



Mazu Culture at Fujian Coastal City of China: Symbolic Interaction and Meaning
Change in the Context of World Cultural Heritage

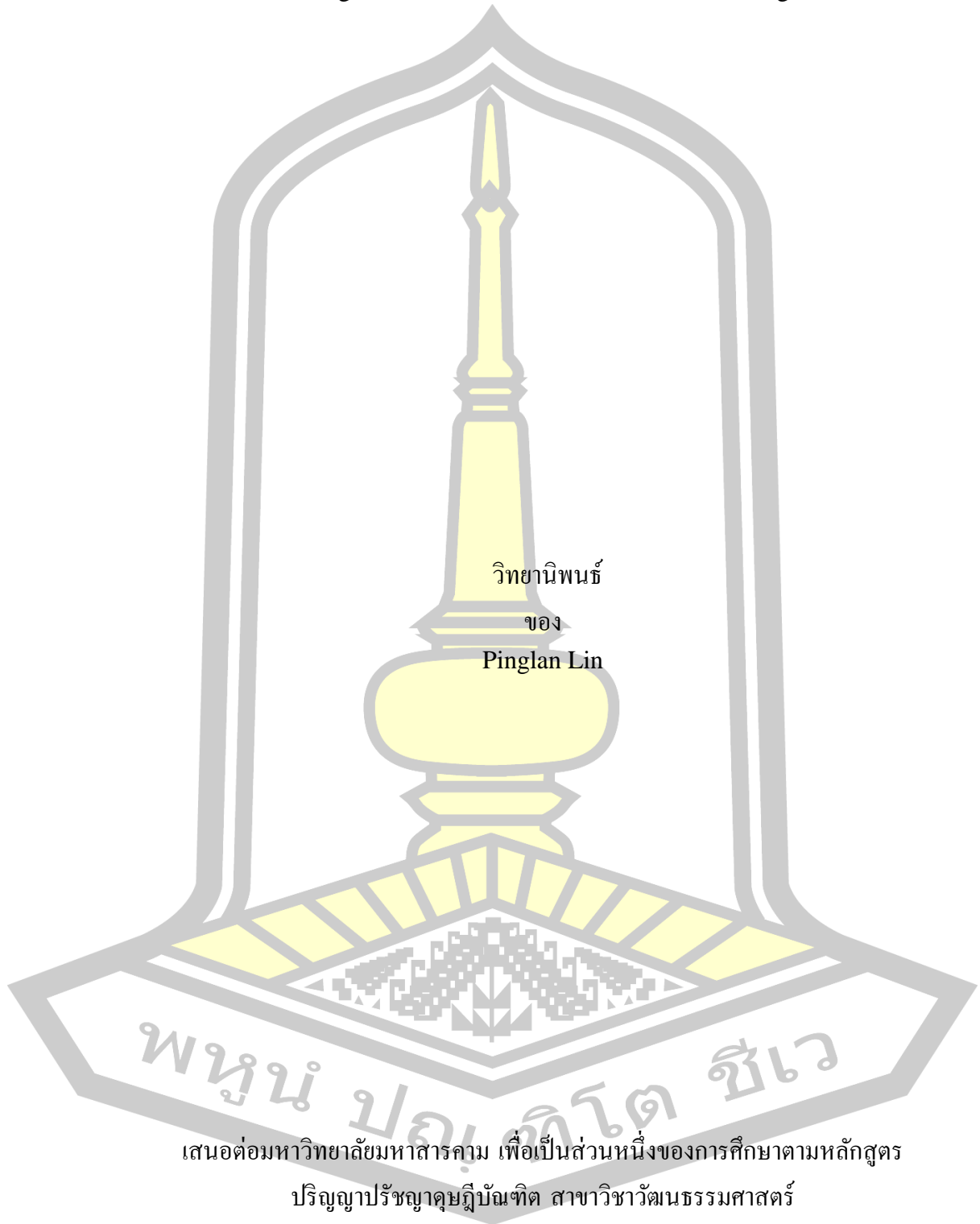
Pinglan Lin

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Science

April 2024

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Mazu Culture at Fujian Coastal City of China: Symbolic Interaction and Meaning
Change in the Context of World Cultural Heritage



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เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร
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TITLE	Mazu Culture at Fujian Coastal City of China: Symbolic Interaction and Meaning Change in the Context of World Cultural Heritage		
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ABSTRACT

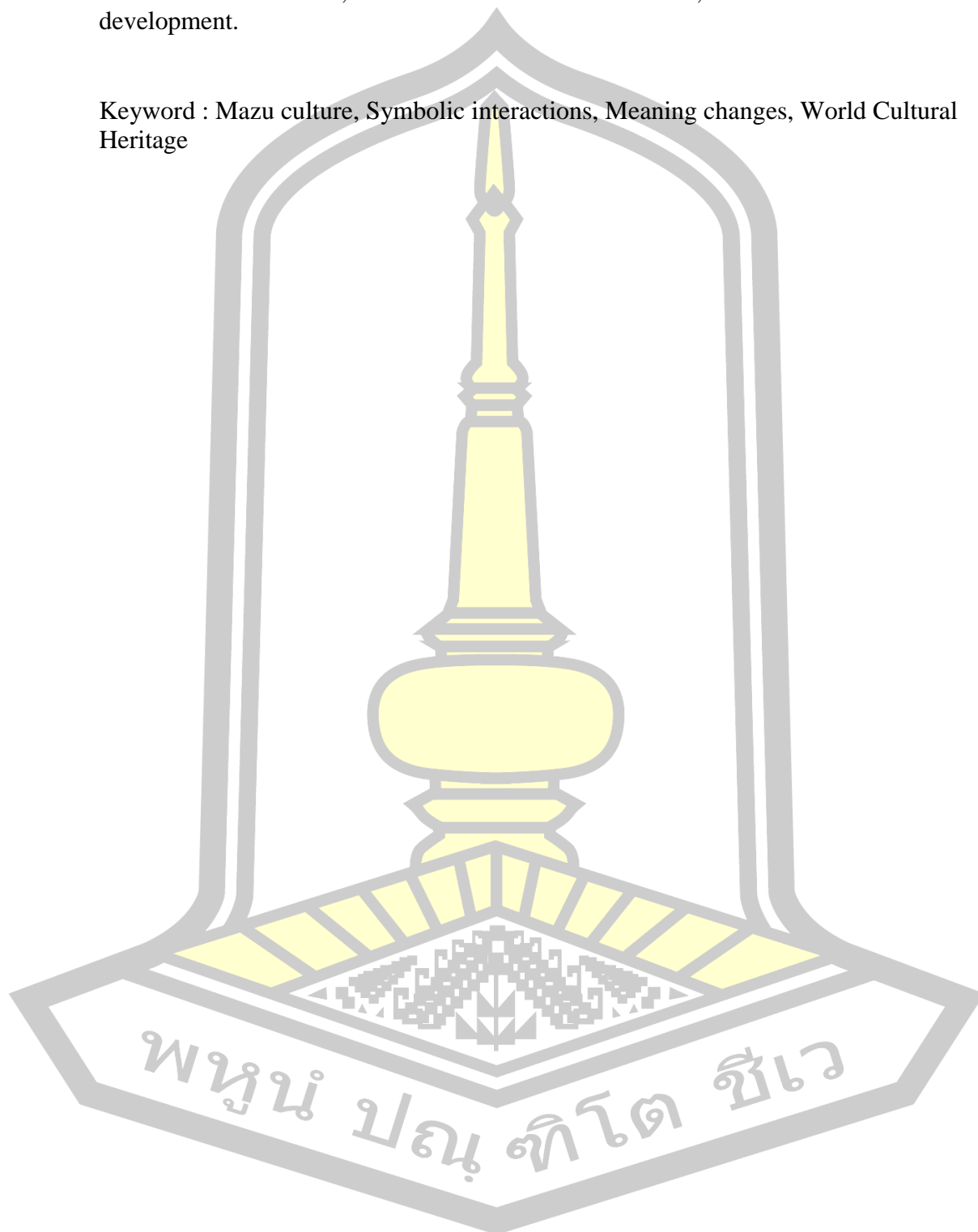
This research is foundational and employs qualitative methodologies. Set against the backdrop of World Heritage culture, it delves into the "Mazu Culture of Coastal Cities in Fujian, China." The study delineates four research objectives: 1) Investigating symbolic representation-tracing the evolution and underpinnings of Mazu culture in the historical continuum of Fujian coastal cities. 2) Probing symbolic interaction-historical deconstruction and contemporary construction of the meanings within the Mazu culture. 3) Charting symbolic transformation-temporal interpretations and the evolutionary trajectory of Mazu cultural symbols. 4) Symbolic reimagining-new opportunities for Mazu culture in the progression of World Heritage.

Findings suggest that the Mazu culture, emblematic of the coastal cities of China, stands as a unique religious and cultural phenomenon imbued with profound historical significance. Having undergone an extensive historical metamorphosis, Mazu culture encapsulates reverence and gratitude. The veneration of Mazu transcends mere religious belief, encompassing a rich tapestry of symbolic elements such as temple fairs, deity processions, music, and dance, culminating in a multidimensional cultural system. From the Song Dynasty to the present, the vicissitudes in the history of Mazu worship in Fujian coastal cities have paralleled shifts in Mazu's symbolic interactions and meanings. The evolution of Mazu culture in these cities has been multifaceted, with its societal roles adapting to the ebbs and flows of historical epochs. From ensuring maritime safety to symbolizing cultural and societal cohesion, the evolution of Mazu worship in the Fujian region mirrors intricate historical and societal shifts, exemplifying the interplay between societal transitions and individual identity.

Mazu culture, a pivotal element of the coastal Fujian region in China, serves as a cultural nexus and shared value pursuit linking local inhabitants with the global Chinese diaspora—acting as a mutual "social capital." In this contemporary era, as part of the intangible cultural heritage initiative, Mazu culture embraces new prospects. Its revitalized applications showcase a renewed visage. It not only acts as a conduit for religious faith, providing solace to believers and fostering societal harmony, but also emerges as a vital asset in augmenting cultural soft power and

fostering international dialogues. Concurrently, it serves as a catalyst propelling industrial investments, cultural and leisure tourism, and maritime economic development.

Keyword : Mazu culture, Symbolic interactions, Meaning changes, World Cultural Heritage



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During the process of writing this paper, I have come to deeply realize that producing an outstanding thesis requires a steadfast research attitude and an unwavering spirit of dedication. I would like to express my gratitude to all who have supported and assisted me; without your support and help, the completion of this paper would have been impossible. Firstly, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Supachai Singyabuth. Throughout the composition of this paper, Professor Dr. Supachai Singyabuth provided selfless guidance and assistance, continually reminding me to think systematically, adhere to proper thesis format, and enhance both the depth and breadth of my work. Thank you for fostering and improving my academic capabilities; I am committed to exerting even greater effort in future research endeavors.

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Lastly, I owe a debt of gratitude to Mazu culture, through which I discovered the unique allure and profound significance of Mazu beliefs. By understanding the evolution and transmission of this distinct culture, we can better grasp the essence of Chinese heritage. As I continue in my academic journey, I will remain true to my initial aspirations, redoubling my efforts to contribute even more to the perpetuation and advancement of Chinese culture. I offer my deepest thanks!

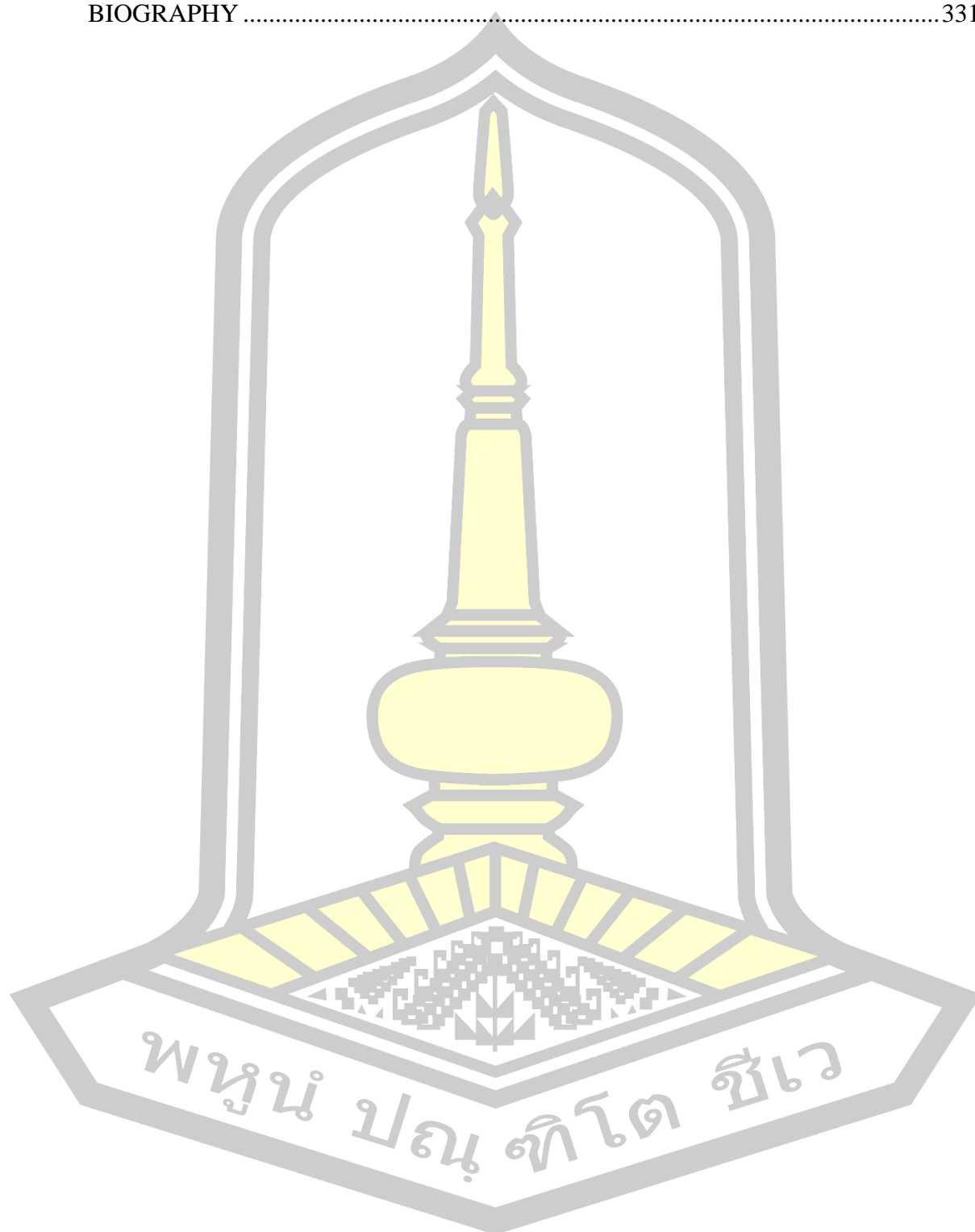
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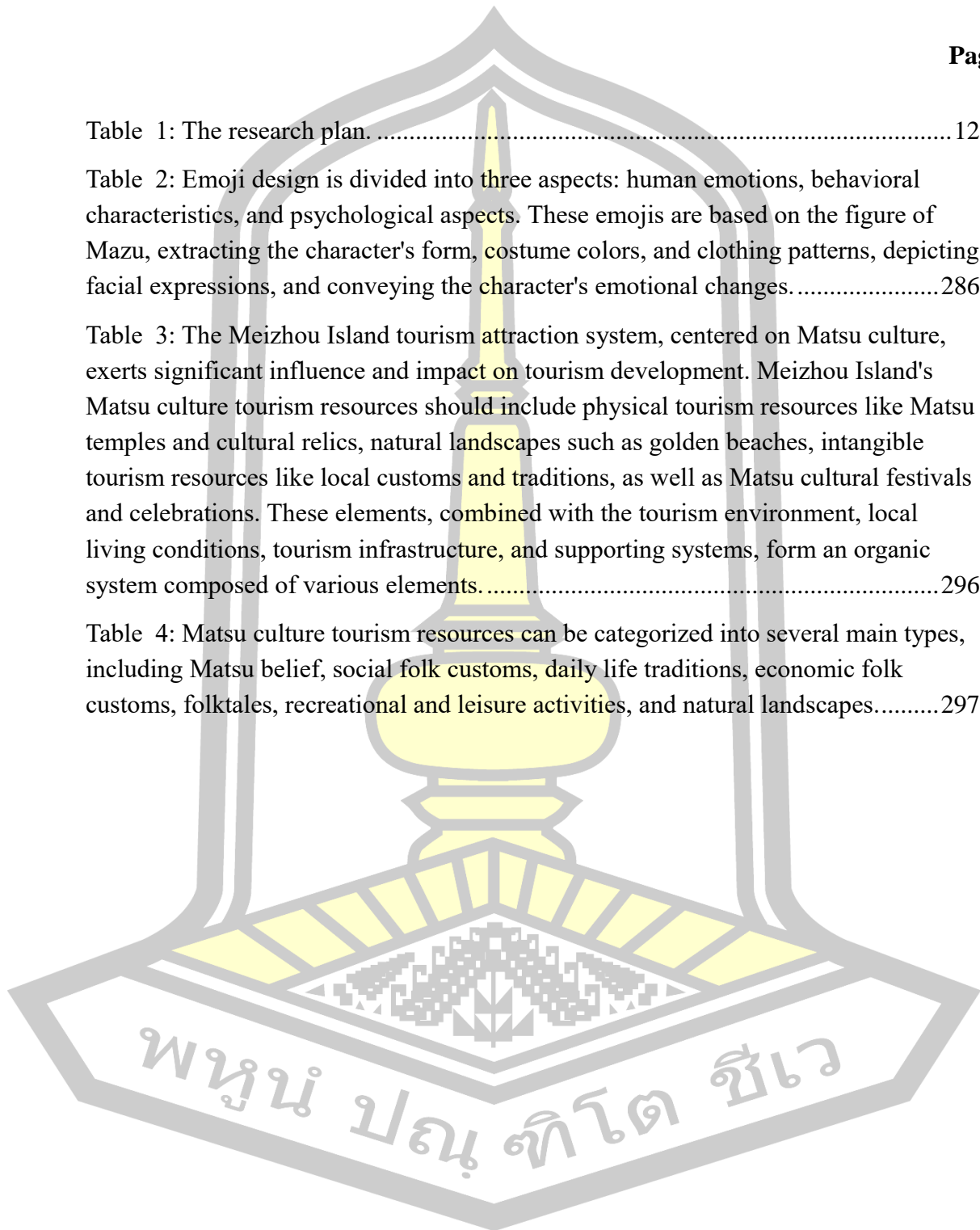
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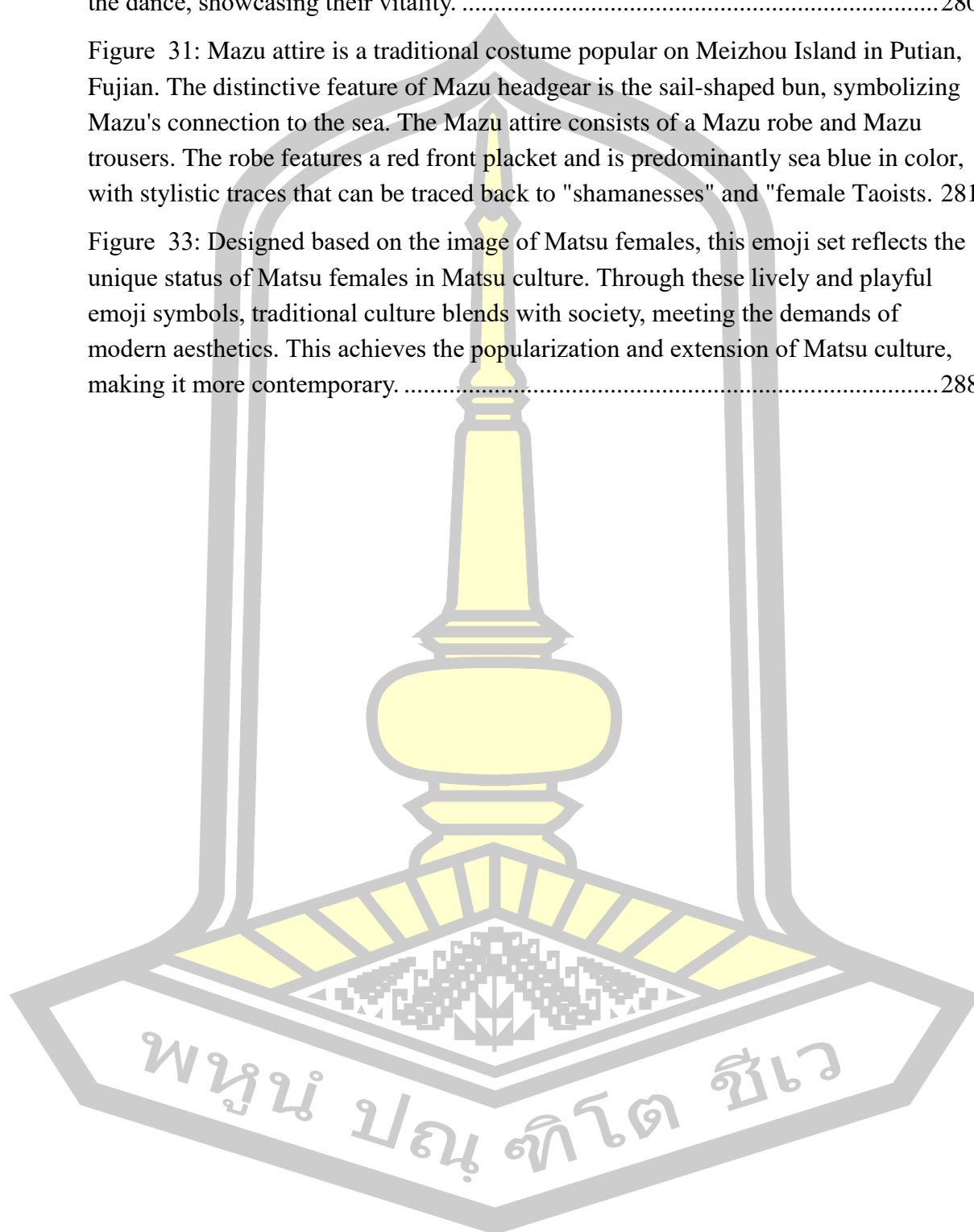
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Chapter I

Research Proposal

1. Background of Research

Mazu culture is a folk culture based on the belief in Mazu, rooted in Meizhou Island along the coastal region of Fujian, China. Mazu, originally named Lin Mo, was an ordinary woman in the Northern Song Dynasty who did good deeds on the sea. After her passing, ordinary people revered her as a deity, and her deeds were widely spread and worshipped. With the flourishing maritime trade in coastal regions, Mazu culture rapidly spread throughout China and became one of the shared spiritual beliefs among global Chinese communities. 2009, Mazu was listed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List, becoming China's first World Cultural Heritage and a symbol of Chinese cultural identity. Incomplete statistics indicate that Mazu culture has taken root in over 40 countries and regions across five continents, with over 10,000 Mazu temples globally and more than 300 million believers. This culture gradually integrated with local societies during its dissemination, forming an influential belief culture. Mazu culture transcends ethnic, cultural, institutional, and religious boundaries, fostering deeper economic and cultural cooperation. Under the "Belt and Road"¹ initiative, Mazu culture holds unique value in promoting economic trade, cultural exchange, cross-strait peace, and global governance. Its cross-border dissemination has also built cultural identity ties between overseas Chinese and residents.

Fujian, located along the southeastern coast of China, is a convergence point of the East China Sea and the South China Sea, with Taiwan to the east and spanning the Taiwan Strait, connecting the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta. Fujian Province has a land area of 124,000 square kilometers and a sea area of 136,000 square kilometers. It is an important maritime gateway for mainland China to the sea and was historically the starting point of the ancient Silk Road and Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas. Fujian's topography is characterized by highlands in the northwest and lowlands in the southeast, exhibiting a "mountains alongside the sea" trend. Mountainous areas account for approximately 90% of the province's land area. Fujian has a coastline stretches for 3,752 kilometers, ranking second in the nation. The winding coastline has formed numerous ports of various sizes. As the birthplace of Mazu culture, Fujian also played a vital role in the maritime Silk Road of ancient China. Historically, its residents depended on the sea for their livelihoods and maritime travel. Their maritime consciousness and spirit began to develop distinctively.

The mountainous regions of Fujian, with more arable land, created a favorable environment for the emergence of Mazu beliefs and the development of a mountainous humid climate. In ancient Fujian, natural disasters were frequent and

devastating, but due to limited technological advancements, engaging in risky maritime activities posed great dangers. The coastal waters of Mazu Bay had distinct marine climates, and when typhoons struck, storms often resulted in disastrous events. Surrounded on three sides by mountains and facing the southeast bay, Mazu Island, along with many islets, formed multiple natural barriers, making Mazu Harbor an excellent fishing port unaffected by adverse weather conditions. Mazu's origins are similar to many traditional Chinese mythological figures; her prototype was derived from everyday life, an existence transcending life itself. Mazu represents people's aspirations for happiness and the pursuit of truth.

In ancient times, the Chinese did not attach great importance to seafaring, and it was only during the Han Dynasty that the worship of sea gods began to gain prominence. Mazu was born during the Northern Song Dynasty and is known for her charity and assistance to stranded sailors. After her passing, villagers commemorated her benevolent deeds, and over time, fishermen believed that Mazu's spirit could calm Mazu Bay. This is why Mazu beliefs originated in the Mazu Bay of Fujian. Mazu beliefs proliferated during the Yuan Dynasty and extended to places like Taiwan and Penghu. During the Ming Dynasty, Mazu was consecrated three times to seek her blessings for Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas. In the Qing Dynasty, the belief in Mazu expanded beyond industries related to the sea and reached its peak. Mazu received 15 awards during the Qing Dynasty, especially for her role in recovering Taiwan and maritime transportation. In the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Kangxi ordered the Fujian naval commander Shi Lang to use military force to recover Taiwan, resulting in the defeat of the Ming and Zheng forces and the unification of the Qing Dynasty. Shi Lang left behind many anecdotes about Mazu's assistance during his leadership in the campaign to reclaim Taiwan. The development of maritime commerce in the coastal regions of Fujian during the Qing Dynasty facilitated the spread of Mazu beliefs overseas, reaching countries like Ryukyu. During the Qing Dynasty, overseas Fujianese merchants built many Mazu temples abroad, not only in Ryukyu but also in countries like Japan and Vietnam. Many overseas Chinese worshipped Mazu deities in local temples or at home, and successful overseas Chinese business people often donated funds to build Mazu temples abroad. As a result, Mazu culture naturally assimilated into local cultures.

Mazu culture is a valuable spiritual treasure of Chinese traditional culture, covering many areas, including economics, politics, military affairs, arts, and more. It possesses rich historical connotations and holds high research value. Today, wherever there are Chinese people, there are rivers, lakes, and oceans; there are Mazu temples. Mazu culture has spread to more than 30 countries and regions worldwide. One of the key factors contributing to Mazu culture's enduring status in the folk domain is the active promotion of Mazu culture by rulers of various dynasties.

Consequently, Mazu is known as the "Goddess of the Sea" in China. After receiving 36 awards, Mazu culture spread among the ordinary people and permeated various

aspects of national politics, economics, and social life. The number of Mazu temples rapidly increased, ensuring the widespread transmission of Mazu culture.

On March 16, 2016, during the Fourth Session of the Twelfth National People's Congress, the "13th Five-Year Plan" was voted on, and the section "Promoting a New Stage of Open and Inclusive Cultural Exchange Together" included the phrase "Leveraging the positive role of folk cultures such as Mazu culture." Since then, Mazu belief has become essential to China's implementation of the "Belt and Road" national strategy. In the contemporary world cultural landscape, Mazu culture holds a significant position. It is not only Chinese culture but also a product of maritime civilization. Mazu belief represents kindness, compassion, and the prosperity and development of the maritime Silk Road. Mazu is the guardian deity of seafarers, symbolizing the spiritual strength to overcome difficulties and obstacles. She is a symbol of China's maritime civilization and, for overseas Chinese, a symbol of cultural identity. Since its inception, Mazu culture has accompanied the development and prosperity of the maritime Silk Road from the Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties to the Qing Dynasty and modern times, spreading to countries along the Silk Road, taking root in each nation, and becoming an integral part of local social life, serving as both a sanctuary and a bridge, strengthening the connections among cultural exchange participants.

Today, Mazu cultural heritage is an intangible cultural heritage of the regions along the Maritime Silk Road. In 2009, it was listed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Mazu believers from different cultures and ethnicities in various countries celebrate Mazu's birthday every year, and Mazu culture has become a transcultural belief uniting different nations and ethnic groups. It has promoted the flourishing of Mazu culture on the world stage. After centuries of inheritance and development, Mazu culture exhibits two significant issues in the academic field: symbolic interaction and changes in meaning. (Office of State Oceanic Administration, 2017)

Furthermore, due to the value and characteristics of Mazu's belief as an intangible cultural heritage, it has important research value not only in the fields of religious culture and social customs but also in discussing the forms and meanings of symbolic expressions, rituals, and customs as they change over time. Through an investigation of the symbolic interaction and changes in meaning embedded within Mazu culture, based on the presentation of Mazu symbols, this research aims to understand better the relationship between the people and society in the birthplace of Mazu culture and the historical changes in society. This study will employ qualitative research methods, as the dissemination and development of Mazu culture are dynamic historical processes, to explore the symbolic interaction and changes in meaning within Mazu culture.

2. Purpose of Research / Objective

2.1 To investigate the geographical location and socio-cultural history of coastal cities in Fujian, China, as the spatial context of Mazu culture.

2.2 To examine the development of Mazu culture in various symbolic interaction dimensions, from its origins to the present day (2022).

2.3 To analyze the process of meaning change for Mazu in different socio-cultural contexts.

2.4 To explore and analyze Mazu culture within the framework of world cultural heritage.

3. Research question

3.1 What is the geographical location and socio-cultural history of the coastal areas in Fujian, the birthplace of Mazu culture? Why did Mazu culture originate here and spread to various parts of the world over thousands of years?

3.2 What different historical processes have shaped Mazu culture from its origins to the present day (2022)? How has the development and transformation of Mazu culture been viewed from the perspective of symbolic interaction in various contexts?

3.3 How has the meaning of Mazu culture evolved in different socio-cultural contexts, and what connections exist between these changes and the societal backgrounds of their respective eras?

3.4 Within the context of world cultural heritage, what are the distinctive features and significance of Mazu culture?

4. Definition of Terms

4.1 Mazu Culture

Mazu culture in this research means the culture that emerged from the belief in Mazu influenced idolatry, worship, and symbolic interaction. Between people, groups, and Mazu gods, it becomes Mazu culture that covers the dimensions of arts, traditions, rituals, history, religion, folklore, legends, maritime studies, architecture, archeology, linguistics, literature, and so on.

4.2 Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction in this research means the interactions of people related to Mazu beliefs create symbols and meaning through works of art, traditions, rituals, and land and sea spaces. It becomes a series of symbolic interactions that operate across multiple time periods and contexts, up to the context of becoming an intangible cultural heritage.

4.3 Meaning Change

The meaning change in this research means meaningful changes in Symbolic Interactions in Mazu Culture Changing in Different Contexts Since the

founding of Mazu beliefs in the Song Dynasty, Mazu beliefs have continued to evolve and develop. Praise and praise are given to successive emperors. It was given to Mazu to play an important role in increasing the number of believers. Through 36 canonizations or sealings, Mazu's identity has been constantly changing according to the changing social context.

4.4 World Cultural Heritage

World cultural heritage this research refers to Mazu, which was recognized as a World Cultural Heritage Site in 2009 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It is included in the "Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" due to its inherent cultural significance.

5. Scope of Research

5.1 Research area

Main Location: The research area is located on Meizhou Island in Fujian Province, China, which is the place of origin for Mazu culture.

Sub-Locations: The areas surrounding Meizhou Island and temples related to Mazu temples.

5.2 Time

Mazu culture (from Tang Dynasty to present, about more than one thousand years)

5.3 Another

6. Research Methods

This study falls under the category of "pure research" and "basic research" aimed at seeking academic answers and employs qualitative research methods. Below is a classification description of the research methods.

6.1 Population and Sample

1) **Believers:** Believers refer to individuals who have faith in Mazu.
 2) **Locals:** Local island residents living on Meizhou Island. Influenced by Mazu culture, they have formed a cultural community. In the past, most of them were fishermen making a living through fishing. On Meizhou Island in Fujian Province, aside from a very small number of Christians, the vast majority of the population are devout Mazu believers.

3) **Temple Staff:** Most Mazu temples have a fixed management team and an ad-hoc management team. The fixed team is the board of directors, and the ad-hoc team consists of assistants and leaders. The board of directors is elected by villagers, and the number of members varies based on the temple's population, with the chairman typically being a person of high prestige and with ample free time. Leaders of the ad-hoc team are elected by representatives from various households in front of Mazu, and they usually change annually. The primary tasks of the board of directors

include managing the temple's finances, overseeing the temple's infrastructure, opening and closing the temple gates daily, maintaining the temple's cleanliness, managing offerings, and other necessary diplomatic activities. The ad-hoc team is mainly responsible for organizing temple fair activities during the intervening years. Some temples require the ad-hoc team to work at the temple throughout the year, while others only require them to work during the temple fair.

4) Pilgrims: Nearly 200,000 people visit the first Mazu temple each year in groups or individually, establishing relationships with numerous temples, most of which are located within temples, handling "spiritual matters" or as members of the "China Mazu Culture Exchange Association." Some have registered while others maintain connections for ancestral pilgrimages.

5) Government Officials: Here, government officials refer to local and national government officials who play significant roles in policy-making and operations, making Mazu culture a World Cultural Heritage site. Currently, they play a regulatory role in various aspects of Mazu culture as a World Cultural Heritage site, including those related to cultural tourism.

6) Tourists: Tourists here are visitors to Meizhou Island who come to explore the World Cultural Heritage of Mazu culture. They can participate in various forms of cultural tourism activities, including taking part in Mazu's religious rituals.

7) Researchers: Mazu culture has attracted numerous researchers from around the world and China, including archaeologists, cultural researchers, sociologists, architects, and writers. Their research contributions make Mazu culture the core of cultural heritage value.

6.2 Instrumentation

Computers, hand-painted boards, recording software, notebooks, fountain pens, cars.

6.3 Data Collection

1) Interviews: Formal interviews, informal interviews, focus group interviews.

2) Observations: Normal observations (or general observations), participatory observations.

3) Literature Data Collection.

6.4 Data Analysis

While conducting data collection, I used a research framework as a guiding classification tool for data synthesis and organized information in detail based on the outline of the research paper's chapters. Subsequently, I employed research concepts for analysis. My study primarily used two concepts: the symbolic interaction and semantic change of Mazu culture to analyze the relationship between Mazu culture and its societal context. Simultaneously, I analyzed the development of Mazu culture in the socio-cultural and historical development process.

6.5 Research presentation

The research in this paper will be submitted as a doctoral thesis and published in international journal which is indexed in SCOPUS.

7 .Literature Review

7.1 Before 1986

In the early 20th century, there were significant academic achievements in the modern exploration of Mazu belief. In 1916, Zeng Xijing, also known as Zeng Xijing, published "A Journey to Mazu Temples in Taiwan and an Analysis of the Heavenly Empress," which was the earliest known article to delve into Mazu beliefs and customs. In 1929, Gu Jiegang and Rong Zhaozu separately published articles in "Folklore Weekly" with the title "Heavenly Empress," discussing the historical changes in Mazu belief and different historical records regarding the "Heavenly Empress" in various eras. In May 1929, Zhou Zhenhe published an article titled "Heavenly Empress," which explored the life of the Heavenly Empress, reasons for folk worship, and the development of Mazu temples through the examination of ancient and contemporary records related to the sea goddess. In 1939, Wei Yingqi compiled "A Study of Three Deities in Fujian," which explored the myths and legends related to Mazu belief. In 1941, Han Huaizhun published "The Holy Mother of the Heavenly Empress and the Southward Expansion of Overseas Chinese," discussing the relationship between Mazu belief, maritime activities, overseas Chinese, and Confucian societies.

After the end of World War II, research on Mazu belief made significant progress. In the 1950s, Japanese-Chinese scholar Li Xianzhang conducted comprehensive research on Mazu belief, publishing several research papers and releasing a monograph in 1979, which contributed to the advancement of this field of study. Additionally, American scholar Watson, in his 1985 article, used Mazu as an example to elucidate "how traditional dynasties used deity worship to construct a unifying atmosphere," which had a profound impact on the study of Mazu belief. During the initial phase of Mazu belief research, many achievements were made by overseas scholars, especially Japanese scholars, in this field. (Li XianZhang, 1979)

7.2 Before 1986

On October 31, 1987, the first large-scale academic conference on Mazu culture was held in Putian, Fujian Province, China, and it was followed by the publication of the "Collection of Research Papers on Mazu Culture." Since then, mainland China's research on Mazu culture has flourished, forming a substantial research community, marking 1987 as the beginning of the rise of Mazu culture research.

In terms of organizing and publishing Mazu research materials, Jiang Weitan compiled the book "Mazu Documentary Materials," which systematically

organized historical materials related to Mazu from the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, and included literature from Portugal, Spain, and Ryukyu related to Mazu belief. Lin Jinbang, the editor-in-chief of "Inscriptions of Mazu Temples in Meizhou," collected numerous inscriptions and poems related to Mazu written by renowned scholars. Liu Fuzhu and Wang Liandi, the editors of "Annotated Collection of Poems and Songs Dedicated to Mazu in Different Dynasties," annotated over 620 poems, songs, lyrics, and chants related to Mazu found in historical collections, local gazetteers, temple records, family genealogies, and inscriptions. Jiang Weitan and Yang Yongzhan, the editors of "Compilation of Historical Archives on Mazu in the Qing Dynasty," published archival materials from the Qing Dynasty's palace and cabinets related to Mazu belief in their original form, providing valuable historical resources for the study of Qing Dynasty Mazu belief. Zheng Lihang and Jiang Weitan, the editors of the "Catalog and Index of Mazu Research Materials," collected research papers and articles on Mazu from ancient and modern times, dividing them into two volumes: historical documents and modern materials, providing a convenient research reference. The Fujian Quanzhou Overseas History Museum compiled "Survey Data on Historical Sites of Tianfei in the History of Quanzhou's Overseas Trade," enriching the diversity of Mazu culture research and providing important evidence for researchers studying Mazu culture.

7.3 From 2007 to the Present

Starting in 2007, academic research on Mazu culture gradually prospered. After Mazu beliefs and customs were included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009, it garnered widespread attention from scholars in Fujian and Taiwan. Before this recognition, significant progress had already been made in collecting and organizing relevant literature and materials.

In 2007, the three-volume "Compilation of Mazu Documentary Historical Materials" was published successively, which, by selecting a large amount of original materials during its compilation, became the most frequently referenced collection for scholars researching Mazu culture, signifying the beginning of the flourishing of Mazu culture research. Subsequently, Wang Jianchuan edited the six-volume "Compilation of Modern Mazu Scripture Documents and Materials on Zheng Chenggong's Belief," which included modern documents from Mazu temples and Mazu scriptures, as well as materials related to Zheng Chenggong's belief. Recently, two volumes containing a total of 40 books titled "Compilation and Research Series on Mazu Documentary Materials" were published. This series maintained the completeness and authenticity of the documents by using original photo-reproduction methods and included most of the literature related to Mazu culture. In addition, some scholars conducted monographic studies. Xu Xiaowang authored "A Study of the History of Mazu Belief," which reviews the academic history of Mazu belief research from multiple perspectives and delves deep into the origins and development of

ancient Mazu belief. Huang Ruiguo, in "Introduction to Mazu Studies," introduced the concept of "Mazu Studies" for the first time and systematically discussed the multidisciplinary content of Mazu Studies. Other scholars' research papers covered various aspects of Mazu literature, exploring the origins, dissemination, religious beliefs, and artistic influences of Mazu culture in depth. (Xu Xiaowang, 2007 ; Huang Ruiguo, 2013)

Research into Mazu's image and divinity explored the changes and implications of Mazu's image and divinity in different historical periods and regions. For example, Li Xiaohong's "On the Transformation and Causes of Mazu Belief in the Song Dynasty" analyzed the transformation and causes of Mazu belief in the Song Dynasty. Li Jinming's research focused on the early changes in the role of Mazu belief among overseas Fujian immigrants, evolving from a sea guardian deity to a goddess fostering kinship and emotional bonds. Wang Yingying's "The Aesthetic Implications of Chinese Deity Image Through the Lens of Mazu Iconography" interpreted the evolution of the folk art of deity images in China by tracing the development of Mazu iconography, exploring the significance of aesthetics in Chinese deity image creation. Shi Jing's "Investigation of Mazu Beliefs in Traditional New Year Prints in Tianjin" introduced Mazu beliefs reflected in woodblock New Year prints from Yangliuqing, Tianjin, covering themes such as tying children with red strings, Mazu statues, Tianjin's Huanghui (Tianjin Mazu Temple), and flower festivals.

In the context of Mazu culture and the "Belt and Road" initiative, research focused on the relationship between Mazu culture and the initiative. Song Jianxiao's "Research on the Inheritance and Development of Mazu Culture from the Perspective of the 'Belt and Road' Initiative" discussed the origins and evolution of Mazu belief while emphasizing a maritime perspective. It paid special attention to Mazu culture's unique mode of inheritance and the linear distribution of Mazu temples along the coasts, rivers, and ports as part of the heritage of coastal, riverine, and marine communities. Lin Mingtai's "The Dissemination and Development of Mazu Culture in Countries Along the Maritime Silk Road under the 'Belt and Road' Initiative" described the dissemination of Mazu culture in countries along the Maritime Silk Road and explored the current status of the integration and development of Mazu belief with local religious culture. Liu Tingyu's "The Overseas Spread of Mazu Belief along the Maritime Silk Road in the Ming Dynasty" emphasized the essential role played by Mazu, as a maritime goddess of Chinese folk belief, in the Maritime Silk Road since the Song and Yuan dynasties.

Mazu culture is an important component of traditional Chinese culture. In recent years, many scholars have recognized that the development of Mazu belief in coastal cities in Fujian is a valuable cultural resource and foundation, serving as a bridge connecting people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Some scholars have proposed that from the grand perspective of "Believe in China," the positive narrative, shaping, and exhibition of "Believe in China" by Chinese national power will not only provide solid value support for national rejuvenation but also have a positive

significance for the protection and expansion of China's national sovereignty and interests. Therefore, it is necessary to review the past achievements and research paths of Mazu belief studies, identify weak areas in previous research, and explore new research paradigms and paths to contribute to the study of Mazu belief. (Cai Xiangfeng, 2006)

8. Concept and Theory

Throughout various historical periods in China, religion has played an exceptionally significant role. The development of coastal cities in Fujian is not only a "cultural sphere," a "tribute sphere," or a "trade sphere" centered around Mazu culture but also a "faith sphere" of Mazu culture. Whether it's Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, or folk beliefs like Mazu, they have all directly contributed to the formation and operation of contemporary society. These belief systems serve as crucial spiritual bonds connecting the government, society, and its people. Hence, there is an urgent and essential need to study the relationship between Mazu belief and Fujian society from the perspective of constructing a "Mazu Symbol Interaction" discourse system.

In exploring the historical changes and reasons behind the development of Mazu culture in coastal cities of Fujian, it's necessary to understand the historical evolution of Mazu belief and Mazu temples in regions including inland Fujian and Guangdong, the coastal areas of Fujian, and the Fujian-Taiwan region. The author begins by providing an overview of the historical development, societal impact, modes of transmission, and the diversity and complexity of Mazu culture and belief in coastal Fujian. Beyond the specific manifestations of Mazu belief evolution, the author analyzes the "why," which is the reasons for symbolic transformation. In terms of research methods, the author traces the historical context, primarily relying on key historical materials such as the "Annotated Collection of Poems and Songs Dedicated to Mazu in Different Dynasties" and the "Compilation of Mazu Documentary Historical Materials." Through in-depth research and analysis of historical documents, the author conducts document exploration and compilation. From the perspective of the relationship between the state and society, the author analyzes the significance of the presentation and transformation of Mazu belief.

Based on the earlier presentation of Mazu culture's symbols, to further explore symbol interactions, it provides important clues to the historical deconstruction and contemporary construction of Mazu culture's significance. The author examines China's feudal society, the Republican era through the Cultural Revolution, the period after China's reform and opening-up, and the new opportunities for world intangible cultural heritage. These four periods are analyzed regarding Mazu temple plaques¹, inscriptions, historical records, and Mazu belief-related events in coastal Fujian. The aim is to explain the official pathways and interactions of Mazu deification in different historical stages, the transformation and interaction of Mazu cultural beliefs in modern and contemporary times, and the value representation of Mazu beliefs in

world intangible cultural heritage. By analyzing the role of Mazu culture in integrating local society and interpreting the era and transformation processes of Mazu symbols under the interaction of both official and folk entities, this research clarifies the cultural interactions among individuals, communities, localities, the state, and mainstream global culture. It connects different communities and generations. In the modern construction of Mazu culture, it emphasizes the importance of cultural inheritance in aspects such as local identity, interaction between official and folk entities, international exchanges, cultural preservation, and innovation. This promotes the continued cultural and societal significance of Mazu culture in contemporary society and spreads the spiritual values of Mazu globally.

In September 2009, UNESCO included Mazu beliefs and customs on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, making it China's first intangible cultural heritage of the belief category. This marked the international recognition of the cultural uniqueness and influence of Mazu belief. In 2008, "Mazu Beliefs and Customs" was recommended as one of the 35 projects to participate in the evaluation for the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It was also the first project recommended by the Chinese government for World Heritage application in Putian, Fujian Province. The historical event of "from feudal superstition to cultural heritage" is related to folklore studies and sociology, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage involves various disciplines and professions. During the writing process, the author conducted field interviews with members of the working group who participated in the application for the inclusion of "Mazu Beliefs and Customs" on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, unveiling the story behind the successful application. The application process explores how "Mazu Beliefs and Customs" initiated deeper interactions and how the government cleverly transformed the work practice of applying for the inclusion of "Mazu Beliefs and Customs" in specific political and economic discourses. The study investigates whether Mazu beliefs have appropriately adapted to the current "culture as the stage, economy as the performance" situation and societal needs, thus continuing to exist and play a role beneficial to local economic development.



9. Research plan

Plan work content										
Collect literature and papers	■	■								
Visiting the countryside and the performance site of the troupe, interviewing key figures		■	■							
Organize on-site pictures and interview information			■	■	■					
Writing papers			■	■	■	■	■			
Revise, adjust and improve the thesis						■	■	■		
Thesis defense							■	■	■	
Published journals								■	■	■
Graduation										■

Table 1: The research plan.
Source: Drawn by Pinglan Lin, 2022.

10. Chapter structure

Chapter I The research proposal

Chapter II Symbol presentation -- historical changes and reasons of Mazu culture development in Fujian coastal cities

Chapter III Symbolic Interaction - Historical Deconstruction and Modern Construction of the Meaning of Mazu Culture

Chapter IV Symbolic Change - Interpretation and Transformation of Mazu Cultural Symbols Over Time

Chapter V Symbolic Reconstruction - New Opportunities for Mazu Culture in the World Cultural Heritage Process

Chapter VI Conclusion, discussion and suggestion

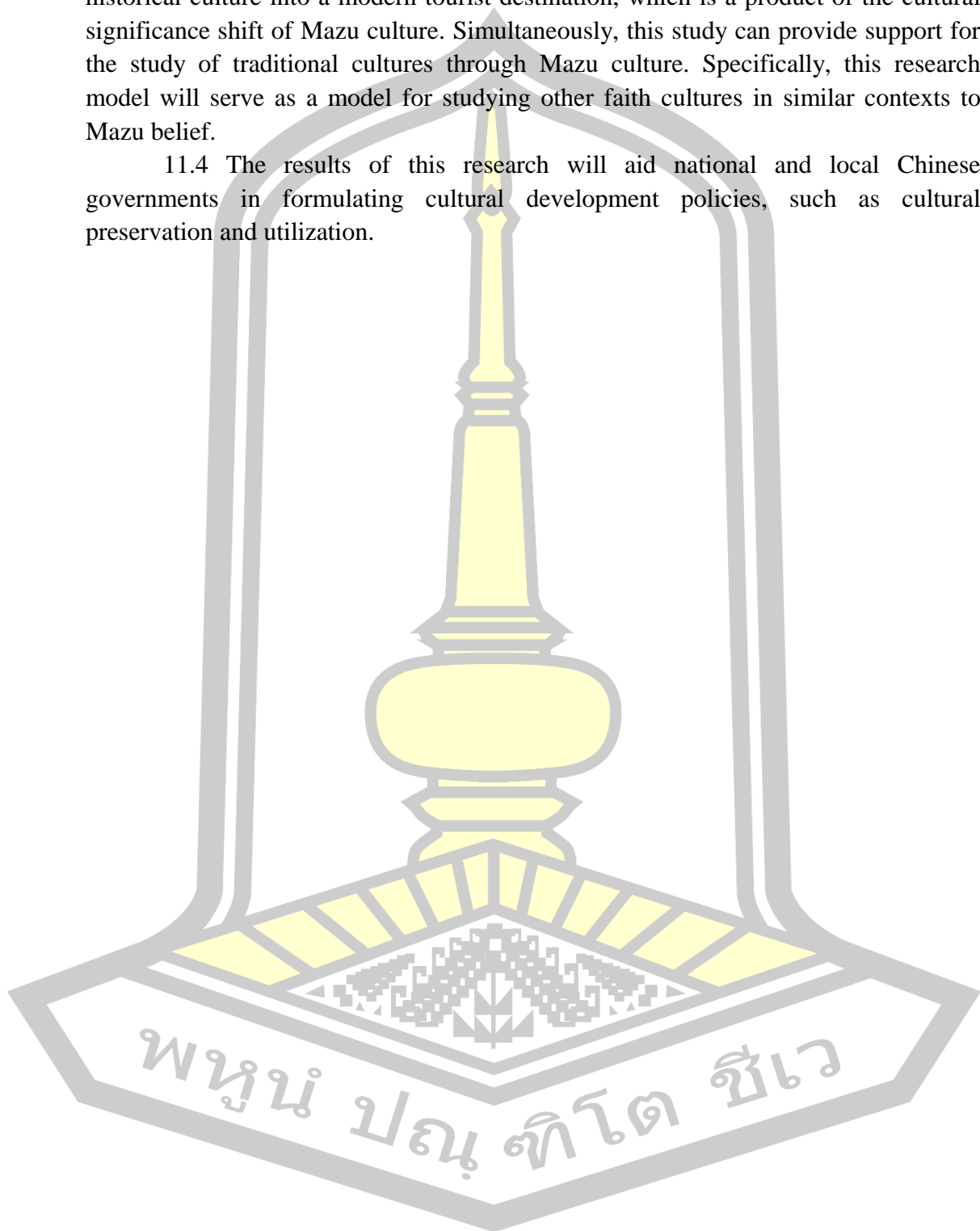
11. Benefit of Research

11.1 Currently, research on symbolic interaction and semantic change in China is relatively scarce, and these two concepts belong to a relatively novel field. Prior to this, few had used these two concepts to study Mazu culture. This work will fill this gap. As an interdisciplinary study, this research should involve aesthetics, anthropology, and sociology. In comparison to single disciplines, this will add value and conclude that research based on these concepts is still in its early stages. A systematically comprehensive study can fill the void in this specific academic domain.

11.2 This research further analyzes the value of Mazu culture from anthropological and sociological perspectives, aiding in a deeper understanding of the significance of Mazu culture and the development of coastal Chinese society. By examining the relationship between individuals and society, this research will enrich the information available for future studies in this field.

11.3 Mazu culture has transformed Meizhou Island from a unique place of historical culture into a modern tourist destination, which is a product of the cultural significance shift of Mazu culture. Simultaneously, this study can provide support for the study of traditional cultures through Mazu culture. Specifically, this research model will serve as a model for studying other faith cultures in similar contexts to Mazu belief.

11.4 The results of this research will aid national and local Chinese governments in formulating cultural development policies, such as cultural preservation and utilization.



Chapter II

Symbol presentation -- historical changes and reasons of Mazu culture development in Fujian coastal cities

1. Introduction

This chapter presents the local social and cultural history of the Mazu culture in the coastal city of Fujian. An ancient and rich belief system with deep roots in the coastal city of Fujian on China's southeastern coast. It is the Mazu culture, which is both a religious belief and a cultural symbol. The Mazu belief emerged from the historical changes of the development of Fujian's coastal cities, and the development of Mazu beliefs and traditions in different historical periods.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first section introduces the historical origins of the Mazu belief in the coastal city of Fujian. This creates a special phenomenon in Chinese religious beliefs. The second section introduces the evolution of Mazu's beliefs over time, in the coastal city of Fujian. How did this development process become a unique belief and identity in the Fujian coastal region? and the reasons for the symbol change. The third section discusses the development practices of the “Mazu name” in Fujian coastal cities in different historical periods. The belief is that Mazu played different roles at different times. And why has the usage structure changed?

2. Historical Origins of Mazu Belief in Coastal Cities of Fujian

Mazu belief was quietly born in Putian, Fujian Province in the southeast coast of China. The rise and wide spread of this belief provides a vivid cultural anthropological evidence for the integration of regional culture and the inheritance of Chinese culture in the coastal area of Fujian. The remoteness of Fujian's geographical location makes it easy to form a unique local culture and beliefs. This land of steep mountains, deep gullies, jungle living a variety of exotic animals, snakes and insects lurking, dense fog filled the air, often let people fall into a fantastic fantasy. At the

same time, coastal residents in Fujian are faced with natural disasters such as floods and diseases that cannot be explained by science, which prompts people to seek the protection of supernatural forces.

One of the distinctive features of southern traditional culture is the "Like witchcraft good ghosts", and the southern Fujian is the palace temple and temple, many gods and goddesses. Mazu belief was originally a local belief of Mindi residents in witchcraft and worship of ghosts and gods. Liao Pengfei, a scholar in the Song Dynasty, mentioned in the story of the Reconstruction of Shunji Temple: "In the beginning, witchcraft was the thing to predict the fate of people." This indicates that Mazu was a sorcerer in his lifetime. Folklore also suggests that because women were considered feminine and communicated more easily with the gods of the underworld, heaven and Earth than men, female sorcerers were quite common in the region. In life, Mazu was regarded as an inhuman, while in death, she was often revered as a god. This phenomenon is also widely reflected in many goddesses in Fujian area. In ancient Fujian, the phenomenon of belief in witchcraft and worship of gods was closely related to the living conditions at that time. Because medical resources were scarce, people were more likely to turn to wizards and gods than to doctors and medicines when faced with illness. In Zhangzhou, Quanzhou area, there is a typical example, that is the god Baosheng Emperor. Like Mazu, Baosheng Emperor is one of the important deities in Fujian and Taiwan. There is a popular proverb circulating in southern Fujian: "Crossing the sea depends on Mazu, and settling down depends on real people." After hundreds of years of development and dissemination, Mazu belief has become a unique phenomenon in Chinese religious belief, which has profoundly affected the cultural appearance and social life of Fujian coastal cities. (Malinowski, 1986)

2.1 Geographic Location and Cultural Background of Coastal Cities in Fujian

Fujian Province is located in the southeast of China, on the coast of the East

China Sea, adjacent to Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Guangdong provinces. It is the confluence of the East China Sea and the South China Sea, bordering the Taiwan Strait to the east and the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta to the west. With a land area of 124,000 square kilometers and a sea area of 136,000 square kilometers, the province is an important maritime export for mainland China, the historical starting point of the Silk Road and Zhenghe voyages to the Western seas, and a maritime trade center. The terrain of Fujian is mainly hilly, and the peaks and peaks are high and the hills are continuous. More than 80% of the total area of the province is mountainous and hilly. The rainy climate and the terrain conducive to water collection make rivers distributed among the hills, and the sedimentation of flowing water forms valleys and basins, and it is fitting to describe Fujian as "eight mountains, one water and one field".



Figure 1: Map of Fujian's Geographic Location. Fujian is located in the southeastern part of China, along the coast of the East China Sea. It is separated from Taiwan by the Taiwan Strait. As shown in the map, Meizhou Island is situated to the southeast of Putian City in Fujian Province.

Source: Google Internet, accessed in 2023.

Fujian Province has a long history, Fujian province is commonly known as Bamin, was the ancient Yue nationality residence. After Jin and Tang Dynasties, the Han people in the Central Plains moved to Fujian to avoid the wars. Since ancient times, Fujian has been separated from the Central Plains by steep mountains, leaving locals with only two choices: either to seek a way out through the mountains and rivers, or to turn to the sea. Both options were fraught with danger, especially in

ancient times, when traveling to the Central Plains to take the imperial examinations was extremely difficult. Surprisingly, however, Fujian did well in the ancient imperial examinations, and imperial scholars from Fuzhou, Xinghua (now Putian) and Quanzhou occupied important positions in the imperial court, especially during the Southern Song Dynasty.

In the era of feudal society relying on land for self-sufficiency, due to limited land resources, the sea became the main way of life for Fujian people. Especially since the late Qing Dynasty, with the invasion of Western culture and economic models, which brought subversive disasters to the traditional life of self-sufficiency, coupled with the long-term instability, many coastal residents of Fujian were forced to cross the ocean to seek refuge. Southeast Asia became their main destination, but there the Chinese were often subjected to brutal colonial rule and unfair treatment. Historically, the Chinese suffered a lot of massacres and persecution in Southeast Asia, and even in the late 20th century, they still faced the tragedy of Chinese exclusion.

After the reform and opening up, in order to change the poverty situation, Fujian people once again sought a way to cross the ocean to change the fate of poverty, without fear of life and death, and kept trying. The interweaving of these two ways of life forms the unique culture of Fujian. On the one hand, Fujian and the Central Plains culture exchanges and integration, inherited and developed a lot of the central Plains culture has disappeared. On the other hand, Marine culture also emerged in this process, and Fujian and foreign cultures, especially Southeast Asian cultures, formed unique characteristics in the separation and integration. The best carriers of these cultures are temples, churches, ancestral shrines and tombs. These unique social relations and characters of Fujian people formed by historical, geographical and cultural backgrounds regard blood ties as an important bond, which is both closed and open, conservative and adventurous. Temples, churches, ancestral halls and tombs are the best forms of Fujian culture, reflecting the richness and diversity of regional folk

culture.

The formation of folklore in a region is "conventional", and its content and form have invisible binding force on the vast majority of social members. With superior port conditions and abundant Marine resources, Fujian coastal area has been an important maritime transportation hub and trade port since ancient times. Due to the frequent exchanges between the sea and overseas, the residents of coastal cities in Fujian are mostly fishermen, sailors and maritime merchants, which are closely connected with the sea and form a unique Marine culture. The origin of Mazu is similar to many Chinese traditional mythological figures, and her prototype originates from real life and existence beyond life, reflecting people's desire for a better life and the pursuit of truth. In the early ancient times, the Chinese did not pay special attention to navigation, until the Han Dynasty began to worship the god of the sea. In the Song Dynasty, with the development of China's maritime industry, the worship of the sea God became increasingly common. Mazu was an ordinary woman in the Northern Song Dynasty. She was eager to give alms and help others. She often helped shipwrecked people.

After her death, people remembered her good deeds and spread the word about her. Fishermen gradually believe that the goddess of Mazu makes Meizhou Bay quiet and peaceful, which is the fundamental reason why Mazu belief originated in Meizhou Bay, Fujian Province. The first Mazu Temple in Putian Meizhou is often used by fishermen to light lamps. It is the origin of Mazu belief and the birthplace of more than 6,000 Mazu temples. In ancient times, navigation technology and shipbuilding plans were not very advanced, and in the face of the changing climate at sea, people could only seek the protection of Mazu, a small god, to obtain shelter. As the goddess of the sea, Mazu's beliefs were integrated with the Marine culture of these cities. It is believed that Mazu can protect the safety of navigation and harvest, and is also the patron saint of fishermen. Mazu culture is a folk culture formed according to Mazu beliefs and customs. At the same time, Mazu belief also nourished the Marine

culture of these cities, forming a unique folk belief tradition and festival activities. Mazu legends and stories spread widely in these places, there are temples and ancestral halls dedicated to Mazu. In particular, cities such as Quanzhou and Xiamen, with many historic Mazu temples, are important centers of Mazu belief. These temples are not only places of faith, but also cultural heritage and tourist attractions, attracting many believers and tourists to visit. (Chen C Z, 1998)

In general, the geographical location and rich Marine cultural background of Fujian coastal cities provide favorable conditions for the spread and prosperity of Mazu belief. Mazu belief took root in these cities and became an important belief and cultural symbol in the hearts of local people. At the same time, Mazu belief also adds unique cultural charm and historical heritage to these cities.

3. Development of Mazu Belief in Different Historical Periods in Coastal Cities of Fujian

3.1 Local Protector Deity: The Origin and Spread of Mazu Belief in the Song Dynasty

Mazu culture was originally a folk belief. Since the Northern Song Dynasty, Mazu gradually developed from a local witch to a great deity to be sacrificed, and the image of an ordinary woman quickly rose to a heavenly virgin admired by all people. Mazu, as the protection god of seafarers, has gradually become the universal belief of overseas Chinese all over the world. After more than 1200 years of inheritance and development, Mazu belief has become a maritime culture that crosses national boundaries and is included in the world intangible cultural heritage.

During the Song Dynasty, the state supported and honored folk deities who were considered meritorious to the people, first by bestowing temple heads and then by bestowing the title of gods. Mazu from the northern Song Dynasty to the Southern Song Dynasty after fourteen times, the title from the initial two characters gradually increased to sixteen characters. After that, it was renewed four times in the Yuan

Dynasty, four times in the Ming Dynasty, and five times in the Qing Dynasty, for a total of 27 times. After so many times of enthronement to a folk god in successive dynasties, Mazu's divine position was high and revered, and it reached an incomparable position, unique among Chinese folk gods.

In the Song Dynasty, it was not easy to build a Mazu temple, and it was rare to have two Mazu temples in one area. Only the temple of the main worship of Mazu can be called Mazu Temple, with the expansion of Mazu belief, other temples also become Mazu temple. During the Southern Song Dynasty, Mazu belief was introduced into the Jiangnan area and was spread and inherited. There is a strong religious atmosphere of worship of the dragon King in Jiangnan area, which also gives Mazu the reputation of "Dragon Lady" and enhances her ability to resist the tide. Mazu retains strong characteristics in the image of local protective gods.

Mazu belief in Song Dynasty showed a trend of distribution and diffusion in geography, and the spread path and activity characteristics of different belief groups formed different geographical distribution. At the beginning, Mazu belief mainly spread to fishermen, seafarers, maritime merchants and local gentry officials and other low social classes, and gradually spread to high social classes, and formed the hierarchical spread of belief.

1) Social and cultural background of Song Dynasty

Geographical factors: Meizhou Island in Fujian Province is a coastal island. In Song Dynasty, the general education level, educational level or cognitive ability in this area is relatively low, and residents rely on fishing and navigation for a living in addition to farming. Under the circumstances of the dominant position of natural economy and the relatively low level of science and culture, living and working in peace and contentment, praying for disasters and seeking blessings from themselves are their greatest wishes and requirements. Lin's woman was a witch on Meizhou Island, also produced under such objective conditions. From the law of the emergence and activity of witches at that time, it was often first produced in the

mountainous and remote areas, coastal islands or from other places to these areas, and then gradually spread. This also fits Lin's case. Meizhou Island residents met such a "born to show magical, speechless people" "goddess", it is natural that they will trust her and spread her deeds. After her death, it was inevitable to set up a temple for her, pray and offer sacrifices regularly, and pray that they would continue to bless their lives in peace, so that they would become the protection god of the people.

Social factors: In the Song Dynasty, the Xinghua Army, like the whole Fujian Road, continued to prosper and develop in economy, and promoted obvious progress in all aspects of society. In particular, education was developed and talents came out in large numbers, which attracted more attention from Bamin. However, the Song Dynasty suffered from severe foreign aggression, internal strife, sharp national struggles and class contradictions, and frequent natural disasters. As far as Xinghua Army is concerned, according to local records and statistics, natural disasters occurred in the Song Dynasty during the three hundred years, there were 12 droughts. There were six floods, four windstorms, two famines and one epidemic. There were insurrections, mutinies, and robberies one each, and two seacoasts. In the face of frequent natural and man-made disasters, heavy double tax burden and land rent exploitation, people in difficult and nowhere to ask for help on the day, they went to pray for the gods to eliminate disasters and bless peace, which should be a very natural and common behavior of the people at that time. Meizhou Lin goddess, on the occasion of natural disasters and man-made disasters and the invasion of foreign enemies, rumors can show "gods", make "contributions to the country, there are virtues in the people" "God", therefore, by the court repeatedly sealed, folk will be more faith, build temples and worship more and more. Whenever the temple was built or rebuilt by the people, the officials of the Xinghua Army and prominent local figures such as Huang Gongdu, Liao Pengfei, Chen Mi and Liu Kezhuang wrote and wrote poems for the female temple to promote it. Local scholar Li Junfu wrote Puyang Bi Shi and Xianxi Zhi edited by Xianyou county magistrate Huang Yansun. These two

works also gave a positive brief introduction to the goddess Lin. At that time, theocracy from top to bottom dominated the society, it is not surprising that they did so, especially to promote the folk faith played a greater role.

2) Maritime trade and navigation activities in Song Dynasty

In the Tang and Song dynasties, Quanzhou and Fuzhou became important port cities for international trade, and Putian Meizhou Island was located between the two cities, becoming the only place for north-south sea traffic, and its geographical location was very crucial. In the Song Dynasty, the coastal area was divided into two main areas: one, called Xiali, was dominated by merchants, while the other coastal area southeast of Putian became a gathering place for merchant ships. On the other side of Meizhou Island is "Jilazhi (Huaxu) Mountain", where there are two ports, forming a busy downtown. Mulan Creek in the upper reaches of Xinghua Bay built Mulanpi, and Baihu City and Ninghai Town became the key zone between the inner and outer ports connecting Putian's North-South goods. The Fengting city in the south Meizhou Bay connects the stream to the Jinda Sea, attracting Putian and Xianyou merchants' boats and becoming a distribution center for general merchandise. The prosperity of these ports and shipping routes has promoted the development of maritime relations of the Xinghua Army. Despite the use of the compass in navigation at that time, winds and waves were still unpredictable, and seafarers, merchants and travelers often encountered shipwrecks during their arduous journeys at sea. In this case, the belief in the sea protector God came into being. Meizhou Island became the "main temple", showing the fishermen and seafarers to the protection and wishes.

In the Song Dynasty, the outer harbor of Xinghua Bay built a female temple of Lin, named Sacred Pier, which first began in the Northern Song Dynasty Yuan You Bingyin year (1086). Decades later, a taller statue of Lin was erected in the temple and was rewarded with a gift. On the other hand, the White Lake served as the inner harbor in Shaoxing 27 (1157) when the Shunji Temple was built. Fengting City in Meizhou Bay also expanded and rebuilt the temple in Shaoxing and Baoyou period of

Southern Song Dynasty. The construction of these temples confirms the development of maritime traffic from Meizhou Island to the inner ports of the northern and southern bays and then to the outer ports of Xinghua Army. This series of facts fully show that the prosperity of the maritime exchanges of the Xinghua Army in the Song Dynasty had a positive impact on the spread and development of the goddess Lin belief.

Before the Song Dynasty, the Putian area was located between the seven Fujian counties, close to the coastline, and the terrain was mostly high brine land, which could be used for farming limited. However, since Putian was incorporated into the territory of the Song Dynasty and the Xinghua Army was established, a series of water conservancy projects, including the construction of beading DAMS and dikes to reclaim fields, made Putian River estuary and the North and South Ocean areas have a large amount of irrigable land. These measures greatly promoted the development of agriculture and other industries. Xinghua Army has a wealth of special products, such as indigo, litchi, longan, sugar, salt, porcelain and iron ware. To meet the needs of maritime trade, the Xinghua Army developed ironmaking and shipbuilding industries.

In Song Dynasty, the economy in Xinghua Army developed rapidly. Goods such as grain, wine, paint, silk, cloth, etc. were sent to the Xinghua Army. Luxury goods mainly rely on imports, imports include fragrant rhinoceros elephant Cui and so on. Development and trade within the Xinghua Army are not only the result of internal and external communication, but also the reflection of the interaction between external and internal markets. This prosperous economy and the development of maritime trade contributed to the spread of the Goddess Lin belief to Jiangsu and Zhejiang. In Ningbo, Hangzhou, Shanghai and other places established Lin goddess temples, this spread process, the goddess of Lin belief is no longer limited to Putian, but spread to Fujian, Guangzhou, Jiangsu and Zhejiang and other places. The prosperity of the Song Dynasty economy and the development of maritime communication became one of the important reasons for the spread of Lin goddess

belief. (Addis M. and Holbrook M, 2001)

3) The popularization and development of Mazu as a local protection god

When discussing the origin and spread history of Mazu belief, we need to comprehensively consider the social conditions at that time and carry out a comprehensive historical investigation and analysis. All folk beliefs about God have social causes and are created by human beings. It would be putting the cart before the horse if we only look for the reason of widespread belief in Mazu from the aspects of its own miraculous legend, divinity and divinity. Mazu's efficacies, divinity and divinity are all given by people, which reflect and express the social reasons of people's belief in Mazu.

Therefore, when discussing Mazu belief, we have made clear two questions: first, what causes people to believe in Mazu and spread her miraculous legend, which contributes to the change of Mazu's divinity and divinity; Second, the spread of efficacious legends and the change of divinity and divinity had what impact on the development of Mazu belief. Only by considering these factors comprehensively can we better understand the origin and evolution of Mazu belief.

The belief in Mazu was the result of the combination of the folk superstition and the witch activity in the fishing village of Meizhou Island. In the Song Dynasty, the Lin witch of Meizhou Island had a strong influence on the island with her mysterious and supernatural abilities. This is due to the special social conditions of Meizhou Island, which is located on the southeast coast, surrounding the Taiwan Strait and Meizhou Bay, and is sparsely populated, making it difficult for full-time doctors or witches to exist. Therefore, Mazu is likely to be a part-time hexenbiest, she learned some spirit possession, drawing, practice and other skills, won people's trust.

The social living conditions in Meizhou Island made people's dependence on the divine power more and more urgent. Earlier gods and witches had already existed, but Mazu was newly recognized as a more useful and reliable object. This is because the spiritual activities of Lin's women have satisfied the small fishing village's need for

help in the danger and instability of fishery production and the difficulties of medical treatment. As the spokesman or embodiment of the God, she satisfied the islanders' dependence on the divine power, and was more intelligent and perfect than other witches in the past and at that time. Therefore, people are full of confidence and awe in her, believing that her soul remains strong after death, and believing that her magic exists even beyond her life. As a result, she was honored as a "Taoist goddess" or "dragon woman" and continued to be sacrificed in the temple, becoming the object of prayer for help. The rise of Mazu belief is closely related to the mysterious ability of Lin Shi Nu and the divine activity to meet the needs of islanders, so deep Mazu belief has been formed in Meizhou Island.

In the process of studying Mazu as a local protection god, we can see three co-existing facts in the history of Song Dynasty: (1) There were many witchcraft beliefs in Song Dynasty. In Fujian, witchcraft belief was very common in Song Dynasty. CAI Xiang pointed out that there is a widespread phenomenon of "left doctors and right witches, depending on the witch" among the people. In the Xinghua Army area, this phenomenon is more prominent. It is an undisputed fact that Lin's daughter was called a witchcraft in her lifetime. Before and after her, there are also some witch records, such as "Wu Shi, Goddess of East Ou" in Zhejiang, "Witch of Gujiao Mountain" in Xinghua, "Zhan Zhan" in Putian, etc. These witches were given the image of multifunctional shelter gods in the folk, and then the court granted them the title, which established their divine status. (2) The coexistence of folk gods with Buddhism and Taoism in the Song Dynasty. During the Tang and Song dynasties, Buddhism and Taoism flourished. In the Southern Song Dynasty, in order to consolidate the political power, the authorities attached great importance to folk temples and conferred titles on them. There are many folk temples, and the imperial court has special regulations on the titles of temples. The shrines and temples in Xinghua Army area were also granted by the court, such as "Xianji Temple" and Lingyou Temple in Xinghua. Shunji Temple was originally dedicated to the goddess Lin, and was later identified as the

"sea God". In the Southern Song Dynasty, many shrines were granted by the imperial court, which shows that folk gods were valued in the Southern Song Dynasty, and the goddess of Shunji Temple was important in the Southern Song Dynasty. (3) In the Xinghua Army area, many sea gods co-existed. In the Tang and Song Dynasties, the southeast coastal trade was prosperous, but maritime disasters were frequent, and people hoped to have a supernatural protection god. In the Southern Song Dynasty, Sea Temple rose in Guangzhou, Quanzhou and other places and was widely worshipped. The Xinghua Army also has two highly worshipped "sea gods", namely the Goddess Lin of Meizhou and the "Xiang Ying Temple" of Putian. These four sea gods were honored and revered by the imperial court, and became revered gods in the southeastern coastal areas. Therefore, no matter the folk or the official, the worship of Mazu as a "local protection god" during this period was pious, reflecting people's common concern and belief in maritime safety.

4) The role and status of Mazu temple

The belief in Mazu originated from the mysterious rituals when Lin's daughter was a sorcerer, but the real power that promoted the expansion of the belief in Mazu was that after Lin's death, Meizhou islanders built temples and regarded her as a protective god for superstitious sacrifices.

According to Song Dynasty records, Mazu was revered as the "Dragon Lady," signifying her divine authority over maritime affairs and her close relationship with the Dragon King. In Huang Gongdu's poem, there are mentions of "万户牲醪无水旱" (Ten thousand households offer sacrifices, free from drought) and "千里危樯一信风" (A thousand miles away, a single wind report), both of which indicate Mazu's ability to control water, prevent drought, and save ships in peril. These descriptions all point to the attributes of a sea goddess and water deity that Mazu acquired upon her deification.

These attributes reflect the challenges faced by the people of Meizhou Island in their production and livelihoods. Intractable problems were believed to be alleviated

through the worship of Mazu, who was thought to have foreknowledge of human fortunes and misfortunes. She became the object of people's supplications, particularly among fishermen engaged in maritime activities, making her a central figure in Mazu faith. This enduring belief in Mazu became increasingly steadfast over time.

Within more than a hundred years, the residents of Meizhou Island regarded Lin's daughter as a protector and began to build temples. As miracles and legends continued to emerge, attracting believers from nearby areas, the Mazu belief spread to Putian, Xianyou and other places, becoming a local god. Many Mazu temples appeared in Puxian area, and Mazu became a local god widely worshiped by Puxian people. Temples built during this period include: Ninghai, thirty miles east of Putian County, the Temple of the Goddess of the river Estuary, the Temple of the Goddess of the Port of Xianliang across the Chao Phraya, and the Temple of Shunji on the White Lake near Putian County. Mazu belief gradually expanded to Fujian, Zhejiang, Shanghai and other coastal areas, becoming the god of maritime protection, and Mazu temples were built all over the country, such as the "Princess Temple" in Quanzhou and the "Holy Princess Palace" in Shanghai. The construction of these temples not only shows the diversity of religious beliefs, but also reveals the lasting influence of Mazu belief in local society. In 1155, after Mazu obtained the title of "Lady", the palace temples in Xinghua Haikou, Putian Fuxi Bay and Xianyou also began to be named after "Lady", such as the "Lady Lin Temple" in Xinghua Haikou, the "Lady Chongfu Temple" in Putian Fuxi Bay and the "Lady Fengting Temple" in Xianyou, and the mother ancestor became a local god widely worshipped by Puxian people. Although many Mazu temples were built in the Song Dynasty, two were particularly important. One is the ancestral temple located on Meizhou Island, which became a gathering place for merchant ships, fishing boats and worshippers going to the pilgrimage. Another temple is the "White Lake Shunji Temple", where Putian County's official Spring and Autumn Festival is held. This is because the temple of

Meizhou Island is quite far from the county town, and it is inconvenient to cross the sea, so the two temples have become the center of Mazu belief.

Through the history of Mazu temples around the country, from the primitive temple to the later Mazu Temple, Mazu belief made great development in the Song Dynasty and became an important belief and cultural element in the coastal areas. We can trace the evolution of Mazu belief in the Song Dynasty, and the construction of these temples not only shows the diversity of religious beliefs, but also reveals the lasting influence of the role and status of Mazu temples in local society.

5) The "transboundary" spread of Mazu belief

Mazu belief spread from the islands to the mainland, and first took root in Putian Ninghai, which has its inevitable objective factors. Ninghai in today's Hanjiang town, Sanjiang estuary, was a commercial, fishing and prosperous port, from the perspective of the channel of superstition spread, the most vulnerable, is a shortcut to spread, from the superstitious requirements of the society, the deity of the Lin woman is in line with the protection of fishing and commercial maritime transport safety psychological requirements, in this case, as long as there is a prominent figure under the pretext of the goddess to build a temple, Things will soon be done. The spread of Mazu belief from Meizhou Island to Ninghai was a key step in the transformation of the narrow island protector god of Mazu Mountain into the protector god of China's coastal rivers and seas. If it had not taken root in Ninghai, a fishing and commercial port, Mazu belief would not have spread to other counties and provinces quickly, because there could not be authoritative figures or middle and senior officials with wide influence living on the islands, and without the support of such figures, Mazu belief would not have expanded so quickly. Because the Mazu belief took root in Ninghai and received the attention and support of the ruling class, it quickly spread in Putian and Xianyou, and then spread to Quanzhou and Zhejiang. (Zhu TianShun,1986.p.102-108)

In the Song Dynasty, why there were so many court and official help to expand the influence of Mazu belief, this is related to the Southern Song Dynasty to move the

capital to Lin 'an, west of Hangzhou. As the court moved south, the security of the southern coast became a political issue that must be paid attention to, and in the economy, the importance of Shanghai trade and the use of sea and river transportation increased. In this case, in order to suppress the riot at sea, it is necessary to have a suitable protector to boost the morale and deter the enemy; On the other hand, in order to stabilize the river and sea transportation industry, which is engaged in the unpredictable situation, it also needs to rely on the mysterious power of the water field; Therefore, "Mazu", which is considered to have a high efficiency in both aspects in the folk belief, was chosen as the protector god. In addition, the Southern Song court would pay so much attention to Mazu, and the Puxian forces in the court at that time played a role in the status. According to Zhu Tianshun's article *The Origin of Mazu Belief and Its Spread in the Song Dynasty*, Putian people in the Song Dynasty made six champions (Xu Duo in the ninth year of Xining, Wu Shuao in the second year of Duanping, Huang Gongdu in the eighth year of Shaoxing, Zheng Qiao in the fifth year of Qiandao, Chen Wenlong in the fourth year of Xianchun, etc.), 824 scholars, plus nine of Grace, who became officials in the imperial court. Actively propagated to the emperor the story of the hometown god Mazu, and asked for the title, so Mazu would be so valued by the court. It makes sense that most of the grants from the emperors in the Song Dynasty came from Putian and its surrounding areas. It can be seen that in the process of expanding Mazu belief to other places, the help of official forces is a factor that cannot be ignored.

Local officials in the Southern Song Dynasty had considerable autonomy in dealing with sexual sacrifice. They could deal independently with situations they believed involved prostitution, or they could disobey court decrees and support civil religious assemblies for local interests. Take Chen Ye in Qingyuan years in Tingzhou to combat the sexual sacrifice of five gods as an example. Although the Five gods were given the temple name "Lingshun" as early as the third year of Daguan (1109), and in the first year of Chunxi (1174), they were given the title of "Gong" and became

a formal service approved by the court, Chen Ye took action in Tingzhou to ban the destruction of the temples of the Five Gods. This shows that local officials in the Southern Song Dynasty had a certain discretion in dealing with folk belief issues.

In this regard, historical records state: "The customs in Tingzhou favored ghost worship and belief in witchcraft, while in Ninghua, the affluent people sought the services of ritual priests and depended on the Five Manifestations of deities to dispel evil influences among the populace. Upon realizing the truth, Ye (Liu Ye) fled to the domains of ritual priests. He first punished those who had betrayed the Qin Dynasty and disrupted their sacrificial rites." Additionally, Zhen Dexiu took action to prohibit the destruction of licentious shrines. In the account written by Liu Kezhuang for Zhen Dexiu, it is recorded: "Throughout the year, during the four seasons, (Zhen Dexiu) governed with education as a top priority, opened government schools, expanded agricultural schools, erected the shrine of Fan Zhongxuan Gong in Jiangdong, the temple of the newly-created Jiafu in Changsha, and the shrine of the Qiaowang in Jin. He also established the shrine of Zhu Wengong in Wenling, and for Lin Gongzuan and Su Gongjian at schools, while eliminating those who should not have shrines." These two examples demonstrate that even though the Mazu goddess of Meizhou received imperial recognition, local officials during the Southern Song Dynasty, such as Zhen Dexiu during his tenure as the Prefect of Quanzhou, still had the authority to take action against folk beliefs they did not endorse.

Among scholars, the prestige of Zhendexiu is extremely high. It is recorded in the history books that he was tall, his face was beautiful, and there was no hope that he could help him. He only served in the court for less than ten years, and he submitted hundreds of thousands of words, each of which was relevant to the current situation, and his blunt words shocked the court. Scholars from all over the world extolled his articles as if they had witnessed his style. When he traveled around, he governed honorably, lived up to his words, and was praised at home and abroad. Sometimes there is a saying in the capital: "The real straight won is coming!" As soon

as he arrived, people poured out of the city to meet him, even filling the streets and squares. At the same time, however, some contemporary people worried about his influence and often excluded him from the court, but this only increased his popularity. ... However, his two experiences as governor of Quanzhou, especially the second one from the fifth year of Shaoding (1232), are less than 50 years after the collapse of the Southern Song Dynasty. In this turbulent situation, if the destruction of the temple of the goddess of Meizhou is prohibited at this time, it will greatly hinder the possibility of restoration. In addition, in the Song and Yuan dynasties, Quanzhou was the center of maritime traffic and foreign trade, and ships from all over the world gathered here. This provides a unique opportunity for Meizhou goddess belief to spread abroad. Quanzhou played an important role in the history of spreading the belief in the Goddess of Meizhou (Mazu), and even called her "the Goddess of Quanzhou" directly in the History of Yuan Dynasty. Therefore, if Zhen Dexiu does not agree with the belief of Meizhou Goddess, the prohibition of destroying its temples in Quanzhou is likely to hinder the development of the belief of Meizhou Goddess in Quanzhou, which may affect its spread overseas.

Although China was influenced by Confucianism and the worship and sacrifice of deities presented diversity, scholar-officials could still criticize or prevent the folk belief in gods through their writings and administrative means. As mentioned above, local officials in the Southern Song Dynasty had a great deal of initiative in dealing with folk beliefs, so Zhen Dexiu became a crucial figure at the critical moment when the belief in the goddess of Meizhou spread to the whole country. Liu Kezhuang had contacts with many distinguished disciples and gatekeepers of Zhu Zi, but the one he most respected and formally studied was Zhendexiu. Liu Kezhuang studied in Guozijian when he was young, and Zhendexiu formed a friendship between teachers and students, and later not only followed Zhendexiu many times to learn, but also was promoted by Zhendexiu, and served as Zhendexiu's staff. Therefore, Zhendexiu's attitude towards the belief of Meizhou goddess will naturally affect Liu Kezhuang.

According to the available materials, Liu Kezhuang left many poems praising the goddess of Meizhou (Mazu).

In the Southern Song Dynasty, Meizhou goddess belief was in the transitional period from Puxian to the whole country. This benefited from the praise of many Confucians such as Zhen Dexiu, Liu Kezhuang, Li Choufu and Ding Bogui. They either emphasized the miracles of the goddess of Chao Phraya, or demonstrated the rationality of their belief beyond the "sacrifice and hope", through dual means, promoted the widespread spread of the goddess of Chao Phraya belief across many provinces.

3.2 Sea Guardian: The rise and development of Mazu belief in Yuan Dynasty

1) Social and political background and the rise of Marine economy in Yuan Dynasty

In the Song Dynasty, Fujian region received unprecedented attention, and the administrative divisions gradually developed. From the five prefectures to the eight prefectures in Tang Dynasty, the territory of Fujian was gradually formed. The number of counties under its jurisdiction also increased accordingly, and the Yuan Dynasty further improved its administrative system on the basis of the Song Dynasty. In the mid-13th century, Kublai Khan was established as emperor, the North experienced a long war of 500 years, and the social and economic damage was serious. In order to stabilize the political situation of the Yuan Dynasty, it was necessary to transport a large number of grain from the south. Yuan Shizu Kublai Khan adopted the policy of the powerful minister Boyan by sea, so that Zhu Qing and Zhang Xuan opened up sea transportation of grain to Dadu, which stabilized the economic and political situation at that time. The sea transport has to go through great natural and social risks, which causes many great difficulties to the carriers who have been away from home for a long time. Mazu belief has become their spiritual strength to overcome the difficulties. The Yuan emperor followed the public opinion and promoted the development of Mazu, the local sea god believed in along the coast of

Fujian, along the road of water transport. Later, the Yuan Emperor named Mazu "Heavenly Concubine" and added the title repeatedly, which connected her with the security of the country.

At the same time, the number of households in Fujian also experienced a significant growth, although in the Yuan Dynasty slightly decreased, but the overall development still has a certain guarantee. The development of society and economy has higher requirements for water conservancy construction, which in turn promoted the economic development of Fujian in the Song and Yuan Dynasties. In ancient times, the level of productivity was limited, and the population had an important impact on the economy, especially on agriculture.

The inherent lack of terrain in Fujian makes the development of cultivated land particularly difficult, "the land is narrow and the people are thick, and the living is difficult, which is nowhere else than". During this period, the increase in labor force brought about by the rapid population increase made it possible to cultivate the mountains and reclaim the sea on a large scale. During the Yuan Dynasty, Fujian reclaimed terraced fields and irrigated them with mountain springs. The coastal principle of the construction of large water retention tide water conservancy project, reclamation of the sea and land, and the sea to compete for land. Secondly, the division of labor in agriculture was gradually refined. The limitation of Fujian's natural environment and the diversification of the demand for agricultural products due to the growth of population make some farmers turn to planting cash crops. Fujian's subtropical climate is conducive to the cultivation of cash crops, "mulberry is long land, tea and bamboo shoots mountain connected to the mountains." The tea produced in Fujian in the Yuan Dynasty is famous in the country, the main tea production in Jianzhou and Nanjianzhou, there are "dragon, phoenix, stone milk, white milk, such as twelve classes", "can not be made elsewhere", in addition to Fuzhou, Tingzhou, Shaowu, Quanzhou and other state armies also have tea production. Litchi, longan, sugar cane, citrus, loquat and other fruits along the coast of

Fujian are also well known. Fujian is one of the earliest areas to introduce cotton, mainly planted in southern Fujian and Xinghua Army. In addition, banana, mulberry, kudzu, trees, bamboo, flowers, etc. are widely cultivated in Fujian. In the Yuan period, Fujian handicraft industry prospered, mining, textile, tea making, shipbuilding, printing and so on all had great development. In the Yuan Dynasty, the pit and metallurgy industry in Fujian developed, and there were important silver farms such as Baofeng Farm and Baorui Farm, and countless copper farms. The mining of non-ferrous metals promoted the economic development of Fujian. Among them, the Fengguo Supervision established in Jianzhou in the Northern Song Dynasty was one of the important coin supervision departments in the Song Dynasty.

The shipbuilding industry is particularly prosperous in the coastal areas of Fujian, and the technology is developed, and there is a saying that "the sea boat is on Fujian". Fujian paper production is mainly concentrated in the northern part of Fujian, Jianyang is the center of the printing industry, the output is huge, Xinghua Jun, Quanzhou, Tingzhou and so on have also engraved some books. In the Yuan Dynasty, Fujian's trade developed greatly, especially the Marine trade. Due to the blockade of the overland Silk Road, the need for maritime trade was more urgent, and Fujian occupied favorable conditions. First of all, Fujian has many excellent ports, which are conducive to the sea trade; Secondly, the natural conditions of Fujian are not conducive to farming, and residents have had the habit of seeking a living on the sea since ancient times. In the Song and Yuan Dynasties, when the population was growing rapidly, there was a surplus of labor force, so more and more people went to sea for business, and various cultures converged to promote the development of maritime trade.

2) The function of Tianfei in the Yuan Dynasty was transformed into "national God" in the navigation escort.

Today, many rivers and coastal areas in Fujian still have the tradition of offering sacrifices to the water god. In the early stage of the belief of water God in Fujian area,

most of the natural gods appeared in animal images, and the most common ones were dragon, dumpling and snake. The dragon, as the god in charge of precipitation in ancient China, is no exception in Fujian. The dragon King of Longcun River in Jianning Prefecture, Fujian Province, and the Dragon well of Xinghua Army all pray for rain in times of drought. Such legends place the dragon as the local water god to protect the local wind and rain. There have been many water gods in Chinese history, the earliest Luoshui God, Xiang lady, Hebo, etc., and different places, such as Zhejiang to worship Wu Zixu, Guangdong to worship Lu Bode, Ma Yuan and other sea gods. As early as in the period of Tang Xuanzong, he conferred the four Seas Dragon King, Guangli King, etc. Since then, the dragon King has become an important sea god. Even in Fujian, Mazu's hometown, there are many sea gods. So why was Mazu, the sea goddess on Meizhou Island, a small place in Fujian Province, able to be revered in one place during the spread of history? Among them, the further nationalization of Mazu belief in Yuan Dynasty is an important reason.

Mazu belief began in the Song Dynasty, but the most important turning point appeared in the Yuan Dynasty. In the Yuan Dynasty, the sea water supply became the mainstream, the members of the government and the people of the Limin both inside and outside the capital depended on the large amount of grain brought by the Beiyang water transport. In 1281, due to the success of escorting the water transport, the ship of Dao City of Fujian proposed Pu Shiwen as the title of Mazu, and the Yuan Emperor Kublai Khan conferred the title of the goddess of Meizhou as the "protection of the kingdom and Princess of Heaven". Princess of Heaven, that is, princess of God, spouse of heaven. The title of Yuan Shizu for the first time linked Mazu with "protecting the country", indicating that the goddess of Meizhou became the heavenly god of the country, governed the gods and monsters of the four seas, and established the exclusive status of Mazu as the sea protection god. Every spring and autumn, the imperial court sent officials to the ancestral Temple and Baihu Temple in Meizhou Island. At that time, Pu Shiwen was the son of the famous Song city ship secretary Pu

Shougeng, the Yuan Dynasty Pu family firmly controlled the shipping of Quanzhou, the largest port in the East. Because they changed to Mazu, so the sea god Mazu belief rose rapidly.

In the Yuan Dynasty (1282), most people were in urgent need of grain, but the transport of grain by river was not only expensive but also limited, often due to shallow water and silting of river channels, which led to the failure of the transport vessels to arrive on time and meet the needs of the court. Faced with this dilemma, the Yuan Prime Minister Boyan and his ministers were helpless. However, the proposal of Zhu Qing and Zhang Xuan changed the situation at that time. Because of their poor families, they had been fishing for a living for many years, and they were pirate gangs engaged in maritime activities for 15 or 16 years. (By 1275), they accepted the surrender of the Yuan Dynasty.) After listening to the opinions of Zhu Qing and Zhang Xuan, the Yuan Prime Minister, Bo Yan, decided to adopt their proposal to transport grain by sea. In the Yuan Dynasty (1282), Zhu Qing and Zhang Xuan were ordered to set up sea transport grain, and for the first time loaded 60 sea ships, carrying 46,000 stone grain, and successfully reached Dadu, the capital of the north. In that year, Zhu Qing and Zhang Xuan, together with the general manager Luo Bi, were ordered by Kublai Khan to build 60 gondolas carrying 46,000 stone grain in the area of present-day Chongming and Taicang. The ships were divided into large ships and small ships, each equipped with soldiers to supervise the transport. After departing, the fleet passed Yangzhou, Huanglian Sha Sui to the east of Haimen County, and Wanli Long Beach, then sailed northwest, followed the coastline north, and finally reached the ancient port of Dengzhou, then turned west and entered the Tianjin Haikou.

Because this route out of the mouth of the Yangtze River will go to the northwest along the coast, many shoals, reefs, navigation is very dangerous, the total 13,350 miles, the distance is very long. It did not reach Kyoto until March of the following year. Although more than 46,000 stones of grain were transported this time, the loss of food in the shipwreck was nearly 0.4 million stones, but the first shipping was

declared successful. In the 28th year of the Yuan Dynasty (1291), Kublai Khan appointed Zhu Qing as Jiangdong Evangelist, Zhang Xuan as Huaidong evangelist, and at the same time, the territorial Sea road was transported to tens of thousands of households. In this year, more than 1.5 million stones of grain were shipped by sea, taking the original route, but the sunken boat grain competed as high as 24.5 635 stones, equivalent to 16% of the ship's grain was swallowed by the sea.

The vast sea, the waves are rough, but these can not stop the ancient people's determination to conquer the sea. In the Yuan Dynasty (1292), Zhu Qing and others were not afraid of the "sinister road" and resolutely decided to "open up a way of life" and create a new sea route. Before this voyage, they went to the Mazu Temple to pray for safe sailing and safe arrival. The specific path of this improved route is: Starting from Liujiagang, the grain ship crosses the Wanli Long Beach in the north of the Yangtze River estuary, stays away from the near shore until the sea is "deep", and then turns to the northeast. If it meets the southwest wind, it can sail for more than 1,000 li a day and night, arrive at the Qingshui Ocean, sail along the southeast wind, pass the Black Water Ocean, and after three days and nights, you can see the mountains on the Jin Island, continue to sail along the southeast wind. It takes one day and night to reach Cheng SAN Kok. After passing Chengshan Point, they sailed west again to reach the boundary estuary and finally reached the Haihe estuary. The departure season of this route has changed from winter to summer, and it can travel downwind, and it can use the Kuroshio warm current in the Western Pacific along the way to speed up the voyage, and it can reach the destination in about half a month. The new route avoids the shallow and dangerous areas of Jiangsu and Shandong, making it safer. In the first year of the new route, the loss of food due to shipwrecks dropped from 16 percent to 3 percent from the previous year. However, in case of headwinds, it would take more than a month to reach the destination port, so the imperial Court ordered the shipping company to further improve the route. The new route, improved by Yin Minglue, still started from Liujiagang, crossed the mouth of the Yangtze River

and directly entered the Black Water Ocean, then sailed north to Chengshan Point, and then turned west to reach the boundary estuary through the southern Bohai Sea. The whole route avoids the shallow and dangerous waters near the shore, and the whole voyage is far from the coast in the deep water area of the Yellow Sea, and the safety is greatly improved. When the wind is favourable, the whole voyage can be completed in about 10 days. According to the records of grain transport from the Yuan Dynasty to the thirty-first year of the Yuan Dynasty (1294), the proportion of grain loss caused by maritime disasters in the total shipment has dropped to about 2%. Later called this route "Yin Minglu route". The successful transport of Jiangnan rice and grain by sea enabled the metropolis to accumulate sufficient grain and stabilize the economic and political situation in the early Yuan Dynasty. (Malinowski, 2016)

The rulers of the Yuan Dynasty were much more generous in canonizing gods and texts than the previous dynasty, but only Mazu was always associated with "protecting the country" in addition to receiving 6 titles: such as "protecting the country Ming Linghui Xie Zheng Shan Qing Xianji Tianfei", "Protecting the country Ming Tianfei", "Protecting the country Xianyou Ming Tianfei", "Assisting the saint shelter people Guangji Ming Tianfei", "Protecting the country and sheltering the people Guangji Huiming Tianfei", "Protecting the country and protecting the Holy Asylum Guangji Huiming Tianfei", "Assisting the country to protect the Holy Asylum Min Guangji Fuhui Ming Tianfei", these are consistent with the meaning of defending national security and "Tianfei" 's prestigious titles complement each other. Since then, Mazu has become a spiritual symbol of Chinese defending maritime rights and interests.

The evolution and expansion of the belief in Tianfei reflects not only the wisdom and religious policies of the Yuan regime, but also the diversity and inclusiveness of ancient Chinese religious beliefs. As a national deity, Tianfei became part of the society and culture of the Yuan Dynasty, influencing the religion, culture and society of the time. It highlights the importance of religious belief in everyday life and how it

has evolved and deepened with historical, social, and political changes.

3) Construction and development of Mazu temples and religious ceremonies in the Yuan Dynasty

According to the historical materials of the Yuan Dynasty, the official Tianfei Temple was regularly maintained by the Yuan Dynasty official office. For example, Zheng Dong of the Yuan Dynasty mentioned in the "Rebuilding the Stele of the Lingci Palace": "In the spring of the thirteenth year, the official government began to repair the Lingci Palace, because the Palace rafters had been destroyed, and Yan Gong (that is, Yan Zhenqing, the envoy of Caoyun) was alarmed, believing that this was not only a problem of the main shrine in disrepair, but also an official negligence. So he used public banknotes, a total of 7,500 threads, for repairs. Yang Chunze presided over the construction, and local governors and wealthy people donated money to help. The restoration work proceeded quickly, after which the palace and temple were restored. And Wei Su recorded in the "Hedong Dazhigu Tianfei Palace Stele": "During the Taiding period, the Tianfei Temple suffered a fire, and the imperial court issued official money to the official palace to request repair. Soon, Wu Sengzhi presided over the East Temple, but due to the aging of the temple and the influence of tides, it needed to be restored again. Duke Lu (referring to Lu Jue, then the governor of the ten thousand households of Kaido) turned to the Tianfei Temple when he encountered danger at sea, and after receiving the blessing, he reported it to the imperial court and was rewarded with the title. Subsequently, the government ordered the distribution of 850 strands of money for the restoration work. Officials from various places also provided support, and the project was successfully completed."

Combining these two records, it can be seen that the official Tianfei Temple of the Yuan Dynasty received strong support from the official government, and supported the restoration project by issuing official coins and orders. In addition, local governors, wealthy people, and people also actively participated in the construction project. It is important to note that the Tianfei temples in different regions may differ

in the hosting, some are presided over by Taoist priests and some are presided over by monks, perhaps influenced by local customs and traditions.

In addition, the Yuan Dynasty government also specially made sacrificial vessels for the official Tianfei Temple. For example, on a sacrificial night from the Yuan Dynasty to the second year of the Shun, when the state official Yi Yingdong Gong came to visit the temple of Tianfei, he found that the sacrificial vessels were not neatly arranged. Therefore, Zuo Cheng Maizhugong of Xingxian Province proposed to ask the emperor to give gold and platinum and other materials, and remade the sacrificial vessels in the temple to show the respect for the gods. A total of twelve sacrificial vessels and other instruments were made for temple sacrifices. These newly made sacrificial vessels and instruments were stored in the storehouse of Pingjiang Prefecture for use in sacrifices. This record describes the process of making new sacrificial vessels used by officials in Pingjiang Prefecture to build the Tianfei Ancestral Temple.

To sum up, the Mazu temples in the Yuan Dynasty held colorful sacrificial ceremonies to thank Mazu for his protection and pray for peace. The Yuan government generally supported the Mazu faith as helping to stabilize society and encourage maritime trade. The government granted special status and rights to Mazu temples and sacrifices, while also maintaining religious order. (Peng Zhaorong, 2002)

4) The sea power of the Yuan Dynasty laid the foundation for the internationalization of the Mazu faith

In the process of the development of the "pluralistic and integrated" Chinese nation, the Yuan Dynasty established a new world of integration based on sea transport, which relied on the opening of sea routes, the popularization of Marine science and technology, and the exchange of maritime economy and culture. It is the continuation and development of China's sea power that has been formed in the Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty, and reflects the idea of China's sea power that it has

always not established maritime colonies - peaceful use and development of the sea. Yuan Dynasty is an important stage of the development of the sea power of the Chinese nation, and it is a period of the history of the sea power of China worth commemorating today, which laid the foundation for the internationalization of Mazu belief.

The Yuan Dynasty set up seven municipal ship departments in the international ports of Quanzhou, Qingyuan (present Ningbo), Shanghai, Ganpu, Wenzhou, Guangzhou and Hangzhou, which realized a simple and effective maritime trade management system. These ports are very busy with ships, especially the prosperity of Quanzhou port, which has impressed many foreign travelers. Moroccan traveler Ibn Baduda wrote in his travels: Quanzhou city is very large, one of the world's largest commercial ports, the city produces velvet and satin, good quality. There are many ships in the port, the largest about 100, the smaller countless. He even pointed out that in China, silk had become the cloth of the poor and would be worthless if it were not trafficked by merchants. In Kublai Khan's time, foreign trade was carried out in the way of "official ship trade", and commercial agreements were signed with some countries. At that time, China's sea ships were already strong and large, and the facilities were relatively complete, and a large number of soldiers accompanied the ships to and from, which could prevent pirate attacks. Chinese merchant ships regularly shipped raw silk, brocade, satin, silk and gold brocade to other countries. To the Philippines and the islands of Indonesia in the east, Kozekot in India in the west, Hormuz in Iran, Basra in Iraq, Aden in Yemen, Mecca in Saudi Arabia, Dumiyat in Egypt, as far as Tangier in Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean, Mogadishu in Mali in the south, and Kilwa in Tanzania. Even elements of Yuan art reached Europe along the Maritime Silk Road. In the church of Padua, a small town in northeastern Italy, there is a European Renaissance work - a fresco painted in 1306 - the Robe of Christ. It was found that the cloth and pattern of the robe adopted the Mongolian custom, and the golden edge of the robe was the Yuan Dynasty's eight Siba script.

In the vast territory under Kublai Khan, the various ethnic groups had different languages and beliefs, but unified standards of technology, agriculture, and knowledge were applied. In 1279, under the auspices of scientist Guo Shoujing, 27 astronomical observatories were set up across the country, with the northernmost observation point near the Arctic Circle and the southernmost observation point in the South China Sea. Kublai Khan fully supported two world-class scientists, Guo Shoujing and Jamarudin, who were engaged in revising the Shoushi Calendar and Hui Hui Calendar, which provided scientific and technological guarantee for world shipping.

The Chinese government under Kublai Khan promoted the economic and cultural development of the world at that time, and realized the "globalization" dominated by the Yuan Dynasty. In 1291 AD, the Italian traveler Marco Polo had the opportunity to witness the powerful maritime business of the Yuan Dynasty. His fleet has been to the ports of Vietnam, Java, Sri Lanka, India, got a large number of goods, such as sugar, ivory, cinnamon and cotton, as well as Chinese products porcelain, tea, silk, in exchange for a large number of goods from Arab and African nations and European tapestries, sand gold and weapons. In this masterpiece, the Travels of Marco Polo, the sea power thought of the Yuan Dynasty, which did not establish colonies overseas, was vividly reflected. Using the Maritime Silk Road, Kublai Khan unreservedly spread and projected Eastern advanced culture, including the four greatest inventions of ancient China, to the Southeast Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the hinterland of Europe. Therefore, at that time, Westerners were very longing for and admiring our advanced civilization in the East, which also prompted the navigator Columbus to sail to the ocean to find the new world.

In the Yuan Dynasty, there appeared a famous navigator Wang Dayuan. His voyages were 175 years earlier than Zheng He and 262 years earlier than Columbus. When he was young, he traveled with merchant ships, visiting as many coastal countries and regions in the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans as he could navigate at

that time. Wang Dayuan's first voyage was in 1330, and he traveled overseas for five years. Two years after returning home, he went overseas again and traveled around the South Asia for three years. Based On his eight years Of overseas wanderings, Wang Dayuan wrote A Synopical Account Of The Barbarians On Islands. "A Synopical Account Of The Barbarians On Islands" is a famous book of maritime transportation geography in Yuan Dynasty. It was renamed "A Synopical Account Of The Barbarians On Islands" in the Qing Dynasty. The book is divided into 100 articles, with the exception of the last article, "gathering of different stories", which is a compilation of previous books, and the remaining 99 articles, excluding Penghu, Ryukyu and Wan Li Shitang (today's Xisha Islands), and 96 overseas countries, recording the names and place names of overseas countries as many as 22; Its geographical scope, to the east Penghu, Ryukyu, west to the Arabian Peninsula and the east coast of Africa (Zanzibar) and other places, including East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean coast of the vast area. During his travels, Wang Dayuan paid great attention to The local mountains, landscapes, products, inhabitants, diet, clothing and trade, which was recorded in A Synopical Account Of The Barbarians On Islands.

A Synopical Account Of The Barbarians On Islands became an important document for later generations to study the history, geography, economy and culture of Asia, Africa and Europe in the first half of the 14th century, and also a precious historical material reflecting the friendly exchanges between the Yuan Dynasty and overseas countries. "A Synopical Account Of The Barbarians On Islands" had a great influence abroad. Foreign scholars who studied East Asian and South Asian countries and maritime traffic in the Yuan Dynasty, You must read A Synopical Account Of The Barbarians On Islands. "A Synopical Account Of The Barbarians On Islands" was widely circulated and even became an important reference for Zheng He's later voyages.

Mazu belief in the Ming Dynasty, with the success of Zheng He's seven voyages

to the West, went to the world, but it benefited from the foundation laid by the sea power of Yuan Dynasty. During the 28-year period from the third year of Yongle (1405) to the eighth year of Xuande (1433) in the Ming Dynasty, Zheng He led a large fleet to go to sea seven times, traversing the Pacific and Indian Oceans, visiting more than 30 countries in Asia and Africa, and reaching as far as the fourth degree south latitude of East Africa, Tassa (today's Mombasa, Kenya), traveling more than 70,000 nautical miles, equivalent to more than three times around the earth. Zheng He's maritime career unblocked the maritime "Silk Road" between China and Asian and African countries, developed overseas trade, promoted mutual understanding and friendship between Chinese and Asian and African people, created favorable conditions for overseas Chinese to settle, survive and develop in Southeast Asia, and stimulated the development of China's shipbuilding industry, improved people's navigation skills and enriched people's geographical knowledge. In the history of China's overseas transportation, in the history of the world's maritime, write an extremely glorious page.

Zheng He's brilliant achievements in maritime affairs were based on China's maritime power in the Yuan Dynasty. The anchor of Zheng He's seven voyages to the West was Liujia Port, the starting point of the grain transport from the south to the North. Liujiagang, which flourished in the shipping industry of the Yuan Dynasty, was an indispensable preparation and preparation for Zheng He's voyages to the West. Zheng He worshipped the sea goddess Mazu every time he set out and returned, and worshipped the statue of Mazu on the ship, which was closely related to the nationalization of Mazu in the Yuan Dynasty. In this way, Mazu belief spread all over the world. Mazu belief was not only widely spread in China, but also spread to Southeast Asia, South Asia and the east coast of Africa with Zheng He's voyages to the West. This faith is not only part of maritime activities, but also becomes a medium of religious and cultural exchange for the international community. The internationalisation of Mazu belief provided a bridge for China to establish cultural

and religious ties with other countries.

In short, there is a close relationship between the sea power of Yuan Dynasty and the internationalization of Mazu belief. The prosperity of maritime trade and the internationalization of Mazu belief jointly promoted the rise of China in the maritime field in the Yuan Dynasty. The maritime activities and religious beliefs of this period have left a rich historical legacy for China's cultural traditions and international exchanges, and still have a profound impact on China's relations with the world today.

5) The humanistic development and spiritual pillar of Mazu belief in Yuan Dynasty

The Yuan court complied with the folk custom of believing in the sea goddess Mazu. Before the shipping ships set sail, the local government of Jiangnan held a ceremony to worship the heavenly princess in the port of departure. When the vessels successfully arrive at Yandi, the central Government will send important officials to the arrival port to perform a heavenly princess sacrifice. At the same time, local governments should be encouraged to build Mazu temples. The prosperity of Liujiagang was closely related to the belief in Mazu. At that time, people prayed for the protection of the sea goddess Mazu. The development of sea transportation and maritime traffic, coupled with the rulers' attention, made Mazu's status as a sea protection god be continuously consolidated, and the scope of Mazu worship was further expanded. The Yuan rulers made use of Mazu worship, which also effectively promoted the development of water transport and maritime literature. The sea power of the Yuan Dynasty also gained a steady flow of spiritual power.

With the construction and reconstruction of Mazu temples in various places, many officials and literati wrote temple records (庙记), sacrificial writings, poems, and wove new stories about Mazu. The Mazu faith and culture were further disseminated. For example, Song Bo wrote "顺济庙记" (Shunji Temple Record), proclaiming "瓯粤舶贾，风涛之祷辄应" (Merchants from Ou and Yue, prayers for favorable winds and waves are always answered). The renowned calligrapher Zhao

Meng wrote a temple record and Shuji, the Right Assistant Secretary, inscribed a plaque. Huang Yuan from Putian wrote a record for the newly built Sanjun Hall of Shunji Ancestral Temple and composed poetry to promote it. She Li Xinggu wrote the "灵慈宫原庙记" (Lingci Palace Original Temple Record), Cheng Xuduan wrote "四明灵慈庙记" (Siming Lingci Temple Record), and Zhou Boqi, a censor, inscribed the "天妃庙碑" (Tianfei Temple Stele) in Taizhou, Zhejiang. Zhu Derun from Suiyang, Henan, composed the "海漕政绩碑铭" (Maritime Transport Achievements Stele Inscription), and so on. Some officials and literati, such as Yu Ji, Huang Xiang, and Wang Yi, wrote sacrificial writings and divine songs for Mazu temples.

During the Yuan Dynasty, many emperors promoted this, and officials and literati continued to embellish it. Mazu became the protector goddess of seafaring and gradually embedded herself in people's hearts. The image of Mazu as a maritime goddess flourished, and poets made significant contributions to spreading her fame through their romantic imagination and graceful prose. This, in turn, led more people to embrace Mazu faith and understand Mazu culture, making her a spiritual pillar for all.

3.3 Protecting the country and protecting the people: the social status and spread of Mazu belief in Ming Dynasty

1) Transition of Mazu Belief from Maritime Response to Assisting in Suppressing Wokou Pirates

In the early Ming Dynasty, Japanese pirates became increasingly rampant in the southern coastal areas of China. The Japanese pirates were pirates and invaders from Japan who attacked the coastal cities and inhabitants of China, causing serious damage and harm. Desperate to control this threat and protect the territory and maritime trade, the Ming government imposed a sea ban, which led to the relocation of coastal villages and reduced the chances of the Mazu belief being granted. However, the Ming government realized that Mazu belief had a wide influence on maritime activities, and many seafarers and fishermen believed that Mazu could

protect them during dangerous sea voyages. The government decided to strengthen cooperation with the Mazu faith and regard her as the national patron saint to mobilize more people to participate in the action against Japanese pirates. The government began to set up Mazu temples in coastal areas and gave Mazu official numbers. The government actively promotes Mazu belief and encourages people to participate in religious ceremonies in the Mazu Temple in order to enhance their belief in and dependence on Mazu. The government cooperated with Mazu faith groups to organize fleets and armed forces against Japanese invaders. People who believe in Mazu are encouraged to participate in the action against Japanese pirates, believing that this is a sacred mission to protect the country and society.

In short, Mazu belief in Ming Dynasty evolved from the original sea spirit to support the government to resist Japanese pirates. This evolution reflects the evolution of religious beliefs in history and their ability to respond to external threats, while also underlining the important role of religion in Chinese society and politics. The internationalization of Mazu belief and cooperation with the government have contributed to the stability and prosperity of the southern coastal areas of China.

2) Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas promoted the construction and development of Mazu temples in the coastal areas of Fujian

During the Ming Dynasty, the country's relatively open trade policy and the increase of maritime economic and trade activities provided favorable conditions for the development of Mazu belief. As an important maritime gateway, the Fujian region benefited from the Ming government's open-door policy, which prompted an increase in maritime activities. Zheng He's seven voyages to the West became the close connection between Mazu belief and sea navigation. Zheng He and his fleet often prayed to Mazu for protection in the face of wind and waves and dangers. This not only deepened Zheng He and his crew's belief in Mazu, but also carried out various sacrificial ceremonies on the return journey.

Under Tai Chu in an effort to expand diplomatic ties, he sent the eunuch Zheng

He on seven voyages to more than 30 countries in Asia and Africa. During this voyage, Zheng He's fleet encountered numerous storms and hardships, and whenever faced with difficulties, they prayed to Mazu for protection and repeatedly miraculously resolved the danger. This situation further deepened their firm belief in Mazu's divine power. Zheng He's fleets often recruited sailors from Fujian. In order to gain the support of sailors and soldiers, Zheng He held a sacrificial ceremony for Mazu before and after each voyage. These ceremonies were held in Putian Meizhou, Fuzhou Changle, Quanzhou and other places, are very grand.

In the Ming Dynasty (1405), Zheng He passed Quanzhou in southern Fujian on his way back from his first voyage to the West. Quanzhou is his hometown, where there is also the Tianfei Palace, a place of Mazu belief, which retains historical relics. At this time, the imperial palaces in Meizhou and Quanzhou were brought to the attention of Zheng He, who repaired and maintained them by issuing a decree "ordering the officials of the garrison towns in Fujian to put the temples in order". This restoration was not limited to the palace of the Heavenly Concubine, but was also accompanied by missions, including trips to Ryukyu, Java, Manxika and other places, where the members of Zheng He's fleet often held rituals of sacrifice and prayer to pray for the blessings of the gods.

In the Ming Dynasty (1407), after returning from the Western seas, Zheng He established the Heavenly Concubine Palace in Longjiang, Nanjing, and also requested that "the garrison officials in Fujian be ordered to organize and study the temple in order to thank God for his kindness." According to historical records, at that time, there were two renovated Tianfei Palace: one was located in the ancestral temple of Meizhou, and the other was located in Quanzhou Tianfei Palace. "Huang Zhongzhao's Bamin General Annals" mentioned, "During the Yongle period, eunuchs said that the Sanbao expedition to the West, in order to build a temple, the scale is grand and spectacular, and said that the sea has a great omen. In addition, in the Ming Dynasty (1409), Zheng He made all the ships in the West moor at Changle, and even changed

the Majiang River into Taiping Port. The Temple of Heavenly Concubine was built in the Ming Dynasty (1409). Before Zheng He returned from his trip to the Western regions, he worshipped the Heavenly Concubine in the village to pray for the safety of navigation. On the island of Changle, there is also the Tianhou Palace of Changle Island, built in the Chongzhen period of the Ming Dynasty. Similarly, there should also be a Tianfei Temple on Monkey Island, also built in the late Ming Dynasty.

In the Ming Dynasty (1412), on the eve of Zheng He's fourth mission to the Western seas, in order to thank the God of the sea, he asked the Emperor to approve the construction of a grand palace next to the Nanshan Tower of Changle, as a place for fleet officials to pray and thank God. In the Ming Dynasty (1413), while his fleet was waiting for the monsoon in Changle, he carried out the restoration of the ancient pagoda and temple near the palace of the Heavenly Concubine, and inscribed "Three Peaks Pagoda Temple" on the forehead after completion. In the winter of the Ming Dynasty (1431), Zheng He and Wang Jinghong also waited for the monsoon at Taiping Port in Changle on the eve of their seventh mission to the West. After rebuilding the Tianfei Palace and Sanfeng Pagoda Temple in Nanshan and building a new Sanqing Treasure Hall, they erected a tablet called "The Record of Tianfei Ling Ying" to record this history. The Annals of Changle County records the great well of Tianyi Palace, built under the instructions of Zheng He.

In the Ming Dynasty (1431), before Zheng He's last voyage to the West, he erected monuments at Liujiagang and Changle Tianfei Palace in Taicang, and then personally went to Meizhou Island to preside over the imperial festival, and carried out repairs and extensions to the ancestral temple of Meizhou. According to the "Heavenly Concubine's Holy Record" : "In the sixth year of Xuande, the imperial Concubine was asking the eunuch Zheng He to lead the Xing and Ping two guards, thousands of households, hundreds of households and county officials to buy, jointly fund the repair of the temple, and carry out the emperor's altar." As the birthplace of Mazu, Meizhou had a special sacred status in Zheng He's heart. According to the

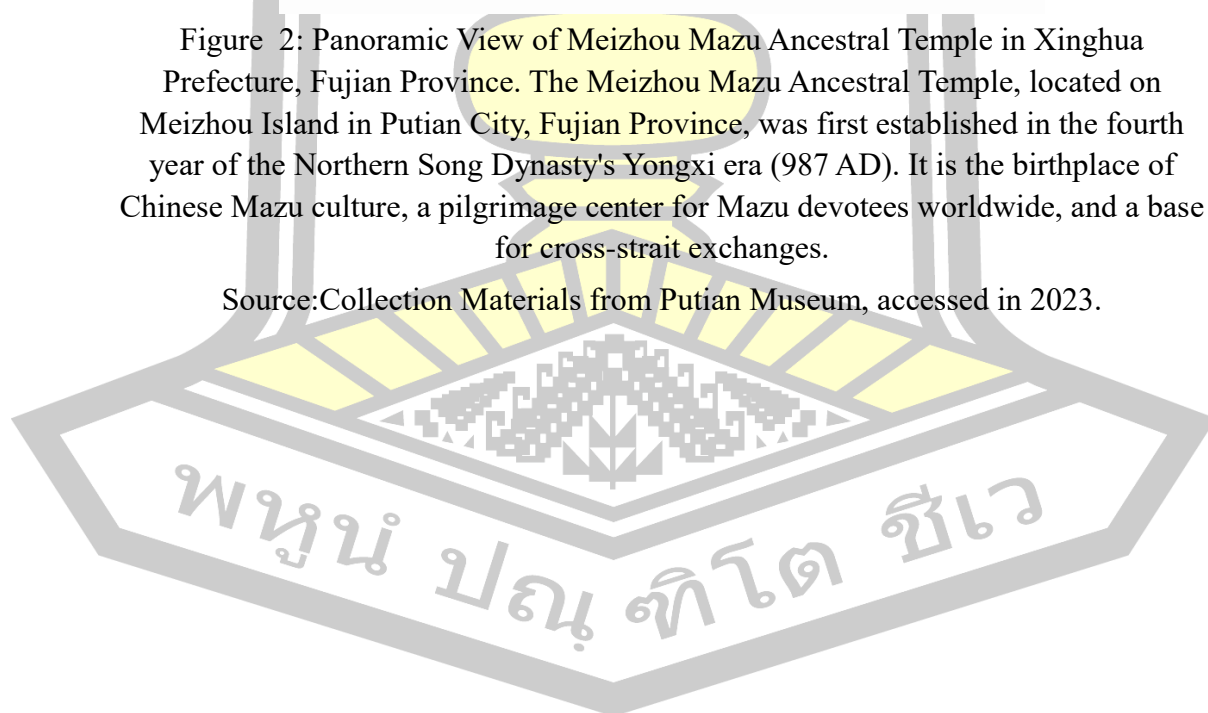
records of Yang Jun's Annals of Meizhou Island, Zheng He's fleet came to Meizhou eight times to offer sacrifices to Empress Tian in the third, seventh, thirteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, nineteenth, and Xuande years. In the Ming Dynasty (1409) and Ming Dynasty (1431), Zheng He personally represented the emperor to come to Meizhou to offer sacrifices.

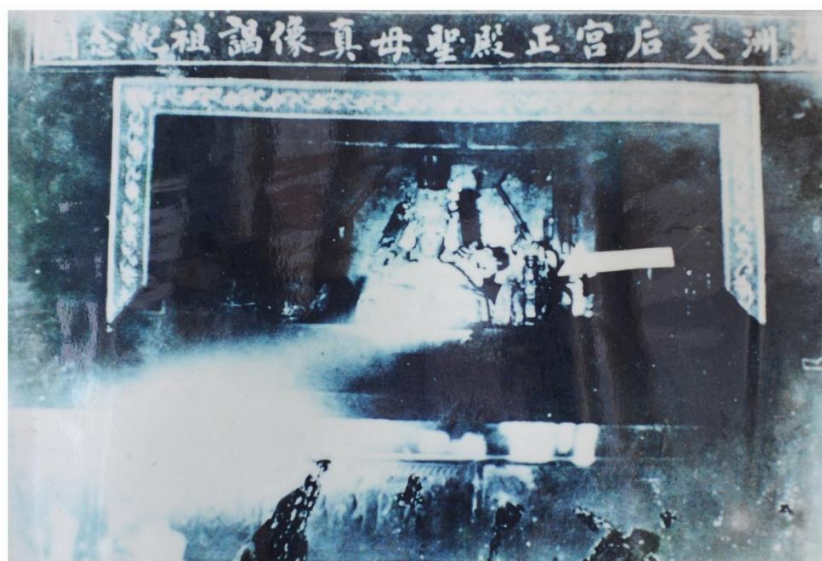


福建省兴化府湄洲妈祖祖庙全景（摄于1922年）

Figure 2: Panoramic View of Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple in Xinghua Prefecture, Fujian Province. The Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple, located on Meizhou Island in Putian City, Fujian Province, was first established in the fourth year of the Northern Song Dynasty's Yongxi era (987 AD). It is the birthplace of Chinese Mazu culture, a pilgrimage center for Mazu devotees worldwide, and a base for cross-strait exchanges.

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, accessed in 2023.

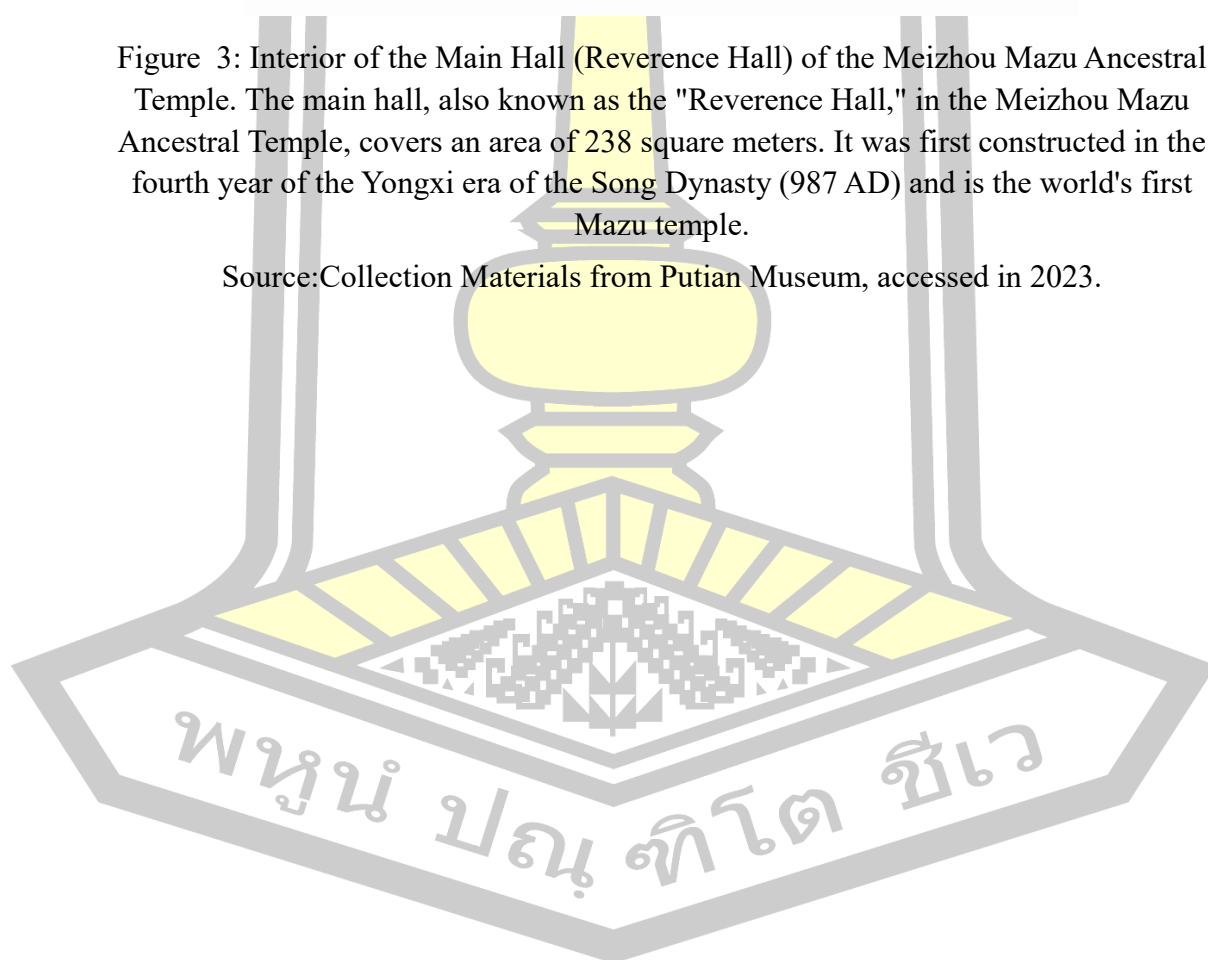




湄洲媽祖祖廟正殿（寢殿）內景（攝于1922年）

Figure 3: Interior of the Main Hall (Reverence Hall) of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. The main hall, also known as the "Reverence Hall," in the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple, covers an area of 238 square meters. It was first constructed in the fourth year of the Yongxi era of the Song Dynasty (987 AD) and is the world's first Mazu temple.

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, accessed in 2023.





湄洲妈祖祖庙太子殿（摄于1922年）

Figure 4: The Taizi Hall of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. In the 22nd year of the Kangxi reign of the Qing Dynasty, after the recapture of Taiwan by Shi Lang, the Governor-General of Fujian, Yao Qisheng, received an imperial edict and traveled to Taiwan to deliver the first imperial decree on behalf of the court. Due to unfavorable wind conditions at the time, he couldn't cross to the east and was concerned about not being able to return to the court within the specified time. Therefore, Yao Qisheng came to the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple to seek the blessing of Mazu, hoping for a smooth completion of his mission and a safe return. As expected, the next day, a northwest wind blew, and Yao Qisheng successfully arrived in Taiwan to deliver the certificate. Upon his return to the court, in recognition of his successful delivery of the decree, he was conferred the title of "Prince Guardian" and "Minister of War." People affectionately referred to him as "Prince Guardian." To express his gratitude for Mazu's divine favor, he personally visited Meizhou to fulfill his vow and expanded the Mazu Ancestral Temple. In honor of his merit, the common people named the palace he oversaw building as the "Taizi Hall."

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, accessed in 2023.



湄洲妈祖祖庙梳妆楼内景（摄于1922年）

Figure 5: Interior of the Dressing Chamber in the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. In the 23rd year of Kangxi's reign (1684), Marshal Shi Lang, known as the "Pacifier of the Seas," added the Dressing Chamber to the temple. This chamber served as Mazu's living quarters and dressing room, where a statue of Mazu in her casual attire is enshrined.

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, accessed in 2023.



湄洲妈祖祖庙中军殿（摄于1922年）

Figure 6: The Central Military Hall in the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. The Central Military Hall is located between the Holy Edict Square and the Temple of the Five Emperors in the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple in Putian City. It was originally built during the Ming Dynasty. According to legend, during the Ming

Dynasty, Commander Zhou Zuo of Quanzhou Wei had surplus construction materials left after the expansion of the Mazu Temple during a period of extensive construction.

He used these materials to construct a hall and created a deity statue to serve as the guardian in front of the Mazu Temple, naming it "Central Military." Later generations believed that the Central Military deity protected Mazu and her temple, and they identified this deity as the incarnation of Zhou Zuo, to whom they paid homage through the generations.

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, accessed in 2023.



湄洲妈祖祖庙圣旨门（摄于1922年）

Image 7: The Gate of Imperial Edicts in the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. This gate was built to commemorate more than 30 imperial edicts bestowed upon Mazu by emperors throughout history. It holds a sense of sanctity and solemnity.

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, accessed in 2023.

In this context, the construction and restoration of Mazu temples were supported by the government. In Quanzhou city outside the Jinjiang County seaside, there are 15 around the head of Mazu temple, also built in the Ming Dynasty. In addition, Tongan County, Xiamen, and Kinmen and Maxiang Hall in Quanzhou Prefecture also have Mazu temples built in the Ming Dynasty. These temples provided a place of worship for local people, and also witnessed the inheritance of Mazu belief in the local people.

In southern Fujian, there is the Huian Chongwu Tianfei Palace, a temple also built in the Ming Dynasty. The Chongwu Tianfei Palace in Hui 'an was limited in architectural size, but during the Jiajing period, it was expanded by Wang Guangfu, Zhang Ruiyou, Zhang Junpin and others. Later, due to natural disasters, the temple fell into ruin several times, but in 1603 Wanli, after many people donated and rebuilt, the temple was revitalized. Behind these efforts is not only the devotion to Mazu belief, but also the infinite reliance on the safety of navigation and the protection of gods.

In Zhangzhou Prefecture, there is also a Mazu temple built in the Ming Dynasty. The records of Zhangzhou Prefecture record the four Mazu palaces in the prefecture, which are distributed in different places, including Tianfei Palace in the city, and Mazu temples in Longxi County, Haicheng County and Zhangpu County. In addition, Tongshan House and Yunxiaoting City in Zhaoan County of Zhangzhou Prefecture also have a Mazu temple built in the Ming Dynasty. These temples were mostly built in important areas such as cities and ports, adding a strong heritage to local culture and beliefs.

In Nanjing, the port of Liujia in Taicang was the starting point of Zheng He's fleet, while in Fujian, the port of Taiping in Changle became an important port of residence and navigation base. Zheng He made seven voyages to the West, each of which included a stop at Changle. This made Changle closely connected with Zheng He, and many Mazu temples were erected here.

According to historical documents such as the Biography of Zheng He, the Record of the Ming Dynasty, the Record of Mindu, Yingye Shenglan and the Record of Tianfei Lingying, Zheng He made seven voyages to the West, each of which would first arrive at Changle and Wuhumen ports at the mouth of the Minjiang River. Such stops serve multiple purposes: to wait for a suitable northeast tailwind; Recruiting sailors and repairing ships; Sacrifice to the sea goddess Mazu to pray for safety. Such berthing time varies from a few months to more than half a year, so Changle County

has left many cultural relics and legends.

In addition to Changle, other coastal counties of Fuzhou Prefecture, such as Min County, Houguan, Lianjiang, Luoyuan, Fuqing, etc., also have Mazu temples built in the Ming Dynasty. These temples are closely linked to the local geography and maritime activities. For example, the Hou Guan's Hongtang Jinshan Temple is said to be the place where Zheng He repaired the ship of benefit during his voyages to the West, and is still worshipped with a gold-covered statue of Mazu. In other areas of Fuzhou, you can also find the Mazu Temple of the Ming Dynasty, which has witnessed the vicissitudes of history.

Zheng He's sailing mission in Ming Dynasty promoted the construction and development of Mazu temple in Fujian coastal area. It is worth noting that although Zheng He was a Muslim, his devotion to Mazu did not diminish during these voyages. Zheng He restored and built Mazu temples in various places in Fujian, such as Meizhou, Quanzhou, Changle, etc. These temples became places for believers to pray for God's blessing and gratitude. Based on the activities of Zheng He and other eunuch missions, Mazu belief was popularized and passed on in Fujian. Mazu temples are located in different cities and counties, bearing witness to the history and tradition of the faith.

3) Various Mazu spirits in Ming Dynasty should bless the ship of Ryukyu

Mazu belief flourished in the coastal areas of Fujian in Ming Dynasty, and Mazu was regarded as the goddess of the sea and the patron saint of navigation. During the Ming Dynasty, there were close exchanges between China and Ryukyu (present-day Okinawa), including diplomacy, trade, culture and many other fields. Mazu belief in this period had a positive impact on the navigation activities of the ships of the Ryukyu, bless their ships safe and smooth sailing,

In the Ming Dynasty (1372), Emperor Taizu sent Yang Zai to Ryukyu to establish formal diplomatic relations between China and Ryukyu. Although Ryukyu is an island, but limited by poverty and backwardness, its shipbuilding and navigation

business are in a very primitive state. Ryukyu was once an envoys of China, but because of its plight, it struggled to face even such glory. In order to improve the backwater of Ryukyu, Emperor Taizu not only generously presented sea ships, but also sent "thirty-six Fujian people who were good at sailing" to Ryukyu in the Ming Dynasty (1392), which promoted the development of maritime business in Ryukyu. With the migration of these Min people, the Tianfei belief in southern China also spread to Ryukyu. According to the book, "In the past, people from Fujian moved to the Zhongshan area and built shrines to pray for good luck and blessings for the country." This temple is dedicated to the Heavenly Concubine.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, most of the envoys to Ryukyu were shipbuilders and navigators from Fujian, which became the legal port to Ryukyu. Therefore, envoys to Ryukyu became one of the special ways to spread the Mazu belief. According to the records in volume 16 of Quanzhou Fu, in the Ming Dynasty (1407), Zheng He ordered the guarding officials of Fujian to rebuild the temple. Since then, it has become normal for officials such as internal officials, Gizizhong officials and pedestrian officials to go to Ryukyu, Siam, Java, Manchuria and other countries to perform sacrifices. The imperial envoys of Ryukyu in the Ming Dynasty would come to worship Mazu, and this custom continued into the Qing Dynasty. During the reign of Kangxi, Wang Ji went to Ryukyu as an imperial envoy, and he held a sacrifice for the goddess of the sea at Yishan Yuan. The stone tablet of Yishan Yuan, also known as the Palace of the Heavenly Concubine, has been preserved in Fuzhou Yishan Yuan to this day. It is inscribed with the inscription: "A ceremony or activity in which the deputy envoy of Ryukyu (the Shushiren in the Cabinet) donated 500 liang of silver to express reverence and gratitude to the god (Mazu) in the newly built temple (the Temple of the Heavenly Three Families)." . In addition, Changle Aragonite Tianfei Palace is said to have been founded by Zheng He, and envoys to Ryukyu in the Qing Dynasty would also visit here.

At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, Cheng Shunze, a descendant of the Min

people of the Ming Dynasty, attacked as a general minister, and wrote in his "Guide Generalized • Introduction" : "The Virgin of Heaven, for the Fuxing of the river sea." It was originally introduced to Ryukyu by the Min people and later revised by Cheng Shun, becoming an important guide for Ryukyu sailors. From the Ming Dynasty, Mazu belief also became the maritime protection god of Ryukyu. According to records, there were three Heavenly Concubine palaces introduced into Ryukyu in the Ming Dynasty (1424) : The Lower Heavenly Concubine Palace, built by the King of the Middle mountains of Ryukyu, is located on the east side of the Naha Heavenly Embassy; In the Ming Dynasty (1561), the Imperial Concubine Palace was built with the help of the canonized Guo Rulin, located in Jiumi Village; The Tianhou Palace on the mountain of Gumi Island, located in Zhenxie Port, may also have been created in the Ming Dynasty, and was rebuilt by the imperial envoys Quan Kui and Zhou Huang in the Qing Dynasty (1756). It was mainly used to guide ships to and from the Ryukyu Sea and guide the navigation direction, and it still exists today.

According to reports, the Japanese Zhenrongcheng Anko had returned to Quanzhou to trace family roots, her family tree records, her family name Jin, is the Ming Taizu period given to the Fujian coastal 36 of one of the family names, her ancestors with the migration to Naha Kumi village, the creation of Tianfei Palace, worship Mazu. Since the Ming Dynasty, these Ryukyu people have continued to come to Quanzhou Tianfei Palace to pray for Mazu's protection, and this palace temple has also become one of the important places for Chinese and Ryukyu sea personnel.

In general, Mazu belief played an important role in the navigation activities of ships in Ryukyu in Ming Dynasty, and the safety of navigation has always been one of the core contents of Mazu belief. Ryukyu envoys in the Ming Dynasty usually went to the local Mazu temple or other places to worship Mazu before and after their departure, and held sacrificial ceremonies and prayer activities. On the ships in Ryukyu, there was usually a special Mazu shrine to worship the goddess or symbol of Mazu. During the voyage, the crew will regularly offer incense, burn paper money

and burn incense lamps to Mazu to show their respect and pray for Mazu. This ritual of offering and sacrifice is common on the ship. They would pray to Mazu to keep their ships safe at sea from wind and waves and other dangers.

4) The prosperous maritime trade in Fujian in the Ming Dynasty further deepened the merchants' reverence for Mazu belief

In the Ming Dynasty, the southeast of Fujian was geographically advantageous and close to the sea, so the maritime economic activities were very prosperous. In the first year of Longqing (1567), Tu Zemin, governor of Fujian, made a request to emphasize the strategic importance of Meizhou Island, the birthplace of Mazu, which was located in the transportation hub of the east and West oceans, and hoped that the imperial Court would reconsider the maritime prohibition policy. This led Emperor Muzong of the Ming Dynasty to abolish the policy of restricting maritime trade and declare the "law of eliminating the sale of Yi". At the same time, in order to obtain more silver and alleviate the shortage of precious metals, the government actively opened Meizhou Bay, allowed Chinese and foreign merchants to hold market trade on Meizhou Island, and established a government-run "Water Department" and "Ship transfer Department" to manage maritime trade affairs and collect taxes and fees.

In the Ming Dynasty, the maritime trade in Fujian was very prosperous, and the ports along the coast of Fujian, such as Fuzhou, Quanzhou and Xiamen, became important trade centers. Merchants exchanged with merchants in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Arabia and other places through maritime trade, thus accumulating wealth and forming a strong economic momentum. In this period, new economic ideas and theories adapted to commodity economy emerged, overturning the traditional concept of "emphasizing agriculture and suppressing commerce" in the past. Especially in southern Fujian, maritime trade is very active. The marketization of agricultural products and the development of ship construction in Meizhou Bay have promoted maritime trade. Under the background of "Putian fish and rice itself is low in price, but also has the interests of ship trade", Mazu hometown presents a prosperous scene:

the port business is prosperous, such as "Xiuyu Port" Fang city has more than 1,000 shops and restaurants, more than Xianyou city. A large number of litchi, silk cloth, Mazu statues and other goods were exported by sea and sold to Japan, Ryukyu, Southeast Asia and other places. At the same time, Meizhou Bay was opened for regular government-run market trade and a large amount of silver was introduced. This economic development momentum has spawned a revival of Mazu belief.

With the prosperity of maritime trade, merchants began to incorporate Mazu beliefs into their business activities. They often go to the Mazu Temple before going to sea to pray, hoping that Mazu bless their ships safe sailing and return, to ensure the safety of goods. At the same time, they also come to give thanks after a successful transaction. Under the influence of Mazu cultural thought, the phenomenon of constructing Mazu Temple also appeared in Fengting Putian and other places. With the deepening of businessmen's belief in Mazu, some wealthy businessmen began to fund the construction of Mazu Temple or the expansion and maintenance of the existing Mazu Temple, and it was gradually common for businessmen in southern Fujian to raise funds to build Mazu Temple. These temples became centers of faith for merchants and communities, and also provided a religious backdrop for commercial activities. Fuqing "Haikou Special records" recorded the salt merchants built Tianfei Palace, Wanli Gengshen Year further expansion. Jinjiang's Anhai, Fengting, Jinjiang itself also has various kinds of days princess Palace construction. In addition, the belief in Mazu also began to spread in other provinces. For example, Fujian businessmen raised funds to build the Palace of Empress Tianfei in Wujiang County, Jiangsu Province, and also built Mazu temples in Yangzhou and Jiaxing. This phenomenon was particularly obvious in the late Ming Dynasty, and the belief in Mazu gradually combined with the merchants' association hall, forming a pattern of the integration of Mazu temple and association hall.

In general, the prosperity of maritime trade in Fujian in the Ming Dynasty deepened the merchants' reverence for Mazu faith, and Mazu became their patron

saint when they ventured into business at sea, and in turn, the merchants' faith supported the construction of Mazu temples and the heritage of the faith. This mutual relationship has left a deep trace in the culture and history of Fujian region.

5) The Maritime Silk Road in Ming Dynasty and the overseas spread of Mazu belief

The maritime Silk Road in Ming Dynasty and the overseas spread of Mazu belief are interrelated historical phenomena. In the early Ming Dynasty, with the continuous expansion of the scale of Chinese immigration overseas, in the late Ming Dynasty, the Fujian diaspora began to spread the Mazu belief to Japan and Southeast Asia. The official title of Mazu and the increasing worship of the people make the belief in Mazu deeply rooted in people's hearts.

During the Ming Dynasty, especially the Tai Chu period, China's maritime trade reached its peak. Zheng He's seven expeditions and other voyages boosted China's trade with South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. This made Ming China one of the world's largest maritime trading nations at the time. The Mazu belief in the coastal areas of Fujian in the Ming Dynasty began to spread overseas under the background of the Maritime Silk Road.

The Mazu belief in Taiwan spread to Penghu area of Taiwan with the influx of fishermen from Fujian Sea who believed in Mazu. In the late Ming Dynasty, with the prosperity of maritime trade, many Fujian merchants and fishermen went to the Penghu area of Taiwan to do business and cultivate land. They worshipped Mazu as their patron saint, usually worshipping the goddess before sailing, and worshipping the goddess in the Mazu Temple after arriving at the destination. In just a few years, Mazu temples were gradually established all over Taiwan, among which the earliest Tianhou Temple was built in Penghu, and later, Mazu temples were also built all over Taiwan, such as Qitian Palace in Taipei. The spread of Mazu belief was closely linked to the activities of Fujian immigrants, and these temples not only worshipped Mazu, but also served as meeting places for overseas Chinese communities, contributing to

the spread of Chinese culture and belief. In addition, the Fujian people also built a series of Mazu temples in the Nanyang area. Qingyun Pavilion in Malacca, Malaysia was founded by Zheng Fangyang and Li Junchang, who were anti-Qing scholars in the late Ming Dynasty. Qingyun Pavilion is the main worship of Goddess of Mercy, and also worships Mazu and other gods.

In overseas, Mazu belief is often integrated with local religion and belief, forming a unique cultural phenomenon. This integration contributes to the spread and acceptance of Mazu belief in overseas communities. The introduction of Mazu into Japan can be traced back to the end of the Ming Dynasty, and its transmission route was mainly through Kyushu Island to the north, distributed in various parts of Honshu, such as Satsuma Peninsula, Kataura Port of Kagoshima, Nagasaki, Hirado, Gifu City, Ibaraki Prefecture and other places, and even extended to Aomori Prefecture, the northernmost part of Honshu Island. The number of Mazu temples was about 100. The famous Nanjing Temple, Quanzhou Temple and Fuzhou Temple, collectively known as the "three temples of Tang Dynasty", are temples dedicated to Mazu in early Japan. These temples were mostly established by the ship owners of Quanzhang Gang and Fuzhou Gang, whose Mazu belief has been inherited since the late Ming Dynasty. In addition, according to research, Lin Beishan, a Chinese businessman from Fujian who fled to Japan in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, placed the goddess of Mazu in the West Palace after crossing the east, and settled in Pu Port during the war in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. He carried with him seven statues of Mazu and the goddess of guards, placed in the West Palace of the goddess of Mazu, known as the goddess of Mazu in the Forest, and the meaning of "Goddess of Mazu" in the Japanese language. Since then, every time the Chinese merchant ships entering the port from Nagasaki saw this mountain, they would burn paper money, beat gold drums, and hold a grand ceremony.

To sum up, the prosperity of the Maritime Silk Road in Ming Dynasty provided an opportunity for the overseas spread of Mazu belief. Mazu belief built temples in

overseas ports, influenced local culture and religion, and integrated with other beliefs to jointly build a unique overseas Chinese culture. This historical phenomenon reflects the wide spread and influence of Chinese culture and beliefs overseas.

6) Mazu belief observed by Western official envoys and missionaries in Ming Dynasty

In the 15th and 16th centuries, a historical stage regarded by the West as the "Great Age of Navigation", China's maritime strength also showed an influence that cannot be ignored. During this period, Eastern and Western cultures intermingled on the Maritime Silk Road, and Mazu, the representative of Chinese folk belief, played an important role in the belief in the sea god. Since the Song and Yuan Dynasties, she has occupied an indispensable position in this process. At the same time, 16th-century European emissaries, missionaries, merchants, and sailors mentioned Mazu belief in Ming China in their accounts, highlighting how this belief had a cultural impact on European visitors influenced by Christian culture.

In the official history of Portugal, *Crónica do Felicissimo Rei D.Manuel* published in 1566, the religious belief of the Chinese people is recorded as follows: The Chinese sincerely believe in a creator God, who is regarded as the creator of all things in the universe. In particular, they venerated three similar idols, one of which, in particular, was a female saint known as Nama. This Nama is seen as a guardian before God, protecting people both on land and at sea..... Fernão Peres de Andrade brought these statues back to Europe. The gods were painted on cloth supported by sticks or branches, similar to the colored cloth made in Flandres. He presented these idols, along with other objects from the province, to King Don Manuel. This account of Mazu may be the first reference to Chinese religious and folk belief in gods in European court historical materials, which means that Mazu belief was already well known to the Portuguese royal family in the mid-16th century. Fernand Perez de Andrade, mentioned in the record, was ordered to lead a fleet to the East in 1515, and was also assigned an envoy to meet the Emperor of China. The envoy was Tome

Pires, who was known as "the first European envoy to China."

As for the Mazu belief in the eyes of Ming missionaries, the missionary who was first recorded is Xavier. The seas of Asia in the 16th century became a gathering place for global traders and explorers, and missionaries were an important force to be reckoned with among the first Europeans to arrive in the region. The Jesuit missionary Xavier, a pioneer of Catholicism in China and throughout East Asia, boarded a Chinese-style sandboat in 1549 that probably belonged to a "pirate" owner. Xavier's first impression of this Chinese ship was also the most profound, because the goddess of Mazu was worshipped on board.

He wrote: "It was a merchant ship, about three or four hundred tons, low at the front and high at the back, with a broad square hull. There are three masts in total, and the sails are made of straw MATS, also square, supported by bamboo poles, and very simple. In the shrine on the left side of the cabin, there is a statue of Mazu, because she is believed to be the protector of sailors and pirates. On either side of her were two guards, one named Clairvoyant and the other named Wind-ear. The first guard had an indigo face, shining eyes, a wide mouth with long teeth, and a tall figure; The second guard is like a winter melon, with a bloody mouth, long teeth like a sword, red hair, and two tentacles... Mazu is also called Tianfei. People on the ship respect her very much. Every morning and evening, they light candles and salute her statue. In case of a serious accident, I would ask her for guidance through divination."

Even today, after many years of development in the study of folk religion, the description of the folk religion in Fujian by Rada, a sixteenth century Catholic friar, still makes people feel extremely accurate and detailed, which indicates that Xavier may have personally seen the sacrifice of Mazu on a Chinese merchant ship, so he can describe this more accurately.

The ritual of worshiping Mazu by Ming fishermen before going to sea described by Lada is confirmed in later Chinese records. For example, according to the "Folklore of Fujian Province", fishermen along the coast of Fujian would bring

incense to the shrine on the ship after determining the date of going to sea, and then prepare all the offerings, with incense sticks, gold foil, firecrackers, etc., and go to the beach to set up altars to worship the god. Shipowners will burn incense and kneel down, praying to the gods to bless the smooth sailing and return with a good harvest. Then the paper money will be burned, and the fishing boat will slowly head out to sea amid the sound of gunfire. It can be said that the deepening of Western cognition of Chinese religion represented by Mazu belief stems from the fact that European seafarers joined the China-centered Maritime Silk Road and continued to enrich this new historical process in the following centuries.

The reason why Mazu belief became the representative symbol of Chinese religion and folk belief, and frequently appeared in the European vision in the 16th century, can be attributed to two aspects. First, the maritime trading networks in Southeast Asia during that period were dominated by Chinese merchants in Fujian, Guangdong, and Zhejiang. Secondly, when these Western emissaries arrived in China, they usually made their first stop in the coastal areas of South China, which were full of Mazu belief, which was often the result of the planning of the national foreign policy. The way in which the Ming Dynasty treated the Spanish friars mission was to make Fuzhou Prefecture responsible for diplomatic reception, although it was different from the traditional tribute or management institutions, it could still be seen from the reception banquets and courtesies. Therefore, the first stop of Lada and his party was Xiamen (then called Zhongzuo), and then went to Fuzhou. Along the way, the coastal areas have a large population and prosperous towns, and the Mazu temples are usually large in scale and beautifully built temples, which impresses Lada deeply. His description of the Fujian region, where "residents reclaimed land and even the Jagged rock mountains were cultivated," is consistent with the historical reality of the limited land but dense population of Fujian in the Ming Dynasty. Rada kept detailed records of what he saw and heard, but as a cleric he was mainly concerned with the religious worship of the Chinese.

In short, Western official envoys and missionaries in the Ming Dynasty recorded and paid attention to various elements related to Mazu belief, including belief rituals and folk traditions, when observing Mazu belief. At different levels, Westerners' cognition of Mazu belief in Ming Dynasty not only shows the richness of religious culture along the Maritime Silk Road in Ming Dynasty, but also brings about a new collision due to the intervention of Western Christian culture. This knowledge of the Chinese sea goddess combined with a new understanding of China in Europe in the seventeenth century and influenced the relationship between Europe and China in the age of Enlightenment.

3.4 Advocating Diva: The prosperity and prosperity of Mazu belief in Qing Dynasty

1) Mazu belief in the Qing Dynasty began to diversify the "function" of protecting the coastal areas of Fujian

In China's long feudal society, as human beings could not scientifically explain the complex and changeable phenomena in nature, they had a kind of worship for natural phenomena, and at the same time formed the concept of God. Mazu was named the most frequently among many folk deities, and Mazu gradually developed into a prominent national deity. However, whether in the folk or the court, her main role was still centered on the rescue god and the goddess of Marine protection. In the Qing Dynasty, Mazu belief was respected by the rulers to the peak, and her worship scope expanded to all parts of the country, especially in the "aquarium" and other industries, the role positioning of Mazu became diversified, that is, the protection "function" began to diversify. Under the joint promotion of folk belief, local officials and the court, Mazu belief in Qing Dynasty gradually emerged multiple role positioning.

The title of Mazu began in the period of Xuanhe in the Song Dynasty, until the period of Jingding, starting from Lady Huiling, through a series of titles, such as help shun Xianwei Heroic Association ZhengShanqing. During the period of Shizu,

Chengzong, Renzong and Wenzong in the Yuan Dynasty, Mazu was enthralled with a total of 20 characters. During the Ming Dynasty, the famous navigator Zheng He was sent seven times to the Western seas. He sailed for 30 years, covering more than 100,000 miles and reaching more than 30 countries. After his triumph, he asked to seal Mazu on the table. During the Yongle period, Mazu obtained the title of Hongrenpuji protecting the country and protecting the people, Mingda Concubine, and built Mazu temples and stele records in many places along the way.

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, thanks to the promotion of the people, the assistance of local officials and the recognition of the court, Mazu belief experienced a process of "function generalization". This trend shows that the multiple protection functions of Mazu belief roles are determined in different periods. Initially, from the Yongzheng period, Mazu was regarded as a "water war protector God" to protect water warfare. Subsequently, during the Qianlong period, she became the "seawall Protector of God" and "River Protector of God", guarding the seawall and the tranquility of the waterway. At least during the Jiaqing period, she became the "God of Universal protection" and assumed a broader function of blessing. In the Daoguang era, she was also regarded as the "God of water transport and protection" and "God of drought and flood protection" to ensure canal traffic and farmland irrigation. In addition to sailing, the Mazu belief began to expand into rural areas and was seen as a protection for agriculture and life. Mazu's blessing is believed to bring good harvests and peace. Mazu Temple also became a place of faith for rural residents, used for worship and prayer. This evolution process is closely related to the role of "Shuifu Gods", and Mazu belief in Qing Dynasty reached its peak in the shaping of these different roles.

This phenomenon of "functional generalization" usually originated among the people, was then promoted by local officials, and was eventually officially recognized by the imperial court. This reflects the ruler's strategy of using theocracy to strengthen his rule, and also reflects the people's desire for social stability and national

tranquility. This process is as much an exercise in politics as it is a reflection of people's attitudes and expectations.

It is worth noting that the function of Mazu belief in the coastal areas of Fujian in the Qing Dynasty was no longer limited to navigation and protection, but began to diversify, covering agriculture, life, society, culture and other fields, and had a profound impact on the local community and culture. This diversified function contributes to the inheritance and development of Mazu belief and makes it an important religious and cultural phenomenon in Fujian.

2) The development of Mazu belief in Fujian and Taiwan coast in the late Qing Dynasty

Before 1887, both Taiwan and Penghu were under the jurisdiction of Fujian Province. Historical research shows that the Penghu area had existed before the Ming Dynasty (1604 AD). However, the rise of Mazu belief in Taiwan began during the reign of Zheng Chenggong's grandparents and grandchildren, from 1662 to 1683.

In the Ming Dynasty (1624 AD), Dutch colonists landed in Kunshen (present-day Anping Town), Tainan, and established the city of Jelanchak, beginning to colonize Taiwan. In 1659, the patriot He Bin (named as "He Tingbin" in Yang Ying's Book From the Zhengshi) secretly returned to Xiamen, Fujian Province, and presented Zheng Chenggong with a map of Taiwan and the benefits of recovering Taiwan, prompting Zheng Chenggong to decide to recover Taiwan. In 1661, Zheng Chenggong, with more than 25,000 soldiers and 400 warships, set sail from Ziluo Bay in Kinmen, Fujian Province, for Taiwan. Before departure, Zheng Chenggong went to the ancestral temple of Meizhou in Putian, Fujian Province, respectfully invited the Goddess of Mazu, and then worshipped the goddess of Mazu on each warship, praying for the protection of Mazu, hoping to win the battle. In the early morning of April 2, 1661, Zheng's army successfully landed on the Luermen beachhead on the west side of Tainan. After nine and a half months of fierce fighting, the last garrison of the Dutch colonial Army surrendered, marking the end of 38 years of Dutch

colonial rule over Taiwan.

Zheng Chenggong is a native of southern Fujian, and the southern Fujian region has long had a tradition of worshipping Mazu. Therefore, in Zheng Chenggong's training areas, such as Xiamen, Baisha, Dongshi and other coastal areas, there are Mazu temples. After Zheng Chenggong recovered Taiwan, he believed that Mazu's divine help was the reason for his victory. Therefore, after the recapture of Tainan, he set up the "Chengtian Mansion" in Chichiera Tower as the center of Taiwan's administration, and transformed the Dutch Church in Anping, Tainan into the Mazu Palace (now the Great Tianhou Palace in Tainan). He will be from the ancestral temple of Meizhou respectfully returned to the goddess goddess in the main hall, later known as "Kai Tai Ma." Up to now, there is a temple named "Orthodox Luermen Madonna Temple" near the place where Zheng Chenggong's army landed, and the diva deity in the temple is Zheng Chenggong's spirit from the Meizhou ancestral Temple.

Zheng's reconquest of Taiwan also triggered a massive wave of emigration. According to Shi Lang's research, the "General Annals of Southern Fujian" recorded: "Zheng Chenggong brought a total of more than 30,000 soldiers and their accompanying families, of which less than 20,000 actually took up arms to fight." In addition, during the three years of Kangxi, there were about six to seven fake officers and soldiers and their accompanying families brought by Manager Zheng, of whom no more than 4,000 actually took up arms to fight." Combining these figures, about 60,000 to 70,000 people have emigrated to Taiwan. The officers and sailors of the southern Fujian naval forces generally believed in Mazu, and this traditional custom was continued in Taiwan, and the Mazu who entered Taiwan during this period was called "Mother of the guard army". The legend about "defense mother" is mainly reflected in the story of Luermen Mazu assisting tide.

In short, the Mazu belief in Taipeng area flourished in the Ming and Qing dynasties, which was closely related to the Taiwan rule of Zheng Chenggong's

grandfathers and grandsons in Fujian. During this period, Mazu belief gradually penetrated into various ferry ports and became an important folk phenomenon.

3) Development and status promotion of Mazu Temple in Fujian coastal area in Qing Dynasty

In the Qing Dynasty (1681 AD), Zheng Kecheng, the grandson of Zheng Chenggong, was proclaimed king at the age of 12 by Feng Sifan and others, but Emperor Kangxi heeded the advice of Shi Lang and others and decided to recover Taiwan by force. In 1683, Shi Lang, commander of the Fujian Naval Division, led 20,000 soldiers and more than 500 warships to Taiwan from Tongshan (now Dongshan) in southern Fujian. Before the expedition, Shi Lang specially invited the goddess of Mazu from the ancestral temple of Meizhou, hoping that the blessing of Mazu could protect the army. Therefore, Mazu became the god of army protection.

However, in the Qing Civil War, Zheng's army was defeated and Zheng Ke 塙 surrendered to the Qing Court, which realized the unification of Taiwan. Subsequently, the Qing Court changed the "Chengtian Prefecture" to "Taiwan Prefecture" and placed Taiwan under the jurisdiction of Fujian Province. Mazu's blessing in this war was remarkable, and Shi Lang even asked her to be named "Queen of heaven". One of the notes reads: "On June 16 and 22 of the twenty-second year of Kangxi, I defeated the enemy in Penghu. The soldiers all said that they saw the princess, who seemed to be in the sky, standing around them. Pinghai people also saw the goddess of the Heavenly Concubine, that day her robes were soaked, and the gods on both sides were also blisters. Everyone was watching, believing that it was a miracle of the Heavenly Concubine's help." As a result, Mazu was given the title of "Queen of Heaven" and a temple was built in Lugang, Taiwan to worship her idol.

The Qing Court's invasion of Taiwan not only led to the promotion of the title of Mazu, but also affected the status of other Mazu temples in Fujian. The Qing Court used Mazu's divine power many times to boost morale and soothe people, which further strengthened the influence of Mazu belief in Fujian. It can be seen that the

Qing Court's military actions had a profound impact on the promotion of the status of many Mazu temples in Fujian.

4) The expansion of Mazu belief in Qing Dynasty was based on the prevalence of maritime commerce

In the Qing Dynasty, with the prosperity of Fujian maritime merchants, Mazu belief quickly spread to the coastal areas, and later extended to other countries such as Ryukyu. As an important seaport and trading center, the Fujian region attracted a large number of merchants and seafarers. Mazu belief is closely related to maritime safety, so it received more attention in this period. The article "Xu Gongsheng and other maritime Trade and the Spread of Mazu Belief" describes the events of Fujian merchant ships arriving in Ryukyu after encountering strong winds and waves on the sea, according to the records in the Treasure Case of the past Dynasties of Ryukyu. In these incidents, almost all Fujian merchants carried the goddess of Mazu on their ships. For example, in the Qing Dynasty (1749 AD), Wu Yongsheng, a merchant from Fumin County in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, was caught in a storm on his way to Taiwan for trade and floated to Ryukyu. The shipwrecked crew were rescued, and their belongings included six statues of the Goddess of Heaven. There are many similar cases, almost all the ships rescued after the disaster bear the goddess of Mazu. These records show that in these merchant ships, the goddess of Mazu became the spiritual pillar of sea navigation.

In addition, the envoys sent by the Qing Court to Ryukyu returned the story of being blessed by Mazu after being in distress at sea, and also contributed to the expansion of the scope and influence of Mazu belief. These stories of salvation include a series of events, such as a storm on the return voyage of the envoys Zhang Xueli and Wang Gai in the second year of Kangxi (1663 AD); In the 22nd year of the Kangxi Dynasty (1683), the envoys Wang Ji and Lin Lin 焜 encountered a typhoon on their way back; In the 58th year of Kangxi (1719 AD), the envoys Hai Bao and Xu Baoguang encountered a cyclone on their way back. In the 21st year of Qianlong

(1756 AD), the envoys Quan Kui and Zhou Huang encountered a typhoon on their way home; In the nineteenth year of Daoguang (1839 AD), the envoys Lin Hongnian and Gao Renjian encountered two sudden storms on their way to Ryukyu. These events and stories led to the expansion of Mazu belief in coastal areas, especially in Ryukyu and other countries. This shows the importance of Mazu belief in Fujian merchants and the influence of Mazu as the god of sea protection in maritime business activities.

After the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with the increase of trade activities, the groups worshipping Mazu in Fujian were no longer limited to merchants and ship owners related to the sea, but expanded to various industries. Mazu Temple got the opportunity to build and expand. Merchants and seafarers built Mazu temples in different places for worship and worship. These temples became the center of Mazu belief and also attracted more believers. At the same time, the rise of the guild hall in the same township and trade further enhanced the merchants' sense of identity for Mazu belief. During the Qing Dynasty, many Mazu temples in and outside Fujian Province were built by merchants. For example, the Tian Hou Palace in Xixuefang, Shaxian County, Fujian Province, was built by local merchants during the reign of Yongzheng. The temple of Our Lady of Heaven in Hongji Fang, west of Guangcheng City, was built by salt merchants; Tianhou Palace on Lufeng Mountain in Taining was donated by Zheng Guoliang, a merchant from Fuzhou. The First Heavenly Queen Palace of Hom in the west of Pucheng and the Shuinan Heavenly Queen Palace outside the Nampu Gate were built and rebuilt with donations from Pucheng merchants. Xiafang Street, outside the north gate of Jianning, was built with donations from Yanba Gang in the county. There are many other similar examples, and these Mazu temples built by merchants have sprung up all over Fujian Province and beyond.

The "Tin Hau temples" in other provinces are often merged with fellow township guild halls, or called "guild halls" or "Tin Hau temples". Tin Hau temples built by Min

merchants are all over the country. For example, there are a number of Tin Hau temples in Wuchuan County, Guangdong Province, one of which was built on a fort in the east of Jianmen, although it is in disrepair, but according to rumors, Fujian businessmen must pray here. In addition, many Tin Hau temples are closely integrated with guild halls, and some are even in the same building, such as Minjiang Guild Hall in Beijing, commonly known as Tin Hau Temple.

Fellow township hall is a non-governmental organization spontaneously organized by the industrial and commercial practitioners of the same place or trade. As early as the Ming Dynasty, Fujian businessmen set up fellow town halls in some commercially developed cities such as Yangzhou and Jiaxing. In the Qing Dynasty, this situation was more common and spread all over the country, especially in other provinces. A notable feature of these halls is the worship of Mazu, and many halls are actually Mazu temples. This situation is especially prominent in Beijing, whether it is established in the province or other provinces of the guild hall, almost there are Mazu temple. For example, Xiaxu Xingan Association Hall in Hanjiang, Huangshi Shuinan Association Hall in Putian, Xiahang Street Xingan Association Hall in Fuzhou, Wufuli Xingan Association Hall in Chong'an, Tushan Street Xinghua Association Hall in Quanzhou, Xingan Association Hall in Fuxing East Road in Shanghai, Xingan Association Hall in Da Nanmen Gate in Wenzhou, etc., all worship Mazu.

A similar situation also exists in Beijing. For instance, the Yan Shao Hui Guan in Yongzhi Hutong, Chongwenmen Outer Street, was established in the early years of the Qianlong period by paper merchants from Yanping and Shaowu in northern Fujian. The main hall of the guild hall displays a plaque that reads "海邦仰圣" (Nations Rely on the Holy) written by Cai Xin, a native of Zhangpu, Fujian. Similarly, in the second courtyard of the Beiguan (North Hall) of the Tingzhou Hui Guan, also located on Chongwenmen Outer Street in Beijing, there is a temple dedicated to the Heavenly Empress (Mazu). The Tingzhou Hui Guan was originally built during the Ming Dynasty's Hongzhi reign, and after significant restorations during the Qing

Dynasty, it still retains its historical appearance and is now a protected cultural heritage site.

In Xuanwu District, Beijing, the Putian Hui Guan, located in Jiajia Hutong, is a guild hall for Fujian natives from Putian who venerate Mazu. Inside the guild hall, there is a temple dedicated to the Heavenly Empress. The couplet by Tu Qinglan, a successful candidate in the Qing Dynasty's Tongzhi examination and a member of the Hanlin Academy, remains popular to this day. It reads, "神力云帆济沧海，帝京香火似湄洲" (Divine power and cloud sails cross the vast seas; the capital's incense offerings rival those of Meizhou).

To sum up, the expansion of Mazu belief in Qing Dynasty was closely related to the prevalence of maritime commerce. The prosperity of maritime commerce and trade made the Mazu belief spread in Fujian and other places, becoming one of the important religious and cultural phenomena in Qing Dynasty China. At the same time, the rise of the town and trade hall also further strengthened the merchants' emotional identification of Mazu belief, prompting them to worship Mazu temple in the hall. The spread of this faith not only strengthens community cohesion, but also promotes cultural exchange and international trade.

3.5 Mazu Belief: the transformation of the religious nature of modern Mazu belief and the folk nature of modern Mazu belief

1) The belief custom and sacrificial ceremony of Mazu culture

The belief, customs and sacrificial ceremonies of modern Mazu culture still retain the ancient traditions in some areas, and are also affected and changed by modern society.

As a cultural phenomenon, religious belief originates from people's ideas, aspirations and customs, and has a profound impact on local customs. Mazu belief is superior to exclusive religion and narrow folk belief. It is highly adaptable, flexible and inclusive, and can meet the needs of different regions, times and groups of people, so it has a longer vitality, keeping pace with The Times and enduring.

Regarding the nature of Mazu belief, there are many different opinions about whether it belongs to Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, or all three. This dispute is not only between believers and non-believers, but also between officials and the public, and even among experts and scholars, it is difficult to reach an agreement. The Taoist view holds that Mazu is "the virgin of the goddess", inspired by Taoist metaphysics, with supernatural ability. In the spreading of Mazu belief, although influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, its legend, title, sacrificial ceremony and temple management all have Taoist characteristics, so they belong to the category of Taoism. From the Buddhist point of view, Mazu may be the embodiment of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva. Mazu always studies the Guanyin Sutra and holds compassion as her heart, which is consistent with the purpose of Buddhism. Some temples are also influenced by Buddhism, such as the Zhaozhou Ancestral Temple, which is abbot by a monk and has a monk's room and a hall. From the viewpoint of Confucianism, the deep psychology of Mazu belief originates from Confucianism, with the purpose of "worship of heaven" and "worship of rites", it realizes the transformation from natural god to personal god and promotes the social value of Confucianism.

Those who hold the mixed theory of "three religions" believe that Mazu belief combines the elements of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in its spreading process, and is influenced and created by various thoughts. The evolution of Mazu biography also shows its fusion. Some people believe that Mazu belief has independently become a kind of existence similar to Dao or Buddha, with unique divinity. There are also views that Mazu belief may be the residual of Manichaeism, both have goddess belief, and there is an intersection in the path of transmission. There are also feudal superstitious views that Mazu belief lacks doctrine and strict organization, which is similar to feudal superstition and should be restricted and banned. To sum up, regarding the nature of Mazu belief, there are different opinions and it is difficult to reach a consensus. This reflects the richness and complexity of

Mazu belief, but also highlights the characteristics of religious diversity.

From the period of the Republic of China to the founding of New China, due to historical changes, Mazu sacrifice was greatly impacted, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Until the reform and opening up, the Mazu sacrifice gradually resumed, including the creation of the Meizhou Ancestral Temple ceremony in 1994, so that the Mazu festival re-integrated into modern society. Mazu sacrificial ceremony is the general name of various sacrificial activities and ceremonies to commemorate Mazu. These ceremonies include temple fair, family sacrifice, ship sacrifice, seaside sacrifice and other forms, of which the most representative is Mazu festival. Mazu Festival refers to a grand ceremony sponsored by the government in the development of Mazu belief, aiming at offering sacrifices to Mazu. In 2006, the Mazu Festival was listed as the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage by The State Council of China. With the evolution of Mazu belief, the ritual, scale and rank of offering sacrifices to Mazu also changed.

The sacrificial ceremony is one of the core activities of Mazu belief to show respect and gratitude for Mazu's blessing. Customs cover taboos, clothing, marriage and childbearing, diet, festivals, entertainment and other aspects, forming a huge and diverse system. The folk customs on Mazu concerning taboos and life are as follows: No fishing on the birthday of Mazu: Around the birthday of Mazu, fishermen are forbidden to go fishing in the sea to show respect for Mazu. Mazu Symbol on the gate: Believers will paste yellow symbol paper printed with the goddess of Mazu and scripture on the gate to show pious faith. When fishermen go out to sea, they hang straw MATS on the mast of the boat, hoping to get a safe wind. "Thank you and worship God" : After the people get Mazu's blessing to solve the difficulties, they go to the Meizhou ancestral Temple to ask incense and worship to express gratitude. Holy chalice asking: People use wooden" chalice "to ask questions to detect good or bad luck. Mazu hangs up: When Mazu parades, the believers will tie gold and silver treasures on the neck of the goddess to express their devout offerings. Meizhou new

ship launching custom and making ship model: When the new ship is launched, a prayer ceremony is held, and the ship model is made and enshrined in the Mazu Temple. Boatmen worship Mazu: Fishermen go to the Mazu Temple to ask for incense and put incense in the boat to pray for peace. Mazu folk customs in terms of clothing - half red pants: women wear red shirts, symbolizing Mazu's red dress, to express respect. Sailing bun (Matsu bun) : Women comb their hair into a sailboat shape to imitate the hairstyle of Matsu in her lifetime. Mazu folk customs in marriage and fertility: Women "flower exchange" custom: married women without children in a specific period of exchange planted flowers and trees to pray for fertility. Tianhou Palace tied dolls: Believers go to Tianhou Palace to pick up dolls and take care of them as their children, hoping to obtain an heir. Ask Mazu shoes: women who have not given birth use a cup to divinate, if Mazu agrees, ask Mazu a shoe, if pregnant, they need to make new shoes for Mazu. Mazu folk custom in diet - Mazu cake: Sugar cake made of glutinous rice and winter rice, representing the food offered to Mazu. Mazu Banquet dish: A special banquet in memory of Mazu to show respect for Mazu. Mazu noodles: Noodles made with various ingredients to symbolize harvest and good life. Mazu folk custom of festivals - Mazu lanterns: In Mazu's birthday or important festival activities, Mazu lanterns are hung to highlight the solemn. Dragon Boat decoration: The statue and flag of Mazu are hung on the dragon boat in the Dragon Boat Festival to express reverence. Mazu travel: Before and after the Lantern Festival, Mazu parades are held to pray for good weather in the coming year. The folk custom of Mazu entertainment - Placing a palm sedan chair: the people carry the sedan chair made of brown materials, jump over the fire, praying to dispel evil and avoid disaster." Chaos children" sitting on the knife chair, with four strong men acting as sedan bearers, "Chaos children" perform exaggerated physical behavior, and the sedan bearers perform dances together to show vitality.



Figure 7: In Mazu religious customs, the "Chaos children" performers play a special role and are often part of celebrations such as Mazu temple fairs. These customs add joy and entertainment to the temple fairs. Audiences typically feel happy and delighted due to the comical performances of the "Chaos children" and the dances of the sedan bearers, contributing to a more festive atmosphere at the temple fair. On certain occasions, the "Chaos children" and sedan bearers may display reverence and worship towards Mazu, which serves as a ceremonial display of respect for Mazu's protection and blessings. The roles they play at times symbolize Mazu's guardianship and sheltering.

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, consulted in 2023.

Swimming lanterns and crossing the ocean: At night, people light lanterns and parade in groups to express entertainment and prayers. There are also unique customs in different areas of Mazu belief, such as the golden body parade in Meizhou ancestral temple, Mazu believers thirst for ancestor incense, Dalian put sea lantern offering Mazu and so on. These diverse customs show the profound connotation and multi-cultural form of the modern Mazu belief, and also reflect the continuous influence of the Mazu belief in history.



Figure 8: Mazu Golden Statue Procession Scene. The Mazu golden statue is a gold-cast or gold-covered bronze sculpture, considered as the tangible embodiment of Mazu. The golden Mazu statue is typically solemn and dignified, adorned with precious stones and jewels, serving as a significant symbol of Mazu worship. The Mazu golden statue procession is a grand and solemn religious celebration. The golden Mazu statue is enshrined in a golden palanquin or divine sedan, carried by devotees or palanquin bearers as it proceeds along the parade route. These processions often traverse various locations, including cities, towns, and fishing villages. This long-distance procession symbolizes the extensive reach of Mazu's protection and the dissemination of her divine power.

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, Accessed 2023.

In general, Mazu belief still maintains its deep tradition in modern times, combining with maritime culture and folk beliefs, influencing the social and cultural life of coastal areas. This belief is not only the worship of Mazu, but also the expectation of safety and harvest at sea, and it is also a way to unite the community and pass on the culture.

2) The social function of Mazu Temple and the interaction of local culture

Mazu Temple plays an important social function in society and interacts closely with local culture. The modern function of Mazu Temple is to serve as a bond of cultural identity for Chinese at home and abroad, and to play a cohesive role in the community. It draws residents together and strengthens social ties. The formation of this function has undergone historical evolution, and originally originated from the

function of the Mazu Temple playing the role of guild hall in the early days.Xie Chongguang, 2002)

Mazu is revered as the patron saint of Fujian, and the vast number of Fujian merchants and officials, whether they are merchants from all over the world or those who travel abroad, all believe in Mazu. In the place where Fujian businessmen and Fujian officials were concentrated, the Mazu Temple became an ideal social place to help each other communicate and maintain feelings, so that the Mazu Temple gradually took on the characteristics of a guild hall. The Tianhou Palace in the Qing Dynasty is an example, known as "Shengshan Guild Hall", which was founded by Fujian businessmen, mainly for Fujian businessmen to regularly hold Mazu worship activities, as well as feasts and socializing, but also to provide a rest place for Fujian officials passing by, to provide a place for Fujian students to study and study, and even some Mazu temples also participate in charity and social service activities. To give back to the community. Similar to the Tianhou Palace, where the Mazu Temple is used as the Fujian Guild hall, it is gradually popularized in other places, such as Nanjing, Tianjin, Yantai, Yingkou and other places, there are Mazu temples as the local Fujian Guild hall, sometimes called "Xing 'an Guild Hall". This model was also replicated by merchants in other provinces, who, following the example of the Fujian merchants, raised funds to build the Mazu Temple as a guild hall in their province. For example, Tianhou Palace, Sanjiang Guild Hall and Shandong Guild Hall in Gaiping County, Liaoning represent the guild halls of Fujian, Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi and Shandong respectively, symbolizing the connection and ethnic identity between merchants and eunuchs in these places.

With the passage of time, this development model of Mazu Temple as a guild gradually extended, across the Strait, especially in overseas more obvious. This trend means that Mazu belief has gradually become a link for all Chinese people to identify with Chinese culture and Chinese people to identify with Chinese culture. Overseas Chinese merchants and workers went to Southeast Asia and other places to make a

living, inherited the model of Mazu temple as the town hall, and on this basis developed the friendship function of all Chinese. In Japan, from the beginning of the 17th century, the influx of Chinese merchants and expatriates established merchant gatherings in Fujian, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Anhui and other provinces, and the Mazu belief played an important role in uniting the merchants and overseas Chinese in these provinces. In central Taiwan, a number of Mazu temples have also been established. Not only Han immigrants, but also Pingpu people have been influenced by Mazu belief and shared belief in Mazu, strengthening national unity.

The Mazu belief in Taiwan further deepens the kinship bond between the people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. Taiwan Mazu believers often carry out "return home" worship thirsty activities, return to the ancestral temple of Meizhou, identify with their ancestral temple, identify with Chinese culture. This phenomenon is not only to pray for peace or to eliminate diseases and disasters, but also an expression of cultural identity. In recent years, hundreds of thousands of Taiwan compatriots go to the ancestral temple of Meizhou every year. According to statistics, since 1979 to 1987, there are 115 batches of Taiwan compatriots to worship in Meizhou, 434 people, please take 63 statues of Mazu gods; From January to June 1987, there were 42 batches with 128 people. As mentioned above, in recent years, more than 100,000 Taiwanese come to the Mazu Temple every year to worship and search for their roots. This shows that the inner needs of the nearly one million believers who go to the ancestral temple in Meizhou are no longer limited to the traditional prayers for sea safety, health and peace in the past, and the Mazu belief has become their identification with the ancestral temple and cultural identification, connecting Taiwan compatriots and Chinese around the world.



湄洲媽祖祖廟主持釋淨空在禪房接待進香團成員（攝于1922年）

Figure 9: Abbot Shi Jingkong of the Mazu Ancestral Temple receiving members of the pilgrimage group in the meditation hall. The 'Mazu devotees' pilgrimage to pay respects to the ancestors' temple is a ritual act where temples, possessing a branch spirit of the Mazu temple, embark on a pilgrimage to the Mazu Ancestral Temple to offer incense. In ancient times, these temple-specific ancestral pilgrimage and incense-offering rituals were unidirectional and sporadic. However, in recent years, this activity has evolved into an organized and large-scale event. The Mazu Ancestral Temple welcomes various branch temples for a unified pilgrimage ceremony at a predetermined time, closely resembling the ancient practices.

Source: Collection Materials from Putian Museum, Accessed 2023.

As a result, Mazu Temple plays multiple roles in society, being both a center of religious belief and a carrier of cultural inheritance, while also participating in activities such as community cohesion, tourism and charity. These functions make the Mazu Temple an important social and cultural institution that has a profound impact on local social and cultural life.

3) Mazu belief in the main function of social governance

Mazu belief in custom is the core content of Mazu belief, which gradually evolved from the belief and respect for Mazu, forming a rich folk culture system. This cultural core mainly consists of three series of sacrificial ceremonies, folk customs and legends. As an activity place and an important carrier, Mazu Palace Temple carries the actual practice and inheritance of the mother's faith in custom.

On September 30, 2009, the fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the United Nations Science, Technology and Educational Organization officially listed "Mazu Religion and Religion" in the world intangible cultural Heritage, becoming China's first religion and religion world Heritage, and also the first world-class heritage of Putian City. This honor not only highlights the unique value of Mazu faith, but also symbolizes its significance and influence on a global scale. Mazu belief and custom have become the product of Mazu belief in history, which contains the core idea of Mazu culture, and its research has great academic and cultural value. Scholars began to further study Mazu, dig deeper into the Mazu cultural spirit, and expand the positive influence of Mazu on society. It embodies the Mazu cultural spirit of kindness, tolerance, justice, integrity, wisdom and bravery. At the same time, Mazu belief carries rich cultural traditions, including religious rituals, myths and legends, and artistic expressions, which help to inherit and promote local culture. At the same time, local identity has been formed, making people cherish and pass on their own cultural heritage.

Mazu beliefs usually emphasize moral and ethical norms, encouraging believers to be honest, helpful, and respectful of others. These values help to shape a good social morality and promote social order and public morality. Mazu, as a model, has become the object for people to follow and learn, which has a certain impact on people's life in rural society, especially in the governance of rural society. At present, the rural governance mode of Meizhou Island is mainly "government-people co-governance", in which Mazu culture has an important auxiliary function, reflected in the following aspects: First, Mazu culture has become the spiritual home of the

people. The Mazu culture of Meizhou Island has been widely integrated into the life of the local people, and participating in the ceremonies and sacrifices held by the Mazu temple has become one of the main activities of the people. These activities gradually transformed into folk literature and art, adding cultural atmosphere, adding fun to people's lives, and becoming their psychological sustenance and emotional adjustment channels. Mazu belief has penetrated into people's lives and become a guide for daily behavior. Through the purpose of Mazu culture, it restricts people's behavior, transmits moral concepts, forms a fixed cultural form, and plays a positive role in rural governance. Secondly, Mazu culture contributes to the service of government departments. The Mazu spirit promotes virtues such as good deeds, filial piety for the elderly and helping others. Meizhou Island has set up a Mazu volunteer service team to provide civilized volunteer services for tourists and residents, strengthen social order and enhance the degree of social civilization. In addition, public activities related to Mazu culture held by the government enrich local culture, create order for society and help shape unique local characteristics. Moreover, Mazu culture promoted the development of rural economy. Mazu culture drives the tourism economy of Meizhou Island. Mazu Temple attracts a large number of pilgrims and tourists every year, driving the development of local catering, souvenirs and other businesses. The development of Mazu culture also made the residents of the island realize the potential of tourism, and transferred the labor force from fishing to tourism, which promoted the economic growth.

To sum up, Mazu culture, as a folk belief, played an important role in Meizhou Island village society although there was no strict doctrine. It becomes the people's spiritual home, guides the people's behavior, and affects the rural governance; It also helps governments provide services and strengthen social order; At the same time, Mazu culture also promoted the development of rural economy and injected new vitality into local economy. (Hesham Z. Al-Sabbahy, 2004, p.226-234)

In short, Mazu belief played an important role in modern social governance, not

only helping to maintain social order and cohesion, but also promoting social functions such as cultural inheritance, moral norms, and economic development. This belief contributes to the harmony and development of society.

4. The development of "Mazu title" in the coastal cities of Fujian in different historical periods

4.1 The goddess of Meizhou (Mazu) in Song Dynasty had the title of "Dragon woman"

Since the Han and Jin Dynasties, there has been a folk tradition of offering sacrifices to the dragon God and praying for rain. With the prosperous influence of Buddhism and Taoism in the Tang Dynasty, the status of the dragon God gradually rose and was regarded as the dragon King. There were dragon Kings in various waters such as rivers, lakes and oceans, and many dragon king temples were built throughout the country. In the Song Dynasty, the worship of the dragon God became more prevalent, and in the Song Dynasty (1021), 50 dragon Kings were even added. Since then, in the ceremony of praying for rain, there have been sacrificial objects such as Five Dragon Halls and Nine Dragon Halls, and the implementation of the Law of Praying for Rain. These decrees clearly expressed admiration for the dragon God and promoted the belief in the dragon God throughout the country through official acts.

Under this background, the belief in the dragon God also flourished in Fujian. In Fuzhou area, Lingze Temple was originally named King Shunhua of the Five Dragons, because of the influence of the pseudo-Min Wang clan. The temple showed the magical power of the dragon God at the time of famine, and was worshiped by the local people. In Putian area, there were similar situations at Longtan, Nine-Carp Lake Longtan and other places, where people prayed for rain and the dragon God appeared and brought rain. In Putian, which is close to Fuzhou, the social atmosphere of dragon God worship is also very strong. Here is a brief reference to the documents as an example: Longhua Temple is located in the southwest of Xianyou County, built in the Sui Dynasty Daye period. At that time, a monk came from Danyang and established a

monastery here, because the forests here are deep and few people. According to legend, there was once a white dragon with white lotus flowers in its mouth, flying from the air and offering them, hence the name "Longhua Temple". Today, although Longjing Longchi has changed a lot, the remains of this temple still exist. In addition, Longtan is located in the north of Putian County by the Biase River. It is said that in ancient times there were black dragons and white dragons appearing on the water, so a temple of Five Dragons was built next to it. Local residents believe that as long as the drought prayer is performed, the dragons will be answered and rain will fall. There is also a place called Nine-Carp Lake Longtan, where the governor Zhu Duanxue once ordered the county officials to pray for rain. They obtained water from the Dragon Pool, and then prayed for rain successfully. Someone saw a white dragon appearing in the clouds, which drew a crowd of onlookers. Later, someone drew a drawing of this wonder and recorded this unusual event. Finally, there is a place called White Dragon Rock, located in Xinghua County. If you look up at the sky in this cave, you can see a white dragon wrapped around the rock wall, facing each other, and the horns, claws and scales on its head are clearly visible. Local residents have built a statue of a dragon Lord here, believing that if they pray for drought, rain will come. (The Annals of Foreign Affairs).

Although the worship of the dragon goddess was a national folk belief in the Southern Song Dynasty, it was also true in the Putian area, where the belief in the Goddess of Meizhou originated, but the two cases of the goddess of Meizhou being called the dragon woman in the Song Dynasty documents commonly seen today are in the southern region: First, "in Puyang Meizhou, there was a woman named Lin Shi, who had the ability to predict the fate of people when she was young. After her death, people worshipped her as a goddess of wisdom, some called her the Dragon Woman." Second, "The main god worshipped in the Temple of Heavenly Concubine is named Fei Lin, and she was born in Meizhou on the sea of Putian." Others call her the offspring of the Concubine Dragon."

In short, since the Han and Jin dynasties, the folk worship of the dragon God has gradually flourished in China, especially in the Song Dynasty, through the official system and folk rituals, the belief in the dragon God reached a peak. Whether in the north or the south, there are temples and rituals of the dragon God, which shows the deep reverence of the Chinese people for the dragon god - the goddess of Meizhou.

1) "Dragon Girl" is not only a good name but also originated from the influence of the dragon King in the Marine society

Some scholars believe that people in the coastal areas of Zhejiang in the Southern Song Dynasty called Lin Merniang, the goddess of Meizhou, the "dragon woman", probably because the dragon King had a greater influence in the Marine society. This explanation is instructive, but fails to account for the fact that although the worship of the dragon God (king) was widespread throughout the country during the Southern Song Dynasty, and several local temples in Fuzhou, Putian and other places that worshipped the dragon God (king) predated the Song Dynasty, in the existing Song Dynasty documents, only the temple records in Lin 'an and Zhenjiang refer to the Goddess of Meizhou as the Dragon woman. Interestingly, the authors of these two temples, Ding Bogui and Li Choufu, were both from Putian, which may mean that the title of "Dragon woman" in the Southern Song Dynasty in the Jiangnan area of the good name for the goddess of Chao Phraya should have no doubt.

Through comparative reading of records of Southern Song Dynasty in Putian area and Lin 'an area, it can be found that there were more temples or places to worship the Dragon King (God) in Lin 'an area than in Putian area, such as records in Dream Lianglu and Xian Chun Lin 'an Annals. In the Annals of Xian Chun Lin 'an, there are many temples of worship to the dragon King (God) in Lin 'an area. In contrast, the Putian area has relatively few records. This indicates that the worship of dragon god (king) was more common in Lin 'an area during the Southern Song Dynasty, which may be related to the stronger atmosphere of dragon culture worship in Jiangnan area. The worship of temples such as Shunji Dragon King in the middle

and lower reaches of the Yangtze River may also have had a certain influence.

To sum up, the goddess of Meizhou is called "dragon girl" in the Jiangnan area, possibly because the dragon culture worship atmosphere in the Jiangnan area is strong, especially the number of temples worships the dragon God in the Lin 'an area is more, which may strengthen the spread of the dragon girl this laudatory name. At the same time, the worship of Shunji Dragon King and other temples in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River since the Northern Song Dynasty may also have an impact on this title.

2) The channeling goddess is the spiritual power of Fujian Sea

In history, the earliest documents about Mazu appeared in the Southern Song Dynasty, Liao Pengfei's "Shengdun Ancestral Temple Reconstruction Shunji Temple". This text describes a being known as the "Goddess of Heaven" who has the power to predict the fate of people. According to records, when Mazu was born, the sky suddenly flashed a beam of red light, shooting into the room from the northwest, instantly becoming bright and dazzling around, fragrant, accompanied by a roar, and soon the earth also turned purple. This vision convinced the family that the baby girl was destined for greatness, so they adored her. Mazu did not cry even before the full moon, so the family named her Mo, which is also the origin of the name Lin Mo.

Lin Mo showed remarkable intelligence from an early age, learning knowledge easily, and at the same time had a loving heart. She grew up to be a very knowledgeable and helpful person - not only was she proficient in medicine, often curing diseases, but she also knew astronomical geography so well that she could predict the weather for sailors at sea. Lin Mo never married her whole life, her life has always been guided by benevolence and good behavior, benefiting the coastal people.

After Lin Mo's death, the residents of Meizhou Island found her as a goddess, shrouded by the colorful clouds of Meifeng Mountain, appearing on the sea in red to protect the navigation of ships and sailors. Since then, Lin Mo began to be respected by people as "spirit girl", "mother", "Mazu" and so on. Coastal residents began to

worship the goddess of Mazu, praying for safety at sea. Mazu also always guards the ships on the sea, no matter what kind of shipwreck, the crew and the ships can get her blessing and save the danger.

4.2 The establishment of the title of "Defense of the Kingdom Ming Tian Fei" in the Yuan Dynasty

1) Yuan Dynasty Tianfei Chongsi specifications

Mazu belief can be traced back to the Song Dynasty, but its most significant development occurred in the Yuan Dynasty. In 1281, because of his contribution to the protection of the grain transport, the ship of Dao City in Fujian Province proposed Pu Shiwen to be granted the title of Mazu. Yuan Shizu Kublai Khan then named her the "protection of the kingdom Ming Ying Tian Concubine", associating Mazu with the "protection of the kingdom". This letter made Mazu the heavenly god of the country, the god demon ruling the sea, and established her exclusive status as the sea protection god. The title of the Yuan rulers to the gods was more generous than that of the previous dynasties, but only Mazu was named more than once, and all were related to "protecting the country". These titles, such as "protecting the country Mingzhu Ling Hui Xie Zhengshan Qingxian Tianfei" and "Assisting the country to protect the Saint and protect the people Guangji Fuhui Mingzhu Tianfei", all emphasize the role of Mazu as the protection of national security, consistent with the honorable title of "Tianfei". Therefore, Mazu has become a symbol of China's spirit of safeguarding sea power.

The Yuan Dynasty was an important development stage for Mazu belief. Kublai Khan, the emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, established a new world order based on sea routes, which depended on the opening of sea transportation, the popularization of Marine technology and the prosperity of maritime economy and culture. The astronomical and hydraulic technology of the Yuan Dynasty surpassed that of Europe at that time, which is recorded in the Travels of Marco Polo. With the development of sea transport, Mazu belief was vigorously advocated by the authorities and was

regarded as the spiritual bond uniting sailors and sailors at sea. Mazu belief is closely connected with sea transport, which is a major feature in the history of Mazu belief in Yuan Dynasty, and promotes a new chapter of Mazu belief culture.

The Yuan court gradually deepened its respect for Mazu, incorporated Mazu into the national sacrificial system, and regularly sent emissaries to the Palace of Heavenly Concubine to worship Mazu. In particular, the Tianfei Palace was built along the navigation line, among which the Tianfei Palace in Taicang Liujiagang and Zhigu was especially decorated. Several emperors in the Yuan Dynasty have granted Mazu many times, such as in the fifteenth year of the Yuan Shizu to the Yuan (1281) in August, "protecting the country Ming Ling Hui Xiezheng Shan Qingxian Ji Tianfei" and so on. These titles expressed Mazu's importance to national security as the goddess of the sea, reflected the supreme rulers of the Yuan Dynasty's reverence for Mazu, and also provided spiritual support for the navigators. The Yuan court's respect for Mazu was not only expressed in the high title, but also sent envoys to the Tian Fei Palace to perform official sacrifices every year, which can be seen in the historical records of the Yuan Dynasty. In addition, the Yuan court actively responded to the folk belief and honored Mazu as the goddess of the sea. Every time before the shipping ships set sail, the governments of the Jiangnan area (such as Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, roads and prefectures) will hold a solemn ceremony to worship the Heavenly princess at the port of departure. When the ship arrived safely in the northern paradise, the central government would send senior officials to the destination port to hold a Heavenly princess sacrifice. At the same time, local governments were encouraged to build Mazu temples.

In the early Yuan Dynasty, the prosperity of Liujiagang (now Liuhe, Taicang, Jiangsu Province), a port of grain sailing, was closely related to Mazu belief. People are eager to get the protection of the sea goddess Mazu, offering sacrifices to the Heavenly princess has become the primary event for ships to go to sea, so the Mazu Temple is prosperous, and Liujiagang even has the reputation of "Heavenly Princess

Town". According to records, there were five Heavenly concubine palaces in the history of Taicang, such as "Liuhe Heavenly Concubine Palace", "Zhoujing Heavenly Concubine Palace", "Xinzhen Heavenly Concubine Palace", "Floating bridge Goddess Temple" and "Seven Ya Goddess Temple". Among them, the Tianfei Palace of Zhoujing established by Zhu Xu, the third son of Zhu Qing, in the 29th year of the Yuan Dynasty (1292) played an important role in the development of grain shipping.

Regarding the system of offering sacrifices to the Empress of the Yuan Dynasty, the History of the Yuan Dynasty briefly recorded the process: "The temples of the loyal officials in various mountains and rivers were presided over by the directors of various places. Lady Linghui, the goddess of the South Sea, was given the title of Heavenly Consort for her protective maritime miracles. Her trumpet reached the cross, and the temple was called "Spirit of Mercy." There are temples in Zhigu, Pingjiang, Zhoujing, Quan, Fu, Xinghua and other places. During the reign of Emperor Qing, emissaries would be sent each year a pair of gold flags and silver flags to the Pingjiang Official Cao Department and relevant government officials to sacrifice soft wine. The message is roughly "in a certain year on a certain day, the emperor appointed an official, etc., to offer sacrifices to protect the country and protect the people, Guangji Fuhui Ming and Concubine." It can be seen that the sacrificial ceremony of the Yuan Dynasty was very solemn. In Yuan Dynasty, the sacrificial offerings and rituals to the heavenly concubine were roughly the same as those of Haidu Yuechen in the same period, and the degree of respect was similar. Each sacrifice in the Yuan Dynasty would send officials, incense flags, and other offerings such as silver coins. The ritual specifications of this sacrifice clearly reflected the importance of the heavenly concubine.

To sum up, these measures and veneration in the Yuan Dynasty made Mazu belief play an important role in Chinese maritime culture, which was closely related to maritime transport, national security and cultural inheritance.

2) Tianfei's Miraculous Protection of Maritime Transport in the Yuan Dynasty

In the Yuan Dynasty, Mazu belief was considered to have spiritual support in sea grain protection. This belief stems from people's worship of Mazu as the goddess of the sea, believing that she can protect the safety of sea navigation.

In the Yuan Dynasty, Dadu (present-day Beijing area), located in the transition zone between farming and nomadic areas, long served as a political center. However, because the capital of Dadu mainly depended on the Jiangnan area for food and taxes, there were "The capital of the Yuan Dynasty is located in Yan, far from Jiangnan. However, this region is home to numerous administrative institutions and a large population, including guards and ordinary citizens, all of whom rely on supplies from Jiangnan. The annual grain demand of the capital exceeds three million stone and more." Therefore, the "southern grain transport to the North" has been a national event in the Yuan Dynasty.

In the early days, supplies from the Jiangnan area were mainly transported to Dadu (now Beijing) by river. This route consisted of entering the Huai River from the western part of Zhejiang Province through Jiangsu Province, then going upstream to the Yellow River, then overland to Qimen, then into the Yuhe River, and finally to the capital. Later, attempts were made to open waterways such as the Sibu River and the Shinkai River in Jeju, but the results were not good. The new river even caused damage to boats due to tidal problems, and the people also felt hardship.

When river transport was in trouble, the Yuan Dynasty experimented with sea transport. The earliest shipping was initiated by Bo Yan, who ordered the Shanghai governor Luo Bi, Zhu Qing, Zhang Xuan, etc., to build 60 flat-bottled sea boats to transport grain. These ships start from the sea and move along the coastline, where they are affected by wind currents, resulting in a long time. However, it finally arrived in Zhigu next year. The shipping was not smooth at first, and the route was changed three times before it was finally settled. The original sea route is from the Pingjiang Liujiagang sea, through Yangzhou, Tongzhou, Haimen County, Huanglian Sandou, Wanli Long Beach, and then out to the sea, along the mountain, has been to Huaian

Road Yancheng County, and then through a series of maritime cities, and finally arrived at the capital. The route is very long, covering about 13,350 miles. According to legend, some local governments would hold a goddess worship ceremony when a ship arrived at its destination, especially at the port where the route ended. According to the legend, these sacrificial ceremonies were often fulfilled and prayers were often answered, which further strengthened people's belief in Mazu blessing.

By the 29th year of the Yuan Dynasty, Zhu Qing and others decided that this route was fraught with danger, so a safer route was re-opened. Before the ship goes to sea, people will hold a solemn ceremony to worship the heavenly princess, praying for her protection to ensure the safety of the voyage. This belief encouraged sailors and crew to maintain confidence during the difficult sea voyages, believing that Mazu would protect them from disasters. This time, the route is from Liujia port to the sea, through the Sansha of Chongming State, out to the ocean, moving east, and then into the Black water Ocean, and finally arrived at Liujia Island, Shamen Island, and then into Laizhou Ocean, and finally arrived at the boundary estuary, this new route is faster and more convenient. As the shipping routes gradually became more reasonable, by the end of the Yuan Dynasty, the grain transport to the north of Jiangnan mainly turned to sea, marking the emergence of sea transport in material transport.

The practice of these spiritual responses and beliefs together constituted the important content of Mazu belief in sea grain protection in the Yuan Dynasty, and played a spiritual support and encouragement role in the safety of sea navigation and water transport. The promotion of Mazu belief in Yuan Dynasty was also closely related to the prosperity of Chinese maritime culture and the development of Marine economy.

3) The Spread of Tianfei Worship Northward in Line with the Imperial Court

Tianfei belief is one of the most popular religious beliefs in southern China, especially in Fujian Province. With the development of history, the Tianfei faith

gradually expanded northward and attracted the attention of the imperial court.

At the earliest, the Tianfei belief was mainly rooted in Fujian and Taiwan and other places, as part of the maritime belief, mainly related to maritime activities and water safety. With the spread of Mazu belief to different places, due to the different customs and needs of different regions, the ministry of Mazu is also constantly changing and expanding. First of all, with the passage of time, the image of Mazu has not only been limited to Fujian and coastal areas, but also affected the Mazu temple in the inland and Tongliao in Inner Mongolia. Maritime trade and the development of coastal areas also promoted the spread of the Tianfei belief. Northern merchants and sailors often engaged in maritime trade in the south, so they also brought the goddess belief back to the North. The spread of this belief strengthened the recognition and reverence of the Tianfei belief in the northern region. With the increase of Mazu's priesthood and remarkable miracles, her status continued to rise. In the historical evolution of Mazu belief, her image also changes with the changes of region and times. This situation is particularly evident in the development of traditional Chinese beliefs, especially in the process of the relationship between gods and people, which shows a clear utilitarian color.

The Yuan Dynasty was a crucial period for the spread of Tianfei belief in the north. The Yuan government actively supported Mazu belief, incorporated it into the national sacrifice system, and regularly sent emissaries to the Mazu Temple for sacrifice. This policy strengthened the official recognition of Mazu belief and also promoted the spread of Mazu belief. In Jiangsu, Zhejiang and other places, the temple of Tianfei faith was gradually established and became the religious center of local believers.

From the Yuan to the Qing Dynasty, from Liaodong to Guangdong, the people who built Mazu temples repeatedly stressed that "God is not dependent, but man is dependent." Since Mazu is dependent on and serves humans, her image will change as human needs change. Because the image of Mazu changes constantly according to the

needs of times and regions, the image of Mazu seen by people in different times and places will also be different. It can be said that Mazu is a spirit with the characteristics of "thousands of faces", and the image of Mazu seen by different people is only composed of some aspects of her.

Mazu's status gradually developed from a local deity to a national deity, which was worshipped both officially and by the people. One of the reasons is that Mazu itself has the characteristics of "thousand faces", which can constantly change its image with the change of time, region and conditions to meet the spiritual needs of different groups. At the same time, the social, economic, and political development of China's coastal regions created a need for new deities with different divine powers. Mazu adapted to this demand and played different roles in different regions and groups to meet the needs of more believers. The belief in Mazu has a history of more than 1,000 years since the Northern Song Dynasty, whether it is the official title for many times, or the imperial sacrifice ceremony with the status of Confucian Confucianism, whether it is the mission of God to protect Lu Yundi, or the legend of protecting Zheng He's seven voyages to the Western seas, or even the capture of Penghu and Taiwan in the Qing Dynasty, these all meet the political needs of the official to develop maritime trade, establish national prestige, stabilize people's hearts, and resist foreign enemies.

The Yuan Dynasty was the era when Mazu belief spread on a large scale. At the same time, the development of the Maritime Silk Road also made the Yuan Dynasty increasingly dependent on Mazu. Especially in the Southern Song Dynasty, the image of Mazu began to change, and her priesthood changed from a local god to a national god of protection. This process was officially influenced, and Mazu was promoted to the rank of "concubine" and became a deity in the official view. In the Southern Song Dynasty, the capital moved to the coastal areas, the sea traffic became more developed, and the status of Mazu received greater attention. Mazu's miracles began to be promoted at the official level, and her image gradually transformed into the

"official god" of navigation protection. Mazu's title was upgraded from "Fei" to "Tianfei", marking that she had surpassed the status of a local deity and become a national deity. In the Yuan Dynasty, the image of Mazu received high official respect, she was regarded as the heaven level god of protection, and many official temples were built. Mazu belief in Yuan Dynasty was widely participated by the national forces, which further promoted the spread and development of her belief.

In general, the Tianfei faith is a religious belief that flourished in the south and gradually spread to the north. It is closely related to maritime trade, maritime safety and aquatic culture, so it has won the support of the court and the people in the process of its development to the north. The spread of this faith has not only promoted cultural exchanges between regions, but also enriched the religious diversity in China.

4.3 The further consolidation and deepening of the title of "Tianfei Neoma" in Ming Dynasty

1) Family and world -- the achievements and feelings of Mazu

In the Yuan Dynasty, Mazu was awarded the title of "Heavenly Princess" and showed a magical ability in protecting water transport on the sea, which directly contributed to the remarkable development of Mazu belief in the northern coastal areas. Entering the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Taizu began to commend Mazu for her magical performance in protecting water transport on the sea. The praise of Mazu in Ming Dynasty was more systematic and standardized than that in previous dynasties. Although the title has not been greatly promoted, the sacrificial activities of Mazu have become increasingly frequent, becoming an important part of the national political and economic events, and continuing to maintain her prominent position in the sea gods.

In the Ming Dynasty, the feudal rulers gradually began to honor the Mazu belief, mainly because of its role in overseas envoys and diplomatic activities. For example, on each of Zheng He's seven voyages to the West, he would pay tribute to the Heavenly Concubine before setting out, and offer thanks to the goddess after

successful voyages. These actions show that the Ming government took advantage of Mazu belief. At the same time, the legends about Mazu in Ming Dynasty were further developed on the basis of Yuan Dynasty.

Mazu belief has experienced continuous development from family, family, and then to hometown and country. At different levels, Mazu belief expresses different emotions. The stories in the legend, such as "Saving Father and seeking Brother", "Burning House Navigation", "Praying for rain to help the people", etc., fully demonstrate Mazu's deep feelings for her family and her people. Therefore, when Mazu died, the residents of the island spontaneously built temples for her. During this period, people's belief in Mazu was mainly gratitude to the elders in the family for protecting their descendants, similar to the reverence for the ancestor god in the family ancestral hall. With the repeated appearances of Mazu, the scope of her belief expanded to other areas and became a regional god of protection. However, since there are many Hakka immigrants from the north in Fujian, they pay more attention to ethnic cohesion. Therefore, Mazu has also become the clan god of the Hakka people, expressing the emotion of "we are all one family". At this stage, the legend of Mazu's apparition involves more "protecting the country and assisting the Holy", "God helps to capture the Kou", "Protecting the Envoy", etc., highlighting her patriotic spirit. The titles bestowed upon the Empress of Heaven (妈祖) by emperors throughout history, such as "英烈" (Heroic and Virtuous), "协正" (Harmonious and Upright), "振武" (Martial and Brave), and "绥疆" (Pacifying the Frontier), also reflect recognition and praise for her patriotic spirit.

Mazu belief began to spread on a large scale during Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas during the Yongle period of the Ming Dynasty, and her belief spread from China to the world. Mazu temples will be built wherever the Chinese gather, and overseas Chinese, especially those who have traveled across the oceans, have deep feelings for Mazu belief. With the development of Chinese immigrants and overseas Chinese communities, Mazu belief has been more widely spread and developed

overseas. Today, there are temples and halls in Chinese communities all over the world, and the Mazu belief is not only a belief, but also a symbol of Chinese cohesion and identity. All Mazu spirits are derived from the ancestral temple of Meizhou, which reflects the feeling of "sharing the same roots and ancestors as one family". Among the people of Taiwan, especially before the opening of cross-strait flights in 1987, more than 80% believed in Mazu. In 1987, 17 Taiwanese believers made a pilgrimage to Meizhou by way of Japan, which reflected the strong feelings of home and country and Cross-Strait affection. Although Mazu's real name is Lin Mo, she has never been called God's Mazu. First in the Penghu area of Taiwan, the Minnan people called her "mother". This title is the most respectful title for female elders in the south. Lin clan people call her "great-aunt", more like their own family elders - "parents". According to the research of scholars, the name of Mazu first appeared in the Penghu area of Taiwan, when the Ming and Qing Dynasties were banned from the sea, coastal fishermen lost their livelihood and went to the Southeast Ocean to Taiwan. When they left their hometown to earn a living across the sea, they all left with a statue of Mazu. After arriving at the local, in order to express the yearning and remembrance of Meizhou Mazu ancestral Temple, it was called Mazu, meaning the ancestor of mother and mother, implying the meaning of their roots in the motherland, and slowly the name of Mazu spread in Southeast Asia, and gradually accepted by the majority of believers. The title of Mazu also reflects the matriarchal culture, which attaches more importance to women and respects women's mother culture. It elevates the traditional "filial piety" to a new height, attaches importance to women, and respects traditional family values. Therefore, the concept of "family is fundamental" has been emphasized again in the tradition, and Mazu belief is the strengthening of the matrilineal culture, it not only carries forward the family tradition, but also expands the influence of the matrilineal culture, and further elevates the position of the mother to a sacred status in the matrilineal culture.

For the overseas Chinese living away from home, Mazu belief is a profound

emotion and a noble belief. Mazu belief has been passed down from generation to generation and has become the spiritual support in the hearts of overseas Chinese. In addition to good wishes, she also symbolizes the respect for the ancestors and the yearning for the hometown. Mazu belief in the hearts of overseas Chinese bearing a strong sense of home and country.

At present, there are nearly 20,000 Mazu palace temples in the world, distributed in 49 countries and regions. The Mazu spirits worshipped in these temples either came directly from the ancestral temple of Meizhou or indirectly from the Mazu spirits. Every year from the first month to March 23, the Mazu spirit will return to the ancestral temple of Meizhou, which is called "Mazu return home", symbolizing the tradition of searching for roots and asking ancestors. This shows the root culture of traditional Chinese culture and the feelings of the family - "family under the world".

2) With the formation of maritime trade, Mazu belief spread more widely in northwest Fujian

The Ming Dynasty was one of the heydays of China's maritime trade, and the Southern Sea Road began to play an important role in the economic, trade and cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. The coastal area of Fujian has become one of the important birthplaces of the Maritime Silk Road. A large number of people, such as merchants, sailors, and sailors, were active in the maritime trade and faced many challenges of maritime safety and risks, so seeking divine protection became a common need.

In the sixth year of Xuande in the Ming Dynasty (1431), Zheng He held a grand Mazu sacrificial ceremony in Changle, Fujian Province, on the eve of his seventh mission to the West. The scene of this ceremony is recorded in the stele of Tianfei Lingying. This inscription praises Mazu's protection for Zheng He's voyages. This event reflects that after hundreds of years of maritime Silk Road in Song and Yuan Dynasties, Mazu's status as the Chinese goddess of the sea has been firmly established.

With the expansion of trade routes, Mazu belief gradually spread to the northwest of Fujian, including Fuzhou, Ningde and other places. These areas also became important ports for maritime trade, so the Mazu belief was more widely spread in these places. Although western and northern Fujian are not dependent on the sea, the Mazu belief began to spread in these areas in the middle of Ming Dynasty due to the promotion of inland shipping industry and merchants. There are records of Mazu Temple in Changting County, Wuping County, Yongding County and other places. Tianfei Palace in Xidong Township of Wuping County should be built in Ming Dynasty, which proves the spread of Mazu belief in Hakka area. Yongding Xibei Tianhou Palace was built in the Ming Dynasty (1543) and is one of the representative Mazu temples in the Hakka region of western Fujian. There is also a Tingzhou hall in Fuzhou, which is a total of eight counties in the west of Fujian and serves Mazu inside.

The Mazu Temple in northern Fujian was built in Yuan Dynasty and Ming Dynasty, and the reconstructed Tianfei Palace in Yanping and Tianhou Palace in Shaowu all reflect the origin of Mazu belief in navigation. During the Jiajing period, the records of Shaowu Prefecture recorded the establishment of the Palace of Heavenly Concubine in Shaowu. It is also mentioned in the annals of Jianning House that Jianning built Tianfei Palace in the middle of Ming Dynasty, and later changed the worship of the local goddess Lady Lian.

To sum up, the belief in Mazu reached its peak in the Ming Dynasty, which fully reflected the decline of the land Silk Road and the rise of the sea Silk Road. Mazu's blessing in the sea voyage makes its position stable and becomes the symbol of the sea goddess. The establishment of Mazu Temple in the west and north of Fujian and the construction of guild hall all show the popularity of Mazu belief in Hakka area.

4.4 Origin of the "Tianhou (Empress of Heaven)" Title for Mazu in the Qing Dynasty

1) The Qing Dynasty's Decrees and Worship of Mazu

The Qing Dynasty gave Mazu more honorific titles for several times. Among them, the Kangxi Emperor had named Mazu as "protecting the country and protecting the people", and the Yongzheng Emperor named her "protecting the country and protecting the people and Qingfeng." These titles emphasized Mazu's important role in protecting the country and the people, reflecting the Qing government's great importance to Mazu belief. In the Qing Dynasty, Princess Tianfei was given the honorific title of "Queen of Heaven". In feudal society, the status of the emperor's concubines was divided into hierarchies, in which the "concubine" was second only to the empress, and in the imperial palace, the "queen" represented the highest status of the emperor's wife. Therefore, the title of Empress Tianfei as a diva means that Mazu has been equal to the God of Heaven.

In the early Qing Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty attached great importance to the sea goddess Mazu because of the unification of Taiwan. Mazu's divinity was greatly promoted in the court, and her divinity and the scale of sacrifice were also beyond the previous. In the Qing Dynasty, the title of Mazu began in the 19th year of Kangxi (1680), and the princess was given the word "heaven" and the title was Miaoling Zhaoying Hongren Puji Tianfei. Subsequently, in the 20th year of Kangxi's reign (1681), she was conferred the title of "Benevolent Heavenly Empress of Illuminating Spirit." In the 2nd year of Qianlong's reign (1737), the Ministry of Rites proposed changing her title to "Blessing and Protecting All Lives." In the 19th year of Qianlong's reign (1754), she was further honored as "Manifest Deity of Auspicious Obedience." In the 22nd year of Qianlong's reign, her title became "Tranquil Wave Propagating Benevolence." In the 6th year of Daoguang's reign (1826), she was once again honored as "Peaceful and Prosperous Benefactor." In the 18th year of Daoguang's reign (1838), she was bestowed the title "Spreading Blessings Across the Seas." In the 28th year of Daoguang's reign (1848), her title returned to "Tranquil Wave Propagating Benevolence." In the 53rd year of Daoguang's reign (1788), she was additionally conferred the title of "Benevolent Protector of Abundant Blessings."

In the 2nd year of Xianfeng's reign (1852), she was given the title "Peaceful Seas Bestowing Blessings." In the 3rd year of Xianfeng's reign (1853), her title was "Pacifying the Frontier." In the 5th year of Xianfeng's reign (1855), she was further honored with the titles "Kindness Surrounds Virtue" and "Guardian of Transportation and Prosperity." In the 7th year of Xianfeng's reign (1857), her title became "Martial and Brave, Pacifying the Frontier." In the 11th year of Tongzhi's reign (1872), her title was "Blessings and Auspiciousness." With a total of 62 characters, Mazu has the most titles among all the common gods. These titles reflect Mazu's role in maritime transportation, security and smooth navigation, and also show people's reverence and faith in her.

This is a great reward for the folk gods who are included in the national sacrificial system. From the names of these titles, during the reign of Kangxi, Wan Zhengse, governor of Fujian Province, requested the court to title Mazu as "Protecting the country and protecting the people, Miao Ling Zhao Ying, Hongren Puji Tianfei", and sent officials to the Mazu Temple to offer sacrifices. This shows that Emperor Kangxi continued the title of Empress Tian and held the Spring and Autumn Festival. After that, Shi Lang, in order to pray for the protection of the gods, asked for a seal on Mazu, but the Ministry of Rites did not elaborate on the two issues, and the court sent people to the Mudu Temple to offer sacrifices. Despite Shi Lang's request, the imperial court did not grant the title. It was not until the reign of Qianlong that Mazu was given the honorable title of "Diva".

พหุมนุ ปณุ ทิโต ชีเว



Figure 10: The historical origin of the "Heavenly Empress" plaque associated with Mazu can be traced back to the deep-rooted history and traditions of Mazu worship.

Mazu, originally named Lin Mo Niang, is the primary guardian deity of the coastal regions of Fujian, especially Matsu Island, and is considered the protector of the seas and fishermen. She is renowned for her miraculous powers and compassionate deeds, and is venerated as the Heavenly Empress. This title reflects Mazu's supreme position in the hearts of believers, regarding her as the Heavenly Empress with the utmost divine authority. The "Heavenly Empress" plaque is crafted as an elaborate decoration to showcase reverence for Mazu. It is typically placed in prominent positions within Mazu temples, capturing the attention of worshippers and pilgrims, while also adding a sense of solemnity and sacredness to the temple.

Source: Field Investigation on Matsu Island, Captured in 2023.

In the Qing Dynasty, the respect for Mazu not only lies in the promotion of her title, but also reflects the great importance of sacrifice. In terms of the frequency and scale of sacrifices, the Qing Dynasty far exceeded the previous generations. In the 19th year of Kangxi, Mazu was awarded the title of "Protecting the country and protecting the people". In the 59th year of Kangxi, Emperor Kangxi agreed to compile the Mazu sacrifice into the "Ritual Code", which was formally incorporated into the national sacrifice system. Emperor Kangxi himself wrote an "oratory to the Heavenly Concubine". Since then, due to the dependence on Mazu God for the rule of Taiwan,

the diplomacy of Ryukyu and the wine transport and other national events, the Qing Dynasty has repeatedly honored Mazu and given him plaques. Eleven years after Yongzheng, the sacrificial rituals of all prefectures and counties were basically unified, including the ritual of "Three Kowtows and Nine Prostrations" which only Confucius, Guan Di and Mazu could enjoy throughout the country. In the 22nd year of Jiaqing, Huiji Temple was established in Yuanmingyuan, and officials sent by the central government regularly offered sacrifices to Mazu. There are related records about Mazu in the five Assemblies compiled in the Qing Dynasty. After Yongzheng, more and more places were included in the sacrificial rites.

Not only that, the Qing Dynasty also formulated different levels of Mazu sacrificial ceremonies. Sacrifice is divided into "big sacrifice", "middle sacrifice", "small sacrifice" and "group sacrifice", of which "group sacrifice" includes the sacrifice to heaven. Mazu is ranked among the gods of the water house in the festival, and it is regularly sacrificed by the Ministry of Rites and local officials every spring and autumn. At the same time, the ceremony also read a special message for the sacrifice of Mazu, and the sacrificial activities vary from place to place.

The respect of Mazu in successive dynasties can also be seen from the construction of temples. Mazu Temple has undergone continuous renovation and upgrading, from the "Shunji" of Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty, through the "Tianfei Palace" of Ming Dynasty, to the "Tianhou Palace" of Kangxi. The titles given by each generation give Mazu a variety of spirituality to prove that the people's affairs are due to the diva spirit, which is actually the emperor's virtue of tenderness.

In general, the royal enthronements and sacrifices to Mazu in the Qing Dynasty reflected the great importance of Mazu belief, and Mazu became the patron saint of maritime navigation and public safety in the Qing Dynasty. The Qing government promoted the inheritance and development of Mazu belief in various ways, making it an important cultural and religious phenomenon in southern China.

2) Qing Dynasty imperial gift Tianhou Palace tablet and its historical background

The tablets in Tianhou Palace given by the Qing Dynasty are part of the cultural heritage in Chinese history, they represent the Qing emperor's attention to Mazu belief and appreciation of Mazu temple. These plaques were usually inscribed by the Qing emperors themselves to praise and bless Mazu, while also adding historical and religious solemnness to the Mazu temple.

During the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, reverence for the divine spirit of Mazu was primarily expressed through two methods: commendations and imperial edicts for sacrificial offerings. However, during the Qing Dynasty, these expressions of respect became more diverse. Not only did they include the bestowal of plaques, but this tradition of honoring Mazu began with Emperor Kangxi and continued through the reign of Emperor Guangxu, spanning a total of eight emperors, thus becoming a well-established tradition. Among these bestowed plaques, the most influential and widely known is the "神昭海表" (Divine Manifestation over the Seas) plaque conferred in the fourth year of Yongzheng's reign. As time passed, other bestowed plaques gradually faded into obscurity due to historical changes, loss of physical artifacts, and the scarcity of historical records. In some cases, misinterpretations and inaccuracies in transmission also occurred.

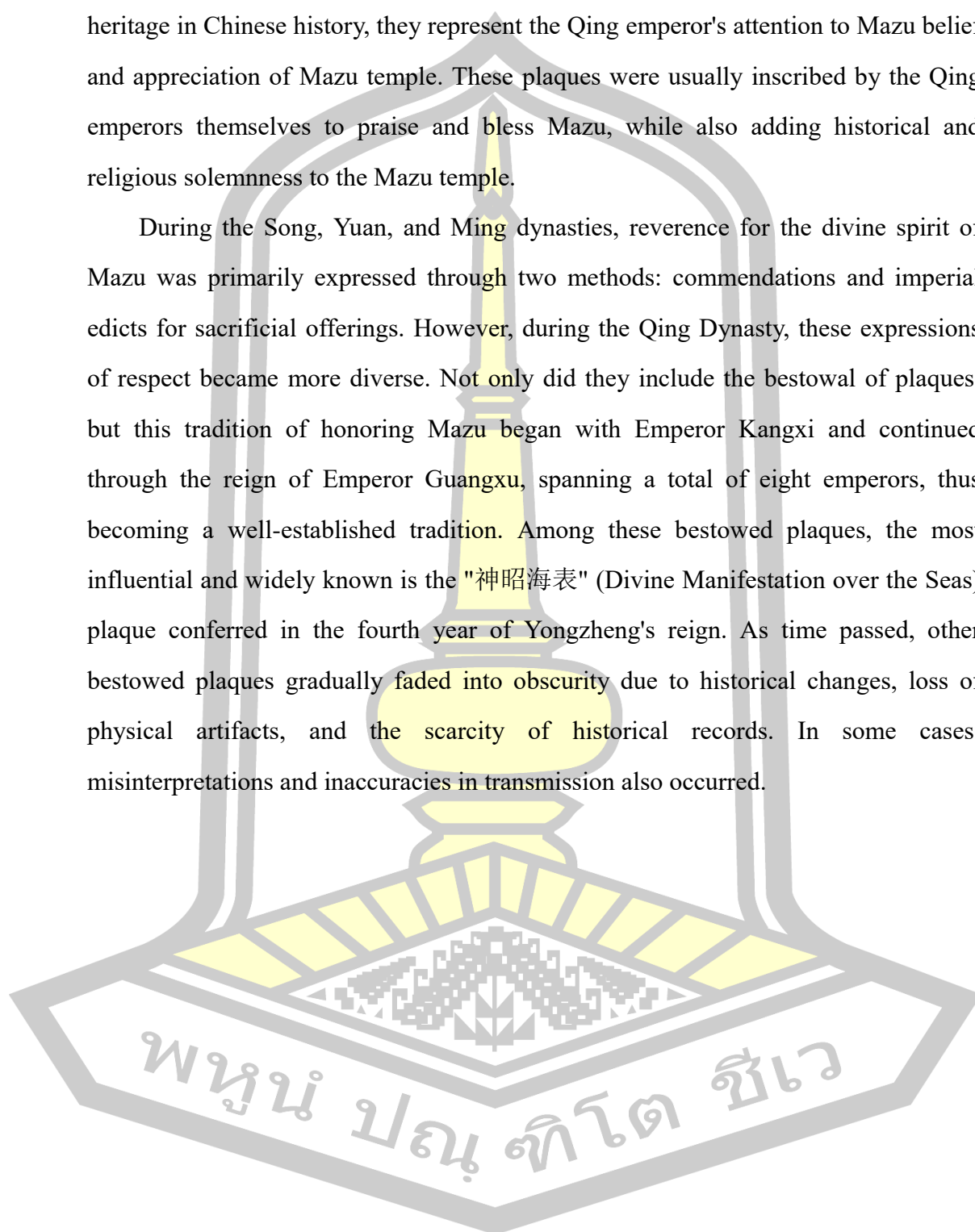




Figure 11: The "Divine Manifestation of the Seas" plaque, the plaque was personally inscribed by Emperor Yongzheng in the fourth year of his reign (1726 AD). Emperor Yongzheng also ordered the Fujian Navy to reproduce three identical plaques, which were subsequently hung in the Matsu Mazu Ancestral Temple on Meizhou Island, the Grand Matsu Temple in Tainan, Taiwan, and a Matsu branch temple in Xiamen.

Source: Field Investigation on Matsu Island, Captured in 2023.

1. Subduing Taiwan: During the early Qing Dynasty (1683-1788), in order to maintain national unity, the imperial court launched several military campaigns against Taiwan. Since the Fujian Navy officers and soldiers who participated in these wars devoutly worshipped Mazu, many legends emerged during the course of the wars about Mazu manifesting and assisting them. To boost morale and rally the troops, the imperial court utilized these legends and requested commendations, bestowing plaques. This practice of bestowing imperial plaques began during the reigns of Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, becoming a form of praise. As the situation in Taiwan stabilized and the Qing Dynasty reduced its military involvement, the frequency of bestowing plaques decreased accordingly. However, during the later years of the Qing Dynasty in the Tongzhi era, when Taiwan

experienced turmoil once again, the imperial court limitedly deployed forces, resulting in another seven instances of bestowed plaques.

Piracy at sea: During the Jiaqing period, the pirate forces in Fujian and Zhejiang waters were constantly expanding, resulting in serious piracy problems. In order to quell the unrest at sea, the court paid a huge price, and it was not until the 14th year of Jiaqing that it was successfully put down. In this process, Emperor Jiaqing repeatedly sent an oracle to heaven, but there is only one historical plaque, that is, a plaque to the Tianhou Palace in Taizhou, Zhejiang province. This plaque, as a case of Mazu giving plaque, has been handed down to this day.

Conferring titles to Ryukyu: Since the second year of Kangxi, Qing envoys conferred titles to King Zhongshan of Ryukyu many times, a total of eight times in 204 years. As the enthronement made the ship need to rely on Mazu's blessing, the court often had oracles and commendations in the process of enthronement. From the sixth canonization, a new form of plaque was added.

Protecting and Facilitating Canal Transport: During the reign of Emperor Daoguang, the transportation method for the south-north grain transfer was changed from canal transport to maritime transport in response to the breach of the Hongze Lake. During the process of canal transport, the Jiangsu Governor Tao Peng, believing he received the protection and blessings of the Heavenly Empress (Mazu), requested the bestowal of a plaque that read "安瀾利運" (Protecting and Facilitating Canal Transport). This type of bestowed plaque occurred a total of eight times.

The government and the people resist disasters: Mazu gradually expands its belief and is regarded as a goddess who defends disasters and protects the country and the family. In the late Qing Dynasty, the court frequently gave plaques to thank Mazu for her protection. Governor officials often asked for a plaque, and the court often approved it. Due to the incomplete historical archives, the specific reasons for some plaques are not yet detailed, but they are temporarily classified as such.

Overseas Chinese relief: in the late Qing Dynasty, the government was corrupt, the disaster relief was weak, and the Treasury was empty. In the face of major natural disasters, in addition to praying for the gods, the court also sent gentry merchants to solicit donations from overseas Chinese. There are three records in the archival historical materials that the Nanyang Guild Hall Tianhou Palace was awarded a royal plaque in recognition of its assistance.

Emperor tour: Qianlong and Jiaqing emperors loved to cruise, and they often inscribed plaques when visiting places of interest. There are historical records, there are five times the emperor visited the Tianhou Palace and gave plaques.

8. New temples: In the eleventh year of Yongzheng, the Ministry of Rites proposed that Mazu temples should be built or repaired in places where there was no ritual ceremony, and plaques were given to show encouragement. In this case, the plaque was given four times. The awarding of plaques in different situations reflects the Qing court's respect for Mazu belief and the social needs and political considerations under different historical backgrounds.

The plaque is not only a symbol of religious belief, but also a part of Chinese cultural tradition. These plaques represent the Chinese emperors' respect for Mazu belief in the Qing Dynasty, and also reflect the religious and cultural traditions related to the sea in southern China at that time. They are still cherished today by Mazu temples and devotees, and serve as a precious symbol of history and faith.

3) The Qing Dynasty's Enfeoffment of Ryukyu and Its Bestowment of Mazu

The conferring of Ryukyu and the conferring of Mazu in Qing Dynasty had a certain relationship, among which Ryukyu, as a region with close cultural and political relations with China, also had a certain influence on Mazu belief. The degree of reverence for Mazu in the Qing Dynasty was significantly improved compared with the previous dynasties. Not only the number of titles of Mazu increased, but also the number of inscribed plaques greatly increased, showing that the belief in Mazu was highly respected. Mazu rose to the rank of "diva" during this period and became the

most officially revered sea god. This change is related not only to the Qing Dynasty's management of the southeast coast after the recovery of Taiwan in the reign of Kangxi, but also to the Qing Dynasty's attention to the tributary relationship. Among the titles of Mazu, there are 12 characters related to enlisting Ryukyu.

The escalation of the granting of Mazu was also related to the emperor's attitude. When the emperors Yongzheng, Qianlong, Jiaqing and Xianfeng, who believed in Mazu, were in power, the intensity of bestowing was greatly increased. The Qing Court consolidated Mazu's authority in the belief of sea God by increasing titles and awarding plaques, so as to stabilize the coastal areas. Starting from the "Spring and Autumn Two Festivals" in which Wang Qi, Lin Linyan and others requested that Mazu be included in the national ritual during the Kangxi Dynasty, to Quan Kui and Zhou Huang requesting additional edicts to sacrifice Mazu during the Qianlong period, to Zhao Wenkai and Li Dingyuan requesting the title of Tianhou's parents in the Jiaqing period, and Qi Kun and Fei Xizhang requesting that the accompanying water god Chen Wenlong and Duke Fu be given the title of Mazu. During the Daoguang period, Lin Hongnian and Gao Renjian, as the last generation of Mazu's request, and Zhao Xin in the Tongzhi period, requested to increase the worship of Su God, and Mazu's status gradually rose, in which the Ryukyu conferring officials played a crucial role.

Most of the reasons for Ryukyu envoys to request the title of Mazu were because they were caught in a storm during their long voyage but miraculously escaped the danger. Some people feel as if they have been blessed because their voyage has been so smooth. At that time, due to limited technological conditions, crossing the ocean was a life-and-death journey, and they would attribute their safety to the "blessing of the gods." At the same time, Fujian played an important role in Sino-Ryukyu trade, from the ship workers and sailors in Fujian to the descendants of the Min people in charge of tributary affairs, they believed in Mazu. As the envoys sailed, they became vulnerable to infections from the ship's crew and the Ryukyu people, recognized the

Mazu faith, and fought for the title of Mazu after completing their missions.

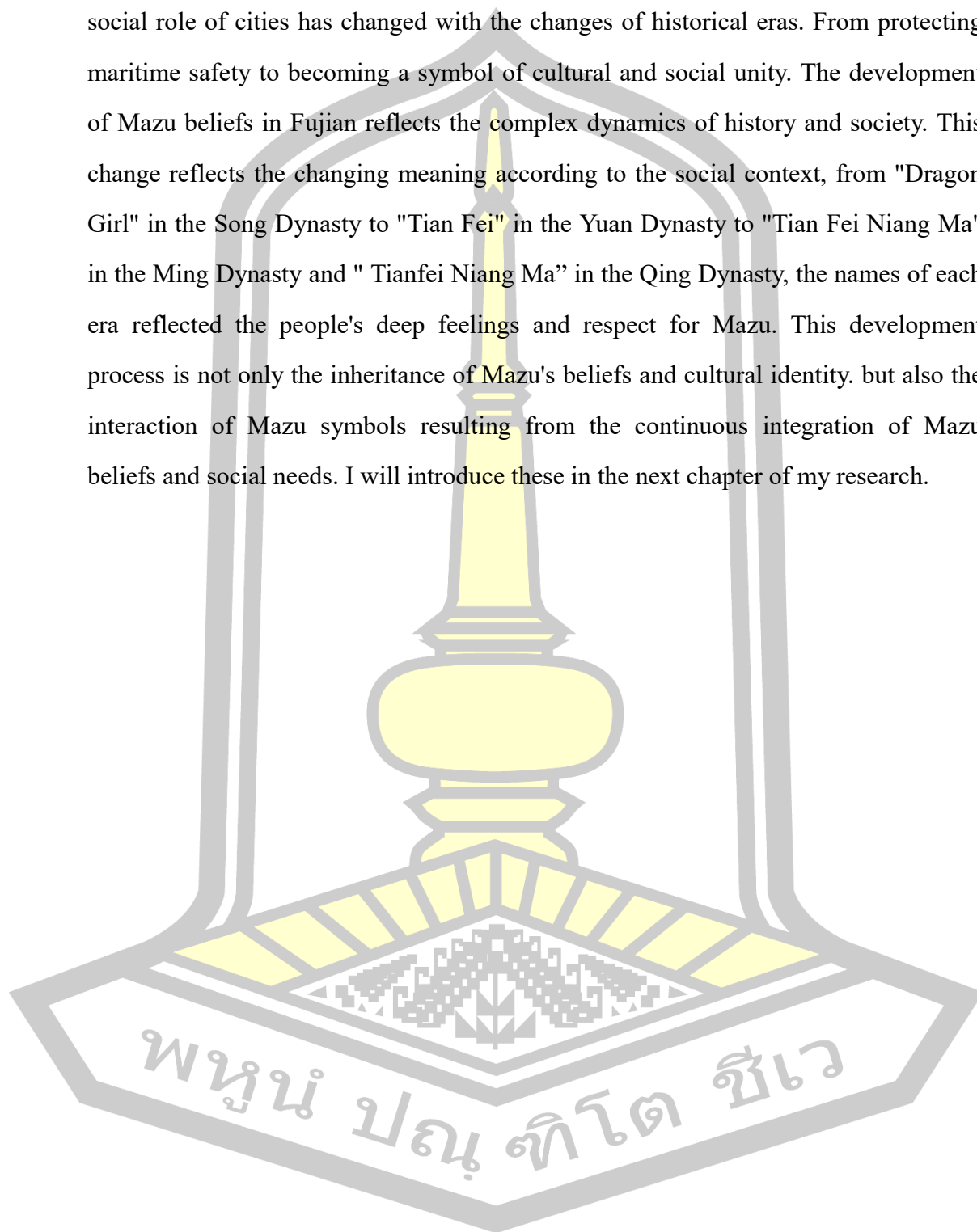
Compared with the Ming Dynasty, conferring envoys in the Qing Dynasty respected Mazu more, especially those from Fujian, such as Lin Lin, deputy consul in the 22nd year of Kangxi, Qi Kun in the 13th year of Jiaqing, Lin Hongnian in the 18th year of Daoguang, and Zhao Xin in the 5th year of Tongzhi. They themselves are Fujian people and have a deep recognition of Mazu culture. These envoys not only played an important role in requesting titles, but also promoted Mazu belief in the local area and contributed to the spread of Mazu culture.

In general, during the Qing Dynasty, the political status of Ryukyu and its connection with the Qing government may have influenced the Mazu belief practice in Ryukyu to a certain extent. The conferron-envoys of Ryukyu requested the granting of Mazu, which not only promoted the status of Mazu, but also spread the Mazu belief to Ryukyu through this activity, which had a profound impact on Ryukyu society. With the rise of the status of the diva, the conferment of titles increased the reverence for the gods, and a series of worship ceremonies were held, such as the oracle ceremony, the statue reception, and the visit to the Tianhou Palace, which were also introduced into Ryukyu. The Mazu belief in Ryukyu continued to exist with the three Heavenly Queen palaces as the core, which became an important link of political and cultural exchanges between Ryukyu and the Qing government.

Summary

Mazu culture is a phenomenon in the symbol system. Mazu is associated with deep and unique religions and beliefs in China's coastal cities. At the same time, Mazu has a long social and cultural history. From the Song Dynasty to the present The course of development of Mazu beliefs in coastal cities in Fujian has shown a variety of characteristics. It also reflects the combination of social change and people's spiritual needs. Moreover, the historical transformation of the development of Mazu culture in Fujian coastal cities is also a symbol of Mazu culture. The guidelines The

development of Mazu beliefs in the coastal cities of Fujian was diverse. And the social role of cities has changed with the changes of historical eras. From protecting maritime safety to becoming a symbol of cultural and social unity. The development of Mazu beliefs in Fujian reflects the complex dynamics of history and society. This change reflects the changing meaning according to the social context, from "Dragon Girl" in the Song Dynasty to "Tian Fei" in the Yuan Dynasty to "Tian Fei Niang Ma" in the Ming Dynasty and "Tianfei Niang Ma" in the Qing Dynasty, the names of each era reflected the people's deep feelings and respect for Mazu. This development process is not only the inheritance of Mazu's beliefs and cultural identity, but also the interaction of Mazu symbols resulting from the continuous integration of Mazu beliefs and social needs. I will introduce these in the next chapter of my research.



Chapter III

Symbolic Interaction—Historical Deconstruction and Modern

Construction of the Meaning of Mazu Culture

1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the historical deconstruction and modern construction of the meaning of Mazu culture. The first part of this chapter focuses on the development and characteristics of the folk path of Mazu's deification. Mazu belief, as a folk belief, initially underwent the process of deification from a mortal to a deity within the folk context. Rooted in folk belief, the worship of Mazu began its dissemination and development within the folk once deification was completed, presenting a unique folk path of Mazu's deification that differed significantly from the official path.

The interaction between the "official" and the "folk" determines the direction and dynamics of Mazu belief's development. Mazu belief evolved from a regional deity to a national sea goddess, and Mazu's titles progressed from "Lady" to "Holy Concubine," "Heavenly Concubine," and even to "Empress of Heaven." This evolution highlights the significant involvement and deep engagement of official authorities in Mazu belief compared to typical folk beliefs. Therefore, there emerged an official path of Mazu's deification in relative contrast to the folk path. The second part of this chapter seeks to reconstruct the official path of Mazu's deification through an examination of official narrative patterns. During the Song Dynasty, the rise and reverence of Mazu belief in official circles led to her becoming a protector goddess of local communities. In the Yuan Dynasty, the rise of Mazu belief was linked to the development of China's maritime economy, and Mazu was recognized as a national deity. In the Ming Dynasty, Mazu belief shifted towards supporting efforts against Japanese pirates. In the Qing Dynasty, Mazu was enshrined as the "Empress of

Heaven" and became the national sea goddess. However, during the period from the Republic of China to the Cultural Revolution, Mazu belief faced setbacks, and folk beliefs waned. After the reform and opening-up period, Mazu belief experienced a revival and played a positive role on the international stage. Through this series of evolutionary processes, we explore the official paths and interactions of Mazu culture in different historical stages, as well as the changes and interactions in modern times. We reexamine the development of Mazu's deification in ancient and modern times, as well as the decline and revival of Mazu cultural beliefs from the Republic of China to the Cultural Revolution. The second part of this chapter also delves further into the value representation of Mazu culture during the period of being recognized as intangible cultural heritage. (Schwartz, B, 2003)

The final part focuses on the analysis and characteristics of the paths of folk and official Mazu deification under symbol interaction. The entire process of the transformation of deities from their initial emergence, development, change, positioning, and even disappearance constitutes the continuous and enriching process of deification. Connecting the significant nodes of change within this process forms the path of deification. Folk and official entities, as different constructing subjects, actively participated in the construction of Mazu's deification based on their respective inner desires and practical needs.

2. The Folk Path and Interaction of Mazu Deification

Deification is the process of transformation from human to deity, representing the alienation of human powers. The transformation of Mazu Linmo from an ordinary woman into a universally revered sea goddess is a process of deification. Studying Mazu belief with the concept of deification as an entry point reveals that the process of Mazu's transformation from a human to a deity is a process actively shaped by different constructing subjects based on their own inner expectations and practical needs.

2.1 Historical Background of Human-to-Deity Transformation

During the Tang and Song dynasties, the Min region (coastal Fujian) became the center of a wave of deification, which was related to the flourishing of Taoism, frequent changes of political regimes, and people's belief in divine beings at the time. During this period, the Min region created numerous deities, some of whom were ordinary individuals who underwent the process of human-to-deity transformation and became objects of worship by the populace.

Mazu Linmo was one such figure. Born into a fishing family on Matsu Island, she became renowned for her knowledge of astronomy and meteorology, her maritime skills, and her ability to predict sea voyages. She assisted fishermen, merchants, and travelers in avoiding maritime disasters, and she even sacrificed her own life to save others during sea emergencies. Consequently, the local community established temples in her honor after her passing, considering her as a goddess of seafaring. Mazu became the protector goddess of maritime navigation, and sailors prayed to her for safe voyages before setting sail. It's worth noting that shipbuilding and navigation technology in Fujian made significant advancements during the Song and Yuan dynasties, and Mazu became the guardian of fishermen and seafarers, completing the process of her transformation from a human to a deity.

The process of Mazu Linmo's transformation from a mortal to a deity, including her life stories, was not documented in official temple records and scriptures. Instead, these stories were preserved in oral traditions among the folk. It was a continuous, evolving, localizing, and subjectivizing process, with her life stories being constantly supplemented, modified, localized, and personalized within the folk context. In the Qing Dynasty, the monk Zhao Chaocheng compiled these orally transmitted stories into a collection titled "Tianfei Xiansheng Lu" (Records of the Manifestations of the Empress of Heaven). This process of transmission included different versions of Mazu's birth and rescue stories. Some recurring motifs in Mazu folklore, such as "divine birth," "miraculous birth," and "rescue," are prevalent in these stories.

In Mazu legends, the stories of her birth have various variations, including themes like her transformation from a dragon maiden, being born from a divine dream, and her unusual birth signs. These variations underscore the miraculous and supernatural abilities of Mazu, portraying her as possessing unique attributes from birth. In Mazu legends, the "rescue" motif is of utmost importance. Folk legends describe how Mazu assisted people, including those from the lower strata of society, relatives, and overseas merchants, in various distressing situations. These stories emphasize Mazu's compassion and divine power, making her an object of seeking help and faith. Additionally, other motifs in Mazu legends, such as "testing" and "divine assistance," have contributed to the richness and diversity of Mazu folklore. In summary, the inheritance and process of deification of Mazu belief involve a colorful tradition of oral storytelling influenced by various motifs, providing abundant material and creative inspiration for the evolution and development of Mazu legends. (Xiang Yunju, 2004)

2.2 Evolution of Mazu's Deification: Changing Characteristics and Folk Titles

Initially, Mazu was not given a specific name, and people simply knew her as "Miss Lin from Meizhou." In ancient times, women typically did not have names, and Mazu was no exception. People referred to her as "Goddess" or "Spiritual Lady" based on her supernatural abilities, such as saving lives and foreseeing fortunes. Some even attributed her the title of "Dragon Lady" due to her proficiency in navigating and rescuing from maritime perils, considering her as the daughter of the sea god, Dragon King. However, these titles were short-lived, and during the Ming Jiajing era, the term "Neoma" (娘娘) emerged, which persisted in folk usage in mainland China for a long time. It wasn't until the late 1950s, with the decline of Niángmā belief on the mainland and the gradual rise of Mazu worship in Taiwan, that the term "Māzǔ" gradually replaced "Neoma" ."

The use of the title "Neoma" during the Ming Dynasty is well-documented and can be found in Western literature from the 16th and 17th centuries. In a letter written

by a missionary named Gaspar da Cruz to his fellow Christians in 1549, he mentioned an encounter on a Chinese sailing ship: "On the left side of the cabin, (ellipsis) there is an image of a Niangma (Neoma), for she is the protector of sailors and pirates." "Neoma" is a transliteration of the Minnanese term "Niángmā," indicating that early Western knowledge of Mazu might have come from Minnanese individuals who acted as interpreters, translators, and intermediaries. Western navigators came to the East primarily to acquire spices and convert Christians, and they needed to understand Chinese trade practices and also became interested in the beliefs of the Chinese. Mazu belief, being a widely spread folk religion along the southeastern coast during the Ming and Qing periods, attracted Western attention. In over a century of Western documentation, they continued to use the term "Neoma."

The transition from "Neoma" to "Māzǔ" initially occurred in early Qing Taiwan. There is no definitive conclusion in academia regarding why the early Taiwanese settlers decided to change "Niángmā" to "Māzǔ." Mr. Jiang Weitan proposed his own theory in the article "The Origin of the Name 'Māzǔ,'" suggesting that "Māzǔ" is a shortened or abbreviated form of "Niángmā's ancestor." However, we won't delve into this topic further here, and interested readers can refer to Mr. Jiang's relevant writings.

During the Qing Dynasty, Zhao Yi wrote in his work "Gai Yu Congkao": "When traveling to Taiwan, miraculous occurrences related to deities are especially noticeable. The local people refer to the deity as 'Māzǔ.' When faced with danger at sea, calling upon Māzǔ immediately elicits her divine response. If one were to invoke 'Tianhou' (Heavenly Queen), the deity arrives but takes longer. 'Māzǔ,' in the local vernacular, signifies the mother's family name." The populace did not favor the cold and lofty title "Tianhou," and thus, they adopted a more nuanced approach to express their cultural identity by distinguishing between "Māzǔ" and "Tianhou" based on the speed of Māzǔ's assistance. Moreover, the jia-ma (甲馬) used in Mazu rituals was categorized into three types, each with different functions: "Tianhou-Shengmu...

Lingxian is the quickest to respond, and she is highly revered by those at sea. When facing sudden winds and waves, invoking her yields immediate results. If one invokes 'Tianhou,' the deity comes but may take some time. 'Māzǔ,' in the local dialect, signifies the mother's family name." Depicting Māzǔ standing with her usual attire, disheveled hair, washing her feet, and wielding a sword represents her authentic identity as a fishing woman. It reflects the genuine recognition of the common people towards the goddess.

If the series of title changes from "Madam - Consort - Heavenly Consort - Heavenly Empress" represents the evolution of Mazu's official titles, then "Goddess - Spiritual Lady - “Neoma” - Māzǔ" reflects the evolution of her titles in folk belief. This indicates that the folk did not simply adopt the conferred titles but used a unique form of expression, designating the goddess they deeply respected as "Māzǔ." The title "Māzǔ" bears the imprint of regional characteristics and folk culture, signifying not her real name but rather a term of reverence from the people of the Minnan and Cantonese regions. In traditional Chinese culture, women usually have a stronger connection to their maternal families, especially to their aunts and grandaunts. Consequently, the people regarded Lin Moniang, the goddess of the sea, as their most trustworthy guardian, endowing her with a name that has persisted across the seas and beyond - Māzǔ.

2.3 External Transmission and Localization of Mazu's Deific Characteristics

The localization of Mazu's deity features in various regions of China encompasses alterations to the goddess's identity and the proliferation of her divine functions. Mazu worship has been passed down for millennia across different regions of mainland China, from south to north, east to west, with temples dedicated to her lining the coasts and reaching inland. During the Southern Song period, Mazu belief had already spread to coastal towns south of the Yangtze River and extended northward to areas like Tianjin, Yantai, the Matsu Islands, Qingdao, Qinhuangdao, Jinzhou, and Beijing. The worship of Mazu flourished. In the Ming and Qing periods,

Mazu belief continued to expand northward, taking root in Hebei and Liaoning. Notably, Mazu belief also found firm footing in inland regions, following rivers and the migration of Minnanese people.

The localized spread of Mazu worship has not only enriched the deity's divine essence but has also sustained her vitality in various regions. However, as beliefs spread through time and space, variations and ruptures in understanding have emerged in different areas. Traditional cultural elements have gradually integrated into local beliefs, resulting in a "localized" divine character for Mazu.

1) Alterations to the Goddess's Identity:

One of the most distinctive features of Mazu worship's localization is the alterations made to the goddess's identity. The deity's identity plays a crucial role in folk beliefs, and without it, the belief loses its essence. For instance, in Zhejiang's Ningbo, Wenzhou, Taizhou, and the Zhoushan Islands, the worship of "Tianhou Niangniang" (Heavenly Empress) has been passed down. However, most fishermen in these areas do not know that "Tianhou Niangniang" is, in fact, Lin Moniang from Meizhou, Fujian. They believe that the deity is a character from a theatrical play called "Lixi Huantai" (狸猫换太子), where the role of the deity is played by Kou Chengyu (寇承御). Similarly, in Taihu Wuxing Daqiankou of Jiangsu, there is a "Tianhou Temple," which local fishermen consider as a deity conferred by Emperor Renzong of Song. The coastal regions of Guangdong have developed the belief in the "Three Ladies," showcasing variations in the divine identity during the localization process. These examples illustrate the rewriting of Mazu's background and identity during localization, blending the Mazu belief with local culture more seamlessly.

2) Proliferation of Divine Functions:

Another prominent feature of localization is the "proliferation" of Mazu's divine functions. Different regions have developed unique functions for Mazu in their beliefs. For instance, in the Pengxi area of Quanzhou, Fujian, Mazu is revered as the "Grain Goddess," and worshippers offer wooden barrels filled with rice grains in front

of her statue, symbolizing the wish for abundant harvests. In Chenghai, Mazu is seen as a water goddess because the local agriculture relies on the rich river waters, and thus, she is worshipped to ensure the prosperity of agriculture. In some areas, Mazu is regarded as a deity who grants success in the imperial examination system. These expanded functions add diversity to Mazu worship in different regions and reflect the close connection between belief and local culture and life.

In summary, the localization of Mazu worship enriches the goddess's divine essence and maintains her vitality in various regions. Alterations to the goddess's identity and the proliferation of her divine functions are significant manifestations of this localization process. These features highlight the fusion and evolution of Mazu belief with local culture.

2.4 Diversified Divine Characteristics of Mazu

The localization of the divine characteristics has enriched the essence of Mazu belief, actively responding to the top-down standardization strategies imposed by the authorities. It's worth noting that the localized nature of the deity is not the sole factor guiding folk belief pathways. In contrast to official directives, the government, while attempting to consolidate the belief in the Sea Goddess Mazu, imposed strict "sea bans" policies, restricting civilian maritime activities. Nevertheless, the pressures of survival and the spirit of adventure drove the devotees of Mazu to brave life-threatening sea voyages. These individuals became targets of imperial crackdown, abandoned by the central authority, yet Mazu did not forsake them. As a result, carrying their faith in Mazu, they embarked on a new path for the deification of Mazu in folk belief.

1) Migration Waves and the Fluid Migration of Mazu Belief

Historical records trace back to the Tang Dynasty when numerous Chinese settlers established themselves in Southeast Asia, either for trade or to escape turmoil in their homeland. Arab traveler Mazudi documented in the 10th century that he encountered many Chinese engaged in agriculture in Sumatra, particularly in

Balingpandang (now known as Palembang). These individuals were said to have arrived to escape the chaos of the Huang Chao Rebellion in China. By the Song Dynasty, records of overseas Chinese, known as Huaqiao (华侨), were abundant in Chinese historical texts. Overseas merchants often resided abroad for extended periods, with some not returning for a decade, gradually forming overseas Chinese communities. During the early Ming Dynasty, in the era of Zheng He's maritime voyages, overseas Chinese communities began to take shape, and a significant number of immigrants began settling abroad. Concurrently, the founder of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang, implemented strict maritime bans.

For the subjects of Mazu, the Ming Dynasty was a tragic era. The sea bans policy persisted for a daunting 276 years, upheld as the "ancestral admonition" of Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang. Early on, during the reign of Emperor Zhu Di, there was a slight relaxation of the sea bans for about 20 years. However, it was not until the first year of the Longqing era in 1567 that individual trade was allowed in Yuegang, Zhangzhou, Fujian, permitting voyages to the Eastern Ocean. For most of the Ming Dynasty, overseas commerce by individual merchants was considered "illegal," and they were labeled as "bandits." These overseas merchants not only faced the perils of sea voyages but also the pursuit of imperial forces. Therefore, they enshrined Mazu on their ships, seeking safe journeys. This phenomenon caught the attention of Western colonizers in the 16th century, who documented these rituals.

Under the protection of Mazu, these overseas immigrants safely crossed the seas, and upon landing, they began venerating Mazu to express their gratitude for her protection. Initially, they established simple "Altars of the Lady" (亚答屋) at the entrances of streets for Mazu worship, praying day and night. The early Mazu temples were typically small, even makeshift structures constructed with earth and stones. However, these overseas Chinese firmly believed in Mazu's ability to ward off calamities and ensure their safety. Consequently, they built Mazu temples in their new lands, where the goddess's spirit would guard the community, preventing disasters.

Mazu became the guardian deity of the overseas immigrants' safety. In the 16th century, Western colonizers arrived in Southeast Asia, and overseas Chinese communities faced oppression from colonial rulers, leading to difficult lives and a lack of government protection. In such circumstances, Mazu belief became the spiritual support for overseas Chinese. While there were not many Mazu temples at the time, Mazu's faith held a special place in the hearts of overseas Minnanese, providing solace to the lonely souls of the wanderers.

With the arrival of the Qing Dynasty, Mazu belief continued to grow overseas. Overseas Chinese communities had accumulated enough strength during the Qing period to actively participate in the construction of Mazu temples. These temples were often grand and magnificent structures, becoming local landmarks. These temples served not only as places of worship but also as cultural centers for the community, carrying on the cultural heritage of overseas Chinese.

2) Diverse Divine Characteristics of Mazu in Chinese Communities

In the Ming Dynasty, there were not many overseas Mazu temples because the construction of such temples required a certain level of faith coverage and economic capacity. However, the functions of Mazu belief began to change during this period. This was due to the gradual settlement of Chinese immigrants overseas, leading to changes in their professions and living environments, which drove the diversification of Mazu belief. The originally maritime-related divine functions of Mazu gradually faded, replaced by a variety of other functions, showcasing the diversified divine characteristics of Mazu.

This diversification is mainly evident in several aspects:

1. Guardian Deity of Life Safety: As Chinese immigrants settled overseas, they faced unfamiliar territories and dangers. Mazu became their guardian deity of life safety, as they believed she could protect them from threats from indigenous populations and persecution by colonial powers.

2. Religious Syncretism: In some regions, Mazu belief merged with other

religions such as Catholicism. Chinese immigrants might outwardly practice Catholicism but still secretly venerate Mazu, reflecting the feature of religious pluralism. Some Chinese celebrated Mazu's birthday while also participating in Catholic worship in churches, demonstrating the fusion of religious cultures.

3. Sharing of Business Information: Mazu temples became primary sources of business information for Chinese merchants. In foreign lands, Chinese immigrants established channels of information exchange through Mazu temples to acquire the latest business information, helping them survive and thrive in competitive business environments.

4. Maintaining Balance in Competition: Chinese merchants actively sought self-improvement but needed an institution to regulate cutthroat competition. Mazu temples played a crucial role in maintaining order and fair competition, becoming a prerequisite for the sustainable development of commercial trade.

5. Ethnic Cohesion: Mazu temples served not only as units of kinship and geographical organization but also in occupational organizations. These temples fostered connections and emotional identity among Chinese immigrants, strengthening ethnic cohesion.

6. Cultural Inheritance: Mazu temples also carried the cultural inheritance of Chinese immigrants. They served as places where Chinese children received their early education, preserving elements of Chinese culture, including language, customs, traditional crafts, and more.

In summary, during the Ming Dynasty, Mazu belief underwent multidimensional changes overseas. Mazu temples served not only as religious sites but also fulfilled various roles, including connecting overseas compatriots, disseminating business information, maintaining competitive balance, strengthening ethnic cohesion, and preserving culture, making them an integral part of overseas Chinese communities.

(Abbott, L,1993)

3. Official Path and Interaction of Mazu Deification at Different Stages

The formation, development, and fading of deities represent the continuous transformation and enrichment of deification, with pivotal changes serving as the connecting nodes in the path of deification. The same deity may follow different paths in the process of deification due to the inner aspirations of different groups and societal demands. Mazu, as a product of the deification wave during the Song Dynasty in the Min region, received imperial accolades in the course of her development, transforming from a regional deity into a national sea goddess. This process enjoyed both folk support and official promotion. Based on different constructing subjects, Mazu's deification manifested two distinct trajectories: the folk path and the official path.

Firstly, from the origin of these paths, Mazu's folk deification took place within the folk during the Song Dynasty, rooted in the prayers and societal needs of the common people. This is reflected in folk narrative motifs and the logic of "deification of a mortal." Mazu's deification was not a product of whimsy but rather deeply embedded in folk traditional narrative patterns, endowing it with profound folk characteristics. In contrast, Mazu's official deification commenced after her transformation from a mortal to a deity, as per the official requirements of incorporating folk beliefs into the orthodox sacrificial system, forming a top-down vertical path. The folk path was rooted in a tradition of nearly a thousand years of thinking, while the official path was a bottom-up vertical process.

Secondly, in terms of the direction of these paths, the folk path exhibited horizontal spatial characteristics, while the official path possessed vertical temporal characteristics. The folk path spread through oral narratives, forming stable historical evaluations, and maintained inclusiveness that transcended social classes and ethnic groups. The official path employed written expressions, but evaluations fluctuated under different historical contexts and were susceptible to political needs and interests, imbuing Mazu belief with class distinctions. Officially, Mazu belief was

used for educating and controlling the populace, serving as a means of social control. The official path of Mazu's deification was a bottom-up vertical process, originating from the folk and later expanding nationwide to meet political demands.

Lastly, in terms of the endpoints of these paths, during the Qing Dynasty and the maritime crises it faced, official Mazu belief reached its zenith, becoming the national sea goddess. However, with the onset of Western conflicts with China and the subsequent collapse of the Qing Dynasty, official Mazu belief waned. In contrast, folk Mazu belief did not disappear but continued to evolve, adapting to the needs of a new era and demonstrating vitality. The folk path of Mazu's deification assumed a horizontal form radiating from Matsu Island to all directions. During the Ming and Qing periods, Mazu belief also extended significantly to overseas regions, showcasing its prosperity.

The interaction between the "official" and the "folk" is crucial for the development of belief systems. Scholars and officials exerted control over and constructed folk beliefs through narratives. The history of Mazu belief encompasses its evolution from a local to a national phenomenon, with official and folk paths interweaving and mutually influencing each other. The history of Mazu belief is a dynamic narrative text collectively authored by multiple narrative subjects, characterized by interplay across time and space, generation, and variation.

3.1 The Rise and Promotion of Mazu Belief by the Song Dynasty Authorities

1) Folk Reverence for the Legend of Mazu

"Lingfei, a maiden, and the fragrance of incense rises over Meizhou." In the first year of the Jianlong era of the Northern Song Dynasty (960 AD), Lin Mo, known as Mazu, was born on the surrounded-by-ocean Meizhou Island as an ordinary fisherman's daughter. Meizhou Island was a land of poverty with numerous mountains, and its residents relied on fishing for their livelihoods. Lin Mo grew up by the sea, possessing not only profound knowledge of astronomy and meteorology but also remarkable seafaring skills, even being able to predict the weather. In folk belief, the manifestation of

deities is often crucial in maintaining believers' faith. To make the presence of deities more reasonable, the creation of extraordinary backgrounds for their births is a common narrative pattern in folklore. Therefore, "divinely birthed" and "miraculously born" became frequent themes in folklore throughout history, as seen in both official historical accounts and myths and legends.

First, let's examine the birth legend of Mazu. There are several main interpretations: one connects Mazu with the Dragon Girl since the Four Seas Dragon Kings have represented ancient Chinese sea deities since the Han Dynasty, naturally associating Mazu with the Dragon Girl in folklore. Another interpretation describes Mazu's birth as "born from a dream," representing the theme of "miraculous birth." According to the legend, Mazu's mother had a dream after praying for a child, during which South Sea Guanyin bestowed upon her an elixir (or a sacred bowl flower). Subsequently, she became pregnant. The third interpretation involves "omen," which is extensively documented in ancient historical records, such as divine light and extraordinary atmospheric phenomena accompanying the births of emperors and important figures. Mazu's birth was also accompanied by loud noises, landslides, twinkling Venus, radiant red lights, and a fragrant aroma, all of which were "omens" that showcased her divine abilities.

The narrative structure of Mazu Lin Mo's story can be summarized as "formerly a deity, now a mortal, and ultimately ascending to divinity," aligning with the concepts of "three lives matching" and "three lives enlightened" in folk belief. This belief stems from Buddhism's concept of "three existences," representing past, present, and future existences, forming a comprehensive understanding of individual life that runs through the concepts of karma and reincarnation. In Mazu's legend, this narrative pattern manifests as her previously being a deity, then being born as a mortal, and finally ascending to divinity.

In folk tales, "rescue in times of distress" is a significant theme. In official narratives, Mazu primarily assisted high-ranking officials, but in folk legends, her

focus was on aiding the common people. She protected relatives, fellow villagers, and even overseas merchants. In these stories, Mazu blessed ordinary people to shield them from natural disasters and calamities. Additionally, Mazu engaged in battles against demons and monsters, a prevalent theme in folklore. Mazu's tales of vanquishing demons highlighted her extraordinary powers and aligned with people's expectations of deities.

The themes in the Mazu legend, including "divinely birthed," "miraculously born," "rescue in times of distress," and others, are deeply rooted in the folk narrative tradition, contributing to the reverence of Mazu belief.

2) Support from the Court and Officialdom Expanded the Influence of Mazu Belief

Mazu belief initially began as a folk religious practice in the Putian region of Fujian during the Northern Song Dynasty. At first, Mazu was a localized deity, living by the seaside and gaining deification through her acts of saving seafarers. In 987, after her transformation into an immortal, she was recognized as the protector of maritime voyages, ensuring the safety of ships. Her primary role was to safeguard local fishermen during their sea journeys. However, during the Song Dynasty (1121-1125), Mazu's status began to transition from the realm of folklore to official recognition. On a diplomatic mission, Lu Yundi encountered a severe storm at sea but safely navigated through it. He reported this event to the imperial court, and in 1123, the court granted the title "Shunji" to Mazu's ancestral temple. From that point, Mazu's status began to receive official support. During the two Song Dynasties, Mazu's title was bestowed upon her fourteen times, progressing from "Madame" to "Consort," and her image gradually evolved from that of a local folk goddess to that of an official deity. The official intervention in Mazu belief marked a qualitative leap in her image. She shed her witch-like appearance, officially upgraded to a deity, and began her path towards mainstream faith.

Furthermore, the development of coastal regions and the prosperity of maritime

trade along the southeastern coast following the Northern Song Dynasty led to an increase in official maritime activities. This elevated Mazu's status, eventually positioning her as the protector of maritime navigation. This significance was particularly amplified during the Southern Song Dynasty when the capital moved to a coastal region, further emphasizing control over coastal areas. Consequently, Mazu's miracles began to be widely publicized. During the Southern Song period, Mazu's title evolved from "Linghui Madame" to "Consort." Her role gradually shifted from being a local "folk goddess" to becoming an official "national deity" and the "deity of public affairs" responsible for protecting the nation.

In the Southern Song period, Mazu's divine responsibilities underwent significant changes. Her tasks became closely tied to the interests of the state, including suppressing banditry and assisting in battles. These divine events were determined by the state's needs, expanding Mazu's divine jurisdiction. During the Southern Song period, Mazu belief also began to spread to regions beyond Fujian. This expansion was partly due to Fujianese migration but primarily driven by official support.

In traditional Chinese culture, the worship of deities was often conducted by one's own descendants, and deities who received offerings from entire regions or the entire nation were objects of veneration. Marriage held a special place in a woman's life. In official titles, Mazu was bestowed titles signifying her roles as a wife and mother, highlighting her transformation from an "unmarried maiden" to a "married woman." This tacitly normalized the image of a woman who died unmarried but later became a deity. Although government intervention played a significant role, the widespread dissemination and deep-rooted nature of Mazu belief also stemmed from her continued miracles. These legends formed a stable narrative framework, depicting the image of the Mazu deity and embedding it deeply in the hearts of the people. Government involvement, by strengthening the construction of Mazu temples and religious rituals, enhanced its influence on believers, further consolidating Mazu

belief.

In summary, Mazu belief gradually transitioned from a folk belief to an official belief, and her role evolved from a local deity to a national protector, with official intervention playing a crucial role in this transformation. In this process, changes in her titles reflected the influence of power on the image of Mazu. Orthodox titles portrayed Mazu as a wife and mother, aligning with the societal perception of women's roles and further solidifying her status. Additionally, Mazu's pre-existing popularity among the people, thanks to her reputation for witchcraft and aiding others during her lifetime, provided a foundation for government involvement.

3) The History of Folk Temples and the Origin of the "Mazu Ascension" Legend

Mazu, the widely revered maritime goddess and protector of fishermen in the southern coastal regions of China, has a rich cultural background and a deep-rooted tradition of belief associated with the history of folk temples and the legend of her ascension. Mazu, also known as Mo Niang, was said to have ascended to the heavens at the age of twenty-eight during the Song Dynasty (987 AD), precisely on the eighth day of the ninth lunar month.

On the eve of her ascension, she tidied her belongings, bid farewell to her family one by one, and spoke to them, "Tomorrow is the Double Ninth Festival, and I wish to ascend a high mountain, temporarily departing from this bustling world, so I bid my farewells in advance." The next day, she adorned herself beautifully, applied makeup, and bade farewell to her family and the sisters in her village. Although everyone was reluctant to part with her and wanted to accompany her, she politely declined, saying, "This time, I intend to climb a very distant mountain, and the journey is far. Please do not follow me, my dear sisters." With heavy hearts, they parted ways, and she ascended Meifeng Mountain. Her sisters watched from afar and suddenly heard melodious music emanating from the sky, with eight musical instruments playing in harmony. As they looked up, they saw a magnificent celestial chariot, accompanied by attendants and flags, slowly approaching. Multicolored auspicious clouds descended

upon Meifeng, and Mo Niang ascended on the clouds, gradually rising into the sky. The onlookers couldn't help but sigh in wonder. She ascended into the sky, and before long, the colorful clouds converged, and she was no longer visible!

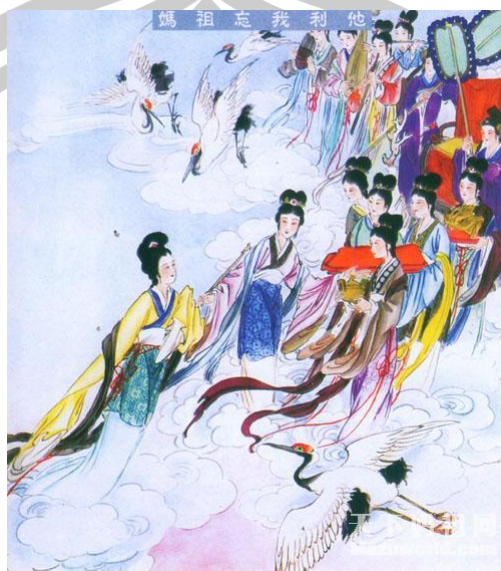


Figure 12: A scene depicting Matsu's ascension to heaven, painted by a local artist based on historical records. When Matsu was twenty-eight years old, during the fourth year of Emperor Taizong's reign (987 AD), on the eighth day of the ninth lunar month, she packed her belongings at home and gave instructions to her family. She then told her family, "Tomorrow, on the Double Ninth Festival, I intend to ascend to a high place, temporarily leaving behind the noise and disturbances of the mortal world. I wanted to bid you farewell in advance.

Source: Matsu Ancestral Temple Archives, Accessed in 2023.

In ancient times, the worship of Mazu was considered a divine protector of fishermen against sea disasters and storms. Mazu temples were typically constructed along the coast or in fishing villages, serving as the spiritual centers for fishermen and coastal residents. The purpose of building these temples was to seek the blessings of Mazu, ensuring the safety and abundance of the fishermen's harvests.

During the Song Dynasty, in the region of Putian, Fujian, there existed the wealthy and influential Li clan. Among them, Li Fu, the brother of Li Zhen, was a valiant warrior who had ventured north to resist the Jin invaders. His generous contributions, coupled with his involvement in the restoration of temples, led to the earliest recorded traces of Mazu worship in historical documents. This documentation,

preserved in the "Baitang Li Clan Genealogy," dates back to the Northern Song Dynasty (1150 AD). It is one of the earliest known records concerning Mazu and is separated by only 163 years from the legendary time of Mazu's ascension (the fourth year of the Yongxi era in the Northern Song Dynasty, 987 AD). This solidifies the historical significance of the Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island. Moreover, this document also unveils geographical information related to another temple known as the Shundun Shrine, believed to be associated with Mazu worship. Hence, this historical record provides compelling evidence that Li Fu's contributions extended beyond financial support for the reconstruction of the Mazu temple. More significantly, he left behind a written account that conveys vital information: the rise of the Mazu temple originated on the coastal island of Meizhou.

From Liao Pengfei's "Record of the Reconstruction of the Shunji Temple at Shengdun Ancestral Temple," we can learn about some key factors in the early development of Mazu belief. This temple record covers four categories of Mazu devotees: fishermen, merchants, local residents (gentry), and officials. The interactions between these four categories of devotees created conditions for the early development of Mazu belief. The temple record recounts a story: there were often celestial lights appearing at night above Shengdun Temple, and the fishermen discovered a sacred wood knot (referred to as Shunji) and brought it home, but it would return to its original location on its own the next day. At the same time, the residents of Shengdun had dreams of the goddess instructing them to build a temple there. This story illustrates the interaction between ordinary people and the goddess, which played a pivotal role in the formation and development of Mazu belief. Furthermore, the temple record involves geographical factors. Shengdun Temple is located on the north bank of the Mulan River estuary, facing Xinghua Bay, not far from the seashore. This location facilitated the spread of Mazu belief overseas. Additionally, the temple record mentions the manifestation and efficacy of the goddess in dreams, among other factors, enhancing the recognition and belief of the

populace in Mazu.

It is worth noting that the temple record also discusses the selection of the temple's location. The choice of the temple site seemed to have sparked some controversy, but the position of Shengdun was ultimately established as the location for the Mazu temple. This discussion reflects that in the early development of Mazu belief, the participation of various devotees, as well as the influence of geographical and cultural factors, collectively contributed to the rise of Mazu belief. From Li Fu's efforts to Liao Pengfei's temple record, and subsequently to the temple records of various literati, these factors collectively shaped the development trajectory of Mazu belief, transforming it from a coastal island deity worship into a far-reaching folk belief.

In conclusion, the history of folk temples dedicated to Mazu and the origin of the "Mazu Ascension" legend are closely related to the deep-seated cultural traditions and the maritime culture of fishermen in the coastal regions of Fujian, China. These temples and legends reflect the devout worship of Mazu, the hope for maritime safety, and the close connection between the ocean, faith, and culture.

3.2 Official Deification of Mazu in the Yuan Dynasty: From Fisherwoman to Aristocrat

During the Yuan Dynasty, Mazu underwent a process of deification, transitioning from being a goddess of fishermen to being officially accepted and worshipped by the authorities. This transformation reflects the changing political and social environment of the time and the significance of Mazu worship in Chinese society.

In the Yuan Dynasty, after the establishment of the Yuan Empire, there was an effort to unify China's social and religious systems. During this period, the authorities sought to standardize religious beliefs, incorporating regional deities into the national pantheon to strengthen the legitimacy and stability of their rule. Mazu, as a widely worshipped goddess, attracted the attention of the Yuan Dynasty officials. During the Yuan Dynasty, the Mazu faith was closely associated with the concept of "protecting

the nation." Successive emperors conferred titles upon Mazu a total of 22 times, with 21 of these titles containing the phrase "protecting the nation." This was especially prominent during the reigns of Emperor Yuan Cheng, Emperor Yuan Chengzong, and Emperor Yuan Wen. However, the role of "protecting the nation" was typically associated with the literati and not something accessible to the common people. To legitimize Mazu's role as a protector of the nation, the court linked her origins to an aristocratic family, giving her an illustrious pedigree. Yuan scholar Cheng Ruixue's "Record of the Temple of Divine Compassion" and Ming-era scholar Zhou Ying's "Records of Xinghua Prefecture" make this point clear: "When I was young, I read the county annals of the Song Dynasty, and in the Shaoxi era, [Mazu] was referred to as a diviner in Ruli village, but in later Yan You editions, she is called a goddess. Now, when I read the annals, they all refer to her as the daughter of a district inspector, gradually losing the truth." This marked a significant narrative shift from the Song Dynasty, where Mazu was depicted as an ordinary village diviner, and the subsequent portrayal emphasized her aristocratic lineage. Consequently, Mazu was presented as a member of the gentry and even the daughter of a "district inspector," particularly during the reign of Emperor Yuan Huizong.

Nevertheless, this official standardization of Mazu's narrative strategy raised questions. Song Dynasty records describe Mazu as an ordinary village diviner who worked with shamanic practices, with no mention of aristocratic lineage. This contrasted with the later narrative changes. The clothing culture in Putian also supported the view that Lin Mo (Mazu) was a commoner. The blue shirt and red trousers worn by Mazu worshippers today are considered to be the attire of Lin Mo during her time as a commoner, which contradicts the notion of her aristocratic background. Furthermore, Song Dynasty records do not mention the title "district inspector," further diminishing the possibility of Lin Mo hailing from an aristocratic family.

Similar descriptions of Mazu's aristocratic background are found in Western

literature. In Pedro Menéndez de Avilés' work from 1585, Mazu is portrayed as the daughter of a noblewoman from the capital of Fujian province. However, such descriptions were not derived from folk traditions but rather borrowed from official narrative strategies. Similarly, David Wricht, a Scottish author, mentioned Mazu's father as a local governor when describing her. This demonstrates that the Yuan Dynasty's narrative strategies continued to be perpetuated and accepted in Ming Dynasty and Western depictions. It was not until the Qing Dynasty that Lu Gongming, a member of the Society of the Blessed Francis Xavier for Foreign Missions, provided a relatively accurate account of Mazu's origins, connecting her to a family of boatmen in Xinghua Prefecture. This highlights the folk nature of Mazu worship.

In conclusion, the aristocratic lineage attributed to Mazu was a narrative strategy introduced during the official standardization process. While later depictions emphasized her aristocratic origins, Song Dynasty records and Putian's clothing culture suggest that she may have been an ordinary commoner. The folk essence of Mazu worship gradually gained recognition. In summary, during the Yuan Dynasty, Mazu underwent a transformation from a fisherwoman goddess to an official deity, reflecting the influence of political and social change and showcasing the diversity and evolution of Chinese religious beliefs.

3.3 Official Portrayal of Mazu as the "Protector" and "Orthodoxy" against Wokou Pirates in the Ming Dynasty

In the Ming Dynasty, there was a mutual support relationship between the authorities and Mazu worship, particularly in suppressing activities of the Wokou pirates. Mazu was regarded by the authorities as the guardian goddess for safe navigation and quelling maritime piracy. This mutual relationship is evident in official narrative strategies.

Mazu, often depicted as Lin Mo, was widely recognized as a "shamaness," a status that had become a consensus in folk traditions. However, Ming Dynasty literati employed a clever narrative strategy by associating Mazu's shamaness identity with

acts of safeguarding and pacifying pirates at sea. Building on Mazu's mystical abilities, the authorities positioned her as a guardian of safe navigation while emphasizing her role in countering maritime piracy. The purpose behind this narrative strategy was to reinforce the perception of Mazu as a protector of maritime safety, effectively addressing threats at sea by highlighting her divine powers.

Mazu worship became closely linked to the official efforts to combat piracy during the Ming Dynasty. The government intensified its crackdown on piracy during this era, reflecting in the guidance provided for Mazu worship. While Western missionary records suggest a connection between Mazu worship and pirates, Chinese official narratives characterized those involved in illegal activities as "bandits" and "thieves," considering them as outlaws unassociated with the orthodox rule. In this narrative context, the authorities linked Mazu's worship with orthodoxy, positioning her as a protector who pacified pirates and safeguarded navigation for the sake of orthodoxy.

In summary, the relationship between the Ming Dynasty authorities and Mazu worship reflected a dynamic of mutual reinforcement. By emphasizing Mazu's role in safeguarding and countering piracy, the authorities incorporated her faith into the orthodoxy of maritime order. Simultaneously, Mazu worship played a spiritual role in suppressing piracy activities, strongly supporting the dynasty's anti-piracy policies. This mutual support narrative strategy enabled the widespread dissemination and recognition of Mazu worship during the Ming Dynasty.

3.4 Official Deification in the Ming and Qing Dynasties: Transition from Filial Daughter to Warrior Goddess

During the Ming and Qing periods, Mazu underwent a transformation from being perceived as a filial daughter to assuming the role of a warrior goddess. This transformation reflects the changing social and political landscape of the time, as well as the adaptability and diversity of Mazu worship. In this era, China experienced significant political and cultural transformations, with rulers of the Ming and Qing

Dynasties implementing different policies towards religious beliefs, which also influenced the development of Mazu worship. During this period, Mazu worship gradually shifted from the image of a filial daughter to that of a warrior goddess.

In the Ming Dynasty, particularly during the Wanli era, the Ming government initiated the deification of Mazu, elevating her status. Mazu was not only considered the protector of fishermen and sailors but also seen as the guardian goddess of the nation. This process of deification reinforced Mazu's image as a warrior goddess, perceived to possess the ability to safeguard the country's tranquility and resist foreign aggression.

During the Ming Dynasty, while attitudes toward Mazu varied, dissenting voices predominated. Mazu worship remained relatively stagnant, receiving only two instances of honorary titles without substantial elevation. In the early Qing Dynasty, influenced by traditional thinking, mainstream scholars were critical of Mazu worship. Confucianism master Qin Huitian once criticized the practice of combining state rituals with folk beliefs and raised questions about Mazu worship. During the Kangxi era, Mazu worship faced suppression. In the Qianlong era of the Qing Dynasty, historian Quan Zuwang also expressed skepticism about Mazu worship, categorizing it as one of the "Three Peculiars," questioning Mazu's status. The literati in power controlled the Ministry of Rites, and as a result, the Qing court held a strict attitude towards Mazu worship. In the 22nd year of Kangxi's reign, envoy Wang Yi requested an imperial edict to perform a sea deity ritual, which was initially refused by the Ministry of Rites but was reconsidered following Kangxi's instructions. The Ministry of Rites adjusted its narrative strategy, claiming that Wang Yi's request was different from ordinary diplomatic missions, thus granting his request. Chen Chiyang, a literatus from Putian, successfully altered the narrative strategy of Mazu worship through clever storytelling.

Firstly, he resolved the contradiction between Mazu's unmarried status and her filial piety by elevating her filial piety from small to great. Chen Chiyang emphasized

Mazu's great filial piety in rescuing her father and brother at sea, highlighting her virtue. He removed the supernatural elements from the story of Mazu's saving of her family, emphasizing her benevolence and deeds of salvation, constructing a saintly image centered on great love. Furthermore, he found a reasonable explanation for Mazu's decision not to marry, attributing it to her dedication to doing good and helping others, presenting a logical image. Not only did Mazu protect imperial envoys at sea, but even her parents were honored with titles. Chen Chiyang reconstructed Mazu's image through the lens of her "loyalty and filial piety," legitimizing her worship within the official context.

Secondly, Chen Chiyang refuted the argument put forward by some in the Ming and Qing Dynasties that Mazu was primarily a sea goddess. He used Mazu's illustrious family background to establish her presence, combining it with the family tradition of "Nine Pastoral Rites" to corroborate her acts of benevolence and salvation of the people. Chen Chiyang reconstructed Mazu's family background, creating a hierarchical system within folk beliefs. He extended this hierarchical system to rural society, a critical motive in his narrative.

Chen Chiyang successfully shaped Mazu's image, enabling the literati class to worship her reasonably and avoiding the concept of her being a lascivious deity. During the Republican era, Mazu worship continued under the name Lin Xiaonü. The creation of this image was a significant adjustment in the official narrative strategy, greatly enhancing Mazu's influence and establishing her as the most revered ancient Chinese maritime protector.

While the foundation of the Lin Xiaonü image persisted, her image was not monolithic in the Qing Dynasty. She was even attributed with a warrior goddess image that contradicted her female identity. Mazu became not only a sea goddess but also a warrior goddess in the early Qing Dynasty. The "blessing of the Qing army" was another narrative approach used to redefine Mazu's image. In this strategy, Mazu's identity as a sea goddess was intentionally downplayed, and her image

gradually evolved into that of a warrior. According to Professor Zhu Tianshun of Xiamen University, there are 15 recorded legends about Mazu in the Qing Dynasty, with 7 of them involving Mazu's blessings helping the imperial army overcome challenges or defeat enemies. This indicates significant attention to Mazu's spiritual performance in times of war, especially in the context of Taiwan affairs and campaigns against uprisings in Taiwan. The Qing Dynasty was a minority ethnic dynasty in Chinese history, and to legitimize their rule and consolidate their power, they utilized the widespread dissemination of Mazu worship, linking their ruling actions with the divine will of Mazu. The Qing government extensively promoted legends of Mazu blessing the Qing army to boost soldiers' morale and garner support from the populace, weakening resistance forces. It was this image of Mazu as a warrior goddess that allowed her to become the symbol of Qing orthodoxy and standardization. (Yang Yongzhan, 1997)

As James Watson (1985) pointed out in his study of Tianhou (Mazu), during the early Qing period, some regional goddesses were worshipped under the title of Tianhou, gradually assimilating them. This religious transformation, in fact, symbolized the establishment of political rule.

Watson quoted the perspective of a reporter from Sha Tin in the New Territories of Hong Kong, stating, "Tianhou effectively swallowed the earlier small goddesses, causing them to disappear after being promoted." For example, Sha Jiang Ma, worshipped by fishermen in Xiamen Township, was once a local goddess, but now her stone statue is placed beneath that of Tianhou in the temple. The same situation occurred in Sha Tin, where the Tianhou Temple replaced earlier temples as the new primary local deity. Reporters believed that Tianhou strengthened herself by absorbing the power of other minor goddesses. Watson argued that "Tianhou spiritually conquered the coastal areas of Guangdong, effectively a metaphor for political rule" (Watson, 1985).

In the 1650s, Scottish resident David Wright lived in Taiwan, and he described

the beliefs of the Han Chinese population there. In his narratives, Mazu's image also took on that of a warrior goddess. He explained that Mazu earned the reverence of the entire nation because she had assisted General Komp in winning a battle. In gratitude for her help, the emperor ordered the nation to venerate Mazu as a goddess.

In this context, the Ministry of Rites, as the narrative subject, also underwent subtle changes in its attitude toward Mazu. In the 58th year of Kangxi's reign (1719), envoys Hai Bao and Xu Baoguang once again petitioned for the holding of the Spring and Autumn Rituals. The Ministry of Rites' attitude began to change: "Checking Kangxi 19 years, the Ministry previously discussed honoring Tianhou as 'the Guardian of the Nation and the People, the Marvelous Spirit Who Responds Clearly, the Broad-Benevolence Universal-Salvation Tianhou,' and dispatched officials to offer sacrifices according to the titles, following the case. Now, Tianhou has silently blessed the imperial boats and various miraculous occurrences. The local officials should be ordered to offer sacrifices during the Spring and Autumn seasons and compile them into the 'Rituals.'"

In 1732, Governor of Fujian, Hao Yulin, and Fujian Governor Zhao Guolin jointly requested the issuance of a plaque for South Taiwan in Fujian Province and the establishment of a Ritual. The Ministry of Rites not only approved of their request but also added to it. This marked a fundamental change in the Ministry of Rites' attitude toward Mazu.

Both the narrative subject and the recipient jointly achieved an adjustment in the official narrative strategy of Mazu worship, creating variations in the narrative model. Through the analysis above, it can be seen that this transformation reflects the adaptability and diversity of Mazu worship. Mazu is not just a filial daughter; she is also a warrior goddess, and her image changes according to the needs of the times and the cultural connotations of Mazu worship. The transformation of Mazu worship from a regional goddess to a national sea goddess is a crucial outcome of the official competition for and regulation of folk cultural resources. Narration is the strategy that

the authorities employ to achieve this goal, adjusting the narrative strategy according to the needs of different eras and the cultural connotations of Mazu worship, creating diverse narrative models.

3.5 Standardization of Mazu's Deification in the Qing Dynasty: National Sea Goddess

In the Qing Dynasty, Mazu's standardization of deification underwent significant changes as she was elevated to the status of a national sea goddess, possessing a higher official standing and sanctity. This transformation reflects the profound importance of Mazu worship during the Qing Dynasty and her crucial role in Chinese maritime culture.

During the Qing Dynasty, coastal regions of China witnessed a flourishing maritime trade and shipping industry, making the ocean a key component of national security and economic prosperity. Mazu, as the protector of maritime safety and fishermen, saw her status elevated during this period. The Qing government recognized Mazu as the national sea goddess, signifying that her worship was no longer confined to folk beliefs but became an official religion at the national level. Her rituals and temple construction received support and regulation from the government.

One of the most notable features of Mazu's deification in the Qing Dynasty was the creation of her image as a national sea goddess. This process began as early as the Yuan Dynasty when Mazu was titled "Guardian of the Nation and the People, the Marvelous Spirit Who Responds Clearly." Subsequently, her titles evolved, often emphasizing her connection to the nation's destiny, with titles like "Pacifier of the Seas" and "Stabilizer of the Borders." These titles portrayed Mazu as the guardian of the nation's maritime boundaries and the national sea goddess who defended against foreign aggression. During this process, Mazu transitioned from being solely an object of religious worship to a representation of national political needs, culminating in her standardization as a divine figure.

The process of Mazu's deification is evident in the layering of her titles during the Qing Dynasty. The gradual strengthening and adjustment of the official deification of Mazu can be seen in the evolution of her titles. Beginning with "Spiritually Benevolent Consort," her titles went through a series of changes, including "Merciful Aid," "Manifest Aid," and "Widespread Aid," all of which emphasized her role in rescuing the distressed and her benevolent nature. These titles were designed not only to highlight Mazu's qualities as a protector in times of peril and her compassion but also as a rhetorical strategy to win the hearts of the populace. The ambiguity in Mazu's titles allowed for concealed standardization of her divine status while accommodating the interpretative needs of different regions.

Mazu's deification also manifested in the broadening of her functions and multiple protective roles during the Qing Dynasty. Initially, Mazu was primarily seen as the "Goddess of Naval Warfare," but her role expanded to encompass roles such as the "Goddess of Sea Dykes" and the "Goddess of Rivers and Canals." These shifts in her roles were related to her association with water, emphasizing her divine power in maritime navigation and water management. In the context of maritime traffic between mainland China and Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty, Mazu emerged as the primary maritime protector deity, with the support and promotion of officials like Shi Lang, further elevating Mazu culture to its zenith.

In the late Qing Dynasty, Mazu's titles escalated to "Heavenly Empress," the highest female title of nobility, emphasizing her pivotal role in the national belief system. Mazu was firmly established as the national sea goddess, intricately linked with the nation's maritime interests. At this point, she transcended being an object of individual worship to becoming the guardian deity of the nation's maritime boundaries, signifying the completion of the standardization of Mazu worship.

The deification of Mazu's image in the Qing Dynasty resulted from the fusion of folk beliefs and official requirements. The process of Mazu worship accommodated not only the religious sentiments of the people but also served the political goals of

the state. Through title design and rhetorical strategies, the official authorities standardized Mazu's divine status, securing her place in official state rituals, while simultaneously ensuring her widespread propagation in folk culture, reinforcing both national and societal cohesion.

3.6 Transformation and Interaction of Mazu Cultural Beliefs in Modern and Contemporary Times

1) From the Republic of China to the Cultural Revolution: Decline and Silence of Mazu Worship

From the Republic of China era to the Cultural Revolution, Mazu worship experienced a period of decline and silence. This period marked a tumultuous time in Chinese history, with significant political and social upheaval, which profoundly impacted religious beliefs.

The modernization movements and intellectual trends during the Republic of China era led to a decline in religious beliefs. Traditional religions and beliefs in China came under scrutiny and suppression. Religious institutions and temples were closed and destroyed. Mazu worship, as a form of traditional religious belief, also faced challenges, with a dwindling number of adherents and a gradual weakening of Mazu temples and activities.

During this period, the Mazu worship in coastal areas of Fujian, particularly in Putian, experienced a downturn. The society was characterized by instability and frequent conflicts, and scientific rationalism gained prominence while superstition was rejected. These factors contributed to the complex trajectory of Mazu worship. Many Mazu temples were repurposed for other uses, reflecting the challenges faced by Mazu worship. For instance, in Fujian's Pingtan area, the Tianhou Palace of Liushui Village was requisitioned for use as a township office. In 1941, Liushui Village was under the jurisdiction of Zhongzheng Township, and its Temple of the Heavenly Empress was used as a township office, with the shrine and statues removed. In Su'ao Town, the Temple of Mazu in Su'ao Village was transformed into a

school as part of the "Temple Property for School Construction" movement. The temple, after renovation, became the County Public Fourth District Second Elementary School, equipped with classrooms, dormitories, a reception room, kitchen, dining hall, and playground.

During the period of resistance against the Japanese invasion, coastal areas of Fujian, including Pingtan, suffered from Japanese occupation. The Tianhou Palace in Sanduipai Village, Pingtan, became a stronghold for anti-Japanese resistance and witnessed the struggles of the local people during the war. According to legends, Mazu manifested her divine powers and helped Pingtan's residents successfully repel the Japanese invaders. However, in 1945, Japanese forces invaded again and occupied the Tianhou Palace. Yet, with the joint efforts of Pingtan's residents, the Japanese forces were defeated, and the Tianhou Palace was recaptured. In 1948, the Pingtan County government allocated funds for the reconstruction of the temple.

During the Chinese Civil War, the Tianhou Palace in Sanduipai Village, Pingtan, became a site for revolutionary activities. In 1948, the Central County Committee of the Chinese Communist Party established the Pingtan People's Guerrilla Unit at the Tianhou Palace in Kanzai Village, where the unit gradually grew in strength. Although the period witnessed a series of transformations and challenges to Mazu worship, Mazu's role as a protector in the context of maritime navigation continued to be significant. Many people continued to pray to Mazu for safe sea voyages.

The Cultural Revolution in China ushered in an era of immense political and social turmoil. Religious beliefs were seen as feudal superstition and subjected to severe suppression and persecution. Mazu worship, as a form of religious belief, also suffered a severe blow, with Mazu temples closed, and adherents forced to renounce their faith.

During the Republic of China era to the Cultural Revolution, the decline and silence of Mazu worship were inevitable. However, despite facing significant setbacks, Mazu worship maintained its resilience and persistence throughout Chinese

history. (Luo Chunrong, 2006)

2) Post-Reform and Opening-Up Era: Revival and Development of Mazu Worship

In the post-Reform and Opening-Up era, Mazu worship experienced a notable revival and development. This period marked a rapid transformation of Chinese society and a reevaluation of religious beliefs. Particularly in Pingtan, Fujian, which was designated as a comprehensive experimental zone for cross-strait cooperation with Taiwan, Mazu culture evolved into a richer form of Mazu culture, serving as a bridge in cross-strait exchanges and cooperation. The revival of Mazu culture in Pingtan gained momentum.

Since the 1980s, at least 27 Mazu temples in Pingtan, Fujian, have undergone renovations and even expansions. For example, the Tianhou Palace in Sanduipai Village, Pingtan, built the Ascension Hall and the Lingci Hall behind the old temple, and the Qiaojintou Tianhou Palace in the Aodong Township was completed with a rear hall in 2017. In 2018, the Nianggong Mazu Temple in Beicuo Township was newly constructed, and the expansion project for the Dongfeng Village Mazu Temple in Dongxiong Township is currently underway.

The scale and influence of Mazu temple rituals in coastal areas of Fujian have continued to expand. The rituals at the Dongfeng Village Mazu Temple in Dongxiong Township serve as a typical example. Since 2012, the participation in the annual Mazu's birthday ritual has consistently attracted hundreds of participants, even drawing worshippers from Pingtan and Taiwan. Furthermore, worshippers from various regions collaborate on scriptwriting and the creation of microfilms, showcasing the rich cultural aspects of Mazu worship.

Interactions among Mazu temples in coastal Fujian have also strengthened, particularly in connection with the Meizhou Mazu Temple. For example, the Xiasi Tianhou Palace in Lancheng Township established a branch temple, named the Tianhou Palace at Zhuyu Port, and enshrined a sacred image of Mazu that was

divinely connected to the Meizhou Mazu Temple. Representatives from the Meizhou Mazu Temple's board of directors also attended the inauguration ceremony of the Niangong Mazu Temple in Pingtan, further promoting cultural exchanges between the two locations.

The opening of direct shipping routes between Pingtan and Taiwan has further facilitated cross-strait exchanges of Mazu culture. These maritime routes have become convenient channels for people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to travel, particularly for Mazu devotees. Through these routes, worshippers from Taiwan can easily visit the mainland for religious pilgrimages. Pingtan has gradually become a transit point for cross-strait Mazu cultural exchanges, with large groups of Taiwanese pilgrims traveling through Pingtan, promoting cultural and religious exchanges between the two regions.

In summary, since the Reform and Opening-Up era, the Mazu worship in coastal Fujian has undergone a transformative development process. Mazu culture has not only experienced a revival in traditional domains but has also displayed new vitality in modern society. Pingtan's Mazu culture serves not only as a vessel for religious beliefs but also as a bridge connecting the hearts of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, facilitating cultural exchanges and cooperation. The resurgence and development of this culture not only promote maritime beliefs but also enrich the cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, becoming an integral part of traditional Chinese culture.

3) Political Attitudes of "One Country, Two Systems": Legitimacy and Value of Mazu Worship

In contemporary times, the worship of Mazu is widely practiced across both sides of the Taiwan Strait and in Southeast Asian countries. Regardless of the geographical location, Mazu temples adhere to similar religious activities and festivals. Mazu devotees engage in various aspects of religious activities, including religious rituals, festival celebrations, and the "returning to the maiden home"

ceremony. These activities encompass rituals, poetry, Mazu scriptures, and more. The activities of Mazu devotees can be categorized into three main types: grand ceremonies, which involve inviting ritual masters, monks, musical performances, and theatrical performances; regular commemorations that occur throughout the year, presided over by ritual masters and featuring offerings of various foods and drinks; and pilgrimage ceremonies, which are simpler rituals focused on seeking safety and protection, involving the symbolic journey of Mazu through various villages within her jurisdiction.

From the lifting of the "ban" by the Taiwan authorities in 1987 until the first half of 2012, over 2.8 million Taiwanese compatriots made pilgrimages to Mazu on Meizhou Island. During this period, Meizhou Island also hosted more than 100 events with over 1,000 participants, two-thirds of which involved pilgrimages to Mazu temples on the island. The "returning to the maiden home" ritual is an important official event related to Mazu worship in Taiwan. Mazu devotees on the island are devout in their worship, with millions of adherents. Prior to the 1980s, it was a tradition for Taiwanese Mazu devotees to visit the "Heavenly Empress of Beigang" at the Beigang Chaotian Temple. However, since the 1980s, more and more Taiwanese compatriots have overcome obstacles to make pilgrimages to the Mazu temples on Meizhou Island. This trend gained significant momentum in 1987 when thousands of Taiwanese devotees participated in the Millennium Celebration of the Meizhou Mazu Temple, underscoring the significance of Mazu worship. The phenomenon of "returning to the maiden home" garnered great attention, with political figures in Taiwan actively participating. Many high-ranking members of the Kuomintang (KMT) visited Mazu temples, inscribed plaques, and demonstrated the political importance of Mazu worship.

The departure of the Meizhou Mazu statue for Taiwan as part of a pilgrimage received significant government attention. On January 23, 1997, the golden statue of Mazu from the Meizhou Mazu Temple embarked on its first pilgrimage to Taiwan,

fulfilling the fervent wishes of Taiwanese devotees. Although Mazu worship has a history spanning millennia, it was only at this time that the Meizhou Mazu statue set foot in Taiwan. The arrival and pilgrimage of the Mazu statue in Taiwan generated tremendous enthusiasm, with nearly one million devotees participating in this spectacular event. The pilgrimage of the Mazu statue not only enhanced cultural exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait but also deepened the resonance of Mazu worship. Leaders from various political factions in Taiwan were involved in welcoming the statue, highlighting the unifying power of Mazu worship.

The Chinese government has paid close attention to Mazu worship. As part of China's outstanding traditional culture, Mazu worship has received recognition and support from the government. In 1997, high-ranking officials, including the Deputy Governor of Fujian Province and the Secretary of the Putian Municipal Committee, attended the ceremony to send off the Mazu statue for its pilgrimage to Taiwan. Vice Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the promotion of Chinese culture and cross-strait exchanges through this event. Mazu worship is the only folk belief recognized by the State Council of China.

Mazu worship has undergone profound changes and interactions in modern and contemporary times. From the inheritance of religious activities to the phenomenon of "returning to the maiden home" in Taiwan and the pilgrimage of the Meizhou Mazu statue, Mazu worship has not only deepened cultural exchanges among people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait but also demonstrated government attention to China's outstanding traditional culture. The inheritance and development of this belief reflect people's reverence for the Mazu figure and embody the spiritual strength of the Chinese nation. (Lin Guoliang, 2014)

3.7 Value Manifestation of Mazu Religious Customs in the World Intangible Cultural Heritage

1) Lineage of Mazu Religious Customs

Mazu religious customs have evolved and developed in different historical

periods and regions. During the period of World Intangible Cultural Heritage, they contribute to the inheritance and promotion of Chinese religious and cultural values. The lineage of Mazu worship includes elements such as deity worship, religious rituals, temples, folk beliefs, traditional culture, and community cohesion. This complex and diverse system makes Mazu worship an important religious and cultural tradition in coastal China and Southeast Asia, with profound influence on local society and culture.

The close connection between Mazu religious customs and intangible cultural heritage is undeniable. They complement each other and mutually influence. On one hand, there is a profound link between lineage and pilgrimage behavior. Lineage is not only an expression of religious order but also the cornerstone of pilgrimage. Any issues with lineage can affect the pilgrimage rituals. Pilgrimage, on the other hand, is a means of communication that facilitates the interaction and holistic expression of lineage, establishing identity among related communities and populations. Pilgrimage directly influences the formation, alteration, consolidation, and development of lineage, and the absence of pilgrimage can lead to lineage disintegration, jeopardizing the inheritance and development of intangible cultural resources. Based on the concept of lineage, pilgrimage is considered a practical method of passing down religious customs. (Wang Wenzhang, 2008)

Firstly, in the relationship between lineage and pilgrimage, pilgrimage is seen as a means to enhance the identity of Mazu religious customs. Cultural identity is a core goal of intangible heritage protection, and pilgrimage plays a crucial role in this regard. By establishing spiritual connections and kinship relationships between various temples, pilgrimage can construct and strengthen the identity of intangible cultural resources. The cultural identity symbols of Mazu religious customs are widely summarized in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, showcasing cultural spirits. Pilgrimage, as an actual behavior, becomes a practice that constructs cultural identity. This identity discourse forms the

basis for intangible heritage protection and inheritance.

Secondly, based on lineage, the transmission capacity of relevant communities and populations comes into play through pilgrimage. Pilgrimage transforms belief into a tangible ritual that requires the participation of both hosts and pilgrims. As representatives of intangible resources, bearers maintain lineage through practices like visits and exchanges, safeguarding the lineage structure and promoting the inheritance of intangible heritage. Similarly, the involvement of relevant communities and populations in pilgrimage activities is crucial. Pilgrimage brings them together, forming lineage connections. Their participation and interaction collectively promote the inheritance of intangible resources.



Figure 13: Mazu genealogy holds significant historical significance across various levels such as history, culture, religion, and society. It serves as a vital resource for the study and preservation of Mazu belief and related culture. Mazu genealogy reflects the organizational structure, family relationships, and societal cultural backgrounds of specific regions. By examining these genealogies, one can gain insights into how Mazu belief has integrated into local social cultures and its impact on societal organization and values.

Source: Mazu Ancestral Temple Archives, accessed in 2023.



Figure 14: Mazu genealogy records significant historical events related to the Mazu belief, which have profound impacts on religious, cultural, and social aspects. The genealogy provides detailed accounts of Mazu's birth, upbringing, encompassing her family background, early life, and the process of her recognition as Mazu. Mazu's miraculous deeds, including her reverence as the guardian of the seas and protector of fishermen, are documented. These stories involve miraculous events such as Mazu subduing demons, calming turbulent waves, and rescuing fishermen. The Mazu genealogy traces the historical evolution of Mazu belief, reflecting not only religious aspects but also encompassing various fields, including culture, society, and history. These records contribute to a better understanding of the evolution and influence of the Mazu belief.

Source: Mazu Temple Archives, accessed in 2023.

The specific lineage of Mazu religious customs can be summarized in several aspects: 1. External formal lineage: Mazu religious customs encompass a rich cultural variety, mainly divided into two major components: Mazu belief and Mazu customs, covering three major elements of ritual ceremonies, folk customs, and storytelling legends. These are further subdivided into ten categories, including Mazu legends, Mazu attire, Mazu rituals, Mazu temple festivals, Mazu offerings, the Mazu golden statue's pilgrimage, "returning to the maiden home," Mazu devotees' pilgrimage to pay respects to ancestors, Mazu practice venues, and Mazu ziggurats. These cultural forms constitute the external formal lineage of Mazu religious customs. 2. Internal

structural lineage: The intangible resources of Mazu religious customs include their own temporal development, spatial distribution, as well as related elements such as communities, populations, etc. The interaction between these elements is reflected in temporal lineage, spatial lineage, ethnic lineage, and power lineage, among other aspects. This forms the internal structural lineage of intangible resources. 3. Spatial cultural circle: The lineage of faith-based intangible resources is formed by the mutual connection of various temples. Temples in different regions originated from the Meizhou Island Mazu Temple, sharing a common spiritual core and cultural DNA, constituting a cultural whole characterized by mutual connection and exchange. These temples form a "spatial resource belt" or "spatial cultural circle." 4. Ethnic lineage: Mazu religious customs originated from Meizhou Island in Fujian Province and spread to other regions over time, leading to the establishment of subsidiary temples and forming an influential belief system among the Chinese population. Temples in various regions all trace their origins back to the Meizhou Island Mazu Temple, sharing a common spiritual core and cultural DNA, thus creating a culture characterized by mutual connection and exchange. The lineage of Mazu religious customs is reflected in the interaction between the ancestral temple and subsidiary temples, establishing a hierarchical and branching cultural structure. (Yuan Li, Gu Jun, 2009)

2) Pilgrimage Temples of Mazu Religious Customs

Pilgrimage temples of Mazu worship are significant carriers of religious faith, constituting a part of China's cultural heritage that reflects ancient architectural styles, religious rituals, artistic expressions, and cultural traditions. By protecting these temples, we can safeguard and pass down China's rich cultural heritage. Additionally, through the practice of pilgrimage, these temples not only reinforce the core of faith but also maintain the structure of religious lineage. Pilgrimage holds profound meaning and influence within Mazu religious customs, with the Meizhou Mazu Temple serving as the spiritual core of this lineage.

The Meizhou Temple not only plays a role as a center for religious worship on Meizhou Island but also serves as the global center of Mazu worship. Subsidiary temples from various regions regularly make pilgrimages to the ancestral temple, regarding it as their "maiden home." The grand celebration of Mazu's birthday on the 23rd day of the third lunar month, known as "Crazy Mazu," is a testament to this connection. Subsidiary temples travel to the ancestral temple, showcasing not just regional ties but also the continuity of faith through the act of pilgrimage.

Moreover, pilgrimage to the ancestral temple serves as a means for subsidiary temples to seek blessings and divine power. Subsidiary temples require the blessings and spiritual strength of the ancestral temple to enhance their own influence. Through pilgrimage to the ancestral temple, they demonstrate their direct bloodline connection, which confers upon them a legitimate position within the lineage. Subsidiary temples compete to improve their standing within the lineage by seeking blessings from the ancestral temple. This competition also extends to the relationships between subsidiary temples, as seen with the Da Jia Zhenlan Temple and the Beigang Chaotian Temple. By directly pilgrimaging to the ancestral temple, the Da Jia Zhenlan Temple established itself as a "direct descendant" of the ancestral temple, redefining its position within the lineage. This phenomenon of vying for "seniority" gradually emerged within Taiwanese Mazu culture as various temples pursued the pilgrimage to the ancestral temple, demonstrating their acknowledgment and pursuit of lineage status.

This competition also extends to the relationships between subsidiary temples, such as the Da Jia Zhenlan Temple and the Beigang Chaotian Temple. By directly pilgrimaging to the ancestral temple, the Da Jia Zhenlan Temple established itself as a "direct descendant" of the ancestral temple, redefining its position within the lineage. This phenomenon of vying for "seniority" gradually emerged within Taiwanese Mazu culture as various temples pursued the pilgrimage to the ancestral temple, demonstrating their acknowledgment and pursuit of lineage status.

The practice of pilgrimage to Mazu temples is not only a form of reverence for the deity but also a means of passing down beliefs and cultural preservation. It strengthens the connection between subsidiary temples and the ancestral temple, constructing a dynamic lineage structure. Without the link of pilgrimage, the lineage can become fragile and isolated, and the entire belief system may struggle to develop. Therefore, pilgrimage temples of Mazu religious customs are not only a ritualistic practice but also an important means of passing down faith and cultural preservation, infusing enduring vitality into the entire Mazu worship.

4. Analysis of Symbolic Interactions and Characteristics of the Deification of Mazu in the Context of Folk and Official Paths

Mazu, emerging during the Song Dynasty in the Fujian region as part of a wave of deification, received repeated imperial accolades throughout its development, evolving from a local deity into a national maritime goddess. This transformation was not only supported by grassroots forces but also driven by official influence. In the realm of folk pathways, the Mazu belief emerged among the lower echelons of society from the Song Dynasty onwards, manifesting as an external expression of the inner desires and societal needs of the common people. It embraced traditional oral storytelling and the narrative logic of "equivalence of gods and humans," deeply rooted in millennia-old folk thinking. In contrast, the official pathway commenced after the deification of Mazu, with authorities incorporating folk beliefs into the orthodox ritual system and shaping them according to political necessities and vested interests. The differing origins and development methods of these two pathways resulted in strikingly divergent trajectories.

When examining the origins of these pathways, the folk path is firmly rooted in folk thinking traditions, whereas the official path only emerged after Mazu had completed her transition from a human to a deity. Consequently, the folk path boasts a broad and profound base among the masses, while the official path is top-down in

nature.

Concerning the direction of these pathways, the folk path extends horizontally and exhibits spatial distinctiveness, with the Mazu belief radiating from Meizhou Island to regions nationwide. It has encountered variations and discontinuities in different locales, reflecting localized divine characteristics. On the other hand, the official path is vertical and marked by temporal features, with official evaluations and attitudes towards Mazu fluctuating based on different historical contexts.

In terms of their endpoints, the official path reached its zenith when Mazu ascended to the position of the nation's maritime deity but eventually reached its conclusion with the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. The folk path, however, did not vanish; it adapted to the requirements of the modern era. The Mazu belief continues to thrive in immigrant communities and within the broader Chinese populace, maintaining a state of "vibrancy."

The folk and official paths of Mazu belief in deification underscore their distinct characteristics and developmental trends. These differences reflect the mutual influence of religious beliefs between the folk and official spheres and their evolution within different historical and societal contexts. The development of Mazu belief progresses along two distinct paths across the dimensions of time and space, each displaying unique characteristics and reflecting profound cultural psychology and the differences between constructing agents.

Firstly, there are characteristics of diversity and standardization. Folk deification of Mazu originates from a wide array of believer groups, resulting in its diversity. In contrast, the official approach, aimed at controlling and utilizing Mazu belief, adopts a standardized method through titles, ritual ceremonies, and other means to standardize Mazu's deity status. However, folk belief retains its diverse features through oral transmission within families and communities, not relying on institutionalized educational mechanisms, thereby continuing to exist. Consequently, folk Mazu deification exhibits diversity, while the official focus leans more toward

standardization.

Secondly, there are characteristics of openness and closure. Folk Mazu deification embodies an open cultural psyche, reflecting the active engagement of coastal populations in maritime trade. Mazu's legends include stories of her rescuing foreign merchants, highlighting the prosperity of maritime trade and a cross-ethnic open-mindedness during that era. However, official Mazu deification also partly reflects an open cultural psyche but with limitations. Official deification of Mazu is, in some historical contexts, intertwined with elements of closure, such as the exclusion of "sea pirates" and "barbarians." Officials adopted varying policies in different historical periods, reflecting changes in political demands and societal needs.

Summary

Mazu belief, as an integral part of Chinese traditional culture, carries rich symbolism and values, with its symbols exhibiting diverse interactions and evolutions across different historical periods. This symbolic interplay is evident in the ancient process of Mazu deification, the transformations of Mazu culture and belief in modern times, and the fusion between Mazu religious customs and intangible cultural heritage protection.

The folk and official entities are two distinct constructing agents, each shaping the deification of Mazu based on their own social needs and vested interests. These divergent paths of Mazu deification, namely the folk path and the official path, offer distinct perspectives. The folk path, originating from the Song Dynasty, reflects the inner desires of the lower strata of society. In contrast, the official path began after the deification of Mazu and incorporated folk beliefs into the orthodox ritual system. Furthermore, the folk path exhibits horizontal spatial characteristics, while the official path displays vertical temporal features. The folk path embodies an open and diverse cultural psyche, whereas the official path is characterized by closed and standardized cultural psychology.

In antiquity, Mazu belief underwent a process of deification. Mazu was regarded as the guardian deity of the seas, and her multifaceted functions in different eras gradually accumulated and were codified in written form. This culminated in the creation of authoritative texts with profound connotations, leading to the standardization of Mazu's image and deity status. Notably, the concept of "titles" in historical records became a unique and self-contained system. By analyzing the continual addition of titles in various periods, we can outline the official pathway of Mazu deification. Starting from the Northern Song Dynasty, Mazu was bestowed the title "Linghui Zhushun Fei" and later the honorific title "Tianfei" during the Yuan Dynasty. These titles not only recognized Mazu's divine powers but also represented the government's hope for national stability and maritime security. The official deification of Mazu continued through the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with the transformation of her image from a filial daughter to a warrior deity. This transition was not arbitrary but rather tied to the belief that Mazu safeguarded naval victories, ensured safe maritime trade, protected against epidemics, and averted droughts. Successive rulers elevated her status due to her perceived role in the nation's fortunes. Each step in the deification of Mazu reflects the societal and political contexts of the time, demonstrating how the worship of Mazu as a maritime goddess interacted with the changing value systems of different eras, gradually shaping her image as an object of faith. This process, characterized by both bottom-up and top-down elements, integrated Mazu belief into the official system and to some extent influenced people's beliefs and their perceptions of government authority. (Zhu Tianshun, 1989)

In modern times, amid societal transformations and cultural exchanges, Mazu culture and belief have undergone profound changes. In the process of modernization, Mazu religious customs, recognized as world intangible cultural heritage, not only highlight cultural diversity but also contribute to community cohesion, the preservation of traditional culture, economic development, and international cultural exchange. Mazu temple festivals have become platforms for people's faith and

cultural exchange, bringing together diverse beliefs, customs, and architectural art forms.

To sum up, the interplay of symbols in Mazu belief spans different historical stages, from the ancient process of deification to modern-day cultural exchange and intangible heritage protection. This symbiotic relationship between symbols and society and culture underscores the significance of symbol evolution in shaping the rich essence of Mazu belief. It injects enduring vitality into cultural inheritance and development. In the next chapter of this study, I will delve into the interpretation of Mazu cultural symbols and the significance of the transformation of Mazu belief.



Chapter IV

Symbolic Transformations – An Era-Based Interpretation of Mazu Cultural Symbols and Their Evolution

1. Introduction

This chapter, from various perspectives such as the relationship between the state and society, national cultural strategies, local Mazu temple festivals, and the transformation and inheritance of Mazu culture, analyzes the changes in Mazu belief during China's feudal society and periods of social change, as well as the attitude and influence of the modern state towards Mazu belief. This chapter is divided into three parts. Li Jingrui, 2016)

The first part interprets the changes in Mazu belief from the perspective of the relationship between the state and society, reflecting the evolution of "state-society relations" in China since its founding.

The second part interprets the significance of local Mazu folk belief from the perspective of national cultural strategy. This not only transformed the local economic structure but also served as a bridge for cross-strait communication through Mazu culture.

The third part interprets the stable development of local Mazu temple festivals and believers. National awareness is injected into the grassroots society through rituals, and local Mazu folk organizations have formed a unique "faith circle."

2. Changes in Mazu Belief from the Perspective of State-Society Relations

Mazu culture has long been a subject of extensive attention and research by historians and modern experts. Despite the absence of written works or a systematic philosophical framework associated with Mazu, her noble deeds and heroic actions,

such as her love for labor, care for the people, courage in the face of danger, assistance to the needy, and selfless dedication, have inherited the noble traditions of the Chinese nation, creating a powerful spiritual force.

The fluctuating history of Mazu belief reveals a process of revival for traditional folk beliefs. This belief experienced a resurgence in the late 1980s, interrupting a hiatus of nearly 30 years. Within these shifts in continuity, we can see the influence of state-society relations. Using the example of Mazu belief on Meizhou Island, we will explore a series of transformations in faith. From the perspective of state and society, we will examine aspects such as ritual ceremonies, temple construction, and temple festival organization, although these are not our central focus. Instead, they serve as entry points to uncover the underlying societal roots and their sociological significance. We view folk belief as a cultural form and, through its intrinsic connections with the social world, delve deep into the interactions among various stakeholders involved in the process of faith transformation, their interactions with social systems and organizations, and the resulting structures and spatial orders. Through individual cases, we reveal the power dynamics and logic of actors behind Mazu belief, reflecting the evolution of "state-society relations" in China since its founding.

The rise and reverence of Mazu belief can be traced back to the Song Dynasty (987 AD), according to historical records. It is believed that from a young age, Mazu exhibited mysterious qualities that set her apart from others. She dedicated her life to acts of kindness, such as aiding the poor, and her selflessness. Existing literature suggests that in feudal society, the authorities usually endorsed Mazu belief. This endorsement was particularly evident in the construction of Mazu temples and the conferment of titles. In ancient times, the imperial court's recognition of local deities held significant importance. Mazu belief transitioned from a folk belief to an officially sanctioned one, partly due to the imperial court's accolades. Throughout history, Mazu received 36 titles, starting from the Song Huizong and continuing into the Qing

Dynasty. The titles gradually increased in length, signifying her elevated status. These titles held various meanings, such as in the Song Dynasty when Mazu's legends of safeguarding maritime navigation and aiding in battle were closely tied to the economic and military conditions of the time. During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, Mazu was conferred the status of protecting the nation and aiding in warfare. These titles and recognitions contributed to the official shaping of Mazu's image and reinforced her position in society.

Temple construction: The earliest Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island was built in the fourth year of the Yongxi reign of Emperor Taizong of the Song Dynasty (987 AD). The initial temple was modest in size, but due to her perceived extraordinary abilities in navigation and healing, the temple gradually expanded. Rulers from different dynasties actively participated in the construction and restoration of the temple, even sending ministers to perform worship ceremonies. The scale of the temple continuously grew, and the architectural complex became splendid and magnificent. The construction and restoration of these temples, to a certain extent, reflected official support for Mazu belief and further strengthened the faith's position in society.

During this process, the official endorsement not only influenced the development of faith but also became a tool for the penetration of state power into social life and the control of people's thoughts. As a deity, Mazu was used to instill values like loyalty, filial piety, and righteousness, which were essential for maintaining social order and national stability in society. This also demonstrated the extensive control exercised by the state over various aspects of social life in China's feudal society.

2.1 The Evolution of Mazu Culture in the Context of Feudal China

The evolution of Mazu culture in the context of feudal China is a complex process involving the interaction of folk beliefs, local culture, official deification, and the feudal social system. This evolutionary process reflects both the adaptability of Mazu belief and the diversity of feudal society, laying the foundation for its

subsequent development.

Folk character of Mazu belief: In feudal society, Mazu belief was primarily a folk belief. Fishermen and coastal residents believed that Mazu was their protector, ensuring the safety of fishermen during their sea voyages. This belief was rooted in folk religious customs and livelihood needs and did not necessarily align with the prevailing feudal religious system.

Local characteristics: Mazu belief exhibited different local characteristics in various regions. Different places had their own unique ceremonies and rituals associated with Mazu temples, which were influenced by local culture, customs, and traditions. This emphasis on local characteristics highlights the significance of local culture and social structure in feudal society.

Official deification: Over time, Mazu belief gradually gained official recognition and deification. Whether it was the divine favor during the Northern Song Dynasty, ensuring the success of missions to Goryeo, the protection of water transport safety during the Yuan Dynasty, the blessings for Zheng He's seven voyages to the Western Seas during the Ming Dynasty, or the divine support in capturing Penghu and Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty, all these instances aimed to fulfill political needs, promote maritime trade, stabilize public sentiment, and defend against external threats. Furthermore, this recognition involved an increasing number of titles, which reached as many as 36 titles and were accompanied by various mysterious legends of divine interventions, giving rise to solemn rituals like the imperial sacrifices. As such, Mazu belief became a symbol of social stability and prosperity in certain regions. Government officials started to participate in Mazu temple festivals and established official temples to maintain social order and appease the populace.

Influence of the feudal social system: The feudal social system also influenced Mazu belief. Under this system, the official religious hierarchy controlled religious ceremonies and deities. Mazu belief evolved within this system and gradually became integrated into the religious framework of feudal society.

This demonstrates that in various aspects of feudal society, including politics, economics, and culture, concessions had to be made to powerful non-state forces to maintain cultural consensus. Society relied on the lifestyle conveyed by faith and the cultural customs acquired by believers through faith, which were essential for the progress of feudal society. The civilization of society and the faith of believers developed harmoniously together. In summary, the inheritance of Mazu culture is not only a belief but also a cultural pillar of society, making positive contributions to the development and stability of feudal society.

2.2 Distortions and Interruptions in Mazu Belief: Exploring the Impact of Social Change

Mazu belief in Chinese history has experienced periods of distortion and interruption, complexly influenced by social change, including interruptions and declines, as well as revivals and transformations. The development of Mazu belief is closely related to the social environment and historical context, and its continuous adaptation to and response to societal changes are key to its inheritance and development.

Starting from the late Qing Dynasty, along with national crises and the impact of Western culture, intellectuals gradually became aware of the differences between Chinese and Western knowledge systems. They called for reform of traditional Chinese knowledge and culture, advocating for a new knowledge and culture based on "scientificism" to promote modernization. Within this context, the "New Culture Movement" emerged, advocating anti-feudalism, anti-superstition, and the promotion of modernization. In 1928, the Nationalist government in Nanjing issued standards for the preservation or demolition of temples, expressing its intention to eliminate what was considered "harmful" folk beliefs. During the period of the Republic of China, attitudes toward Mazu belief were relatively ambiguous, leading to the flourishing of folk belief activities such as pilgrimages, vows, and soul retrieval rituals. However, not only did the government suppress folk beliefs, but also local landlord forces

attempted to manipulate the development of faith, particularly in rural Putian, where landlords used Mazu belief as a means of exploitation.

Before the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Putian region, like other places, had long been under the rule of feudal forces. To resist exploitation, peasants engaged in struggles. However, the landlord class on Meizhou Island used "Mazu belief" as a guise for exploitation, using religious ceremonies as tools of oppression. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, there was a significant shift in religious policies, introducing religious freedom. By the pre-reform and opening period, the state was heavily involved in local society, focusing on the construction of a national state while suppressing feudal superstitions. The Land Reform Movement in 1952 had a profound impact on Mazu belief; religious land was confiscated as part of land reform, leading to dissatisfaction among some believers. Subsequently, industrialization exacerbated conflicts between agriculture and industry. The government lowered agricultural product prices, affecting the economic conditions of groups such as fishermen and weakening the economic support for religious rituals. The collectivization and People's Communes movement left farmers impoverished and unable to sustain their religious practices. The Cultural Revolution in 1966 nearly destroyed Mazu ancestral temples, as religion was viewed as an obstacle to the progress of communism.

Until 1978, the state continued to exert control over local society, striving to build a national state while suppressing feudal superstitions. This had a profound impact on Mazu belief. Faced with government suppression and landlord exploitation, believers united and utilized religious freedom to resist, while also exerting pressure through social relationships to influence government decisions. These fluctuations in Chinese society during periods of change reveal the intricate interaction between belief, politics, and social transformation.

2.3 The Revival and Prosperity of Mazu Belief: The Collective Impact of Timing, Conditions, and Organizational Efforts

The revival and prosperity of Mazu belief are typically the result of a combination of factors, including timing, societal conditions, faith organizations, and media dissemination, all of which have shaped the modern face of this belief. The flexibility and adaptability of this faith have allowed it to thrive in various societal contexts.

With the advancement of the reform and opening-up policies in 1978, along with adjustments at the national level and a more lenient political environment, Mazu belief in the Fujian region began to gradually recover and innovate. Survey data shows that starting from the 1980s, residents of Meizhou Island in Putian, Fujian, began to pay more attention to Mazu belief, actively engaging in activities such as crafting Mazu statues, temple construction, and conducting rituals. The local government adopted a policy of "non-interference" in faith activities, intervening only when the number of participants in rituals exceeded 20 people. However, there were restrictions on ritual expenses, and religious organizers were required to provide statistics and report to local officials.

The revival of faith is the result of the intertwined influence of various factors. Firstly, the relatively lenient state policies provided an opportunity. Secondly, the birthplace of Mazu belief, Meizhou Island, was relatively isolated with limited transportation access, thus restricting the influence of the state. Lastly, the Mazu temple organization played a crucial role in the revival process. This organization gathered most of the island's residents and was spontaneously formed by Mazu devotees, religious figures, and leaders. The cohesion within the temple organization was strong, and its members had a strong sense of identity with the group, which led to a tighter internal structure. This organization traces its origins back to the Republican era's self-defense force and was reestablished through the efforts of some villagers on the island after undergoing multiple transformations. The leaders of this organization were respected figures in local villages, enjoying prestige. They mobilized believers to participate in various activities, including fundraising and

charity work, through personal charisma and influence. This organization also played a crucial role in social mediation and investment attraction, while simultaneously bearing the mission of preserving Mazu culture.

In summary, the revival of faith benefited from lenient state policies, favorable local conditions, and the cohesion and efforts of the organization, collectively driving the resurgence and prosperity of Mazu belief activities.

2.4 The Values and New Considerations of Mazu Belief

In different historical periods, the Chinese government has had varying attitudes and policies towards religious issues. The evolutionary path of Mazu culture is rich and meaningful, as it encompasses multiple cultural elements such as maritime culture, peace, ancestral roots, compatibility, and virtue:

1) Imprint of Maritime Culture: Mazu was initially revered as the goddess of the sea, deeply integrating maritime culture into early Mazu belief. Although initially confined to the vicinity of Putian, Fujian, the rapid rise of Fujian's maritime economy led to the swift spread of Mazu belief. Over different periods since the Song Dynasty, the geographical scope expanded beyond Fujian to other provinces and even abroad, highlighting the commercial nature of Mazu culture. Sea merchants held a significant place among Mazu devotees, as their ventures received Mazu's protection. Consequently, compared to the agrarian background of Confucian culture, Mazu culture emphasized commercial elements, making it more compatible with the contemporary market economy and consistent with the spiritual ethos of the 21st century.

2) Role in Peaceful Culture: As Mazu belief spread, its followers became widespread around the world. The spirit of benevolence emphasized in Mazu culture makes it easier to communicate and harmonize with the world's three major religions. Therefore, Mazu has been given the role of a "peace ambassador," bridging the friendship between the Chinese and people globally, thus promoting international goodwill. In the 1980s, the United Nations recognized Chinese Mazu as a "Goddess

of Peace." For both sides of the Taiwan Strait, Mazu's role as a "peace ambassador" is particularly significant. Today, an increasing number of Taiwanese compatriots cross the strait to pay homage to Mazu's ancestral temple on Meizhou Island, where Mazu becomes a spiritual solace for compatriots on both sides of the strait and overseas Chinese.

3) Link to Ancestral Roots: Originating in Fujian, Mazu belief has diversified over a millennium and now spans the globe, with nearly 5,000 temples and nearly 200 million believers. This belief is particularly vibrant in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Mazu has become a spiritual anchor for the vast overseas Chinese population, serving as a vessel for feelings of seeking roots and honoring ancestors. Mazu is not only revered as a folk belief but also serves as a cultural identity for overseas Chinese.

4) Fusion of Compatibility: While distinct from Confucian culture in nature, Mazu culture does not reject integration. In its process of transmission and development, Mazu culture has absorbed the essence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, achieving a harmonious fusion with these traditions. This not only strengthens the compatibility of Mazu culture but also allows it to adapt flexibly to changing times.

5) Representation of Virtuous Culture: Legends of Mazu's divine interventions often contain moral elements. In the eyes of believers, Mazu embodies noble virtues. The values and morals she represents, such as benevolence, saving the distressed, acting bravely, and promoting righteousness, reflect the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation, thus earning her enduring respect through generations.

Today, as China faces a relatively peaceful domestic political environment and the process of reunification with Taiwan remains ongoing, Meizhou Island's unique geographical location (near the Taiwan Strait) provides new considerations for the country, especially in connecting overseas Chinese and promoting cross-strait exchanges. In this context, a series of events have highlighted the new values and significance of Mazu belief. In May 2002, the Mazu statue from Meizhou Island

successfully sailed directly to Kinmen, breaking the so-called "small three links" restrictions imposed by Taiwan. In May 2006, a tourism route between Meizhou and Kinmen was established, making Meizhou the third entry point for Fujian residents to travel to Kinmen. In May 2007, over 500 residents from Mazu Island traveled to Meizhou Island for the first time via "Tai-Ma" ferries to pay respects to Mazu, further enhancing direct cross-strait connectivity. On September 8, 2008, Taiwan's Lukang Tianhou Temple organized a large Mid-Autumn Festival concert, celebrating the festival with well-known figures from Taiwan and southern China and the people of Meizhou Island. On November 2, 2009, over 300 participants from Taiwan's Lukang Tianhou Temple joined the Meizhou Mazu statue's millennium pilgrimage in Xinghua, celebrating the successful declaration of Mazu belief and customs as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage.

To preserve and propagate Mazu culture, compatriots from both sides of the strait have increased cultural exchanges in various forms. Mazu ancestral temples have become a focal point for cross-strait exchanges. Whether it is the enthusiastic response to the Meizhou ancestral temple's Mazu statue procession to Taiwan or the return of hundreds of Taiwanese Mazu temples to their "ancestral home" on Meizhou Island in recent years, it underscores the significant role of this ancestral temple in connecting compatriots on both sides of the strait. In the increasingly widespread and close cultural exchanges between the two sides of the strait, the consensus of "Mazu is one, and various local Mazus originate from Meizhou" is gradually deepening. Many Taiwanese Mazu temples emphasize their direct connection to the Meizhou Mazu ancestral temple to highlight their status. To date, more than 1,300 Taiwanese Mazu temples have acknowledged their ancestral origins and maintain close ties with the Meizhou Mazu ancestral temple. Therefore, the values and new considerations of Mazu belief are promoting peaceful development across the Taiwan Strait.

3. The Evolution of the Significance of Mazu Folk Belief from the Perspective of National Cultural Strategy

3.1 National Efforts to Develop Matsu Island Tourism and Urbanization Drive the Interactive Development of Mazu Belief

Meizhou Island is located on the coast of Meizhou Bay, Putian City, Fujian Province, approximately 42 kilometers from the city center. With a land area of 14.35 square kilometers, the island stretches about 9.8 kilometers from north to south and is approximately 2 kilometers wide, resembling the shape of an eyebrow, hence its name Meizhou. Meizhou Island is the hometown of the sea goddess Mazu, and it attracts a continuous stream of worshippers who come to pay their respects to Mazu. In addition to cultural landmarks like Mazu temples, Meizhou Island boasts abundant natural coastal tourism resources, including golden beaches, rocky islets, and mangrove wetlands.

In June 1988, the People's Government of Fujian Province approved the establishment of the Meizhou Island Open Economic Zone, signaling the beginning of the island's tourism development. With close cooperation between foreign investors and the government, Meizhou Island gradually improved its infrastructure and transformed into a national-level tourism and resort area. In October 1992, Meizhou Island was recognized as a national-level tourism resort, and the Zhumiao Scenic Area in the northern part of the island and the Meiyu Chaoyin Scenic Area were successively developed. In March 2002, Meizhou Island was awarded the title of a 4A-level tourist attraction by the National Tourism Administration, signifying significant improvements in tourism resources, facilities, and management services. In 2009, Mazu faith and customs were included in the World Cultural Heritage list, adding luster to Meizhou Island's tourism reputation. During the "Thirteenth Five-Year Plan" period, Meizhou Island set clear development goals to become a "Pilgrimage Island, Tourism Island, Ecological Island," and an international tourist destination. In 2016, the island successfully hosted the first Mazu Culture Forum,

further highlighting its role in the inheritance of Mazu culture. By 2020, Meizhou Island had been upgraded to a national 5A-level tourist resort, injecting new vitality into its tourism industry. (Aitchison, C,2001,p.133-147)

In exploring and researching how the national government promotes the urbanization process of Meizhou Island, we can gain insights into the island's evolution during the urbanization process by analyzing four decades of population census data from 1982 to 2020 (as shown in the figures). Over the past 40 years, the urbanization rate of the permanent population on Meizhou Island has increased from less than 50% initially to the current 64.07%. Notably, the period of rapid tourism development on Meizhou Island is characterized by a clear trend of population concentration in urban areas. This trend is also reflected in the employment structure of rural labor on the island, as shown in Figure 2. Starting from 2005, the proportion of labor engaged in agricultural production declined to below 50%. Given the island's small-scale industrial sector, the majority of labor shifted to tourism-related service work. These data illustrate a clear trend: Meizhou Island has undergone significant changes in its urbanization process, marked by population concentration and the transformation of the labor force's employment structure. This urbanization trend holds important reference value for Meizhou Island's future development direction and planning.

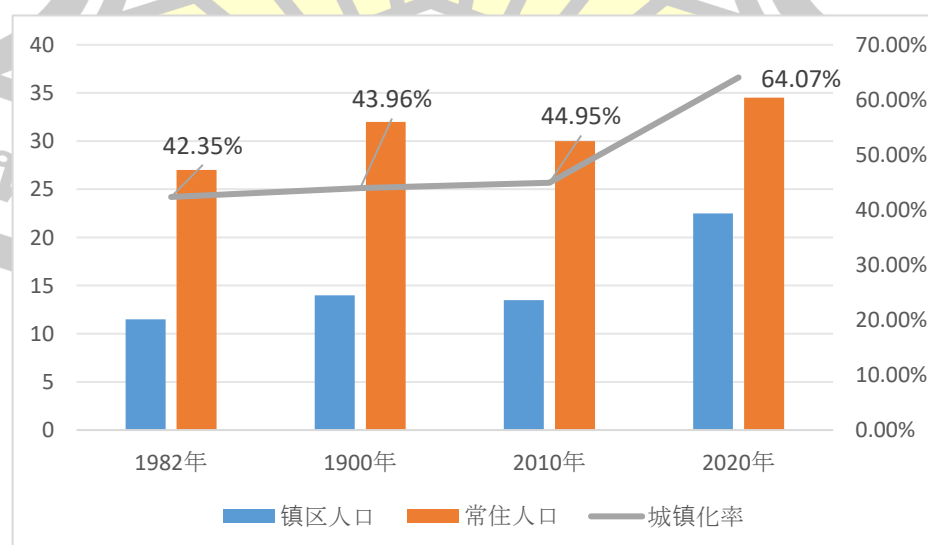


Figure 15 : This table displays the changes in urbanization rates on Meizhou Island from 1982 to 2020. The development of tourism on Meizhou Island has contributed to the urbanization transition in social life. Some residents have improved their income levels by engaging in tourism-related work, enhancing their purchasing power, which in turn has driven increased income for more island residents.

Source: Compiled by Lin Pinglan, 2023.

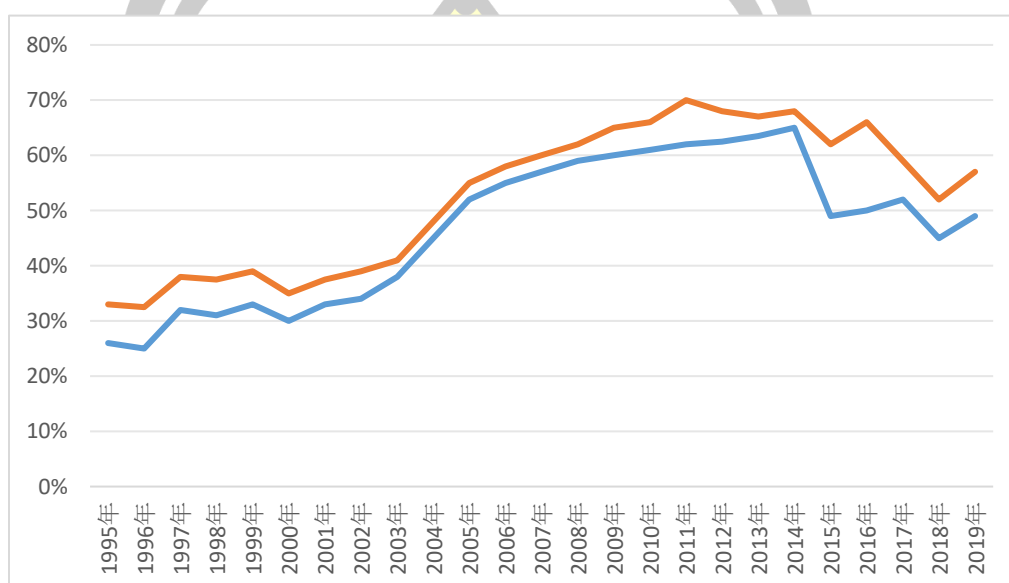


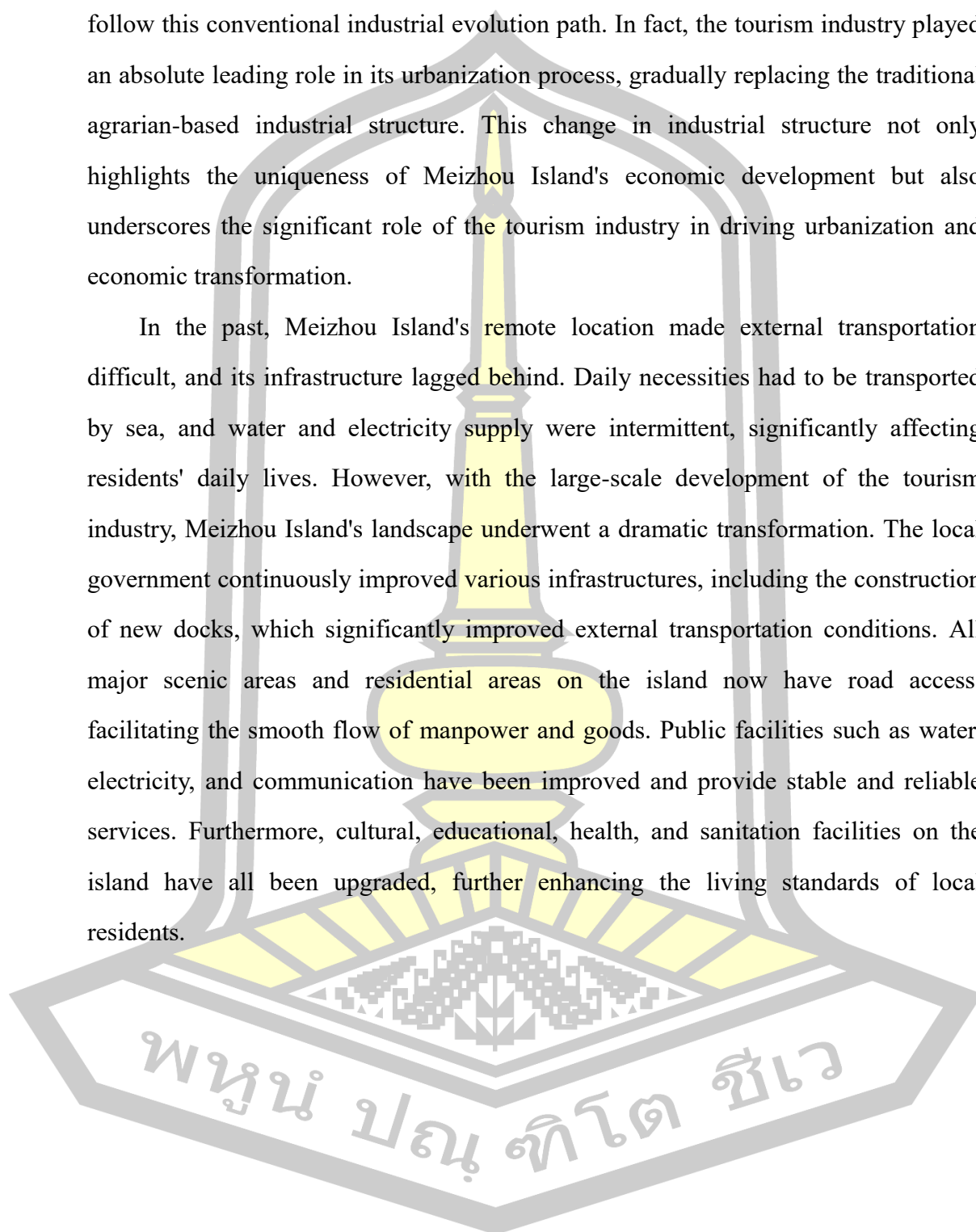
Figure 16: This chart illustrates the non-agricultural employment situation on Meizhou Island from 1995 to 2019. Being an island, Meizhou Island boasts abundant marine and fishery resources. Its beautiful beaches and island charm have attracted a large number of tourists for sightseeing and tourism. Considering the island's minimal industrial scale, the majority of the workforce has shifted to jobs related to the tourism sector.

Source: Compiled by Lin Pinglan, 2023.

The economic development of Meizhou Island is the intrinsic engine of the urbanization process, a trend clearly reflected in the evolution of its industrial structure (as shown in the figures). Initially, Meizhou Island heavily relied on the primary sector, accounting for up to 70% of the economy, while the development of the secondary and tertiary sectors had a relatively weak foundation. However, as the tourism industry was developed and expanded, the proportion of the primary sector gradually declined. Around 2005, the tertiary sector began to emerge and took the lead, steadily growing to its current share of 60%. Unlike most urban areas that

primarily rely on industrial development during urbanization, Meizhou Island did not follow this conventional industrial evolution path. In fact, the tourism industry played an absolute leading role in its urbanization process, gradually replacing the traditional agrarian-based industrial structure. This change in industrial structure not only highlights the uniqueness of Meizhou Island's economic development but also underscores the significant role of the tourism industry in driving urbanization and economic transformation.

In the past, Meizhou Island's remote location made external transportation difficult, and its infrastructure lagged behind. Daily necessities had to be transported by sea, and water and electricity supply were intermittent, significantly affecting residents' daily lives. However, with the large-scale development of the tourism industry, Meizhou Island's landscape underwent a dramatic transformation. The local government continuously improved various infrastructures, including the construction of new docks, which significantly improved external transportation conditions. All major scenic areas and residential areas on the island now have road access, facilitating the smooth flow of manpower and goods. Public facilities such as water, electricity, and communication have been improved and provide stable and reliable services. Furthermore, cultural, educational, health, and sanitation facilities on the island have all been upgraded, further enhancing the living standards of local residents.



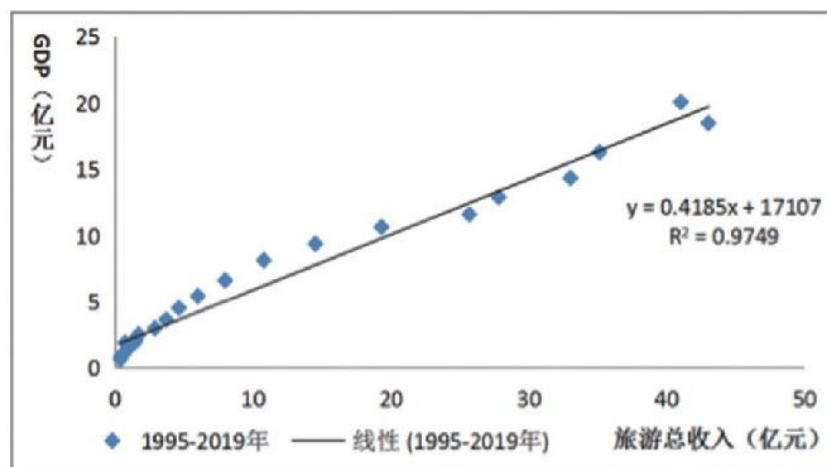


Figure 17 : This chart depicts the correlation between tourism income and GDP on Meizhou Island. The island's economic revenue primarily derives from the tourism industry and its related sectors, making the tourism economy a dominant player in the urbanization process on Meizhou Island. This has not only significantly increased the income of farmers but has also improved their overall quality of life.

Source: Compiled by Lin Pinglan, 2023.

Through regression analysis, we can observe a strong linear correlation between total tourism income as the abscissa and the urbanization level index as the ordinate (as shown in the figure). Meizhou Island's economic income mainly comes from the tourism industry and related sectors, making the tourism economy the driving force behind the island's urbanization process. Looking back at the income of rural residents on Meizhou Island, the per capita income was only 419 yuan in 1985. However, with the establishment of the open economic zone and active development of the tourism industry, income levels experienced rapid growth, reaching over 10,000 yuan by 2012, an increase of 35%. Although the pace of income growth slowed somewhat afterward, it still maintained an average annual growth rate of approximately 10%. As of 2019, the per capita disposable income of rural residents had reached 20,564 yuan, exceeding the city's average level. Compared to other rural areas in Putian, Meizhou Island residents achieved sustained income growth through reliance on tourism development, gradually enhancing their purchasing power. Simultaneously, as contact with the outside world increased, both material and spiritual aspects of life on the

island significantly improved. This change also led to a gradual transition from a traditional rural lifestyle to an urban one, signaling that the island's social life is undergoing the transformation of urbanization.

The development of tourism on Meizhou Island not only changed its economic structure but also served as a bridge for economic exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait through Mazu culture. Mazu faith is considered an important cultural asset for promoting economic cooperation between the two sides, contributing significantly to economic cooperation. Additionally, the government introduced foreign investment to foster the flourishing development of Meizhou Island's tourism industry. This not only led to the construction of tourism attractions and reception facilities but also improved the island's infrastructure, including roads and municipal facilities. Although these changes were initially made for tourism development, they not only made local residents' transportation more convenient but also enriched their material lives. The increase in tourism income also led to a substantial increase in government fiscal revenue. These funds

were invested in public areas such as education, healthcare, public safety, and environmental protection, laying the foundation for creating a favorable tourism environment and a positive social image. In terms of industrial structure, the tourism industry gradually replaced agriculture as the dominant industry, a trend that became increasingly evident over more than a decade of development on Meizhou Island. The strong interconnection of the tourism industry also drove growth in other sectors, such as transportation, construction, and fishing, generating more economic benefits for the local community.

The development of tourism on Meizhou Island has generated a mutually beneficial interaction with urbanization. The rise of tourism has brought numerous employment opportunities to the local community, successfully guiding surplus rural labor toward the tourism service industry. This not only significantly improved farmers' income and quality of life but also prevented the outflow of labor resources,

thereby reducing the phenomenon of "hollow villages." Simultaneously, the urbanization process stimulated the improvement of local education levels, providing young people with increasing opportunities for higher education and raising the overall population's quality. Those employed in the tourism sector were positively influenced through interactions with tourists, leading to improvements in Mandarin language proficiency and cultural literacy. Some islanders even underwent specialized training to work in tourism reception after being educated abroad, further enhancing the local tourism service and management standards. According to data from the Meizhou Island Management Committee, as of the morning of May 6, 2023, Meizhou Island had received over one million visitors, 15 days ahead of the numbers from 2019. During the May Day holiday, Meizhou Island hosted a series of events such as "Refreshing Summer in Putian: Coastal Getaway" and "May 1 Visit to Intangible Cultural Heritage of Putian." These events prompted Meizhou Island to plan more attractive activities, including the launch of sea tourism routes from Meizhou Island to Pingtan Island and Meizhou Island to Nanri Island, showcasing intangible heritage skills like the Meizhou women's traditional hair bun, and hosting events like the Beach Music Festival. These activities attracted a large number of visitors for sightseeing. According to statistical data, from April 29 to May 3, 2023, Meizhou Island received a total of 127,800 visitors, an increase of 542.21% compared to the same period in 2019, marking a 61.98% increase compared to 2019. On May 1, 2023, the number of tourists reached 46,500, setting a new record for the highest number of daily visitors in Meizhou Island's history.

The development of tourism on Meizhou Island has also given rise to a transformation in social life toward urbanization. Some residents have improved their income levels and purchasing power by working in tourism-related jobs, which has led to increased incomes for the local community. Improved logistics conditions have allowed local residents to access goods similar to those found in urban areas, leading to the gradual upgrading of household facilities and a shift toward urban-style living.

The urbanization of Meizhou Island's spatial landscape is a comprehensive reflection of interactive development. The attractiveness of tourism attractions has brought a large number of visitors, which, in turn, has attracted investors to build hotels, restaurants, specialty shops, and other tourism reception facilities nearby, gradually forming a clustering area for tourism services. The spatial agglomeration of these industries and service facilities brings about strong economies of scale, further promoting urban development. Meanwhile, the rise of the tourism industry has also raised higher demands for the urban landscape environment, prompting the local government to increase investments in greening and beautifying the urban environment.

Furthermore, the influx of a large number of tourists and the exchange of islanders with the outside world have brought about collisions of information and culture, stimulating a shift from traditional closed and backward thinking to a more open and modern urban mindset. It is important to emphasize that Meizhou Island's unique customs and culture have not disappeared due to urbanization. The local government holds grand festivals and events every year, attracting visitors from both home and abroad. Through such promotion, more people come to understand Mazu culture, which enhances the islanders' self-identity and mitigates the impact of rapid urbanization on traditional folk culture.

3.2 Mazu Folk Belief in Coastal Fujian and Its Interaction with Local Culture

Cultural transformation, as an inherent attribute of human culture, manifests itself as a highly complex and organic process. The major factors driving cultural transformation include external and internal elements. External factors encompass changes in the social and natural environment. The Mazu beliefs prevalent in Meizhou Town, Putian City, Fujian Province, along the coastal areas of Fujian, have had profound impacts on the spiritual and cultural development of the local population. Especially in the context of multiple stakeholders facing challenges in rural governance, Mazu beliefs play a crucial role in promoting innovation and

development in rural governance. Rooted in the local society of Meizhou Island, these beliefs are interwoven with folk activities, gradually becoming a vital component of the local rural society.

In the context of rural governance in China and the development of Mazu beliefs in Meizhou Town, rural governance holds a significant position in China's national governance system, and the diversity of governance subjects has been widely recognized. Government entities, social organizations, rural collectives, and rural residents are crucial actors in rural governance. Despite having nearly a century of history, social organizations still have limited coverage in rural areas. Mazu beliefs have gradually become an important participant in rural governance due to their grassroots influence. This belief, by strengthening grassroots influence and political authority, has facilitated political democracy participation in rural areas.

The fusion of Mazu culture with the local society in Meizhou Town, along the coastal areas of Fujian, is evident. The Mazu ancestral temple in Meizhou holds numerous ceremonies and temple fairs annually, such as Mazu's birthday celebration and her ascension day. Additionally, folk activities like family worship and the worship of "Ship-Mazu" by fishermen are common. These Mazu belief-related activities have interacted with the local society for an extended period, becoming an integral part of the local rural culture. Examples of this interaction include traditional hairstyles resembling sailing ships, distinctive clothing, Lantern Festival celebrations, and Mazu lantern processions.

These activities not only influence folk customs but also underscore the role of Mazu beliefs in the local society. This interaction has made Mazu beliefs a cultural bond that upholds harmony within families and communities. Especially since Mazu beliefs were inscribed on the list of intangible cultural heritage, the understanding of their significance and value has deepened, leading to a more profound integration of Mazu beliefs with local culture. Mazu beliefs have become an essential element of the local culture in the Meizhou region.

3.3 The Peaceful Value of Mazu Culture in the Context of Cross-Strait Relations

Mazu culture, as one of the bonds in cross-strait relations, holds immense significance. Both sides of the Taiwan Strait should actively engage in promoting the construction of the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road." Taiwanese compatriots regard the early branch temples of Mazu as "Kaitai Mazu," indicating the close connection between Mazu's journey to Taiwan and the development of the island. Over two-thirds of Taiwan's population, exceeding 18 million people, have faith in Mazu, making her a peaceful goddess who connects the emotions of people on both sides of the strait. This cultural fusion has formed a profound foundation for Chinese maritime culture, linking the inseparable national sentiments of people on both sides of the strait. The exchange of Mazu culture will drive the process of national reunification. (Ji F,2019)

During the Qing Dynasty, General Shi Lang led his troops to conquer Taiwan, uniting it with the territory of the motherland. One of his divisions achieved victory at Wutou in Quanzhou, and this triumph was believed to be the result of Mazu's protection. Deeply grateful for Mazu's assistance, Shi Lang, at the request of his fellow townsman and the commander of the Fujian Navy, Wan Zhengse, repeatedly submitted petitions to Emperor Kangxi, pleading for Mazu's enshrinement as a gesture of gratitude.

It is worth noting that there are currently over 1,500 Mazu temples in Taiwan, with more than 430 of them being of significant size and influence. The Chaotian Temple in Beigang (established in 1694) is one of the three largest Mazu temples in the world. In history, in 1987, Mazu devotees from Dajia Town, Taichung County, achieved a historic breakthrough by breaking through the cross-strait blockade, paving the way for the motto "Officials do not communicate, but Mazu communicates first." This had a profound impact on the Chinese communities on both sides and became a significant link in cross-strait exchanges. Mazu culture transcends political barriers and promotes communication between the two sides. In 1997, the golden statue of Mazu from Meizhou Island toured Taiwan for 103 days and received over 10

million visits from Taiwanese Mazu devotees, creating a tremendous impact. In 2000, over 4,000 believers from Dajia Town's Chaotian Temple made a pilgrimage to the mainland in batches, conducting worship activities at multiple locations in Fujian. This event received widespread media attention and expedited the opening of Taiwan's "mini three links" policy. In 2006, more than 40 Mazu temples from Taiwan collectively made a pilgrimage to the mainland, becoming the largest cross-strait religious and cultural exchange event to date, positively influencing the implementation of the "big three links" policy. Mazu culture promotes patriotic thinking and drives peaceful reunification of the motherland. This culture has gradually become a symbol of peace in cross-strait trade and exchanges, providing active support for the process of national reunification.



Figure 18: In 2006, on September 26th, a collective group of devotees from Taiwan's Mazu temples arrived at the Xianliang Port Tianhou Ancestral Shrine in Putian, Fujian, carrying the statue of Mazu to pay homage. On that day, the "2006 Taiwan Mazu Reunion Association and Dalin Town Lanzhu Temple Meizhou Pilgrimage Group," consisting of over 4,300 Mazu devotees, reached the hometown of Mazu, Meizhou Island in Putian City, to engage in a 4-day pilgrimage and cultural exchange activities dedicated to Mazu.

Source: Retrieved from the internet via Google, 2023.

Today, Mazu culture, known as the "Goddess of Peace in the Taiwan Strait," holds unique value in promoting cross-strait cultural exchange and facilitating the integration and development of both sides. By using Mazu culture as a link, activities such as sports industry development, agricultural production, trade negotiations, and investment promotion have strengthened the spiritual connection between people on both sides, contributing to the elimination of mutual barriers and fostering mutual understanding.

The combination of local Mazu culture and sports culture in Fujian and Taiwan represents a new cultural phenomenon and a new area of cooperation in cross-strait sports and cultural exchange. The sports exchange between Fujian and Taiwan has been active for a long time, marking many "firsts" in cross-strait sports and cultural exchange. In recent years, cross-strait sports exchange has become more frequent, with a diverse range of activities. Currently, there are nearly 400 Taiwanese investments in the sports industry in Fujian, mainly involving sports apparel, shoes, sports and recreational activities, sports and fitness equipment, and more. The requirement for "deepening cross-strait sports exchange and cooperation" in the State Council's "Opinions on Supporting Fujian Province in Accelerating the Construction of the Cross-Strait Economic Zone" has provided greater opportunities for cross-strait sports exchange. In 2010, the Fujian Provincial Sports Bureau, in collaboration with the General Administration of Sport of China, organized the "Cross-Strait Sports Festival" during the "Cross-Strait Forum." They invited Taiwanese sports associations, well-known figures in the sports industry, especially those who had not participated in the forum before, to participate in exchange competitions and discussions. Various activities such as "Cross-Strait Traditional Martial Arts Exchange Competition," "Cross-Strait Bridge Tournament," "Cross-Strait Sports Dance Exchange Competition," "Cross-Strait Bicycle Race," "Cross-Strait Basketball Challenge," and "Cross-Strait Half Marathon" were organized in different regions of

Fujian. In the same year, a team from Kinmen, Taiwan, participated in the basketball competition in the "14th Fujian Provincial Games," marking a new chapter in cross-strait sports exchange. This demonstrates the unique role of sports in promoting cooperation and communication, expanding cross-strait communication channels, and enhancing the influence of Fujian's sports, contributing to improving cross-strait relations and creating a stable and harmonious environment for the construction of the Cross-Strait Economic Zone.

In the field of agriculture, as of March 2018, Fujian Province had approved 2,650 Taiwanese agricultural projects, with contracted Taiwanese investment reaching 3.88 billion US dollars and actual investment at 2.2 billion US dollars. Fujian has become an important distribution center for Taiwanese agricultural products to enter the mainland Chinese market. The Cross-Strait Agricultural Cooperation Experimental Zone has fully played its role as a "window, demonstration, and radiation," demonstrating significant results. This practice proves that the development of Taiwan cannot be separated from the support of the mainland. With the strong support of the motherland, the living standards of Taiwan compatriots will be greatly improved, and their development prospects will be broader.

Despite differences in certain aspects of culture between the two sides, cultural exchange has advantageous factors due to their shared roots. We should use Mazu culture to promote cross-strait cultural exchange activities in ways that are appealing to the public, enhancing understanding and recognition of the mainland among Taiwan compatriots. At the same time, we should strengthen the exchange of young people across the strait, allowing the younger generation to have a deeper understanding of their motherland and jointly promote the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

3.4 The spread of Mazu belief overseas is based on the "Chinese religion" and characterized by "interactive symbiosis."

During the Tang and Song dynasties, the integration of maritime culture and

witchcraft culture in coastal Fujian laid the foundation for the origin, formation, and spread of Mazu culture. At the same time, since the Song Dynasty, Fujian emphasized clan and township relationships, fostering strong local identity. Fujianese merchants and immigrants may have believed that their hometown deities would protect them more wholeheartedly, contributing to the widespread dissemination and growth of Mazu culture in coastal Fujian.

Viewing the overseas spread of Mazu culture in the context of global cultural communication history, it is evident that in the history of Chinese cultural dissemination and exchange, the overseas spread of Mazu culture holds irreplaceable significance. In the past, the influence of Chinese culture was often attributed to elite culture such as Confucian classics, while the role of folk culture in world cultural dissemination was overlooked. However, since the Ming and Qing dynasties, folk culture in China's southeastern coastal regions, especially the lifestyles of overseas Chinese immigrants, has gradually become an important part of the external dissemination of Chinese culture. In the Ming and Qing periods, Chinese society underwent transformation, moving from "regional history" to "world history." Under the influence of Western colonialism, exchanges between East and West became more frequent. While the external dissemination of Chinese culture can be traced back to the Han and Tang dynasties, it was not until the Ming Dynasty that the influence of Western countries became significant. During this period, cultural exchanges between East and West became more equal, and Chinese traditional culture was recognized by Western Jesuit missionaries. However, in modern times, Western capitalism and the industrial revolution made the West more confident and led to a change in their view of Chinese culture. Nevertheless, the relatively smooth transmission of folk culture and communication channels in China's southeastern coastal regions, preserving cultural symbols with Chinese characteristics.

Mazu culture, as a folk belief in coastal Fujian, has been revered by generations of sailors and immigrants. Its overseas dissemination is closely linked to the outward

migration of coastal residents since the 15th and 16th centuries and the concurrent overseas dissemination of folk culture in coastal regions such as Fujian. Overseas trade brought substantial material benefits to coastal residents. For instance, during the Ming Dynasty, they engaged in trade with more than ten countries and regions, including the Arabian Peninsula, Daqin (the Roman Empire), Gepo (central Java, Indonesia), Sanfoqi (eastern Sumatra Island), Goryeo (Korea), Japan, Ryukyu, Jiaozhi (northern Vietnam), Champa (southern Vietnam), Zhenla (Cambodia), and the Hong Kong and Taiwan regions at the time.



Figure 19: The Mazu Procession is an important ritual in Mazu worship, typically held at specific times. It often includes grand parades and processions, with participants dressed in elaborate costumes and carrying the statue or gold body of Mazu, proceeding along predetermined routes. These processions can be quite

extensive, attracting large numbers of worshippers and tourists. During the procession, worshippers commonly pray for health, safety, and happiness, both for themselves and for their families and communities. They also offer blessings to their households and neighborhoods while expressing their faith in Mazu's protection. The Mazu Procession is a celebration filled with religious, cultural, and social significance, aimed at preserving Mazu worship and promoting traditional culture. These activities bring together people's faith and enthusiasm while making positive contributions to the development of their communities and regions.

Source: Google Internet, accessed in 2023

At the same time, many coastal residents ventured across the seas in search of livelihoods, with Penghu even witnessing cases where residents from coastal provinces such as Fujian and Guangdong routinely sailed to these islands for seasonal work and returned home after the harvest. Mazu temples became important venues for coastal residents to showcase their customs, discuss community activities, and trade. For example, residents near the Mazu Pavilion in the southwest of the Macau Peninsula were mainly engaged in trade, translation, and business, with many of them originating from Fujian. They rented houses from Westerners for residence, and their settlements quickly became populated areas and commercial districts. Every Mazu's birthday and Ascension Day, Mazu temples held grand ceremonies, featuring Mazu processions and temple fairs with lively performances, including yangge dance, lion dance, and dramas. This also made Mazu temples the central hub for local commercial and cultural activities. For instance, the Lianfeng Temple in Macau served as an inn for local officials, and the area around it quickly developed into a residential and commercial district.

In summary, we can see that the expansion of Mazu culture's overseas dissemination relies on a collective communication model. This communication model can be divided into three stages guided by integrative thinking theory: "input, process, and output." In the input stage, Mazu culture aims to alleviate the anxieties of believers through faith and worship. In the process stage, Mazu belief shows a North-South divide, with higher recognition in the southern region due to maritime trade, while the northern region struggles to gain widespread recognition. After these two

stages, Mazu culture quickly demonstrates output, mainly through temple construction, ritual performance, and economic interactions.

In terms of temple construction, believers around the world have constructed Mazu temples to show their reverence for Mazu. In Singapore, a series of Mazu temples such as Yueh Hai Ching Temple and Thian Hock Keng Temple serve not only as gathering places for immigrants but also as spiritual pillars for overseas Chinese, connecting them emotionally with their hometowns and symbolizing unity and identity among overseas Chinese. Mazu belief has also integrated with local culture in various places, such as the fusion of Mazu belief with Hinduism in the Surabaya Fu'an Gong Temple in East Java. Moreover, Mazu temples actively integrate into local culture through participation in local landscapes and other means.

This "interactive symbiosis" highlights the sacred concept of Mazu rituals in the local context and gains consensus. As a folk belief, Mazu belief, by showcasing art, faith, and organizational strength, fully adapts to the religious environment overseas while conveying traditional Chinese culture. This fusion has allowed Mazu culture to quickly undergo localization overseas.

3.5 The Role of Mazu Belief in Promoting the National "Belt and Road" Strategy

The year 2016 marked the introduction of the "13th Five-Year Plan," which emphasized the vigorous promotion of the "Belt and Road" initiative. Based on the grand vision of building the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road, harnessing the positive influence of Chinese folk beliefs, with Mazu as a prominent representative, became imperative. Over the long course of cultural diffusion, the formation and expansion of the Mazu culture network has gradually become an essential means of disseminating Chinese culture overseas, making Mazu culture an indispensable part of the global human cultural exchange system. (Song Jianxiao, 2015)

From an economic perspective, Mazu culture has played a crucial role in maritime trade and cultural industry development. Historically, China's commercial activities were predominantly land-based. However, as economic centers shifted

southward and connections between East and West commercial routes solidified, a mature overseas trading system along the southeastern coast began to emerge. Particularly during the Ming and Qing periods, waves of immigrants to Southeast Asia propelled the zenith of overseas Chinese business activities. Mazu, as the sea goddess, instilled a strong faith in these immigrants, and its enduring cultural and growing economic value became increasingly evident. In modern times, the rich cultural heritage of Mazu culture has attracted numerous foreign tourists who visit the origin sites of Mazu and renowned Mazu temples within China, laying a solid foundation for the development of China's tourism industry. According to statistics, in the first half of 2017 alone, Matsuo Island attracted 3.618 million domestic and foreign tourists, with a year-on-year growth of 12.96%, and the total tourism revenue reached 2.23 billion yuan, up 7.73% year-on-year. Additionally, since its opening in 1986, the restored Tien Hou Gong Temple and Ancient Cultural Street in Tianjin have drawn tourists from more than 80 countries and regions, including heads of state. Clearly, the economic and social benefits generated by Mazu culture are significant.

As the times evolve, human economic models are transitioning from traditional "three-tier economic activities" to a "knowledge economy." Mazu culture inherently contains economic value. Today, countries worldwide are increasingly focused on culture and contemporary socio-economics. Mazu culture is transcending traditional cultural frameworks and embracing new challenges with innovative values. Temples such as Taiwan's Dajia Zhenlan Temple, Beigang Xing Tian Temple, and Tainan's Datianhou Temple not only attract a large group of worshippers but also possess rich tourism resources, holding tremendous economic potential. In recent years, these temples have actively integrated their resources with the cultural and creative industries, introducing a variety of unique creative products, from cultural products in temple shops to festival cultural merchandise and derivative cultural products from Mazu processions, gradually forming a unique industrial chain and structure. Government support plays a crucial role in the operation of this diversified economic

model. Mazu culture conveys harmonious concepts to the world through modern media, creating a "virtual space" to expand its influence, and actively participating in various political and economic activities. In conclusion, as a part of East Asian maritime culture, Mazu culture plays multiple roles in temple construction, customs evolution, and economic exchanges, serving as an essential bridge for human cultural exchange. Moreover, this two-way interactive model further enriches the content of the Mazu knowledge system, providing solid guarantees for the continuous vitality of Mazu culture.

Mazu cultural beliefs serve as a link in the construction of the "Belt and Road." With the passage of time, the role of Mazu culture as a cultural link for national identity has become increasingly evident. Whether in politics, economics, or culture, Mazu culture can integrate the connections between China and countries along the "Belt and Road." Despite differences in political systems and economic development among different countries, Mazu culture, as a folk culture, is characterized by affinity and a sense of identity. This helps enhance emotional resonance among people of various countries, promotes mutual understanding, and achieves win-win outcomes. China's "13th Five-Year Plan" emphasizes "encouraging diversified folk cultural exchanges and leveraging the role of folk cultures like Mazu culture." Every year, over 3.5 million believers from around the world travel to Matsu Island to participate in worship and blessing activities, and this number continues to grow. In countries and regions along the "Belt and Road," cultural exchange activities with Mazu as the theme are also on the rise, attracting considerable attention. In 2016, 40 young overseas Chinese from Indonesia and Italy visited Matsu Island to experience Mazu culture. They came because of their interest in Mazu culture and not only learned Chinese language, calligraphy, paper-cutting, and other Chinese cultural elements but also engaged in dialogues and exchanges with Chinese youth, bridging the cultural gap between them. In the same year, Datuk Gan Tian Lu, from Malacca, Malaysia, also visited Matsu Mazu Temple and the Chinese Mazu Culture Research Institute.

Gan Tian Lu mentioned that Mazu culture has a long history of spreading in Malaysia and not only helps consolidate the cohesion of Chinese overseas but also promotes harmonious coexistence between Chinese overseas and Malaysians. Mazu culture has become a vital medium for unity, continuing the spirit of the "Belt and Road" initiative. These exchange activities demonstrate the appeal and influence of Mazu culture, contributing not only to strengthening cultural connections between individuals but also to deepening cooperation among countries and regions along the "Belt and Road," further promoting the implementation of the "Belt and Road" initiative. (Meng Jian-huang, Pan Shi-hui, 2020)

The Mazu cultural spirit aligns with the goals of the "Belt and Road" initiative. The emphasis on harmony and prosperity in the Mazu culture is highly consistent with the objectives of the "Belt and Road" initiative. Mazu culture embodies traditional Chinese virtues, and adherents actively participate in charitable activities. This cultural spirit helps establish harmonious interpersonal relationships and drives social prosperity. The pioneering, fearless, and altruistic spirit exemplified in Mazu culture is in line with the spirit of the "Belt and Road," providing strong impetus for exchanges and cooperation among countries along the route in various fields.

4. Steady Development of Folk Temples and Believers in Mazu Folk Belief

4.1 The Introduction of National Awareness into Folk Society through Ceremonies

In the historical development of Mazu belief, the status fluctuations of the Tianjin Huanghui (Tianjin Mazu Temple) were influenced not only by national policies but also deeply constrained by regional culture and social structure. The functions and organizational forms of temple fairs evolved over a long history, gradually developing diverse characteristics through multiple phases. From initially being a guardian deity for seafarers to becoming an all-encompassing protector and evolving into comprehensive temple fairs, this transformation was a product of both

public demand and social change. Temple fairs are no longer just places of religious worship but have also integrated various activities like drama, tourism, social interactions, and commodity exchange. This integration has created a unique cultural atmosphere and behavioral patterns, which further unite the believers, convey core values, and meet societal needs.

Local guild organizations play a crucial role in temple fairs, and the combination of geography and lineage constitutes the basic elements of temple fairs. As the intersection of local elites and official authority, temple fairs help maintain local order and play a critical role in the stability of social structure. Local guild organizations play a leading role in inheriting and developing temple fairs by transmitting beliefs through forms such as family associations and fellowships. The stability of temple fairs is closely related to the existence of local guild organizations, which contribute to community resilience, promote social relations, drive economic development, and reflect the value of intangible cultural heritage.

However, the role of the state should not be overlooked when studying temple fairs. As a form of folk belief, temple fairs are influenced by national policies, especially in feudal China. Taking the Tianjin Huanghui (Tianjin Mazu Temple) as an example, as a representative temple fair with distinct regional characteristics, it also reflects the influence of the state on temple fairs. However, it is essential not to oversimplify the relationship between the state and local, historical and modern aspects. Instead, it should be understood within the historical context of the state. The historical context of regional societies is closely linked to the national system, and the internal context of regional history can be seen as a unique expression of national ideology in different regional societies. National history can also be fully displayed in the economic development of regional societies. As a state-supported temple fair, the Tianjin Huanghui (Tianjin Mazu Temple) has a closer relationship with the ruling class compared to other forms of folk temple fairs. Only by understanding the influence of the state on local power at various times can we scientifically recognize

the value of the Tianjin Huanghui (Tianjin Mazu Temple) in regional studies.

Starting from the Yuan Dynasty, as the political center shifted to Dadu (modern-day Beijing), economic exchanges between the north and south became increasingly close. Dazhuai (modern-day Tianjin) gradually became the gateway fortress to the capital due to the development of cargo transport and maritime shipping. Its advantageous geographical location promoted economic and cultural exchanges, allowing various religions, beliefs, and thoughts to collide and merge. From a political and cultural perspective, the north was closer to the political center and aligned more with the ruling culture, forming a relatively stronger cultural axis. Conversely, the south lacked centripetal force and cohesion towards the central government. This unique geographical location determined that the state viewed Tianjin as a representative folk temple fair. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the state's influence on Tianjin was greater, stronger, and more direct than in other cities. Therefore, the state frequently bestowed names and honors upon Mazu, changing the name of the Niangniang Meeting to the Tianjin Huanghui (Tianjin Mazu Temple) and transforming it from an ordinary secular temple fair into a tightly organized, strictly regulated temple fair symbolizing the official sacred system. In a sense, the stability of the Tianjin Huanghui (Tianjin Mazu Temple) is closely linked to the participation of official authorities. Since the Ming Dynasty, authoritarian monarchs attempted to control grassroots society in a subtle way by using people's belief in deities to strengthen community education. However, they needed to choose which folk beliefs to adopt and where to implement them to achieve the best control effect.

In conclusion, the development of Mazu belief and the evolution of the Tianjin Huanghui (Tianjin Mazu Temple) are influenced by both public demand and regional culture, as well as by national policies and official authority. This interaction has gradually formed a rich and diverse temple fair culture in the historical process of temple fairs, demonstrating the social functions and cultural value of temple fairs. Additionally, the stability provided by the combination of geographical and lineage

factors, as well as the influence of the state in the development of temple fairs, should be considered and comprehensively analyzed within the historical context.

4.2 Mazu Folk Organizations as "Faith Circles" at the Center of Culture and Economy

Mazu folk organizations serve as faith circles that connect culture and economy. Throughout China's history, folk belief has played an essential role in uniting social forces and preserving culture. This study examines religious activities and organizations centered around the main deity, Mazu, in the coastal regions of Fujian Province from the perspective of social organization. The concept of faith circles refers to voluntary religious organizations centered around the worship of a particular deity and its incarnations. Mazu belief, widely inherited in the southern coastal regions of China, has formed a unique "faith circle." Within this circle, Mazu folk organizations, as the center of culture and economy, connect multiple aspects of faith, society, and economics, shape regional characteristics, and influence social development and cultural heritage.

In terms of social cohesion, Mazu belief originated from ancient fishermen's beliefs, initially aimed at ensuring safety during maritime activities. Over time, it evolved into a comprehensive system encompassing religion, society, and culture. Mazu folk organizations, such as temple fairs and guilds, have become the carriers of faith and sources of cohesion. Temple fairs, as gathering places for believers, serve not only as venues for religious ceremonies but also as platforms for social interactions and cultural preservation. Within temple fairs, people can come together for worship, sightseeing, and socializing, creating a diverse range of social activities.

Mazu belief also influences economic activities in the regions where her blessings are invoked. The functions of Mazu folk organizations extend beyond religion and social activities; they also play significant roles in the economy. Temple fairs often accompany markets and trade activities, serving as platforms for economic exchanges. From ancient maritime trade to modern-day commodity trading, temple

fairs have played a role in driving local economic development. Mazu belief also influences residents' career choices to some extent, with many opting for occupations related to the sea, such as fishing and shipping. This further enhances the position of Mazu belief in the local economy.

Mazu temples contribute to the preservation of regional culture. Mazu folk organizations do not just connect people economically; they also carry rich regional culture. Mazu temples are open to the public, and anyone can come to seek the goddess's blessings and participate in various temple activities, such as divination, fortune-telling, making offerings, and watching performances. Due to the openness of Mazu belief, it attracts believers from outside the region. The efficacy of Mazu often depends on the length of her history in a particular area, and the geographical location of Mazu temples

affects their popularity. Therefore, the culture and customs in Mazu temples often display the features of both the local area and the believers' places of origin. This blending of local and non-local cultures contributes to the diversification of local customs and the development of regional culture.

The combination of culture and economy is evident in the diverse activities of Mazu folk organizations. In addition to religious rituals, temple fairs often include cultural performances, traditional crafts exhibitions, and folk art displays. These activities not only enrich the cultural life of local residents but also attract tourists, generating income for the local economy. Moreover, the integration of culture and economy is embodied in the offerings made by believers. Believers often present offerings that reflect their economic status, such as gold and silver ornaments, precious antiques, and agricultural products. These offerings are not only religious offerings but also symbols of economic prosperity.

In conclusion, Mazu folk organizations, as faith circles, connect culture and economy in the coastal regions of Fujian Province, China. They serve as platforms for social cohesion, economic activities, and cultural preservation. Through the

integration of culture and economy, Mazu folk organizations contribute to the development of regional culture and the local economy. By examining the interplay between faith, society, and economics within the context of Mazu belief, this study sheds light on the multifaceted nature of religious practices and their impact on society and culture.

4.3 Interaction and Steadiness Factors between Mazu Temples and Other Temple Fairs

Mazu temple fairs, as vibrant traditional cultural events, have played a significant role in societal life throughout history. Mazu ancestral temples, as a crucial component of these temple fairs, maintain close interactive relationships with other temple fairs, which, to some extent, influence the stability of these fairs. An in-depth exploration of the interaction between Mazu ancestral temples and other temple fairs, as well as the factors influencing their stability, contributes to a better understanding of the diversity and heritage of Chinese temple fair culture.



Figure 20: Members of the Mazu Temple Association carry Mazu out to participate in activities. The activities of the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island often involve a fusion of tradition and innovation with Mazu temple associations from various regions.

Along the parade route, local villagers come out of their homes to warmly welcome Mazu's sacred procession and conduct worship ceremonies, praying for favorable weather, national prosperity, and people's well-being.

Source: Mazu Temple Archives, Accessed in 2023.

Mazu ancestral temples have a deep-rooted faith base in the southern coastal regions of China, and the temple activities on Meizhou Island often involve traditional and innovative interactions with Mazu temple fairs in various locations. This interaction is not only geographical but also cultural, reflected in activities with themes such as "Mazu's return to her hometown," "Mazu rituals," and "seafaring Mazu." These intangible heritage rituals encompass various elements, including folk performances and processions, fostering exchanges and integration between different temple fairs. As vital centers of local faith, Mazu ancestral temples attract devotees from various regions, bringing together temple fairs from different places, leading to a phenomenon of mutual communication, innovation, and fusion.

Mazu ancestral temples, as the core sites of Mazu belief, carry rich religious and cultural connotations. For instance, Meizhou Island and Macau, though separated by a strait, are closely connected through Mazu belief. Meizhou Island's Tin Hau Temple, as the birthplace of Mazu, attracts numerous pilgrims every year. Meanwhile, Macau's Tin Hau Temple serves as the center of Mazu belief in Macau. The interaction between these two temples is not merely about communication among devotees but also a cultural confluence between the two regions. (Zheng Miaobing, 2004)

During significant religious events like Mazu's birthday or important Mazu celebrations, both Meizhou Island's Tin Hau Temple and other temples organize grand temple fair activities. Devotees flock to these events from various regions, with some even taking ferries to cross the sea to participate, expressing their reverence for Mazu. In addition to temple fairs, Meizhou Island's Tin Hau Temple and Macau's Tin Hau Temple also collaborate on cultural activities. For instance, they jointly organize cultural lectures on Mazu, art exhibitions, stage performances, and more. This cross-sea participation not only strengthens emotional ties among devotees but also elevates

the interaction between Mazu cultural symbols and people, promoting the inheritance of culture in both regions.

During significant religious ceremonies, both temples often extend invitations to each other. For example, Macau's Tin Hau Temple invites representatives from Meizhou Island's Tin Hau Temple to jointly perform rituals during Mazu's birthday celebration each year, signifying their shared reverence for Mazu. Likewise, during grand celebrations at Meizhou Island's Tin Hau Temple, devotees from Macau's Tin Hau Temple are also invited to join in the festivities. This cross-sea interaction and cooperation are not merely exchanges between two temples but also a fusion of cultures between the two regions. It not only allows devotees to feel a shared faith but also plays a crucial role in the transmission of belief, which is essential for the stability of temple fairs. Temple fairs serve as platforms for the display of faith, transmitting it to future generations and enhancing the cohesion of local communities. The interaction between Meizhou Island's Tin Hau Temple and Macau's Tin Hau Temple is also a vivid reflection of friendly relations between the two regions.

The interaction between Mazu ancestral temples and other temple fairs enriches the cultural exchanges and integration within Chinese temple fair culture. This interaction strengthens community cohesion and promotes social harmony. As integral components of community culture, temple fairs not only promote the heritage of ancient beliefs but also reflect social change and cultural diversity. The blending and conflicts between different beliefs and the diversity of temple fair activities deserve in-depth research within this interaction. These cases inspire us to recognize that the status of religious belief within communities not only influences societal moral values but also has profound effects on economic and cultural development.

4.4 The Profound Impact of Mazu Temple Fairs and Temple Management in the Post-Intangible Cultural Heritage Era

In 2006, the "Mazu Festival of Meizhou" was listed as one of the first national-level intangible cultural heritage items in China. In September 2009, the resolution to

include "Mazu belief and customs" in the World Intangible Cultural Heritage List was approved by UNESCO. The period of applying for the inclusion of Mazu culture in the intangible cultural heritage was a result of a phased understanding of the development of China's intangible cultural heritage protection, which has promoted the sustainable development of traditional cultural protection.

Mazu culture has officially become the common cultural heritage of all humanity, contributing positively to the protection of Mazu culture, the inheritance of faith and customs, the exploration of cultural connotations, the promotion of widespread dissemination, and the expansion of its global influence. Protection is the prerequisite for all work related to "intangible heritage." The protection strategies and research in this field even involve investigations in disciplines such as history, anthropology, communication, and economics. The government has organized research experiences from more mature disciplines, analyzing from multiple angles, and conducting interdisciplinary research. Starting with a census, an exhaustive inventory is carried out to identify valuable historical artifacts related to the location, rules, lineage continuity, current status of inheritance, unique skills, and lists of inheritors. This information is systematically documented, serving as a reference for research on cultural heritage in the "post-intangible heritage" era.

Furthermore, the government-led management model of Meizhou Island's ancestral temple has played a crucial role. After being included in the intangible cultural heritage list, Meizhou Island's ancestral temple received support from the government for development. However, since temples are both cultural relics and involve religious aspects, as well as being tourist attractions, their management involves multiple government departments, such as culture, cultural relics, tourism, and religion. Managing them directly through a single department would not adequately address their complex needs. After various attempts, the People's Government of Putian City ultimately chose to establish the Meizhou Island Management Committee through the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple Council. This

dual-mode approach was adopted.

In November 2019, the "List of National-level Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Protection Units" was announced, and the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple Council was granted the status of a "Mazu Festival" protection unit. The main members of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple Council are primarily descendants of Mazu devotees, with additional government-appointed members, including representatives from religious and cultural relics departments, and most notably, devotee representatives. Given that the temple primarily centers around Mazu, the involvement of devotees in religious activities is crucial. Devotee representatives play significant roles within the council, participating in its daily management. Additionally, to ensure effective supervision, a board of supervisors was established, with members from various social strata.

The Meizhou Island Management Committee, led by the chief executive (directly appointed by the Putian City government), is responsible for coordinating relevant departments. The committee has established detailed systems, specifying the responsibilities and divisions of all members of government departments and

institutions on Meizhou Island, thereby maintaining the island's development. During the organization of major events, the government takes the lead in the planning and coordination, ensuring a unified arrangement and management. From fundraising to event planning, each step is carefully planned, ensuring the smooth execution of activities. This management model ensures the regular operation of temples and provides government support and leadership for major festivals, guaranteeing their success.

Summary

Mazu culture, as a belief system steeped in historical roots, has undergone multifaceted transformations across different temporal and spatial contexts. This chapter has provided a profound analysis of the evolving significance of Mazu

culture, examining it from the perspectives of national and societal relationships, national cultural strategies, as well as the stable development of grassroots Mazu temple fairs and believers.

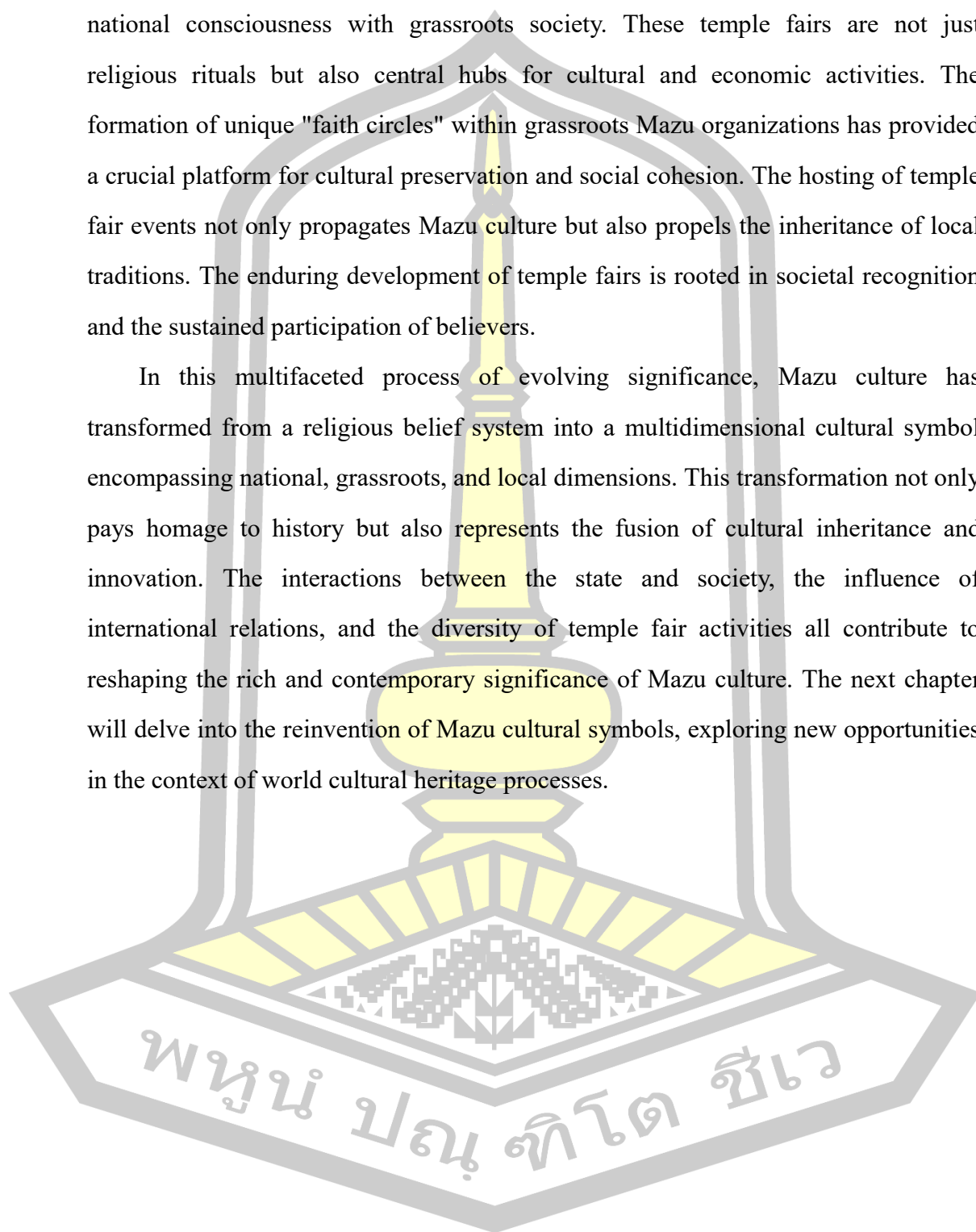
The Evolution of Mazu Faith from the Perspective of National and Societal Relationships Within the backdrop of feudal China, Mazu culture played the role of safeguarding maritime security and blessing fishermen. However, as it gradually assimilated into the feudal ritual system, Mazu faith underwent an evolution in the context of religion and societal relationships. Especially during periods of social upheaval, Mazu faith encountered distortions and interruptions. Nonetheless, the era of reform and opening-up provided an opportune moment for the revival of Mazu faith. The resurgence and flourishing of Mazu faith activities were not merely a convergence of timing and conditions but also a result of active engagement from various social organizations.

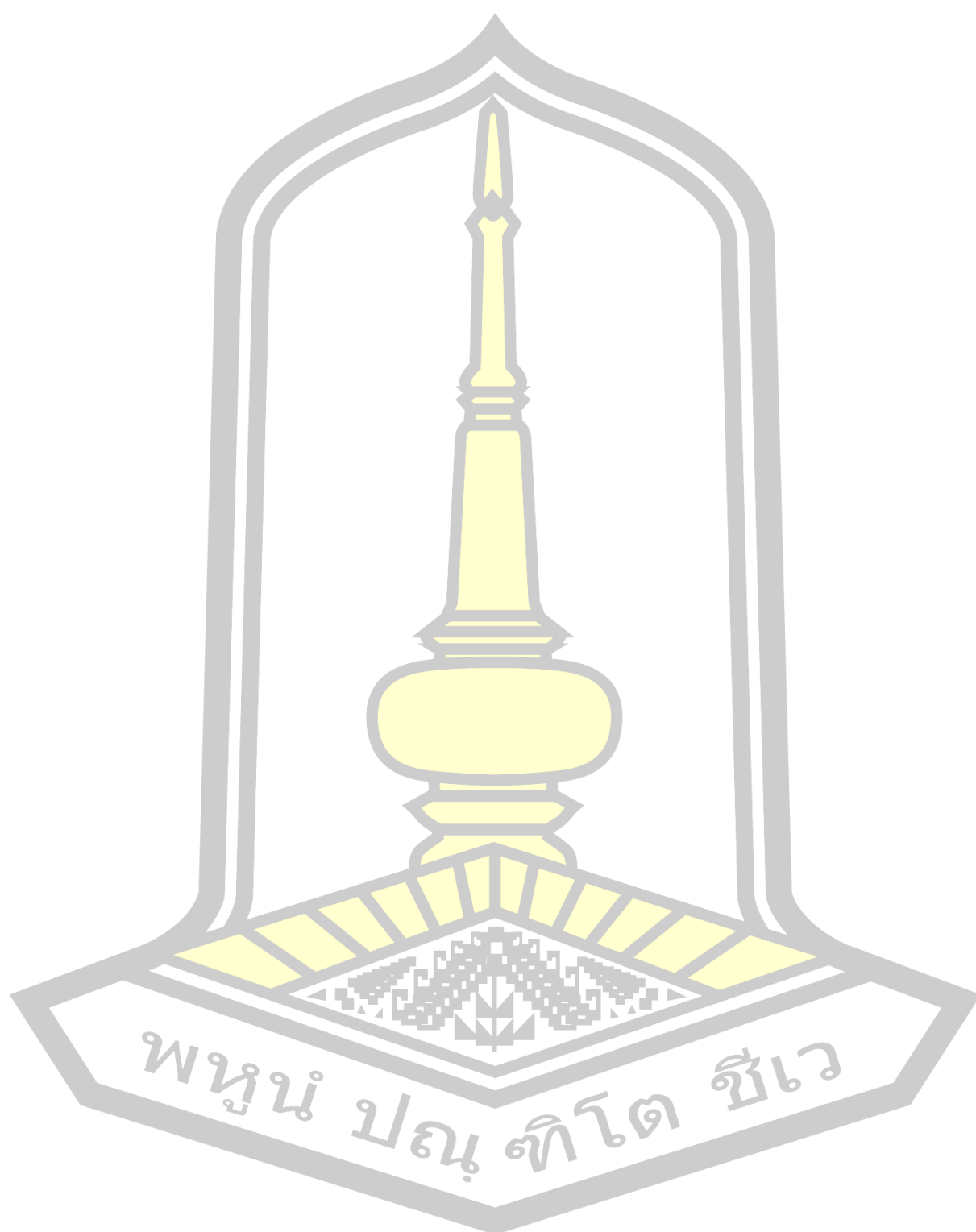
The Evolution of the Significance of Grassroots Mazu Belief from the Perspective of National Cultural Strategies Mazu culture transcends being merely a religious belief; it forms an integral part of national cultural strategies. The government has actively promoted the development of the Mazu Island Management Committee, fostering the synergy between maritime development, tourism, urbanization, and Mazu belief. This has propelled the interaction between local Mazu customs and indigenous cultures in coastal regions, firmly embedding Mazu culture within local traditions. Against the backdrop of cross-strait relations, Mazu culture has acquired a profound value in promoting peace. Serving as a harbinger of peace, Mazu has played a constructive role in easing and improving cross-strait relations. Moreover, Mazu faith has become integrated into national strategic initiatives, particularly as a significant component of the "Belt and Road" strategy. This integration has facilitated cultural exchanges and people-to-people diplomacy, thereby exemplifying the embodiment of the nation's soft power.

The Stable Development of Grassroots Mazu Temple Fairs and Believers Mazu

temple fairs, as concentrated expressions of Mazu faith, serve as a bridge connecting national consciousness with grassroots society. These temple fairs are not just religious rituals but also central hubs for cultural and economic activities. The formation of unique "faith circles" within grassroots Mazu organizations has provided a crucial platform for cultural preservation and social cohesion. The hosting of temple fair events not only propagates Mazu culture but also propels the inheritance of local traditions. The enduring development of temple fairs is rooted in societal recognition and the sustained participation of believers.

In this multifaceted process of evolving significance, Mazu culture has transformed from a religious belief system into a multidimensional cultural symbol encompassing national, grassroots, and local dimensions. This transformation not only pays homage to history but also represents the fusion of cultural inheritance and innovation. The interactions between the state and society, the influence of international relations, and the diversity of temple fair activities all contribute to reshaping the rich and contemporary significance of Mazu culture. The next chapter will delve into the reinvention of Mazu cultural symbols, exploring new opportunities in the context of world cultural heritage processes.





Chapter V

Symbolic Reimagination—New Opportunities for Mazu Culture in the World Cultural Heritage Process

1. Introduction

The final chapter focuses on the development and changes of Mazu culture in the process of applying for World Intangible Cultural Heritage status. This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part, we investigate the changes in folk customs such as "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace," compare the "Sea Worship of Mazu" ceremony in Xianliang Harbor, and contrast the changes before and after the application for heritage status of the "Mazu Ancestral Temple Festival" on Meizhou Island, and discuss their contemporary significance. In the second part, we delve into the process of applying "Mazu Beliefs" for World Intangible Cultural Heritage status, examining how the government cleverly transformed the application process and explored the significance of the inheritance and change of Mazu belief culture from the perspective of "World Intangible Cultural Heritage." In the third part, through the revitalization of Mazu culture, academic research, cross-lingual communication, and cross-border fusion development, we confirm the transformation of Mazu as World Intangible Cultural Heritage from "static" preservation to "active" inheritance. In the fourth part, we analyze the scale of the Mazu cultural tourism market on Meizhou Island, and pilgrimage tourism under the framework of "identity economics" of World Intangible Cultural Heritage welcomes new opportunities.

2. Folk Beliefs of Mazu and "Intangible Heritage"

In the past two decades, Chinese society has undergone a significant trend of renaming folk culture as "intangible cultural heritage," thereby diminishing its previous superstitious labels. This change holds immense significance. On one hand,

it breaks the mold of traditional culture in China, which has been influenced by external and top-down factors since modern times. On the other hand, this transformation, for the first time, systematically reorganizes the cultural relationships between individuals, communities, regions, nations, and even global mainstreams.

The intervention and shaping of this intangible heritage protection movement have not only changed the fate of folk culture but are also reconstructing China's cultural relationships in both domestic and international contexts. By redefining and reevaluating, China is reversing the negative impressions left by history, transforming folk beliefs once seen as superstitions into intangible cultural heritage with cultural value. This transformation not only impacts culture but also creates a sense of cultural identity and connection on a larger societal and international scale.

2.1 Comparing the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" Folk Customs Before and After Applying for Heritage Status

As folk beliefs gain legal recognition, government intervention is inevitable, which will inevitably bring opportunities for transformation to folk beliefs. The "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" ritual exhibited new characteristics after being listed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage register. In this process, some traditional customs were restored and preserved, while others underwent reconstruction.

Before Application: Before applying for heritage status, folk activities related to Mazu beliefs were usually based on local traditions and customs, resulting in regional variations in the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" folk customs. However, the local nature of Mazu beliefs led to differences in these customs between regions but also facilitated cultural exchanges. Followers and tourists might cross geographical boundaries to participate in celebrations in different regions.

After Application: After the successful application for heritage status, both the international community and the domestic government tend to pay more attention to the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage. The "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" folk customs may attract more domestic and foreign tourists and

participants. This will promote cultural exchange and understanding among different regions, contributing to a deeper awareness of Mazu beliefs and related cultures.

1) Historical Inheritance of "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" as Intangible Cultural Heritage

The impact of intangible cultural heritage on folk beliefs goes beyond rewriting and reconstruction; it also plays a crucial role in the preservation and protection of traditional culture with modern values. For the traditional ritual of "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace," the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage are a continuation of the previous "official rites" and "folk rites." During the Ming and Qing dynasties, official rituals were conducted following the procedures of welcoming the deity, offering sacrifices three times, presenting gifts, etc. Mazu worship encompassed previous rituals, including the "Lesser Offering" with whole pigs and sheep as sacrifices and vegetarian food and fruits as well as the official's ritual of "kneeling three times and bowing nine times." The ritual also included the recitation of sacrificial texts and the burning of offerings. The "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" ritual still follows these basic procedures after being designated as intangible cultural heritage. However, adaptations have been made to accommodate the needs of modern society. From this perspective, the protection of intangible cultural heritage indeed promotes the revival and inheritance of contemporary folk beliefs. This traditional ritual has been able to continue through this means after a period of interruption. (Ding Y X, 2008)

2) Continuity of Folk Tradition of "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace"

The tradition of "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" has persisted from ancient times to the present. Whether it is the Tianhou Temple on Qingfeng Ridge or the Longjing Temple on Tanbian, these traditions originated from historical customs passed down through generations. In the history of Longjing Temple, divination cups were used every year on the sixth day of the lunar calendar to confirm whether the pilgrimage to Xianliang Harbor to worship Mazu could proceed. If the "Holy

Grail"was not obtained, they would prepare lantern festivals at home. Once the "Holy Grail" was obtained, preparations for the pilgrimage to Meizhou Island and Xianliang Harbor for ancestral worship, which lasted for more than twenty days, would begin. This tradition continues at Longjing Temple to this day. During the pilgrimage, the camping sites, routes, attendants, and other related matters have become integral parts of the modern tradition of "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace."

3) Changes and Evolution of "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" Ritual After Intangible Heritage Status



Figure 21: The scene of the Mazu returning to her hometown ceremony, where Mazu temples from around the world return to the Mazu Ancestral Temple on Meizhou Island. "Mazu returning to her hometown" means tracing one's roots and ancestors. Its characteristic is the combination of ancestral worship and Mazu worship into one, which is a ritual where Mazu temples from all over escort their own Mazu deity to the Mazu Ancestral Temple on Meizhou Island for pilgrimage and incense offering. It is an important part of the intangible cultural heritage of Mazu belief and customs worldwide.

Source: Field investigation on Meizhou Island, Captured in 2022.



Figure 22: The scene of the Mazu returning to her hometown ceremony, where Mazu deity statues from around the world gather together for a group photo. "Mazu returning to her hometown" means tracing one's roots and ancestors. Its characteristic is the combination of ancestral worship and Mazu worship into one, which is a ritual where Mazu temples from all over the world escort their own Mazu deity to the Mazu Ancestral Temple at Xianliang Port for pilgrimage and incense offering. It is an important part of the intangible cultural heritage of Mazu belief and customs worldwide.

Source: Field investigation on Meizhou Island, Captured in 2022.

1. Changes in Naming and Ritual Timing: Before and after applying for heritage status, the name of "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" gradually transitioned from diversity to uniformity, and the timing of the ritual shifted from being flexible to a fixed schedule, enhancing the awareness and impact of the activity.

Evolution of Naming Before and After Application: Looking back to 2005, the concept of intangible cultural heritage had not yet widely spread. During that time, from January to March each year, major temples held ancestral shrine pilgrimage rituals. However, these activities did not have a unified name. Due to the diversity of regional traditions and dialects, different temples, such as Longjing Temple and Tianhou Temple, used their unique appellations, such as "visiting my home," "visiting an outsider's home," "returning to the maternal home," "visiting the maternal home," or simply "returning to the harbor," "pilgrimage," "ancestor shrine pilgrimage," and so

on. Although local residents could understand the specific activities, a written, consistent name had to be established when applying for intangible cultural heritage recognition. The board members of the Tianhou Shrine spent a considerable amount of time weighing the options when choosing between the names "returning to the maternal home" and "visiting the maternal home." In the end, they decided to name the application "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace." The decision was motivated by the fact that the word "return" conveys a sense of warmth better than "visit," capturing the emotion of returning home. However, it is reported that when the temple board plans to apply for national-level recognition this year, they are once again hesitating between these two names. This is because "visiting the maternal home" is more in line with the local dialect usage. In the 2007 application text, this religious practice was named the "Xianliang Harbor Tianhou Shrine 'Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace' Ritual Customs in Xiuyu District." In this application name, the applicants deliberately avoided using religious terms such as "ceremony" or "ritual" and chose "ritual customs" as a suffix. This naming approach places more emphasis on the local traditional worship customs of the masses and seems to intentionally blur the characteristics of religious nature.

Regarding the timing of the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" ritual, there were no fixed regulations in the past. Typically, the ritual primarily took place between the lunar months of January and March. In January, various sacrificial activities were held, so there was no need to prepare specifically for "returning to the maternal home." People could also take the opportunity of the Lunar New Year to visit relatives and friends and participate in various sacrificial activities. Additionally, the third lunar month was Mazu's birthday month, and many followers and temples chose to worship during this time. During this period, the ancestral shrines had to continuously host followers who came to pay their respects, but at that time, the ancestral shrines were relatively small in scale, and the management was not perfect. They were mainly managed by the Lin family members and often felt exhausted due to hosting a large

number of followers.

However, in 2004, Professor Ye Mingsheng of the Fujian Academy of Arts accidentally began researching this ritual in Xianliang Harbor. To relieve the burden on temple staff and better organize followers and temples, he proposed adjusting the timing of the ritual to create more impactful large-scale events. This adjustment made it possible to hold large "return to the maternal home" ceremonies for the first time in 2005, which was a significant factor in the successful application for heritage status in 2006. The timing adjustment can be seen as a form of compromise by folk beliefs within the framework of intangible heritage. On one hand, it involved a reconstruction based on tradition, accelerating its evolution. On the other hand, it drove a new transformation of the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" ritual, injecting it with new vitality.

2. Changes in Ritual Content and Form: From the combination of official and folk rites to modern ritual adjustments and female participation, the content and form of the ritual underwent significant changes after being recognized as intangible heritage. These changes represent a continuation of tradition as well as an adaptation to modern society.

1) Changes in Ritual Content

In the past, the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" ritual was typically presided over by the clan head of the Lin family, with other elders from different households accompanying and performing the three kneelings and nine kowtows. Women were prohibited from participating, resulting in smaller-scale rituals. However, the content of the modern "return to the maternal home" ritual has undergone significant changes. Present-day main officiants and accompanying officials combine the ritual with the "Head Stove Incense" ceremony, which includes not only the clan head of the Lin family but also the Fukou (temple head) of various temples and the leaders of temples participating in the "return to the maternal home" ritual, along with those who have earned great merit in receiving the "Head Incense." In the modern context, female

participants are included, as sometimes the male head of the household may be absent, and the ritual is conducted by the female head instead. This change reflects the compromise of traditional beliefs in the face of modern society. In terms of the ritual schedule, the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" activities had no fixed timing in the past. Followers, temple Fukou, and Daoist priests would bring the Mazu statue or incense burner to the Tianhou Shrine, and there were no specific dates or times designated. If they arrived too late, they would have to stay locally overnight. However, after being listed as intangible cultural heritage, the "return to the maternal home" ritual acquired a fixed process. The event is now scheduled to coincide with Mazu's birthday on the twenty-third day of the third lunar month, with standardized procedures. Not only are there grand ceremonial rituals, but also cultural performances such as processions, and the overall scale of the ritual has been increasing year by year, with a growing number of participating temples. As for the route of "returning to the maternal home," in the past, each temple would walk to Xianliang Harbor to pay their respects, and the route was relatively casual. However, now there are fixed ritual times and routes. For Longjing Temple, in the past, it took more than twenty days to walk, but now, they usually take a vehicle at a fixed time, return to the temple after the ritual, and "race to carry the palanquin" back to the temple. These changes reflect the influence of modern social development on folk beliefs.

2) Changes in Ritual Form

In terms of the scale of the festival, the "Spring Festival" in the past was an official ceremony with a high level of formality but limited to government officials' participation, resulting in a relatively small scale. The folk "return to the maternal home" activities had no fixed timing and were relatively small in scale. However, after being listed as intangible cultural heritage, the ritual was fixed on the twenty-third day of the third lunar month, Mazu's birthday, with standardized procedures, greatly increasing the ritual's impact and the number of participating temples.

In the past, there were relatively few temples participating in the "return to the maternal home" each year, mainly concentrated in Mazu temples in nearby Shanting, Shanbing, and Xiasha. Now, the influence of "return to the maternal home" activities has expanded, with more temples participating from Taiwan and various other places. In terms of funding sources, the "Spring Festival" in the past was a state ritual, funded by the government. The funding for folk "return to the maternal home" activities primarily came from temple donations and contributions from followers. During times when religious beliefs were restricted, these activities were rarely held. However, after being listed as intangible cultural heritage, these activities regained legal status, and funding support was partially restored, mainly coming from temple donations and follower contributions. In terms of the organization of "returning to the maternal home" activities, in the past, temples would decide whether to "return to the maternal home" and when to do so during the period from January to the third lunar month in various ways. However, after being listed as intangible cultural heritage, the ancestral shrine would send invitations to various temples in March, confirming the list of participating temples. Some temples abandoned the traditional decision-making process and switched to fixed dates for participation, and the standardization of "returning to the maternal home" activities has also attracted the attention of many scholars, volunteers, and tourists.

3. Changes in the Subjectivity of Belief: Intangible heritage recognition requires folk beliefs to be subject to government management, leading to a partial loss of autonomy. With folk beliefs gaining legal recognition, a balancing act ensues. In this process, the cultural subject's independence gradually weakens, and some autonomy is transferred to the government. After "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" belief was established as intangible cultural heritage, it needed to accept government management, meaning that the Tianhou Shrine and regional followers, as the main practitioners of this belief activity, even had to follow the government's "guidance." Before the annual "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" belief activity held by the

ancestral shrine, a detailed ritual plan had to be developed and submitted for review by higher authorities. Once the plan was discussed and approved, the activity could proceed as planned. During the activity, government departments were involved and provided support to ensure the smooth progress of the ritual. Additionally, the government actively participated in publicity activities, assigning individuals to capture and record the entire event, transmitting the footage to Putian City TV and relevant newspapers for official reporting and publicity. This series of changes marks the increasing influence of government participation and management on belief activities within the framework of "intangible cultural heritage." Government involvement in management, publicity, and other activities has all affected the scale and significance of the ritual.

4. Changes in the Significance of Ritual Content and Meaning: Although at the national level, the ritual has been endowed with political, cultural, and economic significance, the folk masses still prioritize the inner spiritual power of belief, and their participation remains driven by spirituality.

Under the framework of intangible cultural heritage protection, folk beliefs undergo both positive and negative changes. Protection allows folk beliefs to better inherit folk culture, but it also brings some negative effects. Before integrating into the intangible heritage system, belief has already experienced "cultural reshaping," which may damage its integrity and even lead to its "fragmentation," permeating national ideology and resulting in the reinterpretation of belief at the national level. For the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" ritual to gain national recognition, it first emphasized its role in strengthening the relationship between Putian and Taiwan and promoting cross-cultural exchange in the provincial-level heritage application. Secondly, because this belief retains related ritual dances, music, carvings, and other elements, it plays an essential role in preserving folk art. Finally, it emphasizes its transformation into "cultural capital," promoting economic development in Putian. Although at the national level, the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" belief is

assigned more political, cultural, and economic significance, after being recognized as "intangible heritage," it seems to undergo a "cultural reshaping." However, for ordinary believers, this change is gradual. In their daily lives, they still adhere to the belief in "the supremacy of spirituality." Every year, devout followers come to "return to the maternal home," mostly because they believe that through this ritual, they can receive the stronger protection and spiritual power of Mazu.

In summary, the "Mazu's Return to Her Birthplace" ritual underwent various changes in terms of naming, timing, content, form, subjectivity, and the significance of ritual content and meaning under the backdrop of intangible heritage. Intangible heritage recognition not only promotes the recovery and inheritance of tradition but also brings about new adjustments and developments. This process reflects the interaction and compromise between folk beliefs and state power and modern society, representing both tradition and change in the times.

2.2 Comparison of the "Sea Ritual to Mazu" Ceremony Before and After Intangible Cultural Heritage Recognition

Starting from the 1950s, there was an interruption of nearly 50 years until around 2007 and 2008 when it gradually began to revive. Ultimately, in 2017, it successfully obtained provincial-level recognition as intangible cultural heritage. This journey can be seen as reigniting the vitality of the "Sea Ritual to Mazu" ceremony within the context of intangible cultural heritage protection. While preserving traditional heritage, both the form and content of this ceremony have undergone transformation, demonstrating that within the framework of intangible heritage, traditional folk beliefs have experienced a process of reshaping.



Figure 23: The scene of the "Sea Worship of Mazu" ceremony. Sea Worship of Mazu is a thousand-year-old folk ritual observed by the people of Xianliang Port Township on the north coast of Meizhou Bay in Putian City. It primarily involves boat-based worship. According to historical records, Mazu was born in the first year of the Song Jianlong era (960 AD) on the 23rd day of the third lunar month and passed away on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month in the fourth year of the Song Yongxi era (987 AD) while rescuing sailors in distress at sea.

Source: Collection materials from Putian Museum, Accessed in 2022.

After being recognized as intangible heritage, the original "Sea Ritual to Mazu" ceremony incorporated elements from the "Autumn Ritual" and the September 9th Mazu Ascension ceremony. Additionally, customs from the Ming and Qing dynasties have been preserved, with Taoist priests, clan leaders, and temple elders assuming the roles of primary celebrants. This is a way to express mourning for the ancestral goddess and seek her blessings for the Lin family descendants. Offerings to Mazu include whole sheep and whole pigs, known as "Shao Lao". During the ritual, participants perform the "Three Kowtows, Nine Kneels" ceremony. Additionally, acts of charity, known as "Pu Shi," are conducted to continue the tradition of benevolence and bravery among maritime laborers. Presently, the "Sea Ritual to Mazu" grand ceremony has undergone improvements and enrichment based on historical ritual practices. It maintains the original ritual location in front of the "San Zao Xiang" temple, restores the tradition of Taoist priests presiding over the

ceremony, and still includes the customary theatrical performances as offerings to the deity. From this, it can be observed that intangible cultural heritage has indeed played a pivotal role in preserving and promoting traditional customs within the "Sea Ritual to Mazu."

1) Changes in Ceremony Content: Diversification of participants in terms of gender, evolving from clan leaders or organizers to include main priests and accompanying priests related to the "Head Burner" ritual. The top donor can also become the "Head Burner," and a group of prominent donors and temple furnace masters form the "Accompanying Ritual Team," ranking after the main priests. In recent years, female participants have emerged, often stepping in when male heads of households are absent, reflecting compromises made by tradition in a modern context. In the past, government officials participated in the rituals, but after the Qing Dynasty's fall, the "Sea Ritual" separated from state rituals and became a folk belief. With intangible cultural heritage protection, the "Sea Ritual" has once again gained national recognition, with government officials and official staff participating. Experts, scholars, media, folklore enthusiasts, and tourists have also joined in. Offerings have become more diverse and distinctive, evolving from simple incense, flowers, candles, and tea to higher-grade and distinctive offerings, including various foods and non-traditional offerings such as saucers, boat models, books, and more. There has been an enhancement in ritual music and dance, with the inclusion of student dance performances, troupe performances, middle-aged women forming drum and flag teams, and drum teams. Furthermore, government officials and official media have become participants, indicating state recognition and involvement in this activity.

2) Changes in Ceremony Format: The scale of the ceremony has expanded. In the past, a boat served as the altar by the sea, and the scale was relatively small. Now, it features the "Mazu Divine Ship," which covers an area of over 300 square meters and accommodates more than 100 participants, complete with a viewing platform.

The number of participating temples has increased. In the past, it mainly involved nearby fishermen and temples, but it has rapidly expanded, with over 200 temples from Putian City and surrounding areas participating. The organization has become more standardized. In the past, worshippers would spontaneously perform the rituals, but after being listed as intangible heritage, the content must be reviewed and approved by relevant authorities to ensure alignment with mainstream ideas. Additionally, the rise of new media and the promotion of intangible heritage have allowed more people to participate in the "Sea Ritual to Mazu" ceremony.

3) Changes in Ceremony Significance and Meaning: Folk beliefs encompass various elements such as religion, faith, and shamanism. During the application for intangible cultural heritage status, applicants typically refine and reconstruct beliefs to align with mainstream ideologies. In the application process, emphasis is placed on the role of the "Sea Ritual to Mazu" in promoting relations between Fujian and Taiwan and positioning it as a cultural resource for tourism, thereby transforming it into cultural capital. Despite the formal changes, the core of faith remains intact for ordinary believers.

4) Changes in the Subjectivity of Belief: Folk beliefs, while gaining national legitimacy, effectively transfer some authority to the state. Through integration with intangible heritage, the "Sea Ritual to Mazu" becomes part of state management, reducing the autonomy of ritual activities and increasing the government's influence. The activities at ancestral temples require approval from higher authorities, and government departments are involved in planning and promotion. (Fraser J. G, 2017)

These comparisons demonstrate the multifaceted impact of the intangible cultural heritage protection movement on the "Sea Ritual to Mazu" ceremony, including changes in form, content, and significance. These changes, within the context of intangible cultural heritage, have profound effects while reflecting the fusion and compromise of tradition with modernity. They also bring about shifts in the subjectivity of belief. However, despite the restructuring at the national level, the faith

of the worshippers remains deeply rooted in their lives, expressing profound religious sentiments and cultural identity.

2.3 A Comparison of the "Mazu Temple Festival" in Matsu Island Before and After Applying for World Intangible Cultural Heritage

1) Origin and Characteristics of the Mazu Temple Rituals on Meizhou Island

In Mazu culture research, the study of ritual culture is an extremely important component. On May 20, 2006, the "Mazu Temple Rituals on Meizhou Island" were approved by the State Council and included in the "First Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List." On September 30, 2009, it was inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity under the category of "Mazu belief," with "rituals" being the most crucial component. Among all Mazu rituals worldwide, the rituals on Meizhou Island's Mazu Temple are the richest, most authoritative, and most standardized, considered the model for all Mazu rituals worldwide. Therefore, the primary focus of this study is on the rituals of the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island.

The Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island is considered one of the oldest Mazu temples globally, with a long and storied history. During the Southern Song Dynasty, the literatus Liu Kezhuang from Putian praised Mazu in his poetry, saying, "The divine lady, fragrant incense rises from Meizhou," vividly depicting the origin of Mazu belief on Meizhou Island and expressing the notion that all Mazu temples are connected to the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island. To delve into the celebration activities of the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island, it is essential to understand its historical establishment.

In the 20th year of the Southern Song Dynasty's Shaoxing era (1150), Liao Pengfei's "Records of the Reconstruction of the Shunji Temple in Shengdun" became the earliest surviving document about Mazu's life. This record provides detailed information about Mazu, a woman from the Lin family, revered as the "Heavenly Maiden," who hailed from Meizhou Island. Initially regarded as a shamaness with the

ability to predict people's destinies, she was commemorated with a temple on Meizhou Island after her passing. This record quickly spread and became one of the important documents widely cited by scholars, both domestically and abroad, researching Mazu. The mention that "after her passing, a temple was built on her native island" informs future generations that a temple was erected on Meizhou Island in her memory.

The "Putian Comparison" is a work by Putian's Jinshi scholar Li Junfu, which also provides specific information on this matter. He wrote, "The divine lady Lin of Meizhou was born with divine abilities, capable of foretelling people's fortunes. After her passing, offerings were made in the temple. Nowadays, not only Meizhou but also Shengdun, Jiangkou, Baihu, and other places have Mazu temples." Similarly, during the late Ming period, the "Record of the Manifestation of the Heavenly Lady: The Ascension of Mazu on Meishan" documented that after Mazu's ascension, local residents built a "Temple of Virtuous and Wise Spirit Woman" on the spot of Mazu's ascension on Meizhou Island. Though it was just a small temple supported by "a few beams," Mazu frequently manifested in people's dreams, bringing them good fortune. Hence, the faithful prayed and made wishes almost every day. This earliest small temple dedicated to the Heavenly Lady was, in fact, the precursor of the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island. Even in an era where science was not as advanced, this humble and accessible temple provided solace to those who depended on the sea for their livelihoods.

According to the records in the "Rites of Zhou" and the "Zuo Zhuan," emperors throughout history attached great importance to the worship of deities, stemming from the concept of "those who have the world under their rule worship a hundred spirits." This tradition continued throughout history, particularly emphasizing the rigorous attitudes towards rituals during different dynasties. Starting from the Western Zhou Dynasty, there were five types of objects of worship designated by the state: legalism for the people, diligence in service through death, labor for the country's prosperity,

protection from major disasters, and defense against great dangers.

Regarding the history of Mazu's ritual ceremonies, it can be traced back to the Song Dynasty in the fourth year of the Yongxi era (987), after Mazu's "ascension" to divinity. Although the rituals of the worshippers at that time were quite simple, they should be considered the most primitive Mazu rituals. During the Southern Song Dynasty, Liao Pengfei recorded the content and ceremonies of the early Song Dynasty's Mazu rituals in his "Records of the Reconstruction of the Shunji Temple in Shengdun." This included songs and dances such as the "Welcoming the Deity Song" and the "Sending Off the Deity Song," indicating that there were already songs and dances in Mazu rituals among the common people during the Song Dynasty. The description "the ceremony ends, and the offerings are completely presented" implies that the rituals at that time followed the ancient "Three Offerings" ritual, which included the Initial Offering, the Secondary Offering, and the Final Offering.

Although the exact location of the "Shengdun Temple" in Putian is unknown today, it was a branch temple of the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island. Therefore, through the rituals of the Shengdun Temple, we can roughly understand the situation of Mazu Temple rituals on Meizhou Island. Historical records state that in the fourth year of the Xianchun era during the Southern Song Dynasty (1123), Yi Didi, an envoy to Goryeo, encountered a storm at sea. However, divine intervention occurred at the mast, ensuring his safe return. This marked an important turning point in the history of Mazu belief. Official recognition of Mazu's divine power began, and even temple names were granted. This was the beginning of Mazu receiving imperial enshrinement. (Li Ligang, 1990, p.4)

Mazu rituals become part of the state system: The first appearance of Mazu's worship and title occurred during the reign of Emperor Gaozong of the Song Dynasty. From then on, the gradual integration of Mazu rituals into the national worship system commenced. The worship of deities was crucial during the Song Dynasty, especially against the backdrop of social turmoil in the late Northern Song Dynasty. Emperors

became more reverent and reliant on divine blessings. In the 26th year of Emperor Gaozong's Shaoxing era, Mazu was titled "Lady of Auspicious Wisdom." During this period, Mazu's rituals were incorporated into the "Imperial Sacrificial Rites." Although the specific details of the ceremonies are not well-documented, this marked the initiation of rituals conducted for Mazu at the "imperial" level. The ritual standard gradually increased: During the Song Dynasty, the significance of Mazu's rituals gained recognition from the imperial court. Numerous royal edicts and titles were conferred upon Mazu, with her titles evolving from "Lady" to "Consort," and she was popularly referred to as the "Holy Consort." As a result, the rituals for Mazu evolved from the "Initial Offering" to the "Imperial Offering," further reinforcing the preliminary foundation of the Mazu Temple's ritual status on Meizhou Island.

The scale and solemnity of Mazu rituals in Meizhou significantly elevated during the Yuan Dynasty. Records from the Yuan Dynasty indicate that in the 14th year of the Zhiyuan era (1277), Pusou Geng and Pusou Wen surrendered to the Yuan court, becoming important officials. Yuan Shizu solidified the position of Mazu belief by granting favorable conditions for the Pusou family's maritime trade. In the 15th year of the Zhiyuan era (1278), Yuan Shizu conferred the title "Guardian of the Nation, Bright and Eminent Heavenly Lady" upon Mazu. He personally dispatched Pusou Wen to Meizhou Island to proclaim the title and conduct grand ritual ceremonies. This title reflected his reverence and gratitude towards Mazu. The Yuan Dynasty issued multiple edicts to honor Mazu, with some of the edicts drafted personally by the emperors. Yuan Shizu's decree brought widespread attention and official recognition to the Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island. Moreover, during these rituals, especially in the texts for the rituals held in the Dingwei year for Putian's Baihu Mazu Temple and in the Wushen year for the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island, the emperors explicitly highlighted Mazu's merits and contributions. The Yuan court also dispatched officials bearing imperial edicts to preside over the rituals, further enhancing the grandeur and standardization of the ceremonies. These Yuan Dynasty measures ensured that the

Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island received the personal attention and oversight of the Yuan court multiple times, further consolidating their status. The scale and grandeur of these rituals laid a solid foundation for the development of Mazu rituals in the Ming Dynasty.

The Ming Dynasty was an important period for the development of Mazu rituals on Meizhou. In the seventh year of the Yongle era, the emperor conferred the title "Protector of the Nation, Benevolent and Merciful Miraculous Lady, Manifestly Responding and Profoundly Beneficial Heavenly Lady" upon Mazu. The Longjiang Heavenly Lady Palace in Nanjing became the national Mazu temple. Rituals were held on the fifteenth day of the first month and the twenty-third day of the third month each year at the Longjiang Heavenly Lady Palace in Nanjing. Zheng He, the renowned maritime explorer, often expressed his reliance on Mazu's protection during his voyages, leading the emperor to either grant titles or send Zheng He to Meizhou Island for worship. Particularly noteworthy are the multiple records of Zheng He's visits to Meizhou for worship. During the Ming Dynasty, emperors personally conferred titles and inscribed steles praising Mazu's merits. In the Ming Dynasty, palace eunuchs such as Xianhou Wang Guitong, Yingxin, and Zhou Fu were dispatched to Meizhou for rituals, elevating the status of Mazu rituals to "imperial ceremonies." This continuous royal involvement drove the development of the Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island. The Longjiang Heavenly Lady Palace, as a nationally recognized Mazu temple, continued its rituals uninterrupted from the seventh year of the Yongle era to the first year of the Guangxu era.

The Qing Dynasty witnessed the zenith of Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island and the standardization of these rituals. In the nineteenth year of the Kangxi era, the emperor issued the "Imperial Edict for Encomium and Offerings to the Heavenly Lady" emphasizing the "respectful dispatch of ceremonial officials to perform worship." Kangxi-era documents provide detailed records of the rituals for worshipping Mazu, including information about the officials sent to participate. The

participants and actions in the ritual ceremonies were precisely defined, including the guidance, kneeling, presentation of silk, and recitation of prayers, among other aspects. This level of standardized ritual practice ensured rigorous control over the proceedings. Furthermore, in the fifty-third year of the Qianlong era, the Grand Secretariat submitted an archive mentioning the establishment of shrines to the Heavenly Lady in coastal areas, with special emphasis on the standardization of the Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island. From the nineteenth year of Kangxi to the first year of Guangxu, Mazu received sixteen honorary titles from the Qing court, reaching the status of "Heavenly Lady," and she was incorporated into the national sacrificial system. Every aspect of the rituals, including offerings, ceremonies, and ritual texts, was explicitly defined, further solidifying the form and tradition of the Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island.

2) Contemporary Paradigm of Mazu Temple Rituals on Meizhou Island

The Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island, as the source of Mazu belief, not only maintained high-standard and prestigious ritual activities throughout the dynasties but also became a model for "Mazu rituals," garnering significant societal attention. However, "Mazu belief" is a dynamic tradition that, over the years, has undergone innovations, reforms, and practical adaptations. In 2006, the Mazu Temple rituals on Meizhou Island were included in the national "Intangible Cultural Heritage List." Subsequently, in 2009, "Mazu belief" was inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In contemporary times, the rituals of the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island have experienced multiple innovations and reforms, ushering in new interpretations and forms. These innovations encompass various aspects, including the composition of participants, the presentation of songs, dances, and music, the styles of clothing and artifacts, the arrangement of altars, the display of offerings, and the innovation of ritual texts. This has resulted in a completely new ritual process and paradigm.



Figure 24: Scene of the Mazu Festival. The Mazu Festival originated during the Song Dynasty. During this period, the worship of Mazu was incorporated into ceremonial rituals, marking the beginning of the formal worship of Mazu at an imperial level. Subsequently, this tradition continued through the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, continuously expanding and enriching folk activities. Today, the Mazu Festival is recognized as one of the national-level intangible cultural heritages.

Source: Field investigation on Meizhou Island, taken in 2022.

3) Composition of Participants

In the Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island, the arrangement of participants is a fusion of tradition and innovation. Compared to ancient rituals, it preserves traditional elements while introducing new features. Participants in the rituals are mainly divided into roles such as the main officiant, attendant officiants, assistant officiants, and ritual performers.

The main officiant is typically the chairman of the board of directors of the Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island or an important guest, while attendant officiants are individuals with high prestige in the religious, political, or social spheres. Assistant officiants encompass representatives from some prominent temples or Mazu believers, representing a wide spectrum of faith communities. Ritual performers include ritual masters, dancers, musicians, drummers, trumpeters, and more, in

addition to personnel carrying various flags, banners, and flags representing different roles, forming a procession with over 20 different roles.

The scale of the Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island has historically varied, leading to differences in the number of participants in the rituals. After the reform and opening-up policies, the Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island restored the Mazu rituals. The number of ritual dancers is divided into two categories: "Six Yis" with 36 dancers and "Eight Yis" with 64 dancers, preserving the traditional "Yi dance" system from ancient times.

4) Composition of Songs, Dances, and Music

Music and dance have held significant importance in Mazu rituals since ancient times. During the Southern Song Dynasty, detailed records of songs and dances in Mazu rituals, such as the "Welcoming Song" and "Farewell Song," were documented by Liao Pengfei in the "Record of Reconstructing Shunji Temple in Shengdun Ancestral Temple." Subsequently, inscriptions from the Yuan Dynasty by figures like Zhou Boqi and Liu Ji, those from the Ming Dynasty by Lai Ju, and texts from the Qing Dynasty by Qi Shun mentioned the songs performed during Mazu rituals. These included songs like "Welcoming," "Offering," and "Farewell." This historical continuity demonstrates the enduring role of music and dance in Mazu rituals, adding solemnity and joy to the ceremonies.

In modern times, Mazu ritual music has undergone innovation while remaining rooted in traditional practices. The ritual music of the Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island is divided into five chapters: "Welcoming," "Farewell," "Initial Offering," "Secondary Offering," and "Final Offering." These five chapters collectively constitute a comprehensive ritual music system, conveying rich emotions through concise and elegant language.

Dance plays a significant role in Mazu rituals and is commonly referred to as "ritual dance." Throughout history, various divine rituals were often accompanied by song and dance performances. However, the inheritance and development of ritual

dances in Mazu rituals have been complex. Large-scale ritual dances typically employ the "Eight Yi" dance, consisting of 64 dancers, equally divided between males and females. Male dancers hold feathered "Bi Xie" and flags, representing masculine energy, while female dancers simulate playing the "Yuè" during the dance, symbolizing feminine grace. These ritual dances harmoniously blend strength and grace to extol Mazu's divine powers and virtues.

The Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island emphasize the preservation of ritual protocols. In addition to adhering to the prescribed religious rituals such as offerings, recitations, libations, chants, blessings, and prostrations, the rituals incorporate elements from the traditional dances of Putian, including styles from Puxian opera, such as "Che Jian" and "Die Bu." Notably, the "Three Offerings Dance" holds special significance within the ritual dance. Comprising the "Initial Offering," "Secondary Offering," and "Final Offering," these three segments highlight the climaxes, transitions, and rhythmic variations of the ritual ceremonies.

The ritual music, known as ritual music pieces, is based on the restoration and moderate adaptation of traditional Chinese sacrificial music. Traditional Chinese music is diverse, with the "He" and "Miu" scales mentioned in the "Treatise on the Celestial and Terrestrial Systems" in the "Huainanzi" forming the basis of the seven-note scale system. The design of the ritual music restoration and composition in the Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island aims to enrich the ritual music, express the sacred virtues of Mazu, and highlight the local cultural characteristics of Mazu's hometown, satisfying the contemporary appreciation of ritual music. The musical instruments used in the ritual music follow the requirements of "Da Sheng Yue" and are crafted from eight different materials, including metal, stone, silk, bamboo, clay, gourd, leather, and wood, to meet the requirement of "golden sound and harmonious eight tones." These instruments unify the "Three Offerings" under a single tonal structure.

Traditional musical instruments used in Mazu rituals include bamboo flutes,

gongs, cloud gongs, cymbals, chimes, large bronze bells, bronze chimes, special chimes, various types of string instruments, including ancient and Putian octagonal zithers, erhus, sihu, qins, pipas, guzhengs, zhushis, flutes, woodwinds, plucked reed pipes, pan flutes, large drums, ying gu, sheng, yu, and xun, among others. In Mazu rituals, the music follows the seven-tone scale of Puxian opera music called "Guo Shan Hu" and incorporates simpler folk harmonies into the ritual music, continuing the ancient tradition while integrating with local instrumental music. For example, the "Three Offerings" music adheres to the Song and Ming dynasties' forms and employs a total of 28 instruments, totaling 60 pieces. Besides a few folk instruments from Putian, most of the instruments used are ancient court instruments.

5) Composition of Attire and Accessories

The design of attire used in the Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island draws inspiration from traditional elements while catering to the practical requirements of the rituals. These designs incorporate styles from the Tang and Song dynasties, emphasizing both aesthetics and functionality during the performance of rituals. While retaining traditional characteristics, the attire styles have been adjusted and improved to suit the needs of the rituals. The colors and styles of the attire emphasize cultural connotations and contemporary features, aiming for simplicity, harmony, grandeur, and opulence. The inspiration for the attire primarily comes from official attire and noble attire of the Tang and Song dynasties but has undergone transformation and innovation. Participants in the rituals are categorized into five series, mainly characterized by yellow, red, gray, and sea blue as the primary color schemes. The design goal is to present a simple, harmonious, dignified, and colorful effect while maintaining clear distinctions between primary and secondary roles.

The accessories used in the Mazu rituals on Meizhou Island mainly include nine-tiered yellow umbrellas, sun-and-moon fans, lanterns, incense burners, flags of purity, banners of procession, decree banners, flags of conferment, and various replica ancient weapons. These sacred artifacts undergo careful craftsmanship and material

selection, striving for an ancient and elegant appearance while highlighting the characteristics of local traditional craftsmanship. The most eye-catching part of the rituals is the procession, and the ceremonial items in the procession are derived from the transformation of ancient martial arts techniques. These ceremonial items serve as symbols of warning and majesty during the procession. Based on the basic concept of the ancient court "Lu Bo," combined with the local traditional Mazu procession and ritual customs of Putian, the design of these ceremonial items was developed.

6) Altar, Feast, and Offerings

There are no precise historical records of the altar used in Mazu rituals. However, for the new Mazu rituals, a unique altar style has been designed, emphasizing the connection with nature and humanity, drawing from historical references in Chinese religious rituals. According to the "Supplement to the Annals of the Three Sovereigns" in the "Records of the Grand Historian," Fu Xi once "sat on a square altar, listened to the qi of the eight winds, and then drew the Eight Trigrams." Therefore, the altar design adopts an 8x8 square wooden structure as the base, symbolizing the fusion of the "qi of the eight winds." The topmost layer of the altar is a 5-meter diameter circular platform, symbolizing the ancient concept of "Heaven is round, Earth is square." In front of the square altar, four large incense pillars and an incense burner are prominently placed, emphasizing the solemn and mystical nature of the rituals while symbolizing prosperity and flourishing. The design of the ritual altar may vary depending on the location, with each major ritual having a unique altar. The selection of ritual vessels references historical records of traditional rituals, including eight "Bian" vessels, eight "Dou" vessels, one "Xing" vessel, two "Fu" vessels, two "Gui" vessels, and three "Jue" vessels, as well as lavers and ladles used for ablution rituals. Additionally, traditional folk ritual vessels such as incense burners, flower vases, wooden carved dragon candles, table lamps, fruit boxes, and food boxes are used.

The ritual feast is set up on a platform in front of the main hall, resembling an

altar-like structure. From the ritual feast, a procession extends into the "Holy Decree Gate," forming a ceremonial procession area. A red carpet is laid on the central axis, music and dance stages, and the dancing stage. Inside the ritual feast area, the Mazu deity's seat and incense table (including "Chong An" and "Long An" tables) are arranged, with seats for offerings and reading prayers in front of the incense table. The main officiant and attendant officiants pay their respects in front of the incense table, with a washbasin area nearby. Seats for musicians are set up on both sides of the square, with the central area serving as the dance stage, and the area leading to the Holy Decree Gate is designated as the procession area.

As for offerings, traditional ritual etiquette involves the offering of "Shao Lao," which consists of whole pigs and sheep with the entrails removed, placed on wooden stands on both sides of the altar. Additionally, fresh and dried fruits are offered. During the "Three Offerings" ceremony, offerings are presented in the form of "Jue," fruits, and dishes.

7) Ritual Texts

Ritual texts, also known as invocation texts, in Mazu religious ceremonies are poetic expressions of respect and wishes for Mazu. They are usually in verse form and may vary in content due to different historical periods and regional variations in rituals. For example, in the seventh year of the Yuan Dynasty's Yan You era (1320), Zhang Zhongshou composed the "Tianfei Invocation Text," which expresses gratitude for Mazu's blessings and invokes future prosperity. This text reflects appreciation for divine protection and expresses the desire for continued blessings.

In the rituals of the Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island, the recitation of ritual texts is an important part of the ceremony. The content of the texts may vary based on the season of the ritual and the specific prayers required. These texts are recited and prayed by the main officiant or presiding person to invoke blessings and divine favor from Mazu. The ritual texts serve as expressions of devotion to the deity and convey the sincere intentions of the participants.

8) Ritual Procedures

The ritual procedures of the Mazu ceremonies are constructed based on historical traditions and reference to other religious ceremonies. These procedures form the core of the entire ritual event. When a Mazu ritual is about to commence, the "Yan Gu" (strict drum) is first sounded from the drum tower. It is struck three times, with the rhythm gradually increasing from slow to fast, totaling 108 strikes in all. Following this, ceremonial cannon salutes, with 81 shots, symbolizing the formal beginning of the ritual. Subsequently, the procession team, guard team, musicians, singers, and dancers take their positions. The master of ceremonies leads the main officiant, attendant officiants, assistant officiants, and dancers into position. The "Welcoming" music is performed, and incense is offered. This is followed by the recitation of scriptures, reading of ritual texts, and the presentation of offerings. The ceremonial presentation of the "Initial Offering," "Secondary Offering," and "Final Offering" is conducted. Ritual texts and offerings are burned, and the ceremony is concluded with the departure of the deity, marking the completion of the rituals.

2.4 The Contemporary Significance of the Meizhou Ancestral Temple's Mazu Rituals

The Mazu rituals at the Meizhou Ancestral Temple in Fujian carry the core of a millennia-old Mazu belief system and stand as a significant symbol of traditional culture. This ritual, centered around the veneration of Mazu, upholds the ancient Chinese tradition of worshipping deities. Examining the essence and history of Mazu rituals reveals several crucial aspects. Firstly, it continues the sacrificial norms dating back to the "Rites of Zhou." In the ceremonies dedicated to Mazu, government officials are required to arrive at the temple dressed in specific attire the day before the formal ritual, conducting a series of rites before the actual ceremony. These rituals align with the descriptions found in the "Rites of Zhou." Secondly, the ritual implements used in Mazu rituals, such as "xing," "gui," "fu," "bian," and "dou," adhere to the regulations outlined in the "Rites of Zhou."

However, despite being religious ceremonies, Mazu rituals have evolved into broader folk activities that transcend religious boundaries, carrying deeper contemporary significance. In summary, they hold at least the following important meanings:

1) Moral Education on Traditional Virtues: The Chinese nation has long been referred to as a "nation of rituals." Throughout history, rituals have been interwoven into our production and daily life. Mazu, with her noble virtues of "moral integrity, benevolence, and great love," serves as an exemplar. Her reverence, remembrance, and worship aim to encourage people to "contemplate deeply," not forget the wisdom of their predecessors, and show reverence for "venerating the virtuous." Today, there are various forms of worship and commemoration of Mazu, but the most specific, typical, and solemn ceremony is the "Mazu Ritual." Through this solemn ritual, people purify their hearts, inherit outstanding traditional virtues of the Chinese culture, and inspire people to cherish the examples set by their ancestors, guiding them to contemplate more significant goals. Therefore, conducting the Mazu Ritual is an outward manifestation of learning from the wisdom of our predecessors, and its real-world value is evident.

2) Significance for Cultural Identity and Belief: "Tianxia Mazu, Zu zai Meizhou" (Mazu reigns over the world, and her ancestors are in Meizhou). The historical development of Mazu culture has established the sacred status of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. As the birthplace of Mazu temples, the rituals of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple serve as a model for other temples in multiple aspects. Every year, the Mazu Rituals held at the Meizhou Ancestral Temple attract numerous believers and people from all walks of life from both domestic and international regions to participate and observe. This act of pilgrimage to Meizhou further solidifies the core position of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. The participation of Mazu believers in the Meizhou Island rituals involves an exchange of information, forming an inseparable sense of Chinese cultural identity. Simultaneously, the rituals, through

a unique cultural transformation, reshape shared experiences and memories, evoke special emotions and consciousness, and establish an emotional ritual of a "community" to facilitate connection and continuity in the present and future.

3) Cultural Significance of Living Heritage: Mazu culture originates from the fundamental folk culture of China, but in its evolutionary process, it has incorporated elements from various traditional Chinese cultures, including elements from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. The Mazu spirit conveys Confucian ideas of benevolence and moral integrity, Mazu's stories incorporate Taoist elements, and the architecture and classics of Mazu temples carry traces of Chinese Buddhism. The Mazu Rituals, as a part of Mazu culture, periodic celebratory events, make every 23rd day of the third lunar month and the ninth day of the ninth lunar month grand commemorative occasions, constantly evolving and improving. They are not only a recognition of faith but also a living heritage of Chinese culture. Holding these rituals allows people to learn from the wisdom of their predecessors, and the real-world value is evident.

4) Significance of Religious Spiritual Comfort: Although Mazu belief incorporates elements of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, when the rituals are held, they already possess functions similar to religious ceremonies. The design of the ritual altar and the incorporation of Daoist elements into the ceremony contribute to this sense. The dates chosen for the ceremonies, Mazu's birthday and ascension day, add to the feeling of being "in communion" with the deity. Through the music and atmosphere during the ceremony, participants are seemingly led to a realm connected to Mazu, providing inner solace. Through the rituals, people can regulate their emotions, purify and elevate their spiritual selves.

In conclusion, the modern Mazu Rituals at the Meizhou Ancestral Temple are one of the most typical and representative activities related to Mazu belief. Hosting this ceremony not only continues outstanding traditional Chinese virtues but also showcases the excellence of Chinese culture to the world. The significance of this

activity is profound and deserves further promotion and in-depth research.

3. "World Intangible Cultural Heritage" Perspective on the Inheritance and Changes in Mazu Belief and Custom Culture

3.1 Cultural Values of Mazu Belief and Customs Before Applying for World Heritage Status

The Mazu culture originated during the Song Dynasty, flourished during the Yuan Dynasty, thrived during the Ming Dynasty, reached its peak during the Qing Dynasty, and prospered in modern and contemporary times. It is a precious gem of Chinese traditional culture and an integral part of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, representing the intangible cultural heritage of all humankind.

Mazu culture is profound and carries deep significance. Since the birth of Mazu, whether in ancient, modern, or contemporary times, it has had a profound and far-reaching impact on politics, economics, culture, society, and other fields. As emphasized by Zhang Kehui, the President of the China Mazu Culture Exchange Association, the enduring continuity, widespread dissemination, rich content, and profound influence of Mazu belief are unparalleled among other folk beliefs.

Mazu culture revolves around Mazu belief as its core and primarily expresses itself through Mazu temples, rituals, legends, mythology, literature, and art, among other forms, blending various cultural elements to create a unique cultural system.

The content of Mazu culture is reflected in its connotation and extension. As part of East Asian maritime culture, Mazu culture is disseminated through material cultural landscapes, rituals, legends, literature, folk songs, dances, and more, serving as a bond that unites the spirit of the Chinese people. It is also an essential component of the outstanding culture of the Chinese nation. Furthermore, the extension of Mazu culture encompasses its historical relationships with China and other countries, anti-invasion warfare, maritime trade and port development history, scientific and technological advancement, as well as academic value, among others.

Structurally, Mazu culture can be divided into material culture, institutional

culture, behavioral culture, and mentality culture. Mazu material culture includes aspects such as the architecture of Mazu temples, folk crafts, clothing, inscriptions, statues, and shrines. Mazu institutional culture comprises customs and norms that have evolved and developed over time, such as grand ceremonies, clearances, processions, division of spirits, return to the maiden's home, and various forms of worship. Mazu behavioral culture is a product of the interplay between nature, economy, society, and culture, including Mazu ritual ceremonies and folk activities. Mazu mentality culture reflects the beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts of believers, showcasing the Mazu spirit, characterized by "benevolence, justice, courage, and peace." These cultural expressions include myths, legends, poetry, couplets, prose, drama, film and television, music and dance, painting, sculpture, and architecture, comprehensively illustrating the profound connotations of Mazu culture.

In its internal structure, Mazu culture exhibits a notable hierarchical "dual structure." American anthropologist Robert Redfield introduced the concept of "great tradition and little tradition," suggesting that within a civilization, there typically exist two traditions: one is the "great tradition" created by a small number of highly intellectual individuals, while the other is the "little tradition" created spontaneously by a large number of individuals with little contemplation. The "great tradition" is usually nurtured in academies or temples, while the "little tradition" emerges spontaneously and continues to be passed down in rural communities. Chinese cultural scholars also share similar viewpoints. Tian Qing proposed the concept of "two-story building," indicating that Chinese traditional culture comprises elite culture and folk culture. Elite culture is created by literati, such as Confucianism, the poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties, while folk culture is orally transmitted and includes traditional drama, music, dance, fine arts, handicrafts, folk customs, and festivals, among others. Mazu culture also possesses this "dual structure," encompassing elite culture and folk (grassroots) culture. Imperial grants throughout the dynasties, literary creations by scholars, official rituals, and the like belong to the

"great tradition" or "elite culture," while folk rituals related to Mazu, temple fairs, folk customs, folk arts and crafts, among others, belong to the "little tradition" or "grassroots culture." This "dual structure" of culture interacts and complements each other, jointly propelling the development and innovation of Mazu culture.

The spiritual connotations embodied in Mazu belief showcase Mazu culture as a collective memory, a collective creation, and a collective inheritance. Whether it is the Forty-Eight Illustrations of the Miracles of the Holy Mother of Heaven compiled in the twelfth year of the Daoguang reign, the Forty-Nine Illustrations of the Enthronement of the Heavenly Queen during the Qianlong period, or the Sixty-Four Illustrations of Wenfeng Palace in Putian, they all contain rich elements of traditional Chinese culture. These diverse illustrations fully reflect the profound connotations of Mazu belief. Whether it is the plaques and couplets in Mazu temples or various murals and carvings, they all represent the essence of traditional Chinese culture. This is precisely the multifaceted display of the rich connotations of Mazu culture.

1) The concept of "benevolence" in Confucian and Taoist culture forms the foundation of the Mazu spirit. Mazu deeply moves people with her compassion and great love, which are vivid manifestations of the Confucian concept of "benevolence." "Benevolence" holds a central position in Confucian thought. Confucius integrated ethical and moral standards into a system centered around "benevolence," which includes elements like filial piety, brotherhood, loyalty, empathy, ritual, wisdom, courage, respect, tolerance, trustworthiness, sensitivity, and benevolence itself.

In the Analects of Confucius, when Fan Chi asked about benevolence, Confucius replied, "Love people." This statement conveys the core essence of benevolence. In Confucius's recorded sayings in the Analects, "benevolence" is discussed as many as 109 times, highlighting its significance. Confucianism emphasizes both "benevolence" and "righteousness," advocating governing the country with benevolence and filial piety. "Benevolence" also holds a crucial role in Taoism. The Tao Te Ching by Laozi mentions the principles of "harmony" and "blending" several

times. Laozi's "benevolence" incorporates the thoughts of "Tao" and "virtue."

In the legends of Mazu, her qualities of compassion, kindness, and virtue are prominently displayed, making her deeply endearing. The legends, such as those about alleviating drought in Putian and her role in the "Holy Spring Plague Relief," showcase her benevolence. In the story of "Sanctifying the Spring to Relieve the Plague," Mazu's kindness is revealed. Another legend tells of Mazu helping a woman bear children, demonstrating her care for families. In yet another tale, Mazu protects a child, highlighting her concern for children. In the widespread legends of Mazu, she generally displays her care for the people, embodying the image of a "benevolent being." Her benevolent heart is beloved and revered by the masses. It is precisely this spirit of "benevolence," which considers the people's well-being, that has allowed Mazu culture to endure throughout history.

2)The core value of "righteousness," cherished collectively in Chinese multiculturalism, is fully exemplified in the Mazu spirit. Mazu, with her actions of upholding justice and dispelling evil, earns the admiration of people, and "righteousness" in traditional Chinese culture plays a central role in her spirit. Since the Spring and Autumn Period, "righteousness" has been an essential part of Chinese ethical and moral values. In Confucianism, "righteousness" and "benevolence" together constitute an extensive moral framework. Confucius interconnected "benevolence" and "righteousness" and regarded them as the highest standards of moral behavior. Mencius defined "righteousness" as the right path, believing that justice is the right path for humanity. Mohism also emphasized "righteousness" and considered it "the precious treasure of the world." Chinese folk culture has consistently regarded "righteousness" as a guideline for interpersonal conduct. The values of chivalry and righteousness in the Jianghu (martial arts world) culture are also advocated.

In the legends of Mazu, she not only demonstrates compassion and love but also upholds justice, administers fairness, and combats evil. Her actions are closely tied to

the image of the "Heavenly Queen." The Forty-Eight Illustrations of the Miracles of the Holy Mother of Heaven record many legends about Mazu upholding justice. These legends involve not only subduing demons and expelling evil but also helping with tide raising, aiding in battles, assisting scholars, aiding attacks on Taiwan, and more, fully showcasing Mazu's patriotic sentiments.

From these legends, it can be seen that distinguishing right from wrong, upholding justice, and loving and protecting the country are at the core of the Mazu spirit. She not only exhibits a compassionate heart but also makes clear judgments about good and evil.

3)The Mazu spirit embodies the ancient pursuit of "harmony" in Chinese culture, setting her apart from other deities. What makes Mazu unique is her embodiment of tolerance and harmony, concepts of significant importance in Chinese philosophy. In Taoism, the cosmic law is one of "harmony," and the harmony of all things is supreme. Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* emphasizes the principles of "harmony" and "blending." Confucianism also values harmony. "Harmony" is an essential concept in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

Traditional Chinese culture divides "harmony" into four levels, encompassing harmony between people, harmony within society, harmony between humans and nature, and inner harmony within individuals. These four layers of "harmony" are critical for achieving social harmony. Whether it is Confucian governance, Taoist self-cultivation, or Buddhist spiritual practice, "harmony" is the common goal. It is this shared objective that allows these three philosophical schools to coexist harmoniously and develop in Chinese history. The Chinese nation firmly believes that "harmony" is the most fundamental and essential force on the path to harmony.

The Forty-Eight Illustrations of the Miracles of the Holy Mother of Heaven record a story about a man named Yan Gong encountering a sea monster. Mazu used her magical powers to subdue it, but even though the monster felt her divine presence, it did not fully surrender. Mazu then transformed into a divine dragon, causing the sea

to surge and envelop the monster's ship. She ordered the casting of a magical rope that tightly bound the monster, which could not be undone. Terrified, the monster confessed its wrongdoings. Mazu admonished it, saying, "The East Sea is treacherous and full of dangers. You must protect the people." Afterward, Mazu took it in as a subordinate general. This story bears similarities to the story of Zhuge Liang capturing Meng Huo seven times. In fact, among the numerous legends of Mazu, there are many similar stories, such as "Performing the Divine Spell to Subdue Two Generals," "High Li Gui Manifests," "Following the Sacred Decree to Capture Two Dragons," "At Linhai Crossing, Using the Dharma to Drive Away Two Beasts," "Crushing the Demonic Path, Subduing Two Healers," and more. These stories emphasize that Mazu does not seek to punish troublesome demons; instead, she resolves issues through morality and magical powers, ultimately transforming them into benevolent entities. This exemplifies the path of "harmony." Huang Yuan, a scholar from the Yuan Dynasty, compared Mazu to other deities, stating that Mazu does not threaten with death or blessings but blesses people like a mother. As a deity who does not use threats of death or blessings, Mazu focuses on protecting and blessing people, earning her the respect and love of all, much like how people respect their own mothers. Mazu is a deity who, through her benevolence and magical powers, diffuses conflicts and, in the end, turns potential threats into assets. This showcases the "harmony" within her belief. (Wu Weifeng, 2015)

3.2 The Application Process for "Mazu Belief and Customs" to be Included in the World Intangible Cultural Heritage List

The endeavor to apply for "World Heritage" status for Mazu culture was initiated with the government's vision. In May 2008, during his first visit to Meizhou Island, Yang Gensheng, the newly appointed Party Secretary of Putian, proposed the aspiration to have Mazu culture recognized as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage. He emphasized that even if it took seven, eight, or even ten years, the application process itself would serve as a form of promotion, enhancing the influence of Mazu

culture, elevating the visibility of Meizhou Island, and contributing to its transformation into a globally renowned tourist destination. The Party Committee and Administrative Committee of Meizhou Island attached great importance to this vision and promptly established a working group for the application of Mazu culture to the World Heritage list. This working group was led by Tang Bingchun, the Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee, and comprised Lin Jinbang, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple, as the Deputy Leader.

Inspired by Secretary Yang Gensheng's speech, the application group started to consider the possibilities of applying for the World Heritage status for Mazu culture. Tang Bingchun, as the group leader, approached the Fujian Provincial Department of Culture and the Ministry of Culture to seek guidance from relevant leaders and experts on the feasibility and procedures for applying for World Heritage status for Mazu culture. Experts were invited to hold discussions, and it was universally agreed that "Mazu Belief and Customs" met the criteria of Article 2(3) of the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" adopted by the 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference, which pertains to "social practices, rituals, and festive events." It was deemed most appropriate to submit the application under the name of "Mazu Belief and Customs" within the category of human intangible cultural heritage. Thus, the direction for the application of Mazu culture to the World Heritage list was established, and the Ministry of Culture and the Provincial Department of Culture endorsed this effort.

The entire application process began with a glimmer of hope. On September 10, 2008, two young officials returned with the news that even if Mazu culture were listed as a candidate, as long as the application document and related materials were of high quality, it might be promoted by the Ministry of Culture to become a preliminary candidate or directly submitted to UNESCO for consideration by the World Heritage Committee in September 2009. In light of this, Tang Bingchun, the group leader, immediately took action. On the night of September 10, he entrusted China Central

Television (CCTV) to help gather key video materials related to Mazu culture and produce a television promotional film. He also requested an expert in Mazu culture to read and study the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" overnight to assist in drafting the initial application document. This was done to ensure that the application document, complete with Chinese and English versions, along with the 10-minute and 60-minute television promotional films, could be submitted to the Ministry of Culture for review by September 25.

On September 15, the application group sent the initial draft of the application document to the Preliminary Review Committee of the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO through Zhou Jinyan, Deputy Secretary-General of the Chinese Association for the Exchange of Mazu Culture, and a member of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. On the afternoon of September 16, the Preliminary Review Committee conducted the first review of the initial draft of the application document. They found significant gaps between the draft and the application requirements and requested a rewrite. Upon hearing this, Tang Bingchun, the group leader, decided not to give up and continued to organize efforts to rewrite the application document.

On September 17, he instructed Zhou Jinyan and Xiaolonghua, among others, to go to Fuzhou directly, while he himself went to Fuzhou to seek the assistance of Ma Jianhua, Deputy Dean of Fujian Arts Research Institute, who was familiar with the process of World Heritage applications. At that time, various departments and experts pointed out that other projects had been preparing for World Heritage applications for several years, and their application materials were complete. With only one week left before the deadline, they kindly suggested that Meizhou Island should give up the current application. However, Tang Bingchun, in a comforting tone, replied, "It's alright. Meizhou Island will eventually apply for 'Mazu Belief and Customs' as a UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage. Our participation this time can be seen as training for future applications, accumulating experience for a smooth application in the future." While Tang Bingchun said this out loud, he was determined to make a

final effort. He decided that Ma Jianhua would draft the first three sections of the application document, and he himself would write the remaining five sections.

In the early morning of September 19, the second draft of the application document was finally completed. It was sent for review by the Fujian Provincial Department of Culture and the China National Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center on the same day. On September 20, Tang Bingchun, the group leader, decided to spend the weekend in Beijing with Zhou Jinyan, Xiaolonghua, and two other colleagues. That night, the head of the China National Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center informed them that the second review of the document would take place the next day. Tang Bingchun, along with Ma Jianhua, worked overnight to make revisions, finishing around 4 a.m. One young official, in a half-asleep state, typed as Tang Bingchun dictated. When Tang Bingchun asked him to delete a sentence, he said, "Don't include this sentence," but in his drowsy state, he actually added the words "Don't include this sentence" to the document. Tang Bingchun chuckled upon seeing this, realizing that the team had been working tirelessly.

On the morning of September 21, the Chinese Expert Review Committee held a review meeting, meticulously evaluating every line and sentence of the document. They concluded that the document largely met the application requirements.

The application team pursued perfection as their standard. While the initial draft of the document was accepted, it did not satisfy Tang Bingchun and the team. Therefore, Tang Bingchun, Ma Jianhua, and others continued to work overtime, sometimes until after 3 a.m., making continuous revisions and refinements to the document. Simultaneously, they collected relevant photos and videos needed for the application through various means. They also gathered written statements, voluntary application letters, authorization letters, and diagrams illustrating the main distribution of Mazu Belief and Customs worldwide, in China, and within Fujian Province from communities, Mazu temples, and individuals who supported the application. Essential photos were requested to be retaken by local staff on Meizhou

Island. Additionally, individuals were dispatched to search for relevant video materials at the Fujian Provincial Television and Putian Television stations. To quickly obtain statements of support for the application from Mazu temples in various provinces and municipalities across the country, Tang Bingchun used a bold approach. He asked Zhou Jinyan to contact the heads of Mazu temples in various provinces and municipalities and have them recite the statement using the provided text via phone, recording the statements for submission. In this way, support from Mazu temples across the country for the application of "Mazu Belief and Customs" as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage was promptly obtained. Furthermore, Tang Bingchun, together with personnel from China Central Television, wrote the narration script for the promotional video, enlisted a senior translator who had previously served as a simultaneous interpreter at the United Nations to translate the Chinese document and narration script into English, and employed a foreign announcer from China International Broadcasting Network for voice-over. On the evening of September 25, the same day when China's "Shenzhou VII" spacecraft was launched into space, the application team successfully sent all the materials, including the Chinese and English versions of the application document, photos, television promotional videos, diagrams, books, rights transfer declarations, and more, to the Foreign Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Culture, which was responsible for packaging and mailing the materials to the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris, France. This marked the official submission of "Mazu Belief and Customs" as one of the 35 projects recommended by the Chinese government for consideration in the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity." It was also the first project from Putian City to be recommended by the Chinese government for World Heritage application. Truly, it can be said, "Mazu reported to the World Heritage, a miraculous process, and the application was submitted in just one week."

On October 28, 2008, Tang Bingchun, the leader of the working group for the application of "Mazu Belief and Customs" to the World Heritage list, received a letter

from Ms. Cécile Duvelle, Director of the Division of Cultural Heritage of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, sent through the China National Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center on October 29. In the letter, Ms. Duvelle informed him that the first two parts of the application material for "Mazu Belief and Customs" needed to be modified. Specifically, Part C of the cover and Part 1.C of the application material required further clarification regarding communities, groups, and individuals involved. Additionally, Part 2, "Description of the Heritage," needed to be rewritten according to the elements defined in Article 2 of Chapter 1 of the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage." It was requested to provide a clearer explanation of the characteristics of the founders and practitioners of "Mazu Belief and Customs," as well as various special roles and types of individuals responsible for the heritage, while also further detailing the specific modes of transmission of cultural and technical skills related to Mazu festivals, offerings, music, dance, and more. The deadline for submitting these supplementary materials was set for January 15, 2009. Any late or incomplete submissions would require reapplication in the next round.

The letter requested supplementary materials for "Mazu Belief and Customs," although fewer in quantity compared to other projects, were treated with utmost diligence by Tang Bingchun, the leader of the Meizhou Island application group. While swiftly reaching out to experts to rewrite the necessary content, he also meticulously studied the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" and the original submitted application materials. Based on a comprehensive examination of the Convention, letter requirements, and absorption of expert opinions, Tang Bingchun combined his nearly ten years of research and understanding of the constitutive elements, intrinsic characteristics, manifestations, social status, cultural functions, involved communities, and transmission methods of Mazu Belief and Customs, along with his successful experience in composing the five sections of the application document. He decided to personally take the reins and compose the

supplementary materials in a factual manner.

From December 21 to 23, 2008, the Ministry of Culture convened a meeting in Beijing, attended by folk experts and the heads of the 35 national heritage projects, to provide guidance and review the supplementary materials to be submitted to UNESCO. "Mazu Belief and Customs" was scheduled as the last project for evaluation. During this opportunity, Tang Bingchun attended the evaluation meetings of all heritage projects, absorbing the highlights of each project and expert opinions. He meticulously refined, enriched, and modified the already-prepared supplementary materials. When it was time to review "Mazu Belief and Customs," leaders and experts from the Ministry of Culture found the supplementary materials to be well-written and suitable for direct submission to UNESCO. On the evening of the 23rd, immediately after disembarking from the plane, Tang Bingchun continued to edit the materials, striving for completeness and conciseness. He managed to limit the word count for the "Heritage Description" section to precisely 999 words, staying within the mandated 1000-word limit. That night, he enlisted the help of a translator from China Central Television's educational channel to urgently translate the documents and supplementary materials into English. On the 24th, the documents were officially submitted via the internet. To ensure a secure submission, he also sent physical copies of the letter, supplementary materials, and CD-ROMs through express delivery to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section in Paris, France, on the same day.

Upon receiving the letter and the submitted supplementary materials from Tang Bingchun, the leader of the "Mazu Belief and Customs" application group, the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section swiftly initiated the review process. On January 10, 2009, Tang Bingchun received a letter from Mrs. Cécile Duvelle, the Director of the Division of Cultural Heritage of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, which read: "I am pleased to inform you that your nomination file 'Mazu Belief and Customs' representing China for inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding is now complete with the additional

information you submitted on 29 December 2008. Consequently, your nomination file will be transmitted to an international body established by the Committee of Governmental Experts for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. This body will evaluate the nomination and make recommendations." This confirmed that the supplementary materials submitted by the Meizhou Island application group for "Mazu Belief and Customs" met the requirements of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, passing the integrity review of the application materials. This marked "Mazu Belief and Customs" as one of the few projects recommended by the Chinese government to enter the third phase. The International Department of the Ministry of Culture congratulated this achievement in a letter dated January 13, 2009, and noted that "the effort to promote Mazu culture's application for World Heritage is showing initial success."

On June 12, 2009, Tang Bingchun, Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of Meizhou Island and leader of the "Mazu Belief and Customs" application group, received a letter from Mrs. Cécile Duvelle, the Director of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, informing him that an international body had reviewed the results of the evaluation of "Mazu Belief and Customs." The evaluation report concluded that "Mazu Belief and Customs" met the criteria for World Heritage nomination and recommended that the relevant materials be forwarded to the Committee of Governmental Experts for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. This signified that the application of "Mazu Belief and Customs" for World Heritage, after passing the registration and integrity review of the materials, had smoothly passed the evaluation stage of the international body, leaving only the final review and decision to be made.

In a letter, Mrs. Cécile Duvelle stated, "Your nomination file 'Mazu Belief and Customs,' representing China's proposal for inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, has been considered by an international body appointed by the Committee of Governmental Experts for the

Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. This body held its meeting at UNESCO Headquarters from 11 to 15 May 2009 to assess the nominations for this list. Please find attached to this letter the letters of recommendation for your nomination file as well as a draft decision by the body for consideration by the Committee." The letter further mentioned, "The fourth session of the Committee of Governmental Experts for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage will be held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, at the end of September or beginning of October 2009. Before this meeting, the reports of the body and the recommendation letter for the inscription of 'Mazu Belief and Customs' on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding will be forwarded to the Committee of Governmental Experts for its consideration and discussion."

3.3 Post-Application, "Mazu Folk Belief" Becomes a Cultural Calling Card

1) Clever Transformation: The Practical Work of Applying "Mazu Folk Belief" to World Intangible Cultural Heritage

In a historic milestone on September 30, 2009, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approved the inclusion of China's submission, "Mazu Belief and Customs," into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This momentous decision marked the formal recognition of Mazu culture, which has its origins in China and has been passed down for millennia, as a cultural heritage to be shared by all of humanity. This recognition also prompted Chinese governmental bodies and various sectors of society to reevaluate and reposition the cultural value inherent in Mazu Belief and Customs. In 2016, the National Development and Reform Commission included "leveraging the positive role of folk culture such as Mazu culture" in the national "13th Five-Year Plan," thereby fully acknowledging the significant place of Mazu Belief and Customs in modern Chinese culture.

For an extended period, folk belief activities in which the public participated had been trapped in a dilemma between religion and superstition, even being regarded as

"feudal superstitions" in government religious management affairs. As the work of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage progressed, the declaration of folk belief activities became a challenging aspect of this work. How did the government resolve the issue of declaring such projects? What knowledge could the field of folklore studies provide to address these challenges? An interview with Professor Wu Bing'an shed light on the declaration approach for "Mazu Belief and Customs." Professor Wu Bing'an has long been engaged in the study of folk beliefs and has served as the Deputy Director of the Expert Committee of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Work, placing him at the forefront of academic research on folk beliefs and the practice of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Through "customs transformation," the successful nomination of folk belief projects, including "Mazu Belief and Customs," was facilitated during the nomination process. This approach also strengthened the role of "communities" in intangible cultural heritage protection, significantly impacting not only Mazu Belief and Customs itself but also having a positive influence on the protection of other folk belief heritage projects.

In Professor Wu Bing'an's interview on the nomination process of "Mazu Belief and Customs," he mentioned the introduction of the concept of "customs transformation" and how it led to a reevaluation of folk belief activities. As the safeguarding work for intangible cultural heritage advanced, how was this concept practically applied? What were the challenges faced during the nomination process of "Mazu Belief and Customs"? Initially, "Mazu Belief and Customs" was proposed as an academic concept. However, as the work of intangible cultural heritage protection progressed, the declaration of projects involving folk beliefs became increasingly complex. The Expert Committee had stringent requirements, particularly scrutinizing projects involving folk beliefs. The declaration of projects related to folk beliefs faced difficulties both in terms of policy recognition and practical submission. In the interview with Professor Wu Bing'an, it was evident that overcoming these challenges required adapting to policy requirements and international organizational standards.

Professor Wu Bing'an explained, "When the concept of 'customs transformation' was introduced, it was initially used in academic discussions. At the beginning of intangible cultural heritage protection, there was a strong emphasis on publicity, especially on how to mobilize the masses to voluntarily declare their cultural practices, which proved to be effective. The earliest declarations included projects related to singing, dancing, storytelling, and other visible and performative forms of folk culture. These projects were relatively easy to declare and be approved, even if they included elements of ritual practices. Our country established an expert committee for the evaluation of national-level intangible cultural heritage projects and established a review mechanism. The expert committee was primarily responsible for the review of project declarations, with a particular focus on projects involving folk beliefs. The declaration of such projects faced challenges both in terms of policy recognition and practical submission. Initially, when the first batch of national-level intangible cultural heritage projects was declared, over 50 temples applied for projects. These temples often possessed cultural relics at the national level. However, their temple fairs or other activities were still regarded as 'feudal superstitions.' During the review process, the expert committee decided to consolidate the hardware and software of some temples, including their temple fairs, into the national-level intangible cultural heritage list. This was because these temple fairs were considered 'cultural spaces' with specific activity periods, aligning with UNESCO's emphasis on holistic protection rather than singling out individual elements within temple fairs for protection. The protection of temple fair activities as integral spaces adhered to the spirit of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage." (NORI KO AIKAWA,2004,p.146)

However, during the declaration of other projects, issues arose with projects titled "Mazu Ritual," "Confucius Ritual," "Huangdi Mausoleum Ritual," and "Genghis Khan Mausoleum Ritual." Scholars and experts at the grassroots level and in counties and townships generally submitted projects following this pattern. At that time, during

the first round of project declarations, any project with a ritualistic title was automatically rejected. This posed a significant challenge: should the project names be altered appropriately? There was a possibility that all ritual-related projects submitted at the grassroots level would be rejected, and it was not feasible to find substitute projects for all of them. Similar situations were expected to arise in future declaration work, necessitating a solution.

In addition to the elements of worship often present in temple fairs, many Chinese festivals are a combination of celebration and reverence. Nowadays, people often wish each other "happy holidays" when celebrating, but in reality, festivals in China are not just about joy and festivities. Chinese festivals involve reverence before happiness, reflecting the ethical and moral values of Chinese culture. In this context, the issue lies not with the "worship" but with the "belief" aspect. Official worship is linked to the state, and this connection is generally accepted. However, what the authorities recognize as "folk beliefs" is seen differently, as they are not considered beliefs in the same sense. So, what do we call it? Is it "folk belief in Mazu"? Even this term feels awkward to us. Calling it "Mazu faith" is even less acceptable because the term "faith" directly relates to political and religious ideologies, and it is rarely used in the context of folk beliefs. In recent years, with changes in government policies, the religious authorities have started paying more attention to folk beliefs.

We can say that pasting door gods on doors is a folk belief, which the authorities can accept. However, when the public gathers, kneels, burns incense, and worships with great fervor, it becomes a complex phenomenon that cannot be adequately described as a simple folk belief. Therefore, the expert committee faced difficulties when determining intangible cultural heritage projects and confirming their names. At the time, I was considering whether "belief" was suitable or if "custom" would be better. Suddenly, I thought about how in folklore studies, the term "folk belief customs" often appears. From the perspective of folklore, it is indeed folk belief customs. So, I shortened it to a simple term. We know it's a belief custom, but when

we apply for it, we present it as a custom without mentioning the belief aspect.

Late one night, after careful consideration, I proposed changing all the project names to "Xin Su" (信俗), which means belief customs. We eliminated the term "worship" entirely and replaced all temple activities with ceremonies. What we reported were the traditional cultural customs and rituals within these activities, reflecting the value of China's intangible cultural heritage through the concept of "Xin Su" and promoting our excellent traditional culture.

These conclusions and determinations quickly received approval from the national authorities and were implemented in the application for intangible cultural heritage status. It's important to understand that this change wasn't limited to Mazu alone but encompassed a large number of worship projects, all redefined as belief customs. This paved the way for future applications to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Using "Xin Su" as a typical case of successful application ensured that it closely aligned with the realities of China and was academically sound.

In the field of folklore studies, simplifying the term "folk belief customs" to "Xin Su" proved to be concise and practical. We found a neutral term that was academically valid, accepted by official discourse, and recognized by international organizations. The primary goal of applying for the UNESCO project on intangible cultural heritage was to secure the successful nomination of national treasures in the form of large-scale intangible heritage projects. This was a natural progression. A crucial element of this was the involvement of communities, referred to by UNESCO as the "bearers of tradition." In UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the evaluation criteria repeatedly emphasize the active participation of communities and individuals, especially indigenous and various groups, in the production, safeguarding, continuity, and recreation of intangible cultural heritage, thus contributing to enriching cultural diversity and human creativity.

Therefore, the introduction of the concept of "Mazu Xin Su" actually represented

a way to apply for similar projects. By using the term "Xin Su," we avoided names associated with political and religious ideologies, making it more consistent with government policies and international recognition. The article also emphasizes the importance of community involvement in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The active participation of representative inheritors, faith communities, and folk communities is crucial for protection efforts.

Ultimately, the successful application of "Mazu Xin Su" marked an important step in the protection of folk belief customs as a form of intangible cultural heritage. Local representative inheritors and believers have begun to consciously preserve and pass down their belief customs. The article highlights the need for policy adjustments in line with societal developments, particularly in minority regions, where traditional practices such as shamanic dances are gradually recognized as forms of cultural heritage worth preserving.

2) From Feudal Superstition to Cultural Heritage: The Transformation of "Mazu Folk Belief"

Since "Mazu Xin Su" was included in the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity," the most noticeable change has been the increased frequency and vibrancy of activities at the Mazu Ancestral Temple on Meizhou Island. "Mazu Xin Su" is no longer solely protected by official entities; it now requires the active participation of diverse stakeholders because it has become a cultural treasure shared by all of humanity. Today, the Mazu Ancestral Temple on Meizhou Island is no longer an isolated temple fair; it collaborates with many other Mazu temples, both domestically and internationally, particularly in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Through the cooperation of these temples' boards, they organize joint activities, making the Mazu Ancestral Temple on Meizhou Island an international Mazu temple. During the application for "Mazu Xin Su" to be inscribed as intangible cultural heritage, these temples expressed their support, demonstrating the significance of broad participation and cooperation. It can be said that they all constitute a part of "Mazu Xin Su," which

is a crucial driving factor.

Furthermore, for the local government, "Mazu Xin Su" has brought substantial economic benefits from tourism. Millions of people visit Putian and Meizhou Island every year, fostering prosperity in the local tourism and commercial sectors. Local governments have also experienced economic development, and their leadership should draw ethical, benevolent, and altruistic values from the Mazu faith to benefit local residents. More importantly, Mazu culture has thrived locally. The Mazu Ancestral Temple, like a cultural relic, no longer needs new construction. Instead, the temple has expanded in scale, and previously demolished temples have been rebuilt – this is the first change. Secondly, the number of Mazu devotees from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, as well as Southeast Asian pilgrims who come annually to pay their respects, has grown exponentially. Their most significant characteristic is no longer merely burning incense and bowing in worship; they bring statues of Mazu from their hometowns to be consecrated at the ancestral temple. Some even charter special flights for this purpose, and now the temple is busy every day receiving these devotees.

The cultural activities centered around "Mazu Xin Su" have continuously enriched their content, and their influence and scale continue to expand. This has turned them into essential platforms for China's cultural exchange and cooperation with the world. In particular, Putian Meizhou Island hosts various events throughout the year, including the New Year's Prayer and Culture Festival, the Mazu Lantern Festival, the Mazu Return to Her Hometown, the Mazu Ancestral Temple Fair, beach music festivals, the maritime Mazu festival, Mazu Cultural Week, large-scale variety shows, Mazu song competitions, Mazu offerings exhibitions, and Mazu calligraphy and painting exhibitions. These events attract over one million domestic and international visitors annually. As a result, the International Festivals and Events Association has designated Putian Meizhou Island as the "City of World Festival Events." This marks the first time a city with a population of less than one million has

received this honor in China and represents the second global recognition for Meizhou Island, following the inscription of "Mazu Xin Su" as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage.

From the perspective of intangible cultural heritage protection, we can observe specific folk cultural projects being included in the lists of humanity's intangible cultural heritage, national-level intangible cultural heritage, and regional-level intangible cultural heritage. This grants these projects rightful status and access to government funding. Therefore, intangible cultural heritage protection is essentially elevating folk culture as a representative and receiving comprehensive support. This has changed the position of these cultures in national politics and societal life. Folk culture forms the basis of everyday life and the meaning of life for ordinary people. Intangible cultural heritage protection shifts the discourse framework around these cultures, guiding China's modernization towards a foundation based on folk culture.

The presentation of activities that were once widely viewed as superstitions under the banner of intangible cultural heritage is not an overnight process. The inclusion of Mazu faith in the national-level intangible cultural heritage representative list, followed by its recognition as world intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO, is a testament to its uniqueness. Mazu faith serves as a bridge connecting mainland and Taiwanese cultures. It no longer merely influences the Minnan region and China's coastal areas but has also made its presence felt in Taiwan. The symbolism of the Thousand-Mile Eyes and the Favorable-Wind Ears in the Mazu pilgrimage activities, from another perspective, is a well-recognized cultural symbol for people. Regardless of the origin or past significance of these symbols, what matters now is that local residents use these symbols to express their collective psyche and social cohesion. It represents the consciousness of the people and, fundamentally, is not significantly different from other symbols.

China is a global leader in emphasizing the protection of intangible cultural heritage. No other country, whether large or small, has invested as much in intangible

cultural heritage protection as China has. Comprehensive systems have been established at the township, county, city, province, and national levels. Intangible cultural heritage protection in China isn't merely a cultural project within the existing system; instead, it has created a specialized system to carry out this cultural endeavor. In the current landscape of intangible cultural heritage protection, the attitudes of various sectors of society toward these projects have undergone significant changes. The core requirement of intangible cultural heritage protection is to preserve the original state as much as possible. Arbitrary changes could potentially damage cultural heritage. For certain projects, if destructive alterations are made, it may violate the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage" and related regulations, even leading to legal action. The core issue lies in the fact that being recognized as intangible cultural heritage means the project must maintain its uniqueness. Intangible cultural heritage projects themselves possess unquestionable value and do not need to exist for the sake of charity, public welfare, or economic development. It is crucial to allow intangible heritage projects to retain their inherent characteristics. This not only safeguards the rights of project holders but also ensures that the government allocates funding for their protection and provides corresponding services. In the philosophy of intangible cultural heritage protection, projects should adhere to their uniqueness, as that is the best way forward.

4. Transition from Static Protection to Dynamic Inheritance of Mazu Culture as World Intangible Cultural Heritage

4.1 Analysis of the Current Status of Synergistic Governance in the Activation and Utilization of Mazu Cultural Heritage

In China, the core principle of preserving intangible cultural heritage is "government leadership with social participation." Only when various participating entities fully leverage their respective expertise and cooperate effectively can the orderly and efficient inheritance of cultural heritage be achieved. The activation and

utilization of Mazu cultural heritage require active involvement from various stakeholders beyond government departments, including social organizations, businesses, inheritors, ordinary citizens, academia, and media. Their resources and strengths need to be integrated to form a collective effort, thus realizing the optimal preservation approach for Mazu cultural heritage.

The governing entities for Mazu cultural heritage encompass the government, businesses, social organizations, inheritors, and ordinary citizens. The government takes a leading role in the activation and utilization of Mazu cultural heritage, actively fulfilling its duties and guiding the comprehensive implementation of the work. Businesses serve as the users of Mazu cultural heritage, deriving economic benefits through the development and sale of related products, thereby promoting the growth of the Mazu cultural industry. Social organizations, composed of non-governmental organizations such as the Mazu Cultural Research Center, the Chinese Mazu Research Association, and academic institutions, facilitate the dissemination and exchange of Mazu culture. Academic institutions, on the other hand, play a role in talent cultivation and academic research, contributing to potential educational aspects. Inheritors, as the primary transmitters of Mazu cultural heritage, pass down the relevant traditions through the teaching of skills and practical demonstrations. Ordinary citizens are supporters of Mazu culture, and their support contributes to the prosperity and wider dissemination of Mazu culture. Collaboration among these entities is indispensable in the activation and utilization of Mazu cultural heritage.

The ultimate goal of governance is to enhance and maintain the maximization of public interests. Currently, the activation and utilization of Mazu cultural heritage depend on the full utilization of the advantages of various participating entities, their coordination, and cooperation with each other, as well as the implementation of appropriate measures to ensure the effective preservation and inheritance of Mazu cultural heritage. This governance approach includes coordination and cooperation among government departments and interactions among various stakeholders.

However, the current governance system for the protection of Mazu cultural heritage is relatively centralized, with the government remaining the primary governing entity. Nonetheless, businesses, social organizations, inheritors, and ordinary citizens, among others, are actively contributing to heritage preservation, thus facilitating the progress of conservation efforts.

The increasing attention of the state to cultural heritage protection has led various levels of government to incorporate cultural heritage work into comprehensive economic and social development plans. As a precious regional treasure of cultural heritage, Mazu culture has long been highly valued in Putian City. The Putian municipal government actively implements the policy of "protection as the main priority, rescue as the top priority, reasonable utilization, and inheritance and development" for intangible cultural heritage protection. Simultaneously, it upholds the principle of "government leadership with social participation," encouraging diverse stakeholders to participate in the protection and development of Mazu culture. In recent years, prompted by General Secretary Xi Jinping's instructions, the Putian municipal government and various sectors of society have attached great importance to building the Mazu cultural brand. They have actively developed the connotations of Mazu culture, formulated corresponding development plans, and aimed to establish Putian as the center of the world's Mazu culture. Throughout this process, they have emphasized innovative development with the goal of achieving a win-win situation for both society and the economy.

Mazu culture, as a precious heritage spanning millennia, has consistently received high levels of attention from various levels of government and sectors of society. Every year, the government formulates relevant plans for the development of Mazu culture, deeply understanding the situation through professional seminars and field research, and proposing directions for development. In terms of legislation and policy-making, especially since the inclusion of Mazu faith in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in September 2009, the Putian

municipal government promptly formulated regulations such as the "Regulations on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mazu Faith in Putian City." These regulations provide guidance for the protection, rescue, reasonable utilization, and inheritance and development of Mazu cultural heritage, emphasizing the principles of government leadership and social participation. They have conducted registration, surveys, and confirmation work on Mazu faith and related natural and cultural resources. Additionally, they have encouraged the active participation of social funds to promote the development of Mazu culture-related industries, making the protection of Mazu culture more standardized. In March 2016, the inclusion of "leveraging the positive role of folk cultures like Mazu culture" in the "Thirteenth Five-Year Plan" outline officially marked Mazu culture as a national strategy. In November of the same year, the Putian municipal government issued a notice on the "Action Plan for Building a Beautiful Putian," which included special actions to achieve greater achievements in promoting Mazu culture, aiming to transform Putian into the center of world Mazu culture. Building on the rich tourism resources of Mazu culture, they have worked diligently to create a tourism brand of "Clean and Fresh Fujian, Holy Land of Mazu, and Beautiful Putian," accelerating the development of comprehensive tourism. By the end of 2017, the municipal party committee and government also issued opinions on the protection of Meizhou Island. On October 1, 2019, the local regulation, "Regulations on the Protection and Management of Meizhou Island in Putian City," officially came into effect.

In terms of financial investment, the municipal government attaches great importance to the construction of Mazu cultural facilities. They have invested over 50 million yuan in the restoration of the Mazu ancestral temple complex, nearly 10 billion yuan in the construction of the new ancestral temple complex, which is renowned as the "Potala Palace of the Sea." Regarding tourism on Meizhou Island, they invested 7.544 billion yuan, advancing projects related to the Mazu cultural characteristic towns and fishing port terminals, among others. The government has

also allocated special funds for the maintenance and repair of heritage related to Mazu faith customs, as well as supporting academic research, protection application, and tourism cooperation, thereby strengthening financial guarantees.

In terms of organizational support, the municipal government has established a public service department and a municipal-level intangible cultural heritage protection center, while counties and districts have set up cultural centers to enhance the inheritance and protection of cultural heritage projects. The establishment of the Putian Mazu Cultural Research Institute has brought together the research strength of experts and scholars, elevating the academic research level of Mazu culture.

In terms of cultural dissemination and exchange, Putian City has organized several branded events such as the "Mazu Spring and Autumn Festival" and "Mazu World Tour." It has also partnered with the Taiwan China Times Group to host cross-strait Mazu cultural and creative festivals, enhancing the international influence of Mazu culture. The government has further promoted Mazu culture through various means, including media coverage and branded events, gradually taking it to the world and gaining the love and recognition of the public.

Regarding the industrialization of Mazu culture, the government has actively facilitated the integration of Mazu culture with the cultural industry and tourism development. The government has issued Mazu stamps, gold commemorative medals, and introduced various film and television productions and cultural products, such as Q-version Mazu and the Puxian opera "Sea Goddess Mazu." This continuous effort has optimized the Mazu cultural industry.

In the integration of Mazu culture and tourism development, Putian City has promoted the development of "Mazu + Tourism" through the development of tourism products and the cultivation of high-quality tourism routes. The government is committed to incorporating Mazu culture into its planning, expanding the tourism space, and enhancing the international influence of Mazu cultural tourism. These efforts have yielded significant results, with an increasing number of tourists and a

growing international reputation for Mazu culture.

4.2 Mazu Studies: The Mazu Culture Research Center at Putian University

In April 2005, Putian University in the coastal region of Fujian established the Mazu Culture Research Institute, followed by the establishment of the Mazu Culture Research Center in January 2008. This center was also designated as a research base for humanities and social sciences in Fujian Province.

The Putian University Mazu Culture Research Center comprises four research offices: Mazu Culture Soft Power, Mazu Beliefs and Cross-Strait Relations, Inheritance of Mazu as World Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Creative Industry Development, and the Mazu Studies Discipline System Construction. These research offices cover various disciplines, including religious studies, history, literature, sociology, management, art, medicine, and more, conducting multidimensional and multidirectional research. Additionally, the Mazu Culture Library is established within the center, which hosts the largest domestic database dedicated to Mazu culture research. It includes the Mazu literature bibliography, Mazu literature full-text database, Mazu materials image library, and Mazu materials multimedia library.

The Putian University Mazu Culture Research Center has signed agreements with various related organizations and institutions, such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of History, the National Taiwan Federation of Taiwan, the General Administration of Sport of China, the Chinese Mazu Culture Exchange Association, the Chinese Mazu Network, Putian Municipal Committee of the CPC, the Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, Press, and Publication, Meizhou Island Management Committee, Meizhou Bay North Shore Management Committee, and several cross-strait Mazu temples, including Meizhou Island Mazu Temple, Xianliangang Tianhou Ancestral Temple, and Taiwan Xingang Fengtian Temple, to jointly conduct research on Mazu culture. The center has a team of 61 researchers covering various disciplines, forming a well-structured interdisciplinary research

team. This team has not only achieved rich results in Mazu culture research but has also integrated research outcomes into undergraduate teaching, incorporating Mazu culture inheritance and innovation into curriculum development, student dissertations, graduation project guidance, and field investigations, providing strong support for the inheritance and innovation of Mazu culture. (Fujian Mazu Cultural Heritage and Development Collaborative Innovation Center, 2016)

The Putian University Mazu Culture Research Center values academic exchange and actively hosts academic seminars and conferences, such as the Third Cross-Strait Forum, "Protecting World Heritage and Promoting Mazu Culture," the Fourth Cross-Strait Forum, "Inheriting and Developing Mazu Beliefs to Strengthen Cross-Strait Identity," and the Cross-Strait Mazu Culture Research Academic Seminar. The center has appointed special professors, including Wang Zhenzhong, a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of History, Professor Sun Xiao, Professor Chen Zhiping from Xiamen University, Professor Lin Guoping from Fujian Normal University, and Professor Cai Taishan from Taoyuan Innovation Institute of Technology in Taiwan. It has also invited guest professors such as Professor Zhang Xun from the "Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences" in Taiwan, Professor Lin Meirong from Tzu Chi University in Taiwan, and Dr. Wang Jianchuan from Southern Taiwan University of Science and Technology. Collaborating with the World Mazu Culture Research and Documentation Center of Taiwan's Xingang Fengtian Temple and Xianliangang Tianhou Ancestral Temple, the center has jointly published the academic journal "Mazu Studies," providing a platform for establishing academic connections with experts and scholars in the field of Mazu culture research both domestically and internationally, thereby advancing the study of Mazu culture.

4.3 Architectural Forms and Folk Characteristics of Mazu Temples in Coastal Fujian

1) Architectural Characteristics of Mazu Temples

Starting from the definition of "intangible cultural heritage" as passed by the

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which refers to various practices, performances, expressions, knowledge systems, skills, and associated tools, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces regarded as cultural heritage by different groups, communities, and sometimes individuals, this section analyzes the architectural features of Mazu temples, with a focus on the interpretation of the architectural decorative elements, particularly in the case of the Meizhou Mazu Temple. It is emphasized that the Meizhou Mazu Temple is constructed following the architectural traditions of traditional Chinese ancient buildings, reflecting the folk, religious, and cultural aspects of the Fujian region.

The decorative patterns in Mazu cultural architecture originate from the contemplation of ordinary people about life, with inspiration for creating these decorative elements drawn from their devout beliefs in Mazu and her culture. Mazu devotees consider Mazu cultural architecture as a material embodiment and entrustment of their inner emotions, expressing respect and protective feelings towards the Mazu deity through a rich variety of decorative elements.

The overall layout and architectural characteristics of Mazu temples incorporate features from Buddhist and Taoist architecture during the Ming and Qing dynasties. An analysis of representative regional Mazu temple architectural decorative elements in the coastal areas of Fujian is conducted, summarizing the characteristics of Mazu temple architecture, structure, and decorative arts.

Mazu temple buildings are mostly composed of two or three courtyards, with four courtyards or more being less common. The common basic layout consists of "mountain gate - main hall - rear hall - side hall - eave corridor," while larger temples may have archways, plazas, auxiliary buildings, and dressing rooms, among others.

1) Quanzhou Mazu Temple

Quanzhou Mazu Temple is the most complete existing ancient Mazu temple architecture in Quanzhou, known as the "Sacred Temple of Wenling." It covers an area of approximately 0.72 hectares. The architecture follows a four-courtyard layout

and includes features such as a stage, four cool pavilions, east-west pavilions, and two dining halls, among others.

2) Beigang Chaotian Temple

Beigang Chaotian Temple covers an area of approximately 0.2 hectares and was built in the 33rd year of Kangxi (1694). It has undergone multiple renovations and is the most prosperous Mazu temple in the Taiwan region. The temple follows a four-courtyard layout and, in addition to the main Yulin Palace, includes the Double Gong Temple, Lingxu Hall, Wenchang Temple, Jukui Pavilion, and Sanjie Public Shrine, among others.

3) Meizhou Mazu Temple

Meizhou Mazu Temple was listed as the sixth batch of national key cultural heritage protection units by the State Council in 2006. As the birthplace of Mazu faith culture, it has undergone restoration and expansion. The overall area of the ancestral temple is approximately 3.8 hectares, with a building area of 1.8 hectares. Meizhou Mazu Temple is famous for its thriving incense and is considered the holiest place for Mazu believers worldwide. It is also the largest Mazu temple architecture.

The roofs of Mazu temple buildings primarily consist of roof tiles and ridge decorations, with common types being cylindrical and flat tiles. Due to the abundant rainfall in the southern region, the roof tiles are designed to facilitate drainage using "upturned eaves." Circular roof ridges effectively prevent rainwater from pouring in. Given that Meizhou Mazu Temple is located in an area prone to typhoons and heavy rain, the temple's walls are constructed using bricks, stones, or a combination of both. Roof tiles in the Minnan and Puxian regions tend to be in shades of orange-red, and the architectural support structure is mostly a combination of post-and-beam and bracket sets, with some being purely post-and-beam or purely bracket sets. Traditional architecture in the Minnan and Puxian regions uses red bricks, while the Minbei region employs black bricks and tiles, resulting in noticeable regional differences between the north and south. Roof types for Mazu temple buildings include hard

gables, hanging gables, and resting gables. In other regions, some Mazu temples have double-eaved resting gable roofs. Representative examples include Putian Huangshi Tianhou Temple, Quanzhou Mazu Temple, Quangang Nanpu Shagelingci Temple, Zhangzhou Zhaoan Chaotian Temple, Longyan Chishui Tianhou Temple, and Longyan Yongding Tangzijiao Tianhou Temple.



Figure 25: Architectural Plan of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple. The Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple, located on Meizhou Island in Putian City, Fujian Province, was originally constructed in the fourth year of the Northern Song Dynasty's Yongxi era (987 AD). It is the birthplace of Chinese Mazu culture, the pilgrimage center for Mazu devotees worldwide, and a hub for cross-strait exchanges. The existing buildings of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple mainly date back to the Qing Dynasty. The temple's architectural layout centers around the main hall, following the natural contours of the mountain, resulting in a 300-meter-long main temple path with a height difference of over 40 meters. The path is connected by 323 stone steps, flanked by various buildings from the mountain gate and ritual gate to the main hall.

Source: Retrieved from Google Internet, 2023.

The ridge of Mazu temple architecture consists of the main ridge and hanging ridges. In the three-section main ridge, the central part is higher than the left and right sides, with additional hanging ridges on either side, a style known as the "San Chuan Ridge." Typically, the San Chuan Ridge is used for large mansions with three or five bays.

In the Meizhou Mazu Temple architecture, the main ridge can be classified as follows: "Ding Gai Ridge," which has a cross-sectional profile resembling the shape of a tripod, often adorned with decorative elements like cut porcelain carvings, colored bricks, pottery sculptures, and gray sculptures; "Flower Window Ridge," constructed using hollowed red and green colored bricks. The main ridge extends outward and curls upwards at both ends, forming swallowtail patterns.

The walls linked by the wooden framework beneath the roof are load-bearing walls that support the roof. Among them, the upper part of the wall that forms a triangular shape with the roof is known as the "mountain wall." The mountain walls in Mazu temple architecture are constructed using stacked bricks and stones, enhancing the stability of the building's foundation. The conventional style of mountain walls is known as the "Five-Element Mountain Wall," where the "Five Elements" in their decorative forms incorporate concepts from architectural Feng Shui, constituting the primary form of mountain walls in Meizhou Mazu Temple architecture. In addition, extended overhanging swallowtail ridges are adorned with cut porcelain carvings to avoid a visually rigid appearance, while the protruding parts of the roof ridges serve to protect the mountain walls.

Decoration in Mazu temple architecture varies and includes wood carvings, stone carvings, brick carvings, murals, cut porcelain carvings, and gray sculptures, among others. Additionally, physical objects such as couplets, plaques, inscriptions, ritual instruments, and palanquins reflect the local architectural and craftsmanship standards, presenting a comprehensive display of architectural and craft culture. Carved decorations are particularly common in the three-section architectural structure. Wood

carvings are often applied to roof beams, short columns, camelback pedestals, and eave boards. Stone carvings are concentrated on the walls and foundations of the buildings, as well as on stone gates, stone plaques, stone windows, stone lions, stone beams, and stone pillars. Noteworthy are the gray sculptures on wall ends and cut porcelain carvings on the main and hanging ridges of the roofs. These are unique temple architectural crafts in the Chaoshan region of Guangdong and the Minnan and Puxian regions of Fujian, symbolizing the religious status and high-quality standards of Mazu temple architecture. Like ancestral halls and temples, Mazu temple architecture preserves traditional Chinese architectural styles. Inscriptions on door couplets, column couplets, door plaques, and other hanging plaques are often the work of renowned calligraphers, adding significant artistic value.

2) Symbolic Elements in the Decorative Art of Mazu Temples in Coastal Fujian

We will take the example of the Meizhou Mazu Temple to explore the typical decorative elements of Fujian's Mazu culture architecture. The Meizhou Mazu Temple is located in the northeast of Guanxia Village on Meizhou Island, Xiuyu District, Putian City, Fujian Province. The temple complex includes the main hall, dormitory hall, and the Holy Parents Shrine. It was originally built in the fourth year of the Yongxi era during the Song Dynasty (987 AD) and has undergone multiple renovations and expansions to achieve its current layout. The entire Meizhou Mazu Temple revolves around the west and south axes. The west axis includes prominent structures like the grand archway, long corridor, mountain gate, ceremonial gate, bell and drum tower, main hall, and Chaotian Pavilion. The south axis complex is the New Hall of Meizhou Ancestral Temple, featuring a five-section, Song-style architecture. It includes Shunji Hall, Tianhou Square, Tianhou Hall, Lingci Hall, and the Mazu Cultural Exhibition Hall. At the highest point of the temple hilltop stands a towering 14-meter tall stone sculpture of Mazu.

Mazu culture architecture commonly employs wooden structures supplemented by earthwork construction techniques. Wooden structures play a load-bearing role in

these buildings and are mainly divided into various forms such as "Tangliang-style," "Jinggan-style," and "Chuandou-style." Among these, Mazu culture architecture often uses "Tangliang-style" roofs, a method derived from traditional Chinese architectural construction. The "Tangliang-style" construction relies on longitudinal pillars, with main beams placed between the primary pillars, connecting to the main beams of the rooms. Subsequently, purlins and secondary beams are placed above the main beams, and at the top of the room, purlins are added above the main beams, forming the typical "Tangliang-style" architectural structure.

A distinctive decorative element in Mazu culture architecture is the bracket set, known as "Dou Gong" in Chinese. The bracket set is the intersection between vertical pillars and horizontal beams, serving as a load-bearing element to transfer the weight of the overhanging eaves to the vertical pillars. The bracket set has evolved from its initial form, known as "Diantuo," which was used as support under the eaves, to its modern form as a continuous beam. It provides structural stability to the building but has gradually transitioned from a primarily structural function to becoming a decorative element in Mazu architecture (see image).

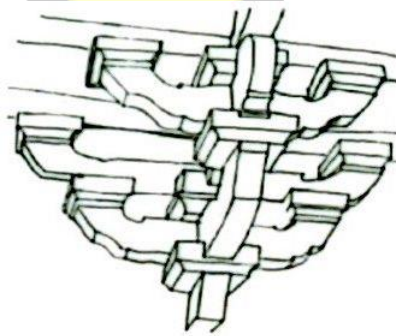


Figure 26: Typical Decorative "Dou Gong" Structure in Mazu Culture Architecture. It is a unique architectural structure in China. Dou Gong, an arch-shaped load-bearing structure, is added in layers from the top of columns, architraves, and purlins or between frames. The square wooden blocks placed between the arches are called "Dou," and together they are referred to as "Dou Gong."

Source: Retrieved from Putian Overseas Chinese Homeland Times website, 2023.

One of the typical decorations in Mazu culture architecture is wood carving,

extensively utilized within the buildings with variations based on functionality. Carved and openwork patterns are often used for partitions and windows, while relief and intaglio carvings are typically applied to columns and beams. Wood carvings in Mazu culture architecture encompass various traditional Chinese motifs, such as dramas, legends, bats, lions, dragons, and more. These architectural embellishments uniquely incorporate marine elements like seaweed and fish, highlighting their distinctive character. The craftsmanship involved in wood carving is exceptional, particularly in the creation of screens and fan grids. Wood, with its versatility, is arranged into various shapes to enrich the architectural decorations (see image).



Figure 27: One of the Typical Decorations in Mazu Culture Architecture - Woodcarving Craftsmanship. Woodcarving craftsmanship is a type of folk art categorized by the carving material. It typically involves carving on wood materials with fine, dense, pliable, and non-deformable textures, such as basswood, birchwood, nanmu wood, camphor wood, cypress wood, ginkgo wood, agarwood, redwood, longan wood, and others. It generally refers to artistic crafts created by carving wood materials.

Source: Retrieved from Putian Overseas Chinese Homeland Times website, 2023.

In the decoration of Mazu culture architecture, brick carving techniques are quite common, especially in the buildings of southern Fujian where local culture, maritime culture, and architectural styles intertwine. Brick carvings are frequently used in exterior wall decorations, including decorative walls, archways, screen walls, mountain walls, roof ridges, stone tablets, and other representative elements. Due to its cost-effectiveness and aesthetic appeal, bricks are widely employed in these elements. Brick carving, as a relatively easy-to-sculpt material, is highly favored by craftsmen. The content is rich, featuring stories of Mazu Linmo, the lives of coastal residents, local legends, and more. The craftsmanship and content of brick carvings are meticulously executed. The bricks used are repeatedly washed and finely processed, and the production process involves multiple steps, ultimately presenting smooth relief patterns. Brick carvings are primarily used in bases and railings, and another method involves embedding brick carvings separately into the walls, depicting ancient coins, begonia flowers, and other patterns, all brimming with the rich cultural characteristics of Mazu and the Minnan region.



Figure 28: The stone archway, often referred to as a "paifang" or "pai lou," is a traditional architectural structure. In religious ceremonies and rituals, these archways play a significant role. They serve as markers denoting the entrance to religious places

such as temples, shrines, or monasteries, imbuing them with an aura of sanctity and solemnity.

Source: Retrieved from the internet via Google, 2023.

In Mazu culture architecture, the archway (or paifang) is a prominent decorative element located at the forefront. Depending on the materials used, it can be made of wood, stone, or glazed tiles. The grand archway of Meizhou Mazu Temple was reconstructed in 1992 and further renovated in 2013. In its center, there is an inscription that reads "Meizhou Mazu Temple" by calligrapher Lin Jiaguo. On both sides of the archway, there are two stone statues of guardian beasts known as "biqu," bearing inscriptions that say "Chuncao Weichen Yongzhao Lei Bi" and "Meizhou Mazu Lingtong Huaxia."

Within the decoration of Mazu culture architecture, the dormitory hall, built in the fourth year of the Yongxi era during the Song Dynasty (987 AD), holds significant historical and artistic value. Its main beam suspends a plaque with the words "Shenzhao Haibiao" personally penned by Emperor Yongzheng during the Qing Dynasty. On the stone pillars in front of the hall, there are couplets written by Dai Dabin, a renowned talent from Putian during the Ming Dynasty. The craftsmanship behind these plaques and couplets involves carving and gilding, presenting a sincere and unpretentious decorative style.

3) The Aesthetic Significance of Decorative Elements in Mazu Culture Architecture

The decorative elements in Mazu culture architecture embody the essence of Mazu culture, closely tied to the profound influence of Mazu culture, thriving through a continuous process of inheritance and innovation. This indeed underscores the pivotal cultural support that Mazu culture provides to the decoration of Mazu culture architecture. Devoid of this robust foundation in Mazu culture, the decoration in Mazu culture architecture would lose its essence, making it difficult to carry forward, develop, innovate, and integrate as a significant component of traditional Chinese architecture.

The origin of the decorative elements in Mazu culture architecture is a culmination of insights and innovations drawn from the daily lives of Mazu devotees. In this process, Mazu culture silently nurtures the evolution of the decorative elements in Mazu culture architecture. Today, the preservation, inheritance, and development have become prominent topics, with Mazu culture holding a crucial place within them. Mazu culture enriches the inheritance and development of the decorative elements in Mazu culture architecture. Over the course of its long history of inheritance, these elements continuously incorporate innovations, adding diverse elements and techniques to flourish. Through this interplay of inheritance and innovation, they absorb new ideas and skills, further demonstrating the inclusivity of Mazu culture and the decorative elements in Mazu culture architecture. As the times and regions change, they also exhibit diverse and distinctive characteristics.

Typical decorative elements in Mazu culture architecture encompass various aspects, such as architecture, sculpture, painting, seal engraving, and more. These crafts and elements are products of people's long-term production and life experiences, thus carrying rich cultural and artistic connotations. Furthermore, with societal progress and economic development, they continually evolve. These decorative elements showcase Mazu culture to the fullest, bearing the spiritual and emotional expressions of devotees over millennia, representing their materialization. Simultaneously, Mazu culture, through the integration of architecture and cultural activities, has continued to this day without fading away.

The design of typical decorative elements in Mazu culture architecture takes into consideration practical needs in daily life while being aesthetically pleasing and conveying cultural significance. Taking archways as an example, they are crucial decorations in Mazu culture architecture. Firstly, they must be sturdy and robust, serving a structural role within the entire building. Only after fulfilling these practical requirements is the addition of tiles and decorations carried out to convey cultural symbolism.

Hidden within the decoration of Mazu culture architecture are numerous auspicious elements. These elements, through their shapes, colors, and symbolic meanings, convey a sense of joy and auspiciousness. Simultaneously, they reflect the wisdom and life philosophy of people. These elements originate from the maritime culture of coastal areas and the spirit of local residents, who are proactive and resilient. The abstraction of these elements repeatedly transforms people's hopes and emotions into typical decorations within the architecture.

Through its decorative elements, Mazu culture architecture guides people to cultivate positive emotions, attitudes, values, and codes of conduct. These elements incorporate the legends and cultural connotations of Mazu, directly conveying her spirit. This includes the concept of justice and equality embedded in Mazu culture, as well as stories of safeguarding the home and the country. These elements are highly inspiring and resonate with people's aspirations for a better life, making them more readily accepted.

Mazu culture architecture and its decorative elements, along with celebratory activities, become a means for Mazu devotees to express their wishes to the deity. Through these material carriers, devotees place their hopes in Mazu's protection, while guided by the spirit of Mazu, they regulate their lives and behaviors, aiming for the deity's blessings. This exemplary influence also subtly affects those around them.

4.4 Mazu Temples: The Symbolic Significance and Forms of "Mazu Lamps" in Folk Belief

For thousands of years, Mazu has been endowed with the divine status of the "Sea Goddess," and her fundamental role in safeguarding and ensuring safety at sea has intertwined her fate with that of the "lamp" or "light." Over the millennia of Mazu culture, the appearance of red light (red lamps) (auspicious light) has gradually become associated with scenes of the Sea Goddess Mazu bravely rescuing sailors in distress, forming the iconic imagery of Mazu's miracles. Consequently, the "lamp" has evolved into one of the symbolic elements of Mazu culture, an undeniable cultural

phenomenon within the community of Mazu devotees.

The formation of a folk phenomenon often undergoes a process of discovery, interpretation, symbolic meaning creation, and dissemination, as well as reinforcement through various scriptures, rituals, activities, oral traditions, and acceptance within the community. The creation of Mazu lantern customs follows a similar cultural construction process. From a semiotic perspective, we can analyze the cultural formation of Mazu lantern customs based on the historical development of Mazu culture. Through the historical records of Mazu culture, we can see how the meaning of the "lamp" symbol was constructed through linguistic forms. Within the inheritance of Mazu culture, non-verbal forms of the "lamp" symbol enhance people's recognition of Mazu culture.

In temples dedicated to Mazu, the lintels often incorporate the "lamp" symbol to symbolize Mazu. For example, in the Qing Dynasty (1886), the Tai Fen Hong Tea Association from Shanxi presented a couplet to the Tianhou Palace in the Han Street Shanxi Guild Hall in Wuhan, Hubei: "Don't worry about the surging waves; rejoice in the blessing of countless ages. Startling waves in the azure sea bring eternal tranquility to the world. Watch how the divine lamp travels thousands of miles, illuminating the lives of myriads of people." Similarly, in the Qing Dynasty (1910), the couplet written for the Tianhou Temple in Saigon, Vietnam, by various merchants from Qiong Prefecture read: "Filial daughters become deities, rising above the three thousand realms; benevolent clouds spread over the mountains, and red lamps illuminate nine thousand miles, shining from afar." Likewise, in the Qing Dynasty (1682), Lin Linjiao composed a couplet for the Upper Tianfei Palace in Kume Village, Okinawa (Ryukyu): "For countless mornings and evenings, praise the god's merits; marvel at the frequent appearances of the red lamp, illuminating the world. On the occasion of the emperor's visit, the teeth and clothing are displayed, and eternal clarity shines on our clan, reflecting upon the sparkling sea." These couplets and inscriptions express faith in the divine and convey hopes for peace, prosperity, and auspiciousness.

Historical Mazu poetry and literature frequently employ the symbolic technique of "seeing the lamp is seeing Mazu." For example, in the Ming Dynasty, Guo Mingpan wrote in "Night in the Sea Watchtower": "At midnight, the Heavenly Concubine's phoenix carriage departs, and a thousand red lamps twinkle." In the Qing Dynasty, Wang Youliang's "Poem to the Heavenly Concubine's Temple" includes the lines: "With red lamps spreading from the remote isles in the sea, the water remains calm." In a prose piece titled "The Heavenly Concubine," written by Yuan Mei in the Qing Dynasty, a story involving a lamp reinforces the connection between the lamp and Mazu.

In modern Mazu cultural creations, the symbolic relationship between the "lamp" and Mazu is still evident. For instance, contemporary writer Zou Zibin wrote in his "Scenes from Mazu's Temple Entry (Bamboo Tune Lyrics)": "Dragons soar, lions dance in front of the Heavenly Queen's temple; before the Five Phoenix Tower, we welcome the sacred lamp." Similarly, Lin Zuhan's "Mefeng Precious Image" reads: "In the dark of night, under the coronet and headdress, a lamp suddenly lights up, distinctly guiding the boat's course." In these works, the "lamp" becomes a symbol of Mazu's presence. Both ancient and modern Mazu culture employs the "lamp" as a symbolic tool, enriching the cultural significance of Mazu and allowing it to be passed down and developed through different eras and regions.

The form of the "lamp" symbol in Mazu culture has shown diversity throughout its history. Before the Qing Dynasty, the "lamp" symbol was primarily expressed in written language, as discussed earlier. However, after the Qing Dynasty, due to changing times, societal influences, and the fusion of different cultures, the meaning of the "lamp" symbol became more diverse in form. It extended beyond linguistic expressions to encompass non-verbal forms, including images, actions, and physical objects. "Mazu's red lamp saving lives" and "carrying a lamp for Mazu" carry cultural significance and serve as a form of cultural identification. From the perspective of cultural construction, the various forms of recognition for the "lamp" symbol have

contributed to the establishment of Mazu lantern customs. In the cross-section of Mazu culture, the "lamp" symbol can include recognition of phenomena, symbolic recognition, and value recognition at three levels. Among these, the construction of meaning and the confirmation of form belong to the level of recognizing phenomena, which is the first level. The explicit symbolic meaning is the second level, and value recognition is the third level. Value recognition is a higher-level aspect, and it is only when value recognition is achieved that Mazu lantern customs, primarily symbolized by the "lamp" symbol, can be expressed in a comprehensive manner.

4.5 Characteristics of Mazu Statues and Their Significance in the Dissemination of Mazu Culture

Mazu culture is a precious part of Chinese culture. Over the course of various dynasties, Mazu sculptures have evolved from simple forms to splendid and luxurious ones, incorporating Western techniques and contemporary artistic expressions. This evolution reflects contemporary aesthetic standards and embodies a sense of the times within folk beliefs. The gigantic Mazu stone sculpture on Meizhou Island, through changes in its form and symbolic meaning, has acquired contemporary aesthetic significance and become a symbol of regional culture.

Although there are no detailed historical records describing Mazu's appearance, Mazu sculptures have always portrayed her as a young female figure. Her image has been influenced by deities such as the Queen Mother of the West and Guanyin Bodhisattva, both of whom hold significant places in traditional Chinese beliefs. Mazu's facial features, hairstyle, and attire all reflect her feminine grace and beauty.

The attire of Mazu sculptures has undergone changes over the dynasties, becoming increasingly lavish, influenced by her conferred titles. Starting from the Yuan Dynasty, Mazu's image became more solemn, coinciding with the growth of maritime activities in China and her recognition by the imperial court. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, her image became even more elaborate, with standardized attire that reflected characteristics of religious teachings, practicality, and social

status. Folk Mazu sculptures take various forms, including paper sculpture, wood carving, clay sculpture, and stone carving. These sculptures exhibit regional and temporal variations influenced by local customs and worship practices, with seated Mazu statues being the predominant form.



Figure 29: The statue of Mazu standing tall in the Mazu Cultural Park atop a hill on Meizhou Island. Designed by Professor Li Weisi from the Xiamen University's School of Arts, this statue's construction began in 1989 and took two years to complete. Its height, measuring 14.35 meters, symbolizes the size of Meizhou Island, and it is carved from 365 pieces of pure white granite, representing the 365 days of the year. The number of stone steps also cleverly signifies the dates of 3.23, Mazu's birth, and 9.9, the day of her ascension.

Source: Retrieved from the internet via Google, 2023.

In 1993, a towering 14.35-meter-high Mazu stone sculpture was erected in front of the main hall of the Meizhou Island Mazu Temple. It stands atop a hill, facing the coastline of Taiwan, and is revered by people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Designed and constructed by professors Li Weisi and Jiang Zhiqiang from Xiamen University's Art Department, this sculpture is a testament to their unique craftsmanship. The height of 14.35 meters represents the area of Meizhou Island, symbolizing the 365 days of the year, while the number of stone steps cleverly conceals references to March 23rd, the date of Mazu's birth, and September 9th, the date of her ascension.

This Mazu statue differs significantly from traditional representations, exuding a

unique presence. It is not placed inside a temple but stands on a mountaintop, gazing in all directions, its radiance touching all living beings. As a spiritual symbol for devotees, the colossal Mazu statue seamlessly combines its massive size, solemn demeanor, and rich cultural symbolism, presenting a formidable and unwavering image of Mazu's benevolence. Consequently, this statue has become a new landmark on Meizhou Island.

The facial features of the Mazu statue depict a woman in her thirties, with a round and plump face and a dignified yet graceful expression. Her appearance shares some resemblance with Buddhist Bodhisattva statues, featuring a high nose, cherry-like mouth, and full cheeks and chin. She wears a crown and robes, and her posture is elegant and dynamic, with her right hand holding a ruyi scepter and her left hand gently resting at her side. The use of white granite for this sculpture is deliberate, as this material is resistant to weathering, provides enduring color, and allows for intricate carving lines, making it the preferred choice for outdoor sculptures. Furthermore, white symbolizes purity, aligning with Mazu's sacred identity. This Mazu statue was created by craftsman Zhu Boying from Jinshan Village, Huangshi Town, in 1988. This skilled artisan also created the North Gang Mazu Giant Statue, which stands across the sea. Both sculptures are masterpieces of traditional handcrafted stone carving, showcasing the distinctive characteristics of stone carving craftsmanship in the Putian region, emphasizing realism, rich layers, exquisite forms, and strong decorative elements.

The innovative design of the Mazu statue on Meizhou Island not only became an icon for the island but also inspired imitations in other places. Mazu statues created based on this new form have appeared in various locations, including the Shuanghu Lingji Palace in Xiamen, Fushan Mazu Temple, New Macau Tin Hau Temple, Melbourne Mazu Stone Sculpture in Australia, among others, highlighting the success and influence of this innovative style. These contemporary representations of Mazu sculptures inherit traditional aesthetic values and imbue them with a sense of the

times through modern expressions, aligning with contemporary aesthetic standards.

As symbols representing the beliefs and hopes of maritime communities, Mazu sculptures not only reflect the wisdom and craftsmanship of laborers throughout history but also carry the value system of traditional Chinese aesthetics. Their meaning emerges as their artistic features evolve, progressing from mere superstition to symbols of folk culture. This Mazu giant statue has become a tourist landmark on Meizhou Island and represents the precious heritage of Chinese traditional history and culture.

4.6 Cross-Language Symbols of Mazu Culture and Literary Dissemination

The concept of "Mazu culture" was first introduced in 1987 at the academic symposium held during the Thousand-Year Festival of Mazu in Putian. Initially, this term was met with controversy, but it later gained recognition from various quarters. The book "Research on Mazu Culture Tourism" provides a comprehensive definition of "Mazu culture," stating: "Mazu culture is a folk culture with maritime cultural characteristics that has developed based on the worship and faith in Mazu within related maritime communities. It can also be said that Mazu culture is the collective term for the material and spiritual wealth left behind and passed down over millennia as people have revered and believed in Mazu. It finds its expression in Mazu temples as physical manifestations and employs rituals, legends, literature, folk songs, dances, and more as means of dissemination. It embodies people's deep gratitude and boundless reverence in their hearts towards the deity who brings benevolence, peace, and harmony to human society. The Mazu cultural sphere is centered around the coastal regions of Fujian, encompassing both sides of the Taiwan Strait, extending along the entire Chinese coastline, and spreading to inland China and other maritime nations worldwide.

Mazu culture and its dissemination activities are inseparable. Culture is the essence of dissemination, and culture exists through dissemination. To become an integral part of societal culture and contribute its positive cultural energy to real-life

situations, Mazu culture needs specific means of dissemination. Symbols serve as the carriers of culture, and the diversity of symbols forms the basis for cultural dissemination. The constant innovation in dissemination media leads to the continual enrichment and transformation of the content of Mazu culture, directly shaping the ways in which Mazu culture is produced. Therefore, conducting cognitive research on cross-language symbols in Mazu culture using visual representations and Mazu literature can better harness the role of cross-language symbols in the dissemination and external communication of Mazu culture.

Cross-language symbols refer to symbol systems that do not rely on artificially created natural languages as their linguistic symbols. Instead, they employ various visual and auditory symbols as carriers of information. In human communication, particularly in the transmission of information and the expression of emotions, cross-language symbols serve functions that are irreplaceable by spoken language. They complement spoken language, running through the entirety of the communication process, achieving the common goal of communication. During the process of conveying information and exchanging ideas, cross-language symbols render information graphically, thus enabling more effective cultural communication and dissemination. Consequently, studying the cognitive functions of cross-language symbols in Mazu culture can accelerate the speed and scope of Mazu culture dissemination, further enhancing its effectiveness.

Body language, also known as nonverbal language or nonverbal communication, refers to the use of bodily movements to express emotions and convey information. It constitutes a cross-language symbol system, comprising facial expressions, body postures, limb movements, and changes in body position, resulting in a visual and image-based symbol system. Human body language possesses certain universality; even in situations where spoken languages differ, geographical locations vary, and cultures diverge, people can effectively communicate to some extent through body language. Traditional Mazu culture includes various forms of body language that are

quite distinctive. For instance, in the hometown of Mazu, Putian, local residents perform a traditional folk dance called "Shuao Dao Jiao" (pictured) during the Lantern Festival. In this dance, a "jiutong" sits on a palanquin adorned with knives. Accompanied by the beats of drums and gongs, the jiutong vigorously collides with the sharp knives tied to the palanquin using various parts of their body, including their back, feet, and buttocks. They also occasionally swing a "throwing thorn ball" in their hands, striking their bare body until it bears the marks of knife cuts. In this performance, the "jiutong" represents the figure, while the palanquin filled with knives serves as the background. To draw the spectators' attention to the underlying message of this traditional dance, the "jiutong" uses bodily movements such as colliding with the knives on the palanquin and tossing thorns onto themselves. These actions shift the viewers' focus from the background to the foreground, effectively graphically conveying the information. At this point, the nonverbal language behavior encapsulates the symbolic act of Mazu bestowing the courage and righteousness to accompany the deity in defeating evil and dispelling malevolence, symbolizing Mazu's spirit of compassion, kindness, aversion to evil, and generosity. It also reflects the resolute and proactive spirit inherent in Mazu's maritime culture. During this period, the nonverbal behavior of the "jiutong" possesses greater expressiveness and emotional impact in semantic expression than spoken language. It aids in making abstract concepts more concrete, tangible, intuitive, vivid, and easily understood.

The unique information-carrying function of cross-language symbols allows them to convey rich information in the dissemination of Mazu culture, enhancing linguistic meaning and facilitating emotional expression among communicators. The information conveyed by cross-language symbols is often more vivid, rich, and realistic than that conveyed through spoken language symbols, particularly in the context of Mazu folk culture, sometimes attaining the sacred realm of "silence is golden" and "understood without words."



Figure 30: In the Lantern Festival's "Nao Mazu" activity, a traditional folk dance known as "Knife Sedan" is performed. During this dance, a "Jitong" sits on the knife sedan, which is carried by four strong men acting as sedan bearers. The "Jitong" engages in exaggerated body movements while the sedan bearers collectively perform the dance, showcasing their vitality.

Source: Retrieved from the collection materials of Putian Museum, 2023.

Clothing language is a means of communication in which people convey emotions or information through changes in clothing and accessories (including jewelry) during their interactions. As a cross-language symbol, clothing not only serves functions like comfort, protection, modesty, and cultural display but also communicates the wearer's personality, temperament, and psychological state, as well as displaying information about their identity, status, and social class, much like language. Clothing is a unique creation of human society, and its emergence and development are significant manifestations of human social and cultural progress. Due to the different shapes and forms of clothing, it conveys varying information, has different impacts, and possesses distinct social and cultural significance.

In Fujian's Putian, there is a folk rhyme that goes: "Sailboat head, ocean-blue shirt, red and black pants bring safety." It actually refers to Mazu clothing (as shown in the image). "Sailboat head" is also known as "Mazu bun," a hairstyle resembling a

sailboat, where the hair at the back of the head is raised high, resembling a sail catching the sea breeze. Wave-shaped hairpins are inserted on both sides, resembling oars rowing the boat. On top, a round hairpin is arranged, resembling a ship's rudder. A red head rope is coiled within the hairpin, resembling ship ropes. A silver hairpin crosses the bun horizontally, resembling an anchor on the ship. When combined, these elements represent an entire ship. The upper body of Mazu clothing consists of a Chinese-style navy-blue cross-collared jacket, while the lower body features wide-legged straight trousers in red and black, commonly referred to as "red and black three-section pants." Since the experience of the graphic-background relationship is a dynamic cognitive process, in our perceptual field, Mazu bun and Mazu clothing are the graphics with clear outlines, while the people in the attire serve as the background. By using Mazu clothing as a reference point to explain and convey the wearer's inner emotional information, the Mazu bun metaphorically signifies smooth sailing, and the Mazu clothing symbolizes the harmonious unity between people and nature, reflecting the image of Mazu as a benevolent, diligent, simple, loyal, and selfless figure.



Figure 31: Mazu attire is a traditional costume popular on Meizhou Island in Putian, Fujian. The distinctive feature of Mazu headgear is the sail-shaped bun, symbolizing Mazu's connection to the sea. The Mazu attire consists of a Mazu robe and Mazu

trousers. The robe features a red front placket and is predominantly sea blue in color, with stylistic traces that can be traced back to "shamanesses" and "female Taoists."

Source: Retrieved from the archives of the Mazu Temple, 2023.

The unique information function of cross-language symbols allows them to express rich information in the context of Mazu culture dissemination, enhancing linguistic meaning and facilitating emotional expression among communicators. The information conveyed by cross-language symbols is often more vivid, rich, and realistic than that conveyed through spoken language symbols, particularly in the context of Mazu folk culture, sometimes attaining the sacred realm of "silence is golden" and "understood without words."

The dissemination process of Mazu literary works includes the public publication and distribution of the works, and recipients acquire cultural information through visual and auditory means, forming a cycle of information feedback, which constitutes a complete cultural dissemination process. Literary works need to be read, appreciated, interpreted, interpreted, supplemented, and created by the audience to truly complete the creative process and realize the embodiment of cultural value. The exact origin of Mazu poetry remains uncertain. However, in the "Collection and Annotations of Mazu Poetry in Various Dynasties" edited by Professor Wang Liandie and Professor Liu Fuzhu, there are some Mazu poems, with the earliest ones dating back to the Southern Song Dynasty during the Shaoxing period (1142 AD), composed by a Xianyou resident named Liao Pengfei, titled "Songs for Welcoming and Sending off the Mazu Deity." According to the scholar Jiang Weitan's research in "Mazu Literature Materials," these two poems are the earliest known Mazu literature. In addition, Huang Gongduo's "Tishunji Temple" is the first work from the Song Dynasty where the Mazu temple name appears in poetry.

The dissemination of Mazu literary works not only brings aesthetic enjoyment to people but, more importantly, records and passes on Mazu culture while also organizing its cultural evolution. For example, some literary works showcase the increasing reverence for Mazu through the display of Mazu's honorary titles

throughout the ages. During the Southern Song Dynasty, the poet Liu Kezhuang composed several poems praising Mazu's divine powers. Among these, the line "灵妃一女子，瓣香起湄洲" from his poem "Twenty Rhymes at Baihu Temple" became widely circulated. These poems reflect the popularization of Mazu in folk culture. Additionally, there is a couplet inside the Tianfei Palace on Mount Xiaogushan in Susong County, Anhui Province. The author, Li Yueqiao, used 256 characters to describe the deeds of Mazu, displaying people's reverence for Mazu and the inheritance of Mazu culture.

In the process of Mazu culture spreading through literary works, it is influenced by several key factors, including the literary status, political status of the disseminators, as well as the language and rhetorical devices they use in their works. Firstly, the literary status of the disseminators. During the Ming Dynasty, Tang Xianzu was a renowned literary and playwright who managed the Tianfei Palace while serving as a scholar at the Taichang Temple in Nanjing. He composed a lengthy poem titled "Viewing the Jade Emperor Pavilion of the Tianfei Palace at Night," vividly depicting the scenery of the Tianfei Palace in Longjiang, Nanjing. Tang Xianzu's literary reputation greatly contributed to the widespread dissemination of his poem. Similarly, Ming Dynasty literary figures like Gui Youguang also contributed positively to the dissemination of Mazu culture by composing poems that praised Mazu.

Secondly, the political status of the disseminators. The higher the political status of the disseminators, the more attention they can attract from society, making it easier to gain acceptance from the audience. Some political figures also composed praise poems for Mazu, providing official support for the dissemination of Mazu culture. During the Qing Dynasty, feudal rulers like Aisin Gioro Yihong composed numerous Mazu praise poems, some of which highlighted Mazu's achievements in pacifying events in Taiwan. These political figures' influence played a constructive role in cultural dissemination.

Lastly, the language characteristics and rhetorical devices of literary works. During the Ming Dynasty, Dai Dabin employed a unique rhetorical style to create a famous couplet, adding vibrancy to the Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island: "齐齐齐齐齐齐戒，朝朝朝朝朝朝朝朝朝朝音." This couplet uses a rhetorical technique called repetition, where similar characters are repeated in sequence to create a unique rhythm and expressive effect. "齐齐齐齐齐齐齐齐戒" emphasizes the religious ceremonies and precepts of the Mazu Temple, urging people to adhere to the rules and rituals of Mazu worship with devoutness. "朝朝朝朝朝朝朝朝朝朝音" also employs repetition and underscores the morning ceremonies or rituals where people come to pray and worship, eager to hear the voice and guidance of the deity. Through the repetition of characters and rhythm, the poem emphasizes the fervent and persistent nature of faith, serving as an ode to Mazu worship.

In conclusion, the dissemination of Mazu culture is influenced by the literary status, political status of the disseminators, as well as the language characteristics and rhetorical devices used in literary works. These factors collectively promote the spread of Mazu culture, enabling the rich and diverse culture to be inherited and developed.

4.7 The Fusion and Development of Mazu Culture in Modern Internet Emoji Design

In folklore, Mazu has become a revered maritime goddess among Chinese communities worldwide. Mazu culture is an integral part of traditional Chinese culture. The Meizhou Mazu Temple in Putian, Fujian, serves as the origin of Mazu temples worldwide. Since 2000, over 100,000 people from Taiwan visit Meizhou annually for pilgrimage, with more than 1.5 million Taiwanese pilgrims received to date. Both mainland China and Taiwan have established websites dedicated to promoting Mazu culture, leveraging the advantages of the internet to better propagate the spirit of Mazu and traditional Chinese culture, fostering cultural identity among Chinese worldwide. For instance, the mainland's "Tianxia Mazu Net" was officially

launched on September 18, 2009, and by the end of March 2010, it had already received over 38,000 clicks. Similarly, the "Zhenlan Palace Net" in Taiwan garnered over 1.8 million clicks in less than three years. This demonstrates that many Chinese people worldwide use the internet to learn about Mazu temples, Mazu herself, and engage in worship and prayer. In the internet age, utilizing websites to disseminate Mazu culture and traditional Chinese culture holds significant practical and historical significance.

From the perspective of Mazu culture's online dissemination, the creation of a networked Mazu emoji culture industry chain provides more opportunities for emoji design and development, driving the external dissemination of Mazu culture. The positive impact generated by the fusion of symbol design and Mazu culture leverages the ability to evoke emotions, memories, and resonance in the audience, creating design works that align with the aesthetic tastes and thought processes of the audience. The collision and integration of Mazu culture with emoji symbols represent a new driving force for the development of Mazu culture. The cross-boundary transformation of Mazu culture has become a demand of the new era, and emoji symbols are an essential part of internet communication. The rise of new media has endowed emoji symbols with strong dissemination effects, making them a "new favorite" in the design industry, and their combination helps gain the favor of the broader public.

The development of the internet has ushered people into the era of visual communication, where emoji symbols have gradually gained popularity. Emoji symbols are fun, widely distributed, and cater to the needs of various age groups. Through this medium, Mazu culture can be integrated into daily life, inadvertently eliminating the sense of distance between the audience and the culture, thereby promoting innovation and transformation within Mazu culture. Highlighting humanistic feelings makes emoji design more emotionally appealing, expressing attitudes and lifestyles rich in humanity. This aligns with the trend of societal

development, as the spirit of Mazu represents a kind of sentiment rooted in the audience's belief in Mazu culture. Therefore, harnessing the power of Mazu culture to meet the audience's demand for cultural sentiment can establish an emotional connection with the audience, paving the way for the Mazu emoji design to accurately and vividly convey design results that resonate with the heart, sparking a wave of enthusiasm for Mazu emoji symbol design.

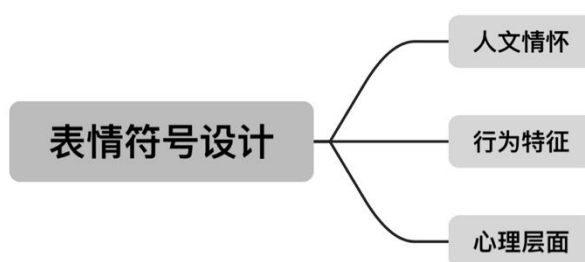


Table 2: Emoji design is divided into three aspects: human emotions, behavioral characteristics, and psychological aspects. These emojis are based on the figure of Mazu, extracting the character's form, costume colors, and clothing patterns, depicting facial expressions, and conveying the character's emotional changes.

Source: Illustrated by Pinglan Lin, 2023.

The playful interpretation adds greater affinity to Mazu culture. This interpretation, through the presentation of Mazu's character, creates unique emoji symbol designs, breaking through traditional design thinking and presenting a completely new design style. This design style aligns with current popular trends, combining cultural heritage with fashionable design. The emoji symbols in the Mo Niang Creative Design exemplify this approach. These symbols are based on the figure of Mazu and, through meticulous creation, extract the character's form, clothing colors, and clothing patterns. They gradually enrich the details based on the initial sketches, focusing on the texture of the headgear and attire and providing a concise yet vivid portrayal of facial expressions, effectively conveying the character's emotional changes. This approach allows people to have a clear understanding of these characters, and the works exhibit a lovable style, pioneering a new direction in

cultural inheritance. The emoji symbol designs are intricate and delicate, filled with unique and strong artistic appeal, combining creativity with visual aesthetics, and embodying profound cultural significance.

The clever portrayal of these Mazu images captures the characters' expressions, fully showcasing the principles of aesthetic beauty, accurately capturing the essential qualities of Mazu, highlighting her kindness and caring nature. The design and color coordination of their clothing is also carefully considered, with the combination of red and yellow symbolizing a sense of identity, harmonizing with the character's image in Mazu culture. Smooth lines depict a lively atmosphere, creating a high degree of tension in the works and awakening the audience's memories of Mazu culture. These emoji designs convey the youth and vitality of the characters, featuring diverse and well-balanced forms. The character's structure is well-designed, their postures natural, ensuring consistency between the character's appearance and characteristics. The designs exude playfulness and charm, embodying intricate design concepts. The handling of expressions is just right, helping to pique the audience's interest in Mazu emoji symbols and injecting new vitality into the sustainable development of Mazu culture. (Xie Tao, Lu You, 2019, p.133-138)

In an image-oriented society, emoji symbol design has evolved from simple textual symbols into image-based communication symbols, reflecting changes in how people perceive emoji symbols. Image-based communication offers a more concrete perception, allowing people to intuitively understand Mazu culture. This graphical design approach enhances the readability of the works, highlighting the individuality of the emoji symbol characters. For example, the Mazu emoji symbol is designed based on the image of Mazu, emphasizing her unique status in Mazu culture. Their clothing design and color coordination carry deep meanings related to Mazu belief, with the combination of blue and red symbolizing auspiciousness and peace, conveying Mazu's spirit of great love, and incorporating design concepts into emoji symbols. Through these lively and amusing emoji symbols, traditional culture can be

integrated into daily life, eliminating the distance between the audience and the culture, thus promoting the modernization of Mazu culture. These cute and fun Q-version images vividly depict the characters' subtle emotions, presenting the artistic characteristics of modern design and adding a sense of fashion to Mazu culture. Furthermore, the incorporation of internet slang to convey themes constructs more vivid and prominent visual expressions, presenting a perfect fusion of external form and internal meaning in the designs, helping the audience easily understand the conveyed messages. The entire series of emoji symbols is unique and diverse, accurately capturing the typical features of Mo Niang, highlighting their gentleness and beauty, embodying the emotional aspect of the design, and eliciting emotional resonance with the audience. (Wang Wei-wei, Su Zhen-zhen, Li Pei, 2020, p.1024-1030)



Figure 32: Designed based on the image of Matsuo females, this emoji set reflects the unique status of Matsuo females in Matsuo culture. Through these lively and playful emoji symbols, traditional culture blends with society, meeting the demands of modern aesthetics. This achieves the popularization and extension of Matsuo culture, making it more contemporary.

Source: Retrieved from the mobile WeChat app, 2023.

From the above, it is evident that through emoji symbol design, cultural transformation has ushered in a new era and created a striking cultural domain. By conducting a deep analysis and reconstruction of elements from Mazu culture, we

have achieved innovative interpretations of emoji symbol designs, enriching the presentation of these symbols. Once we grasp the core points of emoji symbol creation, we can establish a new realm of development for Mazu culture, showcasing profound cultural emotions. This innovative design can provide the audience with a refreshing cultural experience, stimulating their strong interest in Mazu culture and guiding them to a deeper understanding and recognition of this culture.

4.8 "Intangible Cultural Heritage" Documentary Series "Tianxia Mazu"

The documentary film "Tianxia Mazu" presents the global dissemination of China's first intangible cultural heritage of "Mazu belief" with its unique narrative theme. Through the joint broadcasting of China Central Television Documentary Channel, Southeast Television, TVBS, and other overseas online platforms, this film has gained significant social recognition among Chinese diaspora worldwide. From a cultural identity perspective, the documentary "Tianxia Mazu" achieves visual storytelling through its audio-visual presentation and narrative layout. The principle of "immersing in life" runs through it, providing ideas and materials for the film's creation. This includes the reconstruction of audio-visual elements, the arrangement of narrative rhythms, the reorganization of historical memories, the display of individual life narratives, and the organization of spatial contexts, showcasing the diversity of dissemination. This creative approach shapes the audience's identification foundation, builds a multi-dimensional understanding of Mazu, interprets the essence of Mazu belief accurately, and closely combines individual realization with patriotism and national sentiment.

The documentary "Tianxia Mazu," supported by geographical spaces, displays the global dissemination of Mazu culture. From Penghu Tianhou Temple and Lukang Tianhou Temple in Taiwan to Zhēnyuan, Guizhou in mainland China, and even spanning across Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa, the film portrays a vibrant and colorful picture of the global dissemination of Chinese Mazu culture by depicting Mazu temples and religious activities in different regions. Each story starts with a

temple and delves into the local history and culture, revealing the profound impact of Mazu belief. For example, starting with the Mazu Temple in the Philippines, the film showcases the history, challenges, and the role of Mazu belief in the local Chinese community. Similarly, the film also narrates how the Chinese community in Thailand seeks a sense of belonging through Mazu belief and how Mazu temples in Japan have witnessed the historical changes of Chinese merchant families. Through in-depth exploration and emotional expression, the documentary highlights the significance of Mazu belief in different regions while emphasizing the connection between individuals and culture. Through detailed storytelling, the film presents rich historical memories and human landscapes, immersing the audience in a world full of emotions and knowledge. This audio-visual presentation not only deepens the audience's understanding of Mazu belief but also ignites their strong interest in Mazu culture. From another perspective, this documentary is not only a carrier of cultural heritage but also a shaper of emotional identification and cultural cognition for the audience.

The documentary "Tianxia Mazu" cleverly constructs an audio-visual narrative framework of "immersing in life - story context - problem orientation - theme manifestation - value guidance." This design allows the film to draw creative inspiration from everyday life, tell stories around believers, create problem situations, and guide the audience's participation in the narrative, leading them to naturally understand and identify with the themes and meanings behind the stories. The success of the film lies in avoiding dry preaching while subtly fulfilling the role of guiding values. Among these values, the core is the advocacy of "goodness" and "dedication" promoted by Mazu culture. Behind this transformation lies the process of Mazu evolving from an individual to a deity, giving Mazu culture a more accessible power to cultivate people's ethical values of health, integrity, and kindness. This documentary wisely grasps the cultural essence of Mazu belief, closely aligns with core social values, and conveys positive and uplifting themes. In terms of cultural identity, nostalgia, perseverance, moral integrity, and more, the film tightly focuses on

the positive aspects of Mazu belief while avoiding negative elements. This communication approach has provided the general public and the audience with the correct guidance of values. At the same time, the film successfully bridges the cognitive gap that young people may have regarding Mazu belief, changing their feudal and outdated perceptions of religious activities, and encouraging them to deepen their understanding of Mazu culture. This diverse perspective and way of understanding injects new era values into Mazu culture.

In "Tianxia Mazu," the film cleverly builds a narrative framework of "from small to large," connecting individual self-realization with patriotism and national sentiment, sparking the audience's strong patriotism and cultural identity. Among these, the film refers to at least several kinds of values, including upward righteousness (such as the participation of millions of believers in the Taiwan Dajia Mazu pilgrimage), lifelong learning (such as the philosophical life of sculptor Shi Jiongyu in Lukang, Taiwan), originality (such as the incense art business led by Chen Wenzhong in Xinjiang, Taiwan), not forgetting one's homeland (such as the dedication of Lin Yuanrui, chairman of the Yongchun Club in Malacca, to ancestral worship), defending one's home and country (such as the reasoned resistance of Filipino Chinese against Spanish colonizers), and repaying kindness (such as the perseverance of Chinese independent schools in the face of historical development). These are all positive values that provide valuable reflections on cultural inheritance, construction of cultural identity, and the dissemination of Chinese culture, which can be used as a reference for the "Belt and Road" Initiative as Mazu culture's role becomes increasingly important along its routes.

5. Pilgrimage Tourism of "Identity Economics" under the Perspective of World Intangible Cultural Heritage

5.1 The Scale of Mazu Cultural Tourism on Matsu Island

Mazu culture is the most important cultural tourism resource in Putian City,

Fujian Province. The national tourist resort area, Meizhou Island, which relies on Mazu cultural resources, is one of the earlier developed coastal tourist destinations and has become one of the top ten tourist brands in Fujian. The Mazu ancestral temple on the island was originally built during the Song Dynasty and expanded over various dynasties, gradually growing in scale. Currently, the Mazu temple has been renovated with exquisite carvings and paintings, making it a magnificent place of worship for believers both domestically and internationally. The Mazu temple on the island is referred to as the "Tianhou Temple of Meizhou Island" and serves as the ancestral temple for Mazu temples around the world.

Putian is separated from Taiwan by just a body of water, with the nearest point between the two shores being only 72 nautical miles apart. Both sides of the strait have shared the belief in Mazu for over a thousand years. The Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island is recognized as the birthplace of Mazu belief on both sides of the strait. Every year, it attracts tens of thousands of Taiwanese compatriots and overseas Chinese from around the world for worship, establishing unique location advantages for Putian's Mazu cultural industry tourism. In recent years, with the policy support of comprehensive development of the western side of the Taiwan Strait economic zone and the improvement of the southeastern coastal railway transportation system, Putian's Mazu cultural tourism industry has encountered new development opportunities. Meizhou Island in Putian became an open tourist economic zone of Fujian Province in 1998, a national tourist resort in 1992, and was listed as a national AAAA-level scenic area in 2012. It is separated from Taiwan by the Taiwan Strait and is within sight of Taiwan. Under the strong support of policy and the appeal of Mazu belief, local Fujian merchants and incoming Taiwanese businessmen jointly invested, leading to the prosperity of the tourism and cultural industries brought about by Mazu belief. This has made culture and tourism important pillars of the tourism industry on the western side of the Taiwan Strait. Additionally, the Fujian Provincial Party Committee and Government have timely proposed the development blueprint of

"building internationally renowned tourist destinations, with a focus on coastal tourism, ecological tourism, and cultural tourism." Putian, as the final implementer, has further detailed these blueprints. It actively builds the Mazu Cultural Industry Park and strives to create a Mazu Cultural Garden with the Mazu ancestral temple as the core. On the basis of promoting cultural projects such as Mazu City, Mazu Cultural Exhibition Hall, Mazu Monument Forest, the World Mazu Belief Museum, the World Mazu Miniature Landscape Park, and the Tianfei Ancient Site Park, it aims to construct a grand Mazu cultural complex. By the end of 2006, over 1 billion RMB had been invested in fixed assets, including the construction of a 40 km cement road, a 10,000-volt submarine cable and power supply, water supply facilities, ferry terminals for travel to and from the island, and more than 50 other infrastructure and public facilities. There are over 10 popular tourist destinations on the island, including Golden Sand Beach, Riwenkeng, and Eweishan. From 2008 to early 2009, key projects on Meizhou Island that had been completed or were under construction included a sea-view grand hotel, a land-island transportation terminal for vessels up to 3,000 tons, a temperature-controlled seawater swimming pool, a cross-sea passage approved by the Ministry of Transport, the Meizhou Island International Ecological Forum site with an agreement for an investment of over 300 million RMB, the Meizhou Island International Island Ecological Plant Demonstration Park, and a mangrove restoration project. The continuous improvement of infrastructure and tourist service facilities has prepared the necessary hardware conditions for the development of Mazu cultural tourism.

At the same time, Meizhou Island has restored the architectural complex of the Mazu ancestral temple's west axis, and since 1998, it has implemented the fine-quality project for the south axis of the ancestral temple (Mazu cultural heritage protection and supporting project). This resulted in the construction of the world's largest new temple within the ancestral temple complex, along with the completion of various projects such as the Mazu Cultural Exhibition Hall, Mazu Cultural Park, Mazu

Monument Forest, and Tianhou Square. These form a massive, magnificent, and intricate complex of ancestral temple buildings, creating a rich Mazu cultural atmosphere and establishing the solemnity and demeanor of the Mazu cultural pilgrimage center. Furthermore, Meizhou Island has developed the "Mazu Worship Grand Ceremony," which is ranked among the top three grand ceremonies in China alongside the worship of Confucius and Huangdi. Additionally, it has established a bell ensemble and promoted the image of the Meizhou women, further enriching the products related to Mazu folk activities.

Tourism authorities in Fujian Province and Putian City attach great importance to the promotion and organization of pilgrimage tourism to Mazu, primarily targeting Taiwanese compatriots. In 1989, the Fujian Provincial Tourism Bureau held the "Mazu Pilgrimage Tourism Symposium" and the "Mazu Millennium Festival." The National Tourism Administration also launched the "Mazu Pilgrimage Tourism Route" during the 1990 Hong Kong International Exposition. In the same year, Putian hosted an international academic discussion on Mazu. In December 1993, Fujian Province organized the exhibition of Mazu folk cultural relics in Taiwan, with over 800,000 Taiwanese compatriots visiting the exhibition. Since 1994, the annual Mazu Cultural Tourism Festival has been held. Putian specifically established the Mazu Temple Association Limited Company in Hong Kong to directly engage in the business of overseas and Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao pilgrimage tourist groups. In October 2004, with the efforts of the Putian Municipal Political Consultative Conference, the Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee, the Meizhou Island Management Committee, and the Ancestral Temple Board, the National Mazu Cultural Exchange Association was approved by the state, with its headquarters located in the ancestral temple on Meizhou Island. There are 206 domestic and overseas groups that have applied to become members of the association. In May 2008, the China Mazu Cultural Exchange Association, the Meizhou Island National Tourist Resort Management Committee, the Taiwan Mazu Association, and the Putian

Mazu City Development and Construction Company jointly organized the first Mazu Cultural Tourism Week.

Currently, Mazu has become a world-class cultural belief. Pilgrimage tourism development is relatively well-established. Leveraging natural and cultural resources, it attracts religious believers and general tourists to engage in specialized tourism activities such as worship, research, sightseeing, and cultural experiences. According to incomplete statistics, there are more than 5,000 Mazu branch temples in over 20 countries and regions worldwide, with over 200 million Mazu believers. During the 2022 National Day Golden Week, Meizhou Island received a total of 218,000 visitors, an increase of 8.25% compared to the 2020 National Day Golden Week. Among these visitors, 76,900 were from outside the province, accounting for 37.84% of the total, and 47,800 were from within the province, accounting for 62.16% of the total. Nearly 20 million viewers participated in the series of events commemorating the 1,035th anniversary of Mazu's ascension to heaven through live broadcasting platforms. These events have played a significant role in promoting the Mazu culture tourism market, promoting Mazu culture, and facilitating cross-strait exchanges.

5.2 The Current Status and Issues of the Dissemination of the Image of Mazu Cultural Tourism on Matsu Island

The dissemination of the Mazu culture tourism image of Meizhou Island refers to the overall impression formed in people's minds about Meizhou Island as a destination for pilgrimage. This impression encompasses tourism activities, products, services, and more. Mazu culture tourism is a type of tourism activity based on Mazu culture, with various forms such as research tours, museum visits, sightseeing tours, pilgrimage tours, and business tours, all rich in profound cultural content.

There is a close relationship between the dissemination of Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism image and the tourism resources associated with Mazu culture. Meizhou Island boasts rich Mazu culture tourism resources, including Mazu temples, religious rituals, temple fairs, cultural heritage, and more. These resources provide the

actual content and experiences for the dissemination of the Mazu culture tourism image. Visitors can actively participate in temple fairs, witness religious ceremonies, and experience the charm of Mazu culture. The presentation of these resources forms the foundation for conveying the Mazu culture tourism image. From a systemic perspective, Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism resources should encompass core elements such as Mazu culture, including physical tourism resources like Mazu temples and cultural artifacts, natural landscapes like the Golden Sand Beach, local customs and traditions in Meizhou Island, and Mazu cultural festivals and celebrations. These elements, combined with the tourism environment, local living conditions, tourism infrastructure, and supporting systems, constitute an organic system composed of various elements. These system elements influence and interact with each other, collectively forming an attractive system for tourists. Based on the characteristics and essence of cultural tourism resources, the main types of Mazu culture tourism resources on Meizhou Island can be summarized as follows:

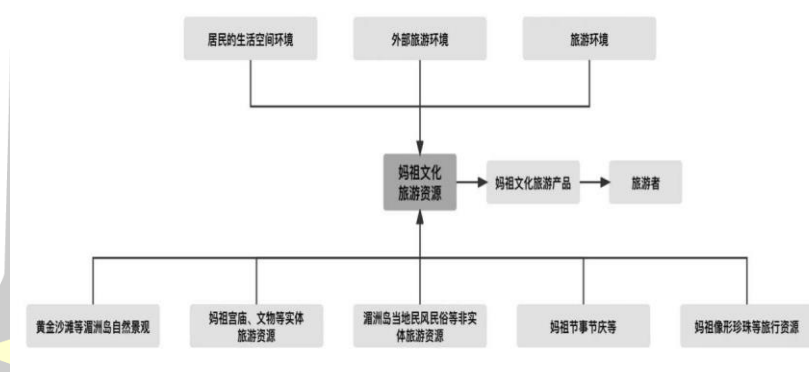


Table 3: The Meizhou Island tourism attraction system, centered on Matsuo culture, exerts significant influence and impact on tourism development. Meizhou Island's Matsuo culture tourism resources should include physical tourism resources like Matsuo temples and cultural relics, natural landscapes such as golden beaches, intangible tourism resources like local customs and traditions, as well as Matsuo cultural festivals and celebrations. These elements, combined with the tourism environment, local living conditions, tourism infrastructure, and supporting systems, form an organic system composed of various elements.

Source: Created by Lin Pinglan, 2023.

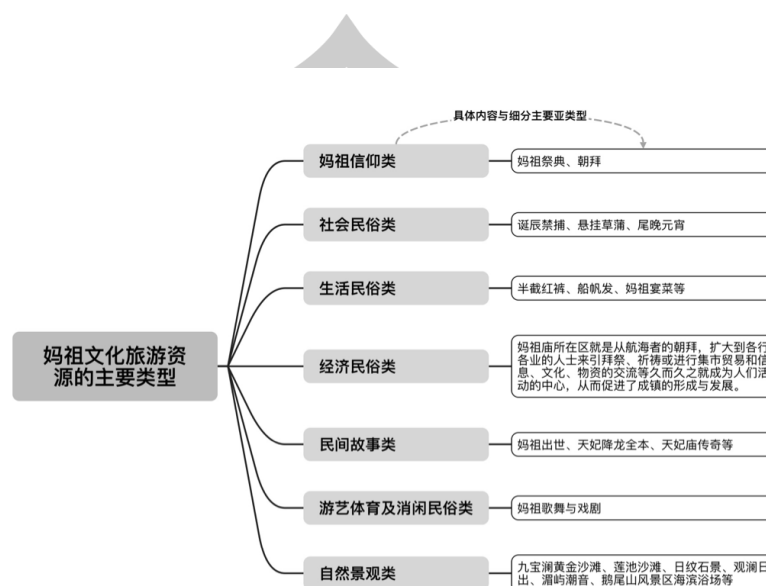


Table 4: Mazu culture tourism resources can be categorized into several main types, including Mazu belief, social folk customs, daily life traditions, economic folk customs, folktales, recreational and leisure activities, and natural landscapes.

Source: Created by Lin Pinglan, 2023.

The image of Mazu culture tourism on Meizhou Island primarily stems from its rich historical and pilgrimage tourism. Mazu culture embodies profound cultural connotations, inheriting the excellent traditions of the Chinese nation and possessing powerful spiritual strength. Pilgrimage tourism attracts a large number of visitors who come to pray for peace, and Mazu culture extends to various fields such as religion, navigation, architecture, literature, and art. This includes elements like Mazu temples, sculptures, murals, literature, poetry, couplets, artifacts, folklore, myths, and legends, forming a rich academic resource for scholars to explore and draw inspiration from. All these elements collectively constitute the core of Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism image. The distinctive ethnic customs, unique culinary culture, and vibrant festive activities are essential components in shaping the image of Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism. The local customs and traditions on Meizhou Island are closely intertwined with Mazu culture, as residents have strong faith in Mazu. Grand festivals are held annually on Mazu's birthday and ascension day, making it one of the three

major Chinese festivals alongside the worship of Confucius and Huangdi. In recent years, Mazu-related delicacies like "Mazu noodles," "Mazu cakes," and "Mazu banquets" have gained popularity, becoming a unique feature of Putian City. The unique attire and hairstyles of Meizhou women, symbolizing safety, add to the charm of the local folklore. These culturally appealing elements, embraced by tourists, undoubtedly constitute significant components of the Mazu culture tourism image.

The Fujian government highly values and supports the dissemination of Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism image. Mazu has become a cultural symbol of Putian City, and the government has introduced a series of policies to shape the Mazu culture brand, fostering economic and cultural exchanges between both sides of the strait. With government support, tourism products like the Mazu Culture Park and Mazu Film and Television City have been fully developed. The 13th Five-Year Plan of China explicitly encourages diverse cultural exchanges, highlighting the importance of Mazu culture in national strategies. The international World Mazu Culture Forum has also been held in Putian, further promoting the dissemination of Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism through policy support. Simultaneously, the distinctive aspects of Mazu culture are being normalized in terms of dissemination, with local management departments actively participating in Mazu worship activities in Taiwan, various events, and festivals, thus promoting cultural exchange and cooperation.

Currently, the dissemination of Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism image is in full swing. Its unique and rich cultural connotations, combined with strong government support and corresponding measures, have ushered in new development opportunities under the "Belt and Road" initiative, propelling it towards greater heights of dissemination. The tourism activities during Meizhou Island's Mazu festivals are showing vigorous growth, attracting active participation from believers and tourists from around the world, creating a unique spectacle.

However, in the process of disseminating Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism image, there are still two key issues that need to be addressed. Firstly, the level of

publicity is relatively insufficient, and the utilization of media channels has not been fully realized. In the modern era of rapid development of electronic network technology, media such as radio, advertisements, books, television, the internet, and newspapers have deeply influenced people's impressions of external matters, indirectly and profoundly. Meizhou Island should selectively choose communication media based on the preferences of target tourists, communication goals, content, and form, with targeted integration and optimization to achieve the maximum benefit of image dissemination. However, currently, the modes of Mazu culture tourism promotion are mainly limited to television advertising, recommendations from travel agencies, and word-of-mouth among tourists. This overlooks the wide and rapid impact of internet and new media communication, an area that requires improvement.

Secondly, there is room for greater depth in the development of Mazu culture, resulting in less prominent dissemination effects. Although Mazu culture tourism on Meizhou Island has achieved certain results, it still relies heavily on events like Mazu's birthday and Mazu culture tourism festivals. This single development model views Mazu culture solely as a singular product, with a disproportionate focus on Mazu pilgrimage tourism, which may leave tourists unsatisfied and fail to achieve the desired immersive experience. The involvement of the audience plays a crucial role in the dissemination of Mazu culture. By allowing the audience to become part of the experience and share their insights and feelings after having a wonderful travel experience, word-of-mouth transmission becomes authentic and vivid. Audience participation also helps accelerate the speed and scope of dissemination, especially in the era of new media. Today, through platforms like Xiaohongshu, WeChat, Douyin, and other new media, people can access the information they need and, through reviews, creation, sharing, and forwarding, spread the image and related information of Mazu culture tourism within their social circles. This kind of viral spread, where one person shares with ten, and ten share with hundreds, effectively enhances the speed and scope of Mazu culture tourism image dissemination.

Therefore, further efforts are needed in the publicity and cultural development of Meizhou Island's Mazu culture tourism image. By fully leveraging the advantages of the internet and new media, coupled with a more comprehensive tourism development strategy, we can expect a more vibrant and attractive dissemination of the Mazu culture tourism image of Meizhou Island, attracting more tourists and believers to participate, injecting new vitality into the inheritance and development of Mazu culture.

5.3 Expanding the Influence of Mazu Culture and Enhancing Fujian's Cultural Soft Power

Mazu culture on Meizhou Island, as an outstanding cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, plays an educational role. Therefore, strengthening promotion and shaping regional cultural symbols is of utmost importance. Putian has initiated cultural exchanges related to Mazu culture with Taiwan, promoting Mazu culture as a bridge and bond in cross-strait exchanges. In 2006, Taiwan's Mazu Association organized over 7,000 Mazu devotees. In 2014, both Taiwan's Mazu Association and the Dalan Gong in Taichung organized 12,000 Mazu devotees. In 2019, more than 1,700 people from various sectors in Kinmen and Mazu devotees escorted 26 Mazu statues to Xianliang Port's Mazu Ancestral Shrine for pilgrimage. To date, over 600 Taiwanese temples and ancestral shrines have established friendship relationships. Mazu culture originates from Putian, belongs to China, originates from the "Maritime Silk Road," and belongs to the world, originating from ancient times and benefiting future generations. Deepening the Fujian Cultural Treasure Island program system, actively conducting on-island promotion, and enhancing the sense of belonging to Chinese culture among Taiwanese compatriots. By telling the stories of Fujian, disseminating Fujian culture, building the brand of Fujian culture, and enhancing Fujian's cultural soft power.

Strengthening the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage, and consolidating cultural communication carriers. In the field of cultural and academic

exchanges, Mazu research is gradually becoming a prominent topic in folk belief studies worldwide. In 2004, Putian established the Chinese Mazu Culture Exchange Association, and in 2008, the association added the title "Chinese Mazu Culture Research Institute." Since 1986, Putian has meticulously organized dozens of large-scale academic exchange activities related to Mazu. In 2014, the International Academic Symposium on "Mazu Culture and Chinese Literature in an Oceanic Perspective" was held at Putian University, attended by nearly a hundred Mazu culture research experts from both sides of the strait and countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. They discussed in-depth topics related to "Mazu culture and the Maritime Silk Road," aiming to raise awareness and reputation of Mazu culture. Efforts should be made to establish the "World Mazu Culture Center," fully leverage the role of the Chinese Mazu Culture Exchange Association and the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Shrine as bridges, and strive to establish a permanent venue for the "World Peace Forum" on Meizhou Island. Regularly host the Maritime Silk Road Peace Forum, Cross-Strait Mazu Culture Summit Forum, World Mazu Culture Academic Symposium, actively participate in the application for world cultural heritage status under the name of "The Birthplace of the Maritime Silk Road Goddess of Protection Mazu" and "Mazu, the Goddess of the World, Originates from Meizhou," and carry out activities such as "Meizhou Mazu Pilgrimage to Southeast Asia" and "The World Mazu Goddess Visits Meizhou," improve the cross-strait forum, Mazu culture activity week, Mazu Spring and Autumn Grand Festival, and China Meizhou Mazu Culture Tourism Festival, learn from the valuable experiences of Confucius Institutes in recent years in promoting Chinese culture overseas, and establish Mazu courses through Confucius Institutes to expand and enhance the influence of Mazu culture in the regions along the Maritime Silk Road.

Using Mazu culture as a carrier to develop the cultural tourism industry. Seizing the opportunity presented by the United Nations World Tourism Organization to create Maritime Silk Road tourism routes, engage in regional tourism cooperation

with cities along the route, and build the Mazu culture tourism brand. Relying on various Mazu temples and using Mazu culture as a carrier, vigorously promote cultural exchange, expand cultural "friend circles," vigorously develop emerging cultural formats such as film and television performances, sports competitions, festival exhibitions, leisure and entertainment, develop creative industries related to Mazu culture, and create demonstration bases for cultural industry cooperation and development along the Maritime Silk Road.

Using Mazu culture as a link to promote regional economic and trade cooperation. Putian has over one million overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese businessmen, with more than 600,000 living in areas around the New Silk Road corridor. They have abundant industries, ample capital, and strong ties to their hometowns. They are also devout Mazu believers with a special connection to their homeland. Strengthen communication and contact with overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese businessmen, actively organize multi-level and multi-form trade fairs, family meetings, and reunions, actively organize and guide overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese businessmen and overseas capital enterprises to return to their hometowns for exchanges and cooperation. Leverage the role of overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese businessmen as bridges and bonds and their cultural identity advantages to connect Fujian enterprises with foreign markets. On the other hand, Fujian Minnan businessmen should actively integrate into the construction of the Maritime Silk Road, strive to expand overseas markets, and seek broader economic exchange space and cooperation areas for Fujian in the "Belt and Road" strategy. Mazu culture can be widely recognized and accepted by people along the Maritime Silk Road, closely related to its values of inclusiveness, openness, and great love. This value orientation is highly consistent with the spirit of the Maritime Silk Road and the trend of peaceful development.

Summary

Mazu culture, as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, has undergone a rich and colorful journey, transitioning from "static" preservation to "dynamic" inheritance, presenting profound contemporary significance. This process highlights the unique value and challenges of Mazu culture on multiple levels.

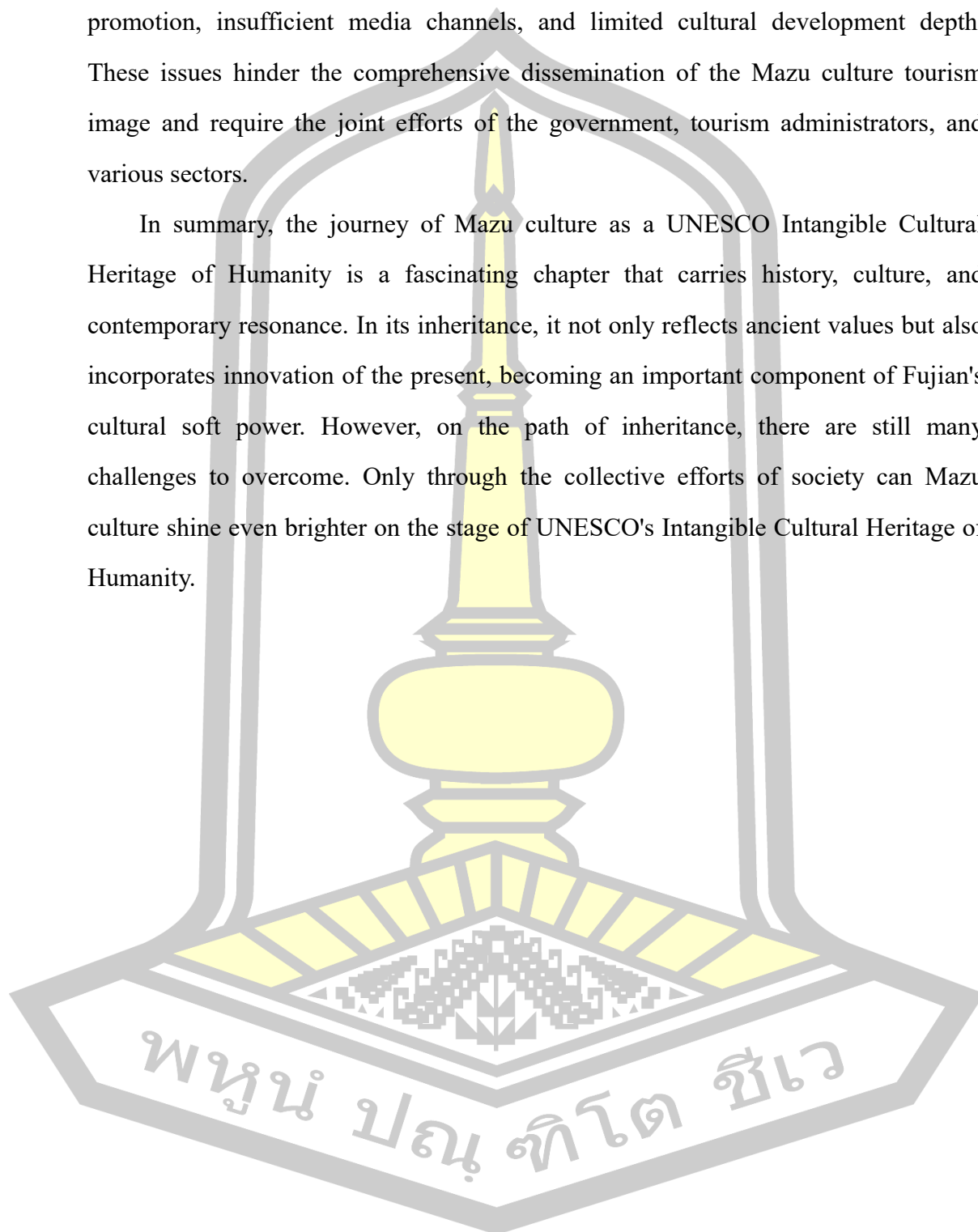
During the UNESCO application process, Mazu culture experienced changes in various folk belief activities, highlighting its relevance and contemporary significance. For example, the "Mazu Returns to Her Hometown" ritual underwent historical continuity and traditional tests. However, after being included in the UNESCO list, the ceremony underwent changes and evolution, showcasing cultural transformation and adaptation. Similarly, the comparison between the "Sea Ritual to Mazu" ceremony in Xianliang Port and the "Mazu Ancestral Shrine Festival" on Meizhou Island before and after the UNESCO listing also emphasized the dialectical relationship between the protection and innovation of traditional culture.

From the perspective of "World Intangible Heritage," the inheritance and transformation of Mazu folk beliefs also provoke deep thoughts. The traditional values of Mazu beliefs have been reflected after being included in the list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, making it an important cultural symbol. In the process of applying for UNESCO recognition, a clever integration of tradition and modernity occurred, transforming "Mazu folk beliefs" from feudal superstition into cultural heritage, demonstrating the vitality and adaptability of culture.

The revitalization and utilization of Mazu culture have also shown a new face in various aspects. From a center for academic research on Mazu to the cross-disciplinary fusion of modern online symbols, from the audiovisual communication of the documentary "The World of Mazu" to the "identity economy" of pilgrimage tourism, the inheritance of Mazu culture is no longer a singular "static" preservation but a more diverse and dynamic "active" inheritance. However, the path of Mazu culture's inheritance is not without challenges. While the market size of Mazu culture

tourism is enormous, there are some issues in its dissemination, such as inadequate promotion, insufficient media channels, and limited cultural development depth. These issues hinder the comprehensive dissemination of the Mazu culture tourism image and require the joint efforts of the government, tourism administrators, and various sectors.

In summary, the journey of Mazu culture as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is a fascinating chapter that carries history, culture, and contemporary resonance. In its inheritance, it not only reflects ancient values but also incorporates innovation of the present, becoming an important component of Fujian's cultural soft power. However, on the path of inheritance, there are still many challenges to overcome. Only through the collective efforts of society can Mazu culture shine even brighter on the stage of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



Chapter VI

Conclusion Discussion and Suggestions

The research titled "Mazu Culture in Coastal Cities of Fujian, China: Symbolic Interaction and Meaning Evolution in the Context of World Cultural Heritage" is a qualitative study focusing on the analysis of Mazu culture in Fujian's coastal cities. Recognized as a distinctive and historically rich religious and cultural phenomenon in China's coastal cities, the Mazu culture has undergone extensive historical evolution, embodying the admiration and gratitude of the people. Beyond mere religious belief, Mazu culture encompasses a plethora of cultural elements such as temple fairs, deity parades, music, and dance, forming a multi-dimensional framework. This study aims for an in-depth exploration of the Mazu culture in Fujian's coastal cities through concepts of "Mazu Culture, Symbolic Interaction, Meaning Transition, and World Cultural Heritage". The researcher's summary, discussion, and recommendations are as follows:

1. Research Results Conclusion

This study has Four research objectives: 1)To investigate the historical development of Mazu culture in coastal cities of Fujian and the reasons for its evolution.2) To explore the historical deconstruction and modern reconstruction of the significance of Mazu culture.3) To analyze the temporal interpretation and evolution of the symbols in Mazu culture.4) To delve into the new opportunities for Mazu culture in the context of World Cultural Heritage.

Based on these objectives, the research findings are summarized as follows:

1.1 To investigate the historical development and underlying reasons of Mazu culture in Fujian's coastal cities.

Fujian Province has a land area of 124,000 square kilometers and a marine area of 136,000 square kilometers. With about 90% of its total area characterized by hills, Fujian has a coastal line that extends to 3752 kilometers, ranking second nationwide.

The intricate coastline has engendered numerous ports, pivotal for China's maritime excursions, marking the starting point for historical Silk Road and Zheng He's voyages, and establishing itself as a marine trade and distribution hub. Historically, residents relied on the sea for their livelihood, and the maritime spirit manifested distinctly here due to the geographic remoteness.

The unique terrain of Fujian, characterized by rugged mountains and profound valleys housing diverse wildlife, often plunged its inhabitants into reveries. Alongside this, coastal residents frequently faced natural disasters and inexplicable diseases, driving them towards seeking divine protection.

Meizhou Island, situated in Putian City, Fujian Province, and affiliated with Meizhou Town, is revered as the sacred land of Mazu. With an area of 14.35 square kilometers and a population of about 38,000, different villages on the island have formed independent worship organizations centered around 14 Mazu temples. This extensive worship organization has led to close interactions between the ancestral temples and the island community. Furthermore, after the restoration of ancestral temples, Mazu temples worldwide established connections based on their requirements, majorly through ancestral temple pilgrimages and cultural exchanges. Given the transnational and cross-regional characteristics of this belief system, the Mazu faith has evolved into an expansive social capital, encompassing political considerations, local image development, and economic and touristic ambitions. Thus, the ancestral temple emerges as the "global convergence center of Mazu", with its relationship with the island's worship organization undergoing nuanced changes.

Overall, the geographical position and the rich maritime culture of Fujian's coastal cities have provided favorable conditions for the proliferation and prosperity of the Mazu faith. It has taken root and grown in these cities, becoming a crucial religious and cultural symbol for locals. At the same time, the Mazu faith has endowed these cities with unique cultural allure and historical depth.

1.2 Research on the historical deconstruction and modern construction of the meaning of Mazu culture.

As a folk belief, the deification process of Mazu, from deity to human, was initially realized within the populace. Rooted in folk belief, the worship of Mazu began its grassroots propagation and development, showcasing a trajectory distinctly different from the official narrative, thus carving its unique folkloric path. The interaction between "official" and "folk" narratives dictates the direction and momentum of the Mazu faith. From a regional deity to a national sea goddess, Mazu's titles elevated from "Lady" to "Saint", "Heavenly Consort", and eventually to "Queen of Heaven". This reveals the significant involvement and depth of intervention by official powers in the Mazu faith compared to other folk beliefs. Through examining the official narrative mode, we can reconstruct the official path of Mazu's deification. During the Song Dynasty, the rise and veneration of the Mazu faith positioned it as a local protector deity. In the Yuan Dynasty, the rise of Mazu faith corresponded with the development of China's maritime economy, with Mazu being worshiped as the national deity. During the Ming Dynasty, the focus shifted towards assisting in the annihilation of Japanese pirates. In the Qing Dynasty, Mazu was conferred the title of "Queen of Heaven", emerging as the national sea goddess. However, during the Republic era to the Cultural Revolution, the Mazu faith faced setbacks, with folk beliefs waning. Post-economic reforms, the Mazu faith experienced a resurgence, playing an active role on the international stage. Through this evolutionary sequence, we delved into the official and folk interactions of the Mazu culture across various historical periods, as well as its transitions and interactions in modern times. We re-examined the development of Mazu's deification in ancient and modern times and the decline and revival of the Mazu cultural faith from the Republic era to the Cultural Revolution. In the second part, we further explored the value manifestation of Mazu customs in the era of World Intangible Cultural Heritage. (Schwartz, B., 2003)

Analyzing and characterizing the folkloric and official paths of Mazu's deification under symbolic interaction. The entire process from a deity's inception, development, positioning to even its eventual demise signifies the continuous evolution and enrichment of a deity's characterization, which, when connected with representative changes, outlines the path of deification. Folk and official narratives, as distinct constructors, based on their social needs and benefit pursuits, have independently completed the deification process of Mazu, showcasing two diverse paths of Mazu's deification - the folkloric and the official.

1.3 Exploration of the Temporal Interpretation and Evolution of Mazu Cultural Symbols

Pierce, a pioneer in semiotics, posited that a "sign", or "representation" is something used by someone to represent something else in a particular aspect or relation. Traditional cultural symbols refer to expressions that symbolize traditional cultural meanings. For instance, "Confucius" as a symbol represents not just an ancient figure but is emblematic of Confucian culture. Roland Barthes suggests that every signified combination comprises an expressive plane (signifier E) and a content plane (signified C). The relation (R) between these two planes results in the ERC combination, which constitutes a symbol. For example, the signifier "Confucius" directly signifies "an ancient person", with its signifier representing Confucius and its signified representing an ancient individual.

The signifier of a symbol can naturally "cohere" with the implicit level of the signified, a phenomenon termed as the symbol's "isomorphism". In his book "Elements of Semiology", Roland Barthes describes the phenomenon where the language structure coheres imperceptibly and inseparably as "isomorphism". However, the isomorphism of a symbol can only be realized in similar communicative contexts and cultural systems.

From an anthropological perspective, modernization signifies the process of cultural evolution, embodying a complex and intensely dynamic procedure. This

transformation isn't restricted solely to economic advancements and improvements in the quality of life but extends to comprehensive shifts in material, institutional, and spiritual facets. As a belief system enriched with historical origins, Mazu culture has experienced multi-dimensional meaning shifts across diverse temporal and spatial contexts.

Shifts in Mazu beliefs under the lens of state and societal relations. Against the backdrop of China's feudal society, Mazu culture assumed the role of safeguarding maritime safety and blessing fishermen. However, through the amalgamation within the feudal ceremonial system, the Mazu belief gradually evolved in its religious and societal relations. Especially under the impact of societal transformations, the Mazu belief faced distortions and interruptions. The era of reforms provided an impetus for the revival of the Mazu faith. The rejuvenation of Mazu-related activities not only epitomized the synergy of timing and conditions but also illustrated active societal organizational involvement.

The significance shifts in Mazu's folk beliefs under the purview of national cultural strategy. Mazu culture isn't merely religious faith but an integral component of the national cultural strategy. The state vigorously develops the Meizhou Island Management Committee, propelling maritime construction and focusing on transforming Meizhou Island into a tourism hub. The promotion of Mazu faith's interaction with the development of coastal regions and local culture ensures that the Mazu culture takes root and flourishes in regional cultures. Against the backdrop of cross-strait relations, Mazu culture has been endowed with values of peace. Portraying Mazu as a harbinger of peace, the belief has actively contributed to the amelioration and amicability of cross-strait relations. Simultaneously, the Mazu faith has integrated itself into the nation's strategic construct. As a vital component of the "Belt and Road" initiative, Mazu culture fosters cultural exchanges and fosters amity among common folk, epitomizing the country's soft power.

Steady development of Mazu's folk temple fairs and its believers. As concentrated expressions of Mazu faith, temple fairs bridge national consciousness and grassroots society. Temple fairs, transcending mere religious ceremonies, emerge as cultural and economic epicenters. Folk organizations centered around Mazu have forged a unique "faith circle", offering pivotal platforms for cultural heritage and societal cohesion. The organization of temple fair events not only promotes Mazu culture but also bolsters the heritage of local culture. Furthermore, the stable evolution of temple fairs is rooted in societal acknowledgment and the continual participation of believers.

In this multifaceted process of meaning evolution, Mazu culture metamorphosed from a religious faith system into a multi-dimensional cultural symbol, embodying national culture, folk heritage, and regional cohesion. This transformation reveres history and signifies the fusion of cultural heritage and innovation. Interactions between the state and society, international relations' influence, and the heritage of grassroots activities like temple fairs collectively reforge the vibrant contemporary significance of Mazu culture.

1.4 New Opportunities for Mazu Culture in the Process of World Cultural Heritage

In September 2009, the Mazu belief was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This marked the first belief-based world heritage for China. The successful nomination of the Mazu belief signifies that it will represent China's excellent traditional culture and be widely disseminated throughout the world, enriching the global perception of China's cultural heritage. Concurrently, this also stands as Putian's first world heritage, presenting immense opportunities for Putian's cultural tourism development.

In the contemporary era, with the overarching backdrop of "cultural resourcing", the trends of industrialization and tourism for Mazu culture are inevitable. However, as a national and even global Chinese faith culture, it is essential to retain its

fundamental traits of folk belief. At the same time, there's a need to continually infuse ethnic cultural connotations to genuinely position it as a symbol with significant cultural cohesion in a globalized context. Taking Putian, the hometown and birthplace of the Mazu belief, as an example: while enjoying widespread social attention as the representative work of humanity's "intangible heritage" for the "Mazu belief," it should always remain aware of its responsibility to balance development with preservation.

By "development," it refers to promoting the branding of Mazu culture, accelerating the tourism infrastructure construction in the Meizhou Island region, enhancing the local service system, and creating a top-notch sightseeing environment with high-quality services for both domestic and international visitors drawn by its fame. Yet, what's even more critical is to deeply investigate, explore, and reconstruct the local Mazu culture as a folk belief. The aim is to revive the most fundamental, genuine, and indigenous Mazu practices within the daily lives of the local populace. By leveraging appropriate religious institutions and media channels, this essence can be communicated to visitors. This approach aims to truly establish Meizhou Island as a renowned pilgrimage site for the Mazu faith. It ensures that pilgrims and visitors not only experience physical and mental relaxation and acquire related historical knowledge but also, through participating in onsite rituals and practices, attain a sense of spiritual belonging and an authentic faith experience that harmonizes body and soul.

2. Research Discussion

The study is titled "Mazu Culture in Coastal Cities of Fujian, China: Symbolic Interactions and Semantic Shifts within the Context of World Cultural Heritage." The researchers have garnered insights into the phenomenon of "Mazu Culture in Coastal Cities of Fujian." Central concepts encompass Mazu culture, symbolic interaction, semantic shifts, and world cultural heritage.

Wei YingQi's compilation "Study on the Three Gods of Fujian" delves into myths and legends surrounding the Mazu belief. Wei undertook a profound investigation into the origins, evolution, and diverse fables of the Mazu faith. These myths often encompass narratives about Mazu's enigmatic life, miracles, and divine missions. Some chronicles detail her acts of saving fishermen from maritime disasters or ensuring safe voyages for seafarers amidst tempests. These legends not only exemplify the reverence for Mazu but also mirror the maritime-centric lifestyle and cultural traditions of local inhabitants. Additionally, the tome encapsulates temple fairs, religious ceremonies, and folk practices tied to Mazu, as well as the architecture and artistry of Mazu temples. Wei's explorations also touch upon the metamorphosis and impact of Mazu beliefs within Fujian's societal and cultural fabric, along with its dissemination and influence in other southern regions of China. Such insights aid in better comprehending the stature and role of the Mazu faith within the traditions and culture of Fujian's coastal regions (Wei YingQi, 1929).

This article employs the theory of "Symbolic Interactionism" as promulgated and developed by eminent American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, to underscore the notion that the significance of social behavior and interpersonal interactions is constructed and conferred through symbols and systems of symbolism. Symbolic Interactionism accentuates the pivotal role of symbols and interpersonal engagements in the edification of social realities, and how individuals partake in societal life through subjective interpretation and socialization. This theoretical framework illuminates our understanding of the relationship between Mazu culture and national development, facilitating the exploration of interpersonal relationships, societal metamorphosis, and cultural phenomena.

The researcher invoke the conceptual framework from the opus "Religion, Symbols, and Symbolism: Selected Studies" by religious scholar Mircea Eliade to elucidate the symbols and emblems intrinsic to religions and their salient functions within religious experiences and rites. In a religious milieu, symbols typically refer to

tangible or linguistic markers that epitomize deeper or abstract connotations. Religious symbols can encompass verbal expressions, such as prayers and scriptures, and actions, like liturgical ceremonies and gestures of supplication. These symbols bear profound emblematic significances in religious rites and practices, serving as conduits through which the devout forge connections with the divine. Religious symbols and allegories often epitomize the perpetuity and stability of religious traditions. Through their transgenerational conveyance, they sustain the sense of identity and cohesion within religious cohorts.

This article harnesses the "Symbolic Interactionism" theory propounded and refined by American sociologists like Charles Horton Cooley, emphasizing that the essence of social behavior and interpersonal interactions is constructed and conferred through symbols and symbolic systems. Symbolic Interactionism underscores the pivotal role of symbols and interpersonal interactions in crafting societal realities, as well as how individuals partake in societal life through subjective interpretations and socialization. This theory facilitates our comprehension of the liaison between Mazu culture and national development, and the study of interpersonal relationships, societal changes, and cultural phenomena.

Pertaining to the religious domain, numerous works resonate with Symbolic Interactionism, such as "Symbols, Public and Private" by Clifford Geertz (1973). Clifford Geertz, an influential thinker in cultural anthropology, in this work, examines the role of symbols in culture and religion, accentuating their sociocultural underpinnings. In more contemporary times, "Religion, Symbols, and Symbolism: Selected Studies" by renowned religious scholar Mircea Eliade delves into symbols and their emblematic representation in religion, alongside their function in religious experiences and ceremonies. Within religious contexts, symbols typically denote tangible or linguistic markers representing profound or abstract meanings. Religious symbols can encompass utterances (e.g., prayers, scriptures) or actions (e.g., worship ceremonies, prayer gestures). These symbols, with their emblematic significance in

religious ceremonies and practices, facilitate a connection between devotees and the divine. Religious symbols and emblems often epitomize the continuity and stability of religious traditions, perpetuating communal identity and cohesion through generational transmission.

From a research standpoint, Mazu culture transcends mere "faith". Viewing it through another lens of societal life and culture, studies on the Mazu culture across varying historical epochs unveil its evolution from a local deity to a national divine emblem. As an objectively existing "faith," the significance of Mazu culture is perpetually molded. This reveals that it isn't an isolated entity but is conferred specific meanings within particular societal contexts via human actions, manifesting tangible expressions of people's communicative behaviors and ideologies.

The concept of "meaning transformation" pertains to the alteration in the original significance of a matter or event over a span of time, exhibiting dynamism and adaptability within the context of the occurrence. Such shifts are typically engendered by myriad factors, including the evolution of language, socio-cultural influences, and historical episodes. Meaning transformation plays an instrumental role in the realm of religion, mirroring the evolution of religious beliefs, ceremonies, and cultural nuances. I employ the compendium "Ritual, Performance, Media" to expound on the role of religion across diverse cultural and societal milieus, as well as the interplay between religion and the transformation of meaning.

The researcher leverage John Lagerwey's "Chinese Religion and Society: Ancient and Medieval China" to elucidate how Chinese religions have sculpted society and culture through different historical epochs. This encompasses how religious symbols, rituals, and beliefs have shaped individuals' values and modes of behavior, consequently forging or reshaping meanings within society. (John Lagerwey, 2004) It's noteworthy to mention that research and analyses deploying the "meaning transformation" concept, in the context of Mazu culture both domestically and internationally, remain scarce. Thus, the employment of "meaning

transformation" in the study of Mazu culture has bridged a lacuna in the field, proffering a novel conceptual interpretation of its intricate content. In this study, meaning transformation alludes to the significant alterations in symbolic interactions within the Mazu culture across various backgrounds. Since the establishment of the Mazu belief during the Song Dynasty, the faith has continually evolved and burgeoned. Successive emperors have lauded and extolled Mazu, which has been instrumental in augmenting the number of adherents. Through 36 instances of deification or seals, Mazu's status has perpetually been recalibrated in alignment with shifting societal paradigms.

2.1 The significance change from Mazu belief to Mazu culture

The term "folk belief" collectively refers to various religious worship forms inherent in people's daily lives. The spectrum of beliefs and worship forms in traditional Chinese society is intricate, making it challenging to encapsulate with a single term. The term "folk belief" is an academic designation for such phenomena, originating from Japan and semantically juxtaposed against what the West refers to as "institutional religion". The use of the term "folk" emphasizes the diffused characteristics of such beliefs. Consequently, inherent biases against folk beliefs emerge, such as the perceptions of lacking rigorous doctrines, uniform organizations, standardized rituals, and distinct congregations. As a result, folk beliefs are often indiscriminately conflated with folk sects, underground organizations, and secret societies.

"Vulgar faith" is a concept recently proposed by scholars as an alternative to folk belief. Derived from Japan and adapted by Chinese folklorists (changing "vulgar faith" to "faith custom"), it has entered the discourse of contemporary Chinese intangible cultural heritage preservation. In the "Second National Intangible Cultural Heritage List" released in 2008, the official sub-category "folk customs" was introduced under the "folklore" category to include intangible cultural heritage of folk beliefs. The inversion in the order of "vulgar" and "faith" subtly modifies the

concept's connotation, emphasizing its folklore aspect and downplaying its religious characteristics. As emphasized by Professor Wu Bingan, "faith" accentuates religiosity, whereas "faith custom" underscores the folkloristic traits of folk belief.

Mazu's folk belief, also known as Mazu, Lady Mazu, Goddess Mazu, Heavenly Empress Mazu, Heavenly Sacred Mother Mazu, and Meizhou Mazu, venerates and extols Mazu's virtues, benevolence, and magnanimous spirit. Centered around Mazu temples, it's manifested through temple festivals, legends, customs, etc. Comprising rituals, folk customs, and legends, it forms an integral part of Mazu culture, capturing its essence. Over centuries, this belief has evolved and expanded from the coastlines to inland regions and globally. The faith boasts over 200 million followers worldwide, with over a million people annually visiting the ancestral temple in Meizhou, Putian, Fujian. Approximately 5,000 Mazu temples are scattered across 33 countries and regions. With diverse representations such as the "Royal Meeting" at Tianjin's Heavenly Queen Temple or the "Pilgrimage by Boat" at Fujian Quanzhou's Heavenly Queen Temple, Meizhou Island in Putian, Fujian, stands out as the cradle of Mazu folklore for its vast array of practices and deep cultural significance.

Moreover, the concept of "faith custom" shifts focus towards the subjects of folk beliefs. Traditional folk belief research, steeped in religious methodologies, emphasizes scriptures, doctrines, rituals, and congregational organizations. The protection of intangible cultural heritage introduces concepts like "heritage" and "community", restoring folk beliefs to their living essence rather than mere abstract religious dogmas. Unlike institutional religions, the scope and number of adherents of Chinese folk beliefs are hard to determine. Lacking fixed doctrines, scriptures, or professional priests, their propagation largely depends on oral traditions within families and communities. This means that through a series of folk activities, the actual practice of faith is completed within families, communities, and spontaneous folk groups. Believers are often connected through social relations, with faith

communities constructed on divine ties or grounded in geographical, vocational, or familial connections.

Mazu culture, rooted in Mazu Island along China's Fujian coastline, is a folk culture built upon the Mazu faith. It reveres and celebrates Mazu's virtues, benevolence, and grand love, centralized around Mazu temples and disseminated through legends, literature, worship, pilgrimages, temple festivals, etc., embodying the maritime cultural characteristics. Since its inception, Mazu culture has been deeply influenced and intertwined with the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist streams of traditional Chinese culture. Primarily, Taoism played a pivotal role in shaping Mazu culture, evident from Mazu's titles, divine depictions, Daoist temple names, and the bestowed titles across dynasties. Buddhism's influence came relatively later, connecting Mazu's benevolent acts with Guanyin's universal salvations. While both Taoism and Buddhism blended with Mazu culture, their influence hasn't surpassed Confucianism. Confucianism emphasizes benevolence and loyalty, with stories of Mazu's loyalty and filial piety resonating with its ethical standards. Furthermore, due to Confucian societal structures, literati modified Mazu worship, highlighting cosmic resonance, gaining imperial endorsements, enhancing Mazu culture's influence, and deeply embedding its benevolence and love in the public psyche. Today, the essence of Mazu culture aligns perfectly with the core values of socialism, emphasizing virtues like patriotism, respect for the elderly, diligence, bravery, uprightness, unity, and kindness, summarized in the tenets of "Uphold Virtue, Do Good, and Embody Great Love".

For centuries, Mazu, as a folk deity and maritime protector, has been a beacon of hope for the masses, spreading from coastal regions to 28 provinces. From East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean coastline to Africa and the Americas, Mazu has devotees worldwide, with its folk custom being recognized as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage. The transition of Mazu culture from a localized folk belief to a national-level intangible cultural heritage reflects the continuous shaping and

construction by local forces, national politics, modern academia, and contemporary cultural trends. This helps us better grasp the essence of folk beliefs and recognize the influence and opportunities that the intangible cultural heritage brings to contemporary development. The formation and propagation of the Mazu faith are intrinsically products of socio-economic development. Mazu temples are commonly found around islands, ports, commercial hubs, markets, and even foreign trade management agencies. The historical evolution of the Mazu faith reflects not only the people's universal acknowledgment of Mazu's grand love spirit but also the reasons for the inheritance of excellent Chinese culture.

Mazu culture inherently embodies the maritime culture's pioneering and daring spirit. During its transmission, it integrated with merchant group culture, enhancing ideals of mutual aid, peace, and collaboration. Promoting Mazu culture inherently bolsters the "Belt and Road" initiative. The "Belt and Road" initiative is a strategic move in the grand scheme of the Chinese nation's great rejuvenation, conducive to China's economic transformation and the economic development of countries along the route. If economic cooperation is hand-in-hand, then cultural exchange is heart-to-heart. Mazu culture can bridge from folk belief to people-to-people connection. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, "An endeavor without cultural support is unlikely to last." The national "13th Five-Year Plan" specifically emphasizes the role of Mazu culture, reflecting the symbiotic relationship between economic strength and cultural soft power. Delving into the essence of Mazu culture serves as a catalyst for the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, with Fujian Province placing a high priority on its construction. Furthermore, given Fujian's position as the starting point of the Maritime Silk Road and its cultural wealth in Mazu culture, it can provide resourceful services and cultural support to the province's participation in the Belt and Road construction.

In the modern era, under the broader societal backdrop of "cultural resourceization", the industrialization and touristic development of Mazu culture is

inevitable. However, being a nationally and globally recognized Chinese faith culture, it must retain its fundamental characteristics of folk belief, continuously infuse national cultural connotations, and truly become a symbol of cultural cohesion in a global context. Taking Putian City, the hometown and cradle of Mazu faith, as an example, while enjoying widespread attention as a representative of humanity's "intangible heritage", there should be an awareness of its dual responsibility: development and preservation.

2.2 Ritualized Dissemination and Cultural Identification in Mazu Belief

Folk religious ceremonies most lucidly and predominantly reflect and express local people's understanding, interpretation, and perception of the human-world relationship, unveiling their fundamental cultural and societal structures, as well as the overarching norms, logic, and order. Anthropologically speaking, there are three primary perspectives on folk religious ceremonies: viewing them as a platform for emotional expression, considering them as theatrical performances or games, and seeing them as a medium for human-divine interactions. While we view these ceremonies as modes of communication, they don't merely facilitate interactions between humans and deities. To an extent, communication also occurs among the participants (not limited to verbal communication). Ultimately, both human-divine and human-human interactions can be categorized as symbolic exchanges between individuals and society. Such symbols foster interactions between individuals and their societies or communities, resulting in cultural identification. Offerings predominantly facilitate human-divine interactions, whereas rituals enhance interactions among humans based on that foundation.

Within a synchronized temporal and spatial context, those participating in these ceremonies share similar or common perceptions of themselves and the world, cultivating a mutual cultural identification. Given the "performative" and "repetitive" nature of these ceremonies, they transcend time and space, ensuring the preservation and transmission of their symbolized worldviews. Through these symbolic rituals,

individuals communicate and pass down cultural legacies both within and across different temporal and spatial contexts. In this process of creating, sharing, modifying, and preserving realities, group identifications centered around cultural identity are reinforced, thereby contributing valuable elements to the reshaping of a collective culture. The cultural significance of Mazu's "divining cup" ceremony embodies the inherent uncertainties of human societal groups, such as risks, loss of control, and crises, and people's endeavors through the mysticism of faith, hoping for divine intervention to ascertain good fortune.

American scholar Paul Connaughton pointed out that collective memory or social memory typically manifests in ceremonial processes, embodying a robust commemorative significance. Worship ceremonies stand as one of the pivotal activities in Mazu belief, expressing reverence and gratitude for Mazu's protection. The customs encompass taboos, attire, matrimony, cuisine, annual celebrations, recreational games, and the like, culminating in an extensive and diverse system. As a cultural heritage of the Mazu culture, worship ceremonies, large-scale collective ritualistic activities, sustain historical memories and emotional values through interactive segments, subsequently integrating into local societal norms. Moreover, they bridge regional clan and ethnic group interactions.

Mazu culture has endured, bearing the collective memories of its adherents. When participating in worship ceremonies, people place their aspirations for a promising future. Thus, ceremonial activities in the Mazu faith, akin to many global religious traditions, play an instrumental role in reinforcing core doctrines, ensuring continuity, and nurturing the sense of belonging among followers. Ceremonies bridge the ethereal and the mundane, offering believers tangible means to connect with the intangible. Within the context of Mazu worship, processions, prayers, offerings, and pilgrimages to sacred sites aren't merely acts of faith; they serve as communication channels, disseminating tales, values, and teachings related to Mazu.

Having employed the concept of "symbolic interaction," Mazu culture has been studied anew. The latest research portrays Mazu culture as a dynamic developmental process continually interacting with the external world. In the evolution of Mazu culture, influenced by societal and psychological needs, its image has undergone transformations. With interactions among the official and grassroots levels, as well as China and the global stage, new values have emerged. This study aids in discerning the societal development background and evolution patterns of Fujian Province, particularly Meizhou Island in Putian City. By depicting the social life of coastal cities in Fujian and their research across various epochs, we gain a deeper understanding of the local populace and revisit the relationships among individuals, society, and temple mediums. The ceremonies symbolizing the social system of "Mazu heading south" and "Mazu returning home" have witnessed transformations, evolving from "Mazu patrolling" to "Mazu heading south," and from "Mazu returning home" to "all Mazus returning home," gradually establishing the cultural community of "Mazu's maternal family." This binds the dispersed Putian populace. This "Mazu's maternal family" cultural community should not, and indeed isn't, merely restricted to Meizhou Island's local cultural medium. It refers to the Mazu folk cultural community originating from the Putian region, as an independent intercultural entity, allowing all people from Putian to share a common identity. We discern that Mazu culture isn't merely a single deity's belief; it possesses unique values in promoting trade, cultural exchanges, cross-strait peace, global governance, and more. Its transnational propagation also fortifies the cultural ties between overseas Chinese and residents. Hence, symbolic interaction plays a pivotal role in religion. They aren't solely integral to religious rites and practices but also epitomize faith, spiritual experiences, and cultural identification.

2.3 From the perspective of intangible cultural heritage, there's an economic recognition associated with pilgrimage cultural tourism.

In September 2009, jointly nominated by the Meizhou Island Administrative Committee and the Board of Directors of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple, the

Mazu belief was inscribed on the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". For China, this marked the first faith-based world heritage recognition. The successful inscription of the Mazu belief implies its representation of China's profound traditional culture, further enriching China's cultural underpinnings on the global stage. Additionally, this was Putian's inaugural world heritage, presenting immense opportunities for its cultural tourism sector.

Anthropologists suggest that pilgrimage and tourism, akin to events like birth, coming-of-age, marriage, childbirth, promotions, and death, can be regarded as "rites of passage" in life's trajectory – ceremonial events marking transitions between different life stages. Inspired by anthropological "ritual" theories, Professor Nelson Graburn of the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, posits that tourism is both a "sacred journey" and a "secular rite".

The notion "tourism is a modern pilgrimage" was articulated by American sociologist Mac Cannell. American anthropologist Nelson Graburn propounded the view "tourism is a rite", asserting a shared essence between tourism and rituals. Some scholars have elevated the concept of modern pilgrimage to a broader context, where "pilgrimage" doesn't strictly denote religious undertakings, but rather represents journeys focused on self-discovery and immersive experiences. For instance, Cohen, while discussing the religious pilgrimage experiences of tourists, emphasized it as a cultural, aesthetic, or political pilgrimage. Chinese scholar Xie Yanjun remarked that the rewards modern tourists garner from traveling parallel those of pilgrims. They obtain values revered by tourists, rejuvenate both mentally and physically, retain their identities, and encounter a myriad of novel phenomena. Professor Zhang Xiaoping, in her book "Tourism Anthropology", defines modern pilgrimage as an activity where modern individuals, to satiate their spiritual and psychological necessities, journey to their 'holy lands' in pursuit of spiritual and cultural values. She elucidates that the spiritual and cultural motivations of modern tourists strikingly resemble those of

pilgrims. Evidently, "modern pilgrimage" is intrinsically connected to the deep-seated spiritual and cultural experiences and demands of tourists.

Graburn opines that tourism is best perceived as a ritual, an embodiment of leisure and travel that sharply contrasts with daily domestic routines. To escape the monotony, drudgery, and stresses of secular life, modern individuals, driven by motivations akin to early pilgrims, embark on their sanctified journeys. They head to tourism destinations—considered "sacred centers"—to seek spiritual and cultural values, discover their genuine selves, and experience a contrasting culture and lifestyle. Tourism, being a ceremonial expression, encapsulates values associated with health, freedom, nature, and self-improvement, offering travelers profound psychological adjustments, therapy, revitalization, and enhancement. After their travels, tourists return to their daily lives, rejuvenated. The primary motivations behind modern tourism resonate with the motivations of historical pilgrims, both seeking solace, enlightenment, and spiritual ascension.

Over the centuries, Mazu culture has weathered historical evolutions, cultivating a vast spiritual essence. From the Song dynasty—worship of the maritime goddess in Fujian and Guangdong—to the Yuan and Ming dynasties—establishing a multifaceted maritime deity along the Chinese coast—to the Qing dynasty and present—emerging as a global peace goddess. Mazu culture manifests predominantly through Mazu temples (also known as Tianhou palaces). During traditional Chinese festivals, like the Spring Festival and Dragon Boat Festival, these temples host ceremonies. Initially, solely Mazu devotees participated. However, as transportation improved and cultural appreciation heightened, not only believers but also non-believers started visiting these temples, both for pilgrimage and cultural immersion. This experiential mode gradually evolved into tourism. The influx of non-believers led to an expansion of Mazu's divine roles. From solely safeguarding maritime travelers, her functions diversified to include bestowing offspring, blessing academic endeavors, and even acting as a deity of wealth. The progression and propagation of Mazu's image

underline her unique capability of perpetuating Chinese folk culture and boosting the tourism economy. Attracted by Mazu's profound cultural allure, tourists from around the globe flock to experience this heritage. Coastal regions in China, including Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shandong, Tianjin, and Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, have benefitted immensely from the Mazu cultural tourism boom. Meizhou in Putian, being the cradle of Mazu beliefs, boasts unparalleled resource advantages. Through annual Mazu cultural tourism festivals and events like the Mazu pilgrimage and her return to her maternal home, Meizhou integrates Mazu beliefs into its tourism development, broadcasting China's rich traditional culture to the world and drawing hordes of tourists to Meizhou Island. The transformation of Mazu temples from places of worship to tourism destinations epitomizes the evolution of Mazu cultural tourism.

3 Research Suggestions

3.1 Recommendations for the Academic Community

For the promotion of Mazu culture, it is essential to establish an expert team. Gather specialists from various fields to provide intellectual support, organize and devise plans for the development of Mazu culture, as well as specific plans for cultural tourism products that perpetuate and promote Mazu culture. Continue to encourage cross-strait Mazu cultural exchanges and academic forums. Break through temporal and spatial barriers, systematically integrate Mazu cultural resources, clarify the connections between Mazu culture from the Song dynasty to the present with maritime culture, ritual culture, vocal music culture, and other cultural forms. This will ensure that Mazu culture progresses in a multi-faceted direction, enhancing the city's cultural backdrop.

3.2 Recommendations for Coastal Cities in Fujian

Strengthen the Mazu Culture Brand: In recent years, as Mazu culture has flourished and generated economic benefits, there has been a proliferation of misuses

of the cultural brand. Some businesses casually use the Mazu name, such as "Mazu Seafood Harbor", "Mazu Tea Path", and "Mazu Jade". These businesses, aiming for their economic benefits, capitalize on the Mazu brand to attract attention. The trend of intertwining economic benefits has led to varying degrees of erosion of the Mazu cultural brand, hindering its long-term development. Local governments should holistically plan to seamlessly blend Mazu culture with city branding, fortify the protective mechanisms for Mazu cultural heritage, improve funding input and allocation, enhance the preservation and promotional education of Mazu culture, and establish a comprehensive protection system involving government coordination, media oversight, and public supervision. Carry out a survey of Mazu cultural heritage sites, urgently restore temples and crafts that require attention, and take care of the transmission of Mazu culture.

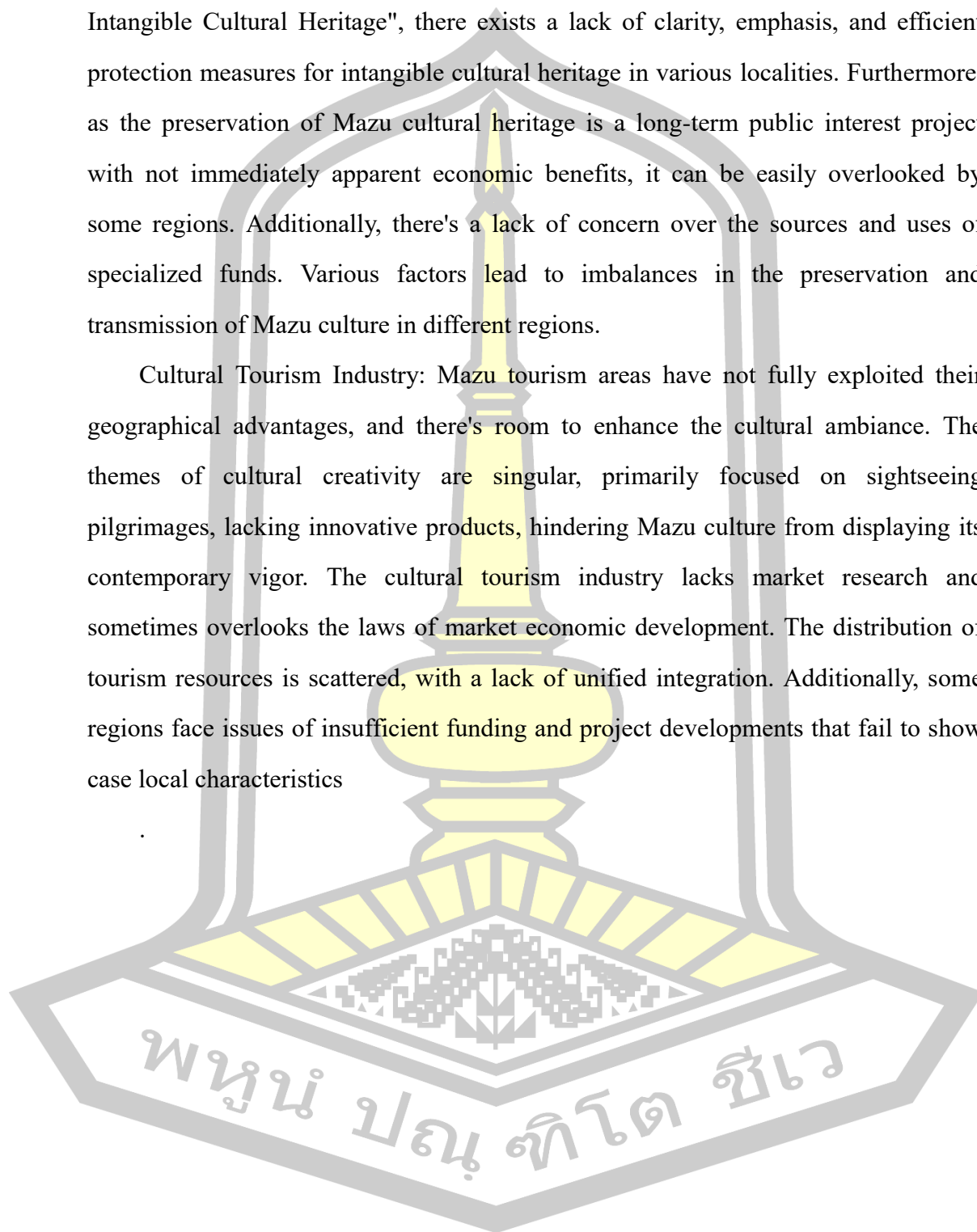
Innovate the Development of Mazu Culture: Enhance proactive guidance to infuse new meanings into Mazu culture. As Mazu culture originated from the public and has constantly evolved with historical and cultural changes, educational experts, respected individuals from society, cultural celebrities, and business elites should be widely involved to adapt to the current societal transformations and developments. Making the culture contemporary and appealing to the younger generation is key. Moreover, leveraging the advantages of Meizhou Island, plan the creation of Mazu-themed products. Plan and produce various works related to Mazu, including paintings, songs, traditional performing arts, dramas, documentaries, books, etc. Relying on Mazu's stories and related cultural narratives, further refine and elevate the inherent connection between Mazu culture and the "Belt and Road Initiative", seeking the support that traditional culture provides to the "Belt and Road". These cultural products also possess market value.

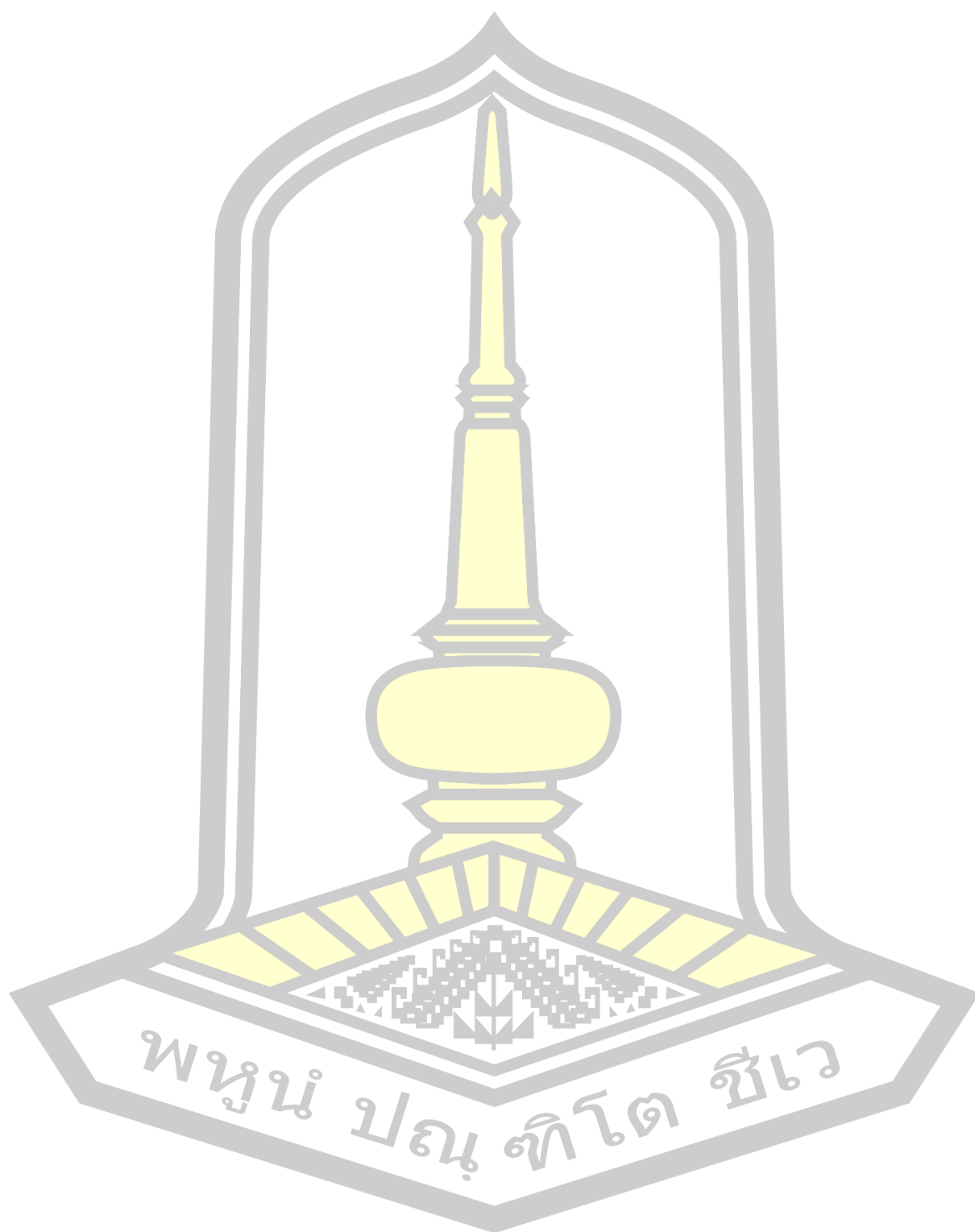
3.3 Recommendations for the Chinese Government

Cultural Heritage Preservation: Although the United Nations has already listed "Mazu Beliefs" as intangible cultural heritage and the State Council has introduced

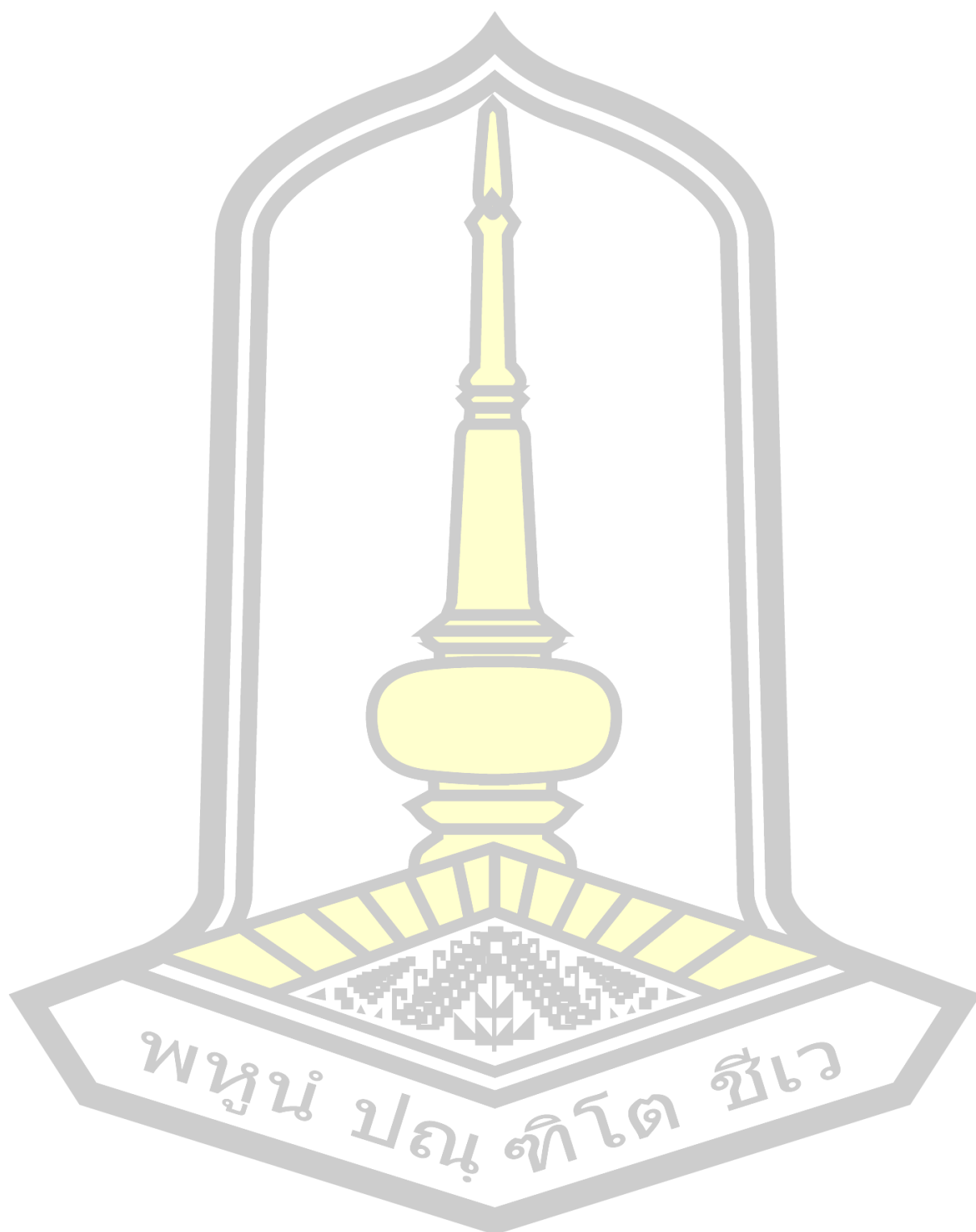
measures like the "Interim Measures for the Protection and Management of National Intangible Cultural Heritage", there exists a lack of clarity, emphasis, and efficient protection measures for intangible cultural heritage in various localities. Furthermore, as the preservation of Mazu cultural heritage is a long-term public interest project with not immediately apparent economic benefits, it can be easily overlooked by some regions. Additionally, there's a lack of concern over the sources and uses of specialized funds. Various factors lead to imbalances in the preservation and transmission of Mazu culture in different regions.

Cultural Tourism Industry: Mazu tourism areas have not fully exploited their geographical advantages, and there's room to enhance the cultural ambiance. The themes of cultural creativity are singular, primarily focused on sightseeing pilgrimages, lacking innovative products, hindering Mazu culture from displaying its contemporary vigor. The cultural tourism industry lacks market research and sometimes overlooks the laws of market economic development. The distribution of tourism resources is scattered, with a lack of unified integration. Additionally, some regions face issues of insufficient funding and project developments that fail to show case local characteristics





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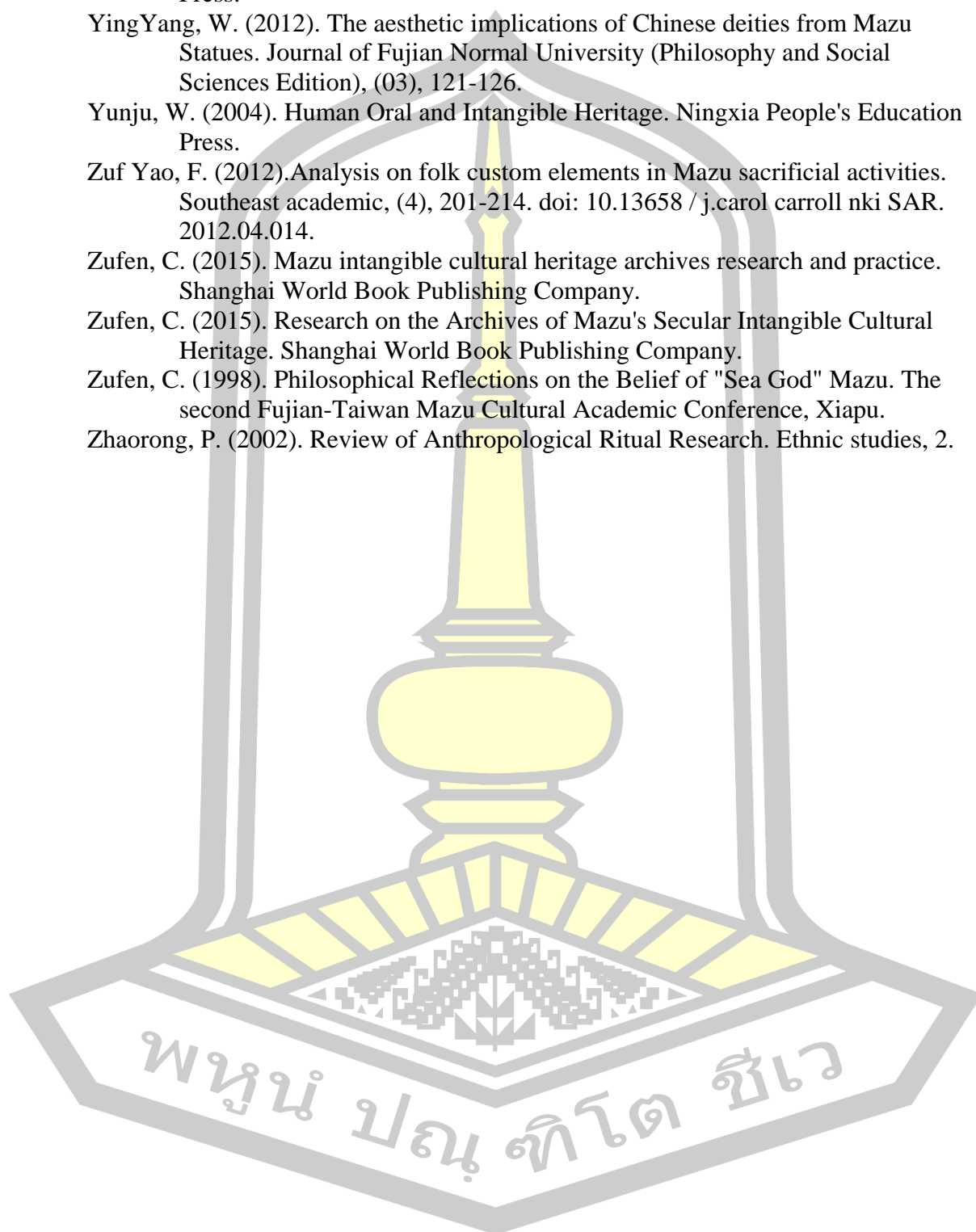


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