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***Asia. Mazu xinyang shi yanjiu* By Xu Xiaowang Fuzhou: Haifeng chubanshe, 2007. Pp. 14 + 340. Bibliography, Some Illustrations. ISBN 978-7-80597-679-2. RMB 38.00.**

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Book Reviews

Asia

Mazu xinyang shi yanjiu 妈祖信仰史研究

By XU XIAOWANG 徐晓望

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This Chinese monograph in short characters surveys the history of the Mazu (妈祖) or Tianfei (天妃) cult which is not only associated with maritime China but also the Ryukyu Islands, Japan and, above all, with the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. The author, Xu Xiaowang, has published extensively on the history of Fujian, which includes various maritime themes and thereby also the story of Mazu, China's Goddess of Seafarers. The book under review here is an authoritative and very impressive account that is likely to substitute the older work by Li Xianzhang (李献璋), entitled, *Boso shinkô no kenkyû* 妈祖信仰の研究 (Tokyo 1978) – and its Chinese translation called *Mazu xinyang yanjiu* 妈祖信仰研究 (Macau 1995) – to some degree.

A major western survey of the Mazu cult does not exist. Only certain aspects of that cult have been treated in monographic form or in scholarly essays. Gerd Wäadow's translation of the *Tianfei xiansheng lu* 天妃显圣录 (Sankt Augustin, 1992), a key text on Mazu, is an excellent example of western scholarship in that regard, but like most other occidental works, it was not mentioned in the vast bibliography provided by Xu Xiaowang. On the other side, Xu has unearthed many primary sources, especially local gazetteers, which were rarely used until now and for the most part, had also escaped Li Xianzhang's attention; thus it is one of Xu's merits to have approached the Mazu theme on the basis of a large stock of hitherto neglected data that were skilfully analysed and used to draw a new and highly accessible 'mosaic' from the bird's-eye view.

By and large, Xu's account is arranged in a chronological manner. There is an introduction with critical remarks on previous research; that also includes a few shots fired against Li. This is followed by a chapter on the political, economic and cultural setting of Fujian, especially in the coastal areas, where the worship of Tianfei was to emerge. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the growth of the cult under the Song, from its very early days through to the end of the dynasty. The official titles conferred upon Mazu by the Song emperors are discussed one by one. Other sections deal with the first Mazu shrines in the Meizhou (湄洲) region and its vicinity. Readers also learn why and how the cult spread beyond Fujian. One area, where Mazu was honoured already in that period, was Xiangshan (香山) county, which is modern Macao and its hinterland. By then, Mazu had become the leading deity for Chinese sailors and fishermen, many of whom hailed from coastal Fujian. The following chapter discusses the situation under Mongol rule. The new government quickly understood that official recognition of the Mazu cult was an essential precondition for gaining political control over coastal

Fujian. This links to the famous Pu (蒲) clan which had surrendered the city of Quanzhou (泉州), then China's leading port, to the Yuan invaders. Further details concern the relation between Mazu and the system of grain transports from southern China to the north, the various official titles received by Mazu from the Yuan administration, the role of Zhang Zhu (张翥) and other key persons in the further development of the cult, and more generally, the newly emerging influence of Daoist circles on its growth.

It may be added here that Xu gives priority to the Buddhist stratum, although he concedes that other dimensions became more important in the course of time. Chapter 5 looks at the Ming period. Once again, we learn how the Goddess of Seafarers was instrumentalised by the imperial court for political purposes. Other segments examine her role in the domestic transportation sector, the gradual spreading of the cult to the Ryukyu kingdom, via the tribute trade system, and her worship in the context of Zheng He's (郑和) voyages to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. In regard to the latter, Xu frequently draws on narrative elements found in *Tianfei xian-sheng lu*. This may not be accepted by conservative historians, because certain details offered in that source do not match the data found in 'historical' records. The two chapters on the Qing period contain a very enlightening discussion of the many titles given to Mazu by the Manju rulers. As in earlier times, military and other merits were associated with this policy. We now also see the cult spreading to Taiwan. Further observations relate to Mazu's assistant deities, Qianliyan (千里眼) and Shunfeng'er (顺风耳). The last two chapters highlight her position in the context of Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian thought, as well as the cult's extraordinary growth in Fujian.

Xu Xiaowang's work is enriched by various tables and statistics. Among other things, they summarise the number of Mazu shrines in different parts of the world, including Southeast Asia. Generally, however, the Southeast Asian 'dimension' was not fully explored, certainly because this would have required several additional sections. The same may be said with respect to Mazu's role in Chinese novels and plays, for example in the important work, *Sanbao taijian Xiyang ji tongsu yanyi* (三宝太监西洋记通俗演义) and the Ming drama, *Feng tianming Sanbao xia Xiyang* (奉天命三保下西洋). Finally, there are some references to the early Republican period and the Cultural Revolution during which the cult had to suffer. As already mentioned, this is a very comprehensive account that offers fresh insights into one of China's most important religious strata. Many details are presented from new perspectives and many sources are meticulously interpreted in new and very convincing ways. Specialists interested in Chinese popular beliefs and China's maritime heritage will greatly profit from consulting this item for their further research.

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