

MAZU WORSHIP IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA: GENDER, POLITICS, RELIGION, AND
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

By

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To people I love

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This dissertation explores the worship of Mazu, one of the most popular goddesses in traditional Chinese religion, from its formative period (c. 960) to its later transformations in late imperial China. More specifically, the dissertation tracks the evolution of Mazu from a minor regional deity worshiped by fishermen and sailors along the southeast coast of China, into a major goddess occupying a central place in the pantheon sanctioned by the state and the religious elites. In the course of this historical transformation, various groups interpreted the origin, roles, and salvific potency of the goddess in accordance with their differing agendas and backgrounds. Namely, the imperial governments promoted Mazu as the goddess of meritorious service to the state. For their part, male Confucian scholars constructed the goddess as an embodiment of certain key elements of Confucian values and as an ideal model of Chinese womanhood. Along the same lines, Daoists reimaged Mazu, emphasizing her role as a universal savior whose efficacy emanated from the Daoist cosmological system. As a multi-functional goddess, Mazu also was venerated by female devotees as a motherly goddess who can provide protection for women and respond to their domestic and everyday concerns. Developing this last thread, the study examines the way the Mazu's cult shaped Chinese women's social, political, and religious status.

By tracing different images and functions of Mazu, as constructed by and for different groups, the dissertation challenges the normative images of Mazu that historical texts and official titles have constructed. These constructions mainly praise Mazu for her service to the state, her role as a paragon of Confucian values, or a universal savior, while tending to ignore or downplay the full scope of popular devotional praxis and women's appropriation in certain forms of the goddess worship. Drawing on a variety of sources, ranging from official hagiographies to local gazetteers and popular lore, the dissertation provides a nuanced and comprehensive examination of the development and character of Mazu worship, as well as of the place of the goddess in the larger religious landscape, especially in reference to the status of women in Chinese society.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the worship of Mazu 媽祖, one of the most popular goddesses in the Chinese religious landscape. Originally, Mazu was believed to protect fishermen and sailors in the area about the southeast costal village of Meizhou 湄洲, in the Putian 莆田 district of Fujian 福建 province. Gradually, she became popular as a sea protector throughout southeast coastal China. In light of the increasing popularity, various imperial governments, from the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1271) onward, began to promote worship of the goddess by granting her a series of honorific titles, following an established practice through which the state granted official recognition to local deities. Along with the state promotion of her cult, Mazu has been worshiped by Chinese people from all backgrounds throughout Chinese history, and to this day she remains a very popular deity. The images of Mazu are not uniform; they have experienced many transformations in different times and among different groups. This dissertation explores the multilayered and many-sided transformations of Mazu, highlighting how these transformations have been shaped by the ways different groups sought to appropriate her in accordance with their concerns, needs, and agendas.

The present study explores various convergences and contrasts in the ways various groups have imagined and approached Mazu. Daoism, official state religion, and popular religion all embraced the cult of Mazu. That fact illustrates the integration of Daoist, Confucian, and popular values, ideas, and practices, which came to characterize the primary modes of Mazu worship. However, different traditions emphasized different aspects of the Mazu cult, in response to the interests, needs, and desires of their devotees.

The dissertation operates at three interlinked levels. First, it is a study of a particular deity and her transformations in different times and among different groups. At the same time, by

comparing and contrasting different systems of beliefs, it offers a window into larger patterns of religious life in China and the interaction between religion and society. Thirdly, as a corollary of the second level, it brings the variable of gender into sharp focus, investigating the particular roles Mazu played for Chinese women.

I contend that the normative images of Mazu, as formulated by historical texts and official titles, are incomplete. These representations mainly praise Mazu as the goddess of meritorious service to the state, an interpretation that ignores the scope of popular devotional praxis and women's engagement with certain forms of goddess worship. In order to fill in this lacuna, the dissertation investigates how over the centuries Chinese female devotees expressed themselves through specific forms of goddess worship. In the end, the goal is to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive reconstruction of the development, scope, and character of the Mazu cult, as well as the place of goddess worship in the popular religious landscape, especially in reference to the status of women in Chinese society.

Historical Background

According to tradition, the worship of Mazu can be traced back to the early North Song era (960–1127), when some villages in the Fujian coastal region began to worship the spirit of a young girl. According to traditional accounts, Mazu was a historical person, a woman known as Lin Moniang (林默娘), who was born in the coastal village of Meizhou, in the Putian district of Fujian province in 960, and died in 987. As stated in Mazu's hagiographical records, she lived a virtuous life and refused to marry when she grew up. She died young, but before her death, local people came to believe that she had mystical powers to aid fishermen to overcome storms and reach home safely. After Lin's death, fishermen along the Fujian coast began to report miracles attributed to her. In due time, Lin became one of the most influential goddesses worshiped in

Fujian province, and during the late Song era she was promoted as a state-approved goddess. Subsequently, the female deity was bestowed the official title of Tianhou 天后 (Celestial Empress) and became widely known as Mazu (Mother Ancestor).

Based on the fact that the Mazu cult started as a popular cult in a small village, scholars in Chinese religious studies consider this goddess worship to fall within the category of popular religion. Historically, as well as at the present, popular religion has constituted an integral and significant part of the Chinese religious landscape. A variety of beliefs and practices comprise the broad category of Chinese popular religion. This category was constructed by scholars as a way of classifying a broad range of prevalent ideas, beliefs, and practices that “do not fit easily under any of the three main labels, namely, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism.”¹

Because of its diffused character and the lack of fixed doctrines and institutions, it is difficult to define Chinese popular religion.² However, scholars have understood it in two ways. The first one refers to the general forms of religion Chinese people practice in everyday life and in their homes, the streets, places of work, as well as temples. Examples here include funeral and memorial services, popular festivals, and rituals of consulting spirit mediums, all activities which enjoy a relative autonomy from religious experts. The second sense of popular religion refers to the religion of the lower classes (folk worship), as opposed to that of the religious and political elite. In this sense, some scholars define popular religion as a realm of beliefs and practices separate from those created, practiced, and controlled by specialized experts sanctioned by

¹ See Stephen F. Teiser, “The Spirits of Chinese Religion,” in Donald S. Lopez, Jr ed., *Religions of China in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 18.

² See Kenneth Dean’s article, “Local Communal Religion in Contemporary South-east China,” in Daniel L. Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 32-52. Dean argues that definition of religion derived from Western tradition is not helpful in defining popular religion, which “involves participation in communal rituals centered in temples dedicated to a variety of gods form a vast pantheon.”

official religious institutions. This definition assumes that many popular religious subcultures existed side-by-side with elite subcultures, sustaining relations of tension, accommodation, and/or co-optation.³ Because popular religion lacked canonical scriptures and established priesthood, its beliefs and values were reproduced and transmitted in the varied forms of symbols, myths, and rituals, primarily through the agency of folklore, performance arts, and family life. Through these means, some local gods and goddess became popularized throughout China. For example, some of the gods and goddesses of popular religion, such as Guandi 關帝 and Mazu that originally emerged in local villages became objects of pan-Chinese worship.

Although the devotion to Mazu originally emerged as a local cult and became an integral part of Chinese popular religious landscape, it was also incorporated into the official pantheon due to its popularity. The process of official promotion started in the Song dynasty.⁴ According to *The Collected Important Documents of the Song* (*Song hui yao* 宋會要), the imperial government of the North Song first recognized the Mazu cult by granting Mazu the first imperial title, “Linghui furen” 靈惠夫人 (Lady of Numinous Wisdom), during the fifth year of the Xuanhe 宣和 era (1156).⁵ Soon afterward, the Song government bestowed a series of related honorific titles upon Mazu, primarily due to her perceived contributions to the state. These imperial titles demonstrate how the worship of Mazu evolved from a local popular cult to a state-

³ This understanding of popular religion can be seen in C.K. Yang’s book, *Religion in Chinese Society*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1961), p. 264. Yang divides Chinese religions into two distinct parts, institutional religions and diffused religions.

⁴ See James L. Watson, “Standardizing the God: The Promotion of T’ien Hou (Empress of Heaven) along the South China Coast, 960-1960,” in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski, ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 299. Watson briefly surveys the process of incorporating Mazu into the official pantheon.

⁵ See Li Xianzhang, *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, p. 89. The first honorific title to Mazu was in response to a request by an imperial emissary. The emissary claimed that the goddess helped his fleet to overcome sea storms and reach its destination safely.

approved mode of worship. Successive official honorary titles bestowed to Mazu followed in subsequent dynasties. The Yuan 元 (1271–1368) government conferred upon the goddess the title Tianfei 天妃 (Celestial Consort) in 1278.⁶ The Ming 明 (1368–1644) and Qing 清 (1644–1911) governments continued this type of state-supported activity. For example, Emperor Chengzu 成祖 (r. 1403–1424) bestowed on her an imperial title, Celestial Consort of Sublime Numinosity, Glorious Response, Magnanimous Humanity, and Universal Salvation, Who Protects the State and Guards the People (*huguo bimin miaoling zhaoying hongren puji tianfei* 護國庇民妙靈昭應弘仁普濟天妃) in the seventh year of the Yongle 永樂 reign (1409).⁷ In addition, the Qing Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (1735–1796) granted Mazu the new title, Compassionate Celestial Empress of Numinous Manifestations and Illuminous Response (*zhaoling xianying renci tianhou* 昭靈顯應仁慈天后), in 1737.⁸

With the aid of imperial sponsorship (from the Song to the Qing dynasty), the Mazu cult eventually grew from a local to a national cult, and became especially popular in Southeast China. Moreover, during this process of incorporating Mazu into the state pantheon, the state and the Confucian literati created a large number of historical accounts and full-fledged mythological lore to glorify the deity. One of the early narratives that included various mythical stories about Mazu is the *Record of the Sagely Manifestation of the Celestial Consort* (*Tianfei xiansheng lu* 天

⁶ See Song Lian 宋濂 ed., *Yuanshi* 元史, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Shizhai juan dierji* 媽祖文獻史料彙編：史摘卷 第二輯 (Beijing: Beijing dang'an chubanshe 北京檔案出版社, 2007), pp. 8-9.

⁷ See "Li," in Xufu 徐溥 (1428-1499) ed., *Ming huidian* 明會典, vol. 96, *Siku quanshu wenyuange ben* 四庫全書文淵閣本 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1987).

⁸ *Qingdai Mazu shiliao huibian* 清代媽祖史料匯編, (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe 中國檔案出版社, 2003), pp. 115-116.

妃顯聖錄).⁹ It was compiled by local Confucian literati and attributed to a monk Shi Zhaocheng 釋照乘 (c. 1644), who took charge of the Mazu temple at the Meizhou Island during the seventeenth century. This hagiography of the goddess became one of the most influential sources on Mazu's origin and the miraculous deeds attributed to her. In addition to hagiographical texts compiled by Confucian scholars, Daoist priests also attempted to incorporate the Mazu cult into a Daoist framework by writing scriptures and liturgical texts dedicated to Mazu.

Along with the state patronage and the promotion of her cult by Confucian and Daoist elites, the goddess also became one of the most popular female deities among the common people, as indicated by the large amount of oral legends recorded in local gazetteers and other popular sources. Nowadays, Mazu still plays important roles in Chinese sociocultural and religious landscapes, as the second most popular goddess, after Guanyin 觀音, the Buddhist embodiment of compassion. Her cult gradually spread from Fujian province to other Chinese coastal region, and then to Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia, and America, through Chinese immigrants. Accordingly, studying this goddess can contribute not only to our understanding of religion in China, but also in other parts of East Asia and among the Chinese diasporas.

Survey of Existing Scholarship

As a popular goddess in China and elsewhere, Mazu has drawn considerable attention from scholars in the field of Chinese religions. Previous historical, ethnographic, and iconographic research has examined varied aspects of the Mazu cult. However, many gaps still remain. A brief survey of existing scholarship on Mazu highlights those gaps, which my

⁹ *Tianfei xiansheng lu* 天妃顯聖錄 (*Record of the Sagely Manifestation of the Celestial Consort*), compiled by Zhaocheng 照乘 (c. 1644). The text used in this chapter comes from Jiang Weitan 蔣維鏞 ed., *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan shangbian* 媽祖文獻史料彙編：著錄卷 上編, pp. 68-103.

dissertation hopes to fill. One of the most significant gaps is the failure of previous studies to pay sufficient attention to gender issues and women's roles in the goddess worship.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Japanese ethnographers started to research the worship of Mazu in Taiwan, then a colony of Japan. Some Chinese scholars have also touched upon this topic, primarily through collecting and organizing primary sources on Mazu worship, thereby revealing the connection between imperial patronage and the popularity of the Mazu cult in late imperial China. For example, Li Xianzhang 李獻章's book, *Study on Mazu Worship* (Maso Shinkō ken kyū), provides a comprehensive historical survey of the Mazu cult and its spread in Taiwan and Japan.¹⁰ Moreover, Li also deals with primary sources on Mazu, dating from 1123 to 1650, with a special focus on her state canonization through conferring honorific titles upon her by various imperial governments.

Likewise, Western scholars have paid some attention to the Mazu cult. The earliest English publication dealing with the Mazu cult is James Watson's article, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou (Empress of Heaven) along the South China Coast, 960–1960."¹¹ He discusses the development of the cult of the goddess Tian Hou (Mazu), primarily centering on its promotion from the Song dynasty to the 1960s. Watson explores the transformation of the Mazu cult as a religious symbol, which "is traced through several links in the power hierarchy of traditional China."¹² His discussion of Mazu as state-promoted goddess starts with "state bureaucrats and passes down to the local elite, then to educated peasants,

¹⁰ Li Xianzhang 李獻章, *Maso Shinkō ken kyū 媽祖信仰の研究*, (Tokyo, 1979).

¹¹ See James L Watson, "Standardizing the Gods," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 292-324.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 295.

illiterate tenants, and finally to illiterate women and boat people.”¹³ Although Watson notes that women are important agents in the transformation of the Mazu cult, his fieldwork data only emphasizes “women’s personalistic vision of T’ien Hou that is not necessarily opposed to the various male representations.”¹⁴ In this respect, his top-down study offers few insights into the ways that both literate and illiterate women approached the Mazu cult in late imperial China. My study proves that women’s “personalistic vision of Mazu cult” stood in sharp contrast to the various male representations, further illustrating the different agencies underlying multiple representations of the goddess.

Additionally, Judith M. Boltz’s article, “In Homage to T’ien-fei,” examines the way that Mazu was incorporated into the Daoist pantheon, with a focus on textual and doctrinal analysis of a Daoist canonical text, titled *Taishang laojun shuo tianfei jiuku lingyan jing* 太上老君說天妃救苦靈驗經.¹⁵ Like Watson’s work, Boltz’s article not only provides a survey of the Mazu cult through historical and textual studies, but also touches upon its popular aspects. Nevertheless, both of them do not delve into the particular ways in which Chinese women have worshipped the goddess.

Recently, an increasing number of scholars have become interested in the study of the Mazu cult in contemporary China and Taiwan. Relevant publications include Hsun Chang’s “Incense-offering and Obtaining the Magical Power of Qi: The Mazu (Heavenly Mother) Pilgrimage in Taiwan”; Murray A. Rubinstein’s MA thesis, “The Revival of the Mazu Cult and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 321.

¹⁵ See Judith M. Boltz, “In Homage to T’ien-fei,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (106/1986), pp. 211-232.

of Taiwanese Pilgrimage to Fujian”; and Mei-hui Yang’s “Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints.”¹⁶ These works all focus on the revival of the Mazu cult in contemporary Taiwan and Fujian, primarily through ethnographies of Taiwanese pilgrimages to the major religious sites centered on Mazu in Fujian, especially the founding temple of the Mazu cult in Meizhou. These articles also highlight the interaction between the Mazu cult in mainland China and Taiwan, in terms of the relevant social, religious, and political backgrounds. While recognizing the importance of the resurgence of Mazu in contemporary life, I am more interested in examining the historical evolution of the cult of Mazu among various religious actors, including women, state actors, and local elites.

The scholarship on the Mazu cult continues to grow and expand to a variety of topics and fields. For example, Vivian-Lee Nyitray’s two articles, “The Sea Goddess and the Goddess of Democracy” and “Becoming the Empress of Heaven: The Life and Bureaucratic Career of Mazu,” focus on the transformation of Mazu’s images and functions from late imperial China to modern China and Taiwan.¹⁷ Due to the sociopolitical differentiation of the Taiwanese society from mainland China, the images of the goddess represented by these two groups are accordingly different: a goddess of democracy for Taiwanese devotees, and a goddess of peace promoted by Chinese government “whose sovereignty transcends the geopolitical boundaries of local nation-

¹⁶ Hsun Chang, *Incense-Offering and Obtaining the Magical Power of Qi: the Mazu (Heavenly Mother) Pilgrimage in Taiwan*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley in Anthropology, 1993; Murray A Rubinstein, *The Revival of the Mazu Cult and of Taiwanese Pilgrimage to Fujian*, MA. thes., Harvard University, Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, 1994; Mei-hui Yang’s “Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints,” in *Public Culture* 16.2 (2004), pp. 209-238.

¹⁷ Vivian-Lee Nyitray, “The Sea Goddess and the Goddess of Democracy,” in Arvind Sharma ed., *The Annual Review of Women and Religion IV* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 164-177; and “Becoming the Empress of Heaven: The Life and Bureaucratic Career of Mazu,” in Elisabeth Benard and Beverly Moon eds., *Goddess who Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 165-180.

states.”¹⁸ Additionally, Jonathan H. Lee’s PhD dissertation, “Transnational goddess on the move: Meiguo Mazu’s celestial inspection tour and pilgrimage as Chinese American culture work and vernacular Chinese religion,” explores the way that Taiwanese and Taiwanese American devotees have worshiped Mazu in San Francisco’s Chinatown temple.¹⁹ Lee’s research focuses on two crucial rituals performed in this Mazu temple: the inspection tour ritual and the trans-Pacific pilgrimages. Lee claims that both rituals function as an expression of American Chinese culture and further shape Chinese immigrants’ religious and political identity in a transnational space. Some scholars in China and Taiwan—for example Jiang Weiyan, Cai Xianghui, Lin Meirong, and Luo Chunrong—have also contributed a number of articles and books that research the Mazu cult.²⁰ All these studies provide valuable information for the historical transformation of the Mazu cult and its contemporary beliefs and practices. However, they do not relate Mazu worship to the broader landscape of Chinese popular religion and the role of women.

A new edited volume dedicated to the Mazu cult, *The Mazu Cult: Historical Studies and Cross-Cultural Comparisons*, illustrates some new trends in scholarship.²¹ First, the modern transformation of the worship of Mazu, in particular its development among the Chinese diasporas, has been drawing more scholarly attention. Second, the comparison between Mazu

¹⁸ Vivian-Lee Nyitray, “Becoming the Empress of Heaven: The Life and Bureaucratic Career of Mazu,” p. 177.

¹⁹ Jonathan H. Lee, *Transnational Goddess on the Move: Meiguo Mazu’s Celestial Inspection Tour and Pilgrimage as Chinese American Culture Work and Vernacular Chinese Religion*, Ph.D. dissertation, UC Santa Barbara, 2009.

²⁰ Lin Meirong 林美容, Zhang Xun 張珣, and Cai Xianghui 蔡相輝, *Mazu xinyang de fazhan yu bianqian* 媽祖信仰的發展與變遷 (Taipei, 2003); Cai Xiang hui 蔡相輝, *Taiwan minjian xinyang zhuanti: Mazu* 臺灣民間信仰專題：媽祖 (Taipei, 2006); Lin Meirong 林美容, *Mazu xinyang yu hanren shehui* 媽祖信仰與漢人社會 (Ha’er bin: Heilong jiang renmin chubanshe 黑龍江人民出版社, 2003); Xu Xiaowang 徐曉望, *Mazu xinyang shi yanjiu* 媽祖信仰史研究 (Fuzhou 福州: Haifeng chubanshe 海風出版社, 2007); Luo Chunrong 羅春榮 *Mazu chuanshou yanjiu: Yige haiyang daguo de shenhua* 媽祖传说研究：一个海洋大国的神话 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe 天津古籍出版社, 2009).

²¹ Jiehua Cai and Marc Nürnberger, eds, *The Mazu Cult: Historical Studies and Cross-Cultural Comparisons* (Lisboa / Macau: Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa / Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, 2017).

and other goddesses in different religious and cultural contexts suggests the significance of cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary perspectives in research of the Mazu cult. Third, the historical study of the Mazu now involves the exploration of alternative sources to official historical records, which have been the primary focus of Mazu scholarship in the past. My dissertation shares in this recent trend. While I pay close attention to canonical texts in Confucianism and Daoism regarding Mazu, I also draw heavily from textual sources not produced by religious and political elites, especially in order to understand what Mazu meant to women in responding to their existential concerns.

Objectives, Sources, and Methods

As we have seen, previous studies mainly offer either historical surveys of the Mazu cult primarily through textual analysis of official accounts and other related literature, or accounts of contemporary transformations through fieldwork observations. The lack of sufficient scholarship on women's roles in the Mazu cult reflects a larger and very serious problem in the field today. In this respect, the main contributions of this dissertation are to bridge a notable gap in existing scholarship, and to present a more accurate and complete picture of beliefs and practices related to Mazu in Chinese popular religion, augmenting Confucian and Daoist representations of the goddess with an examination of the role of women in popular religious practice. In addition, my dissertation also explores how various historical agents have contributed to the evolution of the goddess's images and representations, as they sought to pursue their interests and respond to their needs and agendas.

My dissertation will try to respond to the two following questions:

1. How has the worship of a goddess been transformed in different times and among different religious actors, especially imperial governments, local Confucian elites, Daoist clergy, and women?

2. What the specific images of Mazu have been emphasized in the texts produced or favored by different religious actors? What social and religious concerns have underpinned in different constructions of the Mazu cult?

To arrive at a broad picture of the Mazu cult and its specific roles for of different groups in the Chinese cultural and popular religious contexts, this dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach, namely, a combination of historical, textual, and ethnohistorical perspectives. Traditionally, Chinese religious scholars view historical documents and scriptures as valuable sources for the study of Chinese religious ideas and practices. In terms of Mazu, scholars have paid particular attention to the interaction between the imperial governments and Mazu's worship and to the Daoist involvement of this popular cult. For example, Li Xianzhang and other Chinese scholars 's study on the Mazu cult focus on formal documents, including government documents, standard histories, Daoist scriptures, and literati works. These formal materials provide an overview of the state representation of the goddess worship. However, the historical study of traditional historical sources, such as official documents and Mazu's hagiographies and legends written by Confucian scholars, only reflects a partial view of the Mazu cult.

Although these written sources are crucial to understand the historical development of the Mazu cult and its relationship with the imperial system, they do not show how local people, in particular local women, interacted with the Mazu cult. In addition to the official historiography, informal sources, such as miscellaneous notes (*biji* 筆記) and "petty talk" (*xiaoshuo* 小說), which are more likely to convey how the goddess was approached at the popular level, are now widely used by scholars of Chinese religious studies.²² As Edward Davis, Robert Hymns, and

²² Refer to Kang Xiaofei, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 9.

Kang Xiaofei argue, these informal sources have served as “verifiable historical accounts to fulfill different religious and political agendas.”²³

In the same vein, my study has been enriched by ethnohistorical perspectives focusing on informal sources, like the *Legend of Celestial Consort Mother* (*Tianfei niangma zhuan* 天妃娘媽傳), oral tales and stories preserved in *Pictorial Record of the Palace of Celestial Empress in Tianjin* (*Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce* 天津天后宮圖冊), and *Miscellaneous Record of Tianjin Area* (*Jinmen wenjian lu* 津門聞見錄). My study of the Mazu cult also makes thorough use of temple inscriptions, collected literary works, local gazetteers, archeological reports, Daoist ritual manuscripts, and oral legends. In doing so, it illuminates a broad spectrum of approaches to the goddess worship, ranging from those of seafarers to official accounts, and from those of household women to readings by local elites and Daoist priests. In sum, the sources and methods I use serve to provide a comparative and systematic reconstruction of the historical evolution of the Mazu cult, with a special focus on women’s roles and their approaches within the goddess worship.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the five chapters that follow, I trace the evolution of the representations of Mazu chronologically, starting from her state canonization during the Song dynasty and ending with a discussion of women’s approaches in late Ming and Qing eras. In the introduction, I discuss the historical context of the Mazu cult and its relevance in Chinese popular religion, as well as the sources and methods I use. Then, in Chapter 2, “State Canonization of the Mazu Cult,” I deal

²³ Edward Davis’s *Society and Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001); Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Late Imperial China, 1127–1276* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1990), both consider *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (*Records of the Listener*) as valuable sources to study popular religious beliefs and practices in late imperial China.

with a historical survey of how the goddess becomes appropriated by the empire. In this survey, I cover the origin and developments of a trans-local cult, primarily through the granting of titles, the incorporation of rituals to the goddess into the Registers of Sacrifice, and the establishment of official Mazu temples. Historical documents and other texts trace the State institutionalization to the Song dynasty, primarily through conferring honorific titles upon Mazu. This state-approved activity was continued by the imperial governments of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. In the process of state canonization, the imperial governments attempted to control the cult of Mazu and emphasize her special contribution in imperial affairs. Images of Mazu approved and promoted by imperial authorities functioned to justify various state economic and political interests and, therefore, they constructed the goddess as part and parcel of an imperial metaphor.

Chapter 3, “Localist Confucian Promotion of Mazu Worship,” mainly deals with Confucian literature featuring Mazu, in particular legends and hagiographies written by local Confucian literati in the Putian district. Additionally, it examines how this literature contributed to establishing an idealized image of the goddess that benefited or supported certain Confucian values and local agendas. By closely reading Confucian sources, this chapter explores three features of the evolving Mazu images. First, the multifunctional Confucian images of Mazu emphasize her services to the imperial government, dovetailing with the process of state canonization discussed in the previous chapter. Second, local Confucian literati constructed a family lineage for Mazu by associating her familial and social background with the most prestigious local lineage, Lin. Third, the emphasis of Mazu as a filial daughter reflects the integration of core Confucian values, such as filial piety, into the Mazu cult, importing a dominant male interpretation of what it means to be a female.

Chapter 4, “Confucian Critiques and Alternative Perspectives,” explores other Confucian sources that offer alternative representations of the Mazu cult within Confucian circles, in contrast to the dominant Confucian image of the goddess. This chapter also discusses two different interpretations of the Mazu: integrating Mazu into the Confucian cosmological framework, and criticizing popular religious beliefs and practices associated with the Mazu cult. These two interpretations illustrate Confucian negative perceptions of popular religious practices and the general concerns for social order among Confucian literati and local officials. Their negative attitude toward popular religious practices reflected the cultural and social underpinnings of a patriarchal society, especially in reference to the issue of gender.

Chapter 5, “Daoist Canonization of the Mazu Cult,” discusses the way Daoists constructed the Mazu cult through a compilation of canonical scriptures, Daoist rituals, and the sponsoring the establishment and management of Mazu temples. The discussion of Daoist canonization also deals with the general patterns of interaction between Daoism and popular religion. In the process of Daoist canonization of popular cults, Daoists priests intentionally promoted their Daoist interpretation of popular deities as integral parts of Daoist pantheon, while downplaying certain popular religious aspects of the Mazu cult.

Chapter 6, “Women’s Approaches to the Mazu Cult,” returns to popular religion, investigating the role of Mazu in the lives of women and children. This chapter starts with a discussion of the limits of Western feminist theoretical models to explain the relationship between goddess worship and female devotees. I argue that the religious practices of Chinese women vis-à-vis Mazu illustrate forms of agency that cannot be fully captured by the expectations of Western feminism, demonstrating the need to understand the goddess in her specific religious and social contexts. Through a textual analysis of miracle tales, preserved in

oral traditions, and other non-Confucian texts, I show how Mazu is represented primarily as a motherly goddess with multiple roles. These include a protector of women suffering the pain of childbirth, a fertility goddess ensuring the safe birth and healthy growth of children, and a role model for women to resist marriage in the quest for their own spiritual development. By examining the popular images of Mazu, this chapter reinterprets and augments the patriarchal constructions of Mazu. A substantial section of this chapter explores women's special approaches to Mazu worship, including their participation in daily religious practices and the celebration of religious festivals dedicated to Mazu, which reflect their particular religious experiences and feminine concerns. I argue that women's domestic and public participation in cultic activities served to create special spaces for women to express their religious piety, form a relatively autonomous identity, and develop a sense of agency in late imperial China.

The concluding chapter briefly reviews the whole research project and summarizes the important findings of my dissertation. It argues that the worship of Mazu should not be limited to official and Confucian interpretations. A multiplicity of approaches to the cult—in the popular religious, Confucian, and Daoist contexts—are essential in achieving a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the Mazu cult and a broader picture of Chinese religion. The conclusion also reaffirms the significance of the Mazu cult for the study of Chinese religion.

CHAPTER 2 STATE CANONIZATION OF THE GOODDESS: AN IMPERIAL METAPHOR

This chapter explores the role that the imperial Chinese state played in the development of the Mazu cult. I argue that the state was central in the canonization of Mazu, elevating her from a polyvalent local object of devotion to a key deity of a national cult that strongly reflected official ideology. State canonization refers to a series of rules, procedures, and institutions whereby the state granted official recognition and status to local deities. In the protracted process of state canonization, the imperial government applied three deeply intertwined strategies to standardize and promote a range of local beliefs and practices: the conferral of official titles, the incorporation of local gods and goddesses into the register of sacrifices, and the construction of official temples. In this chapter we see how Confucian officials, especially those at the top of the social hierarchy, were particularly involved in sending petitions for imperial titles, compiling official records, taking charge of official sacrifices, and building Mazu temples. As a result of these interwoven processes, Mazu became associated with domestic defense and warfare, the protection of government officials, and the involvement in political endeavors. From the Song to the Qing dynasty, through imperial patronage, the Mazu cult gradually grew from a local to a national cult. It became especially popular in the Southeast, but it also gained foothold in other parts of China.

Through careful study and textual analysis of official documents and local gazetteers, in this chapter I demonstrate the subtle ways in which the state imposed a high level of cultural integration and homogeneity in regard to regional and local cults, thereby transforming popular religious performance and experience. The chapter starts with a discussion of the Song dynasty's policy of granting imperial titles to local deities as one way to incorporate local deities into the official pantheon. That is followed by a historical survey of imperial titles dedicated to Mazu.

These imperial titles functioned to construct Mazu as a state protector, who thus became associated with the agendas of the imperial state. The second section describes the construction of official Mazu temples. The third section discusses the historical process of incorporating Mazu into the Register of Sacrifices, through which the imperial government developed a standardized ceremony devoted to Mazu. As I argue in the last section, the process of state canonization operated as an ideological expression of the imperial government, as well as a justification and reinforcement of imperial authority. Accordingly, state canonization of popular deities was an extension of imperial control and surveillance over popular religion. However, as we will see, such attempt to redefine the character of local religious beliefs and practices from above, and from the center, was not fully successful, as local believers, particularly women, continued to worship Mazu in the context of their everyday lives, in diverse and often personal ways.

Granting of Official Titles

During the Southern Song era (1127–1279), China experienced one of the most important changes in the religious sphere: the formation of a popular religious pantheon. In previous centuries, most local gods were worshiped only within the local village, where they originated, rather than being recognized by the central government. Starting in the late eleventh century, the imperial government began to grant local gods and goddesses titles on a large scale, as a form of state recognition of their perceived importance. This section explores the administrative procedures of the title-granting system. Specifically, it examines how the imperial government transformed Mazu, originally a goddess worshiped in local communities, into a state approved deity, with the key role of a state protector. In essence, the state ended up appropriating the goddess for its own political and economic interests.

The Song government developed a bureaucratic procedure of awarding a plaque or a title to a specific deity, which can be either male or female.¹ That is described in *History of the Song Dynasty* (*Songshi* 宋史), “Treatise on Ritual” (Lizhi ba 禮志八):

凡天下名在地誌，功及生民，宮觀陵廟，名山大川能興雲雨者，並加崇飾，增入祀典。熙甯復詔應祠廟祈禱靈驗，而未有爵號，並以名聞。於是太常博士王古請：「自今諸神祠無爵號者賜廟額，已賜額者加封爵，初封侯，再封公，次封王，生有爵位者從其本封。婦人之神封夫人，再封妃。其封號者初二字，再加四字。如此，則錫命馭神，恩禮有序。」

All under heaven whose names are recorded in gazetteers, who are beneficial to people, and who have temples and tombs, and who can make cloud and rain in famous mountains and great rivers should be venerated and added into the Register of Sacrifices. According to the second imperial edict of the Xining reign (1068–1077), the names of those who should be enshrined by virtue of responding luminously to prayers, but who are not entitled yet are to be reported. Hence, a chamberlain at the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, Wang Gu (c. 1080), petitioned: “From now on, all shrines without [official] titles should be bestowed temple plaques. Those who have already received plaques should be elevated in stature with [appropriate] ranks, initially marquis, secondly duke, and lastly king. Those who had titles when alive should follow their initial titles. The female deities should be entitled initially as lady, then consort. The initial title contains two characters, and elevated titles have four characters. Thus, the imperial edict will be in charge of deities; and graces and rites will be in order.”²

Wang Gu’s petition made it clear that one deity could be granted a series of titles. That means the central government would recognize continued miracles performed by the same deity in two ways: first, by promoting the deities’ ranks from marquis to lord, and then to king; second, by increasing the number of characters in deity’s title from two to four to six. By the end of the Southern Song era, the maximum number of characters of a deity’s title expanded to eight. Basically, higher number indicates greater importance.

¹ See Hansen, *Changing Gods in Late Imperial China, 1127–1276* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 91–92.

² “Treatise of Ritual Eight” (lizhi ba 禮志八), in Tuotuo 脫脫 (1314–1355) ed., *Songshi* 宋史 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju 鼎文書局, 1978), vol. 105, pp. 2553–2554.

In addition to the format of the titles, the central Southern Song government developed a standardized system of administrative procedures for granting plaques and titles.³ Local officials forwarded petitions for titles, conducted investigations into a given god's history of performing miracles, and made recommendations on behalf of the deities. This system started with a petition forwarded to the central government. The format of the petition included the name of the deity, depiction of the miracles performed by the deity, and the names of the people petitioning for a title to be granted to their deity. After receiving the petition, the central government would dispatch an official to verify the evidence of deity's miracles, as reported in the petition. After that, a second official from a nearby prefecture would review the same evidence. Having received the petition, the imperial secretariat would forward the case to the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. The Ministry of Rites was responsible for the final approval of the petition and the conferral of official titles.⁴

The granting title system was not totally controlled by the central government, which attempted to impose a standardized system on the local community. Local communities could take advantage of this system for their own agenda. Specifically, local officials who responded to petitions depended on local elites to rule locally, while local elites who supported the gods

³ For more details on administrative procedures for granting plaques and titles during the Song dynasty, see Hansen, *Changing Gods in Late Imperial China, 1127–1276*, pp. 91–92.

⁴ The Board of Rites or Ritual Academy (Liyuan 禮院) is an agency subordinated to The Court of Sacrifices (Taichang si 太常寺) that was responsible for writing ritual regulations and training ritual apprentices. The Court of Imperial Sacrifices, indirectly subordinated to the Ministry of Rites (Libu 禮部), was generally in charge of the major state sacrificial ceremonies according to ritual regulations prescribe by the Ministry of Rites and that was also responsible recommending imperial titles of popular deities starting from the Song dynasty. For more details on Taichangsi, see *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, p.476. The Ministry of Rites, one of the core offices of the central government, was generally responsible for “overseeing all imperial and court rituals, for codifying rituals, for supervising state-sponsored education, for monitoring Daoist and Buddhist communities.” For more details on Libu, see *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, pp. 306-307.

needed official recognition for their gods as one way to enhance their social status.⁵ Local elites needed local officials' assistance through which they could send petitions for granting titles. Local officials may have supported these same deities to achieve solidarity and economic prosperity in their communities.⁶ In the process of state canonization, local elites also adopted the title-granting system to exert and strengthen their local agency. Following this argument, deities and cults popular in their own region attracted local elites' attention as part of a hierarchical network of patronage. By seeking canonization for a local deity, local elites attained and maintained their positions in local society. Powerful lineages sometimes claimed an ancestral tie to popular deities to gain official honors for the whole lineage, as in the case of Mazu's association with the Lin lineage at Meizhou Island. This will be the focus of Chapter 3, which deals with the Confucian construction of the Mazu cult.

The whole process of Mazu's state canonization unfolded within the confines of this kind of system. Mazu was first granted a temple plaque, and later she was awarded imperial titles. She was promoted first to the status of Lady, and then to Consort. According to *The Collected Important Documents of the Song* (*Song hui yao* 宋會要), the imperial government of the Northern Song dynasty first granted Mazu a temple plaque, Timely Salvation (*Shunji* 順濟).⁷ That was meant as a recognition of her role in saving an imperial emissary from a terrible storm on his way to Korea. As claimed by the emissary, the goddesses helped his fleet pass through

⁵ See Hansen, *Changing Gods in Late Imperial China*, pp. 91–92.

⁶ See Hansen, *Changing Gods in Late Imperial China*, pp. 86–95.

⁷ The English translation of the title “Shunji 順濟” comes from Fullin Shi's “Old Customs and New Fashions: An Examination of Features of Shamanism in Song China,” in John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone eds., *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960–1368)* Volume 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 255.

rough storms and reach its destination safely.⁸ Soon afterward, the Southern Song government bestowed a series of related honorific titles upon Mazu. As recorded in *The Gazetteer of Lin'an* (*Lin'an zhi* 臨安志), from the Chunyou 淳祐 reign (1241–1252):

順濟聖妃廟，在艮山門外。考之廟記，神本莆田林氏女。數著靈異，祠於莆之聖墩。宣和五年賜順濟廟額。紹興二十六年封靈惠夫人。紹興三十年加封昭應。乾道二年加封崇福。淳熙十二年加封善利。紹熙三年改封靈惠妃。慶元四年加助順……

The Temple of the Holy Consort of Timely Salvation is located outside of the main gate of Genshan. According to the temple inscription, originally the deity was a daughter of the Lin family from Putian. She manifested miracles time and again, and was enshrined in a holy tomb in the Putian district. In the fifth year of the Xuanhe reign (1123), the court bestowed her with a temple plaque, Timely Salvation. In the twenty-sixth year of Shaoxing reign (1156), she was given the [title of] Lady of Numinous Wisdom. In the thirtieth year of the Shaoxing reign (1160), she was granted [the] additional title [of] Glorious Response. In the second year of the Qiandao reign (1166), the court bestowed an additional title upon her, Exalting Blessing. In the twelfth year of the Chunxi reign (1185), she received an additional title, Virtuous Benefit. In the third year of the Shaoxi reign (1210), the court changed her title to Imperial Consort of Numinous Wisdom. In the fourth year of the Qingyuan reign (1198), she was granted additional title, Assisting Smoothly.⁹

The Southern Song government granted thirteen titles to Mazu, ostensibly to reward the goddess for her loyalty and miraculous assistances related to imperial affairs.¹⁰ Similar to other honorific titles, Mazu's special contribution in repelling sea pirates' invasion led to her promotion as The Lady of Numinous Wisdom and Glorious Response (*Linghui zhaoying furen* 靈惠昭應夫人). Later, based on a belief that she played significant role in ending a drought and an epidemic,

⁸ See Li Xianzhang, *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, p. 89.

⁹ Shi E 施諤 (c.1252) ed., *Chunyou lin'an zhi* 淳祐臨安志, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, p. 269.

¹⁰ See Li Xianzhang, *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, pp. 10–14.

Mazu was promoted from Lady to The Consort of Numinous Wisdom (*Linghui fei* 靈惠妃) by the imperial court.

The Song official texts repeatedly provide evidence about how an additional and more elevated title was granted to the goddess for her contribution to the state's safety and prosperity. Specifically, the Song government raised her status to Imperial Consort, and expanded her title to eight characters, the maximum number of characters used to recognize and reward a powerful deity. Mazu's imperial rise, as seen through the granting higher titles, was closely linked to her exceptional response in saving the local people from flood in the Zhejiang 浙江 area.

嘉定三年，浙江潮水齧隄。禱之，應。易封靈惠助順嘉應英烈妃。

In the third year of the Jiading reign (1210), the tidal waters in Zhejiang province eroded the embankments. [The people] prayed to the goddess and received her [felicitous] response. Consequently, [she] was granted the title, Consort of Numinous Wisdom, Assisting Smoothly, Auspiciously Responding, Brave and Chaste.¹¹

According to the official records cited above, Mazu's miraculous control of the flood and tidewaters contributed to her promotion in the imperial pantheon of the Song era. This specific contribution was closely linked to the Song government's concerns at that time. As recorded in both *History of the Song Dynasty* and *Local Gazetteer of Lin'an* (*Lin'an xianzhi* 臨安縣志), areas around Qiantang 錢塘 river in Zhejiang province were affected by a flood, caused by tidal water from the river. The construction and renovation of an embankment around Qiantang river became one of the main concerns of the Song government, in particular during the Southern Song era. Li Qu 李衢 (1210–1261), the investigating censor (*jiancha yushi* 監察御史), wrote a petition, which attested to the fact that the tidal water near the Lin'an area demolished the

¹¹ Shi E ed., *Chunyou lin'an zhi*, p. 269.

embankment and destroyed the nearby villages.¹² To protect the local people, the Song government rebuilt the Qiantang embankments during the fourth year of the Baoyou 寶祐 reign (1256). In line with the state's agenda, Mazu was designated as the protector of the embankments along the Qiantang river.

Mazu's contribution to the Song state's safety and prosperity was also reflected in her assistance of the Song government's fight with "barbarians." Specifically, the Song government was threatened by a Jurchen invasion (1115–1234), which led to the retreat of the Song court to southern China. The retreat marked the end of the Northern Song era and the beginning of the Southern Song period. During the period of Jin-Song wars, Jurchens' military threat became the main concern of the Song government. In this situation, the goddess became closely associated with Song's fight with the Jin state. Ding Bogui's 丁伯桂 (1171–1237) *Shunji shengfei miaoji* 順濟聖妃廟記 (dated 1229) further proved that Mazu's divine manifestation was crucial to Song's triumph over Jin in the second year of the Kaixi 開禧 reign (1206).¹³ This record indicates supposed Mazu's loyalty to the Song government and her contribution in assisting Song's fight against the Jin.

The large-scale conferral of plaques and titles reflected the imperial agenda of the Southern Song dynasty, and was meant to obtain blessings for the ruling dynasty and its subjects. The Southern Song era witnessed a critical transition in Chinese history, "the turn to locality in

¹² Qian Shuoyou 潛說友 (1216–1277) ed., *Xianchun lin'an zhi* 咸淳臨安志, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, p. 271; Tuotuo 脫脫 ed., "Kequ zhi qi 河渠志七," in *Songshi* 宋史, vol. 97 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1977), p. 2397.

¹³ The original text comes from Ding Bogui's 丁伯桂 (1171–1237), *Shunji shengfei miaoji* 順濟聖妃廟記, in Jiang Weitan 蔣維燾 ed. *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian diyiji: Beiji juan* 媽祖文獻史料彙編 (第一輯) 碑記卷, pp. 2-4.

the twelfth century.”¹⁴ Scholars, such as Valerie Hansen and Mizukoshi Tomo, have pointed out that the retreat of the Song court to southern China marked a major shift from national to local sphere of interests, which included a gradual increase in the granting of titles and honors at the local level as a way to rebuild local alliances.¹⁵ These scholars argue that the Southern Song’s unstable political situation is a major reason for the extensive conferral of noble titles to deities associated with local cults.¹⁶ For example, Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127–62), who was responsible for the reconstruction of the entire government in South China, decreed that “in the prefectures where the court had taken refuge (namely, Whenzhou 溫州, Taizhou 泰州, and Mingzhou 明州), the Court of Imperial Sacrifices should issue promotions to the gods of all shrines that already had name plaques and noble titles, and confer titles or plaques on gods and shrines that had one but not the other. The local authorities were also to perform sacrifices to mark the conferrals.”¹⁷ Gaozong’s case demonstrates how the Southern Song state resorted to powerful deities for supernatural protection from foreign invasion, along with the construction of new form of cultural orthodoxy in the south, in their struggle against the Mongol threat.¹⁸ In

¹⁴ See Robert Hymes, *Way and By Way: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 4.

¹⁵ On the study of the Southern Song’s religion policy and political context, see Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*. Mizukoshi, “Sōdai shakai to shibyō shinkō no tenkai: chiikikaku to shite no shibyō no shutsugen,” *Toyoshi kenkyū* 60/4 (2002), pp. 1-38.

¹⁶ See Patricia Ebrey’s article, “Song Government Policy,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960-1368)*, Volume 1, John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 92–95. Ebrey argues along the same lines that key changes in political environment of the Southern Song help to explain the granting title system.

¹⁷ The original text comes from Xusong 徐松 (1781–1848), *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 (Beijing, 1957), “Li,” 42.1a. The English translation comes from Patricia Ebrey’s article, “Song Government Policy,” p. 94.

¹⁸ John Lagerwey, “Introduction,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960-1368 AD)*, p.8.

sum, standardizing the pantheon popular deities could bring blessings on the ruler and the state. This strategy of state managing of popular cults was also adopted by subsequent dynasties.

The imperial government of the Yuan 元 dynasty (1271–1368) continued this type of state-supported activity. According to *History of the Yuan Dynasty (Yuanshi 元史)*, Kublai Khan (1215–1294) conferred Mazu a new title, Celestial Consort (Tianfei 天妃), in 1278.¹⁹ Compared to the imperial titles granted by the Song government, the Yuan court upgraded her status, from consort to celestial consort. As previously noted, all these titles were conferred on the goddess for her “meritorious service” to the state. Here is a listing of imperial titles granted by the Yuan government, with a special emphasis on Mazu’s role as a state protector, from *History of the Yuan Dynasty*:

至元十五年八月乙醜，制封泉州神女號護國明著靈惠協正善慶顯濟天妃；

至元二十五年六月，詔加封南海明著天妃為廣祐明著天妃；

大德三年二月壬申，加泉州海神曰護國庇民明著天妃；

天曆二年十月己亥，加封天妃為護國庇民廣濟福惠明著天妃；

至正十四年十月甲辰，詔加號海神為輔國護聖庇民廣濟福惠明著天妃。

On the fourteenth day of the eighth month, during the fifteenth year of the Zhiyuan reign (1278), the imperial court ordered to canonize the Divine Goddess of Quanzhou with a title, Celestial Consort of Illustrious Manifestations, Numinous Wisdom, Assisting Righteousness, Virtuous Blessings, and Remarkable Salvation, Who Protects the State;²⁰

In the sixth month of the twenty-fifth year of the Zhiyuan reign (1288), the imperial government decreed to confer an additional title, whereas Celestial Consort of

¹⁹ The original text comes from *Yuanshi 元史*, ed. by Song Lian 宋濂 (1310-1381), in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Shizhai juan dierji 媽祖文獻史料彙編：史摘卷 第二輯* (Beijing: Beijing dangan chubanshe 北京檔案出版社, 2007), pp. 8-9.

²⁰ See Song Lian ed., *Yuanshi*, vol. 10, p. 8. The English translation of the title “Mingzhu 明著” comes from Vivian-Lee Nyitray, “Becoming the Empress of Heaven: The Life and Bureaucratic Career of Mazu,” in Elisabeth Benard and Beverly Moon eds., *Goddesses Who Rule* (Oxford, 2000), p. 170.

Illustrious Manifestation of the South Sea became Celestial Consort of Extensive Protection and Illustrious Manifestation;²¹

On the twentieth day of the second month, during the third year of the Dade reign (1299) the imperial court bestowed to the Sea Goddess of Quanzhou an elevated title, Celestial Consort of Illustrious Manifestation Who Protects the State and Guards the People;²²

On the nineteenth day of the tenth month during the second year of the Tianli reign (1329), [the imperial court] elevated the Celestial Consort to Celestial Consort of Extensive Salvation, Beneficent Wisdom, Illustrious Manifestation Who Protects the State and Guards the People;²³

On the twelfth day of the tenth month of the fourteenth year of the Zhizheng reign (1354), an imperial edit bestowed an elevated title to the Sea Goddess, Celestial Consort of Extensive Salvation, Beneficent Wisdom, and Illustrious Manifestation, Who Assists the State, Protects the Emperor, and Guards the People.²⁴

All these titles stressed Mazu's role as "goddess of protecting the state and guarding the people."

In other words, she is lauded for her loyalty to the state and her compassionate protection of the people. The role of Mazu, as a symbol of imperial power and a protector of Yuan state's prosperity, is further attested by her protection of grain transportations.

The goddess's crucial role in grain transport is further attested to in the following two imperial edicts. First, an imperial edict issued by Emperor Shizu 世祖 (r. 1260–1294) of the Yuan dynasty.

惟而有神，保護糧道。糧舟漕運，恃神為命。威靈赫赫，應驗昭彰。

It was only because of you, goddess, that the waterway for the grain ships is protected. The grain transportation system relies on you for its survival. Your august power and majestic response are remarkably manifested.²⁵

²¹ See Song Lian ed., *Yuanshi*, vol. 15, p. 8.

²² See Song Lian ed., *Yuanshi*, vol. 20, p. 8.

²³ See Song Lian ed., *Yuanshi*, vol. 33, p. 8.

²⁴ See Song Lian ed., *Yuanshi*, vol. 42, p. 9.

²⁵ See Song Lian ed., *Yuanshi*, vol. 15, p. 8.

In the second instance, another imperial edict issued by Emperor Shizu emphasizes Mazu's contribution to the imperial state, stating that "she was able to protect the grain transportation every year and benefit the state; she defended the country with loyalty; with her compassion and wisdom, she kept the people safe"²⁶

The above edicts indicate how the cult of Mazu was linked with the state's economic and political concerns, that is, with the state's stability, which was heavily dependent on the efficient operation of the grain transportation system. Officials of Yuan government stressed the significance of Mazu's assistance in water transportation, through which the Yuan government shipped grains from the South to Dadu 大都, the Yuan capital. In "Preface to the Shrine of the Celestial Consort" (Songci tianfei liang shizhe xu 送祠天妃兩使者序), composed by Ju Ji 虞集 (1272–1348), who held the position of grand academician (*daxueshi* 大學士), we find clear reference of the crucial role of grain transportation during the Yuan dynasty.²⁷ Starting from Emperor Shizu, the imperial government transported grains from the south to support the capital in the north every year. In order for the Yuan government to successfully provide sufficient food for thousands of officials and the general populace, it needed an efficient system of sea transportation. Given the unpredictability of the seas and the rudimentary technologies and practices of navigation, the officials in charge of the grain transportation and the seafarers had to resort mostly to the goddess's protection. Therefore, it was in the interest of the emperor to recognize and uphold Mazu's role in "protecting the state and guarding the people."

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ju Ji 虞集 (1272- 1348), "Songci tianfei liang shizhe xu," 送祠天妃兩使者序 in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Sanwen juan*, p. 11.

The successive granting of official titles to Mazu continued during the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644). In the seventh year of the Yongle 永樂 reign (1409), Emperor Chengzu 成祖 (r. 1403–1424) bestowed on her an imperial title, Celestial Consort of Sublime Numinosity, Glorious Response, Magnanimous Humanity, and Universal Salvation, Who Protects the State and Guards the People (*huguo bimin miaoling zhaoying hongren puji tianfei* 護國庇民妙靈昭應弘仁普濟天妃).²⁸

The official documents of the Ming dynasty stress Mazu's important role in protecting official envoys from sea storms. For example, two inscriptions at Tianfei temples, in Liujia gang 劉家港 (1431) and Changle 長樂 (1431), make reference to Mazu's divine protection of imperial envoys from dangerous storms at sea.²⁹ As stated in “Record of Celestial Consort's Numinous Response” (*Tianfei zhishen lingying ji* 天妃之神靈應記),

溟渤之間或遇風濤，即有神燈燭於帆檣，靈光壹臨，即變險為夷即变险为夷，雖在顛連亦保無虞。

In the midst of the rushing waters, it happened that, when there were billowing waves, suddenly a divine lantern was seen shining at the masthead; as soon as that miraculous light appeared the danger was appeased, so that, even with the peril of capsizing, one felt reassured and that there was no cause for fear.³⁰

²⁸ See “Li,” in Xufu 徐溥 (1428-1499) ed., *Ming huidian* 明會典, vol.96, *Siku quanshu wenyuange ben* 四庫全書文淵閣本 (Shanghai 上海: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1987).

²⁹ “Loudong liujia gang tianfei gong shike tongfan shiji bei 婁東劉家港天妃宮石刻通番事跡碑,” in Qiang 錢穀 (1508-1579) ed., *Wudu wensui xuji* 吳都文粹續集, vol. 28, *Wenyuan ge sibu quanshu ben* 文淵閣四庫全書本, pp. 36-38. The original Chinese text reads: [一称神号，感应如响，即有神灯烛于帆檣，灵光一临，则变险为夷，舟师恬然，咸保无虞.]

³⁰ The inscription in the Tianfei palace of Changle is entitled as “Changle tianfei zhi shen lingying ji” 長樂天妃之神靈應記, in *Mazu wenxian shilao huibian: Beiji juan*, p. 45. The inscription is preserved in The Exhibition Museum of Zheng he's Historical Relics in Nanshan of Changle city (Nanshan Zhenghe shiji chenlie guan 南山鄭和史迹陳列館). For the English translation, see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Volume 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 558.

The Liujia gang and Changle inscriptions suggest that the granting imperial title was inseparable from the Ming government's policy and ideology, especially its maritime policy. Specifically, Emperor Chengzu initiated seven Ming-era maritime voyages of the Chinese "treasure" fleets between 1405 and 1433. Admiral Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1433) was commissioned to command the treasure fleets for the expeditions, which are well-known as "Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas." The voyages served to showcase Chinese power and wealth to the known world. These maritime journeys were part of the Ming government's plan to expand the nation's tributary system and sphere of influence through both military and political supremacy, thus incorporating various states into the greater (Chinese) world order, under Ming suzerainty.³¹ The cult of Mazu, then, is not only connected with the protection of the imperial state but with the projection of its power.

Mazu's close connection with the Ming government's maritime policy is further proved by a stele held at the Palace of Taifei in Nanjing, written in 1416 by Emperor Chengzu. Titled "The Imperial Constructed Stele of the Palace of Celestial Consort of Magnanimous Benevolence and Universal Salvation" (Yuzhi hongren puji tianfigong zhi bei 御製弘仁普濟天妃宮之碑), it states: "To transmit the virtues of imperial China and civilize the people living in remote areas, Emperor Chengzu dispatched emissaries."³² In the same text, Emperor Chengzu emphasizes the goddess's divine assistance in guiding the treasure fleet to safety amid storms.

³¹ For detailed information on seven Ming-era maritime voyages of the Chinese treasure fleets, see Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007).

³² The original text comes from The Stele of the Palace of Taifei in Nanjing, entitled "Yuzhi hongren puji tianfeigong zhi bei 御製弘仁普濟天妃宮之碑" (the imperial-constructed stele of the palace of celestial consort of universal salvation and magnanimous benevolence), in Jiang Weitan ed., *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Beiji juan*, pp. 42–43.

Mazu's cult was, thus, not simply linked with the material infrastructure of imperial power—the waterways and grain transportation system—but also with the transmission of Chinese culture beyond the borders of the Middle Kingdom.

Official promotion of the Mazu cult reached its heyday during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), starting from the nineteenth year of the Kangxi 康熙 reign (c. 1680). According to the *Veritable Records of the Qing Shengzu* (*Qing shengzu shilu* 清聖祖實錄), Mazu lent her supernatural support during the military campaign of reclaiming Xiamen 廈門 from Zheng Keshuang 鄭克塽 (1670–1707), whose family occupied Xiamen (around 1645) and later Taiwan (1661) starting from Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–1662). Subsequently, Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722) conferred to Mazu a new title, Celestial Consort of Sublime Numinosity, Glorious Response, Magnanimous Humanity, and Universal Salvation, Who Protects the State and Guards the People (*huguo bimin miaoling zhaoying hongren puji tianfei* 護國庇民妙靈昭應弘仁普濟天妃).³³ Similarly, General Shi Lang 施瑯 (1621–1696) attributed his military achievement of reclaiming Taiwan from Zheng Keshuang to the aid of Mazu.³⁴ Soon after, the goddess received a higher title, Compassionate Celestial Empress of Illustrious Manifestations and Illuminous Response (*zhaoling xianying renci tianhou* 昭靈顯應仁慈天后) from Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1735–1796) in 1737.

Qing official documents refer to fifteen divine manifestations of Mazu, which involve three major spheres of state affairs. The first one refers to protecting imperial envoys dispatched

³³ The English translation of this title comes from Judith A. Boltz's article, "In Homage to T'ien-fei," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106/1 (1986), p. 217.

³⁴ See Shilang 施瑯, *Jinghai jishi* 靖海紀事 (*Record of Pacifying the Sea*), *Taiwan wenxian congkan* 臺灣文獻叢刊 No.13 (Taipei, 1960). The bestowal of honorary titles to Mazu was followed by successive emperors. During the reign of Emperor Tongzhi 同治 (1856-1875), the title granted to Mazu consisted of sixty characters.

to Ryūkyū (Okinawa). For example, it was claimed that Mazu saved several imperial envoys, such as Zhang Xueli 張學禮 (traveling to Ryūkyū in 1662–1663), Wang Ji 汪輯, and Lin Linchang 林麟焜 (traveling in 1682–1683). Those envoys were sent to perform investiture ceremonies for the king of Ryūkyū, formally acknowledging him as king on behalf of the Chinese imperial court, thus making him a tributary subordinate.³⁵

The second sphere of state concern that involves Mazu is military affairs, especially Qing's military conquering Taiwan. There is considerable evidence in Qing official documents about this specific role of Mazu, such as the memorials to the throne presented by officials who were commanded the conquest of areas in Taiwan. Wan Zhengse 萬正色 (1637–1691), the provincial commander of naval forces (*shuishi tidu* 水師提督) in Fujian province, Yao Qisheng 姚啟聖 (1623–1683), the grand governor-general (*da zongdu* 大總督), and the general Shi Lang all submitted memorials to Emperor Kangxi. In the memorials, they attribute their military achievements of reclaiming Xiamen, areas of Taiwan, and the Penghu Island from Zheng Keshuang to Mazu's divine aid. The third sphere of state affairs involves Mazu's divine protection of grain transportation. As shown in the memorial presented by the provincial governor of Jiangsu 江蘇, Tao Shu 陶澍 (1779–1839), Mazu saved thousands of grain ships from sea storms at Heishui yang 黑水洋.³⁶

Mazu's contributions to these three spheres of state affairs were closely tied to Qing's imperial agenda of expanding its supremacy to Taiwan and Penghu. The pertinent official documents stress Mazu's divine protection of the Qing warships and soldiers in suppressing the

³⁵ *Qingdai Mazu shiliao huibian* 清代媽祖史料匯編, (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe 中國檔案出版社, 2003), pp. 115-116.

³⁶ *Qingdai mazu shiliao huibian*, pp. 224-225.

“rebel” forces in Taiwan. This type of state construction of Mazu’s image also served as a key source of political legitimacy for Qing’s military campaigns. According to a memorial submitted by Chan Jibu 禪濟布, the investigating censor (*jiancha yushi* 監察御史) responsible to make an inspection tour of Taiwan in 1724, “When the Qing military forces were conquering Penghu island and Taiwan, Mazu and [an army of] heavenly soldiers appeared in the skies, celebrating the victory of Qing forces.”³⁷ By emphasizing and rewarding Mazu’s divine interventions in state affairs, Mazu became closely associated with the political and military interests of the Qing government.

All these examples indicate that the title-granting system was deployed in order to incorporate local deities such as Mazu into the state-approved pantheon, which served as a symbol of imperial power. State appropriation and re-interpretation of the popular cult centered on Mazu, which involved official recognition of the deity and the miracles she performed in order to protect the state, throws into high relief the active agency of imperial governments in the religious sphere. Over time, the goddess’s function expanded to encompass responsibilities that the state traditionally delegated to male gods, such as the safeguarding of officials, protection of the populace from banditry, and divine intervention in military and political endeavors. Granting titles and temple plaques to Mazu served to justify state policies of different imperial governments. As we have seen, each imperial government highlighted certain aspects of Mazu’s alleged contributions, in response to its evolving political concerns and economic interests.

Construction of Official Temples Devoted to Mazu

In addition to granting titles, imperial governments also standardized cultic worship centered on Mazu through the construction of temples dedicated to the goddess, which were

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

located in administrative centers throughout the empire. This policy started during the Song dynasty. As shown in two edicts issued by the Song government, constructing and repairing local temples dedicated to state-approved deities became the responsibility of local officials. An edict from 1127 specifies that the prefecture where an officially recognized temple was located should allocate money to maintain and fix the temple. An 1130 edict is more specific. In it, the central government instructs certain counties to use leftover money in their budgets for temple repair to deal with damage caused by Jurchen attacks.³⁸

Southern Song local histories provide abundant evidence of constructing Mazu temples sponsored by both the imperial and local governments. Prefects and magistrates were obliged to construct and maintain official temples dedicated to Mazu. According to Li Xianzhang and Chen Jiarong, the Song government sponsored the founding of Mazu temples in the following provinces: Fujian 福建, Zhejiang 浙江, Guangdong 廣東, Jiangsu 江蘇, and Shandong 山東.³⁹

The Yuan dynasty also witnessed the large-scale construction of Mazu temples in both the northern and the southern parts of China. As noted in *History of the Yuan Dynasty*,

廟曰靈慈。直沽，平江，周涇，泉，福，興化等處皆有廟。

Her temples were named Numinous Compassion. There were temples dedicated to her in Zhigu, Pingjiang, Zhoujing, Quanzhou, Fuzhou, Xinghua, and so on.⁴⁰

The areas listed above were significant to the grain transport system of the Yuan government, functioning as the waterway terminals. To protect the grain ships, the Yuan court initiated the

³⁸ *Song huiyao*, “Li 20”: 4a; and *Song huiyao*, “Li 20”: 4a-b.

³⁹ For more detailed information on the construction of Mazu temples during Song dynasty, see Chen Jiarong 陈佳荣, “Wanle hajiian chong shengfei—liangsong mazu fengsi bianshi,” (万里海疆崇圣妃---两宋妈祖封祀辨识) in *Ao'men mazu lunwen ji* 澳门妈祖论文集, pp. 17-26.

⁴⁰ The original text comes from *Yuanshi* 元史, ed. by Song Lian, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Shizhai juan*, p.10.

founding of official temples in honor of Mazu. In line with the granting titles system, constructing official Mazu temples indicated that the Yuan government presented Mazu as a protector of grain transport, which as previously noted was a major concern of the Yuan dynasty.

Ming official texts also contain several records concerning the construction of Mazu temples sponsored by the imperial government. For instance, Ming Emperor Chengzu ordered the construction of a temple outside the capital city of Nanjing.

永樂五年九月戊午，新建龍江天妃廟成。遣太常寺少卿朱焯祭告。時太監鄭和使古里，滿刺加諸藩國還，言神多感應，故有是命。

On the eighth day of the ninth month during the fifth year of the Yongle reign (October Eighth 1407), the Temple of Celestial Consort at Longjiang was newly constructed. [The Imperial court] dispatched the vice minister at the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, Zhu Zhuo, to deliver a sacrifice and a eulogy. At that time, the eunuch Zheng He returned home after visiting several tributary states, such as Kozhikode [Calicut, in present day Kerala, India] and Malacca (nowadays a state in Malaysia). He reported that the goddess was numinously responding to [their prayer]. Therefore, this edict was issued.⁴¹

The construction of a Mazu temple at Longjiang functioned to bolster the reigning regime and offer a veneer of religious legitimacy to the imperial rule and ideology of the Ming government. This official Mazu temple provided Emperor Chengzu with a valuable source of legitimacy, which bolstered his political authority and helped him achieve specific political ends. His policy of sending envoys to visit several tributaries as a way to bolster the political authority of the Ming empire was further legitimized by Mazu's supernatural protection for the dispatched envoys and the ship fleets.

The Ming central government not only sponsored the construction of Mazu temple at Nanjing, the early Ming capital, but also ordered local governments to sponsor building official

⁴¹ Zhang Fu 張輔 (1375-1449), ed., *Ming taizong shilu* 明太宗實錄, (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiu suo 中央研究院歷史語言研究所, 1962), vol. 71, p. 994.

temples. For example, *General Gazetteer of Great Ming Dynasty* (*Ming yitong zhi* 明一統志, 1461) mentions that local officials of the Huai'an prefecture 淮安 and Lüshun 旅順 prefecture, in the Liaodong 遼東 area (present day Liaoning 遼寧 province), were responsible for the construction of Mazu temples in their regions.⁴²

Similar to granting imperial titles, constructing official temples in honor of specific deities served to canonize the local deities as well as promote the imperial ideology. In this respect, official temples dedicated to Mazu served the important role in standardizing the local cult and validating the imperial ideology. For example, after taking over Taiwan, the Qing government sponsored the construction of new temples in Taiwan's administrative centers, as recorded in the local gazetteer of Taiwan prefecture. When the Qing government first took over the administration of Taiwan in 1727, the general surveillance circuitor (*xundao* 巡道) Wu Changzuo 吳昌祚 initiated the construction of Mazu temple, Guandi temple, and Guanyin hall in the southeast area of Taiwan.⁴³ District magistrates in Taiwan prefecture were obligated to sponsor the construction of official Mazu temples in their designated districts. According to Harry Lamley's study, during the Qing dynasty era the construction of official temples and shrines devoted to Mazu and other state-approved deities functioned to sanction the Qing government's eventual takeover of Taiwan. He states that "This new seat of government was expected to play a civilizing role in the Ko-ma-lan region and to advance Chinese culture here."⁴⁴ To promote Chinese culture in Taiwan, the Qing officials imported images of Tianhou,

⁴² The original text comes from *Daqing yitong zhi* 大清一統志, vol. 13 and vol. 15, collected in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Shizhai juan*, pp. 11-12.

⁴³ "Chongxiu Taiwan fuzhi," 重修台灣府志 (1760) in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, pp. 210-213.

⁴⁴ Harry Lamley's "The Formation of Cities: Initiative and Motivation in Building Three Walled Cities in Taiwan," in Skinner ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (California, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 195-196.

Guanyin, and Guandi; subsequently, they sponsored the construction of official temples for each of these important deities. In sum, Mazu temples served as an integral part of the Qing government's agenda to conquer and "civilize" the Taiwanese.⁴⁵

The system of patronage that enabled the imperial construction and maintenance of Mazu temples became firmly integrated into the process of state canonization. Official Mazu temples located in administrative centers were required to perform officially-sanctioned liturgies for the benefit of the state. The highest-ranking official in each administrative center was charged with the duty of performing an official ceremony at a Mazu temple twice every year. In this respect, the local officials functioned as a clerical class who ritually re-enacted the politico-religious authority of the authoritarian state, through (and at) the temple.

Incorporation into the Register of Sacrifices

In addition to granting titles and constructing official temples, state canonization of popular cults also involved other strategies, such as incorporating popular deities into the Register of Sacrifices (*sidian* 祀典). As C.K Yang notes, the system deployed in the Register of Sacrifices makes a distinction between popular and official cults.⁴⁶ The practice of keeping a register of sacrifices can be traced back to the *Book of Rites*.⁴⁷ In imperial China, including the Tang dynasty, the register of sacrifices primarily recorded the sacrificial rituals performed by the imperial government. It also contained detailed information regarding the categories of offerings and the sites for performing rituals. In the Song era, the Register of Sacrifices referred to a list of ceremonies performed by the emperor and his officials, including ceremonies and rituals

⁴⁵ James Watson, "Standardizing the Gods," pp. 302-303.

⁴⁶ On the distinction between official and popular cults, see Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, pp. 145-146.

⁴⁷ On the definition of the register of sacrifices, see Patricia Ebrey's article, "Song Government Policy," pp. 113-114.

performed by local officials at local shrines. Preparing and participating in ritual performances was one of the main responsibilities of local officials. By incorporating the cults of popular religion into the Register of Sacrifices, the imperial state was able to organize popular cults into a system of official rites, with corresponding status in the official pantheon.

Following the Song's policy, the Mazu cult was incorporated into the official pantheon under the administration of the Imperial Board of Rites, which standardized sacrifices dedicated to Mazu in accordance to the regulations of the Register of Sacrifices starting from mid-eleventh century. As recorded in *Songhui yao*, prefects and magistrates were obligated to perform official ceremonies at local Mazu temples recognized by the Song government twice each year, in the mid-months of spring and autumn. This is further attested to by "Eulogy of the Holy Consort" (Shengfei zhuwen 聖妃祝文), written by the prefect of Quanzhou 泉州, Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178–1235).⁴⁸ Based on extant records, Zhen Dexiu was responsible for performing sacrifices at the Mazu temples in Quanzhou during his term as a local official.

As we have seen, the Mazu cult was recognized and standardized by the Song government by incorporating it into the Register of Sacrifices. However, Song official documents do not make clear references regarding the imperial government sending envoys to deliver sacrifices at Mazu temples or shrines. Nor is there detailed information of official ceremonies performed at registered Mazu temples. It was from the Yuan dynasty onward that the imperial governments issued imperial edicts to dispatch envoys to perform official ceremonies at Mazu temples. According to "Treatise on Sacrifice" (*jisi zhi* 祭祀志) in the *History of the Yuan Dynasty*,

⁴⁸ Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 compiled four eulogies in honor of Mazu during 1232 to 1233. See *Xishan xiansheng zhenwen zhonggong wenji* 西山先生真文忠公文集, vol. 15, in *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, vol. 162, p. 1286.

惟南海女神靈慧夫人，至元中以護海運有奇應。加封天妃，神號積至十字。廟曰靈慈。直沽，平江，周涇，泉，福，興化等處皆有廟。皇慶以來，歲遣使齋香遍祭.....

The goddess of the South Sea, Lady of Numinous Wisdom, was indeed exceptionally responsive when it came to the protection of maritime transportation during the Zhiyuan reign (1264–1294). As a result, she was canonized as Celestial Consort, whose divine title had reached ten characters. Her temple was named Numinous Compassion. There were temples dedicated to her in Zhigu, Pingjiang, Zhoujing, Quanzhou, Fuzhou, Xinghua, and so on. Since the Huangqing reign (1312-1313), the court had dispatched envoys to deliver incense for sacrifice in all of these places.⁴⁹

The same text continues to give a thorough account of the official sacrifice to Mazu performed in the Pingjiang area. It includes lists of participants, sacrificial offerings, and the format of the eulogy used to honor the goddess. As recorded in the text, the rituals were led by envoys dispatched from the court. The officials in charge of grain transportation in the Pingjiang area, along with other local officials, were obliged to participate in the official ceremony, once again demonstrating the interplay of economics, politics, and religion. In addition, this text contains details concerning sacrificial offerings, including the sacrificial meat and wine. After presenting offerings, the official prayer text dedicated to the Celestial Consort was announced by the envoys. Specifically, the prayer included the time of the ritual, the names of envoys sent by the emperor, and the imperial title granted by the court. It functioned to express the emperor's sense of reverence for the deity.

The imperial government of the Ming dynasty followed Song's strategy of incorporating popular cult into the state pantheon through inscribing Mazu's name into the Register of Sacrifices system. As shown in Taizu's edict from 1368 :

⁴⁹ See *Yuanshi*, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian*, p.10.

洪武元年，令郡縣訪求應祀神祇、名山、大川、聖帝、明王、忠臣、烈士。凡有功於國家及惠愛在民者，具實以聞，著於祀典。有司歲時致祭。二年，令有司時祀祀典神祇。

During the first year of the Hongwu reign (1368), the imperial court commanded officials in the prefectures and the counties to search out whoever deserved to receive sacrifices, including deities, famous mountains, rivers, sagely emperors, wise kings, loyal officials, and martyrs. All those who made contributions to state and were benevolent to the people were to be reported to the state and recorded in the Register of Sacrifices. Officials were dispatched to deliver sacrifices every year. During the second year of the Hongwu reign (1369), the imperial court decreed officials to offer seasonal sacrifices dedicated to deities who were listed in the Register of Sacrifices.⁵⁰

The imperial edict above suggests that incorporating popular cults into the Register of Sacrifices functioned to standardize and exert control over those popular cults. The popular deities recorded in the Register of Sacrifices were supposed to make contributions to the state and people. In addition, Ming official texts also contain detailed references about the standardization of the official rituals and sacrifices dedicated to Mazu. For example, *Veritable Records of the Ming* (*Ming shilu* 明實錄) provides information about the dates, the rank of sacrifices, and the officials dispatched to perform rituals. It states,

永樂七年正月己酉，享太廟。封天妃為‘護國庇民妙靈昭應弘仁普濟天妃’，賜廟額曰‘弘仁普濟天妃之宮’。歲以正月十五及三月二十三日遣官致祭，著為令。

On the first day of the first month during the seventh year of the Yongle reign (1409), [the goddess] accepted sacrificial offerings at the imperial ancestral temple. The imperial court granted the Celestial Consort the title Celestial Consort of Universal Salvation, Magnanimous Benevolence, Glorious Response, and Wondrous Efficacy, and a temple plaque, The Palace of Celestial Consort of Universal Salvation and Magnanimous Benevolence. The state dispatched officials to offer sacrifice on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, and on the twenty-third day of the third lunar month. [Therefore,] this was issued as an edict.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See “Li 4” 禮四, in *Mingshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, 1974), p. 1307.

⁵¹ *Ming taizu shilu*, vol. 87, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Shizhai juan*, p. 11.

As shown in the above quotation, there were two dates set aside for sacrificing to Mazu: the fifteenth day of the first lunar month and the twenty-third day of the third lunar month.⁵² On these days, the imperial government would send ritual officials from Taichang ci, who were in charge of the sacrifices, to perform official ceremonies in Mazu's honor. In terms of the rank of sacrifice, Mazu was incorporated into the royal ancestral temple (*taimiao* 太廟) system of sacrifices. These were normally associated with the royal family temple, where emperors and royal family members regularly worshiped and offered sacrifices to their ancestors. This illustrates the significant place occupied by Mazu in the official sacrifices system: Mazu was honored by being incorporated into the imperial sacrifices offered at Ming's royal ancestral temple.

The Qing government established a more routinized and standardized approach to the official rituals dedicated to Mazu. Mazu was incorporated into the official sacrifice system, as can be seen in the regulations presented in the Qing's Register of Sacrifices from 1733. Since then, the highest-ranking bureaucrat in every part of the country—each province, prefecture, and county—had the duty of worshipping Mazu during the spring and the autumn. In addition to the spring and autumn sacrifices, Qing emperors also issued edicts to dispatch officials from the central government to deliver sacrifices on behalf of the emperors. Qing official texts, such as *Collected Statutes of the Great Qing from the Kangxi Reign* (*Kangxi daqing huidian* 康熙大清會典), provide specifications relevant to the official rituals, such as the arrangement of orchestras,

⁵² Ibid.

literary formats of eulogy, ritual garments, honor guards, and the lists of officials to participate as observation.⁵³ The following is a sketch of the official rituals dedicated to Mazu.⁵⁴

The ritual preparations involved the participants purifying themselves for two days. Everything had to be put in order on the day of the ritual, including the three sacrificial animals that would be sacrificed and the many sacrificial instruments used at the occasion. Members of the music office (*jiaofang si* 教坊司) played the music. The cantors (*zanyin guan* 贊引官) would lead the sacrificer (*chengji guan* 承祭官) up to the left gate and into the dressing room. After purifying themselves, the officials assumed their assigned positions in the temple hall. The ceremony began with the ritualist “welcoming the deity” (*yingshen* 迎神). The sacrificer and his assistant presented incense to the deity in front of the altar three times, and performed a ritual sequence of bow, prostration, and rising. The ritualist then announced that he would “proceed with the first sacrifice.” Silk, libations, and prayers were offered on the altar by the officials. The master of prayer read the written prayers, placed them on the altar, prostrated thrice, and withdrew. The proceedings of the second offering and the final offering included two libation offerings: the master of wine offered the wine vessel at both the left and right sides of the altar, and then returned to his place. The ceremony ended by “bidding farewell to the deity” (*songshen* 送神). All the officials performed three prostrations and nine kowtows, and the prayers, silk, and food were sent away to be burned.⁵⁵

⁵³ The original text comes from *Kangxi daqing huidian* 康熙大清會典, collected in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Shizhai juan*, pp. 197-199.

⁵⁴ For the original text of the official ceremony in honor of Mazu, see Shen Tingfang 沈廷芳 (1692-1762) ed. *Fujian xuzhi* 福建續志 (1769), vol.14, collected in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁵ For the English translation, I paraphrase David Johnson’s English translation of an official ceremony dedicated to Guanyu, another popular local deity, which offers a portrait of what a state ritual dedicated to Mazu may have

The official ceremony dedicated to Mazu reveals a hierarchical and highly structured moral universe. All the detailed rites and offerings were based on the imperial ideology of proper ritual (*li* 禮), which universalized respect and loyalty towards authority and tradition, which were construed as natural ways of behaving properly as a human being. The performance of appropriate rituals and sacrifices dedicated to heaven, earth, river, mountains, and various deities were perceived to be crucial for the prosperity of the dynasty. This can be seen in Liu Qi's 劉祁 (1203–1250) *Inscription of the Anchoring Temple of the Center* (*Zhongzhen miaoji* 中鎮廟記), which states: “The Lord of the empire must perform rituals at the appropriate times, sending envoys with offerings... by this means the sacrificial ritual is emphasized, the way of sincerity and reverence is illustrated, and great blessings are sought through communicating with the gods.”⁵⁶ The significance of proper ritual and its connection with the empire's prosperity is also emphasized in an edict issued by Ming Taizu in 1370, which reads in part: “The primary principle of the state is ritual.....at the beginning of the founding of Ming state, [we] take ritual as our great affair.”⁵⁷

The ceremonial forms incorporated into the official sacrifices were prescribed by the law: the writing of the prayer texts, the duration and procedures of the pre-sacrificial purification, the rank and number of the participants, the music and choreography of the dances, the types and

looked like. See David Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice: The Ritual Foundations of Village Life in North China*, pp. 306-308.

⁵⁶ The original text comes from Yan Fengwu 閻鳳梧, ed., *Quan liao jinwen* 全遼金文 (Shanxi 山西: Shanxi guji chuban she 山西古籍出版社, 2002), p. 3681. For the English translation, see Chen Guanwei and Chen Shuoguo, “State Ritual,” *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960-1368)*, vol 1, p. 156.

⁵⁷ Li Jinglong 李景隆 (1369-1429) ed., *Ming taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄, vol. 14 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo 中央研究院歷史語言研究所, 1964-1966), p. 176. The original Chinese text reads: [禮法國之綱紀...建國之初，以此為務。]

number of offerings, and the selection of the sacrificial animals.⁵⁸ The official liturgies performed in late imperial China devoted to the deities incorporated into the Register of Sacrifices, imperial ancestors, and to Confucius, have a strong family resemblance, and by and large share a common template. The state rituals are all organized around preparing the ceremony, greeting the spirits, presenting the offerings, and sending off the spirits. All these standardized rituals further demonstrate that the state's ritual program functioned as a strategy to construct the Mazu cult as part and parcel of an "imperial metaphor," as discussed in the next section.

Imperial Metaphor

The three facets of state canonization discussed in the previous sections, in particular granting titles and incorporating deities into the Register of Sacrifices, contributed to reinterpreting Mazu in terms of what anthropologist Stephan Feuchtwang called "an imperial metaphor," which sanctioned existing sociopolitical institutions.⁵⁹ The state and the imperial authorities attempted to appropriate local cults for their own purposes and impose their own definition of official religion.

The official religion, exemplified by the state pantheon and the official ceremony, was a sacred expression of the socio-political power of the centralizing state. Specifically, the bureaucratic system of imperial government influenced the fashioning of the supernatural pantheon, with various gods corresponding to government officials. Similar to the imperial bureaucracy, the celestial pantheon is a hierarchical system, where every god occupies a specific

⁵⁸ See Romeyn Taylor, "Official and Popular Religion and the Political. Organization of Chinese Society in the Ming," in Kwang-Ching Liu, ed., *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 134-135.

⁵⁹ See Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: An Imperial Metaphor*, pp. 65-68.

place and performs distinct functions. Gods in lower position are subordinate to higher gods. At the ultimate top of the celestial bureaucratic system is the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝), whose role corresponds to that of Chinese emperor. The city gods assume an intermediate position, while household and local gods, such as the stove god and the earth god, fill the lower ranks of the celestial bureaucracy. Gods occupying lower ranks need to make official reports to the Jade Emperor through proper bureaucratic channels and procedures. The official cults were organized as part of the territorial division of the empire, centered on administrative hierarchy down through prefectures to villages, and to households.⁶⁰ The higher territorial unit, city or prefecture, was guarded by the city god (Chenghuang 城隍), who occupied a higher position in the celestial bureaucracy, above the stove god and the earth god, who worked under his authority. The lowest rank of the celestial bureaucracy was based on the smallest territorial unit, the household, overseen by the stove god.

The system of granting titles expanded the state pantheon by integrating local gods into the celestial bureaucracy. The titles conferred to popular gods corresponded to official titles in the imperial bureaucracy, such as Lord, King, and Emperor for male gods; Lady, Consort, and Empress for female deities. In the case of the Mazu cult, the goddess was incorporated into this celestial bureaucratic system by the granting of a series of titles: Lady, Celestial Consort, and Celestial Empress. She was also appointed to the role of a state protector in charge of water transportation. In sum, Mazu's role was fixed in terms of her relative rank within the official pantheon by granting her specific imperial titles.

⁶⁰ See Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: An Imperial Metaphor*, pp. 65-66.

The official ceremony dedicated to Mazu was a ritual expression of an imperial vision of the world. As Feuchtwang notes, the official religion reflected the nature of imperial cosmology, focusing on the harmony of the universe. This imperial version of cosmology can be viewed as the tripartite division of the universe, including heaven, earth, and humanity.⁶¹ The Register of Sacrifices was hierarchically rank-based, reflecting a vision of the cosmic order of heaven and earth, linked by the emperors. To be specific, deities of the official pantheons were necessarily “fixed in their relative ranks because they were linked to the abstract powers of the cosmic hierarchy or to their roles in history.”⁶² In line with their ranks in the official pantheon, the official rites were further divided into different levels of ritual importance. The deities were ritually ranked by whether they received animal offerings of *shaolao* 少牢, which included a sheep and a pig or *tailao* 太牢, which included an ox, a sheep, and a pig. Incorporating Mazu into the Register of Sacrifices and performing rituals and sacrifices appropriate to her rank indicates that Mazu became integrated into the imperial cosmology, signifying the harmony of the cosmic order.

In keeping with the imperial metaphor, Mazu’s official ceremony legitimized the emperors’ authority. The dates of the standard sacrifices and the offering items had to be first approved by the emperor. The dispatched official and the local officials obligated to perform the ceremony were representative of the emperor, and thus they ritually enacted the emperor’s attitude of reverence for the deity. In addition, the official prayers written for the sacrifices devoted to the deities elaborately illustrate the emperor’s authority. Specifically, the prayers

⁶¹ See Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: An Imperial Metaphor*, pp. 65-68.

⁶² See Romeyn Taylor, “Official and Popular Religion,” in Kwang-Ching Liu ed., *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*, p. 129.

make it clear that the emperor sent officials to Mazu temples to announce the imperial title of the goddess granted by the court and to reward her contributions to the imperial government.

Given that the celestial bureaucracy viewed deities as officials with divine authority, human interactions with divine authority were mediated by either lower levels of gods or by religious priests. As we have seen in regard to the official ceremony dedicated to Mazu, the dispatched officials or the local officials served as mediums, communicating with the goddess by means of offering sacrifices and performing rituals. The officials asserted their authority and represented themselves as the legitimate and the only reliable mediums for dealing with the divine. Only the state and its agents could take charge of the official ceremonies devoted to the deities recognized by the state.

All these features embodied in the imperial pantheon and state rituals led Arthur Wolf to assert that in Chinese religion deities function as divine officials operating within a bureaucratic system.⁶³ After all, state canonization was founded on the principles of bureaucratic authority and hierarchy, derived from the model of the imperial government. However, understanding the complexity and dynamism of Chinese religion only through the bureaucratic model promoted by various imperial governments is too reductive, because it reduces diverse religious practices and symbolic systems to a single variable—the socio-political logic of the state. It fails to take into account the religious approaches and perspectives of individual worshippers, which scholars, such as Robert Hymes, have termed the “personal model.”⁶⁴ In a study of the Three Immortals cult at Mt. Huagai 華蓋 (present days in Fuzhou of Fujian province), Hymes defines the personal

⁶³ Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in Arthur P. Wolf ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 131-182.

⁶⁴ For the detailed definition of the “personal model,” see Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China*, pp. 4-5.

model in terms of the nature of divine-human relations.⁶⁵ Specifically, this model sets the relationships among the gods and humans more in terms of relations among students and teachers, rather than as parts of an official and centralized hierarchy. The personal model recognizes that the communication between humans and gods also implies a system of direct communication and exchange with the lay population. The offerings employed by common people are gifts of gratitude for the gods' responses and their assistance in matters of everyday life, rather than having to do with the affairs of the state.

Incorporating Hymes's insights, James Watson has suggested that a more fruitful approach is to focus on the interactions between the imperial and the personal models.⁶⁶ I heed Watson's advice. While acknowledging the explanatory power of the imperial metaphor reading, especially in analyzing the historical development of the Mazu cult, I find Hymes' "personal model," which focuses on the common people, as well as the lived experiences of the believer, particularly helpful. My later chapter on women's approaches to the Mazu cult shows how taking these personal experiences into account is crucial to arriving at a more accurate and complete understanding of the Chinese people's devotion to Mazu. The interactions between Mazu and women devotees was often intensely personal. Female devotees saw the goddess as a motherly figure who provided protection for them and their children. Through praying to the goddess, they addressed their personal and family concerns, and established a direct and intimate relationship with the goddess. Such unmediated contact with the goddess stands in tension with the

⁶⁵ For more information of the cult of Three Immortals, see Hymes, *Way and Byway*. The cult of Three Immortals can be traced back to southern Song. The elite families involved with the cult of Three Immortals from the perspective of personal model not bureaucratic one. Local elites' preference to personal model of local cults is inseparable from the shift of elite strategies in the Southern Song.

⁶⁶ In the article "Standardizing the Gods," Watson explores the different approaches used by local elites in worshipping Mazu. He demonstrates that local cults have their own logic, which interacts with the interests of the imperial state, but is not always co-terminus with it.

hierarchical and bureaucratic model. It requires a shift in focus, away from the interests of large institutions and the religious or political elites toward the encounters, and towards the challenges and needs of daily life, as reflected in the personal and domestic spheres of ordinary people.

To sum up, divinity and the nature of divine-human relations cannot be simply generalized in terms of a bureaucratic system or a projection of imperial authority. The state canonized version of the Mazu cult only represented one aspect of Mazu worship. Instead, the interactions and overlaps between the bureaucratic and personal models provide a clearer picture of the Mazu cult in late imperial China. The process of state canonization emphasized the bureaucratic model as a strategy to standardize the local cult and promote the imperial ideology, while downplaying the personal model favored by ordinary people. In addition, even within the imperial model of gods as bureaucrats, we should recognize the possibility of different interpretations or views. This means that local Confucian literati, alongside with the state canonization and the bureaucratic model, reinterpreted the Mazu cult by emphasizing major Confucian values and concerns, as discussed in the next chapter.

Concluding Remarks

The process of state canonization, through granting titles, incorporating into the Register of Sacrifices, and constructing official temples in honor of the goddess, sought to standardize the Mazu cult. Through canonizing the goddess and promoting certain aspects of worship centered on her, imperial governments attempted to advance their imperial ideology and justify their political agendas. As we have seen, all the honorific titles and the edicts meant to honor the goddess emphasize her contributions to the imperial state. For instance, the Song government credited her with protecting the imperial envoys during a sea storm and alleviating the threats posed by bandits and drought; the Yuan government granted her titles in gratitude for the goddess's protection of grain transportation; the Ming government granted her titles in order to

recognize her help in rescuing three imperial envoys from stormy seas; the Qing government promoted her to the rank of Imperial Empress in honor of her personal aid in military and political endeavors, especially the conquering of China's southern coastal regions.

The process of granting titles and performing official ceremonies dedicated to Mazu was integrated into the official bureaucracy system. Specifically, title granting and official ceremony were controlled under standardized bureaucratic procedures. Through granting titles and enlisting Mazu into the Register of Sacrifices, the local goddess was absorbed into the celestial bureaucracy, interpreting her in terms of the imperial metaphor. The goddess was represented as an official belonging to a divine hierarchy, vouching for the expansion and preservation of imperial authority. Accordingly, human interactions with her came to be regulated and mediated by the specialized services of imperial officials. However, the state construction of Mazu in terms of the imperial metaphor did not mean that the official version of the Mazu cult was totally accepted by the local communities. In Taiwan, local people did not necessarily see the official temples as symbols of imperial pacification and approved culture. Instead, local people linked Mazu temples with the indigenous political and cultural interests of Taiwan. That leads to a crucial question regarding the tensions and interactions between the canonized version of the cult and the popular forms of Mazu worship.

At a basic level, state canonization aimed to tame a local deity and absorb her into the celestial bureaucracy, stressing her loyalty and service to the state. Continued examination of the goddess's historical progression in rank and title, however, exposes the subtle interaction between local autonomy and central governmental control. Alongside the unfolding progression of state canonization, local elites adopted the granting of titles as means to their own ends, such as enhancing their social status by building connections with the state-promoted goddess. As we

will see in Chapter 3, the increasingly powerful goddess was enlisted by local Confucians to serve their own ends and agendas, through the creation of new myths or the appropriation of existing ones.

CHAPTER 3 LOCALIST CONFUCIAN PROMOTION OF MAZU WORSHIP

As discussed in regards to state canonization in Chapter 2, Confucian officials played crucial roles in sending petitions for imperial titles, compiling official records, taking charge of official ceremonies, and constructing Mazu temples. The canonization of Mazu by the imperial state, which strategically conformed to official ideology, reflected only one aspect of the Mazu cult. Parallel to the process of state canonization, as I argue in this chapter, local Confucian elites constructed and promoted certain aspects of the multifaceted images and functions of Mazu. In doing so, they advanced certain Confucian values and supported their own agendas, especially through textual representations of these images. This chapter explores how the prevalent roles of Mazu as a state protector, a descendant from Lin's family lineage, and a filial daughter were constructed by Confucian literati as idealized images of the goddess that benefited and reinforced certain patriarchal values. In this sense, Mazu came to reinforce patriarchal structures by embodying traditional virtues tied to women's social and religious status in Chinese society.

To arrive at a more complete picture of the local Confucian promotion of Mazu worship, I start with a brief survey of Confucian literature featuring Mazu's origin and legends, especially in reference to a fully developed hagiography of Mazu disseminated during the late Ming period. That is followed by an examination of three important features of Mazu's hagiographies. First, the image of Mazu as a state protector, which emphasizes her supernatural assistance to the imperial government reflects the strong influence of state canonization in Confucian textual representations. Imperial governments, as discussed in Chapter 2 on state canonization, attempted to tame or appropriate a local deity by integrating her into the celestial bureaucracy and stressing her contributions to the government. Similarly, the local elites emphasized her loyalty to the state, which functioned to allay imperial worries about local fealty. Second,

Confucian literati created a family lineage for Mazu which shifted her social background from a female shaman growing up in a seafarer's family to a filial daughter with a local prestigious lineage. This construction underpins the agenda of local Confucian literati in the Putian district, who promoted their own local powers and status by connecting Mazu with their own lineage. Third, Mazu's role as a model filial daughter came to emphasize selected Confucian virtues and values, such as filial piety, which at a basic level express the Confucian interpretation of exemplary femininity. The last section moves to explore several examples that illustrate the ways local elites sponsored the construction and renovation of Mazu temples, in the Putian area and other places in Southeast China. Through Confucian patronage, Mazu's supernatural persona was finally shaped into an idealized image that represented established Confucian virtues and values.

Texts Compiled by Confucian Literati

Before getting into the details of Confucian textual construction, this section introduces and examines the historical process of compiling key Confucian texts featuring Mazu. Confucian texts suggest the ideological stances of the Confucian literati. There were important reasons why Confucian literati canonized Mazu and her legends in Chinese history. To a large extent, they did so because the Mazu cult exerted enormous influence on the course of the Chinese religious and political history. Starting from the Song dynasty, later generations of Confucian literati from the Yuan and Ming added new elements to original records of the Mazu cult. The whole process culminated with a full-blown hagiography of Mazu, compiled by late Ming and early Qing literati.

The genre of hagiographical collections concerning Mazu seems to have appeared first during the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties. Textual study of the hagiographical collections could contribute considerably to a better understanding of local Confucian elites' views and

perspectives, especially on the Confucian value system. The Song texts with references to Mazu's biography include *Temple Inscription of Rebuilding the Ancestral Temple at Shengdun as Timely Salvation Temple* (*Shengdun zumiao chongjian shunji miaoji* 聖墩祖廟重建順濟廟記), compiled by Liao Pengfei 廖鵬飛 (dates unknown) in 1150; *Tales of Puyang* (*Puyang bishi* 蒲陽比事, 1214) by Li Junfu 李俊甫 (dates unknown); and *Temple Inscription of Timely Salvation Temple for Sagely Consort* (*Shunji shengfei miaoji* 順濟聖妃廟記) by Ding Bogui 丁伯桂 (1171–1237). All these Song authors were either local literati in the Putian district or local degree-holders who served as officials elsewhere in the empire. The main Yuan (1271–1368) text centered on Mazu's legend is Cheng Duanxue's 程端學 (1278–1334) *Temple Inscription of Celestial Consort* (*Tianfei miaoji* 天妃廟記, 1332). Song and Yuan texts can be seen as a starting point for Confucian textual construction of the Mazu cult.

One of the Ming texts that includes various mythical stories about Mazu is the *Record of the Sagely Manifestation of the Celestial Consort* (*Tianfei xiansheng lu* 天妃顯聖錄).¹ It was compiled by a group of Confucian literati and attributed its compilation to a monk Shi Zhaocheng 釋照乘 (c. 1644), who took charge of the Mazu temple at Meizhou Island. The text contains seven prefaces written by seven local Confucian literati from the Putian area, who probably were the actual compilers. This hagiography of the goddess became one of the most influential sources on Mazu's origin and the miraculous deeds attributed to her. *Tianfei xiansheng lu* is commonly known as the first well-developed hagiography of Mazu. Its main body includes three parts: the prefaces by the Confucian literati, a record of the divine birth of

¹ *Tianfei xiansheng lu* 天妃顯聖錄 (*Record of the Sagely Manifestation of the Celestial Consort*), compiled by Zhaocheng 照乘 (c. 1644). The text used in this chapter comes from Jiang Weitan 蔣維燄 ed., *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan shangbian* 媽祖文獻史料彙編：著錄卷 上編, pp. 68–103.

the Celestial Consort and a description of miracles performed by her, entitled “Original Legends of Celestial Consort’s Birth” (*Tianfei jiangsheng benzhuān* 天妃降生本傳), and official enfeoffment documents, with references to a list of imperial titles conferred by different dynasties.²

A brief survey of the social background of the seven literati is crucial to understanding the historical process of Confucian construction of Mazu’s image. According to Li Xianzhang’s research, *Tianfei xiansheng lu* was compiled by a group of Confucian literati, starting with Lin Raoyu 林堯俞 (1560–1628) and Lin Lanyou 林蘭友 (1594–1659) from the late Ming era.³ The author of the first preface is Lin Raoyu, who was the metropolitan graduate (*jinshi* 進士) of the seventeenth year of the Wanli 萬曆 reign (1589), and later assumed the official position of minister of the Department of Rites (*libu shangshu* 禮部尚書). He was also a direct descendent from the Lin lineage of Nine Governors, which was represented as Mazu’s family lineage in *Tianfei xiansheng lu*.⁴ According to his preface, Lin Raoyu initiated the compilation of *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, which was based on a primary source entitled *Record of Sagely Manifestation* (*Xiansheng lu* 顯聖錄). This primary source was given to Zhaocheng later, as attested by Lin Raoyu’s preface: “It is such a pity that there is a lot of information missing in *Xiansheng lu*. I performed ablution for writing a preface so that later generation can compile and transmit it.”⁵

² For more detailed information on *Tianfei xiansheng lu* see Li Xianzhang’s *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, pp. 39-53.

³ For the background of the Confucian literati who involved in the compilation of *Tianfei xiansheng lu* I refer to Li Xianzhang’s *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, pp. 39-42. Li provides the dates of each preface and biographical information of each author.

⁴ More detailed information of the Lin Lineage of Nine Governors will be fully discussed in the section “Reconstructing Mazu’s Family Lineage.”

⁵ According to Li Xianzhang’s study, *Tianfei xiansheng lu* is based on a now-lost late Ming version. Lin Lanyou’s preface discussed in this chapter proves the existence of this lost late Ming version, *Xiansheng lu*.

Lin Lanyou, the author of the second preface, was from the Xianyou 仙遊 district and was the metropolitan graduate of the fourth year of the Chongzhen reign (1631). His preface is followed by two prefaces written by Huang Qiyou 黃起有 from the Putian district, who was the metropolitan graduate of the first year of the Chongzhen reign (1634); and Lin Mei 林媚 (1618–1655), the metropolitan graduate of the sixteenth year of the Chongzhen reign (1643).

The process of compilation was continued in early Qing period (1674–1680) by Qiu Renlong 丘人龍 (dates unknown), who was born and grew up in Meizhou Island and later moved to Juncheng 郡城. As stated in his preface, he was invited by Shi Zhaocheng to compile and edit

Tianfei xiansheng lu:

人龍生長海濱。嘗從里中父老瞻禮於廟廊之下。自播遷後寄寓郡城，遙望故園宮闕在煙雲縹緲中。為之嗟嘆者久矣。適有僧照乘從湄嶼來，踵門而請曰：《天妃顯聖錄》秘而未傳。願求編輯以垂不朽。……爰焚香淨几而為其編輯。其大略云。

Renlong was born and grew up at the seaside region. I have followed the old generation of our village to observe the ceremony with respect in the temple. Since I immigrated and settled down at Jun City, I looked at my hometown from a long distance where the palaces became obscure in the cloud and mist. People sigh for the losing [palaces of Celestial Consort] for a long while. The monk Zhaocheng came from the Meizhou Island to visit and invite me. He said, “*Record of Sagely Manifestation of Celestial Consort* was hidden and hence had not been circulated. I sincerely ask you to edit it so as to make it eternal.” How could you think that I will decline his request? I burned incense and cleaned table for editing and compiling it. Generally, it speaks as follow.⁶

It is safe to conclude that Qiu was the last compiler, thereby making a great contribution to the completion of *Tianfei xiansheng lu*. Qiu finalized the first version approximately in the tenth year of the Kangxi reign (1671). The monk Shi Zhaocheng was responsible for publication and transmission of this first version of the *Tianfei xiansheng lu*.

⁶ *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan shangbian*, p. 107.

This hagiographical collection was reprinted several times during the Qing dynasty. Each new edition, with substantial and interesting differences, was influenced by the changing social and political environments. Due to the surrender of Zheng Keshuang (1670–1707), who used to reign over Taiwan, some new elements were added into the text. The second edition (from 1685) was attributed to a senior disciple of Zhaocheng, a monk named Shi Puri 释普日 (dates unknow).

The second edition of *Tianfei xiansheng lu* adds new elements, including a sixth preface written by Lin Linchang 林麟焜 (dates unknow). As a direct descendent of the Lin lineage from the Putian district, he served the metropolitan graduate of the ninth year of the Kangxi reign (1670) and was sent as an imperial envoy, with Wang Ji 汪輯 (dates unknown), to perform investiture ceremonies for the king of Ryūkyū in 1683.⁷ This edition also introduces historical materials from the nineteenth to the twenty second year of the Kangxi reign (1680–1683).⁸ These elements include: 1) imperial title granted in the nineteenth year of Kangxi reign and a record of sending an official to offer a sacrifice in the twenty third year of the Kangxi reign (1684); 2) memorials from Wang Ji, Lin Linchang, and Shi Lang, through which these three officials reported Mazu's miracles and petitioned for imperial titles to reward Mazu's divine help; 3) eight episodes featuring miracles performed by Mazu, including Mazu's supernatural assistance in protecting the Qing army in its conquest of Taiwan.

In the Yongzheng 雍正's era (around 1727), Confucian literati compiled and published the third edition, adding some episodes featuring the general Wan Zhengse 萬正色 (1637–1691)

⁷ *Qingdai Mazu shiliao huibian*, pp. 115-116.

⁸ The detailed information of three editions of *Tianfei xiansheng lu* refers to *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan shangbian*, pp. 104-108.

and the governor of Fujian province, Yao Qisheng 姚啟盛 (1623–1683). The third edition was in charge of Shi Tongjun 釋通峻 (dates unknown), Zhaocheng's junior disciple. Due to the fact that Lin Lanyou and Lin Mei were leading figures in fighting Qing government, two prefaces written by them were deleted from this edition. We see here how the production and circulation of texts, with particular sanctioned interpretations, were shaped by the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they were written or edited.

There are only two surviving editions of *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, a block-printed edition from the Yongzheng era (1727), and a block-printed edition from the Qianlong era (1778). After Mazu was conferred the imperial title of Celestial Empress, a printed edition of *Record of Sagely Manifestation of Celestial Empress* (*Tianhou xiansheng lu* 天后顯聖錄) was circulated among the populace. Its content is similar to that of previous versions of *Tianfei xiansheng lu*. The only difference is that it added four prefaces that were deleted from the Yongzheng edition, as well as some historical records with reference to the bestowal of the title of Celestial Empress upon her.⁹

The literary process of compiling Mazu's hagiography continued during the late Qing dynasty. The later Qing version of Mazu's hagiography is further elaborated and developed, on the basis of *Tianfei xiansheng lu*. For example, a local Putian literati from the Lin lineage, Lin Qingbiao 林清標 (dates unknown), who was a successful candidate in the civil service examinations at the provincial level during the sixth year of the Qianlong reign (1741), compiled *Record of State Conferred Heavenly Empress* (*Chifeng tianhou zhi* 敕封天后志) in 1778.¹⁰ This text appears to have been compiled largely from an earlier edition of *Tianfei xiansheng lu*. It also

⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁰ *Chifeng tianhou zhi* 敕封天后志 (*The Hagiography of State conferred Heavenly Empress*), compiled by Lin Qingbiao 林清標 (dates unknown), (Nanjing 南京: Jiangsu guji chubanshe 江苏古籍出版社, 2001).

adds historical records of imperial titles conferring upon Mazu in both Yongzheng and Qianlong eras. In addition, *Pictorial Record of Sagely Manifestation from Holy Mother of Celestial Empress* (*Tianhou shengmu shengji tuzhi* 天后聖母聖跡圖志), compiled around 1826, consists of two volumes. The first volume includes historical records similar to those of *Chifeng tianhou zhi*, while the second volume contains a set of hagiographic paintings depicting the miracles performed by Mazu in support of the Qing armies in their conquest of Taiwan, as well as other miracles originally recorded in *Tianfei xiansheng lu*.¹¹ This text is written in the simple language and it features illustrations. These changes presumably were intended to facilitate comprehension by non-educated audiences. A late Qing text, *Veritable Facts of Filial Daughter Lin* (*Lin xiaonü shishi* 林孝女事實), was compiled by a native of the Putian area, Chen Chiyang 陳池養 (1788–1859), who was a successful candidate in the civil service examinations at the national level during the fourteenth year of the Jiaqing 嘉慶 reign (1809).¹²

In sum, these texts, as fully-developed Mazu hagiographies, were mainly compiled by local Confucian literati from the Putian district, who supported the Mazu cult. The purposes of compilation were to promote the cult and reinterpret it in ways that facilitated integration into Confucian values and virtues. The following sections focus on three essential elements by which Confucian scholars fashioned Mazu's images that promoted specific values and virtues linked with Confucianism: an imperial protector, a descendant from a venerable family lineage, and a filial daughter.

¹¹ See *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan*, p. 485.

¹² *Lin xiaonü shishi* 林孝女事實 (*Facts of Filial Daughter Lin*), compiled by Chen Chiyang 陳池養 (1788-1859), *Taiwan wenxian congkan* 臺灣文獻叢刊 No.77, (Taipei, 1960).

Mazu as Imperial Protector

This section discusses a key feature of the Confucian conceptualization of Mazu's image, namely, Mazu's role as a symbol of imperial protection. More specifically, Mazu is presented as a protector of the imperial government in a number of Confucian texts. In that respect, her roles include defending the state from invasion by foreign ethnic groups, guarding grain transportation, suppressing pirates, warding off natural disasters, and protecting imperial envoys from sea storms. On the whole, this image of Mazu is in line with the abovementioned process of state canonization, highlighting Mazu's contributions to the state. It also signifies Mazu's political loyalty to the state, which was highly valued by the Confucian literati. As outlined in more detail below, this view of Mazu, as a symbol of imperial protection, is not stressed in oral versions of her myth, particularly those told or transmitted by seafarers.¹³

The Confucian textual representation of Mazu as a guardian goddess of the imperial government began with the Song literati. It is worth noting that all Confucian texts I have surveyed present Mazu as a universalistic deity who saves everyone in need, from imperial officials to poor seafarers. Both Liao Pengfei's and Li Junfu's texts mention that local people venerated the goddess because of her supernatural power to guide seafarers safely home. In addition to protecting seafarers, Ding Bogui's *Shunji shengfei miaoji* (1228) lists all the divine manifestations associated with Mazu's role in protecting the Song state. The range of goddess's divine protection covers every aspect of state's affairs, including guiding an imperial emissary, Lu Yundi 路允迪, and his fleet safely through a storm, suppressing pirates' intrusions, saving people from epidemic diseases, and protecting people from droughts and floods. This text also gives detailed description of Mazu's divine assistance in fighting with Jin "barbarians":

¹³ See James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods," p. 298.

開禧丙寅，金寇淮甸，郡遣戎兵載神香火以行。一戰花廳鎮，再戰紫金山，三站解合肥之圍。神以身現云中，著旗幟，軍士勇張，凱奏以還。

In the second year of the Kaixi reign (1206), Jin barbarians invaded the area of south part of Hui river. The prefect ordered soldiers to carry on the burning incenses of the goddess when marching to the battle. The first battle occurred at Huayan town; the second battle happened at Mt. Zijin; the third battle led to the rescue of Hefei from a siege laid by the Jin. The goddess manifested herself in the cloud holding a flag. Consequently, soldiers showed their great bravery and returned home after their triumph in battle.¹⁴

According to this text, Mazu's manifestation was crucial to Song's triumph over the Jin. This record indicates Mazu's loyalty to the Song government and her contribution to imperial protection, by assisting Song's fight with the Jin. In addition to the description of her assisting Song government's fight with Jin barbarians, the same text also describes Mazu's merit in the suppression of pirates. It states that "during the Lizong 理宗 reign (1224–1264), pirates intruded into our country and were going to rob villagers. The goddess got their ships stranded. Subsequently, the pirates all got captured and arrested."¹⁵ In this context, the function of the goddess became closely connected with Song government's interests, which has been fully discussed in the chapter on State Canonization.

The popularity of Mazu's image as state protector continued in the textual representation of Confucian literati of subsequent dynasties. Yuan texts featuring Mazu tend to make a point of crediting her with meritorious service to the state, in particular guarding water transportation. This is particularly evident in Cheng Duanxue's *Tianfei miaoji* (1332), in which Cheng records two legends, as follow:

¹⁴ The original text comes from Ding Bogui 丁伯桂 (1171–1237), *Shunji shengfei miaoji* 順濟聖妃廟記, collected in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Beiji juan*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵ Ibid.

天歷二年，漕運副萬戶八十監運舟至三沙，颶風七日，遙呼于神，夜見神火四起，風恬浪靜，運舟悉濟。事聞加封曰靈慈，納臣公言。

In the second year of the Tianli reign (1329), the vice transport commissioner and brigade commander Bashi (a major supervisory unit of the Mongol Army) oversaw grain transport ships sailing to Sansha. At that time, a hurricane lasted for seven days. They called the goddess's name in a long distance. At night, they witnessed the divine light of the goddess raising up from all sides. After that, the wind stopped blowing and the waves calmed down. Grain ships all crossed the storm safely.¹⁶

至順三年夏子押運至萊州洋，夜半風大，作禱之，見神像。轉逆以順。是歲運舟無虞。

In summer of the third year of the Zhishun reign (1332), grain ships of the government were commandeered to sail to the sea around Laizhou. During the midnight, the wind was blowing heavily. After praying to goddess, they saw goddess's image and thereby the wind changed from upwind to downwind. This year there was no ships in danger.¹⁷

Mazu's reputation rests on her ability to guard grain ships for the Yuan government. The reason why Yuan texts stresses Mazu's function as a guardian of water transportation is due to the fact that the Yuan government greatly depended on maritime and water transportation of grain to the capital, Dadu 大都. It is obvious that Yuan Confucian literati chose to emphasize Mazu's role as a guardian of water transportation, which was closely tied with the interests of the imperial government. This image of Mazu is in accord with an imperial edict issued by Emperor Shizu, stating that "she was able to protect the grain transport every year and benefit the state; she guarded the country with loyalty; with her compassion and wisdom, she kept the people

¹⁶ Ibid. The flashing lights on the masthead during the sea storm were believed to be the sign of her divine protection.

¹⁷ The original text comes from Cheng Duanxue, *Tianfei miaoji*, collected in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Beiji juan*, pp.18-22.

safe”¹⁸ Similar to Song’s legends, textual representation of Yuan legends also stresses the key Confucian virtue attributed to Mazu: political loyalty to the imperial state.

The late Ming text, *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, which contains a full-blown version of Mazu’s hagiography, incorporates and reworks Mazu’s legends recorded in Song and Yuan texts, with special emphasis on her role as imperial protector. *Tianfei xiansheng lu* includes thirty-six episodes that illustrate Mazu’s merits, performed after her deification. In addition to her divine manifestations recorded in Song and Yuan texts, it also presents Mazu’s supernatural assistance in protecting the Ming state, specifically in protecting imperial envoys and treasure fleets led by the imperial eunuch envoy Zheng He. According to *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, Mazu’s function as imperial protector can be summarized in the following key themes.

The first theme is that Mazu protects imperial envoys which either undertake expeditions or visits to other subordinate countries. This is evident in the episode “Saving the Eunuch Zheng He at Guang Prefecture” (*Guangzhou jiu taijian Zheng He* 廣州救太監鄭和):

永樂元年，欽差太監鄭和等往暹邏國。至廣州大星洋遭風，舟將覆。舟工請禱於天妃。和祝曰：『和奉命出使外邦，忽遭風濤危險，身固不足惜，恐無以報天子，且數百人之命懸呼吸，望神妃救之』！

In the first year of the Yongle reign (1403), the imperial eunuch envoy Zheng He and others departed to Thailand. When they arrived at the sea of the Daxing area at Guangzhou, the fleet encountered a typhoon. The ship almost got sunk. Sailors on the ship asked [Zheng He] to pray to Celestial Consort. Zheng He invoked the goddess, saying, “Zheng He was sent on a mission to visit foreign countries. We are encountering the danger caused by winds and waves. My body is certainly not worth of cherishing, but what I am afraid is that I cannot report and repay the Emperor. Moreover, hundreds of people’s lives are at stake at the moment of breathing. May Celestial Consort save us!”¹⁹

¹⁸ See Song Lian ed., *Yuanshi*, vol. 15, p. 8.

¹⁹ See *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, p. 97.

This episode ends with the goddess's divine manifestation upon the masthead of Zheng He's fleets, guiding them through the storm to safety. In the episode of "Massacring Pirates at Jiugang" (*Jiugang lukou* 舊港戮寇), Mazu assisted Zheng He and his fleets in their battle with pirates.²⁰

Similar narratives, in which Mazu manifests herself to save imperial envoys and fleets from sea storms, appear in different contexts. That is especially the case in several other stories, including "Protecting Palace Commissioners Zhang Yuan at Eastern Sea" (*Donghai hu neishi zhangyuan* 東海護內使張源), "Saving Eunuch Chai Shan at Ryukyu Island" (*Liuqiu jiu taijian chaishan* 琉球救太監柴山), and "Sheltering Eunuch Yang Hong Who Visited Eight Tributary Subordinates" (*Bi taijian yanghong shi zhufan baguo* 庇太監楊洪使諸番八國).²¹ All these episodes contain several common elements. First, figures saved by the goddess are imperial envoys representing the Ming government. Second, they are all threatened by storms or freak waves at sea. Third, by praying to the goddess, Mazu tames the sea and brings order to the coast. In this sense, Mazu, as a symbol of imperial protection, functioned to protect imperial envoys, and thereby successfully spread the Ming dynasty's power and reputation.

The second major theme pertaining to Mazu's role as a state protector is her divine assistance in suppressing pirates and disloyal officials. Below is a typical story, "Pushing over Waves to Help Ships Cross a Storm," (*Yonglang jizhou* 擁浪濟舟), which describes Mazu's contribution in assisting Ming military ships to fight pirates, and thereby keep the state secure:

洪武七年甲寅，泉州衛指揮周坐領戰船哨捕，忽遇颶風大作，衝泊閣礁。舟人環泣稽首，呼神妃求庇。黑夜間倏見神火懸空畢照，桅檣皆現。

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 98-99.

In the seventh year of the Hongwu reign (1374), the commander of Quan Prefecture, Zhou Zuo, conducted warships to patrol and arrest [pirates]. Suddenly they encountered a strong hurricane springing up. The anchor was broken up and the ship ran aground. Sailors on the ship cried from all sides, knocked their heads, and cried for the goddess's help. Shortly later, there was a divine light appearing in dark night which suspended in mid-air to illuminate everything together. The divine light also appeared upon the masthead of the ship.²²

The divine light was believed to be a sign of Mazu's divine protection. Mazu was able to push over huge waves to send military ships to the harbor safely. This story ends with Commander Zhou's devotional activities to sponsor the construction of a building in the Mazu temple at Meizhou Island.²³ Similar stories surround Capital Commander Zhang Yu's 張翥 (1430–?) battle with Japanese pirates in 1420. Mazu's divine manifestation was supposedly crucial in encouraging Ming soldiers to fight with the pirates. Finally, Ming military troops successfully defeated all Japanese pirates.²⁴ In addition, the episode of "Executing Disloyal Officials through Manifesting Herself in One's Dream" (*Tuomeng chujian* 託夢除奸) describes Mazu's assistance in executing a disloyal official of the Ming government. Mazu manifested herself in a dream of Lin Run 林潤 (1531–1570), a censor (*yushi* 禦史) from the Lin lineage at the Putian district, admonishing him for excusing the most disloyal official Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480–1567).²⁵

Confucian efforts to portray Mazu as a state protector continued during the Qing dynasty. An excellent example of Qing literati's construction is found in second and third revised versions of *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, which was compiled in the early Qing dynasty around 1682.²⁶ It adds

²² Ibid., pp. 96-97.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 99.

²⁶ Refer to Li Xianzhang, *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, p. 90.

nine more episodes centering on Mazu's merit of protecting the Qing state. In this sense, Mazu became closely identified with Qing government's interests under the Kangxi's reign, including Qing's military conquering Taiwan and sending imperial envoys to Ryukyu Island.

In terms of the Qing military reclaiming Taiwan, four episodes refer to the grand governor, Yao Qisheng's conquering Taiwan; and four other episodes involve the general Shi Lang's military campaign in Taiwan. Regarding Shi Lang, the episode "Supplying the Army with a Bubbling Spring" (*Yongquan jishi* 湧泉給師) describes how Mazu saved the whole army by providing fresh water:

靖海將軍侯施於康熙二十一年十月奉命征剿，大師雲屯於平海。此地斥鹵，樵汲維艱。只有神宮前小井一口，甚淺.....將軍侯乃祝諸神..... 禱畢，而泉水湧溢。

In the tenth month of twenty first year of the Kangxi reign (1682), General of Pacifying the Sea Shi Lang was commanded by imperial government to conquer [Taiwan]. The whole army gathered at Pinghai, where salt land was unfit for crops. It was extremely hard to gather fuel and water. There was only a small well in front of the Goddess's palace. This well was very shallow. General Shi invoked the goddess. After praying, a spring bubbled up..... Subsequently, thousands of soldiers got access to inexhaustible water."²⁷

This case also illustrates the influence of state canonization of the Mazu cult. To be specific, this episode can be considered as a literary production of an official record, meant to highlight Mazu's loyalty to the Qing government. According to *Veritable Records of the Qing Shengzu* (*Qing shengzu shilu* 清聖祖實錄), the Qing government during the nineteenth to the twenty-second year of the Kangxi reign (1680–1683) sought to suppress the hostile force controlled by Zheng Keshuang, who took Xiamen, Jinmen, Penghu Island, and Taiwan.²⁸ Yao Qisheng and Shi Lang received the imperial order to reclaim Taiwan from Zheng Keshuang.

²⁷ *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, p. 101.

²⁸ *Qingdai mazu shiliao huibian*, pp. 115-116.

This is also evident in Shi Lang's *Record of Pacifying the Sea (Jinghai jishi)*, in which he attributed his military conquest of Taiwan to the aid of Mazu.²⁹ Based on the historical record, it is safe to conclude that Qing Confucian scholars reworked the Mazu's legend to reflect the Qing's political needs. Qing Confucian texts promote Mazu as a divine protector of Qing's army. With her divine assistance, the Qing government was successful in pacifying the southeast coast of China and maintaining territorial integrity of Qing dynasty.

The analysis above suggests that local Confucian literati intended to highlight Mazu's contributions to imperial governments. By doing this, these local elites expressed their loyalty to both the local and the central governments. The emphasis on Mazu's services to the state indicates the interaction among state interests, Confucian ideology, and the Mazu cult. Song Confucian texts present Mazu as state protector in fighting with Jin barbarians and suppressing pirates. Yuan texts stress Mazu's image as divine guardian of water transportation, which was crucial to Yuan's development. Ming texts emphasize Mazu's role in protecting imperial envoys and suppressing pirates. Qing versions of the Mazu's legend praise her contribution to the Qing government with a special focus on her divine assistance in conquering Taiwan. In this historical process of constructing Mazu as imperial protector, Confucian literati highlighted aspects of Mazu's images that corresponded to the changing interests of different dynasties. In other words, the changing social and political context, in particular state canonization, influenced the way through which Confucian literati reframed Mazu's image.

Mazu's key role as an imperial protector, in particular her universal sovereignty over state affairs, serves as an entry point to discuss feminist and gendered symbolism. This version

²⁹ See Shi Lang 施瑯, *Jinghai jishi* 靖海紀事 (*Record of Pacifying the Sea*), *Taiwan wenxian congkan* 臺灣文獻叢刊 no.13. Taipei, 1960.

of Mazu's image illustrates male Confucian literati's perspectives and their local agency. They redefined the femininity of the goddess, to make her expression of their loyalty to the government and a vehicle to enhance their local status. In this sense, this image of Mazu reinforces patriarchal structures by embodying virtues tied to women's subordination, in part by setting up a normative gap between the goddess and women. A powerful goddess here embodies an idealized version of femininity to which all women should aspire, but which they cannot achieve.

Official enfeoffment documents with references to a list of imperial titles conferred by different dynasties incorporated into *Tianfei xiansheng lu* also suggests a strong connection between Confucian conceptualized image of Mazu as imperial protector and Mazu's state canonization. According to Valerie Hansen, the local elites were actively involved into the granting titles for local gods to the extent that "one way for an elite group to enhance its status was to seek a title for the god it supported."³⁰ As we have discussed in the previous chapter on state canonization, the local elites adopted the granting title system to promote their social and political status. For example, the format of inscriptions and petitions indicate the social status of different people who supported the deities: the author of the text, the person who organized the funding, the main donors who provided land or financial support, or the individuals who took charge of the construction or reconstructions of a temple. Following Hansen's argument, state canonization opens a space for local elite groups to manifest their cultural and religious power in local society.

The image of Mazu as imperial protector provides enough evidence to suggest that Confucian literati supported the state at some level. However, state-elite relations were more

³⁰ See Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, p. 91.

complicated than the Confucian literati simply parroting imperial interests in their writings. There were tensions and fractures in this relationship. For example, “the loss of north China to the Jurchen signaled the failure of state activism for many contemporaries and conclusively shattered the perception of common interests between the state and Confucian literati that the factional battles of the late northern Song had already strained to the breaking point.”³¹ As a consequence, Confucian elites’ concerns shifted from serving the national government to focusing on local interests, primarily represented by local elites’ lineages, which were the source of their standing and legitimacy. This transformation of power also influenced how Confucian literati represented Mazu’s image. By constructing a family lineage for Mazu, Confucian literati promoted her from a local shaman who protects seafarers to a daughter of a local official, thereby bolstering the social and political status of the local elites.

Reconstructing Mazu’s Family Lineage

One key feature of the Confucian reinterpretation of Mazu was the creation of a family lineage for the goddess. The formation of Mazu’s family lineage was a protracted historical process, starting from the Song and unfolding into the Qing dynasty. According to several key Confucian texts from the Song dynasty, Mazu was born in the Lin’s family of Meizhou. At the onset, there was no information on Mazu’s family lineage beyond her surname, Lin. The reference about Mazu’s lineage first appeared in the Yuan dynasty, and grew in popularity throughout the Ming and Qing eras. As Mazu’s hagiography developed, it gathered more and more details, and connected her family background to the famous Lin lineage of the Putian area. More specifically, Confucian texts compiled in the Yuan dynasty began to highlight the social

³¹ Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), p. 20.

background of Mazu's father, Lin Yuan 林願. The process of constructing a prestigious family background for Mazu reached its full development in three texts: *Tianfei xiansheng lu* (1626), *Chifeng tianhou zhi* (1788), and *Lin xiaonü shishi* (around the beginning of the nineteenth century). In this section, I will explore the historical process of developing Mazu's family lineage in Confucian literature, as well as how prevalent Confucian ideology framed these lineage constructs.

The earliest account of Mazu's family origin appears in *Shengdun zumiao chongjian shunji miaoji*, compiled by Liao Pengfei in 1150, during the Song dynasty.³² Liao's record starts with a brief summary of Mazu's origin:

不知始自何代。獨為女神人狀者尤靈。世傳通天神女也。姓林氏，湄洲嶼人。初，以巫祝為事，能預知人禍福。既歿，眾為立廟於本嶼。

The dynasty from which [the goddess] originated was unknown. The only thing known was that the goddess people worship was extremely numinous. It was said that she was the goddess who was capable of communicating with Heaven. Her surname was Lin and she lived at Meizhou Island. At first, she lived as a female shaman and had the ability to forecast fortune and misfortune. After she died, people built a temple for her at this island.³³

The only information referring to family background of Mazu is that the goddess comes from the Lin family of Meizhou Island. By the end of the Song period, the notion of Mazu's family lineage was an established fixture of the Mazu legend. This is evident in Li Junfu's *Puyang bishi*, which is a seven-volume miscellanea featuring legends of local deities and famous people. The seventh volume, dedicated to Mazu, firmly states that "she lives at Meizhou Island, and her

³² See Li Xianzhang, *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, p. 2.

³³ The original text comes from Liao Pengfei 廖鵬飛, *Shengdun zumiao chongjian shunji miaoji* 聖墩祖廟重建順濟廟, collected in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Beiji juan*, pp. 1-2.

surname is Lin.”³⁴ A substantial part of this book includes legends featuring well-known Confucian literati from the Lin clan of Putian. For example, volumes one and four have accounts of famous officials of Tang dynasty, such as Lin Pi 林披 (733–802) and his two sons, Lin Zao 林藻 (?–805) and Lin Yun 林蘊 (755–?). Although Li’s book makes clear reference to Mazu’s social status as a daughter from the Lin family at Meizhou Island, there is no detailed information which connects her directly to these famous Tang literati. However, all these figures and their stories later functioned as primary sources for the Ming literati’s construction of Mazu’s family lineage. Ming Confucian literati consciously built the connection between Mazu and the Lin lineage in the Putian district, tracing Mazu’s lineage back to Lin Pi and his son, Lin Yun.

Huang Yansun 黃巖孫’s *Gazetteer of Xianxi District* (*Xianxi xianzhi* 仙溪縣志, 1257) is the first text to identify Mazu’s parents. It states, “The father of the goddess was Lin Yuan; her mother was Lady Wang.”³⁵ This can be considered the starting point for the detailed construction of Mazu’s family lineage. As discussed above, key elements in the Song Confucian construction of Mazu’s lineage include: Mazu’s descent from the Lin family at Meizhou Island, and Lin Yuan as Mazu’s father. Based on these key elements, as framed in the Song texts, Confucian literati during the Yuan dynasty continued to create and rework Mazu’s lineage by glorifying the social status of Mazu’s father, Lin Yuan. For example, *Tianfei miaoji*, compiled by Cheng Duanxue, creates an official status for Mazu’s father, Lin Yuan. It states, “According to the goddess’s

³⁴ The original text comes from Li Jufu 李俊甫, *Puyang bishi* 浦陽比事 (Tales of Puyang, 1214), *Taiwan wenxian congkan* 臺灣文獻叢刊 No.77, (Taipei, 1960).

³⁵ Huang Yansun 黃巖孫, *Xianxi xianzhi* 仙溪縣志 (Gazetteer of Xianxi 仙溪 District, 1257), in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, p. 44.

surname, Lin, she is the little daughter of a chief military inspector (*duxun guan* 都巡官) in the Putian district of Xinghua 興化 Prefecture.”³⁶ Yuan version of Mazu’s lineage is skeletal in comparison to the version that developed in the Ming and Qing, but the perception that Mazu is the daughter of a local official became a new feature of Mazu’s family lineage. These themes continued in later versions, but in the Ming new details built up Mazu’s lineage significantly.

The Confucian strategy of romanticizing Mazu’s lineage by adding key figures with high official statuses is especially evident in the late Ming and early Qing texts, among Confucian literati who descended from Lin’s lineage of the Putian district. Explicit mention of Mazu’s lineage connected with Lin Pi appears in several key texts dedicated to Mazu’s hagiography, including *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, *Chifeng tianhou zhi*, and *Lin xiaonü shishi*.

Tianfei xiansheng lu presents the first detailed account of Mazu’s lineage as originating from Lin Pi, stating that Mazu was a ninth-generation descendent of Lin Pi. This text starts by introducing Mazu’s lineage and then traces the Lin lineage back to Lin Pi with a special reference to Lin Pi and his descendants’ official statuses and titles. The text continues by presenting how Lin Pi’s descendants immigrated from the Tang capital to the Putian district of Fujian province:

天妃，莆林氏女也。始祖唐林披公，生子九，俱賢。當憲宗時，九人各授州刺史，號九牧。林氏曾祖保吉公，乃邵州刺史蘊公六世孫州牧園公子也。五代周顯德中為統軍兵馬使……棄官而歸，隱於莆之湄洲嶼。子孚承襲世勳，為福建總管。孚子惟慤諱願，為都巡官。即妃父也。娶王氏，生男一，名洪毅，女六。妃其第六乳也。

Celestial Consort of Meizhou was the daughter of Lin’s family at Putian. The first ancestor was Lord Lin Pi from the Tang dynasty, who had nine sons, all of whom were virtuous person. During the Xianzong era (778–820), the nine sons were all entitled as Governors of Prefecture, alternatively named as the Nine Governors. The great grandfather of Celestial Consort was Lin Baoji, who was the sixth-

³⁶ Cheng Duanxue, *Tianfei miaoji*, collected in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Beiji juan*, pp. 18-20.

generation descent from Lin Yun. Lin Baoji was appointed as the army commander for horse pasturages in the Xiande reign (954–959) of Zhou (921–959) He resigned from office and returned to the Meizhou Island to live a reclusive life. Her grandfather Lin Fu was appointed as the area commander-in-chief of Fujian with a heritable noble title. Lin Fu's son, Lin Yuan, was a chief military inspector in the Song dynasty. Lin Yuan is the father of Celestial Consort. Lin Yuan married Lady Wang, who gave birth of one son named Lin Hongyi, and six daughters. Celestial Consort was the sixth daughter, the youngest one.³⁷

Several new elements appear in this version of Mazu's lineage: a fully developed genealogy with ancestors' names and official titles, starting from Lin Pi to Lin Yun, Lin Baoji, Lin Fu, and finally Lin Yuan. All Mazu's direct ancestors mentioned in the genealogy were connected to important official positions either in the central government or local governments. This is commonly accepted as the true and final version of Mazu's family lineage as shown in Mazu's hagiographies of Qing dynasty. For example, *Lin xiaonü shishi* gives a sketchy version of Mazu's lineage, which is identical to that of *Tianfei xiansheng lu*:

林孝女系出莆田唐邵州刺史蘊九世孫。曾祖保吉，周顯中為統軍兵馬使。棄官歸隱湄嶼。祖孚，襲而為福建總管。父惟恚，為宋都巡官。孝女次六，其季也。

The Filial Daughter Lin was the ninth generation descendent of the Governor of Shao Prefecture from the Tang dynasty, Lin Yun. The great grandfather of Filial Daughter Lin was Lin Baoji, who was appointed as the army commander for horse pasturages in the Xiande Reign (954–959) of Zhou (921–959). He resigned from office and returned to Meizhou Island to live a reclusive life. Her grandfather Lin Fu was appointed as the area commander-in-chief of Fujian with a heritable noble title. Filial Daughter Lin's father, Lin Yuan, was a chief military inspector in the Song dynasty. Filial Daughter was the sixth daughter, the youngest one.³⁸

These texts trace Mazu's ancestry to the most prestigious family of the Lin lineage in the Tang dynasty. The father of this family, Lin Pi, and his two sons, Lin Yun and Lin Zao, were recognized as three key patriarchal figures. As stated in other texts compiled in late Ming and

³⁷ See *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, p. 87.

³⁸ The original text comes from *Lin xiaonü shishi*, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan xiabian*, p. 495.

Qing, Lin Pi assumed high official positions in the Tang court, such as the inspector and supervisor of the household of the heir apparent (*jianjiao taizi zhanshi* 檢校太子詹事), and the adjunct mounted escort of Su Prefecture (*suzhou biejia* 蘇州別駕). When he died, he was conferred the honorific title of Governor of Mu Prefecture (*muzhou cishi* 睦州刺史). Lin Pi had nine sons who all took the official position of prefectural governor (*cishi* 刺史).³⁹ Based on this prestigious history, Lin Pi's family was regarded as "The Family of Nine Governors" (*jiumu zhijia* 九牧之家).⁴⁰ Lin Zao is the second son of Lin Pi who was known for his literary talent and the first metropolitan graduate of Fujian province in the Tang dynasty. Lin Yun is the sixth son who was known for his Confucian virtues of loyalty and righteousness. According to extant primary sources and textual analysis of secondary sources, "the Family of Nine Governors" was one of the most prestigious elite families in the Putian district.⁴¹ The conflation of Mazu's family lineage with the most prestigious lineage of Lin was the product of the local literati's improbable imagination as a way to promote a particular form of goddess worship that sacralized local authority.

Some scholars question the authenticity of this lineage based on the fact that there was no record of Mazu's great grandfather, Lin Baoji, her grandfather Lin Fu, and her father Lin Yuan in official history.⁴² This is certainly the case of Lin Fu, who was said to have been

³⁹ *Cishi* 刺史 was appointed only irregularly, alternating with the more prestigious Regional Governors (*mu* 牧) from the Seventh century). Refer to Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, p. 558.

⁴⁰ See the primary source, Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254-1323), "Wenxian tongkao" 文獻通考(1307), vol. 233, *Wenyuan ge siku quanshu ben*, p. 17; secondary source Luo Chunrong, *Mazu chuanshou yanjiu*, p. 8.

⁴¹ Xu Xiaowang 徐曉望, *Mazu xinyang shi yanjiu* 媽祖信仰史研究 (Fuzhou 福州: Haifeng chuban she 海風出版社, 2007), p. 26.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

appointed as the area commander-in-chief of Fujian (*fujian zongguan* 福建總管). This official title did not exist in the five dynasties where Lin Fu lived in. At that time, the highest position of Fujian province was the surveillance commissioner (*guan cha shi* 觀察使). There is no any other record that Lin Fu occupied this official title.

The questionable elements of Mazu's lineage had also been pointed out by a contemporary local scholar of the Putian district, Zhou Ying 周瑛 (1430–1518). The preface of *Gazetteer of Xinghua Prefecture* (*Xinghua fuzhi* 興化府志) compiled by Zhou Ying states, “when I was young, I read *the Gazetteer of Putian District* compiled during the Song dynasty. The original version of the Shaoxi 紹熙 era (1190–1194) describes the Consort as a female shaman of a village. Later, I read the version of the Yanyou 延祐 era (1314–1320) in which she was called as the goddess. The current versions of gazetteer all represent Mazu as the daughter of chief military inspector, Lin Yuan. It gradually lost its authenticity.”⁴³ According to Zhou, Mazu was originally a female shaman with unknown family background. With the popularity of the Mazu worship in the Putian area, local literati from the Lin clan represented Mazu as a descendant of the Lin lineage. Based on all these facts, it is fair to conclude that the official titles occupied by her ancestors were added by Confucian literati as one way to glorify Mazu's family lineage.

It is notable that all Confucian texts above stress Mazu's prestigious social origin by situating Mazu in the family of a virtuous official. This process also reveals the agenda of local elites from the Lin lineage. Local literati from the Lin lineage made use of Mazu's story to

⁴³ The original text comes from Zhou Ying 周瑛, *Xinghua fuzhu* 興化府志 vol.25, in Xu Xiaowang, *Mazu xinyang shi yanjiu*, p. 27.

enhance their position, ensuring that the subsequent written versions tie her origins to the Lin lineage. Mazu's stories were shaped by the formats available to them and reflected the perspectives and values of local elite communities. Thus, a narrative of Mazu's prestigious lineage illustrates the agency of local literati as they manipulated religious and cultural materials to strengthen their social status.

A historical survey of the interaction between local elites and the state in late imperial China may help to answer the popularity of constructing Mazu's family lineage among the local elites of the Putian district. According to Robert Hymes, the Confucian elites changed their interests from national involvements, such as seeking office-holding or the pursuit of high office, toward the local during the late imperial China.⁴⁴ As Hymes argues, "elites grown more local in its concerns might turn toward local and popular religious cults and practices."⁴⁵ As Putian gentlemen grew generally more interested in the various gods and saints of their own region, they grew more interested in the Mazu cult. They thus proceeded to compile Mazu's hagiography, emphasizing her local identity as a daughter from a prestigious family lineage. This representation was central to the self-representation of the local elites as one way to enhance their power. The emphasis of Mazu's origin as a daughter of Lin's family indicates the local elites' own real and wished-for power: to emphasize the permanent quality of their local connection. In other words, Mazu signified local identity in a gendered way, within a clear and normative patriarchal order. Her name and connection to ancient past of Lin's lineage marked her as a local goddess. In this sense, local elites are the most prominent promoters of the Mazu

⁴⁴ Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway*, pp. 114-127.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

cult by compiling myths and texts that stress the tie among the goddess, the Putian district, and the Lin lineage.

Through establishing a prestigious family lineage for Mazu, she was transformed from a local female shaman without any family record to a young lady from a respectable and prestigious family. This romanticizing process reveals a key part of Confucian ideology, that is, the central role of patriarchy. This demonstrates how the principles of patriarchy framed ideological constructs and historical narratives. Mazu's original background as a female shaman allowed for female religious authority that stood in tension with institutionalized, male-centered forms of religious power. In contrast, Mazu as a young lady growing up in a decent family from a prestigious lineage fits into a Confucian idealized image of femininity: a virtuous lady who glorified the whole lineage after she died.

This kind of romanticizing of Mazu's family lineage is characterized by key patriarchal features. According to Patricia Buckley Ebrey, the concept of lineage refers to "the genealogical link from father to son to grandson, and continuing indefinitely. A man's lineage extends backward as a single strand through all of his patrilineal ancestors and will be continued, perhaps by many strands, through his patrilineal descends. Property and social status are normally transmitted along the line."⁴⁶ In other words, family genealogy is based on tracing ancestral descent according to the paternal line. Women were marginalized and barely played key roles in such lineages. This view of Chinese kinship shifts in effect disempowers women in the public sphere. Ebrey points out that the Confucian conception of the cosmos and social order functions to justify the Chinese patrilineal and patriarchal family system in which men and older

⁴⁶ See Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Watson James L eds., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China 1000-1940* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p. 5.

generations assumed more powerful positions over women and young generations.⁴⁷ In the case of the Mazu legend, Confucian literati constructed Mazu's family lineage by glorifying male ancestors and tracing Mazu's family lineage through the paternal line. Women, such as Mazu's mother and her five sisters, were not perceived to be key players in the Lin lineage. The Confucian conception of family continuity is a regulatory ideal that is inseparable from another key Confucian virtue, filial piety. To be filial is to carry the work of one's meritorious ancestors, to honor one's parents, and to continue one's lineage. Accordingly, along with the construction of family lineage, Confucian literati infused the element of filial piety into Mazu's origins and legends.

Filial Daughter

This section explores another key feature of Confucian textual representations of Mazu: her embodiment as "a filial daughter of Meizhou." As we saw in the previous section, Song and Yuan texts concerning Mazu's legend do not mention the aspect of filial piety as a key element of her birth and life. With the establishment of a family lineage, filial piety became woven into Mazu's legend, as compiled by Confucian literati.

The earliest accounts of Mazu's putative origin and her life, compiled in the late Song era, emphasize Mazu's supernatural skills in predicting the future and saving people. Liao Pengfei, Li Junfu, and Ding Bogui all pointed out that her supernatural ability to communicate with the divine realm led to the establishment of shrines and temples for the goddess. As discussed in previous sections, the only information of her family in the Song texts is that Mazu was born in the Lin family of Meizhou. Later texts, such as Huang Yansun's *Gazetteer of Xianxi*

⁴⁷ See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History* (Hove and New York: Psychology Press, 2003), pp. 11-12.

District (1257) and Cheng Duanxue's *Tianfei miaoji* (1332), identify Mazu's parents as Lin Yuan and Lady Wang. This identification provides a starting point for the Confucian textual representation of Mazu as a filial daughter, which is well-established in the late Ming text, *Tianfei xiansheng lu* (1662).

The section of “Original Legends of Celestial Consort's Birth” (*Tianfei jiangsheng benzhuang*), in *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, contains a couple of episodes featuring Mazu's birth and her rescue efforts at sea.⁴⁸ According to one episode, “Rescuing Father and Brother on the Loom” (*Jishang jiuqin* 機上救親), Mazu rescued her father from typhoon at sea in her dream. This narrative starts with her father and brother going on a sailing trip. Unfortunately, Mazu's father and brother encountered a typhoon and almost drowned. As this was happening, Mazu dreamt of them drowning:

秋九月，父與兄渡海北上。時西風正急，江上狂濤震起。妃方織，忽於機上閉睫遊神。顏色頓變。手持梭，足踏機軸。狀若有所挾而惟恐失者。母怪，急呼之。醒而梭墜。泣曰：『阿父無恙，兄沒矣』！頃而報至，果然。彼時父於怒濤中倉皇失措。幾溺者屢。隱似有住其舵與其兄舟相近。無何，其兄之舵摧舟覆。蓋妃當閉睫時，足踏者父之舟，手持者兄舵也。

In the ninth month, fall, her father and brother crossed the sea to the North. At that time the western wind was quite intense, and violent billows were shaken with rage. The Celestial Consort was weaving; suddenly she closed her eyes on the loom and underwent a spiritual journey. Her facial appearance suddenly changed. She was carrying the loom shuttle with her hands; treading on the loom's wheel axle with her feet. It seemed like she was clasping something under her arms while fearing to lose it. Her mother felt strange and hastened to wake her up. The Celestial Consort waked up and dropped the shuttle. She wept and said, “Father was quite well, but brother got drowned.” In an instant, reports arrived, it was indeed the case. At that time, her father was disturbed by the violent waves not knowing what to do. He almost drowned several times. Indistinctly, there was something pulling up his boat close to the Consort's brother's boat. Shortly afterwards, her brother's boat was entirely destroyed and overturned. For when the

⁴⁸ *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, pp. 87-91.

Consort closing her eyes, what she treaded by feet was her father's boat, while what she carried by hands was her brother's boat.⁴⁹

This episode highlights two key aspects of Confucian virtues as represented by Mazu, namely her filial piety and love for her brother. It is obvious that the literati consciously wove key aspects of Confucian virtues and values into the goddess's legend. Mazu's success of rescuing her father reveals that she fulfilled her responsibility as a filial daughter. Another important feature of this narrative is that Mazu was able to rescue her father due to her supernatural power. Her ability to perform miracles becomes the reason for the people's veneration and the state's recognition of her divine power.

Other sources written by Confucian literati, however, directly attribute Mazu's sanctity to her filial acts rather than her supernatural power. To stress Mazu as the embodiment of filial piety, some literati reworked the narrative of "Rescuing Father and Brother on the Loom" by historicizing this mythical story. The most important example is *Lin xiaonü shishi*, compiled by Chen Chiyang. In this revised version, the reference to her spiritual journey is omitted, so as to make her filial act more realistic. It claims that Mazu rescued her father and brother in reality. In addition, to highlight Mazu's filial act, Chen Chiyang renamed Mazu as "Filial Daughter Lin." Confucian promotion of filial piety in Mazu's legend is also situated in the context of her prestigious family lineage. As stated in the text,

林孝女系出莆田，唐邵州刺史蘊九世孫.....父惟愿為宋巡官。孝女次六，其季也。

Filial Daughter [Mazu] descended from Putian. She was the ninth generation descendent of Lin Yun, who was the governor of Shao Prefecture in the Tang

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

dynasty.....Her father, Lin Yuan, was a chief military inspector in the Song. Filial Daughter was the sixth child, the youngest one.⁵⁰

This text continues to “Confucianize” Mazu by stressing her education in Confucian teachings: “When she was eight, she studied with a private Confucian tutor. She fully familiarized and comprehended the meaning of phrases.”⁵¹ Although we do not know detailed information about Mazu’s Confucian training, it is safe to assume that, in this version of the story, Mazu received some classical education, as was common for the daughters of families with upper social standing.

Mazu’s familiarity with Confucian teachings and values lays the foundation for her filial acts. The rest of the passage in this text describes the fact that Mazu rescued her father from a typhoon at sea. Here a salient change is made in comparison to the version found in *Tianfei xiansheng lu*:

年十六，隨父兄渡海，西風甚急，狂濤怒撼，舟復，孝女負父泅到岸。父竟無恙，而兄沒於水。

[Mazu] was crossing the sea together with her father and brother when she was sixteen. At that time, they experienced a very strong storm which caused them to be shipwrecked. “Filial Daughter” immediately carried her father on her back and swam to the shore. Finally, her father was quite well, but her brother got drowned.⁵²

It was said that Mazu successfully saved her father. Although she was unable to save her brother, she was successful in finding her brother’s corpse and getting it buried properly. The rewritten story aims to stress two key Confucian virtues represented by Mazu, “filial piety and sibling love.” As stated in the text, “People near and far praised her filial piety and sibling

⁵⁰ Chen Chiyang, *Lin xiaonü shishi*, p. 495.

⁵¹ Ibid. The original Chinese text reads: [從塾師讀，悉解文義。]

⁵² Ibid.

love.”⁵³ The text ends with other good deeds done by Mazu, who also saved other drowning victims at sea. An important development evident in this record is that all these good deeds are attributed to Mazu’s virtuous character, along with her swimming skill, rather than the supernatural ability mentioned in other texts. In other words, it is her filial acts and other virtues promoted by Confucianism, such as sibling love and the doing good deeds, which resulted in her canonization. Confucian literati grounded Mazu’s religious authority in her perfect fulfilment of Confucian virtues that are part of being an exemplary female, rather than on an intense connection with the divine, which is a central aspect of popular beliefs and practices.

The process of integrating filial piety into Mazu’s legend indicates a key characteristic of Confucian writings. As Denis Twitchett has pointed out, Chinese literati wrote biographies to illustrate the Confucian virtues of their subjects by linking them with Confucian virtues from the ancient past.⁵⁴ Early authors of books about women tended to stress unusually severe interpretations of Confucian values. According to Confucian classics, filial piety demands difficult self-sacrifice. Women who had the courage to self-sacrifice were described as virtuous, even saintly. As pointed out by a famous Confucian scholar, Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (1705–1755), that women were recognized as deities was due to their loyalty, purity, chastity, and filial piety. “As in the case of exemplary women, Lady Xiang was worshiped due to the fact that she followed Shun to die; Nü Xu was sacrificed due to the fact that her young brother was Qu Yuan; Cao E was venerated due to her filial piety. Examples like that are countless.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Denis Twitchett, “Chinese Biographical Writing,” in W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank ed. *Historians of China and Japan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 95–114.

⁵⁵ Quan Zuwang 全祖望, “Tianfei miaoshuo 天妃廟說,” in *Jieqi tingji 結綺亭集* vol. 35, collected in *Zhongguo jindai shiliao congkan sanbian 中國近代史料叢刊三編*, vol.390 (Taipei: Taiwan wenhai chubanshe 台灣文海出版社, 1988), pp. 1523-1526.

The rhetoric about female filial piety became a central feature of Confucian interpretation of womanhood. In two Han dynasty texts, Liu Xiang's 劉向 (79–8 BCE) *Biographies of Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 烈女傳) and Ban Zhao's 班昭 (45–117) *Admonitions for Women* (*Nüjie* 女誡), filial piety is presented as the supreme virtue required of everyone in society. These Confucian texts promoted exemplary women as emblems of filial piety and embodiments of Confucian morality. In this respect, early Confucian literary representation of exemplary women inevitably influenced how Confucian literati represented Mazu's image, especially through the compilation and revision of her hagiography.

Reflecting this Confucian ideal, the notion of a “filial daughter” is a prominent theme celebrated in a number of Mazu texts written by Confucian scholars from the Qing era, as evidenced in Zhang Xueli's 張學禮 (dates unknown) account of Mazu, *Record of An Envoy to Ryukyu Island* (*Shi liuqiu ji* 使琉球記, 1663).⁵⁶ In Zhang's account, Mazu is said to have sacrificed her life to rescue her father. Instead, Mazu drowned and thereby ascended into heaven by virtue of her meritorious effort. In a later version of “Mazu Rescuing Her Father and Brother,” her filial act is modified as an extremely selfless act of a daughter willing to risk her life for her father. Late Qing Confucian literati continued to historicize Mazu as a filial daughter, while neglecting her origin as female shaman and her supernatural power.⁵⁷

Filial piety, as one of the essential Confucian virtues, can be understood in different ways. Filial piety at the familial level is seen as the basis of personal morality. Filial devotion to

⁵⁶ Zhang Xueli, “Shi liuqiu ji 使琉球記,” in *Qingdai liuqiu jilu jiji* 清代琉球紀錄集輯, collected in *Taiwan wenxian congkan* 台灣文獻叢刊, vol. 292, p. 282.

⁵⁷ See “Da riben guo zhenxi samo zhou niangma shan beiji bingming” 大日本國鎮西薩摩州娘媽山碑記并銘, in *Mazu chuanshuo yanjiu*, p. 46.

one's parents is indicative of one's humanity. For Confucius, filial piety is not just a private virtue limited to the familial realm. The field of filial piety extends far beyond the family, into the realm of state affairs and institutions. According to the *Classics of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經), filial piety begins by serving one's parents in the familial realm, and culminates in one's service to the state in the political realm, primarily undertaken in order to honor one's parents and illuminate one's lineage.⁵⁸ It states, "filial piety is the root of virtue and the source of civilization...filial piety begins with the serving our parents, continues with serving the ruler, and is completed by establishing one's character."⁵⁹ This definition of filial piety reveals the notion of patriarchy, since at the top of the family and the state stood male authority. So, in effect, the notion of filial piety serves to strengthen patriarchy. In addition, the Confucian construction of Mazu as an imperial protector can be seen as the extension of the theme of filial piety. The three modes of Confucian textual conceptualization are interconnected, and are deployed in order to promote key Confucian values.

In sum, Mazu's hagiography compiled by local Confucian elites illustrates the ways that Confucian groups rewrote and reconstructed the image of a popular goddess in order to promote certain Confucian values, along with their local agendas. The construction of Mazu's lineage served as a strategy deployed by Confucian intellectuals to legitimize their local authority. The depiction of Mazu as the model daughter served to domesticate, as it were, the religious authority of the goddess and enlist her to buttress the hierarchical and patriarchal values and beliefs of a

⁵⁸ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "The Book of Filial Piety for Women Attributed to a Woman Nee Zheng," in Susan Mann and Yu-Yin Cheng ed., *Under Confucian Eyes: Writing Gender in Chinese History* (University of California Press, 2001), p. 48.

⁵⁹ See *Xiaojing*, translated by Patricia Buckley Ebrey, in *Under Confucian Eyes: Writing Gender in Chinese History*, p. 50.

Confucian-based social order. This Confucian promotion was not just limited to textual representation, but also involves the local elites' sponsoring the construction and repair of Mazu temples.

Local Elites' Patronage of Mazu Temples

In addition to the textual representations of the Mazu cult, local elites also contributed to the establishment of Mazu temples, in Fujian province and other places in Southeast China. Locally, these elites played an important cultural role by promoting the development of local religion. Local elites did not just get involved in sending petitions for official titles for Mazu, but also were crucial in the spread of Mazu cult beyond the Putian district, into other cities far from their native places.

A specific Mazu temple and its local milieu often illustrates the integration of the Mazu cult into a local powerful lineage. This temple is situated in Xianliang 賢良 port (also named Huangluo 黃螺 port), which is couple of miles from the Meizhou Island. The Mazu temple at Xianliang port is closely identified with a powerful local lineage, the Lin lineage, which has dominated this region since the Ming dynasty. Building on previous discussions of Mazu's family lineage, the Lin clan claimed to have originated from Lin Yun, the governor of Shaozhou 邵州. According to the *Gazetteer of Xinghua Prefecture of the Hongzhi era* (1488–1505) (*Hongzhi xinghua fuzhi* 弘治興化府志), the Lin clan migrated from Meizhou Island to the inner land, Xianliang port, as a result of an immigration order (*qianxi ling* 遷徙令) issued during the Hongwu era (1368–1398).⁶⁰ After it relocated at Xianliang port, the Lin clan established Lin

⁶⁰ On more detailed information of *qianxi ling* 遷徙令 see Xu Xiaowang, *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, p. 23.

ancestral hall, and represented it as ancestral hall of Mazu. According to Lin Qingbiao's

Xianliang gang zuci kao 賢良港祖祠考:

港之祖祠，前代已有建立。明永樂十九年，上以天后屢著靈異，聞祖祠圯壞，特命內官赴港修整。

The Ancestral Hall at Xianliang port was established during the Ming dynasty. In the nineteenth year of the Yongle reign (1421), the Emperor had received reports of the numinous miracles performed by the Celestial Empress. Having heard that the ancestral hall has been ruined, the imperial court dispatched the Eunuch to renovate it.⁶¹

The same text continues to depict Mazu as one of the ancestors worshiped in the hall, namely the ancestral figures of Lin clan, including “Lin Yun, the goddess’s great grandfather, her father, her brother, and the goddess herself.”⁶² By incorporating Mazu cult into its ancestral hall, Mazu is represented as a symbol of the Lin lineage at Xianliang port.

The text also contains some information on Lin descendants’ role in managing and renovating the ancestral hall. That also helps build a strong connection between Lin descendants and the Mazu cult at the Putian area.

順治辛丑年，奉文遷界，子姓將神主寶像暫寄於涵江天后宮，祠遂圯。康熙二十年，展界復回，鄉人同子姓鳩工建造，赴涵請歷代神主供於寢堂，寶像供於中廳。春秋二祭，皆在於斯。

In the eighteenth year of the Shunzhi reign (1661), people at Xianliang port were forced to immigrate to more inner land under the policy of "Frontier Shift."⁶³ The Lin descendants placed the paintings of ancestors, including Mazu’s statue, at the Mazu temple of Hanjiang; and then the ancestral hall was ruined. In the twentieth year of the Kangxi reign (1681), the Lin clan returned back to Xianliang port. The Lin descendants along with the village people collected money and gathered

⁶¹ The original text comes from Lin Qingbiao’s “Xianliang gang zuci kao” 賢良港祖祠考, which is included in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan shangbian*, p. 300.

⁶² Ibid. The Chinese text reads: [祠內供奉始祖唐邵州刺史公暨后之高曾祖父兄並后寶像。]

⁶³ For more information on the policy of "Frontier Shift," (*qianjie* 遷界) see Shi Zhihong, "China's Overseas Trade Policy and Its Historical Results: 1522–1840," in *Intra-Asian Trade and the World Market* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 4–23.

workmen to rebuild the ancestral hall. They also visited the Mazu temple at Hanjiang to welcome [the paintings of] ancestral figures back to the side hall and situate Mazu's statue in the central hall. The spring and autumn sacrifices were both performed here.⁶⁴

According to this text, the Lin clan was intimately connected with the Mazu temple as Mazu's direct descendants. Placing Mazu's statue at the central hall symbolizes her primary position in the ancestral hall of the Lin clan. By emphasizing the lineage connection with the goddess, the Lin clan legitimized their control over the local Mazu cult, thereby laying claim to spiritual and social authority within local community. This is further attested to by the fact that the Lin clan took full responsibility for building, managing, and renovating the Mazu temple. In addition, the performance of official sacrifices at this temple suggests that the temple gained official recognition as Mazu's ancestral hall. This official recognition also placed the Lin clan in a prestigious position vis-à-vis the local community, by virtue of having control over the Mazu cult in their area.

The identification of Mazu with the Lin lineage at Xianliang port was later reproduced in a late Qing hagiography of Mazu: *Chifeng tianhou zhi*, written by Lin Qingbiao. Its opening passage includes an illustration of Xianliang port.

賢良港之山如象形橫互。居民數百家，俗呼黃螺港。乃天后生長之鄉。

Resembling the shape of an elephant, the mountains stretch around Xianliang port. It is also commonly known as Huangluo xiang, where hundreds of households reside at. It is believed to be the hometown of the Celestial Empress.⁶⁵

In this text, Lin Qingbiao identifies Xianliang port as Mazu's hometown. As a direct descendant of Lin clan, Lin Qingbiao intentionally changes Mazu's hometown from Meizhou Island to

⁶⁴ See Lin Qingbiao's "Xianliang gang zuci kao," p. 300.

⁶⁵ The original text comes from Lin Qingbiao, *Chifeng tianhou zhi*, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan shangbian*, pp. 177-184.

Xianliang port, so as to strengthen the connection of Mazu with the Lin lineage at Xianliang port. Mazu's ancestral temple at Xianliang port is, thus, another illustration of the way that the Lin lineage promoted the Mazu cult as a symbol of their lineage hegemony.

Starting from the thirteenth century, local elites along with merchants from Putian who traveled outside Fujian province, began to support the establishment of Mazu temples in other places, such as the Jiangzhe 江浙 area (present-day Jiangsu 江蘇 and Zhejiang 浙江 provinces). Temple inscriptions from that area give evidence that the Putian elites group sponsored the building of branch temples dedicated to Mazu. In this way, a regional goddess from Putian was also transposed to other places, becoming a translocal goddess. A temple inscription written by Ding Bogui, an official from Putian serving in the capital, states the popularity of the goddess outside Putian district:

神雖莆神，所福徧宇內，故凡潮迎汐送，以神爲心，回南簸北，以神爲信，邊防里捍，以神爲命。商販者不問食貨之低昂，惟神之聽。莆人戶祠之，若鄉若里，悉有祠.....神之祠不獨盛於莆，閩、廣、江、浙、淮甸皆祠也。

Although she is from Putian, she enriches all the world. Therefore, all those who welcome the morning tide and see the evening tide out hold her in their hearts. All those who return to the south, who live in the north, depend on her. Those who defend the borders and resist in the villages depend on her for their lives. Merchants do not concern themselves with food and goods: they only listen to her. People at Putian enshrine her at home. Like villages and neighborhoods all have her shrines. The goddess's temples did not just flourish in the Putian area. [People in] Fujian, Guangzhou, Jiangzhe, and Huaidian all worshipped her.⁶⁶

Another temple inscription for the Mazu temple in Zhenjiang 鎮江 (1251–1252), written by another native of Putian, Li Choufu 李丑父, justifies the transmission of the Mazu cult outside the Putian area and glorifies Putian elites' patronage of this cult. Li's inscription first describes the fact that the new Mazu temple of Zhenjiang area is thousands of miles away from

⁶⁶ Ding Bogui, *Shunji shengfei miaoji*. pp. 2-3.

Fujian province. That leads to the issue that “the making of offerings should not transgress the boundaries of one’s own fief.”⁶⁷ To refute this accusation, Li refers to Mencius’s saying, “There is [a] gentleman of one district or one country. There are also gentlemen of the world.”⁶⁸ Based on the fact that Mazu was efficacious in protecting people along the southern coast, how can one question the suitability of worshiping the goddess on the basis of the distance between Fujian and Zhenjiang? Li then legitimizes the spread of Mazu’ cult outside Putian: “It is suitable that the people of Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, and further south, which are all about the great sea, and where the winds and waves push the boats, should depend on the Celestial Consort.”⁶⁹

The following passage from the same text describes the context of building the new Mazu temple in Zhenjiang. The main donor, Weng Daiyi 翁戴翼, who was a native of Putian and moved to Zhenjiang as a local officeholder, had dreamt that the Celestial Consort asked him to build a temple in Zhenjiang. Since then, Weng had dedicated himself to preparatory work, such as negotiating with the local government, applying for temple lands, and collecting funds. Thirteen years later, the temple was finally established. It contained a central hall dedicated to Mazu, as well as halls facing east and west halls with shrines in honor of two Fujian heroes and to dragon kings, and a temple gate. As a result, the establishment of this new Mazu temple

⁶⁷ The original text comes from Li Choufu 李丑父, “Linghui fei miaoji 靈惠妃廟記”, in Tuoyin 脫因 ed., *Zhishun Zhenjiang zhi* 至順鎮江志 vol. 8: 13a. The Chinese text reads [祭不越望.] The English translation is adopted from Hanson, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, p. 147.

⁶⁸ The original text comes from *Mengzi*, “Wan Zhang xia” 萬章下 10: 2746. It reads: [有一鄉一國之士又有天下之士烏.] The English translation is adopted from Hanson, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, p. 147.

⁶⁹ The original text comes from Li Choufu, “Linghui fei miaoji,” in *Zhishun zhenjiang zhi* vol. 8: 13a. The Chinese text reads [又宜。浙閩廣東南，皆岸大海，風飄浪舶焉，依若其所。] The English translation is adopted from Hanson, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, p. 147.

contributed to the spread of the Mazu cult: “People who want to make sacrifice to the goddess have a place to visit.”⁷⁰

Moreover, this inscription also contains the information about the alliance of local officials and elite natives from the goddess’s home district in constructing Mazu temples. Li lists the names and social statuses of local officials who involved in the temple construction, including a secretarial court gentleman (*shangshu lang* 尚書郎) of Zhedong 浙東 area, Zhao Gongfu 趙公夫, a land donor, along with his son who supervised the construction, a local guardian general, and other local elite. As Hansen argues, “people had most definitely begun to worship regional deities, and, as far as anybody could tell, the deities appeared to be responding.”⁷¹ Building from the initial patronage of local elites, such as Weng and Li who are from the Celestial Consort’s hometown, the Mazu cult developed from a regional worship to a transregional cult worshiped by people all throughout China. To recapitulate, local Confucian literati of the Putian area played a significant role in the spread of Mazu cult, through both the compilation of Mazu’s hagiography and the patronage of Mazu temples.

Concluding Remarks

The Confucian construction of Mazu worship is a complex process, which suggests the interaction among Confucian ideology, social and political contexts, and religious beliefs and practices. Confucian reconceptualization of Mazu is represented in different versions of Mazu’s hagiography. As noted in my textual analysis, Confucian interpretations of Mazu were products of a long history of literary development, during which Confucian scholars absorbed and adapted

⁷⁰ Li Choufu, “Linghui fei miaoji,” in *Zhishun zhenjiang zhi* vol. 8: 13a. The Chinese text reads: [守僧與祀饗者皆有所止。]

⁷¹ Hanson, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, p. 148.

early Confucian texts, and at the same time contributed to the evolution of Mazu's textual representations. Late Ming and early Qing witnessed compilation, publication, and circulation of several well-developed versions of Mazu's hagiography, as exemplified by *Tianfei xiansheng lu*. The compilation of this text was a gradual process of adapting older texts and fashioning new elements, for the ongoing fabrication of a well-developed version of Mazu's hagiography.

As demonstrated above, Confucian versions of Mazu's hagiography carry images of the goddess expressing three main themes. The prevalent features of Mazu's images demonstrate the way through which literati infused certain Confucian elements into Mazu's origin and associated legends, in order to promote Confucian values and virtues. Specifically, promoting Mazu's role as a state protector illustrates the strong influence of state canonization through which literati emphasized the Confucian value of state service and the virtue of loyalty. Constructing an illustrious family lineage for Mazu suggests local Confucian scholars' concern to connect Mazu's origin with most prestigious local lineage, Lin, so as to promote the power of the Lin lineage. Similarly, emphasizing Mazu's role as a filial daughter reveals the Confucian virtue of filial piety.

Through Confucian-inspired creative appropriations, Mazu was finally shaped into an idealized image that embodied prime Confucian virtues and values, such as filial piety, sibling love, and loyalty to imperial state, which were connected to patriarchal politics and power configurations. A powerful goddess, as a divine symbol, was interpreted from the experiences and perspectives of male Confucians. This therefore affirmed and supported the patriarchal values of Confucianism. Under Confucian gaze, Mazu was engendered into an idealized woman, a normative role model that cannot be reached by Chinese women in society. She was a divine protector assisting the state and its political affairs; a well-educated lady immersed in Confucian

teachings from a prestigious lineage, whose merits contributed to further glorify her lineage; and a filial daughter willing to sacrifice her own life to save her father and brother. We can thus see here how a powerful goddess was enlisted to support patriarchal conceptions of an exemplary female, a role model which did not give women economic, political, and social power.

As a whole, Confucian texts compiled by literati from different dynasties reflect changing social, political, and cultural realities. Such texts consciously stress certain aspects of Mazu's image while neglecting other aspects, such as Mazu as a protector of women and children as well as her early death and resistance to marriage. These features conflict with key Confucian values. These findings highlight the fact that Confucian constructions of the Mazu cult only tend to point to certain aspects of the goddess worship. A more complete picture of the Mazu cult requires adding other perspectives, such as the Daoist construction of the Mazu cult and women's approaches to devotional practices.

In sum, the Confucian construction of the Mazu cult was a complex and protracted process, which involved the deployment of literary devices, the infusion of Confucian values and virtues, the local elites' patronage, and the state's promotion of the goddess as an object of worship. In addition to the compilation of hagiographies that promote Confucian ideology, other texts written by Confucian scholars shed light into their rationalizing of the Mazu cult, either by incorporating the cult into Confucian cosmology or criticizing popular religious practices centered on Mazu. This approach is main focus of Chapter 4. It illustrates Confucian scholars' struggling with popular religion, which some Confucian scholars considered as a symbol of social disorder. The rationalized Confucian-inspired critiques also project Confucian conceptions of the family system and the gender roles linked with it, an aspect I discuss in more depth in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4 CONFUCIAN CRITIQUES AND ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

While some Confucians promoted the worship of Mazu, especially through textual representation and temple patronage, in other Confucian circles there were critical voices and alternative perspectives. Most of the Confucian literati who assumed negative attitudes toward the worship of Mazu were especially critical of some of the popular religious practices and observances associated with her. As we examine closely the relevant sources, it becomes apparent that these kinds of Confucian discussions of the Mazu cult follow two different strategies. First, there is a tendency to rationalize the cult, primarily by incorporating it into a Confucian cosmological framework. Second, there is an inclination to criticize those popular religious beliefs and practices that can serve as potential causes or symptoms of social disorder. In this chapter, I argue that the critical perspectives articulated by Confucian scholars illustrate their negative perceptions of popular religious practices and their general concerns for social order. This kind of discourse of popular religion was also influenced by Confucian conceptions of gender.

The first section of this chapter explores why certain aspects of Mazu's legends, such as her role as a guardian goddess for women and children and her resistance to marriage, which are prevalent in popular versions of Mazu texts, are barely mentioned in Confucian texts. Confucian literati's avoidance and dismissal of these two dimensions of Mazu lore, I argue, reflects their conception of gender roles. The second section explores some strands within Confucianism that sought to advance an alternative understanding of Mazu and her cult from the one discussed in the previous chapter. Some Confucian scholars assumed a rationalized attitude toward the Mazu cult, attempting to provide an interpretation that would be in line with an orderly and hierarchical conception of Confucian cosmology. In doing so, these scholars betrayed a prejudice against

popular religious practices, in particular against women's involvement in common religious activities. The last section investigates cases of local official prohibition against women's participation in popular modes of worship and related religious activities. The chapter ends with a discussion on how the anti-popular religious discourse reflects the cultural and social underpinnings of traditional patriarchal society, especially in reference to the general social and religious statuses of Chinese women. By the same token, the need to institute local official prohibitions against women's religious activities also suggests the robustness of popular religion at the grassroot level and the widespread participation of women in it.

Missing Elements

Chapter 3 illustrates how Confucian scholars chose to emphasize certain elements of the goddess's image and salvific potency. They creatively reinterpreted Mazu's hagiography in part in order to enhance their own position in society. Primarily they accomplished that by ensuring that the hagiography highlighted her worthy social origins in the family of a virtuous official, her contributions to imperial state, and her embodiment of the prime Confucian virtue of filial piety. However, in the process of crafting a textual representation replete with Confucian themes, they intentionally ignored other images and functions of the goddess. For example, Mazu's role as protector for women and children and her resistance to marriage are barely mentioned in Confucian texts. These two aspects of Mazu's divine persona are considered to conflict with Confucian conceptions of gender roles and society order. This conflict between Confucian ideology and Mazu's role as women's protector and her resisting of marriage, I argue, posed a challenging conundrum to traditional Confucian constructions of her.

The role of Mazu as protector for women and children is firmly grounded in non-Confucian sources, such as Daoist texts, popular novels, and oral traditions.¹ According to James L. Watson, many of oral versions of Mazu's myths provide strong evidence that Mazu was believed to have a special relationship with spinsters and other unmarried women.² The special connection between women and Mazu also finds its expression in women's approaches to the Mazu cult. In some accounts, for example, the goddess was believed to protect women giving childbirth, and she also assumed the role of a guardian of children.

As can be seen from different hagiographies of Mazu, Confucian scholars consciously overlooked Mazu's role as protector of women and children. Nonetheless, as discussed in the last chapter, female devotees visited Mazu temples to pray for their family and their personal concerns. They also participated in the religious processions of Mazu to express their religious piety. The following section explains how Confucian male intellectuals saw women's engagement in popular religious practices in late imperial China as a threat to the established social order. This anti-popular religious attitude was deeply rooted in Confucian conception of gender roles.

Confucian gender ethics was dualistic and hierarchical, grounded in a doctrine of separate spheres: men control the "outer" public spheres, which were considered more consequential, while women stay in "inner" domestic sphere. According to Dorothy Ko, the inner and outer spheres are based on a clear demarcation between domestic and public realms: "Chinese family functioned on a gender-based division of labor, with women barred from taking the civil service

¹ The Chapter of Women's Approaches to the Mazu Cult will mainly explore Mazu's roles as women protector and her resistance to marriage.

² Refer to James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods," p. 297.

examination and hence from bureaucratic appointment.”³ This ideal of women’s proper spheres admonishes women to stay at home while avoiding outside activities. Visiting Mazu temples and attending temple festivals by women was considered as a violation of the Confucian norm of gender separation, in particular trespassing the boundaries between the domestic and public spheres, as discussed in the following sections.

In addition to downplaying Mazu’s role as protector of women and children, the Confucian versions of Mazu legends also tend to ignore the fact that she died early and did not marry, deviating from some of the basic norms of Confucianism, namely family values and filial piety. Mazu’s early death is also glossed over in Confucian versions of the life story, and little is said about her passing away except that she was freed to become a deity and rose on a cloud to Heaven. That is evident in an episode titled “Ascending to Heaven in Meizhou” (*Meizhou feisheng* 湄洲飛升), in *Tianfei xiansheng lu*.⁴ As described in this episode, at the Chongyang 重陽 festival (the ninth day of the ninth lunar month) in 987, Mazu climbed to the summit of Mount Meizhou. When she arrived at the summit, the sounds and echoes of stringed instruments and pipes descended down from heaven. Mazu rode the wind, flew with the cloud, and wandered beyond the blue sky and bright sunshine. Mazu was surrounded by colorful clouds and ascended to heaven.⁵ Mazu’s ascending to heaven also became a prevalent representation of Mazu’s death in other versions of Confucian texts.

³ Refer to Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 12.

⁴ *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, p. 91.

⁵ *Ibid.*

In oral tradition and popular texts, Mazu's early death is also related to the theme of marriage resistance, which is among the main topics discussed in the last chapter. Early death and marriage resistance suggest bold and provocative stances. They challenged the prevalent Confucian value system, which was anchored on family life and the principle of filial piety. The Confucian ideal of filial piety was grounded firmly on the continuance of the family lineage. Hence, the fact that Mazu never married represents a sharp break from that ideal. Confucian values put the bond to one's parents at the center of life, with marriage and reproduction as the supreme filial duties. Women must be absolutely chaste in their words and conduct, except within marriage, and take primary responsibility for rearing children and caring for the elders. On this assumption, it was in the interest of Confucian literati to eliminate the theme of marriage resistance from Mazu's hagiography.

The theme of Mazu's resistance to marriage was considered to be an unfilial act, which became a serious conundrum for Confucian literati. When a woman refused to get married while devoting herself to religious cultivation, she would neither take the responsibility to take care of the parents nor provide children to carry on her prospective husband's family lineage. Unmarried women were considered symbols of social disorder and a violation of the fundamental principle of filial piety and the patrilineal kinship system.⁶ After death, an unmarried woman could not be buried in her family or lineage graveyard, nor could her tablet be placed into a lineage temple. In this respect, Confucian scholars faced a serious challenge in reconciling the narrative of Mazu's early death with the core family values associated with their tradition. To solve this contradiction, Confucian scholars reworked on Mazu's hagiography, by representing her as the

⁶ See Bret Hinsch, "Confucian Filial Piety and the Construction of the Ideal Chinese Buddhist Women," in *Journal of Chinese Religions* 30 (2002), p. 53; Beata Grant, "Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature," in *Journal of Chinese Religions* 23 (1995), pp. 36-37.

embodiment of a highly filial daughter, as demonstrated in Chapter 3. The emphasis on filial piety reinforces core Confucian values and moves away from popular religious practices. Some Confucian texts dedicated to the Mazu cult exemplify this negative attitude toward popular religious practices.

Alternative Perspectives and Confucian Critiques of the Mazu Cult

Within Confucian circles, there were varied attitudes toward the Mazu cult. In addition to local Confucian literati's support of the Mazu cult, expressed by their compiling of texts to glorify the goddess and their sponsoring of Mazu temples, there were other Confucian literati who either reinterpreted or criticized the Mazu cult from their own agenda. First, some Confucian literati ignored the “superstitious” aspect of the Mazu cult, by rationalizing the cult from a Confucian cosmological framework. Second, other Confucian literati assumed a negative attitude toward the cult, in particular toward popular religious practices dedicated to Mazu. In this section, I examine two different approaches of this types of Confucian-inspired reinterpretations of the Mazu cult.

Some Confucians attempted to rationalize the Mazu cult by situating it into a Confucian cosmological framework. This trend is particular evident in the texts written by famous Confucian scholars such as Qiu Jun 邱浚 (1418–1495) and Lu Sheng 陸深 (1477–1544). Qiu Jun's text begins with an explanation of Confucian cosmological framework in terms of a triad comprising of heaven, earth, and sea. It rationalizes the Mazu cult by associating the sea with Mazu. It states:

天所覆者地也，地之盡處海也。海之所際則天也。蓋氣之積為天，而凝結以成地。所以浮乎地者，水也。水源地中，而流乎地之外。其所委之極，是則為海……冥冥之中，必有神以司。

That covered by the heaven is the earth; at the end of the earth is the sea. What the sea borders with is the heaven. For the vital forces accumulated into the heaven;

and coagulated into the earth. It is the water that makes the earth floating. The water originated from the middle of the earth and flowed out of the earth. What the water relied on to the extreme pole is the sea in the unseen world there must be god or goddess in charge of the sea.⁷

Based on this Confucian explanation of heaven, earth, and sea, the belief that there is a goddess, Mazu, in charge of the sea becomes more rational. In other words, for this Confucian scholar, the world is not pervaded by random, mysterious forces, but it is an ordered cosmos, clearly demarcated into specific domains, with a legitimate authority at the head of them. Since the sea is as vast as the heaven and earth, it is well-reasoned that the state canonized the goddess as Celestial Consort, with oversight of the sea. As it explains in the next page of the text:

惟天之太，物不足以儷。儷之者，地也.....汪洋浩渺之浸，無所如而不相通。也是則海之太與天同。而司海之神稱天以誅之，而且假以伉儷之名，厥亦宜哉。

The heaven is too vast to be paired with it. What can be paired with it is the earth..... vast expanse of water extended into the distance to the extent that no place does not reach and no place is not connected. In this sense, the sea is as vast as the heaven. It is proper to canonize the deity as a celestial [being] and entitle her as a consort.⁸

Lu Shen's argument echoes with that of Qiu Jun, while adding a new point to rationalize the Mazu cult. Specifically, Lu Shen adopts Qiu Jun's explanation of Confucian cosmology, including the relationship among the heaven, the earth, and the sea. He also justifies the identification of the sea with Mazu by quoting Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BCE), the famous historian: "Water is classified as Yin. The deity in charge of it must be female."⁹

⁷ Qiu Jun, "Tianfei gongbei" 天妃宮碑, in *Chongbian qiongtai huigao* 重編瓊臺會藁 vol.17, *Siku quanshu ben* 四庫全書本, pp. 21-22.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The original text comes from Lu Shen, "Jintai jiwen" 金臺紀聞, in *Yanshanwaiji* 儼山外集 vol.7, *Siku quanshu ben* 四庫全書本, p. 3. The original Chinese text reads: [水，陰類也，其神當為女子。]

These rationalized perspectives illustrate Confucian literati's inclination to avoid the popular aspects of Mazu cult that did not fit into the religious nature of Confucianism. A rationalized expression of the Mazu cult indicates Confucian literati's attempts to incorporate the Mazu cult into Confucian ideology, while avoiding popular aspects that may contradict ritual orthodoxy and concerns about political security. As argued by C.K Yang and Donald. S. Sutton, the tendency to rationalize popular religious beliefs and practices among Confucian literati in late imperial China betrayed their concerns about ritual orderliness and political security.¹⁰ According to Sutton, the Confucian conception of ritual was predicated on "emotional self-control and submission to the social order, so the physical spontaneity of popular religious practices implied the relaxing of social controls over the individual."¹¹

Some Confucian literati even assumed more radically negative attitudes toward popular cults, which they termed as licentious or heterodox (*yinsi* 淫祀).¹² Late Ming and early Qing Confucian sources suggest a general sense of anti-popular religion bias among Confucian elites. As noted by Sutton, the hostile attitude assumed by elite Confucian scholars towards popular religious practices was based on the fact that popular religious beliefs and practices "offended the Confucian sense of ritual and moral orthodoxy."¹³ Drawing on the writings of some among the Confucian elites, we can see how popular religious practices associated with the Mazu cult became the targets of criticism.

¹⁰ See Donald S. Sutton, "Shamanism in the Eyes of Ming and Qing Elites," in Richard Shek and Liu eds. *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), pp. 220-221.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sutton discusses the changing attitude of Confucian elites toward Shamanism ranging from medieval China to late imperial China. For more detailed information see Donald S. Sutton, "Shamanism in the eyes of Ming and Qing Elites," in *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China*, pp. 209-237.

¹³ Ibid., p. 226.

Zhu Zhe 朱澗's (1486–1552) “Debate on Celestial Consort” (*Tianfei bian* 天妃辯) offers critiques of the worship of Mazu from several perspectives. First, the origin and transmission of the Mazu cult resulted from the ignorance of unsophisticated people who, according to him, preferred supernatural things. The bizarre fact that Lin's daughter died early when crossing the sea pandered to vulgar taste, and the same is true of her subsequent identification as a goddess. As Zhu Zhe states, the vulgar sayings “transmit errors, and no one is able to distinguish and interrogate the truth.”¹⁴

Second, the popularity and transmission of Mazu worship was due to the survivors from sea disasters and misfortunes, who attributed their survival to the goddess's protection. Zhu Zhe points out the reasons that led to the popularity of the Mazu cult, singling out unsophisticated people's ignorance:

然風濤漂沒，葬於魚腹者何限也。幸而不死，則歸功天妃。指天畫日，以為得天助也。互相誑誘，轉相陷溺。

Countless people died from perils of the sea. Those who fortunately survived contributed it to Celestial Consort. They referred to the Heaven and the Sun, from which they believed to receive assistance. Then they mutually misled and inveigled, trapped and drown in vice.¹⁵

Third, Zhu Zhe strongly critiques popular practices connected to the Mazu cult, including ritual offerings and sacrifices. By offering paper money and animal sacrifices people prayed to the goddess for varied concerns, ranging from asking for quick recovery from ailments, getting pregnant with a son, and securing travel protection. All kinds of devotees, including officials, merchants, sailors, and pirates, worshiped and paid homage to the goddess in the Palace of the

¹⁴ Zhu Zhe, “Tianfei bian 天妃辯,” in *Tianma shanfang yigao* 天馬山房遺稿 vol. 6, collected in Xu Xiaowang, *Mazu xinyang shi yanjiu*, p. 314.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Celestial Consort at Meizhou island. The temple also held religious rituals, including purification and offering rites. People would pray and offer sacrifices to the goddess, or make divination with a pair of blocks before taking departure. These popular practices, in Zhu Zhe's view, posed a threat to social order. In criticizing popular practices, he conflated religious piety and social disorder, including criminal activities. As intimated by the lurid pictures of temple activities by Zhu Zhe:

顧乃混處人寰。闇黯穢濁，譸張禍福，以應擔夫、爨婦、饞人、妒婢囁嚅啞喋之求。甘為盜賊嚮導盜，以度劉剝割無罪之人。

But the temple was mixed with secular realm. It was very dark and unclean. Making false claiming of fortune and unfortune, it responded to the babbling prayers of porters, cooking women, slanderous and jealous maids. It was even willing to serve as guide of bandits. It exploited and oppressed innocent people.¹⁶

Fourth, starting from the fact that Mazu was not able to protect a local temple dedicated to her, Zhu Zhe questions Mazu's ability to save people in danger at sea. To strengthen his argument, Zhu refers to the example of an envoy from the Putian district, Huang Jiaheng 黃嘉亨 (dates unknown), who was dispatched to travel aboard during the early Hongzhi 弘治 era (1488–1505) and died from a shipwreck. Based on the fact that Mazu could not protect the envoy from her own hometown, Zhu Zhe asks: how could she protect other envoys?

In his conclusion, Zhu criticizes popular religious practices associated with Mazu as one of the most troubling signs of disorder and declining moral standards. He also accuses Putian officials of fabricating and spreading Mazu's legends in order to benefit from them:

而莆之宦遊四方者，又從以是而誇詡之以實其事。則其惑世誣民，比之佛、老二氏，其禍為尤烈也。故為之辯。嗚呼！此豈可於俗人言也哉？

Those Putian people who travelled around for their official careers exaggerated Celestial Consort's legend, presenting it as truth. Their deception of the world and

¹⁶ Zhu Zhe, "Tianfei bian," p. 315.

spreading of delusion among the people were more severe than those of Buddhism and Daoism. For this reason, I refute them. Alas! How can I tell this to unsophisticated folks?¹⁷

Popular religious practices were the subject of critical official discourse in late imperial China. This opposition to the Mazu worship continued, as evidenced by some Confucian writings from the Qing dynasty. For instance, it is evident in Quan Zuwang 全祖望's text, *Tianfei miaoshuo* 天妃廟說.¹⁸ His critique raises three polemical points concerning the Mazu cult. 1) There was a deity who controlled the sea before the birth of Lin's daughter. However, during the Song dynasty the Lin lineage promoted Lin's daughter, to represent the glory of the whole lineage, and worshiped her as the sea goddess. 2) The heaven should be paired with Fu Ao 富媪 (the earth goddess), rather than with the daughter of a family from Fujian province. 3) The daughter of the Lin family kept her virginity when she was alive. The unsophisticated people called her Consort, Lady, and Mother. People, in Quan's view, who believed these sayings came from the south where the cult originated from. Seafarers and sailors were ignorant and uneducated. They made up miracle stories and then circulated them around as true facts.

Confucian critiques of the Mazu cult, such as those mentioned above, are an integral part of an anti-popular religious discourse prevalent in Confucianism. An intellectual basis for anti-popular religious activities is the supposedly rationalistic character of Confucianism.¹⁹ Sutton suggests that Confucian opposition to popular religious practices can be related to imperial elites' ideological concerns: control over popular religion and emphasis of proper social order.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Quan Zuwang 全祖望, "Tianfei miaoshuo" 天妃廟說, in *Jieqi tingji* 鮚埼亭集 vol. 35, collected in *Zhongguo jindai shiliao congkan sanbian*, vol. 390, pp. 1523-1526.

¹⁹ See Donald S. Sutton, "Shamanism in the Eyes of Ming and Qing Elites," pp. 209-237.

As he states, “Neo-Confucians criticized shamanism or popular religious practices, they did so as a class elite and as moral reformers. Driven by the urge to order the Chinese world by their own fashion, they resisted popular ritual behavior that offended their special brands of morality and liturgy, chaotic services or nocturnal meetings that disturbed the local peace.”²⁰ Elite opposition to popular religion served to defend and bolster Confucian values and a related way of life. The Confucian conception of proper ritual and orthodox religion reflected overriding concerns with emotional self-control, methodical discipline, and submission to a divinely-sanctioned social order, as a way to promote human flourishing. In contrast, shamanic performance and popular religious activities were predicated on powerful, seemingly uncontrolled affective and visceral events that often flew in the face of established social norms. Following Sutton’s argument, popular practices symbolize the relaxing of social control over the individual, as expressed via his and her personal devotion to the goddess. Thus, popular religion is perceived to pose a challenge to Confucian values, including Confucianism’s understanding of proper gender roles in society.

Gender Centered Critiques

Late imperial officials repeatedly produced documents criticizing popular religious beliefs and practices. These Confucian critiques of popular religion singled out women’s practices, which were perceived as generating social disorder, which led them to prohibit women from participating in them. These texts which criticize women’s religious practices indicate Confucian imposition on gender roles. A large amount of documentation compiled by local officials involves the regulation of women’s popular religious activities. Two cases in point are *The Complete Book of Beneficent Wisdom* (*Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書 c. 1694), written by Huang

²⁰ Ibid., p. 230.

Liuhong 黃六鴻 (1633–?), and Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀’s (1696–1771) *Treaty of Custom* (*Fengsu tiaoyue* 風俗條約). Both of these official documents attempt to promote the Confucian perception of women’s proper roles in family and society. As Huang Liuhong remarks, “Women and daughters should carefully stay indoors. That is the proper way.”²¹

This strict segregation of the domestic and public realms is crucial for a properly functioning household, which serves as a foundation of the social order. Chinese society has often been said to thrive on a clear demarcation between domestic and public spheres, with women confined to the inner sphere and men controlling the outside. To be specific, a man “was responsible for keeping order in the familial, local community, government, and the world at large. His private morality was the root of public good. A woman’s contribution was limited to the ordered household whose field of activities was also confined to the domestic and private.”²² On the basis of this argument, Huang’s emphasis on women’s proper role is grounded in Neo-Confucian ideology of gender.

As noted by Dorothy Ko, with its doctrine of two separate and unequal spheres, Confucian ideology reinforced a gender hierarchy. The burden of ensuring the maintenance and reproduction of the inner/outer and male/female boundaries through the performance of disciplined conduct, of knowing and remaining in proper place, fell primarily on the women. According to Patricia Buckley Ebrey, this conception of gender distinction can be traced back to

²¹ Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻, *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書 (c. 1694), vol. 26, in *Guanzhen shu jicheng* 官箴書集成, vol. 3 (Hefei 合肥: Huangshan shushe 黃山書社, 1997), p. 519. The original Chinese text reads: [婦人女子，謹守閨門，理之正也。]

²² See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, p. 144.

Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086) *Miscellaneous Etiquette for Family Life* (*Jujia zayi* 居家雜儀).²³ It describes the strict rules of gender separation:

凡為宮室，必辨內外，深宮固門。。。男治外事，女治內事。男子晝無故不外私室，婦人無故不窺中門。婦有故出中門必掩其面。

In housing, there should be a strict demarcation between the inner and outer parts, with a door separating them..... The men are in charge of all affairs on the outside; the women manage the inside affairs. During the day, without good reason the men do not stay at their private rooms nor the women go beyond the inner door. A woman who has to leave the inner quarters must cover her face.²⁴

Sima Guang's view of gender distinctions had great impact on Neo Confucian scholars, such as Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), both of whom emphasized the correct social roles for men and women. The gender conception that the female's correct place is in the inside, while the male's correct place is on the outside, became a dominant idea among Confucian literati in late imperial China.²⁵

Spatial segregation is accompanied by a gender-based division of labor, both of which constitute the foundation of the Chinese family system, as well as the social order at large. In other words, the social order builds on the orderly management of family, and the orderly management of the family begins with women. Virtuous women are crucial to the governance of the state and the management of the home. Because the place of virtuous women is at home, in

²³ See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History*, pp. 10-38. Ebrey notes that Confucian conception of gender distinction can be traced back to Sima Guang. Neo Confucian scholars reemphasized Sima Guang's idea of sexual segregation.

²⁴ The original text comes from Sima Guang, "Jujia zayi," (居家雜儀) in *Sima shi shuyi* 司馬氏書儀, collected in *Yeshu jicheng* 叢書集成 vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shangye chuban she 商業出版社, 1935-1937), p. 45. The English translation is from Patricia Buckley Ebrey's *Women and the Family in Chinese History*, p. 25.

²⁵ See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History*, pp. 33-37. Ebrey discusses the influence of Sima Guang's views on new Confucian scholars.

practicing religion, their activities should also be confined to the domestic space. Participating in the religious activities at public spaces, thus, violates proper gender rules of conduct.

To cultivate virtuous women, local officials' writing in late imperial China focused on two key gender issues: women's work and women's religious practice. They developed programs to expand the use of female labor in the household economy, especially in cotton spinning and weaving. They also led campaigns to stamp out what they viewed as dangerous religious activities among laywomen.²⁶ To defend Confucian moral and gender authority, Huang argues that any participation in public religious activities should be seen as a violation against women's proper duties towards family and society. He describes women's visit to temples as insincere and unrelated to true religious beliefs and pious devotion. Moreover, he accuses these women of using temple-visiting as an excuse for dressing up in their prettiest attire and travelling around mountains and rivers. He says,

後世風俗不古，婦女好為游冶。遂爾盛妝艷服玩山游水、朝神禮佛……又有婦女無故成群結隊寺廟燒香，不過以祝謁為名，其實乃嬉游為事。

Nowadays, the custom and public moral is not what it used to be. Women are fond of the exhilaration of travelling, and therefore they dress up in their prettiest attire to do sightseeing among hills and up and down rivers, [while] worshipping deities and paying homage to the Buddha…… Women go to temples or shrines in droves and, on the pretext of burning incense and worshipping idols, they actually participate in sightseeing and entertainment on the premises.²⁷

A major concern running through his critique of women's temple-visiting is the perceived problem of sexual libido, criminal activities, and sexual encounters among young women. Huang complains that women visiting temples at mountains and mixing in the crowds are not only

²⁶ Refer to Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, 1997), p. 21. Mann draws the connection between the gender separation and women's religious practices, in particular temple visiting and religious pilgrimage.

²⁷ Huang Liuhong, "Jin funǔ shaoxiang," (禁婦女燒香) in *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書, vol. 26, p. 519. The English translation adopts Mann's *Precious Records*, p. 195.

susceptible to sexual misconduct with young men and male Buddhist and Daoist clerics, but can also become potential victims of sexual offenders. Sexuality outside the proper confines of the domestic sphere and beyond the goal of reproducing male-centered family lineages posed a dangerous threat to social order and public moral standards.

Chen Hongmou's *Treaty of Custom* also emphasizes the proper gender role of women:

婦女禮處深閨。坐則垂簾，出必擁面，所以別嫌疑，杜窺伺也。

A woman's proper ritual place is to be sequestered in the inner quarters. When at rest, she should let the screen fall; when abroad, she must cover her face to distance herself from any suspicion or doubt and prevent herself from coming under observation.²⁸

From the perspective of Confucianism, Chen criticizes women's religious activities, in particular going out to temples and burning incense, which challenged both the proper gender roles and the security of local community.

何乃習於遊蕩，少婦艷妝，拋頭露面，絕無顧忌；或兜轎游山，或鐙夕走月，甚至寺廟游觀，燒香做會，跪聽講經，僧房道院談笑自如。

But instead we find young women accustomed to wandering about, all made up, heads bare and faces exposed, and not a care in the world! Some climb into their palanquins and go travelling in the mountains. Some ascend to pavilions and gaze at evening moon. In the most extreme cases, we find them travelling around visiting temples and mountains, burning incense and forming societies for prayer and meditation, kneeling to listen, chanting the sutras. In the temple courtyards and in the precincts of the monasteries, they chat and laugh freely.²⁹

In addition to warning that women's public religious activities led to social disorder, Chen points out that the worst threat posed women's popular religious practice is spending nights at the temples (*sushan* 宿山) and going to pilgrimage.

²⁸ Chen Hongmou, "Fengsu tiaoyue," in "Fengsu 风俗" of Tongzhi 同治 era *Suzhou fuzhi* 蘇州府志 vol.3, 33b-34a. The English translation adopts Mann's *Precious Records*, p. 195.

²⁹ Ibid.

又其甚者，三月下旬，以宿神廟為結緣……七月晦日，以點肉燈為求福，或宿山廟還願求子，或捨身於後殿寢宮，朔望供役。

The worst times are in the last ten days of the third lunar moth, when they form sisterhoods and spend nights at local temples…… On the last day of seventh month, when they light lanterns and suspend them from their flesh bodies for good fortune. They may spend the night in a mountain temple to fulfill a vow made to ensure the birth of a son. Or they may renounce the world and shut themselves up in a cloistered chamber, performing menial services on the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month.³⁰

This description suggests the perceived fear of women publicly getting together by themselves, without proper male guidance and supervision. In that sense, the key issues here are female autonomy and self-empowerment. The same text continues to express Chen's concerns that women visiting temples and participating in festivals, processions, and pilgrimages may lead to social disorder and collapse of moral values.

僧道款待，惡少圍繞，本夫親屬，恬不為怪。深為風俗之玷。

The monks and priests entertain them cordially; evil youths encircle the place. And their husbands and relatives think nothing of it. This is really a blight on the reputation of the local community!³¹

In response to the challenges of women's popular religious practices to the political and moral order, late imperial local officials repeatedly issued bans prohibiting women from visiting temples, in addition to the two cases we just discussed. Examining sources like late Qing official handbooks and *Shenbao* 申報, a newspaper founded in 1872, Vincent Goossaert uncovers five concerns behind the prohibitions against female participation in public religious activities.³² The first aspect had to do with preventing women from desecrating temple's ritual purity, and with

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Chen Hongmou, "Fengsu tiaoyue," in *Tongzhi suzhou fuzhi*, vol.3, 33b-34a. The English translation is from Mann's *Precious Records*, p. 196.

³² See Vincent Goossaert, "Irrepressible Female Piety: Late Imperial Bans on Women Visiting Temples," in *Nan Nü* 10 (2008), pp. 212-241.

maintaining women's chastity. Second, women should not take an active role in public religious activities, especially as religious specialists. Third, young women should not engage in sexual encounters. Fourth, women should not spend the night in the temple, either during pilgrimage or festival celebrations. Finally, female presence can undermine clerical purity and morality. Overall, the prohibitions of local officials suggest a Confucian discourse on gender in which women's bodies and sexuality are seen as an unpredictable threat, both to themselves and to religiously sanctioned males. That must be neutralized and controlled by setting female chastity and seclusion as paramount values.

The emphasis on female chastity and seclusion among Confucian literati is echoed by government policies and campaigns aimed at promoting them. Going back to early Ming era, local leaders nominated exemplary women and reported their names, along with a brief biographical account, to the county magistrate, who would consider whether the women were eligible for imperial honor. After being examined at the Board of Rites, the family of a chaste widow might be granted a commendation written in the emperor's calligraphy.³³ In some cases, the family or community leaders constructed a monumental stone arch (*zhenjie paifang* 貞節牌坊) to reward a woman's chastity. In Ming times, there were even dramatic examples of woman's fidelity being promoted by Ming society, including the valorization of suicides by young widows, expressing their wishes to follow their husbands in death (*xunsi* 殉死).

The promotion of female chastity was not just closely tied to the Confucian ideal of womanhood, but also reflected local literati's concerns. T'ien Ju-K'ang argues that local literati's celebration of women's chastity served as a channel to express their own inadequacies and

³³ See Susan Mann's study for Qing state policies affecting women and family, in *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, pp. 23-26.

insecurities: “It was in the congregation of these great numbers of pathetic scholars that pent-up emotions of anger and frustration, seeking a common outlet in self-serving behavior, eventually molded and distorted their conception of morality into increasingly narrow and bigoted interpretations. There were then transmitted and gained widespread recognition among the populace.”³⁴ In other words, without the promotion of “frustrated” scholars, the cult of female fidelity would not gain such great popularity. The promotion of women’s chastity is closely tied to Confucian scholars’ self-expression of their conception of gender and morality, as they sought to control women’s involvement in popular religious practices.

The official disapproval of female congregations in public religious spaces suggests that women’s participation in popular religious practices were seen as deviant, from a Confucian supported version of orthodoxy and patriarchal conception of religion and gender roles. However, due to the negotiations of local elites and temple leaders with officials, “prohibiting women entering temples or joining festivals was difficult to maintain on a long-term basis.”³⁵ As Goossaert points out, “temple leaders negotiating with officials could promise to bring some sort of control over such overt transgressions of the Code, while they almost never incorporated into their own local regulations a comprehensive ban on women visiting temples. Apparently, enforcing a durable ban on women visiting neighborhood temple was just beyond the means of late imperial officialdom.”³⁶ The popular practices were so widespread and important to women that they could not be fully curtailed. Hence, local officials often had to work with Confucian

³⁴ T’ien Ju-K’ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch’ing Times* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 102; Katherine Carlitz, “The Daughter, the Singing-Girl, and the Seduction of Suicide,” pp. 25-26.

³⁵ Vincent Goossaert, “Irrepressible Female Piety: Late Imperial Bans on Women Visiting Temples,” p. 212.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

intellectuals and the state to co-opt such practices to the best of their abilities, as was the case with state canonization.

Chen's descriptions of a wide range of women's religious experience outside the home further prove that the bans on women's participation in religious festivals and temple visiting were quite ineffective. In his text, Chen provides detailed information of women's special approaches to popular religious practices in late imperial China. The female religious involvements described by Chen suggest communal experiences were widespread and vital. In particular, women's pilgrimages to temples dedicated to popular deities, such as Guanyin and Mazu, were crucial parts of their religious lives.

Concluding Remarks

The texts written by Confucian scholars surveyed in this chapter provide alternative perspectives on the Mazu cult. The ambivalent approaches adopted by some scholars and officials, alternating from creative incorporation of the Mazu cult into Confucian cosmology to outright critique of the vulgarity and indecency of popular religious practices centering on Mazu, illustrate how Confucian scholars struggled with popular religion. The anti-popular religious discourse, adopted by some scholars and officials, was closely connected with Confucian conceptions of the family system and gender roles. Women's participation in popular religious activities was construed as a symptom and a cause of social disorder. This anti-popular religious bias also found its expression in prohibitions issued by some local officials. Prohibiting women's popular religious activities usually went hand-in-hand with the promotion of a Confucian ideal of womanhood, in particular women's chastity. That only allowed for female bodies and the practice of sexuality within the controlled confines of the inner, domestic sphere, where it served to reproduce the male interest in continuing socially recognized norms and lineages. In sum, the

anti-religious discourse and promotion of women's chastity projects Confucian literati's anxiety about defending the existing social order and conventional morality.

However, local official prohibition of women's religious activities was not as effective as expected, as proven by women's active involvement of temple visits, processions, and pilgrimages. This was partly due to the local elites and temple clerics' negotiation with local officials. In the fissures left by these negotiations, women continued to exert their own agency. Popular religious activities, such as pilgrimage, helped women share a communal experience, through which they developed their sisterhood; in other words, it helped forge an identity as a local female community. In addition to the formation of sisterhood, pilgrimage expanded women's social space from the indoor realm to the outdoor, which was mainly perceived as men's domain, in terms of Confucian ideology. Religious activities women participated in provided them a space to express their religious piety and develop their individual and communal identities at meaningful public occasions. I will take up these points in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5 DAOIST CANONIZATION OF THE MAZU CULT

As discussed in the previous chapters, the imperial governments, Confucian literati, and local elites, all reinterpreted the goddess's religious personal and primary modes of worship in order to emphasize their own agencies. Considering the intense interaction between Daoism and popular religion, it is not surprising that Daoist priests also engaged in appropriating Mazu, in ways that on the whole benefited and reinforced the Daoist aspect of the Mazu cult in late imperial China.

As observed by Judith Boltz and Kristofer M. Schipper, the term of Daoist canonization or canonization of the Dao (*daofeng* 道封) refers to the Daoist bestowed titles dedicated to popular deities that are also recorded in Daoist canonical scriptures. These Daoist titles are in opposition to the canonized titles bestowed by the imperial states (*guofeng* 國封).¹ Nevertheless, this definition of Daoist canonization only reveals one aspect of Daoist involvement in popular cults and practices. The scope of Daoist canonization can be expanded to other dimensions, such as the incorporation of popular deities into the Daoist liturgical system and the Daoist institutional management of temples associated with popular deities.

This chapter explores the approaches applied within Daoism to assimilate a popular goddess into the Daoist celestial hierarchy. The first section focuses on Daoist textual production that deals with Mazu, zeroing in particularly on the *Scripture of Lord Lao, the Most High, Speaking on the Numinous Efficacy of the Celestial Consort in*

¹ See Kristofer M. Schipper, "Sources of Modern Popular Worship in the Taoist Canon: A Critical Appraisal," in *Proceedings of International Conference on Popular Beliefs and Chinese Culture* (Taipei: Center for Chinese Studies, 1994), vol.1, p. 9; also see Judith M. Boltz, "In Homage to Tianfei," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 106 (1), pp. 211-232.

Relieving Distress (Taishang laojun shuo tianfei jiuku lingyan jing 太上老君說天妃救苦靈驗經).² This scripture elaborately illustrates the ways in which Daoism assimilated a popular goddess as a Daoist deity, who embodied universal saving power. The following two sections discuss how Daoist liturgy reorganized the Mazu cult and incorporated her into the Daoist cosmology, primarily by writing Daoist liturgical texts and performing *jiao* 醮 rituals. The fourth section moves to the historical study of Daoist management of Mazu temples as one strategy of Daoist appropriation of the Mazu cult. In the last section, I argue that this kind of approach to Mazu worship illustrates a general pattern of Daoist involvements in local cults in late imperial China. In the process of Daoist canonization and appropriation, Daoists intentionally promoted select facets of Daoist ideology, while downplaying certain popular religious aspects of the Mazu cult.

Daoist Scriptures for the Worship of Mazu

Daoist canonization involves the writing of Daoist scriptures in honor of popular deities. The best example is the *Taishang laojun shuo tianfei jiuku lingyan jing* (*Tianfei jiuku lingyan jing*) included in the *Daozang* (CT649). According to the studies of Li Xianzhang and Judith Boltz, this Daoist scripture can be traced back to the time period (1409–1420) during which Emperor Chengzu issued edicts to reward the goddess by conferring titles and constructing official temples.³ Boltz, who translated the entire text and provided some commentaries, points out that this scripture bears strong testimony to

² On the English translation of the Daoist scripture, see Judith M. Boltz, “In Homage to Tianfei,” pp. 211–232. The Chinese version of the text I use is *Taishang laojun shuo tianfei jiuku lingyan jing* 太上老君說天妃救苦靈驗經, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Jingchan juan* 媽祖文獻史料彙編：經懺卷, pp. 1–7.

³ See Kristofer M. Schipper, “Sources of Modern Popular Worship in the Taoist Canon,” p. 8.

the popularity of the Mazu cult. It also indicates the way that Daoism attempted to incorporate the local goddess into the Daoist pantheon.⁴

The scripture consists of five parts, arranged in sequence: “Ritual of taking sincere refuge (*zhixin guiming li* 至心歸命禮), invocation (*qiqing zhou* 啟請咒), doxology (*fengli zhou* 奉禮咒), sermon (*tingxuan fayin* 聽宣法音), and talisman (*tianfei jiuku lingfu* 天妃救苦靈符).”⁵ The ritual of taking sincere refuge is comprised of fourteen lines in heptasyllabic style that gives a testimony of faith. It proclaims the goddess’s Daoist title and her numinous salvation, and recognizes the imperial title in honor of her Confucian virtues, as well as her contributions to the imperial state. The invocation highlights Mazu’s compassion and omnipotence in every aspect. That includes her meritorious service to the state, her supernatural power in controlling rains and winds, and her numinous responses to save people. This part of the text concludes with vows by the devotees: “I now take this vow, to forever offer my support, with all my heart, I do commit myself to uphold this scripture of truth.”⁶ The doxology is an incantation, which, again, emphasizes Mazu’s omnipotent power of salvation: “Placing out the astral configuration of Ursa Major. There is no distress that is not vanquished nor any wish that is not fulfilled. Uphold this sacred incantation with your chanting. And the life-forces of the Tao will be forever preserved.”⁷ The sermon, composed of both prose and prosodic sections, describes the context of Mazu’s incarnation at Meizhou Island and her vows of

⁴ See Judith M. Boltz, “In Homage to Tianfei,” pp. 211-232.

⁵ See Judith M. Boltz, “In Homage to Tianfei,” Boltz calls the last part of the text “sacrament,” but I believe a better translation is “talisman.”

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

proffering universal salvation. The last part of the scripture includes the numinous talisman of the Celestial Consort for relieving distress and the incantation for giving charge to the talisman. As it claims, “this single talisman, together with water, can bring relief and salvation to the myriad peoples. [With it, one may] abolish all misery and eliminate all obstacles.”⁸

In addition to the typical format of Daoist scripture mentioned above, *Tianfei jiuku lingyan jing* illustrates the way that Daoists appropriated Mazu’s images and functions from Daoist perspectives for several reasons. It first reinterprets Mazu’s identity as a spirit from the Daoist pantheon: Jade Maiden of Marvelous Conduct (*Miaoxing yunü* 妙行玉女) from the star of Sustaining the Dipper (*Fudou* 輔斗) within the constellation of the Northern Dipper (*Beidou* 北斗). This Daoist interpretation downplays the popular conception that Mazu originated from the Lin’s family at Meizhou Island. In line with the Daoist origin of Mazu, the scripture states that she is canonized with a Daoist title, “Supreme Numinous Spirit of Humanity and Compassion who Sustains the Northern Dipper” (*Renci fudou zhiling shen* 仁慈輔斗至靈神).⁹ Second, this scripture describes Mazu as a universal savior originating from the Dao’s omnipotent power of salvation.

Mazu’s Daoist background as Jade Maiden of Marvelous Conduct is emphasized repeatedly throughout the scripture. For example, the sermon section offers a full explanation of Mazu’s Daoist origin, the Daoist canonized title, and the context leading

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The English translations of Mazu’s Daoist titles come from Judith M. Boltz, “In Homage to Tianfei,” pp. 211-232.

up to Mazu's incarnation at Meizhou Island and her promise of universal salvation. In the beginning of the sermon section, Lord Lao, the Most High, becomes aware of the plight of the merchant class, in particular those suffering from sea disasters and the seafarers crying for mercy. To show his compassion, Lord Lao searches for a volunteer to convey salvation. The Perfected One of Far-reaching Salvation (*Guangji zhenren* 廣濟真人) reminds Lord Lao that the Jade Maiden residing at Sustaining the Dipper took a vow dedicated to universal salvation. Subsequently, Lord Lao commands the Jade Maiden to descend and reincarnate in the human world to rescue humans from all kinds of sufferings. This is followed by a short version of Mazu's birth, life, and her fulfillment of her vows in the human realm. When her merit is complete and her destiny is fulfilled, she ascends on high in broad daylight. Due to her merit of universal salvation, Mazu is granted with a Daoist title. As the text states,

於是老君敕下，輔斗昭孝純正靈應孚濟護國庇民妙靈照應弘仁普濟天妃。

It was Lord Lao who canonized her as Celestial Consort of Universal Salvation, Magnanimous Humanity, Glorious Response, and Wondrous Divinity, She Who Preserves the State and Relieves the People, a Trustworthy Savior of Numinous Response, Unadulterated Authenticity, and Resplendent Filiality, in Sustenance of Ursa Major.¹⁰

The second Daoist title conferred by Lord Lao appears in the context of Mazu repeating her vow of universal salvation:

老君聞天妃誓言，乃敕玄妙玉女，錫以“無極輔斗助政普濟天妃”之號。

Once Lord Lao heard the Celestial Consort's pledge, he commanded the Jade Maiden of Marvelous Conducts to grant her the title: "The

¹⁰ See Judith M. Boltz, "In Homage to Tianfei," p. 224.

Interminate Celestial Consort of Universal Salvation Who Comes to the Aid of Regime in Sustenance of Ursa Major.¹¹

These two Daoist titles further confirm Mazu's Daoist origin and identity. They also emphasize that Lord Lao, the Most High, who occupies the highest position in the Daoist celestial hierarchy, confers Mazu the titles to reward her merits. These Daoist titles officially symbolize the incorporation of Mazu into the Daoist pantheon as a subordinate deity under the Lord Lao.

In addition to conferring Daoist titles to Mazu, another feature of Daoist interpretation of Mazu's images is to extend the goddess's salvific domain to the whole universe. As suggested in *Tianfei jiuku lingyan jing*, Mazu manifests her majestic countenance to all in both celestial and mortal realms and establishes intense and equal relationships with all her subjects. The changing perception of the goddess clearly reflects the Daoist soteriology, expanding the salvific domain of the goddess from saving seafarers, business men, and officials, to everyone who calls her name; from protecting the state and people to numinously responding to everyone's daily concerns. A lengthy series of vows bear eloquent testimony to the Daoist conception of Mazu as a universal savior:

一者，誓救舟船，達於彼岸。二者，誓護客商，咸令安樂。三者，祛遂邪祟，永得消除。四者，蕩滅災沴，家門清靜。五者，追捕奸盜，屏跡潛形。六者，收斬惡人，誅鋤強梗。七者，救國護民，民稱太平。八者，釋罪解愆，離諸報對。九者，扶持產難，母子平安。十者，庇護良民，免遭橫逆。十一者，衛護法界，風雨順時。十二者，凡有歸向，保佑安寧。十三者，修學至人，功行果滿。十四者，求官進職，爵祿亨通。十五者，過去超生，九幽息對。

I will rescue all boats, large, and small, so that they may reach the other shore; I will offer protection to visiting merchants so that they will be

¹¹ See Judith M. Boltz, "In Homage to Tianfei," p. 226.

content; I will cast out all perverse and aberrant forces and make them vanish forevermore; I will sweep away all sources of suffering and adversity, so that family homes will know pure quiescence; I will seize all treacherous thieves so that there will be absolutely no trace of them left behind; I will seize and behead all malevolent beings and chop off their heads with a hoe, while restraining them with thorns; I will relieve the people and preserve the state, so that humankind may proclaim great peace; I will pardon the transgressors and release the disorderly, freeing them from all retribution; I will offer my support to those with difficulties in childbirth so that mother and child will remain out of danger; I will offer shelter and protection to people of good will so that they may have on encounters with oppression and tyranny; I will stand guard over the sacred domain so that wind and rain will be timely; For those who yield in submission, I will offer my protection to ensure their tranquility; May those who engage earnestly in scholarly pursuits achieve full satisfaction in their meritorious work; May those who seek office and promotion in their profession enjoy the prosperity of rank and reward; And may those how have passed on transcend incarnation and be released from the Nine Shades.¹²

The lengthy series of vows above highlight the goddess's universal sovereignty which is in accord with the Daoist title granted by Lord Lao, "The Interminate Celestial Consort of Universal Salvation."¹³ In this context, Mazu makes fifteen vows, which synthesize her connections with both state canonization and popular cult. On the one hand, Mazu's vow to protect the state and guard its people corresponds with the imperial government's concerns to justify its political and economic interests. On the other hand, Mazu's vow to protect the safety of travelling merchants and seafarers stresses her popular origin as a sea goddess. In fact, the vows that emphasize her role as guardian to ordinary people, like seafarers, merchant class, and women cover almost every aspect of daily life. In addition, Mazu's realm of influence also expands to spheres normally assigned to other deities, such as her vow to fulfill the wishes of literati or officials. In

¹² See Judith M. Boltz, "In Homage to Tianfei," pp. 225-226.

¹³ Ibid.

other words, Daoist masters applied a syncretic approach to blend representations of Mazu constructed by the state with popular conceptions of the goddess into Daoist canonized images: a universal savior, who promises immediate and reliable responses to anyone in need, a savior acting in concert with the Dao, with the organizing forces of nature. The emphasis of Mazu's cosmic omnipotence in the Daoist text contributed to her popularity.

The third aspect of Daoist canonization illustrated by *Tianfei jiuku lingyan jing* is the emphasis on the ritual function of this Daoist text. It is meant to be recited and chanted by the devotees:

世間若有男女，恭敬信禮，稱其名號；轉誦是經一徧，乃至百徧，千徧，即得祛除災難。

if within the moral realm, men and women express a sincere faith, bow down in devotion and call her name... if they but chant this scripture once through, and then a hundred, thousand times, they have achieved an alleviation of their stress and hardship.¹⁴

The passage makes it clear that chanting and reciting this scripture could save one from all calamities. In addition to reciting the scripture, the Numinous Talisman of Celestial Consort for Relieving Distress in conjunction with incantation for giving charge to the talisman, stresses even more the ritual function. As claimed in the closing instructions, the talisman, inscribed with figurative signs and formal symbols, serves as a manifestation of cosmic energies and a representation of the goddess. The talisman functions to drive out demons, eliminate various harmful influences, and obtain the protection of the goddess. Moreover, talismans are also designed to be burned and their ashes drunk in water to remedy various illness: "Light incense and Recite the incantation

¹⁴ See Judith M. Boltz, "In Homage to Tianfei," p. 226.

seven times, pulverize it together with freshly drawn well water and gum olibanum. When ingested, all will be made well of its own accord.”¹⁵

Aside from *Tianfei jiuku lingyan jing*, the *Daozang* scripture, there are other Daoist scriptures in homage to Mazu that circulated outside the Daoist canon in late imperial China. Most of these scriptures can be seen as later revisions of the *Daozang* scripture, with various components rearranged and, in some cases, adding new components. Some of these texts are still circulated in contemporary China. Among them, two Daoist scriptures are significant to the popularity of the Mazu cult: *The Wondrous Scripture of the Most High Speaking on the Numinous Efficacy of the Celestial Empress in Relieving Distress* (*Taishang shuo tianhou jiuku miaojing* 太上說天后救苦妙經) (1721)¹⁶ and *The Perfected Scripture of the Holy Mother* (*Tianshang shengmu zhenjing* 天上聖母真經) (1888).¹⁷ These additional Daoist scriptures devoted to Mazu compiled and circulated in the late Ming and Qing eras demonstrates the popularity of Mazu cult and the efforts of Daoist priests to assimilate this cult into the Daoist system.

As the previous discussion and textual analysis demonstrate, *Tianfei jiuke lingyan jing* offers different perspectives concerning Mazu’s origin, her path to immortality, and her divine functions. It illustrates how a local deity was assimilated into the Daoist pantheon. In this process, the individual identity of a local goddess is fully reconstructed as a Daoist deity emanating from the Daoist cosmological system. Another notable

¹⁵ See Judith M. Boltz, “In Homage to Tianfei,” p. 229.

¹⁶ Fang Xingshen 方行慎 ed. *Taishang shuo tianhou jiuku miaojing*, included in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Jingchan juan*, pp. 22-67.

¹⁷ Yangjiu 楊濬 ed. *Tianshang shengmu zhenjing*, included in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Jingchan juan*, pp. 157-168.

feature of Daoist interpretation is that Mazu is represented as the universal savior. In this respect, Mazu's salvific sovereignty encompasses not only maritime affairs and state activities, as it did for Confucian officials, but also all aspects of life and death. The last aspect worth noting is the importance of incantations and talismans in the name of Mazu, which reflects the liturgical function of the Daoist scripture. In sum, *Tianfei jiuke lingyan jing* serves as a good example of the Daoist adoption of popular deities.

Daoist Liturgical Texts Featuring Mazu

In addition to compiling Daoist scriptures, another aspect of Daoist canonization worth studying is the inclusion of local deities into the Daoist liturgical system. There are additional ritual texts paying homage to Mazu, such as the *Rite of Offering to the Celestial Consort* (*Tianfei jiaoke* 天妃醮科) and the *Rite of Divine Lampe Praying to Beneficent Wisdom and Illustrious Manifestation of the Celestial Consort* (*Fuhui mingzhu tianfei shengdeng ke* 福惠明著天妃聖燈科). These two ritual texts are included in the *Golden Book of the Great Completion of Rescue and Salvation of the Supreme Purity and Numinous Treasure* (*Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* 上清靈寶濟度大成金書) compiled by a well-known Daoist priest, Zhou Side 周思德 (1359–1451).¹⁸ The compilation of Daoist ritual manuals dedicated to popular deities and to performing *jiao* ritual functions to incorporate popular deities into Daoism. As noted by Maruyama Hiroshi, the use of written documents in Daoist ritual is one key feature that distinguishes

¹⁸ The version I used is included in *Daoist Texts Outside the Canon* (*Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書) (Sichuan: Bashu shushe 巴蜀書社, 1992); English translation of *Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* 上清靈寶濟度大成金書 comes from Livia Kohn ed. *Daoist Identity: Cosmology, Lineage, and Ritual* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), p. 271.

it from Buddhist, Confucian, and popular rites.¹⁹ Following this argument, the written manuals of Daoist rituals featuring Mazu carry an important weight in the formation of her Daoist identity.

Tianfei jiaoke, as shown by the title, is a typical Daoist liturgical text used for performing an offering in honor to the Celestial Consort. This text is a document written in literary language for the specific liturgical occasion, *jiao*, the ritual of offering. Generally, early Song liturgists traced it back and attributed it to Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933). Du Guangting was considered as the first Daoist who separated *jiao* ritual from *zhai* 齋 (retreat) service, thereby construing *jiao* as either an independent ceremony of performing an offering of thanksgiving or a continuation of the *zhai* service.²⁰ Starting from the Song dynasty, *zhai* became more associated with ceremonies for the dead, and today it most commonly refers to the Daoist funeral liturgy. The term of *jiao* gradually came to refer to ceremonies for the living. This new development of *jiao* ritual during the Song times was closely connected with the emergence and popularity of local cults. According to Lowell Skar, the Daoist communal liturgy has achieved its survival through a functional symbiosis with local cults of popular religion by performing sacrifice and offering rituals dedicated to local deities since the Song dynasty.²¹ Considering the close

¹⁹ On more information of the significance of Daoist documents in Daoist rituals, see Maruyama Hiroshi's "Documents Used in Rituals of Merit in Taiwanese Daoism," in Livia Kohn and Harold Roth eds., *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual*, pp. 256-273.

²⁰ For the difference between *zhai* and *jiao*, see Poul Anderson, "Jiao," in Fabrizio Pregadio ed., *The Encyclopedia of Taoism: Volume 1*, pp. 540-544; Kristopher Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 74-77; Livia Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture* (Three Pines Press, 2001), pp. 124-125.

²¹ See Lowell Skar's article "Ritual Movements, Deity Cults and the Transformation of Daoism in Song and Yuan Times," in Livia Kohn ed., *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 417. Edward Davis makes a similar point in his *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

relationship between *jiao* ritual and local cults, *Tianfei jiaoke* suggests that the growing importance of the Mazu cult in late imperial China led to the writing of specific Daoist ritual texts devoted to her.

The following is a paraphrased version of the original text, *Tianfei jiaoke*. The first part of the text begins with a description featuring elements of the Daoist cosmology, thus situating Mazu in a large cosmological scheme. It says,

伏聞晨星北拱，應德曜於中天，萬水東歸，顯海之靈。自古欲遂濟川之平妥，須憑大道以懷祈。

We have heard that the morning star bows to the North; [it] dazzles in the center of heaven [as is] appropriate to virtue; and [the truth that] myriad rivers run back to the east reveals the numinousity of the sea. From ancient times, those who wish to cross the river safely should rely on grace resulting from prayers to the Great Way.²²

After sketching this large cosmological scheme, the text continues to identify Mazu's position from a Daoist cosmological perspective. It states that Mazu occupies an important position in the Bureau of Water (*shuifu* 水府) and is associated with *kan* 坎, one of the eight diagrams, which symbolizes water. In this context, the Daoist cosmology, in particular the classical association of Mazu with the water virtue, provides religious legitimacy for the claim of Mazu as a deity of Daoist origin. As Schipper points out, Daoist classical liturgical manuals often feature descriptions of cosmic powers and the use of bureaucratic metaphors.²³ The same text continues to eulogize the goddess's merit in invocations of her. It praises Mazu's capacity to bestow the universal salvation:

²² The original text comes from *Tianfei jiaoke*, in Zhou Side ed., *Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu*, vol. 22, included in *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 vol.16, p. 801.

²³ See Schipper, "Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism," in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 45, No. 1 (Nov., 1985), p. 35.

“Relieving sufferings all over the place, she makes the vow of protecting the state and guarding people. She brings salvation to a myriad people.....”²⁴ This emphasis on Mazu as a universal savior is in line with her images described in *Tianfei jiuku lingyan jing*.

The second part of the text starts by describing human suffering in this world. It then is followed by the confession of the patron who commissions the *jiao* ritual. The confession mentions that the patron was immersed in all kinds of sufferings from sensual world and expressed his regret of wrong doings. According to Schipper, such an expression of apprehension and humility is a standard formula found in this kind of Daoist ritual texts.²⁵ Following the confession is the standard presentation of all the faithful: “[We] humbly present our sincerity, and let your radiant grace descend upon us. [We] still expect thousands of spirits and sages approaching and watching over [the ceremony]. May you accept the fragrant sacrifice from our simple ritual and bring down your limitless grace upon us.”²⁶

The last part of the text emphasizes the patron’s piety to the goddess and the purposes of performing this *jiao* ritual. In general, as Schipper points out, the intention (*yi* 意) of *jiao* is an integral part of the memorial that explains the reasons for the service and prays for blessings received from deities.²⁷ It says,

今醮主因斯涉海之危, 獲濟川之利, 是用肅陳清醮, 仰譽洪休.....

²⁴ The original Chinese text reads: [濟難多方, 有護國庇民之願, 度人無量。] See *Tianfei jiaoke*, in *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 vol.16, p. 801.

²⁵ See Schipper, “The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies,” in A. P. Wolf ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 317.

²⁶ *Zangwai daoshu*, vol.16, p. 801.

²⁷ See Schipper, “The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies,” p. 319.

Now the patron encounters a danger of crossing the sea, while [seeking to] gain the benefit of crossing the river. [For that], we solemnly prepare pure offerings so as to praise your limitless blessing descended upon us.²⁸

The same text continues to describe the benefits of *jiao* ritual: praying for prosperity, peace, longevity, and good fortune in the journey are among the purposes of this offering.

According to Schipper, the written memorial in classical *jiao* ritual contains several generic features. First, “It is in pure classic Chinese (*wenyan* 文言) in a variety of styles, usually alternating prose with rhymed parts. The style is often flowery and sophisticated.”²⁹ In this respect, *Tianfei jiaoke* is written in classic literary Chinese and designated to be read, that is, the text has to be present on the altar during offerings to the Celestial Consort. Second, the text stresses the Daoist priest’s authority to present the memorial to the Celestial Consort on the patron’s behalf. Schipper argues that the capacity to address memorials originated from the Daoist priest’s status as an official of the heavenly administration. It is this clerical status that makes him a legitimate mediator. The establishment of a specialized and institutionally recognized core of liturgical experts, buttressed by authoritative ritual texts, marks an important transformation of popular cults, including that of Mazu, which originally proceeded without the presence of such mediators.

Another ritual text is the *Rite of Divine Lamp Praying to Beneficent Wisdom and Illustrious Manifestation of the Celestial Consort* (*Fuhui mingzhu tianfei shengdeng ke* 福惠明著天妃聖燈科). The rite of lighting lamps to Tianfei and her immediate family

²⁸ *Zangwai daoshu*, vol.16, p. 802.

²⁹ See Schipper, “Vernacular and Classical Ritual,” pp. 21-22. Schipper discusses the literacy features of texts used in the classical ritual.

can be traced back to an important Daoist liturgical tradition, as suggested by Du Guangting in *Funeral Ritual and Yellow Register Retreat* (*Taishang huanglu zhaiyi* 太上黃錄齋儀) (DZ507). Du emphasized the crucial function of lighting lamps in saving the deceased person from hell.³⁰ In addition, the Daoist canon contains a vast range of liturgical compendia for the rite of lighting lamps, such as *Shangqing dongxun mingdeng shangjing* 上清洞玄明燈上經, *Sangong dengyi* 三宮燈儀, and *Xuandi dengyi* 玄帝燈儀.³¹ These texts suggest that the lamp rite became well-developed in the Daoist liturgical framework in the Song China. In addition, *Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu* in the Ming dynasty also adds a great number of new categories of lamp rites, including *Lamp Rites for Deconstructing Nine Obscurities and Purgatories* (*Po jiuyou yu dengke* 破九幽獄燈科), and *Lamp Rites for Paying Homage to Deities* (*Zanzhu dengyi men* 讚祝燈儀門).

Among the different categories of lamp rites, those paying homage to deities show further diversity: there are specific rites designed for particular deities that accumulate merits for the people who attend the rites. The *Fuhui mingzhu tianfei shengdeng ke* features the lamp rite dedicated to Mazu. The basic outline of the lamp ritual in homage of Tianfei, as shown below, proves the way that Daoist priests attempted to incorporate a local deity into the Daoist liturgical system.

³⁰ Du Guangting 杜光庭, “Taishang huanlu zhaiyi,” 太上黃錄齋儀, vol.56, DZ507. Du gives detailed explanations of the significance of lamp ritual.

³¹ There are many liturgical texts about the lamp ritual in *Daozang*, such as *Nandou yanshou dengyi* 南斗延壽燈儀 DZ0199, *Beidou benming yanshou dengyi* 北斗本命延壽燈儀 DZ0201, *Danguan dengyi* 三官燈儀 DZ0202, *Xuandi dengyi* 玄帝燈儀 DZ0203.

The incenses and lamps must first be lighted as offerings dedicate to the Celestial Consort and her parents as a way to attract the attention and blessings of the goddess:

今以焚香供養，宣封護國庇民廣濟福惠明著天妃，聖父佑德積慶侯，聖母太平興國夫人……一切威靈悉仗真香，普同供養……

Now by burning incense, [we] make offerings to declare the titles of honor, the Celestial Consort of Beneficent Wisdom and Illustrious Manifestation, your holy father, the Marshal of Blessing Virtue and Accumulating Merits, and your holy mother, the Lady of Great Peace and Prospering State…… All the manifestations of majestic sprites totally depend on the true incense as universal offerings.³²

After making the offerings, a couple lines of eulogy are delivered to address the majestic compassion of Celestial Consort,

靈昭四海，天朝累將於褒封廟食。諸方黎庶咸依於覆護，無遠弗屆。有感必通。

[The celestial Consort]’s numinosity manifests within the four seas, [therefore] the imperial governments repeatedly granted honorific titles and made offerings to [the goddess]. Everywhere people all rely on [her] protection to the extent that no place [is] too distant to be reached. [Her] divine response must be known.³³

The prayer made in behalf of the patron who commissions the ritual addresses his compassion as well as his religious piety to take refuge in the Celestial Consort. The following part specifies the purpose of the ritual, obtaining blessings and protection from Mazu:

出行祈舟楫之安居 ……【虞】遂世家之慶。稽首燈壇虔誠讚頌。

When going on a journey, [we] pray for the safety of sailing the boat……the family from generation to generation prospers as one wish.

³² The original text comes from *Fuhui mingzhu tianfei shengdeng ke*, in Zhou Side ed. *Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu*, vol. 14, collected in *Zangwai daoshu*, vol.16, p. 514.

³³ Ibid.

[The patron] pays obeisance to the lamp altar and praises [the goddess] with utmost sincerity.³⁴

The text stresses that this ritual of lighting the lamp, along with the offering of incense, functions to bring good fortune and longevity to the family of the patron who sponsored the rite. As we can see from the text, there is a strong connection between lighting the lamp and devotee's praying for the forthcoming blessings.

The two liturgical texts devoted to Mazu discussed above are not included in the Daoist canon, but they serve as additional evidence of interactions between local Daoist priests and popular cults in late imperial China. As both Schipper and Kenneth Dean point out, the writing in classical Chinese of liturgical texts dedicated to local gods “represents a major strategy in the process of Daoist incorporation of local cults into the universalistic Daoist liturgical system.”³⁵ In this process, the compiling and reading of the written documents dedicated to Mazu suggests strong Daoist points of view. To be specific, the above two written documents, by virtue of their high formality and Daoist terminology, as well as through their association with the specific Daoist rites and priestly powers, function to establish the Daoist sense of identity. In addition, when presenting these two memorials to Mazu, Daoist priests, as representatives of the patrons, became celestial officers to convey prayers and confessions of devotees. The interaction of Daoist priests with the divine is “almost exclusively through written documents that are often lengthy, convoluted, and penned in formal classical Chinese.”³⁶ In other words,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See Kristopher Schipper, “Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism,” pp. 21-57; Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 18.

³⁶ See Maruyama Hiroshi's “Documents Used in Rituals of Merit in Taiwanese Daoism,” p. 256.

the Daoist appropriation of popular cults, such as that of Mazu, involves a process of "textualization," in which diverse local practices, come to be formalized, standardized, and made the privileged domain of a priestly hierarchy. In this sense, as Livia Kohn argues, the popular cult was translated into a Daoist context and has come to serve the world of the Dao, reinforcing both the identity of the individual and the group as Daoist.³⁷

Jiao Ritual Dedicated to Mazu

In liturgical terms, Daoist canonization was not only confined to the writing of liturgical texts that paid a homage to Mazu, but also involved the Daoist priests' active participation in popular religious festivals and their roles in performing *jiao* rituals devoted to Mazu. In fact, a widely popular strand of Daoism grew rapidly during the late imperial China that included the active participation of Daoists in popular religious festivals and celebrations of the birthdays of local deities.³⁸ These celebrations opened new spaces for the performance of large-scale Daoist liturgies, such as *jiao*.

For the celebration of Mazu's birthday, Daoist priests were normally invited or commissioned to perform the great annual *jiao* offerings in homage to the goddess. In one particular case, Daoist priests were dispatched by the Emperor Chengzu who were responsible to pray Mazu for the safety of Zheng He's voyage and performed pure offerings for the safe departure of the imperial fleets.

永樂十五年，欽差內官王貴通、莫信、周福率領千戶彭佑、百戶韓翊並道士詣廟，修設開洋清醮。

³⁷ See Livia Kohn ed. *Daoist Identity: Cosmology, Lineage, and Ritual*, p. 271.

³⁸ Pierre-Henry De Bruyn, "Daoism in the Ming (1368-1644)," in *Daoism Handbook*, p. 617.

“In the fifteenth year of the Yongle reign (1416), the envoys, eunuchs Wang Guitong, Mo Xing, and Zhou Fu, led a battalion commander Peng You, a million commander Han Yi, and Daoist priests to the [Mazu] temple with an imperial decree. [It] purported to prepare and perform pure offerings for commencing sailing.”³⁹

Similar evidence testifying to the Daoist role in taking charge of large scale offerings is scattered over local gazetteers of different areas throughout late imperial China. *The Gazetteer of Xin'an District* (*Xin'an xianzhi* 新安縣志) (1688) states that,

遇神誕，設醮供祭。

“In the event of the goddess's birthday, [she] should be worshiped by performing *jiao* and offering sacrifice.”⁴⁰

As demonstrated by these sources, *jiao* ritual performed by Daoist priests was an integral part of the celebration of Mazu's festivals sponsored by both official governments and local communities. *Jiao* ritual held in Mazu temples functioned either to consecrate newly built temples or as a service of thanksgiving for the blessings received from Mazu during the popular festivals, in particular her birthday. In this sense, performing *jiao* rituals cemented the Daoist priests' status as required liturgical specialists at great popular festivals. Simultaneously, *jiao* ritual assimilated local deities into Daoism, further enhancing the religious authority of Daoist priests. Indeed, as they performed *jiao*, Daoist priests sought to incorporate the local deity into the Daoist celestial bureaucracy. They attempted to impose their interpretation of local cults so as to better fit the theological expectations of Daoism.

³⁹ *Tianfei xiansheng lu*, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Xin'an xianzhi* 新安縣志 (1688), vol. 5, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, vol.2, p. 26.

A classical form of *jiao* typically includes two main procedures: first, the establishment of a sacred space and the *zhai*, and second, the actual performance of a *jiao* sacrifice and the deconstruction of the sacred space.⁴¹ The first set of rituals, as suggested by Schipper and Dean, includes the nocturnal invocation (*suqi* 宿啓), through which a sacred ritual area is established, referred to as the "Daoist altar" (*daotan* 道壇), as well as the purification, invocation, and distribution of the Five True Writs (*wuzhen wen* 五真文) in the five directions of the sacred area.⁴² In the second set, the presentation of memorial (*jinbiao* 進表) is first performed to praise the spirits in assisting the Daoist priest to communicate with heaven. It is followed by the true sacrifice, including large-scale offerings devoted to the Jade Emperor and a series of offerings rituals in homage to all categories of sprite world. The second set ends with the destruction of the altar and the sending off of the gods.

The above general pattern of Daoist *jiao* ritual reflects the Daoist ideology, in particular the installation of the ritual area, the sacrifice of writings, and the consecration of the Five True Writs. These mark that the Daoist version of sacred space and time “speeds up cosmic cycles.”⁴³ According to Schipper, the installation of the ritual area “is

⁴¹ John Largerway, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987); Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*, pp. 46-47; Poul Andersen, “Jiao,” in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, pp. 540-544. Kristopher Schipper, in “The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies,” gives similar explanation.

⁴² See Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*, p. 46. Kristopher Schipper, in “The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies,” gives similar descriptions of procedures of *jiao* ritual, p. 317.

⁴³ See Kenneth Dean, “Daoist Ritual Today,” in *Daoist Handbook*, pp. 672-677. Contemporary *jiao* ritual (communal sacrifices) begins with the creation of a sacred space by placing the five True Talismans of the Lingao tradition around the altar and at the central altar. Then the purification and sealing of the altar occur, followed by the invitation of Daoist gods, the offerings of incense and tea, and the enactment of an audience with the gods. The presentation of a memorial (*jinbiao* 進表) explaining its purpose and the names of the sponsors are considered as the most important process of the ritual. The final stage involves

the first articulation and is accompanied by actions considered to represent the creation of the worlds... a perfect model of the world is created, where all the time cycles and spatial categories of the space-time continuum are integrated.”⁴⁴ In addition, the placing of the Five True Writs spontaneously recalls the Daoist cosmology, which is the creation of the universe. Specifically, “all the powers of the universe have been concentrated and materialized in the sacred True Writs.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the dispersal of the sacred True Writs also represents the temporal cycle of the cosmos and allows the world to benefit from the spiritual force released by this ritual action.

As one integral part of the establishment of ritual space, the statues of Mazu normally worshiped in the temple are removed from their regular locations, namely the noble north; and situated on the opposite side. The place next to Mazu is also set with smaller statues of Mazu and of other local gods brought from other local temples or the home altars of local people. In this location, Mazu and other local gods are believed to “review the ritual” and form the enclosure of the ritual area. As Schipper notes, the places occupied by Mazu and other deities are known as the Table of Three Offices (of Heaven, Earth, and Water), the liturgical function of which is to represent “theologically, all the higher spiritual beings this side of the Tao.”⁴⁶ Opposite of the table of Three Offices, the noble north is occupied by highest Daoist deities, represented by the paintings or statues of Three Pure Ones (*Sanqing* 三清) and Jade Emperor. This arrangement of the seats of

the reverse process of feasting the gods, an announcement of the success of the ritual, an expression of thanks and a sending-off of the gods.

⁴⁴ See Kristopher Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, p. 76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-91.

⁴⁶ See Kristopher Schipper, “The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies,” pp. 317-318.

the gods vividly illustrates the assembly of Daoist divine power in the ritual space. The rearrangement of the inside of the temple reflects the Daoist celestial bureaucracy. It is a tensile-yet-hierarchical order in which the local deities, including Mazu, are absorbed into the Daoist pantheon in a subordinate position. The structure of the Daoist ritual area is a “model of” and “model for” the Daoist vision of a cosmic hierarchy presided over by the Three Offices, with the deities of popular religion repositioned as deriving their authority from the higher Daoist powers.⁴⁷

From the Daoist perspective, the *jiao* ritual also indicates that the unified and centered structure of the offering puts the Daoist priests and their liturgy at the core, while subordinating the local gods. For the Daoist priests are the only religious agents able to install the ritual area, arrange the gods into hierarchies of Daoist pantheon, recite scriptures, make offerings when performing *jiao* liturgy. In this sense, as some Daoist scholars have argued, the *jiao* ritual devoted to local deities is at bottom a Daoist-oriented ritual. In Dean’s words, Daoist rituals function as a liturgical framework through which “a complex process model of spiritual power [enters] in multifaceted interaction with local systems of power.”⁴⁸ During the ritual dedicated to local gods, the activities of the entire community in ritual events, including the priest, community representatives, the theater group and musicians, and the individual devotee, are all organized by the Daoist liturgical framework.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The notion that religion is a cultural system that provides ‘models of’ (maps that reflect the configuration of the world) and ‘models for’ (blueprints for ordered and ordering activity) comes from anthropologist Clifford Geertz. See his “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 87-125.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*, p. 50.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

However, other scholars challenge the Daoist-oriented reading of *jiao* ritual. Drawing on his study of *jiao* rituals in Taiwan, Robert Hymes posits that they reflect the combination of two models into a single ritual: a model of direct contact between humans and local gods; and a model of a universal, impersonal, mediated, and bureaucratic hierarchy of divinities.⁵⁰

Generally, at the liturgical level, priests distinguish between two rituals which they perform during the service: the solemn rites in classical Chinese and the more popular practices in vernacular that are linked to popular belief systems. Inside the temple, Daoist priests (*daoshi* 道士) perform *jiao* ritual in classical Chinese; outside the temple, the ritual masters (*fashi* 法師), also known as lay Daoist specialists, lead spirit mediums in reciting chants dedicated to the legends of the local gods.⁵¹ In other words, despite the centralizing efforts of Daoist priests, there is no single sacred space. Rather, during the performance of *jiao* ritual, there are multiple, contested spaces that fulfill multiple functions. In the case of the Mazu cult, along with the classic *jiao* ritual performed by Daoist priests, there is also a ritual of summoning Mazu performed by ritual masters who invoke Mazu by reciting verses in the vernacular form:

I respectfully invite the Holy Mother Lin, Queen of Heaven, who saves the people..... The Queen of Heaven journeys over the seas, she withstands the winds and storms. With all her might she comes to help. Then she returns to Meizhou, her temple, where every day men and women pay her their respects. The Holy Mother appeared there at Meizhou. Her birthday is

⁵⁰ Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China*, pp. 252-260.

⁵¹ For more details of *fashi* and *daoshi* see Kristopher Schipper, "Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism," pp. 27-28.

the twenty-third of the third moon. But all here present sincerely invite her,
Holy Mother of Heaven, descend!⁵²

The text above stresses the local background of Mazu, the goddess from the Meizhou Island, and her close connection with local people rather than the Daoist cosmological context shown in Daoist classical *jiao* texts. In this case, the goddess from popular pantheon becomes the focus of the rite which denotes the strong popular belief system: Mazu serves as a guardian deity of the local community.

Daoist rituals, and in particular *jiao* rituals, thus, serve as the most important vehicle through which Daoist priests approach local cults from their strong Daoist theological perspectives. Daoist ritual texts suggest a transformation in the ways in which local deities are understood and ritually approached in late imperial China. In the structured and formalized performance of ritual devoted to popular deities, Daoist priests emphasized Daoist spiritual priorities. As we have discussed, Daoist priests were responsible for organizing the entire sequence of rites that make up the full ritual. Every communication with the celestial bureaucracy, and all of the invocations, consecrations, and the texts of *jiao* were in charge of Daoist priests.

The Daoist Management of the Mazu Temples

The affinity between Daoism and popular cults and temples in late imperial China is attested to by the fact that a considerable amount of the Mazu temples were under the management of the Daoist clergy. Gazetteers compiled in late imperial China provide detailed evidence concerning Daoist priests' involvements in Mazu temples. This section

⁵² “Zhongshen zhou” 众神咒 included in Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, p. 52; also see Kristopher Schipper, “Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism,” p. 30.

explores several examples that illustrate the ways Daoist priests involved in the construction and management of Mazu temples.

First, a large amount of Mazu temples were founded by or closely connected to Daoist priests. The founding of a Mazu temple at the Pinghu 平湖 district of Jiaxing 嘉興 prefecture was directly connected with a Daoist priest's dream of Mazu, who revealed to him a piece of fragrant wood in the sea. The next day, the wood had flowed in from the sea, just as the Daoist dreamed. It was later engraved as a Mazu statue emplaced in a new temple. Many efficacious responses associated with Mazu were reported after the establishment of the temple.⁵³

According to random records in local gazetteers dating to the Ming and Qing eras, a large number of Mazu temples became closely connected to Daoist priests who were responsible for their renovation and expansion. For example, the Tianfei palace in the Renhe 仁和 district of Zhejiang 浙江 prefecture that was first built in the Hongwu 洪武 era (1368–1398) deteriorated following years without repair. The Daoist abbot of Sanmao 三茅 Abbey, Chen Fuming 陳福明 (dates unknown), and his disciple Zhu Yuanming 朱源明 (dates unknown) renovated it during the seventeenth year of the Chenghua 成化 reign (1481). In addition, later generations of Master Chen's disciples continued the efforts to maintain them. As stated in the text,

嘉靖十八年鄰火不戒，延燎一空。賴有其徒鄭景隆，奮不顧身，徧加募緣，不辭寒暑。日弛遠近，勞苦萬狀，幸已訖功，居民瞻仰。

In the eighteenth year of the Jiajing reign (1539), a fire from nearby had not been treated with caution, spreading to burn down everything. [Especially] one disciple, Zheng Jinglong was dedicated himself to raising donations extensively regardless of cold and heat. He traveled nearby and

⁵³ *Jiaxing fuzhi* 嘉興府志 (1878), in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, vol.1, p. 292.

faraway in one day without afraid of toil. Fortunately, it was accomplished. People living nearby regarded [this feat] with reverence.⁵⁴

A local gazetteer in Beijing area offers similar evidence that Daoist priests contributed to enlarging a Mazu temple, thereby promoting its status from a temple (*miao* 廟) into a palace (*gong* 宮):

京師舊有廟，在都城之異隅大通橋之西。景泰辛未，主持道士丘然援引南京例，升為宮……成化庚子然源乃募材鳩工，拓大而一新之。祠神之宮茲其稱矣。

There used to be a temple in the capital [Beijing] that was located west of the Datong bridge. During the eighth year of the Jingtai reign (1451), the chief Daoist priest Qiu Ran referred to [the palace in] Nanjing as a precedent in order to promote [the idea of turning] the temple into a palace…… In the sixteenth year of the Chenghua reign (1480), [Daoists] subsequently collected the materials and assembled the workmen so as to enlarge it into quite a new palace. In this way, the palace to worship the goddess corresponded to her title.⁵⁵

These examples above prove the increasing Daoist involvement in the Mazu cult that enhanced its popularity. Daoist priests were either involved in the original establishment of new Mazu temples or remained heavily invested in later restorations of existing temples. The evidence unequivocally indicates the significance of the Daoist connection for the spread of the Mazu cult.

Furthermore, evidence in local gazetteers also suggests that some established Daoist temples incorporated a hall or a shrine dedicated to Mazu as one way to absorb popular deities into Daoism. This is certainly the case for the Numinous Compassion Palace (*Lingci gong* 靈慈宮) in the Taicang 太倉 district:

⁵⁴ Shen Chaoxuan 沈朝宣, ed., *Renhe xianzhi* 仁和縣志 (1893), in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, vol. 1, p. 279.

⁵⁵ Qiu Rui 邱濬 (1421-1495), “Chongqiu jingdu tianfei gong beiji 重修京都天妃宮碑記,” (1418) from *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Beike juan*, p. 15.

元至元二十九年海道萬戶朱旭建為天妃祝釐之所……宮舊歸併崑山清真觀。

In the twenty-ninth year of the Zhiyuan reign (1292) of Yuan dynasty, a brigade commander Zhu Xu established [the temple] to worship the Celestial Consort…… [Later], the palace became worn and was integrated into the Qingzhen Abbey at Mt. Kun.⁵⁶

There were similar cases in other areas, such as the Mazu shrine in the Chongming 崇明 district, which was situated in the Baoqing 寶慶 Abbey.⁵⁷ The fact that Mazu was worshiped as a subordinate deity in Daoist temples further indicates the affinity between Daoism and the Mazu cult in late imperial China. In some rare instances, Mazu was interpreted as identical with other Daoist goddesses, such as the Three Daughters of Lin Lingsu 林靈素 (1076–1120), the founder of Divine Empyrean (*shenxiao* 神霄) ritual tradition. This identification was mainly prevalent in the Jiangzhe 江浙 area, as shown in the following two gazetteers of Songjiang 松江 district.

天妃宮，江淮間濱海多有之。其神為女子三人，俗傳神姓林氏，遂實以為靈素三女……

Celestial Consort Palaces are mostly located in riversides and sea coasts. The goddess was considered as three ladies. Since it is commonly believed that the goddesses originated from the Lin's family, [they] were truly identified as Lin Lingsu's three daughters.⁵⁸

上海縣天后宮，後有丹鳳樓，觀潮者登焉。。。。中肖神姊妹三人。。。。神采如生。

The building of Danfeng is located at the back of Tianhou Palace of Shanghai district where visitors observing the sea tides would ascend…

⁵⁶ Wang Ao 王鏊 (1450-1524) ed., *Gusu zhi* 姑蘇志, included in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, p. 424.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639) ed., *Songjiang fuzhi* 松江府志 (1630), in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, vol.2, p. 464.

The changing scenes of the tidal waves were like the three sisters' images. The looks of the goddesses were so vivid.⁵⁹

The two excerpts above are respectively dated back to the Chongzhen reign of Ming dynasty and the Jiaqing reign of Qing dynasty. It is possible that the perception of Mazu as being identical to the Three Sisters became prevalent in this area during and after those eras. This identification further supports the fact that Daoism had shaped the Mazu cult in significant ways in some local areas. Relating Mazu to the three daughters of a famous Daoist master, in a sense linking Mazu's descent to the foundational Daoist lineage, is yet another way in which Daoism sought to assimilate the popular cult.

As in the case of the Mazu temple in Tianjin 天津 area, the Daoist institutional connection with the Mazu cult during late imperial China also came in the form of dispatching Daoist priests to take charge of her temples under imperial edicts.

天后宮：一在東門外，元朝建。明永樂元年重建。正德十年參將楊節重修，禮部劄付道士邵振祖領道經一部，春秋二祭。

One Celestial Empress Palace, which was founded during the Yuan dynasty, lies outside the Eastern Gate. During the first year of the Yongle reign (1403), it was rebuilt. In the tenth year of the Zhengde reign (1515), the assistant regional commander, Yang Jie, devoted himself to its renovation. The Department of Rites bestowed the Daoist priest Shao Zhenzu a copy of Daoist canon, and dispatched him to take charge of spring and autumn sacrifices.⁶⁰

The *Gazetteer of Haining District* (*Haining xianzhi* 海寧縣志) reports a similar case during the Qing dynasty. Specifically, in September of the seventh year of the Yongzheng 雍正 reign (1729), the Mazu temple was built under an imperial edict. The

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 466.

⁶⁰ *Chongxiu tianjin fuzhi* 重修天津府志 (1899), in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, vol.2, p. 249.

Qing government also sponsored the construction of a Daoist abbey, which was responsible for the management of the Mazu temple.⁶¹ Here, we can see the close cooperation between imperial governments and Daoist priests. Like Confucianism, which I discussed in chapter three, Daoism served as an imperial tool to institutionalize the local cults. According to another gazetteer from the Dongwan 東莞 district, the local official relied on Daoist priests to manage the Mazu temple, at the same time the Daoist priests' living depended on the financial support of the local government. As it says in the text, "the magistrate Wang Jing 王灝 (dates unknown) allotted certain amount of grain to sponsor the Daoists in support of their activities, such as offering incenses to the goddess and cleaning up the temple."⁶²

In sum, the local records provide sufficient evidence to suggest that, from the Ming to the Qing period, the Mazu cult became closely connected with Daoism at the institutional level. A substantial number of temples' establishments or restorations were directly or indirectly linked to Daoist priests. Moreover, the evidence discussed above strongly supports the contention that the Daoist involvement in the management of Mazu temples contributed to the popularity of her cult. Indeed, the spread of Mazu temples was the collaborative effort of the local communities and state patronage under the initiative of the Daoist clergy that was responsible for founding and managing Mazu temples.

⁶¹ See *Haining xianzhi* 海寧縣志, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, vol.2, p. 266. The original text reads: [雍正七年九月，欽奉上諭敕建，前後為齋宿廳，後為道院。]

⁶² See *Dongwan xianzhi* 東莞縣志 (1798), in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan*, vol.2, p. 24. The Chinese text reads: [天后廟，乾隆十四年邑人張氏送地創建。知縣在資福寺租項內撥穀三十一石一斗七升零一勺給守廟道士供香燈酒掃用。]

The General Pattern of the Interaction between Daoism and Popular Religion

As discussed in previous sections, Daoist canonization and adoption of the Mazu cult in late imperial China mainly reflect in several aspects: the writing of Daoist scriptures and liturgical texts featuring Mazu, performing Daoist liturgy, and the institutional management of Mazu temples. Mazu's case illustrates the general pattern concerning the interaction between Daoism and popular religion in late imperial China. In this section, I would like to draw the full implications of these strategies of incorporation in order to deepen our understanding of the interplay of Daoism and popular cults.

The turning point in the re-articulation of state hierarchies and Daoist and popular pantheons took place during the Song dynasty. Considerable evidence suggests that Daoism in the Song and Yuan eras gradually became an integral part of a religious transformation that took root in local communities and different groups. This transformation entailed the gradual emergence of a popular pantheon composed of gods recognized by the state.⁶³ From the Song to the Ming dynasties some popular gods and goddesses were absorbed into the Daoist pantheon. These deities include Mazu, Wenchang 文昌 (God of Literature), Zhenwu 真武 (the Perfect Warrior), Guan Yu or Guandi 關帝 (the Lord of Guan), Bixia Yuanjun 碧霞元君 (Lady of Blue Clouds), and Doumu 斗母 (Mother the Dipper). Just as for Mazu's case, Zitong 梓潼, a local god in Sichuan area, was first constructed as a Daoist deity, Wenchang, in the end of twelfth

⁶³ According to Patricia Ebrey and Peter Gregory, this is the result of a move away from suppression to strategies of appropriation. Ebrey, Patricia B. and Peter. N Gregory, *Religion and Society in Tang and Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993). Valerie Hansen links it to the rise of organized lineages, which were dedicated to local society rather than national politics.

century, eventually becoming known for revealing Daoist scriptures and ceremonies. Daoist temples were also founded next to his shrines.⁶⁴

The compilation of texts devoted to popular deities and cults in the Ming Daoist canon illustrates the intense interaction between Daoism and local cults in late imperial China, an interaction that was important in the development of Daoism. The *Ming Daoist Canon of 1445*, just to offer a striking example, contains a wealth of information related to popular worship.⁶⁵ In fact, around sixty texts in this canon deal with popular deities and practices. In addition, the *Supplement of Ming Canon of 1607* (*Ming xu daoze* 明续道藏) includes sixteen texts devoted to local cults and deities out of the total fifty.

According to Schipper, there are five categories of Daoist scriptures related to popular deities and worship. There are Daoist scriptures paying homage to popular deities, Daoist scriptures revealed by popular deities, the stories of popular deities, books of popular worship and practice, and texts related to popular rituals.⁶⁶ For example, Daoist scriptures dedicated to popular deities include *Scripture of the Numinous Responses and Proofs of Divine Lord of Zitong, Spoken by Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning* (*Yuanshi tianzun shuo zitong dijun yingyan jing* 元始天尊說梓潼帝君應驗經), which was devoted to Zitong, who became known as Wenchang; and *On the Origin of the Religious Practice of the Green-Black Thunder Commander, a Scripture*

⁶⁴ For more information of the Daoist adoption of the Zitong cult, see Terry Kleeman, "The Expansion of the Wen-ch'ang Cult," in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Song China*, pp. 45-74.

⁶⁵ See Kristofer M. Schipper, "Sources of Modern Popular Worship in the Taoist Canon: A Critical Appraisal," pp. 11-15; also see Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen ed., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, vol. 2, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 1188-1249.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Spoken by the Most High (Taishang shuo qingxuan leiling faxing yindi miaojing 太上說青玄雷令法行因地妙經), in honor of Marshal Wen (Wen yuanshuai 溫元帥).⁶⁷ These scriptures throw into the high relief Daoist attempts to incorporate popular deities into its pantheon. Additionally, some popular deities were represented as the revealers of Daoist scriptures. There are couples of examples of this dynamic in the Ming canon, such as Great Cavern Scripture according to Wenchang (*Taishang wuji zongzhen wenchang dadong xianjing 太上無極總真文昌大洞仙經*) revealed by Wenchang, and *Scripture on the Recompense for Parental Kindness spoken by Xuantian shangdi (Xuantian shangdi shuo bao fumu enzhong jing 玄天上帝說報父母恩重經)*.⁶⁸

Beyond the production of canonical writings, the interaction between Daoism and popular religion was also characterized by the active participation of Daoist clergies in the popular festivals and celebrations in local temples of popular deities. Starting from the Song dynasty, Daoist clergies began carrying out practices ranging from healing and sacrifices to praying for rain or shine.⁶⁹ The Song dynasty also witnessed the interaction between Daoist clergy and popular religion that led to the emergence of a triadic system of religious specialists in the Chinese religious landscape. This system brought together and organized Daoist priests (*daoshi* 道士), lay "Daoist" specialists known as ritual

⁶⁷ The English translation of these two scriptures is from Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen ed., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, vol. 2, p. 1206; p. 1225.

⁶⁸ The English translation of these two scriptures is from Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen ed., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, vol. 2, p. 1207; p. 1200. Kristopher Schipper, "Sources of Modern Popular Worship in the Taoist Canon," pp. 9-13.

⁶⁹ See Matsumoto Koichi, "Daoism and Popular Religion in the Song," p. 311.

masters (*fashi* 法師), and spirit-mediums (*wu* 巫).⁷⁰ As Edward Davis observes, “the assimilation of local cults by Daoism produced the Daoist Ritual Master, who mediated between Daoism and the possessed mediums of local cults and village religion.”⁷¹ The popular festivals and celebrations devoted to local deities, according to Davis, involved not only the participation of Daoist priests, but also of ritual masters and spiritual mediums.

The Ming and Qing dynasty saw a continuation of the affinity between Daoism and popular cults and temples, in particular regarding temples for Mazu, the City God, Zhenwu, and Guan Yu.⁷² According to Terry F. Kleeman’s study on the expansion of the Wenchang cult in late imperial China, popular religious activities in Wenchang temples were closely connected to the Daoist clergy: “The Taoist church played a special role in this expansion. The identity claimed in the revelations of 1168 to 1181 was above all a Taoist identity, and cult practices seem to have centered on a Taoist scripture. The first recorded worship of the god outside Szechwan took place in the form of a Taoist offering.”⁷³ In addition, the Ming dynasty witnessed the large-scale presence of Daoists at popular religious festivals. For example, over 40,000 Daoists participated in the annual

⁷⁰ Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, pp. 7-8. Davis situates this complex and constantly fluctuating world of religious culture in the context of Song social and economic changes, specifically the “centripetal” forces of commercialization and urbanization, and the “centrifugal” forces of demographic and geographic expansion.

⁷¹ Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, p. 11.

⁷² Livia Kohn, “The Taoist Adoption of the City God,” in *Mingqing yanjiu* 5 (1996), pp. 69-108; On the information of Zhenwu cult and Daoism, see Shin-yi Chao, *Daoist Ritual, State Religion, and Popular Practices: Zhenwu Worship from Song to Ming (960-1644)* (Routledge, 2011); Barend J. Ter Haar, “The Rise of the Guanyu Cult: The Taoist Connection,” in *Linked Faiths: Essays on Chinese Religions* (1999), pp. 183-204.

⁷³ Terry F. Kleeman, “Expansion of the Wen-ch’ang Cult,” in *Religion and Society in T’ang and Song China*, p. 59.

festival of Yanjiu jie 燕九節 in Beijing.⁷⁴ Such Daoist engagement in popular festivals and pilgrimages occurred throughout late imperial China.

Concluding Remarks

In the process of absorbing and reinterpreting popular cults and related practices, we see the Daoist concern for orthodoxy, centered on the establishment of Daoist religious authority and identity. A careful investigation of Daoist canonization of the Mazu cult throughout Chinese history reveals four strategies: compiling Daoist canonical scriptures, writing liturgical texts, performing *jiao* rituals, and founding and restoring temples dedicated to Mazu. In the process of canonization, we have seen that Daoist priests attempted to impose their understanding of Mazu worship. Daoist scriptures featuring Mazu underplayed her local origins and functions while emphasizing her origin as the cosmic force of Ursa Major and her pledge to offer the universal salvation. Daoist ritual texts and *jiao*, on one hand, illustrate the strong connection between Daoism and the Mazu cult in late imperial China; on the other hand, they reveal that Daoism attempted to establish a Daoist spiritual hierarchy and ritual orthodoxy. This Daoist version of the Mazu cult is significant in mapping out a complete picture of the Mazu cult in late imperial China and also revealing a general pattern of interaction between Daoism and popular religion.

In conclusion, the complex and subtle interaction between Daoism and popular religion, especially as seen in the previous discussion, tended to emphasize the putative

⁷⁴ Pierre-Henry De Bruyn, "Daoism in the Ming (1368-1644)," in *Daoism Handbook*, p. 617. For example, Lagerway's fieldwork on popular practices of Southeast China, in particular New Year celebrations and festivals dedicated to City God, as well as other gods' festivals and *jiao*. In the case of festivals and *jiao* dedicated to local gods, he highlights the interaction between Buddhists, Daoist priests and spiritual mediums. Refer to John Lagerway, *China, a Religious State* (Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

superiority and priority of Daoism. In this respect, the Daoist claim to liturgical authority depended partly on its ability to absorb popular deities into the Daoist pantheon. Daoist priests attempted to represent themselves as both morally and ritually superior to those same cults they attempted to absorb and transform as one integral part of Daoism. As Schipper and Dean put it, Daoism provided a structure, or "liturgical framework," for the continued practice and routinization of local cults. Current scholarly debates around this topic can be summarized in two opposed viewpoints: on one side are scholars who tended to view Daoism as a higher or elevated form of Chinese popular religion that organized local cults under an officially sanctioned liturgical framework. On the other hand, there are scholars who focus on the diversity and creativity of local cults, downplaying the influence that Daoism might have played in their development. Both views shed light on important processes, but they are ultimately partial and static, failing to appreciate the degree to which Daoism and local cult have shaped each other, indeed depended on each other for their very existence.

CHAPTER 6 WOMEN'S APPROACHES TO THE MAZU CULT

As previously discussed, Mazu's images were constructed by different groups, which appropriated and shaped these diverse representations in accordance to their needs, life experiences, and interests. The imperial government promoted an image of the goddess with a special emphasis on her merits in state affairs. Confucian constructions presented Mazu as the embodiment of certain prominent values and ethical principles, such as filial piety and female domesticity. Daoist versions of Mazu stressed her identity as a universal savior in a Daoist mold. As mentioned before, these images of the goddess were crafted primarily by religious and political elites, and only manifest select aspects of the Mazu cult and the practices associated with it, ignoring the approaches and concerns of common people, in particular those of female devotees. Expanding my argument about Mazu as a multi-functional goddess with varied representations constructed by different groups, this chapter explores how women worshiped Mazu as a maternal goddess who validated or responded to their concerns.

The main body of this chapter explores the images of Mazu fashioned or favored by female devotees, and her roles in the lives of women and children. The discussion begins with a survey of western scholarship on gender study and goddess worship. This field has tended to be dominated by the conception of goddesses as liberating symbols through which women can affirm their female power to challenge or even liberate them from gender oppression caused by patriarchal structures. While taking on a comparative perspective, my study of Chinese women and Mazu worship illuminates the limitations of Western feminist understandings of goddess symbols and women's empowerment, and offers an alternative understanding of women's agency within Chinese religion and

society. This is followed by an exploration of women's general religious experiences in the popular religious context, primarily in order to provide an overview of patterns of general patterns of female religious involvement in late imperial China. I also discuss how these features reflect the cultural and social underpinnings of patriarchal society, especially in reference to the general social and religious status of Chinese women.

The following sections narrow down to the case of Chinese women's special approaches to Mazu worship. It starts by a textual analysis of miracle tales in oral traditions and other non-Confucian texts, which serve as alternative sources to reveal the different ways in which women worshiped Mazu. By comparing several types of Ming and Qing-era sources, including novels and popular legends preserved as part of oral lore, I identify two main themes in popular representations of Mazu that were prevalent among women: resistance to marriage and the goddess as a protector of women at childbirth. The first theme presents Mazu as a female religious figure who rejected marriage in her search for spiritual enlightenment. The second theme explored in this chapter describes Mazu as a divine guardian who primarily protects women giving birth and children suffering diseases.

The two main themes linked with Mazu's images, I argue, address women's main concerns in late imperial China, namely, their familial and social responsibilities to continue the family lineage by giving birth of male offspring, the danger and suffering brought by childbirth, and the concern for children's health. These images of Mazu also explain women's unique approaches to the Mazu cult, including daily worship, temple visiting, and pilgrimage. These practices enabled female devotees to establish a close

connection with Mazu, as well as among themselves that reflect larger patterns that span across a spectrum of women's religious experiences in late imperial China.

In the conclusion, I argue that women's religious experiences reveal a deep and often dramatic ambivalence in their expression of religious piety, and in regards to their conventional familial and social roles. On the one hand, their religious experiences reveal and affirm traditional Confucian gender conceptions and prevalent notions of feminine virtue. On the other hand, women's domestic and public religious participation constitute a creative response to the conditions of life they faced, a response that may have given them a sense of agency in late imperial China.

Gender Study and Goddess Worship

In order to answer these questions and arrive at a better understanding of the complex relationship between goddess worship and the religious lives of Chinese women, I draw from the growing field of gender and religion. As Megan Bryson, who have studied goddess worship in Dali 大理, Yunnan 云南 province, puts it, "when sources by and about women are scarce, goddesses can provide an entry point for discussions of femininity and gendered symbolism."¹

Earlier studies of goddesses in Western scholarship were dominated by the conception of goddesses as transgressive symbols through which women can affirm their female power to challenge or even liberate them from gender oppression caused by patriarchal structures.² They built on Mary Daly's and Carol Christ's argument that

¹ Megan Bryson, *Goddess on the Frontier: Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in Southwest China* (Stanford, California: Sandford University Press, 2017), p. 5.

² Early works on goddesses and gender study includes Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (Harper & Row, 1979); Monic Sjioo's *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (HarperOne, 1987); Wendy Hunter Roberts's *Celebrating Her: Feminist Ritualizing Comes of Age* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1998). These earlier feminist

monotheistic religions centered on the worship of an all-powerful and all-knowing male god served to legitimize male political and social authority and put women in a subordinate position. As Mary Daly writes in *Beyond God the Father*, “the symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting.”³ In other words, they argue that there is mutual reinforcement between religious symbols systems exclusively anchored by male images of the divinity and the patriarchal social and political systems in which they operate. Therefore, these feminist scholars advocate that it is important for women to recover or create empowering female symbols, which is helpful for women to envision alternative social and political arrangements and, ultimately, to liberate themselves from patriarchal oppression. Female symbols, in particular goddess symbols, provide examples of female leadership and sources of spiritual female power that can enhance women’s status in both family and society.

The critique of religiously mediated forms of gender oppression, the study of the role of religious symbols in potentially enhancing women’s status, and the widespread worship of the goddess among women became an important subject for religious studies over the past decades. One particular case is the study of feminist spirituality. As Cynthia Eller notes, feminist spirituality can be defined as “all religious or spiritual beliefs or activities that claim both a feminist worldview and a position outside normative

scholars assumed that powerful and independent goddesses promoted female power and status in social realms.

³ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 13.

religion.”⁴ In other words, the study of feminist spirituality has meant that scholars have to go beyond dominant, institutionalized religion. Feminist scholars emphasize themes of female empowerment through goddess worship and other ritual practices at the grassroots level, as well as through less hierarchical, centered, and exclusionary constructions of sacred, often focusing on the matriarchal origins of religion and how religion is transmitted through matriarchal lineages. Feminist reconstruction of ancient matriarchies not only represents a challenge to existing patriarchal structures, but also offers women alternative and potentially autonomous identities.

To go beyond Western patriarchal monotheistic religions, some feminist scholars have turned to other religious traditions for goddess symbolism, including Asian religious traditions. Moreover, the interest in the relationship between goddess worship and female social power and status has spread to Asian feminist field. A growing body of literature on this subject attest to this. According to some Asian feminist scholars, Asian women’s activist movements are traceable to the early 20th century and further developed in the late 20th century. After coming of age in the 1990s, feminism in Asia began responding to social and political contexts specific to the local culture. According to Mananzan, the characteristics of the emerging Asian women spirituality can be understood as follow: 1) self-affirming, which enables Asian women to value their feminist strengths and establish their self-identity; 2) empowering, which functions as a way to empower women and bring about social changes towards a more humane world; 3) inner liberation, which helps women experience an inner liberation through self-affirming and self-knowledge;

⁴ See Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1993). Cynthia Eller explores the brief history of feminist spirituality and its definition.

4) healing, which enables women to heal their psychic wounds and others with compassion and empathy.⁵ Asian feminist spirituality aims to establish a free society devoid of exploitation, which counters the negatives of patriarchal culture. This trend presents itself two ways. On one hand, Asian feminist spirituality reinterprets major religious traditions, such as Christianity and Islam, in the selective search of liberating elements that are interpreted from a feminist perspective. On the other hand, Asian feminists are rediscovering indigenous traditions, including myths and legends dedicated to goddesses as sources of their power. In this respect, Kwok Pui-Lan argues that the rich practices of Asian religions have “liberating aspects in which women may have played more significant roles,” such as “the rich traditions of feminine symbolism in Hinduism, the establishment of nunneries as an alternative to patriarchal family in Buddhism and the Islamic belief in human equality as liberative elements.”⁶

Influenced by both Western and Asian scholarship on goddess worship, some works on Chinese goddesses also emphasize the natural link between Chinese women and goddess worship.⁷ According to them, the rich tradition of Chinese goddess worships empowered women in certain ways, allowing them a measure of freedom from the patriarchal system of oppression in religious beliefs and practices. As shown by Brigitte Baptandier’s study of the Lady of Linshui, this goddess defied patriarchal conventions of

⁵ Mary John Mananzan, *Woman, Religion and Spirituality in Asia* (Pasig City, Philippines: Published and exclusively distributed by Anvil and Institute of Women's Studies, 2004).

⁶ Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), pp. 47-48.

⁷ Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult* (Stanford University Press, 2008); Yu Rongmin 余荣敏, “Nǚquan shijiao xia de mazu xingxiang jiedu,” 女权视角下的妈祖形象解读 in *Fujian sheng shehui zhuyi xuanyuan xuebao* 福建省社会主义学院学报 4 (2007), pp. 52-60.

women's proper roles by "tearing apart of her fate between her 'real' life in Chinese society and her search for the alchemical development of the self."⁸ Margaret Topley's study on small communities of women living in celibacy and vegetarianism suggests that these Chinese women followed Chinese goddesses, especially Guanyin, as ideals in order to resist marriage. In Topley's words: "religion (in this case, Guanyin worship) can help those brave enough to resist; that men cannot be trusted; and that suicide is a virtue when committed to preserve one's purity."⁹

However, the relationship between goddesses and their female devotees is multifaceted and complex. Goddesses are more than mirror images of women's social roles, and they do more than either oppress or liberate women. According to Rosemary Radford Ruether, goddess worship and female social and political empowerment are not inherently correlated.¹⁰ She argues against "the essential view of the female as embodiment of nurturing, life-affirming virtues, versus the male as paradigm of aggressive militarism, that often lurked behind these modern Goddess spiritualities."¹¹ Worship, sacred texts, and ritual acts within goddess traditions project, albeit ambivalently, the normative social structures, which are often patriarchal. This is particularly evident when there is a sharp division between men's and women's participation in goddess worship and practice. Some scholars go as far as arguing that

⁸ Brigitte Bapandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, p. 5.

⁹ Margery Topley, "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kuangtung," in Margery Wolf and Roxanne Witke, eds., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 75.

¹⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddess and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (California: University of California Press, 2005), Ruether focuses on the status of goddess and feminine deities in various Western religious traditions and their influence on women's lives.

¹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddess and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History*, p. 4.

ultimately the goddess's functions to help maintain patriarchy by sacralizing female virtues and ideals of femininity which celebrate women's subordination.¹²

These observations challenge the assertion by Western feminists that there is close relationship between goddesses and social, political, and religious empowerment for women in general, that goddesses naturally function as liberating symbols that combat patriarchal system. Quite the contrary, we can conclude the opposite: that there is a reciprocal relation between popular religion and the patrilineal gender ideology. At the very minimum, in approaching goddess worship in Asian, and, more specifically, Chinese cultures, we cannot simply transfer Western liberal feminist conceptions of empowering female symbols that foster women's freedom and autonomy.¹³

In response to the limitations of Western feminist understandings of goddess symbols and women's empowerment, some religious scholars offer an alternative understanding of women's agency within religion and in society at large. In her influential *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood claims that Muslim women in Egypt exercise agency when they actively participate in popular revival movements that Western women would see as totally oppressive.¹⁴ These women consciously promote practices like veiling, the restricting women's presence in the public sphere, and submission to male authority in ways that seem to betray their freedom. Through textured ethnographic work,

¹² See Rita M. Gross's "Is the Goddess a Feminist?" in Alf Hildebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl eds., *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses* (University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 66-80. Gross highlights the different understanding of female values in Hindu tradition.

¹³ See Rita M. Gross's "Is the Goddess a Feminist?" in Alf Hildebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl eds., *Is the Goddess a Feminist?: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses* (University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 66-80.

¹⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Female Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Mahmood demonstrates that this is not a case of false consciousness or the mechanical reproduction of internalized patriarchal values. These practices only appear disempowering from a Western liberal perspective that sees agency narrowly as synonymous with autonomy, with the exercise individual freedom. In order to understand the participation of women in pietistic movements in Islam, Mahmood suggests that we develop alternative notions of agency take seriously women's desire for social and religious embeddedness and interdependence.

Along the same line, my study of Mazu cult and Chinese women's religious experience redefines the meaning of religious agency for women by focusing on the specific ways in which the goddess works for them. Exercising agency in a manner that benefits one's gender interests and needs does not necessarily mean a social and political liberation from patriarchal society. Rather, it can be experiencing a sense of belonging and enabling self-expression through establishing close connections between female devotees and a caring and responsive Chinese goddess and among the devotees. In the Chinese religious and social context, we can see that the primary thing that female devotees seek from the goddesses is not to provide equal rights or high status, but to psychological comfort, emotional support, and validation of their understanding of womanhood.

The following parts of this chapter identifies female voices in popular religious practices in general, the Mazu cult, in particular, what roles goddess worship and popular religious activities associated with them played in Chinese women's social and religious lives. This exploration offers a new perspective on female religious experience. It shows how Chinese female devotees gain a relative degree of religious autonomy through the

goddess worship, and how female deities can serve as models for women's empowerment that are not captured by Western liberal conceptions of agency that are all about radical individual freedom and autonomy.

Women's Experiences and Popular Religion

This section will explore a broader picture of women's religious experiences, in particular with popular goddesses with whom women felt a special connection in late imperial China. Popular religious practices ranged from daily practices, such as burning incense, making offerings, and divination, to public activities, including the celebration of popular festivals dedicated to gods and goddesses, religious procession, and pilgrimage. Other popular devotional practices involved spirit writing and healing.¹⁵ We can divide these diverse practices into two main categories: domestic religious experiences and communal events such as pilgrimage and temple visiting. In bridging the private and the public, the personal and communal, women's religious experiences reflect the complex interactions among religion, Confucian values, and women's agency.

According to Dorothy Ko, who studies Chinese women's religious experiences in the Seventeenth Century, religious piety was a dominant motif in women's domestic life in late imperial China. In fact, Ko designates this everyday piety taking place in the inner chambers of the household as a "domestic religion," a combination of the devotion to goddesses, such as Guanyin, with other popular practices.¹⁶ As expressed through poetry writing, painting, and embroidered portraits of Guanyin and Xiwang mu 西王母, this domestic religion included the worship of popular deities, dream interpretations, and the

¹⁵ See Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, pp. 197-200.

¹⁶ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 198.

emotional devotion to Du Liniang 杜麗娘, the heroine of *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹亭).¹⁷ The devotion to Du Liniang, refers to true love between men and women, namely the cult of *qing* 情, represented ideally in the love between the hero and heroine of *The Peony Pavilion*. As mentioned by Ko, *qing* as “natural impulse unstrained by moral codes or even death” invoked a sympathetic emotion among women readers in the Ming and Qing eras.¹⁸ The conception of *qing* was expanded to the love between family members and friends. Many female writers celebrated the true love between human beings through poetry production. Women’s reading romantic fiction helped them shape their self-perceptions and projected their self-perceptions onto literary production of commentaries and poems.¹⁹ As shown in Ko’s study, women also expressed their cult of *qing* in ritualistic ways, such as setting up shrines in their home and making offerings to Du Liniang.²⁰

Due to patterns of gender segregation and women’s association with domesticity in late imperial China, women’s religious devotion at home became an integral part of their religious experiences in general.²¹ As a result, women’s daily worship may also have afforded them opportunities for empowerment and identity negotiation. Specifically, women’s use of the domestic space for religious rituals could serve as expressions of their creativity, as they transformed their homes into sacred space connected with the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, pp. 68-112.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

²¹ See Vincent Goossaert, “Irrepressible Female Piety: Late Imperial Bans on Women Visiting Temples,” in *Nan Nü* 10 (2008), pp. 215-216.

goddess. For example, many women worshiped goddesses such as Guanyin, Mazu, and Bixia yuanjun in a house shrine by offering incense and praying to them daily.²² Additionally, women would often recite the goddess's name during prayer, observe a vegetarian diet, and chant sutras at home.

Women experienced domestic religion in three primary ways: daily rituals to the goddess, ancestor worship alongside their husbands, and extreme acts of virtue associated with being a woman, such as filiality and chastity. The pattern that emerges across these dimensions is that women's domestic religious observances reflected their everyday concerns, such as pollution, illness, and prosperous lives.²³ In every important moment of women's lives, they would ask guidance and protection from some specific goddesses. In other words, women chose to worship the goddesses who oversaw their household concerns. For example, women performed rites to the Privy Goddess who is connected to fecundity and abundance: "On the evening of the twenty-ninth day of the twelfth lunar month, young girls on the verge of puberty (passage) offered her a night soil basket covered with decorations. At the time of the offering, the girls spread pounded rice on an altar table set with candles and burning incense."²⁴ The significant of this rite was to pray for the next year's harvest or about more personal matters. A second example of popular household rituals specific to women includes special rituals performed by women giving birth.²⁵ As I discussed regarding women's pollution, women had to face the punishment

²² See Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, pp. 197-200.

²³ See Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, pp. 178-179.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

²⁵ See P. Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols," p. 13.

of the blood lake after death. A specific ritual, “Blood Bowel,” was performed dedicated to women through which they would be free from their polluted state, opening her way to better afterlife and rebirth. All these household rites had significant meanings for women going through important moments of their lives.

In addition to the popular rituals and practices specific to female devotees, religious piety in late imperial women’s domestic life also involved ancestor worship and other household rituals alongside their husbands. Married women with male children were considered integral members of their family lineages and were responsible for offering incense and food to family ancestors. Women were also responsible for preparing food offerings for men’s rituals, which focused on worshipping the stove gods (*zaojun* 灶君) and territorial gods (*tudi gong* 土地公).²⁶ This aspect of domestic religiosity illustrates the gender separation in late imperial China. As Dorothy Ko puts it, “husband and wife in household occupied separate spheres of responsibility, a functional distinction reinforced by spatial separation of the female quarters and the frequent travelling the husband’s public career entailed.”²⁷

Finally, women’s domestic religious experience involved fulfilling their familial obligations with extreme demonstrations of filiality, through which women could be sanctified as “domestic goddesses.”²⁸ This pattern was exemplified by the cult of chaste widowhood during Ming-Qing periods. Through performing extreme acts of loyalty and filiality to one’s husband, parents, or parents-in-law, a woman could be sanctified as a

²⁶ See Daniel L. Overmyer, “Women in Chinese Religions: Submission, Struggle, Transcendence,” in *From Benares to Beijing, essays on Buddhism and Chinese religion in honor of Prof. Jan Yün-hua*, p. 112.

²⁷ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 203.

²⁸ Yu Junfang, *Kuanyin*, p. 338.

“domestic goddess.”²⁹ The practice of *gegu* 割股 (the slicing off a piece of flesh from one’s thigh), described by Yu Junfang, is an obvious example. It was inspired by Miaoshan’s self-sacrifice, who offered her eyes and hands to save her father. Miaoshan’s extreme acts of filial piety to her father contributed to her transformation into a goddess, becoming one thousand hands and one thousand eyes of Guanyin.³⁰

The image of Miaoshan as a filial daughter inspired some Chinese women to sacrifice their body to save their parents or parents-in-law. In her study of the practice of *gegu* in late imperial China, Yu Junfang concludes that *gegu* was a domestic religious practice through which the practitioners “achieved religious sanctification by worshipping the parent to the point of sacrificing his or her body.”³¹ Through such extreme acts of loyalty and filiality to one’s husband, parents, or parents-in-law, women, on one hand, reinforced feminine virtues promoted by the patriarchal society; on the other hand, they gained recognition and status far beyond the inner chambers of the household.³² A loyal, filial, and chaste woman was publicly recognized as a symbol of the family’s morality and the public standing of her family. In this sense, the domestic sphere was reconstituted to embrace public values and functions, and, as a result, women were elevated not only in their eyes and those of their families, but also in the larger

²⁹ Ann Waltner, “T’an-yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen: Visionary and Bureaucrat in the Late Ming,” *Late Imperial China* 8 .1 (1987), pp. 105-127.

³⁰ Yu Junfang, *Kuanyin*, pp. 338-347. Yu explores the practice of *gegu* inspired by Miaoshan’s legend among Chinese women in late imperial China.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 345.

³² Yu Junfang, *Kuanyin*, p. 338.

society. It was a way for women to attain a measure of sacred power within the limits of a patriarchal society.

In sum, women's domestic rituals reveal many of their primary concerns, allowing us to better understand how they constructed their identities. Through their religious experiences, women positioned themselves to face marriage, motherhood, illness, aging, and death with the assistance of the goddess. To some believers, domestic religion affirmed the superior spiritual powers of women, as in the case of a notable Suzhou 蘇州 spirit medium in the seventeenth century, Madame Chen 陳. She was believed to be the reincarnation of Master Liezi 泐子 of Tiantai 天臺 into a female body and was followed by a large number of male and female devotees in Suzhou.³³ One of her believers, Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (1589–1648), a famous litterateur, implored Liezi to communicate with his deceased wife and daughters. Dorothy Ko sees Madame Chen as a stark example of a female spirituality through which “women were endowed with a special spiritual sensitivity; they should seek to become immortals in their womanly bodies after death.”³⁴ This case illustrated that women could develop positive self-perceptions of womanhood through a widespread recognition of female spiritual power.

We have seen how women's religious beliefs and practices reached beyond the domestic settings, as in the case of temple visiting and pilgrimage. I would like to return to these public expressions with a view toward the way in which they empowered women and extended their agency beyond their traditional realm of activity in late imperial China. With regards to temple visiting, women generally visited temples dedicated to

³³ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 200.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

popular goddesses to carry out of a vow or an expression of gratitude.³⁵ The women making the visit came accompanied by other women, often their mothers-in-law or sisters but sometimes a female medium.

Historical accounts provide key information on female religious pilgrimage to Guanyin's shrine. For example, Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–1684) describes women's visiting to the Guanyin temple at Putuo 普陀 island in these terms:

至大殿，香煙可作五里霧，男女千人鱗次坐。自佛座下，至殿廡內外，無立足之地。是夜多比邱，比邱尼，燃頂燃臂燃指，俗家閨秀亦有效之者。熱炙酷烈，惟朗誦經文，以不痛不皺眉為信心，為功德。

When we arrived at the great hall, the smoke from incense had risen in a fog stretching for five miles. A thousand men and women were seated close together like fish scales. From the throne of the Buddha down to the verandas of the hall, there was not even room to stand. On this particular night, a number of nuns were lighting fire to the top of their heads or their arms or their fingers and even some of the respectable women from lay families were following their example. In their fierce heat of burning flesh, they recited their sutras in clear voices, believing that if they did not suffer or feel pain or wince, that would be a sign of believing heart of meritorious virtue.³⁶

In Zhang Dai's description, we see lay women joining nuns in the performance of an extreme devotional practice, burning their bodies with incense. This shared act of mortification was one way to express female religious devotion and acquire spiritual merit for themselves and their families. It demonstrated publicly spiritual and physical fortitude, the sacrifice of one's wellbeing on behalf of one's family, which was considered a female virtue.

³⁵ See Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui*, pp. 193-195.

³⁶ Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–1684), *Langhuan wenji* 瑯嬛文集, (Yuelu shushe 岳麓書社, 1985), p. 79. The English translation is from Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 197.

Indeed, these pilgrimages were often communal activities through which women had a chance to express their religious devotions and develop a sense of community. Some groups of pilgrims included mothers and their children; others were large groups of young unmarried women. Another historical account from early nineteenth-century Nanjing 南京 provides evidence of women's pilgrimage to the Guanyin shrine on the nineteenth day of the sixth lunar month, Guanyin's birthday:

諸姬之心出家者，相率齋戒素服而來，貝葉低宣。蓮花悄合，香與小駐，藉以眺覽湖山。簡齋太史詩云：“觀音無別樂，受盡美人頭。”觀此益信。

All the young ladies who aspire to become nuns come along in sequence, fasting and wearing plain clothes and chanting Buddhist sutras in low voices. With their hands clasped like lotuses, they make stops at incense pavilions briefly. They enjoy the [beautiful] mountain and lake scenery. A poem by Jianzhai, a member of the Hanlin Academy, says: “There is little else for Guanyin to do, but enjoy receiving all these lovely ladies' homage.” When you see this spectacle, you certainly believe it.³⁷

As we can see from this text, these young ladies participated in the public pilgrimage as a group and were involved in communal activities, such as fasting, chanting, offering incense, and sightseeing that built a strong sense of collective and gender-based identity. Through temple visiting and pilgrimage, female devotees bridged the divide between the private and public spheres set up by Confucianism, or better yet, they extended their concerns in the private sphere into the public sphere, creating alternative spaces for effective action within the dominant structures. Women's religious activities in late imperial China constituted a continuum, where group devotion and performance of devotional scriptures, sometimes at home, sometimes in public spaces,

³⁷ Penghua sheng 捧花生 ed., *Qinhuai huafang yutan* 秦淮畫舫餘談, in *Xiangyan congshu* 香艷叢書 (1914), 18:1/25b. The English translation is loosely based, with extensive changes, on Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 180.

involving family members as well as female religious specialists bridged the inside and the outside. That enabled women to relativize gender hierarchies and boundaries without rejecting them outright. In some cases, as Marjorie Topley has shown, there were small communities of women in early nineteenth century rural China who dedicated themselves to a sisterhood lifestyle, observing in vegetarian halls and spinsters' houses. These sisterhoods practiced celibacy and vegetarianism, took vows before a deity, such as Guanyin and Mazu, and studied religious literature that celebrated the virtues of foregoing marriage to pursue spiritual enlightenment and even the merit of committing suicide to preserve chastity.³⁸

As previously discussed, the obvious restrictions on female religious activities suggest a clear division of gender roles. The general pattern of women's religious experiences, including domestic religious activities, temple visiting, and pilgrimage, partly reflects Confucian gender ideology, with a special focus on chastity and silence and its separate spheres for women. Women barely played any roles in managing temples, organizing temple festivals and leading public activities. Instead, women's religious beliefs and practices were closely connected to their personal lives, as represented by their domestic religiosity and their approaches to the public religious activities.

The dominant Confucian discourse on women's place in society in general, and in religious activities in particular, has been studied by a number of scholars.³⁹ In late

³⁸ Marjorie Topley, "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kuangtung," in Margery Wolf and Roxanne, Witke, eds., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 75.

³⁹ Scholars have studied the topic of female religious spirituality in late imperial China: see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, pp. 197-207; Yu Junfang, *Kuanyin*, pp. 336-338; Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, pp. 178-200; He Suhua 何素花 "Qingchu shidafu yu funü —yi jinzhi funü zongjiao huodong wei

imperial Chinese society, home was considered as a sacred site for women: the so-called inner world as opposed to the outer world dominated by men. According to Confucian ideals, family life should satisfy women's spiritual needs fully. In this sense, women's domestic religiosity was approved and encouraged by society. In addition, when venturing into the public sphere to express their religiosity, women had to contend with a strong demand for female chastity, as shown by the awareness of prohibiting men's inappropriate engagement with female devotees in public religious activities. This also resonates with the Confucian elite criticism and local official bans on women's participation in public religious activities as immoral and disruptive, as discussed in Chapter 4.

As we have seen in the case of Chinese goddess worship, women devotees adhere to beliefs and values that are part of a patriarchal ideology.⁴⁰ This ideology enjoins them to fulfill their duty to bear sons and uphold filial piety.⁴¹ As Steven Sangren notes, Chinese goddesses, such as Guanyin, Mazu, and Eternal Birthless Mother (Wusheng laomu 无生老母), embody idealized feminine characters "as similar to the power of women in domestic groups (in this case, the positive power of mothers) and their purity

zhongxin" 清初士大夫與婦女—以禁止婦女宗教活動為中心, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 3 (2003), pp. 62-72.

⁴⁰ Some scholars who study Chinese goddesses have argued that Chinese goddesses embodied the female values supported by patriarchal society, such as P. Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Mazu, and the Eternal Mother," in *Signs* 9 (1983), pp. 4-25; Junfang Yu, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); and Megan Bryson, *Goddess on the Frontier*.

⁴¹ Women's concern with Confucian values can be seen in some scholars' field observations. For example, Fan Lizhu, "The Cult of the Silkworm Mother as a Core of Local Community Religion in a North China Village: Field Study in Zhiwuyi Baoding, Heibei," in Daniel L. Overmyer, ed. *Religion in China Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 53-66; Law Pui-Lam, "The Revival of Folk Religion and Gender Relationships in Rural China: A Preliminary Observation," *Asian Folklore Studies* 64/1 (2005), pp. 89-109.

and perfection as a consequence of a symbolic separation of women's unifying (positive) and divisive (negative) roles.”⁴² Sangren argues that there are deep “discontinuities between qualities associated with female deities and those associated with women.”⁴³ The goddess is a paragon of purity while women’s bodies are considered polluted and polluting, often the source of temptation and distraction for men, especially for male religious authorities. In turn, this chasm between the idealized femininity of the goddess and the dangerous and imperfect femininity of women serves to justify their disciplining, segregation to the private sphere, and exclusion from membership and leadership in dominant religious institutions.

Nevertheless, while women’s religious practices mirrored and reinforced gender hierarchies, they also offered spaces and opportunities to exert agency within existing power structures. The evidence suggests that women did not openly challenge Confucian patriarchy. Rather, they creatively negotiated power within the larger male-dominant structures. As a number of scholars have pointed out, during the Ming and Qing eras, women opened new territories to express their emotions, as exemplified by their active involvement in poetry writing.⁴⁴ However, the increasing voices of women in literary, social, and religious spheres do not suggest that women, in general, transcended or subverted the patriarchal values, namely Confucian social system. As Maureen Robertson notes, “women’s lives were stories not of subversion and transgression but rather of

⁴² P. Steven Sangre, “Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols,” p. 23.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, and Maureen Robertson, “Voicing the Feminine: Construction of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China,” *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13, no.1 (1992), pp. 63-110.

negotiation between self-expression and self-compliance.”⁴⁵ As shown in the following passages, my research on women’s devotion to Mazu confirms Robertson’s insight. Women’s active engagement in public religious activities dedicated to Mazu in late imperial China were more exercises of self-expression and self-affirmation than the enactment of a strong feminist agenda, understood in a Western sense, seeking to destroy patriarchal values. In the pre-modern period (the eleventh century to nineteenth century), women devotees perceived Mazu as a model of superhuman power, and women interacted daily with Mazu by appealing to her for protection, especially during childbirth and against diseases that were fatal to their offspring and other family members. Women’s approaches to the Mazu cult can be seen as a way to express their female religious experience and attain psychological well-being by modeling the image of femininity that Mazu represents. In particular, women’s involvement in religious processions dedicated to Mazu indicates a strong sense of agency without a direct and wholesale challenge to the patriarchal Confucian values and institutions that dominated in pre-modern China.

Textual Sources

Before exploring alternative textual representation of Mazu’s images favored by Chinese women, this section examines non-Confucian texts and oral traditions regarding her. The sources I use in this chapter include a popular novel, the *Legend of Celestial Consort Mother* (*Tianfei niangma zhuan* 天妃娘媽傳), *Origins of the Three Teachings: A Comprehensive Account in Search of the Sacred* (*Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* 三教

⁴⁵ Maureen Robertson, “Voicing the Feminine: Construction of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China,” pp. 63-110.

源流搜神大全), oral tales and stories preserved in the *Pictorial Record of the Palace of Celestial Empress in Tianjin* (*Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce* 天津天后宮皇會圖冊), and *Miscellaneous Record of Tianjin Area* (*Jinmen wenjian lu* 津門聞見錄). These textual sources popularized the Mazu cult throughout China, providing a glimpse into the religious lives of common people in late imperial times.

The novel, *Tianfei niangma zhuan*, contains valuable information on common people's understanding of the Mazu cult, in particular some oral legends. It can be dated to late Wanli 萬曆 era (around 1573), as suggested by the text itself, "published by Zhongzheng tang 中正堂 in the beginning of a new year of the Wanli era (1573)."⁴⁶ Although this novel was one of the most influential texts centering on Mazu, it did not survive as an independent work in China.⁴⁷ This novel consists of two volumes and thirty-two chapters in the forms of narrative illustrations. Each page includes an illustration on the top of the paper and texts attached below. The only extant version of this novel is kept in the literature collection of Shuanghong tang 雙紅堂 of Oriental Culture Institute in Tokyo University. This novel is attributed to Wu Huanchu 吳還初 (dates unknown), as shown in the beginning of the novel, "Nanzhou sanren 南州散人, Wu Hunchu edited; and Changjiang yishi 昌江逸士, Yu Defu 余德孚 (dates unknown) revised."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See Zhou Jinyan and Jiang Weitan eds., *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan shangbian*, pp. 65-67.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 66. The discovery of this novel in Japan was attributed to Li Xiangzhang's work, *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, around 1969. However, this novel was first retransmitted into China through Hu Congjing 胡從經's photocopied version of this novel in 1987.

⁴⁸ See Wu Huanchu 吳還初, *Tianfei niangma zhuan*, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Zhulu juan shangbian*, p. 3.

In its form, this text is similar to other popular literature featuring female religious figures, such as the *Complete Biography of South Sea Guanyin* (*Nanhai guanyin quanzhuan* 南海觀音全傳) and the *Pacification of the Demons of Linshui* (*Linshui pingyao* 臨水平妖). As noted by Brigitte Baptandier, this style of work was usually written in the vernacular in prose and originally appeared and became popular around the sixteenth century. These stories were closely linked to the Precious Scroll (*baojuan* 寶卷), hagiographic texts which combine liturgical parts with homilies from the oral tradition.⁴⁹ Glen Dudbridge points out the influence and significance of this type of work in his study of Miaoshan's legends:

Their undeniable importance lay in their normative force extending widely but unevenly through the whole spread of society, and in their simultaneous reflection of values and preoccupations common to the public at large, as they strove for the appeal which would guarantee their circulation and survival.⁵⁰

Following the same argument, *Tianfei niangma zhuan* reflects the ways that common people participated in the Mazu cult, rather than being produced to capture the attention of the largest possible audience. In this sense, *Tianfei niangma zhuan* serves as a very valuable source to explore popular beliefs and practices of the Mazu cult.

Additionally, *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*, a late Ming text, contains a concise version of Mazu's hagiography. Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1864–1927) reedited a version of this text in 1909. According to Ye's preface, he considered this text originating from a Yuan version of *Extensive Record of Searching the Sacred* (*Soushen guangji* 搜神

⁴⁹ Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 21-22.

⁵⁰ Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1978), p. 21.

廣記). Citing Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599–1659)'s comments, Ye summarizes main characteristics of this type of text:

凡三教聖賢及世奉眾神皆有畫像，各考其姓名，字號，爵里及封贈縊號甚詳，亦奇書也。

Sages of three teachings and many deities worshiped by common people all have their iconographies. Each one is individually examined in its name, birth place, and honorific titles granted by [imperial governments] in extreme detail. It is such an extraordinary book.⁵¹

There are two existing versions of texts in the categories of *Soushen ji* 搜神記: one with six volumes, *New Printed and Fully Illustrated Supplement to Searching the Sacred* (*Xinke lianxiang zengbu soushen ji* 新刻連像增補搜神記); another one with seven volumes, *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*.⁵² Luo Maodeng 羅懋登 (dates unknown) added a preface to the first one in 1593 and it was published by Fuchun tang 富春堂 in Jinling 金陵. The Fuchun tang edition was reprinted in 1607 and incorporated into *Daozang* (CT 1476) under the title of *Soushen ji*.⁵³ The seven-volume *Soushen daquan* has two editions, Sizhi guan 四知館 edition and an edition preserved in Neige wenku 內閣文庫. Ye Dehui revised and republished Neige wenku edition. The different editions and formats of *Soushen daquan* have been studied by some scholars, including

⁵¹ Ye Dehui, *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan: Fu soushen ji* 繪圖三教源流搜神大全：附搜神記 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi 聯經出版事業公司, 1980), p. 3.

⁵² See Wang Qiugui 王秋桂 and Li Fengmao 李豐楙 eds., *Zhongguo minjian xinyang ziliao huibian* 中國民間信仰資料彙編 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju 台灣學生書局, 1989), pp. 1-4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Li Fengmao 李豐楙, Wang Qiugui 王秋桂, and Li Xianzhang 李獻章.⁵⁴ Based on these studies, *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* deals with the most popular new cults of the Tang and Song periods, drawing on existing hagiographical and oral sources. In this sense, it is significant to shed light on popular religious beliefs and practices in late imperial China.

Likewise, *Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce* (*Huanghui tuce*), a pictorial record dating to the tenth year of the Guangxu 光緒 reign (1884), illustrates popular religious beliefs and practices associated with Mazu, such as temple festivals and pilgrimage. It was compiled by an unknown local painter in Tianjin. The extant version consists of eighty-nine images, each with individual written narratives. Several features contribute to making this work a precious source for local religious beliefs and practices, as well as history of folklore. First, the narratives are mixed up with local dialects in Tianjin area. Second, there are some spelling mistakes and wrong word choices. Third, the narratives are full of oral expressions that are common in everyday language use. This pictorial document is currently preserved in Chinese national museum. Xu Qingsong 許青松 and Guo Xiulan 郭秀蘭 published a photography version in 1992, following the sequence of the original version in Chinese national museum.⁵⁵ In terms of the content, *Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce* depicts the temple festivals of Celestial Empress Palace

⁵⁴ See Wang Qiugui and Li Fengmao eds. *Zhongguo minjin xinyang ziliao huibian*, pp. 1-4; See Li Xianzhang, *Mazu xinyang yanjiu*, pp. 24-30. Li Xianzhang explores the difference of Mazu legends recorded in *Soushen ji* and *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*.

⁵⁵ Xu Qingsong 許青松 and Guo Xiulan 郭秀蘭, *Tianhou shengmu shengji tuzhi: Tianjin tianhou gong huitu heji* 天后聖母聖跡圖志：天津天后宮繪圖合集 (Hong Kong: Heping tushu youxian gongsi 和平圖書有限公司, 1992).

(Tianhou gong 天后宮) sponsored by imperial court in Tianjin area, well known as the Imperial Patronage of Temple Festival (*huanghui* 皇會).

Other sources used to sketch popular beliefs and practices of the Mazu cult include local gazetteers compiled by local elites. These local gazetteers contain valuable information through which we can understand local people's approaches. However, these texts written by men represent men's gaze. They are literary texts constructed for specific historical purposes. In this sense, we cannot expect to find them an unproblematic window into women's own religious identities, practices, and experiences. Nevertheless, these texts do show the limits of imperial, Confucian, and Daoist representations of Mazu and the existence of viable alternative images at the popular level, especially among women.

The following sections focus on textual analysis of these materials. We will see that the two themes—the theme of Mazu's marriage resistance and that of her as goddess-protector of women and children—emerge very clearly. These two themes contrast sharply with those in Confucian versions, reflecting not only popular representations of Mazu among common people, but, more importantly, women's concerns and their social statuses in late imperial China.

The Theme of Resisting Marriage

The theme of marriage resistance is central in a group of popular religious texts dedicated to female religious figures in late Ming and Qing periods.⁵⁶ According to Beata

⁵⁶ See Beata Grant, "Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature," in *Journal of Chinese Religions* 23 (1995), p. 30. Beata Grant summarizes two narrative patterns featuring female religious figures. The first category focuses on women who resist marriage when pursuing religious enlightenment. The second mainly presents women who get married while piously dedicating to religious cultivation.

Grant's study on popular literature featuring female religious figures in late imperial China, there are two narrative patterns associated with female religious figures. The first pattern mainly presents women who get married while piously dedicating themselves to religious cultivation. The second focuses on women who resist marriage in order to pursue religious enlightenment. For example, the *Precious Scroll of Fragrant Mountain* (*Xiangshan baojuan* 香山寶卷) features Princess Miaoshan 妙善, who was the female transformation of Guanyin. Miaoshan resisted arranged marriage in her search for spiritual enlightenment. Similar to Miaoshan's story, popular literature dedicated to Mazu highlights Mazu's refusal to get married. That leads one to question why purity and resistance to marriage are glorified in Mazu's myth and how marriage resistance reflects cultural and social environments of late imperial China. The emphasis on marriage resistance contains two meanings: Mazu's purity as a virgin and her devotion to religious cultivation. In turn, these meanings reveal two main concerns of the period: female pollution and marital discord, both which illustrates the some of the dilemmas faced by Chinese women as they seek to balance their personal religious pursuits with their familial and social responsibilities.

In the case of *Tianfei niangma zhuan*, we can see how Mazu negotiates the familial and social demands made by Confucianism in a way that defends the exercise of her religious devotion. As described in the novel, Mazu begins to show signs of her spiritual pursuit from a very early age.⁵⁷ Specifically, she is almost bereft of desire, barely talking and laughing. As a young girl, Mazu worships and makes daily sacrifices to the image of Guanyin she drew. Her religious devotion contributes to her supernatural

⁵⁷ See Wu Huanchu, *Tianfei niangma zhuan*, pp. 20-21.

power through which she saves merchants in her dream. After that, Mazu gradually stops eating cooked food and devotes herself to meditation in a quiet room. Her religious devotion is closely related to her refusal to marry.

The theme of marriage resistance appears in Chapter Ten of the novel, “The Daughter of Mysterious Perfection Transforming Herself at Meizhou” (*Xuanzhen nü meizhou huashen* 玄真女湄洲化身).⁵⁸ Upon reaching her marriageable age, Mazu is betrothed to a young man from the Chen family, a prestigious lineage of Meizhou island. In her defense of celibacy, Mazu confronts all kinds of oppositions. In my view, these oppositions represent the social status quo, consisting of two powerful arguments. The first has to do with familial and social systems’ demands upon women; the second one is the conflict between filial piety and religious devotion.

In the novel the taken-for-granted social norms and moral demands on women are given voice through a neighbor woman who is sent by Mazu’s mother to persuade her to accept the marriage proposal from Chen’s family. The neighbor forcefully expresses the Confucian norm that defines the proper roles of women as daughters, wives, and mothers.

孟子云：‘男子生而願為之有室，女子生而願為之有家。父母之心，人皆有之。’

Mencius says, “When a man is born, his parents wish that he may one day find a wife, and [when] a woman is born, they wish that she may find a husband. Every parent feels like this.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Tianfei niangma zhuan*, p. 22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

On this argument, Mazu's search for spiritual fulfillment is unnatural, going against the normal and rational way of things. Referring to Mencius's saying, the neighbor woman reveals the prevalent social morals of society as opposed to Mazu's personal religious calling.

As we have seen in the chapter on Confucian appropriations of Mazu, the proper role for women in Confucianism is to be a good wife and good mother. That is the basis of Propriety (*li* 禮), namely the three principles and five relationships. The whole society should follow the essence of *li* in order to function harmoniously. As further explained by the neighbor woman, Mazu's search for spiritual fulfillment poses a great challenge to *li*, which is the root of social harmony:

賢侄女未學禮乎？夫三綱五常，禮之大體，三皇不易之而治，五帝惟順之而昌。。。不寧惟是，即賢而士夫君子，愚而夫夫婦婦，靡不範圍於此禮之中。頃觀侄女之言，是必欲盡去三綱，蔑裂五常，而後為快。是何其生於聖人之世，為聖人之氓，而不道聖人之教？

Have you never studied Propriety? The Three Principles and the Five Relationships are the main bodies of Propriety. Three Sovereigns put the world in good order by not changing them; Five Emperors kept the world prosperous only by following them... More than that, those as wise as officials and gentlemen, or as ignorant as ordinary couples, are all confined to the sphere of Propriety without exception. From what I have just heard, you do not feel happy, unless you eliminate the Three Principles and disrespect the Five Relationships. How could you not talk about the sages' teachings, given that you are born in the sages' age and you are a member of the sages' people?⁶⁰

It is obvious that society's conception of the proper role of women is considered to be superior over women's religious piety, the public performance of which is the purview of men. In facing this strong challenge, Mazu makes a most unequivocal statement of her

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

spiritual pursuit: she wishes to “inhale the wind and drink the dew, drive a flying dragon, and wander beyond six reaches of the universe.”⁶¹ In other words, rather than obeying *li* that is stipulated and structured hierarchically, she wants to dedicate herself to pursuing Dao, which cannot be named.⁶²

Another forceful means to dissuade Mazu is the argument on behalf of filial piety. This argument is an extension of Confucian norms, highlighting the conflict between the required fulfillment of filial piety and the pursuit of religious ideals. We find this argument repeatedly through the neighbor woman’s voice:

以余聞之，人生百行，孝道為先。今汝言學道，顧乃違父母之命而不順，拂父母之意而不從，是則於孝道盡乎未也？不能盡孝道而妄言大道。

According to what I heard, filial piety comes first among all sorts of conduct in human’s life. Now you speak of learning the Way. How could it be that you refuse to obey your parents and reject to follow your parents? Can you, in this way, completely fulfill filial [obligations]? You cannot exhaust filial piety, yet you presumptuously assume the Way.⁶³

Relating to the first argument, Mazu’s choice to lead a life of austerity and renunciation challenges the Confucian value of filial piety, which is grounded firmly on women’s familial obligations as a good daughter, later as a good wife and mother.

Similar to her first reply, Mazu refutes the claim that there is a contradiction between religious ideal and filial piety. Therefore, the accusation of being unfilial is

⁶¹ The original text reads: “余方欲吸風飲露，禦飛龍而遊於六合之外。” Refers to Zhuangzi, *Wandering on the Way*, the description of a spirit man dwelling on Mount Gushe 姑射: “He does not eat any of the five grains, but inhales the wind and drinks the dew. He rides the clouds, drives a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas.” In Victor H. Mair trans., *Wandering on the Way* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), p. 6.

⁶² *Tianfei niangma zhuan*, p. 23.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

unfounded. Specifically, Mazu declares that her commitment to religious devotion will further lead to her fulfillment of filial piety. As shown in the novel, Mazu explains what the true meaning of filial piety is, “by filialness it refers to the essence rather than the trace.”⁶⁴ She further restates the essence of filial piety: “Today I will forsake the physical form and abandon the vital energy, leave the human world and go beyond inchoate chaos. I will serve the heaven as my father, and serve the earth as my mother.”⁶⁵ In her defense, serving the heaven and earth can be seen as one way to accumulate merits for Mazu’s parents. In fact, that service can be understood as the supreme act of filial piety. Thus, Mazu makes an extraordinary declaration for a young woman who would like to devote herself to pursuing religious cultivation and to helping others.

Another text, titled *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*, presents a short version of Mazu’s resistance to marriage:

年及笄誓不適人，即父母亦不敢強其醮。居無何，儼然端坐而逝。芳香聞數裏，亦猶誕之日焉。

Reaching the age sixteen, Mazu vowed not to marry. Even her parents could not force her to marriage. After a certain period of time passed, she sat upright and then passed away. The fragrance reached a couple of miles away as in the case of her birth.⁶⁶

Here the message is quite clear and echoes to that of *Tianfei niangma zhuan*: Mazu resisted marriage and devoted herself to religious cultivation until her death, achieving a level of holiness that was extra-ordinary. The theme of marriage resistance is also dominant in oral versions, as exemplified by two oral legends circulated in Taiwan and

⁶⁴ *Tianfei niangma zhuan*, p. 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Ye Dehui, *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*, pp. 186-187.

Hong Kong areas. The popularity of this theme partly suggests the social problems women had convincing others of the importance of their own spiritual life. As shown by previous discussions, Mazu served as an ideal, successfully reconciling her religious cultivation with her familial and social responsibilities in late imperial China.

In addition, Mazu's life as a strong, independent, successful woman who lived in the secular world offers religious legitimation to unmarried women's lifestyles, providing them with spiritual support for their celibate lives. For example, in an oral tradition from Fujian and Taiwan areas, Mazu breaks off an engagement with the god, Dadao gong 大道公, also known as the Great Emperor who Protects Life (Baosheng dadi 保生大帝).⁶⁷ On the eve of the wedding ceremony, she witnesses an ewe suffering in labor. As this reminds her of the pain and danger of childbirth, Mazu subsequently refuses the union.⁶⁸ In a second, more extreme example from the oral traditions of Hong Kong's New Territories, Mazu rejects a marriage proposal by committing suicide.⁶⁹ Mazu's examples are significant to Chinese women, in particular to women who did not want to get married, for these unmarried women could take refuge in the goddess. By following Mazu as an ideal, they may have the chance to live a religious lifestyle or reconfigure

⁶⁷ See Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*, pp. 88-89. Dean provides detailed information on the cult of Baosheng dadi. The god was traced to a real person, Wu Tao 吳牟 (979-1035), who was born and lived in the Song dynasty. After his death, he was worshiped as the Divine Doctor in Baijiao 白礁 village of Tongan 同安 area, Fujian province; Wu Han'en 吳漢恩 and Yang Zongyou 楊宗祐, *Tujie taiwan ying mazu: yisheng bizou yici de chaobai zhilü* 圖解台灣迎媽祖：一生必走一次的朝拜之旅 (Taipei: Chenxing chuban 晨星出版, 2014).

⁶⁸ This popular legend also describes the aftermath of Mazu's marriage resistance which led to a battle between the two gods. This explains the winds on the fifteenth day of the third lunar month, the day of Baosheng dadi's procession, which was designed to blow his hat as humiliation. The rain on the twenty-third day of the third lunar month was designed to soak Mazu's cloth in her birthday's procession as the revenge from Dadao gong. See Kenneth Dean's *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*, p. 89.

⁶⁹ James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods," p. 297.

their familial and social responsibilities without engaging in outright defiance and transgression, which could stigmatize them. This strategic reconfiguration of gender roles allows Mazu to have a special connection with unmarried women.

As I have argued, Mazu's resistance to marriage contains two meanings: the valuation of her purity as a virgin and of her devotion to religious cultivation. These are common hagiographical motifs in a lot of religious literature featuring female deities and female religious figures, as noted by some religious scholars.⁷⁰ For example, *Precious Scroll of Fragrant Mountain* presents Princess Miaoshan, the feminization of Guanyin, as a pious Buddhist woman refusing to get married. For that, she experienced much suffering and even death. According to Sangren, "the relationship between female-pollution beliefs and women's social role becomes evident when these beliefs are juxtaposed with those pertaining to female deities. These themes are clearly in the case of Kuanyin, and specifically in the Miaoshan legend."⁷¹ As further argued by Yu Junfang, the rejection of marriage of Miaoshan's story was grounded on two arguments: "the first had to do with a negative attitude toward sexuality and desire and the second was negative evaluation of the married condition itself."⁷² Borrowing insights from both Steven Sangren and Yu Junfang's studies, the theme of marriage resistance in Chinese goddesses' myths suggest two main conceptions: women who wished to pursue religious enlightenment did not want to be defiled by sexual intercourse and burdened by the

⁷⁰ See P. Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and The Eternal Mother," *Signs* 9 (1983), pp. 4-25; See also Yu Junfang, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara*, pp. 333-347; and Beata Grant, "Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature," pp. 29-58.

⁷¹ See P. Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols," p. 11.

⁷² Yu Junfang, *Kuan-yin*, p. 333.

obligations of family life.⁷³ They wished to elevate themselves above the narrow and negative prejudices against women's bodies that were dominant at the time.

Late imperial China had a strong belief regarding female pollution. Substances coming out from women's body, in particular blood from menstruation and childbirth, were considered impure and polluting. These polluting substances were believed to cause women to suffer after their death. This popular belief, as noted by Yu Junfang, can be traced back to the *Blood Bowl Sutra* (*Xuepen jing* 血盆經), which was included in the Buddhist canon in 1437.⁷⁴ Daoist scriptures from the thirteenth century along with several Ming novels also attest the fact that the belief of female pollution became prevalent in late imperial China.⁷⁵

According to the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, "a woman's body is an unclean collection of worms' pus and filth, which comes together and collects."⁷⁶ Moreover, this sutra claims that there is a strong connection among women's bodies, pollution, and karmic retribution. The blood coming from women's bodies, particularly during childbirth, was thought to lead to their bad karmic retribution. After death, women were believed to "drink the blood from the blood pool three times a day to expiate their sins of polluting the earth with their menstrual and childbirth blood."⁷⁷ The belief of female pollution also

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ See Yu Junfang, *Kuan-yin*, pp. 334-335.

⁷⁵ *Linshui pingyao* highlights the popular notion of the blood pool referred in Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui*, pp. 81-83; *Liuxiang baojuan* 劉香寶卷 also refers to the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, see Beata Grant, "Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature," p. 43.

⁷⁶ Gary Seaman, "The Sexual Politics of Karmic Retribution," in Emily M. Ahern and Hill Gates, eds., *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), p. 390.

⁷⁷ Yu Junfang, *Kuan-yin*, p. 335.

explains the restriction on women's religious activities. Specifically, menstruating women and those who had recently given birth were forbidden to enter temples and participate in rituals.⁷⁸ Popular beliefs held that the presence of polluted women would offend deities and also prevent the communication between gods and other devotees.⁷⁹ Because women's bodies are considered impure in themselves, the only way for women to live a virtuous life is within the bounds of a marriage in which men play the dominant role as the only agents capable of rational action and legitimate religious practice. In rejecting marriage and showing herself to be holy on her own, Mazu provides an alternative path for valuing womanhood. This strong popular belief of female pollution partly explains the popularity of the theme of marriage resistance in Mazu's popular sources.

In addition to the belief of female pollution, the theme of marriage resistance surely reflects the difficulties for women of married life in a patriarchal society. That includes the challenges of pleasing husbands and mothers-in-law and the pain and danger of childbirth. The painful description of childbirth in Mazu's oral legend truly mirrors the familial and social status of Chinese women. First, married women had to follow three obediences and four virtues, including unquestionably following their parents-in-law orders and dealing with domestic disharmony arising out of quarrels between different consorts and their children.⁸⁰ Second, popular literature from late imperial China offers

⁷⁸ On women and pollution see Emily M. Ahern, "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women," in Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke eds., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 303-310.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ See Beata Grant, "Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature," pp. 42-43. Grant explores the sufferings of married life experienced by women in late imperial China.

vivid and detailed descriptions of the pains from pregnancy and childbirth. As it is stated in the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, “When the time of birth has come, whether full or soon, their birth is fitful, lacks smoothness, and is brought forth with difficulty. Their hands and their feet grapple and obstruct so that the fetus does not come out. . . .the mother meets an extreme of pain. And the child suffers deeply.”⁸¹ In this sense, the sufferings from marriage life partly explain Mazu’s resisting marriage and reflects Chinese women’s specific concerns in late imperial China and beyond.

A close reading of these texts and oral legends demonstrates how the motif of marriage resistance in Mazu’s myths projects the popular beliefs regarding gender and marriage. It also reflects the dilemma traditional Chinese women faced: on the one hand, they were raised and taught to fulfill their social responsibility by giving birth to children; on the other hand, they were confronting endless suffering caused by their womanhood in this life and afterlife.⁸² Mazu’s image here serves as an ideal model for Chinese women who desired to negotiate with the traditional womanhood. In addition, Chinese women’s almost unbearable position made them take refuge through goddesses with whom they felt strongly connected, such as Guanyin and Mazu. This leads to our following discussion, that is, Mazu as a protector of women giving birth and a guardian protecting children from diseases.

⁸¹ See Gary Seaman’s discussion of this text in “The Sexual Politics of Karmic Retribution,” in Emily M. Ahern and Hill Gates, eds., *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), p. 390.

⁸² Yu Junfang, *Kuan-yin*, p. 335; and Beata Grant, “Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature,” pp. 29-58.

Mazu as Protector of Women and Children

The motherly image of Mazu as protector of women and children is also presented in these two late Ming texts, *Tianfei niangma zhuan* and *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*. Other sources, such as local gazetteers and oral legends circulated among local people, provide important information to show how Mazu functioned as a polyvalent motherly goddess, protecting mothers giving childbirth, enhancing fertility, and defending children from all kinds of diseases. In close examination of all these sources, the motherly image of Mazu poignantly illustrates the close relationship between the goddess and women. She was deeply involved in women's concerns in their daily lives and social lives, demonstrating that women's familial and social concerns contributed greatly to the popularization of Mazu's motherly images.

To begin with, Mazu as a protector of women addresses the risk of pregnancy and childbirth. In late imperial Chinese society, a pregnant woman and the baby she was carrying were believed to be particularly vulnerable to the acts of demons as well as of other evil spirits.⁸³ When symptoms of a troubled pregnancy persisted, it was necessary to perform an exorcism ritual. The symptoms included a pale complexion, all threatening to end in the death of the baby and mother.⁸⁴ *Tianfei niangma zhuan* emphasizes Mazu's role as a protector of women giving childbirth in Chapter Twenty-eight, entitled as "Celestial Consort Mother Protecting Childbirth in Putian" (*Tianfei ma putian huchan* 天妃媽莆田護產).⁸⁵ In this episode, the wife of county magistrate of Putian, Lady Wang,

⁸³ See Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui*, pp. 174-176.

⁸⁴ See Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui*, pp. 174-181.

⁸⁵ *Tianfei niangma zhuan*, pp. 59-60.

was about to give birth to a baby. A female demon wearing a white robe attempted to make Lady Wang suffer, destroy her baby, and eventually kill her when she was giving childbirth. Lady Wang suddenly felt a cold blast blowing over her face, subsequently feeling her body being torn apart. She could not bear the sufferings imposed by the demon. Her spirit became drowsy and finally unconscious. Mazu came in and acted as a protector of Lady Wang by exorcising the female demon. As Mazu performed a purifying ritual, namely cleansing Lady Wang's body with her magic water, Lady Wang gradually recovered. After that, she gave birth of a male child safely. This episode ends with a poem in praise of Mazu's merit for protecting childbirth. Mazu as a protector for women giving birth suggests the crucial challenges women faced in late imperial China: the moment of birth is a liminal period in which the mother and the baby are especially vulnerable to unpredictable and uncontrollable forces.

After giving birth to a child, women were susceptible to all kinds of diseases. In some oral legends circulated in late imperial China, Mazu not only protected women giving birth, but also saved women from the disease caused by childbirth. A case in point is an oral story recorded in *Huanghui tuce*.⁸⁶ It presents Mazu as an old lady saving a young woman from severe postpartum bleeding. The daughter-in-law of a family with a good reputation got sick after childbirth. The family was desperate to find help from doctors and other professional experts. However, the sickness of the young lady was aggravated to the extent that she was on the throes of her death. The mother-in-law visited the Mazu temple. Through burning incense and offering sacrifice to Mazu, she

⁸⁶ See *Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce*, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Huihuajuan, zhongbian* 媽祖文獻史料彙編：繪畫卷中編, p. 193.

expressed her feeling of gratitude to Mazu, prayed for her numinous efficacy, and asked for Mazu's help faithfully. At night, Mazu revealed herself as an old lady who entered into the dying young woman's room, healing the woman's body with her hands. After that, the old lady said, "Send someone to pick up the magic water from the table of the central hall at the Mazu temple. After drinking up the water, you would recover soon."⁸⁷ The story is ended by the daughter-in-law's recovery from postpartum bleeding, which was usually considered as an incurable ailment in late imperial China. This oral legend highlights Mazu's key role as women's protector in responding to a key crisis in their lives.

In addition to her role of protecting women giving birth or suffering after childbirth, another key aspect of her motherly images is as a fertility goddess, especially helpful in giving birth to male children. Another text, *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* represents Mazu as the goddess of conception and posterity. As stated in the text,

尤善司孕嗣，一邑共奉之。邑有某婦，醮於人，十年不字。萬方高謀終無有應者。卒禱於妃，即產男。子嗣是凡有不孕者，隨禱隨應。

Mazu is particularly in charge of conception and posterity. The entire county worshiped her. A woman in the county remained barren for ten years after wedding. She asked for help from all kinds of deities, even if no one responded to her. Finally, she prayed to Celestial Consort and immediately gave birth to a son. Whoever was incapable of conception, whenever they prayed they will be responded accordingly.⁸⁸

This led to a widespread belief that Mazu answered prayers from any woman incapable of conception. In her role of goddess in charge of fertility, Mazu, like Guanyin, was

⁸⁷ Ibid., 193.

⁸⁸ *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*, p. 187.

considered particularly to helpful in sending babies to be reincarnated in women who desire them.

This image of Mazu as a goddess giving children is echoed in oral versions of her myth. As described in *Jinmen wenjian lu*, local people shared the same belief in the “Celestial Grandma of Child-giving” (*Tianlao songzi* 天姥送子).⁸⁹ An oral story recorded in this text is a typical example of Mazu’s efficacy in giving children. The plot is summarized as follows: A boy of Tong’s 童 family, named Tongba 童八, dreamed of an old lady carrying a baby with her servant. Her face looked extremely trim and solemn and her hands were carrying a couple of peonies. The old lady asked the boy where Hao’s 郝 family lived. The boy told her truthfully what the address was. The second day grandmother of Hao’s family got a grandson. Early in the morning, the grandmother of Hao went to the Mazu temple to burn incense as an expression of her gratitude. On her way, she met Tongba’s mother who told her about Tongba’s dream. This further confirmed Mazu’s efficacy of giving child.

Along with being a goddess-mother for women giving birth and the symbol of female fertility, Mazu’s popular role as a protector of children from harm and disease reflects another concern of women’s daily life in late imperial China. Mazu was believed to be the goddess-protector of children. In this sense, children were connected to Mazu from the moment of their conception, and even before. As we will see from the oral stories, Mazu as the goddess protector of children has multiple responsibilities, including taking care of the child, watching over children to ward off illness, healing illness, and

⁸⁹ This oral legend is recorded by Hao Fusen in *Jinmen wenjian lu* 津门聞見錄, vol. 2.

protecting them from other demons or negative energies (*xiesui* 邪祟). Therefore, most of the events of childhood were directly or indirectly linked to the cult of Mazu.

The belief in Mazu as a goddess who protected children from diseases and disasters became prevalent in late imperial China. People whose children got sick would visit Mazu's temple to pray to the goddess and offer incense. Mazu's image as the guardian of children was popularized in most parts of late imperial China, including both Putian of Fujian and Tianjin areas. The first example of this popularity is a local gazetteer of Fujian province:

莆田林氏婦人將赴田者，以其兒置廟中，曰：姑好看兒！去終日，兒不啼不餓，不出暮歸各攜去。

The women of Lin lineage in the Putian district who were going to do farming would put their children at the temple and say, "Auntie please take care of the kids." During the whole day after they left children none cried, got hungry nor crossed the threshold. After coming back at sunset, they brought their children back home separately.⁹⁰

In addition, Xu Zhaoqing's 徐肇慶 study on the Mazu cult in the Tianjin area also cites the above text to suggest that Mazu was not just worshiped as the goddess in charge of the sea, but also as a guardian for children (*baochi zhishen* 保赤之神).⁹¹

As people attested to Mazu's further miracles, her reputation as a protector continued to grow. In oral legends popularized in the Tianjin area of late imperial China, Mazu is represented as goddess-protector of children, in particular numinously

⁹⁰ The original text comes from *Fujian tongzhi* 福建通志, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan shangbian*, p. 10.

⁹¹ Xu Zhaoqing, "Tianjin huanghui kao" 天津皇會考, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Huihua juan, zhongbian*, pp. 222-223.

responding to children's suffering from smallpox (*hua* 花).⁹² In the description of the different stages and symptoms of smallpox, it was clearly considered one of the most vicious illnesses which could lead to the death of children.⁹³ The last stage of smallpox, so-called watching out the flowers (*kanhua* 看花), was the most dangerous one, during which parents and other family members would guard the sick child for days and nights. To make sure that the sick child would safely pass through this tribulation, the family members, in particular the mother and grandmother, would pray for Mazu's divine assistance. Mazu was, thus, considered a particularly powerful savior of the children during the most critical stage of smallpox.

The oral stories recorded in *Tianjin huanghui tuce*, further confirm that Mazu's role of protecting children suffering from smallpox became one of the prevalent images favored by common people.⁹⁴ These stories conform to a general pattern. The lives of sick children were threatened by smallpox virus. Neither doctors nor masters could save their lives. The family members, in particular grandmothers, visited the Mazu temple, burned incense, and prayed to the goddess. Mazu either manifested herself or sent her assistants to save the sick children. In one case, Mazu sent one of her assistants, the Lady who Sends Children (*songzi niangniang* 送子娘娘), to take care of the sick child.⁹⁵ After

⁹² See *Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce*, p. 173.

⁹³ Ibid. The first stage is to get infected by smallpox virus, which was called as the sprout of smallpox (*chuhua* 出花). During this stage, children would feel boiling hot throughout the body. The second stage is the full-bloom of flower (*kaihua* 开花), namely smallpox. In this stage, sick children would have increased sweating or body odor. The sweating, fever, and heat were believed as necessary to release the poisonous emanation caused by the flower.

⁹⁴ See *Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce*, pp. 152, 173, 187.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 173.

the children recovered from the illness, the family would visit the temple again with offerings to repay the goddess for having protected the child recovering from the fatal disease. On that day of Mazu's birthday, the children would also take part in the Association of the Flower Vase (*huaping hui* 花瓶會) through which they offered good flowers to Mazu in gratitude for her protection. Women and children's involvement of cultic activities dedicated to Mazu will be the focus of the next section.

Along with the disease of smallpox, Mazu's function as protector of children covers other important aspects of women and children's lives, such as the facilitation of pregnancy, the hastening and protection of childbirth, and the health of child-growth. These things that were so crucial for women and their children's lives partly explain the further transformation of Mazu's images. Mazu became a multi-functional goddess accompanied by four immediate helpers: the Lady of Sending Children (*songzi niangniang* 送子娘娘), the Lady of the Children (*zisun niangniang* 子孫娘娘), the Lady of Smallpox and Measles (*banzhen niangniang* 斑疹娘娘), and the Lady of the Light of the Eyes (*yanguang niangniang* 眼光娘娘).

Each goddess took on one aspect of Mazu's responsibility as protectors of children. The Lady of Sending Children was responsible sending the baby's soul to a woman's body. According to popular belief in Tianjin area, she had a double face: one is normal; the other is the scary. The goddess accompanied the baby's souls to reincarnate into the mother's womb. Sometimes, the soul would follow the goddess. By showing her scary face, the lost soul would return to mother's womb.⁹⁶ The Lady of the Children was

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

credited with taking care of babies. The Lady of Smallpox and Measles, as suggested by her name, functioned to ward off and heal all kinds of measles, smallpox, and other diseases.⁹⁷ Finally, the Lady of the Light of the Eyes aided in the healing of eye diseases that were common in early childhood.⁹⁸

Popular texts and oral traditions emphasize the crucial role of Mazu in the lives of women and children in late imperial China. This aspect of Mazu's images was glossed over in the state and Confucian constructions of the Mazu images, as discussed in the previous chapter. The special emphasis on Mazu's roles as goddess protector for women and children indicates women's main concerns as well as their family and social status in late imperial China. The fact that women presented Mazu as the goddess of childbearing, or the symbol of fertility indicates women's reproductive and social responsibilities, the continuation of the family lineage by giving birth of a male heir. This also explains why a sterile woman became so desperate in praying for a son, as described in oral legends. To continue the family lineage, the male baby was officially entrusted to the care of the goddess. Following this argument, women's roles in family life were expressed in the gendered construction of the Mazu's images. Mazu provided protection for women and families to deal with the pressures, uncertainties, and dangers of everyday life. This aspect of Mazu's images also was closely linked to women's special approaches to the Mazu cult, namely, how they practiced the goddess worship in late imperial China.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 176.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 179.

Women's Participation in Cultic Activities

Women's approaches to the Mazu cult in late imperial China were varied. They included daily practices as well as participation in temple festivals and pilgrimage. In examining their specific approaches, we can see some underlying features. First, female devotees' relation to the goddess was deeply personal, praying for having child, their children's health, and their family's prosperity. Second, women approached Mazu "informally." Indeed, women were absent from the formal, official rituals held on behalf of the goddess. These features do not just confirm the gender roles in Chinese society, but also suggest women's different conceptions of the spiritual world. Their different approaches also helped them to develop a sense of agency.

Let us see how these underlying patterns play out across the diversity of female cultic practices. The mythical stories recorded in *Huanghui tuce* provide some cases of women's domestic worship.⁹⁹ As in the case of their children got sick from smallpox, women would invite female shamans to their house and under shaman's suggestion, they would pray and make offering to Mazu both at home and temples. In the second example, female devotees at the Putian area would welcome a Mazu statue from the Meizhou temple and worship it at their home shrines by daily offering incense and other sacrifices.¹⁰⁰ It is worth noting here how the goddess operated in the private sphere, not mediate by a state sanctioned religious elite.

⁹⁹ See *Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce*, pp. 167, 180.

¹⁰⁰ See Jiang Weitan 蒋维钺 and Zhu Hepu 朱合浦 eds., *Meizhou mazu zhi* 湄洲媽祖志 (Beijing: Fangzhi chuban she 方志出版社, 2011), p. 340.

In addition, women's public participations are observable both in temple visits and their participation in other public religious activities, such as pilgrimage and temple festivals. Similar to their domestic religiosity, Mazu as a goddess of female fertility and goddess-protector appeared to be the focus of their visits to temples and public cultic practices. In the first instance, women's temple visits involved a wide range of activities: praying, offering incense and sacrifices, consulting spiritual mediums, and performing some rituals. The mythical stories recorded in *Huanghui tuce* provide us with proof that the most prevalent motivations among female Mazu temple visitors in late imperial China were praying for a son and praying for children's good health growing up.¹⁰¹ Specifically, a woman desiring a child would visit the Mazu temple to pray to the goddess for a son. Sometimes, the visit would involve popular rituals like "Tying down a Clay Doll" (*shuan wawa* 拴娃娃) that was common among women in the Tianjin area. On both the first and the fifteenth day of every month, a wave of married women who still had not become pregnant would flood into the Mazu temple to perform the ritual. First, female devotees offered burning incense to Mazu and bowed to her with respects. After that, they would use red chords to tie down clay dolls, placing them in front of the statue of the Lady of Children. As each woman tied down the doll, she repeated, "Good child. Please go home with me."¹⁰² If the female devotee succeeded to give birth of a child, she would come back to the temple to thank Mazu for granting her a child. In addition to burning incense and worshipping the goddess, returning female devotees also deposited ninety-nine clay

¹⁰¹ See *Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce*, pp. 167, 180.

¹⁰² See Wu Chunrong, *Mazu chuanshuo yanjiu*, p. 134. This ritual was also recorded by a painting titled "Dajie shuan wawa 大姐拴娃娃" (*The Lady Tying Down A Doll*), a new year wood blocks printing from Yang Liuqing 楊柳青, Tianjin bowu guan 天津博物館, dated to the Guangxu reign (around 1871-1908).

dolls in front of the statue of the Lady of Children, so that other women who desired children could perform the same ritual.

Likewise, women in the Putian area would perform a similar ritual of “praying for flowers” (*qiuhua* 求花) in the Mazu temple.¹⁰³ According to local custom, the color of flowers signified the sex of their future offspring. In praying for flowers, if female devotees got white flowers which means they would give birth to a boy; if they got red ones then they would give birth to a girl. In some cases, women who did not have children would pray for one pair of small shoes from Mazu. If they succeeded getting pregnant, they would return another pair of small shoes to Mazu’s shrine.¹⁰⁴ All these rituals suggest that Mazu as the goddess of pregnancy and conception became the focus of female devotees’ cultic practices in late imperial China.

It is clear, then, that, women’s domestic religious practices and their temple visits helped them to develop their own version of the cult of Mazu, through which they expressed their personal and familial concerns. As discussed above, women presented to the goddess with individual sets of offerings on behalf of their households. Women approached Mazu as a personalized deity who took care of their childbirth and health problems. In praying to the goddess female devotee would make a vow, like promising to offer a sacrifice or live a vegetarian lifestyle. After Mazu answered efficaciously their prayers, female devotees would visit the temple with offerings as an expression of gratitude for Mazu’s help. In other words, the relationship between women and Mazu

¹⁰³ See Jiang Weitan and Zhu Hepu eds., *Meizhou mazu zhi*, p. 340.

¹⁰⁴ Chen guoqiang 陳國強 ed. *Mazu xinyang yu zumiao* 媽祖信仰與祖廟 (Fuzhou 福州: Fujian jiaoyu chuban she 福建教育出版社, 1990), p. 134.

was deeply intimate. This personal and direct communication with the goddess through offering incense and offerings, helped women develop a different approach to the spiritual world than the bureaucratic model men preferred and controlled by men. In fact, there is no record of men participating in visits to Mazu's temple to pray to the goddess to deal with their personal and familial concerns.¹⁰⁵

Women's involvement of cultic activities dedicated to Mazu also found its expression in public religious activities, particularly, in temple festivals and pilgrimages. In their participation of temple procession and pilgrimage, women on the one hand barely played important roles in organizing and managing the associations consisting of temple festivals.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, temple festivals and pilgrimage also served as a public sphere for women to express their religious piety and construct their own understanding of goddess worship. Before digging up the details of women's participation, a brief survey of temple festivals in Tianjin area is helpful to provide a broader picture of women and men's different roles in public religious activities.

During late imperial China, the twenty-third day of the third lunar month was known as Mazu's birthday. It was the most important day for all sorts of pilgrims coming to the Mazu temple at Tianjin from nearby and far away. The annual arrival of huge crowds gave rise to the temple festival of Tianjin, also known as "Imperial Patronage of Temple Festival" (*huanghui* 皇會). The Qing writer, Hao Fusen 郝福森 (dates unknown), describes the festival he observed in the tenth year of the Guangxu 光緒 reign (1884) this way:

¹⁰⁵ See James Watson, "Standardizing the Gods," p. 320.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

三月二十三日，俗傳為天后誕辰。天津系瀕海之區，崇奉天后，較他處尤虔。東門外有廟宇一所，金碧輝煌，樓臺掩映，即天后宮，俗稱娘娘宮。

According to the folklore, the twenty third day of the third month was the birthday of Celestial Empress. Tianjin was a coastal area where people venerated and worshiped Mazu more piously than other areas. A temple was located outside the Eastern Gate, illuminating with brilliant and splendid lights. The pavilions and lofts were screening from the glare. That was the Palace of Celestial Empress, also known as the Goddess Palace.¹⁰⁷

The same text continues to provide detailed information on the temple festivals:

向例此廟於十五日啟門，善男信女，絡繹而來。神誕之前，每日賽會，光怪陸離，百戲雲集，謂之‘皇會’。香船之赴廟曉（燒）香，不遠數百里而來……河面黃旗飛舞空中，俱寫‘天后進香’字樣。紅顏百鬢，迷漫於途。

According to the custom, this temple opened the door on the fifteenth day. [On that day], faithful men and women had been continuously coming here from nearby and far away. The daily temple festivals were full of bizarre and motley as well as various theatrical performances holding before the goddess's birthday. This was so call "Imperial Patronage of Temple Festivals." The pilgrimage boats had been coming here from hundreds of miles away...On the river yellow banners were fluttering in the air on which characters were written, "Presenting Incense to Celestial Empress." Men and women, old and young, pervaded all over the place.¹⁰⁸

The festival's central spectacle was the birthday procession, a combination of religious practices and cultural entertainment. The term of *huanghui* derived from Kangxi's first visit to the Palace of Celestial Empress in Tianjin during the thirtieth year of the Kangxi reign (1691). At that time, local people performed hundreds of ritual operas as their sacrifices to the goddess through which they also paid their homage to the emperor. That is the origin of *huanghui*.¹⁰⁹ For example, the *Sequel of Tianjin Gazetteer*

¹⁰⁷ Hao Fusen, *Jinmen wenjian lu*, vol. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ For more details, see Xu Zhaoqiong, "Tianjin huanghui kao," in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Huihua juan zhongbian*, pp. 222-223.

(*Xu Tianjin xianzhi* 續天津縣志) compiled during the Qing dynasty provides a brief overview of ‘*huanghui*’:

二十三日天后誕辰，預演百會，俗稱為‘皇會’。十六日為送駕，十八日曰接駕，二十，二十二兩日輦駕出巡。先之以雜劇，填塞街巷，通宵達旦，游人如逛(狂)，極太平之景象。

On the twenty-third day, the birthday of Celestial Empress, temple associations rehearsed their performance, commonly known as Imperial patronage of Temple Festival. On the sixteenth day, it signaled the departure of the goddess’s sedan. On the eighteenth day, it welcomed the goddess back. On the twentieth and twenty-second days, it held the procession of the goddess’s sedan chair. Led by the performances of varied operas, the procession blocked and crammed the streets and lanes, lasting all night long. Pilgrims and sightseers were overjoyed. It was truly a spectacle of the heyday of peace.¹¹⁰

As we can see from the texts above, *huanghui* was a great celebration of Mazu’s birthday, a combination of operas and religious procession. In the records, we can see that women deeply involved in *huanghui*. However, their active presence did not mean that they played key roles in the religious procession. In fact, women were not allowed to carry banners, umbrellas and parasols, lanterns, and identifying flags in each pilgrimage groups. We can conclude this from the rich descriptions of the organization and activities of the twenty-six associations (*hui* 會) that animated the birthday procession, descriptions which contain ample references to men’s important roles in the event.¹¹¹ The whole procession consisted of twenty-six troupes in which men members took the main responsibilities of carrying sedan chairs, holding banners, and performing operas. The procession was led by a group carrying door banners, followed by a troupe of two sedan

¹¹⁰ The original text comes from *Xu tianjin xianzhi* 續天津縣志, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhijuan xiabian*, p. 251.

¹¹¹ For more details, see Xu Zhaoqiong, “Tianjin huanghui kao,” pp. 222-223.

chairs with two lions on them. Behind the troupe of lines was a group of people holding middle banners, the troupes of drums. All sorts of popular performing arts troupes demonstrated the uses of varied types of martial arts and operas, such as the troupes of stilts, canopy troupes, and costumed opera players singing folk songs and local operas. Finally, the focus of the procession was a troupe carrying goddesses' statues in sedan chairs. The statues were followed a group of people carrying metal pots, one of which was filled with the incenses offered by pilgrims and one filled with temple incense fire to light pilgrims' incenses.

Among all these *hui*, only the Association of Flowers (*xianhua hui* 鮮花會) and the Association of Flower Vase (*huaping hui* 花瓶會) involved women. The Association of Flower was an integral part of *huanghui*, consisting of children recovering from all kinds of measles.¹¹² During the procession, the children would hold a vase with paper flowers in their hands. The boys usually dressed up as Daoist acolytes whose father and brothers would surround him while holding lanterns in their hands. The girls making vows of attending procession would dress up with palace cloth and hair ornaments sitting in a cart. Children's participation of the Association of Flower or Flower Vase was to express their gratitude to the goddess's help. According to *Huanghui tuce*, "participating in the Holy Association of Flower Vase, procession, and pilgrimage, was all to express their piety to the goddess and repay the goddess for her numinous blessing bestowed."¹¹³ Participation in this procession was recommended by the spirit mediums and elderly ladies, when the sick children's case appeared to be so serious that it required the

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ *Tianjin huanghui tuce*, p. 194.

numinous intervention from Mazu, as we have seen in a couple of mythical stories.¹¹⁴ It is obvious that this popular practice was closely linked to Mazu's image as children's protector.

Women's limited role in the formal organization of the temple festivals was also evident in the case of the "Association of Sweeping the Hall in Celestial Empress Palace" (*tianhou gong saodian hui* 天后宮掃殿會). The following description of the organization and membership of this association illustrates that men, in particular those with high official and social statuses, were in charge:

天后宮掃殿會眾位爺們，多有舉，監，生員人物上會，俱是袍套靴帽，各有頂戴職份，尊為會中領袖。商議差派，請會，提會，安置。致是有會首人，大家共議，議出敬神好善規。

Among the members of the Association of Hall-Sweeping in Celestial Empress Palace, there are many provincial graduates, national university students, and government students joined the association.¹¹⁵ Each of them wears official uniforms and occupies official positions. As a result, they are respected as leaders of the association. They communicate the dispatch of tasks, application, preparation, and organization of the fair. The heads of the association reach an agreement on rules for venerating the goddess and charity work.¹¹⁶

As shown in the same text, this association consisted of leaders (*huishou* 會首) and members (*huizhong* 會眾). The association leaders were men who appeared to be local officials with important political statuses. In this case, there is no record of female members. It is safe, thus, to conclude that women did not play important roles in the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ See Charles O Hunker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, pp. 93-94. Statue as Provincial Graduates, the National University Students, and Government Students symbolizes the achievement and of membership in the state-certified elite.

¹¹⁶ *Tianjin huanghui tuce*, p. 199.

religious association contributing to organizing the birthday procession. The Association of Sweeping the Hall was one of the religious associations created for the purpose of lay donations to the Mazu temple. Such groups had been an important expression of popular piety since the medieval period.¹¹⁷ Like other popular religious associations, the Association of Sweeping the Hall was created by lay devotees themselves and directed toward Mazu and the Tianhou Palace. According to Susan Naquin, the religious associations of the Ming-Qing period were the products of “lay participation in the merit-making clerical life.”¹¹⁸ In that sense, although the association were part of popular religiosity in late imperial China, they represented an extension of the bureaucratic structure and power of male elites.

This description of the association rules further confirms the different roles men and women played in the procession. Male members of the association were responsible for the organization and safety of the procession, while women were, at best, pilgrims who need to be protected and, at worst, temptations who can lead to rule breaking:

廟里廟外，行會街市巷口，胡同路上，城里城外，有看會的婦道年輕，不許瞪眼力瞧，失誤會規，受罰。白晝，天黑，晚間，若有進香少婦，幼女，迷路走單時，我等會友只管說話問明，不許竊看。。。我們淨看少婦幼女容顏俊美出色，失誤會規，受罰。

Whenever the association procession encounters young women inside and outside the temple, main streets and lanes, the road to alleys, and inside and outside the city, we are not allowed to stare at them. If one violates the rule, he will be punished. If there are young women pilgrims and those girls are lost day and night, we as the member of association, can only ask them and inquire what happened and should not peep at them..... Just by peeping at

¹¹⁷ Refer to Susan Naquin, *Peking Temples and City Life: 1400-1990* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 226.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the feminine beauty of young married women and girls we have violated the rules and should be punished.¹¹⁹

These rules further highlight the strict line between female pilgrims and male members.

The presence of women was one of the central concerns of the male organizers, as suggested by the avoidance of close engagements with female pilgrims.

Although female devotees barely played any important roles in the formal organizations of *huanghui*, they approached the goddess from different perspectives. Their religious experience mainly focused on their personal and family level. To protect their whole family and to fulfill their familial responsibilities, they prayed directly to the goddess, communicating through burning incense and offering sacrifices. *Huanghui tuce* provides rare accounts of women's roles and religious experiences in *huanghui*.¹²⁰ The text vividly recounts how sizable crowds of women, young and old, gathered at the main street and the entrance of lanes and alleys, and waited for the arrival of goddesses' sedans. Many younger women would pray for sons, while older women prayed for their daughters-in-law to bear children. As they made their requests, they offered incense to the goddess, at times even kneeling with incense at the foot of the incense pots. Older women prayed for their daughters who were close to delivering a baby, making a vow to the goddess of child giving, so that she would grant a boy and the safety of her daughter's giving birth. Some old ladies made vows for their granddaughter, who remained sterile for over ten years, that the goddess grant them babies. Other grandmothers made vows for their granddaughter-in-law to give birth of a great grandson. In their vow making

¹¹⁹ *Tianjin huanghui tuce*, p. 199.

¹²⁰ *Tianjin huanghui tuce*, p.167; also see Yang Yikun 楊一崑 (1753-1807), *Huanghui lun* 皇會論, in *Mazu chuanshou yanjiu*, p. 209.

(*xuyuan* 許愿), they also promised that “We will offer sacrifices on the Mazu temple and pay homage to the goddess by opera performances.”¹²¹ Offering sacrifices and opera performances dedicated to the goddess were ways of vow-fulfilling (*huanyuan* 還愿) for female devotees.

As we have seen from women’s presence in *huanghui*, women developed their own conceptions of the spiritual world, based on a more devotional, affective, embodied understanding of the sacred and its connection with everyday life. In this sense, their public presence and participation may still have provided them with a sense of agency. Women consciously approached to the goddess who had the ability to protect childbirth, aid shamans, cure disease, bestow sons, and work miracles. These aspects of the Mazu cult seem to have made her more accessible and appealing to female devotees. That illustrates women’s main concerns in late imperial Chinese society and their special approaches to the goddess worship were closely linked to the images of Mazu popularized among women.

Beyond the temple festivals at Tianjin, female devotees participated in other public activities that demonstrated their religious agency. They were involved in a special ritual on the eve of Mazu’s birthday procession in the Meizhou temple. Female devotees, in particular old women, were responsible for dressing up Mazu’s statue, such as putting flowers and hairpins in Mazu’s hair, cleaning up the incense stains on her face, and changing a new robe for the statue.¹²² In dressing up and grooming the statue, female devotees developed a personal and close connection with the goddess which was not

¹²¹ *Tianjin huanghui tuce*, p. 167.

¹²² See Jiang Weiyuan and Zhu Hepu, *Meizhou mazu zhi*, p. 351.

shared by men. This special connection was also represented in female devotees' hair styles and clothes, which were respectively named as Mazu's hairstyle and Mazu's cloth.¹²³ Through following Mazu's dressing and hair style, female devotees "became one of the goddesses" or at least closely identified with her, including her choice to follow her own spiritual path.

Women's presence at pilgrimage sites dedicated to Mazu not only expressed their religious piety, but also provided opportunity for them to explore publicly and with other fellow devotees' feelings and emotions. This exploration became all the more important given the contexts of their existence, especially their limitation to the inner sphere. The pilgrimage site provided a space to relax, to commune with others in a beautiful natural setting, as expressed in poems written by women themselves. As shown in the *Local Gazetteer of Zhapu District (Zhapu beizhi 乍浦備志)* in Jiaying 嘉興 prefecture, the Palace of Celestial Consort at Kuzhu 苦竹 mountain served as a sightseeing site where religious piety and leisure were inextricably intertwined.¹²⁴ The same gazetteer records a poem written by Zhou Lanxiu 周蘭秀 from the Chongzhen 崇禎 era (1611–1644) which exemplifies women's active involvement into the religious pilgrimage, sightseeing, and literary production. The poem depicts the beauty of this pilgrimage site experienced from a pleasure boat that navigated the scenic waters in the warm and clear spring. By describing the beauty of nature, such as the fragrant grasses, the scenic waters surrounding green hills, singing birds at the forest, laughing boat ladies, and peach

¹²³ Ibid., p. 361.

¹²⁴ The original text comes from Zou Jing 鄒璟, *Daoguang zhapu beizhi 道光乍浦備志*, in *Mazu wenxian shiliao huibian: Fangzhi juan shangbian*, pp. 311-312.

blossom reflected from the water, Zhou expressed her emotional and physical gratification.¹²⁵ In this respect, Mazu's pilgrimage site, as illustrated by Zhou's poem, created a new space in which some women enjoyed nature's beauty and expressed their feelings of freedom and fulfillment in communion with it.

Although women had little access to organizing official, public ritual activities, their participation into pilgrimages and temple visits made them highly visible in the Mazu's cult. This participation expressed a deep personal religious piety connected with familial and day-to-day existential concerns that were part and parcel of their gender roles amid a clear separation of private and public spheres. In that sense, they invested their devotion to Mazu with both public and private meanings that differed from the normative images and labels advanced by official government and Confucian group. In addition, women's approaches to the Mazu cult reveal the general patterns of women's participation into popular religious beliefs and practices. In turn, these patterns bring to the gender conceptions and women's agency in late imperial China.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter examined women's distinct approaches to the Mazu cult, in contrast to the dominant Confucian constructs of goddess images that circulated in late imperial China. The textual analysis suggests that Mazu's images in popular texts and oral legends emphasize two main themes: Mazu's resistance to marriage and her roles as goddess protector for women and children. These two aspects of Mazu's image reflect women's personal and familial concerns. In this sense, women reinterpreted the images and roles

¹²⁵ Ibid., the original text of the poem reads: [芳草重重綠繞坡，遊情澹遠欲如何？無端紈扇因風墮。是處桃花映水多。榜女自依煙渚笑，林鶯卻對客樽歌。山光為共春光醉，歸棹前溪一逶迤。]

of Mazu established by official and Confucian texts, rather than coming up with something that was completely new. Women's alternative approaches to the Mazu cult also address the relationship between the feminine image of Mazu and women. Through personal communication with Mazu, like burning incense, praying to the goddess, and consulting the goddess about their own concerns, women built a special connection with Mazu, approaching her as a motherly goddess. Additionally, their active engagement with the Mazu cult in popular religious activities also closely linked to their personal and familial spheres. Their presence on pilgrimage and procession dedicated to Mazu also illustrates their religious piety and women's agency. Mazu's case indicates women's general patterns of popular religious beliefs and practices in late imperial China. Women expressed their religious piety through domestic religion and their involvements in public religious activities. In exploring women's general patterns of religious experiences, we can see a complex interaction among religion, Confucian values, and women's agency.

The close reading of Mazu cult in Chinese religious history proves the limitation of western feminist reading and interpretation of goddess worship, particularly its Eurocentricity. That raises a number of important questions about the extent to which scholars can apply extraneous theoretical models that their subjects' lives and activities, especially if they do not share the basic supposition of those models. My study reveals the challenges of applying this western feminist framework to our understanding of the religious beliefs and practices of Chinese women. First, western feminist study of goddess worship claims that the simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power. The case of Mazu cult illuminates an ambiguous or even dilemmic

position Chinese women occupied in the patriarchal modes of familial and social systems. The fact that women were neither an important player in the official religious rituals nor temple organization structure further proves that the powerful goddess did not bring positive impact for Chinese women in religious and social sphere. In line with previous scholars who study Chinese goddess worship, such as Yu Junfang, Sangren, and Megan Bryson, the presence of goddess or feminine symbols in Chinese religion does not necessary mirror a positive situation of Chinese women.

Second, my study offers an alternative model of Chinese women's empowerment, which transcends some of the limitation of western feminist and Chinese modernist discourses. Women had the opportunity to participate in the temple festivals and pilgrimage associated to the Mazu cult and other popular religious practices as long as they did not interfere with the male-centered structures of Chinese society. The opportunities allowed for diversity and plurality of expressions. Chinese women devotees developed their own versions of communicating with the goddess and built strong connections with the goddess in different critical periods of their lives. Different kinds of female religiosity illuminate the uniqueness of Chinese women's religious experiences, which served as gateways to personal fulfillment and the formation of sisterhood.

Over the centuries, Chinese women consciously promoted certain religious practices, like performing specific rituals exclusive to women, seeking refuge in goddess worship, developing individual and communal identity, limited presence in the public social and religious spheres, and submission to male authority in public religious activities. My study on Chinese women's special religious experiences demonstrates that this is not a case of false consciousness or the mechanical reproduction of internalized

patriarchal values, but a sense of belongings and psychological comforts through which Chinese women realized their personal fulfillment and affirmation of womanhood. These religious experiences illustrate an alternative model of empowerment, which can be considered as disempowerment from a Western liberal perspective.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

Over the centuries, Mazu has functioned as a multivalent symbol in Chinese cultural and religious history. My dissertation focuses on the diverse ways in which various human agents appropriated Mazu's imaginary persona and participated in her cult in order to negotiate the boundaries between the public and the private, and between the official and the unofficial. Mazu's different representations and functions, some of which are in tension with each other, illuminate the dynamics of the larger field of Chinese religions, particularly the development of Chinese deities and their roles in the social, political, and religious spheres.

As a multifaceted religious symbol, the analytical study of Mazu and her worship opens up many interpretative possibilities. The exploration of the Mazu cult as a local as well as a national phenomenon, reflects how different groups, including officials, elite scholars, Daoist priests, and ordinary people, draw from Mazu worship to respond to the challenges and needs generated by particular social, political, and cultural realities. In addition, Mazu's multiple images and functions do not just suggest different concerns. They also shed light into the way that people can develop different forms of self-representation according to their specific social and cultural contexts.

Successive imperial governments attempted to organize the local Mazu cult into a standardized religious and cultural system that reflected the state's interests and could be administered by officials. Through several strategies these officials constructed and legitimized the imperial understandings of Mazu worship in line with imperial interests. These range from the bestowing of titles and the building of state-sanctioned temples, to the production of authoritative hagiographies of the goddess. At the local level, the

intertwining of religious and political interests is reflected in the efforts of local elite scholars to represent Mazu as an embodiment of Confucian values and a symbol of territorial hegemony. Thus, Confucian elites from Putian area sought to associate Mazu's origins with a prominent local lineage, reinforcing their social status by presenting her as one of their ancestral figures, closely connected with their local area. More generally, local Confucian elites consciously manipulated gendered images of Mazu to sustain a moral and political order based on Confucian values and principles. Simultaneously, they denigrated popular beliefs and practices as heterodox and potentially disorderly.

Daoist priests, for their part, interpreted Mazu as a Daoist cosmic savior as a means of highlighting the universality of Daoist belief and ideology. By elevating Mazu above her local origins and identifying her with the foundational and underlying forces of Daoist cosmology, Daoist priests attempted to promote their version of the Mazu cult, emphasizing the religious authority and distinct identity Daoism.

While recognizing Confucian and Daoist readings of Mazu, ordinary people approached the goddess primarily as a potent protector who efficaciously responded to personal concerns in their daily lives. In particular, female devotees saw Mazu as a key source of religious inspirations, offering support as they faced the demands, pressures, and constraints of being a wife and a mother, as shaped or imposed by Confucian ideology. It is in this context that Mazu emerged as a heroine who resisted marriage in order to follow her religious pursuit and live out her piety, in a manner that did not overturn the status quo. In the introduction, I showed that, while Mazu has received substantial scholarly attention, the role of women as significant agents in her worship has been ignored by most of scholars in Chinese religious studies. In this respect, my study of

women's approaches in late imperial China opens a window into how Mazu's gendered symbolism operated outside of narrow Confucian circles. As we have seen, women's special connection with the goddess worship served as an alternative to Confucian constructs. Confucian-promoted images and functions of Mazu embodied dominant gender conceptions, which are characterized by a strict separation of genders, with women circumscribed to the subordinate domestic sphere, and by a strong emphasis on women's chastity. For Confucian literati, Mazu embodied the feminine values and ethics promoted by the patriarchal society. Instead, female devotees approached Mazu as their protector, a guardian goddess who helped them navigate life with a relative degree of agency, as they deal with the demands and conflicts of familial and social existence.

Nevertheless, the diversity in presenting different aspects of Mazu and her worship should not lead us away from points of continuity and connections among multiple representations. In each of Mazu's forms, all devotees, from government officials to ordinary women, saw her numinously responding to anyone in danger. The state constructed an image that emphasized Mazu's supernatural power in guarding imperial envoys; Confucian scholars at Putian promoted images that highlighted her salvific powers in both state affairs and local community; Daoist version of Mazu embodied universal saving power in both celestial and mortal realms; popular images circulated in oral traditions stressed aspects of Mazu's functions as a mother figure who protected women and children. It is this primary role as a savior deity that has, above all, assured her widespread and continued popularity among Chinese people, all the way to the present.

In addition, the Mazu cult illuminates larger patterns of Chinese religious and cultural life. First, the worship of Mazu and the popular religious practices associated with it provided a common, shared-yet-contested space, which connected diverse groups and different religious traditions. In other words, the Mazu cult involves many of the complex interaction among Confucianism, Daoism, and popular religion that over the centuries have shaped the Chinese religious landscape. According to Kenneth Dean, popular religion can be described as “a syncretic field.”¹ This concept reveals “the reservoir of cultural potential of local communal religion.”² Dean argues that the syncretic field is not only self-changing, but also full of potentiality, touching various aspects of Chinese religious and cultural life. It is a field “stretched between polar attractors of Confucian *sheng* (hierarchical, ordering, centering power) and *ling* (immediate, localized, unpredictable spiritual efficacy), marked by complex, hybrid forms of religious ritual and collective experimentation.”³ In the same vein, Hymns posits popular religion as a repertoire, which refers to “a varied historical accumulation of models, systems, rules, and other symbolic resources.”⁴

Applying Dean and Hymns’s insights, the Mazu cult, including the religious festivals and celebrations associated with it, illustrate the convergence of different models of religious beliefs and practices, rituals, soteriologies, and the roles of people as cultural actors from different religious and social backgrounds. This convergence is arguably

¹ See Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, and Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*.

² *Ibid.*

³ Kenneth Dean, “Local Communal Religion in South-east China,” in Daniel L. Overmyer ed., *Religion in China Today*, p. 47.

⁴ Hymns, *Way and Byway*, p. 5.

most visible in Mazu temple festivals. In traditional society, local officials and Confucian-educated elites took charge of the official rituals dedicated to Mazu, while Daoist priests took control of *jiao* rituals dedicated to Mazu, and spiritual mediums were responsible for divination and communication with the goddess. Although male devotees led the organization of festivals and processions, female devotees were actively involved through pilgrimages and offerings that expressed their religious piety and validated their personal experiences.

Given that Mazu is one of the most important female goddesses, an exploration of her cult can be very helpful in assessing the impact and role of gender in the Chinese religious landscape, and the influence of goddess worship on women's social and religious status. Traditionally, Chinese goddesses have played significant roles in women's religious lives. The strong connection between Mazu and female devotees did not mean that women simply approached her as a figure of empowerment or patriarchal oppression, as Western feminist scholarship tends to see the relation between goddess worship and women's social statuses. The fact that women prayed to Mazu as a goddess of fertility and protector of their children underscores the strong impact of the patriarchal values imposed on Chinese women, for they had the responsibility of giving birth to male heirs and taking care of familial affairs. In this sense, we can conclude that the Mazu cult supported the prevalent patriarchal values.

However, women's domestic and public religious activities vis-à-vis Mazu also offered spaces and opportunities for women to develop their personal and communal identities, and express elements of religious piety that were sometimes at odds with patriarchal norms and expectations. Women also developed creatively their own

understandings of traditional virtues, such as being a filial daughter, a dedicated wife, and a virtuous mother, in part by following the example set by Mazu, who, after all, rejected marriage in her quest for spiritual enlightenment. However, the voices of women in the religious sphere do not suggest that women, in general, transcended or subverted patriarchal values, as codified by the Confucian social system. As we have seen, a high percentage of female devotees prayed to Mazu and goddesses for having a son, or for their children and family members' health, or family's welfare. While offering a measure of self-empowerment and personal fulfillment, as well as a sense of community among believers, women's religious practices did not depart from or impugn normative Confucian values. In that sense, my study of different encounters with the goddess worship reminds us that it is necessary to explore feminine symbols, in this case those centered on goddesses, in specific historical and social contexts. The presence and functions of goddesses in the cultural and religious contexts of medieval China do not automatically mirror those that prevalent feminist discourse has identified in the modern West. We need to study how Chinese women appropriated Mazu in relation to and in tension with other concerns and agendas of the particular period under investigation.

Understanding the complex relationship between the worship of goddesses and women's social status should go beyond the binary conception of goddesses as symbols of either oppression or liberation. Instead, without presupposing from an abstract perspective that the goddess always functions in a given way, scholars should explore how she operates as a gendered symbol for her followers in different and specific contexts, and how various groups of people, men and women, from government officials and priests to everyday people, approach and interpret these symbols in different ways.

As noted by Megan Bryson, “nor does gender only apply when considering the relationship between goddesses and women: masculine deities are gendered, and men worship goddess too.”⁵ This dissertation takes precisely this multi-perspectival approach. First, it examines to what extent the traditional images of Mazu described in official records and sources have served the interests of the patriarchal tradition (in particular Confucianism) in China. Second, it identifies different voices within the Mazu cult, in particular the roles the worship of the goddess played in both Chinese men and women’s social and religious lives. In the pre-modern period (from the eleventh century to nineteenth century), male devotees and Confucian literati produced written materials that represented their understandings of Mazu, as the quintessential embodiment of key Confucian values and a powerful patron goddess linked with a local lineage. In contrast, women devotees perceived Mazu as a source of supernatural power, interacting daily with her through prayers and offerings requesting protection, especially during childbirth and against diseases that were fatal to their offspring and other family members. Women’s approaches to Mazu can be seen as ways to express and channel their female religious experiences, and attain psychological well-being.

Due to the limitations of time and space, there are some topics connected to the Mazu cult that I did not address, such as the Buddhist interpretations of Mazu. Historical sources and local gazetteers in late imperial China show that Buddhist monks also played a role in popularizing the goddess worship. Buddhist texts represented Mazu as one of the transformations of Guanyin, the Buddhist embodiment of compassion. The connections with Guanyin are fascinating and are worth further study. The Guanyin image also

⁵ Megan Bryson, *Goddess on the Frontier: Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in Southwest China*, p. 6.

influenced the way Mazu was represented by other groups. For example, *Tianfei xiansheng lu* recounts how Mazu was born with the help of Guanyin, who granted Lady Wang, Mazu's mother, a panacea. After taking the panacea, Lady Wang gave birth to Mazu. In addition, as attested in local gazetteers from both Fujian and Taiwan, Buddhist monks were in charge of establishing and managing many Mazu temples. Thus, an exploration of the way that Buddhism intersected with the Mazu cult is also needed in order to paint a complete portrait of the cult as it developed in late imperial China.

The dissertation also does not discuss the on-going complex interaction between religion, women, and Confucian values in contemporary China. The evolving places and roles of women in modern China have led to some important changes in women's participation in the Mazu cult and, more generally, in popular religious practices. The May Fourth Movement (1919), which had strong anti-Confucian undercurrents and served as the starting point for the construction of modern Chinese society and nationalism, also altered the perception of and discourse on womanhood. This movement considered the liberation of women from the oppression of the patriarchal system, including its religious underpinnings, along with the promotion of gender equality, as key elements in the emergence of a modern, developed, and independent Chinese state.⁶ In the Reform era (1976 to the present), the newly risen Chinese feminism adopted Marxist humanism, emphasizing "female roles, sexual difference, and individual personhood."⁷ The notions of modern womanhood evidenced in the May Fourth Movement and in the Reform era's feminist discourse are presented as being at odds with traditional forms of

⁶ Kang Xiaofei, "Women and the Religious Question," in Vincent Goossaert et al, eds., *Modern Chinese Religion II 1850-2015*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 502-503.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 541.

Chinese religiosity. They tend to construe popular religious beliefs and practices, such as the worship of female deities and motherly goddesses, as outdated “superstitions.”⁸

Official discourses and Chinese feminism both tend to devalue the role of religion in constructing new meaningful social and cultural spaces and new forms of female power for Chinese women. However, religious revival, in particular the revival of popular religion, has provided new opportunities for women to express publicly their individuality and to re-signify traditional values. More specific, Chinese women are able to develop different versions of religiosity, womanhood and female leadership that retrofit “old” values, beliefs, and practices for the modern era. In the case of the modern Mazu cult, there have been some changes in reference to women’s involvement in worship, which have effectively transcended Confucian gender conceptions, particularly the sharp separation of public and private spheres and the confinement of women to the domestic space. For example, women have started to play important roles in the board that manages the temple in Meizhou since 1990s. They also participate in the temple festivals and processions, which includes organizing a troupe exclusively made up of women. This troupe now performs many of the traditional dances in honor of Mazu.⁹

However, these new changes do not necessarily mean that modern Chinese women’s religious experiences and goddess worship entirely subvert the patriarchal values and ideas that characterized imperial times. Some scholars have noted that women’s participation in the revival of popular religion only reinforces traditional or

⁸ Ibid., p. 544.

⁹ See Jiang Weitan and Zhu Hepu eds., *Meizhou mazu zhi*, p. 368.

patriarchal modes of gender relations.¹⁰ Working on popular religious practices in South China, Law Pui-Lam observes that “praying for the welfare of their husbands, children, and other family matters” are still the main concerns for Chinese women.¹¹ In addition, Fan Lizhu’s fieldwork on the cult of silkworm mother, centered on a village in northern China, also illustrates how Confucian values such as filial piety are still promoted by popular religious beliefs and practices.¹²

The tensions engendered by enduring Confucian values, evolving constructions of womanhood, and women’s personal religious experiences remain the defining themes in the contemporary Mazu cult. In my future study I plan to expand on this dissertation, by continuing to explore modern Chinese women’s religious experiences. Specifically, I will try to tackle the following questions: Have religiously inflected patriarchal values and social orders changed or not? To what extent do women’s religious practices reproduce those values and orders? Is religion, particularly popular forms of worship like what we find in Mazu’s cult, contributing to the transformation of patriarchal constructions? What are the main patterns of continuity and change in women’s participation in the Mazu cult? What factors contribute to changes in contemporary modes of practice? In answering

¹⁰ Women’s concern with Confucian values can be seen in some scholars’ field observations. For example, see Fan Lizhu, “The Cult of the Silkworm Mother as a Core of Local Community Religion in a North China Village: Field Study in Zhiwuyi Baoding, Heibei,” in Daniel L. Overmyer, ed. *Religion in China Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 53-66; and Law Pui-Lam, “The Revival of Folk Religion and Gender Relationships in Rural China: A Preliminary Observation,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 64/1 (2005), pp. 89-109.

¹¹ Law Pui-Lam, “The Revival of Folk Religion and Gender Relationships in Rural China: A Preliminary Observation,” p. 92.

¹² Fan Lizhu, “The Cult of the Silkworm Mother as a Core of Local Community Religion in a North China Village: Field Study in Zhiwuyi Baoding, Heibei,” p. 65.

these questions, it will seek to compare women's religious experiences in late imperial China and those in contemporary China.

APPENDIX
GLOSSARY

Ban Zhao 班昭 (45–117)	Chenghuang 城隍
Banzhen niangniang 斑疹娘娘	chengji guan 承祭官
Baochi zhishen 保赤之神	Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107)
<i>Bao fumu enzhong jing</i> 報父母恩重經	Chengzu 成祖 (1403–1424)
baojuan 寶卷	Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀 (1696–1771)
Baoqing 寶慶	<i>Chifeng tianhou zhi</i> 敕封天后志
Baosheng dadi 保生大帝	Chongming 崇明
Baoyou 寶祐 (1253–1258)	Chongyang 重陽
Beidou 北斗	Chongzhen 崇禎 (1611–1644)
biji 筆記	Chunyou 淳祐 (1241–1252)
<i>Bi taijian yanghong shi zhufan baguo</i> 庇 太監楊洪使諸番八國	Cishi 刺史
Bixia Yuanjun 碧霞元君	Dadao gong 大道公
Changjiang yishi 昌江逸士	daofeng 道封
Changle 長樂	daoshi 道士
Chan Jibu 禪濟布	dasi 大祀
Chen Chiyang 陳池養 (1788–1859)	daotan 道壇
Chen Fuming 陳福明	Daxueshi 大學士
Cheng Duanxu's 程端學 (1278–1334)	Ding Bogui's 丁伯桂 (1171–1237)
Chenghua 成化	<i>Donghai hu neishi zhangyuan</i> 東海護內 使張源

Doumu 斗母	<i>Guangzhou jiu taijian Zheng He</i> 廣州救 太監鄭和
Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933)	Guanyin 觀音
Du Liniang 杜麗娘	guofeng 國封
Duxun guan 都巡官	Guo Xiulan 郭秀蘭
fashi 法師	<i>Haining xianzhi</i> 海寧縣志
<i>fengli zhou</i> 奉禮咒	Hao Fusen 郝福森
<i>Fengsu tiaoyue</i> 風俗條約	Heishui yang 黑水洋
Fuchun tang 富春堂	Hongwu 洪武 (1368–1398)
Fudou 輔斗	<i>Hongzhi xinghua fuzhi</i> 弘治興化府志
<i>Fuhui mingzhu tianfei shengdeng ke</i> 福惠 明著天妃聖燈科	Huagai 華蓋
<i>Fuhui quanshu</i> 福惠全書	Huai'an 淮安
Fujian 福建	huanghui 皇會
fujian zongguan 福建總管	Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻 (1633–?)
Gaozong 高宗 (1127–1162)	Huangluo gang 黃螺港
gegu 割股	Huang Qiyou 黃起有
gong 宮	Huang Yansun 黃巖孫
Guancha shi 觀察使	huanyuan 還愿
Guandi 關帝	huaping hui 花瓶會
Guangdong 廣東	Huguo bimin miaoling zhaoying hongren puji tianfei 護國庇民妙靈弘仁普濟天妃
Guangji zhenren 廣濟真人	hui 會
Guangxu 光緒 (1875–1908)	huishou 會首
	huizhong 會眾

Jiancha yushi 監察禦史	<i>Kangxi daqing huidian</i> 康熙大清會典
Jiangsu 江蘇	<i>kanhua</i> 看花
Jiangzhe 江浙	Kuzhu 苦竹
Jianjiao taizi zhanshi 檢校太子詹事	li 禮
jiao 醮	Liaodong 遼東
jiaofang si 教坊司	Liao Pengfei 廖鵬飛
Jiaqing 嘉慶 (1796–1820)	libu shangshu 禮部尚書
Jiaxing 嘉興	Li Choufu 李丑父
jinbiao 進表	<i>Lienü zhuan</i> 烈女傳
Jinling 金陵	Liezi 泐子
<i>Jinmen wenjian lu</i> 津門聞見錄	Li Fengmao 李豐楙
jinshi 進士	Li Junfu 李俊甫
<i>Jishang jiuqin</i> 機上救親	<i>Lin'an zhi</i> 臨安志
<i>Jiugang lukou</i> 舊港戮寇	Lingbao 靈寶
jiumu zhijia 九牧之家	Lingci gong 靈慈宮
<i>Jujia zayi</i> 居家雜儀	Linghui fei 靈惠妃
Ju Ji 虞集 (1272–1348)	Linghui furen 靈惠夫人
Juncheng 郡城	Linghui zhaoying furen 靈惠昭應夫人
Kaixi 開禧 (1205–1207)	Lin Lanyou 林蘭友 (1594–1659)
<i>kan</i> 坎	Lin Linchang 林麟焜
Kangxi 康熙 (1661–1722)	Lin Lingsu 林靈素 (1076–1120)
	Lin Mei 林媚 (1618–1655)

<i>Linshui pingyao</i> 臨水平妖	Ming 明 (1368–1644)
<i>Lin xiaonü shishi</i> 林孝女事實	<i>Ming shilu</i> 明實錄
Lin Yuan 林願	<i>Ming xu daoze</i> 明續道藏
Lin Yun 林蘊 (755–?)	<i>Ming yitong zhi</i> 明一統志
Lin Zao 林藻 (?–805)	Mingzhou 明州
Liujiagang 劉家港	Muzhou cishi 睦州刺史
Liu Qi 劉祁 (1203–1250)	
<i>Liuqiu jiu taijian chaishan</i> 琉球救太監柴山	<i>Nanhai guanyin quanzhuan</i> 南海觀音全傳
Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE)	Nanzhou sanren 南州散人
Li Xianzhang 李獻章	Neige wenku 內閣文庫
<i>Lizhi ba</i> 禮志八	<i>Nüjie</i> 女誡
Lizong 理宗 (1224–1264)	
Luo Maodeng 羅懋登	Pinghu 平湖
Lu Sheng 陸深 (1477–1544)	<i>Po jiuyou yu dengke</i> 破九幽獄燈科
Lu Yundi 路允迪	Putian 莆田
Lüshun 旅順	Putuo 普陀
	<i>Puyang bishi</i> 蒲陽比事
Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599–1659)	
Meizhou 湄洲	Qianlong 乾隆 (1735–1796)
<i>Meizhou feisheng</i> 湄洲飛升	qianxi ling 遷徙令
miao 廟	Qing (1644–1911)
Miaoshan 妙善	qing 情
Miaoxing yunü 妙行玉女	<i>Qing shengzu shilu</i> 清聖祖實錄

qiqing zhou 啟請咒
 qiuhua 求花
 Qiu Jun 邱浚 (1418–1495)
 Qiu Renlong 丘人龍
 Quanzhou 泉州
 Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (1705–1755)

 Renci fudou zhiling shen 仁慈輔斗至靈神
 Renhe 仁和

 Sangong dengyi 三宮燈儀
 Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan 三教源流
 搜神大全
 Sanmao guan 三茅觀
 Sanqing 三清
 Shandong 山東
 Shangqing dongxun mingdeng shangjing 上
 清洞玄明燈上經
 Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu 上清
 靈寶濟度大成金書
 shangshu lang 尚書郎
 shaolao 少牢
 Shaoxi 紹熙 (1190–1194)
 Shenbao 申報

 Shengdun zumiao chongjian shunji miaoji 聖
 墩祖廟重建順濟廟記
 Shengfei zhuwen 聖妃祝文
 shenxiao 神霄
 Shi Lang 施瑯 (1621–1696)
 Shi liuqiu ji 使琉球記
 Shi Puri 釋普日
 Shi Zhaocheng 釋照乘
 Shuanghong tang 雙紅堂
 shuan wawa 栓娃娃
 shuifu 水府
 Shuishi tidu 水師提督
 Shunji 順濟
 Shunji shengfei miaoji 順濟聖聖妃廟記
 sidian 祀典
 Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086)
 Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BCE)
 Sizhi guan 四知館
 Songci tianfei liang shizhe xu 送祠天妃兩使
 者序
 Song hui yao 宋會要
 Songjiang 松江
 songshen 送神
 Songshi 宋史

songzi niangniang 送子娘娘

Soushen guangji 搜神廣記

suqi 宿祈

sushan 宿山

suzhou biejia 蘇州別駕

Taicang 太倉

taimiao 太廟

Taishang huanglu zhaiyi 太上黃錄齋儀

Taishang laojun shuo tianfei jiuku lingyan jing 太上老君說天妃救苦靈驗經

Taishang shuo qingxuan leiling faxing yindi miaojing 太上說青雷令法行因地妙經

Taishang shuo tianhou jiuku miaojing 太上說天后救苦妙經

Taishang wuji zongzhen wenchang dadong xianjing 太上無極總真文昌大洞仙經

Taizhou 泰州

Tao Shu 陶澍 (1779–1839)

Tianfei bian 天妃辯

Tianfei jiangsheng benzhuann 天妃降生本傳

Tianfei jiaoke 天妃醮科

tianfei jiuku lingfu 天妃救苦靈符

Tianfei ma putian huchan 天妃媽莆田護產

Tianfei miaoji 天妃廟記

Tianfei niangma zhuan 天妃娘媽傳

Tianfei xiansheng lu 天妃顯聖錄

Tianfei zhishen lingyan ji 天妃之神靈應記

Tianhou 天后

Tianhou gong 天后宮

tianhou gong saodian hui 天后宮掃殿會

Tianhou shengmu shengji tuzhi 天后聖母聖跡圖志

Tianhou xiansheng lu 天后顯聖錄

Tianjin tianhou gong huanghui tuce 天津天后宮圖冊

Tianlao songzi 天姥送子

Tianshang shengmu zhenjing 天上聖母真經

Tiantai 天臺

tingxuan fayin 聽宣法音

Tongba 童八

Tongjun 通峻

tudi gong 土地公

Tuomeng chujian 託夢除奸

Wang Ji 汪輯

Wang Jing 王灝

Wang Qiugui 王秋桂

Wanli 萬曆 (1573–1620)

Wan Zhengse 萬正色 (1637–1691)

Wenchang 文昌
 Weng Daiyi 翁戴翼
 wenyan 文言
 Wen yuanshuai 溫元帥
 Wenzhou 溫州
 wu 巫
 Wu Changzuo 吳昌祚
 Wu Huanchu 吳還初
 Wusheng laomu 无生老母

 Xiamen 廈門
 Xiangshan baojuan 香山寶卷
 xianhua hui 鮮花會
 Xianliang 賢良
 Xianliang gang zuci kao 賢良港祖祠考
 Xiansheng lu 顯聖錄
 Xianxi xianzhi 仙溪縣志
 Xianyou 仙遊
 Xiaojing 孝經
 xiaoshuo 小說
 xiesui 邪祟
 Xinghua 興化
 Xinghua fuzhi 興化府志

 Xinke lianxiang zengbu soushen ji 新刻連像
 增補搜神記
 Xiwang mu 西王母
 Xuandi dengyi 玄帝灯仪
 Xuanhe 宣和 (1119–1125)
 Xuantian shangdi 玄天上帝
 Xuanzhen nü meizhou huashen 玄真女湄洲
 化身
 Xuepen jing 血盆經
 xundao 巡道
 xunsi 徇死
 Xu Qingsong 許青松
 Xu Tianjin xianzhi 續天津縣志
 xuyuan 許愿
 Xu Zhaoqiong 徐肇慶

 Yanguang niangniang 眼光娘娘
 Yanjiu jie 燕九節
 Yansong 嚴嵩 (1480–1567)
 Yanyou 延祐 (1314–1320)
 Yao Qisheng 姚啟聖 (1623–1683)
 Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (1589–1648)
 yi 意
 yingshen 迎神

yinsi 淫祀
Yonglang jizhou 擁浪濟舟
 Yongle 永樂 (1402–1424)
Yongquan jishi 湧泉給師
 Yongzheng 雍正 (1722–1735)
 Yuan 元 (1271–1368)
Yuanshi 元史
Yuanshi tianzun shuo zitong dijun yingyan jing 元始天尊說梓潼帝君應驗經
 Yu Defu 余德孚
 Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝
 yushi 禦史
Yuzhi hongren puji tianfigong zhi bei 御製弘仁普濟天妃宮之碑

 zanyin guan 贊引官
Zanzhu dengyi men 讚祝燈儀門
 zaojun 灶君
 zhai 齋
 Zhang Dai 張代 (1597–1684)
 Zhang Xueli 張學禮
 Zhang Yu's 張翥 (1430–?)
 Zhao Gongfu 趙公夫

 Zhaoling xianying renci tianhou 昭靈顯應仁慈天后
Zhapu beizhi 乍浦備志
 Zhedong 浙東
 Zhejiang 浙江
 Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178–1235)
 Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–1662)
 Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1433)
 Zheng Keshuang 鄭克塽 (1670–1707)
 Zhenjiang 鎮江
 zhenjie paifang 貞節牌坊
 Zhenwu 真武
zhixin guiming li 至心歸命禮
 zhongsi 中祀
 Zhongzheng tang 中正堂
Zhongzhen miaoji 中鎮廟記
 Zhou Side 周思德 (1359–1451)
 Zhou Xiulan 周蘭秀
 Zhou Ying 周瑛 (1430–1518)
 Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200)
 Zhu Yuanming 朱源明
 Zhu Zhe 朱淞 (1486–1552)
 Zisun niangniang 子孫娘娘
 Zitong 梓潼

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yanchao Zhang started her Ph.D. study in the Religions of Asia track, at the University of Florida under the guidance of Dr. Mario Poceski in Fall 2011 and received her Ph.D. from the University of Florida in the fall of 2018. She also received a B.A. from Xiamen University and a M.A. from Fudan University. Ms. Zhang is interested in studying Chinese popular religion, in particular Mazu, a popular goddess, and the issues of gender in Chinese religious history. Her dissertation, entitled “Mazu Worship in Late Imperial China: Gender, Politics, Religion, and Identity Construction,” explores how prevalent modes of goddess worship had been constructed by patriarchal society, in part as a way of promoting an ideal of exemplary Chinese womanhood, and the ways that Mazu cult has shaped Chinese women’s social, political, and religious statuses.