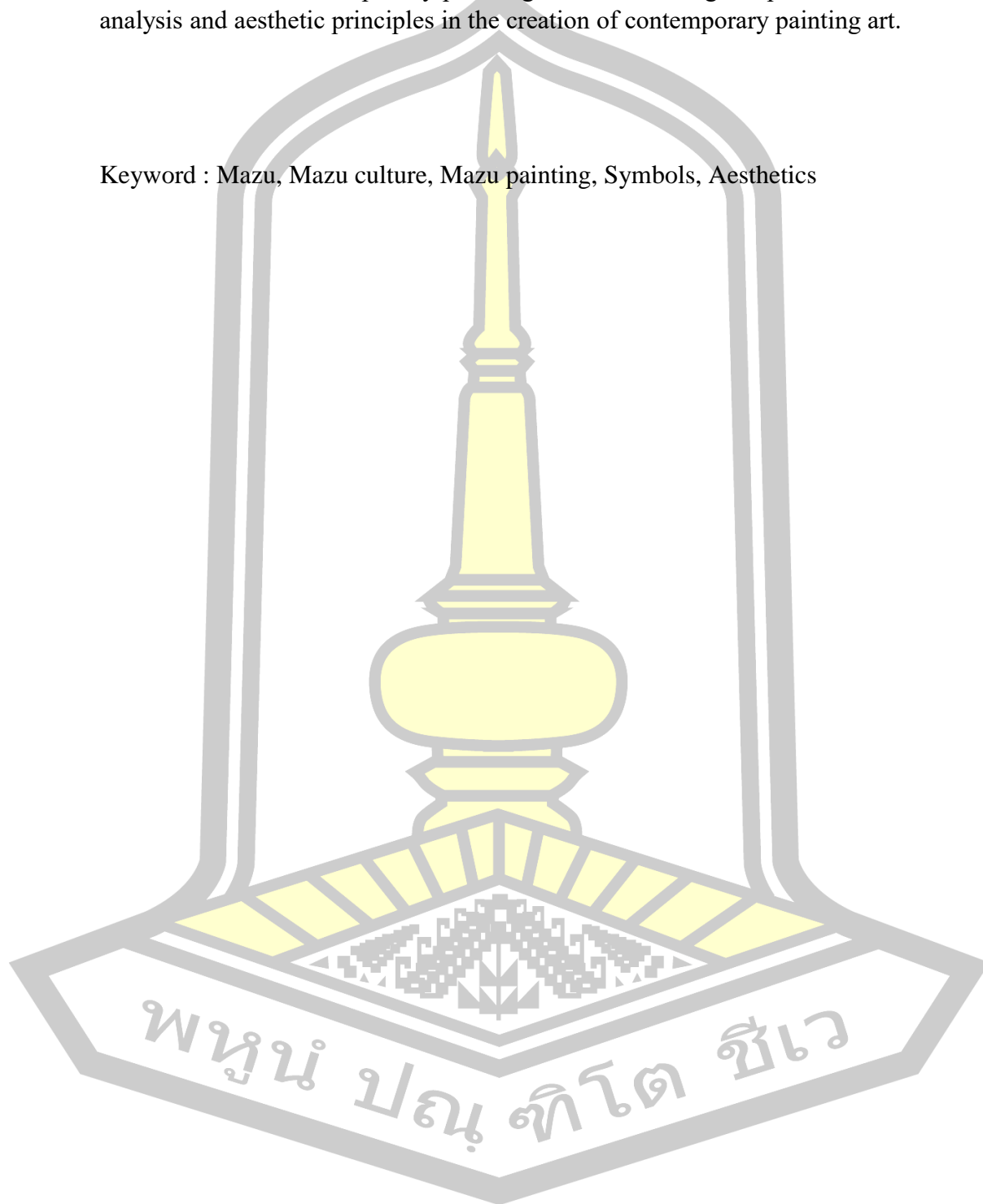
This study is an creative research, qualitative research. By integrating Peirce's semiotics and the aesthetics of point, line, and plane, it explores the application of Mazu culture in contemporary painting art. Mazu, as the deity with the highest status and most frequent honors recognized by successive Chinese governments, holds significant cultural and religious importance in China.

The first part of this study focuses on analyzing the development and current state of Mazu culture based on the direction of the created works, to understand the origin and evolution of Mazu paintings. The second part employs qualitative research methods, using Peirce's three elements, three Properties, and the concept of infinite semiosis to analyze and extract Mazu cultural symbols. Through detailed analysis of Mazu's stories, duties, beliefs, and influences, it identifies symbol elements that can convey the meaning of Mazu culture. These extracted symbol elements are then reimagined through the aesthetics of point, line, and plane to create paintings that bridge traditional symbolism and contemporary artistic expression. The third part details the creation process of the painting works. It begins with an introduction to the creative sources of the works, followed by the evolution of symbols through semiotics, explaining the creative thinking behind the evolved symbols, and concludes with the creation process and the presentation of the final works. The fourth part showcases the research outcomes, comprehensively introducing the works and evaluations from field experts. The fifth part summarizes the research findings, discussions, and suggestions.

The study finds that by interpreting traditional symbols of Mazu culture through semiotics, artists can develop new visual narratives that preserve the essence of Mazu culture while catering to contemporary aesthetics. This approach not only revitalizes traditional cultural symbols but also fosters a dialogue between the past and present, offering new perspectives for the development and inheritance of Mazu culture in contemporary society. The paintings created in this study demonstrate the dynamic interaction between traditional culture and modernity, showing that

traditional symbols can be reinterpreted through semiotics and aesthetics to create meaningful contemporary art. This research contributes to the study of Mazu culture and the field of contemporary painting art, showcasing the potential of semiotic analysis and aesthetic principles in the creation of contemporary painting art.

Keyword : Mazu, Mazu culture, Mazu painting, Symbols, Aesthetics



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With a heart filled with gratitude and excitement, I write this acknowledgment. Throughout my doctoral studies, I deeply experienced the challenges and joys of the pursuit of knowledge. The doctoral phase is not only about delving into academic knowledge but also a tremendous test of one's willpower and patience. During this time, I experienced countless failures and theoretical overturns, yet these setbacks honed my resilience and perseverance. Each breakthrough and success owes much to the careful guidance of my mentors and the selfless assistance of my peers. Through continuous learning and research, I not only expanded my horizons in my field but also cultivated the ability to think independently and solve problems. My doctoral journey taught me that research requires not only intelligence but also perseverance and passion. Every day of doctoral study has been precious time for my growth and progress. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to those who have supported and helped me in my growth and learning process. Their love and guidance have made me who I am today.

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help me analyze problems and find solutions, not only enhancing my academic level but also cultivating my ability to think independently.

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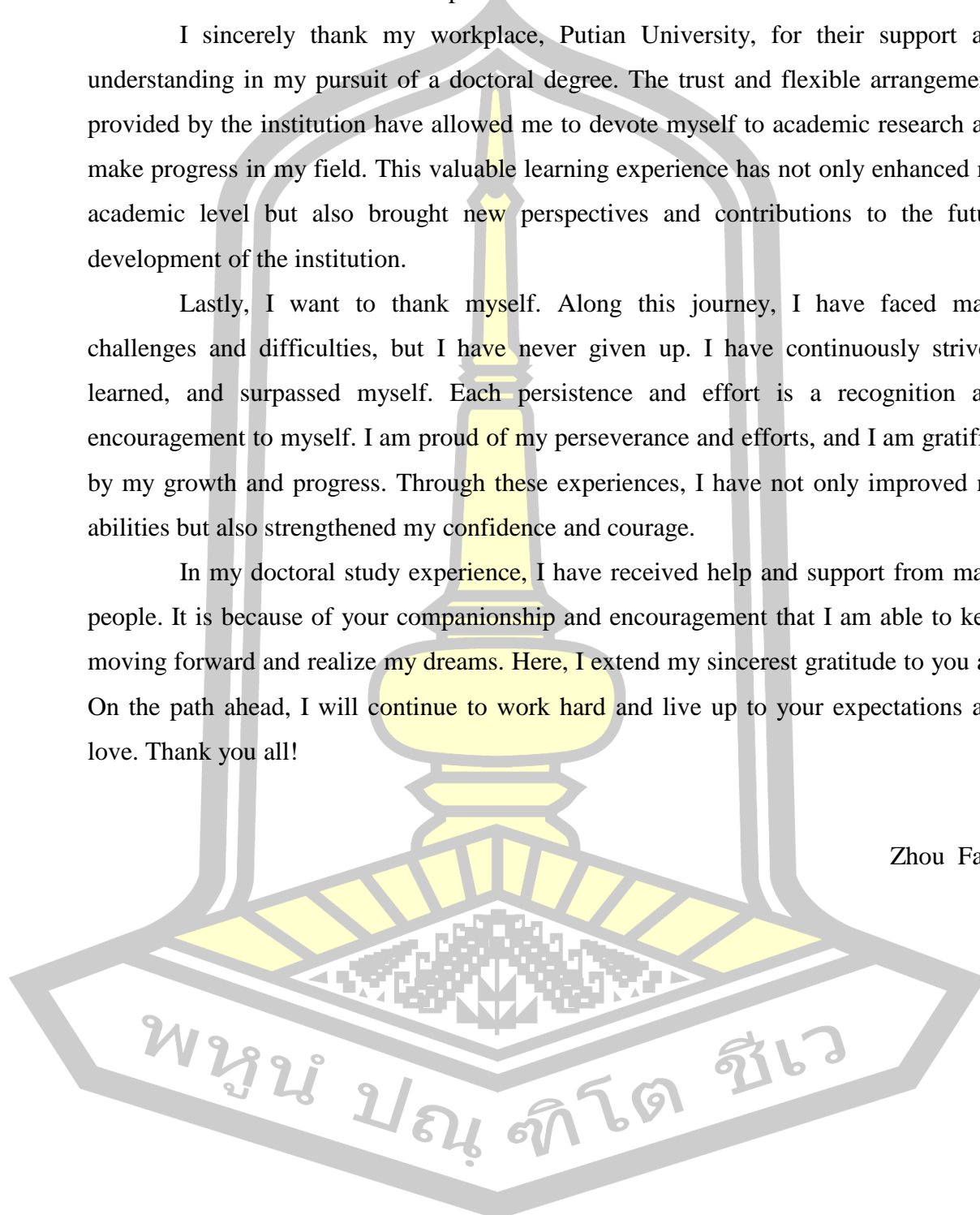
pursuing my dreams. Our friendship not only brings me warmth and strength but also teaches me how to care for and help others.

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Zhou Fang

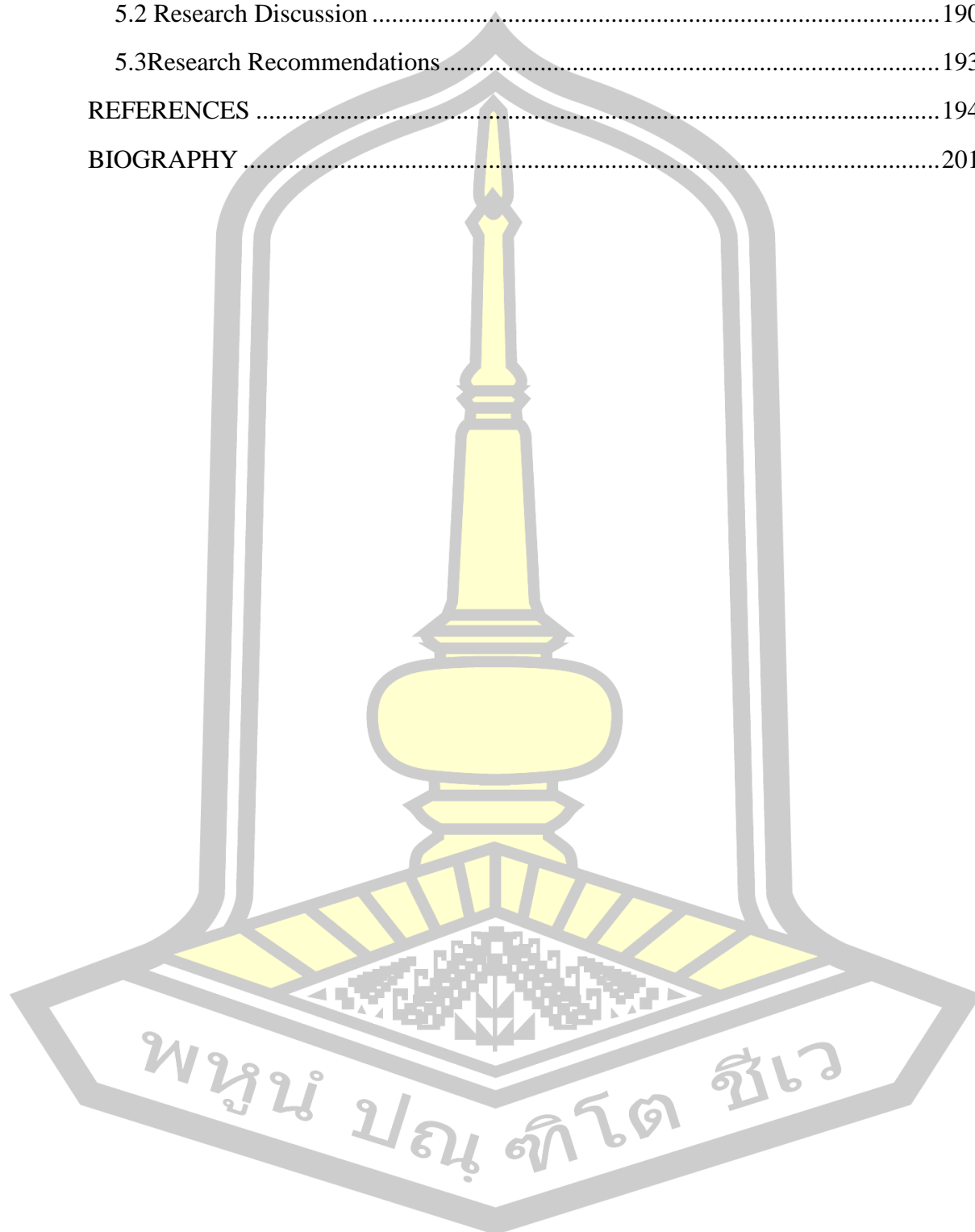


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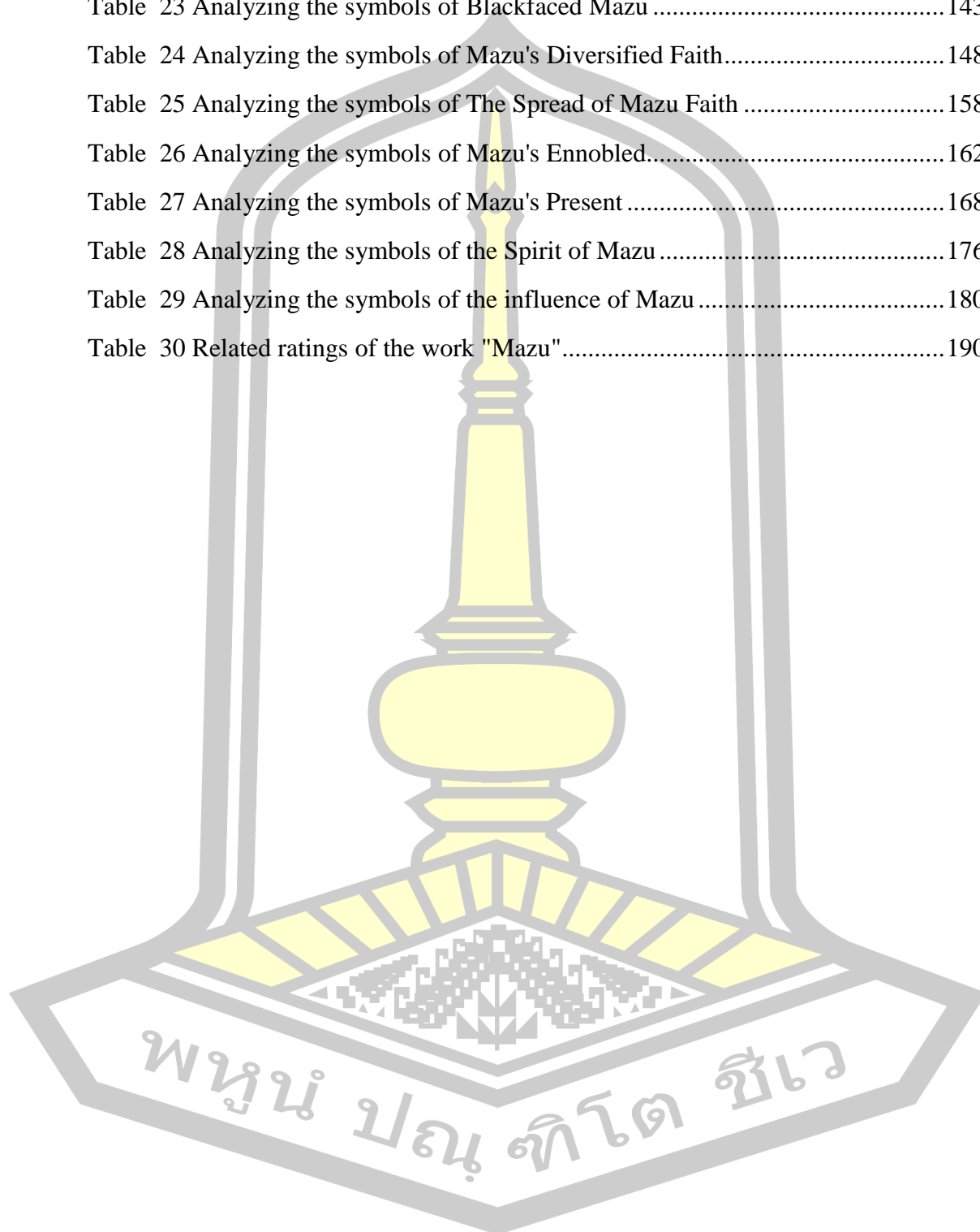




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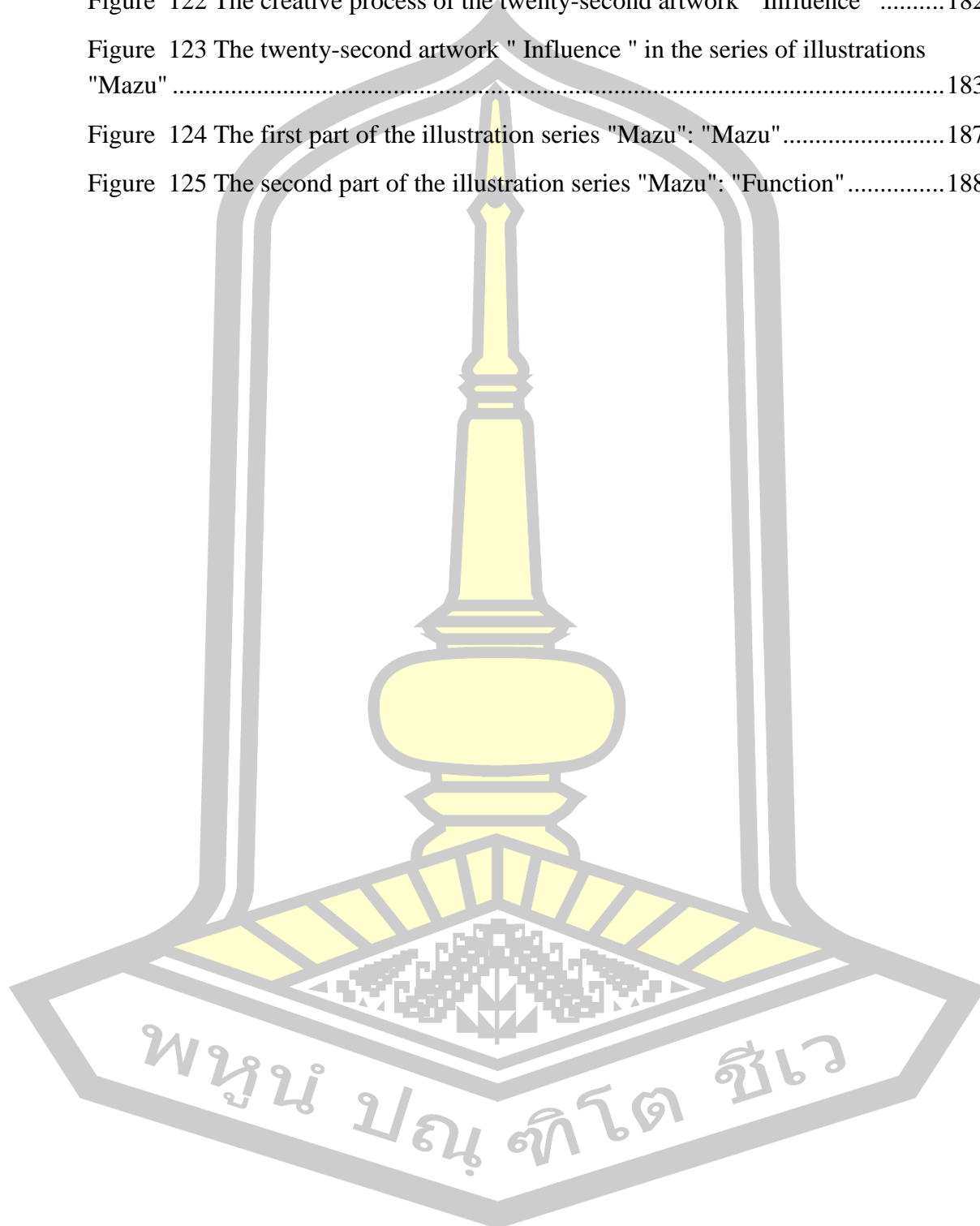
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# Chapter I

## Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Mazu, formerly known as Lin Mo, was born in Meizhou Island<sup>1</sup>, Putian, Fujian Province, China, on March 23 of the lunar calendar in the first year of Song dynasty (960). It has been more than 1000 years. Mazu was willing to help others during his lifetime, skilled in witchcraft, and had saved lives and worked in water many times. He was loved by the local people and had a good reputation. In the fourth year of the Yongxi reign of the Song Dynasty (987), on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, Mazu bravely sacrificed his life to rescue the shipwreck at the age of 28. The local people believe that Mazu ascended to heaven due to her perfect achievements. In order to commemorate Mazu, they built a small temple on Meizhou Island and enshrined it. They hope that she can still bless one party to return safely to the sea. Although temples are small, the power of faith is immense, spreading like sparks around the world.

Mazu belief was first spread in the Folk religion in the coastal areas of China, appearing as a sea deity. Mazu culture originated in the Song Dynasty, matured in the Yuan Dynasty, flourished in the Ming Dynasty, flourished in the Qing Dynasty, and flourished in modern times. Before going to sea, people should first worship Mazu, pray for blessings in the wind and safety, and erect the throne of Mazu on ships to worship. Mazu is a spiritual symbol and female representative that combines traditional virtues such as selflessness, kindness, love, and bravery. Mazu's title has undergone 36 canonization in the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Mazu has gone from being a "Furen"<sup>2</sup>, "Tianfei"<sup>3</sup> to "Tianhou"<sup>4</sup> and "Deity", becoming one of the most recognized deities in Chinese theological culture. The belief customs of Mazu, also known as the belief customs of the Niangniang<sup>5</sup>, mainly demonstrate Mazu's spirit of good conduct, good deeds, and great love, and express people's respect for Mazu.

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1 Meizhou Island: Located in Meizhou Town, Xiuyu District, Putian City, Fujian Province, China, it is 42 kilometers southeast of the city center of Putian and only 1.82 nautical miles from the mainland. It is the second largest island in Putian City and the birthplace of Mazu. Meizhou Island has a land area of 14.35 square kilometers, a population of 38000, and an average annual temperature of 21 °C. Including over 30 islands, small islands, and reefs. In 1998, Meizhou Island was designated as a tourism and economic zone open to the outside world in Fujian Province. In 1992, it was established as a national tourist resort, and in December 2020, it was listed as a national 5A level scenic spot.

2 Furen : In ancient feudal society, the title of advanced woman usually referred to women with high status and honor, such as the wife or mother of a nobleman, who enjoyed high social status. During the ruling system of the Song Dynasty, the ruling wife was granted the title of Furen.

3 Tianfei: Fei is a title used to refer to the emperor's concubine, or here the concubine is a symbol of status, not specifically referring to someone's concubine, but a symbol of rank. In ancient times, the respectful title for a deity was Heavenly Concubine.

4 Tianhou : Describing an empress or the wife of an emperor as the highest ranking woman.

5 Niangniang : The honorific titles of ancient harems, deities, mothers, female elders, or elderly women, etc.

In 2009, Mazu belief and customs was listed in the World Intangible cultural heritage of Humanity by the UNESCO<sup>6</sup> (UNESCO, 2009). Mazu Festival<sup>7</sup> is listed as one of the three major sacrifices in China, along with the Emperor Mausoleum and Confucius Memorial. Mazu belief is one of the spiritual symbols of Folk religion in Chinese culture. With the spread of cultural and commercial activities such as the Maritime Silk Road, Mazu culture and belief have been extended to Southeast Asia and other regions. Mazu belief culture has gone beyond the scope of regions and ethnic groups. Nowadays, the Mazu faith has become an internationally influential belief culture, with approximately 300 million Mazu believers worldwide.

China is one of the ancient civilizations in the world. The History of art of Chinese painting is long and its works are exquisite. The situation of ancient Chinese painting art is the same as that of other countries around the world, and it can also be divided into two categories: written painting (Miniature painting<sup>8</sup>) and printed engraving painting (Print). Mazu, as a very important sea deity in China, mainly exists in temples, and its related painting are often expressed in combination with legendary stories. So Mazu's painting are mainly in the form of handwritten painting, with the representative one being the existing Qing Dynasty fine brushwork painting "Tianhou Miraculous Manifestations Scroll" at Fengtang Palace<sup>9</sup> in Xianyou. The original axis does not have the author's name, and the paper is colored. It consists of four axes, with 12 pictures of the story of Mazu drawn on each axis, totaling 48 images. Each image is 61 centimeters vertically and 38 centimeters horizontally. The group painting depicts the life story of Mazu, the development of Mazu faith, and the stories of emperors praising and awarding titles throughout history. Each painting has a brief introduction text at the top.

With the development of the times, compared to traditional book painting (Miniature painting), contemporary painting of Mazu are more influenced by elements such as anime graphic design, showing a diversified trend. However,

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6 UNESCO : United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization.

7 Mazu Festival: Originating from the Song Dynasty and evolving through the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, the folk activities have been continuously expanding and enriching. They are held annually during significant festivals such as the birth anniversary of Matsu (the 23rd day of the third lunar month), her ascension day (the 9th day of the ninth lunar month), and the Matsu Cultural Tourism Festival. Additionally, they are occasionally held based on the requests of pilgrimage teams.

8 Miniature painting : began as ornamental designs in the margins of the Quran. It is an important genre of Persian art, characterized by finely detailed small-scale painting. Typically used to decorate books, miniature painting is believed to have originated from European illuminated manuscripts and small tempera painting on wood panels. These miniatures served as painting and cover decorations for books, emblems on title pages, and adornments for items like boxes, mirrors, as well as decorative patterns on jewels and ivory jewelry. The art form reached its peak during the Timurid dynasty (circa 1369-1500) but almost vanished after the 18th century due to the invasion of European colonizers.

9 Xianyou Fengtang Palace: Located in Baita Village, Licheng Street, Xianyou County, Putian City, Fujian Province, it was originally built during the Qing Dynasty. The palace was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and rebuilt by local devotees on the original site in 1986. It was renovated in 2005. The temple primarily worships two statues of the Heavenly Consort (Mazu), along with other deities such as the Central Military deity and the Child-Giving Mother.

overall, they still have a clear Mazu image and storytelling characteristics, without breaking away from traditional frameworks and lacking a more artistic interpretation and expression of culture. As one of the representatives of traditional Chinese culture, Mazu's symbols are mostly inherited from traditional and well-known images. With the development of the times and the promotion of multicultural values, people's aesthetic and painting techniques are also developing and innovating. At the same time, there is relatively little research on the innovative expression of Mazu themes in contemporary painting. With the emergence of increasingly rich painting and compositions, how to apply Mazu, a traditional cultural symbol, to painting has become a problem that needs to be studied.

In contemporary Mazu painting, the incorporation of youthful styles such as gaming and anime has brought innovation to traditional painting expressions. However, the essence of the creation theme remains rooted in the imagery of Mazu and her story scenes. In modern painting creation, unlike in the past where the focus was on conveying specific content and meaning, more emphasis is now placed on the overall impression and feeling that the artwork imparts to the viewer. Therefore, the artist aims to expand the Mazu symbol using modern painting techniques, combining it with the semiotic concept of unlimited interpretation. This approach goes beyond merely depicting the character and stories, and instead integrates the functions, spirit, and faith associated with Mazu, enhancing its artistic value and cultural beauty.

Exploring and expressing the Mazu symbol is a key aspect of innovation in this work. It also reflects the artist's own understanding and perspective of the Mazu symbol. As a traditional Chinese sea deity element, Mazu's presence is often manifested through statues, painting, stories, and legends. Studying and integrating the Mazu symbol through painting is an innovative attempt to refresh traditional painting methods, fostering cross-form communication.

Incorporating the Mazu symbol into modern painting design essentially involves a process of infinite interpretation and understanding of rich symbols. Initially, this process involves understanding the symbol of Mazu herself, which then evolves into various expressions and interpretations based on different perspectives and the connections and explanations among symbols. This allows for diverse and innovative understandings of the Mazu symbol, enriching its cultural and artistic significance.

In addition, Mazu is one of the most revered deities in Chinese theological culture, officially recognized and designated as an intangible cultural heritage of China. With approximately 300 million followers worldwide, Mazu represents a faith with significant international influence, making her culture highly valuable for promotion and dissemination. Mazu is a vital part of Putian's local culture, and as a native, there is a responsibility and duty to promote and propagate this cultural heritage. By understanding and analyzing the Mazu symbol and expressing it through painting, we can better understand, inherit, disseminate, and innovate Mazu culture.

This project aims to explore how to combine Chinese Mazu symbolism with modern Chinese painting expression, presenting the Mazu symbol through painting. By leveraging the infinite interpretive and associative characteristics of symbols, this approach seeks to expand the scope of semiotic practice, enhance the understanding and interpretation of semiotic theory, and further deepen semiotic research. The fusion of Chinese Mazu symbols with modern painting art not only represents the

continuation of Chinese traditional culture but also explores new ways to propagate Mazu culture and faith, reflecting the enduring nature of Chinese cultural heritage.

Preliminary research indicates that there is an abundance of literature and image data related to Mazu, with many successful theories available. The author hopes to extract elements and symbols from Mazu culture, integrating them with the concept of infinite semiotic interpretation, and create new works through aesthetic concepts. This approach aims to introduce new forms of creation in the fields of semiotics and modern painting, thereby better inheriting and spreading Mazu culture.



## 1.2 Purpose of Research

- 1). Research on the development and current status of Mazu culture and painting.
- 2). Analysis and research of Mazu culture from the perspectives of semiotics and aesthetics.
- 3). Creating contemporary painting inspired by Mazu symbols.

## 1.3 Research Question

- 1). What are the origins and development of Mazu culture in China? What is the development and current status of Mazu painting?
- 2). What are the symbols of Mazu culture? How can aesthetics be applied to create works with Mazu symbols?
- 3). How can Mazu symbols be analyzed and extracted to create contemporary painting?

## 1.4 Definition of Terms

1.4.1 **Mazu:** Female. Mazu's original name was Lin Mo. She was born on the 23rd day of the third lunar month in 960 AD during the Song Dynasty on Meizhou Island in Putian, Fujian, China. On the 9th day of the ninth lunar month in 987 AD, she tragically died at the age of 28 while rescuing fishermen. Due to her helpful nature during her lifetime, many people benefited from her assistance and protection. After her death, the local people built a temple in her honor and revered her as Mazu. Over time, Mazu evolved from being a historical figure to a deity, receiving multiple posthumous titles and becoming the sea deity in Chinese tradition, protecting those who venture out to sea and ensuring their safe return. Today, Mazu has become a cultural symbol and an integral part of Chinese theological culture.

1.4.2 **Painting:** In this context, "painting" refers to an artistic form represented by one or multiple images in a series, as documented in literature and other sources. It encompasses various art forms such as painting, comics, prints, sculptures, and more, all of which can depict the image of Mazu. The focus is primarily on two-dimensional artworks within the realm of painting.

1.4.3 **Furen:** In ancient feudal society, "Furen" was a title for high-ranking women, usually referring to women with high status and honor, such as the wives or mothers of nobles, who enjoyed a high social status. During the Song Dynasty's ruling system, the mother or wife of a ruling official was conferred the title of "Furen."

1.4.4 **Fei:** In ancient China, "Fei" was a title for the emperor's concubines. Here, "Fei" symbolizes status rather than referring to a specific person's concubine. It denotes a rank for women.

1.4.5 **Tianfei:** A title one rank higher than "Fei," it was a respectful term for divine women in ancient times.

1.4.6 **Hou:** Refers to the female ruler or the wife of an emperor, the highest-ranking woman.

1.4.7 **Tianhou:** In ancient China, this term referred to a queen or a female emperor, a title even more exalted than "Hou."



1.4.8 **Shengmu:** Refers to a mythical woman with divine powers and high status. In Chinese culture, some deity are called "Shengmu," such as the Eastern Shengmu and the Golden Spirit Shengmu. In Catholicism, the mother of Jesus, Mary, is referred to as the "Shengmu."

1.4.9 **Heavenly:** Shengmu: With the addition of "Heavenly," this term denotes an even higher respect for the Shengmu, indicating her divine status in heaven and emphasizing her esteemed position.

1.4.10 **Niangniang:** A respectful title in the ancient imperial harem, it is also used to honor deity. It is commonly used to address mothers, female elders, or elderly women. In folk traditions, female deities are respectfully called "Niangniang."

1.4.11 **Meizhou Island:** Located in Meizhou Town, Xiuyu District, Putian City, Fujian Province, China, Meizhou Island is the second largest island in Putian City. It is situated approximately 42 kilometers southeast of the downtown area of Putian City and is only 1.82 nautical miles from the mainland. The island covers a land area of 14.35 square kilometers with a population of 38,000 people and experiences an average annual temperature of 21°C. Meizhou Island comprises over 30 islands, islets, and reefs of varying sizes. Meizhou Island is the birthplace and sacred site of Mazu, where many stories about Mazu's life occurred. Currently, the Mazu Temple of Meizhou has been constructed on the island, serving as the venue for the annual Mazu Festival and a pilgrimage destination for Mazu believers worldwide.

1.4.12 **Historical depictions:** Portraits of the era refer to historical artifacts depicting figures, primarily in forms such as sculptures, murals, and prints. These portraits are valuable in cultural studies as they authentically represent societal conditions and people's understanding and expression of individuals and events from a specific period in history. They provide a relatively accurate and realistic portrayal of historical contexts, making them significant for cultural research.

1.4.13 **Infinite Semiosis:** Infinite semiosis is a concept in Peircean semiotics where a symbol is seen as capable of further development through interpretation into subsequent symbols. According to Peirce, if a symbol cannot be interpreted into further signs, it does not qualify as a genuine symbol. By continually interpreting the referent and interpretant of a symbol, one can better understand and expand its meaning. This process allows for ongoing deepening and development. This paper will utilize the concept of infinite semiosis from semiotics to study and select elements of Mazu culture.

1.4.14 **Elements of Mazu Culture:** Elements related to Mazu culture that have been passed down to the present day include Mazu festivals, Mazu culture, Mazu traditions, and similar aspects.

## 1.5. Scope of Research

### 1.5.1 Research Field

#### 1). Geographic Location:

The research field of this paper is in China. The People's Republic of China, established on October 1, 1949, is located in East Asia on the western coast of the Pacific Ocean. It is a socialist country under the leadership of the working class, based on the alliance of workers and peasants, and practices people's democratic dictatorship. The official languages are Mandarin Chinese and standardized Chinese characters. The capital city is Beijing. China is a unified multi-ethnic country predominantly composed of the Han ethnic group among 56 ethnic groups.

China's land area is approximately 9.6 million square kilometers, with over 18,000 kilometers of coastline along the eastern and southern mainland. The total area of its territorial waters is about 4.73 million square kilometers, including over 7,600 islands, with Taiwan Island being the largest at 35,798 square kilometers. China shares borders with 14 countries and has maritime boundaries with 8 countries. It is administratively divided into 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities directly under the central government, and 2 special administrative regions.

Specifically, due to Mazu's origins in Meizhou Island, Putian City, Fujian Province, much of the research material originates from Fujian Province. Fujian Province is the primary geographical focus of the study. Fujian, abbreviated as "Min," is a provincial-level administrative region of the People's Republic of China with Fuzhou as its capital. It is located on the southeastern coast of China, bordered by Zhejiang Province to the northeast, Jiangxi Province to the northwest, and Guangdong Province to the southwest. Across the Taiwan Strait to the southeast lies Taiwan Province. The terrain of Fujian Province is characterized by mountains and hills, covering about 90% of its total area. It has a subtropical maritime monsoon climate. As of the end of 2021, Fujian Province consists of 9 prefecture-level cities and Pingtan Comprehensive Experimental Zone, with a land area of 124,000 square kilometers and a sea area of 136,000 square kilometers. The population of Fujian Province was 41.88 million by the end of 2022, with Putian City, the birthplace of Mazu culture, being the main focus of research.

#### 2). Research Objects:

Elements of Mazu Culture: Such as Mazu beliefs, Mazu culture, Mazu festivals, and related elements.

Elements of Mazu Imagery: Sculptures and painting depicting Mazu.

Mazu Mythological Legends: Stories, legends, and deeds associated with Mazu.

### 1.5.2 Time

Since the inception of Mazu belief, its artistic expressions such as Mazu statues and painting have emerged alongside it and have continued to evolve to this day. The cultural and artistic development of Mazu can be outlined as follows:

Song Dynasty: 960–1279 AD

Yuan Dynasty: 1271–1368 AD

Ming Dynasty: 1368–1644 AD

Qing Dynasty: 1636–1912 AD

These periods span the historical timeline during which Mazu culture and its associated artworks flourished and developed.

### 1.5.3 Another

This project is presented in the form of painting. The painting theme is Chinese Mazu, created by the artist Fang Zhou in 2023. The dimensions of each artwork are 80x100 cm, and there are a total of 22 painting.

Creation Techniques: The artist used an iPad with the Procreate app for creating the artworks.

Creative Approach: In terms of content, the painting focus on the theme of Mazu symbols, integrating semiotics and aesthetics to create modern art painting. The artworks depict scenes inspired by Chinese Mazu.

## 1.6 Research Methodology

### 1.6.1 Population and Sample

#### 1.6.1.1 Population

Experts and scholars in relevant fields:

- 1). Zhu Hepu: Male, renowned scholar in the Mazu field.
  - 2). Zhou Jinyan: Male, Executive Vice Secretary-General of the Chinese Mazu Culture Exchange Association, Director of the Academic Department, Member of the Chinese Folklore Society, expert scholar in Mazu culture.
  - 3). Sun Zixuan: Female, curator of the Yibanxiang Mazu Culture Exhibition Hall in Huian. Yibanxiang Mazu Culture Exhibition Hall located at Qipai Mountain in Julong Town, Huangtang, Huian County, Quanzhou City. The hall houses nearly a thousand Mazu statues, including over 350 ancient statues that are more than 100 years old. The collection spans different styles of Mazu statues, such as those from the Southern Song Dynasty resembling noblewomen and those from the Qing Dynasty portraying Mazu as the Heavenly Empress. Materials used include gold, wood, bronze, silver, papier-mâché, and ceramics. The hall holds the largest number of Mazu statues in China.
  - 4). Pan Qiang: Male, Director of the Department of Fine Arts and Design at Capital Normal University, professor, master's supervisor.
  - 5). Meizhou Island Mazu Temple: Official management organization of Mazu culture, the origin of Mazu culture.
- Residents and tourists in unrelated fields:



- 6). Tourists on Meizhou Island.
- 7). Residents of Meizhou Island.
- 8). Students of Putian University: Local university students.

#### **1.6.1.2 Sample**

**Textual literature:** Mainly focused on researching literature and materials related to Mazu and folklore stories. The study of Mazu cultural literature can summarize the development of Mazu culture and provide a comprehensive understanding of it. Mazu folklore stories primarily reflect the authentic content of Mazu culture and belief, constituting an important part of both. These will serve as the framework and creative inspiration for the artwork, forming its thematic foundation and structure.

**Painting works:** Primarily using historical depictions related to Mazu. These historical depictions refer to various artifacts related to Mazu throughout history, including portraits, murals, painting, and statues. For example, Mazu statues selected for reference include the Southern Song Dynasty Mazu wooden statue of the deity, Southern Song Dynasty Mazu wooden statue of the lady (currently housed in the Putian Museum, Fujian), Southern Song Dynasty Mazu wooden statue of the deity, Song Dynasty Mazu wooden statue, Southern Song Dynasty Mazu wooden statue of the lady (currently in the Wenfeng Palace, Putian, Fujian), Ming Dynasty lacquered wooden Mazu statue, Ming Dynasty Dehua kiln ceramic Mazu statue, two Ming Dynasty Mazu statues housed in the Yibanxiang Museum, Quanzhou, Fujian, and two Qing Dynasty Mazu statues housed in the Meizhou Island Mazu Origin Museum, Fujian.

Through these historically authentic depictions of Mazu, the artworks aim to faithfully represent the image of Mazu as understood throughout history, providing a tangible portrayal of people's perception of Mazu. These texts will primarily guide the visual representations in the creation of the artwork.

#### **1.6.2 Instrumentation**

- 1). Artwork Drawing Tools: computer, iPad, Procreate, etc.
- 2). Data Collection Tools: camera, mobile phone, voice recorder, etc.
- 3). Artwork Printing Tools: scanner, printer, cutting machine, laminator.
- 4). Interview Questions:

Zhu Hepu: What are the representative symbols of Mazu culture in different periods?

Zhou Jinyan: What are the evolutionary patterns and reasons for changes in the image of Mazu across different eras?

Sun Zixuan: Which antique statues and paintings of Mazu are representative in the Fujian region?

Pan Qiang: How does modern illustration art integrate traditional symbolic elements in creative work?

Meizhou Island Mazu Temple: What is the direction of development for Mazu culture?

### 1.6.3 Data Collection

July 8, 2020: Conducted data collection at the Mazu Museum of Putian City Museum, Fujian Province, China.

March 7, 2021: Conducted field investigation and interviews on Meizhou Island, Putian City, Fujian Province, China.

March 8, 2021: Interviewed Mr. Zhou Jinyan from the Mazu Research Institute.

March 11, 2021: Visited the Yibanxiang Mazu Culture Exhibition Hall in Huian, Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China, for data collection and interviewed the curator, Ms. Sun Zixuan.

August 10, 2022: Conducted field investigation and interviews again on Meizhou Island, Putian City, Fujian Province, China.

September 3, 2023: Planned and contacted for online interviews with Mr. Zhu Hepu and Professor Pan Qiang.

### 1.6.4 Data Analysis

For the data analysis in this study, I will use qualitative research methods.

1). Mazu Symbols: By reviewing extensive historical research materials, conducting field investigations, and interviews, relevant data will be gathered. Utilizing image processing techniques to convert three-dimensional images of paintings and sculptures into two-dimensional representations, followed by summarizing and categorizing them, I aim to capture the evolving representations of Mazu across different historical periods. This will serve as the foundation for creating illustrations for picture books. Additionally, various characters and elements from Mazu legends, as well as contemporary Mazu-related elements, will be incorporated.

2). Painting Techniques: I will use the Procreate drawing software on iPad to create the artwork. The technique will focus on point, line, and shape as expressive forms, utilizing a drawing method that is akin to vector graphics. The goal is to produce contemporary illustrations with Mazu themes.

### 1.6.5 Research presentation

1). Theory:

Through analysis and understanding of Mazu culture, incorporating the visual characteristics of Mazu depictions and folk stories, this study employs Peircean semiotics to analyze Mazu cultural symbols. Based on the analyzed symbols and utilizing Peirce's theory of infinite semiosis, these symbols are expanded to serve as elemental symbols for creating Mazu illustration artworks. The author innovatively concretizes various abstract symbols such as influence, belief, and spirit using Peircean semiotics, creating modern-style Mazu illustrations. Upholding principles of beauty and respect, the study aims to better integrate the past and present, promote Mazu's spirit through modern artistic techniques, and effectively disseminate and

enhance understanding and recognition of Mazu culture among contemporary audiences, thereby contributing to its development, dissemination, and inheritance.

1). Works:

The research outcome is expected to yield 22 illustrations measuring 80X100CM each. These artworks will combine semiotics and aesthetics to offer a new interpretation of Mazu culture, enhancing its development and promotion.

### 1.7 Literature Review

As of May 2024, on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), there are 3906 research papers related to Mazu and culture as keywords and topics, and 638 research papers related to Mazu and art. Surprisingly, there are only 17 research papers specifically on Mazu and illustration. This indicates that while Chinese researchers have conducted extensive studies on Mazu culture, particularly in art and illustration, there remains a significant gap in research focused on Mazu illustration, highlighting its high research value.

In the Scopus database, Mazu-related papers are scarce, with only about 3 primarily focusing on anthropology and sociology, mostly discussing topics related to Chinese aesthetics.

Through examination of these research papers, it becomes evident that Mazu culture's development abroad is significantly less than within China, with a sparse quantity of studies. Mazu, as a longstanding traditional Chinese cultural and intangible heritage, holds significant meaning and value for overseas promotion and dissemination. The study direction of Mazu art, especially in illustration, while emerging as a mainstream area in Mazu-related research, remains under-researched, thus warranting further investigation and practical exploration.

Artistic research, particularly in Mazu illustration, remains limited. By conducting research and creating Mazu illustrations, a comprehensive development and promotion of Mazu culture can be achieved. Through extensive reading and research of relevant books and literature, it is clear that Mazu culture is extensively studied and developed in various fields, primarily focusing on existing objects and mythological legends. However, innovative attempts combining these with semiotic concepts are rare.

One notable pioneering attempt was made by Associate Professor Li Lijuan from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Putian University in 2009, supported by the Fujian Provincial Department of Education's Social Science Research Project. She sequentially published articles such as "Interpreting the Reproductive Meaning of Mazu Stone Carvings from the Perspective of Social Semiotics" (Li Lijuan, 2009) and "Interpreting the Interactive Meaning of Mazu Stone Carving Deities from the Perspective of Social Semiotics" (Li Lijuan, 2009). Applying Kress and Leeuwen's Visual Image Grammar theory, she attempted a social semiotic

visual interpretation of Mazu stone carving deities, exploring the reproductive significance expressed by these deities through aspects such as contact, social distance, attitude, and modality. This research demonstrated the rich interpersonal interaction significance embodied by Mazu stone carving deities in terms of designers' creativity, concepts, specific expression techniques, and resulting effects.

Moreover, Mazu elements in modern artistic illustrations are seldom seen, and the majority of illustration works are distant from the actual cultural origins of Mazu. Despite numerous scholars and researchers engaging in innovation and creative research across different fields related to Mazu, there remains a lack of systematic overview and organization regarding the application and innovation of Mazu symbols in semiotics and aesthetics within modern illustration art.

### **Xiao HaiMing 2017-05 Research on Mazu image**

#### **Brief introduction**

This book extensively collects image materials such as the statues, painting, prints, and murals of Mazu from various dynasties. Based on this, it comprehensively and systematically sorts out the characteristics and changes of Mazu images from various dynasties. It is the first monograph to comprehensively sort out and discuss Mazu images. This book focuses on the study of the image of the Mazu story in the form of the Holy Mark schema, and explores it through two main lines: the first main line is the analysis of the mythological structure of the image of the Mazu story in the form of the Holy Mark schema, and the second main line starts from the interactive relationship between the official and the people. This book also responds to the viewpoint of American scholar James Watson regarding the standardization of deities along the southern coast of China from the perspective of image research.

### **Ke Yihan 2022 The Mazu of Meizhou sland:Construction of Secular Self-Identity among Chinese People in the Era of Globalization**

#### **Brief introduction**

At present, in the context of the world's protection of intangible cultural heritage and China's policy of "One Belt, One Road", due to Mazu's unique culture and characteristic as folk belief, Mazu has become important bond for promoting China's unity, strengthening cohesion. It contributes to contact with the overseas Chinese people. Mazu culture has profound cultural connotation and historical value. The research in this article will help spread and carry forward Mazu culture, strengthen people's moral concepts, form a good social atmosphere, and maintain social stability. This has important practical significance.

First of all, this article starts with studying the specific social culture and geographical environment of Meizhou Island, and sorts out the origin, development, myths of Mazu belief.

Secondly, starting with representative Mazu artworks, it lists and analyzes the artistic characteristics of folk customs, clothes and architecture, and analyzes the symbolic significance of the Mazu statue as a new landmark on Meizhou Island.

Third, it analyzes the construction process and mode of contemporary Mazu belief, and explores the performance of contemporary Chinese self-identity of Mazu belief and the important influence of Mazu belief on the self-identity of different groups.



Fourth, it analyzes the social network of residents on Meizhou Island and the influence performance of the Mazu ancestral temple, and discusses the role and performance of Mazu belief and related organizations in the construction of social networks of the overseas Chinese people.

Fifth, it analyzes the Mazu Festival, which is an important part of the Mazu beliefs and customs of the world's intangible cultural heritage, and expounds the brand- new manifestation of the Mazu Festival in modern society. It uses the concepts of self- identity and social network to do research for demonstrate the significance and value of the Mazu Festival.

### **Wang Yingying 2021 Research on Mazu Image Aesthetic Culture**

#### **Brief introduction**

The abundant images of Mazu that arise and exist in the Mazu faith and social life are my focus of interest.

The image of Mazu's belief in customs has spanned a thousand years of time and space. What influences the changes in the image of Mazu, from a graceful and elegant witch to a high bun and long sleeved lady, and then to a queen in a phoenix crowned python robe, from simplicity to magnificence and then to solemnity? The image of Mazu's belief in customs was created by the believers in Yangzhong and is a material manifestation of Mazu's faith. So, how do images reflect the meaning of faith? How does faith utilize images? The image of Mazu's belief in customs has witnessed people's exchanges on the Maritime Silk Road for thousands of years

Where are the sources and sects, flows and transformations in Chinese literature? Is the study of Mazu's aesthetic culture of images with varying facial expressions, ages, and clothing images arbitrary?

The image of Mazu also embodies the social consciousness, ideological trends, and historical views of various regions, which are influenced by many factors. How are these specifically manifested? What is the significance of Mazu's image in the global stage and modern cultural construction? Before writing, these doubts formed question marks in the author's heart, large and small. Hidden behind the images was a colorful and vast unknown world that was tempting to explore. The image of Mazu faith is like an uncut piece of jade, attracting me to use my meager power to analyze and discover its value.

### **Huang Ruiguo 2013-08 Introduction to Mazu Studies**

#### **Brief introduction**

Starting from sociology, philosophy, Religious studies, history, economics, literature and art, marine culture, diplomatic history and many other disciplines, this book focuses on the development history of Mazu belief, Mazu spirit, Mazu and national affairs, Mazu and religion, Mazu culture communication, official sacrifices of Mazu in previous dynasties, Mazu folk custom, Mazu and marine culture, Mazu and overseas Chinese, Mazu literature, Mazu art, Mazu folk sports, Mazu cultural tourism Mazu and medical ethics, Mazu Creative industries, Mazu data collation and research, Mazu terminology, Mazu cultural relics and protection were comprehensively and systematically discussed in theory, discussing the formation and development of Mazu culture, its status in all previous dynasties and its impact on all aspects of society, and discussing the expression, influence and role of Mazu culture

in many fields: studying the impact of Mazu culture on modern society, economy, culture The enlightenment and function of spirit and other aspects, the research on the protection and utilization of Mazu Cultural resource management, the improvement of Mazu cultural research and the promotion of Mazu cultural development, and the construction of the spiritual home shared by the three regions on both sides of the Straits and the Chinese nation have extremely important historical and practical significance.

### **Zhou Jinyan, Jiang Xiaoqian 2011-09 Compilation of Mazu Literature and Historical Materials Volume 3 Painting Volume 1**

#### **Brief introduction**

The existing Qing Dynasty fine brushwork painting "The Legend Axis of the Heavenly Empress" at Fengtang Palace in Xianyou. The original axis does not have the author's name, and the paper is colored. It consists of four axes, with 12 pictures of the story of Mazu drawn on each axis, totaling 48 images. Each image is 61 centimeters vertically and 38 centimeters horizontally. The group painting depicts the life story of Mazu, the development of Mazu faith, and the stories of emperors praising and awarding titles throughout history. Each painting has a brief introduction text at the top.

### **Ke LiHong 2015-08 On Xianyou Fengtang Palace- Story axis of Queen of heaven**

#### **Brief introduction**

Mazu is the only Millennium deity listed in the national ceremony in China During the reign of Emperor Kangxi and Emperor Qianlong in Qing Dynasty, large-scale painting were usually used to represent major political events.

The "Legend Axis of the Heavenly Empress" is a large painting scroll consisting of 48 small images, each measuring 38.5 centimeters by 60 centimeters. Mounted in four axes, each with 20 pictures, the painting style inherits the painting style of the Ming and Qing dynasties' beautiful women.

In fine brushwork, the image of Mazu is not restricted by the perspective proportion, and the scattered perspective method is also used.

In order to highlight Mazu, the painting is painted in red. This is the first time that the deity Mazu is painted in red. Since then, "wearing Zhuyi" has become one of the symbols of Mazu's image.

The content of the painting reflects the integration of the three religions of Folk religion, including Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism

### **Xu SuJia 2018-02 Mazu costume culture and its inheritance**

#### **Brief introduction**

Mazu Costume: The clothes Mazu liked to wear during his lifetime. According to the records, Mazu wore red clothes, and the common people reformed

Mazu bun: it is said that it is a hairstyle designed for Mazu Li to save fishermen and never marry

Costume culture: represents the blessing and yearning for fishermen going out to sea

Cultural Consciousness: 1. Accurate understanding of their own traditional culture; 2. Relying on the local people to improve their awareness of inheritance and protection

Commercial value: 1) Clothing materials, 2) Traditional production processes, 3) Fishing village cuisine culture, 4) Shipbuilding culture, 5) Fishing culture, 6) Experience products (experience Mazu attire)

### **Huang ZhiLin 2018-01 Biography of tianfeiniang and the image of Mazu in Ming Dynasty**

Brief introduction

1. The spread of Mazu's deeds in song and Yuan Dynasties mostly appeared in poetry, inscriptions, historical extracts, congratulatory writings and local records

2. This paper gives a detailed list of the historical sources of the main stories in the legend of Tianfei ma

3. It presents the concept of three religions in one as a whole

4. Since the Ming Dynasty, with the development of the maritime Silk Road, Mazu, as a belief, began to follow the development of merchant shipping, and the stories are mostly related to the deeds of maritime merchants

### **Huang Ruiguo. History 2017-03 Inheritance and Development of Matsu Cultural Studies**

Brief introduction

This article briefly reviews the research history of Mazu culture, proposes that the study of Mazu culture should start from the Song Dynasty, and focuses on the overview of research since the 20th century. This paper summarizes the different views of scholars on the study of Mazu culture for more than a thousand years, the research compilation of historical materials, different research perspectives and methods, and puts forward some suggestions on strengthening the basic construction of Mazu studies and "Mazu Tibet", emphasizing that the study of Mazu culture must meet the needs of contemporary social and economic development, especially giving full play to the positive role of Mazu culture in the construction of the 21st century Maritime Silk Road.

### **Xiao HaiMing 2016-10 A comprehensive study of portrait mazu images in Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties**

Brief introduction

This article provides a comprehensive and systematic review of the portrait like images of Mazu from past dynasties, exploring the characteristics and evolution trajectory of Mazu images. At the same time, it focuses on two controversial issues in the academic community and proposes its own views. As pointed out in the controversy over the issue of "Qing Gui covering the Zhu diao", the Mazu image of "Qing Gui covering the Zhu diao" that emerged after the enfeoffment of the imperial concubine in the Southern Song Dynasty has continued to develop throughout the history of Mazu images, becoming the main thread of the development of portrait like Mazu images. Another example is pointing out that the phoenix crown plate Mazu image, which has been very popular in Mazu temples all over the world since the Qing Dynasty, is the perfect combination of "later" and "emperor", so that Mazu not

only retains the characteristics of the highest female deity, but also has the identity of an emperor, and has the same status as the male "emperor" deities. The image of Mazu wearing a Mian diao in the Qing Dynasty is actually a metaphor for Mazu's status as an emperor.

### **Du Yu 2014-06 Study on deity image in Chinese folk art**

#### **Brief introduction**

The deity image in Folk religion is a typical source of creative themes in folk art. The deity, symbolizing fairness and justice, has become the embodiment of "truth, goodness, and beauty" in people's minds. Creative thinkers and artists often derive strength and inspiration from the worship of deities. Throughout history, the Chinese people have used their inspiration and wisdom to shape colorful deity images. The deity images influenced by folk deity beliefs have their own historical origins, rich connotations, and thought-provoking deity myths. The traditional deity images in folk art mostly have a kind face and beautiful posture, but they have different specific forms of expression, diverse forms, and lifelike postures. The image of a deity, as a creative theme in folk art, is not only a work of art but also has artistic appreciation value in various forms such as folk sculptures, wooden New Year painting, and paper horse categories. The round face, plump figure, kind expression, profound auspicious decoration, as well as the full composition, smooth lines, and bright red and green festive colors of the deity are all for general artists to reference and appreciate. The value of the deity image in folk art is not only the appreciation value as a work of art, but also the reflection of folk cultural forms. The image of deities reflects a strong sense of ethical and moral consciousness. It is precisely according to these ethical standards that the people shape folk deities, and they also place these moral and ethical consciousness on the deities, making these deity images a guide for people's behavior orientation. All the stories of deities embody the common people's simple life desires, ethical ideals, and the integration of mainstream ideas of their times. This is also the Secularization and ethics of folk culture reflected by the image of the deity.

### **Mao Qingli 2018 Study on the evolution of Mazu Sedan chair**

#### **Brief introduction**

##### **The deity image in**

Religion in Taiwan has diverse religious beliefs, among which Mazu and Guan Sheng are the most popular deities among the Taiwanese people, and their celebration activities run through the whole year. The most eye-catching event throughout the year is the "Mazu Tour", which refers to the travel of deities. The divine sedan, as a means of transportation for deities, has become the focus of everyone. In recent years, due to the development of technology and the transformation of lifestyle, the craftsmanship and manufacturing technology of the Mazu sedan have gradually become unpopular. This article will explore the development of the Mazu sedan from a vertical perspective using a timeline as the axis, and compare it to understand the development of the Mazu sedan in Taiwan, and use it to stimulate people's interest and thinking about traditional craftsmanship.



### **Wang yingxuan 2011-04 Analysis on artistry of Statue carving of Mazu in Putian** Brief introduction

By exploring the external form characteristics of Mazu statue carving, we aim to delve deeper into its connotation. The artistry of the statue of Mazu in Putian lies in its concrete bearing of the spiritual aesthetics of Mazu, and a relatively complete reflection of the aesthetic views of Mazu's image in various periods. It inherits the traditional art tradition of Chinese sculpture and incorporates the exquisite carving techniques of the region, vividly demonstrating the development level of Putian statue carving technology, and truly recording the aesthetic culture and artistic pursuit of the Putian people, Becoming an important artistic and cultural asset in Putian Mazu belief culture.

### **Zhang Ruibo. 2017-08 Analysis on the official image of Mazu under the Confucian female view** Brief introduction

From the Southern Song Dynasty to the late Qing Dynasty, the title of Mazu achieved a development from "Madam" to "Tian Tian", and the official reshaped the deity content of Mazu's "assisting politics and protecting the country". Analyzing the official image of Mazu from the Confucian perspective on women, it is found that Mazu not only meets the Confucian requirements for women to reside within, but also breaks the traditional gender division of labor in China. This contradictory phenomenon to some extent reflects the "instrumentality" of feudal women, pointing out that the shaping of the image of Mazu culture is actually the result of the joint efforts of many traditional Chinese cultural factors. It indicates the differences and integration of women's views between Confucianism and Taoism.

### **Yang Yue 2011-02 ContemporaryPainting** Brief introduction

painting is an art form, and both artistic drawings andpainting containing explanatory text are calledpainting.Painting can also be divided into servicePainting and creativePainting. ServicePainting emphasizes its commercial value, while creativePainting emphasizes its artistic value.

In this era of image reading,Painting, as an important form of visual communication in modern design, holds a specific position in modern design due to its intuitiveness, infectiousness, and artistry. It has been widely used in multiple fields of modern design, involving cultural activities, social public utilities, commercial activities, and film and television culture.

China is one of the ancient civilizations in the world. The History of art of ChinesePainting is long and its works are exquisite. The situation of ancient ChinesePainting art is the same as that of other countries around the world, and it can also be divided into two categories: writtenPainting (fine and dense painting) and printed engravingPainting (woodblock printing). The earliest extantPainting art in China was unearthed from the Warring States Chu Tomb in Changsha, Hunan. This silk painting features text in the middle andpainting on all four sides, resembling a 12 month old moon deity. It adopts a meticulous and meticulous method of using meticulous brushstrokes, heavy colors, lines, and flat graphics.

## **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel 2011-07 Aesthetics**

### **Brief introduction**

#### **The Essence of Beauty**

Hegel defined the essence of beauty as "beauty is the emotional manifestation of ideas", and "the task of art is to express ideas through emotional images" for direct observation, rather than in the form of thoughts and pure spirituality. Because the value and significance of artistic expression lie in the coordination and unity of ideas and images, the height that can be achieved in practical works that conform to artistic concepts depends on the degree to which ideas and images can be integrated into a unified entity. Ideas are the purpose, meaning, and inner spirit of content. Image is the appearance, form of expression, and external expression of content. The concept is the core and essence of beauty, and the perceptual manifestation is the form and appearance of beauty. Only when the concept is transformed into concrete and tangible images can the beauty of art that blends water and milk be achieved. The proposition of "beauty is the perceptual manifestation of ideas" encompasses rational dialectical artistic thinking, emphasizing the unity of ideas and perceptual manifestation, content and form, subject and object, individual and general... It can be said that Hegel's understanding of the essence of beauty has further advanced the exploration of the essence of beauty in Western aesthetic history.

#### **Natural beauty and artistic beauty**

Beauty is the perceptual manifestation of ideas, which becomes natural beauty in nature and artistic beauty in art. Hegel believed that artistic beauty is higher than natural beauty. Artistic beauty is the beauty that arises and regenerates the soul, and the activity and freedom of the soul can be seen in it as much as the soul and its products are higher than nature and its phenomena. Artistic beauty is higher than natural beauty. The superiority of artistic beauty over natural beauty is not a quantitative difference, but a qualitative difference. That is to say, only the soul is real, and only the soul covers everything. Therefore, all beauty is truly beautiful only when it involves and arises from this higher realm. As an object of scientific research, the concept of natural beauty is uncertain and has no fixed standards, while artistic beauty is different. It has clear objects and standards and can be used as an object of scientific research.

#### **The Creation of Artistic Beauty**

How to transform artistic ideals, such conceptual things, into objective and qualitative existence, and achieve the unity of ideals and nature. This involves the creation theories of artistic beauty, such as character images, environmental plots, and conflicts in the creation. In the first part of Aesthetics, Hegel elaborated on these contents: an ideal personality should possess richness, clarity, and wholeness. The ideal environment includes two aspects: the ideal general world situation and the ideal situation. The ideal situation is a situation of conflict, where universality turns into individual and specific things, which are in a state of opposition to other things. Essentially, differences and opposition lead to conflicts. Such a situation is an ideal situation, most suitable for the ideal expression of art.

### **Hegel G.W.F. 1997-02 Aesthetics**

#### **Brief introduction**

These speeches are about aesthetics; Its object is the vast field of beauty, to be more precise, its scope is art, or rather, the art of beauty.

The name 'Asthetik' is not entirely appropriate for this type of object, as 'Asthetik', The more precise meaning of 'is the science of studying sensations and emotions. It is in this sense that aesthetics began to become a new science, or rather a department of philosophy, within the Wolf School; At that time in Germany, people usually viewed art works from the emotions of pleasure, admiration, fear, and pity that they should evoke. Due to the inappropriate, more precise, and superficial name of "Eastek", some people want to find another name, such as "Kal listik". But this name is also not appropriate because the science it refers to is not about general beauty, but only about the beauty of art. Therefore, we may still use the name "Istitek" because the name itself is not significant to us, and since it is already adopted in general languages, it is not harmful to keep it. Our legitimate name for this science is' philosophy of art, or more precisely, philosophy of beautiful art .

### **Charles Sanders Santiago Peirce. James Jacób Liszka 2014-12 C.S.Peirce: On Signs**

#### **Brief introduction**

#### **Infinite semiosis**

The basic way of symbols expressing meaning is called infinite semiosis by Aike. Pierce believes that symbols "face another person, that is, create a corresponding or further developed symbol in that person's heart. His meaning is that in the recipient's mind, each explanatory term can become a new representation, forming an endless series of consecutive explanatory terms. Therefore, he gave a paradoxical definition to the symbol: "The explanatory term becomes a new symbol, to the point of infinity, and the symbol is something we only understand in order to understand something else. In this way, the symbolic process cannot be terminated by definition, as the symbol that interprets the symbol still needs another symbol to explain it. The meaning of symbols is a process of infinite derivation. Without derivation, we cannot discuss meaning. Interpreting meaning is a process of derivation. Therefore, Semiotics is dynamic in nature.

### **Zhao YiHeng 2016-01 Semiotics Principles & Problems**

#### **Brief introduction**

What kind of situation will the infinite extension of meaning eventually reach? Pierce believes that "precisely because interpretation becomes a symbol, a supplementary explanation may be needed, which, along with the already expanded symbols, forms a larger symbol; following this approach, we will or should ultimately touch upon the symbol itself." (Peirce 1931-1958:2.230) What is this final "symbol itself"? Aiko explained that "the ultimate symbol is not actually a symbol, but a whole semantic field that is mixed, connected, and connected through structure" (Peirce 1931-1958:11.79). The "overall semantic field" is culture: the infinite extension of a symbol may ultimately extend to the entire culture.

## Zhang ningning 2019 Symbolic construction and literary dissemination of mazu image

### Brief introduction

The widespread influence of Mazu faith has gradually symbolized and symbolized the image of Mazu. As a cultural symbol, Mazu carries many ideologies. Connotation has become the object of different social strata to express their needs. It is one of the influential Folk religion in Chinese society. Historical literary works clearly reflect.

The widespread dissemination and profound influence of the Mazu faith demonstrate people's reverence, worship, and praise for Mazu. This article intends to explore the birth of Mazu's image from the perspective of Semiotics.

To deepen the cultural connotation of Mazu worship through its formation, acceptance, and dissemination.

### 1.8 Research Conceptual framework

This study primarily adopts semiotics as its main conceptual framework, supplemented by aesthetics, to create and produce modern illustration artworks (Figure1).

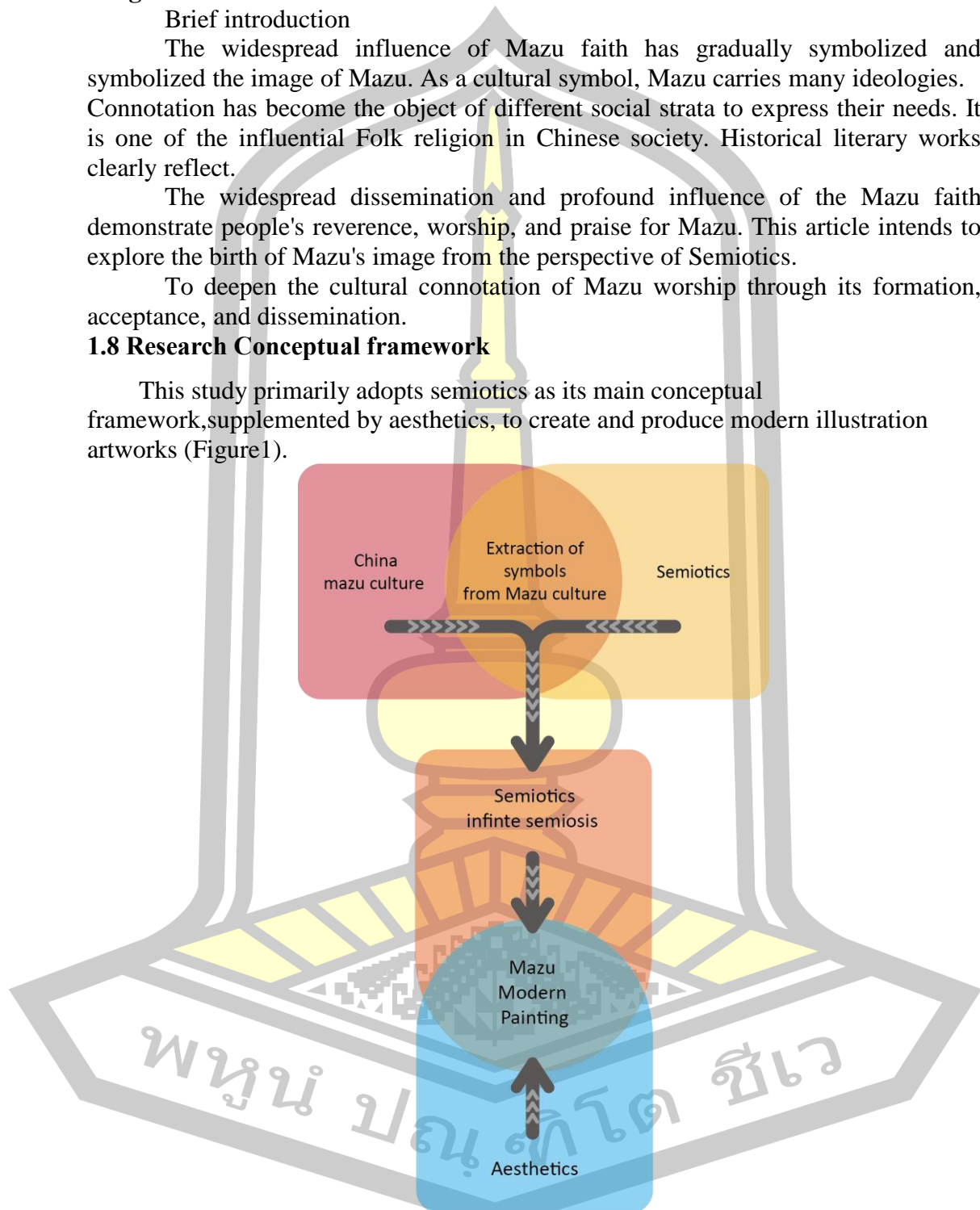


Figure 1 The framework of this article  
Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

### 1.9 Benefit of Research

1. Promote the spirit of Mazu's virtues, benevolence, and great love, and disseminate Mazu culture.
2. Facilitate the innovative integration of Mazu culture and semiotics for a deeper understanding of semiotics.
3. Utilize aesthetics and semiotics to creatively innovate the image of Mazu.
4. Develop a Mazu illustration style that differs from traditional storytelling methods, contributing to the protection and innovation of Mazu culture with promotional and referential significance.
5. Create a series of Mazu-themed illustrations that incorporate semiotic and aesthetic insights.





## Chapter II

### The Development and Current Status of Mazu Illustrations.

#### 2.1 The Development and Current Status of Mazu Culture

Mazu culture originated in the coastal areas of Fujian, China. Since the Song Dynasty, the belief in Mazu has rapidly spread, gradually becoming an important faith in the southern coastal regions of China and among Chinese communities worldwide. Mazu culture encompasses various aspects, including religious beliefs, folk customs, and traditional arts, possessing profound historical and cultural significance.

Modern research on Mazu culture began in 1918, leading to numerous scholarly works. In recent years, the development of Mazu culture has shown trends of diversification and internationalization. Traditional rituals, the construction of Mazu temples, and cultural festivals have continually expanded, becoming vital parts of cultural tourism and community cohesion. Additionally, Mazu culture, through modern media, cultural and creative products, and cultural exchange activities, has significantly enriched its representation in the field of illustration, achieving broader dissemination and recognition. Especially with the advancement of digital technology and social media, innovative Mazu illustrations continue to emerge, attracting the attention and participation of the younger generation.

Internationally, Mazu culture has spread to Southeast Asia, the Americas, Europe, and other regions through the influence of Chinese immigrant communities, becoming an important bridge for global cultural exchange. Facing the challenges of modernization and globalization, Mazu culture actively pursues innovation and integration while preserving tradition, showcasing its strong vitality and cultural adaptability. In this context, Mazu illustrations have rapidly developed, presenting a trend of multi-source and multi-field integration.

##### 2.1.1 The Origin of Mazu Beliefs and Customs

Mazu, originally named Lin Mo, also known as Lin Mo Niang or Lin Mo Gu, was born on Meizhou Island, Putian City, Fujian Province. She was born in the first year of the Song Jianzhao era (960) and passed away in the fourth year of the Yongxi era (987). Mazu was known for her kindness, generosity, and ability to foresee others' fortunes and misfortunes. She was revered as a "Heavenly deity" and was said to have died at the young age of 28 while rescuing fishermen in distress at sea.



According to legend, Mazu is said to be the dragon daughter under the seat of Guanyin Bodhisattva<sup>10</sup>. One day, Guanyin Bodhisattva, accompanied by the dragon daughter and Shancai<sup>11</sup>, attended the Queen Wangmu<sup>12</sup> of Peach Banquet<sup>13</sup>. On their way back to Mount Putuo, they passed by Meizhou Island in Putian, Fujian Province. Witnessing the hardships of the local people and unable to bear their suffering, Guanyin Bodhisattva descended to the mortal realm to save and assist sentient beings. Thus, Mazu's incarnation on earth began, driven by compassion to help those in need.

The earliest record of Mazu's miracles in the "Record of the Manifestations of Tianfei"<sup>14</sup> describes her birth in the following manner: Legend has it that when Mazu was born, a red light shone from the northwest into the room, dazzling and accompanied by a mysterious fragrance that lingered for a long time. The neighbors believed this to be a celestial phenomenon, interpreting it as the essence of the sun and moon coalescing to give birth to Mazu. After Mazu was born, she did not cry until the full moon had passed. Because of this, her father named her "Mo"<sup>15</sup>, and thus her name Lin Mo originated from this event.

From a young age, Mazu displayed exceptional intelligence, unlike other children around her. At the age of eight, she could comprehend the contents of books

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10 Guanyin Bodhisattva : The bodhisattva's name in Buddhism is Avalokiteśvara, transliterated from Sanskrit. It is also translated as "Light World Sound," and newly as "Guangzizai" or "Guanshiyin," phonetically rendered as "Apo Luo Jidi She Bala" or "Afei Lujiduo Yishifa Luo." He serves as the attendant on the left side of Amitabha Buddha and is one of the "Three Saints of the Western World." In Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara is regarded as a bodhisattva of great compassion. Whenever sentient beings encounter difficulties, they need only to chant his name.

11 Dragon daughter and Shancai : The female attendants and male attendants around Guanyin Bodhisattva.

12 Queen Wangmu : In Chinese traditional culture, the leader of female immortals in the celestial realm of Taoism is known as the Queen Mother of the West. Originally revered as Xiwangmu, later known as Yaochi Jinmu, and finally honored as Wangmu Niangniang, she is said to be the daughter of Taiyuan Shengmu, who was born shortly after Pangu opened heaven and earth. She is deeply connected to the Emperor Haotian, who governs countless heavens and myriad worlds, and is fortunate to be married to him. Together, they had a daughter named Longji, who played a significant role since the creation of heaven and earth.

13 Peach Banquet : Also known as the Peach Banquet or Peach Festival, the Peach Banquet is a grand celestial celebration in Chinese mythological legends. It is said to occur on the third day of the third lunar month, which is believed to be the birthday of the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu). During this event, the Queen Mother hosts a lavish feast where the main delicacy is peaches. Various deities and immortals from all directions are invited to attend, coming together to celebrate and offer birthday wishes to her, hence it is known as the Peach Banquet. The peaches grow in the Peach Garden and are picked by the Seven Fairy Maidens, a concept prominently featured in the Ming Dynasty novel "Journey to the West".

14 Record of the Manifestations of Tianfei : The first comprehensive book that systematically records Mazu's life, deeds, myths, and imperial recognitions across various dynasties is the "Record of the Manifestations of Tianfei". Subsequent understandings of Mazu's worship mostly derive from this text. During the Qing Dynasty, in the Tongzhi era, the bibliophile Yang Jun collected many accounts of Mazu's deeds and compiled them into the "Gazetteer of Meizhou Island". After Yang Jun's death, his collection of books eventually ended up in the Taiwan Governor-General's Museum, which included the precious "Record of the Manifestations of Tianfei." This book is the only existing woodblock-printed edition known today and is highly valued for its historical significance.

15 Mo : The Chinese meaning is silent and quiet

and began studying. By the age of ten, she was reciting scriptures and practicing Buddhism. At thirteen, she attained enlightenment through secret teachings passed down by an elderly Taoist priest. By sixteen, she possessed divine powers to expel evil and save the world.

Legend has it that when Mazu was seven or eight years old, she and her companions saw a craftsman repairing a pot at the village entrance. The craftsman was earnestly concentrating on fixing the pot. However, his skills were inadequate, and the red-hot iron sand failed to seal the hole. Embarrassed and frustrated, he angrily shouted, causing everyone else to disperse in laughter. Only Mazu remained, quietly observing the scene.

At the age of seven or eight, legend has it that Mazu and her companions witnessed a potter diligently repairing a pot at the village entrance. Mazu offered to help, but instead of appreciating her offer, the potter tried to scare her away by threatening to pour the remaining red-hot iron sand from the furnace in front of her. To everyone's surprise, Mazu boldly extended her hands and held the scorching iron sand without flinching. The potter, shocked and fearing a catastrophe, hastily left the scene.

Unexpectedly, Mazu calmly held the red-hot iron sand, and as it cooled in her hands, it transformed into two crescent-shaped cast iron pieces. Mazu returned to the village with these two pieces and threw them on the ground in front of the villagers, declaring, "Done!" One piece landed with its convex side up and the other with its concave side up, forming a symbol of Yin and Yang. The villagers were amazed by this miraculous event. From then on, Mazu used these two crescent-shaped iron pieces for divination, predicting fortunes for the villagers. If one piece landed convex side up and the other concave side up (one Yin and one Yang), it was considered very auspicious. Over time and with the widespread belief in Mazu, this divination model became popular and evolved into the "Jiaobei"<sup>16</sup>, a divination tool used in Mazu temples to this day (Zhu Hepu.2022.PP11-12).

Nowadays, the material of jiaobei is no longer iron; it is mostly made of wood or bamboo. During divination with jiaobei, believers typically start by stating their name, birthdate, address, and the matter they wish to inquire about in front of a deity. They then cast the jiaobei to receive guidance from the deity. Based on the jiaobei's outcome (Holy Cup, Laughing Cup, or Yin Cup), believers can discern the auspiciousness or feasibility of the matter. The term may refer to jiaobei used in specific religious or cultural rituals involving communication with or consultation of deities. Specific practices and interpretations may vary depending on different religious or cultural traditions. Jiaobei has become a widely recognized tool in Chinese cultural and religious practices for divination and communication with spirits.

As Mazu grew older, she not only possessed a dignified and beautiful appearance but also was skilled in weaving and textile work. At the age of 16, during

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16 Jiaobei : It is a divination tool, shaped like a crescent moon, consisting of two pieces, each with convex and flat sides. The convex side is called "Yin" and the flat side is called "Yang". When one piece shows Yin and the other Yang, it is called "Holy Cup", indicating affirmation or agreement regarding the inquiry. If both sides are flat (Yang), it is called "Laughing Cup", indicating ambiguity or the need for further consultation. If both sides are convex (Yin), it is called "Yin Cup", indicating that the inquiry is not feasible or not agreed upon.

late autumn, one day her father and brother set out separately by boat to fish at sea. Before they departed, Mazu repeatedly reminded them: "Beware of the strong northwest wind when you're out at sea." After her father and brother left, Mazu helped her mother weave cloth at home.

While weaving, Mazu suddenly stopped moving the shuttle in her hands and the foot pedal beneath her feet also ceased. Her mother found this behavior strange and upon closer inspection, saw Mazu lying on the loom, seemingly asleep yet muttering softly and with slight movements in her hands and feet as if trembling. Astonished, her mother gently pushed Mazu, trying to wake her. To her surprise, Mazu woke up and exclaimed, "Oh no! Father is safe, but brother has perished!" It turned out that while weaving, Mazu had a premonition of her father and brother encountering danger at sea. She projected herself to the sea to rescue her father while her physical body remained at the loom. After rescuing her father, she intended to continue to save her brother but was awakened by her mother.

After a while, her father returned. He recounted that shortly after they set out to sea, they encountered a sudden strong wind and towering waves. Just as his boat was on the verge of capsizing, it felt like someone firmly grasped the helm, steering the boat safely. Slowly, his boat was guided towards where Ma Zu's brother's boat was. Unfortunately, as the two boats were about to come together, Ma Zu's brother's boat's helm was broken by the fierce wind, causing the boat to overturn into the sea. It turned out that when Ma Zu had closed her eyes and lay on the loom earlier, she had been flying to rescue them at sea. The foot pedal she was stepping on symbolized her father's boat's helm, and the wooden shuttle she held in her hand represented her brother's boat. When her mother abruptly woke her up, the foot pedal beneath her feet remained intact, but the wooden shuttle in her hand fell, causing her brother's boat to capsize (Zhu Hepu.2022.PP16-17).

The story became a famous part of Mazu's legend. Afterward, Mazu searched the sea extensively for her brother but never found him, becoming a lifelong regret for her.

Mazu was not only exceptionally brave and skilled in magic but also willingly selfless in helping and rescuing others. One night nearing midnight, Mazu was by the cliffs near the sea when she spotted several points of white light floating in the water, accompanied by faint cries for help. She knew immediately that a fleet had been caught in a storm and had lost its way. It was too late to guide them with her boat, so Mazu swiftly ran back home and gathered her family outside. She then hurled an oil lamp against the eaves, igniting a fierce blaze that quickly engulfed the thatched roof. The towering flames from Meizhou Island lit up the sky, visible from afar to the stranded fleet on the sea. It turned out to be a Roman fleet, panicked and lost in the stormy night. Spotting the beacon of light, they discerned the direction of the land and exerted all their strength to guide the fleet into Xiuyu Harbor<sup>17</sup>, finally navigating safely through the perilous situation.

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17 Xiuyu Harbor : Xiuyu Port is located in Putian City, Xiuyu District, Dongzhuang Town, Putou Village, on the west coast of the Taiwan Strait in Fujian Province, China. Positioned between Fuzhou and Xiamen to the east, and Hong Kong and Shanghai to the west, it is strategically located. It is situated 72 nautical miles east of Taichung Port in Taiwan, 132 nautical miles north of Mawei Port in Fuzhou, 510 nautical miles from Shanghai Port, 96 nautical miles south of Xiamen Port, and 397 nautical miles from Hong Kong. Xiuyu Port is a natural deep-water harbor known as "rare in China, scarce in the world". Designated as a Class I port open to the outside world by

The next day, the merchants from Rome disembarked to express their gratitude to those who had guided them through the fire. However, they found all the islanders had gathered, some bringing wood, others bringing tiles, everyone pitching in to rebuild. In just a few hours, a new building stood before them. Seeing this scene, the merchants were relieved and, after profuse thanks, went to conduct their business at Xiuyu Pier. News spread of Mazu guiding ships by burning houses, and merchants from far and wide remarked: "Xinghua's specialties are indeed valuable, but the deep affection of its people is even more precious!" Consequently, more merchants came to Xinghua for trade. From the story of Mazu, who unhesitatingly set her own house ablaze to save others, we see her willingness during her lifetime to selflessly aid others. It is because of Mazu's outstanding qualities that the people nearby, despite her being a woman, held her in such high regard.

As Mazu matured into adulthood, she also reached the age suitable for marriage. There are two versions of Mazu's story regarding romantic relationships.

One version of the story is a folk tale. It is said that the son of a blacksmith in Mazu's hometown had an unrequited love for Mazu and developed feelings for her. This matter was discovered by a butterfly spirit, rumored to be a sea fairy who often transformed into a beautiful woman to seduce men and absorb their essence. The butterfly spirit, upon seeing the handsome son of the blacksmith and falling in love at first sight, transformed into the image of Mazu whom the blacksmith's son admired and began secretly dating him.

Later, the parents of the young man discovered that their son was neglecting his studies and meeting with a woman daily, which led to a tragic incident. The matter escalated to the court of officials. Upon learning that someone was impersonating her, Mazu appeared in court and confronted the impostor. She engaged in a fierce battle with the butterfly spirit, eventually defeating her and driving her away, thus restoring her own honor.

In another version, a matchmaker arranged a marriage for Mazu at the insistence of Mazu's mother's brother, who saw it as disobedient and unfilial for a woman in ancient China to remain unmarried. Mazu, being deeply filial, acquiesced to her mother's wish and agreed to the arranged marriage. However, Mazu's true aspirations lay elsewhere—she was devoted to the welfare of all beings. Faced with the dilemma of balancing loyalty and filial piety, Mazu used her powers to create a butterfly double to take her place in the marriage, allowing her to continue her divine mission. In this version, Mazu and the butterfly spirit are not adversaries but unified as one. The butterfly spirit becomes an extension of Mazu, fulfilling the traditional societal role expected of women in ancient China, while Mazu herself pursues her calling.

From the stories of Mazu and the butterfly spirit in these two versions, Mazu ultimately continues to promote and enhance her own mission. In the official version of Mazu's story, the topic of her marriage is notably omitted. This highlights the contradiction in ancient Chinese culture regarding traditional views on women's marriage and their identity focused on their careers. The butterfly spirit is portrayed as Mazu's embodiment, representing both the conflict and a means of resolution. Later



on, butterflies also came to be regarded as one of Mazu's manifestations and symbolic representations.

In history, Mazu sacrificed herself at the age of 28 while rescuing sailors from a maritime disaster. In folklore, Mazu's sacrifice is steeped in mythological elements. One prevalent version recounts that at the age of 28, Mazu exerted all her efforts to assist an imperial ship in distress during a maritime rescue. Exhausted from her efforts, she was then ambushed by bandits who took advantage of the chaos caused by the disaster. Unable to resist, Mazu tragically passed away by the sea shore.

In another version, Mazu ascended to heaven after fulfilling her mission. As mentioned earlier, Mazu was originally a dragon daughter under the guidance of Guanyin Bodhisattva. Unable to bear seeing people suffer, Mazu descended to earth to assist them. Before departing, Guanyin Bodhisattva instructed Mazu, saying, "Your time on earth will be two eights. Go forth!"

The dragon daughter reincarnated into the Lin family on Meizhou Island. When Lin Moniang (Mazu's mortal name) turned sixteen, she acquired secret techniques from Daoist Xuanton, ensuring fishermen's safe voyages on the sea without calamity. One night, Mazu dreamed of Guanyin Bodhisattva saying, "Two eights have passed (interpreted as a total of 16 years). Your time on earth has come to an end; return promptly to Mount Putuo." Reluctant to leave and eager to continue helping people, Mazu paced the beach alone at dawn. At that moment, Daoist Xuanton appeared and advised her that "two eights" could also mean 28 years. Thus, Mazu chose to remain on the island to continue her benevolent work.

On the Double Ninth Festival when Mazu was 28 years old, Lin Moniang rose early, dressed meticulously, and lit incense to pray for peace and happiness in the world. She then greeted her parents, sisters, and the villagers on the island, saying, "Today, on this auspicious Double Ninth Festival, I am going to Mifeng Peak to offer prayers to heaven. I may not return, so please do not worry about me." Step by step, Lin Moniang ascended Mifeng Peak and sat down on a clean stone surface, hands folded in prayer and eyes gently closed. As twilight approached, celestial music filled the air, and colorful clouds floated by. Guanyin Bodhisattva arrived with the Wealthy deity Child to welcome her. Gradually, her soul began to depart from her mortal body, carried away by a gentle breeze straight to the celestial realm. Meanwhile, Lin Moniang's parents, sisters, and the villagers became anxious when she did not return. They hurried to the summit of Mifeng Peak to search for her. There, they found her peacefully seated, having achieved spiritual transcendence on the stone. Overwhelmed with sorrow, they mourned deeply, their cries of grief echoing for miles around.

Before long, the first Mazu temple appeared on Meizhou Island. Inside, the first statue of Mazu was crafted from a handful of sea mud contributed by every man, woman, and child on the island. (妈祖故事 · Zhou Jinyan&Xu Ping PP41-42) The Mazu belief originated from here.

### 2.1.2 The Origin and Evolution of Mazu's Divine Position :

In traditional Chinese culture, there are commonly three methods for the creation of deities. The first involves reverence for natural forces, where incomprehensible natural phenomena and powers are worshipped as spirits. People pray to them to bring blessings to humanity and to prevent them from causing harm when they appear. Common examples include Lei Gong<sup>18</sup>, Dian Mu<sup>19</sup>, and Dragon Kings.

The second method involves worshipping phenomena or animals that are harmful to humans as deities. For example, there are Wenshen<sup>20</sup> who control diseases, and in Fujian province, there is the monkey deity who historically disrupted the lives of ordinary people. People hope to transform these malevolent spirits into protective deities by defeating them, thus avoiding suffering and hardships.

The third method is to worship famous individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the people as deities. The hope is that even after their passing, they will continue to protect the people. Examples include Mazu, Menshen<sup>21</sup>, and Chenghuang<sup>22</sup> (Wang Yingying, 2021, PP21). Mazu's deification process exemplifies this third method.

Mazu's original divine role was to bless safe voyages at sea, stemming from her frequent rescues of sailors in distress during her lifetime. However, Mazu's divine role is not static. With the spread and development of Mazu worship, her divine duties have evolved over time in response to changing societal needs, especially the evolving demands from ruling classes for spiritual guidance.

In the Song Dynasty, due to the lagging development of shipbuilding and the lack of effective measures against natural disasters such as storms at sea, people's main hope and the government's official concern after setting sail was for safe return. As maritime transportation expanded, this need grew stronger. Mazu, known for her compassion and sacrifices during her life, was believed by the people to continue to

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18 Lei Gong : In Chinese mythology, Lei Gong is the deity who governs thunder.

19 Dian Mu : The deity in Chinese mythology who presides over lightning is Dian Mu. She is one of the deity revered in Chinese folk belief and Taoism, also serving as the assistant and spouse of Lei Gong.

20 Wenshen : The deity in charge of plague in Chinese folklore generally refers to the five ghosts, namely the Spring Plague Zhang Yuanbo, the Summer Plague Liu Yuanda, the Autumn Plague Zhao Gongming, the Winter Plague Zhong Shiji, and the General Manager of Chinese Plague History and Literature.

21 Menshen : The Door deities are guardian deities who protect the entranceways. Door deity paintings are a type of artwork traditionally pasted on doors during the Lunar New Year. As spiritual guardians in folk belief, people affix these images to their doors to ward off evil spirits, safeguard their homes, ensure peace and security, promote prosperity, and invite auspiciousness. They are widely cherished as protective deities among the Han Chinese population in China.

22 Chenghuang : The deity who manages cities, worshipped in Chinese folk religion and Taoism, is a guardian deity of cities and is also known as Chenghuangye. The term "Cheng" refers to city walls, and "Huang" originally referred to dry moats that surrounded cities, both serving protective roles for the city. The belief in City deities emerged during the Northern and Southern Dynasties period, flourished during the Tang and Song dynasties, and evolved in the Ming and Qing dynasties to represent a counterpart to the "yang officials" dispatched by earthly governments, specifically handling affairs related to the underworld in their respective regions.



save ships and bless everyone's safe return. During the Song Dynasty, this became Mazu's primary role.

With the transition of time into the Yuan Dynasty, commercial development and the revival of maritime trade occurred. Besides commercial transport needs, there was also a significant political demand for the transportation of grain from the south to the north, known as the "Southern Grain Transport to the North." Due to population growth in the north outstripping local food production, the Yuan government needed to transport grain from the south to meet the northern population's needs. This policy became crucial for maintaining Yuan rule, evident from the government's five successive honorary titles bestowed upon Mazu.

Due to the government's need to safeguard grain transportation, Mazu's role expanded beyond protecting maritime trade to include safeguarding inland grain transport. In the 18th year of the Yuan Dynasty (1281), Mazu was officially titled "Protector Ming Zhu fei," indicating her elevation from protecting shipping to protecting the nation itself.

During the Ming Dynasty, rulers highly revered and utilized Mazu primarily for overseas missions and foreign relations. At that time, the threat of Japanese pirates (Wokou) was frequent, prompting the Ming Dynasty to enforce a maritime prohibition policy that restricted coastal residents from sailing. This policy severely impacted China's maritime activities. However, to demonstrate national prestige, pacify neighboring countries, and receive tribute, the Ming government repeatedly dispatched envoy ships abroad. Each voyage involved rituals at Mazu temples, attributing the safe passage of these missions to Mazu's divine protection.

For instance, during Zheng He's seven voyages to the Western Seas (Indian Ocean), Mazu's statue accompanied the fleet to ensure protection. Upon their return, reports to the court highlighted miraculous incidents where Mazu's divine protection was invoked during perilous encounters, prompting requests to build temples dedicated to Mazu. The belief in Mazu spread to various Southeast Asian countries through Zheng He's expeditions. Thus, despite the Ming Dynasty's maritime restrictions, Mazu worship continued to flourish and evolve, supported by official recognition and the propagation of Mazu's miracles associated with overseas expeditions (Wang Yingying, 2021). During this period, Mazu's divine role expanded beyond blessing ships to include facilitating foreign relations. It was during this time that Mazu culture and Mazu worship officially crossed national borders, spreading to countries including Southeast Asia, Japan, India, and others. Mazu culture began its journey towards international recognition and influence.

During the Qing Dynasty, the development of Mazu worship reached a new peak. The Qing government aimed to pacify the people's hearts and actively promoted the canonization and development of Mazu culture and belief. Mazu was canonized by the Qing government 15 times during its rule, the highest number of canonizations in Chinese history. During this period, Mazu was canonized as "Tianhou" and eventually as "Deity of Heaven," achieving a prestigious status.

Under the promotion of the Qing government, a nationwide craze for building Mazu temples emerged. During this period, in addition to Mazu's traditional roles of blessing sea and canal transport, diplomatic missions, and praying for rain and drought relief, Mazu's divine duties expanded into the military realm, particularly meeting the needs of the navy. Furthermore, as Mazu worship spread among

households nationwide, extending beyond coastal regions into the inland areas, her followers diversified beyond merchants to encompass people from various professions. With the development of Mazu worship and the elevation of her status, Mazu's divine duties also expanded significantly. Besides being regarded as a protector, Mazu was entrusted with roles such as repelling invaders and bandits, controlling droughts and disasters, ensuring the well-being of women and children, and aiding in childbirth. During the Qing Dynasty, Mazu's divine responsibilities underwent unprecedented enrichment.

In modern times, with the development of modern maritime technology and science, Mazu's traditional role in ensuring safe sea voyages has been greatly diminished. However, as a representative of traditional culture, Mazu culture has begun to highlight its role in cultural exchange. Due to its deep-rooted history and widespread popularity among the people, Mazu culture's function in cultural exchange has significantly increased. As the Chinese government continues to promote Mazu culture and actively expands its influence along the maritime Silk Road, Mazu has been endowed with new roles in safeguarding peace and development. Particularly in cultural and peaceful exchanges across the Taiwan Strait, Mazu plays an indispensable role.

It is worth mentioning that, in addition to the historical divine roles attributed to Mazu, Mazu folklore includes many stories and legends associated with these roles. Among them, the most famous is the story of Mazu subduing Clairvoyance and Sharp Ears. In Mazu temples, people often see two accompanying deities beside Mazu: Clairvoyance and Sharp Ears. These two minor deities possess unique abilities: Clairvoyance can see things thousands of miles away, while Sharp Ears can hear sounds from thousands of miles away.

Legend has it that during the late Shang Dynasty, under the tyrant King Zhou of Shang, there were two brothers with formidable magical abilities. The elder brother was named Gaoming, renowned for his clairvoyance, known as "Clairvoyance." The younger brother was named Gaolan, famous for his keen hearing, known as "Sharp Ears." During the conflicts between Shang and Zhou, these two brothers aided King Zhou's tyranny, posing a great threat to the generals of the Zhou dynasty.

Eventually, Jiang Ziya, a prominent general and strategist of the Zhou dynasty, devised a plan. He used war drums to disrupt Sharp Ears' hearing and used flags to obstruct Clairvoyance's vision. With this strategy, he managed to capture and kill both brothers. After their deaths, the spirits of Clairvoyance and Sharp Ears harbored resentment. Their malevolent souls haunted Taohua Mountain in the northwest of Meizhou Island, causing trouble for the local people for three thousand years. Later, upon hearing about Mazu's powerful abilities to exorcise demons and evil spirits, the local villagers sought her help to rid them of these two monsters. Upon hearing the cries of the villagers, Mazu immediately took action. Without hesitation, she carried bronze talismans and wielded a golden sword, setting off to Taohua Mountain to subdue the two monsters (Yu Guoqing.2011.PP36-38).

However, the two monsters feared Mazu's powers and used their abilities to evade her, hiding from her sight. Mazu transformed herself into an ordinary girl to deceive Clairvoyance and Sharp Ears. She used her magic to subdue the two monsters, but they managed to escape when she briefly lost focus. Eventually, Mazu found and subdued them again. Since then, Clairvoyance and Sharp Ears became

Mazu's trusted aides, assisting her with advice and strategies during her endeavors to help and save people, contributing greatly to her achievements.

In conclusion, Mazu's divine roles are shaped both by historical reasons and societal needs, as well as by myths and characteristics. They encompass the official positions and abilities bestowed by the government as well as traits that resonate with the hearts and demands of the people. Mazu's divine status evolved from Furen" to "Deity in Heaven," reflecting not only the development of Mazu culture but also the societal changes in politics, economy, and culture of the time. Mazu's stories are widely circulated among the populace, demonstrating how her divine roles mirror the evolution and transformation of society during that era.

### **2.1.3 The Origins and Development of Mazu Faith:**

#### **1). Objective Conditions and Factors Leading to the Birth of Mazu Faith:**

The Mazu faith originated in the Song Dynasty, deeply influenced by the political, economic, and cultural factors of the time. During the Song Dynasty, there was comprehensive development and prosperity in economic and cultural aspects. Population growth led to significant advancements in agriculture, commerce, and handicraft industries. Economic progress facilitated cultural development, and the Song Dynasty inherited previous religious policies, utilizing and promoting religion. With economic development, Buddhism and Taoism experienced astonishing growth in Fujian Province during the Southern Song period (Huang Ruiguo.2013.PP72-73). Mazu was born on Meizhou Island in Putian, a location strategically positioned on vital maritime routes between the North and South Seas, with a thriving maritime industry. Alongside the maritime industry's development, the Song Dynasty witnessed frequent natural disasters and human calamities in Xinghua (modern Putian). According to records, over the span of more than 300 years in the Song Dynasty, major natural disasters included 12 droughts, 6 floods, 4 typhoon disasters, 2 famines, and 1 plague. There were also instances of unrest, uprisings, banditry, and piracy. Amidst these frequent disasters and challenges, the common people faced hardships and sought urgently to pray to deities like Mazu for relief from calamities and blessings for peace and safety (Zhang Daren.1988). Therefore, the highly developed economic society, rich religious atmosphere, and frequent natural disasters and human calamities provided the objective social environment, religious soil, and societal demand for the emergence of Mazu belief.

#### **2). The Birth of Mazu Faith**

After Mazu's death, local residents on Meizhou Island built temples to worship her, hoping that her soul could continue to bless the safety of people's lives and livelihoods, just as she did during her lifetime. Their prayers were answered, and from then on, Mazu's identity underwent a qualitative change from a mortal woman to a deity(Huang Ruiguo.2013.PP74).Twelve years after Mazu's passing, in the year 999 during the Song Dynasty (Xianping Era, Year 2), a Mazu temple was established in Pinghai Ao<sup>23</sup> across the sea from Meizhou Island. This is the earliest known

23 Pinghai Ao : Pinghai Wei City was built during the Ming Dynasty and is now Pinghai Town, located under the jurisdiction of Xiuyu District, Putian City, Fujian Province. It lies in the southeastern part of Xiuyu District, facing Nanri Town across the sea to the east, bordered by Pinghai Bay to the south, and adjacent to Dongqiao Town to the northwest and Daitou Town to the north. The administrative area covers an area of 62.07 square kilometers. Pinghai People's Commune was established in August 1965, changed to Pinghai Township in October 1984, and further upgraded to Pinghai Town in 1994. In February 2002, it was placed under the jurisdiction of Xiuyu District. As of October 2021, Pinghai Town administers 1 community and 19 administrative villages.

documented instance of a Mazu temple dedicated to her spirit (Lin Guoping, 2001, PP148).

In the fifth year of Xuanhe (1123), Lu Yundi<sup>24</sup> was dispatched on a diplomatic mission to Goryeo<sup>25</sup>. During this journey, Mazu manifested her divine presence. This event is documented in Liao Pengfei's "Record of the Reconstruction of Shunji Temple at Shengdun" on page 19. During a voyage encountering severe weather with strong winds and waves, nearby ships were tossed about dangerously, causing many onboard to fall into the water and get injured. However, on Lu Yundi's mast, a female deity was seen dancing, ensuring the safety of the ship. Lu Yundi asked his companions about the identity of this sacred woman. Li Zhen, a devout believer of Mazu from Ninghai Town in Putian, explained that it was Mazu of Shengdun in Ninghai, who had manifested to protect and guide the ship.

Deeply convinced by this incident, Lu Yundi reported it to the court upon his return. In response, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty issued an imperial decree, granting the Mazu temple at Shengdun in Ninghai the honorary title of "Shunji." This imperial decree signifies the formal recognition and high regard Mazu began to receive from the authorities, marking the official recognition of Mazu belief.

### 3). The Development and Current Status of Mazu Faith

The Mazu belief originated during the Northern Song Dynasty, began to develop significantly during the Southern Song Dynasty, flourished in the Yuan Dynasty, expanded into new areas during the Ming Dynasty, became widespread in the Qing Dynasty, and has since spread globally in modern times. During the Southern Song period, Mazu was highly valued and utilized by the imperial court due to her perceived ability to protect the nation. Over the course of more than a century, Mazu was canonized 14 times, progressing from the title of "Furen" to "Fei." With the official promotion by the court, the Mazu belief rapidly developed, and Mazu temples began to appear across the country. Nearly all ports and the capital city had Mazu temples. Despite the rapid increase in the number of Mazu temples, the scope of the Mazu belief remained largely confined to maritime commerce, mainly involving the shipping industry.

The Yuan Dynasty placed great emphasis on maritime transport. Both maritime shipping and overseas trade reached their peak during this period. The number of countries and regions trading with Quanzhou increased from over 50 during the Southern Song period to more than 100, doubling in number. Quanzhou had six international routes that could reach several countries in Southeast Asia, India, and the Arabian Peninsula (Li Shaoyuan, 1997). The Yuan Dynasty faced a significant challenge in meeting its food demand due to insufficient grain production in the north. As a result, transporting grain from the south to the north became a critical national

24 Yundi: An official and envoy of the Song Dynasty, he was dispatched on several missions to Goryeo by imperial decree and rose to the positions of Minister of War and Deputy Director of the Bureau of Military Affairs. In the first year of the Jingkang era (1126), he was sent to the Jin Dynasty to negotiate peace. When he went to Taiyuan to persuade the local defenders to surrender, he was sternly rejected by General Wang Bing. Subsequently, he was dismissed from his position and retired. In the ninth year of the Shaoxing era (1139), during peace negotiations between the Song and Jin dynasties, he was reinstated and appointed as the governor of Nanjing.

25 Goryeo : One of the ancient countries located on the Korean Peninsula.



task, making canal transport the country's lifeline. However, issues such as banditry and siltation of the waterways made the safety of canal transport an urgent concern.

Consequently, the flourishing of international trade and maritime shipping, coupled with the critical importance of canal transport for national food security, highlighted Mazu's role as a deity who could ensure the safety of transport. Mazu's importance in maintaining political stability and ensuring a steady food supply, as well as safe maritime journeys, was significant. The Yuan government canonized Mazu 5 times, elevating her from a concubine to the title of Tianfei.

During the Ming Dynasty, due to frequent attacks by Japanese pirates, the Ming government imposed a period of maritime prohibition, causing a decline in the development of Mazu worship from its peak. However, with the Ming government's expansion of diplomatic policies, especially through Zheng He's seven maritime expeditions, Mazu worship spread to various overseas regions, marking a period of overseas development for the Mazu faith. During the Ming Dynasty's rule, Mazu was canonized twice, advancing from Tianfei to Shengfei. During this time, Mazu worship in China transitioned from a peak to a decline domestically. However, with Zheng He's expeditions and the growth of overseas Chinese merchants, a new wave of expansion occurred abroad for Mazu worship.

During the Qing Dynasty, the rulers continued the previous dynasty's reverence for Mazu worship. With strong promotion from the imperial court, Mazu worship once again entered a period of peak development. Mazu was canonized 18 times during this era, starting from her first title as Tianfei and eventually being titled as Empress (Hou), the highest honor for a mortal woman. From then on, Mazu became widely known as "Tianhou", a title that spread widely, and many Mazu temples across various regions were named "Tianhou Palace" in her honor. Praying to Mazu for safety had become a widespread social custom. Coastal residents not only worshipped Mazu, but many inland county residents also regarded her as their protector. Even in areas where ethnic minorities lived, Tianhou Palaces were built. The worship of Mazu expanded beyond merchants and seafarers to encompass various industries. Mazu was not only seen as a guardian deity of seafaring but also entrusted with functions such as praying for rain, warding off bandits and thieves, disaster prevention, safeguarding the people and the territory, warding off calamities, blessing women and children, and aiding in childbirth. The traditional customs formed around the worship of Mazu have become an integral part of social life (Huang Ruiguo, 2013, pp. 84-85).

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China until the 1980s, Mazu worship experienced a period without support from the central government. During the Cultural Revolution, Mazu temples were extensively damaged and destroyed, and religious activities ceased. After the policy of reform and opening up was implemented, China adopted a policy of religious freedom. Mazu worship was revived, and Mazu temples were rebuilt across the country. With the development of cross-strait exchanges and needs, Mazu worship once again received government support, ushering in a new phase of development.

In 2006, Mazu was awarded the title of "deity of Peace" by UNESCO. In 2009, the "Mazu belief and customs" were inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As of 2023, Mazu has more than 300 million followers worldwide.

#### **2.1.4 The Impact of Mazu Culture:**

Mazu culture, as an integral part of Chinese traditional culture, exerts profound and diverse influences across various aspects including religious beliefs, folk customs, artistic expressions, and international exchanges. Mazu culture holds significant importance not only in coastal regions of China but also globally, following the expansion of overseas Chinese communities and maritime trade.

Firstly, in terms of religious beliefs, Mazu culture has a long history spanning over a thousand years since Mazu's birth. Over this millennium, Mazu culture has evolved and integrated with changes in social, economic, political, and cultural landscapes, developing its own religious beliefs and cultural practices. These include worship rituals, divine roles, ceremonial activities, temple constructions, and more. This faith not only holds religious significance but also deeply influences local social life and cultural identity, thereby playing a crucial role in societal development. The core of Mazu culture is the spirit of Mazu, which includes virtues such as good conduct, good deeds, and great love. The positive and uplifting spirit of Mazu has effectively guided numerous believers and played a very constructive role in society. In terms of folk customs and cultural inheritance, Mazu culture is deeply rooted in folk customs, influencing various aspects of people's lives, evident in many traditional festivals and customs. For instance, when facing difficulties, people habitually seek Mazu's blessings, visiting Mazu temples to offer incense and seek guidance through divination. On a larger scale, Mazu's birthday on the 23rd day of the third lunar month is celebrated nationwide with grand festivities including temple fairs, rituals, and processions.

Mazu's annual ceremonies are comparable in scale and significance to Confucius worship and Tian worship, making them one of China's three major ceremonies. These events are not only religious rituals but also crucial for community cohesion and cultural transmission. By participating in these activities, the younger generation learns about and inherits Mazu culture, fostering a stronger sense of identity and belonging to traditional culture.

In terms of diversity in artistic expression, Mazu culture has had a significant impact in the artistic realm. Traditional Mazu temples, sculptures, and murals exhibit exquisite craftsmanship and profound cultural heritage. Modern artists continuously draw inspiration from Mazu culture, expressing it through forms such as painting, sculpture, film, music, and more. For instance, films and TV dramas featuring Mazu themes spread her legends and spirit to wider audiences, while digital illustrations and contemporary artworks breathe new life and contemporaneity into the image of Mazu.

In terms of international communication and cultural exchange, Mazu culture has been influential globally since the Ming dynasty, when it spread with Zheng Chenggong's maritime expeditions. With the expansion of Chinese diaspora and increased international exchanges, Mazu culture gradually became an integral part of global cultural exchange. Mazu temples are found in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, as well as in communities in the United States, Australia, and elsewhere, where regular celebrations are held. Mazu faith is not only a significant part of these overseas Chinese communities' spiritual lives but also a crucial bond for cultural identity and solidarity. In international cultural exchanges, Mazu culture has gained increasing recognition. In 2009, UNESCO recognized Mazu beliefs and customs as intangible cultural heritage of humanity, further enhancing its international



influence. Each year, Mazu cultural festivals attract numerous tourists and devotees worldwide, serving as important avenues for understanding and appreciating Chinese culture.

Especially during Mazu's annual processions, Mazu culture not only stimulates economic and social development locally but also plays a pivotal role in promoting regional economic growth. Cultural tourism centered around Mazu beliefs has flourished in Fujian, Taiwan, and other places, drawing domestic and international tourists for worship and sightseeing. This not only boosts local tourism, hospitality, and handicraft industries but also fosters regional economic development. Simultaneously, Mazu cultural festivals create numerous job opportunities and economic benefits for local communities.

In summary, Mazu culture, with its deep historical roots and broad social impact, has become a significant symbol of Chinese culture. Its influence extends beyond religious beliefs to encompass folk customs, artistic expression, international communication, economic development, and modern innovation. Facing the challenges and opportunities of the new era, Mazu culture continues to exhibit vitality and broad influence globally through diverse forms and cross-cultural exchanges, maintaining its importance and contributing significantly on a global scale.

## **2.2 The development history of Mazu illustrations**

The history of human painting is long and diverse. Illustration is one of the oldest, most significant, and most popular types of painting in world art history. Ancestors of humanity began using color and lines to depict images early on, employing simple symbols to convey information, demonstrating the role of pictures in aiding textual comprehension. Archaeological research by Western scholars has revealed cave paintings from the Paleolithic era, which vividly and effectively addressed communication challenges of the time.

China, as one of the ancient civilizations, shares a similar history of illustration art with other countries worldwide. Chinese ancient illustration art can be categorized into handwritten illustrations (fine meticulous paintings) and printed woodblock illustrations (woodblock prints). As early as the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC - 8 AD), China produced many notable illustrated works, such as "Five Stars Fortune-telling," "Comet Diagram," and "Garrison Map" unearthed from the Mawangdui Han Tomb in Changsha. These works combined text with vivid illustrations, displaying elaborate decorations. During the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589 AD), illustration art further developed, primarily used for propagating Confucian and Buddhist scriptures. Historical records indicate that many painters during this period were engaged in illustration art, highlighting its prevalence (Yang Yue.2011.PP8).

By the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), Chinese illustration art reached its zenith. Illustrations of the Tang Dynasty were predominantly hand-painted scroll paintings, but this era also saw the invention of woodblock printing and relief printing, significant artistic forms that greatly contributed to the development of illustration art in later periods.

During the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), woodblock and relief printing techniques began to rapidly develop, significantly elevating the status of book illustrations. Various forms of everyday illustrations emerged in works ranging from

classics and histories to novels and dramas. Colorful overprinted illustrations also became prevalent during this period.

The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD) marked the golden age of illustration in China. Illustrations flourished in terms of content, form, creativity, and influence. Illustrations accompanying novels and theatrical works, such as "The Romance of the Western Chamber"<sup>26</sup>, "Peony Pavilion Resurrection Record"<sup>27</sup>, were particularly popular during this period.

During the Qing Dynasty (1616 or 1644 to 1911), illustration art further developed as European lithography entered China, replacing traditional woodblock printing and rapidly gaining popularity among the populace. Illustrations also began to incorporate richer colors.

Mazu originated during the Song Dynasty, and the development of Mazu illustrations was influenced by the broader evolution of Chinese illustration art, following a similar developmental trajectory. Traditional Mazu illustrations typically fall into two artistic expressions: portrait-style depictions of Mazu and miracle-style images. **Portrait-style** Mazu illustrations primarily portray Mazu as a divine figure through individual portraits. These illustrations are often used for worship purposes after being displayed or posted. **Miracle-style** Mazu illustrations, on the other hand, depict the life and miraculous stories of Mazu through images. They serve to enhance understanding and dissemination of Mazu's stories and deeds.

### 2.2.1 The Development History of Portrait-style Mazu Images

#### 1). The expression style of Portrait-style Mazu illustrations

In terms of composition, there are primarily two compositional styles. One is the individual portrait of Mazu. As its main function is for worship, Mazu is often depicted sitting upright in a frontal view with a solemn and dignified expression, reflecting the majesty of the deity (Figure 2).

<sup>26</sup> The Romance of the Western Chamber: The fictional drama created by Wang Shifu during the Yuan Dynasty was written approximately between the Yuanzhen and Dade eras (1295-1307), and is considered one of the four great classical dramas of China.

<sup>27</sup> Peony Pavilion Resurrection Record: This is a fictional legendary drama script created by Tang Xianzu, a playwright of the Ming Dynasty. It was published in the forty-fifth year of the Wanli era (1617), and is considered one of the four great classical dramas of China.



Figure 2 The "Chiwan Shengmu" in Foshan<sup>28</sup>, Guangdong  
Source: Books by Wang Yingying "An Aesthetic Culture Study of Mazu Images" PP50,2021

However, not all illustrations of Mazu follow this style. For example, in the "Genealogy of the Lin Clan of Xihe Jiulong", the "The heavenly Mazu Lin Mogu deity portrait" depicts a compassionate expression (Figure 3). Her face is slightly turned to the lower right, showing a gentle elder listening, which conveys kindness and warmth.



Figure 3 The heavenly Mazu Lin Mogu deity portrait  
Source: Painted by Sun Hua<sup>29</sup>

Another type is the combined statue of Mazu, where Mazu is depicted prominently as the main subject with a larger scale compared to other figures. This highlights Mazu's distinguished status as a deity different from other characters.

<sup>28</sup> Foshan : Foshan is a prefecture-level city in Guangdong Province, China. It is classified as a megacity and is designated by the State Council as an important manufacturing base in China. Foshan is located in the southern part of China, in the central region of Guangdong Province, within the heart of the Pearl River Delta.

<sup>29</sup> Sun Hua : Descendants in the family genealogy.

Typically, accompanying deities appear on both sides of Mazu, depicted on a smaller scale, with their actions and expressions centered around Mazu. The entire artwork clearly demonstrates Mazu's elevated status as a deity and the subordinate relationship of these accompanying deities to Mazu (Figure 4)

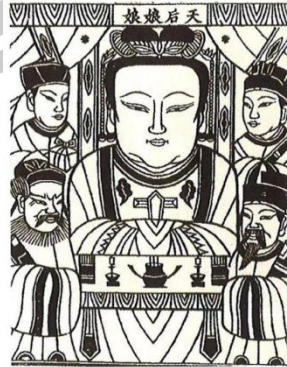


Figure 4 Woodblock New Year painting "Tianhou Niangniang" in Zhuxian Town<sup>30</sup>, Henan Province<sup>31</sup>

Source: Books by Wang Yingying "An Aesthetic Culture Study of Mazu Images" PP150, 2021

In such composite portrait illustrations, commonly seen accompanying deities are Clairvoyance and Shap ears. Typically, Qianliyan and Shunfeng'er are depicted on the left and right sides respectively, serving Mazu. This setup highlights Mazu's absolute central position and control within the depicted group (Figure 5)



Figure 5 The Tian Shang Sheng Mu depicted in "The Scripture of the Tian Shang Sheng Mu"  
Source: Published by Miaosufei Chengtang in Hsinchu, Taiwan, 1921.

Over time, Mazu's entourage has grown increasingly larger, reflecting an expanding trend. Particularly in folk culture, Mazu's talisman illustrations, combined

30 Zhuxian Town : Zhuxian Town belongs to Xiangfu District, Kaifeng City, Henan Province. It is located in the southwest part of Kaifeng City, 22.5 kilometers away from the city center, with a total area of 70.26 square kilometers. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, it was renowned as one of the "Four Famous Towns" in China, along with Foshan in Guangdong, Jingdezhen in Jiangxi, and Hankou in Hubei.

31 Henan Province : a provincial-level administrative region of the People's Republic of China, has its capital in Zhengzhou. It is located in the central-eastern part of China, along the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River.



with her temples and numerous accompanying deities, create a lively and festive atmosphere that is immensely popular and beloved among the people (Figure 6) (Wang Yingying,2021.PP144-145).

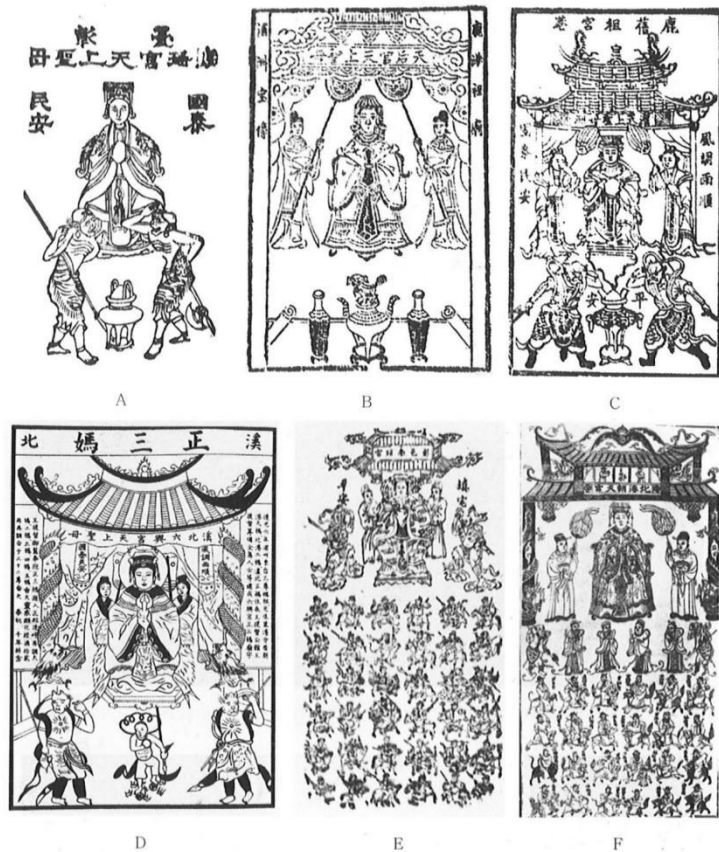


Figure 6 The evolution of composite portrait illustrations

Source: Books by Wang Yingying "An Aesthetic Culture Study of Mazu Images" PP144, 2021

In figure the A-F in the figure are respectively derived from : Figure A is a Mazu talisman from Nanyao Palace in Changhua during the Qing Dynasty, depicting the standard trio of Mazu, Qianliyan, and Shunfeng'er. Figure B is Mazu talisman from the Ancestral Temple in Lugang shows Mazu accompanied by two maidens holding fans, representing another form of three-deity combination. Figure C is talisman from the old Ancestral Temple in Lugang depicts Mazu, Qianliyan, Shunfeng'er, and two maidens, forming a standard five-deity combination. Figure D is the Mazu talisman from Zhengsan Temple in Xibei, featuring the five deities including Mazu, Qianliyan, Shunfeng'er, and the Third Prince Nezha. Figure E is the Mazu talisman from Nanyao Palace in Changhua, where the five deities include Mazu and thirty-six celestial officials. Figure F is the Mazu talisman from Chaotian Temple in Beigang, showing Mazu and the five deities accompanied by the Four Sea Dragon Kings and twenty-four celestial officials. Mazu's role as the principal sea deity is depicted in this grand and imposing ensemble.

## **2) . The creative techniques of Portrait-style Mazu illustrations.**

Portrait-style Mazu illustrations often appear in the form of woodblock prints. These illustrations are primarily intended for believers to hang or display at home for purposes of protection and warding off evil, commonly referred to as "shenfu" or "zhima" (paper horses). They are particularly common in the Fujian and Taiwan regions.

The predominant use of woodblock printing in creating portrait-style Mazu illustrations is due to its low production cost and ease of mass replication. This method efficiently meets the creative efficiency and objectives of Mazu portrait illustrations, making it the primary technique.

In addition to woodblock prints, portrait-style Mazu illustrations also commonly appear in the form of sculptures. With the rise of Mazu temples, Mazu statues have been extensively crafted and promoted alongside these temples. There are various techniques for creating Mazu statues, distinguished by materials such as wood carving, clay sculpture, ceramic sculpture, stone carving, papier-mâché, and soft-body sculpture.

These statues, characterized by their different production methods and materials, each have unique features and characteristics. They significantly enrich the expressive techniques of portrait-style Mazu illustrations.(Wang Yingying,2021.PP46-47).

### **2.2.2 The Development History of Miracle-style Mazu illustrations**

The fuller expression of "Miracle-style Mazu illustrations" in English is "Narrative Mazu Iconography," which refers to a type of illustration that portrays the life stories and miraculous deeds of Mazu as its main theme. These illustrations are often accompanied by text in a pictorial form, aiding people in understanding the related stories and legends. They are frequently found in temple murals, providing a vivid display of Mazu's miracles and wonders for worshipers. This form of art caters to a wide audience, ranging from royal officials to common folk, encompassing all levels of society.

#### **1). The expression style of Miracle-style Mazu illustrations**

Miracle-style Mazu illustrations are mainly divided into official versions and folk versions. Due to their different audiences and purposes, each presents different expressive effects.

The characteristics of official miracle-style Mazu illustrations are typically as follows: Firstly, the stories from which they originate are mostly the same. For example, during the Qing Dynasty, the stories all came from the book "Records of Tianfei's Miracles". This book can be considered a comprehensive collection of Mazu stories before the Qing Dynasty and is also the source of a series of miracle-style Mazu illustration stories since the Qing Dynasty.

Secondly, the mythological structure is the same. The entire story structure of the miracle-style Mazu illustrations is divided into two parts: the first part mainly depicts Mazu's stories while she was on earth, and the second part mainly depicts her miraculous appearances after ascending to heaven.

Thirdly, they often represent the official stance. In the stories of official miracle-style Mazu illustrations, most of the miracles performed by Mazu are related



to the state and the authorities. For example, in the "Tianhou Miraculous Manifestations Scroll", 24 out of the 28 depicted works are related to the state.

Fourth , function is in line with official needs, and mural style Mazu illustrations are often used for religious propaganda to enhance the religious atmosphere. The miraculous Mazu illustrations in the form of works were mostly privately collected by officials at that time for exchange and appreciation.

Fifth , the image of theMazu is similar. The overall image of Mazu has not changed much, with paintings mostly depicting young women in red clothes, and printmaking mostly featuring images of ladies wearing headscarves or buns. Its posture often includes objects with red hands brushing against the dust, such as Ruyi, and Hu Ban, which are consistent with the story of the holy site. Mazu's image can be divided into two types: before ascending to heaven, she was portrayed as a commoner woman and a noblewoman, and after ascending to heaven, she was portrayed as a queen (Xiao Haiming.2017.PP273-275).

Representative of official miracle-style Mazu illustrations is the "Tianhou Miraculous Manifestations Scroll" (Figure7), currently preserved in Xianyou Fengtang Palace. This work, whose author is unknown, is done on colored paper and consists of four large scrolls. Each scroll depicts 12 stories of Mazu, totaling 48 illustrations. Each illustration measures 61 cm in height and 38 cm in width. The entire set depicts the life deeds of Mazu, her miraculous stories after becoming a deity, and the stories of her honors through the ages. At the top of each painting, there is a brief ink inscription. Despite some inscriptions being faint, the collection is largely well-preserved. Originally hung in Xianyou Fengtang Palace.



Figure 7 The existing Qing Dynasty paper and silk scroll "Tianhou Miraculous Manifestations Scroll" from Fengtang Palace in Xianyou.

Source: Books by Zhou Jinyan & Jiang Xiaoqian "Compilation of Mazu Historical Documents and Materials Volume III: Paintings" ,2011

Characteristics of folk miracle-style Mazu illustrations can be summarized as follows: Firstly, their stories originate diversely. Unlike the official narratives predominantly drawn from the unified "Records of Tianfei's Miracles," folk miracle-style Mazu illustrations derive from complex sources of local Mazu legends, distinctively not from the "Records of Tianfei's Miracles." These stories are rooted in local folklore, highlighting regional characteristics. For instance, stories depicted in Mazu murals at Lingci Temple in Fengting, such as Mazu's filial marriage and her medicinal healing miracles, have been passed down through generations in Xianyou, Putian, Fujian.

Furthermore, folk miracle-style Mazu illustrations exhibit a distinct perspective. These stories often reflect the preferences of the lower-class populace, free from many taboos and constraints. Themes deliberately avoided by official narratives are boldly depicted in folk stories. For example, murals at Lingci Temple<sup>32</sup> in Fengting include scenes of Mazu's marriage (Figure 8), as well as graphic depictions of monsters devouring people. Such themes, avoided by official accounts, are vividly described and elaborated upon in folk tales.



Figure 8 One of the Qing Dynasty Mazu story murals at Lingci Temple "Marriage with the Approval of Mother"

Source: Books by Xiao Haiming "Research on Mazu Images" PP204, 2017

Third, rich cultural connotations. Unlike official stories that are often subject to more restrictions and constraints, folk Mazu stories incorporate many popular customs into their illustrations, resonating with the public and enhancing the appeal of the artwork.

Fourth, emphasis on folk magic and sorcery. Official stories portray Mazu as a noble figure and thus do not delve much into Mazu's use of magic and sorcery. In contrast, folk stories frequently feature Mazu using magic and sorcery to rescue

<sup>32</sup> Fengting Lingci Temple is located in Xiaqiao Community, Fengting Town, Xianyou County, Putian City, Fujian Province. It is currently situated approximately 100 meters north of Chenqiao at Xiaqiao Port (Taiping Port), commonly known as "Xiaqiao Grand Palace."



people. For example, in mural number 45 at Fengting Lingci Temple titled "Brave Rescue of Zheng He," Mazu employs the technique of flying sand and stones to repel thieves attempting to plunder (Xiao Haiming.2017.PP276-277).

Whether official or folk, miracle-style Mazu paintings are all based on Mazu legends. Each work centers around a story depicting Mazu as the protagonist, depicting her actions and deeds. Among them, the woodblock prints of "Records of the Miracles of the Tianhou" (Figure 9) have the widest and deepest influence, spreading widely. Its painting style and composition have influenced other miracle-style Mazu paintings, presenting standardized characteristics and becoming a model for others to study and emulate.



Figure 9 One of the Qing Dynasty Suzhou woodblock painting "Records of the Miracles of the Tianhou"<sup>33</sup>

Source: Books by Xiao Haiming "Research on Mazu Images" PP127, 2017

## 2). The creative techniques of Miracle-style Mazu illustrations.

The three main common methods of creating miracle-style Mazu illustrations are woodblock printing, paper and silk painting, and murals. These methods exhibit different characteristics based on their intended use.

Woodblock printing has a long history in China, particularly during the Ming and Qing dynasties. In popular novels of that era, illustrations significantly enhanced readers' interest. Mazu-related stories also adopted this creative method, incorporating

<sup>33</sup> The themes drawn separately are "Birth of the Heavenly Empress with Auspicious Fragrance" and "Nine day Ascension"

many illustrated prints into the narratives. A representative example is the late Ming mythological novel "Biography of Tianhou NiangMa"(Figure 10) , which uses a layout with images on the top and text below. The entire book contains 309 prints, including 75 images of Mazu as Empress Tianfei. The character depictions are simple, and the lines are smooth(Wang Yingying.2021.PP48-50).



Figure 10 Illustrations in the Ming Dynasty novel "Biography of Tianhou NiangMa"  
Source: Books by Wang Yingying "An Aesthetic Culture Study of Mazu Images" PP52, 2021

In the category of miracle-style Mazu illustrations on paper and silk, the themes are relatively fixed, often using stories from the "Records of the Tianfei's Miracles" in a predetermined sequence for their creation. Compared to woodblock carvings, works on paper and silk feature more intricate lines, richer colors, and convey more delicate and beautiful expressions, thereby possessing higher aesthetic value.

The stylized creation of Mazu miracle paintings is particularly evident in works on paper and silk. Both composition and depiction adopt a standardized approach, often using identical compositions for the same Mazu miracle stories. Take, for example, the Mazu miracle story "The emergence of spring water to aid the army."

During the Qing Dynasty, Admiral Shi Lang<sup>34</sup> commanded a force of 30,000 soldiers stationed at Pinghaiwei in Putian, awaiting the seasonal winds to cross the sea and reclaim Taiwan. At that time, there was a severe drought in Pinghai, and local springs and wells had dried up. The troops faced a critical shortage of water, causing great distress among them. Admiral Shi Lang ordered each camp to dig wells to secure water, but all efforts were in vain as no water was found.

In their desperate situation, Shi Lang discovered an ancient temple with a plaque that read "Tianhou Palace" . Beside the temple stood an old well filled with rocks and mud. Shi Lang led his officers in kneeling before the statue of Mazu and offering incense. Afterwards, he personally led the effort to clear the well. Once cleaned, the well began to gush forth with an abundant supply of spring water that never diminished, providing relief to the 30,000 soldiers.

Following this miraculous event, Shi Lang sailed with his troops and soon succeeded in retaking Taiwan. Upon their return, Shi Lang named the well "Shiquan

34 Shi Lang (1621-1696) : originally named Lang, styled Zunhou, with the courtesy name Zhugong, was a native of Jinjiang, Fujian Province. He was a renowned naval commander during the Qing Dynasty in China.

Jing", in gratitude for Mazu's gift of water to aid the army. He personally inscribed the characters "Shiquan" on a stone tablet erected beside the well.

In both the illustrated books "Records of the Miracles of the Tianhou"<sup>35</sup> (Figure11) and "Miracles of the Tianhou"<sup>36</sup> (Figure12), they depict related stories where Shi Lang leads his generals gathered around the abandoned well in front of the Tianfei Palace. From the composition of the scenes to the clothing and positions of the characters, there are noticeable traces of a template, showing significant similarities.



Figure 11 One of the Qing Dynasty picture "Records of the Miracles of the Tianhou"  
Source: Books by Zhou Jinyan & Jiang Xiaoqian "Compilation of Mazu Historical Documents and Materials Volume III: Paintings" PP50, 2011

35 "Records of the Miracles of the Tianhou": Illustrated collection of Mazu's miraculous stories from the Qing Dynasty, currently housed in the National Museum of China. The collection consists of 48 paper-based works, each measuring 31.4 cm in height and 32.4 cm in width.

36 "Miracles of the Tianhou" : Illustrated collection of Mazu's miraculous stories from the Qing Dynasty, currently housed in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The collection consists of 7 paper-based works, each measuring 54 cm in height and 86 cm in width.





Figure 12 One of the Qing Dynasty picture "Miracles of the Tianhou"  
Source: Books by Xiao Haiming "Research on Mazu Images" PP115, 2017

In Mazu temple murals, which are predominantly found in Mazu temples, particularly along the coastal regions of Fujian, nearly half of these temples feature murals depicting the miracles of Mazu. These murals come in various forms. In the earliest periods, murals were directly painted on walls using ink and brush. However, this method had a relatively short lifespan, requiring re-painting every few decades. As a result, such murals are becoming increasingly rare in existing folk temples. Representative examples that still exist include the murals at Fengting Lingci Temple and Tianjin Tianhou Palace<sup>37</sup>.

Taking the murals at Fengting Lingci Temple as an example (Figure 13), these murals are located on the walls of the front hall's two compartments. There are a total of 56 colorful murals, with 28 on each side. Each small mural is approximately 60 centimeters square and combines ink and color painting techniques. They are presented in a sequential comic-like format, depicting various legendary stories of Mazu's life, such as her birth and family background, her education and enlightenment, subduing of demons, her ascension to Matsu Island, and the creation of her statue and temple.

<sup>37</sup> Tianjin Tianhou Palace : Located at No. 80 Guwenhua Street, Nankai District, Tianjin City, China, the Mazu Temple was first established in the third year of the Yuan Dynasty's Taiding era (1326). It is one of the older architectural complexes in downtown Tianjin and one of the earliest surviving Mazu temples in China.

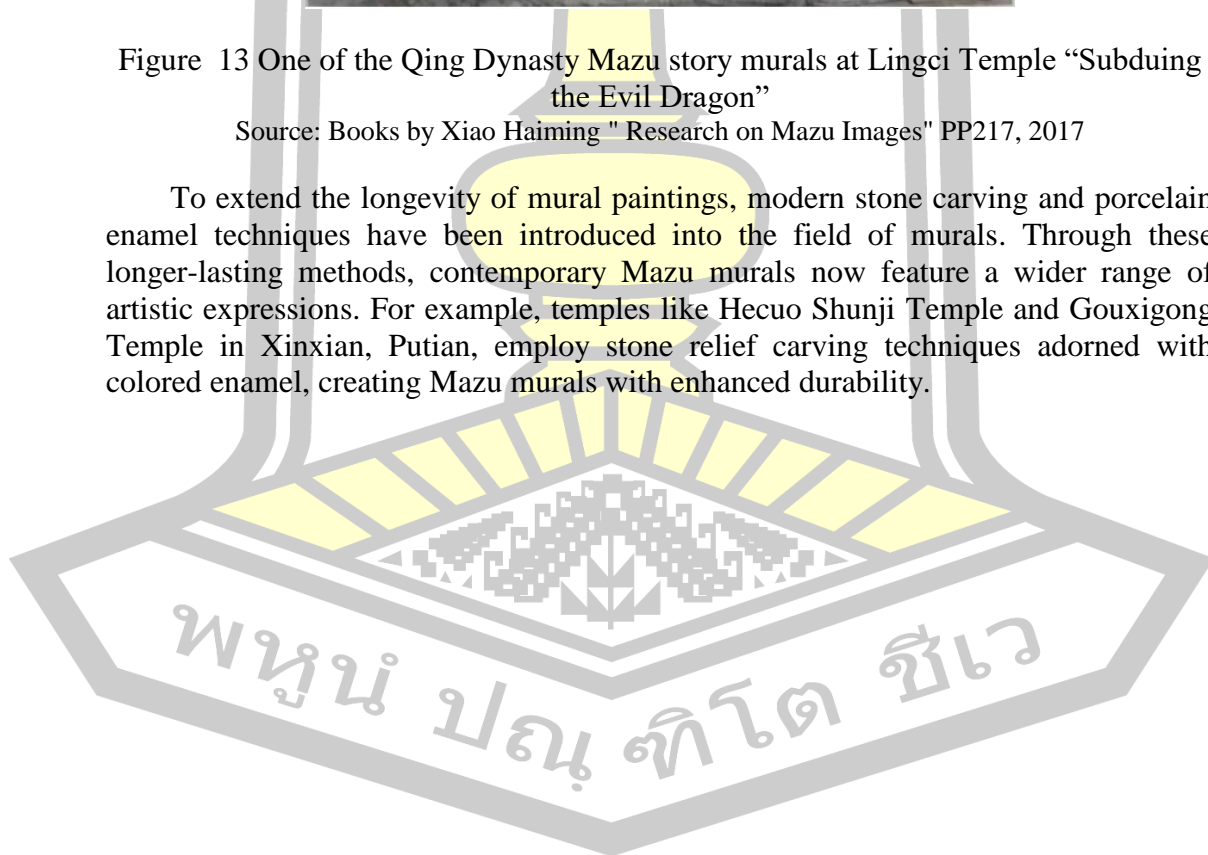




Figure 13 One of the Qing Dynasty Mazu story murals at Lingci Temple “Subduing the Evil Dragon”

Source: Books by Xiao Haiming " Research on Mazu Images" PP217, 2017

To extend the longevity of mural paintings, modern stone carving and porcelain enamel techniques have been introduced into the field of murals. Through these longer-lasting methods, contemporary Mazu murals now feature a wider range of artistic expressions. For example, temples like Hecuo Shunji Temple and Gouxigong Temple in Xinxian, Putian, employ stone relief carving techniques adorned with colored enamel, creating Mazu murals with enhanced durability.



### 2.2.3 Development and Evolution of Mazu Illustrations

#### 1). Song Dynasty Mazu illustrations:

The Song Dynasty (960-1279) due to its ancient age, the preserved images of Mazu mostly consist of folk statues, reflecting differences in material preservation. Representative statues include (Figure14) :



Figure 14 Representative Mazu statues from the Song Dynasty

Source: Fang Zhou reports, 2024

In Figure : Figure A is a wooden sculpture of Mazu from the Southern Song Dynasty, depicting her as a "Furen." This sculpture is currently housed in Wenfeng Palace in Putian City, Fujian Province. Figure B is another wooden sculpture of Mazu from the Southern Song Dynasty, also depicting her as a "Furen." This sculpture is currently housed in the Putian Museum. Figure C is a wooden sculpture of Mazu from the Southern Song Dynasty, depicting her as a divine "Fei." This sculpture is currently housed in the Putian Museum. Figure D is a wooden sculpture of Mazu from the Southern Song Dynasty, depicting her as a divine woman. This sculpture is currently housed in the Putian Museum. Figure E is a sculpture of Mazu from the Song Dynasty, currently housed in the Yipianxiang Mazu Culture Exhibition Hall in Hui'an, Quanzhou.

From these Song dynasty statues of Mazu, it can be observed that the image of Mazu during the Song dynasty was quite simple and modest in attire, with a relaxed posture. The facial features of the statues depict a youthful appearance, fitting the characteristic age of 28 years old, which is associated with Mazu's ascension. Overall, they present a relaxed, youthful, and energetic image.

It is noteworthy that the depiction of Mazu in red attire dates back to the Song dynasty, as evidenced by traces of red and gold lacquer found on a wooden statue of Mazu's consort in the Putian City Museum.

#### 2). Yuan Dynasty Mazu illustrations:

During the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Mazu was bestowed the title of Tianfei, leading to her illustrated portrayal predominantly as a noblewoman. In terms of sculptures, the three surviving Yuan Dynasty wooden statues in the Fragrant Mazu Cultural Exhibition Hall in Hui'an, Quanzhou, exhibit a notably dignified posture and consistent attire (Figure15).



Figure 15 The existing Yuan Dynasty Mazu statue in the Yibanxiang Mazu Culture Exhibition Hall  
Source: Photographed by Fang Zhou, 2021

The mural painting "Tianfei Shengmu portrait " located in Pilu Temple<sup>38</sup> on the northern outskirts of Shijiazhuang<sup>39</sup>, Hebei Province<sup>40</sup>, is the earliest surviving Yuan Dynasty depiction of Mazu (Figure16). Pilu Temple features expansive murals that integrate elements from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, known as the Surface painting<sup>41</sup>. Within this assembly, Mazu is depicted as the Water deity, portrayed with a tall stature and a gracefully flowing attire, arranged in a harmonious and intricate composition.

38 Pilu Temple: Located in Shijing Village, on the western outskirts of Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, it is an ancient Buddhist temple of the Linji sect of Chinese Buddhism, renowned for its exquisite ancient murals.

39 Shijiazhuang: Capital of Hebei Province

40 Hebei Province: A provincial-level administrative region of the People's Republic of China, with its capital in Shijiazhuang. Located in the Central Plain region, it is one of the birthplaces of the Chinese nation.

41 Surface painting: In Buddhist activities, during the Water and Land Dharma Assembly, images representing all celestial beings, earthly beings, humans, deities, and bodhisattvas are displayed. Such ceremonies are only held in temples of a certain scale and reputation.



Figure 16 Part of the Yuan Dynasty mural "Tianfei Shengmu portrait" at Pilu Temple  
Source: Books by Xiao Haiming " Research on Mazu Images" PP30, 2017

During this period, Mazu was officially designated as Tianfei, and accordingly, her facial features began to evolve towards the idealized expectations associated with this title. When comparing individual facial features, it becomes evident that compared to the more realistic depiction of Mazu in the Song Dynasty, the Yuan Dynasty sculptures of Mazu gradually became fuller. Her facial shape transitioned from the oval-shaped face of the Song Dynasty to a rounder and more prosperous face. Her nose became broader, and her expression more serene and dignified. The eyes, narrower compared to the Song Dynasty, often appeared slightly closed. Her lips protruded more prominently, particularly the lower lip, which was thinner compared to Song Dynasty depictions. Overall, these sculptures presented a dignified and gentle appearance, reflecting the transformation of her identity as Tianfei (Fang Zhou.2022).

### 3). Ming Dynasty Mazu illustrations:

During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), maritime trade in China began to flourish, and individual economies started to develop. Influenced by new perspectives and foreign cultural factors, Ming Dynasty aesthetics underwent changes that differed from those of previous periods, with imagery becoming more personalized and emotional.

In Ming Dynasty Mazu paintings, a representative example is the mural of the Tianfei Shengmu portrait at Princess Temple<sup>42</sup> in Fanzhi County<sup>43</sup>, Shanxi Province<sup>44</sup>

42 Princess Temple is located in Gongzhu Village, Xingyuan Township, about 15 kilometers southeast of Fanzhi County in Shanxi Province. It is famous for preserving large-scale Ming Dynasty Surface painting.

43 Fanzhi County : located in the northeast part of Shanxi Province, under the administration of Xinzhou City, Shanxi Province. It was founded during the Spring and Autumn Period and has a long history.

44 Shanxi Province : a provincial-level administrative region of the People's Republic of China, with its capital in Taiyuan City. Located in northern China, it spans across the Yellow River and Hai River basins.



(Figure17).The mural is also a surface painting, covering a total area of 98.99 square meters on the four walls of the main hall. The Tianfei Shengmu gazes forward with a dignified and majestic expression, holding a Huiban<sup>45</sup> in her hands. She is dressed in a white robe with large sleeves and adorned with a colorful scarf, featuring smooth and flowing lines.



Figure 17 Part of the Ming Dynasty mural “Tianfei Shengmu portrait”at Fanzhi Princess Temple

Source: Books by Wang Yingying "An Aesthetic Culture Study of Mazu Images", 2021

The painting "Portrait of Tianfei Shengmu Bi Xia Yuanjun<sup>46</sup>" (Figure18), housed in the Capital Museum, is also highly representative. It measures 175.6 cm in length and 91.8 cm in width, and it is a silk scroll surface painting executed in colored pigments.

In the painting, there are eight figures depicted. Besides the four attendants in the background, the foremost figure among them, portrayed as a deity, has Mazu positioned as the first figure on the right in the front row. Mazu is depicted wearing robes with large sleeves, adorned with a colorful scarf, and holding a Gui<sup>47</sup> in both hands. Her appearance is graceful and her headwear, in particular, influenced the depiction of Mazu in paintings from the Qing Dynasty onwards.

45 Huiban: also known as a "handboard," "jade tablet," "court hu," or "court board," was a tool used by officials in ancient China when they presented themselves before the emperor.

46 Bi Xia Yuanjun: A mountain deity worshiped in the northern regions of mainland China, particularly associated with Mount Tai. Revered as the deity of Mount Tai, she is also known colloquially as Tai Shan Niang Niang. Her sanctuary is located at Mount Tai (East Yue of the Five Sacred Mountains of China), in Tai'an City, Shandong Province.

47 Gui: an ancient Chinese jade ceremonial vessel, varied in name and size depending on the rank and purpose.





Figure 18 Ming Dynasty silk scroll surface painting "Portrait of Tianfei Shengmu Bi Xia Yuanjun"

Source: Books by Xiao Haiming "Research on Mazu Images" PP30, 2017

With the development of printing technology, artistic illustrations began to appear in Ming Dynasty novels. In the case of "Biography of Tianhou NiangMa" (Figure 10), the depiction of Mazu's image can be categorized into two main types: one as a maiden with hair coiled up before her ascension, and the other as a queenly figure adorned with a phoenix crown after ascension. Due to the limitations of carving techniques, the woodblock prints of Mazu often featured simple and natural lines, yet managed to vividly capture her essence with just a few strokes.

In summary, compared to the relatively uniform characteristics of the Song and Yuan dynasties, Ming Dynasty depictions of Mazu exhibit diverse facial features and varied, distinct styles of attire. However, through comparative analysis of their lines, some common flat features can still be discerned. Firstly, Ming sculptures typically feature slender eyes with rounded eyeheads, pointed and upward-sloping eye ends, and thick, round eyelids. Regarding noses, Ming depictions show smaller, delicately refined nasal tips and straight nasal bridges, reflecting the facial features of older individuals compared to the rounded, fleshy noses of the Song and Yuan periods.

During the Ming Dynasty, the status of Mazu's deity further elevated. Younger features and more realistic human portrayals could no longer satisfy people's expectations of Mazu's image. Consequently, Ming depictions of Mazu adapted by emphasizing elderliness, dignified richness, and began to exhibit a more divine overall appearance with a fuller bodily presence. These adjustments aimed to meet the

public's demand for a divine figure. Ming depictions of Mazu became more magnificent in overall appearance, featured richer colors, and diversified in artistic forms, moving beyond mere portraiture to include sacred depictions that circulated widely.

#### 4). Qing Dynasty Mazu illustrations:

The Qing Dynasty (1616 or 1644 – 1911), China's final feudal dynasty, also esteemed classical and elegant culture, but its reverence for antiquity differed from that of the Ming Dynasty. The Qing blended Confucian "gentleness and sincerity" with Taoist "harmony and tranquility," forming a subdued aesthetic perspective.

One such portrait-style image of Mazu is found in the Lin Family Genealogy, The heavenly Mazu Lin Mogu deity portrait (Figure3). She is adorned with a Mian guan<sup>48</sup> with seven tassels, her eyes slightly squinted, and her lips curved in a gentle smile, radiating warmth and kindness.

A representative example is the Qing Dynasty colored portrait of Mazu (Figure19), measuring 167 cm in height and 92 cm in width, executed on paper and silk as a scroll painting. The painting depicts a standard portrait-style Mazu, seated centrally. Flanking Mazu on both sides behind her are female attendants holding fans, while on the front sides are mythical creatures with clairvoyance and sharp ears. Mazu is clearly portrayed here as a middle-aged woman, radiating kindness and dignity, adorned in magnificent attire.



Figure 19 Qing Dynasty colored portrait of Mazu

Source : Books by Zhou Jinyan & Jiang Xiaoqian "Compilation of Mazu Historical Documents and Materials Volume III: Paintings", 2011

<sup>48</sup> Mian guan: It is a type of traditional Chinese attire that is paired with a traditional Chinese dress. It is also the most important crown style in ancient China, often used by emperors.

Here, it is evident that with the elevation of Mazu's deity status, her image increasingly reflects an older age trend. Concurrently, as Mazu's deity status rises, her headwear begins to include Mian guan and tassels, traditional Chinese cultural symbols typically reserved for emperors. This indicates that Mazu's status at this time approached that of rulers.

During the Qing Dynasty, with the vigorous development of the printing industry, there was a significant proliferation of sacred depictions of Mazu. Influenced by "Records of the Tianfei's Miracles," many such depictions, such as "Records of the Miracles of the Tianhou" (Figure11) and the illustrated book "Miracles of the Tianhou" (Figure12), exhibited clear patterns in their compositions. However, not all Mazu sacred paintings followed such standardized approaches. For instance, the "Biography of Tianhou" (Figure20) currently housed in the National Museum of China includes 14 Mazu sacred illustrations characterized by concise compositions and smooth lines. Despite belonging to the genre of sacred illustrations, these works demonstrate unique interpretations and innovations compared to the templated compositions influenced by "Records of the Tianfei's Miracles," showcasing novel compositions.

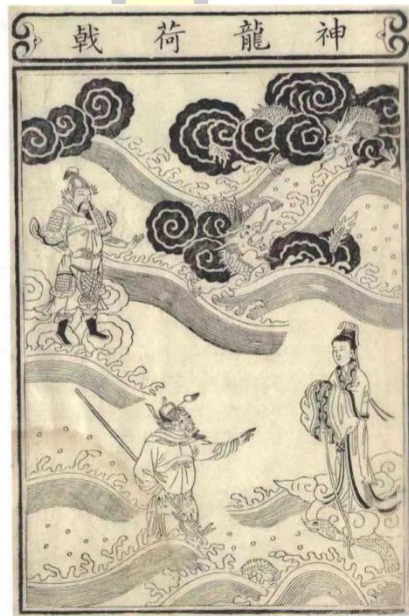


Figure 20 Illustrations from Biography of Tianhou

Source : Books by Xiao Haiming "Research on Mazu Images" PP175, 2017

In sacred depictions of Mazu, her image is often divided into two main categories: Mazu during her mortal life and Mazu after becoming a deity. During her mortal life, Mazu is typically portrayed as a young girl with hair coiled up. After ascending to deity status, she is often depicted as a red-robed woman adorned with various crowns and draped in colorful scarves.

In general, Qing Dynasty portraits of Mazu depict a solemn and dignified elderly figure, aligning with her elevated status comparable to that of an emperor. To maintain a sense of reverence during worship, Mazu's portraits from this period often depict her as much older than her actual age. Some portrayals even incorporate masculine features to enhance her authoritative appearance. Additionally, Mazu's



attire becomes increasingly luxurious and noble, while the number of attendants and accompanying deities also increases.

During this period, the genre of sacred depictions of Mazu exhibits diverse development. The compositions and themes are generally similar, promoting a standardized portrayal and narrative of Mazu and her stories.

#### 5). The current development status of Mazu illustrations :

In modern times, with the development of illustration art and the advent of the visual culture era, illustration has evolved from its narrow definition (limited to pictures and drawings) to a broader concept. It is not only a form of visual communication but also a medium for information dissemination. Illustration has undergone changes in both its stylistic form and thematic content.

Against the backdrop of modernization and globalization, how traditional cultural elements like Mazu can integrate with rapidly evolving modern illustration art poses new challenges. How can it attract the attention of young people? How can it engage in more interdisciplinary collaborations to expand its development space? These are the new challenges facing Mazu illustrations today.

With the advancement of technology, an increasing variety of illustration techniques have emerged. Mazu illustrations are no longer confined to traditional forms such as drawings or woodblock prints. They have expanded into new modes of expression through the development of new technologies and fields. These include applications in areas like film and animation, comics, virtual reality, game design, and more, showcasing a diverse array of artistic approaches.

Based on their purpose and function, modern Mazu illustrations are categorized into two main types by researchers. Service-oriented Mazu illustrations focus on commercial viability, primarily used for commercial sale and business activities. Creative Mazu illustrations emphasize artistic expression, primarily serving religious and spiritual needs.

Service-oriented Mazu illustrations are primarily applied in the cultural and creative industries, serving the development of tourism. There are many representative Mazu illustrations in the cultural and creative industries, among which the most well-known is the Mazu Q version character created by the illustrator Yingzi LG for Mo Niang Cultural Creatives (Figure 21). Known for its cute art style that appeals to modern aesthetics, this depiction has gained wide popularity and is extensively used in cultural and creative products, as well as in daily applications like emojis.

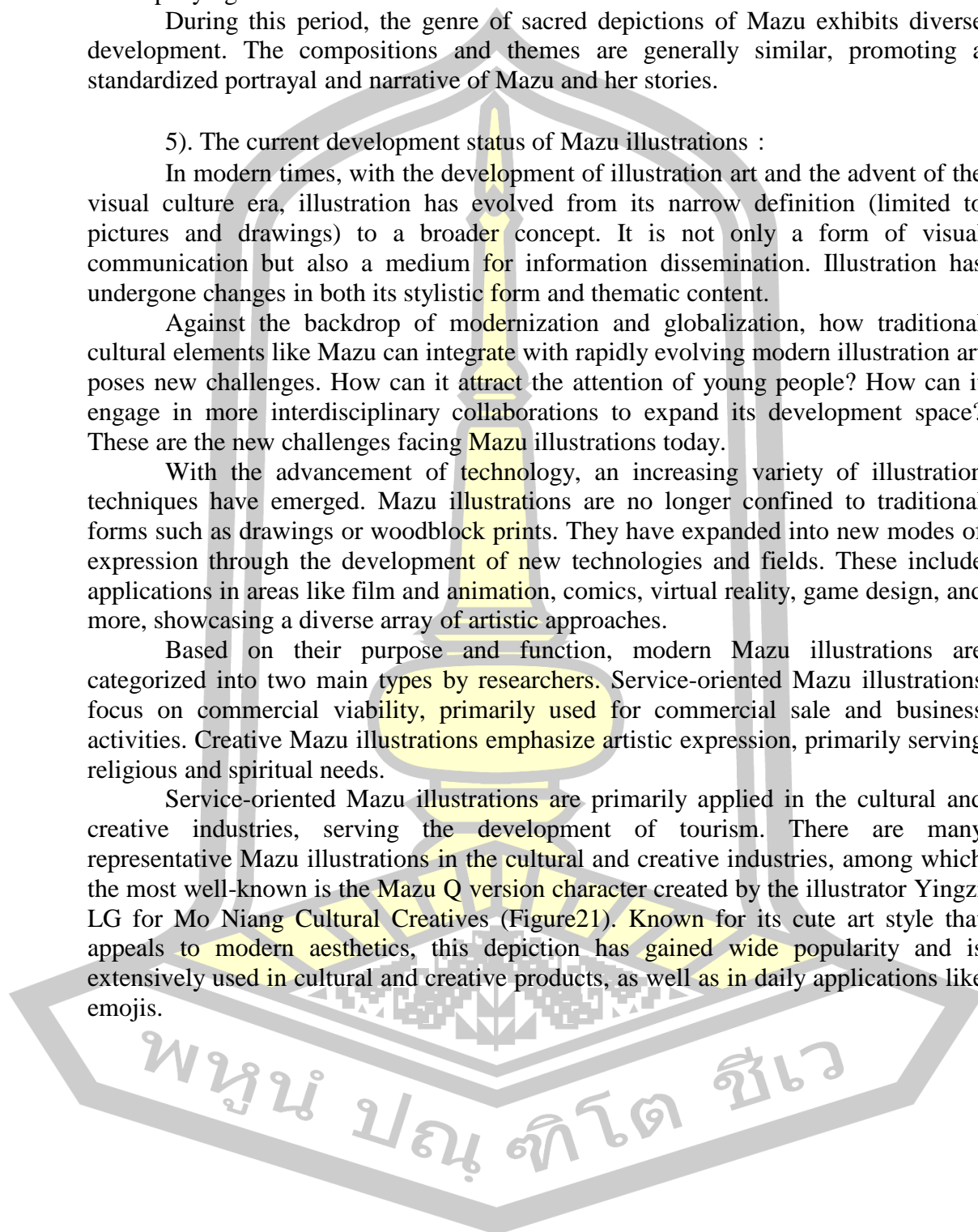




Figure 21 Mazu Q version" depicted by Mo Niang Cultural Creatives

Source : Painted by Yingzi LG, 2018

Retrieved from : <https://www.zcool.com.cn/work/ZMjE3MjgwODg=.html?switchPage=on>

In addition, commercially-oriented illustrations of Mazu in the form of modern art comics have also found many applications. A representative example of such comics is "Deviant". "Deviant" is a popular Chinese comic series created by Chinese artist Yi Wang Kong Qi. The series primarily reinterprets Chinese traditional mythological stories using modern aesthetics and perspectives, integrating mythological characters into contemporary life. This work is highly popular among Chinese youth and was awarded the Silver Prize for Best Drama Comic at the 14th CACC<sup>49</sup>.

In "Deviant", there are various comic depictions of Mazu, such as her image as a fisherwoman during her lifetime, the traditional red-clothed Mazu image, and her everyday life portrayal. The author designed Mazu with hair made of water, within which various fish often appear, symbolizing her identity as a sea deity (Figure22).

49 CACC: China Animation Golden Dragon Awards, It is the main competition of the China International Cartoon and Animation Festival, jointly organized by the State Administration of Press and Publication, Radio, Film and Television and the People's Government of Guangdong Province. It is one of the most influential animation awards in China, often referred to by the media as "China's top animation award".



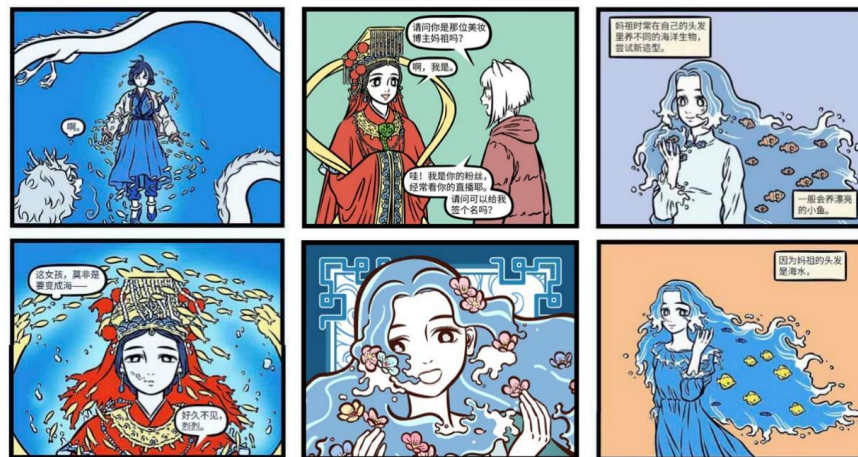


Figure 22 The Mazu character in the popular Chinese comic series "Deviant"  
Source : Painted by Yi Wang Kong Qi, 2023

Creative Mazu illustrations primarily serve religious beliefs, focusing more on cultural promotion, artistic creation, and expression, conveying the faith and spirit of Mazu to people. These works exhibit a variety of expression methods and diverse imagery, incorporating many creators' personal interpretations and artistic styles, resulting in a flourishing development.

In terms of artistic representation, traditional Mazu portrait-style illustrations have moved beyond the conventional frontal, solemn posture. They now include more creative space, allowing for freer poses and a portrayal that restores Mazu's youthful appearance. This departure from the stern and aged characteristics previously associated with masculinity has brought about a more lively depiction of Mazu as a young girl.

One of the well-known Mazu-themed illustration works is "Little Mazu" (Figure 23) by the illustrator Fu Lu, created using color and ink techniques. It is currently housed in the [Yibanxiang Mazu Culture Exhibition Hall in Huian, Quanzhou](#), contributing to the vibrant cultural heritage of Mazu.



Figure 23 The Mazu illustration work "Little Mazu"

Source : Painted by Fu Lu, 2020

Retrieved from : <https://www.zcool.com.cn/work/ZNDk1NzgyMjQ=.html>

With the development of science and technology, there has been a revolutionary change in the way paintings are created, with computer-generated (CG) electronic drawing taking center stage in history. An increasing number of creators are using electronic drawing tablets to create Mazu illustration works. For example, in the CG illustration piece "Mazu Blesses the Human Realm" (Figure24), created by the artist Zoooe97 using Photoshop to imitate traditional Chinese rock painting textures. It can be seen that the depiction of Mazu here also reflects a youthful and girlish appearance.



Figure 24 The Mazu illustration work "Mazu Blesses the Human Realm"

Source : Painted by Zoooe97, 2023

Retrieved from : <https://www.zcool.com.cn/work/ZNjQ4NzUzNjg=.html>

In computer-generated artworks, there are also Miracle-style creations depicting Mazu's miracles. For instance, in the series of illustrations titled "Impressions of Mazu" (Figure25), classic stories from Mazu folklore are extracted to create three illustrations. The themes of these creations are: Mazu protecting seafarers, people worshipping Mazu, and Mazu blessing the people. Each theme incorporates well-known folk legends.



Figure 25 The Mazu illustration work "Impression of Mazu"

Source : Painted by Rabbit eating egg tart, 2020

Retrieved from : <https://www.zcool.com.cn/work/ZNDA1NTQxMDg=.html>



These illustrations extract elements and colors from Mazu culture, showcasing distinct characteristics of Mazu culture while also reflecting the regional features of Fujian and Taiwan cultures. This has led to a series of cultural and creative products that highlight Mazu's cultural essence, combining traditional culture with modern commodities to propagate the spirit of Mazu and promote Mazu culture.

In addition to the field of painting, modern Mazu sculptures have broken away from traditional strict requirements and constraints on clothing styles. While referencing traditional Mazu imagery, they now incorporate more elaborate decorations. The purpose is to highlight Mazu's splendor and nobility, and to portray Mazu in a more youthful manner. There is a departure from the previous emphasis solely on solemnity and imposing presence, now aligning more with contemporary aesthetic preferences (Figure26).



Figure 26 One of the Mazu statues worshipped in the Zhumiao Temple on Meizhou Island  
Source: Photographed by Fang Zhou, 2021

One of the most representative Mazu statues is the giant Mazu statue located in the Zhumiao Temple on Meizhou Island, Fujian Province (Figure27). Zhu Boying, a craftsman from Jinshan Village, Huangshi Town, Putian City, carved the giant statue of Mazu. He was selected to carve the statue on Meizhou Island in 1988, and the statue is regarded as the highest aesthetic level of folk handmade stone carving, reflecting the characteristics of carving technology in Putian with realism, rich layers, strong features, and exquisite detail (Guanglei 2018). The statue has become not only a landmark of Meizhou Island, but also a new standard that has been imitated across the world. As one local artisan pointed out, “the image of Mazu has transitioned from a local folk aesthetic to a rich global attraction aesthetic by combining traditional folk handicrafts and western modeling techniques”. The Mazu statue is the embodiment of contemporary aesthetic standards in folk belief, and her appearance gives it contemporary aesthetic significance. (Ke Yihan, 2022)



Figure 27 The Giant Statue of Mazu on Meizhou Island  
Source: Photographed by Ke Yihan, 2020

In conclusion, in this era of visual communication, Mazu illustrations serve as an important form of modern art, valued for their immediacy, emotiveness, and artistic expression. They play a crucial role in the development of Mazu art and culture, widely employed in tourism, architecture, film, and other fields. As such, they have become an indispensable component of modern Mazu culture.



## Chapter III:

### Symbol Extraction and Idealized Interpretation of Mazu Culture

#### 3.1 Peirce's semiotic concepts

Charles Sanders Peirce :

The representamen is a subject of the triadic relation. The second position of this triadic relation is referred to as its object, and the third position is known as its interpretant. This triadic relation functions in such a way that the representamen produces its own interpretant, to replace some interpretant in the same triadic relation with the same object (Zhao Xingzhi.2014.PP31).

A symbol or representamen is something that, for a person, stands in place of something else in a particular respect or capacity. It can speak to a person, meaning that it can create in their mind an equivalent symbol, or even a more developed symbol. The symbol thus created, I call the interpretant of the first symbol. This symbol stands for something, that is, it stands for its object, but it does not stand for all aspects of its object, only for aspects related to a certain idea, which I typically call the ground of the representamen.(Zhao Xingzhi.2014.PP31).

Pierce's triadic relation is mutually supportive. In Pierce's triadic relation, the representamen is the impact or impression a sign has on someone, the object is the specific thing indicated by the sign, and the interpretant is the medium formed by the sign. The representamen, object, and interpretant together constitute Pierce's triadic relation (Figure28) .

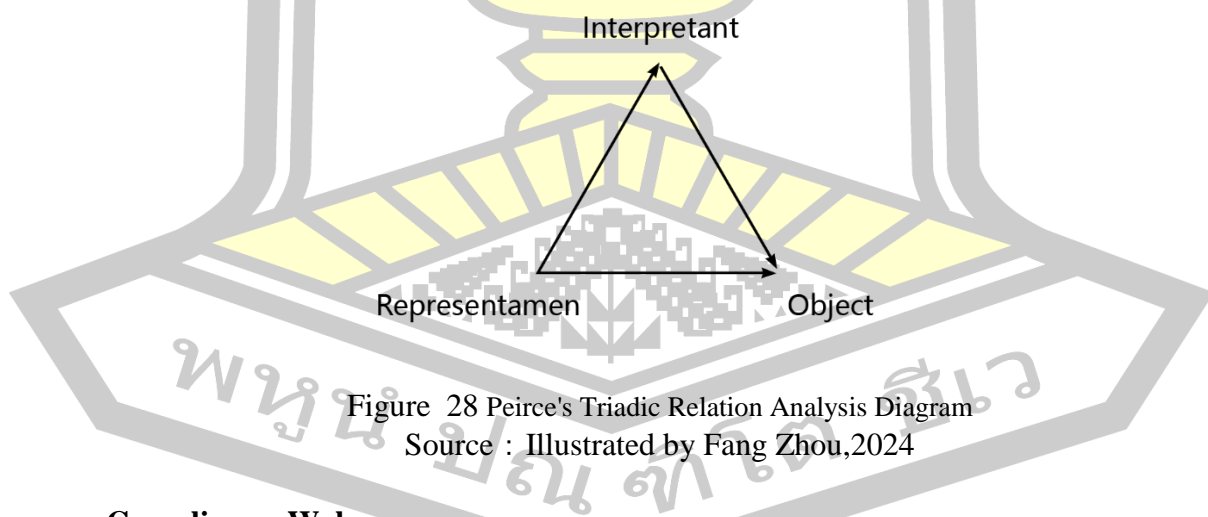


Figure 28 Peirce's Triadic Relation Analysis Diagram

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou,2024

**Cornelis van Walraven :**

Peirce's semiotics involves three fundamental stages that form a universal law: the "firstness" of a sign, also known as "phenomenality," is "initial and fleeting," such as the screech of a steam whistle; when it demands that the recipient interpret the perception, it acquires "secondness," becoming solid, external, and capable of expressing meaning; then comes "thirdness": "We then form a judgment of what we



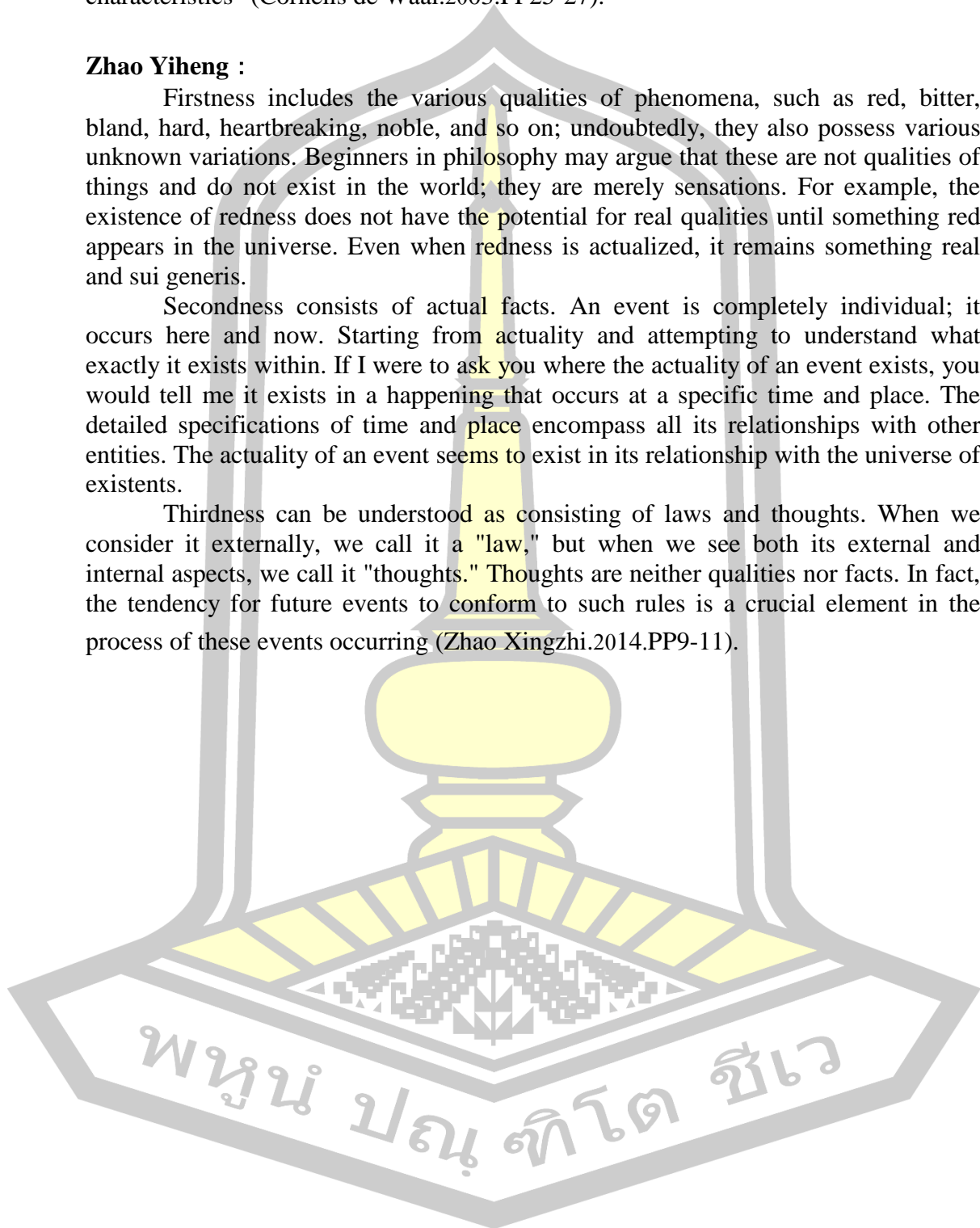
see, which judgment asserts that the object of perception has certain general characteristics" (Cornelis de Waal.2003.PP25-27).

**Zhao Yiheng :**

Firstness includes the various qualities of phenomena, such as red, bitter, bland, hard, heartbreaking, noble, and so on; undoubtedly, they also possess various unknown variations. Beginners in philosophy may argue that these are not qualities of things and do not exist in the world; they are merely sensations. For example, the existence of redness does not have the potential for real qualities until something red appears in the universe. Even when redness is actualized, it remains something real and sui generis.


Secondness consists of actual facts. An event is completely individual; it occurs here and now. Starting from actuality and attempting to understand what exactly it exists within. If I were to ask you where the actuality of an event exists, you would tell me it exists in a happening that occurs at a specific time and place. The detailed specifications of time and place encompass all its relationships with other entities. The actuality of an event seems to exist in its relationship with the universe of existents.

Thirdness can be understood as consisting of laws and thoughts. When we consider it externally, we call it a "law," but when we see both its external and internal aspects, we call it "thoughts." Thoughts are neither qualities nor facts. In fact, the tendency for future events to conform to such rules is a crucial element in the process of these events occurring (Zhao Xingzhi.2014.PP9-11).



In this study, Pierce's triadic approach, which includes three elements and three properties, will be employed to analyze and extract symbols from Mazu cultural practices, specifically focusing on Mazu festivals. This analysis will interpret the symbolic relationships of these rituals using Pierce's three elements and three properties (Table1) .

Table 1 Analyzing the Symbols of Mazu Festivals Using  
Pierce's Three Elements and Three Properties

Solemn and majestic	Firstness		Representamen	A folk activity commemorated during important occasions related to Mazu
A religious ritual of worshipping Mazu	Secondness		Interpretant	Commemoration, blessing, religious belief, religious activity
Religious belief and cultural heritage	Thirdness		Object	Mazu Festival

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

#### **Zhao Yiheng :**

Pierce posited that "an interpretant becomes a new symbol, ad infinitum. A symbol is something we understand in order to understand something else." To explicate an interpretant, one must initiate another symbol process. The meaning of a symbol is inherently "interpretable," yet to interpret meaning, another symbol must be employed. Consequently, the process of symbols, by definition, cannot conclude, as the symbol interpreting the interpretant still necessitates another symbol for interpretation. This gives rise to the concept of "infinite semiosis," emerging directly from the interpretant. This concept foreshadows the open stance of post-structuralism: symbolic representation inevitably entails infinite semiosis (Zhao Xingzhi. 2016. PP101).

This study will explore the infinite ambiguity of symbols in Mazu culture through the concept that a symbol points to an object and an interpretant. The interpretant is expressed by another symbol, which in turn generates another interpretant, and so on indefinitely (Figure 29). Therefore, symbols are infinitely interpretable. This research will utilize the concept of infinite ambiguity to analyze symbols in Mazu culture, thereby extracting symbols for the creation of illustrative works in Mazu culture.

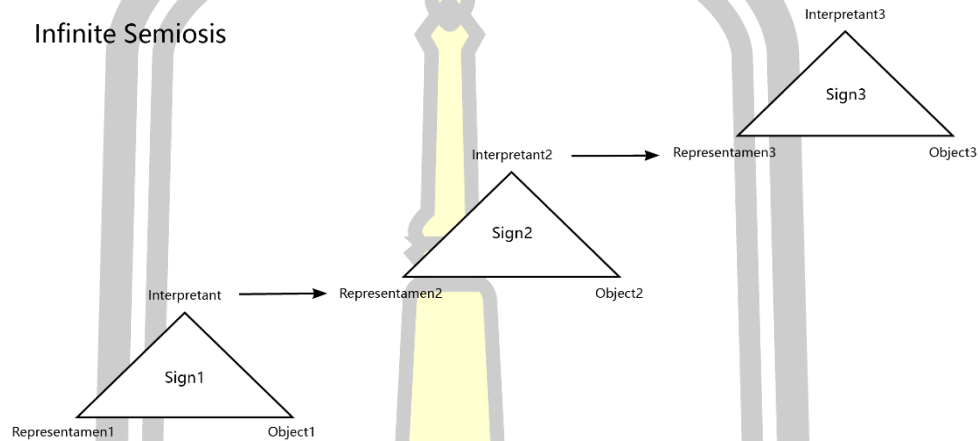


Figure 29 Pierce's Triadic Relation Diagram of Infinite Semiosis  
Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

### 3.2 Extraction of Symbols in Mazu Culture

Due to the scarcity of academic papers on overseas Mazu culture, this study primarily relies on data from China. Based on an analysis of 3,906 papers retrieved from the CNKI<sup>50</sup> database using "Mazu" and "culture" as keywords and topics, the author utilized VOSviewer software to generate network maps for structural analysis (Figure30). The main findings indicate that research on Mazu culture in China focuses predominantly on Mazu beliefs, Mazu folk customs, as well as surrounding regions and temples associated with Mazu. Analysis of the network maps suggests that Chinese research on Mazu culture primarily centers around Mazu folk customs and mythological stories, Mazu beliefs, and Mazu's influence on surrounding regions.

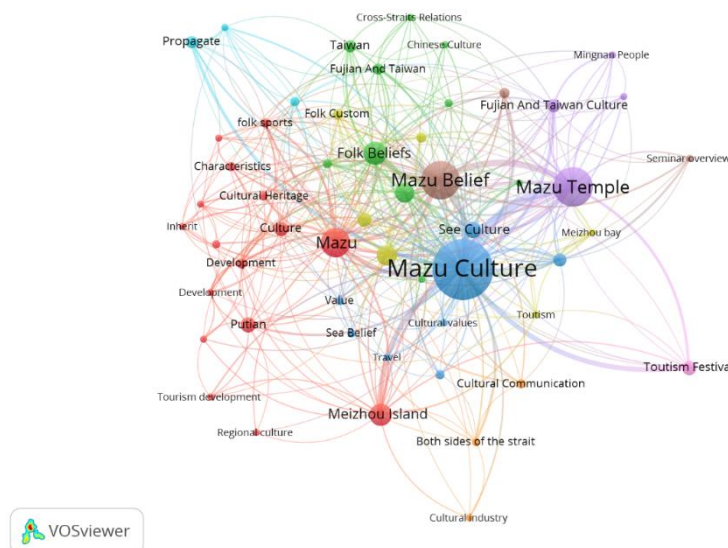


Figure 30 As of May 2024, the network diagram of Mazu culture generated from the official CNKI data in China

Source : Produced by Fang Zhou use Vosviewer, 2024

Additionally, through extensive reading of literature related to Mazu, such as "Research on Mazu Imagery" (Xiao Haiming,2017) and "An Aesthetic Culture Study of Mazu Images" (Wang Yingying,2021), common research aspects in the analysis of Chinese deified figures include historical background, personal experiences, belief and worship, mythological stories and legends, as well as their impact and significance.

Referring to these analytical directions and data, the author decided to categorize Mazu cultural symbols into four directions: personal experiences, abilities, beliefs, and impact, for analysis and extraction of related Mazu cultural symbols.

50 CNKI : China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), established in June 1999, is an academic platform under Tsinghua Tongfang Co., Ltd. It aims to provide professional knowledge management and services to various sectors of society. CNKI is based on the concept of National Knowledge Infrastructure (NKI), proposed by the World Bank in 1998. The CNKI project is an information technology development initiative aimed at achieving the dissemination, sharing, and value-added utilization of knowledge resources across society. Website: [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net)



**The text describes a structured approach to studying Mazu, divided into four parts:**

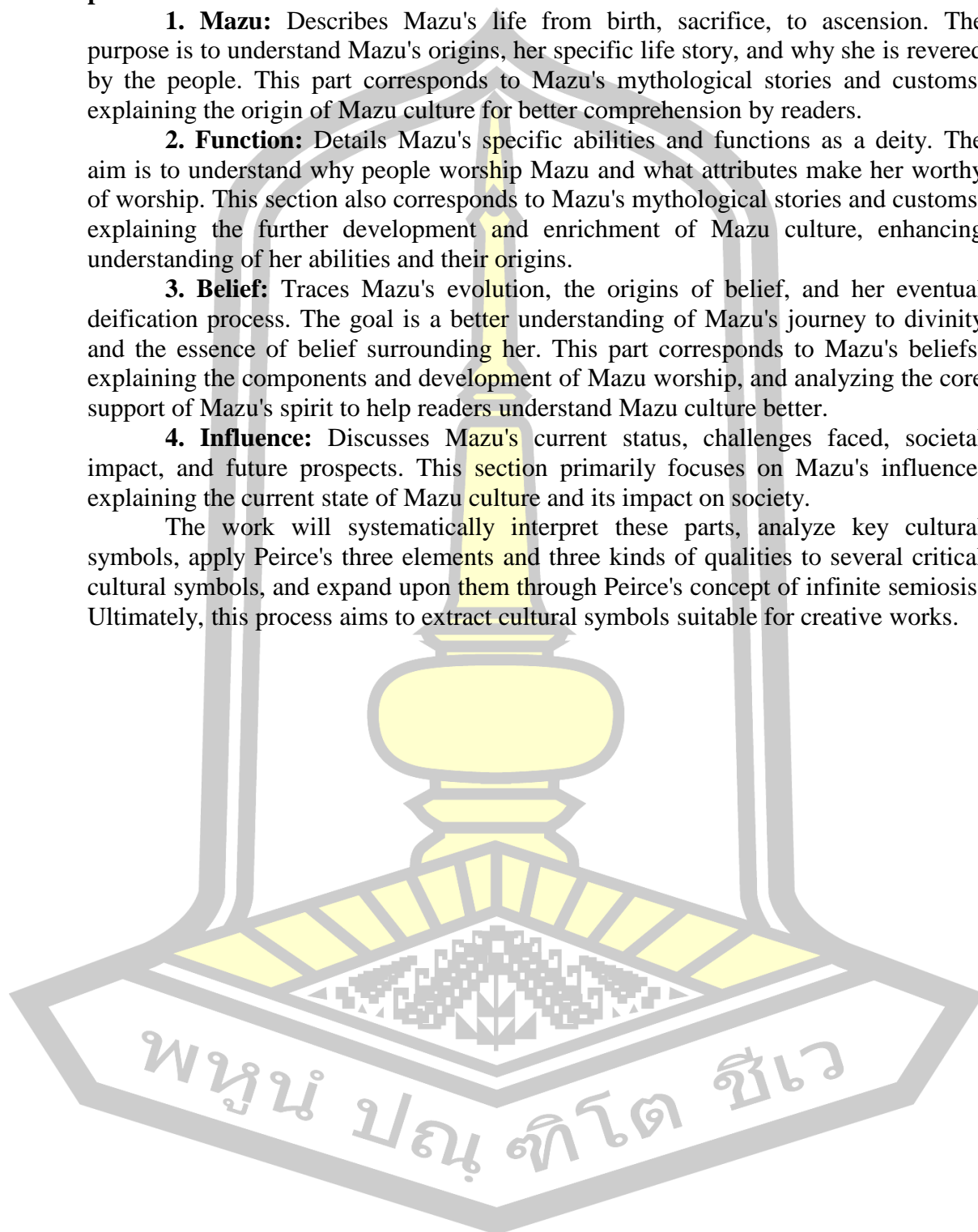
**1. Mazu:** Describes Mazu's life from birth, sacrifice, to ascension. The purpose is to understand Mazu's origins, her specific life story, and why she is revered by the people. This part corresponds to Mazu's mythological stories and customs, explaining the origin of Mazu culture for better comprehension by readers.

**2. Function:** Details Mazu's specific abilities and functions as a deity. The aim is to understand why people worship Mazu and what attributes make her worthy of worship. This section also corresponds to Mazu's mythological stories and customs, explaining the further development and enrichment of Mazu culture, enhancing understanding of her abilities and their origins.

**3. Belief:** Traces Mazu's evolution, the origins of belief, and her eventual deification process. The goal is a better understanding of Mazu's journey to divinity and the essence of belief surrounding her. This part corresponds to Mazu's beliefs, explaining the components and development of Mazu worship, and analyzing the core support of Mazu's spirit to help readers understand Mazu culture better.

**4. Influence:** Discusses Mazu's current status, challenges faced, societal impact, and future prospects. This section primarily focuses on Mazu's influence, explaining the current state of Mazu culture and its impact on society.

The work will systematically interpret these parts, analyze key cultural symbols, apply Peirce's three elements and three kinds of qualities to several critical cultural symbols, and expand upon them through Peirce's concept of infinite semiosis. Ultimately, this process aims to extract cultural symbols suitable for creative works.



### 3.2.1 Symbol Extraction of Mazu's Birth in the First Part

Since the Song Dynasty, people shifted from worshipping animals or natural forces as deities to using real-life figures to replace these fictional spirits. People began placing their hopes in individuals who made outstanding contributions to their communities. Mazu emerged during this period. According to Mazu's legend, she lived a life of kindness and generosity, sacrificing herself to save others. After her death, she ascended to become a deity and was worshipped by the people, leading to the birth of Mazu as a divine spirit.

Mazu's birth is based on the symbolic representation of her life experiences. Six significant stories from Mazu's life have been selected: The birth of Mazu, Mazu burning houses to save people, Mazu Saves Father and Finds Brother, Transform into a butterfly and get married, Mazu Sacrificed to Save People, Mazu ascension after sacrifice Six stories. Using these stories as subjects, they correspond to birth, saving people, marriage, death, sacrifice, and ascension. Specific elemental symbols analysis is shown in the Table 2. Analysis of three types of property symbols can be found in the Table 3.

Table 2 Analyzing the symbolic experiences of Mazu's life events using Pierce's Triadic Relation of Semiotic

Representamen	Dragon Daughter, Babies, Meizhou Island, Flame, Moon, Storm, Hand, Storms, Thread, Seabird, Tears, Fire, Butterfly, Cocoons, 囍 <sup>51</sup> , Bubble, Ocean, Sky, Ascension, Seabird, Stars and Points
Interpretant	Birth, Saving People, Marriage, Death, Sacrifice, Marriage, Death
Object	The birth of Mazu, Mazu burning houses to save people, Mazu Saves Father and Finds Brother, Transform into a butterfly and get married, Mazu Sacrificed to Save People, Mazu ascension after sacrifice

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

<sup>51</sup> 囍 : It is a Chinese character with a pronunciation of x ī . Joyful words. Commonly seen in wedding and other festive occasions. It is often cut from red paper or gold foil, or written on red paper, and pasted on the walls of doors, windows, and halls to show joy and celebration.

Table 3 Analyzing Mazu's life experiences symbolically using  
Pierce's three Properties of Semiotic

Firstness	Vitality, full of hope, the cycle of life and death, Selfless, Hopeful, Guiding, Sad and urgent, Full of contradictions, Selfless dedication, Sacrificing oneself, Sad, Remembering, Blessing, Believing
Secondness	The birth of Mazu, Mazu burning houses to save people, Mazu Saves Father and Finds Brother, Transform into a butterfly and get married, Mazu Sacrificed to Save People, Mazu ascension after sacrifice
Thirdness	The beginning and end of a person's life, marriage and funeral rites, saving those in distress, and bringing things to a good end.

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

### 3.2.2 Symbol Extraction of Mazu's functions in the Second part

Mazu, revered as a sea deity, possesses multiple abilities and functions: she safeguards the safe return of ships, has the power to aid and redeem the people, can answer prayers and fulfill wishes, bestows the gift of children to mothers, controls the seas as a sea deity, and blesses with favorable winds and rains for national peace and prosperity. Mazu not only has formidable abilities but also commands numerous subordinates. Among them, the most notable are Thousand-Mile Eye and Favorable-Wind Ear, who serve as Mazu's eyes and ears, aiding her in her endeavors.

Mazu's functions are based on her divine abilities as the foundation for symbolic representation. Selected are five representative functions of Mazu along with one symbolizing the powerful subordinate under her command: Mazu responds to prayers, Mazu Redemption of the People, Mazu bless safe return from the sea, Mazu's subordinates, Mazu Bestows Children, Mazu Sea Deity Based on these abilities, the corresponding explanations are: Prayer, Redemption, Return, Clairvoyance and Sharp ears, Seeking Children, Sea Deity Specific elemental symbols analysis is shown in the Table 4. Analysis of three types of property symbols can be found in the Table 5.

Table 4 Analyzing the Functional Symbols of Mazu through Peirce's Semiotics Triadic Relation

Representamen	Believers, hands, Mazu, Road of Light, White Soul Fire, Hand, Jellyfish, Jellyfish Tentacles, Firelight, Soul, Eyes, Ears, Neuronal Cells, Sea Urchin Shell, Womb, Platelets, Baby, Ocean, Ocean as Clothing, Moon, Stars and Points
Interpretant	Prayer, Redemption, Return, Clairvoyance and Sharp ears, Seeking Children, Sea Deity
Object	Mazu responds to prayers, Mazu Redemption of the People, Mazu bless safe return from the sea, Mazu's subordinates, Mazu Bestows Children, Mazu Sea Deity

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

Table 5 Analyzing the Functional Symbols of Mazu through Peirce's Three Properties of Semiotics

Firstness	Praying, Having a response, Redeemed, Guided, Blessed, Redeemed, Capable, Continuous, Vibrant, Sacred, Beloved
Secondness	Mazu responds to prayers, Mazu Redemption of the People, Mazu bless safe return from the sea, Mazu's subordinates, Mazu Bestows Children, Mazu Sea Deity
Thirdness	Prayer response, energy transmission, Redemption of the soul, Bless peace and guide your return, Control the ocean, The Birth of Life, Inheritance of Bloodline, Smooth Weather, Peaceful Country and People, Controlling the Ocean

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

### 3.2.3 Symbol Extraction of Mazu's beliefs in the Third part

Mazu belief is a crucial part of Mazu culture, representing the foundation and manifestation of Mazu as a deity in reality. Here, we analyze and extract symbols of Mazu belief from several perspectives: the evolution of Mazu's image, the elevation of her divine status, the thriving incense offerings, the diversity of beliefs, the dissemination of belief, and the connections fostered by belief.

In traditional Chinese culture, incense offerings symbolize the concentrated expression of belief. The faith and communication between believers and deities are mediated through incense offerings, making it a highly symbolic and distinctly Chinese representation of Mazu belief. The increase in the strength of Mazu belief is reflected in the elevation of Mazu's divine status. The more people believe, the greater her influence, leading to higher honors bestowed upon Mazu. Therefore, the evolution of Mazu's image and the elevation of her divine status are significant manifestations of changes in Mazu belief.

The composition, diversity, and dissemination of Mazu belief form the systematic foundation and evolution of Mazu belief in its current state. The belief in Mazu is based on the concretization of Mazu's faith into symbols, focusing on six representative themes of Mazu's belief development, evolution, and their cultural dissemination: The Evolution of Mazu's Image, Blackfaced Mazu, Mazu's Diversified Faith, The Connection of Mazu Faith, The Spread of Mazu Faith, Mazu's Ennobled.

Taking these beliefs as concrete symbols, corresponding to Evolution, Incense Fire, Faith, Connection, Communication, Becoming Deities. Specific elemental symbols analysis is shown in the Table 6. Analysis of three types of property symbols can be found in the Table 7.

Table 6 Analyzing the Symbols of Mazu's Faith through  
Peirce's Triadic Relation in Semiotics

Representamen	Statues of Mazu from different eras, Stone Statue, Smoke, Incense, Blackfaced, Different Statues, Golden Statue, Gold, Waves, Flame, Mushroom Circles, Stars and Points, Portraits, Cell Division, Cells, Blood and Flesh, Glowing Line, Heart, Fruit, Tree
Interpretant	Evolution, Incense Fire, Faith, Connection, Communication, Becoming Deities
Object	The Evolution of Mazu's Image, Blackfaced Mazu, Mazu's Diversified Faith, The Connection of Mazu Faith, The Spread of Mazu Faith, Mazu's Ennobled.

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

Table 7 Analyzing the Symbols of Mazu's Faith through  
Peirce's Three Properties of Semiotics

Firstness	Sacred, Developing, Evolving, Sacred and vigorous, Rich, Diverse, Intricate, essential, Infectious, Good conduct, Good deeds, Great love
Secondness	The Evolution of Mazu's Image, Blackfaced Mazu, Mazu's Diversified Faith, The Connection of Mazu Faith, The Spread of Mazu Faith, Mazu's Ennobled.
Thirdness	Keep up with the day, Intense incense and fire, Multifaith, Closely related, Legend of Sparks, Inherit, Legend of Sparks, Spiritual Essence

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

### 3.2.4 Symbol Extraction of Mazu's Influence in the Fourth part

Mazu's influence is a significant expression of Mazu culture. Researchers create works from several perspectives: Mazu's current status, Mazu's future, Mazu's spirit, and Mazu's impact on individuals and the world.

As modern society develops, Mazu belief faces new challenges and changes. Traditionally rooted among coastal fishermen and sailors, Mazu belief may face risks of decline and neglect in some areas due to urbanization and modernization. Despite these challenges, Mazu belief retains deep historical roots and a broad base of followers. With increased cultural exchange and globalization, Mazu belief is poised to expand and strengthen its influence worldwide. As a guardian deity of the sea and cultural symbol, the spiritual values and principles of Mazu may find new interpretations and resonance in different cultural contexts, paving the way for its future development.

At the core of Mazu belief lies Mazu's spirit: Good conduct, Good deeds, Great love. Based on this foundation, people embrace Mazu's spiritual ideals, propagate her teachings, and endorse her spirit, serving as the driving force behind the



dissemination of Mazu belief. Mazu's spirit influences her followers, who in turn impact the world.

Mazu's influence is based on symbols representing Mazu's current state, future potential, spirit, and other aspects. Four representative themes symbolizing Mazu's influence are selected: Mazu's Present, The possibility of Mazu, The Spirit of Mazu, the influence of Mazu. Taking these symbolizations of influence as the object, Corresponding to Bind, Future, Spirit, Influence as explanatory elements, Specific elemental symbols analysis is shown in the Table 8. Analysis of three types of property symbols can be found in the Table 9.

Table 8 Analyzing the Symbols of Mazu's Influence through Peirce's Triadic Relation in Semiotics

Representamen	Bandage, Crown, Pennant, 9 Strings and 12 Beads, Scepter, Mobius Ring, Tiara, Stars and Points, Heart, Flowers, Crown Pennant, Stone Statue
Interpretant	Bind, Future, Spirit, Influence
Object	Mazu's Present, The possibility of Mazu, The Spirit of Mazu, the influence of Mazu

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

Table 9 Analyzing the Symbols of Mazu's Influence through Peirce's Three Properties of Semiotics

Firstness	Calm, Virtuous, Good conduct, Good deeds, Great love, Infinite, Good conduct, Good deeds, Great love
Secondness	Mazu's Present, The possibility of Mazu, The Spirit of Mazu, the influence of Mazu
Thirdness	Overcoming adversity, spiritual core, infinite possibilities, passed down through the ages.

Source : Illustrated by Fang Zhou, 2024

### 3.3 Wassily Kandinsky's aesthetics concepts

#### Wassily Kandinsky:

The concept of the point: In art, the point does not have a precise external form concept. In geometric terms, for a point to materialize, it must occupy a proportionate space on a base surface. Additionally, it must have a distinct outline to differentiate it from its surrounding environment. The point does not require a precise external definition; this is a simple principle that needs no further elaboration. Yet, even this simple principle is often questioned under the pretext of imprecision, highlighting the immaturity of contemporary art theory. When the size and shape of the point change, the abstract sound of the point changes accordingly (Wassily Kandinsky. 2017. PP20).

The form of the point: As discussed above regarding the size of the point, another issue concerns the form of the point, undoubtedly determined by its outline. In abstract imagination, points are often idealized as tiny spheres; in reality, points are idealized as small circles. However, like the issue of size, the outline of a point is also relative. The materialized form of a point, that is, its specific shape, is virtually endless: it can be jagged, can transform into any geometric shape, and can even

ultimately become completely irregular. Points can be sharp triangles or present themselves as relatively stable squares. When points have jagged edges, these slender protrusions can vary greatly in size, each tooth connecting to the next. In this regard, the domain of the point is fundamentally indefinable; it can be said to have no restrictions whatsoever (Figure 31) (Wassily Kandinsky. 2017. PP22).



Figure 31 Various shapes of Point  
Source : Painted by Wassily Kandinsky, 2017

**Abstract and Concrete:** At this point, we can glimpse a major difference between concrete and abstract art. In concrete art, the inherent voice of artistic elements is overshadowed and weakened; whereas in abstract art, these elements assert themselves, brimming with their true voices. Even the smallest dot can suffice to illustrate this phenomenon. In representational graphic art, there are works entirely composed of dots, where artists attempt to create linear effects through dotting. However, this is a clear misuse of dots because in such treatments, the use of dots is subordinated to the purpose of realistic representation, stifling their intrinsic voice and leaving them half-dead. In abstract art, specific techniques should always serve a clear artistic intention and become integral to the composition. This point requires no further elaboration (Wassily Kandinsky. 2017. PP44-46).

Points can take on many forms beyond simple circles; they can manifest in various shapes, each with its own clear intentions and meanings. By shaping points into unique forms and imbuing them with specific meanings, they can be applied more broadly in painting. Moreover, this characteristic of points allows artists to convey richer information to viewers, thus deepening the communication and connection between the creator and the audience.

**The Concept of a Line:** When a point is propelled in a certain direction by an external force, it generates a first-class line. If the direction of this force remains unchanged, the line proceeds along a straight path. Thus, a straight line is formed, showcasing the tension of potential infinite movement in its simplest form. Everyday language often carries ambiguous meanings and can easily mislead, even leading to terminological misunderstandings. The term "motion" is a prime example of this, which is why I substitute it with "tension." "Tension" represents the inner strength of

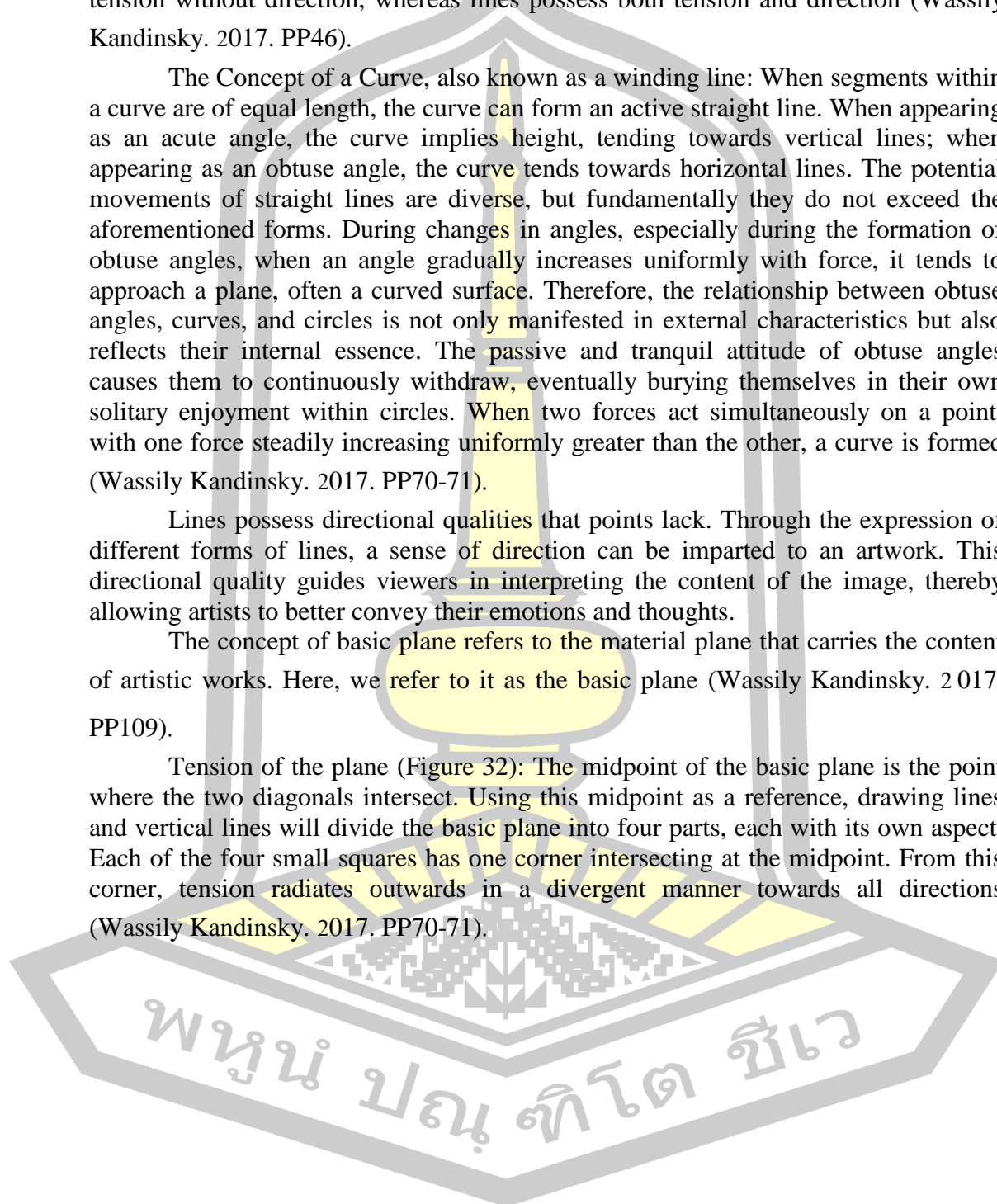
elements, embodying one aspect of creative "motion," while "direction" represents another aspect, determined by "motion." This distinction also establishes a basis for distinguishing various elements, including points and lines. Points possess only tension without direction, whereas lines possess both tension and direction (Wassily Kandinsky. 2017. PP46).

The Concept of a Curve, also known as a winding line: When segments within a curve are of equal length, the curve can form an active straight line. When appearing as an acute angle, the curve implies height, tending towards vertical lines; when appearing as an obtuse angle, the curve tends towards horizontal lines. The potential movements of straight lines are diverse, but fundamentally they do not exceed the aforementioned forms. During changes in angles, especially during the formation of obtuse angles, when an angle gradually increases uniformly with force, it tends to approach a plane, often a curved surface. Therefore, the relationship between obtuse angles, curves, and circles is not only manifested in external characteristics but also reflects their internal essence. The passive and tranquil attitude of obtuse angles causes them to continuously withdraw, eventually burying themselves in their own solitary enjoyment within circles. When two forces act simultaneously on a point, with one force steadily increasing uniformly greater than the other, a curve is formed (Wassily Kandinsky. 2017. PP70-71).

Lines possess directional qualities that points lack. Through the expression of different forms of lines, a sense of direction can be imparted to an artwork. This directional quality guides viewers in interpreting the content of the image, thereby allowing artists to better convey their emotions and thoughts.

The concept of basic plane refers to the material plane that carries the content of artistic works. Here, we refer to it as the basic plane (Wassily Kandinsky. 2017. PP109).

Tension of the plane (Figure 32): The midpoint of the basic plane is the point where the two diagonals intersect. Using this midpoint as a reference, drawing lines and vertical lines will divide the basic plane into four parts, each with its own aspect. Each of the four small squares has one corner intersecting at the midpoint. From this corner, tension radiates outwards in a divergent manner towards all directions (Wassily Kandinsky. 2017. PP70-71).



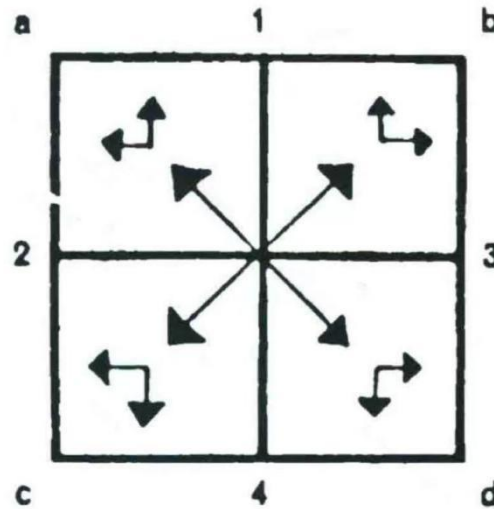


Figure 32 Tension of points within a surface  
Source : Painted by Wassily Kandinsky, 2017

Deconstructing the basic plane involves clearly delineating elements placed on the visible material plane from those that "float" in the invisible space, and their effects are fundamentally different. Generally speaking, even in the realm of art, we are accustomed to viewing elements from a material perspective, considering them as organic components of the material base. While this perspective may be somewhat one-sided, it is nonetheless important. From a material perspective, the expression of art's sound cannot escape these materialized factors such as craftsmanship. Proficient mastery of these factors not only aids in constructing the material base itself but also helps visually deconstruct the material base, facilitating a deeper understanding of the essence of art.

The creation of a sense of "floating" art elements depends not only on the aforementioned material conditions but also on the viewer's internal attitude. Viewers must be able to liberate themselves from the constraints of the material base and perceive the two dimensions of artistic composition. A well-trained viewer can perceive the base, sensing its necessity for the work, while simultaneously disregarding the base and seeing the spatial forms of composition. Even simple combinations of lines can be viewed from these two perspectives. Just as various tensions exist within a simple base, they persist in a complex base even after transforming into intangible space. The rules of composition remain valid, and the purpose of composition still awaits realization (Wassily Kandinsky. 2017. PP135).

### 3.4 The Application of Point-Line-Plane Aesthetics in the "Mazu" Illustration Series

#### 3.4.1 Understanding and Application of Point Elements in the "Mazu" Illustration Series

Mazu, as a deity, derives her primary strength from her spirit of benevolence and compassion both during her earthly life and after her deification. However, this power, though intangible and imperceptible, is conceptualized by researchers into tangible forms, often using the motif of points for creation and expression. The diverse forms of points possess strong expressive capabilities, allowing for rich and nuanced representation of the infinitely complex, thereby better conveying the researcher's intentions.

Before her deification, Mazu's imagery was imbued with the luminous rays of hope, represented by scattered stars across the paintings. After her passing, the evolving belief in the power of hope condensed into more elaborate forms of stars. Different degrees of faith are reflected in varying states of these stars.

For instance, comparing selected pieces reveals a progression: from the simplicity of star symbols in the first piece, "Birth," to the enriched shapes of stars beginning from the fourth piece, "Butterfly," and the continued enhancement of stars with effects in the sixth piece, "Ascension." By the ninth piece, "Return," stars exhibit more complex luminous forms, and by the twelfth piece, "Sea Deity," the symbolism and complexity of stars deepen further. In the eighteenth piece, "Becoming Deities," stars not only become intricately detailed but also independently construct graphic forms (Figure 33). This gradual evolution from simple to rich star systems shapes the entire series, imparting greater harmony and unity to the artworks as a whole, and enhancing their logical coherence and meaning.

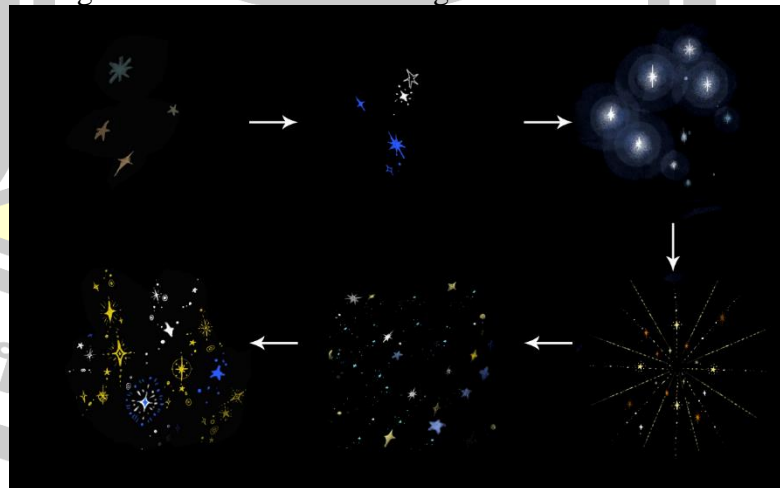


Figure 33 The Evolution of Stars and Points Symbolism in the Illustration Series "Mazu"  
Source : Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



### 3.4.2 Understanding and Application of Line Elements in the "Mazu" Illustration Series

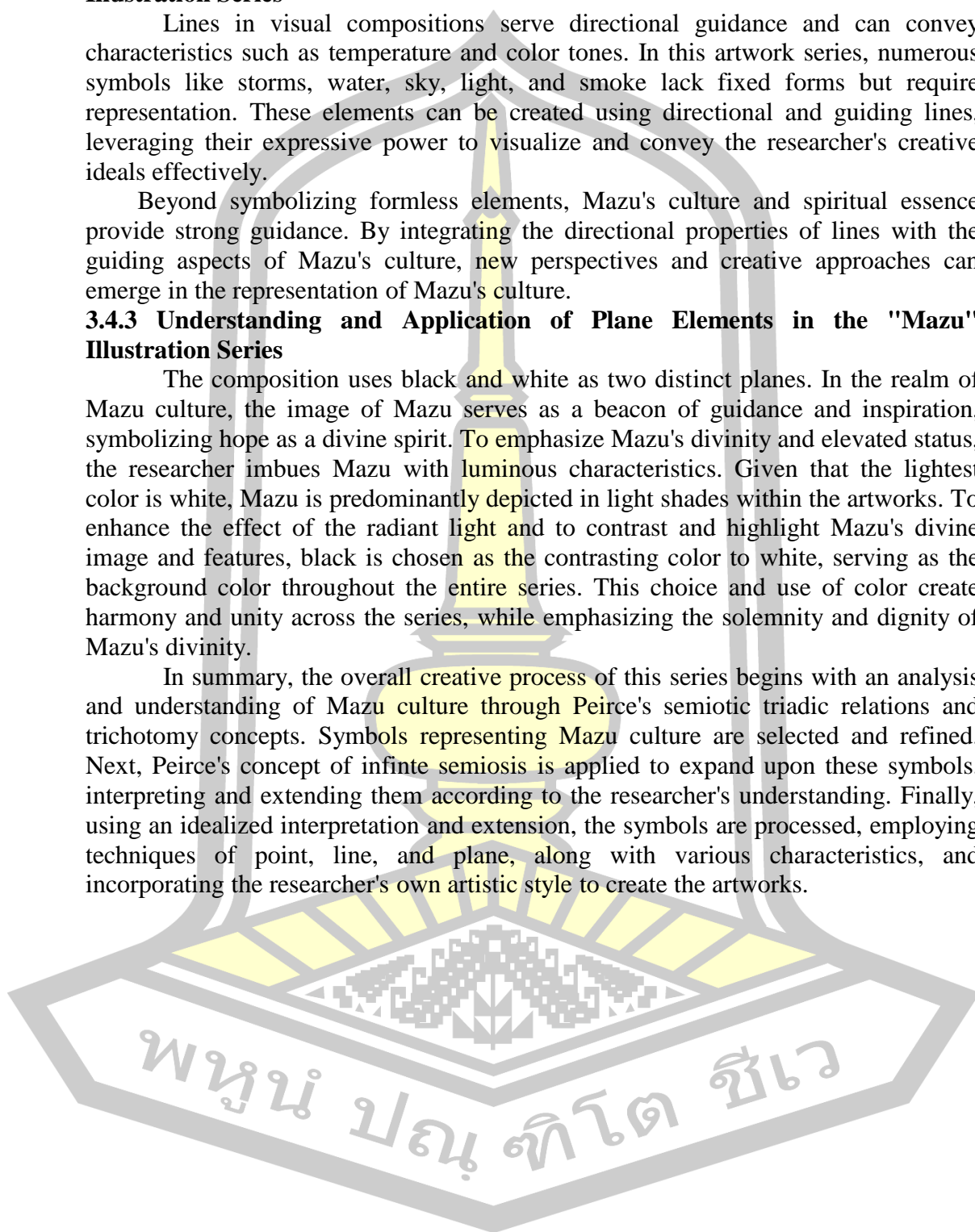
Lines in visual compositions serve directional guidance and can convey characteristics such as temperature and color tones. In this artwork series, numerous symbols like storms, water, sky, light, and smoke lack fixed forms but require representation. These elements can be created using directional and guiding lines, leveraging their expressive power to visualize and convey the researcher's creative ideals effectively.

Beyond symbolizing formless elements, Mazu's culture and spiritual essence provide strong guidance. By integrating the directional properties of lines with the guiding aspects of Mazu's culture, new perspectives and creative approaches can emerge in the representation of Mazu's culture.

### 3.4.3 Understanding and Application of Plane Elements in the "Mazu" Illustration Series

The composition uses black and white as two distinct planes. In the realm of Mazu culture, the image of Mazu serves as a beacon of guidance and inspiration, symbolizing hope as a divine spirit. To emphasize Mazu's divinity and elevated status, the researcher imbues Mazu with luminous characteristics. Given that the lightest color is white, Mazu is predominantly depicted in light shades within the artworks. To enhance the effect of the radiant light and to contrast and highlight Mazu's divine image and features, black is chosen as the contrasting color to white, serving as the background color throughout the entire series. This choice and use of color create harmony and unity across the series, while emphasizing the solemnity and dignity of Mazu's divinity.

In summary, the overall creative process of this series begins with an analysis and understanding of Mazu culture through Peirce's semiotic triadic relations and trichotomy concepts. Symbols representing Mazu culture are selected and refined. Next, Peirce's concept of infinite semiosis is applied to expand upon these symbols, interpreting and extending them according to the researcher's understanding. Finally, using an idealized interpretation and extension, the symbols are processed, employing techniques of point, line, and plane, along with various characteristics, and incorporating the researcher's own artistic style to create the artworks.



## Chapter IV

### The creative process and outcomes of the "Mazu" illustration series.

This series of original illustration works takes Mazu as the theme and creative symbol. The creative purpose of the work is to inherit Mazu culture, promote Mazu spirit, enable more people to understand and understand Mazu culture, and create traditional Mazu culture from the perspective of modern art, hoping to ignite new artistic sparks. Therefore, this series of works is named "Mazu" after Mazu.

The original series of works in this study, "Mazu," consists of 22 works, with a size of 60X80CM . Drawing tool is iPad, drawing software Procreate. Independently conceived and created by researchers from 2023 to 2024, all works were completed by 2024.

This work is divided into four chapters. The first chapter corresponds to Mazu's life experience, the second chapter corresponds to Mazu's function as a deity, the third chapter corresponds to Mazu's faith, and the fourth chapter influences Mazu's influence. In the first three chapters, there are 6 illustrations for each chapter, and in the fourth chapter, there are 4 illustrations for a total of 22 illustrations, which are:

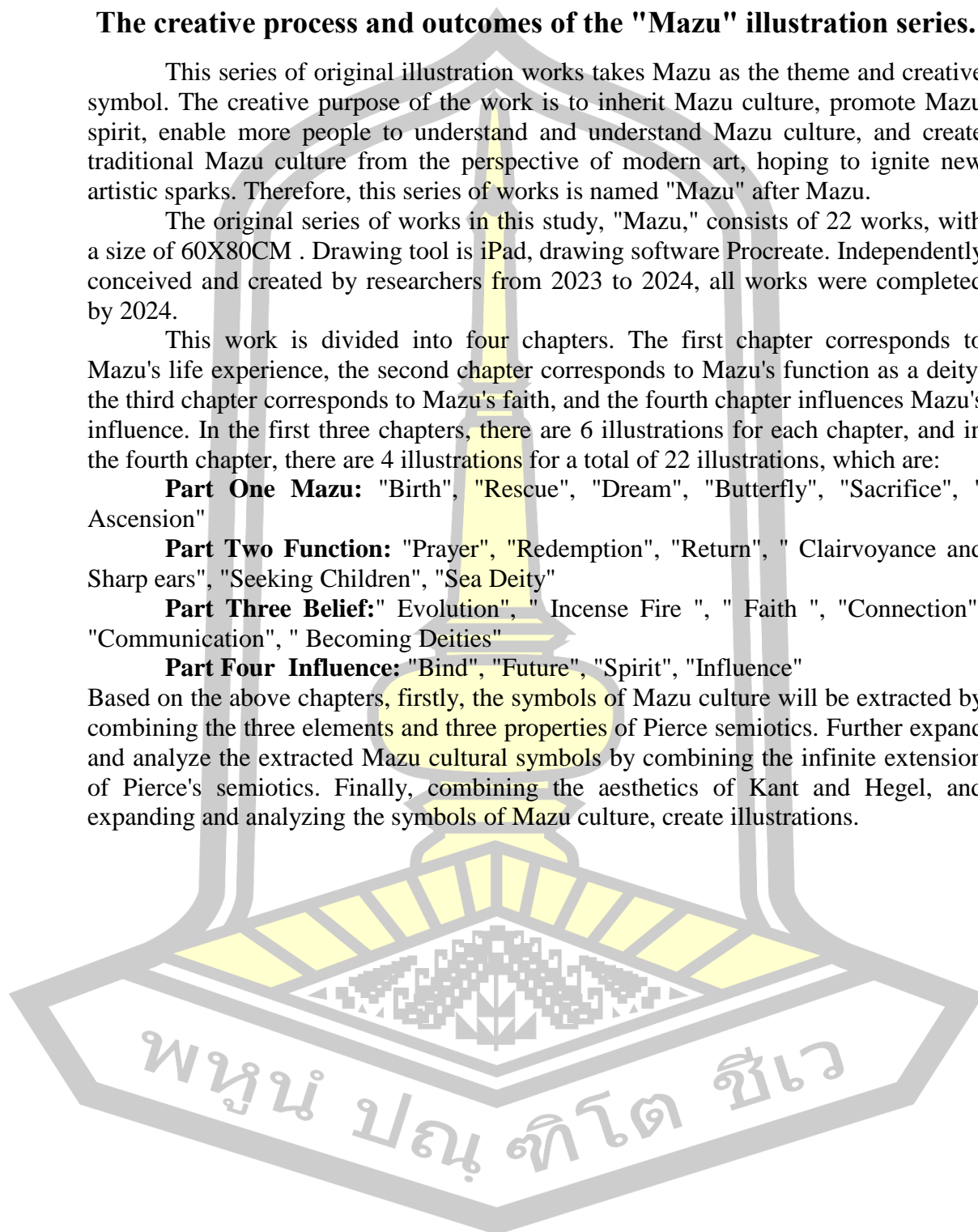
**Part One Mazu:** "Birth", "Rescue", "Dream", "Butterfly", "Sacrifice", "Ascension"

**Part Two Function:** "Prayer", "Redemption", "Return", " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears", "Seeking Children", "Sea Deity"

**Part Three Belief:** " Evolution", " Incense Fire ", " Faith ", "Connection", "Communication", " Becoming Deities"

**Part Four Influence:** "Bind", "Future", "Spirit", "Influence"

Based on the above chapters, firstly, the symbols of Mazu culture will be extracted by combining the three elements and three properties of Pierce semiotics. Further expand and analyze the extracted Mazu cultural symbols by combining the infinite extension of Pierce's semiotics. Finally, combining the aesthetics of Kant and Hegel, and expanding and analyzing the symbols of Mazu culture, create illustrations.



## 4.1 Illustration Work "Birth"

### 4.1.1 Creative ideas for the Illustration work "Birth"

As the first illustration in a series with Mazu culture as the theme, "Birth" aims to express the beginning and origin of Mazu culture. The beginning of Mazu culture originated from the birth of Mazu, so this work is called "Birth". Mazu was born in the Song Dynasty on Meizhou Island, Putian City, Fujian Province, China. Birth is a matter full of hope and vitality, so the painted images will also give people a feeling of vitality and hope, not only representing the hope of life's birth, but also representing the hope that Mazu has made efforts and sacrifices for the people after that.

### 4.1.2 Symbol extraction for the Illustration work "Birth"

(1) Dragon Daughter: It is rumored that Mazu was the reincarnation of a dragon daughter under the seat of Guanyin Bodhisattva. In order to help fishermen and people descend to their families, the dragon daughter symbol from Mazu's previous life was added to the work.

(2) Babies: The birth form of humans is babies, so babies are added as the closest symbol of association in the work.

(3) Meizhou Island: It is easy to connect with the birthplace of Mazu, and the birthplace of Mazu is located on Meizhou Island. Therefore, the image will incorporate symbols related to the island and the ocean.

(4) Flame: The birth of life gives people a feeling of vitality and hope, and flames are also full of vitality and hope. The flame of life has become a symbol reflecting the birth of Mazu.

(5) Stars and Points: The birth of Mazu has brought blessings and hope to the people, so in order to reflect Mazu's characteristic of hope, symbols representing the light of hope, stars and dots, have been added. This symbol will also run through the entire series of works.

(6) Moon: In Chinese culture, the moon's ups and downs represent many meanings, including the meaning of reincarnation. As the first part of the work "Mazu", it mainly expresses Mazu's life experience, that is, the process from birth to death to ascension, which corresponds to the cycle of life. Therefore, the symbol of the moon's ups and downs, representing the cycle of life, was chosen.

In summary, the three elements of the Pierce symbol are used to analyze the symbol of the birth of Mazu: the object is Mazu's birth, the Interpretant is birth, and the Representamen are dragon daughter, babies, Meizhou Island, flame, stars and points, moon.

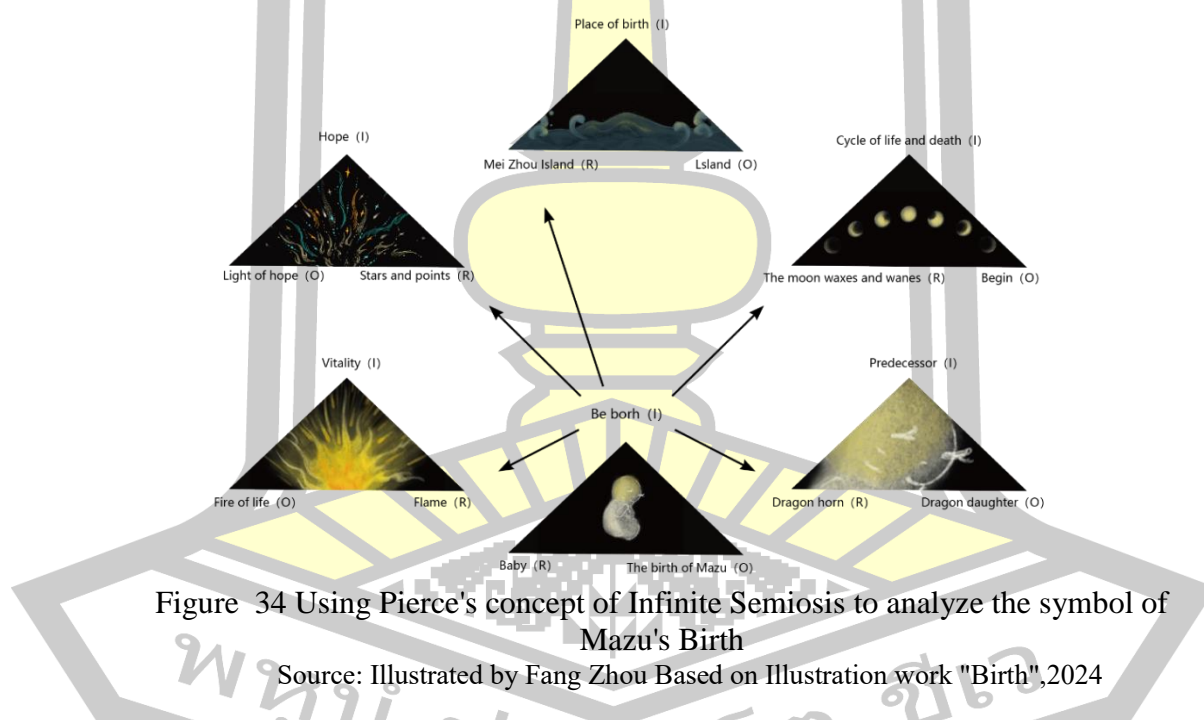
Analyze the birth symbol of Mazu through the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the Firstness is vitality, full of hope, and the cycle of life and death. The secondness is the birth of Mazu, and the Thirdness is the starting point of a person's life (Table10).

Table 10 Analyzing the Birth Symbol of Mazu through the Three Elements and Three Properties of Pierce Symbols

Vitality, full of hope, the cycle of life and death	Firstness	Naissance	Representamen	Dragon Daughter, Babies, Meizhou Island, Flame, Stars and Points, Moon
The Birth of Mazu	Secondness		Interpretant	Be Birth
The starting point of a person's life	Thirdness		Object	The Birth of Mazu

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure34).



#### 4.1.3 The visual expression of the Illustration work "Birth"

In order to highlight the effects of light and flame, the work adopts black as the background color, achieving a contrast between black and white images. The main white image highlights Mazu, flame, and light.

The picture expresses the birth of Mazu, with Mazu's infant form as the center. In the composition, Mazu is located at the center of the picture, which is the center of all the tension and flames spreading out of the picture, and is the visual intersection of the work. The various forms of stars and dots in the picture represent Mazu's great love spirit and the power conveyed to people. Combining the directional indicative

characteristics of the lines in the point, line, and plane, a symmetrical outward spreading line composition is used here (Figure 35).

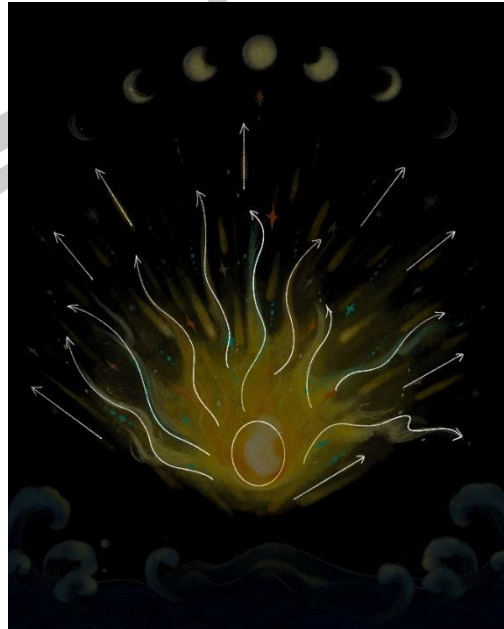


Figure 35 The composition idea of the first artwork "Birth" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

The representative element of Mazu is the dragon horn on her head, which reflects Mazu's reincarnation as a dragon daughter. Mazu is wrapped in the flame of life and hope to express vibrant vitality and hopeful emotions. Use rich and warm colors to express the vitality and burning. The lines that spread outwards have a tense expression, and the visual experience it brings can be well combined with the expressive needs of vitality. At the same time, this composition also satisfies the form of flames. The blue patterns mixed in the flames represent the characteristics of Mazu's green dragon and water elements.

At the bottom of the screen is Meizhou Island, which is the island where Mazu was born, representing Mazu's arrival on Meizhou Island. At the top of the screen, there are the ups and downs of the moon, representing life and reincarnation. This section will be used for the fifth work "Sacrifice" to express Mazu's lifelong commitment to human life.

#### 4.1.4 The creative process of the work "Birth"

As the basic elements of plane composition, points, lines, and surfaces can effectively express and extract symbols.

The application of points, lines, and surfaces is reflected in the yellow color tone of the flame, with color blocks laying out the approximate shape of the flame. To be closer to the real flame, red is added at the center of the flame. Mazu's reincarnation as a soul is depicted in white. At the top of the screen, the moon's ups and downs are depicted in light yellow, with white stars and dots added as embellishments.



The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in the addition of orange and blue lines to the flame. Red represents the fiery vitality, while blue represents the blue dragon element and ocean element of Mazu's predecessor. The birthplace of Mazu, Meizhou Island, also uses the form of lines to outline, while adding wave lines representing the ocean. The way the islands and waves are drawn is based on the traditional Chinese meticulous drawing mode.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the addition of a large number of stars and dots representing hope. Stars represent the power of hope, and dots not only serve as decorations, but also represent sparks of flame (Figure 36).

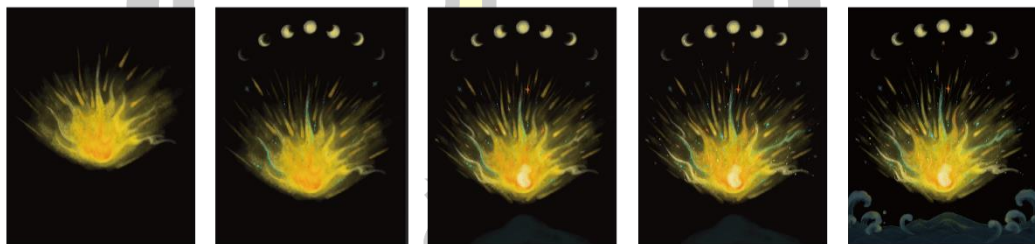
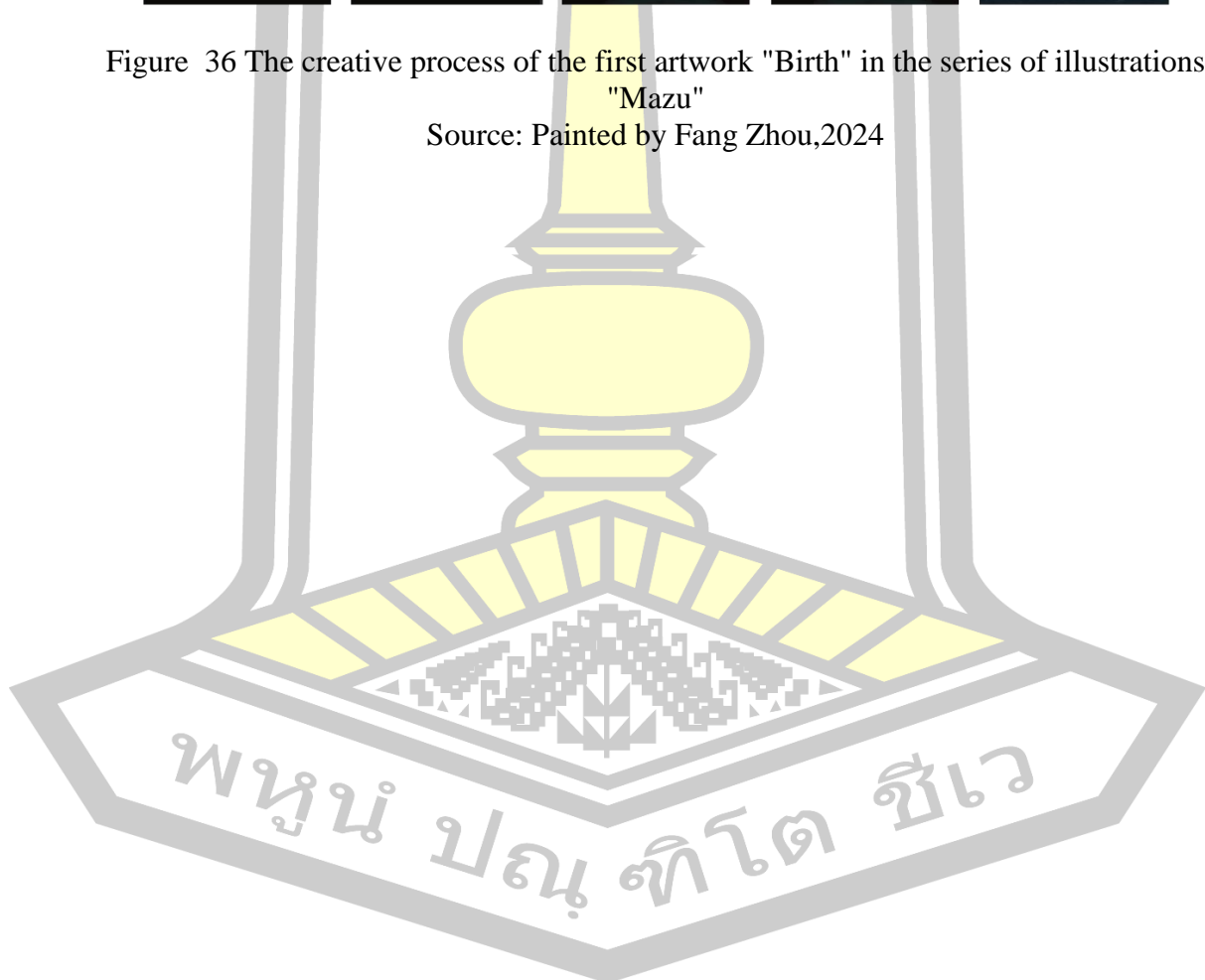


Figure 36 The creative process of the first artwork "Birth" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.1.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Birth":

Work "Birth" :Figure 37

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

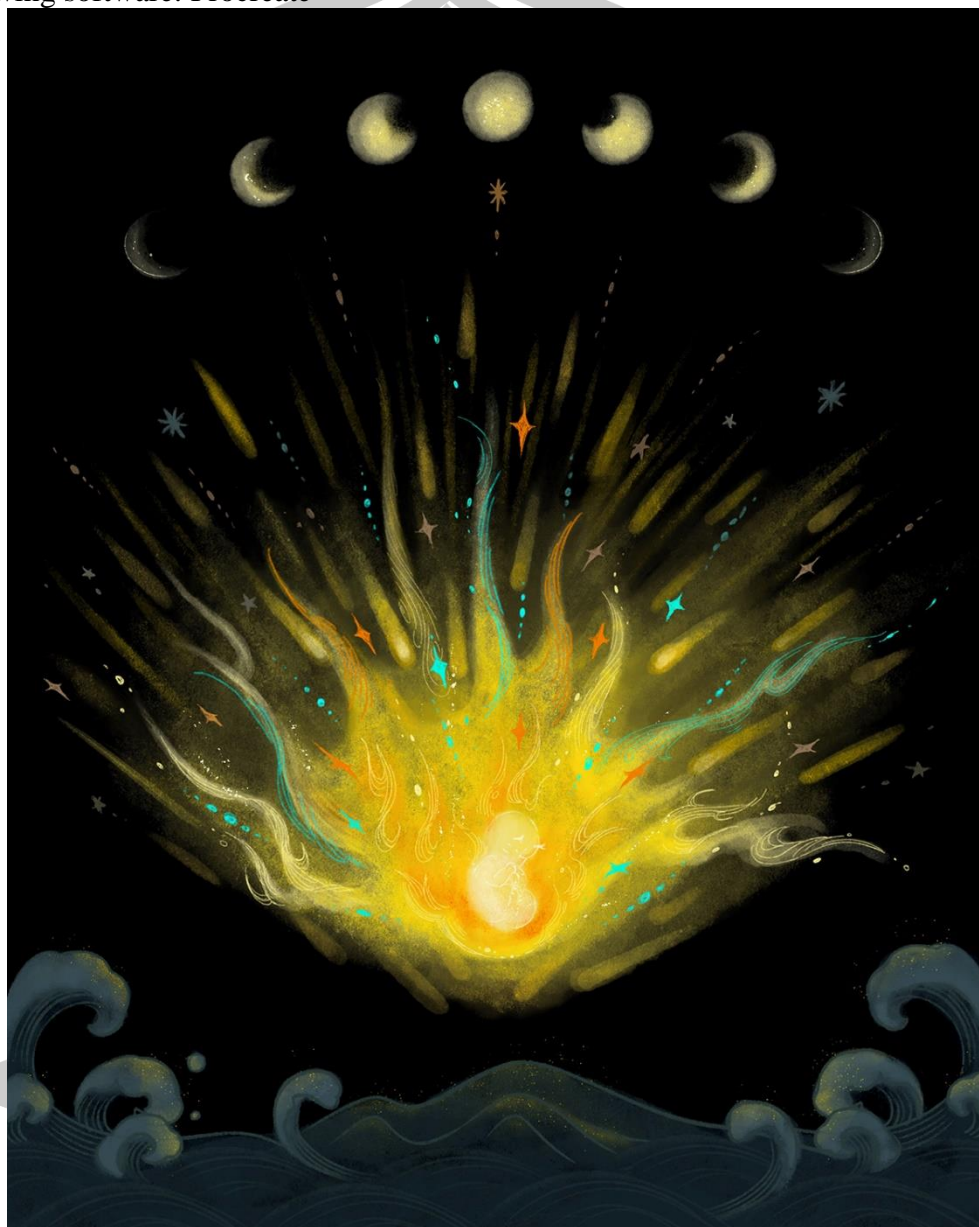


Figure 37 The first artwork "Birth" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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## 4.2 Illustration work "Rescue"

### 4.2.1 Illustration work "Rescue" creative ideas

As the second illustration in a series with the theme of Mazu culture, "Rescue" aims to express the most well-known and classic story of Mazu characters throughout their lives, that is, the story of Mazu saving lives. Therefore, this illustration is named "Rescue". Mazu was kind and benevolent during her lifetime, often helping others and making many contributions to the local people. This became the main reason why she was remembered by the people after her death and was enshrined in temples. The work selects the story of Mazu burning his house to save people: on a stormy night, the fishing boat gets lost in the sea and loses its direction. Mazu lights up his own house to guide the lost boat in the storm, allowing the people on the fishing boat to safely return to the island. This story not only expresses the story of Mazu saving people, but also expresses the spirit of Mazu's selfless dedication.

### 4.2.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Rescue"

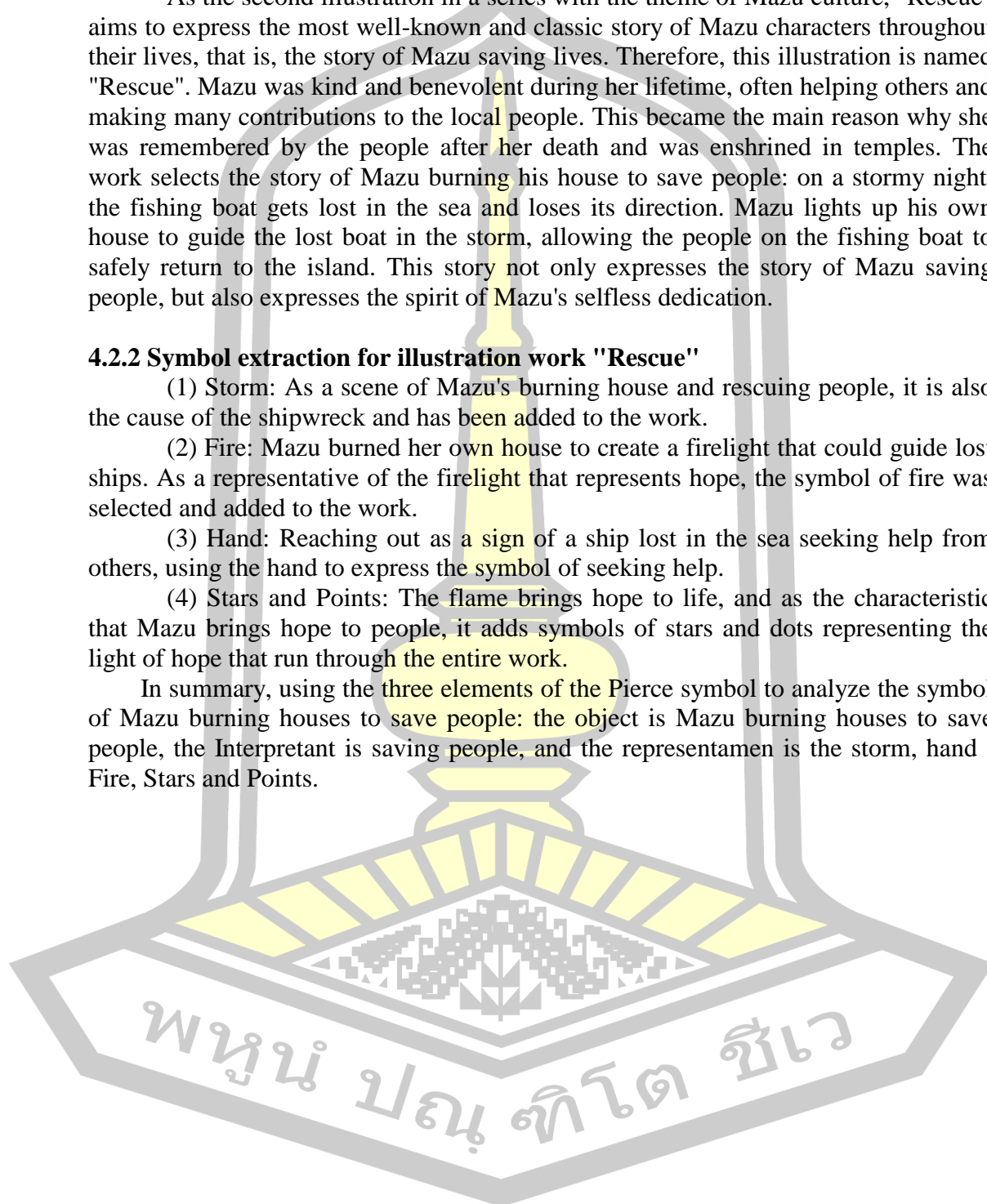
(1) Storm: As a scene of Mazu's burning house and rescuing people, it is also the cause of the shipwreck and has been added to the work.

(2) Fire: Mazu burned her own house to create a firelight that could guide lost ships. As a representative of the firelight that represents hope, the symbol of fire was selected and added to the work.

(3) Hand: Reaching out as a sign of a ship lost in the sea seeking help from others, using the hand to express the symbol of seeking help.

(4) Stars and Points: The flame brings hope to life, and as the characteristic that Mazu brings hope to people, it adds symbols of stars and dots representing the light of hope that run through the entire work.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu burning houses to save people: the object is Mazu burning houses to save people, the Interpretant is saving people, and the representamen is the storm, hand, Fire, Stars and Points.



Analyze the symbol of Mazu burning houses to save people using the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is selfless, hopeful, and guiding. The secondness is Mazu burned house to save people, and the thirdness is help the needy (Table 11).

Table 11 Analyzing The Mazu burned house to save people Symbol of Mazu through the Three Elements and Three Properties of Pierce Symbols

Selfless, Hopeful, Guiding	Firstness	Rescue	Representamen	Storm, Hand, Fire, Stars and Points
Mazu burned house to save people	Secondness		Interpretant	Saving people
Help the needy	Thirdness		Object	Mazu burned house to save people

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure38).

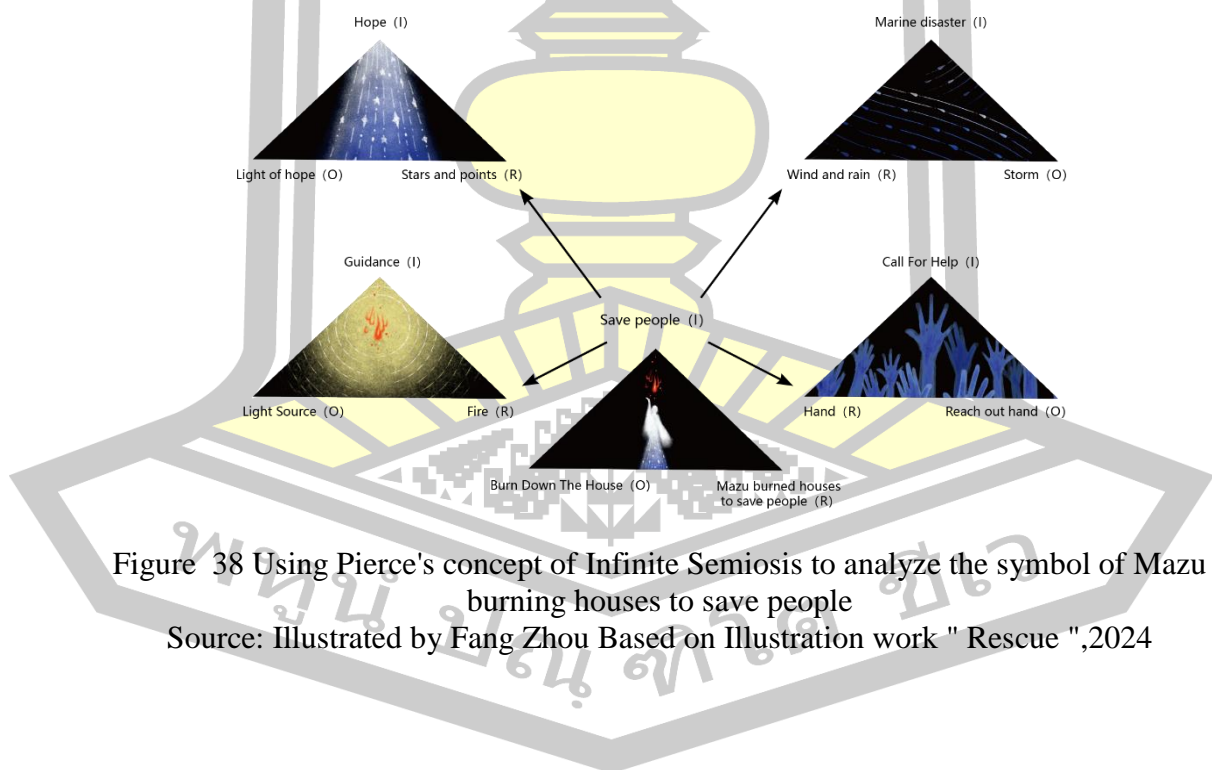


Figure 38 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu burning houses to save people

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work " Rescue ",2024

#### 4.2.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Rescue"

In order to highlight the radiance of the Mazu burning house, the work is uniformly black in color, with flames placed in the center of the upper half of the picture. The screen expresses the harsh weather and environment of the storm through dots, lines, and water droplets. The overall picture adopts a symmetrical composition mode, with the two opposing symbolic elements of fire and storm using concentric circles to express the sacred flame of hope that cannot be concealed in the storm. At the center of the screen is the young Mazu, holding fire and light to guide the lost people. This image represents Mazu's act of burning houses and saving people, as well as the meaning to be expressed. Expressing light and hope through flames, concretizing the incident of Mazu burning houses to save people (Figure 39).

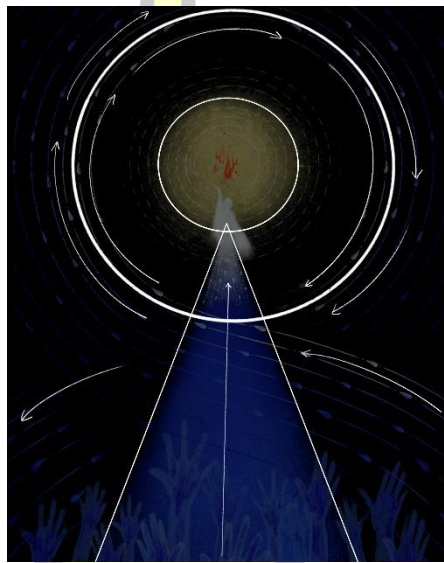


Figure 39 The composition idea of the second artwork "Rescue" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

In the picture, Mazu stands on a triangular color block symbolizing the mountaintop, which has the characteristic of guiding visual upward. Through this visual guidance, the focus is more focused on Mazu and the flame of hope in Mazu's hands.

The numerous hands at the bottom of the screen express the people and ships waiting for rescue, conveying the desire for help and the longing for the hopeful flame brought by Mazu.



#### 4.2.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Rescue"

The application of dots, lines, and surfaces is reflected in the use of yellow light as the visual center, with color blocks laying out the approximate form of light, Mazu as the source of light, and a lighter white color for drawing. The scene takes the shipwreck as the starting point, with blue as the tone to depict the state of the seaside mountains and rescue characters, fixing the overall color tone. The light colors of warm colors give people a lighter visual experience, while the dark colors of cool colors give people a more weight-bearing visual experience. In terms of overall color selection, the upper part is warm and the lower part is cold, and the upper part is light and the lower part is deep, which is more in line with the expression significance of the visual center focus in the upper part.

The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in expressing storms in the form of lines, drawing around light, and expressing the visual sense of avoiding wind and rain to open up safe areas for people in the picture. The application of dots, lines, and midpoints in a storm is reflected in the appearance of raindrops in the form of dots, mixed with lines representing wind to express the effect of wind and rain. At the same time, stars and dots representing hope were added near the flame. Stars represent the power of hope, and dots not only serve as decorations, but also represent Mars, the flame (Figure 40).

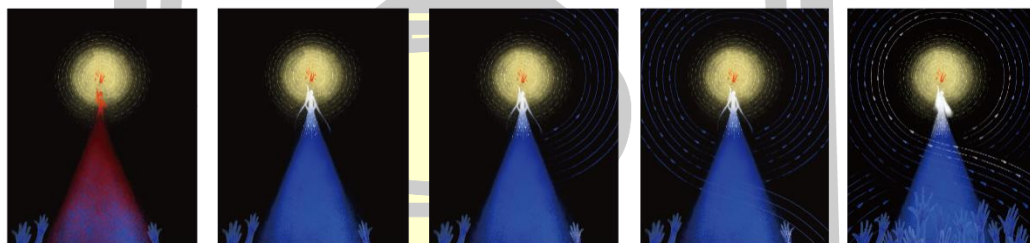


Figure 40 The creative process of the second artwork " Rescue " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

#### 4.2.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Rescue"

Work "Rescue" :Figure 41

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate



Figure 41 The second artwork " Rescue "in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

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### 4.3 Illustration work " Dream "

#### 4.3.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Dream"

As the third illustration in a series of works with the theme of Mazu culture, "Dream" selects a very important classic story in Mazu's life: Mazu saves his father and searches for his brother. Mazu's father and brother were killed at sea. At the same time, Mazu fell asleep on the loom. In her dream, Mazu's soul went out of her body to save her father and brother at sea. She held her father's mouth and bit his brother's clothes. At this moment, she was awakened by her mother. In shock, Mazu let go of her brother and fell into the sea. The awakened Mazu cried and told her mother that she only saved her father, and her brother fell into the sea. I chose this allusion because it is the most classic story related to Mazu and his family, reflecting the close relationship between Mazu and his family, and expressing the connection between Mazu as a mortal and his family.

#### 4.3.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work " Dream "

(1) Storm: The background of the story of Mazu saving her father and searching for her brother is the maritime accident caused by the storm, so this symbol is chosen.

(2) Thread: Mazu fell asleep on a weaving machine and his soul left his body. The weaving machine can be seen as a medium for Mazu's dream and reality. The entire weaving machine is too large and complex, so a thread was chosen to represent the weaving machine, expressing the connection of rescue in Mazu's dream.

(3) Hand: Mazu successfully grabbed his father and saved him on the boat. The white hand represents Mazu, and the black hand represents the father. This symbol is used to represent the event where Mazu saved his father.

(4) Seabird: Seabird is a very common animal on the sea. It can soar in the sea and is known for its fearlessness, bravery, and other characteristics. Like seabirds, humans are a life drifting on the sea, so the symbol "brother" is used to represent seabirds.

(5) Tears: Because she was unable to save her brother, Mazu was filled with sadness, using the symbol of tears to express her current mood and the overall atmosphere of the scene.

(6) Moon: The moon represents the distance between life and death from the new moon to the full moon, and the variation of the moon symbol is used to express the different fates of different characters in the story.

(7) Stars and Points: The twinkling and blending of stars represents salvation and hope, and we will continue to use the stars to represent the light of hope.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of the birth of Mazu: the object is Mazu saves father and finds brother, the interpretant is saving people, and the representamen is the storms, thread, hands, seabirds, tears, moon, stars and points.

Analyze the symbol of Mazu saving his father and searching for his brother based on the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is sad and urgent. The secondness is the Mazu saves father and finds brother, and the thirdness is help the needy (Table 12).

Table 12 Analyzing The Mazu Saves Father and Finds Brother Symbol of Mazu through the Three Elements and Three Properties of Pierce Symbols

Sad and urgent	Firstness	Dream	Representamen	Storms, Thread, Hands, Seabirds, Tears, Moon, Stars and Points
Mazu Saves Father and Finds Brother	Secondness		Interpretant	Save people
Help the Needy	Thirdness		Object	Mazu Saves Father and Finds Brother

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure42).

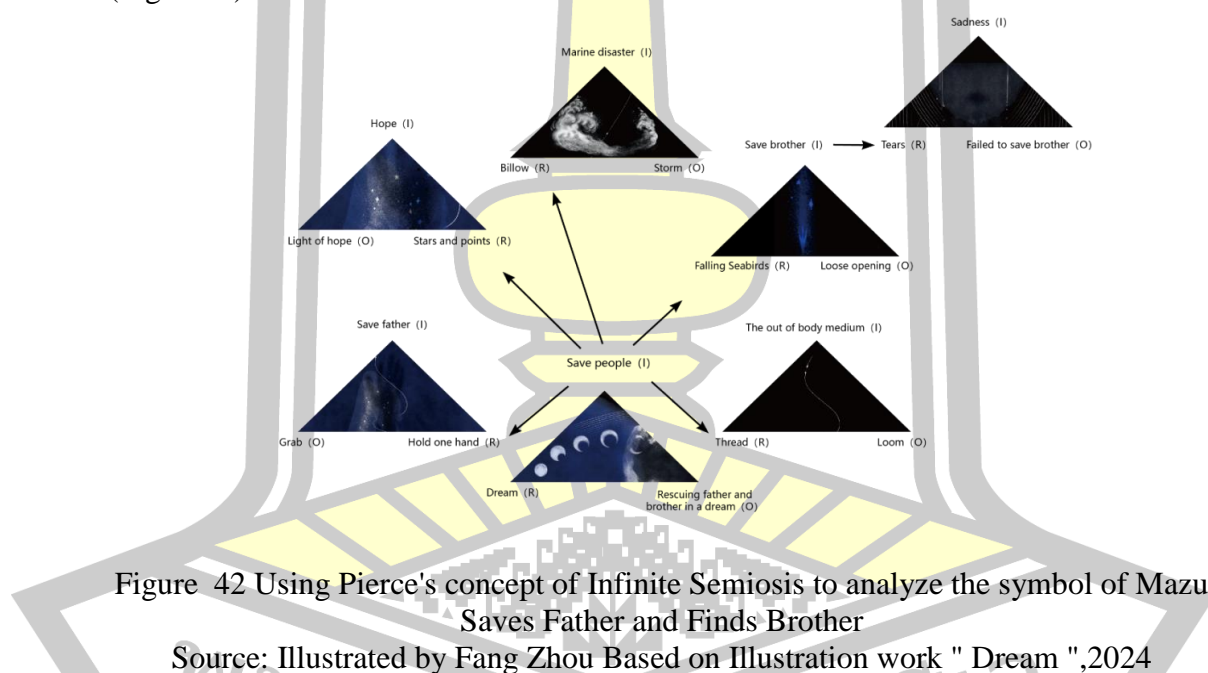


Figure 42 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu Saves Father and Finds Brother

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work " Dream ",2024

#### 4.3.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Dream"

In order to highlight the dreamy effect of dreams, the work uniformly uses black as the background color, and uses black and white to depict the emptiness and illusion of dreams, reality and dreams. The work centers around the Mazu character, so the center and subject of the picture will be the Mazu character itself, using a symmetrical composition.

Mazu fell asleep on the weaving machine and her soul left her body, symbolizing the event with a thread connecting her hair. The waves in the picture represent storms, while the moon's ups and downs represent dreams and life and



death. The white hand in the picture represents Mazu's symbol of hope for rescue, while the black hand represents the hand of the father seeking help. At the intersection of the two hands, there is a star symbol representing hope, expressing Mazu's successful rescue of the father. The seabird that fell from Mazu's mouth represents the brother who fell into the sea without rescue, and the tears flowing out express sadness for this situation. The moon in the water, full and round, represents the life of a father who successfully saved and the death of a brother who did not save.

In terms of expressing the effects of dreams, real-life symbols such as waves are used in a realistic way, while the souls of Mazu characters are semi transparent. Mazu's body is like a bottle, expressing the occurrence and participation of dreams. The selection of lines in the screen as a connection between reality and dreams is not only due to the inherent characteristics of the lines themselves. When Mazu slept and lay on the loom, the loom could be used as a medium. The fabric of the loom is composed of lines, so using lines also symbolizes the symbol of the loom as a medium.

#### 4.3.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Dream"

The application of dots, lines, and planes is reflected in: first, outline the rough outline of the character, and then refine the image. The characters appear in a transparent form, reflecting the ethereal nature of dreams. This effect is created by making the layers of the finished artwork semi transparent. As the work is related to maritime accidents, a large amount of blue is used to represent ocean elements. The waves and moon in the screen, as symbols representing real waves, have been realistically processed, while the characters, as symbols of the soul leaving the body, have been virtualized to create a sense of interconnection between dreams and reality.

The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in the linearization of Mazu's hair, and one of the lines is used as a connecting line between reality and dreams, and processed separately.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the addition of stars and dots representing hope for life in the symbol of Mazu's white hand and near the seabird symbol representing Mazu's brother. The stars represent the power of hope, the hope of survival, and the regret of losing life (Figure 43).

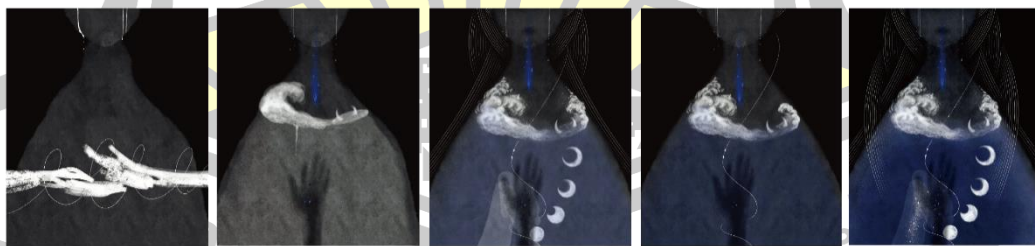


Figure 43 The creative process of the third artwork "Dream" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.3.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Dream"

Work "Dream" :Figure 44

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

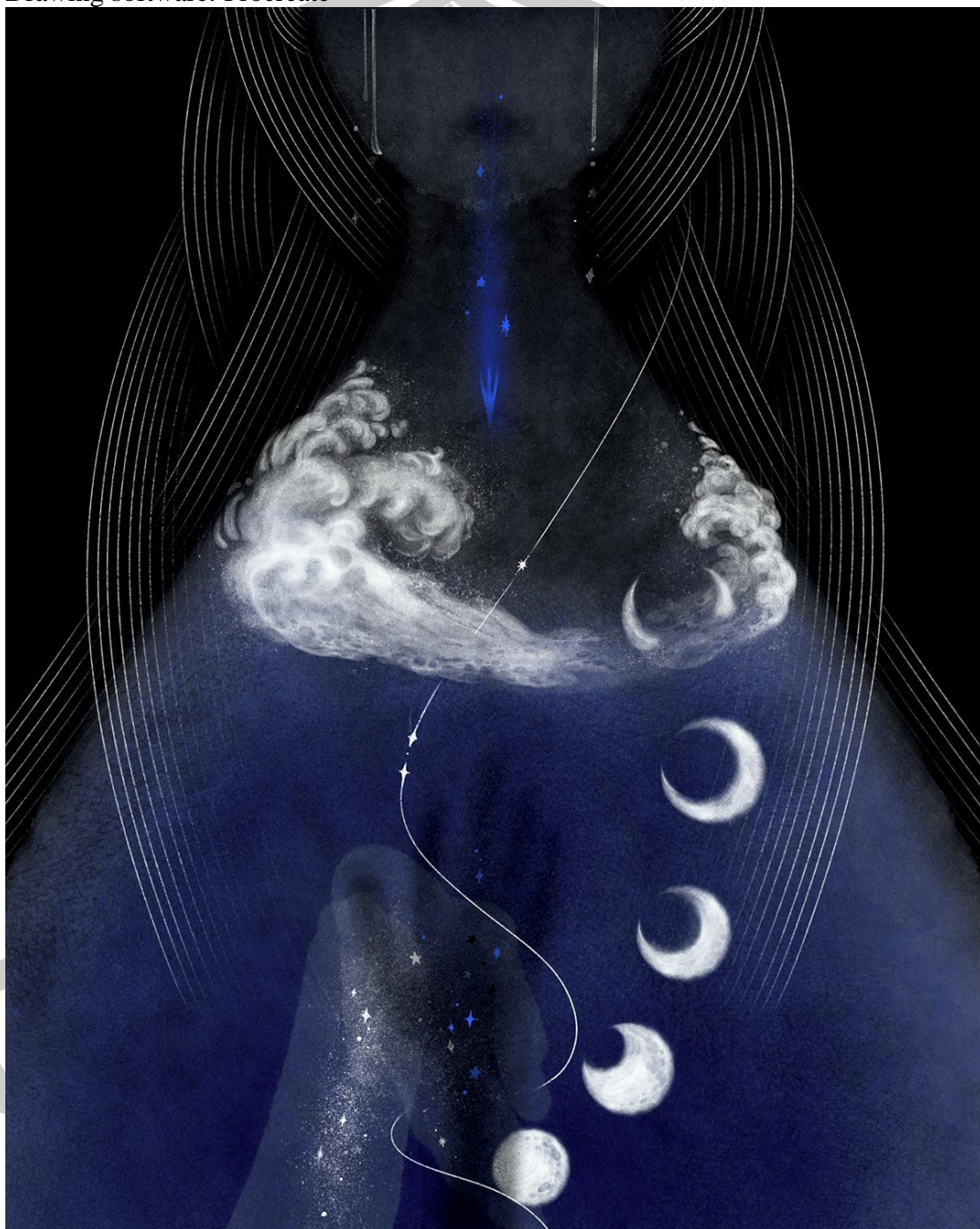


Figure 44 The third artwork " Dream "in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

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#### 4.4 Illustration work "Butterfly "

##### 4.4.1 The creative idea of the illustration work "Butterfly "

As the fourth illustration in a series with Mazu culture as the theme, "Butterfly Transformation" selects a marriage related story: the butterfly spirit impersonates Lin Mo Niang. There are two versions of this story, one version is rumored to be a butterfly spirit who is a fairy in the sea and often transforms into a beautiful woman to confuse men in the world. She discovered that the blacksmith's son had a secret crush on Mazu, so Butterfly Essence transformed into the image of Mazu and fell in love with the blacksmith's son, sucking on his essence. Mazu discovered this and beat Butterfly Essence away. Another version expresses that Mazu, as a deity, maintains chastity. However, the traditional Chinese demand for women to marry and have children goes against Mazu's own will, leading to the story of butterfly spirits replacing Mazu to achieve traditional marriage and filial piety. This story is chosen because as a traditional Chinese woman, Mazu's choice between marriage and divinity is full of contradictions. It expresses the purity of Mazu's divinity during her time as a human and the conflict with traditional society's marriage, which has high representativeness and discussion significance. Here, the second version of the story is used as the creative theme.

##### 4.4.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Butterfly "

- (1) Butterfly: The representative symbol of butterfly is butterfly, and butterfly is chosen as the symbolic symbol.
- (2) Cocoon: Butterflies will transform into butterflies to represent breaking the contradiction between traditional marriage and divine chastity.
- (3) 囍: As the most representative symbol of traditional Chinese weddings, the character Xi is composed of two joyful and joyful characters, full of traditional Chinese culture's blessings for marriage.
- (4) Stars and Points: symbolizing the blessings of marriage and the sanctity of divinity, the use of dots here represents the contradiction and fusion of the two.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the butterfly spirit impersonating Lin Mo Niang symbol: the object is to transform into a butterfly and get married, the interpretant is marriage, and the representamen is butterfly, cocoons, 囍, stars and points.



Using the three properties of the Pierce symbol to analyze the butterfly spirit impersonating the Lin Mo Niang symbol: the first property is full of contradictions and urgency. The second nature is the incident of a butterfly spirit impersonating Lin Mo Niang, and the third nature is marriage, tradition (Table 13).

Table 13 Analyzing Transform into a butterfly and get married Symbol of Mazu through the Three Elements and Three Properties of Pierce Symbols

Full of contradictions	Firstness	Butterfly	Representamen	Butterfly, Cocoons, 囍, Stars and Points
To transform into a butterfly and get married	Secondness		Interpretant	Marriage
Marriage, Traditional	Thirdness		Object	To transform into a butterfly and get married

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure45).

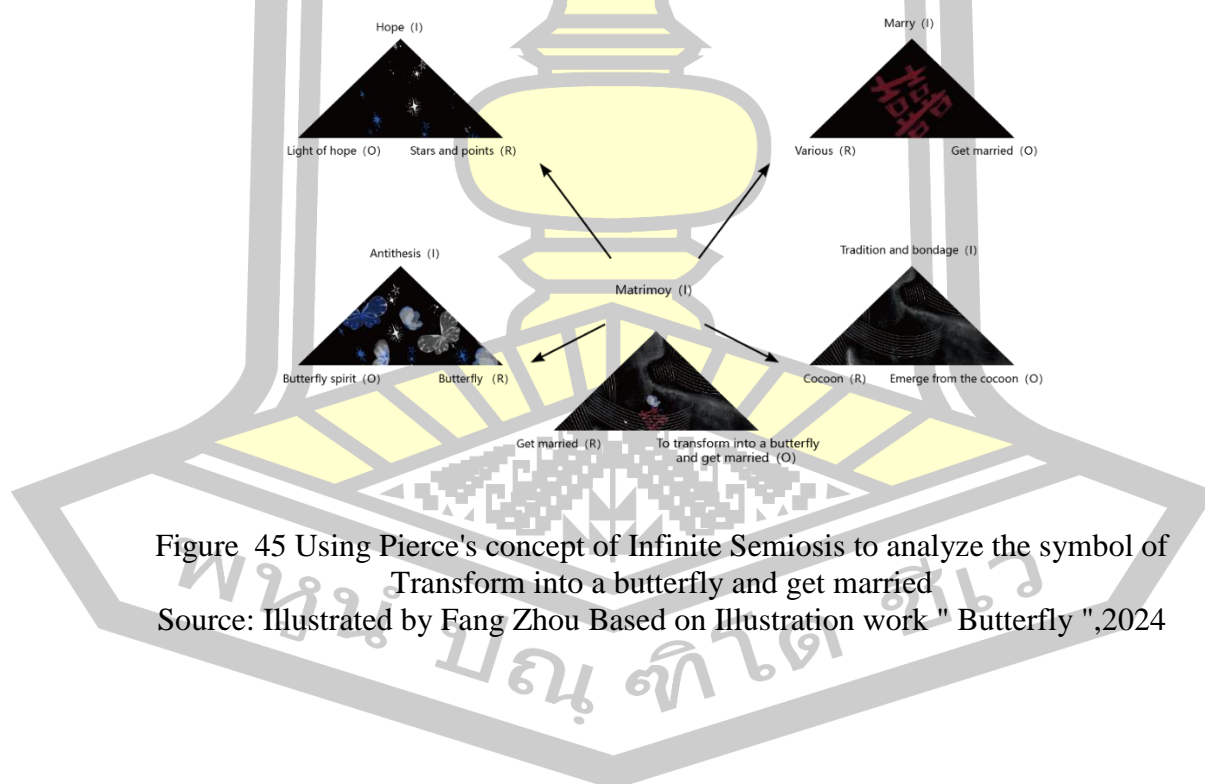


Figure 45 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Transform into a butterfly and get married

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work " Butterfly ", 2024

#### 4.4.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Butterfly "

To highlight the transparent effect of Mazu's butterfly pupa and silk thread, a black background color is used for contrast. The main character in the screen is Mazu, using a slanted composition to express the direction of Mazu's backward movement and the true upward movement (Figure 46).

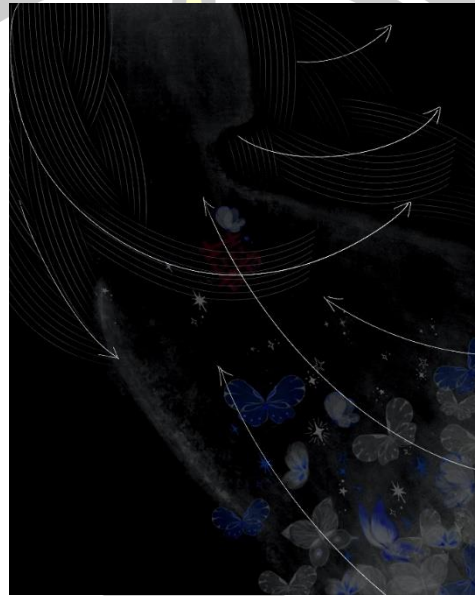


Figure 46 The composition idea of the fourth artwork " Butterfly " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

The Xi character on Mazu's chest represents traditional marriage and is a symbol of traditional Chinese weddings, representing the event of Mazu's marriage. Mazu's hairline and semi transparent body are expressed as butterfly pupae, representing being bound by traditional culture. The butterfly inside Mazu below represents a breakthrough in traditional culture, breaking through the cocoon and becoming a butterfly.

The overall image of Mazu presents an empty bottle filled with butterflies, expressing the event of the butterfly spirit replacing Mazu, as well as Mazu's control and participation in the entire event, as well as the contradiction and struggle between tradition and self-awareness.

#### 4.4.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Butterfly "

The application of lines, planes, and surfaces is reflected in the use of color blocks to draw the rough shapes of characters and butterflies. The characters are depicted in a transparent manner to express elements such as loading and breaking cocoons. By adjusting the opacity of the brush and using the eraser tool, this effect is presented with a focus on the edges and a blank center.

The application of dots, lines, planes, and midlines is reflected in the linearization of Mazu's hair, echoing the image of Mazu in the previous picture,



forming a continuation and overall harmony. The butterfly pattern is also decorated with lines, making it more agile and exquisite.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the addition of stars and dots around the butterfly, representing the hope of breaking tradition. The stars represent the power of hope, representing a breakthrough in tradition, and also represent the spirit and consciousness of Mazu within her body (Figure 47).

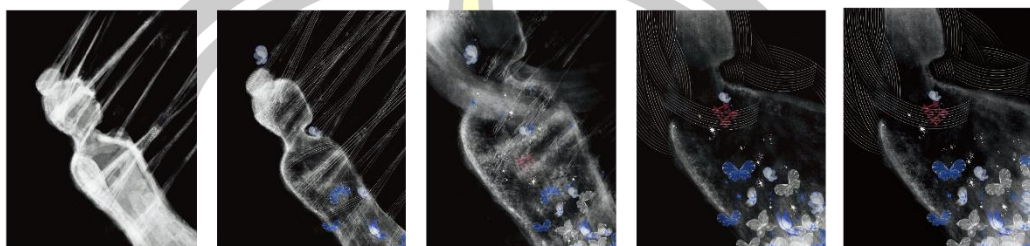
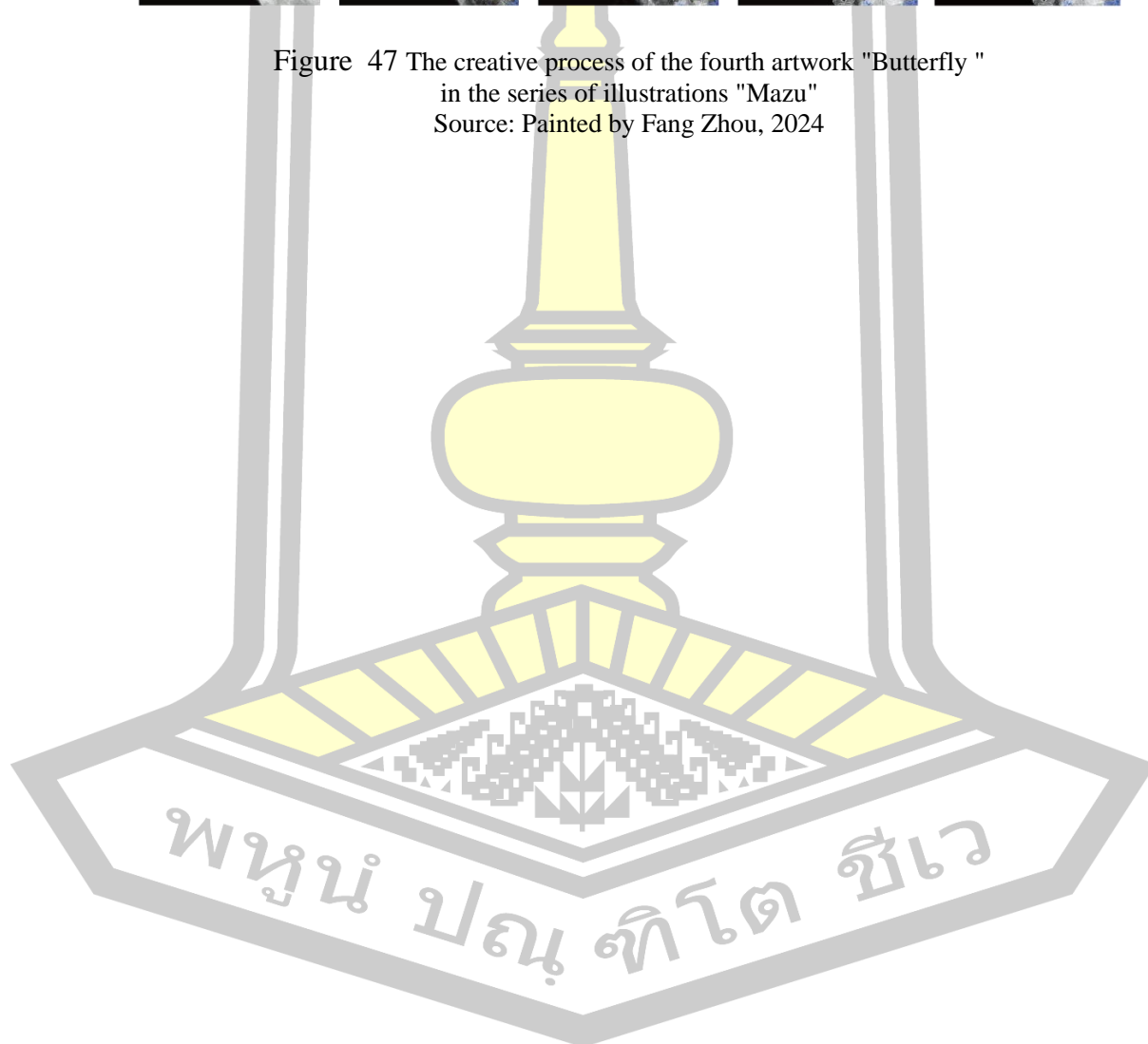


Figure 47 The creative process of the fourth artwork "Butterfly " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.4.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Butterfly "

Work "Butterfly" :Figure 48

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

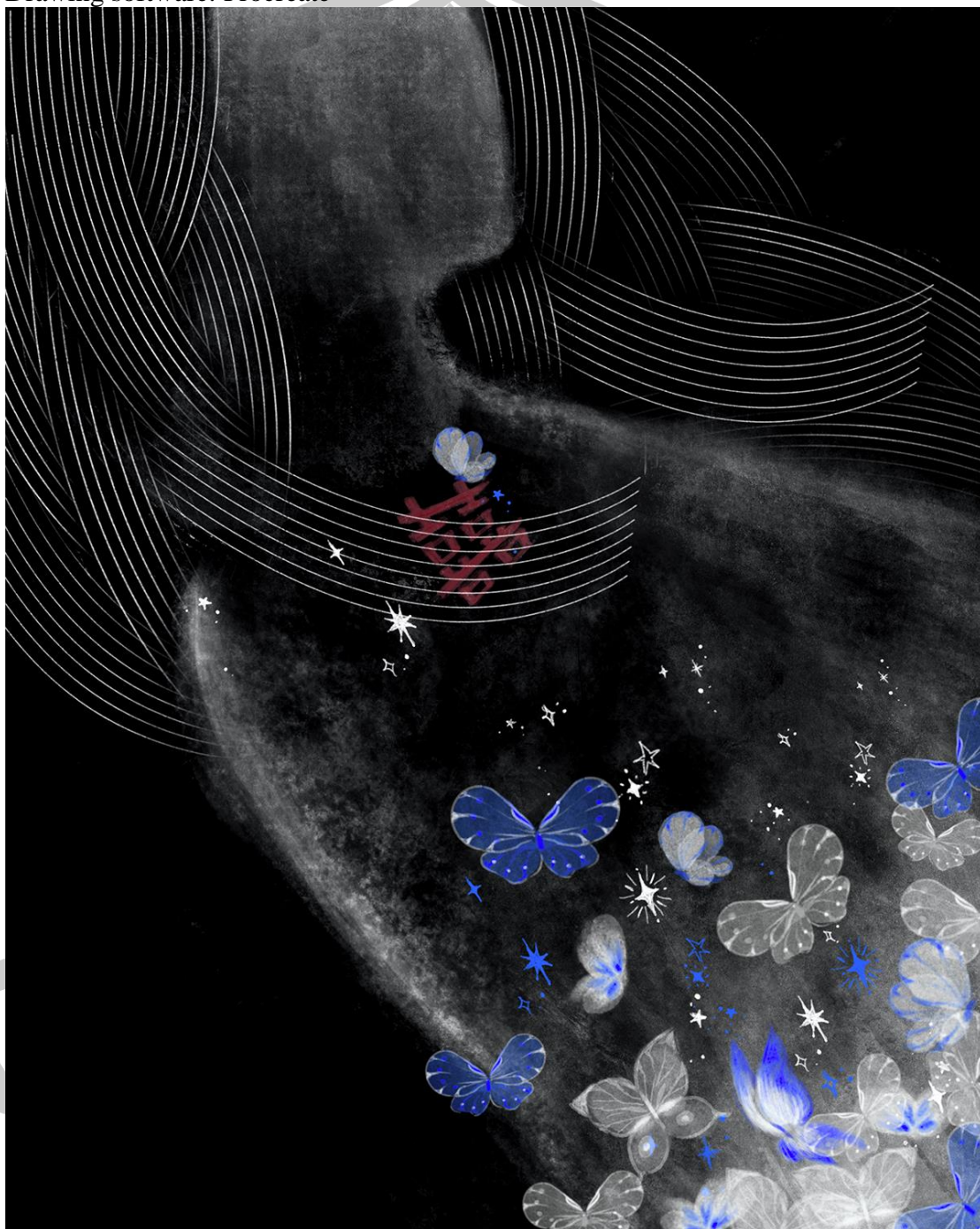


Figure 48 The fourth artwork " Butterfly "in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

## 4.5 Illustration work "Sacrifice"

### 4.5.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Sacrifice"

"Sacrifice" is the fifth illustration in a series of works with Mazu culture as the theme. The work expresses the end of Mazu's life, which is the story of Mazu's salvation and sacrifice. There are many different accounts of Mazu's death, and the mainstream one is that Mazu sacrificed himself to save the sea. This story not only expresses Mazu's quality of saving lives, but also expresses his spirit of moral character, doing good, and loving others throughout his life. This work forms a complete closed loop for the birth of Mazu, depicting his life from beginning to end.

### 4.5.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Sacrifice"

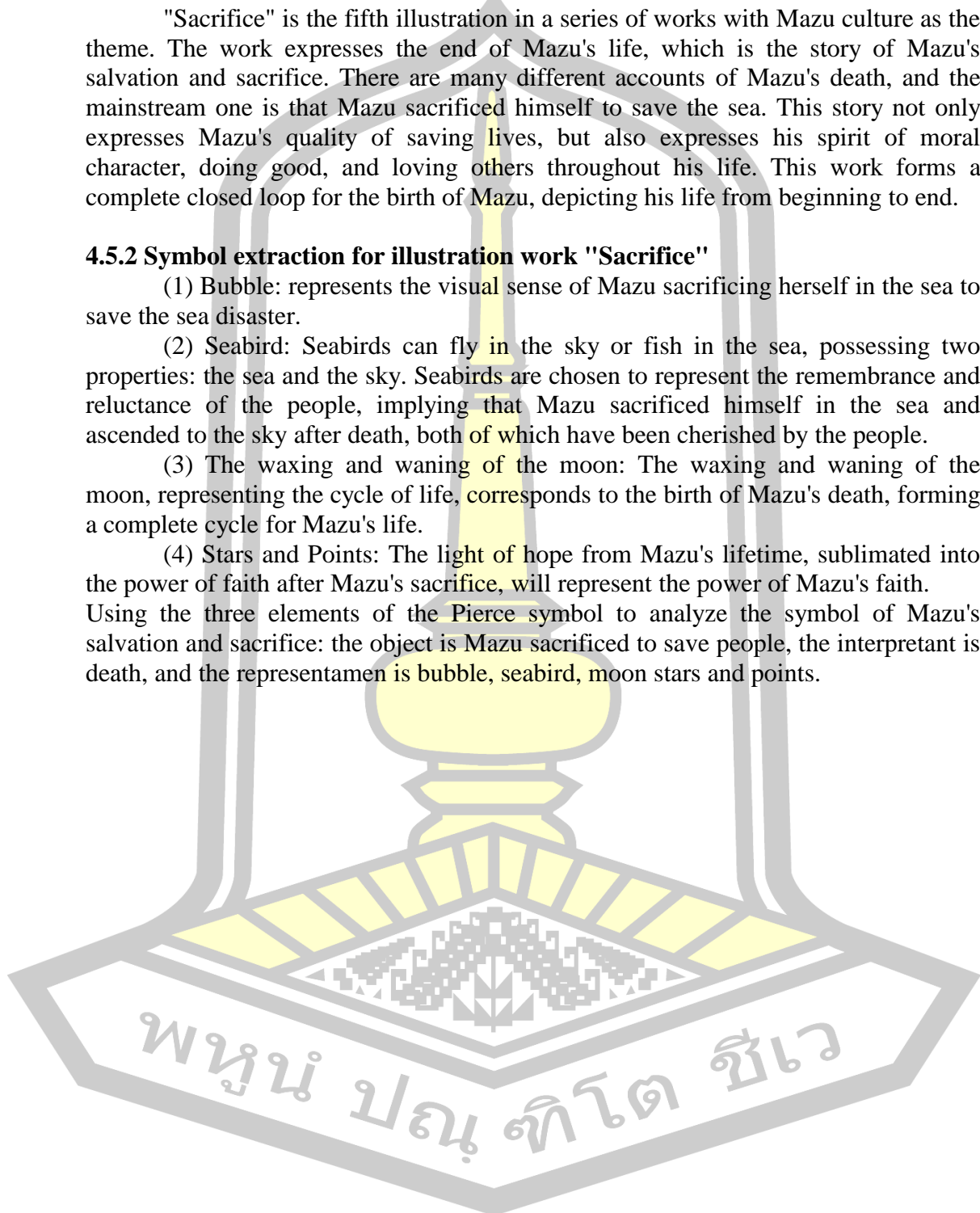
(1) Bubble: represents the visual sense of Mazu sacrificing herself in the sea to save the sea disaster.

(2) Seabird: Seabirds can fly in the sky or fish in the sea, possessing two properties: the sea and the sky. Seabirds are chosen to represent the remembrance and reluctance of the people, implying that Mazu sacrificed himself in the sea and ascended to the sky after death, both of which have been cherished by the people.

(3) The waxing and waning of the moon: The waxing and waning of the moon, representing the cycle of life, corresponds to the birth of Mazu's death, forming a complete cycle for Mazu's life.

(4) Stars and Points: The light of hope from Mazu's lifetime, sublimated into the power of faith after Mazu's sacrifice, will represent the power of Mazu's faith.

Using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's salvation and sacrifice: the object is Mazu sacrificed to save people, the interpretant is death, and the representamen is bubble, seabird, moon stars and points.



Using the three properties of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's salvation and sacrifice: the Firstness is Selfless dedication, Sacrificing oneself, and Sad. The secondness is Mazu sacrificed to save people, and the thirdness is Saving lives, sacrificing oneself, the end of one's life (Table 14).

Table 14 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu Sacrificed to Save People through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Selfless dedication, Sacrificing oneself, Sad	Firstness	Sacrifice	Representamen	Bubble, Seabird, Moon, Stars and Points
Mazu Sacrificed to Save People	Secondness		Interpretant	Death
Saving lives, sacrificing oneself, the end of one's life	Thirdness		Object	Mazu Sacrificed to Save People

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure49).

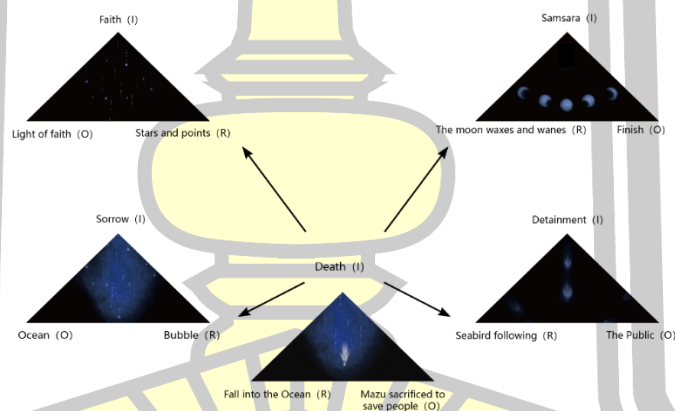


Figure 49 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu Sacrificed to Save People

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work " Sacrifice ",2024

พหุ ประโยชน์ ชั่ว

#### 4.5.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Sacrifice"

To highlight the strength of Mazu's sacrifice as a storm, a black background is used to highlight the danger of the ocean, white is used to depict the sacred nature of Mazu's sacrifice, and a black background is used to express the sadness of the event. The screen uses a symmetrical composition, with characters and seabirds oriented in a concentrated downward direction, expressing the feeling of withering life (Figure 50).

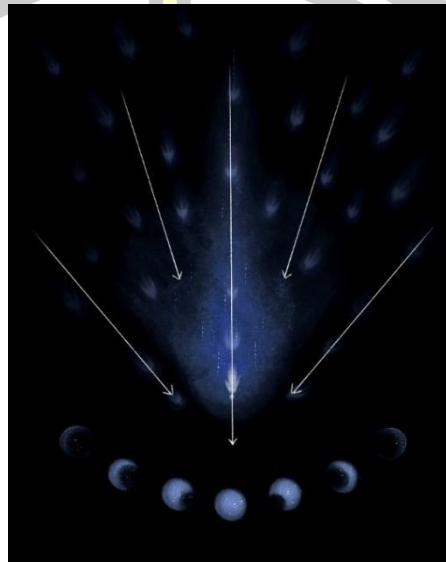


Figure 50 The composition idea of the fifth artwork " Sacrifice "  
in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

The character in the falling state in the picture is Mazu, who falls into the sea and is expressed as saving people and sacrificing themselves in a shipwreck, corresponding to the story of saving people and sacrificing themselves in the sea recorded by Mazu. The numerous seabirds in the picture are the reluctance and retention of Mazu, as well as the spiritual sustenance and pursuit of her by the many people who saved and helped her during her lifetime.



In addition to the use of symmetrical composition techniques in the composition of single works, the first work "Birth" and the fifth work "Sacrifice" were selected from the six works on the birth of Mazu in Chapter 1 for cross work symmetrical composition. The theme of the work corresponds to the choice of life and death propositions, and a hopeful and sorrowful contrast was used in color and visual expression. At the same time, the symbol of the moon representing the cycle of life was used, and this symbol was also designed with symmetrical up and down, making the connotation of the work more convincing and meaningful, making the work more complete (Figure 51).

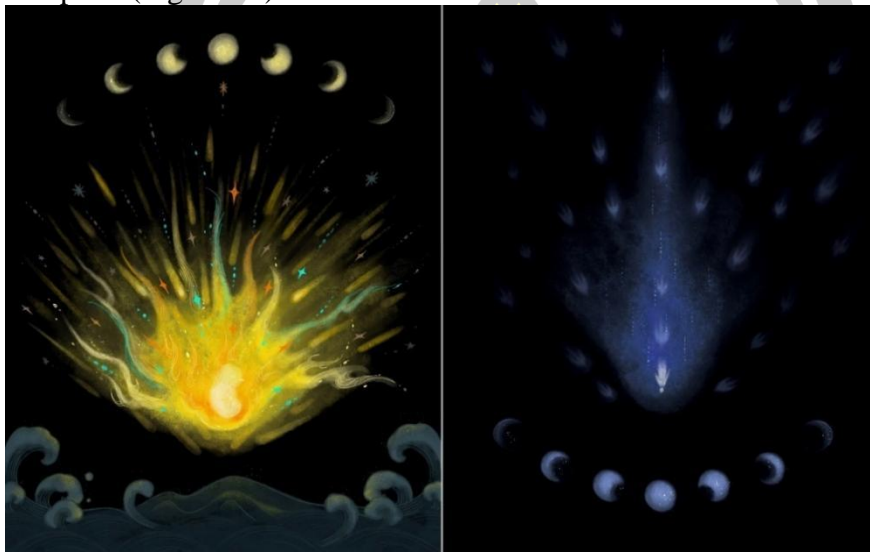


Figure 51 From left to right are the first work "Birth" and the fifth work "Sacrifice"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

#### 4.5.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Sacrifice"

The application of dots, lines, planes, and surfaces is reflected in the use of lighter blue colors with a large area to express the bubbles in the water when falling into the sea. Use a brush with a mottled effect to depict the texture of bubbles. At the bottom of the screen, the moon's ups and downs are depicted in light blue, with white stars added as embellishments. At the beginning of the first work "Birth", the moon here presents a symmetrical effect to express the end of life.

The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in expressing the state of bubbles in the form of dashed lines, while indicating that the direction is downward, to express the downward falling state of Mazu.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in; representing the main character of Mazu and representing the seabirds who follow the people. Mazu, as the main subject of the picture, presents the brightest white, while the seabirds center around Mazu, with the color gradually approaching black from light blue. The lines in the picture are dashed lines, composed of dots, representing the transformation of the power of hope from the power of faith. Mazu evolved from hope during his lifetime to faith that ascended after death (Figure 52) .



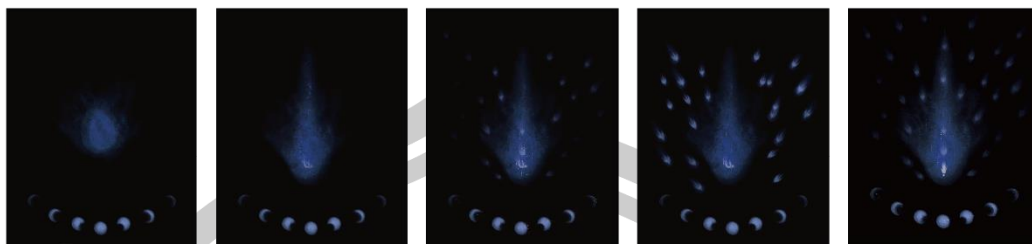


Figure 52 The creative process of the fifth artwork " Sacrifice "  
in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.5.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Sacrifice"

Work "Sacrifice" :Figure 53

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

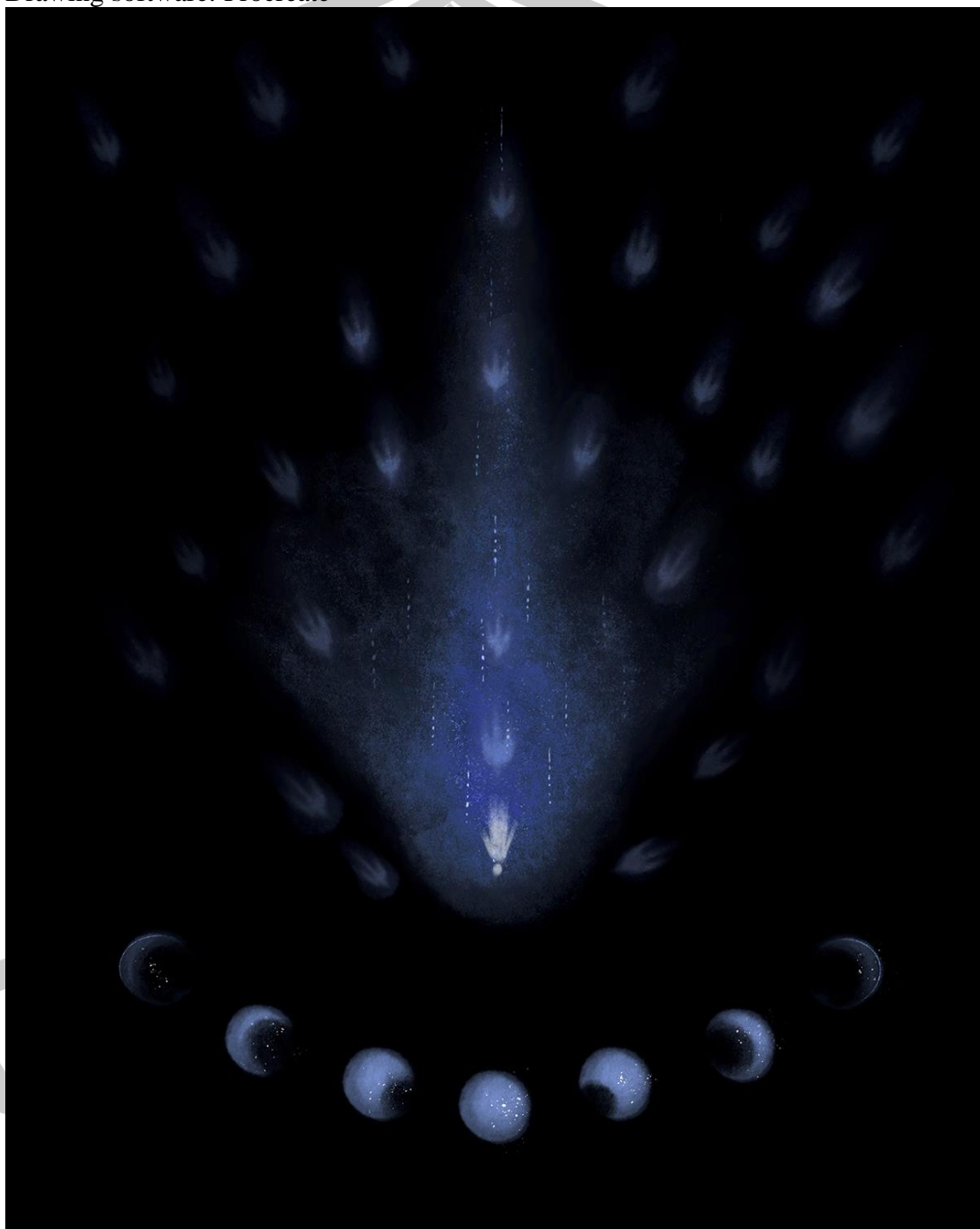


Figure 53 The fifth artwork " Sacrifice "in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

#### 4.6 Illustration and illustration work "Ascension"

##### 4.6.1 The creative idea of the illustration work "Ascension"

"Ascension" is the sixth illustration work in a series with Mazu culture as the theme, and also the last work in the first chapter of the series. The work expresses the story of Mazu ascending after his death. Mazu often saved people from shipwrecks during his lifetime, and he was kind and charitable. Eventually, he sacrificed himself to save others. The people were very reluctant to let Mazu go, believing that he did not die, but rather ascended to become a deity. For this reason, the people built temples to worship Mazu, hoping that after Mazu ascended, they could still bless everyone to go out to sea and return safely, just like before her death. This story reflects the reason why Mazu became a deity and the origin of Mazu's faith.

##### 4.6.2 Symbol extraction for the work "Ascension"

(1) Ascension: After the death of Mazu, he ascended to become a deity, so Mazu Feitian was chosen as the main symbol.

(2) Ocean: Mazu sacrificed himself in the sea to save people, so the ocean is an indispensable symbol chosen in his works.

(3) Sky: Mazu ascended to the sky, so the sky was also selected as an indispensable symbol in his works.

(4) Starry and Points: a concrete representation of the people's faith in Mazu, represented by the symbols of stars and dots.

In summary, the three elements of the Pierce symbol are used to analyze the symbol of Mazu's posthumous ascent: the object is Mazu ascension after sacrifice, the interpretant is ascension, and the representamen is ascension, ocean, sky, stars and points.

Using the three properties of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's ascension after death: the firstness is remembering, blessing, and believing. The secondness is Mazu ascension after sacrifice, and the thirdness is a good beginning and a good ending (Table 15).

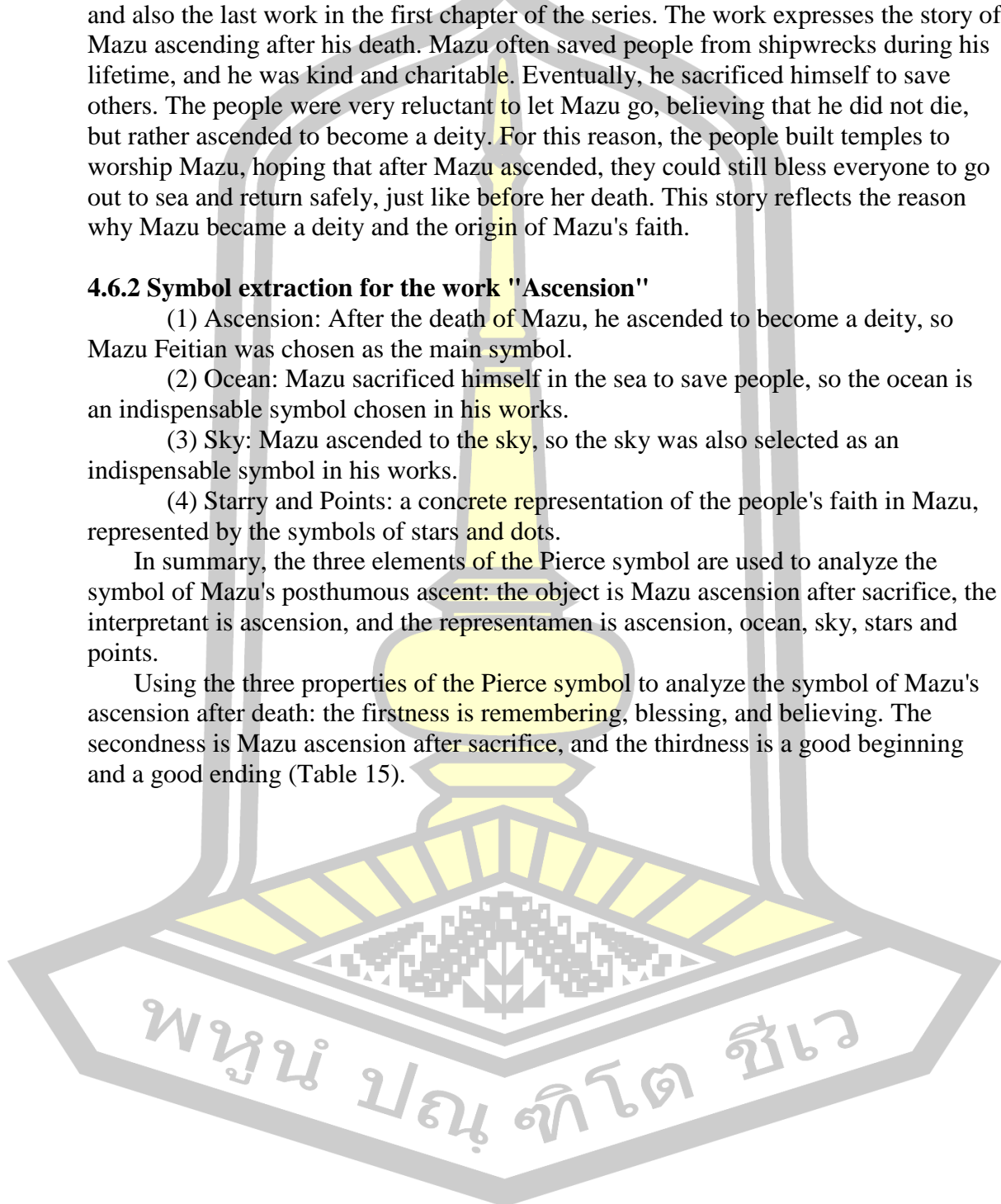


Table 15 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu ascension after sacrifice  
through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Remembering, Blessing,Believing	Firstness	Ascension	Representamen	Ascension, Ocean, Sky, Stars and Points
Mazu ascension after sacrifice	Secondness		Interpretant	Ascension
A good beginning and a good ending	Thirdness		Object	Mazu ascension after sacrifice

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure54).

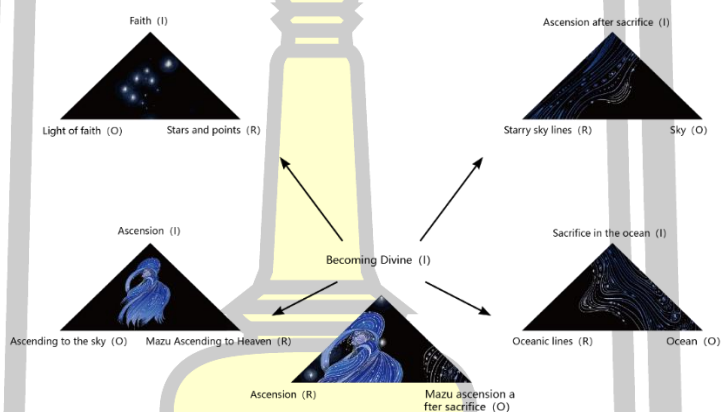


Figure 54 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu  
ascension after sacrifice

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Ascension",2024



#### 4.6.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Ascension "

To display the brightness of lines and dots, use a black background color to express contrast. The screen adopts a face style, as shown in the Figure. The black part of the face is composed of lines representing the ocean and sky, while the white part is empty to symbolize the sky (Figure 55) .

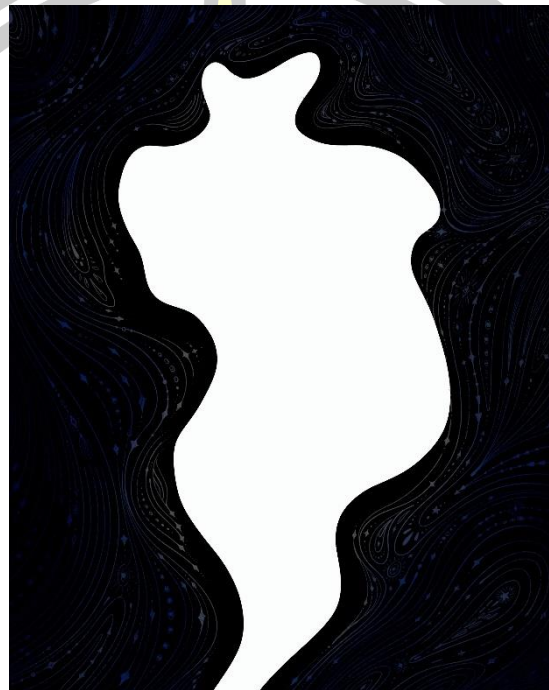


Figure 55 The composition idea of the sixth artwork " Ascension " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

The shape of the white part is similar to the top view map of Meizhou Island, symbolizing Mazu's ascent from Meizhou Island to the sky. The entire painting uses both top view and level view visual angles, and expresses the event of Mazu's ascent from their respective perspectives.

The main body of the screen is the soaring Mazu, with the clothes of the Mazu at this moment and the characteristics of the newly formed deity. Mazu sacrificed himself in the sea and ascended to become a deity, so the elements surrounding Mazu are both the sky and the ocean, to express the state of ascending to heaven and the divine position related to the ocean.

The stars around Mazu in the picture represent the people's reluctance towards Mazu. These energies have transformed from representing the power of hope before Mazu's death to representing the power of faith in Mazu, expressing the people's belief that Mazu will become a deity after his death and continue to bless and protect the people on the island, just as Mazu did before his death.



#### 4.6.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Ascension "

The application of dots, lines, and surfaces is reflected in the use of light colored blocks to express the main character Mazu. Here, Mazu is the only one in the entire series with a groove edge effect, highlighting the combination of life and death and the transformation from human to divine. Except for Mazu, the shape formed by the hollow surface in the middle of the screen is a top-down view of Meizhou Island. The blank surface left out by the hollow is compared with the surface formed by lines, adopting a positive and negative design approach (Figure56).



Figure 56 The creative process of the sixth artwork " Ascension " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

The application of points, lines, planes, and midlines is reflected in the use of undulating lines to express the combination of the sky and the ocean, with both the fluctuation of water and the agility of clouds, corresponding to the state and cause of Mazu's sacrifice for the ocean and ascending to heaven. The lines here use the software's long press and smooth function, as well as the smoothing parameters set by the brush, to make the lines draw more smoothly and smoothly, with a better visual effect. Many stars and dots have been added to the online bar, as well as the line representation of waves and traditional Chinese cloud patterns. The painting method of using dots to form lines is used to enrich the monotonous lines as much as possible, in order to shape the magnificent feeling of Mazu's ascension to heaven.

The application of points, lines, and planes is reflected in the numerous scattered dots, which are more diverse and complex in form, representing the numerous hopes and beliefs of the people.

#### 4.6.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Ascension"

Work "Ascension": Figure 57

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate



Figure 57 The sixth artwork "Ascension" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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## 4.7 Illustration work "Prayer"

### 4.7.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Prayer"

"Prayer" is the seventh illustration in a series of works with Mazu culture as the theme. Starting from this work, it enters the second chapter of the illustration series, which mainly introduces Mazu's ability as a deity. As is well known, responding to the prayers of believers as a deity is the most basic ability, and the same goes for Mazu. After Mazu's death, people worship Mazu and pray to him, with a structure that responds to every request. From then on, the Mazu faith began to spread widely. Responding to prayer is one of the origins of the Mazu faith, so prayer is the main creative subject for the conception and painting of works.

### 4.7.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Prayer"

(1) Believers: As believers in Mazu, we pray for Mazu's help and look forward to Mazu's response.

(2) Hand: A concrete symbol of Mazu's response.

(3) Stars and Points: It is a concrete manifestation of the power of faith, as well as a fusion of the prayers of believers and the responses of Mazu.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's response to prayer: the object is Mazu's response to prayer, the interpretant is prayer, and the representamen is the believers, hand, stars and points.

Analyze the symbols of Mazu's response to prayer based on the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is Praying, Having a response, the econdness is Mazu's response to prayer, and the thirdness is prayer response, energy transmission (Table 16).

Table 16 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu responds to prayers through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Praying, Having a response	Firstness	Prayer	Representamen	Believers, hands, Stars and Points
Mazu responds to prayers	Secondness		Interpretant	Prayer
Prayer response, energy transmission	Thirdness		Object	Mazu responds to prayers

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024



Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure58).

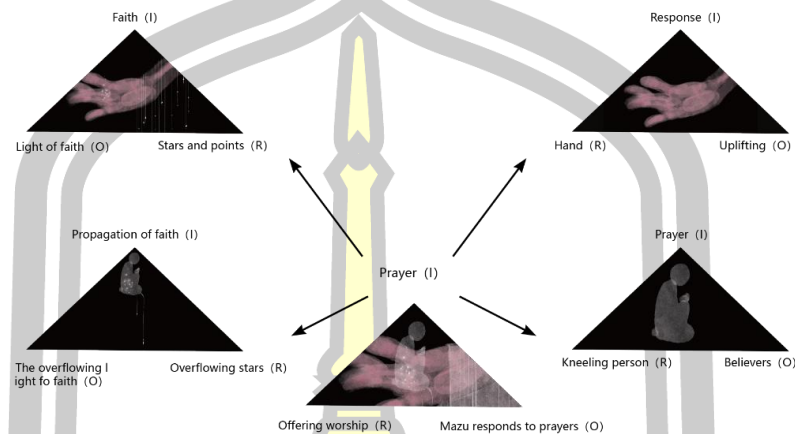


Figure 58 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu responds to prayers

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Prayer", 2024

#### 4.7.3 The visual expression of the work "Prayer"

To highlight the transparency effect of the main element, a black background color is used for contrast expression. The main body of the screen is Mazu's hand holding up the believers, expressing their prayers to Mazu, and Mazu responds to the prayers of the believers. Mazu's hands appear transparent, with visible bones, expressing the essence and sanctity of Mazu's great love for believers as a deity.

The stars on Mazu's clothes represent her spirit and energy, which are transmitted to the believers, so the believers also have stars and energy in their bodies. The sense of energy lines downwards expresses the direction of transmission guidance, while Mazu's gesture upwards expresses the meaning of lifting believers upwards, with the meaning of redemption, rescue, and salvation. The stars overflowing from the believers' bodies represent the spirit and energy of Mazu, which not only responds to the believers but also influences them, becoming a part of her spiritual dissemination (Figure 59).



Figure 59 The composition idea of the seventh artwork "Prayer" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

#### 4.7.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Prayer"

The application of dots, lines, and surfaces is reflected in using light colored blocks to express the hands of the main character Mazu, and using different transparent layers to express the transparency of Mazu's hands. Use large areas of light beige color blocks to depict the effect of Mazu's sleeves. In order to make the clothes appear transparent and better reflect the lines and star decorations on them, the sleeve layer has been semi transparent.

The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in connecting star points with lines, expressing causal relationships and energy transfer relationships. The directionality of the lines reflects the significance and function of the downward transmission of the power of faith, and at the same time, the lines that flow out of the body of believers also symbolize the inheritance and transmission of culture and faith.



The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the scattered dots at the end of each line, expressing the power of Mazu's faith (Figure 60).

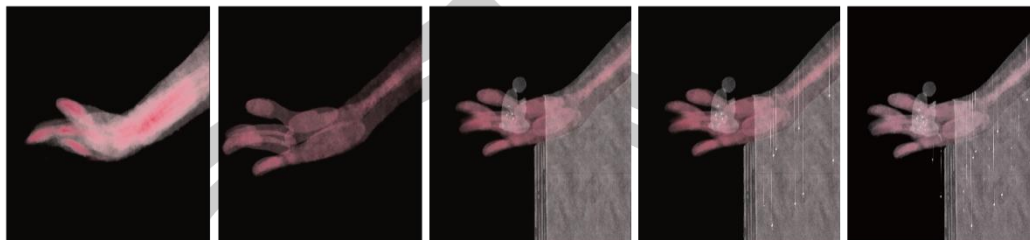


Figure 60 The creative process of the seventh artwork "Prayer " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.7.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Prayer"

Work "Prayer " :Figure 61

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

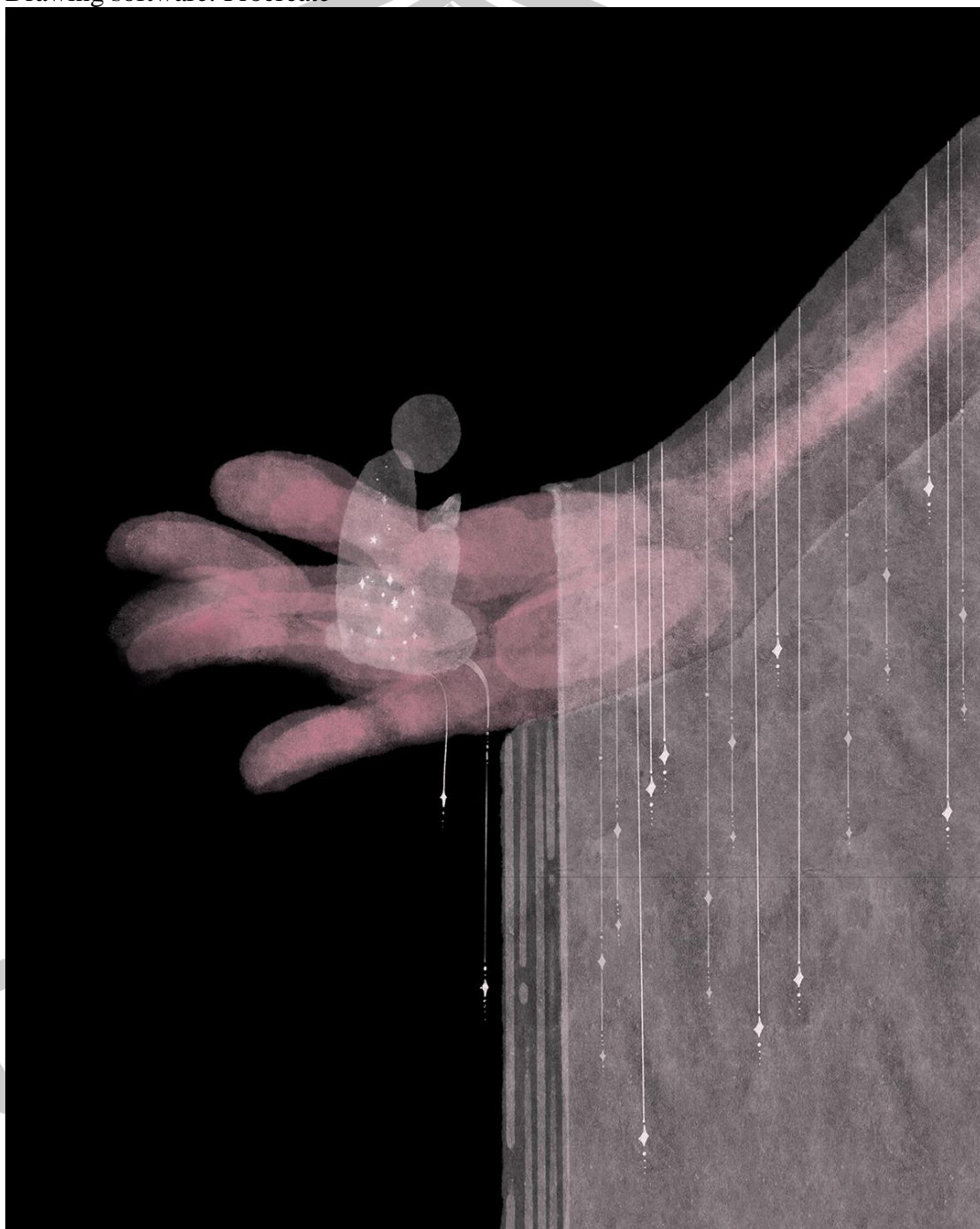


Figure 61 The seventh artwork " Prayer " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

#### 4.8 Illustration work "Redemption"

##### 4.8.1 The creative idea of the illustration work "Redemption"

"Redemption", as the eighth illustration in a series with Mazu culture as the theme, mainly expresses Mazu's response and help, and the role of redemption for believers. This redemption is not only reflected in specific things, but also in the soul and spirit, and is a redemption for people from the inside out.

##### 4.8.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Redemption"

(1) Mazu: Appearing as a divine entity in works.

(2) The Road of Light: represents the power of faith and the process of redemption.

(3) White Soul Fire: It is the concretization of the prayers of believers, and also represents the concretization of their souls and spirits.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's redemption of the people: the object is Mazu's redemption of the people, the Interpretant is redemption, and the representamen is Mazu, road of light, white soul fire.

Analyze the symbols of Mazu's redemption of the people through the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the first property is guided, blessed, and redeemed. The second nature is the event of Mazu redeeming the people, and the third nature is prayer response and energy transmission (Table 17).

Table 17 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu Redemption of the People through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Guided, blessed, Redeemed	Firstness	Redemption	Representamen	Mazu, Road of Light, White Soul Fire,
Mazu Redemption of the People	Secondness		Interpretant	Redemption
Redemption of the soul	Thirdness		Object	Mazu Redemption of the People

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure62).

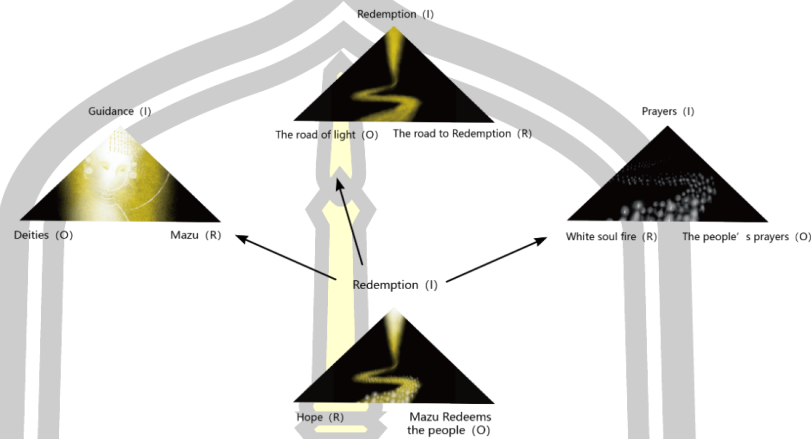


Figure 62 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu Redemption of the People

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Redemption", 2024

#### 4.8.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Redemption"

To highlight the shining effect of the main path of light, a black background is used to express contrast, and the world of light and the world of darkness are cut and contrasted as two sides. In order to reflect the positive and upward visual expression of guidance and redemption, the winding road in the picture converges into the world of light at the end, and the direction of the lines is guided to make the overall work look more in line with the researcher's expression (Figure 63).

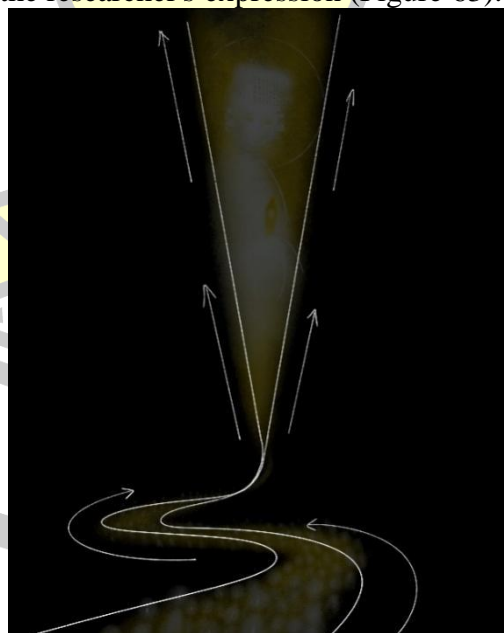


Figure 63 The composition idea of the eighth artwork "Redemption" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

The work expresses Mazu's ability to redeem the soul and guide the soul's return in her functions. Souls follow the path paved for them by the golden deities, heading towards the beautiful world guided by Mazu. Mazu leads their souls to redemption, and gold represents the supreme glory of redemption. The image of Mazu in the picture is based on the Mazu stone carving in the ancestral temple on Meizhou Island (Figure 64).



Figure 64 The Mazu Stone Statue of Meizhou Island Ancestral Temple

Source: Data from Data on China Baidu Pictures Website, (2024)

Retrieved from <http://fj.sina.com.cn/news/2022-01-16/detail-ikyakumy0656012.shtml>

#### 4.8.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Redemption"

The application of dots, lines, and surfaces is reflected in the use of mottled texture brushes to lay out the contours of roads and main structures on a large area. By using the method of copying layers for quick stacking, and finally refining the edges, the road and light world are drawn. Use a large area of white to outline Mazu, soften the edges, and better integrate Mazu into the picture.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the use of a brush with a high degree of edge feathering to draw the soul in the form of dots. The fire of the soul is a white flame, and these dots will also be drawn as flames with flame halos. The numerous scattered fire of the soul is one of the sources of Mazu's faith (Figure65).



Figure 65 The creative process of the eighth artwork "Redemption" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.8.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Redemption"

Work "Redemption " :Figure 66

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

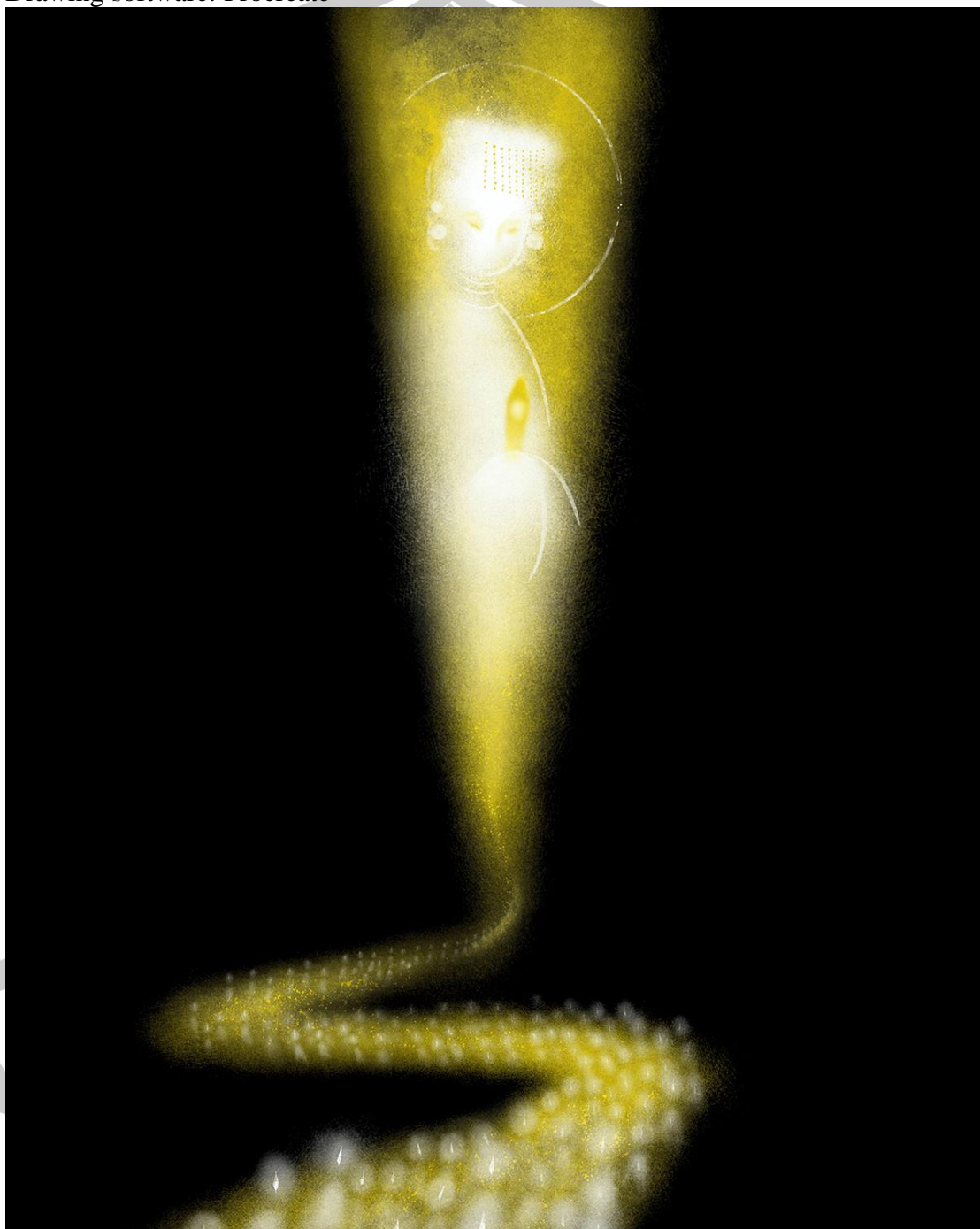


Figure 66 The eighth artwork "Redemption" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

## 4.9 Illustration work "Return"

### 4.9.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Return"

"Return" is the ninth illustration in a series with Mazu culture as the theme. Mazu saved many shipwrecks during her lifetime and helped the people and merchants safely return to land. Mazu sacrificed herself in rescuing a shipwreck, and the people believed that Mazu could ascend after her death. Mazu was able to bless the safe return of ships, just like she did before her death. This was the most popular function of Mazu in the beginning and among the people. From the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, blessing the safe return to sea was one of Mazu's main abilities. In the later stage, Mazu's functional changes not only blessed the safety of going out to sea, but also added the ability to lead people and souls lost at sea back to land and their hometowns.

### 4.9.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Return"

(1) Hand: The hand has the symbolic characteristics of guidance and guidance, representing the guidance and guidance of Mazu.

(2) Firelight: Mazu often appears in the image of a sea deity holding a lantern, which symbolizes hope and guides the direction of return. In ancient times, the lighting was mostly the candlelight of candles, so the candlelight of candles was extracted as a symbolic symbol.

(3) Start and Points: symbols representing the power of faith.

(4) Jellyfish: Mazu's protection and safe return are like protective umbrellas. The first element that can be associated with umbrellas in the sea is jellyfish, and jellyfish are soft, giving people a gentle feeling just like the protection of deity s.

(5) Jellyfish tentacles: The various small symbols on the tentacles of jellyfish can be used to express various prayers and ships, following the main body of jellyfish symbolizing the protection of Mazu, and returning safely together.

(6) Soul: It is rumored that those who die at sea will lose their souls in the sea and find no way home. As a traditional Chinese sea deity, Mazu will lead those who are lost in the sea deity and their souls back home.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's blessing for safe return from sea: the object is Mazu bless safe return from the sea, the Interpretant is safe return, and the representamen is hand, jellyfish, jellyfish tentacles, firelight, soul, stars and point.

Using the three properties of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's blessing for a safe return from the sea: the first property is guiding, blessing, and redeeming. The second nature is the event of Mazu blessing her safe return from the sea, and the third nature is to bless her safety and guide her return (Table 18).

Table 18 The creative process of the eighth artwork "Redemption" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Guided, Blessed, Redeemed	Firstness	Safe Return	Representamen	Hand, Jellyfish, Jellyfish Tentacles, Firelight, Soul, Stars and Points
Mazu bless safe return from the sea	Secondness		Interpretant	Safe Return
Bless peace and guide your return	Thirdness		Object	Mazu bless safe return from the sea

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure 67).

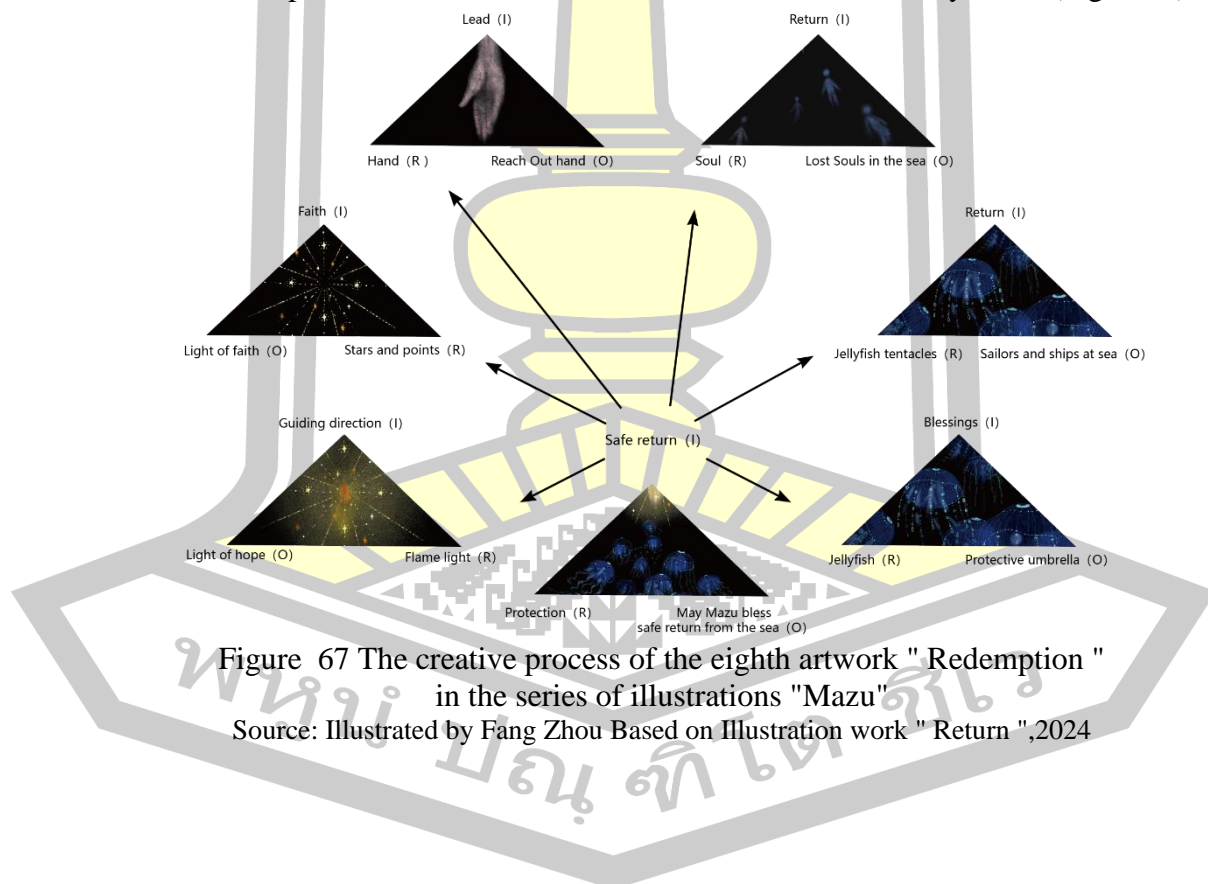


Figure 67 The creative process of the eighth artwork "Redemption" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Return", 2024

#### 4.9.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Return"

To highlight the luminous effect of the main jellyfish and soul, a black background is used to express contrast and contrast. In the picture, jellyfish spiral their way towards the light source in a dotted and linear manner. The perspective of jellyfish is drawn in a near big far small way, giving people a visual sense of converging from themselves to the distant light source (Figure 68).

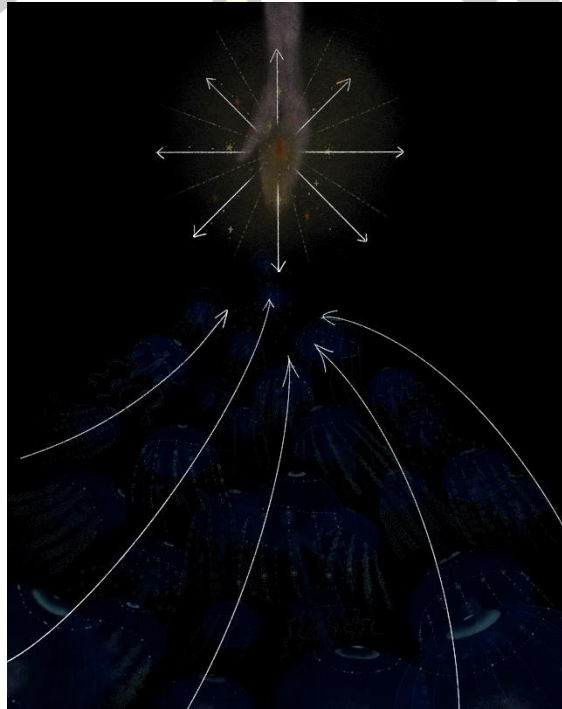


Figure 68 The composition idea of the ninth artwork "Return" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

The hands in the picture represent Mazu's guidance, expressing Mazu's ability as a sea deity to lead people on the sea back home safely. It is rumored that Mazu would hold a lamp to guide the crowd while rescuing people at sea, so a firelight was drawn to represent this scene. The jellyfish in the picture represent the protection of the deity s, while the wrapped souls represent the people and souls waiting to return home. The tentacles of jellyfish in the picture represent ships and personnel going out to sea, and they also follow Mazu. With Mazu's blessings and guidance, they can return safely and smoothly.

#### 4.9.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Return"

The application of dots, lines, and surfaces is reflected in: drawing the glowing effect of Mazu's hands and flames with color blocks, drawing the outline of jellyfish with light blue color blocks, and laying the outline of the soul with white color blocks. The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in drawing flames and luminous effects in the form of lines, and depicting the contours and luminous effects of jellyfish in the form of lines.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the numerous scattered dots surrounding the light source, combined with divergent lines, presenting a magnificent effect and expressing the power of Mazu's faith (Figure 69).



Figure 69 The creative process of the ninth artwork "Return" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.9.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Return"

Work "Return" :Figure 70

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

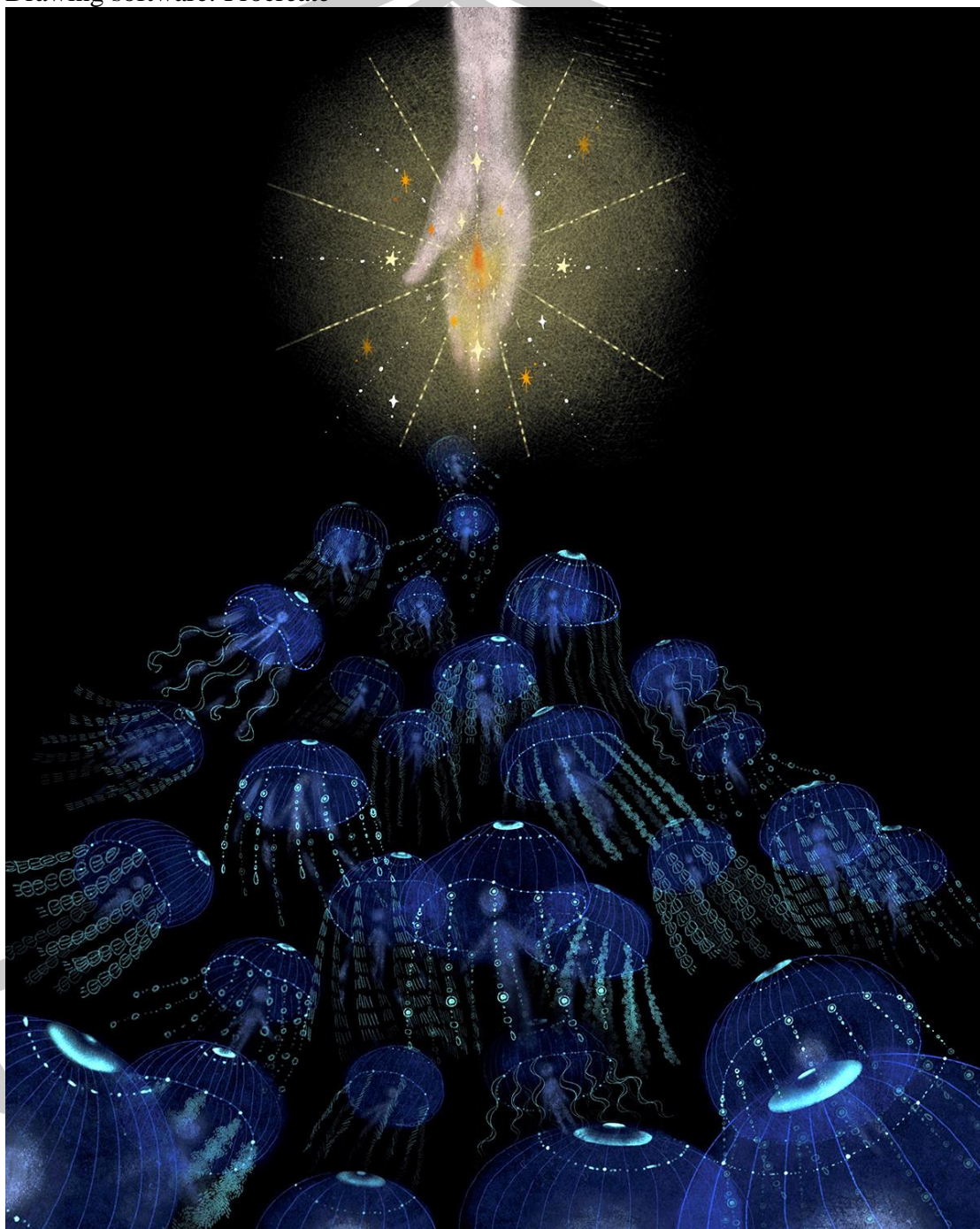


Figure 70 The ninth artwork "Return" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

#### **4.10 Illustration work " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears"**

##### **4.10.1 The creative idea of the illustration work " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears"**

" Clairvoyance and Sharp ears " is the tenth illustration work in a series with Mazu culture as the theme. Mazu, as a deity, has many subordinates, mostly shrimp soldiers and crab generals. Mazu is not fighting alone, but the two most powerful and well-known subordinates of Mazu are Qianliyan and Shunfeng'er. Qianliyan and Shunfeng'er were two monsters that appeared on Taohua Mountain in the northwest of Meizhou Island in the seventh year of the Taiping Xingguo reign of the Song Dynasty (982 AD). They had a fierce appearance, eyes like copper bells, teeth like short swords, tall stature, sound like a giant bell, come and go in the wind, and go like lightning. Due to the harm caused by two monsters to the people, he was defeated and subdued by Mazu, and later became a powerful subordinate of Mazu. It is rumored that the Thousand Mile Eye can see things thousands of miles away, and the Wind Ear can hear sounds coming with the wind. These abilities help Mazu better protect the people.

##### **4.10.2 Symbol extraction for the illustration work " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears "**

(1) Eye: A thousand mile eye can see things thousands of miles away, and its representative symbol is the eye.

(2) Ears: The following ear can hear sounds coming with the wind, and its representative symbol is the ear.

(3) Neuron cells: Neuron cells are important cells for transmitting information in the human body. If the eyes and ears of Mazu are the eyes and ears of Mazu, they convey various information to Mazu, so their ability is expressed through neuron cells.

(4) Sea urchin shell: Many of Mazu's subordinates were concentrated on the sea, so in order to express that Mazu used his subordinates in the ocean, he chose sea urchins with marine elements. Sea urchins themselves carry thorns and have strong toxicity, symbolizing that these subordinates have strong abilities. They all restrained their thorns around Mazu and were willing to use them. Therefore, the symbol used here is the sea urchin shell symbol without thorns.

(5) Stars and Points: symbols of the power of faith and divine abilities.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbols of Mazu's subordinates: the object is Mazu's subordinates, the interpretant is subordinates, and the representamen are eyes, ears, neuronal cells, sea urchin shells, stars and points .

Analyze the symbols of Mazu's subordinates using the three properties of Pierce symbols: the first property is that they are capable. The second property is the fact that Mazu's subordinates, and the third property is the control of the ocean (Table 19).

Table 19 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu's subordinates through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Capable	Firstness	Clairvoyance and Sharp ears	Representamen	Eyes, Ears, Neuronal Cells, Sea Urchin Shell, Stars and Points
Mazu's subordinates	Secondness		Interpretant	Subordinates
Control the ocean	Thirdness		Object	Mazu's subordinates

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure71).

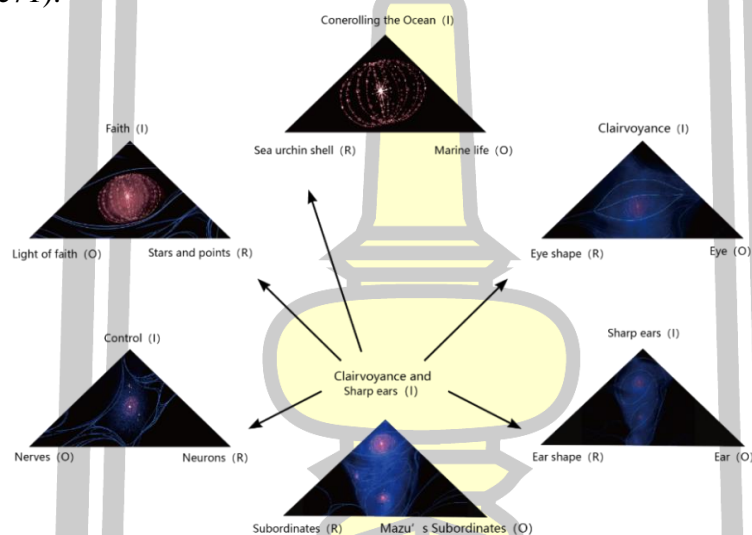


Figure 71 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu's subordinates

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Clairvoyance and Sharp ears",2024



#### 4.10.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Clairvoyance and Sharp ears "

To highlight the luminescent effect of the main neuron cells and sea urchins, a black background is used for contrasting expression. Using the design concept of combination, Qianli Eye and Shunfeng Ear are both the most powerful subordinates of Mazu. Their characteristics are eyes and ears, so the eyes are combined to form the shape of one ear by combining the patterns of multiple eyes (Figure 72).

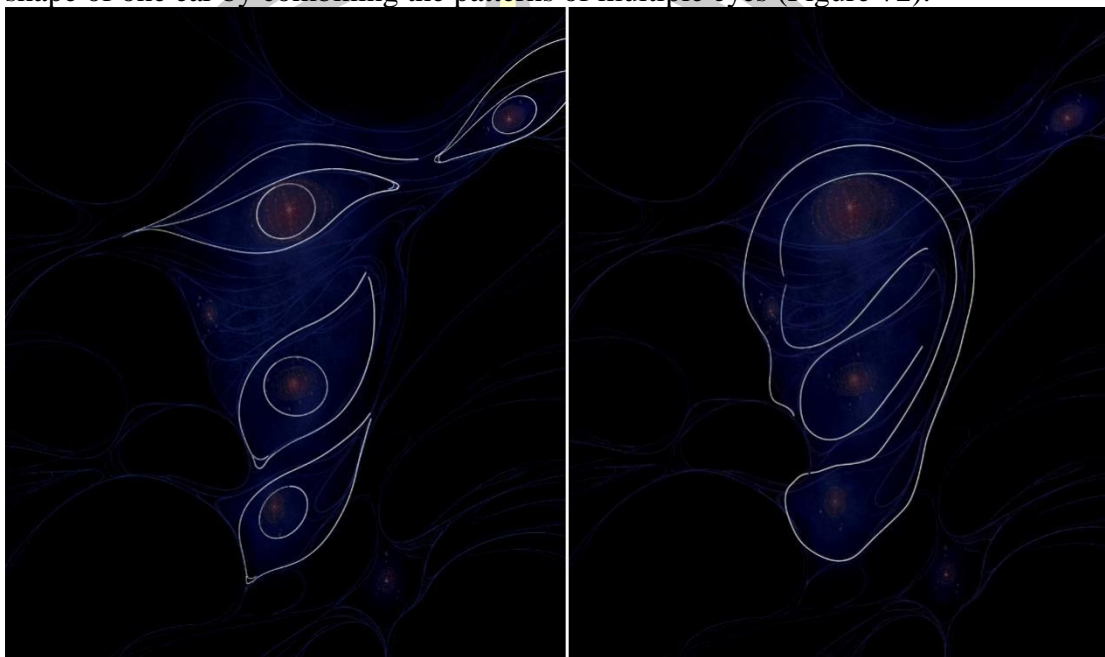


Figure 72 The composition idea of the tenth artwork " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

The eyes and ears in the picture are composed of neuron cell structures (Figure73) as the basic structure. The eyeball of the eye is the inner shell shape of the marine organism sea urchin, with stars representing the spirit of Mazu, representing being subdued and influenced by Mazu. Multiple eyes form the shape of an ear, representing a tailwind ear. Neuron cells are connected to the brain and control the whole body, so the use of neuron cell structure here is to express that Mazu controls two subordinates.





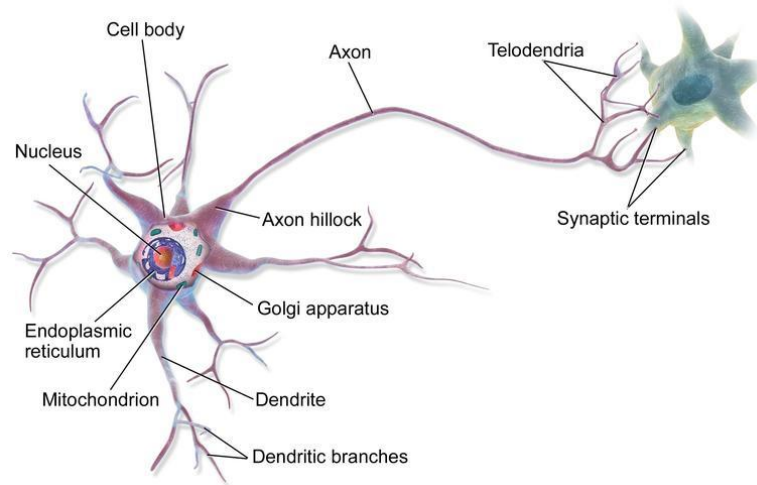


Figure 73 Neuron cell structure diagram

Source: Data from Data on China Baidu Pictures Website, (2024)

Retrieved from [https://pica.zhimg.com/v2-b690a9b8b826995c1f851c80f194570c\\_r.jpg?source=2c26e567](https://pica.zhimg.com/v2-b690a9b8b826995c1f851c80f194570c_r.jpg?source=2c26e567)

#### 4.10.4 The creative process of the illustration work " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears "

The application of dots, lines, and planes is reflected in the use of blue blocks to lay a rough outline of the main body, that is, the distribution of ears and eyes.

The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in drawing neuron cells in the form of lines, first drawing the shape of the eyes in the form of neuron cells, and multiple eyes forming the shape of the ears.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the numerous scattered dots, expressing the power of Mazu's faith. The pink dots form the shape of sea urchins (Figure74) .

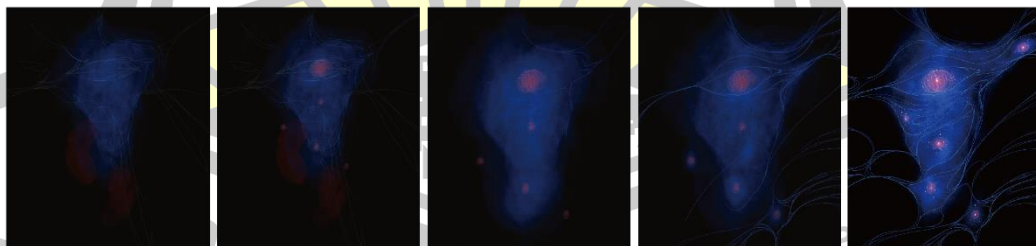


Figure 74 The creative process of the tenth artwork " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.10.5 The complete effect display of the work " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears "

Work "Clairvoyance and Sharp ears" :Figure 75

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

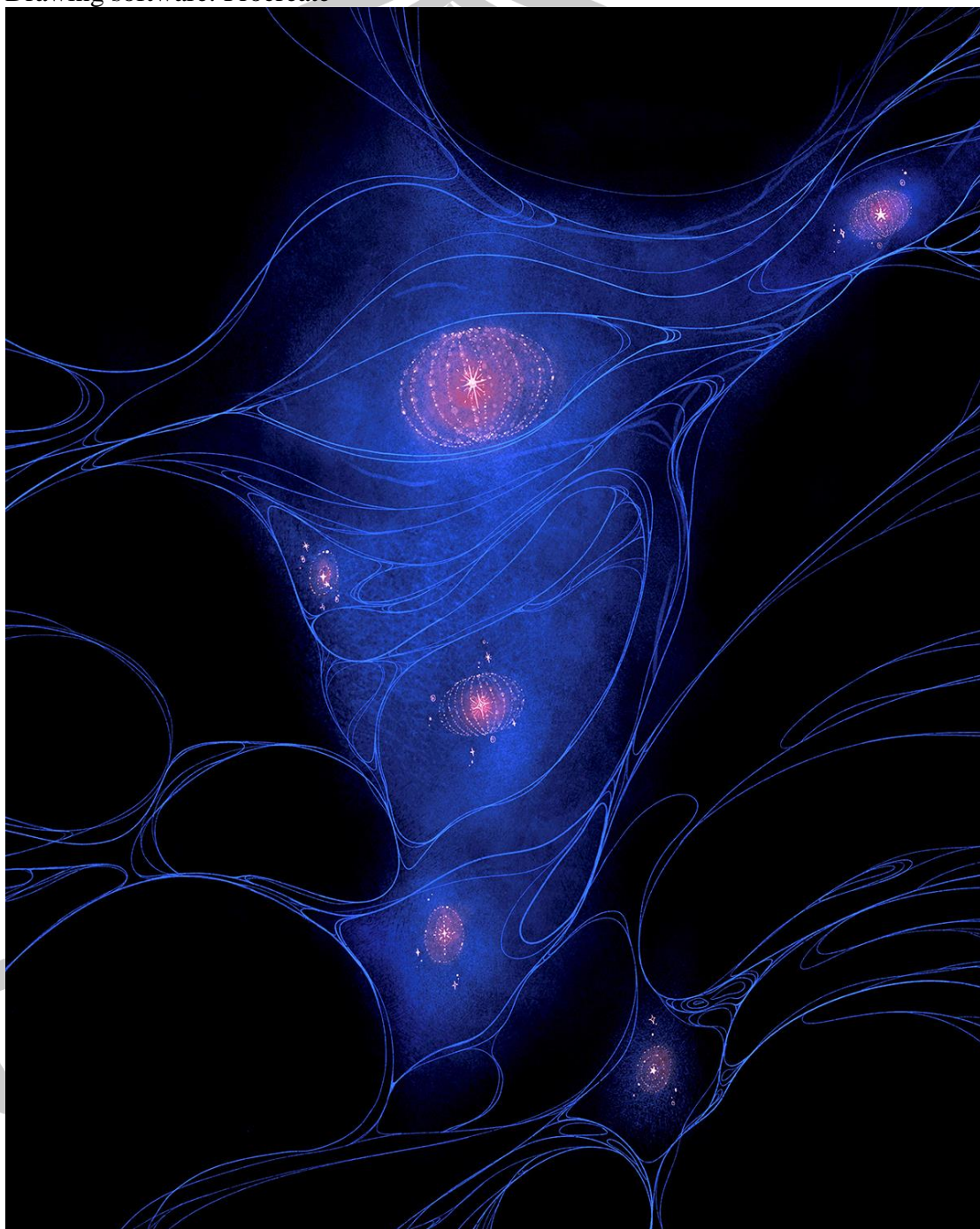


Figure 75 The tenth artwork " Clairvoyance and Sharp ears "

in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

#### 4.11 Illustration work "Seeking Children "

##### 4.11.1 The creative idea of the illustration work "Seeking Children "

" Seeking Childend " is the eleventh illustration work in a series with Mazu culture as the theme. In traditional Chinese culture, bloodline inheritance is a very important part. As the saying goes, unfilial piety has three consequences, and having no offspring is the greatest. In ancient China, there was an extraordinary obsession with having children. As a sea deity, Mazu also has the ability to give birth and bestow upon mothers who wish to have children. Even today, Mazu remains one of the top choices for many mothers who wish to have children to worship the deity.

##### 4.11.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work " Seeking Children "

- (1) Baby: The birth form of human children.
- (2) Womb: The organ used by humans to conceive children.
- (3) Platelets: The continuation of blood vessels is easily associated with blood, and blood is composed of platelets, so platelets are chosen as symbols representing the continuation of blood vessels.
- (4) Hand: Using the posture of holding hands to express giving and receiving, as well as expressing love and prayer held in the palm of the hand.
- (5) Stars and Points: symbols that symbolize the power of faith and the concretization of hope.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu giving birth: the object is Mazu bestows Children, the interpretant is seeking children, and the representamen is womb, platelets, baby, hand, stars and points.

Analyze the symbol of Mazu giving birth based on the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is continuity and vitality. The secondness is Mazu bestows children, and the thirdness is the birth of life, inheritance of bloodline (Table20).

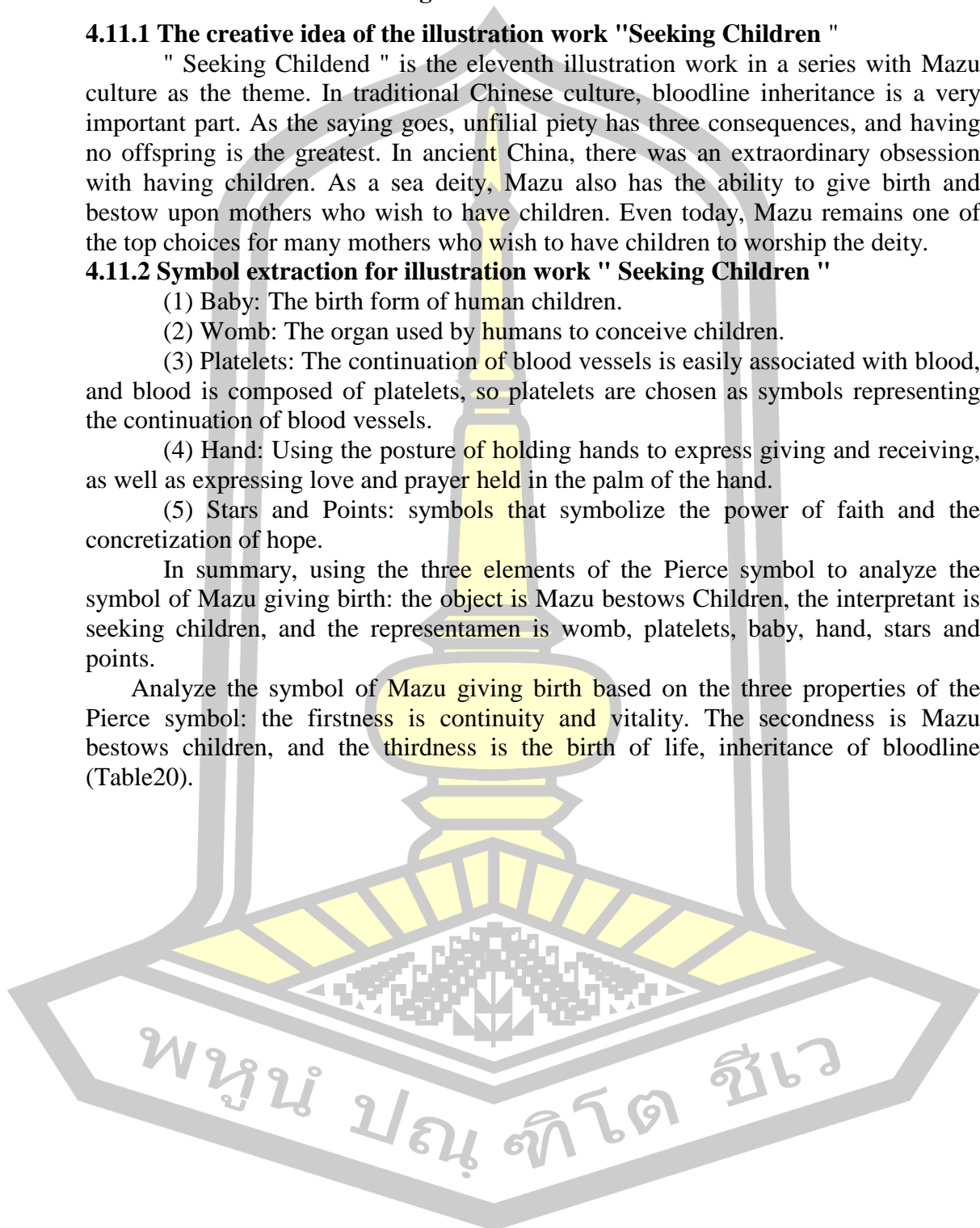


Table 20 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu bestows Children through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Continuous, Vibrant	Firstness	Seeking Children	Representamen	Womb, Platelets, Baby, Hand, Stars and Points
<b>Mazu bestows Children</b>	Secondness		Interpretant	Seeking Children
The Birth of Life, Inheritance of Bloodline	Thirdness		Object	<b>Mazu Bestows Children</b>

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure76).

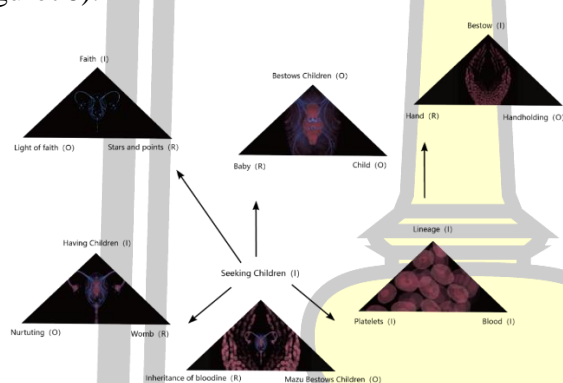


Figure 76 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu Bestows Children

1Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work " Seeking Children ",2024



#### 4.11.3 The visual expression of the illustration work " Seeking Children "

To highlight the luminescent effect of platelets, a black background is used for contrast expression. Using a symmetrical composition combined with the shape of the hand, the composition of the hand lines presents an upward sense of direction, giving people a hopeful and positive feeling (Figure 77).

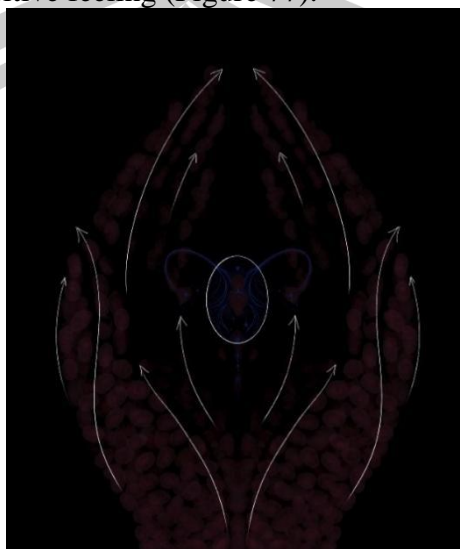


Figure 77 The composition idea of the eleventh artwork " Seeking Children " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

Mazu possesses the ability to bestow children, and the hands depicted in the picture represent both the image of Mazu bestowing upon believers the desired child and the image of parents receiving the child bestowed upon them by deity. The hand is composed of platelets (Figure 78), which represent the blood vessels and also represent the expectations of countless people for the inheritance of blood vessels. Holding a newborn in his hand, wrapped in the uterus, surrounded by stars representing Mazu's divinity and spirit, expressing Mazu's beautiful blessings for the newborn.

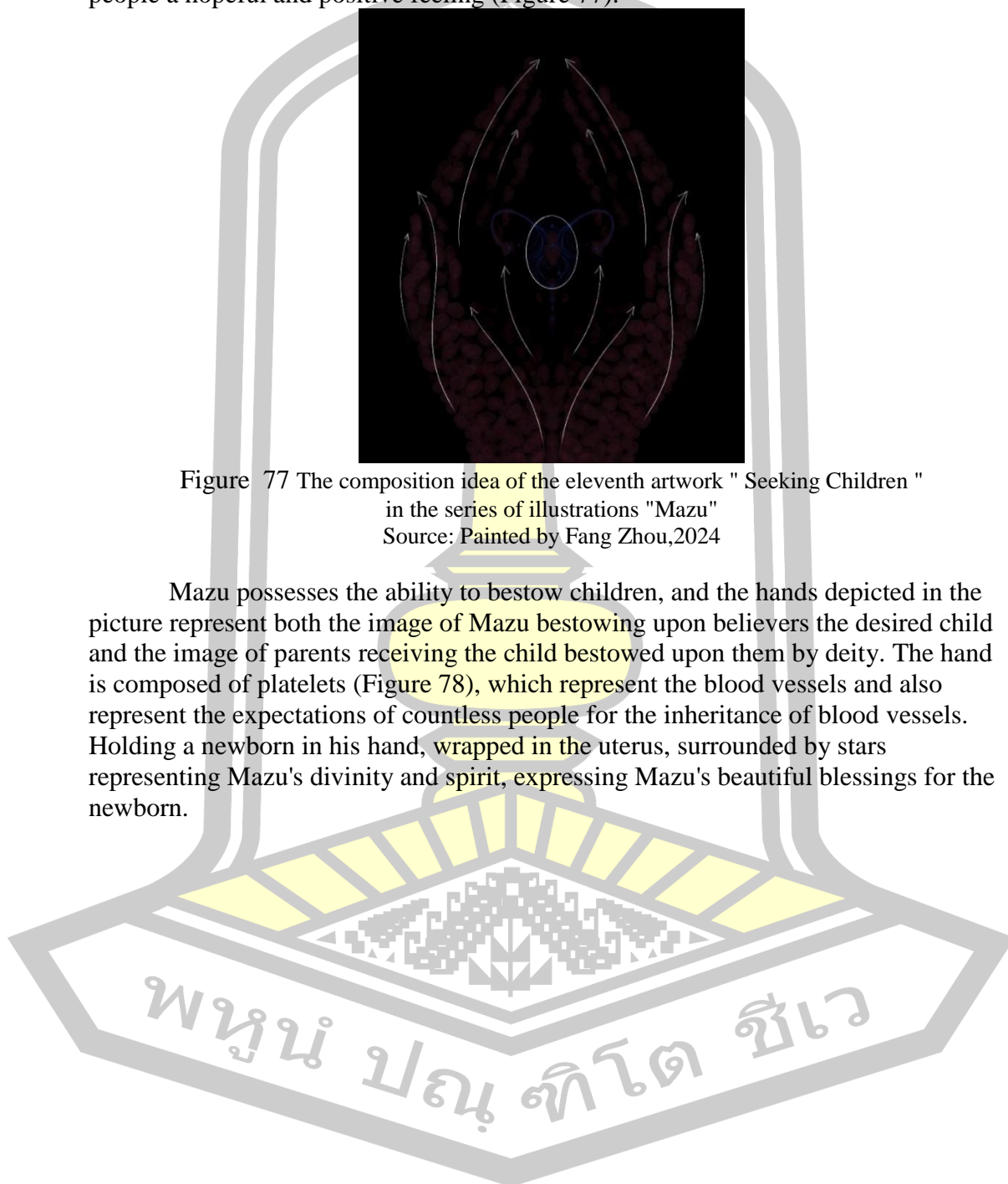




Figure 78 Platelet Image

Source: Data from Data on China Baidu Pictures Website, 2024

Retrieved from :

[https://www.cdsm.cn/gallery/media/mkjx/bktmhdjsj\\_3679/202207/W020220708484993740042.jpg](https://www.cdsm.cn/gallery/media/mkjx/bktmhdjsj_3679/202207/W020220708484993740042.jpg)

#### 4.11.4 The creative process of the illustration work " Seeking Children "

The application of dots, lines, and planes is reflected in the rough shape of hands and babies laid out in red. To achieve a transparent effect of flesh and blood, the layer is semi transparent. Use platelets to construct planes and express the morphology of the head in a planar manner.

The application of points, lines, planes, and midlines is reflected in the use of lines to outline the shape and details of the uterus. Add luminous effects to highlight the sacred feeling.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the use of many blood cell points to piece together the shape of one hand, in order to express the significance of bloodline inheritance. Add dotted elements of stars to the lines representing the uterus, representing the hope and children brought by Mazu (Figure79).

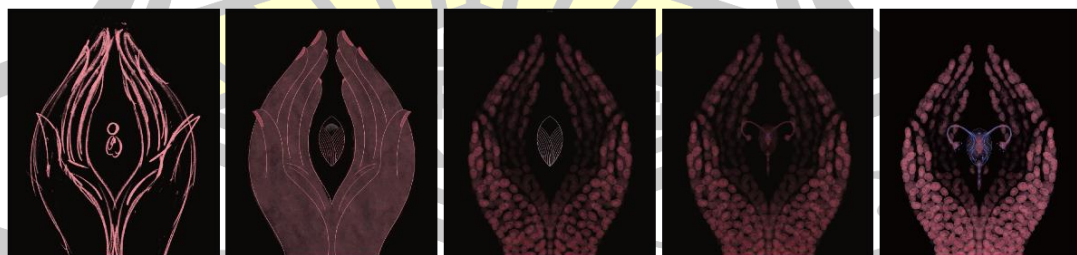


Figure 79 The creative process of the eleventh artwork " Seeking Children " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.11.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work " Seeking Children "

Work "Seeking Children" :Figure 80

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

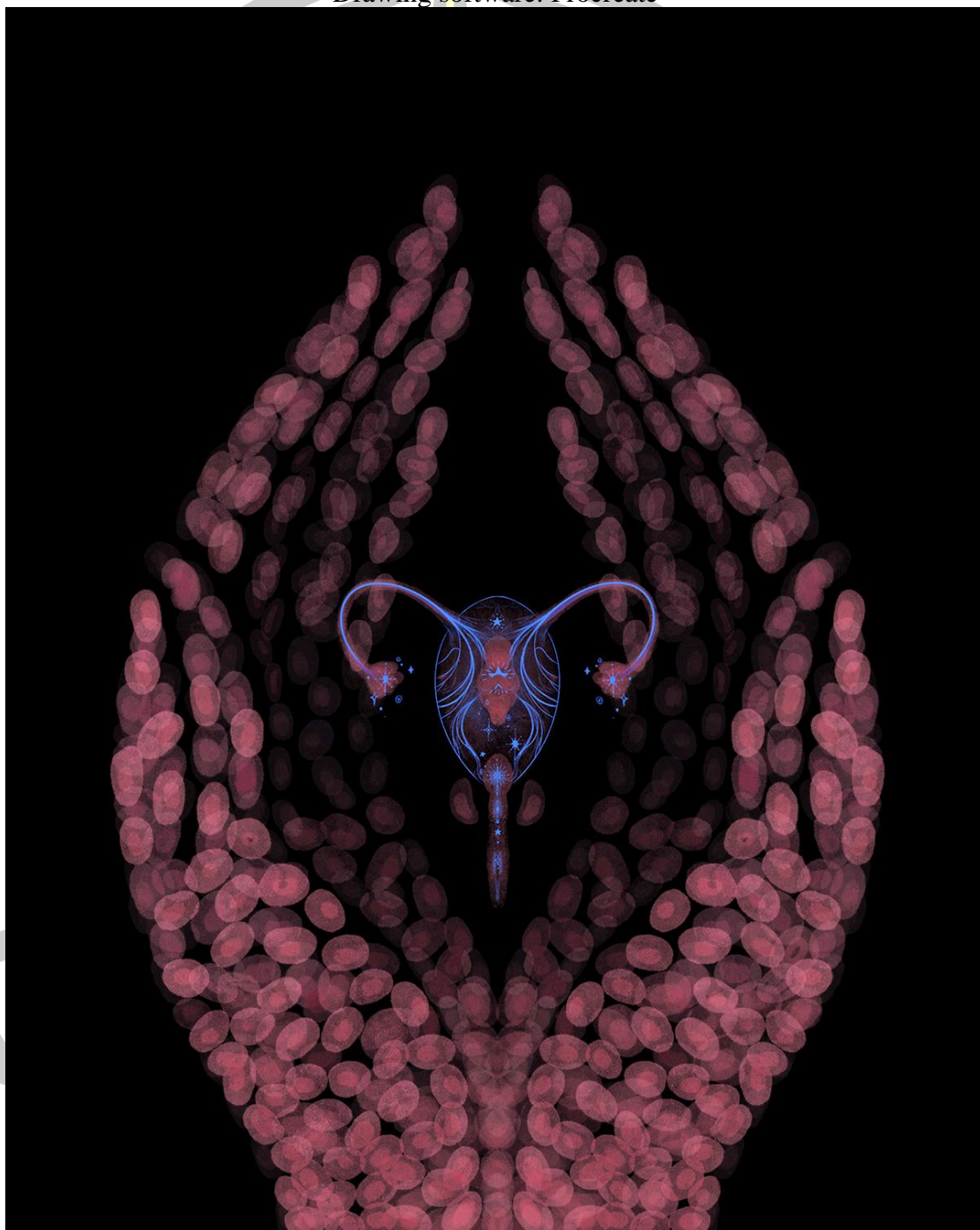


Figure 80 The eleventh artwork " Seeking Children " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024  
Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

## 4.12 Illustration work " Sea Deity "

### 4.12.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Sea Deity"

" Sea Deity " is the twelfth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. This is the last work of Chapter 2, so the function of summarizing and summarizing the sea deity is chosen to summarize the ability of Mazu as a deity as a whole. Mazu is officially recognized as the highest deity in China, and its function as a sea deity is well-known in China. In the final work depicting Mazu's priesthood, the ability of Mazu as a sea deity is depicted, which has a symbolic and summarizing nature.

### 4.12.2 Symbol extraction for the illustration work "Sea Deity"

(1) Ocean: Mazu is known as the deity of the sea, so the ocean is an important element and symbol of expression.

(2) Ocean as clothing: In order to reflect the divine duty of Mazu as the sea deity and possess the ability to control the ocean, the expression of transforming the ocean into clothing is used to reflect Mazu's control over the ocean.

(3) Moon: Compared to the warmth of the sun, the moon appears gentler and gentler, reflecting that the ocean appears gentle under the control of Mazu's ability, rather than full of danger. This reflects Mazu's control over the ocean and her gentle and compassionate heart.

(4) Stars and Points: the concretization of the power of faith.

In summary, the three elements of the Pierce symbol are used to analyze the symbol of Mazu sea deity: the object is Mazu sea deity, the interpretant is sea deity, and the representamen is the ocean, ocean as clothing, the moon, stars and points.

Analyze the symbol of Mazu Sea Deity based on the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is Sacred and Beloved. The secondness is the fact that Mazu Sea Deity, and the thirdness is smooth weather, peaceful country and people, controlling the ocean (Table 21).

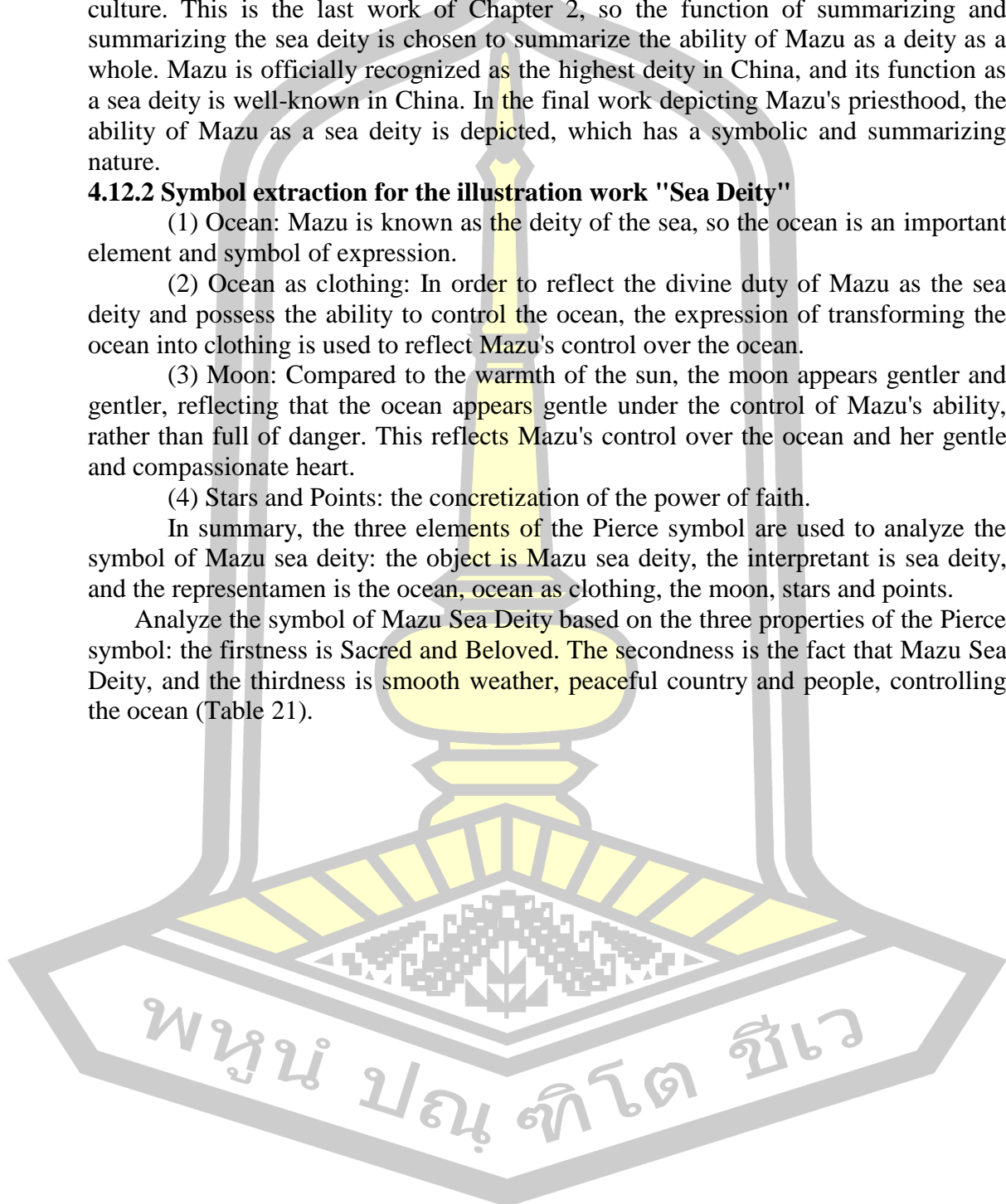
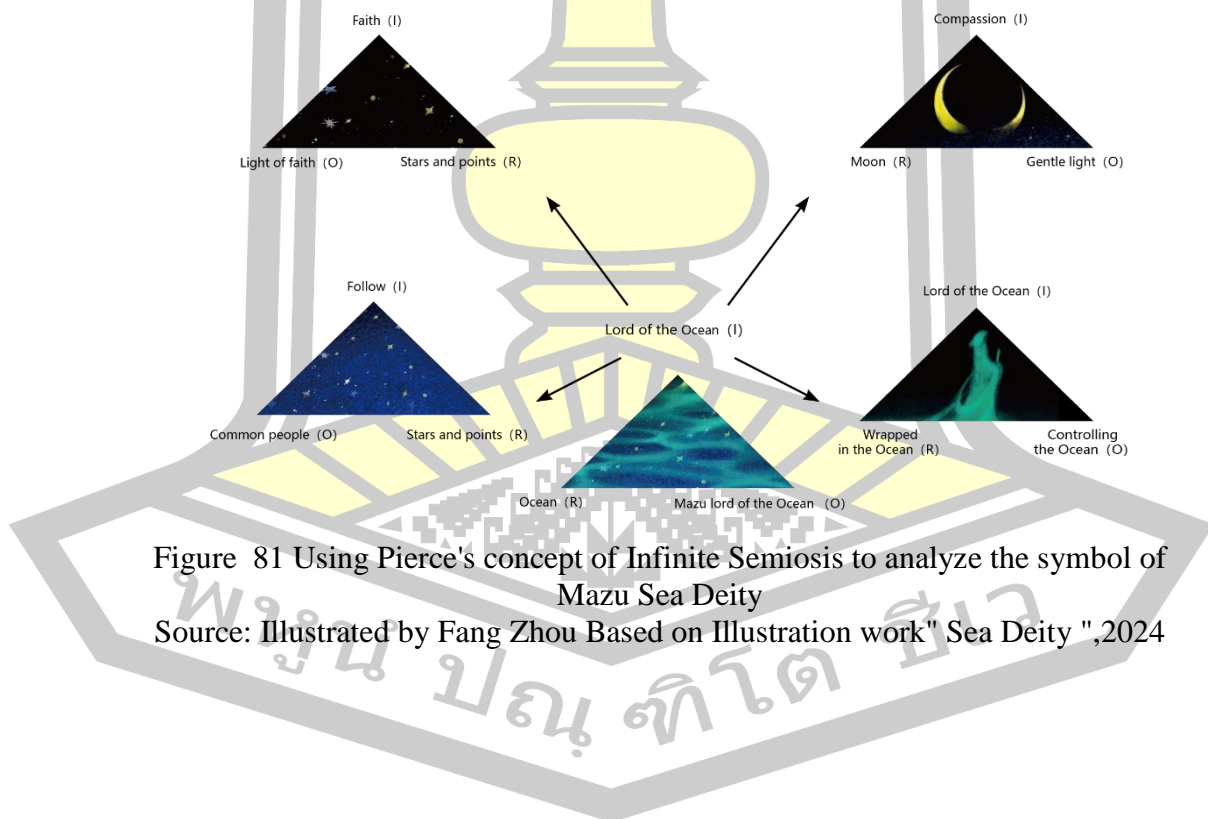


Table 21 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu Sea Deity  
through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Sacred, Beloved	Firstness	Sea Deity	Representamen	Ocean, Ocean as Clothing, Moon, Stars and Points
<b>Mazu</b> Sea Deity	Secondness		Interpretant	Sea Deity
Smooth Weather, Peaceful Country and People, Controlling the Ocean	Thirdness		Object	<b>Mazu</b> Sea Deity

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure81).



#### 4.12.3 The visual expression of the illustration work " Sea Deity "

To express the sacred and unique light effect in the ocean, a black background color is used for contrast expression. The composition uses diagonal composition, where Mazu drags clothes made from a long ocean and walks through the scene. The direction of the lines with a sense of simplicity, composed of dots behind, points towards Mazu, guiding the focus of attention to Mazu (Figure 82).

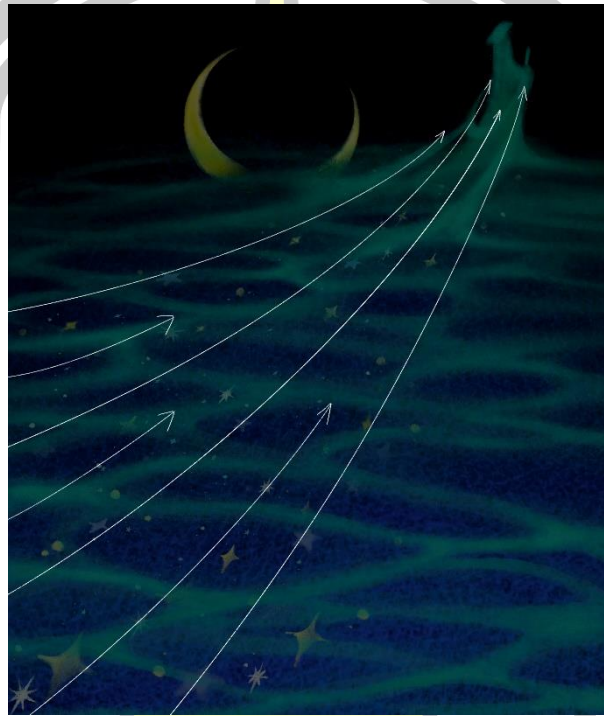


Figure 82 The composition idea of the twelfth artwork " Sea Deity " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

As the legitimate Chinese sea deity, Mazu exercises the function of a sea deity. The sea deity transforms into Mazu's clothes, representing Mazu's power to control the ocean. The places where Mazu passes leave stars, representing Mazu's spiritual love and the use of the power of the sea deity to help sentient beings spread the spirit of love.

#### 4.12.4 The creative process of the illustration work " Sea Deity "

The application of points, lines, and surfaces is reflected in: using color blocks to draw a large area of ocean ripples, then overlaying a layer to overlay the ripple effect again, using lines to represent the surface, connecting each other, and drawing the effect of the sea surface. Use color blocks to draw a silhouette of Mazu's image. The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in the use of lines to outline the ripple effect of seawater. Then use brushed lines to connect the ripples of the ocean with Mazu's clothes. Here, a highly feathered brush is used to connect the texture of the sea surface with the end of Mazu's clothes, creating an effect of the ocean as clothing.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the many scattered dots left by the places where Mazu walked in the ocean, representing the power of Mazu's faith and the spirit of great love (Figure 83).

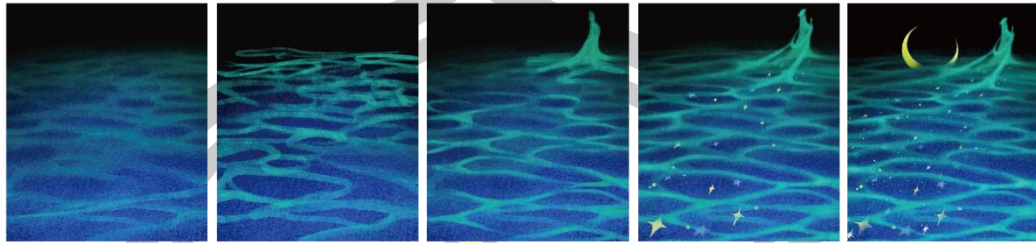


Figure 83 The creative process of the twelfth artwork " Sea Deity " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.12.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work " Sea Deity "

Work "See Deity" :Figure 84

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

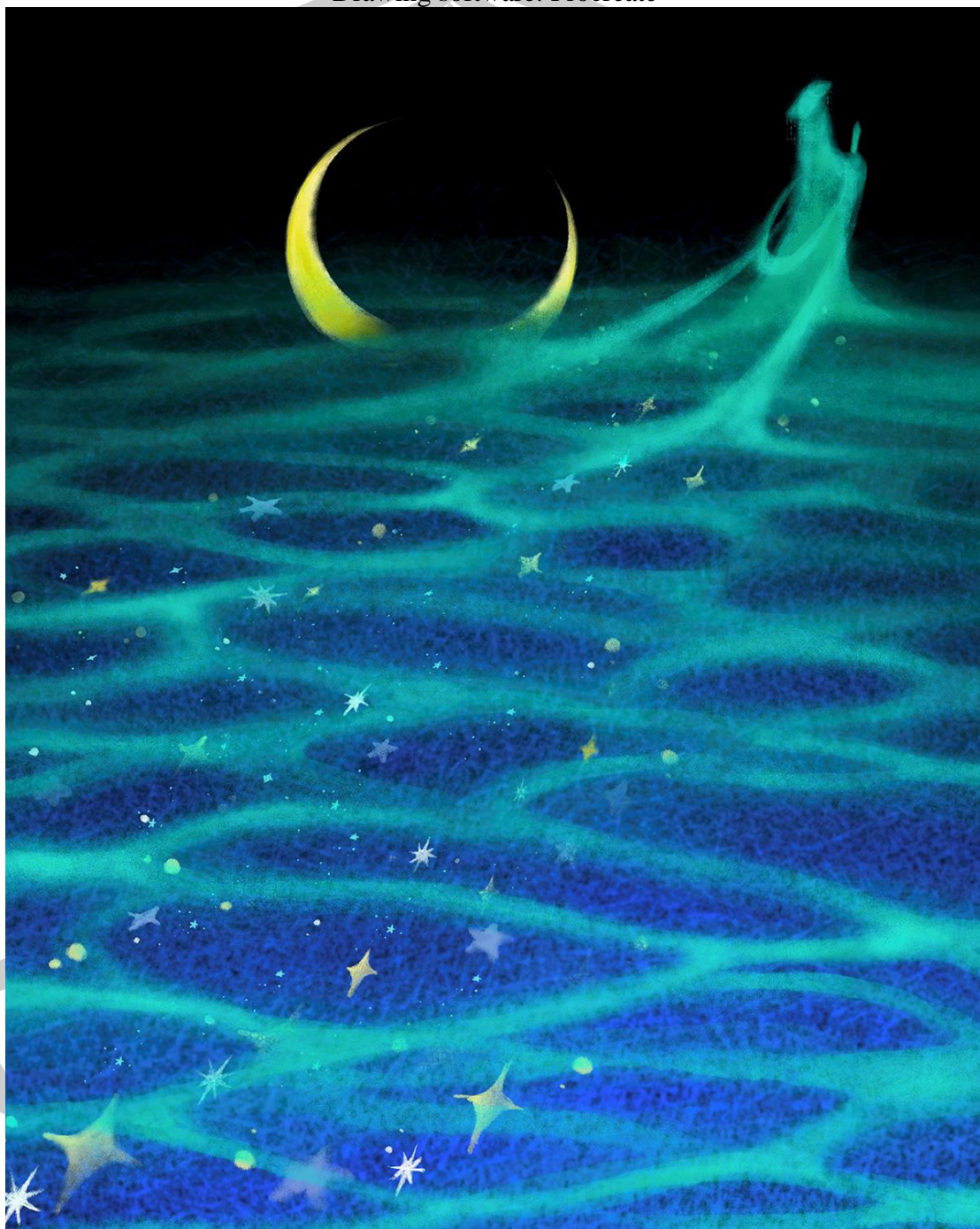


Figure 84 The twelfth artwork " Sea Deity " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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### 4.13 Illustration work "Evolution"

#### 4.13.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Evolution"

"Evolution" is the thirteenth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. This work aims to express the first work in Chapter 3 about the Mazu faith, selecting the theme of Mazu's image evolution from the Song Dynasty, through the Yuan Dynasty, Ming Dynasty, Qing Dynasty, and even modern times. The evolution of Mazu's image is influenced by factors such as Mazu's status and beliefs. From the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, Mazu received 36 official commendations and titles. From his wife to the deity's deess of heaven, Mazu's status and beliefs continued to increase, which in turn influenced the image of Mazu. By expressing and summarizing the evolution of Mazu's image, we can better understand the evolution of Mazu's faith.

#### 4.13.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Evolution"

(1) Statues of Mazu from different eras: Here, we use the statues of Mazu from the Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing, and modern periods to express the evolution of Mazu's image and beliefs.

(2) Stone Statue: There are many materials for the statue of Mazu, and stones are chosen because they are the most weathered and sturdy material to express the indestructibility of Mazu's faith.

In summary, the three elements of Pierce symbols are used to analyze the symbols of the evolution of Mazu's image: the object is the evolution of Mazu's image, the interpretant is the evolution, and the representamen are Statues of Mazu from different eras and stone statue.

Analyze the symbols of the evolution of Mazu's image through the three properties of Pierce symbols: the firstness is sacred, developing, and evolving. The secondness is the fact that the evolution of Mazu's image, and the thirdness is that it is keep up with the day (Table 22).

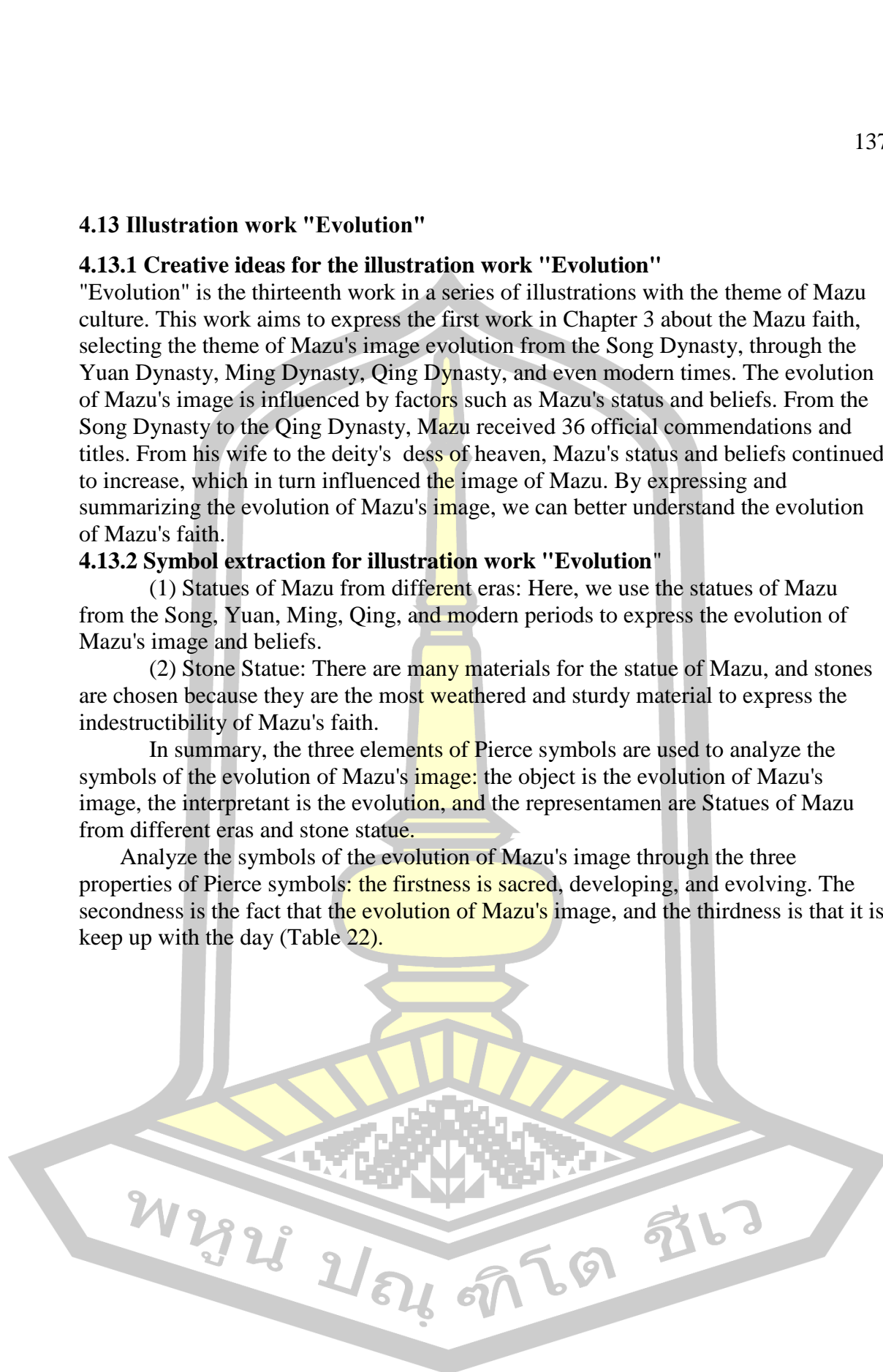


Table 22 Analyzing the symbols of The Evolution of Mazu's Image  
through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Sacred, Developing, Evolving	Firstness	Evolution	Representamen	Statues of Mazu from different eras, Stone Statue
The Evolution of Mazu's Image	Secondness		Interpretant	Evolution
Keep up with the day	Thirdness		Object	The Evolution of Mazu's Image

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure85).

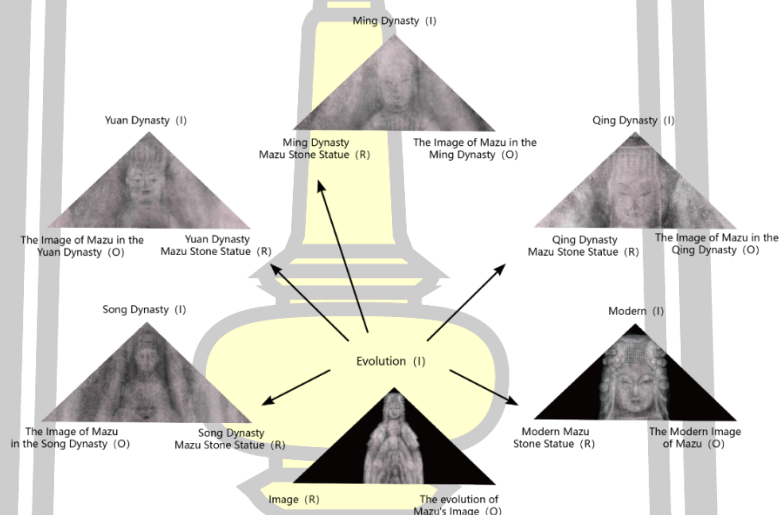


Figure 85 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of  
The Evolution of Mazu's Image

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Evolution", 2024

#### 4.13.3 Aesthetic expression of the illustration work "Evolution"

In order to enhance the effect of the stone statue, a black background is used for contrast expression. In terms of composition, symmetrical composition is used to depict the image of Mazu sitting upright, as this image is the most common image of Mazu. From the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, the image of Mazu gradually expanded with the recommendation of time, and this composition visually reflects a sense of advanced and upward evolution (Figure 86).

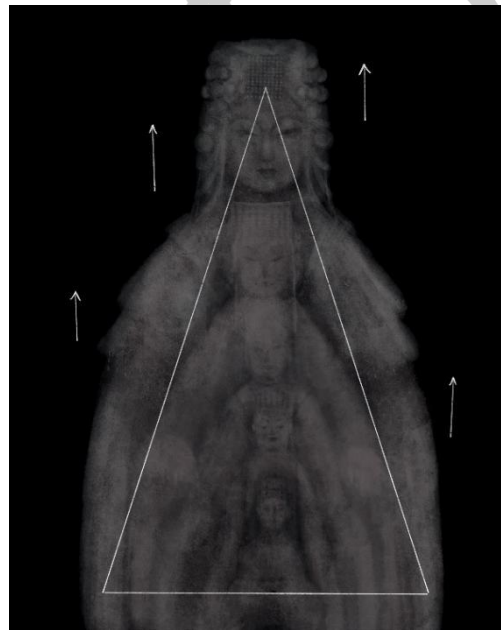


Figure 86 The composition idea of the thirteenth artwork "Evolution" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

Through this expression, the promotion of Mazu's works expresses the evolution of Mazu. With the increase of faith, the image of Mazu has become more and more majestic. Mazu often appears in the public eye through the medium of deities, so stone statues are chosen as materials to conform to the public's impression of Mazu. The deity statues, from the smallest to the largest, are divided into five different time periods: Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing, and modern times. Modern times refer to the Mazu stone statues in the ancestral temple of Meizhou Island, while other dynasties have selected the common characteristics of numerous deity statues from different time periods and summarized them before painting. For specific induction, please refer to another paper by the researcher titled "Evolution and Planarization Design of Mazu's Five Facial Images in Previous Dynasties". The results are shown in the figure (Figure 87).





Figure 87 The Evolution of Mazu's Facial Images and Its Planarization Design in the Paper "The Evolution of Mazu's Facial Images in Various Dynasties"

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou , 2020

#### 4.13.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Evolution"

Use color blocks to lay out the rough shape of the characters, and then further depict the details of the characters. Use a brush with a texture similar to rock to imitate the texture of the stones. Starting from the earliest image of Mazu in the Song Dynasty at the bottom of the screen, the painting is done in chronological order of the Song Dynasty, Yuan Dynasty, Ming Dynasty, and Qing Dynasty. The image of Mazu has grown in proportion over time, and the image has become more magnificent and solemn (Figure 88).



Figure 88 The creative process of the thirteenth artwork " Evolution " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





4.13.4 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Evolution"

Work "Evolution" :Figure 89

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

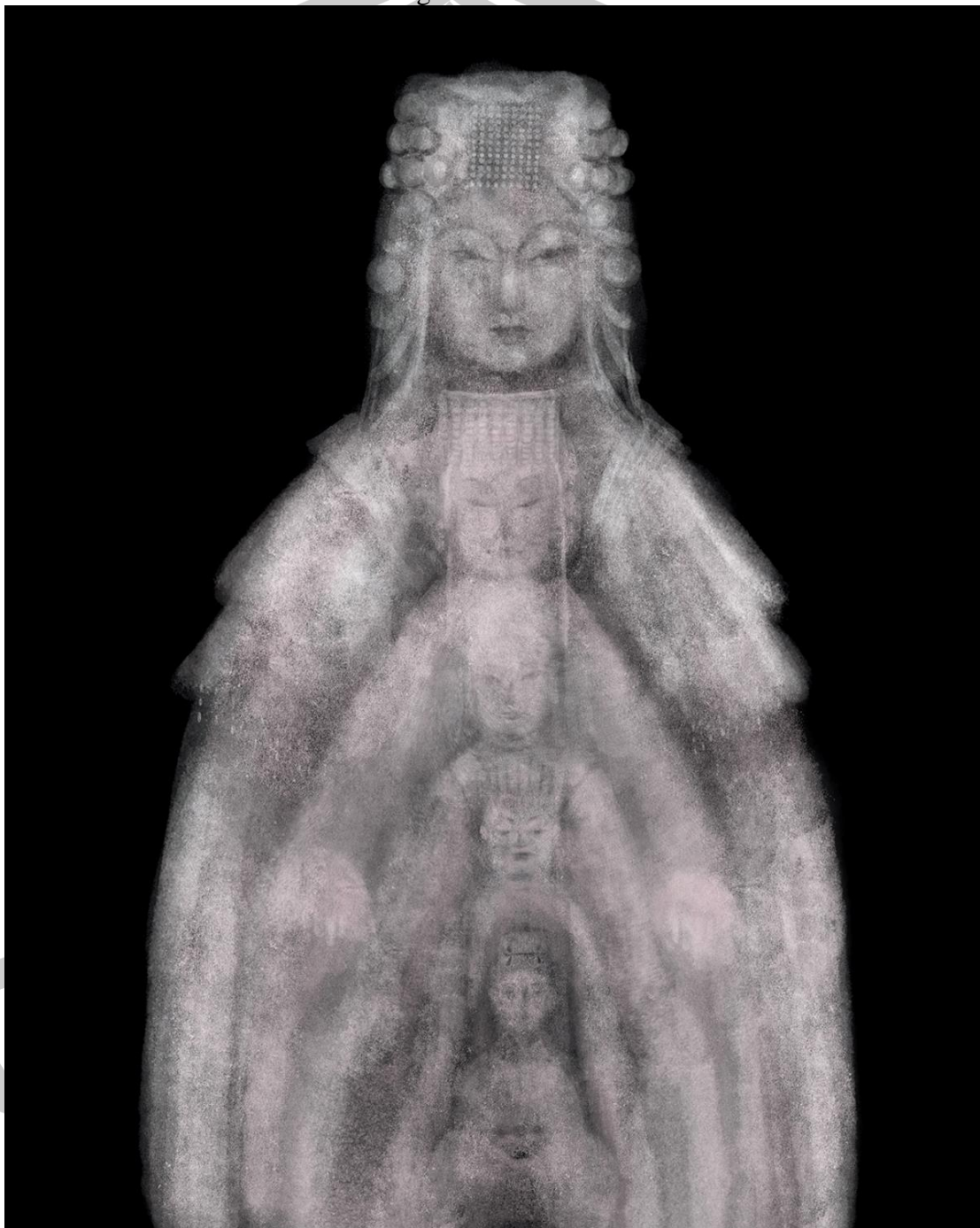


Figure 89 The thirteenth artwork " Evolution " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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#### 4.14 Illustration work "Incense Fire"

##### 4.14.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Incense Fire"

" Incense Fire " is the fourteenth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. The theme of incense is to express the belief of Mazu. There are many supporters and believers, and there is a strong incense fire with a long historical tradition. Mazu has different colored faces, and different colors have different connotations. The pink Mazu represents the mortal appearance of Mazu before becoming a deity, while the golden Mazu represents Mazu's holiness and majesty. People decorate Mazu with gold foil and lacquer to express their respect for Mazu. Red faced Mazu represents joy and auspiciousness, usually appearing during festivals. There are two theories about Black faced Mazu. Firstly, it is because Mazu has a strong incense fire, and too many people come to offer incense, which has blackened Mazu. Secondly, there is a theory that Black faced Mazu is more solemn and can control the situation. When it is necessary to catch demons and other serious scenes, Black faced Mazu will appear. This work expresses the vigorous fragrance of Mazu, so the idea of black faced Mazu is chosen for creation.

##### 4.14.2 Symbol extraction for the illustration work "Incense Fire"

(1) Black faced statue: Black faced Mazu represents Mazu's vigorous incense, with her face blackened by the smoke of incense.

(2) Incense: The way the people use incense to connect with the deity s, expressing respect for the deity and praying to them.

(3) Smoke: The smoke produced by the incense burner blackened Mazu's face, making smoke the chosen symbol.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of the Black faced Mazu: the object is the Blackfaced Mazu, the interpretant is incense fire, and the representamen is smoke, incense, and the Blackfaced statue .

Analyze the symbol of Black faced Mazu based on the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is sacred and vigorous. The secondness is Blackfaced Mazu, and the thirdness is Intense incense and fire (Table 23).

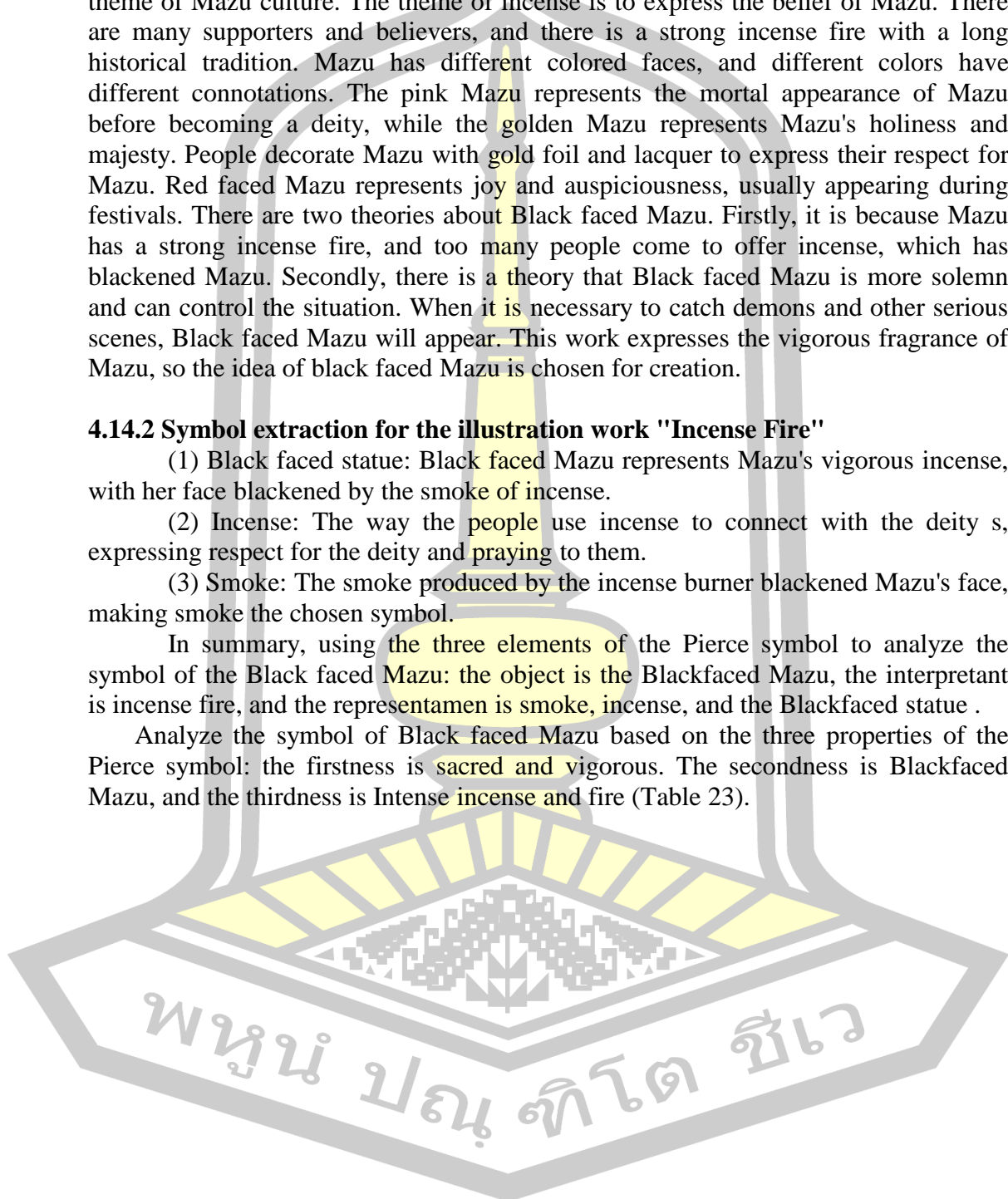


Table 23 Analyzing the symbols of Blackfaced Mazu  
through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Sacred and vigorous	Firstness	Incense Fire	Representamen	Smoke, Incense, Blackfaced Statue
Blackfaced Mazu	Secondness		Interpretant	Incense Fire
Intense incense and fire	Thirdness		Object	Blackfaced Mazu

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure90).

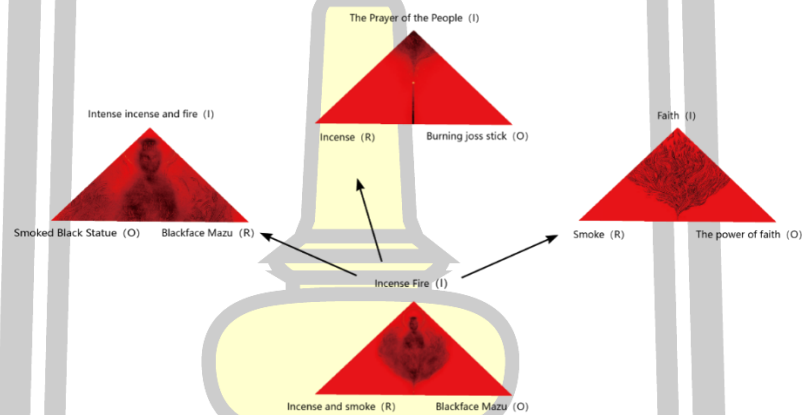


Figure 90 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Blackfaced Mazu

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Incense Fire", 2024

#### 4.14.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Incense Fire"

In order to highlight the effects of black faced Mazu and black smoke, a red background is used to express the contrast, which is also the only work in the entire series with a red background. The illustration uses left-right symmetrical composition, with incense as the symmetrical line. Mazu sits in the smoke, and the direction of the smoke lines feels upward, giving people the feeling of actively surrounding Mazu (Figure91).

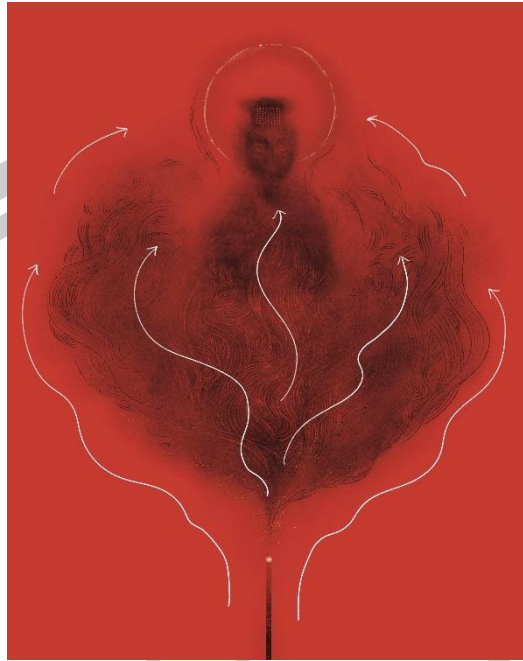


Figure 91 The composition idea of the fourteenth artwork " Incense Fire " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

Black faced Mazu is rumored to have blackened Mazu's face due to excessive incense. Therefore, the effect depicted here is to use a single incense stick instead of the common people to apply incense. In the smoke produced by the incense stick, there is a black faced Mazu sitting in it, representing the vigorous incense of Mazu. The lines are represented by curves, with mixed and mixed colors alternating from black to red, simulating the characteristic of smoke having no solid form.

#### 4.14.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Incense Fire"

The application of dots, lines, and planes is reflected in the use of black tiles to draw a rough image of Mazu.

The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in drawing the smoke effect of incense in the form of lines. The top imitates the gradual disappearance of smoke, and the color becomes closer to the background red. The background red is faintly revealed in the smoke, imitating the characteristic of smoke having no solid form.

Use a line at the bottom to draw the shape of the fragrance. The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is reflected in the small golden dots at the bottom of the incense, expressing the power of Mazu's faith (Figure 92).

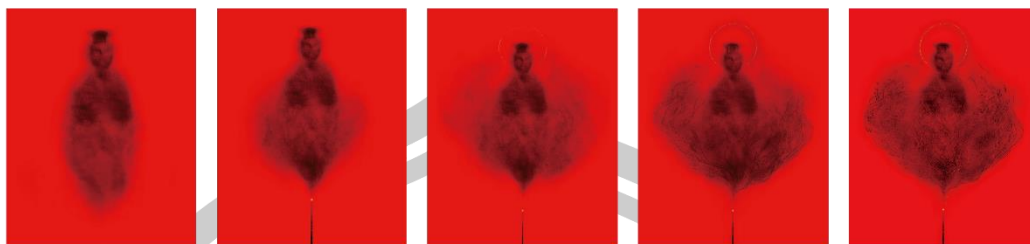


Figure 92 The creative process of the fourteenth artwork " Incense Fire "  
in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.14.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Incense Fire"

Work "Incense Fire" :Figure 93

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

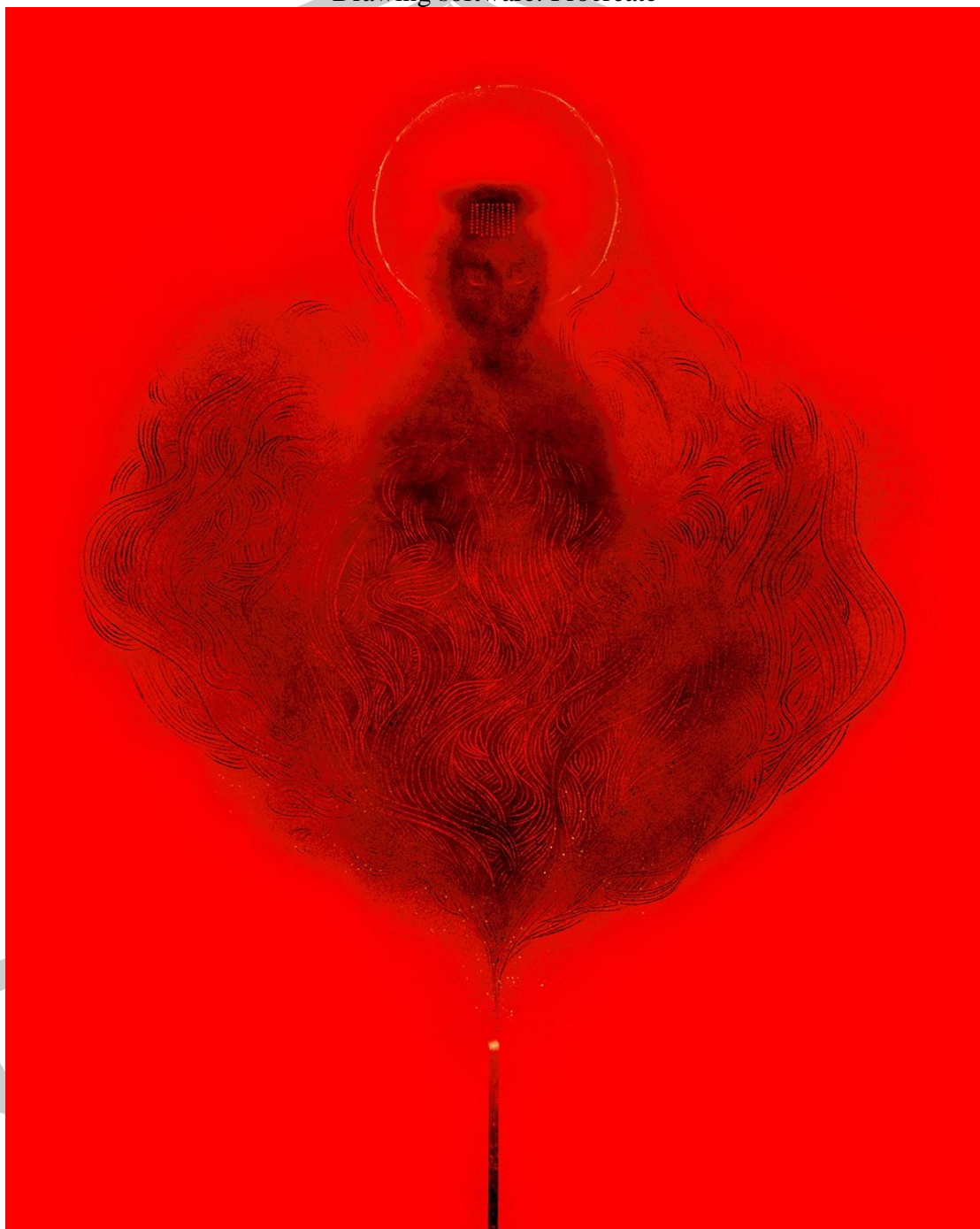


Figure 93 The fourteenth artwork " Incense Fire " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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## 4.15 Illustration work "Faith"

### 4.15.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Faith"

"Faith" is the fifteenth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. Mazu's faith is diverse, not singular and unchanging. Mazu in different periods has also been endowed with different abilities and expectations by the people and the government, so people's beliefs in Mazu are diverse. A thousand people have a thousand Hamlets, and the Mazu in the eyes of different people is different. However, no matter what, the core and spirit of Mazu are golden, pure, and loving.

### 4.15.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Faith"

(1) Different Statues: Mazu statues from different eras and regions represent the various beliefs and needs of people in different eras and regions towards Mazu, that is, the concretization of diversified beliefs.

(2) Statue: The appearance of a large number of specific deities may appear too complex, so here we choose a simplified expression of the Mazu statue and use color blocks to express the deities.

(3) Golden Statue: No matter how diverse Mazu's beliefs are, the core of its recognition and belief remains unchanged, representing the spirit of Mazu. The golden statue is the embodiment and symbol of its essence.

(4) Gold: the power of faith, the embodiment of the core spirit of Mazu.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbols of Mazu's diversified beliefs: the object is Mazu's diversified faith, the interpretant is faith, and the representamen is different statues, statue, golden statue, gold.

Analyzing the symbols of Mazu's diverse beliefs through the three properties of Pierce symbols: the firstness is rich and diverse. The secondness is Mazu's diversified faith, while the thirdness is the Multifaith (Table 24).

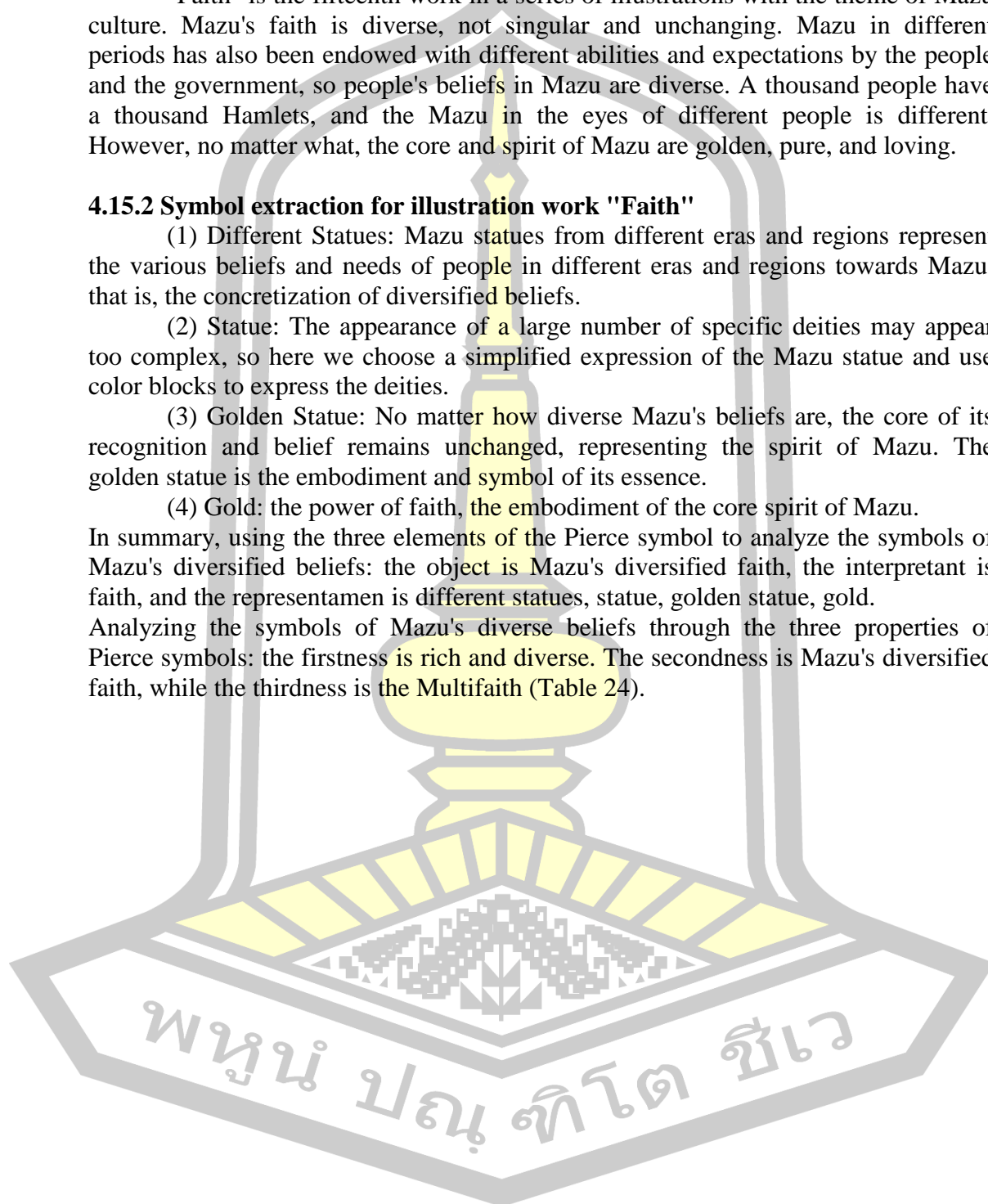


Table 24 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu's Diversified Faith  
through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Rich, Diverse	Firstness	Faith	Representamen	Different Statues, Statue, Golden Statue, Gold
Mazu's Diversified Faith	Secondness		Interpretant	Faith
Multifaith	Thirdness		Object	Mazu's Diversified Faith

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure 94).

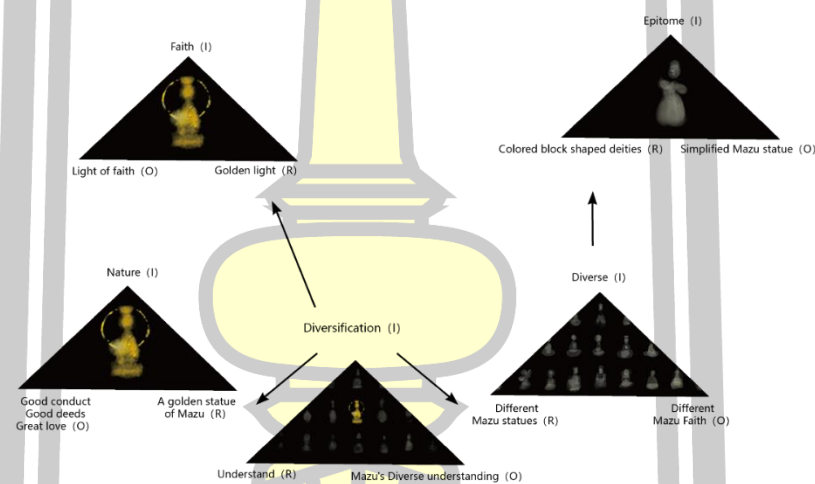


Figure 94 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu's Diversified Faith

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Faith", 2024

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#### 4.15.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Faith"

To highlight the Mazu statue, a black background is used to express contrast. In terms of composition, point diffusion is used to form a surface. Each Mazu statue is regarded as a point, and all the points form a complete surface. In the middle of these points, which is the visual center of the picture, different colors are used to distinguish and express the core creative viewpoint. Therefore, a golden Mazu statue will be drawn in the center of the picture, representing the unchanged authenticity and sincerity of Mazu. These Mazu statues consist of 9 rows, 9 columns, and 81 statues, forming the entire surface of the picture. The reason for using the entire number is because in China, it symbolizes the highest meaning (Figure 95).

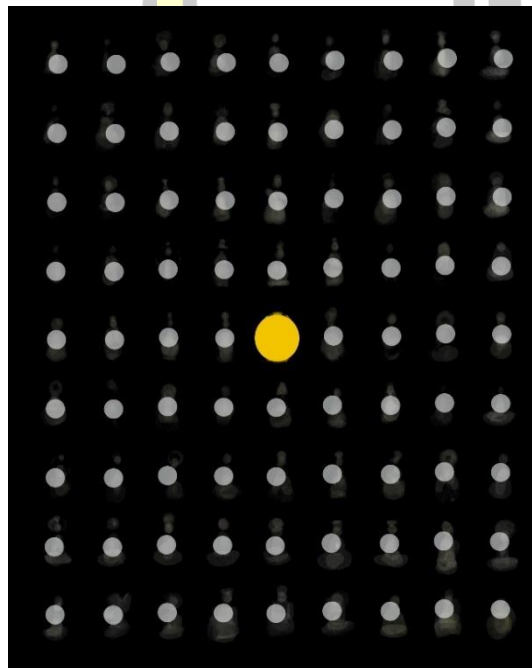


Figure 95 The composition idea of the fifteenth artwork "Faith" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

Due to the fact that Mazu always appears in different images in the world, with sculptures as the main focus, the disconnected statues here are simplified from various Mazu statues from different eras to reflect people's beliefs in Mazu at different times. The Mazu deity statues from different eras here refer to some era portraits (Figure 96) captured by researchers during field investigations, as well as some well-known era portrait photos (Figure 97).



Figure 96: Photos of Mazu era portraits taken by researchers during field investigations  
Source: Photographed by Fang Zhou, 2024



Figure 97: Some famous Mazu era photos  
Source: Fang Zhou Reports, 2024

#### 4.15.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Faith"

Firstly, divide the grid to determine the specific location of the Mazu statue. Then, simplify the representation of Mazu statues from different eras captured by researchers during field investigations, as well as collected photos of Mazu images, using simple color blocks. In the center of the picture is a simplified image of Mazu created by the researchers themselves. In order to distinguish it from other Mazu statues, a light ring backlight is painted on its head to express its inner clarity and purity, which is an immovable golden essence (Figure 98).

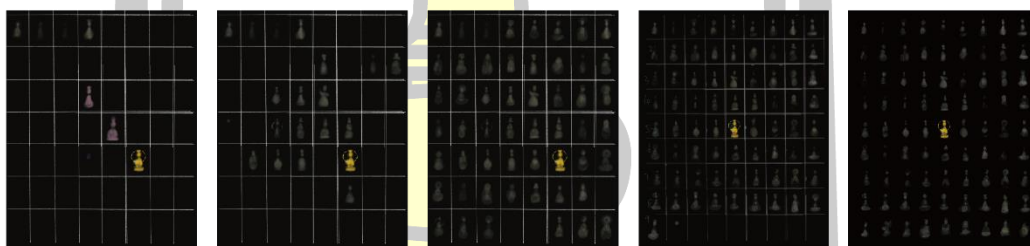
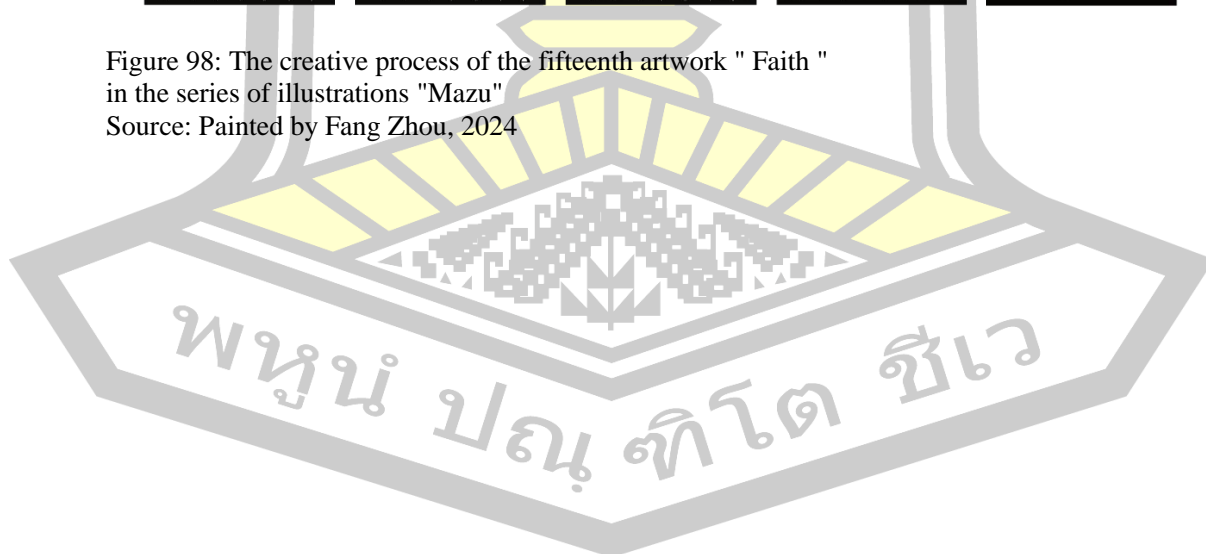


Figure 98: The creative process of the fifteenth artwork "Faith" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.15.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Faith"

Work "Faith" :Figure 99

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

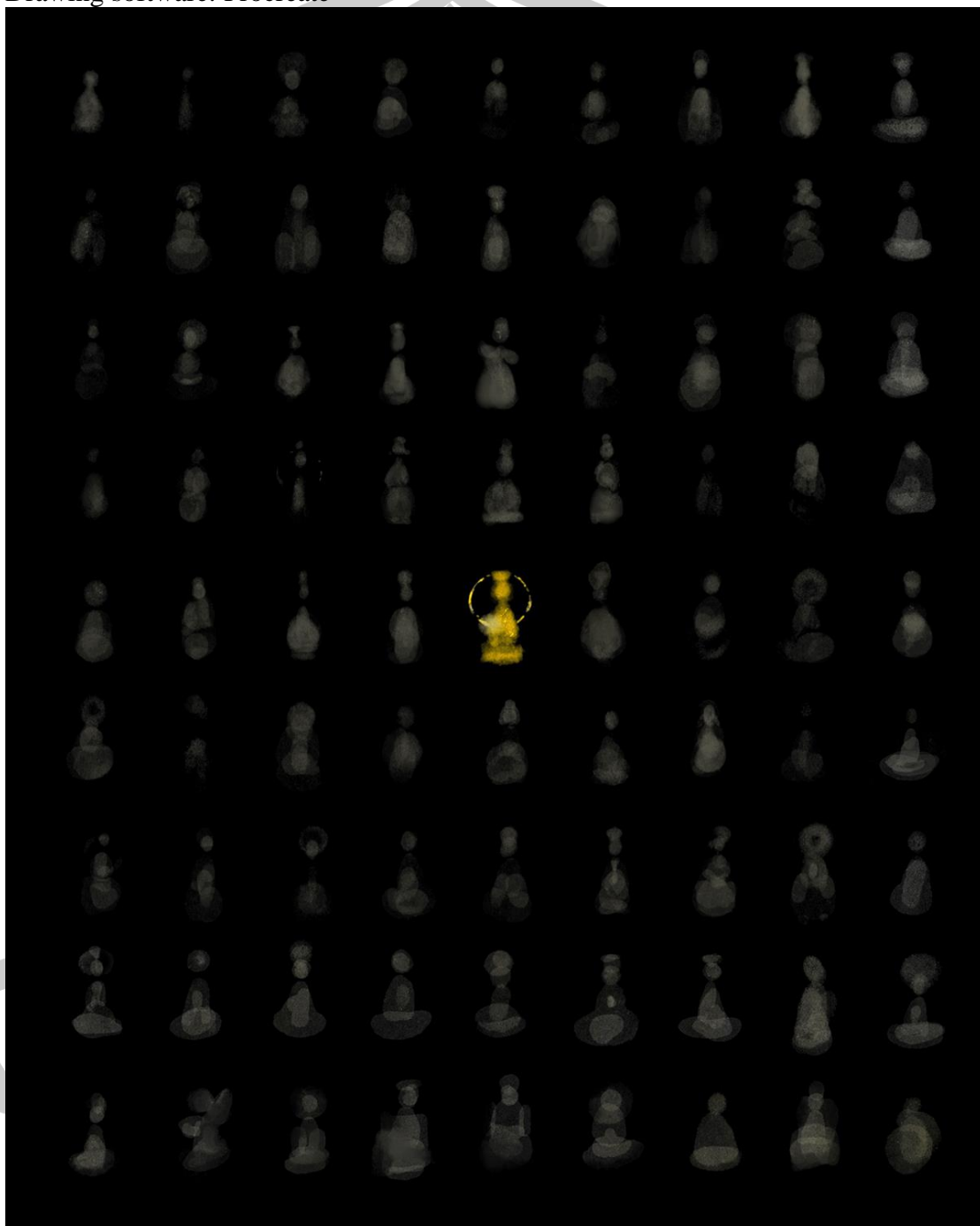


Figure 96 The fifteenth artwork " Faith " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

## 4.16 Illustration work "Connection"

### 4.16.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Connection"

"Connection" is the sixteenth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. The work expresses the connection between Mazu beliefs, and beliefs are not singular, but developed through the connection and inheritance of believers from different eras. It expresses the development process and source structure of faith. This chapter mainly describes the convergence and connection of beliefs, which are invisible but actually exist, and are an invisible connection.

### 4.16.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Connection"

(1) Mushroom Circle: In nature, there are mushroom circles. Mushrooms have no connection on the ground, but they form a circle underground, and all the mushrooms inside the circle grow from the same mother plant. The same goes for believers, who are independent and connected to each other, and share a common belief.

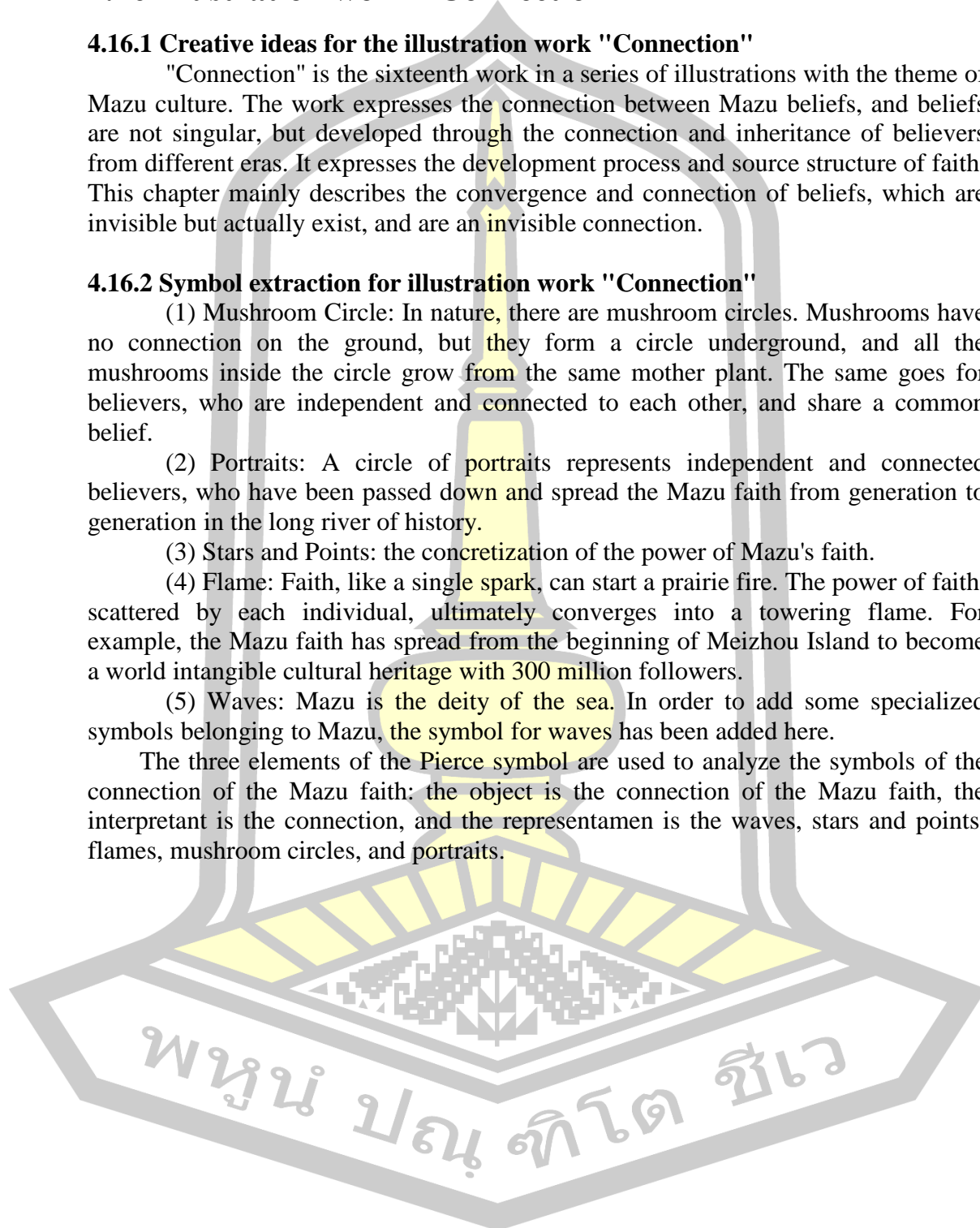
(2) Portraits: A circle of portraits represents independent and connected believers, who have been passed down and spread the Mazu faith from generation to generation in the long river of history.

(3) Stars and Points: the concretization of the power of Mazu's faith.

(4) Flame: Faith, like a single spark, can start a prairie fire. The power of faith, scattered by each individual, ultimately converges into a towering flame. For example, the Mazu faith has spread from the beginning of Meizhou Island to become a world intangible cultural heritage with 300 million followers.

(5) Waves: Mazu is the deity of the sea. In order to add some specialized symbols belonging to Mazu, the symbol for waves has been added here.

The three elements of the Pierce symbol are used to analyze the symbols of the connection of the Mazu faith: the object is the connection of the Mazu faith, the interpretant is the connection, and the representamen is the waves, stars and points, flames, mushroom circles, and portraits.



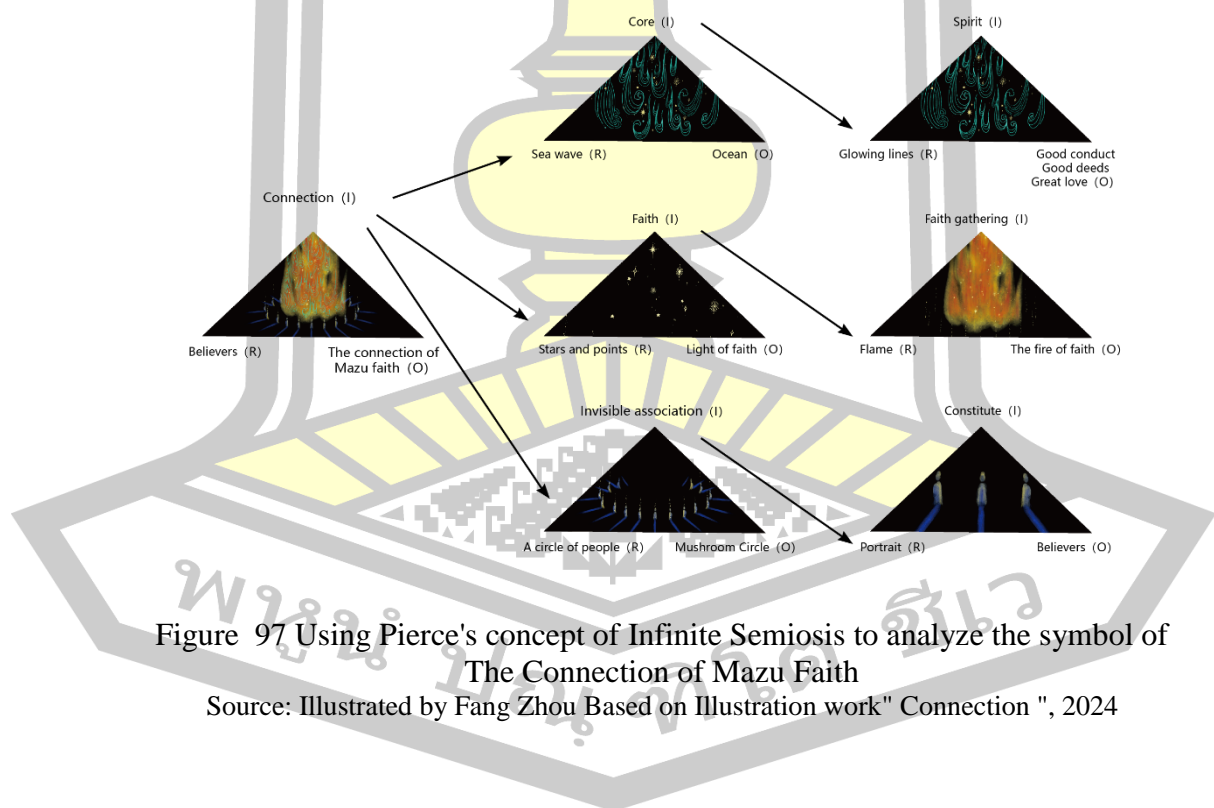
The three properties of the Pierce symbol are used to analyze the connection of the Mazu belief: the firstness is intricate and essential. The secondness is the connection of Mazu faith, and the thirdness is closely related, and legend of sparks (Table 25).

Table 25: Analyzing the symbols of The Connection of Mazu Faith through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Intricate, essential	Firstness	Connection	Representamen	Waves, Flame, Mushroom Circles, Stars and Points, Portraits
<b>The Connection of Mazu Faith</b>	Secondness		Interpretant	Connection
Closely related, Legend of Sparks	Thirdness		Object	<b>The Connection of Mazu Faith</b>

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure100).



#### 4.16.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Connection"

To highlight the effect of flames, use a black background color to express contrast. In terms of composition, symmetrical composition is used for drawing. In addition to the symmetry of the flame, the people and their shadows surrounding the flame also form a symmetrical pattern. The lines of the flame are upward, expressing the expansion and development of the fire of faith. The direction of the lines of the character's shadow is to yearn for a circle to spread, expressing the spread and diffusion of faith, together forming the theme of combination and connection (Figure101).

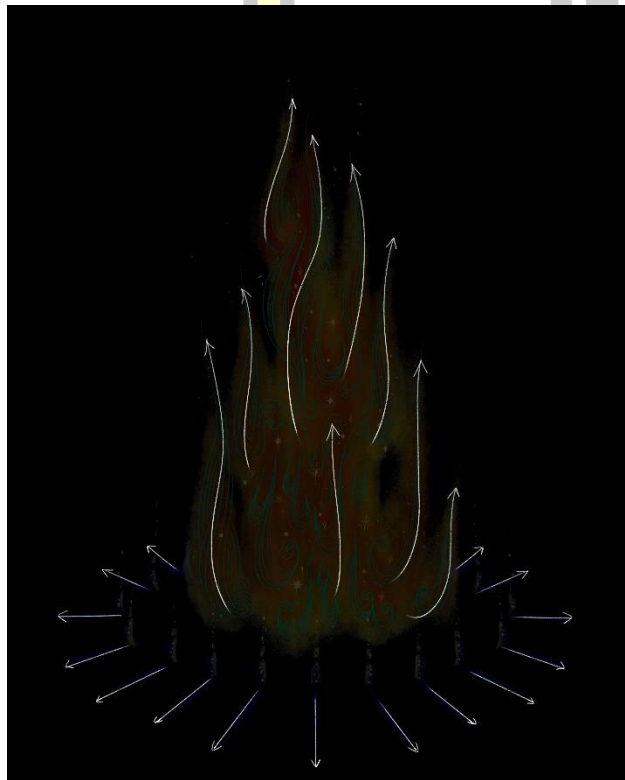


Figure 98 The composition idea of the sixteenth artwork " Connection " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

In the center of the screen, there is a huge flame of faith, with blue symbols resembling waves expressing the ocean elements of Mazu as a sea deity. The raging flames represent the development and growth of faith. There is a circle of little people around the flame, who are followers of Mazu. They are separated and connected to each other, just like the mushroom circles in nature. Although there is no connection on the surface, there is a close connection underground, and they are a unified living entity.

#### 4.16.4 The creative process of the work "Connection"

The application of points, lines, and surfaces is reflected in the use of large area coloring to draw the effect of flames. Draw the figures of believers in a simplified form, surrounding the flames. Draw the center of the flame using a darker red color to mimic the state and structure of the real flame.

The application of points, lines, surfaces, and midlines is reflected in drawing elements of wave shape in the form of lines in flames. Draw the shadow of believer figures in the form of lines.

The application of dots, lines, and planes is reflected in the numerous scattered flames, representing the power of Mazu's faith and the flames burning and bursting together. The dots inside and above the believer's body and head represent the faith that the believer has developed, and are a component of the flame. A single spark can start a prairie fire, expressing the connection and progressive relationship of faith (Figure102).

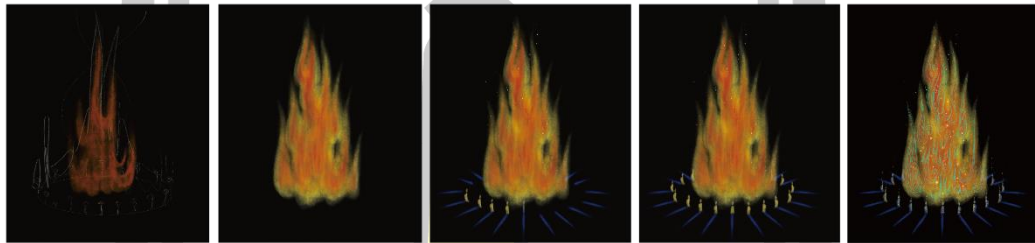


Figure 99 The creative process of the sixteenth artwork "Connection" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.16.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Connection"

Work "Connection" :Figure 103

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

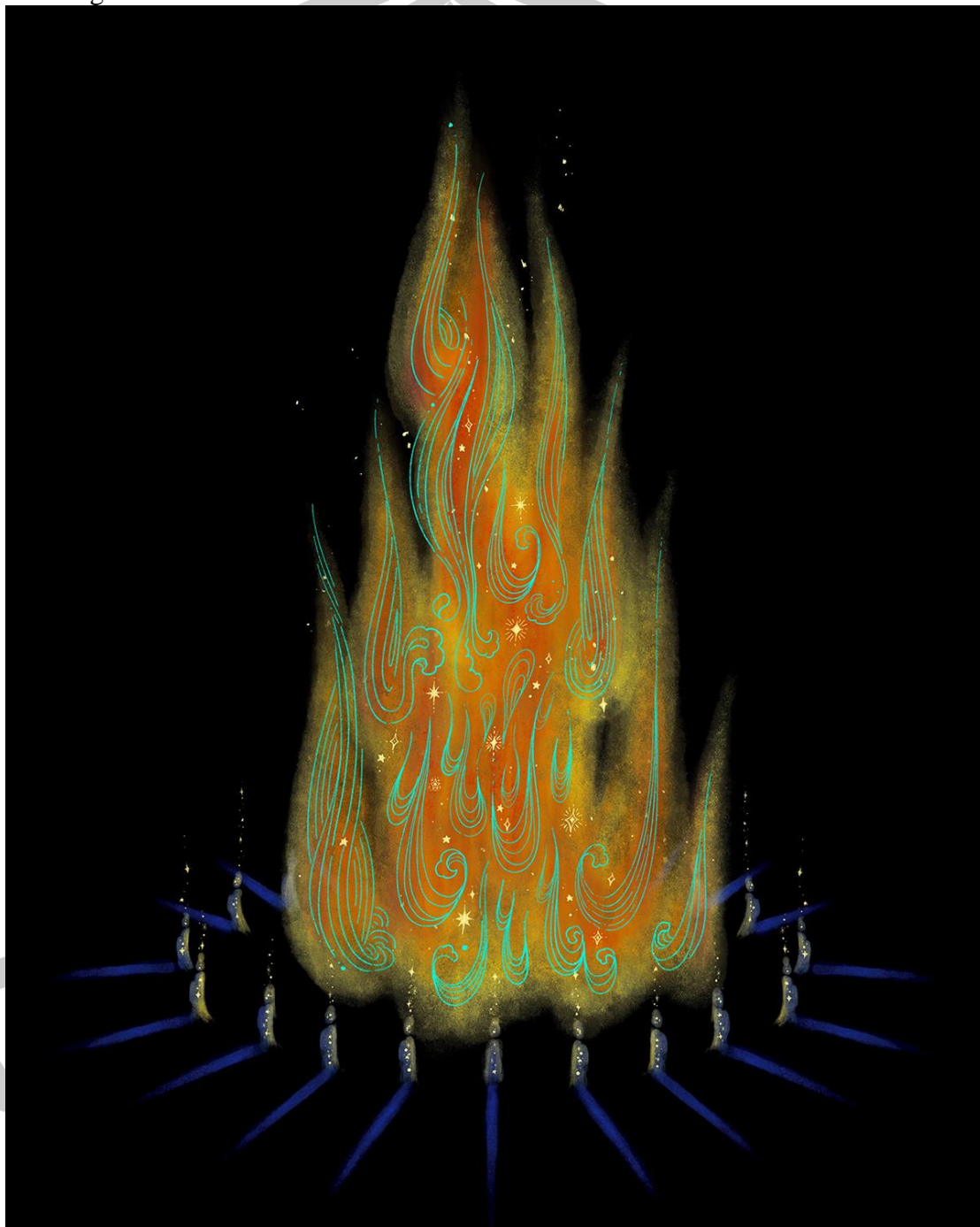


Figure 100 The sixteenth artwork " Connection" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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#### 4.17 Illustration work "Communication"

##### 4.17.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Communication"

"Communication" is the seventeenth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. The work expresses the spread of Mazu's faith. The spread of faith is similar to the birth of humans and the growth of cells. The human body also starts with an egg cell, dividing into one, two, two, four, and gradually dividing, ultimately producing millions of cells, forming a complete living organism. The process of spreading faith is also the same, it is passed down from generation to generation, from mouth to mouth, like cells, where one person influences another and gradually develops and spreads. Nowadays, Mazu has 300 million followers worldwide, and as the highest deity in Chinese tradition, it has been officially honored. This belief is formed by the gathering of millions of believers.

##### 4.17.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Communication"

(1) Cell Division: It is the gradual division and combination of a cell to grow into a complete human being. Belief also suggests that if a cell is infected, assimilated, or divided, it gradually increases reproduction, forming a complete belief system.

(2) Cells: Every cell is a believer, and cells converge from a complete life, an individual's faith, to a complete Mazu belief culture.

(3) Blood and Flesh: the essence and spirit of Mazu's faith.

(4) Glowing Line: The Power of Faith is Brilliant and Radiant

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbols of the spread of Mazu belief: the object is the spread of Mazu belief, the explanatory term is the spread, and the corresponding reproduction body is cells, cell division, flesh and blood, and glowing lines.

Using the three properties of Pierce symbols to analyze the symbols of the spread of Mazu belief: the first property is infectious and spreading. The second property is the fact that the Mazu faith is spread, and the third property is closely related, with sparks passing down from generation to generation (Table 26).

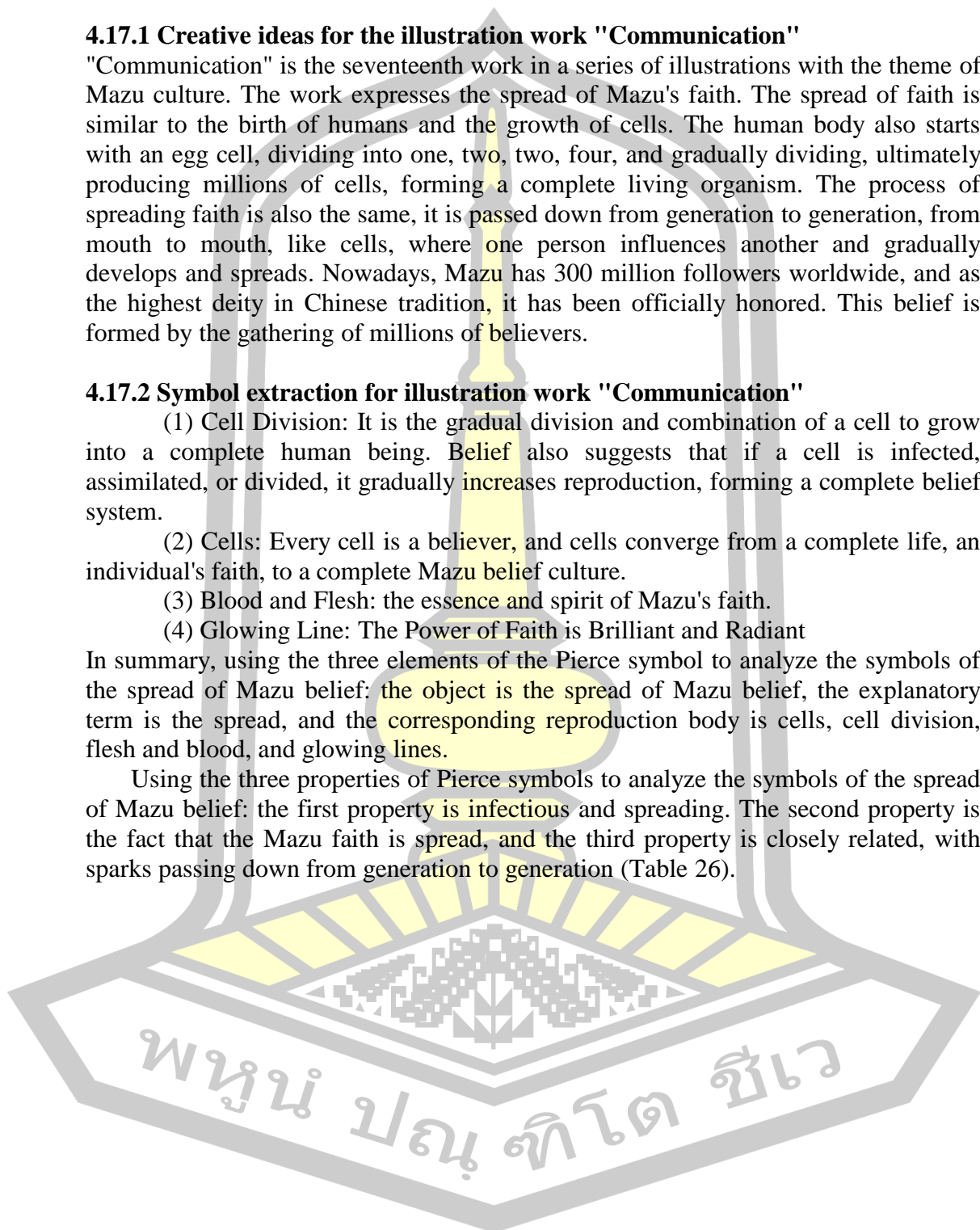


Table 25 Analyzing the symbols of The Spread of Mazu Faith  
through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Infectious	Firstness	Communication	Representamen	Cell Division, Cells, Blood and Flesh, Glowing Line
<b>The Spread of Mazu Faith</b>	Secondness		Interpretant	Communication
Inherit, Legend of Sparks	Thirdness		Object	<b>The Spread of Mazu Faith</b>

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure 104).

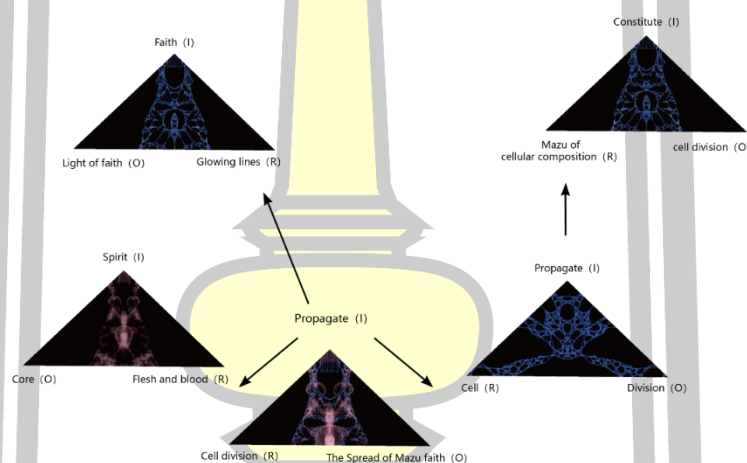


Figure 101 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of  
The Spread of Mazu Faith

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Communication", 2024



#### 4.17.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Communication"

To highlight the effect of cells, a black background is used for contrasting expression. Adopting a symmetrical composition, the character form adopts Mazu's most common sitting posture. Holding a wat board represents its authority and function as a deity.

The basic element composed of cells, the Mazu statue is composed of cells one by one, representing that the Mazu faith is composed of believers who gradually develop and spread, and influence each other. The image of Mazu is based on the Mazu stone statue at Meizhou Island Ancestral Temple in Putian City, Fujian Province, and the old Mazu statue at the Tianhou Ancestral Temple in Putian Port, Meizhou Island Mazu Source Museum (Figure 105). The nine strings of Mian diao on Mazu's head represent her noble status.



Figure 102 Old photos of Mazu statue and Mazu stamps at the Tianhou Ancestral Temple in Putian Port, Meizhou Island Mazu Source Museum  
Source: Photographed by Fang Zhou, 2021

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#### 4.17.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Communication"

Use lines to first outline the outline of the image of Mazu, and then gradually refine the depiction of cells to outline the rough image of Mazu in a symmetrical shape. For the convenience of symmetrical composition, use the symmetrical function in the software for drawing. After completing the cell line drawing, use color blocks to enrich Mazu's headwear, clothing, and face, further deepen and process Mazu's image, and finally complete the painting work. Blue is used as the color line to reflect the water element of Mazu as the sea deity, and pink is used as the color block to better contrast with blue (Figure 106).

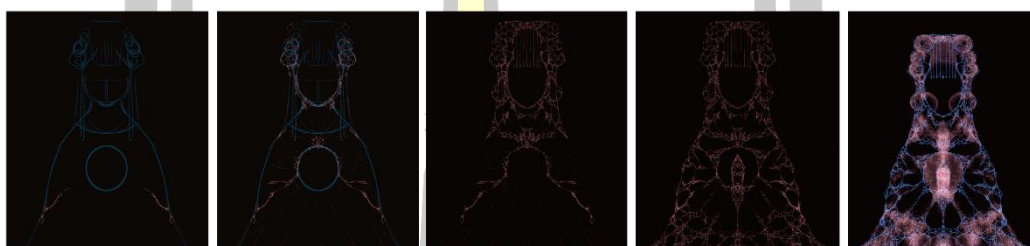
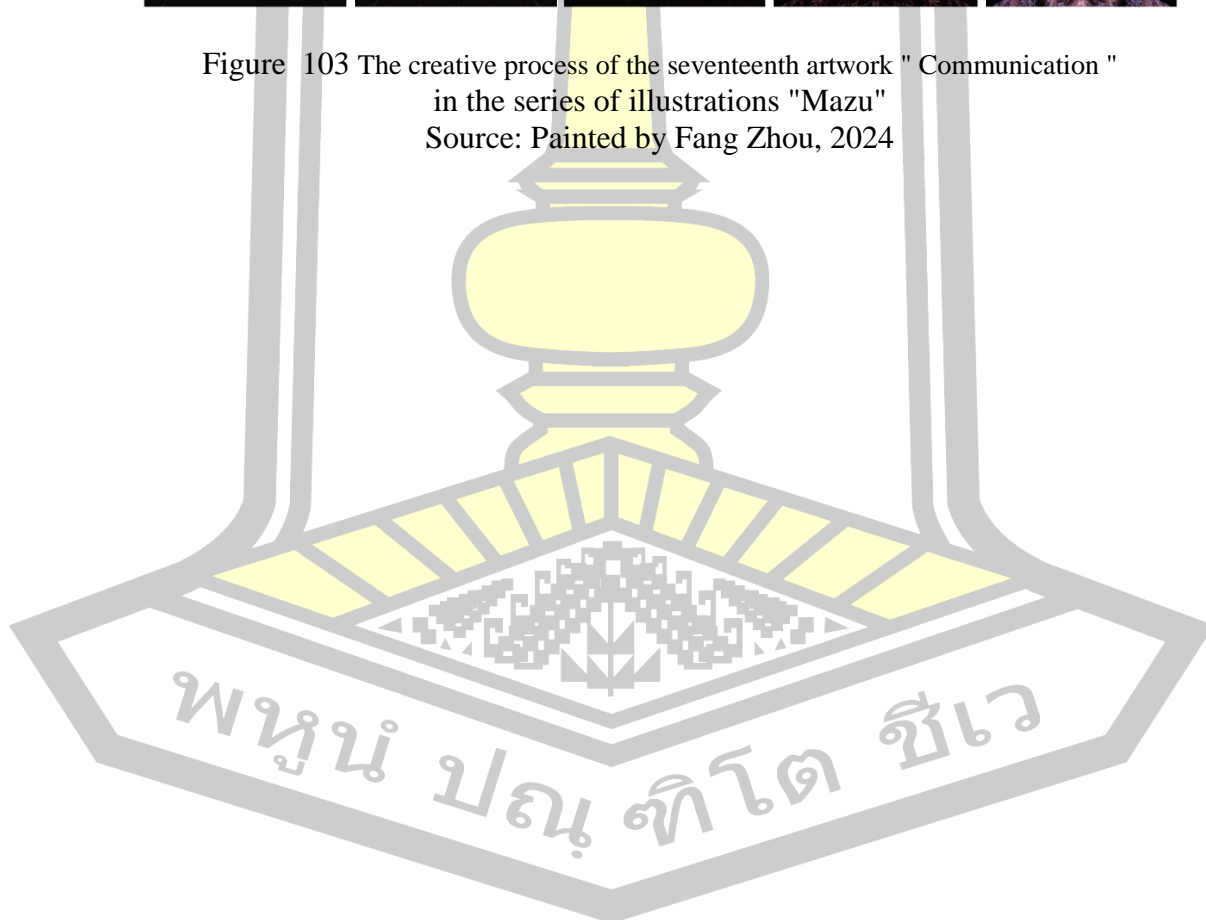


Figure 103 The creative process of the seventeenth artwork "Communication" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.17.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Communication"

Work "Communication" :Figure 107

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

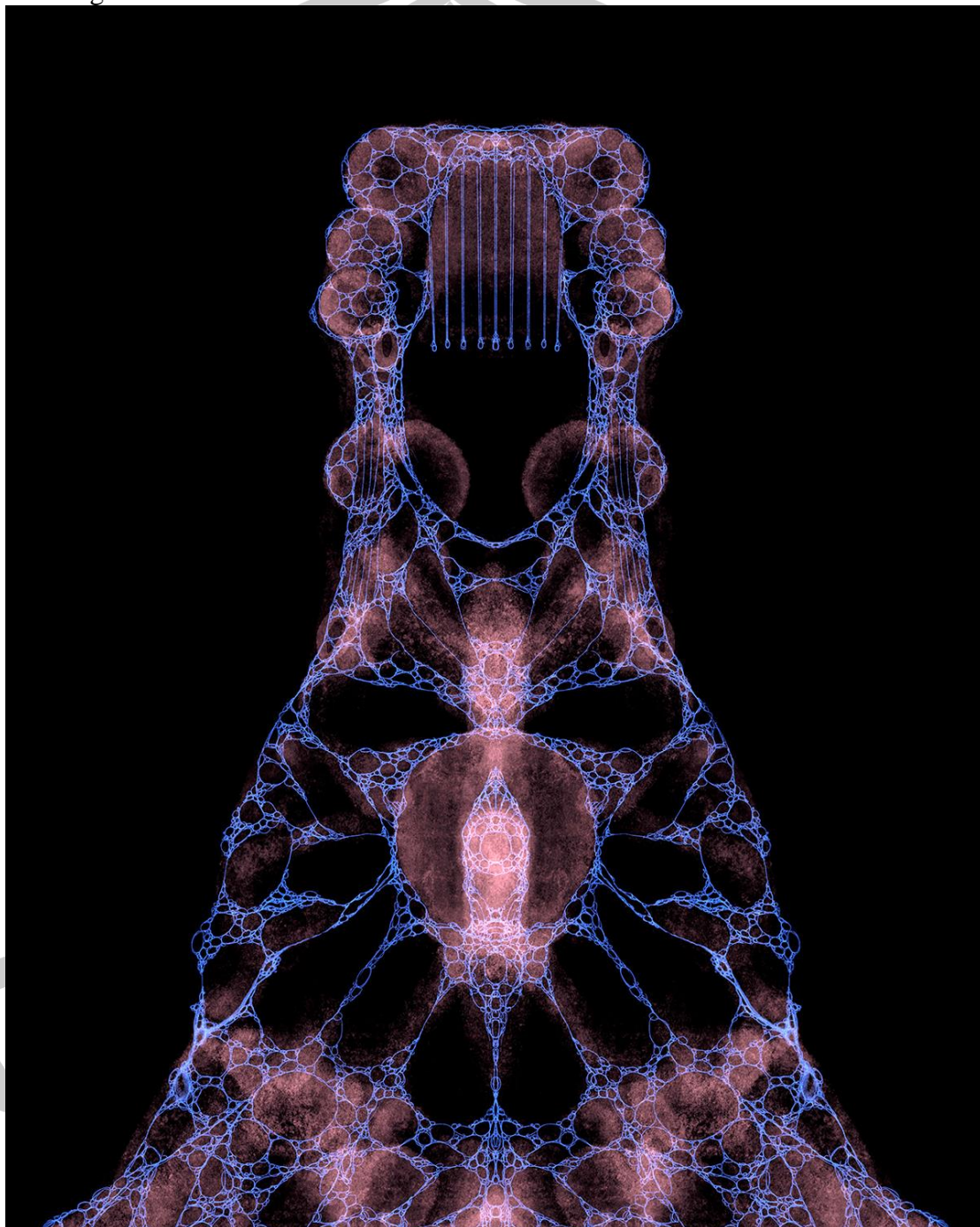


Figure 104 The seventeenth artwork " Communication " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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#### 4.18 Illustration work " Becoming Deities "

##### 4.18.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work " Becoming Deities "

" Becoming Deities " is the eighteenth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. This work is the final work of Chapter 3, which expresses the process of Mazu's becoming a deity. From the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, Mazu underwent 36 official government praises in ancient China. The modern Chinese government's recognition of Mazu is similar to that of the deity of peace and the first non material cultural heritage of China in terms of faith and customs. These commendations are also witnesses of Mazu's gradual transformation into a deity. Mazu's growth was like a tree, starting from a small fishing village on Meizhou Island and growing from small saplings all the way to the towering tree it is today. As the highest recognized deity in China, Mazu's process of becoming a deity is a culmination of Mazu's faith.

##### 4.18.2 Symbol extraction for the illustration work "Chengshen"

(1) Heart: The heart represents the core of Mazu's faith, sincere love, and the small stars representing Mazu's spirit evolve along the branches of the heart's blood vessels, transmitting energy to the fruit.

(2) Fruit: The fruit represents the deity of Mazu. Throughout history, emperors have conferred 36 titles on Mazu, each corresponding to a fruit. The modern Chinese government has designated the deity Ping and Mazu's customs as intangible cultural heritage, each corresponding to a fruit.

(3) Tree: represents the growth process of Mazu belief, with five forks from right to left corresponding to five different eras, namely Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing, and modern.

(4) Stars and Points: These dots represent the concrete power of faith and symbolize the nourishment provided for the tree of Mazu faith.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu Baofeng: the object is Mazu's Ennobled, the interpretant is becoming deities, and the representamen is the heart, tree, fruit, stars and points.

Analyze the symbols of Mazu's commendation based on the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is faith, good conduct, good deeds, and great love. The secondness is the Mazu's ennobled, and the thirdness is the spiritual essence (Table 27).

Table 26 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu's Ennobled

through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Good conduct, Good deeds, Great love	Firstness	Becoming Deities	Representamen	Heart, Fruit, Tree, Stars and Points
Mazu's Ennobled	Secondness		Interpretant	Becoming Deities
Spiritual Essence	Thirdness		Object	Mazu's Ennobled

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure 108).

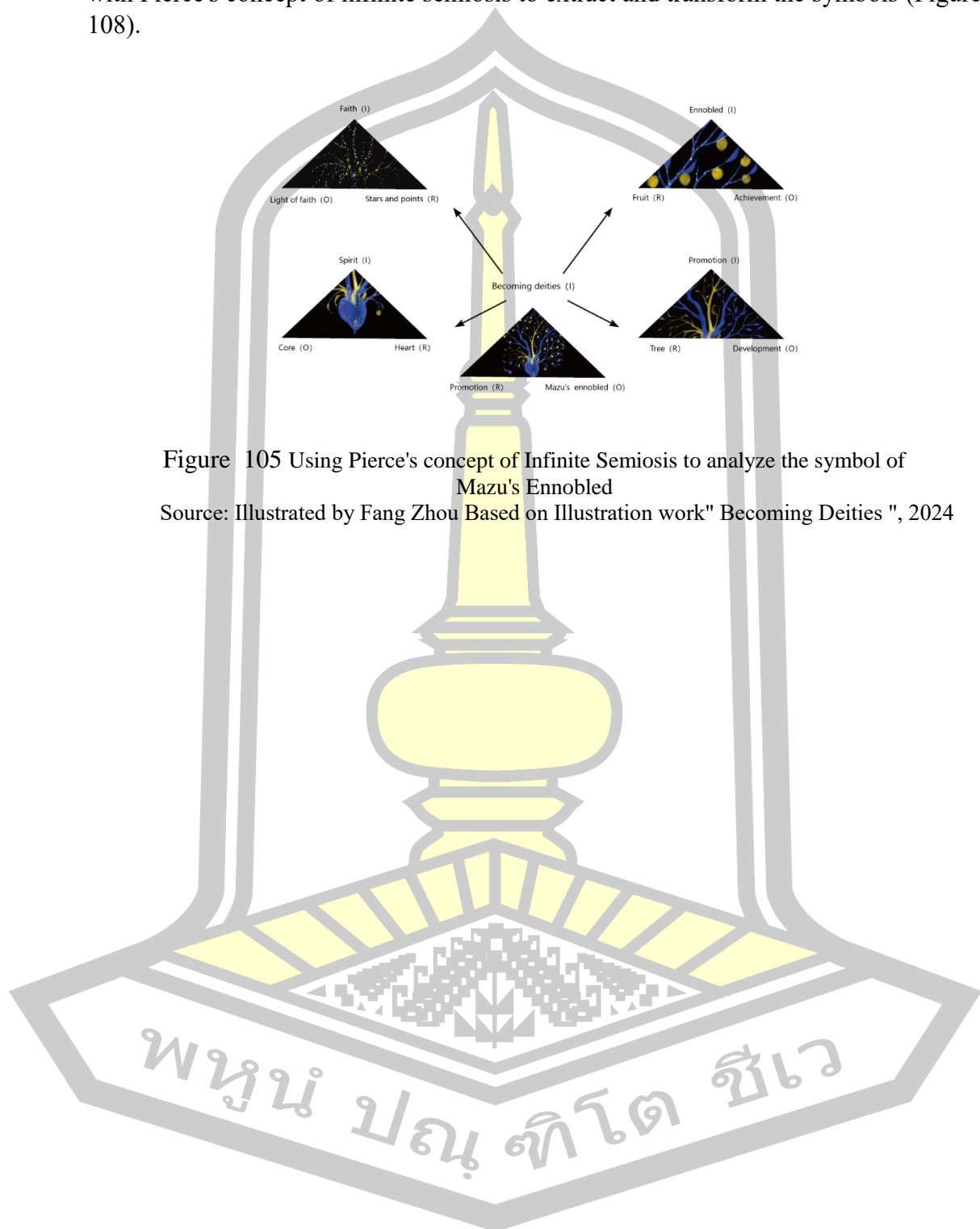


Figure 105 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu's Ennobled

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Becoming Deities ", 2024

#### 4.18.3 The visual expression of the illustration work " Becoming Deities "

To highlight the main effect, use a black background color for contrast expression. In the composition, a symmetrical shape with upward extension is used to spread the structure of the tree throughout the picture, and the direction of the branches is upward extension, giving a positive feeling of growth.

The deity of Mazu is like a tree, and every commendation is a result. Therefore, a fruit is drawn. As Mazu was born in Putian, Fujian, and the most famous fruit in the area is lychee, lychee is chosen as the fruit. The spirit of Mazu is the harmony of Mazu becoming a deity, so this meaning is expressed in the form of the heart. A tree has grown on the spiritual heart of Mazu, and each fork in the heart corresponds to a branch of the tree, representing an era. The branches from right to left represent the five eras of the Song Dynasty, the Yuan Dynasty, the Ming Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty, and the modern era (Figure 109). In each era, golden lychees grow on the branches, and the number of lychees corresponds to the number of commendations received by Mazu during that era. There were 14 awards in the Song Dynasty, 5 awards in the Yuan Dynasty, 2 awards in the Ming Dynasty, 15 awards in the Qing Dynasty, and 2 awards in modern times for Mazu's deity of Peace and intangible cultural heritage of faith and customs.



Figure 106 The composition idea of the eighteenth artwork " Becoming Deities " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou,2024

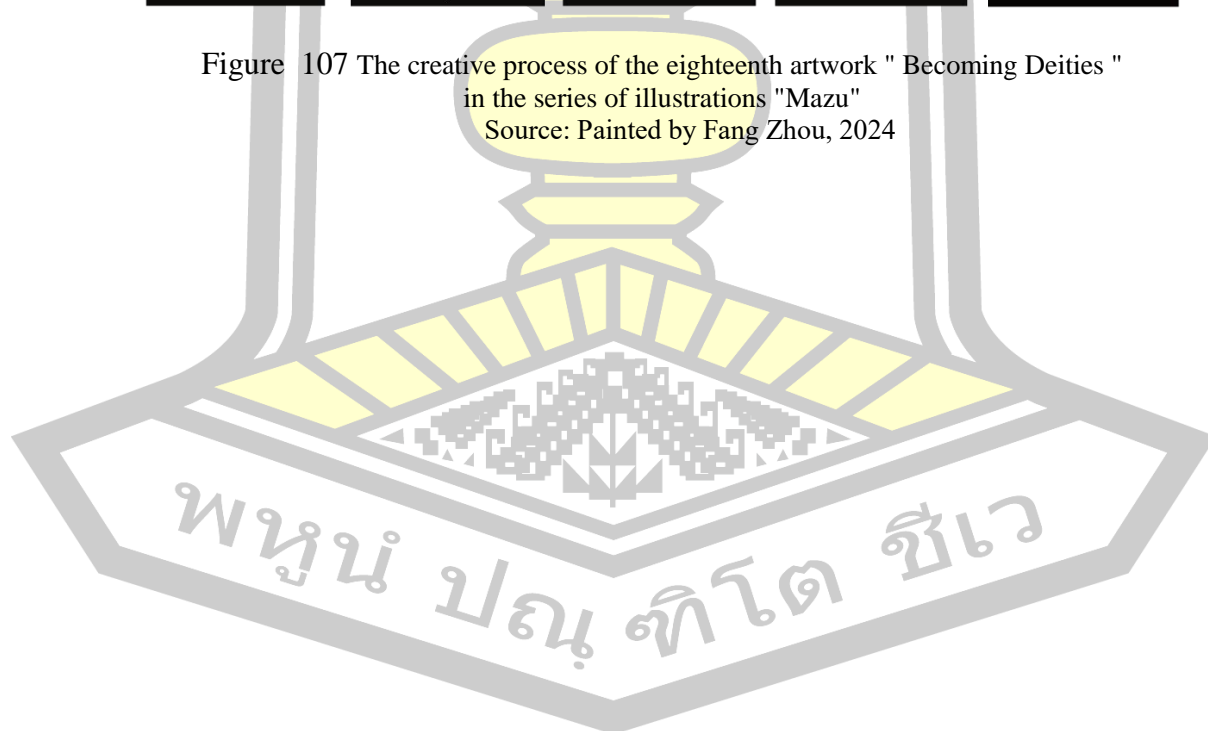
#### 4.18.4 The creative process of the illustration work " Becoming Deities "

Firstly, use color blocks to draw the rough outline and shape of the heart and trees. Using a brush with a rough texture can better mimic the texture and characteristics of trees. Then further refine the image by drawing branches, planning and processing the branches based on the number of deities in the dynasty and the direction of blood vessels in the heart, and covering the image. Then draw golden lychees based on the specific number of times they were praised in each dynasty, and fill the remaining branches with leaves to make the picture look more harmonious.

The application of dots, lines, and midpoints is specifically reflected in the addition of a large number of stars and dots located in the heart and branches, representing that the power of Mazu's faith originates from Mazu's spirit and flows in every branch and era. It is the nourishment, driving force, and basis for Mazu to be praised as a deity. The stars and dots here adopt many different shapes, hollow, stacked, and luminous, with complex textures and ways to express the further evolution of the power of faith (Figure 110).



Figure 107 The creative process of the eighteenth artwork " Becoming Deities " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.18.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work " Becoming Deities "

Work "Becoming Deities" :Figure 111

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

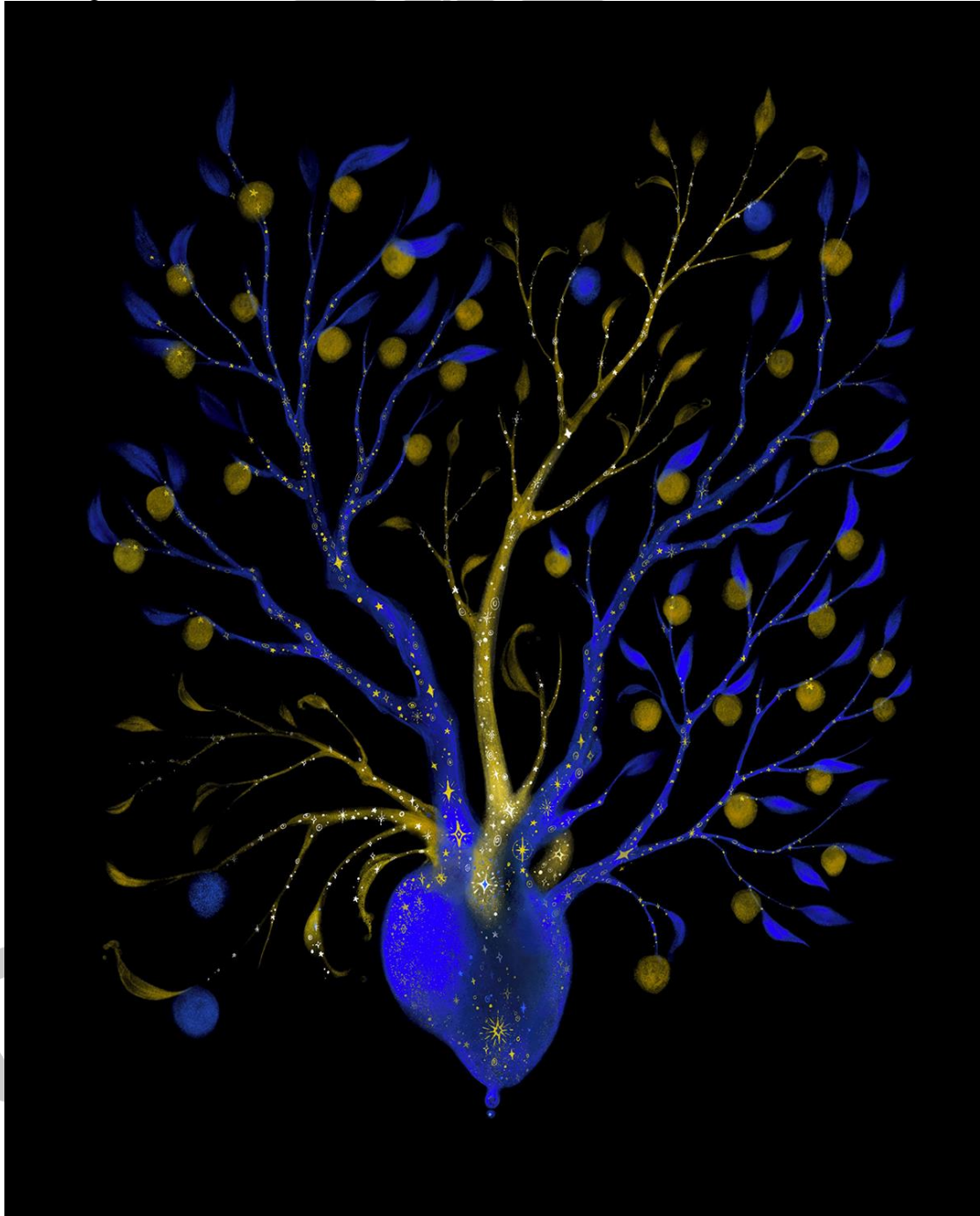


Figure 108 The eighteenth artwork " Becoming Deities " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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#### 4.19 Illustration work " Bind "

##### 4.19.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work " Bind "

"Bind" is the nineteenth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. This work is the first one on the theme of Mazu's influence in Chapter 4. As the first work of influence, I hope to showcase the current situation of Mazu faith and Mazu culture. The work expresses the difficulties that Mazu culture and faith encounter in modern society, such as the lack of faith and stereotypes. However, in the face of the constraints brought about by this series of changes in the times, Mazu culture and Mazu faith still persevere, silently developing around the cultural core of Mazu spirit, and not forgetting their original intention. Nowadays, Mazu's beliefs and customs have become intangible cultural heritage, and Mazu culture has become an important bridge for cross-strait exchanges. It has also ushered in new opportunities and development.

##### 4.19.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Bind"

(1) Bandage: If a bandage binds it, but no matter what constraints, it cannot change the core of Mazu and the spirit of great love. Mazu's head crown, consisting of nine strings and twelve beads, represents her divine power scattered throughout the picture, representing her original intention that remains unchanged even in the face of constraints.

(2) Crown Pennant: A symbol of ancient emperors, Mazu, as the deity of heaven, also enjoys the same symbolic characteristics, symbolizing Mazu's status.

(3) 9 Strings and 12 Beads: The number of bead strings on the imperial crown has a special meaning. In the Qing Dynasty, the imperial crown was nine strings and ten beads. Nowadays, the statue of Mazu often wears nine strings and twelve beads, symbolizing Mazu's higher status in people's hearts than that of an emperor.

(4) Scepter: Like Ruyi, it is a symbolic symbol of Mazu.

(5) Stars and Points: the concretization of the power of Mazu faith.

In summary, the three elements of the Pierce symbol are used to analyze the symbols of Mazu's current situation: the object is Mazu's Present, the interpretant is bind, and the representamen is bandage, crown pennant, 9 strings and 12 beads, scepter, stars and points.

The three properties of the Pierce symbol are used to analyze the current situation of Mazu: the firstness is calm, virtuous, good conduct, good deeds, and great love. The secondness is Mazu's present, and thirdness is the get rid of difficulties, spiritual core (Table 28).

Table 27 Analyzing the symbols of Mazu's Present through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Calm, Virtuous, Good conduct, Good deeds, Great love	Firstness	Bind	Representamen	Bandage, Crown, Pennant, 9 Strings and 12 Beads, Scepter Stars and Points
Mazu's Present	Secondness		Interpretant	Bind
Get rid of difficulties, Spiritual Core	Thirdness		Object	Mazu's Present

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure 112).

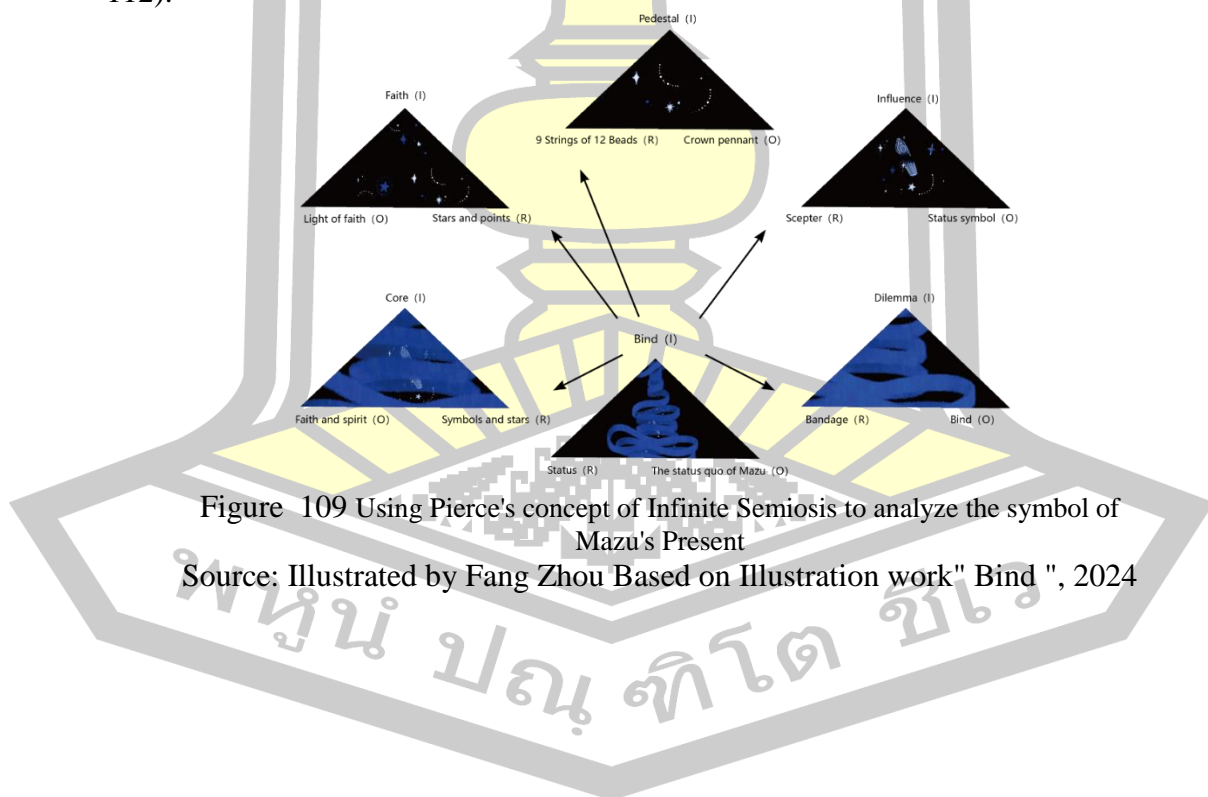


Figure 109 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of Mazu's Present

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Bind ", 2024

#### 4.19.3 Aesthetic expression of the illustration work "Bind"

For this reason, the previous consistent illustration style used a black background color. A bandage is composed of curves, with a directional guidance downwards to conform to the natural world's sense of gravity. These lines form the form of Mazu sitting on a plate (Figure 113).

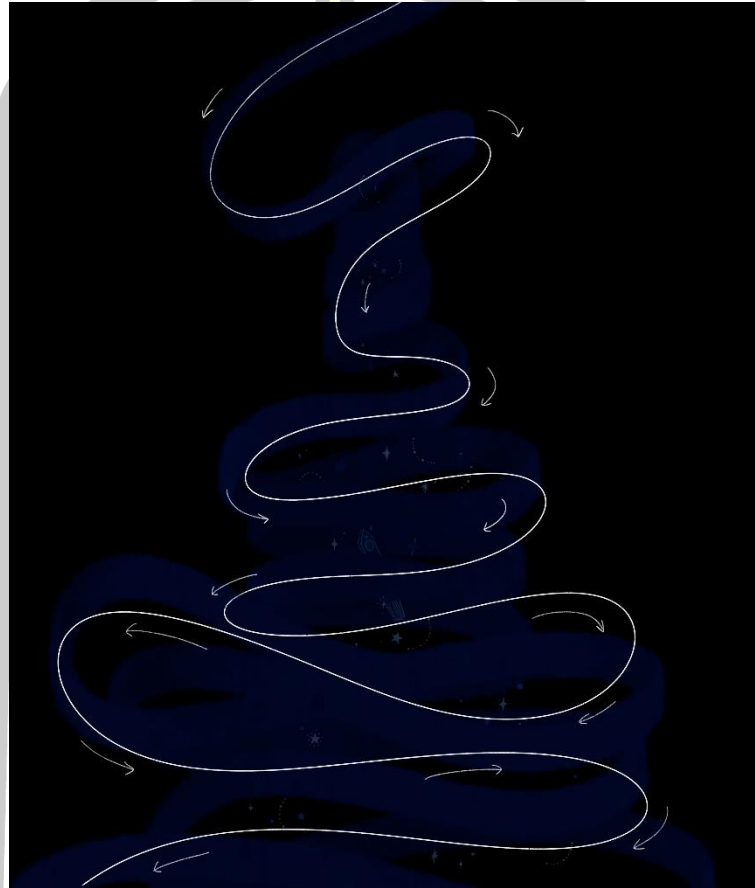


Figure 110 The creative process of the nineteenth artwork " Bind " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

Entering modern society, Mazu, as a traditional culture, has also encountered its own difficulties, such as lack of faith and other issues. Expressed as a Mazu composed of bandages, symbolizing restraint. However, in the face of these problems, the spiritual core of Mazu is based on its perseverance and continued development. Although it has encountered new challenges, Mazu culture, with its spirit of great love, can still actively develop and bring believers forward. The image depicts the appearance of Mian Di and Hu Ban, symbols of Mazu's status, inside Mazu's body, and is painted in bright light colors to express its purity and holiness.

#### 4.19.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Bind"

Firstly, draw the shape of the bandage lines using color blocks. Using brush settings can reduce the freedom of the brush, making the drawn lines smoother and more rounded. Use dark colors to darken the bandage and create a three-dimensional effect. The Mian Gong and Hu Ban of Mazu, as well as the scattered dots representing Mazu's faith, are scattered within Mazu's body, expressing Mazu's inner spirit and the shining and stable status quo. These elements use a light blue color close to white, contrasting with the black background and the dark blue color of the bandage, highlighting the meaning of the Holy Spirit (Figure 114).

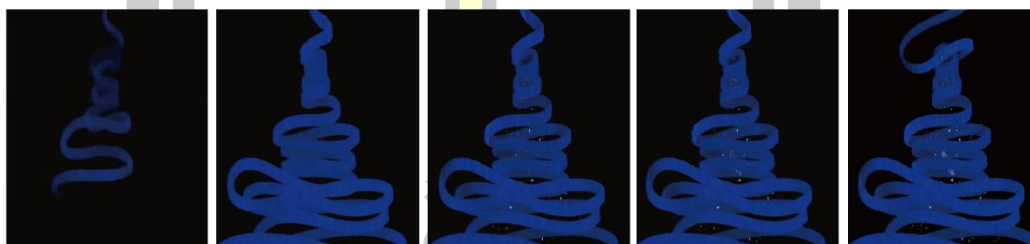
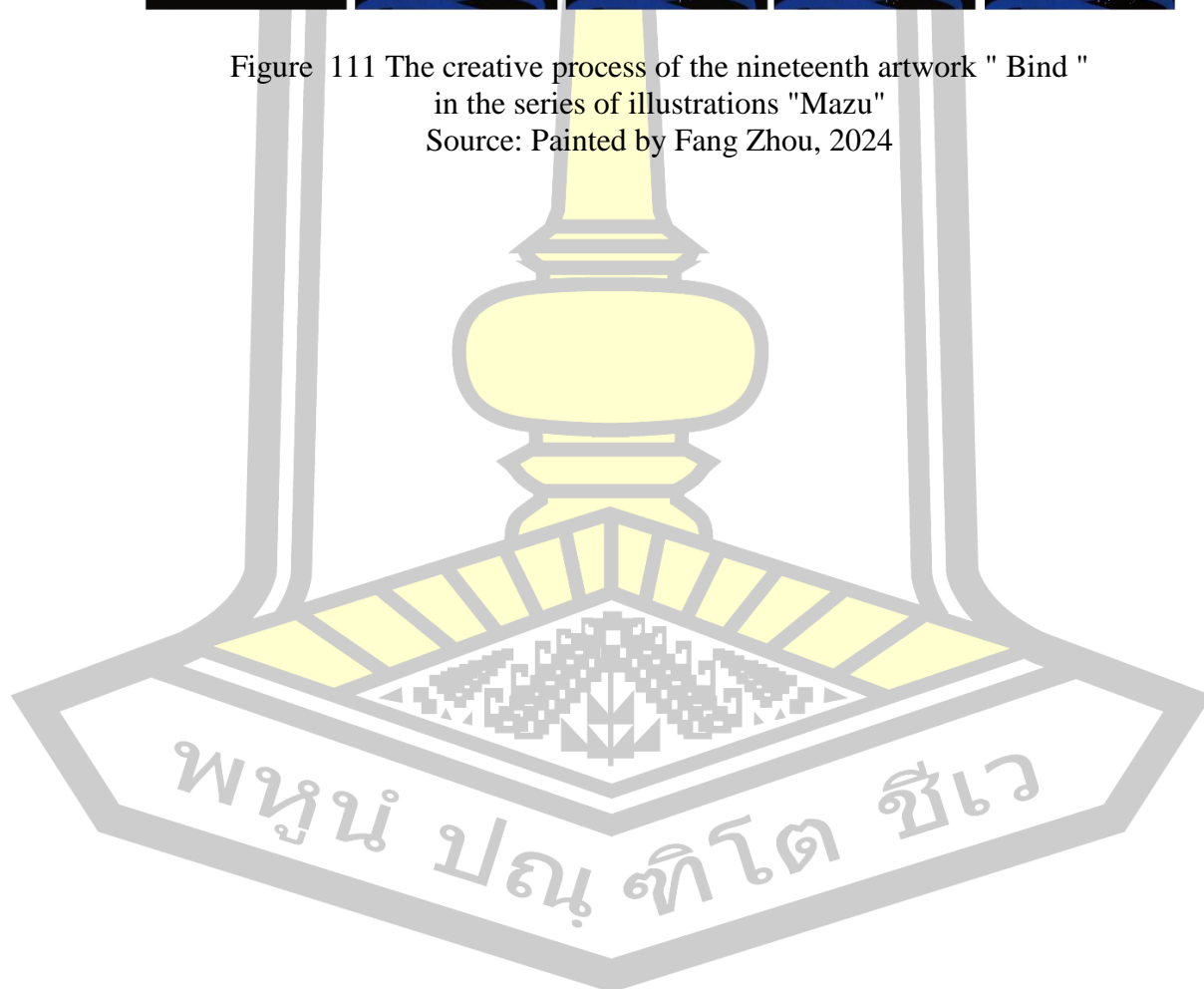


Figure 111 The creative process of the nineteenth artwork " Bind " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024





#### 4.19.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Bind"

Work "Becoming Deities" :Figure 115

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

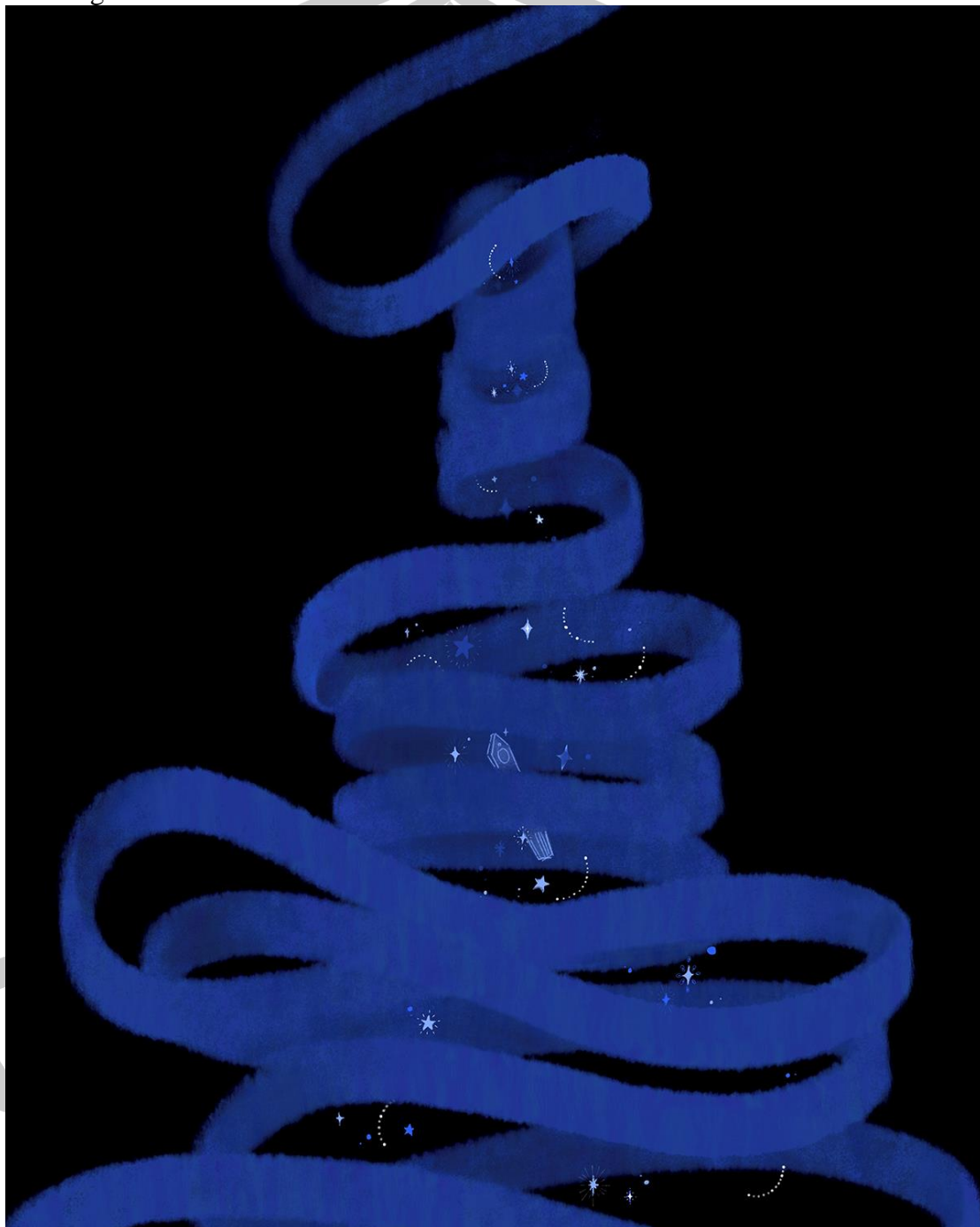


Figure 112 The nineteenth artwork "Bind" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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## 4.20 Illustration work "Future"

### 4.20.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Future"

"Future" is the twentieth work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. The work expresses the future of Mazu culture and Mazu faith. Mazu culture and faith have a rich history, a broad foundation of faith, a beautiful spiritual core support, and official support and promotion, so their future is full of infinite possibilities.

### 4.20.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "The Future"

(1) Mobius Ring: a symbol of infinity, representing the infinite possibilities of Mazu's future.

(2) Tiara: The magnificent crown of Mazu represents the reverence of the people towards Mazu and the recognition of the Mazu faith, which is supported by a beautiful spiritual core.

(3) Stars and Points: the concretization of the power of Mazu faith.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's possibility: the object is the possibility of Mazu, the interpretant is the future, and the representamen is the Mobius ring, tiara, stars and points.

Using the three properties of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's possibility: the firstness is infinite. The secondness is the possibility of Mazu, and the thirdness is the spiritual core, infinite possibilities (Table 29).

Figure 113 Analyzing the symbols of The possibility of Mazu through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Infinite	Firstness		Representamen	Mobius Ring, Tiara, Stars and Points
The possibility of Mazu	Secondness	Future	Interpretant	Future
Spiritual core, infinite possibilities	Thirdness		Object	The possibility of Mazu

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure 116).

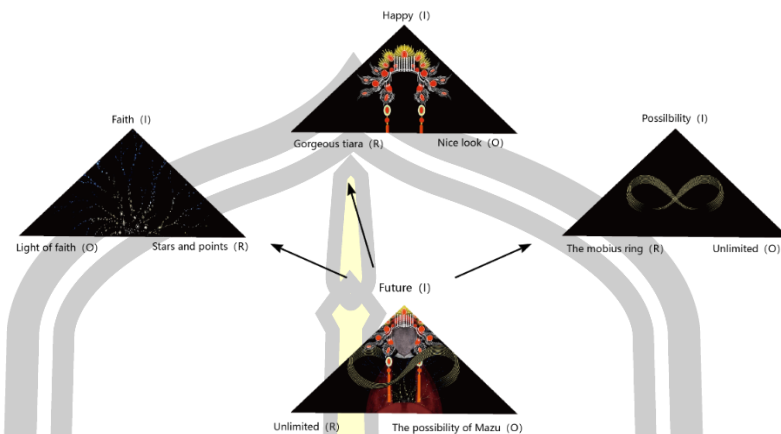


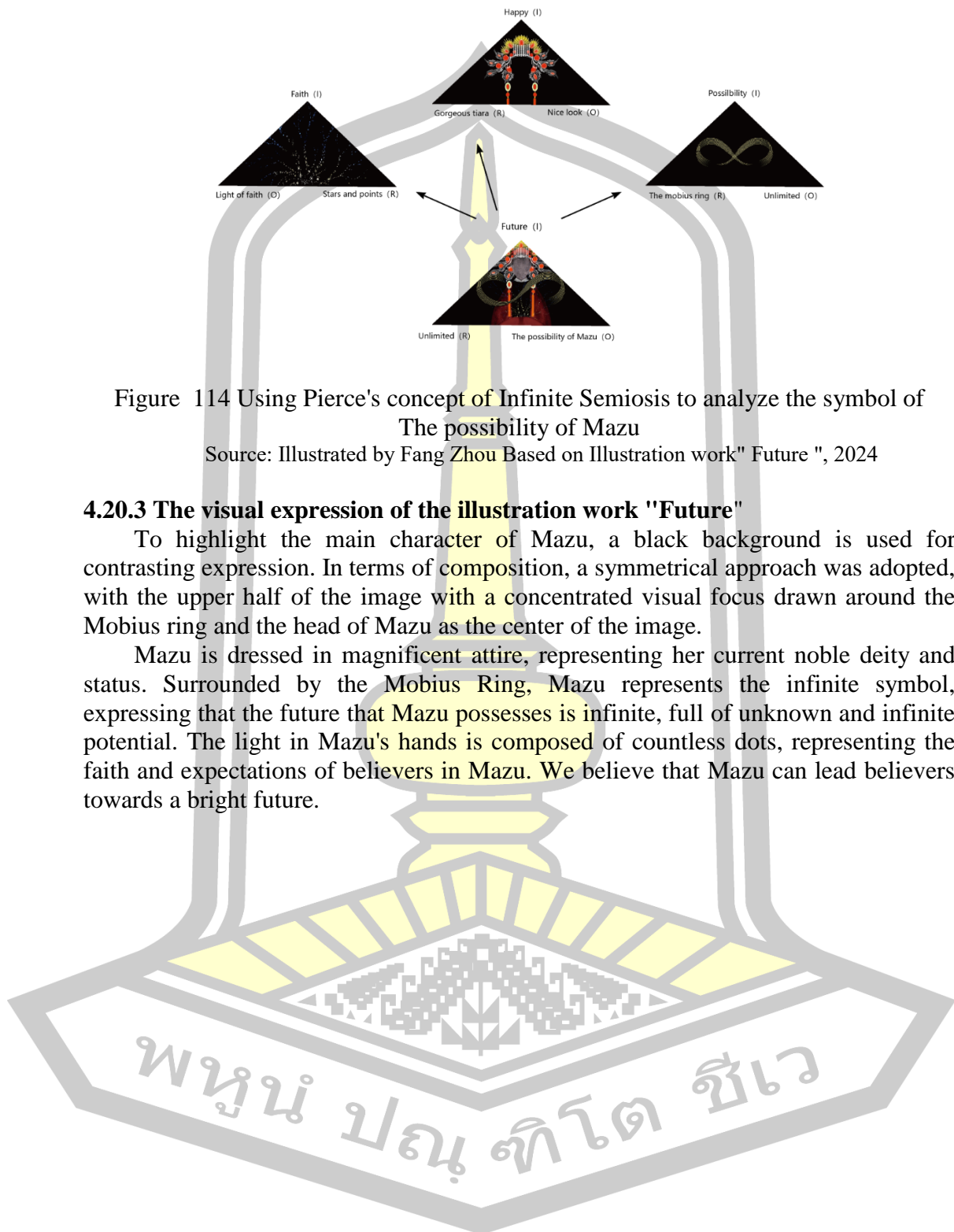
Figure 114 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of  
The possibility of Mazu

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work "Future ", 2024

#### 4.20.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Future"

To highlight the main character of Mazu, a black background is used for contrasting expression. In terms of composition, a symmetrical approach was adopted, with the upper half of the image with a concentrated visual focus drawn around the Mobius ring and the head of Mazu as the center of the image.

Mazu is dressed in magnificent attire, representing her current noble deity and status. Surrounded by the Mobius Ring, Mazu represents the infinite symbol, expressing that the future that Mazu possesses is infinite, full of unknown and infinite potential. The light in Mazu's hands is composed of countless dots, representing the faith and expectations of believers in Mazu. We believe that Mazu can lead believers towards a bright future.

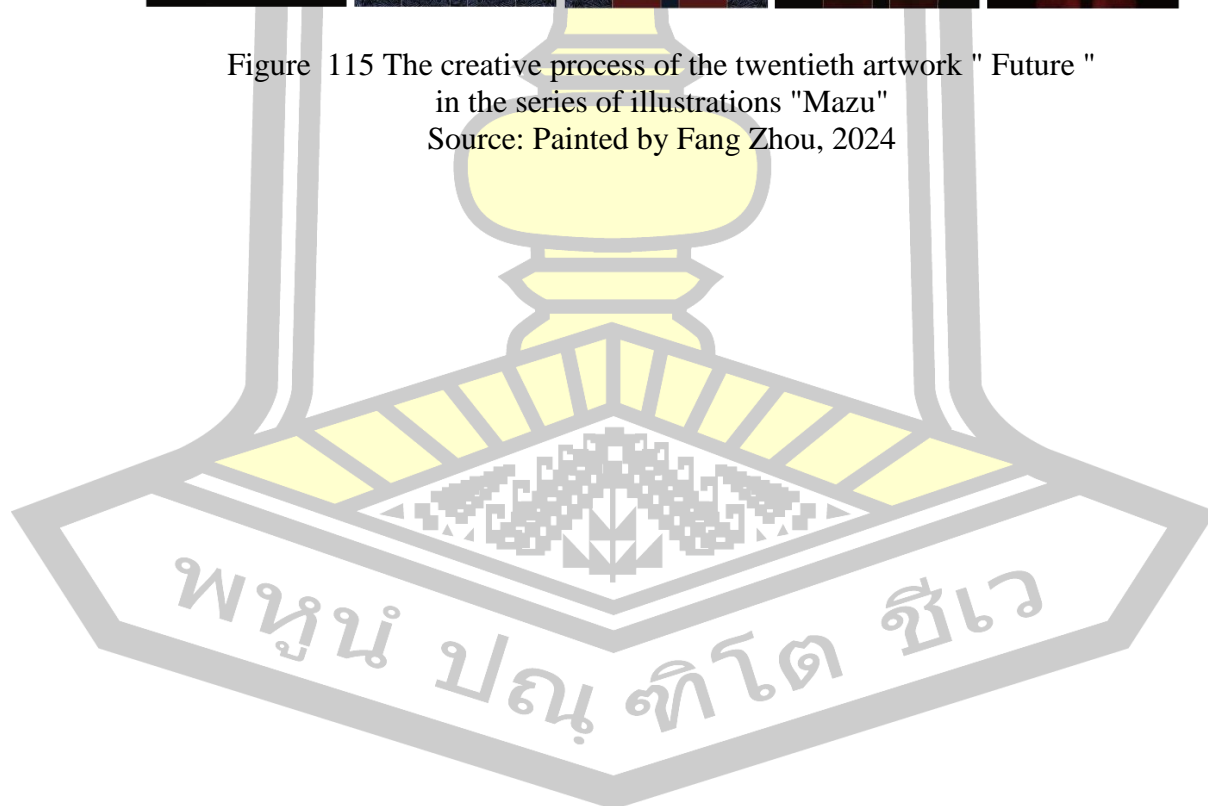


#### 4.20.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Future"

Firstly, use lines to outline the rough image of Mazu, and then use color blocks to lay out the colors to determine the main color tone. Remove the borders from the clothing and body parts of the characters to maintain the same color block based drawing style as previous works. Use an eraser with the same texture to feather and blur the edges of Mazu's clothing, in order to achieve a more integrated and harmonious image. The headwear retains the stroke to distinguish it from the body. The drawing of the Mobius ring also starts by using lines to outline the approximate shape. Here, the interior of the Mobius ring is drawn using a line layout method. After completion, the traced lines are removed, and the complete line layout style of the Mobius ring is retained. Finally, a large number of complex dots were used to draw the flame of faith in Mazu's hand, with a light gold color similar to the Mobius ring, and the end gradually changing to blue, representing a transition from faith to power (Figure 117).



Figure 115 The creative process of the twentieth artwork "Future" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.20.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Future"

Work "Becoming Deities" :Figure 118

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

#### 4.21 Illustration work "Spirit"

##### 4.21.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Spirit"

"Spirit" is the twenty-first work in a series of illustrations with the theme of Mazu culture. A culture and belief require a core as support, and the core of the Mazu spirit is the driving force that supports it. The Mazu spirit: to uphold virtue, do good, and love, runs through all aspects of Mazu culture and belief, and is the fundamental reason why Mazu culture can have such a wide influence. The spirit belongs to things that cannot be seen or touched, so it needs to be concretized. Here, the heart is used as a concrete symbol of the spirit for creation, because the heart is the driving force core and one of the most important organs for humans. The spirit of Mazu is the core of Mazu culture and belief, so representing the heart as the spirit is the creative starting point of this work.

##### 4.21.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Spirit"

(1) Heart: The heart is often a person's most important organ and a source of power. The intrinsic driving force of Mazu culture and belief is the spirit of Mazu, so the symbol of the heart symbolizing the spirit of Mazu is used here.

(2) Flowers: Small flowers are stories and beliefs that make up the statue of Mazu. These wrap around Mazu's heart of great love and are her inner motivation.

(3) Crown Pennant: A symbol representing the social status of Mazu culture.

(4) Stone Statue: An indestructible symbol representing Mazu culture.

(5) Stars and Points: the concretization of the power of Mazu faith.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbol of Mazu's spirit: the object is Mazu's spirit, the interpretant is spirit, and the representamen is the heart, flowers, crown pennant, stone statues, stars and points.

Analyze the spiritual symbols of Mazu through the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is good conduct, good deeds, and great love. The secondness is the spirit of Mazu, while the thirdness is the spiritual core, and spread from ancient to modern times (Table 30).

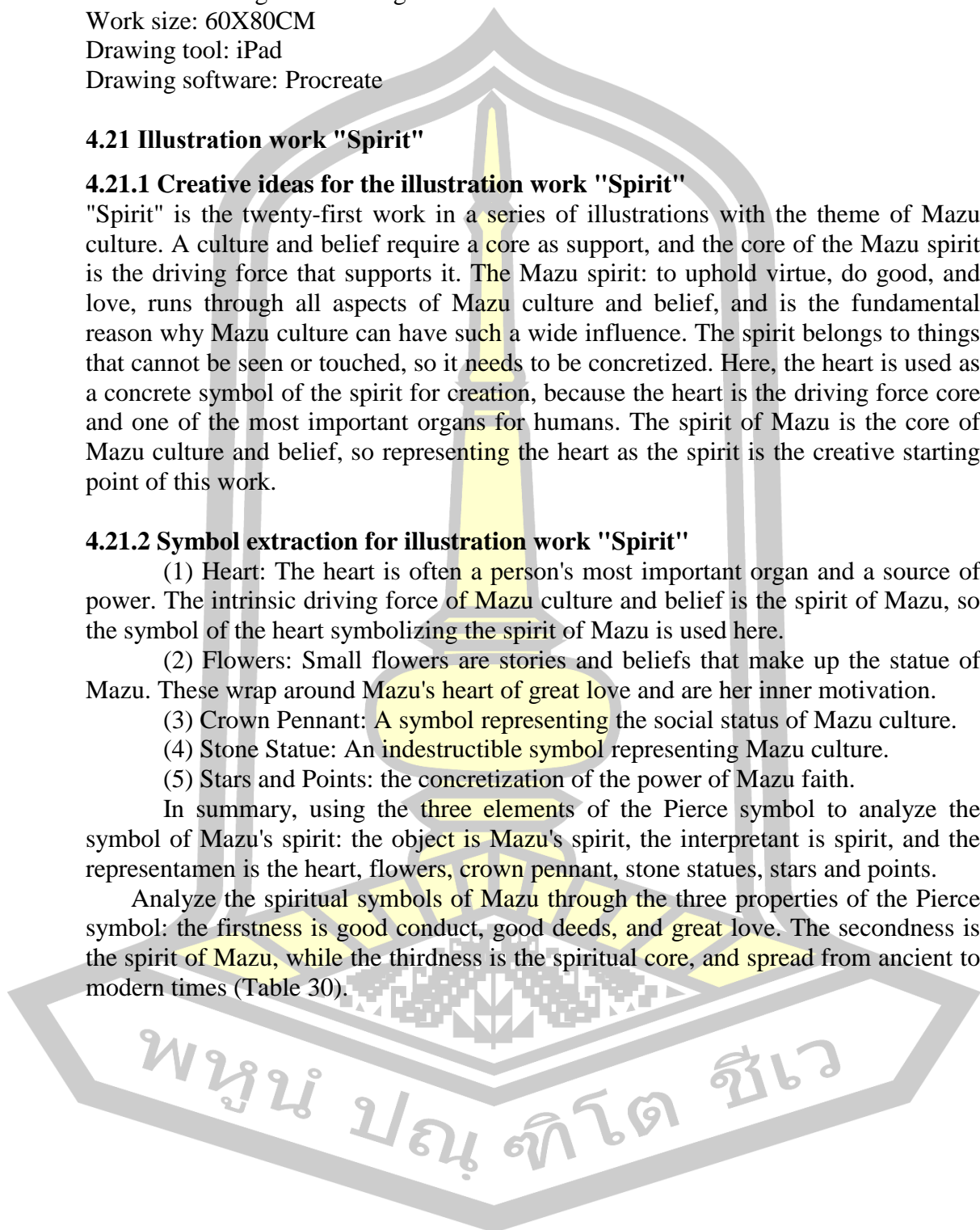




Table 28 Analyzing the symbols of the Spirit of Mazu through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Good conduct, Good deeds, Great love	Firstness		Representamen	Heart, Flowers, Crown Pennant, Stone Statue, Stars and Points
<b>The Spirit of Mazu</b>	Secondness		Interpretant	Spirit
Spiritual Core, Spread from ancient to modern times	Thirdness		Object	<b>The Spirit of Mazu</b>

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure 119).

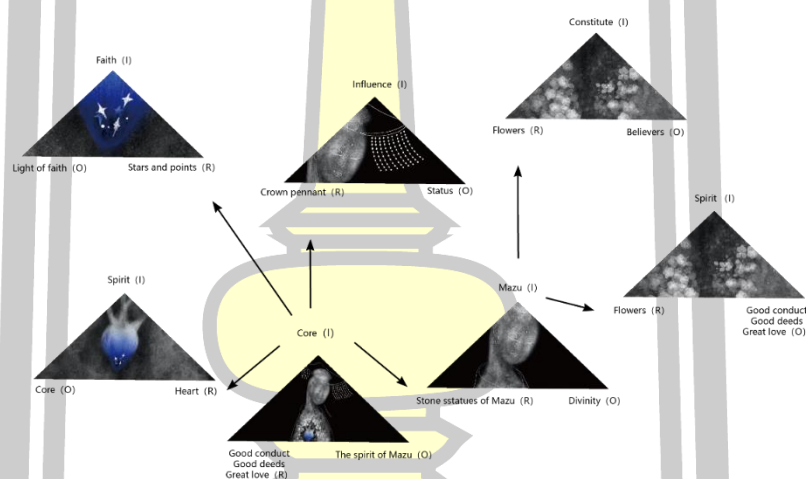


Figure 116 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of The Spirit of Mazu

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work " Spirit ", 2024



#### 4.21.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Spirit"

To highlight the main form of Mazu's light white stone statue, first fill the background with black. Mazu is widely known to appear in the form of statues, so the statue is chosen here to determine the image of Mazu. In terms of material, stone statues are used, which are indestructible and still stand firm despite the ups and downs of history. To express the steadfastness of Mazu's spirit, the form of stone statues is used for painting. Although the Mazu in the picture is in the state of a stone statue, it is composed of millions of flowers, which are the followers of Mazu. Opening the flowers reveals the inner essence of Mazu, which is the spiritual core of Mazu. A pure and transparent heart is the spirit of Mazu's great love. The reason why the spirit of Mazu is embodied as the heart is because, like the spirit of Mazu, the heart is the core and pillar. Finally, to reflect Mazu's exclusivity, a symbolic crown was added to Mazu, reflecting her noble status.

#### 4.21.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Spirit"

Firstly, use a mottled texture brush and choose a state with lower transparency to mimic the texture of stones. Spread the color blocks of this effect over a large area to create the image of Mazu. Use an eraser with the same type of parameter settings to hollow out the body part of Mazu and use it to place the heart. Mazu's face is depicted using lines with a concise style, as the visual focus needs to be set at the heart and the face should not be too dominant. First, use color blocks to draw the shape of Mazu's heart. Then, use a cut mask to refine and color the heart. Blue is used because Mazu's divine power is mostly related to the ocean, so blue is used for drawing. The flower part is depicted with white small flowers surrounding the heart. The closer the flower is to the heart, the clearer it becomes, and the closer it is to the edge of the body, the more blurry it becomes. This can better highlight the theme and also better integrate the elements of the stone statue and the flower. Finally, use lines to draw the crown of Mazu's head (Figure 120).

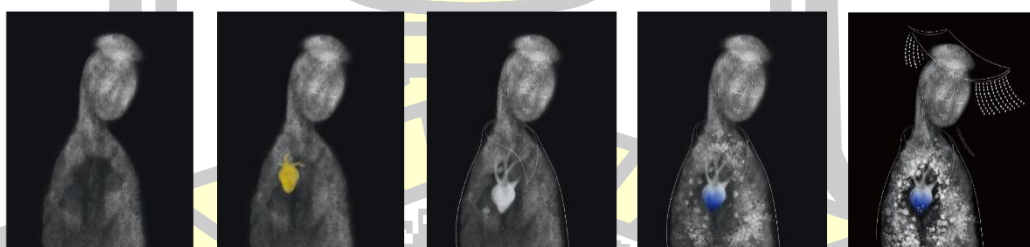


Figure 117 The creative process of the twenty-first artwork " Spirit " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

#### 4.21.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Spirit"

Work "Becoming Deities" :Figure 121

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

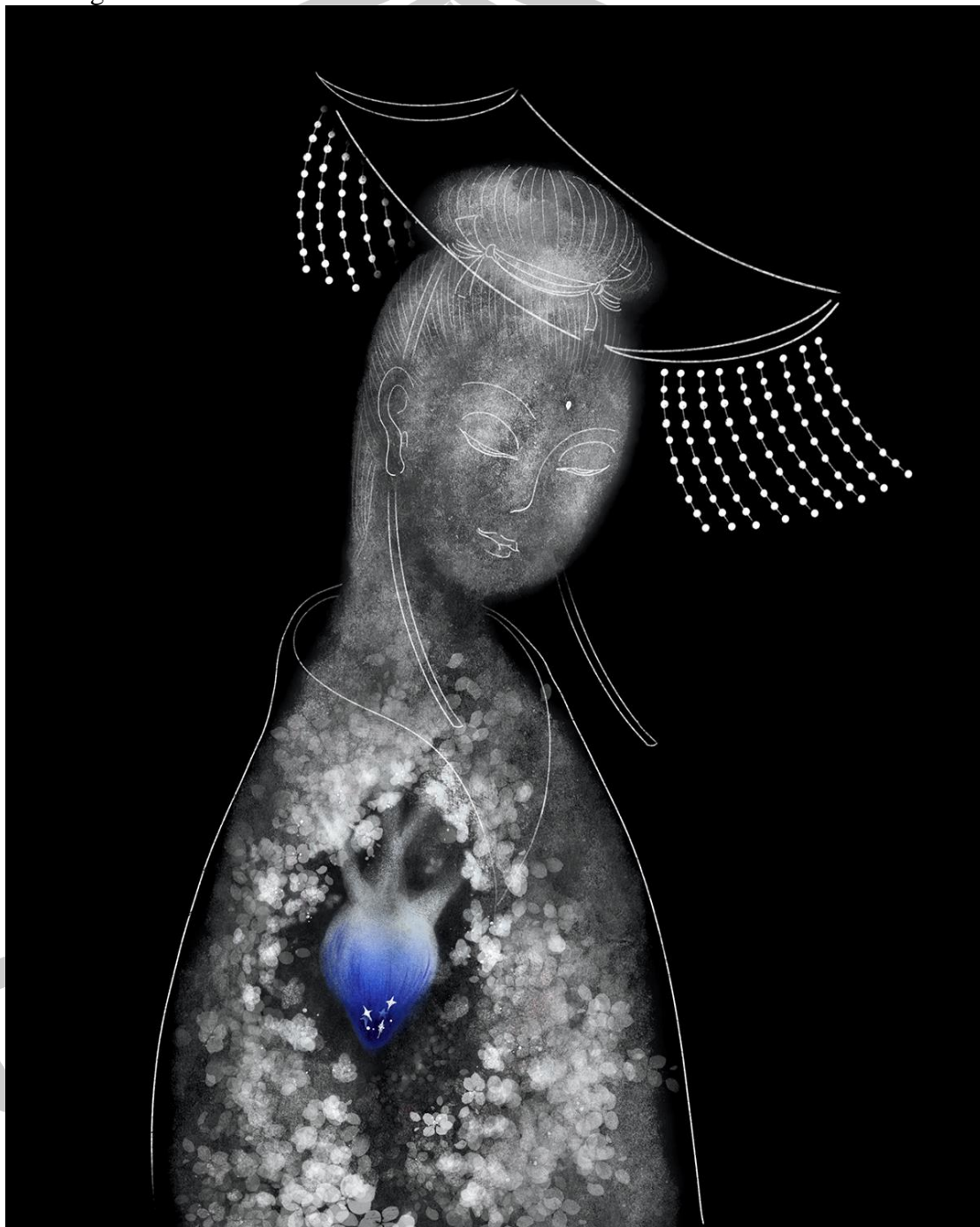


Figure 118 The twenty-first artwork " Spirit " in the series of illustrations "Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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## 4.22 Illustration work "Influence"

### 4.22.1 Creative ideas for the illustration work "Influence"

As the twenty-second and final illustration in a series of works with Mazu culture as the theme, "Influence" expresses the influence of Mazu. The world is made up of an individual, and the world is vast and the people are tiny. However, the very small people have a great impact on the world. Mazu culture has influenced individuals and the world, making it a highly influential culture. Mazu culture, with a positive and beautiful core, has a positive impact on individuals and the world.

### 4.22.2 Symbol extraction for illustration work "Influence"

(1) Cell nucleus: represents an individual's tiny size, selecting cell nucleus symbols that are too small to be visible to the human eye.

(2) Universe: Representing the vastness of the world, choose the symbol of the vast and boundless universe.

(3) Nautilus: The atoms form a Nautilus, and the structural ratio of the Nautilus is the golden ratio of 3.14, representing the heart of Mazu like gold.

(4) Mazu Statue: From a small personal act of kindness to 300 million followers worldwide, great kindness and great love, all are Mazu.

(5) Stars and Points: concrete symbols of the power of Mazu belief that runs through the entire work.

In summary, using the three elements of the Pierce symbol to analyze the symbols of Mazu's influence: the object is Mazu's influence, the interpretant is influence, and the representamen is the nucleus, universe, Nautilus, Mazu statue, stars and points.

Analyzing the symbols of Mazu's influence through the three properties of the Pierce symbol: the firstness is extremely large and extremely small. The secondness is the influence of Mazu, and the thirdness is spread from ancient to modern times (Table 31).

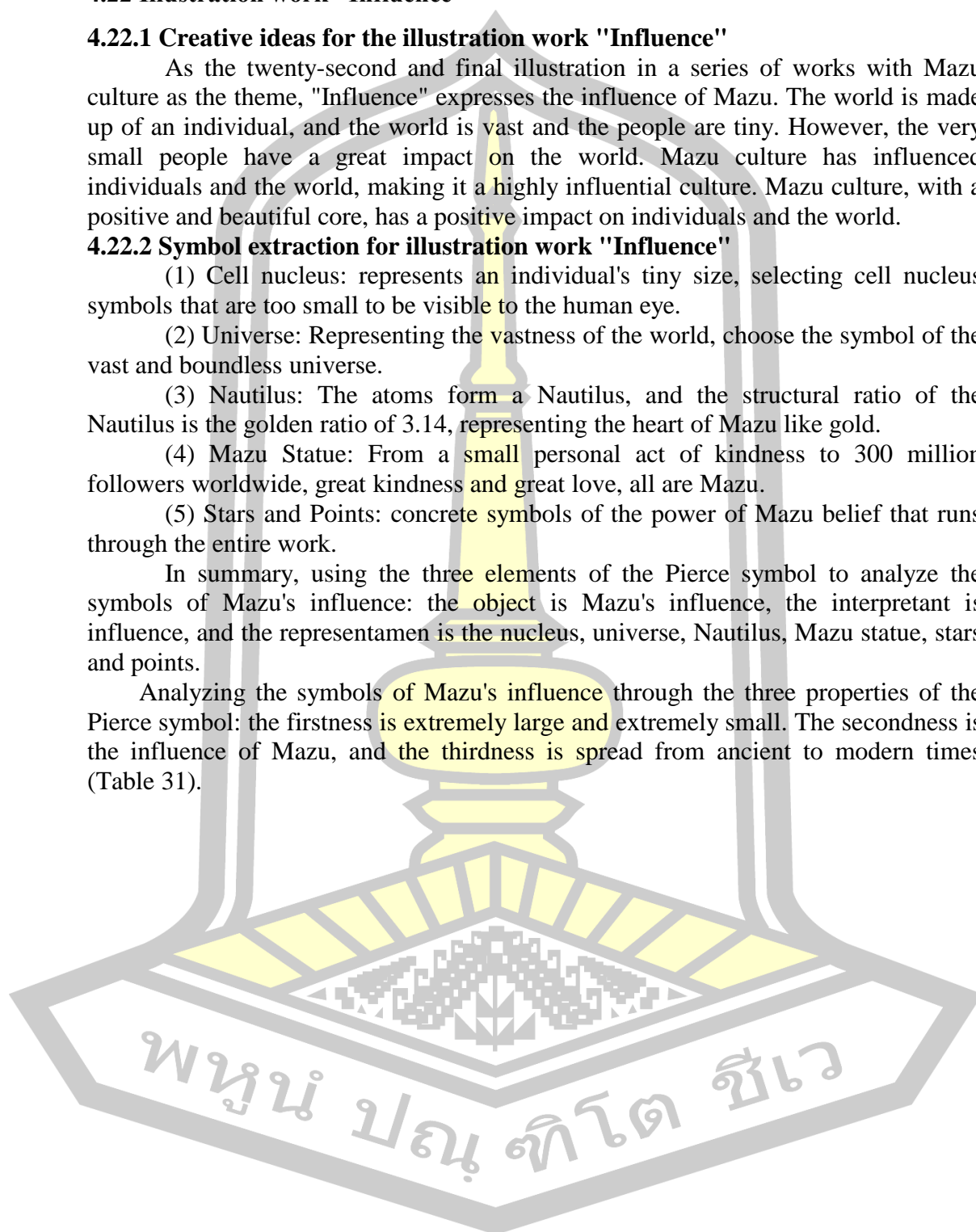


Table 29 Analyzing the symbols of the influence of Mazu  
through the three elements and three properties of Pierce symbols

Extremely small, Extremely large	Firstness	Influence	Representamen	Nucleus, Universe, Nautilus, Mazu Statue, Stars and Points
The influence of Mazu	Secondness		Interpretant	Influence
Spread from ancient to modern times	Thirdness		Object	The influence of Mazu

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou, 2024

Summarize the symbols obtained through the above methods, and combine them with Pierce's concept of infinite semiosis to extract and transform the symbols (Figure 122).

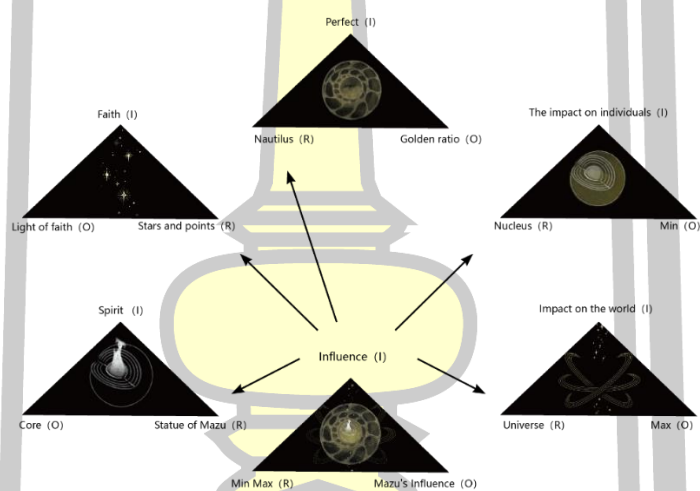


Figure 119 Using Pierce's concept of Infinite Semiosis to analyze the symbol of the influence of Mazu

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou Based on Illustration work " Influence ", 2024





#### 4.22.3 The visual expression of the illustration work "Influence"

Firstly, use black as the background color to depict the dark environment of the universe, while also highlighting the main symbols. The composition uses a circle as the center, and the lines of the symbols spiral outward, guiding people to expand and extend their view from the center of the Mazu image (Figure 123).

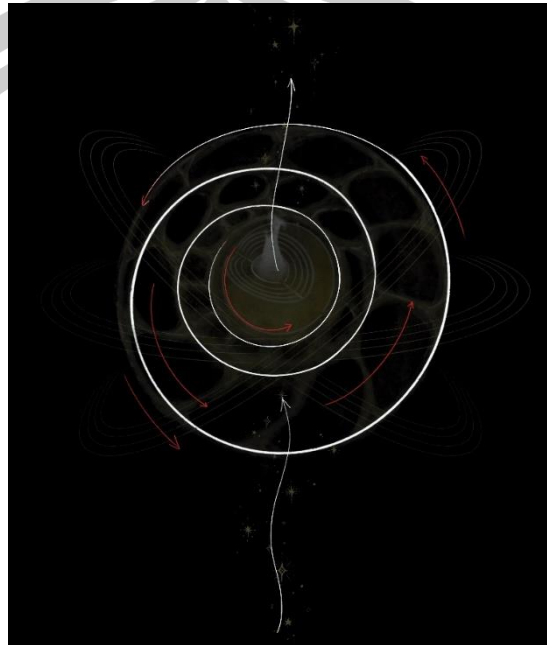


Figure 120 The creative process of the twenty-second artwork "Influence" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

In order to compare the concepts of maximum and minimum, the symbol uses the cell nucleus as the minimum, the universe as the maximum, and the influence of Mazu on people who believe in Mazu, from individuals to the world, is influencing people who believe in Mazu in all aspects and changing the world. The shape of the cells surrounding it is the shell of an ancient creature in the ocean, the Nautilus, which is very ancient and represents the influence of Mazu. It has a long history and heritage since ancient times. The ratio of a parrot snail is the golden ratio, which is called the perfect ratio in mathematics and also known as the perfect ratio in painting. So the second meaning represented by the element of parrot snail is the perfection of Mazu spirit, which is as precious as gold and a perfect and valuable existence for the world.

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#### 4.22.4 The creative process of the illustration work "Influence"

Draw the approximate shape of the central circle using earthy yellow, and then use multiple overlays to draw the background color and range of the cell nucleus and Nautilus. After completing the shape of the nucleus, use a rubber and a paintbrush to continue it into the shape of a parrot snail. In the center of the screen, there is a statue of Mazu standing inside the nucleus, representing the origin of Mazu. To highlight the sanctity of Mazu, Mazu is painted in white. Use flat elliptical lines for repeated drawing, use an eraser to erase the parts that intersect with the main body, and draw the star orbit around the cell. Draw many dotted elements in the upper and lower parts of the main body, representing countless dots representing the power of Mazu faith and also symbolizing the star shape that makes up the universe (Figure 124).

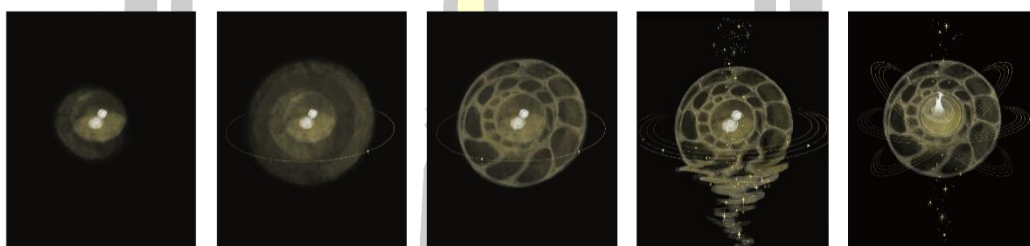


Figure 121 The creative process of the twenty-second artwork "Influence" in the series of illustrations "Mazu"  
Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024



#### 4.22.5 Display of the complete effect of the illustration work "Influence"

Work "Becoming Deities" :Figure 125

Work size: 60X80CM

Drawing tool: iPad

Drawing software: Procreate

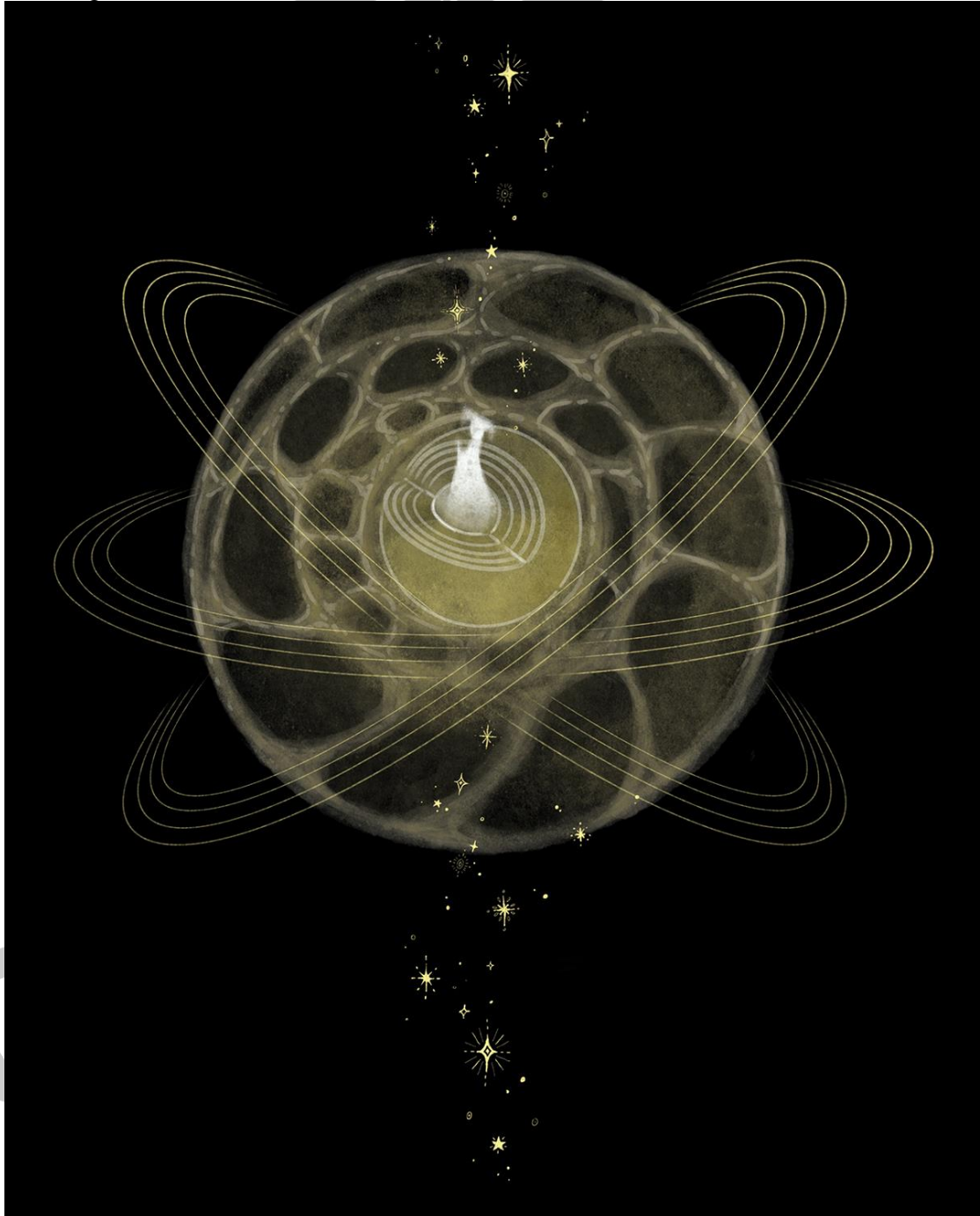


Figure 122 The twenty-second artwork " Influence " in the series of illustrations  
"Mazu"

Source: Painted by Fang Zhou, 2024

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## Chapter V

### Conclusion、 Discussion、 Recommendations

Mazu-themed Illustration Series "Mazu" as Applied Research, This study employs Peirce's semiotic concepts to extract and analyze symbols of Mazu culture from four aspects: Mazu's life, Mazu's functions, Mazu's beliefs, and Mazu's influence. Using aesthetics and applying points, lines, and planes, the illustrations were completed. The researcher hopes to attempt and create new works in the style of modern illustration based on traditional Mazu paintings, aiming to make Mazu more widely known and to promote Mazu culture in modern times.

Based on the research results, the conclusions, discussion, and recommendations are as follows:

#### 5.1 Summary of Research Results

The structure and outcomes of this study basically align with the research objectives and expectations. The creation of the set works and the use of concepts have been successfully completed.

##### 5.1.1 Research on the Development of Chinese Mazu Culture and Mazu Illustrations

Mazu culture originated in the Song Dynasty with the birth of a woman named Lin Mo on Meizhou Island in Putian, Fujian, China. Due to her frequent rescue of the local people during her lifetime and her ultimate sacrifice while saving others, the people built a temple in her honor after her death, thus establishing the Mazu belief. Initially, Mazu was worshipped and believed in only by the local populace. However, with the development of maritime activities, and given the high risks associated with sea voyages due to the then-primitive shipbuilding and navigation technologies, praying for safe voyages became the main belief among coastal worshippers. Mazu's primary role was to ensure the safe return of sailors.

Subsequently, Mazu culture rapidly developed and adapted to the needs of the government and rulers. For instance, during the Yuan Dynasty's canal transport and the Ming Dynasty's Zheng He's expeditions, Mazu culture began to expand and diversify. It no longer remained limited to maritime safety and evolved to include aspects such as praying for children, wealth, rain, and disaster relief. The spread and influence of Mazu culture extended from coastal regions to inland areas and even overseas. Accompanied by 36 official commendations by the government, Mazu's status and divine role grew, making her one of the most highly recognized deities officially in China.

Mazu art, as a concrete representation of Mazu culture, reflects the development of this cultural phenomenon. As Mazu culture evolved, with the elevation of Mazu's divine status and rank, Mazu artworks also exhibited increasingly solemn characteristics. The portrayal of Mazu in paintings transitioned from a relaxed demeanor in the Song Dynasty to a more dignified one in the Qing Dynasty. Her

image evolved from that of a young woman in the Song Dynasty to a more masculine middle-aged woman in the Qing Dynasty, clearly demonstrating this progression.

In modern times, with the advent of the internet and more open and diverse aesthetic preferences, this phenomenon has changed. Mazu art forms and images have become increasingly varied. No longer confined to traditional forms such as statues, murals, and illustrations, Mazu art has expanded with technological advancements to include comics, digital illustrations, TV series, and more. The depiction of Mazu has broken free from the previously rigid and solemn mold, reverting to the youthful characteristics of her earliest representations and branching out into styles that align with contemporary aesthetics, such as vector art and comic styles. Modern developments have infused Mazu art with new vitality.

Mazu culture is a positive and uplifting traditional Chinese culture. The core content of Mazu culture consists of numerous legends and stories, all conveying positive energy through themes of helping others and kindness. Its core spirit—virtue, benevolence, and great love—provides positive guidance to believers. Mazu culture has, over different periods, developed various abilities and functions that met the expectations of both the common people and the authorities, offering spiritual support and guidance to both followers and rulers.

### **5.1.2 Using Peirce's semiotics to extract and analyze symbols in Mazu culture, and studying the application of aesthetics in creating Mazu cultural symbols.**

1) .Through Peirce's semiotics and the theory of the triadic relation of signs, symbols are interpreted as representamen, interpretant, and object. By using Peirce's triad of sign properties, the nature of symbols is defined and contemplated. These symbols are further expanded through Peirce's concept of infinite semiosis to ultimately obtain the symbolic objects needed for creation. Symbols depicted through this method in artwork can establish deeper connections with the creative theme, enhance understanding and contemplation of artistic subjects, and provide a profound insight into a culture. Incorporating the researcher's own interpretation and creativity, this approach greatly aids in the creation of illustrative works.

Themes such as faith, spirituality, and influence, which differ from more tangible and visually perceivable subjects with complete narrative structures, can be challenging to conceptualize. Through the analysis provided by Peirce's semiotics, these themes can be more accurately rendered into tangible forms, aiding creators in crafting their works more effectively.

The final selection of symbols for creative representation of Mazu culture.

#### **Part One Mazu:**

Dragon, Daughter, Babies, Meizhou Island, Flame, Moon, Storm, Hand, Storms, Thread, Seabird, Tears, Fire, Butterfly, Cocoons, 囍Bubble, Ocean, Sky, Ascension, Seabird, Stars and Points

#### **Part Two Function:**

Believers, hands, Mazu, Road of Light, White Soul Fire, Hand, Jellyfish, Jellyfish Tentacles, Firelight, Soul, Eyes, Ears, Neuronal Cells, Sea Urchin Shell, Womb, Platelets, Baby, Ocean, Ocean as Clothing, Moon, Stars and Points

#### **Part Three Belief:**

Statues of Mazu from different eras, Stone Statue, Smoke, Incense, Blackfaced, Different Statues, Golden Statue, Gold, Waves, Flame, Mushroom Circles,



Stars and Points, Portraits, Cell Division, Cells, Blood and Flesh, Glowing Line, Heart, Fruit, Tree

**Part Four Influence :**

Bandage, Crown, Pennant, 9 Strings and 12 Beads, Scepter, Mobius Ring, Tiara, Stars and Points, Heart, Flowers, Crown Pennant, Stone Statue

2) .Through Wassily Kandinsky's aesthetics of Stars and Points, utilizing dot elements with various forms, represented by the motif of stars and points to symbolize the concretization of Mazu faith. Across many artworks, the evolving and enriching Stars and Points connect the entire series, expressing the birth, current state, and future development of Mazu faith.

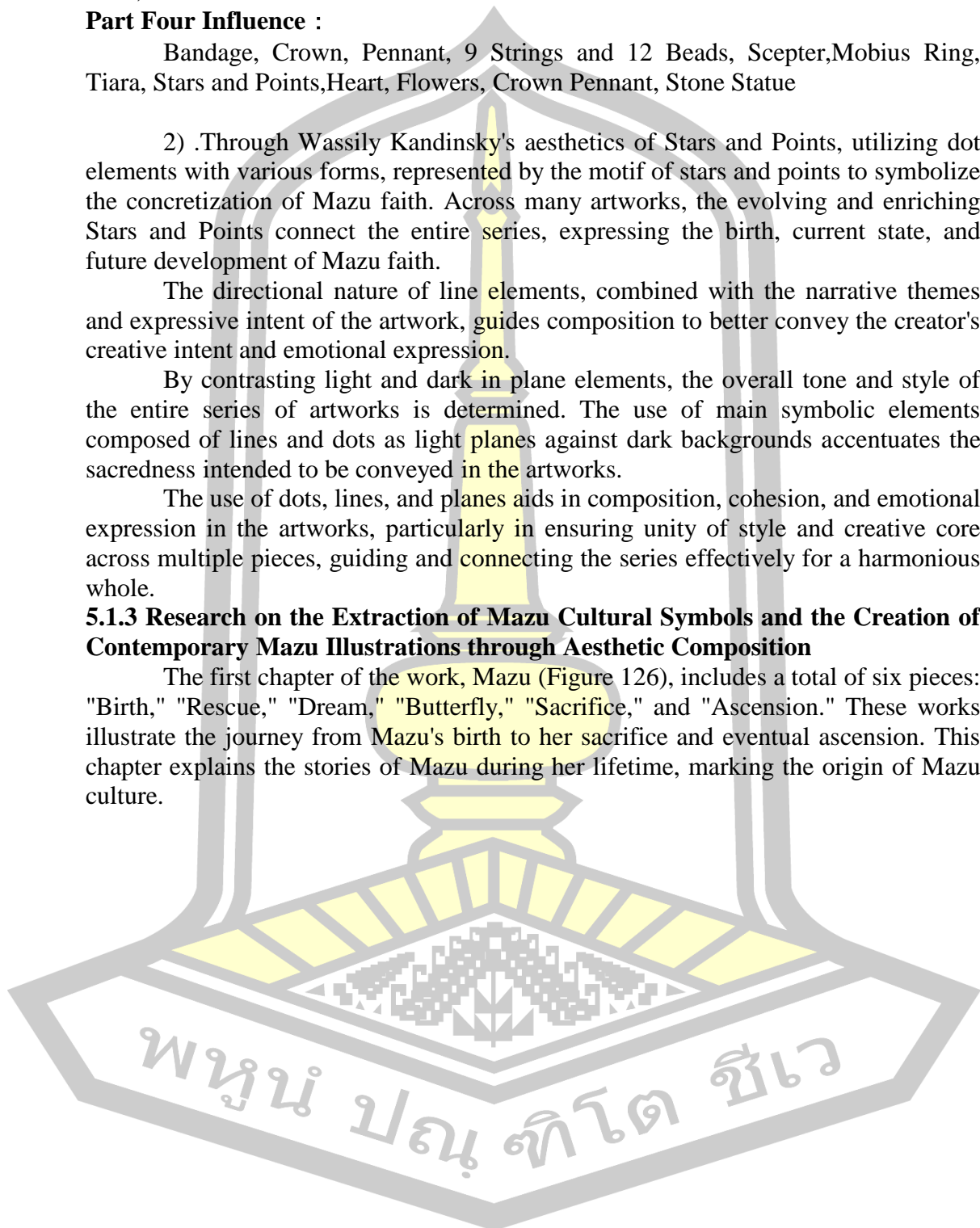
The directional nature of line elements, combined with the narrative themes and expressive intent of the artwork, guides composition to better convey the creator's creative intent and emotional expression.

By contrasting light and dark in plane elements, the overall tone and style of the entire series of artworks is determined. The use of main symbolic elements composed of lines and dots as light planes against dark backgrounds accentuates the sacredness intended to be conveyed in the artworks.

The use of dots, lines, and planes aids in composition, cohesion, and emotional expression in the artworks, particularly in ensuring unity of style and creative core across multiple pieces, guiding and connecting the series effectively for a harmonious whole.

**5.1.3 Research on the Extraction of Mazu Cultural Symbols and the Creation of Contemporary Mazu Illustrations through Aesthetic Composition**

The first chapter of the work, Mazu (Figure 126), includes a total of six pieces: "Birth," "Rescue," "Dream," "Butterfly," "Sacrifice," and "Ascension." These works illustrate the journey from Mazu's birth to her sacrifice and eventual ascension. This chapter explains the stories of Mazu during her lifetime, marking the origin of Mazu culture.



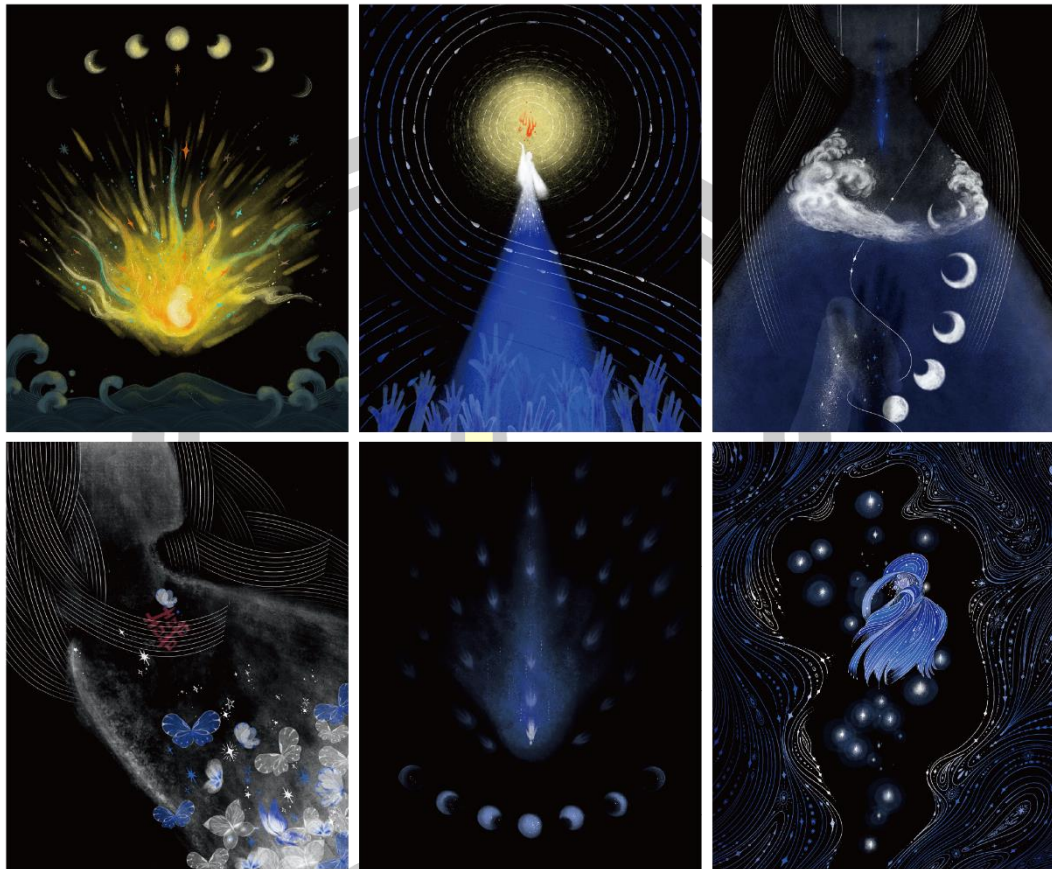


Figure 123 The first part of the illustration series "Mazu": "Mazu"

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou ,2024

Copyright Owner ©2024 Fang Zhou

The second chapter of the work, Function (Figure 127), comprises six pieces: "Prayer," "Redemption," "Return," "Clairvoyance and Sharp Ears," "Seeking Children," and "Sea Deity." This chapter describes Mazu's prayers and redemption for her followers, highlighting her primary and most crucial function of ensuring safety. It also showcases her subordinates' abilities, her later representative power of granting children, and her overarching role as the sea deity.

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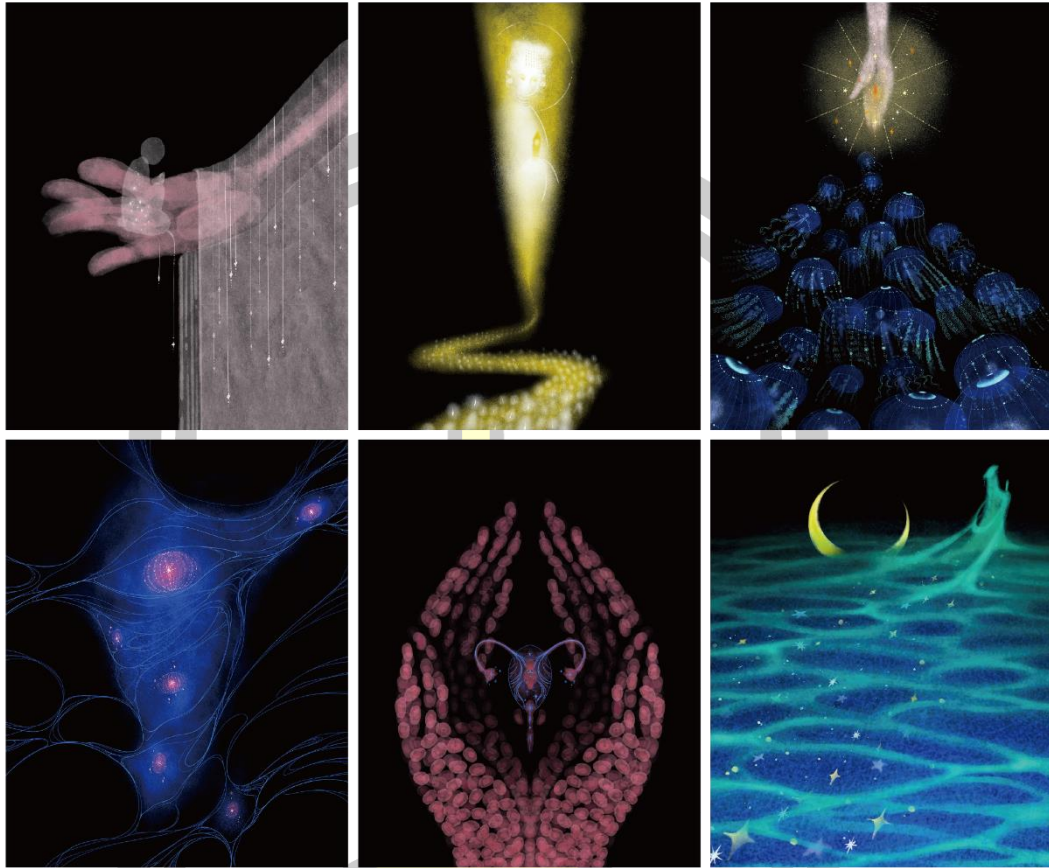


Figure 124 The second part of the illustration series "Mazu": "Function"

Source: Illustrated by Fang Zhou ,2024

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The third chapter of the work, Belief (Figure 128), includes six pieces: "Evolution," "Incense Fire," "Faith," "Connection," "Communication," and "Becoming Deities." This chapter illustrates the transformation of Mazu's image, the diverse beliefs held by different people about Mazu, the connections between believers, the dissemination of Mazu's faith, and the culmination and summary of Mazu's deification process. This chapter primarily expresses the characteristics of Mazu's belief.

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The fourth chapter of the work, Influence (Figure 129), consists of four pieces: "Bind," "Future," "Spirit," and "Influence." This chapter focuses on the current state of Mazu, her future, the core spirit of Mazu culture, and her impact on individuals and the world.





## 5.2 Research Discussion

After completing the creation of the works, experts evaluated the pieces and their academic value to reflect the perspectives and suggestions of this research and creation. The series of illustrated works, Mazu, received support from four experts:

**1). Professor Dr.Supachai Singyabuth :** The professor of the Faculty of Fine Applied Arts and Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University.The professor is an expert in the field of art. (E-mail : Singyabuth @gmail.com)

**2). Professor Arkom Sangiamviboon :** The professor of the Faculty of Fine Applied Arts and Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University.The professor is an expert in the field of art. (E-mail : arkomsang@gmail.com)

**3).Professor Zhan Weifeng :** Dean of the Art&Design college, Putian University.The professor is an expert in the field of art.

**4). Professor Pan Qiang :** The professor of the Fine Arts college, Capital Normal University, The professor is an expert in the field of art. (E-mail: ssdpq@163.com)

Based on the evaluation form in Appendix A, the illustration collection “Mazu” is rated on six aspects:

1). Drawing skill : As an illustration work, drawing technique and skill level are important evaluation criteria. Therefore, the first evaluation item is drawing technique.

2). The fit degree of Mazu theme: Whether the work can embody the Mazu theme and research subject is a key judgment criterion for the work's ability to convey the author's intended expression. This is designed as the second evaluation requirement.

3). Extraction and application of Mazu cultural symbols: This evaluates whether the work fully utilizes semiotic principles and conforms to the semiotic concept usage.

4). Understanding and using ideal aesthetics: The creation style and methods are also a major evaluation angle for judging illustration works.

5). The level of interest in Mazu culture after watching works: This evaluates whether the work effectively spreads and promotes Mazu culture, serving as an intuitive assessment for the work's purpose.

The evaluation uses a 5-point scale, with 5 being the highest score and 1 being the lowest. Higher scores indicate better evaluation. The final score is the average of all experts' ratings (Table 32) .

Table 30 Related ratings of the work "Mazu"

1	Drawing skill	4.75
2	The fit degree of Mazu theme	4.75
3	Extraction and application of Mazu cultural symbols	5
4	Understanding and using ideal aesthetics	4.25
5	The level of interest in Mazu culture after watching works	4
6	The overall rating of the work	4.5

Source: Produced by Fang Zhou,2024



The suggestions and opinions of experts on various aspects are as follows:  
Here is the translated evaluation in English, following the five aspects as requested:

**1). Drawing skill :**

With the support of modern computer graphics technology, the artwork skillfully combines traditional cultural roots with modern artistic expression, showcasing exceptional artistry and creativity. The artist utilizes modern illustration techniques and integrates CG painting technology, making the artwork vivid in color and delicate in style, with a strong visual impact. The technical application demonstrates the artist's high level of mastery in creating images using computer programs, imbuing the work with a unique charm of modern illustration style.

Through professional technical application, the artist not only successfully presents the traditional spirit of Mazu culture but also imbues it with modern artistic forms. The visual artistic elements of the creation convey diverse and multifaceted characteristics. The use of computer graphics technology has achieved a high level of expressiveness and detail, fully demonstrating the profound connotation and rich visual elements of Mazu culture. This fusion of technology not only enhances the artistic expressiveness of the work but also provides viewers with a richer visual experience.

**2). The fit degree of Mazu theme:**

The artwork deeply explores the core values and symbolic meanings of Mazu culture, accurately and profoundly expressing the characteristics of Mazu culture. Through modern artistic expression, the work allows viewers to better perceive and understand the essence of Mazu culture. The artist fully considered the traditional spirit of Mazu culture and its connection to modern society during the creative process, making the theme expression both traditional and modern.

As an important traditional culture in China, Mazu culture is rich in connotation and symbolic significance. The artist deeply understood the essence of Mazu culture and presented it through modern artistic techniques. The work not only showcases the traditional spirit of Mazu culture but also, through modern artistic forms, allows viewers to better perceive and understand the core values of this culture. This deep understanding and accurate expression of Mazu culture make the work outstanding in its thematic relevance.

**3). Extraction and Application of Mazu Cultural Symbols:**

In the artwork, the artist used Pierce's semiotic theory to analyze and extract symbols from Mazu culture deeply. Through the precise extraction of Mazu cultural symbols, the work maintains its cultural identity and artistic value while enhancing its expressiveness and appeal. The work cleverly combines unique cultural symbols of Mazu with universally meaningful symbols, making it rich in visual elements and more attractive.

The extraction and application of symbols are crucial for expressing cultural connotations in art. In the artwork, the artist demonstrates a deep understanding and clever application of Mazu cultural symbols, showcasing high artistic value in the use of symbols. The precise extraction and artistic expression of Mazu cultural symbols not only enrich the visual elements of the work but also enhance its cultural expressiveness. This use of symbols shows high artistry and creativity in conveying the essence of Mazu culture.

#### 4). Understanding and Application of Aesthetics:

There is room for improvement in the application of aesthetics in the work. Although in the book form, viewers need to understand the story rather than just visually perceive it, presenting the work in a larger format could enhance the visual impact and help viewers better perceive and understand its aesthetic value. The artist's use of points, lines, and planes in the work enhances the detail's focus and beauty, adds fluidity and dynamism, and unifies the overall presentation, making it deeper and more coherent. This comprehensive application of aesthetics not only enhances the work's aesthetic expressiveness but also deepens viewers' understanding and appreciation of the Mazu cultural theme.

In artistic creation, the use of points, lines, and planes is important for enhancing the aesthetic value of the work. By using points, the work increases the focus and beauty of details; by handling lines, it adds fluidity and dynamism; by applying planes, it unifies the overall presentation, making the work deeper and more coherent. This comprehensive application of aesthetics not only enhances the aesthetic expression of the work but also deepens viewers' understanding and appreciation of the Mazu cultural theme.

#### 5). Interest in Mazu Culture After Viewing:

Through innovative artistic creation, the work can cultivate a deeper interest and understanding of Mazu culture among viewers. The artist's deep exploration of Mazu culture and clever combination with modern artistic techniques make the work highly artistic and thought-provoking. The narrative elements and interactive design incorporated in the work help viewers better appreciate the diversity and depth of Mazu culture while enjoying the aesthetic experience of the art.

Mazu culture, as a source of artistic inspiration, provides the work with a profound cultural foundation. The artist's unique conception and modern interpretation of Mazu culture not only successfully present it but also enhance viewers' interest in this culture. Especially for viewers from different cultural backgrounds, the work, through modern artistic expression, makes it easier to understand and appreciate the essence of Mazu culture. This modern interpretation of Mazu culture not only enhances the work's aesthetic value but also stimulates viewers' deep thinking and interest in Mazu culture.

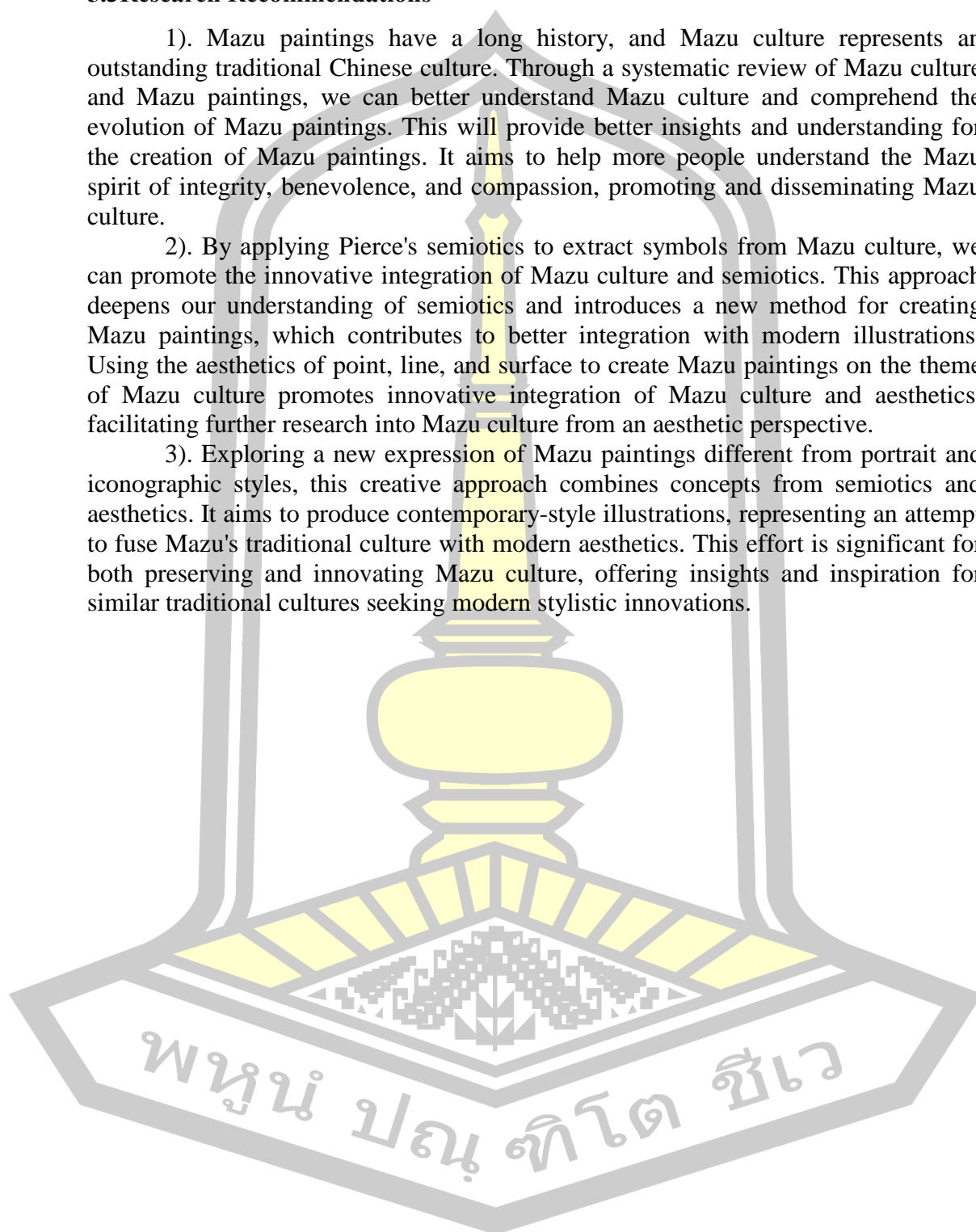
Overall, the work excellently integrates traditional culture with modern art, possessing profound cultural connotations and strong visual impact. Through the application of modern computer graphics technology, the work not only presents the traditional spirit of Mazu culture but also endows it with modern artistic forms, allowing viewers to better perceive and understand the essence of Mazu culture. The artist's precise extraction and artistic expression of Mazu cultural symbols and the comprehensive application of aesthetics showcase high artistry and creativity in all aspects. After viewing the work, viewers' interest and understanding of Mazu culture are further enhanced. It is suggested that in future creations, the artist continues to explore and delve into the rich connotation of Mazu culture and tries different forms of expression to enhance viewers' perception and experience.

### 5.3 Research Recommendations

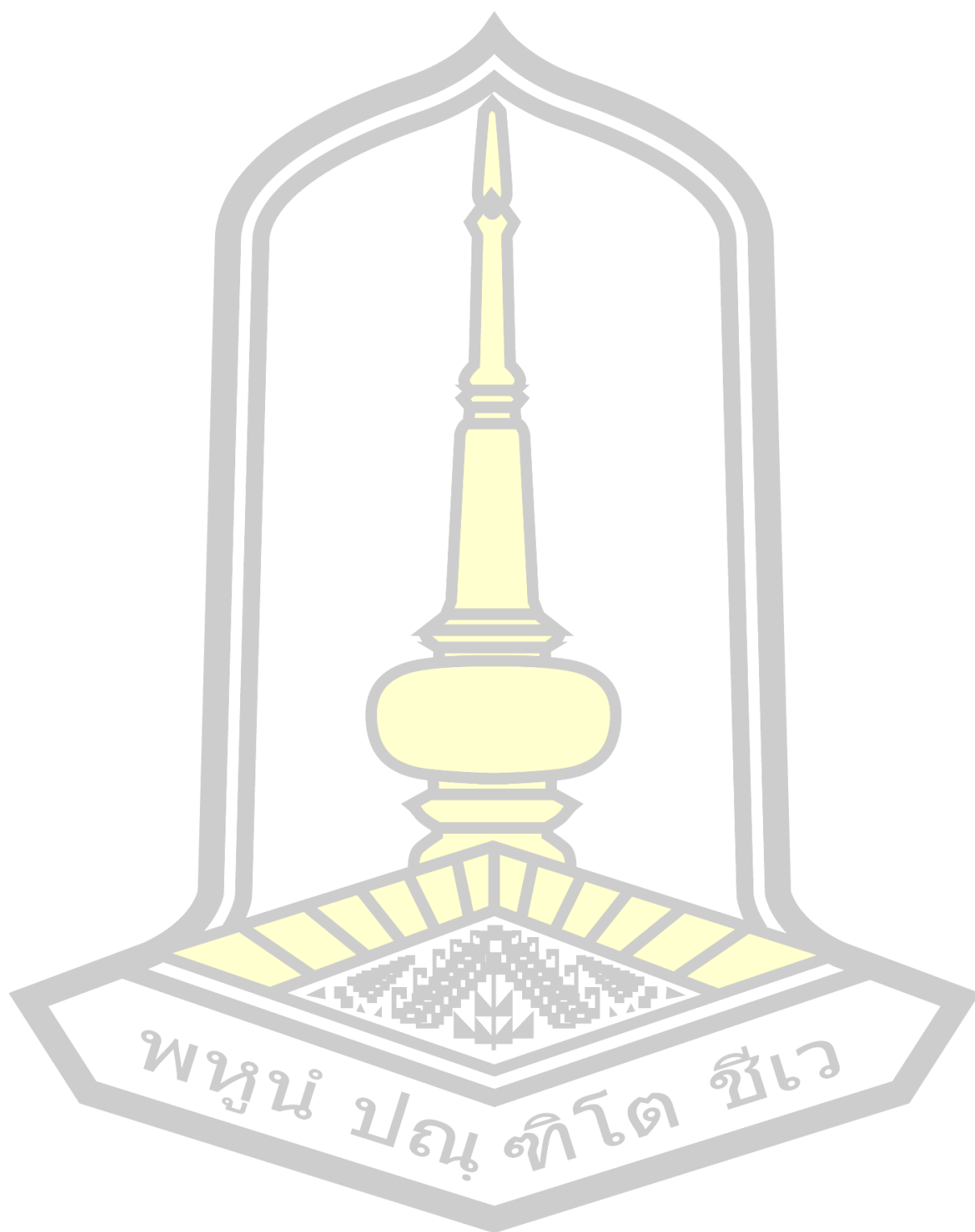
1). Mazu paintings have a long history, and Mazu culture represents an outstanding traditional Chinese culture. Through a systematic review of Mazu culture and Mazu paintings, we can better understand Mazu culture and comprehend the evolution of Mazu paintings. This will provide better insights and understanding for the creation of Mazu paintings. It aims to help more people understand the Mazu spirit of integrity, benevolence, and compassion, promoting and disseminating Mazu culture.

2). By applying Pierce's semiotics to extract symbols from Mazu culture, we can promote the innovative integration of Mazu culture and semiotics. This approach deepens our understanding of semiotics and introduces a new method for creating Mazu paintings, which contributes to better integration with modern illustrations. Using the aesthetics of point, line, and surface to create Mazu paintings on the theme of Mazu culture promotes innovative integration of Mazu culture and aesthetics, facilitating further research into Mazu culture from an aesthetic perspective.

3). Exploring a new expression of Mazu paintings different from portrait and iconographic styles, this creative approach combines concepts from semiotics and aesthetics. It aims to produce contemporary-style illustrations, representing an attempt to fuse Mazu's traditional culture with modern aesthetics. This effort is significant for both preserving and innovating Mazu culture, offering insights and inspiration for similar traditional cultures seeking modern stylistic innovations.



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<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mazu-belief-and-customs-00227#video>





## Appendix B : Professor Dr.Supachai Singyabuth's questionnaire survey

## A questionnaire on the illustration work "Mazu"

	The problem	5 points maximum, 1 point minimum				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	Drawing skill	✓				
2	The fit degree of Mazu theme	✓				
3	Extraction and application of Mazu cultural symbols	✓				
4	Understanding and using ideal aesthetics	✓				
5	The level of interest in Mazu culture after watching works	✓				
6	The overall rating of the work	✓				

suggestions and opinions:

This is the painting, as Surrealism Style that takes the relationship. Between the cultural Roots of the Great Land and the Ocean. Artist presents 'Mazu' imaginatively through the modern computer graphics. Therefore, it is a set of Modern Painting that is very interestingly connected to the traditional spiritual roots of the area of important China.

Professor Dr Supachai  
Singyabuth  
13<sup>th</sup> March 2020

## Appendix C : Professor Arkom Sangiamviboon's questionnaire survey

**A questionnaire on the illustration work "Mazu"**

	The problem	5 points maximum, 1 point minimum				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	Drawing skill		/			
2	The fit degree of Mazu theme		/			
3	Extraction and application of Mazu cultural symbols	/				
4	Understanding and using ideal aesthetics		/			
5	The level of interest in Mazu culture after watching works			/		
6	The overall rating of the work		/			
7	<p><b>suggestions and opinions :</b></p> <p>1 Drawing skills Interest in conveying diverse characteristics in creating visual elements of art. and combines the characteristics of the form of expression well Skills combined with techniques for creating images with computer programs help create a contemporary style of work.</p> <p>2 Levels of Suitability of the Mazu Theme The Mazu content selected was used as the primary inspiration. The level of communication of the content in a narrative manner may have an effect on viewers who have a basic knowledge of the Mazu stories and their beliefs and beliefs. Viewers who have no previous experience with the Mazu culture will feel the effects of the visual elements of the art. Appears In the work What can definitely be recognized is the Chinese character. and orientalism</p> <p>3 Extraction and Application of Mazu Cultural Symbols Symbols have two characteristics: 1) Mazu's unique characteristics and characteristics that have universal meaning. Both characteristics are combined with visual elements of art. And the placement of artistic elements makes the work interesting.</p> <p>4 Understanding and using Ideal aesthetics The work has the characteristics of Imagination and fantasy, while the style and idealism come from using the original form of the Mazu statue. Overall, the work does not show an emphasis on idealism. In terms of aesthetics, the presentation is reduced in book form, causing the perception of the audience to try to understand the story more than the perception of the senses. It should be presented as a larger image to increase the impact and help the viewer's perception better.</p> <p>5 levels of Interest In Mazu culture after viewing the work Mazu culture is the source of Information and inspiration for creativity. The creator's conception and interpretation of Mazu is important. To communicate with today's audience Interest in Mazu culture is therefore non-essential. Especially for audiences from different cultures. Should be interested in issues of belief in contemporary society.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Arkom sangiamvibool 20-3-2024</p>					

## Appendix D : Professor Zhan Weifeng's questionnaire survey

## A questionnaire on the illustration work "Mazu"

	The problem	5 points maximum, 1 point minimum				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	Drawing skill	✓				
2	The fit degree of Mazu theme	✓				
3	Extraction and application of Mazu cultural symbols	✓				
4	Understanding and using ideal aesthetics		✓			
5	The level of interest in Mazu culture after watching works			✓		
6	The overall rating of the work	✓				
7	<p>suggestions and opinions:</p> <p>作品通过现代计算机图形技术，巧妙地将传统文化根源与现代艺术相结合，表现出了极高的艺术性和创造力。</p> <p>作品展现了多样化的视觉元素，巧妙地融合了传统与现代的表达形式。你在运用计算机技术创作图像方面的技能，使作品具有了当代风格的独特魅力。作品中巧妙地结合了妈祖独特的文化符号和具有普遍意义的象征符号。这种符号的运用不仅丰富了作品的视觉元素，还使其更具吸引力。在美学方面，由于作品以书籍形式呈现，观众需要更多地通过理解故事来感知作品，而不是单纯的视觉感受，这一部分并没有很明显的体现。建议将作品以更大幅面的形式呈现，以增强视觉冲击力，帮助观众更好地感知和理解。</p> <p>总体来说，作品较好的将传统文化与现代艺术融合，具有深厚的文化内涵和视觉冲击力。建议在今后的创作中继续探索和挖掘妈祖文化的丰富内涵，并尝试不同的表现形式以增强观众的感受。</p>					

詹伟锋  
2024.06.20



## Appendix E : Professor Pan Qiang's questionnaire survey

## A questionnaire on the illustration work "Mazu"

	The problem	5 points maximum, 1 point minimum				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	Drawing skill	✓				
2	The fit degree of Mazu theme	✓				
3	Extraction and application of Mazu cultural symbols	✓				
4	Understanding and using ideal aesthetics		✓			
5	The level of interest in Mazu culture after watching works	✓				
6	The overall rating of the work		✓			
7	<p>suggestions and opinions:</p> <p>1) Artistic Technique: The artwork skillfully integrates modern illustration with traditional themes, showcasing the visual impact and artistic expression of CG painting techniques. Through expert technical application, the artwork vividly presents vibrant colors and delicate painting styles, effectively conveying the profound cultural essence and traditional spirit of Mazu.</p> <p>2) Relevance to Mazu Theme: The creator deeply explores the core values and symbolic meanings of Mazu culture. The artwork accurately and profoundly expresses the cultural attributes of Mazu, allowing viewers to perceive the essence of the theme.</p> <p>3) Extraction and Application of Mazu Cultural Symbols: The artwork effectively applies Pierce's semiotics to analyze and extract symbols and symbols from Mazu culture, presenting them with clarity and strength while maintaining their cultural identity and artistic value.</p> <p>4) Understanding and Application of Aesthetics: There is room for improvement in the application of aesthetics such as point, line, and plane in the artwork. The use of points enhances the focus and beauty of details, while the treatment of lines adds fluidity and dynamism. The use of planes unifies the overall presentation with depth and coherence. This comprehensive approach enhances the aesthetic expression of the artwork and deepens viewers' understanding and appreciation of Mazu cultural themes.</p> <p>5) Interest in Mazu Culture after Viewing: Through innovative artistic creation, the artwork can cultivate deeper interest and understanding of Mazu culture among viewers. Consideration could be given to enhancing interactivity or incorporating narrative elements to help viewers appreciate the diversity and depth of Mazu culture while enjoying the artwork.</p>					



## BIOGRAPHY

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