Abstract

Guan Yu ( ? ~ A.D. 219 ) of the Three Kingdoms Era is respectfully addressed as Guan Gong, or Duke Guan. Compared to other outstanding historical figures, he is seen as an embodiment of oriental ideal sage figure. While in the context of the Chinese popular cult, he is also regarded as the most well known and influential deity, even among émigré Chinese communities.

This thesis is a study of the formation of the Guan Gong 关公, Chinese God of War, worship and its development in the Chinese society, from its origin to the present age. The earliest information on the origin and development of Guan Gong worship was gathered from the research and works done in mainland China and Taiwan. Thus the focus of the thesis will be on the phenomenon of Guan Gong worship in the Chinese Society.

Guan Gong and his rise to a popular God widely recognized by the Chinese is the most illustrious example of a historical man's deification. From the findings of the research, Guan Gong as a brave, courageous and much-celebrated military general, was portrayed as a national hero, and a sage in literary genre. With the intentional idealization by people of different social classes, especially the rulers, he finally appeared as a holy God, evidenced by the legends of his epiphany. These different historical and cultural roles highlighted his power, integrity, reputation and his grace to the ordinary people. Nevertheless, the reasons behind the development of Guan Gong worship are related to the economic, social and political changes in the Chinese society.