

A comparative study of belief in Mazu and Guanyin in China

**JHSS
17-26**

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Vol. 29 (1), 2021**

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Abstract

Mazu and Guanyin are two well-known deities in China each Chinese family considers them as the protectors and rescuers when disasters happening. With the influence of social development, these gods gradually are ascended into two almighty goddesses with perfect, divine power, supreme clergy and infinite cohesion. Based on the analysis and collation of a large number of documents, this paper points out that the similarities and differences of between Mazu belief and Guanyin belief by comparing their development in Chinese society. The similarities are mainly manifested in the diverse duties of being a deity, and the range of this belief enlarging from several local regions to the whole world, and the development of deities' duties from single to multiple. The differences are mainly reflected in three aspects: the pagination way of the two goodness, Guanyin is a Buddha derived from Indian god, Mazu is a China's native goddess who went to the overseas later; In terms of the transformation mode, Guanyin is transformed from an official deity to a folk deity, and Mazu is a folk deity at beginning and then gradually authenticated by the government as an official deity; the various development trajectories of their duties, Guanyin's duty was first centered on salvation, and then gradually expanded to the deity of the sea, while Mazu's duty was just opposite.

Keywords: Mazu; Guanyin; belief; comparison

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It is a long history of believes in Mazu and Guanyin in China and there are a wide range of believers with different folk deity beliefs. The belief in Mazu originated from Fujian Province, and then expanded to the coastal area of the mainland of China, from the north of Liaoning Province, to the south of Guangdong, and Hainan Province, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Macao Special Administrative Region, even inland provinces, such as Anhui, Jiangxi, Hunan, Guizhou, Gansu etc. are also widely distributed. Meanwhile, Mazu belief is also widespread to Southeast Asia and South Asia by Chinese people who in China went there for making a living from Guangdong and Fujian Province. Although the Guanyin came from in India, the faith was introduced into China with Buddhism. It

had been widely recognized by Chinese civilian from Wei Dynasty to Northern Dynasty (220-589 AD).

The propagate path of Guanyin belief was that a foreign culture was introduced to Chinese people, and then later its belief had developed a profound influence in China, which is different from Mazu belief. The route of spreading the Mazu belief was the external spread of Chinese native culture, which later became a worldwide spiritual belief. The propagation routes of the two are completely different, but both Mazu and Guanyin, as female gods, believe in the spiritual support of people in social life, maintaining the social stability, and enhancing the national cohesion. This article explores how the similarities and differences generated in beliefs between Mazu and Guanyin.

The similarities between Mazu belief and Guanyin belief

The reasons for worshipping Mazu and Guanyin widely in the society rely on the practical purpose and utilitarian attitude of human being that people try making pray to gods for keeping them out of misfortune such as disasters or death and obtaining benefits such money and health, that is why both Mazu and Guanyin faith are common in many similarities from this purpose.

Multi-functionality of the deity's duty

When the beliefs of Guanyin and Mazu were made, functionality of deities were unitary, and the scope of the social influence was quite limited. Due to the advocacy and worship of the ruling classes over the past dynasties, and the society was in a conflict during a period of the new fighting with the old, the tradition transforming into the modern, the living life always brought unprecedented doubts and confusion to people, people need someone who could tell them why these pains or hurts existed and how to avoid these in life. Therefore, the belief function of Mazu and Guanyin began to expand, and gradually showed the characteristics of diversification and multi-level. The diversification refers to the belief that Mazu belief and Guanyin belief are different from the gods with a single duty such as God of Wealth and Door, but gods with two and more duties, who had been integrated into other functions by people with various psychological factors. The multi-level indicates that the belief of Mazu and Guanyin has been rooted in the hearts of the people among social members with different cultural qualities, social status, and life experiences. From the leaders to the ordinary workers, people with different life experience different levels of the belief in them. Therefore, the two gods could satisfy all kinds of his or her needs in daily life. Such as, the god Guanyin could help people stay away from misfortune, help rain, protect the believers, and dominate the births and weddings, while the god Mazu also could help people in disease elimination and epidemic prevention, catching robber, raining, removing ghosts, dominating the births and fertility, protecting the safety of fisher folks and Water Transport of Grain on the sea etc.

The scope of belief developing from the local to the global

When the Mercy belief of Guanyin and Mazu first came into being, they were both regional and the scope of influence was quite limited. It's said that Guanyin, whose hometown located in the Mount Potalaka in India, is a Buddhist deity. According to the Book "Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World", where there is a Buddhist called Tang Xuan-zang who went to the Xitian Heaven in the West for Buddhist scriptures and visited Guanyin shrine. And Mazu's hometown is Putian, Fujian province. When Mazu belief was first formed by local people, its influence was just restricted in Putian area.

In the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Mazu was not the only goddess in protecting the sea in Putian, Fujian Province. And Mazu was just one of these gods, even in Putian people do not have a deep influence. Besides Mazu, other gods existed in temples such as Xianji, Lingwei, Xiangying and Lingxian were worshipped by people as well. Most of them were responsible for protecting transportation on the sea. Similarly, this phenomenon happened on Guanyin as the same as Mazu, was just one bodhisattva at the beginning, without any special features. But later, due to various reasons, especially the worship and commemoration of the ruling class in the past dynasties, the influence of Guanyin was expanding larger and larger until now it is popular in the whole world.

Development from single divine function to multiple divine functions

In the initial period of Mazu belief, Mazu was regarded as a witch to be worshipped by people, and later gradually developed into a sea god in southeast China. However, Mazu's duty is not limited to protecting the sea, but also includes cleaning up thief, releasing people in distress, protecting the country and her people, and other functions if necessary. So, this faith was been spread rapidly, soon from the street to the palace, from the island to the backland, from China to the world. The specific duties developing paths are showed as follows:

Initial function: A god for protection and salvation on the sea

There are many folk legends about Mazu being good at sailing. Until now, the earliest Mazu literature found is Liao Pengfei's "Record of Shun Ji Temple: Reconstruction of Shengdun Zu Temple" in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1276). In this book, the earliest recordation of Mazu's story about protection and salvation on the sea, as "it should be like a sound, so the merchants especially use it as the guide, if getting lucky divination (jibu), even the windstorm is coming, the boat will be still safe". (Jiang Weitan, 1990) And several other stories of divining experience were listed to approve its true in this article, which certificates that Mazu had the status considered as the goddess of the sea. And the change of Mazu's status could be found in the poems and songs, such as the second poem from three Songs of Telling Friendship. Pu Zhong and Bai Hu Ling Hui Fei wrote by Zhao Shixia: "Clouds are boundless and roads are out of the sight. The sky is connected with the water. Boats and vessels are of thousands of miles of traffic, and all prayers to her will be safe." (Zhao Shixia). These records above are all proof for Mazu's magic

function in protecting “the boats to and fro”. In addition, Mazu Temple was directly called “The Sea Shrine” in the poem Ten Pieces of Things by the poet Liu Ke-zhuang. (Liu Kezhuang) These poems have been confirmed with historical records, which truly reflects the role of Mazu as the maritime goddess in early times.

The function of praying for rain to reducing drought

During the Southern Song Dynasty (1277-1276 AD), Mazu's duty had exceeded the scope as a maritime god and was added other function on praying for good weather and good harvest. In an agricultural society that people's food basically depends on heaven for a living, it was natural to endow Mazu with such an important duty. It is recorded that Mazu could help people for rain through praying and save people in an effective way before her death in the article “Praying for Rain to Save People” of the notes Tian Fei Xian Sheng Lu. In the related poems praising Mazu, the contents are also related to praying for rain and protecting agriculture. With the spread of Mazu belief, the custom of praying to Mazu for rain also be spread from Fujian Province to other provinces. For example, in Jin Dynasty (266-420 AD) in Kangjun (present Deqing and Yunan areas of Guangdong Province) suffered from drought, a government official Zengfeng in Guangzhou City, presided over rite of the rainy praying at Mazu Temple, and wrote an article to record it in April of the first year of Jiading (1208 AD). (Zeng Feng)

The tide god who built the dike to block off the tide

The sea water rises and falls regularly to create tides. when flood tide invading banks, destructing the farmland, tidewater will also be caused disasters. if there is a god who is in charge with the tidewater will be needful, so a tidewater god belief emerged at the historic moment and Mazu maybe was the best role to be arranged. After Mazu became the goddess of the sea in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), her function was extended to governing water including tide. In the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1276), after the Mazu belief was spread to Lin 'an (Hangzhou), the “Shunji Saint Concubine Temple” outside Genshan Gate appeared. In Hangzhou, Mazu then began to have the function as a tide god. Chen Mi's Odes reflects a situation that many places on the Xinghua Plain were still under the attack of the sea tide at that time. Later, relying on the cohesion of Mazu faith, people struggled to achieve the beautiful scene of a fertile field with hard work.

The function of repelling the enemy

Mazu was rewarded several times for suppressing the bandits and defeating the enemy. The legends of Mazu who helped to repel the robbers appeared many times in the poems of Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD). Huang Gongdu's “Inscribing Shun Ji Temple” records that the magical function of Mazu was to stop the war permanently in the north. When Jiang Teli captured the pirates in Fujian Province, he wrote “Meishan Continuation”, which recorded that before he led soldiers to conquer pirates in the 26th year of Shaoxing (1156 AD), he had prayed to Mazu for a win war, after winning the victory, Jiang Teli recommended Mazu to the government to be rewarded further (Jiang Teli).

The function of eradicating the plague and treating the disease

In ancient times, people were lack of medicine and treatment. Mazu, who was born with a duty to help people in times of suffering inevitably had the function of curing diseases. Liao Pengfei's record *Memories of the Temple* showed that people would do a pray to her when he or she suffered drought, being sick, and being attacked by pirates. It indicates that one of Mazu's functions was eradicating plague and treating diseases.

Guanyin in Buddhism also has the characteristic of deity changing from single to multiple.

As far as folk beliefs are concerned, the early Guanyin was known based on the Lotus Sutra as an image of relieving suffering. However, after it was introduced into China, Guanyin was regarded as the most popular Bodhisattva who was close to Chinese people and was highly worshipped, and whose reputation was not only overshadowed all other bodhisattvas, but even more famous than other Buddhas. The motto in *Tan Jing* once said: "Being benevolent is Guanyin." (Taishinzaki, 1934) From this point, Guanyin in Chinese Buddhism is no longer an ordinary Bodhisattva, but has become the messenger of Buddhism saving the suffering people in lives.

In the system of Chinese belief, there are a series of externalized shapes about Guanyin. Besides the image of Rescue Guanyin and Pure Land Guanyin, after the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581-907 AD), there are other types, such as Guanyin with 11-faces, Ruyi Guanyin, and thousand-handed and thousand-eyed Guanyin etc. Among them, Guanyin with thousands of hands and eyes is the most famous. Since the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581-907 AD), the books on Esoteric Buddhism began to spread into China and gradually became popular. As the Esoteric Buddhism concerned, it emphasizes in the power of divinity you have obtained, not the theoretical attainment. The Esoteric Buddhism was soon accepted because of practical features by the Chinese. Based on it, the belief to Guanyin developed in the Indian esoteric religion then developed it into the Guanyin belief in China and drove it to the peak with its relief force.

Besides the function of saving the suffering, other Guanyin's images introduced to China also be provided with the following feature:

The image of savior

For instance: in the book of *Records of the Taiping Era*: Xue Daoheng, the official Xue Daoheng used to take a tour in Kaishan Temple, and asked a question to a monk Shui: "Why these Kong Kim are angry, why the Bodhisattva is lowering his eyebrows?" The monk answered: "Kong Kim are repelling the devils, so they are angry, and Guanyin is mercy, so he lowers his eyebrows".

The book of *Origin of the Kingdom* also describes the details in the process of Guanyin surrendering a demon. In addition, then Guanyin chosen a good ruler for their people. From this view, Guanyin was a savior of the people.

The image of guardian

The ninth chapter of Guanyin Record said: “You live in the Dali King for generations and the people are at ease.” Here, Guanyin gave Dali the fine slave. In the seventeenth and eighteenth chapter, Guanyin helped Duan Siping to achieve Dali King. The combination of Guanyin and monarchy reflects the idea of Divine Right of Kings. At this time, Guanyin also became the patron saint of Nanzhao and Dali King.

The deity of agriculture guard

According to the archaeological discovery of Baiyang Village site, the Bai ethnic-group was already a farming nation 4,000 years ago. To Nanzhao (738-902 AD), horticultural planting, sericulture was also more developed. In ancient times, agricultural production mainly depended on the gift of nature, so people prayed to Guanyin for good weather and good harvest. According to the local Chronicles, When the great drought happened, Tianpeng in Sichuan province “Guanyin spring, from the poor gushing, irrigating thousands of acres.” (Jingxin Record) “At the north gate of Guangfeng in Jiangxi province, there was Guanyin Spring too, with endless irrigation, which watered large tracts of fertile land” (He Dongzi Zuanji). It can be proved that the gushing of Guanyin Spring satisfied the people's wish.

The deity of sea guard

As we all know, Guanyin is the most prestigious god in Buddhism. Moreover, Guanyin is also the first female deity of sea guard in Chinese history. On one hand, Guanyin's Daochang (a place where Buddhist sutras are explained) is located in Mount Putuo, Zhejiang province, and surrounded by the ocean. On the other hand, the spirit of purify all beings, which is “ don't do all evil, do all good, have mercy on all, relieve suffering”, and the image of “Virgin Mother” and the function of “relief suffering”, that were regarded as “saviors” by the public. Therefore, merchants, fishermen and voyagers regarded it as the deity of sea guard.” (Guanyin) is widely worshipped by the civilian for its ability to eliminate all suffering, and by the coastal people as the god of protection at sea” (Rongguo, 2003).

Deity of fertility

The reason why Guanyin was widely worshipped among the Chinese people was certainly related to the mercy and rescue duty of deity. However, we should also see that the feminization of the image of Guanyin has made this god form a close relationship with Chinese women. The most concrete and convincing among Guanyin's many duties were its fertility function. There were many records of the fulfillment under the help of Guanyin in fertility and supernatural stories in ancient Chinese documents and literature. For example, the book of “Ming Xiang Ji” records: One person, named Sun Daode from Yizhou in the period of Liu Song (420-479 AD), who was over 50 years old and had no children. In the year of Jingping (423-424 AD), a monk told him, “If you can recite the Buddhist scriptures of Guanyin to your heart, you can get the child.” Sun listened to the monk, and one

day he had a strange dream which told him he would have a child soon. At last, his wife was pregnant and gave birth to a boy.

It can be seemed that the above that Guanyin was originally centered on the function of mercy and rescue. With its development in China and assimilation by Chinese culture, it has gradually developed into a righteous and glorious image that integrates with people's life, cares about people's sufferings and the lack of grain.

The difference of beliefs between Guanyin and Mazu

Different transmission routes

The belief and influence of Guanyin and Mazu are different from region to world. Guanyin is a god introduced from abroad. After it was spread to China, with the transformation of Buddhism, Guanyin belief was gradually localized and secularized. Then, Sinicized Buddhism and Guanyin belief gradually went to the world, and Guanyin belief began to spread to North Korea, Japan, Southeast Asian countries, as well as Europe and the Americas. It experienced a process from the new native to the world. As a result, Guanyin, which has a wide influence in Buddhism, has gradually evolved from an Indian god to a Chinese female protector god of great compassion and salvation.

The track of Mazu belief was from China to the world. According to incomplete statistics of Putian Religious Records, up to 1990, there were 2,520 Mazu temples all over the world. Among them, 2,346 were in China, including 827 in Taiwan, 56 in Hong Kong and three in Macao. In China, the Mazu Temple is distributed in a vast area from the southernmost Xisha Islands to Tongliao City in Inner Mongolia in the north, from the seaport on the southeast coast to Yunnan Province in the southwest inland. In addition, Mazu Temples are distributed in Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, United States, Brazil, and even South Africa. Therefore, on the whole, unlike Guanyin 's widespread influence among Buddhists and Chinese around the world, the initial spread of Mazu was limited to the Putian City area of Fujian Province, and later expanded to the whole of Fujian Province and Taiwan Province, and then slowly to the whole country and ethnic Chinese area of the world. It can be said that Mazu belief was originally regional, and then it It was spread all over the world because of the Chinese throughout the world. It can be said that the Mazu faith is regional and moves towards the world with the ethnic Chinese migration all over the world.

Different ways of transforming about the deity duty

When Guanyin belief spread to China, it was transformed from an official deity to a folk deity. Guanyin belief is a very long and complicated evolutionary process in the spread of China. Guanyin belief was first known with the popularity of lotus Sutra in society. It was not until the Liang dynasty (502-557 AD) in the Northern and Southern Dynasties that began to flourish, and it reached the zenith in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). After the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1912 AD), Guanyin faith gradually faded away the Buddhistic aspect. Due to the strong assimilation power of Chinese culture, the development of Guanyin belief did not

depend on the will of the Buddhist advocates in China, even abandoned its strict ritual restrictions and developed into folk deities, and finally entered the system of the folk deities.

Mazu has gone through a tortuous road from a common folk god to an official god. Because of the geography of the ocean, the belief of the water god and the sea god is most developed in Fujian and Taiwan province. From the early snake worship to the arctic Xuanwu belief and the God of plague belief, Mazu belief, are all folk gods. However, as Mazu fully embodies the spirit of eastern culture, it soon spread to all parts of the country and became one of the most representative folk beliefs in China, especially in Fujian and Taiwan province. In the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 AD), Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty issued a decree granting Mazu the title of "Goddess of Meizhou". It means that Mazu belief had attracted the attention of the imperial court because of its influence, and Mazu belief had since entered the state of interaction between the people and the official. (Zhang Shishan, 2007)

The development track of deity duty is different

Mazu's deity duty began to focus on the goddess of the sea and gradually expanded to the goddess of rescuing. The Mazu belief originated in the coastal areas of Fujian province, where people lived by fishing. Before the fishermen would go fishing on the sea, they would sail across the sea in front of the Mazu Temple and worshiped the goddess of Mazu on their fishing boats. In case of encountering strong wind and waves on the way, the fishermen will pray for Mazu's blessing on the boat. Before fishing in the sea, fishermen also burn incense to worship Mazu and pray for a rich harvest.

Therefore, the particularity of fishery production mode and the adventure of Marine life made the majority of fishermen in order to seek some spiritual sustenance and shaped Mazu into the protection god of navigation according to their will. Therefore, the original Mazu belief had the characteristics of Chinese Marine culture.

Conclusion

Buddhism originated in India and the Guanyin belief was introduced into China along with the eastward spread of Buddhism. The spread of Guanyin in China began when Kumarajiva translated the Lotus Sutra in the eighth year of the Reign of Emperor Yao Qin (406 AD), and the Guanyin belief gradually became known as the Lotus Sutra became popular in the society. In addition, according to the textual research of relevant scholars, the earliest prototype of Guanyin can be traced back to the Vedic period of India, and its belief originated in the south seashore of Indian, which was gradually created in the process of rescue from maritime disasters (Li Li'an, 2003), and its original duty was also to be the protection god on the sea. After being introduced into China, Guanyin was integrated with Chinese traditional culture, and gradually changed from a male god to a female god in accordance with the practical needs of Chinese society. And the original duties of "Relief crisis,

Purdue beings” after the encounter with the southeast coast of China, they were very similar to that of the natural environment and the coastal fishermen eager to get the actual social needs of gods asylum, so that people naturally transferred the duties of Guanyin to Mazu. So, both of them not only in the characteristics of deity, beliefs, but also in the track of deity duty were all similar.

After from four to five hundred years of development, the translation and study of Buddhist scriptures were increasingly developed, and the Buddhist belief among the Chinese people was increasingly widespread. As one of the three western saints (the other two are Amitabha Buddha, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva), Guanyin belief also was imported to Luoyang which was the political and cultural center of China at that time by the Silk Road. After Guanyin was introduced into China, its enlightenment effect of avoiding all evil and being followed by all good can especially arouse the resonance of people in natural disasters and war. Therefore, Guanyin belief in society had a sufficient class basis and space for development. In order to consolidate and maintain their dominant position while promoting Buddhism, the ruling class vigorously promoted the goddess of Guanyin in Buddhism, providing sufficient development space for the spread of the goddess of Guanyin belief in China, forming a top-down development track. In order to consolidate and maintain their dominant position, the ruling class promoted the goddess of Guanyin in Buddhism, which provided a broad mass base for the spread of the goddess of Guanyin belief in China, and formed a top-down development track. Mazu belief from the folk, it was instinct to choose in the folk when people were in struggle against the ocean, However, in the continuous development of Mazu and the continuous expansion of the function of the priesthood, the ruling class realized that the folk belief in Mazu could be a tool to rule and govern people, so they paid various respects to Mazu and advocated it vigorously, making the belief in Mazu and Guanyin form the opposite development trajectory. On the one hand, the similarities and differences between the functions of Mazu and Guanyin show the long history of cultural exchanges between China and India; On the other hand, it also confirms the long history of cultural exchanges between the two countries.

The similarities and differences between Mazu and Guanyin belief, on the one hand, show us the long period of cultural exchanges between China and India; On the other hand, they also confirm the long history of cultural exchanges between the two countries. At the same time, they also prove that the exchange between the national culture and the foreign culture is not a total acceptance of the foreign culture, but a process of mutual adaptation and continuous integration of the foreign culture and the national culture. The continuous integration and integration of foreign culture and national culture will eventually form the national characteristic culture.

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