

The Semiotic Meaning Of The Giant Statue of Mazu And The Place

On Meizhou Island Of China

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Abstract

This article briefly describes the geographical environment of Meizhou Island, analyzes the origin and aesthetic characteristics of the giant statue of Mazu, and focuses on its semiotic meaning from the perspective of the giant statue of Mazu as a visual image resource, it has function of education, this is conducive to develop Mazu culture.

Purpose

- To study the special geographical environment of Meizhou Island.
- To study the semiotic meaning of the giant statue of Mazu.

Method

- Read and collect a large number of historical documents.
- Fieldwork, take a lot of pictures.
- Interviews with locals, tourists and the artist.

Findings / Results

- The giant statue of Mazu has the function of a landmark on Meizhou Island, making it easier for people to remember. At the same time, because it carries the function of belief, people can be educated and deeply experience the special feeling of religious tourism.

Conclusions / Discussion

- With its greater reputation and influence, the giant statue of Mazu on Meizhou Island is attracting a large number of tourists to come to travel. Whether it is for leisure, or a certain spiritual pleasure and sublimation, or to see the respectful appearance of Mazu, or to find psychological sustenance. With its unique image, unique geographical location, and unique symbolism, the giant statue of Mazu is bound to give full play to the important function of Mazu belief, to educate people and develop Mazu culture.

Keywords

- The giant statue of Mazu, semiotic meaning, Meizhou Island, Mazu believer.
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Mazu was born in the first year of Jianlong in the Song Dynasty (960 AD). After more than a thousand years of inheritance and development, Mazu has become a folk sea goddess worshipped in China and even many Overseas Chinese in the world. So far, there are more than 300 million Mazu followers and more than 10,000 Mazu temples in the world. The giant statue of Mazu mentioned in this article is located in area of buildings of the ancestral temple of Mazu on Meizhou Island, Putian City, Fujian Province, China. This is the hometown of Mazu believers all over the world and the ancestral temple of all Mazu temples all over the world.

1 The geographical environment of Meizhou Island

Mazu's hometown is located in Meizhou Island, belongs to Putian City, Fujian Province. Meizhou Island is the second-largest island in Putian City, it is 42 kilometres from the center of Putian City, and only 1.82 nautical miles away from the mainland. Meizhou Island is in the middle of the west coast of Taiwan Strait, which is 72 nautical miles away from Taichung port of Taiwan Province. In the north of Meizhou Island is Meizhou Bay port, it is one of the four major international transit ports in China, which is determined by the Ministry of communications. It is about 9.6 kilometers long from north to south and 1.3 kilometers wide from east to west. Meizhou Island is longitudinally long and narrow from north to south. The central part of Meizhou Island is plain and shaped like an eyebrow, so it is called Meizhou.

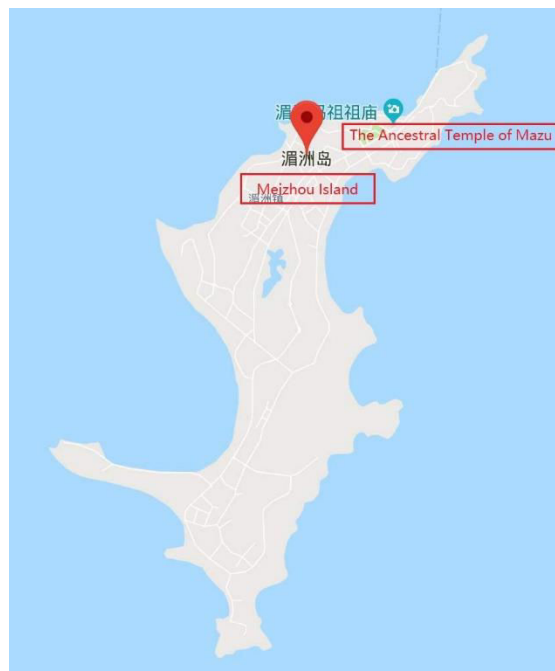


Figure 1: Meizhou Island National Tourism Resort of Fujian Province.

Source:

https://ss2.bdstatic.com/70cFvnSh_Q1YnxGkpoWK1HF6hhy/it/u=3089282630,1819365484&fm=26&gp=0.jpg, 2016

Meizhou Island has a land area of 14.35 square kilometers, with a population of 42,000. The coastline is 30.4 kilometers, it has more than 30 big and small islands, including reefs.

Every year, during the birthday of Mazu on 23rd March and the sacrifice day of Mazu on 9th September, the pilgrimage and tourism are unprecedented, which is known as “Oriental Mecca¹”. (W Zhengfeng, 2018)

Meizhou Island has a typical subtropical maritime monsoon climate, with an average annual temperature of 21 degrees centigrade and an average annual rainfall of about 1000 mm. The climate is mild, the scenery is beautiful, it is an ideal resort. Meizhou Island is the origin place of Mazu culture. In 1988, it was developed as a tourism economic zone of Fujian Province. In 1992, Meizhou Island was approved as a national tourist resort by the State Council.



Figure 2: The environment of Meizhou Island

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/search/detail?ct=503316480&z>, 2016

Meizhou Island is a tourist and summer resort integrating religious holy land, natural scenery, cultural landscape and exchanges with Taiwan. Meizhou Island is surrounded by sea on all sides, and many seas eroded rocks have been baptized by years in various forms, strange and lifelike, the golden sand beach is flat, clean, it is cool in summer and warm in winter, and has a pleasant climate. The unique geographical location creates an attractive natural landscape, which makes the tourists linger on and have an endless aftertaste. Meizhou Island is a good place for leisure and vacation tourism. The broad and profound connotation of Mazu culture, the world's great reputation, and the gorgeous natural scenery have laid a firm foundation for economic development.

2 The semiotic meaning of the giant statue of Mazu and the place on Meizhou Island

The giant statue of Mazu has become a new landmark of Meizhou Island in the new era.

It is majestic and has important symbolic significance. The artistic characteristics of Mazu statue represent the high level of carving art in the Putian area. It is the classic work of Mazu art crafts.

¹ Mecca is the most important holy place in Islam, it is well-known as the "religious capital".

2.1 The introduction of the giant statue of Mazu and the place

The giant statue of Mazu stands on the highest peak of Meizhou Island, at the highest point of “Zumiao mountain²” that is in front of the main hall of the ancestral temple of Mazu. The statue was designed by Professors Li Weisi and Jiang Zhiqiang from the faculty of art of Xiamen University, it was built on the Millennium day of Mazu, the 9th day of September in a lunar month, 1987. The statue of Mazu was not placed in the temple for worship, but she stood on the top of the mountain, looking at Taiwan Island across the sea from far. As the spiritual sustenance of believers, the giant statue of Mazu has become a new landmark of Meizhou Island with its unique image and special meaning.



Figure 3: The giant statue of Mazu on Meizhou Island

Source: Photographed by Ke Yihan, 2020

The giant statue of Mazu is 14.35 meters high, the figure symbolizes the area of Meizhou Island is 14.35 square kilometers. The statue is so tall that it can be seen from far away. In fact, people hope that Mazu can lead the lost people home. The statue is made up of 365 pieces of pure white granite, the figure “365” represents 365 days a year, it means that Mazu can bless people being happy and safe every day. The face of Mazu statue is amiable, showing the

² The mountain where the ancestral temple of Mazu is located.

image of a woman in her thirties. The face and posture are round and plump, graceful and luxurious. She looks serene and majestic, staring into the distance and looking at the strait. The crown on the top of her head represents the godhood and honorable status of Mazu. She wears an elegant clothing, the skirt is naturally gathered and drooped, and the carving lines are smooth and powerful. The Mazu statue holds “Ruyi³” in her right hand and rests gently on it with her left hand. The body is dynamic and elegant, with a sense of beauty. The statue is made of white granite. This kind of stone is not easy to weather, the color can be maintained for hundreds of years, the material is hard, wear-resistant, and has a strong sense of line. It is the material of the first choice for outdoor statues. The white color is holy and beautiful, it is in line with the sacred identity of Mazu.



Figure 4: The part of the giant statue of Mazu on Meizhou Island

Source: Photographed by Ke Yihan, 2020

“The giant statue of Mazu on Meizhou Island was sculpted by the craftsman named Zhu Boying

from Jinshan Village, Huangshi Town, Putian City, who stood out in the bidding competition of the stone carving of Mazu on Meizhou Island in 1988. The colossal statue of Mazu in Chaotian Palace of Beigang⁴ across the sea is also his statue work, both of them are the highest aesthetics level of folk hand-made stone carving. This reflects the characteristics of carving craftsmanship of Putian City from the side, that it emphasizes realism, rich layers, fresh shapes, strong decoration and exquisite details. The new form of Mazu statue has not

³ The traditional auspicious thing of the Chinese nation. In ancient times, "Ruyi" has a wide range of uses. As an auspicious thing, it is widely used in the folk and the court. Before ordinary people travel far, family or friends will send "Ruyi" as a sign of good wishes.

⁴ It is the main temple of Mazu in Taiwan Island. It is built in the 33rd year of Kangxi in Qing Dynasty.

only become a landmark of Meizhou Island, but also a new standard that has been imitated and misappropriated. Through the evolution of the past dynasties, Mazu statues have gradually transitioned from a simple and plain folk aesthetic to a gorgeous and aristocratic one. The traditional folk craftsmanship has absorbed western styling techniques and contemporary forms of expression to create a new form with contemporary aesthetic standards. The Mazu statues are the embodiment of contemporary aesthetic standards in folk beliefs. The form changes of the outlook of the giant Mazu stone statue on Meizhou Island and the diversion of its symbolic meaning also gave it contemporary aesthetic significance.” (G Guanglei, 2018: pp 56)

2.2 The meaning of the giant statue of Mazu and the place

The scientific, digital, and multimedia era has changed the way of interpersonal communication

and the expression of meaning, showing the language world increasingly multi-modal trends. The symbols such as images, colors, sounds, and actions in modern communication and language symbols form a broader symbol resource to participate in the construction of meaning, they all have social significance. The giant statue of Mazu, as a visual image resource, and the location of the statue as a symbolic geographical resource, both of them have formed a specific modal of social resource in the process of social use, which has social significance. The visual symbols in the image can reflect various events occurring in the objective world, the subjective world and the connections between them, they can express various interpersonal relationships, form a specific cultural circle, and form a special social network. Therefore, the Mazu statue and its location not only have formal meaning but also have very important semantics. It constructs the interconnection between social reality and people's psychology.

When the image conveys meaning, there is an image behavior, this image behavior is realized by

the gaze system of the participant. Participants establish an imaginary contact relationship with the viewers through the direction point of their gaze. The giant statue of Mazu creates a contact relationship with the interaction between Mazu's sight and viewers. The Mazu statue faces the sea, Taiwan, and the world. She gazes at the sea, looks out over Taiwan. Her kind and benevolent sight express the common aspirations of the Chinese people for loving peace, her eyes are full of expectation.

In daily communication, the rules of social relations determine the distance that people need to

keep from each other. The kinship between the participant and the viewer in the image depends on the social distance of the image. The relationship between the giant statue of Mazu and the viewer is a close distance of society, we can see the entire modelling of the participant (Mazu). This design of close distance of society shows that the participant (Mazu) and the viewer are not an intimate private relationship, but a social interpersonal relationship.

People can see the whole modelling of the Mazu statue, but they also need to look up at Mazu, to draw the image of Mazu, which is a huge energy and powerful protective ability in their mind. This can express the worshippers' respect for Mazu. This positioning of the social relationship between participants and viewers is in line with facts. Mazu is the 'goddess of peace on the sea' that protects the safety of navigation. It is not only worshipped as a kind of folk belief but also a spiritual carrier and cultural identity of overseas Chinese. Mazu belongs to the Chinese nation and belongs to the whole world.

The giant statue of Mazu faces the sea and looks at Taiwan from a distance. It shows that the participants (Mazu) and the viewers (Taiwan compatriots) are at the same level, it is integrated into the same social life of the viewers, and establish an equal social relationship with the viewers. The attitude shows the equal social relationship between the two sides of the strait. This is an expression of self-emotion, with strong response and interaction. The people on both sides of the strait have the same roots, the same origin, they are connected by blood. The common belief of Mazu has closely linked the hearts of the people on both sides of the strait. Mazu is regarded as the "goddess of peace", she is the bond of peace across the strait. She resonated in the hearts of the people on both sides of the strait who love and pursue peace. She conveyed people's good wishes of piety, kindness and longing for peace. On the other hand, the relationship between participants (Mazu) and viewers (believers) is unequal. Mazu can be versed in astronomy and weather, she can heal diseases and eliminates disasters, and has extraordinary ability. Therefore, her followers cannot be equal to her. When people look up at this tall and magnificent statue, their respect for Mazu will emerge spontaneously. In addition, they will be deeply educated and enlightened.

The giant statue of Mazu has three dimensions. In addition to the dimension of height and depth, she also has light and shadow, it is natural and real. Mazu's back on the vast land of the motherland, stands high on the mountain in Meizhou Island. The simple background gives the statue rich emotion and meaning. "From the perspective of color saturation, she adopts naturalistic high-saturation colors, that is, the whole is carved from pure white high-quality granite, showing a pleasant emotional meaning. The white color means bright, graceful, brisk, pure, noble, peaceful and holy. This highly saturated color perfectly reproduces Mazu's manners, dignified, virtuous and solemn. It fully represents the noble and holy appearance and heart of Chinese women. She is kind and filial, both in ethics and in the relationship of people has the embodiment of Chinese national morality." (L Lijuan, 2009)

The giant statue of Mazu reproduces the relationship between abstraction and detail to the greatest extent. The whole is a single-piece three-dimensional round statue, with vivid images of the front, back, left, and right, and it is carved in part and assembled as a whole. Mazu's posture is perfect, round, mighty and grand. The clothing of Mazu statue has smooth and clear lines. The phoenix crown, tassel and shawl of the head are carved very carefully, which is an

expression technique of naturalism, highlighting Mazu's integrity, kindness and benevolence, showing her image of affinity for virtue, good deeds, and great love.



Figure 5: The giant statue of Mazu on Meizhou Island, and the place

Source: Photographed by Ke Yihan, 2020

The giant statue of Mazu and its location have formed specific symbols, which are rich in symbolic meaning. The social relationship that formed has formed a good interaction with people, and it has far-reaching significance. This great statue of ‘the Goddess of Peace on the Sea’ has both a historical traditional image and a deified image, it becomes the incarnation of truth, goodness, and beauty. The statue can be passed on from generation to generation, it can be admired and worshipped by future generations at home and abroad, praying for family's safety, social harmony, and world peace, it can be appreciated and visited as well.

Summary

In the context of the strong development of Mazu cultural tourism on Meizhou Island, Mazu belief, as a folk religion, has attracted a large number of pilgrims to come for pilgrimage tourism. With the development of the times, religious tourism has shifted from simple pilgrimage activities to religious tourism activities that use religious buildings as ‘tourist attractions’, and focus on visiting religious sites as a center to enhance the purpose of purifying the spiritual realm. Anyone who travels to Meizhou Island can experience this kind of religious tourism.

As a new landmark building on Meizhou Island, the giant statue of Mazu has assumed more of such a function. With its greater reputation and influence, it is attracting a large number of tourists to come to travel. Whether it is for leisure, or a certain spiritual pleasure and sublimation, or to see the respectful appearance of Mazu, or to find psychological sustenance. With its unique image, unique geographical location, and unique symbolism, the Mazu statue is bound to give full play to the important function of Mazu belief and develop Mazu culture.

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