

An Analysis on Taiwanese People's Psychology towards Mazu Belief

Hsiao-Ming Chang¹, Hsiao-Yen Hsu^{2*}

¹School of Physical Education, Putian University, China

²Anxi College of Tea Science, Yuan Ze Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, China

***Corresponding Author:** Hsiao-Yen Hsu, Anxi College of Tea Science, Yuan Ze Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, China

Abstract: The main purpose of this study is to analyze the religious psychology of people's belief in Mazu, as well as to analyze whether Mazu belief is a religious or folk belief through the perspectives of Buddhism and Taoism. This study used qualitative research methods to find that Mazu belief has been integrated into Buddhism and Taoism from local folk beliefs over the course of its thousands of years of development. The belief types of Mazu believers in Taiwan can be divided into regular, occasional, and voluntary service types. The majority of believers seek assistance from Mazu in times of emergency. Many believers are affected by significant others and then start to believe in Mazu.

Keywords: Mazu, Religion, Buddhism, Taoism, Folk Belief

1. INTRODUCTION

Taiwan is characterized by a polytheistic religious culture consisting of Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and folk beliefs. According to the attitude of Taiwanese people towards religious beliefs, Master Sheng Yen and others divided the religious beliefs into the following types: emergency room type, bribery type, witness type, deposit type, fitness center type, religion of sacrifice and love, philosophical type, moral type, empirical type, transcendental religion, and the religion of sticklers, snobbery, and ignorance. It seems that emergency, bribery, and deposit types are the majority of religious believers[1]. In other words, when people encounter difficulties or unknown things and cannot resolve them individually, they will seek assistance from gods at temples. Although Mazu is the goddess of the sea, after arriving in Taiwan, she became the center of people's spirituality and belief. Therefore, her workload also increased significantly. The number of things that believers pray for has increased significantly, from the early blessings for safe crossing of the Heishui Gorge (Taiwan Strait), to blessings for fishermen to go to sea safely after arriving in Taiwan, good harvests, good health, good marriage, and avoidance and relief from disasters (natural disasters, man-made disasters), doing business, taking exams, and having children. Even buying real estate and technological supplies has become the things that young people ask when they are unable to make decisions. Therefore, the questions are all-encompassing. Throwing divination blocks, drawing lots (onsite or online), and asking questions in person have become ways to solve problems. However, is Mazu belief a religion or a folk belief? The views from both sides of the Taiwan Strait are quite different. Mainland China regards Mazu belief as a general belief, while people in Taiwan regard Mazu as a religious belief. In particular, after 1957, in order to facilitate the management of folk beliefs, the Taiwanese authority ordered all temples to join the Taoism association, and the temples with monks, nuns and abbots to join the Buddhism association. However, the division of Mazu into Taoism gradually became distant from the essence of Mazu belief [2]. The main purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between Mazu belief and Buddhism, as well as the relationship between Mazu belief and Taoism. Lastly, this study intends to analyze the Mazu religious belief of Taiwanese Mazu believers, which are described below.

2. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF MAZU BELIEF-BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

There are usually different opinions on whether Mazu belief is a religious behavior, because religion has clear scriptures, doctrines, religious practices, gathering places and groups, etc. Nevertheless, eastern religions are significantly different from western religions. Moreover, in terms of belief, temples in Asia mostly focus on worshiping specific objects. When Mazu was first worshiped, because Mazu's witchcraft could help people get out of trouble, Mazu was believed to be efficacious as a witch god. Later, as Mazu's influence grew, Mazu belief was introduced into the Buddhist and Taoist god systems by Buddhist and Taoist believers and became a member of Buddhism and Taoism. In addition, because of Mazu's protection for the people, Mazu was granted a royal title. In this way, Mazu belief became a great god from an efficacious witch god to a Buddhist deity, and then to a national chief god [3]. Is Mazu belief a religious belief? Yang's study pointed out that from the basic model of Mazu legends that Mazu legends are often related to Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. However, based on the analysis on the content of Mazu legendary stories, in addition to recording the life of Mazu, Mazu legends also reflects that society has been affected by Mazu legends, which present a special lifestyle and even become a cultural phenomenon. Therefore, from the characteristics of Mazu legendary stories, it is most appropriate to classify Mazu's religious attributes as folk religion[4]. Tsai investigated the literature of Mazu belief and found that Mazu is the reincarnation or incarnation of Guanyin, that is, the religious origin behind it is the belief of Guanyin. The monks who presided over the Mazu temples in later generations were all monks of the Rinzai or Huayan sects of Buddhism. Apparently, the religious nature of Mazu belief is close to religion[5].

The current Mazu belief in Taiwan is also related to Buddhism. Interestingly, when some people were interviewed in the temple research, they considered their religious beliefs to be either Buddhism or Taoism. In fact, Buddhists, broadly speaking, are the four groups of people and monks who believe in the Three Jewels of Buddhism, Dharma, and Sangha. However, because of the environment in which some believers grew up and the worship of both Buddhism and Taoism in some temples, some believers may also consider themselves Buddhists. In terms of Buddhism, some are simply Buddhist temples, especially those built in the later period, such as Fo Guang Shan, Tzu Chi, Dharma Drum, Chung Tai Chan Monastery, etc. The most common ones are those worshipping the Buddha and other Bodhisattvas. However, some Buddhist temples established by ancestors who crossed the Taiwan Strait a hundred years ago also worshiped Mazu. For example, in the Longshan Temple in Taipei built in 1738, the main deity worshipped was Guanyin Bodhisattva. It was a branch of the Longshan Temple in Anhui, Jinjiang County, Fujian Province at that time[6]. Currently, the main hall of the temple enshrines Guanyin Bodhisattva, Manjusri Bodhisattva, Universal Virtue Bodhisattva, The Eighteen Arhats, Skanda, and Samghārama. The back hall enshrines common gods in Taiwan, including Wenchang emperor, Dakuixingjun, Master Chu Xi, Horse God, Holy Heavenly Mother, Taiyang Xingjun, Taiyang Xingjun, The Goddess of Child Birth, Chitou Furen, Shi Er Po Jie, Shui Xian Zun Wang, City God, Dragon God, God of the Earth, God Emperor Guansheng, The Three Great Emperor-Officials, Hua Tuo, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, and God of Love. Based on the above, the gods enshrined in Longshan Temple are diverse, including those in both Buddhism and Taoism, which is also one of the characteristics of Taiwanese Buddhist temples. Not only are large temples in the southern Fujian architectural style like Longshan Temple, which originally only worshiped Guanyin Buddha, but later due to social development and changes, they also began to worship Mazu and other Taoist gods, such as the Baozang Temple in Fenyuan Township, Changhua County built in 1672. According to the legend, a plague occurred in the Fenyuan in 1723. It happened that Mazu of Tianhou Temple in Lukang passed by Baozang Temple and once stayed in the temple temporarily to provide relief to the people. As a result, the temple additionally enshrines Holy Heavenly Mother – Mazu[7].



Figure3.1. Statue of Mazu enshrined in the back hall of Fenyuan Baozang Temple, Changhua

Source: photo by the author

There are also some Buddhist and Taoist combo temples in Taiwan, such as Ciyun Temple in Dacun, Changhua County, which was founded in the first year of Daoguang in the Qing Dynasty (1821). It enshrines Guanyin Bodhisattva and to the left and right are Manjushri and Samantabhadra. There is also a Mazu Hall in the temple, which enshrines Mazu in the main hall, the Fourth Mazu from Nanyao Temple in Changhua City, Dazhuang Mazu from Haotian Temple in Wuqi Dazhuang, Taichung City, and the Second Mazu of Dazhuang, as well as the two generals Thousand-Mile Eye (Qianli Yan) and With-the-Wind Ear (Shunfeng Er).



Figure3.2. Statue of Mazu enshrined in Mazu hall of Ciyun Temple in Dacun, Changhua County

Source: photo by the author

In addition to Buddhist temples enshrining Mazu, Mazu's scriptures also contain Buddhist scriptures. General believers are also accustomed to mixing Buddhist and Taoist terms together in terms of language usage, which is most common on many fan pages associated with Mazu. For example, on the Mazu fan group Facebook in Taiwan, some people (probably Buddhists) like to post words of advice (commonly known as elders' messages) on it every day, "Karma and retribution are not empty words. You get what you pay, and you lose what you calculate. Good and evil will eventually be reckoned with...Live in the present, don't let yourself get lost in the past or future." Many netizens responded with "Namo Amitabha." On the fan Facebook page of Mazu believers in Baishatun, someone posted "Today is the day to get rid of illness, transfer it to my mother, and she will be healthy and lucky for a lifetime - Holy Heavenly Mother Mazu." The netizen's reply was "Thank you to the Holy Mother Mazu for blessing with peace. Namo Amitabha." Many words of gratitude and replies are associated with "Namo Amitabha."

Believers often regard Mazu as the god of Buddhism, and they also use terms of Mazu for local temple, such as “Namo the Great Merciful and Great Compassionate Taiping Mama Mahasattva of Xiluo Fuxing Temple.” Based on the above, in fact, some people in Taiwan regard Mazu as Buddhism. Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan once positioned Mazu. He said that strictly speaking, Mazu is also a Buddhist, who believes in Guanyin Bodhisattva. In many Mazu temples, the front hall enshrines Mazu, and the back hall enshrines Guanyin. This has become a common practice, and people believe in Mazu with the same belief in Guanyin[8]. Since Mazu belief came to Taiwan from the Mainland China, it is related to monks and Buddhist temples, it is common in Taiwan where both Buddhism and Taoism are worshipped, it has also affected the religious attributes that Mazu believers in Taiwan regard themselves as.

3. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF MAZU BELIEF-TAOIST PERSPECTIVE

Taoism is a traditional religion in Taiwan. Currently, in the research of scholars, some also include Mazu among the gods of Taoism[9]. Currently, believers in Taiwan also regard Mazu as one of the gods of Taoism. The main reason is that in addition to the popular belief that Mazu is Taiwan's traditional Taoism belief, the religious authority in Taiwan also classifies the Mazu Temple into Taoism. Chang indicated that during the imperial period in Taiwan, the imperial and Taoist feuds coordinated with each other and complemented each other. They gave a god religious sanctity and political legitimacy and were the source of spiritual power and authority for gods. Mazu is also able to enter the sacrificial ceremony because it has been conferred as a god by successive emperors and has official temples for sacrifices, official temple quotas and repair funds, etc. In addition, Taoists incorporated Mazu into the Taoist scriptures, performed Taoism rituals, and had Taoist priests stationed at temples to hold ceremonies, etc. The two cooperated to acknowledge Mazu as a God[10]. In Taoism, Mazu is respectfully called “Fu Dou Yuanjun.” According to the “Tianfei's Spiritual Experience of Saving the Sufferings” of the Cave God of the “Tao Zang:” The Holy Mother was originally a beautiful girl with wonderful deeds in fighting. When she saw that evildoers were running rampant in the world, she was given the title “Wuji” because she came to the world to quell demons and save the people. Therefore, the Holy Mother is also called “Fu Dou Yuanjun”[11]. Under the influence of Taoism, since the Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty, many Mazu beliefs and rituals have developed in folk society. Mazu scriptures are mainly used in Mazu belief rituals, which promote Mazu belief and Taoism and also reflect strong social education and moral functions[12]. As shown in Figure 3-3, although the main deity enshrined in Tianhou Temple in Fuzhou's Three Neighborhoods and Seven Alleys is Mazu, the temple also looks like a Taoist temple inside where gods associated with Taoism are also enshrined. In Taiwan, the honorific title “Fu Dou Yuanjun” is rarely used in Tianhou Temple or temples dedicated to Mazu. The most common one is Holy Heavenly Mother. In Mazu temples in mainland China, the honorific title “Holy Heavenly Mother” is also commonly used, while “Fu Dou Yuanjun” appears in Taoist temples. In fact, the honorific title “Fu Dou Yuanjun” is also an unfamiliar term to most believers in Taiwan, and most of them use the honorific title Holy Mother. The older generation of believers prefer to call Mazu “Mazu Po.”



Figure3.3. The Taoist altar of Tianhou Temple in Three Neighborhoods and Seven Alleys, Fuzhou

The Mazu Temple in Taiwan not only worships the main god Mazu, but also usually includes its secondary gods. Taking Hanxi Lecheng Temple in Taichung City for example, in addition to enshrining Mazu, the gods enshrined in each hall are as follows: Holy Parents Hall: Holy Parents (Mazu's parents), Marshal of the Middle Altar (the third prince), Fu Dezheng Shen (the Lord of the Earth), The three hall princes and the two generals, Xuantian God, God Emperor Guansheng and the two generals; Taisui Hall: Doulao Xingjun and Liushi Jiazi Xingjun; Yuelao Hall: Yuelao Xingjun; Hua Tuo Hall: Hua Tuo; Jade Emperor Hall :The Jade Emperor, The Three Great Emperor-Officials, The Goddess of Child Birth, Guanyin Buddha; Wenchang Hall: Wenchang emperor; Wenchang Hall: Five Gods of Wealth and Lucky Boy. Therefore, from the perspective of the above-mentioned gods and their functions, they are like an administrative agency. The believers who go to the temple to worship and pray to the gods have different needs and motivations. Therefore, a large temple can handle the problem faster without making believers move around to other temples. The author is a Mazu believer, who often visits Mazu temples across Taiwan and conducts research and investigation. The author found that the gods enshrined in Mazu temples are extremely diverse. For example, Taoist gods enshrined in Mazu temples include: The Three Great Emperor-Officials, Shen Nong the Great, Sixty Years Star Emperor, etc. The most commonly seen one related to Buddhism is Guanyin, a.k.a. Guanyin Buddha, and there is also Medicine Buddha enshrined with Ataabu Mazu in Nantian Temple, Wufeng, Taichung). Although Mazu belief has developed to this day, every first and fifteenth day of the Lunar New Year, some Mazu temples will have chanting groups and Taoist priests chanting sutras in the temple; some will broadcast sutras. Every year on July 15 of the lunar calendar, which is commonly known as the Ghost Festival, Mazu temples in various places hold activities to celebrate the Ghost Festival. In particular, large-scale Mazu Temples handles more diversified Ghost Festival activities. In terms of rituals and ceremonies, some follow the Taoist rituals, and some are conducted in a Buddhist manner.

4. TYPES OF MAZU BELIEVERS IN TAIWAN

The differences in the classification of religious beliefs in Taiwan bring challenges in identifying Mazu believers. The main reason is that some people do not visit Mazu Temple regularly. In addition to the own experience of worshipping Mazu for years, the author also found that in terms of the types of Mazu belief, some believers are indeed the emergency room type as stated by Master Sheng Yen. The emergency room type believers are those who visit temple to worship gods when encountering difficulties. As for how to distinguish Mazu believer types, based on subjective consciousness and experiences, the author suggested that Mazu believers can be classified into regular, occasional, and voluntary service types as follows:

4.1. Regular Type

4.1.1. Daily Regular Type

Some people visit temples regularly. For example, when having some inner feelings or grievances, some older Mazu believers in Taiwan do not tell their families, but instead go to the nearby Mazu Temple early every morning and tell Mazu or express their sadness and grievances. Some believers even encounter problems with children. They not merely tell the problems to Mazu, but even throw divination blocks to request Mazu to agree to solve such problems. Such believers go to the temple to greet Mazu whenever they are free. In addition, such believers sometimes will participate in the pilgrimage activities held by local temples and other temples to pray for blessings from gods, as well as to travel around.

4.1.2. Important Festival Worshipping Type

Another type of believers are those who can only be seen on important festivals, such as the birthday of Mazu (March 23 in the lunar calendar), Mazu Ascension Day (September 9 in the lunar calendar), as well as on the first and fifteenth day of the lunar month visiting Mazu Temple to pray for Mazu's blessing. Some of the interesting believers will pray that after the Lunar New Year, they can find a good job, get a salary increase, increase their performance, etc. However, nowadays it is also popular trend for young people to go to Mazu Temple to worship Mazu at the beginning of the new year, praying for successful career, studies, family, smooth marriage, etc.

4.2. Occasional Type

4.2.1. Emergency Assistance Type

Such believers are not regular believers. Such believers do not go to the temple regularly to pray. When something cannot be decided, or when they need help in some way, or when they encounter difficulties, they will go to the temple to pray to Mazu. For example, when they need to take an examination, when a salesman needs to achieve the required performance, when their family is sick and they need to pray for health and recovery, when they lose job and need to find a job or change a new job, when they seek career promotion, and when they are looking for matchmaking, they will pray to Mazu. When their wishes are fulfilled, these believers will go to Mazu Temple to pray and fulfill the promise (fresh incense, plain fruits, gold paper, and money to add incense). Then they may come back to pray for something else, or some may become believers who visit important festivals.

4.2.2. Praying for Peace Type

In fact, this type of believers is usually those with family who are critically ill and hospitalized or believers themselves who are going to be hospitalized or undergo a surgery. They will all pray to Mazu for peace. In other words, such believers are praying for peace and health type. There is also a type of believer who usually goes to the temple to pray for Mazu's blessing and safety when they are out of town or their family members are going on a business trip, tourism, or work. For example, when believers' family members go travelling or go to work in other places, believers are most worried about them. Therefore, in addition to praying to Mazu for peace in temples, they even will ask for a protective talisman and throwing the divination blocks to ask Mazu for the agreement to the blessings.

4.2.3. Type of Obligatory Worship at Every Temple

Although these Mazu believers sometimes worship a certain Mazu temple in their area, when they go out, Mazu temple is usually one of their important visits. Moreover, such believers will go to the temple to worship, greet Mazu, or donate some money for incense. This type of believers also includes politicians and public opinion representatives. In particular, during the election period, as long as it is a temple, especially the Mazu Temple which has the largest number of believers, no matter what the deity is enshrined, it becomes a place where they must worship (to increase their popularity).

4.2.4. Voluntary Devotion Type

This type of Mazu volunteers can be divided into those who contribute money and effort or a combination of both. In general, some people are unable to contribute their efforts due to some reasons, so they donate money to the operation of the temple or for charity purposes. The other type is those who contribute their efforts and use their free time to participate in temple volunteer groups or serve in activities for free. Some people help clean the environment in the temple every day. During holidays, they often guide people to burn incense and worship to avoid crowds and direct traffic. For example, believers of Baishatun Gongtian Temple will provide free shuttle service at Baishatun Railway Station during holidays to take believers to worship at the temple. There are also beach cleanup groups that regularly go to the beach behind Baishatun Temple to carry out beach cleanup activities.

Some people serve as sedan bearers when Mazu is on pilgrimage and provide logistical assistance to the pilgrimage team, while others sponsor event funds. The reason why these believers donate money is that they are Mazu believers, and they also believe that such contributions are helping Mazu spread goodness, and that they and their families may receive blessings, which is the idea of sowing good causes and reaping good results. Some believers not only believe in Mazu, but also participate in Mazu's volunteer groups and some activities to serve believers, such as offering incense at Mazu, pilgrimage, participating in incense activities, and providing free meals and other services.

4.3. Reasons for the Popularity of Modern Mazu Belief

As for the reason why Mazu belief flourishes, in addition to the historical factors mentioned earlier that Mazu belief culture spread from mainland China to Taiwan, the development of modern industrial and commercial society has caused interpersonal alienation, competition among colleagues,

work performance and family economic pressure, religious and folk beliefs have become channels for people to express their feelings and pray. Moreover, Mazu is featured by the image of a loving mother, which allows believers to talk about their psychological grievances or to speak generously about what they pray for. The reasons why there are so many Mazu believers in Taiwan and why Mazu belief is so popular in modern times are as follows:

4.3.1. Influence of Family Members

This factor has the highest influence, mainly because the elders or parents in the family, or older elders, believe in Mazu themselves, and the believers have been taken to the temple to worship Mazu since they were young. In particular, Mazu's birthday is treated as the birthday of one's elders, and believers will prepare gifts (such as flowers, fruits, paper money, etc.) to visit Mazu Temple. Moreover, some people are influenced by their siblings at home or their own relatives and friends. When they encounter difficulties, they are embarrassed to ask others for assistance. At this moment, due to the influence of the above-mentioned relatives and friends, they go to pray for Mazu's assistance.

4.3.2. Peer Group Influence

Peer groups are also very important influencers in the process of our growth. Sometimes, when individuals encounter difficulties and it is inconvenient to ask for assistance from others, praying to gods for assistance is one way to resolve difficulties. Due to the image of Mazu as a loving mother, as well as the recommendation of peers (classmates, friends, colleagues), when an individual does not know which god to ask for help, with the above influence, the individual will go to the Mazu temple to seek assistance from Mazu. This is how a person without a religious belief becomes the believer of Mazu.

4.3.3. Influence of Mass Media

Under the current trend of developed media, mass influence is also a factor that affects people's belief in Mazu. However, this also depends on whether people have a need to seek assistance from gods or have other motivations. Some people may intentionally or unintentionally learn about the famous Mazu Temple or the popular Tienhou Temple from government tourism advertisements or news media reports. Some people go to see or worship Mazu with a tourist mentality, while others think it may be more powerful. Therefore, they go to worship with the motivation of asking for assistance, which will also promote the development of Mazu belief.

4.3.4. Influence of Social Media Communities

In today's society, online communities have a strong influence, especially many temples that have their own fan groups or related communities. For example, although the Mazu pilgrimage in Baishatun has a destination, the stopping place and route there and back are uncertain. In addition, in recent years, there are also journeys of urgent marches. For example, on the return trip from the pilgrimage in 2023, believers had to walk 120 kilometers back to Miaoli Tongxiao within 36 hours. Due to the influence of the social media communities, as well as the peer interaction and herd mentality among teenagers, many young people who were not originally Mazu believers were attracted to participate in the journeys of urgent marches.

4.3.5. Influence of Politicians

Taiwanese politicians and public opinion representatives prefer to go to temples to offer incense, especially at the Mazu Festivals. During the election period, they even visited temples of various gods. The main reason is that they believe that Mazu's efficacious power can protect them. Moreover, because Mazu has so many believers, the event can create a free publicity campaign to increase their popularity. Undoubtedly, it is not just politicians and public opinion representatives who benefit from Mazu-related events. Through their publicity, the temple also increases its popularity and attracts believers or people who want to worship gods to solve their problems to find an efficacious temple to visit.

5. CONCLUSION

Due to the development of history, Mazu's belief has been integrated with the spirit of Buddhism and Taoism for thousands of years and is no longer a single folk belief. Since Mazu belief was spread to Taiwan from mainland China, Mazu belief is related to monks, Mazu is also worshiped in Buddhist

temples, and the fact that it is common in Taiwan to worship both Buddhism and Taoism in the same temple, the self-perceived religious attribute of Mazu believers in Taiwan is also affected. The reason why Mazu belief is most closely associated with Taoism is that most temples in Taiwan worship multiple gods. Besides, other gods are often worshiped together in Mazu temples. Moreover, with the influence of traditional Chinese Taoism on folk customs, many believers regard themselves as Taoists. As a result, Mazu has also become a Taoist deity. However, in Taiwan, because people go directly to temples to worship Mazu, and Taoist temples are rare, most believers do not know that Mazu is granted the honorific title of “Fu Dou Yuanjun” in Taoism. Furthermore, the author also found that the development of Mazu belief has also been integrated into the folk customs of various regions in the rituals of festivals. For example, in Taiwan, there are incense tour, pilgrimage, and “Art Pavilion” parades in which children play roles in various folk tales. In terms of believers, overall, in addition to the daily regular believers, it is somewhat difficult to explicitly classify the occasional believers. Most believers in Taiwan today are a mixture of occasional type and cannot be defined by a single behavior. In terms of the factors that contribute to the popularity of Mazu in modern times, especially in the context of strong religious culture in Taiwan, as well as with the influence of socialization and the media's promotion of Mazu's miracles, it is very common for people in need to turn to Mazu for assistance. This phenomenon also contributes to the popularity of Mazu belief.

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Hsiao-Ming, Chang, Ph.D. (Doctor of Management), professor. The main research areas include leisure psychology and behavior, religious beliefs, tourism planning, and leisure and sports consumer behavior. Currently, there are 5 books on leisure management and 200 published papers. In recent years, most of the papers have been published in international management and tourism journals.



Hsiao-Yen, Hsu, Ph.D. (Doctor of Literature), Associate Professor. The main research areas include epigraphy, Chinese history, Lê Dynasty history of Vietnamese, economic history, and cultural creativity. Currently, there are more than 10 papers. In recent years, most of the papers have been published in history journals.

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