

COMIC ICONS AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE: THE RECEPTION OF THE SUPERHERO MODELS AT WENHENG TEMPLE

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the difference and commonground between deity statues and character models in religious context from the perspectives of religious practitioners. I explore the meanings of deity statues and character models for practitioners of different backgrounds. Specifically, I focus my analysis of the reception of character models on the superhero models at Wenheng Temple, a Taoist temple in Tainan. The most unusual feature of Wenheng Temple is the icons it presents in the main hall, which contain Guan Yu's deity statue and nine one-to-one American superhero models. How do practitioners consider and respond to the presentation of the superhero models around Guan Yu's deity statue? Why can some accept the phenomenon while others deny? Scholars have explored the meanings of deity statue and character models respectively, but few researchers have examined the phenomenon in which these two kinds of icons juxtapose. The presented study adopts qualitative research methods, including in-depth interview and participant observation, to collect data. Based on the data, I suggest there is a fine line between the meanings of deity statues and those of character models, and a series of factors help explain practitioners' reception of the presentation of character models at temple.

Keywords: Religious practice, deity statue, character model, reception, Wenheng Temple