

## **Mazu of Meizhou Island, China: Construction of Self-Identity of Chinese People in the Process of Globalization**

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### **Abstract**

With the continuous progress of reform and opening up, China is in a period of rapid development, it has undergone major changes in economic, political, and cultural aspects. Mazu belief has also taken a new look and better development trend, it is advancing by leaps and bounds. At the same time, the social functions and roles of Mazu belief are constantly adjusted and improved. This paper starts with the concept of self-identity, introduces the relationship between Mazu belief and self-identity, focus on exploring the performance of contemporary Chinese self-identity of Mazu belief, and analyzes the important influences of Mazu belief on the self-identity of different Chinese groups in the world. In the era of globalization and the current background of building a harmonious socialist society and the policy of 'The Belt and Road', it has a great practical significance for Chinese people to construct their self-identity in Mazu belief.

**Keywords:** Mazu, Mazu belief, Self-Identity, Globalization.

### **1. Introduction**

Mazu, formerly known as Lin Mo, her hometown is Meizhou Island of Putian City, China. Mazu is the sea goddess of China. She was awarded titles by the emperor, who is also called 'Tianhou', 'Tianfei'. Mazu means the mother in Fujian dialect. People don't like to call her title, but call her as Mazu, this is a respected and kind name for Lin Mo, because people treat her as a family. (Luo.2006) The call changed from 'Linmo' to 'Mazu' also reflects the whole process of Mazu's transformation from human to god. Today, Mazu has received more attention from Chinese folk people, and she has become one of the female deities who has many believers. Mazu belief has a significant impact on the daily life of the people in the coastal areas of China and many overseas Chinese, this influence has been continuing and developing.

Mazu is a folk goddess in China and even the world's Chinese inhabited areas. Mazu was born as a human and died to become a god. Her archetype is a real figure in history. Her name, birth and death year, and life stories are constantly supplemented and perfected by scholars and believers in each era. Mazu belief has experienced more than one thousand years since it came into being. As a kind of folk belief, it lasts for a long time, spreads in a wide range and has far-reaching influence, which is unprecedented in other folk worship. In 2009, 'Mazu belief' was selected into the Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative List by the UNESCO. Mazu culture, which is based on Mazu belief as the core, has become the common spiritual wealth of all mankind.

The term 'globalization' was first proposed by T. Levy in 1985. T. Levy used it to describe the tremendous changes of the world economy in the previous 20 years. **(Guo.2006)** It is also a process of phenomenon in the development of human society. Globalization currently has many definitions. Globalization in the usual sense refers to the continuous enhancement of global connections, human life develops based on a global scale, and global consciousness rises. Countries and countries are interdependent in politics, economy and trade. Globalization can also be explained as the compression of the world and regards the world as a whole. After 1990s, with the expansion of the influence of globalization forces in human society, governments of every country have gradually paid attention to their politics, education, society and culture.

Mazu culture is a special cultural phenomenon in China. Under the special social situation, the state emphasizes and highlights the cultural characteristics of Mazu belief based on cultural, political, ethnic, economic and other considerations, because Mazu belief is also based on a specific society cultural groups, based on a common value goal, share or choose common value ideals or value promises.

Sociologist Anthony Giddens believes that identification is a historical product of the continuous development of society. It not only refers to a certain continuity of a society in time but also the society creates and maintains something conventionally in reflective activities. That is to continuously absorb events in the external world and incorporate them into the ongoing 'narrative' that concerns the self. **(Wu.2016)**

The construction of self-identity is the process of individuals' balance between the inner self and between self and environment, through cognition and self-synthesis to organize and construct a unified overall self. Self-identity is the individuals' inner continuity of 'past me' and 'present me' and 'future me', it is also a manifestation of the consistent relationship among the individual's 'real self', 'true sel' and 'ideal self'.**(Ji.2008)**

Mazu belief has formed a rich and diverse material and spiritual culture in the process of people's respect and inheritance for more than a thousand years, it is one of the important cultural treasures of the Chinese nation. Mazu belief is a product of history, working people is are the builders and participants of Mazu belief, they play a vital role in the formation of Mazu culture. Through the formation of self-identity, the Chinese know that they are Chinese and should learn from Mazu culture, carry forward Mazu spirit, and help others in society.

The spiritual connotation of Mazu belief is the construction of the meaning of life corresponding to human existence. Its ethical connotation makes a value argument for human existence and guides a meaningful life direction for human existence. Mazu culture is a kind of 'root', which precedes the specific individual, and in the form of 'collective unconscious' through inheritance, it innately constructs a certain 'prototype' for the spiritual structure of the individual. After the individual is socialized, he lives in the cultural context corresponding to this archetype, naturally showing a kind of cultural continuity. As a cultural community with historical continuity, Mazu belief is also a geographical community on Meizhou Island. It integrates various identities of people and is psychologically equivalent to affirming the existence value of individuals and communities.

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In this regard, Mazu belief is not only associated with the 'self' of people, but also with the 'existence' of people, and even the concept of 'people'. Not only that, Mazu belief is the content of life. In the process of human socialization, the process of implanting Mazu belief into one's self-structure is also a process in which an individual continuously discovers himself, confirms his connection with the world, and constructs his own meaning of life. Whether it is the acquisition of language, the acquisition of social customs, or the acquisition of value norms, they have all been internalized into things of 'self'. (Clifford Geertz.1999)

Mazu culture is closely related to the identification. Mazu culture has a direct effect on people's thinking and behavior. Mazu culture has its own characteristics of considerable permanence, universality and independence, forming a complete set of the independent, complete and organized system. In this system, a group of people is permanently gathered together, with specific rules and systems. Mazu culture affects the opinions and identification of individuals with its specific functions, and it has a relatively strong influence on some people, this identification maybe is inherent and is given at birth. But it has a weaker influence on some people, this kind of identification can also be obtained through the learning of each individual. Mazu culture provides a place where many contents in the concept of self can be obtained through meaningful exploration, compatible with other identifications, they can get mutual discovery and common progress.

At present, China is focusing on the great development of economic construction, the breadth and depth of reform and opening up have further increased. Tradition and reality, ignorance and civilization, backwardness and development, closure and openness are impacting people's hearts to varying degrees. People need to adapt to the new environment, deal with the various changes that may occur, correctly understand themselves, find their position in society, and unify 'real me' with 'past me' and 'future me', to form a sense of self-identity. In this context, Mazu belief will help people build a stable sense of self-identity, help individuals find a psychological balance, and directly affect the stability and development of society, affect the realization of China's goal of building a well-off society in an all-round way.

## **2. Significance Of The Study**

Self-identity affects the piety of Mazu belief, and then affects individual behavior. Geographically, those close to the core circle of Mazu belief have a higher degree of identification with Mazu belief. Those who have a high degree of involvement in activities of Mazu belief also have a higher degree of identification with Mazu belief. Self-identity based on Mazu belief has a positive effect on people's lives and thoughts.

## **3. Review Of Related Studies**

In the existing research papers on Mazu belief, most of the research results of researchers focus on the historical development, social function, and communication characteristics of Mazu, as well as the relationship between Mazu belief and other religious beliefs, and the relationship between Mazu belief and policies, and other aspects. For example, Jiang Jiajun's "An Analysis of the Function of Mazu Belief on Individuals", Zheng Junyu's "On the Relationship between Mazu Culture and the Maritime Silk Road", Chen Zufen's "The Influence of Buddhism on Mazu Culture", and Yu Xiaoli's "The Connotation of Mazu Clothing Culture and Inheritance", etc. In recent years, a small number of

researchers have begun to study Mazu from the perspective of identity, such as Tian Qing's "Research on Tourists' Local Identity on Meizhou Island", Chen Zufen and Gong Yifan's "From Meaning to Identity: The Semiotic Construction of Mazu Lantern Customs", etc. The researchers gradually shifted their attentions on regions of belief, belief carriers and other aspects, and attached importance to the interaction between beliefs and individuals, but these were still relatively superficial and not deep enough. Few researchers used the perspectives of self-identity to conduct research on Mazu belief.

In the existing work on Mazu research, historical records in the literature are still the mainstay. For instance, "Mazu Festival" edited by Zhou Jinyan in 2013, "An Introduction to Mazu Culture" published by Ren Qinghua in 2016, and "Mazu Culture and Marine Spirit" published by the Office of the State Oceanic Administration in 2017, are generally based on the analysis of historical documents. It is rare to use an interdisciplinary system to study Mazu belief. The concept of self-identity used in this paper is a brand-new attempt. Several pieces of fieldwork, interviews, surveys have been done and several photographs have been taken. A lot of unearthed and first-hand information, obtaining from officers and chairman of Mazu organization, have been deeply conducted, including some external and internal organizations and some personal sensitive information, such as salary income, willingness to work for Mazu, leadership care, and personal identity. All of these have laid the foundation for subsequent analysis.

The previous literature and historical data and thesis research are certainly the basis for the research and innovation of Mazu. This is a relationship of the same origin and has a high reference value. The rich values, artistic values and social phenomena contained in Mazu legends and the buildings of Mazu temples, reflect the wisdom and talents of the general public. They are an important basis for research. It will not be listed all here.

The research in this article is also based on the predecessors, combined with the framework of the national globalization strategy, in the context of the national policy--- "The Belt and Road" , and in the context of protecting and inheriting intangible culture around the world, constructing the self-identity of Chinese people, exerting the cultural soft power of Mazu belief, improving the material and spiritual civilization of all people, building a harmonious socialist society, building a community with a shared future for mankind, and realizing the all-round development of human society, so that Mazu belief will surely be accepted by more individuals and countries in the world. Therefore, the research in this paper has a broad theoretical foundation and important practical significance.

#### **4.Objectives Of The Study**

- To find out the construction of self-identity of Chinese people.
- To analyze the influence of Mazu belief on the Chinese self-identity construction
- To study the new mechanism and practical significance of Chinese self-identity in the background of globalization.

#### **5.Hypotheses Of The Study**

This paper adopts qualitative analysis. First, in the field research, researcher interviewed the people who worked in the Board of Directors of Meizhou Mazu ancestral temple, which is as the carrier of Mazu

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belief, the officers of local government of Meizhou Island, common believers, the elites of Mazubelievers and the tourists from all over the world. The contents include: how long have they been believed in Mazu belief, why do they believe in Mazu, where are they from, how much do they believe in Mazu, and so on. On the other hand, according to the previous literatures, researcher collected and analysed the historical development of Mazu belief in each era, the increase in the number of believers and Mazu temples, and the activities related with Mazu belief in the process of globalization. Based on these two aspects of information, researcher analyses the current situation of Mazu belief in order to complete the research on the construction of self-identity of Chinese people in the process of globalization.

### **6. Population And Sample**

The population includes the local government, folk organizations and residents on Meizhou Island of China, the tourists from all over the world as well, also with performers and artists, etc.

### **7. Conclusion**

Constructing Chinese identity with Mazu belief, constructing individuals' internal self-identity, and carrying forward the compassion and great love which is the core connotation of Mazu spirit, this has strong vitality and practical significance for contemporary China in the transitional period and gradually realizing modernization.

Modern Mazu is the spiritual pillar of the harmonious coexistence of Mazu belief community. In the hearts of devout Mazu believers, Mazu's position is very clear. People express the simple moral consciousness of the area of Mazu belief through Mazu parade and other rituals. This moral consciousness has increasingly prominent functions in respecting the elder, uniting people and other aspects.

For the mainland and overseas Chinese who live in different parts all over the world, today's Mazu believers respect Mazu not only praying for blessings and preventing disasters, but also a kind of spiritual nostalgia and rely upon, which is the source of culture. Mazu's affinity, charm, and the sense of common identity shared by overseas Chinese towards Mazu culture are conducted to the unity, cohesion and harmonious coexistence of multi-ethnic Chinese at home and abroad. This thus creates a good domestic and foreign environment for the peaceful rise of the Chinese nation and Chinese people. Carrying forward Mazu spirit of compassion and great love will help people from all over the world learning a deeper understanding of the characteristics and essence of Chinese traditional culture, and more clearly see the cultural foundation for the peaceful rise of the Chinese nation.

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