Abstract

This thesis is a study of the Tian Hou (Goddess of the Sea) worship among Chinese Singaporeans. Tian Hou worship began in Song Dynasty and became popular among the Chinese whose livelihood was in the sea, for example, fishermen and overseas traders. It was believed that Tian Hou possessed supernatural power as she could save people from sea disasters.

There has not been any systematic and in-depth study of Tian Hou worship in Singapore to date. This thesis examines the emergence of the Tian Hou cult and its development in Singapore since it was practiced by the early immigrants from China. The earliest information on the origin and development of Tian Hou worship was gathered from the research works done in mainland China and Taiwan.

Much of the early information on Tian Hou worship in Singapore was destroyed during the Japanese Occupation in World War Two. Therefore, research sources for this topic were thus limited. Information on the worship of Tian Hou in Singapore was obtained through local newspapers and journals, oral interviews and surveys.

The findings of this thesis suggest that Tian Hou worship was popular among the early Chinese immigrants in Singapore as they believed that Tian Hou had protected them in the sea journey. They also prayed to Tian Hou for psychological support in a new environment. However, the worship of Tian Hou in Singapore has declined gradually over the years. The reasons behind are related to the modernization of Singapore and the changing values of the new generation.