

The Dynamics, Rituals, and Chinese Identity at Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple (慈德宮, Cí dé gōng), Pasuruan-Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple in Pasuruan, Indonesia, was a reinvention of the MaZu pilgrimage and how the Pasuruan Chinese have preserved the Mazu Belief to the present day. The Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple in Pasuruan, Indonesia, has more than a hundred years of history. During the Soeharto presidency, the Indonesian Chinese were subject to many restrictions that altered the ceremonial activities of the traditional Mazu belief. However, after 2000, many local Chinese temples started reorganizing the pilgrimage activities, and the believers in Pasuruan City are no exception. This study used a field survey to collect the first data, including direct participation in the pilgrimage activities and interviews with temple committees and worshippers. The results of this study show that after more than three decades of restrictions, many young Chinese no longer speak Chinese, which allows for different rituals to be practiced as well as different rituals for traditional Mazu Beliefs. This study demonstrates that although there are some differences, the Mazu Belief and pilgrimage contribute to identifying Chinese Indonesian identity.

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INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted at the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple in Pasuruan City, East Java, Indonesia. This temple was built for Mazu (妈祖, Māzǔ) in the early days, but from around 1970 to 1995, many people thought that Guan Gong (关公, Guāngōng) was the main deity. Interviews with temple elders indicate that this shift occurred not because Mazu was forgotten, but because the placement of the Guan Gong altar in the main hall created the impression that he was the primary deity. According to the temple elders, the Guan Gong altar was relocated to a side room around 1995. Mazu is the god of the sea in Chinese folklore, and seafarers who go out to sea are often in danger, so they always carry a statue of Mazu with them as a guardian deity. Mazu, also known as the “Heavenly Mother” (天上圣母, Tiānshàng shèngmǔ), is the name used by people in northern China and Taiwan. Many temples were built in the coastal areas for settlers to worship Mazu, the goddess of ocean protection (Liang, 2020). The Chinese people highly respect Mazu, and its worship has spread throughout Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and other regions.

Previous studies have shown the diverse ways in which Chinese religious traditions adapt and evolve in diaspora contexts. Phan and Tran (2021) examined Chinese migration to Pho Hien, Vietnam, demonstrating how continuous acculturation with local Kinh beliefs transformed Mazu worship into the distinct Pho Hien Goddess tradition. Similarly, Chia (2007) observed that religion and belief systems are central to immigrant Chinese identity, offering moral support and fostering community solidarity. Yang (2018) highlighted the connection between Mazu worship and the spirit of Chinese maritime traders, while Xu (2021) analyzed traditional Chinese Gypsy beliefs in modern society. Xie and Lin (2018) emphasized the role of Mazu worship in China and Taiwan as a medium of communication. Liang (2020) and Huang et al. (2020) explored Mazu rituals in Putian and Meizhou, respectively.

In the Indonesian and Southeast Asian context, Praptiyono (2019) examined the relationship between Chinese traditions and Buddhism, while Chan et al. (2014) studied the Tangki tradition — an embodied spirit-mediumship practice in which a possessed medium performs acts of ritualized warfare and healing, illustrating how spirit power is mobilized within contemporary Chinese communities in Singapore. Chan (2018) investigated the Jailangkung, a spirit-invocation practice involving a wooden or basket doll used as a medium for communication with non-human entities, showing how this Chinese-derived ritual has been localized and integrated into everyday Indonesian spiritual culture. Together, these studies demonstrate how Chinese cultural traditions persist yet undergo transformation across different sociocultural settings.

We will determine when the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple was built and understand how the local Chinese community practiced Mazu rituals. The Chinese community in Indonesia has also been affected by modernization, which has gradually affected the beliefs and rituals of the Mazu Goddess. Through this study, we will analyze the Chinese cultural characteristics of Mazu worship among the followers of the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple in Pasuruan City. We want to understand the Chinese cultural characteristics of Mazu belief and examine how the Chinese community in Pasuruan City maintains and transmits Mazu worship, and how they actively organize Mazu rituals to strengthen their Chinese identity and maintain peaceful coexistence with locals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study adopts an ethnographic approach and a research subject based on Richard Schechner's theory of performance studies to explore cultural identity and the social functions of Mazu worship at Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple in Pasuruan City. In analyzing the data, we use Eric Hobsbawm's "invented tradition." This theory helps us to analyze the traditions and ritual activities of the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple in Pasuruan City, how the Chinese in Pasuruan City preserve the Mazu belief, and how they recreate the traditional rituals.

Performance Studies

Schechner (2020) defines 'performativity' in performance studies as 'performative,' meaning behavior or speech that expresses something and creates or alters reality. He also emphasized the importance of 'presence' in performance, i.e., the physical and emotional immediacy of the actors and the audience that creates real moments in the theater. The theory attempts to understand performance as a broader phenomenon involving theater, dance, rituals, festivals, and celebrations in human culture. Performance exists in every part of human life. Human life and performance are inextricably linked; are we all performing on our own stages without even realizing it? Richard Schechner analyzes 'performance' in everyday human life from various perspectives. Performance theory views religious ritual as a complex form of performance. Schechner emphasizes that ritual involves formal and symbolic religious acts, as well as physical, emotional, and social performance modes. He

explains that the primary function of ritual in society is to recover its traditional conception. He believes rituals can restore and renew a community's social order, values, and relationships. Through rituals, restoring disordered order, overcoming separation, and rebuilding human relationships with the spiritual world is possible. In addition, Schechner (2020) also emphasizes the importance of “transformation” in religious rituals, meaning that rituals are more than just symbolic acts of resurrection; they create change in individuals and communities. Rituals can change consciousness, beliefs, and behaviors and produce profound spiritual experiences for those involved.

Invention of Tradition

Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) argue that most of the traditions we think of as the oldest and most authentic cultural heritage are instead the result of the latest creation of traditions. The so-called “traditions” are the result of deliberate creations aimed at strengthening political power and collective identity and preserving social stability. He said that cultural practices were repeated to serve as a model for society and to cultivate high values continuously. The purpose is to maintain the cultural roots and to achieve a connection with them. This is also how we live in the face of the ever-changing modern world, where people try to maintain and preserve their traditions, treating culture as static and unchanging in a dynamic world.

“Cultural traditions” can be shaped by political and social forces to strengthen national identity, governmental authority, or human interconnectedness. Inventing traditions involves changing or simplifying existing rituals, creating new symbols, or even creating entirely new traditions that appear to be true. Understanding cultural traditions as “inventions” helps us see that they are not static, unchanging things but rather dynamic processes that evolve in response to society’s needs and the goals it seeks to achieve. In this way, we will understand how certain cultural traditions can be preserved and how they can play a role in society.

Chinese Indonesian Identity

The identity of the Southeast Asian Overseas Chinese population has undergone a fundamental shift, from complete identification with pre-war China to a gradual shift toward identification with the local community. Wang (1991) divides Chinese identity into two major categories: political national identity and cultural identity. In total, there are seven types of identities. Political national identity includes (1) Chinese nationalist identity, (2) local national identity, (3) Chinese communal identity, and (4) ethnic and racial identity with legal and political rights. Meanwhile, cultural identity includes (5) Chinese “historical” identity, (6) Chinese cultural identity, and (7) ethnic cultural identity.

METHOD

This study employs an ethnographic approach, which involves long-term immersion in the field through participant observation, in-depth interviews, documentation of ritual practices, and analysis of textual and visual materials to understand how meaning is produced within a community’s everyday religious life. The primary fieldwork was conducted in Pasuruan, East Java, between September 2022 and December 2024, focusing on Mazu worship at Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple and its role in shaping Chinese Indonesian identity. Ethnographic activities included observing and participating in key rituals—such as the internal Mazu procession (4 October 2022), rehearsal and birthday celebrations (7 and 12 May 2023), and community festivals like the Guan Gong Birthday (29 July 2024) and the Ghost Festival (18 August 2024)—as well as interviewing temple leaders and local authorities (7 March 2024). To contextualize Pasuruan within the broader Mazu network, comparative visits were made to temples in Mojokerto, Madiun, Gudo (Jombang), Kediri,

Tuban, Lasem, Surabaya, and Semarang, as well as to temples in Taipei, Kaohsiung, Melaka, and Kuala Lumpur. All these temples share a common feature: each houses an altar dedicated to Mazu, and many—such as those in Lasem, Mojokerto, Kediri, and Kaohsiung—identify Mazu as their principal deity. These comparative observations were not separate research sites but served to clarify ritual variations, organizational structures, and translocal connections relevant to understanding the Pasuruan case. Data were analyzed thematically, focusing on ritual roles, symbolic meanings, and expressions of identity within the community.

In selecting informants and sources, this study utilized methods developed within the performance studies theory. Performance studies is an interdisciplinary field of study pioneered by Richard Schechner. Schechner (2020) defined performance as “an act that is conscious and intended to be presented to others.” We sought out informants and conducted in-depth interviews through face-to-face and social media (WhatsApp). Social media was also used to establish communication channels and share information with the study informants. Audio interviews and video blogs were recorded, and notes were taken at the end of the interviews if permission to record was not granted. Interviews conducted via WhatsApp were based on chat transcripts, but some were via voice calls and were not included in the transcripts.

Table 1. Participants social profile

Occupation of the Participant	Informant Status	No of Participants
Creator / Author	Chinese Temple Leader	2
	Chinese Temple management and committee members	3
Performer	Deity Statue Bearers	1
	Goddess Stretcher bearers	3
Participant	Chinese Temple congregation (Youth)	3
	Spectators and local community	4
Social and Cultural Context	Secretary General of the Association of Tri Dharma Temples	1
	Head of Cultural Arts Section, Association of Tri Dharma Temples of Indonesia (Central Java Regional), and Author of “Dewa Dewi Klenteng” (2013)	1
	Pasuruan City Government Representatives	2
Total		20

Source: Primary data

We use Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (2012) theory to analyze how Mazu rituals have been adapted or reconfigured to fit the needs of contemporary community identities. At the same time, theories of performance studies (Schechner, 2020) are used to explore the performative aspects of the rituals, including aesthetic elements, audience interactions, and symbolic meanings in the procession.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before Java came under the control of the Dutch, many Chinese had already come and settled on the Indonesian island of Java, according to Groeneveldt’s (2018) study of the Ming Dynasty’s East-West Ocean Examination Record (東西洋考記, *Dōng xīyáng kǎo jì*). The Eastern and Western Ocean Kao is a record of Southeast Asian countries written by Zhang Xie (1574-1640). From these records, no Chinese went to Tuban (Indonesian: Tuban, Pigman, Zhū mán, pronounced Dù bǎn in Minnan, or Tou-ban in Minnan) for security reasons. According to them, many pirates live in Tou-ban. It was called Cècūn (厠村, Cè cūn) in the early days, but now the Chinese name is Grissé (格里西, Gé lǐ xī), or Gresik, which has been changed to Xīncūn (新村,

Xīncūn), meaning “new village.” However, as access to Xīncūn became increasingly difficult, Chinese ships could only pass through. Surabaya was mentioned later, but it was not yet an important port.

The city of Pasuruan began to develop more rapidly during the Dutch colonization due to its strategic location. A big harbor was built in Pasuruan, and many roads and railroads were built in other cities. The original colonizing country was not the Netherlands; the British also settled in the city. In 1707, the Dutch East India Company (Dutch: *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, or VOC) occupied Pasuruan and built De Wilde Castle, bringing the city under Dutch control. Dutch reports to the British leadership described Pasuruan as a place with good weather and suitable for habitation, and in 1811, many residential buildings and other ancillary structures began to be constructed in Pasuruan (Campbell, 1915).

Pasuruan is a city in the province of East Java, in the eastern part of the island of Java, Indonesia. Its location on the coast, with a good harbor and urban infrastructure, attracted many Europeans to work as plantation specialists and company managers. Pasuruan borders Surabaya in the southwest, Malang to the south, and Pangkor to the east. In addition, the Chinese and Arabs opened many stores here. The city is also famous for the Chinese traders who mention “Pasuruan” when they visit. The population’s diversity makes Pasuruan City a city of many cultures. The city’s name, “Pasuruan,” has been called “岩望 (Yán wàng)” or “巴蘇魯安 (Bā sūlǔ’ān)” by the Chinese and “Pasuruan” by Englishman Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. The Englishman Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles called it “Paravan.”



Figure 1. Pasuruan City map
(Source: Leiden University Libraries, 1922)

The Dutch East Indian government’s policy of *wijkenstelsel* (segregation) was also implemented in Pasuruan City, so the Chinese neighborhood on the north side of the city was called Pasuruan Chinatown. The Tjoe Tik Kiong temple is evidence of the implementation of the *wijkenstelsel* system. Around 1910, this system ceased to apply, and many Chinese in Pasuruan no longer lived exclusively in the city’s northern part (Pradana, 2021). For the Chinese, the city was a heterogeneous space with a special status as a gathering place for centers of economic exchange and the development of a unique way of life. Chinatown is best known as a Chinese neighborhood, characterized by two rows of stores facing each other. According to Lombard (1996), this is a typical feature of an agricultural city, distinct from that of a port city. The only remaining feature of Chinatown in the harbor is the straight lines of its streets, which contrast sharply with the chaotic village and rural style of the surrounding area.s

The Chinese community in Battambang starts from 'Jalan Jawa' to 'Jalan Bali' and ends at 'Jalan Lombok.' At the end of 'Jalan Bali,' which crosses 'Jalan Lombok,' there is a Chinese temple. Therefore, the starting point of the Chinese settlement in Pasuruan City is not very different from the settlement pattern of the port cities (low-lying cities) in the Guangdong and Fujian Provinces of China. There is a small river and coastline (in the past, the coastline of Pasuruan City was closer to 'Jalan Lombok' than it is now). The main roads perpendicular to the coastline (Jalan Jawa and Jalan Bali) and the end of the temple building is a Chinese Temple for Mazu, which forms the beginning of the foundation of the Chinese settlement (Handinoto, 2000).

The brief history of Indonesia's "Three Religions" (Tri Dharma) belief

Traditional Chinese religious beliefs are, in fact, very different from monotheistic religions. Chinese society is very tolerant and can accept deities from outside its culture and absorb elements from other beliefs. Therefore, as Chinese society spread around the world, Chinese religious beliefs also spread abroad and merged with local cultures. According to Cangianto (2012), the temples of Chinese beliefs in Indonesia serve many social functions, including education, safety and defense, social control, social shelter, lodging, and free clinics.

These "traditional religious beliefs" began to evolve alongside changing socio-cultural and political conditions among Chinese living in Indonesia. The most apparent changes occurred during the Dutch East Indian colonial rule in the early 20th century, when some Indonesian-born overseas scholars attempted to explore and re-explore the concept of "traditional Chinese religion" to modernize the "Chinese society" of the time. There are similarities between this movement and the changes in the scope of "religion" that have taken place elsewhere and in China itself. This movement resulted from "Westerners" attempting to modernize other places as well, using Christian society as a proxy (Duara, 2008).

Another significant change in Chinese religion in Indonesia is that the government requires the concept of "religion" to conform to the monotheistic principles of Islam and Christianity. This concept has led to other religions and folk beliefs, such as Balinese Hinduism and Javanese *kejawen*, facing significant adjustments for the "beliefs" to be able to cope with the state's conditions of "religiosity." Various adjustments and changes were made to gain official recognition, such as the requirement of a monotheistic 'god,' prophets, holy books, and places of 'worship' as necessary conditions (Ramstedt, 2004). These changes accelerated during the Suharto regime when the Five Principles of Nation-Building (Pancasila in Indonesian) were translated into Pancasila to counter the view that communism was absolute. In addition, the Soeharto regime introduced a series of policies prohibiting "things related to Chinese culture" from appearing in public places (Tsuda, 2011).

1. Early 20th Century - Kwee Tek Hoay (Kwee Tek Hoay) and Sam Kauw Hwee (Sam Kauw Hwee)

In her doctoral dissertation, Sutrisno (2018) describes how Confucianism has become a religious belief in Indonesia as a result of Western modernization and monotheism. The evolution of Confucianism in Indonesia began with "*Hikajat Khonghoetjoe / The Life of Confucius*" by Lie Kim Hok, the first Malay biography of Confucius. Lie Kim Hok was a Peranakan Chinese writer and an alumnus of a Dutch missionary (church) school; he received a Western education and reportedly did not speak Chinese. Lie Kim Hok based his biography of Confucius on books translated from French and Dutch, including J. L. de Lanessan's *La Morale des Philosophes Chinois: Extrait des Livres Classiques de La Chine et de L'Annam / China* (The Morality of Philosophers: An Anthology of Chinese and Annamese Classical Writings (1896). This book describes the traditional beliefs Lanessan observed in Vietnam and China, then compares them with Christianity in Europe, suggesting that the similarities were important doctrines that shaped people's minds. However, Lanessan also states that Chinese traditional beliefs do not have the same concept as Western religion.

Kwee Tek Hoay (1886-1951) was a prolific writer amongst the Indonesian Overseas Compatriot Literary Scholars (OCLS), who authored a book “*Hikajat Penghidoepan*” and “*Peladjarannya Nabi Khong Hoe Tjoe / The Life Story and Teachings of the Prophet Confucius*” in 1934, and founded an organization called Sam Kauw Hwee (literally “Three Churches”). In Indonesian, the word “Tri Dharma” means the combination of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. However, like Lie Kim Hok (李金福, Lǐjīnfú), Kwee Tek Hoay himself cannot read or understand Chinese, so he imports the idea of traditional Chinese culture through literary works and Western education in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what is meant by ‘traditional Chinese religious beliefs’ through the concept of ‘Tri Dharma’ (Tsuda, 2015).

2. Suharto Era: PTITD (Perkumpulan Tempat Ibadah TriDharma / Three Teachings, Three Temples, Three Religions)

In 1967, the government of Indonesia convened a symposium on the name of the temple, Kelenteng, which was later renamed Tempat Ibadat Tridharma, or “Chinese Temple” (Kelenteng). Tempat Ibadat Tridharma means a worship place of the Three Teachings. This change was made to avoid any misunderstanding of “temple” as a traditional Chinese belief, as it is, in fact, a cosmic religion. Later, the “Perhimpunan Tempat Ibadat TriDharma se Jatim” (The Association of Tri-Dharma Temples in East Java) was established, and in 1968, the “All East Java Tri-Dharma Temples Tri-Dharma Association” was expanded to become the “All Indonesia Tri-Dharma Temples Tri-Dharma Association”. This was also requested by the Ministry of Religion, under the Department of Hinduism and Buddhism, which saw the development of the “All East Java Tri-Dharma Temple Tri-Dharma Association” and managed the followers well (Olivia, 2010). On November 19, 1979, the Minister of Religion of Indonesia formally adopted the name of Tri Dharma (Tri-Dharma), and the temple became an official religious institution called “Tempat Ibadah TriDharma” / Temple of the Three Religions (abbreviated as TITD in Indonesian).

The brief history of Pasuruan “Tjoe Tik Kiong” Temple

Determining the founding date of the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple proved challenging, as most temple staff could not provide concrete evidence. Through gradual investigation and guidance from Evi Lina Sutrisno, we consulted Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Indonesia by Franke et al. (1997), which records that the Tjoe Tik Kiong (慈德宮, Temple of Virtue and Kindness), now known as Tempat Ibadat Tri Dharma Tjoe Tik Kiong, was established in the new Kampung Cina around 1853, following the settlement of the Chinese community there in the 1830s. Deity images of Tianhou (天后), Guanyin (觀音), Tudi Gong (土地公), and Jialan (伽藍) ordered from China arrived in 1856, and the completed temple was inaugurated on October 15, 1857, with festivities including a Chinese *wayang* performance. The earliest surviving inscription, however, dates to 1885, with later records noting repairs in 1927, the addition of monks’ quarters in 1947, and the construction of two small pagodas in 1984. The temple is also noted for its ornate wall paintings, as referenced in historical sources such as the Soerabayasche Courant (1858) and Moerthiko (1980).



Figure 2. Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple, Pasuruan
(Source: private photos, 4 October 2022)

The book mentioned two references, “Soerabayasche Courant / Surabaya Newspaper” and Moerthiko's book, so we tried to find these two documents. Moerthiko wrote a book, “Riwayat Klenteng, Vihara, Lithang, Tempat Ibadat TriDharma se-Jawa / History of Javanese Temples, Monasteries, Lithang and TriDharma Worship Places. This book, on page 287, introduces the Pasuruan City temple in the Indonesian language:

“Tjoe Tik Kiong” Temple in Pasuruan

According to one of the administrators, the “Tjoe Tik Kiong” Temple is located at Jalan Lombok, Pasuruan City, and has a history of about 200 years. No one knows the history of its establishment, as the predecessors who knew it are no longer alive. The building is quite large and spacious; besides the main temple (Klenteng), there are additional lofts on the left and right sides. The arrangement of the shrines is as follows: the front porch is the place of worship to the heavens ('God' as the Indonesians call it), and in the center, there are four tables for the gods: 1) Kwan Tee Koen/Kwan Kong, 2) Ma Zu (God of the Sea), 3) Kha Lam Ya, and 4) Hok Tik Tjing Sien. The back room has a deity table for Avalokiteshvara, while the other room on the right has Buddha, the prophet Confucius, and Lao Tzu/Tao. Since the main deity of the “Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple” is Kwan Tee Koen, his birthday is celebrated on the 24th day of the sixth month of the Lunar Calendar every year. Other events include Mazu's and Guanyin's birthdays on March 23 and June 19, respectively, in the lunar calendar. (Translated version)

It is interesting to note that the earlier golden statue of the deity at the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple differs from the present one, as a new statue has been added and the table has been shifted. These traces can be seen in Soerabayasche Courant and Moerthiko (1980), where Franke et al. (1997) mentioned only four golden figures, namely Tianhou (天后), Guanyin (觀音), Tudi gong (土地公), and Jialan (伽藍). However, the Soerabayasche Courant mentions five statues:

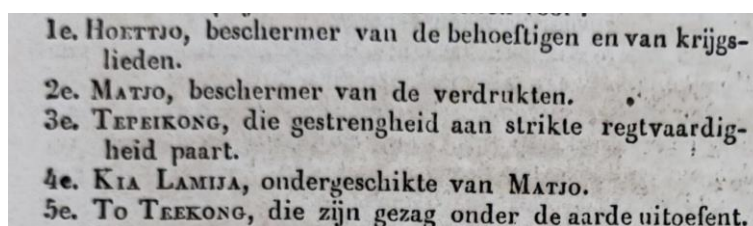


Figure 3. Newspaper article

(Source: Soerabayasche Courant, January 16, 1858)

Over time, as the Chinese spread throughout the world, the Mazu belief evolved and adapted. In terms of mythology, the original legend of the Mazu originated from the story of Lin Mo, or Lin Mo Niang, from Meizhou Island in Fujian Province. However, over time and with the changes in ruling dynasties in China, different versions of the Mazu story emerged, incorporating elements of local tales. The power and role of the Mazu have also evolved and strengthened from being a simple sea guardian deity capable of guarding everything. In the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple, although some believers know that Mazu is a sea guardian deity, Mazu also gives them protection in their daily lives.

Nowadays, there are ten deity table in the temple, these tables are: (1) Thian Kong (天公, Tiāngōng), (2) Sea Goddess, Mazu, (3) Tri Dharma (Three Teachings) is: Sakyamuni Buddha, Confucius and Lao Zi, (4) Earth God (土地公, 土地公), included female earth god (土地婆, Tǔdì pó), (5) Tiger God (虎神, Hǔ shén), and (6) City God, Ka Nam Ya (伽藍爺, Qiélán yé), (7) King GuangZe (廣澤尊王, Guǎngzé zūnwáng), (8) Tai Sui General (太歲星君, Tàisui xīng jūn), (9) Avalokiteshvara (觀音菩薩, Guānyīn púsà), (10) Emperor Guan or Lord Guan (關聖帝君, Guān shèngdì jūn).

Mazu Belief and Ritual

During the Soeharto regime, Chinese culture was rejected by the Indonesian government, and temple activities were restricted and controlled. It was not until Abdurrahman Wahid became president and abolished Presidential Instruction (Inpres) No. 14 of 1967, a restriction on the Chinese, that the Chinese in Indonesia were given the same opportunity to restore the culture that had been cut off in the past. However, after more than 30 years of restrictions, it is not easy to restore some aspects of the Chinese culture in Indonesia (Olivia, 2010).

Most Chinese in Indonesia, especially those living in Java, no longer speak Chinese, which affects temple activities and rituals. In many temples, the tablets are no longer written in Chinese but in Indonesian with Fujian pinyin. Many young Chinese have limited knowledge of Chinese gods and goddesses and struggle to recognize them. The knowledge of the gods and goddesses is slowly disappearing, and the rituals are starting to have their own forms, with each temple organizing different rituals.

According to the administrator of Pasuruan City, after the reform in 1998, many places started to organize the Mazu pilgrimage again, so that other temples would follow the same activities. Many places even began bringing the Mazu back to Meizhou, and the “Mazu pilgrimage” and “Mazu returning to her mother’s home” became popular again at temples in Indonesia.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) suggest that ‘invented’ traditions are often readjusted to meet modern challenges. In the Mazu pilgrimage ritual and cultural festival, we can see that new elements are constantly

being added and changed, all in response to the demands of the times. For example, the use of modern social media to spread the message of the event, the marketing of the event, and the involvement of non-Chinese in the event demonstrate how traditional culture has adapted to the new demands of the modern age. In Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple, Pasuruan, the promotion of the event is not only oral but also sends out official invitations to other temples and promotes the event through social media, such as WhatsApp. Other temples that could not attend the event in person sent out various greeting cards to show their support. These cards are a sign of support from the Chinese community in Indonesia, which may not be common in other countries.

The rituals, including ceremonies organized for Mazu, are a way for the Indonesian Chinese community to preserve the collective memory of the community. These cultural traditions are not only spiritual but also serve to remind the community that, as Chinese, the concept of the homeland still exists and that it is important to maintain a good identity. Participating in the rituals together allows people to feel closer to the “divine realm” and to touch the “sacred” realm. This transcendent moment brings great emotional and spiritual power to the participants, making them feel different from their everyday lives and that they are also sacred.



Figure 4. Mazu Pilgrimage at Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple, Pasuruan
(Source: Private photos, 12 May 2023)

The ceremony needs more participants to utilize its space and time as part of the performance. Participants include temple workers and worshippers, plus spectators from outside the community. Each participant has a role to play in the ceremony. According to Schechner (2020), a performance consists of two leading roles: the actor and the audience. During the Mazu Pilgrimage, those who participated in the procession and rituals were considered actors playing religious roles, while those who watched from outside the temple were the audience.

One of the key aspects of the Mazu ritual tradition in Indonesia is the transformation of space and time during the ritual. When the Mazu Goddess procession takes place, ordinary public spaces, such as streets and city squares, are temporarily sacralized, becoming ritual arenas that carry symbolic meaning for participants. Time itself is also transformed: once the ritual begins, participants and spectators enter “ritual time,” stepping away from the routines of daily life into a shared spiritual and emotional atmosphere. For example, one devotee traveled all the way from Jakarta just to participate in the Mojokerto procession, demonstrating how the ritual creates a transcendent bridge between the sacred and the profane as the sacred effigy of the Mazu Goddess is carried outside the temple.

Within this performance, there is also a fluid relationship between actors and spectators. Following Schechner (2020), devotees who carry out the rituals can be considered actors, while the onlookers serve as spectators. Yet this distinction often dissolves, as spectators may join the procession, offer prayers, or engage emotionally

with the ritual. In this way, the procession is not merely religious, but also a cultural performance in which Chinese Indonesians publicly assert their ethnic identity through artistic displays such as lion and dragon dances, or even giant puppets as seen in Semarang, echoing but also adapting practices observed in Taiwan.



Figure 5. Giant Puppets in the Parade

(Source: Private photos, top and middle images: Semarang, August 4, 2024; bottom: around Tianhou Temple Taipei, 15 October 2023)

The ritual thus becomes a performative expression of cultural identity. It is not only an act of devotion to Mazu, but also a symbolic form of resistance against the history of forced assimilation in Indonesia. By conducting the procession openly, the Chinese community reclaims visibility in the public sphere and affirms its minority identity through collective action. This echoes Hobsbawm and Ranger’s notion of “invented tradition”: the *kirab* simultaneously preserves inherited ritual forms while reinterpreting them as statements of identity and belonging in contemporary Indonesian society.

Public interaction is another defining feature. The Mazu procession is never confined to temple devotees alone; it involves broader society, including non-Chinese and non-Buddhist figures who are often invited to participate. For instance, Mojokerto’s mayor, Ika Puspitasari, joined the 2023 procession, and former minister Dahlan Iskan attended the 2024 Semarang event. Public figures are often invited to various events held by the temple to represent the majority ethnic group, who are willing to actively participate in temple activities to demonstrate harmony between ethnicities and religions. This inclusive dynamic creates cross-cultural encounters in which the ritual becomes both a spiritual event and a public festival, blurring the boundaries between religious performance and civic celebration.

Finally, the Mazu Goddess procession exemplifies “restored behavior”—ritual actions that are repeatedly enacted, transmitted across generations, and adapted to new contexts. Each year, the community restages the same core elements, yet the form remains dynamic. Modern adjustments—such as new artistic performances or engagement with civic leaders—ensure that the ritual remains relevant to contemporary society while

preserving its symbolic essence. In this way, the Mazu Goddess procession embodies both continuity and reinvention, sustaining the cultural resilience of the Chinese Indonesian community.

Chinese Identity of the Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple Congregation

The identity of the Chinese temple community can be analyzed into two categories: political (national) identity and cultural identity, as described by Wang (1991). The Mazu pilgrimage organized by the Chinese in Pasuruan City manifests Chinese cultural and national identity. This parade demonstrates how the Chinese maintain this ritual and express their identity, ensuring it is passed down from generation to generation. According to Wang (1991), the cultural identity of overseas Chinese is to preserve the traditions and rituals of the motherland. Although the Chinese in Pasuruan have integrated into local culture and experienced social changes in Indonesia, where most of them can only speak Indonesian and no longer speak Chinese, they still try to retain their belief in the worship of Mazu, as well as their traditional customs of worshipping gods and goddesses.

Several informants from other temples emphasized that the procession is not only a religious practice but also a rare opportunity to publicly express their heritage after decades of restrictions. One temple committee member explained that careful planning is involved, from inviting artists for lion and dragon dances to selecting the colors, banners, and costumes that visibly mark the community's Chineseness. As Kwa Tong Hay, a Chingay Parade organizer, explained:

“Usually, for the performers who play the deities, we choose talents who are calm, friendly, not too frivolous. Whether or not they are vegetarian is up to them. Most of the performers are actually Catholic, the one who plays the Mazu Goddess is Christian, while the Kwan Im role is taken by a Tri Dharma youth. They are all amateurs, so we cannot ask them to sing; usually, the dialogues and songs are dubbed.” (WhatsApp interview, 21 September 2024).

One key marker of identity within the Chinese-Indonesian community is the use of religious language in ritual contexts. While everyday conversations among Chinese residents of Pasuruan predominantly consist of Indonesian and Javanese—with only limited use of Hokkien or Mandarin—ritual settings preserve a distinct set of Chinese religious terms. During Mazu worship and other temple ceremonies, participants consistently employ phrases such as *bài* (拜, worship), *kòushǒu* (叩首, kowtow), and *guì* (跪, kneel), often written using Indonesianized pinyin for ease of use within the community. These terms function not only as ritual directives but also as expressions of cultural belonging that distinguish religious practice from ordinary speech. As Hananya (2020) observes in her study of young Chinese Surabayanese, language serves both communicative and identity-affirming roles in post-Suharto Chinese-Indonesian life—an insight reflected in how Pasuruan's Chinese community mobilizes religious vocabulary to maintain continuity with ancestral practice. Elders, in particular, prefer to explain ritual history and sensitive cultural memories in Chinese when they discover that the researcher can understand the language, suggesting that ritual Chinese terms carry affective, protective, and identity-rooted meanings within this community.

However, after interviewing many Chinese in Pasuruan, we found that in daily conversations, they use a mixture of Javanese and Indonesian along with a few phrases in Fujian and other simple, ordinary Chinese. This may confuse those who are not accustomed to listening, as they may not understand what they are talking about. When the elders discover that the author can speak Chinese, they usually answer and talk about the past directly in Chinese. This is because the elders are worried that the government will confiscate them if they talk about sensitive matters. Describing the past in Chinese makes them feel more comfortable and helps them feel a sense of belonging, so they feel safe and can talk more deeply about the past.

This shows how the selection of performers, even across religious boundaries, highlights inclusivity while maintaining symbolic authenticity. Similarly, a prayer reader in Tuban explained the persistence of ritual language:

“Here the prayers are still read in Chinese, because Auntie still can read. But in other temples they have already switched to Indonesian. What else can we do, many people can no longer read Chinese.” (Cik Gim, personal interview, 29 July 2024).

These reveal how ritual elements—performance, costumes, music, and language—are renegotiated to preserve ancestral practices while adapting to the present. Through this shared activity, participants in the procession experience a sense of spiritual connection with Mazu and affirm their membership in the Indonesian Chinese community. Thus, the ritual operates as a collective performance in which symbols, practices, and memories are deliberately chosen to affirm Chinese identity in the public sphere.

The ritual is not merely a form of worship for the Goddess Makco but also serves to connect new generations to the history, ancestors, culture, and moral values of the Chinese community. Even in an increasingly modern society, this ritual can still be performed meaningfully. This demonstrates that the sacred value of ritual in Chinese culture persists as an integral part of their spiritual and social life.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the Mazu ritual in Pasuruan functions as an important arena where Chinese-Indonesian identity is continuously negotiated, expressed, and strengthened. The ritual is not merely a religious event but a social process in which community members reinterpret inherited traditions to fit their present context. Choices made by organizers—such as assigning performers, maintaining Chinese-language prayers when possible, or adapting costumes and symbols—reveal an ongoing effort to preserve ancestral heritage while remaining visible and accepted within the broader Indonesian public sphere.

In Indonesia, religions are sacred, and it is easy to offend each other, so many people practicing folk beliefs choose to hide the identity of their beliefs, especially when living or meeting with people of other religions. This is especially true in large cities, where the power of most religions is more politically and economically tense. Religion becomes a reason to congregate with others or to reject it. Whether we recognize it or not, this is what is really happening in Indonesian society. Therefore, during Soeharto’s rule, many Chinese chose other “government-recognized” religions for security reasons to maintain their safety away from their ancestral culture, including their religious beliefs. Most of the ethnic Chinese who participated in the Mazu detour said that their identity cards identified them as Buddhists, and some called themselves Christians and Catholics. On the contrary, no one said they were followers of the “Three Religions” or Confucianism.

Fieldwork further demonstrates that identity among Chinese-Indonesians in Pasuruan is plural and situational. Many participants formally identify as Buddhists, Christians, or Catholics, yet still feel a cultural connection to Mazu and Chinese ancestral practices. Rather than presenting a contradiction, this plural affiliation reflects a pragmatic response to Indonesia’s religious landscape and a long-standing pattern in diaspora history, in which ethnic and religious identities do not always align. The ritual thus becomes a space where individuals can momentarily acknowledge the parts of their heritage that are otherwise hidden in daily life.

The Mazu pilgrimage also highlights the community’s adaptability amid historical marginalization. Elders emphasized the importance of retaining Chinese prayers as a link to their roots, while younger participants

engaged through performance roles such as lion dance and deity impersonation. In addition, local non-Chinese residents regularly attended as supporters and spectators, indicating that the ritual has become embedded in the shared social life of Pasuruan. These interactions illustrate how the ritual creates temporary moments of unity that transcend ethnic and religious boundaries.

Another key finding concerns the challenges of cultural transmission. Limited access to Chinese-language education, the legacy of past assimilation policies, and long-standing mistranslations of Chinese cultural terms have contributed to confusion regarding deities, concepts, and ritual vocabulary. Despite these obstacles, the community at Tjoe Tik Kiong Temple continues to safeguard its traditions through festival celebrations, temple maintenance, and informal cultural teaching. Their efforts demonstrate that Chinese-Indonesian identity is not disappearing; rather, it evolves through reinterpretation while still anchored in a sense of heritage.

Overall, the Mazu ritual in Pasuruan reveals how a minority community actively constructs belonging through religious performance, cultural memory, and everyday participation. It shows that identity is neither fixed nor lost but continually reshaped in response to social change—and that rituals provide a powerful medium through which Chinese-Indonesians affirm who they are within Indonesia's diverse and plural society.

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