

MAZU CULTURAL FESTIVAL AND CITY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TAICHUNG



JOBS CAPACITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
TRADITION SKILLS **CULTURE** ATTRACTIVENESS
HERITAGE GROWTH **IDENTITY**

1. Context

Mazu belief is one of the most important religions in Taiwan. The Mazu pilgrimage held in every 3rd lunar month has been the most celebrated religious and cultural event all over the island. Hundreds of thousands of devout followers participate in this once a year religious pilgrimage, covering the total distance of 330 km over 4 counties and cities. Initiated by the Taichung County Government in 1999, Dajia Mazu Cultural Festival was primarily held in Zhenlan Temple in Dajia District. After the merger of Taichung City and County in 2011, Taichung City Government expanded it into "Taichung City Mazu International Festival" to fully demonstrate the rich Mazu culture. It's hoped that based on the long

running traditional rituals and the employment of hi-tech media, the local resources can be consolidated to generate new energy to the Mazu culture.

Due to Mazu belief's profound influence to Taiwanese cultures, Taichung County established "Dajia Mazu Cultural Festival" in 1999 to pay tribute to Mazu. After the merger of Taichung City and County, Taichung City expanded it into "Taichung City Mazu International Festival" to further the understanding of Mazu cultures in all districts in Taichung as well as to promote Mazu cultures worldwide. Strategic policies have been made to respond to this well-known international event:

1. Strengthening Mass Public Transportation Networks: during this great event, traffic-related plans for the public transportation, shuttle bus and transit routes, vehicle and pedestrian zones, alternate routes, sign system, parking facilities and many other traffic related issues need to be carefully sorted to avoid congestion and ensure smooth flow of the event. "Mazu Festival Shuttle Bus" was officially launched in 2012 to help transport visitors without stress.
2. Integrating the concepts of "International" and "Local" into the programs: to plant the seeds of cultural values deep down by integrating the local folk beliefs and inviting performing groups from Taiwan and overseas to portrait the vibrant distinctive cultures. Via the swift employment of media, Mazu cultures can be promoted to the world and the pilgrimage can be a celebration for the whole city, realizing the concept of "Cultural Taichung".



2. Taichung and culture.

In 2009, UNESCO listed Mazu Belief and Customs as "Intangible Cultural Heritage", underlining the importance of its cultural values. "Taichung City Mazu International Festival" was created under the principle of respecting traditions and rituals as well as preserving cultural heritage and passing on the folk cultures. As a result, Mazu art exhibitions and related activities are organized in Mazu-worshipped temples even in other art and cultural institutions.

Besides the religious rituals, pilgrimage with Mazu artifact (highly decorated palanquin and accessories), folk music performances, martial arts and other cultural activities, themed activities have been designed to appeal to the public, such as the multifaceted themes (religions, martial arts, theatre performing, industry, art, tourism and academic) in 2011, the "Mazu Cultural Expo" emphasizing the exploration of five senses in the fictional and physical interaction in 2012, the outdoor remarkable Taiwanese opera show, Mazu, presented by eminent Ming Hua Yuan Arts & Cultural Group in 2013 and this year, 2014, "Five Creative Themes Open Competition" in Line stickers, short films, comics, illustration and animation, calling for all talented designers to submit their creative works to enrich the Mazu concepts. A series of activities designed for the festival utilizes the resources from the government, business and academic sectors to stimulate the

economics. The local cultural tours also work seamlessly with creative industries to intrigue the world. “Taichung City Mazu International Festival” has transformed Taichung to be a city of cultural, religious and academic importance. The success of this cultural event has also set the guiding principle in sustainable developments in Taichung.

Agenda 21 for Culture includes five items - cultures and human rights, cultures and administration, cultures and sustainability, cultures and social inclusion and finally cultures and economics, which will be referred to as guiding principles when the local government drafts its cultural policies. “Taichung City Mazu International Festival” is designed according to the following four aspects - tourism, commercial, international publicity and sustainability. The close connection between the agenda and the event is elaborated as below.

1. Cultures and human rights: anybody can participate in this international religious event in addition to the Chinese communities around the world. Mazu pilgrimage is a long-running tradition created to pay tribute to the kindness and compassion of Mazu, highlighting the respect to the human rights of multi-cultural backgrounds.
2. Cultures and sustainability: Mazu belief has been worshipped for more than one thousand years in Taiwan and Chinese communities worldwide. It's the most important local belief in Taiwan. To preserve its cultural values, an extensive series of activities have been designed since 1999, which speaks loudly for the event's sustainability.
3. Cultures and social inclusion: each year, more than one million visitors from both the island and overseas participate in this event. Cultural differences are understood and accepted among participants from various religious backgrounds. Plays of Mazu and folk theatre performances presented by Taiwanese or Chinese groups have been organized to spread the roots of her spirits locally and internationally.
4. Cultures and economics: this event has boosted the business of the tourism-related industries - food, accommodation, transportation, cultural souvenir and creative merchandise. Specifically designed Mazu products have also been developed. All of the above has helped bring in the immense economic effect of USD 112.8 million in 2011 and USD 133.3 million in 2012. The event has proved to be beneficial for the local industries.

“TAICHUNG CITY MAZU INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL” SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATES CULTURAL ACTIVITIES WITH FOLK CELEBRATION EVENTS AND ALLOWS MAZU BELIEF TO BECOME THE CORE VALUE IN THE CHINESE COMMUNITIES. THE MULTI-PROGRAMMED INTERACTION AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES HAVE STIMULATED SIGNIFICANTLY THE DEVELOPMENTS IN CULTURAL AND TOURISM INDUSTRIES.

3. Aim, goals and implementation of the project

3.1. Aim and specific goals

The ultimate aim is to integrate Mazu culture with the art activities by encouraging the Chinese communities worldwide to engage in this religious event, highlighting the characteristics of each Mazu temple in Taiwan and deepening the understanding of Mazu pilgrimage. To stimulate the local travel and tourism economics, the traditional folk celebrations held locally can be supported and subsidized. As the number of tourists increase, the local industries, the government and the civilians all reap the benefits from this cultural event.

3.2. Actions

Taichung boasts multi-cultural resources and unique religious festival. Building an “artistic and cultural, low-carbon and intelligent” city has long been the city's goal. Belief in Mazu has been one of the most important religions in the Chinese communities and a population of 150 million are Mazu followers worldwide. Mazu pilgrimage is the largest religious and cultural celebration event in Taiwan, acclaimed as one of the three world largest religions. “Taichung City Mazu International Festival”

seamlessly integrates cultural activities with folk celebration events and allows Mazu belief to become the core value in the Chinese communities. The multi-programmed interaction and cultural exchanges have stimulated significantly the developments in cultural and tourism industries.



In 2011, the budget of this religious event was USD 1.12 million. That year, more than 4.71 million people joined this festival, which generated the economic value of USD 112.8 million into the local tourism-related industries. In 2012, the budget went down to USD 0.97 million yet the economic effect amounted to USD 133.3 million with 5.04 million people participating. It clearly illustrates how Mazu festival has accelerated the economic development in the city.

Taichung City Government for the past several years has inclusively involved the private and the government sectors to cooperate and successfully consolidated the resources for "Taichung City Mazu International Festival". Non-government

organizations, volunteer institutions and community associations all over Taiwan have offered free food and boarding for the pilgrims along the route. Performing groups from Taiwan or overseas invited either by the city government or the temples have taken part in a series of celebrations. In addition to the performers and organizers, the number of the participants from the Red Cross, Tzu Chi Foundation and volunteers from many environmental organizations easily has exceeded ten thousand.

Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Culture, Taiwan Power Foundation and Bureau of Cultural Heritage have subsidized Taichung City Mazu International Festival. Top officials of the Taichung City Government are put into charge of organizing, the role of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Taichung City is to execute the event programs while Tourism Bureau, Environmental Protection Bureau, Transportation Bureau, Health Bureau, Economic Affairs Bureau, Fire Bureau, Police Bureau and Dajia District are all wholeheartedly engaged in promoting, supporting the operation, keeping the traffic in order and the environment clean and safe. Each unit puts in strenuous efforts to ensure the quality of this event.

TO STIMULATE THE LOCAL TRAVEL AND TOURISM ECONOMICS, THE TRADITIONAL FOLK CELEBRATIONS HELD LOCALLY CAN BE SUPPORTED AND SUBSIDIZED. AS THE NUMBER OF TOURISTS INCREASE, THE LOCAL INDUSTRIES, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CIVILIANS ALL REAP THE BENEFITS FROM THIS CULTURAL EVENT.

There has been a steady growth in the number of participants and the scale of the event, which consequently has contributed to the booming of a wide variety of industries - tourism, cultural, folk arts, theatre performing arts, local specialties, martial arts and transportation, furthered the understanding of cultural heritage and promoted Taiwan. Therefore, Mazu festival has become the most known international event in Taiwan. For example, the visitors attended this event reached 5.04 million in 2012 and has generated the economic value close to USD 133.3 million produced by the food, transportation, hotel and shopping industries. The event budget in 2012 was actually reduced to USD 0.97 million, which suffice to say the remarkable potential of economic growth has created benefits for the local industries and raised the city's competency. This religious event has not only boosted the economic development but also opened up Taiwan to the world by providing a cultural platform, where the idea of "Taiwan meets the world" is realized.

4. Impacts

4.1. Impact on the local government

In 2011, “Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage” was certified as Taiwan’s “Intangible Cultural Heritage”, an influential religious ritual. In 2012, the theme of “Taichung City Mazu International Festival” was chosen for the “Taiwan Tourism Calendar” by the Tourism Bureau of R.O.C., indicating the belief in Mazu has spread roots locally in Taiwan and gained global attention.

4.2. Impact on culture and its local workers

Mazu series of cultural activities have consolidated the resources from the private sectors and promoted the local distinctive cultural characteristics. Founded on the traditional rituals and advocated by the new media, Dajia Mazu pilgrimage has grown into a grand-scaled festival of both religious and tourism importance. Learning about how this ancient belief thrives in this modern 21st century can be a unique experience.

4.3. Impact on the territory and on population

This religious event allows the people to understand the essence of Mazu culture especially the intangible sets of values. It not only comforts the public with positive energy but also contributes to the prosperity of the local industries as the number of participants and the scale of the event have been on the stable rise.

VIA THE SWIFT EMPLOYMENT OF MEDIA, MAZU CULTURES CAN BE PROMOTED TO THE WORLD AND THE PILGRIMAGE CAN BE A CELEBRATION FOR THE WHOLE CITY, REALIZING THE CONCEPT OF “CULTURAL TAICHUNG”.

4.4. Cross-sectorial impacts

Besides the economic effects, Taichung City Mazu International Festival has also influenced the cultures, the society and the religions. From the cultural aspect, the Mazu event has attracted impressive number of participants especially the parents-and-children group and the young people. It has become one of the most influential recreational activities. From the social perspective, 40% of the visitors are Mazu worshippers, which showcasing how Mazu belief has influenced the social edification. From the religious point of view, the event creates a platform where temples and followers can interact and exchange their views, which strengthens the bonding among them.

Initiated in 1999, this annual cultural festival has attracted more and more visitors. To respond to this situation, the scale and the level of the event have also expanded significantly. This event has profoundly involved a wide sphere of industries - tourism, cultural, religious, folk arts, theatre plays, martial arts, local specialties, and transportation. The understanding and preservation of cultural heritage and the publicity of Taiwan have been improved. Internationally acclaimed Discovery Channel has reported this event. Each year, revered scholars from Europe, America and Asia are invited to join the “Mazu International Academic Forum” to share their theses on the Mazu topic, which inevitably fortifies the depth of Mazu culture nationally and internationally.

5. Other Information

The City of Taichung was a candidate to the first edition of the “International Award UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21” (January-May 2014). The Jury of the Award elaborated its final report in June 2014 and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture promotes this project as a good practice of the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture.

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Good practice published in October 2014.

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Youtube: 1. "Always with You" - "Five Creative Themes Competition" for Micro Film:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viMw-FRtKMg>

2. "Taichung Mazu Story" - "Five Creative Themes Competition" for Animated Feature film:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25nMAbYtjFs>

3. "Throwing Divination Blocks" - "Five Creative Themes Competition" for Animated Short Film:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sd97Zy13dkc&list=UUueNC1x1V0-fg-dlgM_6jfA

4. "Like a Dream, like a Immortal" - "Five Creative Themes Competition" for Animated Short Film:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5_oeo-Ht60&list=UUueNC1x1V0-fg-dlgM_6jfA