

Mazu – the Protecting Goddess of the Sea **by Tang Shi Gui**

Who is “Mazu”?

She died and reincarnated. She is the first sea goddess in China, saving people from tragic and bitter situation.

She is also an icon of the traditional Chinese oceanic culture, this culture spread from the coastal area to inland, and finally making a worldwide influence through the overseas trade.

Preface

Who is “Mazu”?

She died and reincarnated. She is the first sea goddess in China, saving people from tragic and bitter situation.

She is also an icon of the traditional Chinese oceanic culture, this culture spread from the coastal area to inland, and finally making a worldwide influence through the overseas trade.

Lin Yuan, the Capital Warden of Emperor Min in Wu Dai Dynasty, had a daughter called Lin Mo. Lin Mo has liked to study Taoism since young, the legend said that she has got the blessing of the Mercy Buddha (Avalokiteshvara) and became a goddess protecting the seagoing people. In the world, the “sky” is the most respected, the “earth” is the biggest, and the “ocean” is naturally part of the “earth”. Therefore, the “sky” is the god, the “earth” is god’s queen, and the “ocean” is traditionally taken as the god’s second wife. Thus, the sea goddess is usually called “Tian Fei”, meaning “Princess of the Sky”. The so-called “Tian Fei”’s legend is in fact the legendized story of Lin Mo.

Lin Mo was born in the First Year of “Jian Long” in the North Song Dynasty (960A.D.). She remained a maiden throughout her life. In the 9th of September (the Chung Yeung Festival) in 987A.D., aged 28, Lin Mo died for saving the fisherman victims in a sea catastrophe. The earliest literature about Mazu dated back to the 20th Year of North Song Dynasty, it was a narrative written by Liu Pang Fei

called “The reconstruction of the ancestral temple”. The narrative contained a description of Mazu, it said “Mazu, claimed to be the goddess who could communicate with the “sky”. Her surname is Lin and she was from Mei Zhou Island. At first, she was a sorceress able to predict one’s future. A temple was built for her after her death. Villagers have originally found a washed rotten root fluoresced at night in a beach but they did not know the reason. A villager took the root home but it was found to return to the beach the next day. The villager had a dream that night, and the root said to the villager : “I am the goddess from Mei Island, my spirit was attached to the root. You can build a temple to place the root for worship there”. The villagers found it amazing and thus built a temple for the root. In years of drought, they would pray in the temple for rains. When there is epidemic, they would pray for health. When there are pirates, they would also pray to the goddess and all the pirates would go away at once. That is why the seagoing people would not be afraid even in case of adverse sea conditions as they know their ships or boats would not turn over under the protection of Mazu. However, this is merely a record of the “split” spiritual power of Lin Mo in the area.

How did Lin Mo become Mazu? This is directly related to the nature of the small farming practice in Fujian and the cultural belief of the regional community of Pu Tian Mei Island. The women of Fujian can work well at home and they can also work well in the agricultural fields. However, the men of Fujian usually are doing business outside, leading to the peculiar tradition of Fujian women having a considerable power in the lower class society. Naturally, mother becomes a symbol of goddess protecting family members at home. As a result, the view of people respecting mother was firmly rooted inside the heart of the local people and slowly legendized, leading to the general belief of goddesses protecting their people, including Mazu.

The victims of sea disaster would usually manifest an instinctive call for motherly help, and the mother in this case is Mazu. From the linguistic point of view, mother could either be called “Mazu” (in Fujian, Hong Kong) or “Niang Ma” (in Macau), this is equivalent to the people in Hong Kong calling their mother “Mommy”. Therefore, as time goes by, the “goddess from Mei Island” has eliminated numerous other sea gods and became the sea god of the highest order. However, due to political consideration, the ruling class has turned the cultural belief into politics, and crowned the local goddess so as to better control those being ruled. This has made an even greater influence of the local goddess onto a wider area. The belief of Mazu has since then spread from the coastal region to the inland counties. With the help from

sea trading development, the icon of Mazu has followed the footsteps of emigrating Chinese to other parts of the world as well.

The government has conferred different and honorary names of higher and higher orders to Mazu. The conferment has been conducted as many as 14 times at the end of North Song Dynasty. Since Emperor Hui of Song Dynasty conferred Mazu as “Goddess of Mei Island” to “Lady of Wisdom and Kindness” in the 26th Year of Shiu Hing in North Song Dynasty, Mazu was “promoted” as the “Princess of Wisdom and Kindness” in Pu Tian of Fujian by the Emperor Kwong in the first Year of Shiu Hei and it was conferred by the prime minister Chan Chun Hing. However, as the ruling class of Yuan Dynasty believed in Buddhism but rejected Taoism, the government removed all peerage of people’s gods. Even so, under such political circumstances, Mazu not only was conferred a name but also promoted as the “Princess of Country Guarding”. According to “Record of Princess of the Sky Manifesting Herself”, in the 18th Year of Zhi Yuan (1281), the Great Grand Emperor of Yuan Dynasty conferred the “Princess of the Sky” as the “Princess of Country Guarding” and wrote a narrative to commemorate the case, which in brief saying that “Mazu, you are the goddess protecting the sea navigation channels, boats, ships and the sea transport all depend on your protection. You are so powerful and you commit yourself to every call for help. As you have not been conferred any honours since the assumption of this government, it has been requested and endorsed that you are to be named in the honour of the “Princess of Country Guarding”.

In Quanzhou, the decedents (the Po’s family) of a businessman named Wu were renowned businessmen in the history of external trade. At the end of Song Dynasty, the government appointed Po Shou Kan as Pier Controller and empowered him to control everything about sea transport. The son of Po Shou Kan appealed to the government for honouring Mazu. From this, we understand that the Po’s family had a firm belief in the “Goddess of Mei Island”, but not the sea god of Quanzhou, the “King of Tung Yuen”. Time changes, the tradition of worshipping “King of Tung Yuen” ceased in the Muslim’s Po’s family. However, Mazu was gaining more and more respect as time went, and the effort of Po’s family to strengthen Mazu’s position could not be underestimated.

“Princess of the Sky” is the wife of the “God of the Sky”. She is a couple of the “Sky” and thus even the human royal family cannot be compared to her in status. Mazu has surpassed all other gods since she was conferred the name of “Princess of the Sky”, and shared the same important status of a few other gods like “Emperor

Guan”.

In the Ming Dynasty, the Great Grand Emperor Hung Mo did not use the name “Princess of the Sky” for Mazu in the first few years. However, following Zheng Wo monumental visits of the western part of the world for seven times, Mazu’s role as the god protecting seagoing people have drawn more attention. In the 7th Year of Wing Lok, the government honoured Mazu as “The country and people protecting, the powerful, kind and the wise Princess of Sky”. The use “Princess of Sky” again gained the recognition of the government. At the middle of Ming Dynasty, due to the government’s forbiddance on sea activities and the great influence of Taoism, Mazu’s status was weakened. Mazu’s temple was even listed as a prurient temple in the Year of Ka Hing in the Ching Dynasty. Without doubt, this was a very exceptional case. In fact, for an ocean culture with a history of 700 years, the Mazu’s culture could not be eliminated by individual senior officials in the government.

In the Ching Dynasty, the respect for Mazu reached another peak. As the minor race ruling class, the Ching Dynasty’s government was very open for people’s belief. Therefore, Mazu was named as “the Country and People Guarding, the Wise and the Kind Princess of the Sky” in the 23rd Year of Kang Xi. The honorary name of Mazu was even as long as 64 words in the 7th Year of Ham Fung, with all the traditional Chinese virtues conferred upon her. Since then, Mazu has changed from a local goddess to having an equivalent status as the “God of the Sky”. In the 1000 years till the end of Ching Dynasty, Mazu was conferred honorary names over 40 times.

The Mazu’s belief had no religious element at first. Mazu was only a regional goddess worshipped by the local people. The Mazu’s belief has evolved and exerted greater influence on people, only then Mazu was included in Buddhism and Taoism. Indeed, people’s worship for Mazu is multi-religious.

Mazu was originally a local goddess with a diverse range of power from protecting babies, rescuing victims in disasters, protecting people against enemies and fortune telling etc., but protecting seagoing is an important one amongst her duties. Before Mazu, the local people of different places have already had their own sea gods. In fact, the government has conferred honorary names for these sea gods as well. Some of the most important sea gods are “God of Yin Island” in Fuzhou and “King of Tung Yuen” etc., and their influence was greater than “Goddess of Mei Island” at that

time. As mentioned above, firstly it was people's call for mother, and secondly, from the theory of "Ying Yang and Five Types", the sea is "Water", water is "Yin (female)", so the sea god must be a female but not a male. Thirdly, we could not neglect the strong influence of politics, many senior members of the dictatorship government of Song Dynasty came from Fujian, they have helped to spread the belief of Mazu from the coastal region into the inland counties. In this connection, this made a girl from a fishing village to eliminate other gods and become a goddess in the masculine power directed ancient China.

Mazu's belief was also introduced to the overseas through the external trade of Fujian's people. Mazu had already been rooted in all port cities of Europe and Asia. International trade has made the local culture of Mazu to influence the whole world.

In fact, people's worship for their idol is not without any reason. The conferment of honorary names by the ruling class is also not without any basis.

When an era of ruthless pursue for power and money comes, if there is someone who would sacrifice his precious life for other's life and property, won't we and our children be moved by his selfish and brave attitude? As the great Litterateur Lu Shun said, in every era, there are hard working people, brave people, people that would cry out for others' benefits, people who would sacrifice to get justice, though their lives are destined to be miserable, they are the real backbone of the Chinese, they would become the ever respected talents of the Chinese. Mazu is absolutely the representative of the Chinese.

When power and money become the lubricant for the running of the whole society, politics is the synonym for dictator playing tricks, the mere survival is the only hope of the ordinary people in the lowest class. They not only have to barely survive by themselves but they also need to support all those so-called people's bureaucrats. It would be the time that human could never stay away from pain, they have to move on while moaning and fighting against the nature at the same time. On the other hand, they have to fight against different "robbers" depriving their every interest. So, they need their own Mazu – calling for help from their protecting god in their heart.

Though, Mazu, this respectful motherly representation, was used by the ruling class and turned it from a local belief to their political tool, Mazu's spirit will live on forever in the hearts of ordinary people.

Tang Shi Gui

28.8.2000 at Home “Picking a Flower”

Content

Preface	007
1. Hanging Incense	015
2. Mazu's Family	020
3. Dragon Girl	028
4. Hoping for a Son	033
5. Obligation	041
6. Lin Mo was Born	046
7. Chiu Kung Ming to the Earth	061
8. Two Innocent Kids	065
9. Nightmare	078
10. Elder Brother in Risk	090
11. Collecting Herbal Medicine at Hill (1)	099
12. Collecting Herbal Medicine at Hill (2)	113
13. Collecting Herbal Medicine at Hill (3)	124
14. First Encounter with "Thousand Mile Eyes"	139
15. Meet Again	150
16. Worship for Father	159
17. Beautiful Spring	165
18. Epidemic	173
19. Marriage	186
20. First Sea Going	195
21. Japanese Privates	202
22. On the Way Back	211
23. Private's Sensitive Ears (1)	218
24. Private's Sensitive Ears (2)	228
25. Goddess of Mei Island (1)	237
26. Goddess of Mei Island (2)	245
27. Goddess of Mei Island (3)	251
28. The Magnificent Four (1)	264
29. The Magnificent Four (2)	271
30. The Magnificent Four (3)	279
31. Killing the Drought Ghost	287
32. Mazu's Tomb (1)	299
33. Mazu's Tomb (2)	307
34. Mazu's Ceremony	315
35. Little Dragon Girl of East Sea	323

36. Protecting Korea	330
37. Going West on the Guidance of a Red Light	336
38. Emperor Qian Lung Worshipping Mazu	347
39. Mazu's Spirit (Concluding Remarks)	354

Mazu – the Protecting Goddess of the Sea by Tang Shi Gui, Taipei, 2006