

*Eurasia Foundation International Lectures, Fall 2020 Semester*

*“The Construction and Transformation of East Asiaology” Lecture Series (13)*

**Title: The Introduction and Development of the Belief in *Mazu* in Modern Japan**

For the 13<sup>th</sup> lecture of Eurasia Foundation International Lectures, we invite Fujita Akiyoshi (藤田明良)<sup>1</sup> from the Department of Area Studies at Tenri University, who is also now visiting professor in the Department of Japanese Language and Literature at Chinese Culture University. Professor Fujita’s research interests are modern history and history of international exchanges. In this speech, he focuses on the theme of *Mazu* belief, worshiped by many Taiwanese. Professor Fujita shares the primary precious sources collected from where he actually visited, and led the teachers and students to observe the path and the history of the spread of *Mazu* belief from the *Mazu* statues left in Okinawa, Kyushu, and Honshu. His speech is as following:

**I. The belief in *Mazu* in Okinawa and Kyushu is strongly related to Chinese settlements**

**1. Okinawa:** Due to geographical location, the belief in *Mazu* was introduced to Okinawa 150 years earlier than to Japan. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Ming and Ryukyu public ships traveled between Fuzhou and Naha, and the Chinese established the *Mazu* Temple in Kume Village (Kamitenpigu, 上天妃宮) and *Mazu* Temple in Naha (shimotenpigu, 下天妃宮).<sup>2</sup> The remains of the local *Mazu* statues show that the *Wei* clan of the Kume village, who served the King of Ryukyu, regards *Mazu* as his patron saint; the *Mazu* statues in the Kume Island Museum show that the local *Sakugawa* family once placed the *Mazu* statue on the bow of boat as a patron saint.

**2. Kyushu:** From 1550 to 1630, many Chinese boats (*Tousen*, 唐船) sailed to *Goto* (五島) and *Hirado* (平戸) City, which promoted the development of Chinese town. There are several temples in *Hirado*, such as the statue of *Mazu* in *Kawauchi Kannondo* (河内觀音堂), which is rumored to be related to *Zheng Chenggong* (鄭成功) and his son. There is a statue of *Mazu* on the bow of the ship in the collection of *Saikyoji* (最教寺), and the hairstyle of the statue is similar to that of women in the Ming Dynasty. Professor Fujita believes that this should be the oldest existing statue of *Mazu* in Japan.

In addition, *Yakushidou Mazu* (藥師堂媽祖) is regarded as a statue of *Guanyin* (觀

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<sup>1</sup> Footnote from translator: To avoid confusion, as translate Japanese name in this article, I will adopt the order that family name first, then given name.

<sup>2</sup> Footnote from Translator: *Mazu* was also called “Tenpi” (or “Tianfei” in Chinese, 天妃).

音), and the Kyushu area calls *Mazu* a Bodhisattva (*Bosa*). The idea that regards *Mazu* as the incarnation of *Guanyin* was originated from China and this idea allowed *Mazu* belief became more acceptable to the public. In the Nagasaki area, after the implementation of the *Sakoku* (鎖国, closed country) policy, Chinese ships could only enter Nagasaki. Most of the Chinese in Kyushu's ports moved here and led to the establishment of the *Tojinyashiki* (唐人屋敷, Chinese house). At that time, *Mazu* statues on the bow of the Tang ships entering the port, would be placed in the local *Tosankaji* (唐三か寺, refer to *Kofukuji* 興福寺, *Fukusaiji* 福濟寺, and *Sofukuji* 崇福寺). In the Edo period, transporting statues to temples has become a tradition in Nagasaki. In other places such as Kagoshima, Miyazaki, and Oita, many Chinese settlements were remained because the local *Daimyo Shimadzu* protected the area during the *Sakoku* period. In addition, the top of *Noma* Mountain (野間岳) in the *Satsuma* Peninsula has enshrined *Kumano* God (熊野神) and *Yakushi* Buddha (藥師佛) for long time, while *Shimadzu* called this mountain "Rouma Mountain" because he enshrined the *Mazu* statue here. Many boatmen and fishermen call it Rouma Mountain *Gongen* (権現, buddha) and worship it.

## II. The Edo Shogunate and the Development of *Mazu* Belief in Honshu

Shogunate officials *Hayashi Gaho* (林鷺峰) and his son *Hayashi Houkou* (林鳳岡) edited a book entitled *Kai Hentai* (華夷変態, China changed Barbarians), which recorded the changes of cultural relic in Ming and Qing Dynasties. In a chapter describing the confrontation between the Zheng family and Shi Lang (or Secoe)'s army, the description about *Mazu* appeared. Professor Fujita points out that although what was written in the book was a legend rather than a historical fact, it can be speculated that the Tokugawa shogunate at that period (under Tsunayoshi Tokugawa's rule) had heard of *Mazu*.

**1. Transmission path:** the belief in *Mazu* spread to Honshu in the Edo period. The first path was travelers' descriptions; the second path was books related to "*Tenpi*" from China. Moreover, the lord of the *Mito* clan, one of the *Tokugawa Gosanke* (御三家, the Noble Three Houses), has adopted the belief in *Mazu* to improve shipping routes in the port in the domain and this belief gradually spread throughout Eastern Japan through land and sea.

**2. *Mazu* beliefs in Hokuriku and Osaka:** Most of the goods exported to China during the Edo period were shipped from ports in Osaka and the Sea of Japan to Nagasaki and then exported to China. This was also the path for the spread of *Mazu* belief. For example, *Mazu* statues were collected in several places, for example the

“Peacock *Kannon* (孔雀觀音)” in Anamizu (穴水) Town, Ishikawa (石川) Prefecture, the “*Tenpi Mazu Kannon Bosatsu* (天妃媽祖觀音菩薩)” in Fumon Temple (普門寺) in Fukui Prefecture, and other statues in Kaisen Temple (海泉寺) in Osaka, and in *Kawachi Kokubu* (河内國分). These statues provided evidence that *Mazu* belief was introduced to Hokuriku and Kansai regions.

**3. The belief in *Mazu* in Eastern Japan:** Tokugawa Mitsukuni (德川光圀), also known as *Mito Kōmon* (水戸黃門), has a profound influence on the spread of *Mazu* belief in Eastern Japan. Tokugawa Mitsukuni recruited Toukou Shinetsu (東臯心越) who was good at *guqin* (古琴, a Chinese stringed instrument), music, calligraphy and painting and was also an important figure in bringing *Mazu* belief into Eastern Japan. In 1690, Tokugawa Mitsukuni built two *Tenpi Mazu Gongen* Temples in Isohara (磯原) and Isohama (磯濱) at the port of Mito and the title of “*Seibo Genkun* (聖母元君, The Mother of God)” was recorded in the hierograph. The belief in *Mazu* was spread along the inland waterway in Eastern Japan, and statues and paintings of “*Tenpi Seibo Genkun*” can also be found in Chiba and Miyagi. “*Tenpi Gongensha*” in Oma in Aomori Prefecture was the northmost *Mazu* Temple.

### III. The Belief in *Funadama* (船靈, or 船玉) and *Mazu*, the Belief in *Mazu* in Modern Japan

Following this, Professor Fujita shares his views on why the Japanese believe in *Mazu*. Professor Fujita mentions that the Japanese believe that ships have souls. When building ships, the ship’s craftsmen put dolls and hair into the hull, regarded as a place for souls. In the middle of the Edo period, they began name these souls in the ships, for example, *Funa Myōjin* (船明神), *Funadama Bosatsu* (船玉菩薩). The Funadama Festival is held, with the image of the *Tenpi* as the god of ship, praying for safe navigation. The hanging scrolls and statues of the *Funadama Mazu* collected in museums throughout Japan and the “Portrait of the *Funadama Myōjin*” collected by a wealthy merchant family *Morita* (森田) in Fukui Prefecture (Echizen Prefecture) can all prove the wide spread of *Mazu* belief.

Finally, Professor Fujita compares the gods in the *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀, The Chronicles of Japan) in the paintings, such as the guardian god of travel, *Sarutahiko Ōkami* (猿田彦大神), with the gods of the *Teipi Funadama* in the paintings, he found that the postures and placements were very similar. In the later period of the *Mito* clan, the *Gongensha* related to *Mazu* was successively changed to the *Ototachibana* (*Hime*) (弟橘媛, or 弟橘比賣(姬)) Shrine, etc. Accompanied with the rise of nationalism in the Meiji government, the adoption of Shinto policy and the movement of *Haibutsu kishaku*

(廢仏毀釈, abolish Buddhism and destroy Shākyamuni) led to the confluence phenomenon of *Mazu* belief in Japan. Professor Fujita believes that the belief in *Mazu* in Japan exists in various shrines in different forms. Just like the exchange of *Mazu* belief between Oma, Aomori and Chaotian Temple in Beigang, Taiwan, *Mazu* belief continues to exist in the daily lives of modern Japanese.

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