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**Linshui Furen and Mazu in Beliefs, Practices and the Womanhood
Concerns in Contemporary China**

Master's Thesis

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I have written this master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Abstract

Through in-depth online interviews with in total 20 devotees (10 devotees who believe in Mazu (妈祖, Mǎzǔ) and 10 in Linshui Furen (临水夫人, Línshuǐ Fūrén)), combined with the recorded stories of the believers before the interviews, this paper concludes that although the worship activities of Linshui Furen (临水夫人, Línshuǐ Fūrén) and Mazu (妈祖, Mǎzǔ) in China, mainly in Fujian Province (福建省, Fújiàn Shěng), have undergone great changes, reflecting the changes in women's participation. But at the same time, it is also found that compared with Mazu, the belief of Linshui Furen is closely related to female fertility and the safety of children, resulting in her belief being highly localized, rather than having a national symbol like Mazu.

Keywords: Mazu, Linshui Furen, Mazu's belief, gender studies, comparative studies

Introduction

Mazu and Linshui Furen (also called Chen Jinggu (陈靖姑 Chén Jìnggū)) are two significant goddesses in Chinese folk belief, with the former regarded as the protector of sailors and the latter famous for the protection of women and children. Mazu, also named Lin Moniang (林默娘, Lín Mòniáng), is a real historical figure in Song Dynasty (宋朝, Sòng Cháo), who learned medication to save people in her village, according to historic documents. Meanwhile, she tried to save hundreds of sailors who encountered disasters when fishing, so she is also regarded as the goddess of sea. Linshui Furen, another famous goddess in Fujian, who has less influence than Mazu in general, died in unsuccessful labor after fighting against monsters, becomes a protector of the mother-to-be and children. In China, the majority of deities are males. Interestingly, Guanyin (观音, Guānyīn) plays a crucial role in Chinese deity system, who is known to almost everyone. In Chinese, 观音 means observing the voice from the world. Therefore, the task of Guanyin is to hear the needs of people and give help when necessary. When originated from India and introduced to China, Guanyin was often males. However, to match the quality of kindness and helpfulness, the image of Guanyin turned into a female, who often holds a vase, with purifying water and a tiny willow branch inside. Meanwhile, as rare goddesses in China, especially in Fujian province which is often considered conservative in gender roles, Mazu and Linshui Furen's representation not only showcases the unique local culture in Fujian, but also reflects how women are recognized and anticipated.

My motivation for studying this topic is from personal interest in gender roles. As a woman from the country with a low ranking in terms of gender equality globally, since childhood I have seen many cases where women are weakened instead of being empowered according to traditional and contemporary narratives. Therefore, in my first year of master's study, when Mazu and Linshui Furen were introduced in the course *History of Chinese Thought and Religion*, I was intrigued by these figures and beliefs from another part of my homeland China, although I only knew something superficial about Mazu and I had never heard about Linshui Furen before. This

experience made me think about the differences between Mazu and Linshui Furen's representation given the similarity of their background: they are both from Fujian and died because of saving people.

This thesis will compare and analyze Mazu and Linshui Furen's ritual practices and how they are associated with womanhood in Fujian Province, China, shedding light on the method of shaping and reflecting social expectations of womanhood through folk faith. As a result, this thesis not only narrows the gap between current researches' limitation and Mazu and Linshui Furen's reflection on Chinese women issues, but also provides a new angle from which the relation and interaction between folk faith and social gender cognition could be interpreted.

The set aim of this thesis is to explore the roles Mazu and Linshui Furen play in modern Chinese folk practices. To be more specific, the focus is on how these folk beliefs affect women identity, women empowerment and how the identity and empowerment of women reversely affect people's devotion of the faith as mentioned above. There are two major questions to be examined: 1. How do the beliefs of Mazu and Linshui Furen reflect and shape society's cognition of women's roles? 2. How do their faith practices affect women's identity and empowerment in contemporary society?

The research scope will be mainly focused on southern part of China including Fujian Province (福建省, Fújiàn Shěng) and Guangdong Province (广东省, Guǎngdōng Shěng), because it is the core region of Mazu and Linshui Furen's beliefs. Therefore, over half of interviewees were born and have grown or had lived there for years. Meanwhile, several interviewees from the north of China (where Mazu and Linshui Furen beliefs are much less common) are also included to make it clear to illustrate how people from other regions view these two different beliefs and what is adopted as well as what is abandoned according to devotees' demand. In addition, the emphasis will be narrowed into women believers' faith practices and gender issues through interviews, rather than into the shared historical roots or religious ceremony comprehensively.

To fulfill the objective mentioned above, this research is going to be divided into

several phases:

1. Literature Review: Sort out the history of Mazu and Linshui Furen's belief, ritual practice and related research on women's issues, and clarify the research background and theoretical framework.

2. Research on Linshui Furen: Discuss Linshui Furen's belief practice as a mother and child protector and the relationship with women's empowerment, and analyze her changing role in contemporary society.

3. Mazu Research: Analyze the belief practice of Mazu as a marine protection goddess and her role in contemporary female identity.

4. Comparative Analysis: Compare the similarities and differences between Mazu and Linshui Furen in contemporary women's issues from the perspectives of subjectification and objectification, female empowerment and protection.

5. Conclusion: Summarize the research findings, and put forward the significance of Mazu and Linshui Furen beliefs in contemporary society and their impact on female identity.

Through this five-phase analysis, this thesis aims at uncovering the impact of Mazu and Linshui Furen on current Chinese folk belief especially in Fujian Province and answering by which method worship activities reflect and shape women's self-consciousness and identity, offering a new viewpoint for interpreting the mutual influence between belief and gender roles.

Keywords: Mazu, Linshui Furen, Mazu's belief, gender studies, comparative studies,

Research classification code: H400

1. Resources and Methods

1.1. Resources

To collect information from different perspectives, this research is based on interviewees from 1. not only Fujian where Mazu and Linshui Furen beliefs are prevalent 2. but also other provinces of China where these two beliefs are less common or even rare.

All of these interviews were carried out online due to the limitation of physical interactions and for the seek of more diverse cultural background. Therefore, firstly of all, posts were released on a popular Chinese social media platform called RedNote (小红书, xiǎohóngshū). After receiving dozens of messages of applicants, in total 20 interviewees are selected: 10 interviewees are practitioners of Mazu, and the rest 10 are believers of Linshui Furen. However, the overlap between interviewees' worship is inevitable because most of them are familiar with the two goddesses under the influence of local culture. Interviews were conducted and recorded under interviewees' permission via Tencent Meeting (腾讯会议, Téngxùn Huìyì), one of the most common online conferencing apps.

In total 20 informants were conducted in this way. The majority of informants are from Fujian and grown there, however, there are also a few who once visited and were fascinated by Mazu culture. Meanwhile, several informants mentioned that they were born and stayed in Fujian for years but moved to other regions in China later on. In addition, few interviewees are from Guangdong Province (广东省, Guǎngdōng Shěng) and Zhejiang Province where Mazu and Linshui Furen culture are widespread. In the following discussion I have anonymised all the informants for privacy protection. For easier understanding, all informants will be represented by a combination of a letter L (representing Linshui Furen's practitioners) and M (representing Mazu's practitioners) and a random number from 1 to 10.

Informant L1, female, aged 25. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and working in

Fuzhou City (福州, Fúzhōu), Fujian Province (the birthplace of Linshui Furen and the capital city of Fujian Province). Interviewed once, in total about 1 hour.

Informant L2, female, aged 28. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and working in Jieyang City (揭阳, Jiēyáng), Guangdong Province (a coastal city). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant L3, female, aged 19. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and studying in Shenzhen City (深圳, Shēnzhèn), Guangdong Province (a coastal city). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant L4, male, aged 22. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and studying in Gutian County (古田县, Gǔtián Xiàn), Fujian Province (The core area of Linshui Furen's faith, the location of her husband's family and the place where her major life stories took place). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant L5, female, aged 28. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and working in Gutian County (古田县, Gǔtián Xiàn), Fujian Province (The core area of Linshui Furen's faith, the location of her husband's family and the place where her major life stories took place). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant L6, female, aged 28. Worships Linshui Furen after participating in Linshui Furen's deity procession (游神, yóushén) a traditional folk ritual where statues of gods are carried through the community to bestow blessings. Also knows little about Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and working in Dalian City (大连, Dàlián), Liaoning Province (辽宁省, Liáoníng Shěng) (over 1,500 kilometers from Fujian Province and not regarded as the region of Linshui Furen's belief). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant L7, male, aged 22. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. But does not worship Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and

studying in Anyang City (安阳, Ānyáng), Henan Province (河南省, Hénán Shěng) (over 1,500 kilometers from Fujian Province and not regarded as the region of Linshui Furen's belief). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant L8, female, aged 37. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and working in Fuzhou City (福州, Fúzhōu), Fujian Province (the birthplace of Linshui Furen and the capital city of Fujian Province). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant L9, male, aged 27. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Mazu. Born and living in Fuzhou City (福州, Fúzhōu), Fujian Province (the birthplace of Linshui Furen and the capital city of Fujian Province) during his childhood but later moved to Henan Province (河南省, Hénán Shěng). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant L10, male, aged 29. Worships Linshui Furen under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Mazu. Born, brought up, living, and working in Fuzhou City (福州, Fúzhōu), Fujian Province (the birthplace of Linshui Furen and the capital city of Fujian Province). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant M1, female, aged 21. Worships Mazu under the influence of the family atmosphere. But no familiar with Linshui Furen belief. Born, brought up, living, and studying in Xiamen City (厦门, Xiàmén), Fujian Province (a costal city of Fujian Province). Interviewed once, in total about 1 hour.

Informant M2, female, aged 25. Worships Mazu under the influence of the family atmosphere. But no familiar with Linshui Furen belief. Born, brought up, living, and working in Quanzhou City (泉州, Quánzhōu), Fujian Province (a costal city of Fujian Province). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant M3, female, aged 23. Worships Mazu under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Linshui Furen. Born, brought up in Quanzhou City (泉州, Quánzhōu), Fujian Province (a costal city of Fujian Province) but now living in Hunan Province (湖南省, Húnán Shěng) (an inner region in China). Graduating this year. Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant M4, female, aged 30. Worships Mazu after attending deity procession (游神, yóushén), a traditional folk ritual where statues of gods are carried through the community to bestow blessings. But no familiar with Linshui Furen belief. Born, brought up, living, and working in Dali City (大理, Dàlǐ), Yunnan Province (云南省, Yúnnán Shěng) (an inner region in China). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant M5, female, aged 20. Worships Mazu under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Linshui Furen. Born, brought up, living, and studying in Xiamen City (厦门, Xiàmén), Fujian Province (a costal city of Fujian Province). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant M6, male, aged 29. Worships Mazu under the influence of the family atmosphere. Also worships Linshui Furen. Born and lived during his childhood in Zhoushan City (舟山, Zhōushān), Zhejiang Province (a costal city of Zhejiang Province, which is also a region influenced by Mazu and Linshui Furen culture). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant M7, male, aged 25. Worships Mazu after watching a TV series called Mazu and visiting Mazu temple in Fujian Province. But not familiar with Linshui Furen culture. Born, living and working in Qingdao City (青岛, Qīngdǎo), Shandong Province (山东省, Shāndōng Shěng) (a costal city of Shandong Province, however, it is the region rarely influenced by Mazu and Linshui Furen culture). Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant M8, female, aged 40. Worships Mazu under the influence of the family atmosphere. But only know little about Linshui Furen. Born, brought up in Fuzhou City (福州, Fúzhōu), Fujian Province (the capital city of Fujian Province) but now living in Fuyu County (富裕县, Fùyù Xiàn), Heilongjiang Province (黑龙江省, Hēilóngjiāng Shěng) (an inner region in China and rarely influenced by Mazu and Linshui Furen culture) after getting married. Interviewed once, in total about 30 minutes.

Informant M9, female, aged 29. Worships Mazu after asking Mazu for help. But

only knows little about Linshui Furen. Born, brought up in Tongcheng City (桐城, Tóngchéng), Anhui Province (安徽省, Ānhuī Shěng) (an inner region in China and rarely influenced by Mazu and Linshui Furen culture) but now living in Shanghai City. Interviewed once, in total about 1 hour.

Informant M2, female, aged 19. Worships Mazu under the influence of the family atmosphere. But no familiar with Linshui Furen belief. Born, brought up, living, and working in Quanzhou City (泉州, Quánzhōu) , Fujian Province (a costal city of Fujian Province). Interviewed once, in total about 1 hour.

1.2 Methods

The theoretical cornerstone of this thesis is provided by Leonard Norman Primiano's seminal work, *Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife* (1995). Primiano's critique of the rigid official/folk binary and his proposition of the "vernacular religion" framework offer an invaluable lens through which to analyze the empirical data collected for this study on the devotees of Mazu and Linshui Furen.

Primiano (1995) argues against the tendency in religious studies to simply categorize beliefs into two types: institutionalized and popular religion. According to him, belief should not be regarded as completely official and nor folk. He claims that this artificial distinction, often imposed by scholars, fails to capture the authentic, lived reality of religious experience. Meanwhile, he also thinks that as a main part of religion devotion, devotees narratives, experiences and understanding of religion should be emphasized.

This thesis applies Primiano's conceptual framework. The research design, centered on in-depth interviews with 20 individual devotees (10 primarily devoted to Mazu, 10 to Linshui Furen with overlaps), is fundamentally aligned with the "vernacular" approach. By collecting personal narratives on ritual practices, taboos, and the personal impact of these goddesses, this study shifts the focus from the institutional definitions of these cults to the individual level. The stories shared by the participants constitute the very data of vernacular religion—the subjective, nuanced,

and often eclectic ways in which faith is constituted and enacted personally.

Meanwhile, Valk (2008) argues that legend is surreal and dynamic, and it is often used to reflect tension existing in reality. Valk also says that legend plays a crucial role in community belonging and ethical identity. Valk & Sávborg (2018) suggest that local legend is a combination of narratives and placelore, which makes people transform from outsiders to participants in stories. To combine the theory of narratives and placelore, the interview questions aim to reveal a personalized side of faith. This essay focuses on individual rituals to uncover the unique, homegrown practices that are at the core of a person's religious life. To understand how people use religious figures to shape their understanding of womanhood, their perceptions of female deities are studied. This shows how individuals actively interpret their social and personal realities through faith, reflecting Primiano's concept of religion as a dynamic form of "meaning-making."

Therefore, Primiano's 1995 article provides not just background theory but the core methodological justification for this thesis. This study shows that Mazu and Linshui Furen are not monolithic, static figures, but are actively shaped and lived out by their followers. By prioritizing the devotees' own perspectives as the primary authority, this analysis reveals the complex interplay between cultural tradition, gender identity, and individual religious expression in contemporary China.

Apart from Primiano's theory of vernacular ways of preserving religion, there are also some articles cited in the thesis to give a more thorough introduction to and understanding of these two female deities. In previous studies, it has been widely accepted Mazu's role as the protector of sailors and marine travelers and Linshui Furen as the bringer of children. However, it has been challenged by Ruitenbeek (1999) who argued that Mazu also represents the bringer of children, equal to Linshui Furen's function. According to Peilin (2022), ancient rulers promoted the influence of Mazu culture to strengthen cultural unity. In early modern China, Mazu belief was discouraged due to Chinese civil conflicts as well as external survival threats from other countries such as Japan, but it did not die out due to the protection of local believers. Now China is concerned with Mazu as a center of cultural interaction and

making it a tourist destination to boost economic development of tourism.

Through fieldwork and the analysis of the historical literature, Zhang et al. (2023) also found that people's worship of Mazu culture is not only reflected in festivals but also in daily life, and the cultural events, such as traveling souvenirs, have made the connection between economy and culture closer. Although many scholars, including Zhang (2021), Wei and Zhou (2025) and Ye (2024) demonstrate the significance of Mazu in terms of 'cross-strait reunification' (China Mainland and Taiwan), few references are mentioned in the studies of Linshui Furen. In fact, researches shed light on how the integration of Linshui Furen worship into masses occurred. For example, Zhong (钟) (2016) claimed that the functions of the three ladies (who are revered as powerful protectors of women and children), including Linshui Furen in assisting childbirth, protecting children, and curing illnesses were constantly strengthened and highlighted.

However, scholars debate the symbolism of Linshui Furen. Zheng (2017) argues that her image reveals a tension between gender and ethical norms, a product of its specific historical and social context. According to Zheng, resolving this tension required a fusion of divine authority (theocracy) and Confucian principles. Conversely, an opposite view appeared, which is that compared to the such as the Iliad and the Odyssey of Greek and Mahabharata and the Ramayana of India, Chinese religion lacks complexity and reflection on reality, taking Linshui Furen as an example (Kohn, 2009).

Given this controversy, previous studies have focused primarily on the influences and transformation of Mazu as well as Linshui Furen's worship, leaving their gender implications and comparative analysis underexplored. Therefore, this thesis will first compare these two goddesses' gender role and then offer possible research directions to narrow the gap.

Decades of research indicates that scholars have converted researching methods from traditional religious studies and literature examination to inter-discipline studies, which combined various fields, such as communication and localization, as well as social functioning and current meaning, etc.. However, few focus is put on

comparative analysis towards these two goddess from gender perspective. Meanwhile, scopes, such as cross-region comparative analysis, digitalization along with the internet spreading, arts of intangible ritual culture, and micro narratives, also deserve future researchers' attention.

2. Linshui Furen: The Protector of Mothers and Children

2.1 Introduction to Linshui Furen

2.1.1 Linshui Furen's divine status and functions

Linshui Furen, or Chen Jinggu (陈靖姑, Chén Jìnggū), is also known as the Holy Mother of Shuntian (顺天圣母, Shùntiān Shèngmǔ), and Empress Dowager Yuanjun (元君太后, Yuánjūn Tàihòu). As one of rare female deities, she is mainly worshiped by people in the Minjiang River Basin (闽江盆地, Mǐnjiāng Péndì) in the Mindu area (闽都, Mǐndū) of Fujian Province, China. Because she originated from Fuzhou City, the capital city of Fujian Province, Fuzhou people regard her as the patron saint of the village, or the local protector. Believers in other regions also regard her as the patron saint of women and children. Linshui Furen is a female Taoist priest of the Lüshan School (闾山派, Lúshān Pài). She was virtuous to the people during her lifetime and was worshiped as a deity after her death. She is famous for her ability to protect pregnant women and to ensure smooth childbirth. According to Chinese folklore, she often communicated with people during her lifetime, and is still worshiped as the executor of the *Guanluoyin magic* (落观音, Luò Guānyīn). *The Guanluoyin magic* is mainly used in Fujian Province, China to allow the living to communicate with the dead or to explore information from the underworld.

In *The Compendium of Deities from the Three Religions*, 《三教源流搜神大全》 (16th century), Linshui Furen is revered as Danai Furen (Great Wet Nurse), emphasizing her role of “giving birth to infants and protecting infants” (*Shanghai Ancient Book Publishing House*, 2012, p. 203). This is consistent with the Daoist classic, *The Record of the Happy Childbirth of Empress Cixiao* (*Orthodox Daoist Canon*, vol. 30, p. 412), which refers to her as the “organizer of the underworld in Fengdu,” giving her the power to command the warriors of the underworld and bring back lost souls.

Ye Mingsheng (2008) suggests that Linshui Furen's rituals, especially *the Blood*

Lake exorcism ritual (血湖驱魔仪式, Xuèhú Qūmó Yíshì), are a fusion of Lüshan Daoist exorcism and folk shamanism (Lüshan Daoism and Goddess Worship in Fujian and Taiwan, p. 207). *the Blood Lake exorcism ritual* (血湖驱魔仪式, Xuèhú Qūmó Yíshì) is a complex ritual whose aim is to expel bad luck and punishment from the deceased world from women. It is called the blood lake, because in tradition menstrual blood and maternity blood are viewed as impure. Therefore, a woman with sins during her lifetime may suffer in this blood lake and receive punishment.

2.1.2. Linshui Furen's life experiences and deification

The life of Linshui Furen, the revered protector of women and children, is a blend of historical records and folk tales, creating a rich and multifaceted narrative. As described in the Ming Dynasty's *The Compendium of Deities from the Three Religions*, 《三教源流搜神大全》, Linshui Furen was born in the first year of the Tang Dali era (唐朝大历年间, Táng Dàlì Niándài) (766) in Min County (闽县, Mǐn Xiàn), Fuzhou (now Fuzhou city, Fujian Province, China). Her mother, Ge, conceived after having a dream in which she swallowed a red cloud, symbolizing that her daughter would be extraordinary (*The Compendium of Deities from the Three Religions*, 16th century, p. 203). From a young age, she exhibited remarkable intelligence. At 13, she encountered Xu Xun, a Taoist priest from the Lüshan school, who taught her the practices of 'killing demons and protecting people'. Notably, she chose not to marry and instead dedicated herself to Taoism, an unusual decision in a society that heavily emphasized traditional views of female virtue (Ye, 2008, p. 195).

Linshui Furen's most famous tale is about her beheading a white snake in order to rescue a woman giving birth. This legend is recorded in the Qing Dynasty novel *Ming Dynasty Tales*, (闽都别记). There lived in Fujian Province a white snake spirit in human form, whose purpose was to seduce women and make them suffer in labour pains. Linshui Furen recognized the snake demon's deceit and fought it for seven days, ultimately slaying it with a hairpin that transformed into a sword (*Ming Dynasty Tales*, 18th century, p. 176). Another significant legend recounts how she bravely descended

into the underworld to destroy the ‘blood lake hell’ (血湖地狱, Xuèhú Dìyù) (a punishment for women with sins) and save a woman in labor, but she succumbed to exhaustion, as Taoist belief holds that a person’s magical powers do not fully develop until the age of 24. Such tales not only cultivated her reputation as a savior but also made her become a female deity specifically protecting women and children (Xu, 2005, p.73). Once deceased, Linshui Furen was conferred by the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝, Yùhuáng Dàdì), who leads gods in Taoism and is appointed with duty of safeguarding fruits, rescuing lives and preserving infants and young children, Linshui Furen (Baptandier, 2008, p.102). This divine title firmly established her general adulation among the people.

As the belief in Linshui Furen spread, her image evolved in interesting ways across different regions. The version of the legend in Fujian places greater emphasis on her chastity and sacrificial spirit. *The Gutian County Archives* (古田县志) specifically highlight that her deeds were considered sacred even before her marriage, portraying her as a symbol of the virgin mother (*Gutian County Archives*, 1992).

2.1.3. Linshui Furen’s cultural significance

Linshui Furen’s religion has typical rituals. The ‘passing the door/gate’ ritual (过关, guòguān, a ritual to avert misfortune) is the most typical. Devotees including the children must step over red hot coals to express that life trials can be surmounted (Ye, 2008, p.207). Her story has been developed into interesting dramas in the area of Fujian as a major attraction to folk culture tourism(Xu, 2005, p.88).

The life of her and changes of her worship all clearly explain how folk religion has developed. From witch to Taoist goddess to folk cult symbol for women in today’s China, the transformation of her image illustrates not only the distinctive features in Fujian’s worship but also the variation of the gender roles in China. The abundant cultural practice through years makes Linshui Furen’s belief a typical case to understand the Chinese folk religion and the society’s modern transformations. Taking her as an instance, there is a rather important meaning and value to understand the

meaning and the role of folk tradition in interaction with mainstream culture and the evolution of its new forms in contemporary society.

2.2. Ritual Practices and Worship

The ritual practice and belief worship of Linshui Furen present unique regional characteristics in the folk belief system of Fujian Province. Through in-depth interviews with believers in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, it can be found that although this belief is not the most mainstream folk belief in the local area, its unique ritual system and functional orientation have enabled it to maintain a lasting influence among the female group. When comparing the belief in Linshui Furen and Mazu, L1 specifically pointed out: "In Fuzhou, there are relatively few families who believe in Linshui Furen, and the belief in Mazu may be more prevalent in Putian and the coastal areas of southern Fujian", but then L1 emphasized that "Linshui Furen belongs to the Lüshan School of Taoism, and the Lüshan School (闾山派, Lúshān Pài, a Taoist sect specializing in ritual exorcism) is represented by Zhang Zhenjun (张真君, Zhāng Zhēnjūn). Linshui Furen is also one of the colleagues of the Monkey King (美猴王, Měi Hóuwáng), the protagonist of "*Journey to the West*" (西游记, Xīyóujì), one of the four great masterpieces of China, so we also have the belief in him." (L1, October 24th, 2024). The interconnectedness of this system of gods has built a relatively independent belief network, which is manifested in ritual practice as a collaborative relationship across temples, especially in large-scale events such as the parade of gods (游神, yóushén) (usually during the Chinese New Year when deity statues are carried out of their temples on palanquins in a lively parade to bless the community).

2.2.1. The structure and symbolism of core rituals

The ritual practices surrounding the worship of Linshui Furen are characterized by symbolic actions, offerings, and taboos that reflect deep-rooted cultural beliefs and social values. Central to these practices is the emphasis on reproductive health, child

protection, and gender-specific rites, which collectively form a coherent system of meaning aimed at ensuring well-being across the female life cycle.

A classical example is the "passing the gate" (过关, guòguān, a ritual to avert misfortune) ceremony, described in detail by multiple interviewees. This ritual serves as a mechanism for safeguarding children perceived as vulnerable in their early years. As L1 explained, it is often difficult to raise a child — due to chronic illness or perceived cosmological incompatibility with their family — are symbolically registered under the divine guardianship of Linshui Furen, effectively becoming her spiritual children. This practice, which often spans generations within families, culminates in a ceremony around the age of 13, when the child is formally "returned" to their biological family, marking their successful transition to adulthood. The ritual is performed by Lüshan School (闾山派, Lúshān Pài, a Taoist sect specializing in ritual exorcism) magicians, who employ distinctive tools such as horns and red swords — artifacts believed to be linked to Linshui Furen's own ritual practices (L1, L5). This ceremony not only addresses immediate health concerns but also embodies a broader cultural narrative of overcoming life's challenges, as symbolized by the phrase "surmounting numerous difficulties" (过五关斩六将, guò wǔ guān zhǎn liù jiàng) .

The role of ritual specialists is crucial in these performances. The Lüshan magicians, as described by L1, operate within a tradition that blends Taoist liturgical elements with local shamanistic practices. Despite their formal association with Taoism, they are widely regarded in Fujian Province as practitioners of a localized form of witchcraft (巫教, Wūjiào), rooted in their cultural traditions. This intersection of ritual authority and folk belief highlights the hybrid nature of Linshui Furen's worship, where institutional religion and local custom converge.

Equally significant is the system of sacrificial offerings and taboos, which translates mythological narratives into concrete ritual prohibitions. The most prominently cited taboo, mentioned by L1, L2, and L4, is the strict avoidance of ducks as offerings. This prohibition is directly tied to the foundational myth of Linshui Furen: during a critical moment in her earthly struggles, she was saved by

two ducks—transformations of her master’s straw sandals—that held reeds to keep her afloat. Consequently, despite ducks being a common culinary ingredient in Fuzhou, they are excluded from sacred rituals, reinforcing a boundary between the profane and the sacred. This taboo not perpetuates collective memory but also accentuates the sanctity of ritual space.

Other offerings carry strong symbolic meanings related to fertility, safety, and prosperity. Interviewees highlighted fruits such as oranges (吉祥, Jíxiáng, auspiciousness), apples (平安, Píng'ān, peace and safety), and peaches (长寿, Chángshòu, longevity) as common and valued ritual items (L4, L8, L9). Flowers, particularly orchids and osmanthus, are also offered to invoke blessings (L4). Additionally, items like red eggs are presented by those seeking children (L9), while in some Guangdong and Macao traditions, whole pigs or sheep are used in larger communal ceremonies (L6). The offering of personal items, such as clothing belonging to family members, further personalizes the appeals for divine intervention (L2, L5).

The structural composition of these rituals often involves purificatory preparations, including bathing and wearing red garments like red vest (L4, L5), followed by the presentation of offerings, incense burning, and formal prayers. In certain contexts, divine consent is sought through divination tools such as shengbei (圣杯, shèngbēi, divination blocks), used to determine the route of processions or the selection of ritual participants (L5). These elements collectively form a ritual grammar that articulates both personal aspirations and communal identity, illustrating how symbolic actions mediate between human needs and divine power.

Through these structured practices, the worship of Linshui Furen not addresses immediate pragmatic concerns but also reinforces a worldview wherein spiritual agency and ritual efficacy are intimately intertwined with everyday life.

2.2.2. Efficacy, healing, and the supernatural experience

The belief in the efficacy of Linshui Furen’s supernatural power constitutes a

cornerstone of her worship, particularly in matters related to health, healing, and protection. This perceived efficacy is not confined to abstract faith but is experienced and narrated through tangible interventions in the lives of devotees, especially women and children. The healing practices associated with Linshui Furen often operate within a framework that blends ritual symbolism with deeply rooted cultural narratives, creating a parallel system of explanation and treatment that exists alongside modern medicine.

A prominent theme across interviews is the role of Linshui Furen in safeguarding maternal and child health. Multiple respondents affirmed a strong belief in her protective influence over pregnant women and infants. As L1 articulated, this influence extends beyond mere superstition to engender a form of social respect for women during pregnancy: "When women are pregnant, we all go to Linshui Furen's temple to ask for flowers. The saying is that if a boy is born, white flowers are given, and if a girl is born, red flowers are given. This child is blessed by the gods." This practice, noted by several interviewees (L1, L10), symbolizes a divine endorsement of the child and, by extension, elevates the status of the mother. L10 described the qinghua, "asking for flowers" (请花) ritual in detail, explaining that devotees would pray at the temple and then take a flower—red for a girl, white for a boy—a practice believed to grant fertility. This ritual efficacy is demonstrated in personal accounts; L9 shared the story of a relative who, after years of unsuccessful attempts to conceive and extensive medical treatments, began worshipping Linshui Furen and was blessed with twin sons shortly thereafter.

The belief in her power also provides profound psychological comfort. L4 and L8 emphasized that the practices offer "psychological solace" and "positive hint/suggestion(暗示, ànshì)," reducing anxiety during vulnerable periods like pregnancy or childhood illness. L8 shared a personal experience of giving birth prematurely: her mother went to the temple to seek a protective fu, (符, fú, talisman) for the infant in the incubator. The child's subsequent healthy development was attributed partly to this divine intervention, strengthening the family's faith. Similarly, L2 narrated how her sister, experiencing a threatened miscarriage, found reassurance

through regular worship, which she believes contributed to a successful pregnancy.

The most striking narratives of efficacy revolve around the witch doctor (巫医, wūyī) tradition, where ritual specialists—exclusively women, as knowledge is "passed on to women rather than men" (L1)—intervene in cases of illness resistant to conventional treatment. L1 provided a detailed firsthand account of being cured of shechanyao (蛇缠腰, shé chán yāo, snake coiling around the waist), a condition that had worsened despite hospital care. A female ritualist, inheriting her craft from a lineage of women, performed a healing ceremony involving incense and dietary restrictions, resulting in a complete recovery within three days. L1 contextualized this cure within Linshui Furen's mythological role as a slayer of demons and snakes: "I wonder if these diseases represent various demons and monsters... the healing process is also her process of vanquishing demons." This exemplifies a folk medical logic where illness is attributed to supernatural forces and treated through ritual means.

Other interviewees shared similar stories of supernatural healing. L6 recounted a story from a devout Fujianese friend in Macao whose child, severely ill and unresponsive to medical treatment, recovered dramatically after a visit to the Linshui Temple, where the mother dreamed of the goddess touching the child's forehead. L5 mentioned a personal childhood illness deemed untreatable by doctors; a ritualist identified the cause as a spiritual disturbance, and after performing the prescribed rites, the child recovered. In another instance, a persistent cough was diagnosed as a discontented ancestor needing offerings: a need addressed through ritual, leading to recovery.

These experiences collectively form what medical anthropology terms an "explanation-treatment system." Illnesses are often interpreted through a cultural lens that connects them to spiritual narratives—whether demons (as with 蛇缠腰, shé chán yāo, snake coiling around the waist), restless spirits of aborted children (L2), or neglected ancestors (L5). The ritual treatment, administered by female specialists, provides not just a cure but a culturally meaningful resolution, reinforcing the perceived efficacy of the belief system.

Furthermore, this efficacy is spatially supported by the proximity of sacred sites

to modern medical institutions, creating a "therapeutic landscape" (Gesler, 2003) where devotees navigate between secular and spiritual healthcare options. The high density of temples in Fuzhou, as noted previously, facilitates this access, allowing beliefs in Linshui Furen's healing power to persist and adapt within a modern urban context.

In conclusion, the efficacy of Lady Linshui's worship is demonstrated through a complex interplay of ritual practice, gendered knowledge transmission, and narrative interpretation of health outcomes. It provides a framework for understanding and addressing life's vulnerabilities, particularly those affecting women and children, blending ancient myth with contemporary lived experience in a way that remains vitally relevant for her devotees.

2.2.3. Evolution and adaptation in contemporary worship

The worship of Linshui Furen has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation, ensuring its continued relevance within the rapidly modernizing social landscape of contemporary China. While preserving its core ritual structures and theological emphasis on protecting women and children, the practice has undergone significant functional expansion and stylistic innovation, particularly among younger generations of devotees. This evolution reflects a strategic negotiation between tradition and modernity, allowing the belief system to maintain its vitality without sacrificing its foundational identity.

One of the most notable adaptations is the shift in participant motivations and perceived functions of the deity. As L1 explicitly stated, "We modern women seek more to get rich and have good health. That is to say, Linshui Furen now has more attributes instead of just giving birth to children." This sentiment was echoed across interviews. While older generations, as noted by L4 and L8, primarily prayed for "a good marriage, a good family, and having children," younger female participants now engage in worship to seek blessings for academic success, career advancement, and general well-being. L1 shared an illustrative example: her sister prayed to Linshui

Furen for support with her graduation project, which subsequently won national awards—an outcome the family attributed to divine protection. This represents a clear functional transformation from a singular focus on fertility and child protection to a broader pursuit of comprehensive welfare, reflecting the changing aspirations and pressures faced by women in modern Chinese society.

Concurrently, the methods of participation and ritual expression have evolved to incorporate contemporary aesthetic and cultural elements. L1 observed this during the goddess's parade on Yantai Mountain (烟台山, Yāntái Shān) in Fuzhou: "Now girls are more willing to dress up beautifully, wear Hanfu (汉服, Hànfú, Chinese traditional clothes), carry lanterns, etc." This practice, which seamlessly blends traditional reverence with modern fashion and cultural pride, exemplifies what Chau (2021) identifies as "aestheticized ritual." It allows a new generation to engage with their spiritual heritage in a way that feels personally meaningful and socially enjoyable, without being perceived as disrespectful. This trend highlights a broader shift towards a more personalized and experiential form of worship that values emotional connection and cultural identity alongside spiritual devotion.

Despite these innovations, the core ritual framework remains resilient. Ceremonies such as guoguan, (过关, guòguān, a ritual to avert misfortune) for vulnerable children and the use of divination blocks (圣杯, shèngbēi) to seek divine guidance are still maintained, as noted by L1 and L5. The enduring role of the Lūshan magicians and the strict adherence to taboos, like the prohibition of duck offerings, act as stabilizing forces within the belief system. This creates a "core-periphery" structure: a stable, traditional core surrounded by adaptable, modernizing practices. This structure ensures continuity even as the belief system accommodates new social needs.

The spatial context of worship also illustrates this adaptation. The proliferation of small temples near hospitals, as mentioned by L4, creates "therapeutic landscapes" where individuals navigate between biomedical and spiritual treatment options. This proximity signifies the seamless integration of ancient belief into modern urban life, offering a complementary system of care that addresses both physical and existential

anxieties.

Furthermore, the belief system plays an increasingly important role in the construction of local and gender identity. Narratives connecting Linshui Furen to the historical spirit of Fuzhou women, such as the Fuzhou santiaozhang (福州三条张, Fúzhōu Sāntiáo Zhāng, a historical hairstyle concealing daggers tradition of female resilience), are strategically emphasized. As L1 argued, this counters provincial stereotypes of gender inequality: "In the stereotype, Fujian Province seems to be a place where people favor boys over girls... But in fact, in Fuzhou City, women have a higher status." Thus, contemporary worship becomes a means of asserting a unique local identity that champions female strength and agency.

In conclusion, the worship of Linshui Furen is not a static relic but a dynamically evolving tradition. Its contemporary practice is characterized by functional diversification, aesthetic innovation, and strategic symbolic negotiation. By allowing new meanings and modes of participation to coalesce around a stable ritual core, it successfully meets the modern desires for health, success, and cultural belonging while perpetuating its ancient role as a sacred guardian of women's lives. This adaptive capacity ensures that Linshui Furen remains a relevant and powerful force in the spiritual landscape of modern Fujian.

2.3. Linshui Furen and Womanhood Concern Before and Now

As a quintessential female-centric belief system in Fujian, the worship of Linshui Furen provides critical insights into the construction of female roles and the expression of feminist subjectivity in traditional and contemporary Chinese society. Drawing on in-depth field interviews, this chapter employs gender studies and religious anthropology frameworks to analyze the gendered political significance and historical evolution of the Linshui Furen cult. This belief system not only reinforces traditional gender norms but also serves as a sacred channel for women's autonomy, adapting dynamically to modern social transformations.

2.3.1. Tradition in transition: evolving practices and meanings

The participation and motivations of young women in Linshui Furen worship have undergone noticeable generational shifts. While older adherents traditionally engaged in rituals focused on marriage, fertility, and child protection, younger female participants are increasingly drawn to the cultural and social dimensions of the practice. As L1 observes, many young women now participate in temple activities and processions as much for cultural expression and community as for religious devotion: “Nowadays, girls dress in Hanfu (汉服, Hànfú), carry lanterns, and enjoy looking beautiful while paying respect to the goddess. It is a happy and social event.” This reflects a broader shift in which religious rituals double as opportunities for aesthetic presentation and identity performance.

Moreover, the goals of devotion have expanded. Whereas earlier generations prayed primarily for children and family harmony, contemporary worshippers seek blessings for academic success, career advancement, and financial stability. L1’s sister, for instance, prayed to Linshui Furen for support with her graduation project and subsequently won national awards - an outcome the family attributes in part to divine assistance. Similar observations are made by L2 and L3, who note that young women today pray for health and wealth rather than only for marriage or offspring. This reflects what Yang (2008) identifies as “functional substitution,” wherein traditional religious practices acquire new meanings aligned with modern aspirations.

Modern environmental and cultural concerns are also reshaping ritual practices. L2 mentions that fewer devotees now burn Jinyuanbao, (金元宝, jīn yuánbǎo, boat-shaped gold ingots) as offerings due to environmental awareness, opting instead for symbolic gestures like hand-folding paper items to show sincerity. Meanwhile, cultural revival and government support, including the inclusion of Linshui Furen worship in intangible cultural heritage lists, have bolstered its visibility and appeal among the youth (L8). Tourism and social media have further amplified public interest, transforming local belief into a cultural spectacle with transregional reach.

Nevertheless, core rituals such as the “passing the gate” ceremony (过关, guòguān, a ritual to avert misfortune) and the use of fushui, (符水, fúshuǐ, magical water made from burnt paper spells) persist, illustrating continuity within change. L10 notes that even skeptics participate in family rituals, valuing the psychological reassurance they offer. Thus, while the forms and functions of worship are adapting, they remain deeply embedded in familial and regional traditions.

2.3.2. Between empowerment and convention: negotiating female identity

The belief system surrounding Linshui Furen presents a complex negotiation between female empowerment and the reinforcement of conventional gender roles. This duality is evident in the narratives, rituals, and evolving perceptions among devotees, particularly women, who engage with the deity for both spiritual and practical reasons. Drawing on interview data and feminist scholarship, this section explores how Linshui Furen simultaneously challenges and upholds traditional gender norms, creating a space where women navigate their identities amid modern societal changes.

Linshui Furen’s narrative itself embodies a form of empowerment. As L1 emphasized, “Her birth is not about women being tools for childbirth... She told her family she would not marry—she wanted to serve the people.” This resistance to traditional marital expectations aligns with what feminist scholar Sandra Harding (1987) describes as the “symbolic resistance” found in goddess worship, where sacred narratives challenge mainstream gender norms. The goddess’s initial rejection of marriage and pursuit of spiritual cultivation offer an alternative model of femininity that prioritizes autonomy over conformity.

Moreover, the belief system fosters female-exclusive support networks. Ritual practices, such as the “passing the gate” ceremony (过关, a ritual to avert misfortune), are transmitted intergenerationally among women, creating a religious domain monopolized by females. L5 shared a personal experience: “My witch doctor told me not to drink water for three days... She took incense and turned it around my body. As a result, I was completely cured.” Such practices, reminiscent of the female-led

healing traditions discussed by Furth (1999) in her work on gender politics in Chinese medicine, empower women through control over bodily and spiritual well-being. These rituals not only provide practical solutions but also build a foundation for what L1 termed "girls help girls"—a mutual aid system that reinforces female solidarity.

The cultural symbolism associated with Linshui Furen further amplifies this empowerment. L1 drew connections between the goddess and local historical figures: "Fuzhou women have always been brave... Like the Fuzhou santiaozhang (福州三条张, Fúzhōu Sāntiáo Zhāng, a historical hairstyle concealing daggers tradition of female resilience) women who wore daggers in their hair to fight invaders." This narrative, echoing Notar's (2006) observations on female hero tropes in folk cultures, constructs a counter-discourse to the passive, submissive stereotypes often imposed on Fujian women. By linking Linshui Furen to this legacy of resilience, devotees reframe femininity as a force of strength and resistance.

Despite these empowering elements, the belief system also reinforces conventional gender expectations. The sacred narrative of Linshui Furen incorporates marriage and motherhood: "Her family arranged a marriage, and she eventually became pregnant" (L1). This compromise reflects what Watson (1994) identifies as the dual role of goddesses in both challenging and sanctifying traditional roles. For many devotees, especially older generations, Linshui Furen remains a patron of childbirth and family harmony. L10 noted, "People still pray for pregnancy and child health," while L3 added that married women often seek "protection for their children's safety and successful childbirth."

This emphasis on motherhood is perpetuated through rituals that highlight women's reproductive responsibilities. For example, the chuhayuan (出花园, chū huā yuán, transition from childhood to adulthood ceremony), mentioned by L1, symbolizes a girl's transition into adulthood but also implicitly ties female identity to reproductive capabilities. Similarly, L5 observed that in some regions, devotees believe "having more children pleases Linshui Furen." Such practices align with the Confucian paradigm that disciplines women into roles as wives and mothers, illustrating what feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (Beauvoir, 1949) critiqued

as the social construction of women's "destiny" through cultural norms.

Contemporary devotees navigate this duality by reinterpreting traditions to suit modern values. For instance, while Linshui Furen's association with motherhood persists, young women often expand her role to encompass broader life goals. L1 stated, "Modern women pray for wealth and health, not just children," a shift reflecting what Yang (2008) calls "functional substitution" in religious practices. This adaptation allows the belief system to remain relevant amid declining birth rates and changing social priorities.

Moreover, the perception of Linshui Furen as a source of empowerment varies across generations and regions. L6 noted that in Macau, the goddess is seen as inspiring courage in life and career, while L4 emphasized that worship affirms women's unique capabilities without conflicting with feminism. However, L9 pointed out that some view the deity as reinforcing women's roles as "reproductive tools," highlighting tensions within the discourse.

Feminist scholarship offers frameworks to understand this negotiation. Hovland (2023), in her review of feminist engagements with canonical traditions, argues that women often reinterpret religious symbols to assert agency while navigating patriarchal structures. Similarly, the concept of feminist citational practices encourages critical engagement with traditions to create inclusive narratives. In the case of Linshui Furen, devotees like L1 and L5 exemplify this by emphasizing the goddess's defiance and compassion while downplaying aspects that reinforce conformity.

The belief in Linshui Furen ultimately serves as a dynamic space where female identity is continuously negotiated. It offers empowerment through alternative gender imaginaries and collective solidarity while upholding conventions that sanctify motherhood and family roles. For modern women, this duality is not a contradiction but a resource for navigating the complexities of identity in a rapidly changing society. As L6 succinctly put it, "Faith gives women spiritual space and freedom," allowing them to draw on tradition while asserting their autonomy.

It is clear from the interviews that in general, males and females interviewees

hold similar view points about how Linshui Furen is a symbol of females and provides help when they are in need. However, women interviewees often give more detailed stories and personal experiences related to birth giving or diseases healing compared to their male counterparts. To be specific, women interviewees give stories of themselves, but men provide stories of their relatives. Apart from that, women can also connect abstract traditions with their lives, telling how Linshui Furen support them, including some aspects which are often considered beyond Linshui Furen's duty. In comparison, men emphasize the connection between Linshui Furen and local culture, highlighting her role of protecting mothers and children as a cultural representative, not discuss her link with females. Overall, the regional differences are more significant than gender differences, with non-Fujianese devotees only discussing the superficial elements of the folklore.

3. Mazu: The Protector of Sailors

3.1 Introduction to Mazu

3.1.1. From local seafarer to national goddess: the historical expansion of Mazu belief

Mazu belief is one of the most representative folk beliefs in the southeastern coastal areas of China. Its origin can be traced back to Putian (莆田, Pútián), Fujian Province, China during the Northern Song Dynasty (北宋, Běi Sòng) (960-1127). According to "Records of the Manifestations of Goddesses, or 《天妃显圣录》 (Tiānfēi Xiǎnshèng Lù), Mazu's original name was Lin Mo (林默, Lín Mò) (960–987), and she was born in a fisherman's family on Meizhou Island (湄洲岛, Méizhōu Dǎo) in Putian. Because she appeared at sea many times and rescued a great number of ocean voyagers during her lifetime, she was gradually revered as the sea goddess by the local people (Watson, 1985). Unlike the belief in Lady Linshui, which was mainly popular in the Minjiang River Basin, the belief in Mazu has rapidly expanded since

the Song Dynasty (宋朝, Sòng Cháo) along with maritime trade and immigration activities. It has not only spread throughout the coastal areas of China, but also spread widely to Southeast Asia, forming a huge and complex belief network (李露露, 1994). This process of dissemination has been highly recognized and actively promoted in successive dynasties. From the Southern Song Dynasty (南宋, Nán Sòng) (1127-1279) to the Qing Dynasty (清朝, Qīng Cháo) (1616-1911), Mazu received a total of 36 imperial titles, and was finally revered as the "Queen of Heaven" (天后, Tiānhòu), establishing her supreme deity status (Dean, 1993). Compared with Lady Linshui, it is precisely because of the need of authority to consolidate power and continuously enhance the status of Mazu among the common people that Mazu has transformed from a local protective deity to one of the representatives of national culture. Its core rituals such as "sea departure sacrifice" and "return to port sacrifice" are closely related to maritime life (王铭铭, 2005). This is in sharp contrast to the Linshui Furen belief, which is centered on praying for fertility and child protection, reflecting the profound influence of different livelihoods on the form of folk beliefs.

3.1.2. Gender and divine power: Mazu as a female guardian beyond domestic roles

The feminine characteristics of Mazu belief are mainly reflected in the unique construction of the godhood as the guardian of the sea. Unlike Lady Linshui, who is often portrayed as a midwife and child guardian, the sacred image of Mazu breaks through the shackles of traditional gender roles. As a lifelong unmarried woman, Lin Mo's life story and many miraculous accounts of sea rescues embody a female divine power that transcends the family sphere (Sangren, 1983). In religious practice, although temple management is mostly dominated by men, female believers play a vital role in pilgrimage activities. Particularly in Taiwan and Southeast Asia, large-scale pilgrimage groups led by women are not only frequently held, but also become an important symbol of Mazu belief (Chau, 2006). This form of gender participation is in sharp contrast to the relatively closed mutual assistance network

formed by women in Linshui Furen belief based on the witch doctor tradition. Mazu belief provides women with a broader public religious space and social action platform. It is worth mentioning that the image of Mazu combines the gentle care of a loving mother with the majestic power of a general. This complex deity not only expands its symbolic meaning, but also enables it to meet the multiple spiritual needs of different gender groups (李丰楙, 1993).

3.1.3. From folk ritual to national symbol: Mazu's role in state-building and cultural identity

In terms of constructing the national image, the belief in Mazu has undergone an important evolution from a local deity to a national symbol. Since the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1616-1911) Dynasties, as the government paid more and more attention to the safety of water transport and coastal defense, Mazu was gradually incorporated into the official sacrificial system of the country and became a symbol of the dynasty's maritime governance and power extension (Zheng, 2001). This transformation has endowed the belief in Mazu with significant political significance both domestically in China and internationally, in addition to its local characteristics. One example is that the sacrificial activities at the Mazu Temple in Meizhou Island, Guangdong Province, attract many Taiwanese believers to participate every year (Lin Meirong, 2008). Furthermore, the belief in Mazu has also been brought to many countries due to Chinese immigrants and serves as one of the ways to spread Chinese culture (Tan, 2015). This global development trend is difficult to compare with the local goddess beliefs represented by Linshui Furen.

3.2 Ritual practices and worship

3.2.1 From communal veneration to personal devotion: the evolution of ritual participation

The worship of Mazu has undergone a remarkable transformation from traditional communal ceremonies to contemporary individualized practices while maintaining its core spiritual essence. Historically, Mazu rituals were characterized by large-scale communal activities deeply connected to maritime life, most notably the “sea departure sacrifice” (出海祭祀, chūhǎi jìsì) and “return to port sacrifice” (回港祭祀, huígǎng jìsì) that reinforced collective identity and sought divine protection for seafaring communities (Wang, 2005). These ceremonies typically involved entire villages or fishing communities participating in elaborate rituals that emphasized the collective rather than the individual.

In contemporary practice, however, there has been a significant shift toward personalized forms of devotion that fit modern urban lifestyles. M1's experience exemplifies this transition beautifully. She first encountered Mazu not in a traditional temple setting but in a temporary urban environment — an office building where a small statue had been placed with offerings during temple renovations. "I saw a small Mazu statue temporarily placed in an office building with tributes next to it. Out of curiosity, I went forward to worship and received a fudai (福袋, fúdài, lucky bag of incense)," M1 recalled. This casual, almost accidental engagement contrasts sharply with traditional community-organized rituals and demonstrates how younger generations integrate spiritual practices into everyday urban life.

The adaptation of ritual practices to modern constraints is particularly evident in M1's description of burning tegongjin (特贡金, tègòng jīn, a kind of burning paper) on her way to catch the subway, documenting the process with photos. This practice represents what Yang (2008) identifies as functional substitution, where traditional elements are repurposed to fit contemporary contexts while maintaining ritual continuity. The modernization of rituals extends to the objects used in worship as well. M2 noted changes in offerings: "People now worry more about environmental impact and burn less paper money, though some still hand-fold items to show sincerity."

The gender dynamics within ritual participation have also evolved significantly. While historical accounts indicate temple management remained predominantly male-dominated (Chau, 2006), contemporary practices show women assuming

increasingly important roles. M1 provided detailed observations about temple assistants (文化洽谈员, wénhuà qiàtán yuán), who are predominantly young women selected through divine indication—three consecutive successful casts of shengbei (圣杯, divination blocks). "These roles are mostly played by young women. In my opinion, Mazu seems to provide shelter and support for these girls," M1 noted, suggesting a protective function that extends beyond mere ritual facilitation.

This phenomenon aligns with Furth's (1999) analysis of female-centric knowledge systems in Chinese culture, where women maintain informal but powerful roles in spiritual and healing practices. The temple assistants guide believers in proper worship etiquette, creating what Turner (1969) would identify as a liminal space where traditional hierarchies are temporarily suspended, and women exercise spiritual authority. M4's observation that "now there are fewer restrictions, like those regarding menstrual cycles entering temples" further indicates a liberalization of ritual participation that accommodates modern gender sensibilities.

The personalization of worship is perhaps most evident in how devotees relate to Mazu. M1 described her relationship with the deity in strikingly intimate terms: "I am used to kneeling in front of the statue to 'chat', pouring out my thoughts to Mazu, and seeing her as a listener and spiritual support." This transformation of ritual from transactional prayer to relational communion represents a significant evolution in religious practice that reflects modern needs for emotional support and personal connection.

3.2.2 Ritual as spiritual defense and cross-strait connection: supernatural encounters and grand processions

Mazu worship encompasses not only conventional rituals but also serves as spiritual protection against supernatural threats, particularly evident in M9's detailed account of Northeast Chinese chumaxian (出马仙, dimǎ, animal spirit possession). M9 described a harrowing experience where she and another woman were targeted by malicious animal spirits (typically fox or weasel spirits) seeking to make them dima

(地马, earth horses): vessels for spirit possession that would ultimately destroy their mental and physical health. "These spirits would use any means to make you their puppet, causing depression and even suicidal thoughts," M9 explained, adding that without Mazu's protection, "I might not be here today" .

This account reveals how Mazu worship functions as spiritual defense against what believers perceive as dangerous supernatural forces, particularly for women who are considered more vulnerable to spirit possession due to their yin (阴, yīn) constitution. The ritual of seeking Mazu's protection involves intense prayer and devotion, creating what Csordas (1994) identifies as a ritual of affliction that addresses spiritual crises beyond physical domains. M9's experience highlights the ongoing relevance of Mazu worship in dealing with spiritual threats that persist despite modernization, particularly what she described as "the chaos of spiritual entities in modern society" that especially targets women due to their yin constitution.

The most spectacular manifestation of Mazu ritual practice occurs in Taiwan's annual pilgrimage processions, which M10 described in vivid detail. The most impressive is the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage (白沙屯妈祖进香, Báishātún Māzǔ Jìnxiāng), where believers carry Mazu's palanquin on a 340-kilometer, nine-day-eight-night journey around the island. M10 witnessed millions of participants—approximately one-tenth of Taiwan's population—engaging in this massive ritual mobilization that represents what Durkheim (1912) would recognize as collective effervescence on a grand scale.

The procession follows what believers describe as Mazu's divine guidance. "The bearers move according to Mazu's direction," M10 observed, "all their feet turning simultaneously in one direction without human coordination." Particularly remarkable are the miraculous crossings where the palanquin bearers walk through rivers with water mysteriously reaching exactly waist-level regardless of the bearer's height, which believers interpret as Mazu cleansing the waters of negative energies. These moments of apparent miracle, what Eliade (1957) would call hierophany, serve to reinforce faith through tangible manifestations of divine power.

The ritual reaches its emotional climax when sick devotees kneel in the

procession's path seeking healing. M10 observed one critically ill woman who initially received no response from Mazu's palanquin, but then "Mazu returned and later we heard the woman was healed." Another poignant moment involved a child with an oxygen tank: "The bearers gently circled the palanquin over the child without touching him, as if Mazu herself was blessing him." These rituals demonstrate what Madsen (2007) identifies as the theatre of efficacy in Chinese religious practice, where spiritual power becomes visibly manifest through collective ritual performance.

The social dimension of these rituals is equally significant. The procession stops at police stations where officers remove their hats in respect, highlighting how this ritual integrates spiritual and social hierarchies. M10 also described how the pilgrimage creates temporary communities of faith: "We rest at temples along the way—it is like a conference of deities clearing negative energies and protecting people's safety." This aspect of the ritual reflects Turner's (1969) concept of *communitas*, where traditional social structures are temporarily dissolved in creating bonds of shared spiritual experience.

These cross-strait rituals, while varying in scale between Fujian and Taiwan, maintain what Lin (2008) identifies as a ritual homology that connects communities through shared devotional practices. The grand processions serve both spiritual and social functions—cleansing territories of negative energies while reinforcing cultural identity and community solidarity in increasingly modernized societies. As M10 concluded, "Having Mazu is like having a guiding light in our hearts," summarizing the enduring significance of these rituals in providing both spiritual protection and cultural continuity.

The adaptation of Mazu rituals to contemporary needs while maintaining traditional elements demonstrates what scholars like Tan (2015) identify as the dynamic conservation of religious traditions. Whether through intimate personal devotion or massive public processions, Mazu worship continues to provide meaningful spiritual frameworks for addressing both timeless human concerns and modern challenges, particularly for women navigating complex social and spiritual landscapes.

3.3 Mazu and Womanhood Concern Before and Now

3.3.1 From family guardians to personal confidants: the evolution of women's spiritual support

For generations of women in coastal communities, Mazu has served as a spiritual anchor during times of uncertainty and anxiety. Historically, when men ventured out to sea, women turned to Mazu for protection and emotional stability. M3 shared a family story that illustrates this traditional role: "My mother never asked for wealth from Mazu, only family safety—especially after my father's accident at sea. For her, Mazu was the only source of comfort during those worried days." This historical pattern of seeking security and stability continues today, though the specific concerns have evolved.

The nature of worship has transformed significantly from formal rituals to personal connections. M1 represents this contemporary approach: "I do not always perform elaborate rituals. I simply kneel before Mazu's statue to chat, sharing my thoughts and feelings. She is like a friend who listens without judgment." This intimate, conversational style of devotion contrasts with the more structured ceremonies of the past. Multiple interviewees described emotional moments before Mazu's statue, with M4 noting that "many women weep while praying, releasing burdens they have carried alone."

The temple itself has become a sanctuary where women find both spiritual and practical support. M1 observed that most temple assistants are young women chosen through divine indication—three successful casts of shengbei (圣杯, divination blocks). "These positions aren't jobs but callings," M1 explained. "Mazu seems to provide shelter and support for these girls, especially those who might be struggling in their personal lives." This protective function extends beyond the spiritual realm, offering meaningful community roles for young women.

3.3.2 modern challenges and adaptive faith: Mazu's role in contemporary women's lives

Today's female devotees seek Mazu's guidance for challenges that previous generations never faced. M7 reported that "young women frequently pray for career guidance and educational success," while M4 added that "balancing professional ambitions with family responsibilities remains a common concern." The adaptation of Mazu worship to address these contemporary issues demonstrates the belief system's remarkable flexibility.

The goddess serves as both role model and source of practical wisdom for modern dilemmas. M2 shared a revealing example: "A neighbor used divination blocks to ask whether she should continue her career or focus on childcare. Mazu supported her professional ambitions, showing that faith is not about tradition but about finding your right path." This guidance reflects how Mazu worship has evolved to support women's expanding social roles and personal aspirations.

Significant progress has also occurred in making worship more inclusive. M4 noted that "previous restrictions about women worshipping during menstruation have largely disappeared," making spiritual practice more accessible. M1 observed diverse groups of devotees: "We see everyone from students to executives, young professionals to retirees—all finding their own connection to Mazu."

The emotional resonance remains particularly strong among women across all age groups. M8 observed that "while older women still emphasize family safety, younger devotees seek guidance for personal development." Yet both find comfort in the same divine figure. M10 captured this enduring appeal: "Mazu shows us we can be both compassionate and strong, both traditional and modern—she helps us navigate contradictions without losing ourselves."

The personalization of worship represents not a dilution of tradition but its successful evolution. As M1 expressed: "She is not just a historical figure to worship but a living presence to consult." This transformation ensures that Mazu remains relevant to women's lives, providing continuity with the past while adapting to present

needs—from the fishing villages of history to the urban landscapes of today.

4 Comparative Analysis: Linshui Furen and Mazu in Contemporary Womanhood

The worship of Linshui Furen and Mazu represents two distinct yet interconnected pathways through which Chinese women navigate modern femininity, spirituality, and social expectations. This comparative analysis examines how these goddesses simultaneously challenge and reinforce contemporary gender paradigms through three critical dimensions: the negotiation between personal agency and gendered objectification, the interplay between empowerment and protection, and the tension between independence and relational dependence. Drawing extensively from ethnographic interviews, this study reveals how these ancient deities remain dynamically relevant to women's lives in rapidly changing societies.

4.1 Subjectification and Objectification

The worship of Linshui Furen and Mazu reveals complex tensions between women's subjective agency and their objectification within traditional gender frameworks, presenting a fascinating paradox where ancient rituals simultaneously constrain and liberate modern devotees.

Linshui Furen practice often operates within explicitly gendered biological parameters. The goddess's historical role as protector of women and children creates a spiritual framework that both sanctifies and potentially confines women to maternal identities. L1's detailed description of the guoguan (过关, a ritual to avert misfortune) illustrates this duality: children are symbolically placed under Linshui Furen's protection until age 13, a practice that reinforces the goddess's association with childrearing while simultaneously creating sacred space for maternal concerns. "In Fuzhou, if children are sickly or have bazibuhe, (八字不合, bāzì bùhé, clashing birth characters), families will register them under Linshui Furen's protection," explains L1.

"This creates a spiritual kinship where grandfather and grandson might both be her 'children.'" This matrilineal spiritual lineage empowers women as guardians of tradition while potentially objectifying them primarily as caregivers.

Yet Linshui Furen's own narrative contains powerful resistance to reductionist gender roles. As L1 emphasizes: "Her birth is not about women being tools for childbirth... She told her family she would not marry — she wanted to serve the people." This tension between the goddess's mythology and her ritual functions creates space for modern reinterpretation. L4 observes that contemporary worship increasingly emphasizes Linshui Furen's role as a comprehensive female protector rather than solely a birth goddess: "She protects women across their lifespan — children, pregnant women, elderly women. This holistic protection acknowledges women's full humanity beyond reproduction."

Mazu worship offers a strikingly different paradigm of feminine divinity. As a lifelong single woman who achieved divinity through maritime rescue rather than motherhood, Mazu represents autonomy and public service. M1's intimate devotional style — "I kneel before her statue to chat about my daily life" — exemplifies how modern women personalize their relationship with the goddess, prioritizing emotional connection over ritual formalism. This subjective engagement is further reinforced by what M2 identifies as Mazu's embodiment of "freedom and bravery," qualities that resonate particularly with urban professional women seeking models beyond domesticity.

However, objectification persists in how both goddesses are instrumentalized for practical ends. M5 notes that businessmen "pour money into elaborate worship ceremonies, even building golden statues, seeking business success." Similarly, fishing communities historically relied on Mazu for safety and abundance, as M6 describes: "Before sea voyages, whole villages would pray to Mazu for protection and good catches." This utilitarian dimension potentially reduces the goddesses to spiritual tools rather than holistic symbols of feminine power.

The most compelling evidence of subjectification-objectification negotiation emerges in ritual practices. Linshui Furen worship involves deeply gendered rituals

like offering white flowers for boys and red flowers for girls, implicitly reinforcing gender binaries (L1). Yet these same rituals create spaces for female solidarity and authority. The tradition of female-only witch doctors who inherit healing techniques matrilineally represents what L1 calls "a secret sisterhood of healing." Similarly, Mazu's temples, while often managed by men, are increasingly staffed by young female temple assistants selected through divine signs. M1 describes this selection process: "They need three consecutive shengbei, (圣杯, divination blocks) showing Mazu's approval. These positions are not jobs but callings—Mazu provides shelter for these young women." These roles, while embedded in patriarchal structures, enable women to exercise spiritual authority and build community.

The geographical variation in worship practices further illustrates this tension. In coastal regions like Fujian and Taiwan, Mazu worship involves massive public processions where women play leadership roles (M10), while in inland areas, devotion tends toward private meditation. Similarly, Linshui Furen worship shows regional adaptations — from the elaborate chuhuayuan (出花园, chū huā yuán, coming-of-age ceremonies) in Chaozhou City to simpler home rituals in rural Fujian (L2, L10).

4.2 Women Empowerment and Women Protection

The protective and empowering functions of Linshui Furen and Mazu reveal how spiritual traditions adapt to address contemporary women's needs while maintaining continuity with historical practices, creating complex ecosystems of feminine agency and community support.

Linshui Furen's empowerment model is fundamentally tied to female biological experiences and health. The goddess's historical role as a midwife and healer evolves into modern contexts where women face reproductive health challenges. L2 and L5 describe how pregnant women worship her to ensure safe childbirth, with L10 detailing the qinghua (请花, qǐng huā, requesting flowers) ritual where women pray for fertility by symbolically taking flowers from temple altars. "If they want a girl,

they take red flowers; for a boy, white flowers," explains L10. "This child is considered blessed by the goddess." While this might appear to reinforce gender essentialism, L3 emphasizes its psychological value: "In a society where women face pressure to produce heirs, these rituals provide comfort and sense of control."

The goddess's protection extends beyond reproduction to general women's health. L1's personal account of being cured of shingles through Linshui Furen's witchcraft demonstrates how alternative feminine healing traditions persist alongside modern medicine. "The witch doctor—always a woman—told me not to drink water for three days, only eating pears. She performed rituals with incense, and my shingles disappeared," L1 recounts. This matrilineal knowledge transmission (从女传女, *cóng nǚ chuán nǚ*, passing exclusively to females) represents what L4 calls "a parallel medical system created by and for women."

Mazu's empowerment model operates more through public engagement and cultural influence. As M3 describes, "She is a cultural bond connecting coastal communities across Southeast Asia," highlighting her role in fostering collective identity beyond national boundaries. M10's vivid description of Mazu's processions in Taiwan illustrates their scale and significance: "Millions participate in nine-day-eight-night processions covering 340 kilometers. The palanquin carriers move as if guided by invisible forces — all turning simultaneously without verbal coordination." These events create visible, large-scale female-led spaces where women exercise organizational leadership and spiritual authority.

Crucially, Mazu's protection extends beyond physical safety to economic and social agency. M2 shares a revealing story: "A neighbor consulted Mazu about choosing between career and childcare. Through shengbei (圣杯, divination blocks), Mazu advised continuing her career despite family pressure." This guidance aligns with Mazu's own narrative of resisting marriage to pursue her calling, offering a powerful model of economic independence. M5 adds that many female entrepreneurs worship Mazu for business success, while students pray for academic achievement—a significant expansion from her original maritime protection role.

The protective functions of both goddesses show interesting adaptations to

modern challenges. Linshui Furen's temples often located near hospitals (L1) serve as spiritual sanctuaries for women facing health crises. Meanwhile, Mazu worship increasingly addresses psychological well-being. M7 observes that "young urban women pray to Mazu for emotional strength in relationships and careers, not just physical safety."

However, limitations persist in both empowerment models. Linshui Furen's emphasis on childbirth can inadvertently pressure women into maternal roles. L9 notes that "some young women worship her not by choice but because mothers-in-law insist," reflecting how traditional expectations persist through religious practice. Similarly, Mazu's historical association with maritime industries initially prioritized male concerns, though modern worship has dramatically expanded to include diverse feminine needs.

The social advocacy dimension emerges most strongly in how both cults create support networks. Linshui Furen's female-only healing traditions represent what L1 calls "an underground sisterhood" that preserves women's knowledge. Mazu's temples function as community centers where women exchange information and support. M1 describes temple assistants as "cultural negotiators who guide devotees through life challenges," suggesting an informal counseling function.

4.3 Independence and Dependence

The tension between independence and dependence manifests differently in these two worship traditions, reflecting broader societal negotiations between individual autonomy and relational responsibilities that characterize modern womanhood.

Linshui Furen worship fosters a model of interdependence within female networks that challenges simplistic independence-dependence binaries. The goddess's mythology herself embodies this tension — she initially resisted marriage to pursue spiritual cultivation yet eventually married and died in childbirth. This paradox resonates with modern women navigating competing expectations. L1's description of "girls help girls" illustrates how women rely on each other and the goddess for

emotional and practical support, creating what L4 calls "a spiritual safety net for women at vulnerable life stages.

This interdependence, while empowering, can also perpetuate traditional dependencies. L6 observes that in Macau, older women remain the primary devotees, suggesting that younger women may associate Linshui Furen with outdated gender roles. Yet the goddess shows remarkable adaptability. L1 notes that students now pray to her for exam success, while career women seek promotion—expanding her domain far beyond childbirth. L4 adds that urban professional women reinterpret rituals: "When they offer flowers now, it's less about baby gender and more about general life blessings."

Mazu worship more explicitly champions independence through the goddess's iconic autonomy. M4 emphasizes that "Mazu's decision to dedicate herself to the sea rather than marry models economic and spiritual self-reliance." This narrative resonates particularly with single professional women. M7 notes that "young women pray to Mazu for career opportunities rather than husbands," representing a significant shift from traditional priorities. M2's story about Mazu endorsing a woman's career choice over family expectations illustrates how the goddess legitimizes non-traditional life paths.

However, fascinating dependencies persist in how devotees relate to Mazu. M5 describes entrepreneurs who consult her before business decisions, sometimes delaying journeys if she disapproves. M10 recounts how fishing communities completely rely on Mazu's guidance for sailing times. This blend of autonomy and reliance exemplifies what M6 calls "guided independence" — making personal decisions within a spiritual framework.

Geographical variations significantly influence this independence-dependence balance. In traditional communities, both goddesses often reinforce interdependent values. L5 describes how entire villages participate in Linshui Furen processions, strengthening community bonds. M10's account of Taiwanese Mazu processions emphasizes collective participation: "Everyone from police officers to shopkeepers stops to pay respect, creating temporary social equality."

In urban settings, worship becomes more individualized. M1's personal chats with Mazu represent what scholars call designer spirituality — tailoring religious practice to personal needs. L4 notes that urban women often worship both goddesses situationally: "Linshui Furen for health matters, Mazu for career issues," suggesting a pragmatic approach to spiritual resources.

Generational differences further complicate this dynamic. Older women tend to maintain traditional worship patterns, with L8 noting that "grandmothers still pressure young wives to pray for grandchildren." Younger devotees develop more critical engagements. M1 acknowledges that while she finds comfort in Mazu worship, she does not accept all traditions: "Some temples still restrict menstruating women, but I ignore those rules." This selective adoption represents what L3 calls "critical devotion"—maintaining spiritual connection while rejecting outdated elements.

The independence-dependence negotiation appears most strikingly in how women use goddess worship to navigate modern dilemmas. Working mothers pray to both goddesses for work-family balance (M4). Single women seek support for independent lifestyles (M7). Even LGBTQ+ individuals, though not explicitly mentioned in interviews, might find empowerment in goddesses who challenged gender norms.

Economic factors also influence this balance. Wealthier women can afford elaborate rituals — M5 mentions businesswomen funding expensive ceremonies — while others practice simple devotions. This economic dimension adds class considerations to the independence-dependence dynamic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although researches on Mazu are extensive in China and other countries, and there are similar studies on Linshui Furen, little attention is focused on the comparison of these two female immortals. Through in-depth interviews with

twenty devotees, this paper analyzes the rituals of worship of the two goddesses and how these rituals relate to the shift in gender consciousness.

To collect diverse information, practitioners from Fujian Province and other regions are interviewed. The focus is on the impact of Mazu and Linshui and how belief practices are integrated into their daily life, aligned with narratives theory, emphasizing the role of individuals and how legend shapes culture.

In terms of the role of Linshui, devotees show positive attitudes. Most of them say that they are proud of Linshui Furen and have a sense of security when acting practices. It is also observed that besides praying for giving birth, modern women also pray for a childless life, which is in contrast to Linshui Furen's traditional representation of fertility.

As for Mazu belief, her practitioners view her as part of their life so they would share their moments with Mazu by chatting. Interestingly, Mazu is also regarded as the protector of almost everything to satisfy people's needs, but in tradition, she is closely linked with the protection of sailors and marine travelers.

Through comparative study, it is found that Mazu is a goddess believed by the state, while Linshui Furen is more widespread in the local area, which mainly comes from the need for authorities to use Mazu to consolidate national consciousness, while Linshui Furen is unable to expand the spread of belief due to excessive correlation with the goddess. Although the worship activities of the two goddesses are no longer related to prayer for fertility, etc., but tend to make them become the role model and emotional confiding objects of the believers, especially the female believers, the belief of Linshui Furen is still more widely spread among women, instead of becoming a national consciousness like Mazu.

One of very important discoveries is that worshiping activities and practices evolve in the modern society, with goddesses having more functions instead of being the protector of sailors or children, although traditional temple visiting and incense burning are still prevalent both in daily lives and in important festivals. Specifically, some interviews mentioned that they often pray for the sake of business, important examinations such as Chinese college entrance examinations, job hunting, as well as

in interpersonal relations. In addition, when people go to Linshui Furen temple, people would also pray for health, job promotion, wealth rather than asking for a smooth labor. Meanwhile, the worship of both Mazu and Linshui Furen shows regional diversity, which means devotees are not only from coastal cities, but also from inland regions. Apart from regional diversity, in terms of Mazu worship practices, occupation diversity can be seen. Some interviewees are students, artists, white collars, and so on. By contrast, the worship was mainly committed by sailors and their families in the past. To sum up, these two folklore beliefs demonstrates an evolution by being multifunctional and attracting people from all fields.

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Linshui Furen ja Mazu: Uskumused, harjumised ja naislikkuse küsimused moderns Chinas

Kokkumisiin, kuigi Mazu kohta teisiid esimesed on üleilmne, ja Linshui Furen kohta on olemas sarnaseid uuringuid, siiski on vähem tähelepanu keskendunud nende kaks nais-üleva võrrelede. Kaheksa koguduse usalduslikku usulikke isikut läbi süvendatud intervjuude analüüsid teeme üle selleid kaks naisdeivi kuulutustele pühitsejate rituaale ja kuidas need rituaalid on seotud suguandluse muutustega.

Mitmekeelse teabe kogumiseks intervjueritakse Fujiani provintsi ja teiste piirkondade praktikuid. Keskendub Mazu ja Linshui mõjule ja sellele, kuidas usutavad on integreeritud nende igapäevaelusse, kooskõlas narratiivide teooriaga, rõhutades üksikisikute rolli ja seda, kuidas legend kujundab kultuuri.

Linshui rolli osas näitavad pühendunud positiivseid suhtumisi. Enamik neist ütleb, et nad on uhked Linshui Fureni üle ja on praktikas tegutsedes turvalisuse tunne. Samuti täheldatakse, et lisaks sünnituse eest palvetamisele palvetavad kaasaegsed naised ka lasteta elu eest, mis on vastuolus Linshui Fureni traditsioonilise viljakuse esindamisega.

Mis puudutab Mazu uskumust, siis tema praktikud näevad teda kui osa oma elust, nii et nad jagaksid oma hetki Mazuga vesteldes. Huvitav on, et Mazut peetakse peaaegu kõigi kaitsjana, et rahuldada inimeste vajadusi, kuid traditsiooniliselt on ta tihedalt seotud meremeeste ja merereisijate kaitsega.

Võrdlevate uuringute abil leiti, et Mazu on riigi usutav jumalanna, samas kui Linshui Furen on kohalikus piirkonnas laialdasemalt levinud, mis tuleneb peamiselt vajadusest, et ametiasutused kasutaksid Mazu rahvusliku teadvuse tugevdamiseks, samas kui Linshui Furen ei suuda usu levikut laiendada jumalannaga liigse korrelatsiooni tõttu. Kuigi kahe jumalanna kummardamistegevus ei ole enam seotud viljakuse palvega jne, kuid kipub muutma neist usklike, eriti naisusklike, eeskujuks ja emotsionaalseks usaldusväärseks objektiks, on Linshui Fureni usk naiste seas endiselt laialdasemalt levinud, selle asemel, et saada rahvuslikuks teadvuseks nagu Mazu.

Üks väga olulisi avastusi on see, et tänapäeva ühiskonnas arenevad

kummardamistegevused ja tavad, kus jumalannadel on rohkem funktsioone kui meremeeste või laste kaitsja, kuigi traditsioonilised templi külastused ja suitsutuspõletamine on endiselt levinud nii igapäevaelus kui ka olulistel festivalidel. Konkreetselt mainisid mõned intervjuud, et nad palvetavad sageli äri, oluliste eksamite, nagu Hiina kolledži sissepääsu eksamid, tööotsing ja inimestevaheliste suhete pärast. Lisaks, kui inimesed lähevad Linshui Fureni templisse, palvetavad inimesed ka tervise, töökoha edendamise, rikkuse eest, mitte sujuva töö eest. Vahepeal näitab nii Mazu kui ka Linshui Fureni kummardamine piirkondlikku mitmekesisust, mis tähendab, et pühendunud ei ole mitte ainult rannikulinnadest, vaid ka sisemaapiirkondadest. Lisaks piirkondlikule mitmekesisusele võib Mazu palvetamise tavade seisukohast näha ka ametialase mitmekesisust. Mõned intervjuueeritud on õpilased, kunstnikud, valged kraed ja nii edasi. Vastupidi sellele pühendusid minevikus peamiselt meremehed ja nende perekonnad. Kokkuvõtteks näitavad need kaks folkloori uskumust evolutsiooni, olles multifunktsionaalsed ja meelitades inimesi kõigist valdkondadest.