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Multiple Religious and National Identities

Mazu Pilgrimages across the Taiwan Strait after 1987

Hsun Chang

Abstract

After the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, pilgrimages to China have become a routine activity for many temples in Taiwan, especially in the case of the temples of Mazu. To most residents of Taiwan, Mazu is a symbol of Taiwanese identity; to the Chinese, Mazu is a symbol of peaceful unification between Taiwan and China. Thus, there are two nationalist interpretations of Mazu, and many tensions exist among Mazu believers. This chapter focuses on the cross-strait pilgrimage from Xingang Mazu Temple in Taiwan to Yongchun, Fujian in China in 2011, and the establishment of a Taiwanese branch temple in Fujian. In addition, the author shows that Taiwanese local politicians use Xingang Mazu Temple to attract tourists and as a platform for new religious nationalism.

Keywords: Taiwan, Mazu, pilgrimage, cross-strait, religious nationalism

Pilgrimages across Taiwan Strait after 1987

While there has been much research on folk religion in modern Taiwan after World War II, there have been relatively few studies on religious changes after the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987. By comparison, we find rich documents of the religious revival and its related issues in China after 1987. The southeastern Chinese province of Fujian was the original homeland of most immigrants from China to Taiwan over the past two centuries, the majority of cross-strait religious contact has been between temples in Fujian and Taiwan. In the early history of Chinese settlement in Taiwan, many immigrants would annually return to their Chinese places of origin to worship their ancestors, and would often bring statues of deities

1 Wolf (1974); Jordan (1994); Clart and Jones (2003); Katz and Rubinstein (2003).
back to their ancestral temples to strengthen the statues’ power. Although Han Taiwanese no longer make annual trips back to their places of origin in China to worship their ancestors, they are still aware of their roots in Fujian and the fact that their deities were ‘divided spirits’ (fenlin 分靈) or ‘divided incense’ (fenxiang 分香) from their predecessors in Fujian. When the practice is allowed, believers will bring statues back to Fujian to be empowered, which is why there are so many pilgrimages across the Taiwan Strait every year. Among dozens of deities from Fujian, Mazu 媽祖, the sea goddess, has long been a favorite; Mazu ensured that immigrants crossed the Strait safely, brought rain to water crops, protected the safety of merchants going back and forth across the Strait, and sheltered the poor. Even nowadays, she is said to listen to all those who ask for her help. Among the hundreds of deities in the folk religion of Taiwan, Mazu has hundreds of thousands believers, and is often considered to be the patron deity of Taiwan. There are around one thousand temples in Taiwan dedicated to her, and roughly sixty of these temples send their members on regular pilgrimages to Meizhou (湄州), Fujian.³

Most group pilgrimages to China are organized by temple committees. A pilgrimage group is typically composed of the chief temple manager, other temple managers, pilgrims (also called ‘incense-guests’, xiangke 香客), and entertainers hired by the temple. All these participants have to follow certain rules during the trip, such as wearing clean clothes, observing a vegetarian diet, maintaining sexual abstinence, and avoiding alcoholic beverages, betel nut, and cigarettes, etc. Some of the pilgrims bring their own statues of Mazu, and these pilgrims must burn incense throughout the trip and have their statue stay at the ancestral temple overnight once. Before the pilgrims leave the ancestral temple and start their journey back to Taiwan, all the statues are passed over the main giant censer of the ancestral temple in order to fill them with the deity’s efficacious powers.

The Dajia 大甲 Mazu Temple undertook its first recent pilgrimage to Meizhou, Fujian in October 1987, which was before Taiwan’s central government legalized direct religious contact with mainland China. The Dajia Mazu Temple gained a higher status in the hierarchical system of Mazu temples throughout Taiwan thanks to the cooperation it obtained from Fujian, and it thus earned the reputation of being the headquarters of

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³ According to the Record of the Divine Feats of the Heavenly Imperial Consort (天妃顯聖錄), Mazu’s maiden name was Moniang Lin, she was born in Xianliang Harbor in 960 AD, and died on Meizhou island, Fujian, in 987 AD. The Meizhou temple was subsequently granted the status of the ancestral temple (or mother temple) of Mazu.
Meizhou Mazu in Taiwan and attracted more believers than before. This prompted other Mazu temples to undertake the pilgrimage to Meizhou and bring back new statues (fenshen 分身) from Meizhou. Eventually, after 1990, not only were Mazu believers busily crossing the strait, but other deities’ believers were also making pilgrimages to their deities’ ancestral temples in China in order to empower their temples and enhance their reputations.

The returning believers from Taiwan have provided an opportunity for the revival of folk religion in China. Folk religion was severely repressed during the Cultural Revolution, and is still not a legal religion in China. Nevertheless, after the modernization and opening in 1987, folk religion has been tolerated or permitted in some coastal areas, especially in Fujian. Folk religion is used as a tool for promoting cohesion with the Taiwanese by local governments in Fujian. More importantly, the belief and cult of Mazu was declared intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2009, and this has provided stronger incentives for promotion of the Mazu cult by Fujian’s local governments. Many Mazu temples have been rebuilt and rituals reinitiated as a token of friendship with people from Taiwan. My own observation is that some temples dedicated to other deities that have been rebuilt have added Mazu to their altars. According to my informants, when you have Taiwanese signatures in the petitions, permission to rebuild a temple will be granted faster. The revival of folk religion in Fujian has attracted not only people from Taiwan, but also overseas Chinese from Southeast Asia.

In recent years, many believers from folk-religion temples in China have traveled to Taiwan as well. Some of these temples are the ancestral temples of various deities, including the Warrior God (Guansheng Dijun 關聖帝君), Madam Linshui (Linshui Furen 臨水夫人), and the Universal Blessing Emperor (Guangze Zunwang 廣澤尊王). These trips are interpreted as visits by the deities to inspect their branch temples in Taiwan. Some of these trips are also made to learn how to run a temple using modern business methods. Furthermore, numerous academic conferences, seminars, and workshops have been held on both sides of the Strait concerning various relevant issues, such as hagiography, ritual, legend, myths of different deities, architecture, painting, sculpture of different temples, religious tourism, religious economy, and religious politics, etc. These meetings have resulted

4 Chang (2003).
5 Nyitray (1996); Rubinstein (2001); Hatfield (2010).
6 Yang (2008, p. 8).
7 Dean (2010); Kuo’s chapter in this book.
8 Sangren (2003); DeBernardi (2013).
in the publication of many proceedings or books, which in turn give rise to more events, and induce more scholars to get involved in the study of folk religion.

**A cross-strait Mazu pilgrimage in 2011**

Mayfair Yang has studied the pilgrimage of Dajia Mazu to the Meizhou ancestral temple by ship in July 2000.\(^9\) In this section I will describe how Xingang Mazu and her followers took a plane to Fujian to establish a new branch temple at Yongchun County. This was an extraordinary event. Usually an old temple establishes a branch temple in a newly developed frontier area. Historically, temples in Taiwan typically received images of deities from places of origin in China, and thereby became branch temples of mother temples in China. Why would a Chinese village accept an image from Taiwan and become a branch temple of a Taiwanese temple?

Originally a local temple in Jiayi County, Xingang Mazu Temple later emerged as a regional temple by holding annual ‘inspection-tour’ processions through southern Taiwan. Along with fifteen temple committee members, I escorted two Mazu images, one large (about 180 cm) and one small (about 45 cm), on a flight from Taipei to Xiamen on 30 December 2011. After a careful inspection by the Xiamen airport customs, we took cars and trucks to Yongchun County. The two Mazu images, received amid the sound of firecrackers, gongs, drums, and other entertainment groups, made an inspection tour around the town, and were finally taken to Chenban Village, which is located in a mountainous area.

Chairman Ho (2008-present) of the Xingang Mazu Temple and other committee members had presented one small Mazu statue and two statues of guardian generals (‘Thousand-Miles Eye’ and ‘With-the-Wind Ear’ (qian-liyen 千里眼; shunfenger 順風耳)) to Chenban Village in 2010. The friendship between Xingang and Chenban started at an academic conference in May 2010, when Professor Chen of the Chinese Academy of Social Science in Beijing came to Xingang to present a paper at the first International Conference on Mazu Culture, which was held by Xingang Mazu Temple. After a week spent observing and enjoying the Mazu culture of Xingang, Professor Chen decided to recommend Xingang Mazu to his hometown, where an existing village temple was dedicated to Daoist Master Zhang (Zhang Tianshi 張天師). A compromise was found to build a new back hall.

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for Mazu. Permission for the construction of the new back hall for Mazu was granted by the local government office quickly enough so that the statues that came from Taiwan in 2011 could be housed. Because this is the first Mazu in Yongchun county, she is respectfully called ‘Kaiyong Mazu’ – the ‘first Mazu who helped develop Yongchun’ (Kaiyung Mazu 開永媽祖) – by the village people.

A branch temple ranks lower than its mother temple. Why would Yongchun county office approve the construction of a back hall for the installation of Mazu from Xingang? Why would Chenban villagers accept donations and statues from Xingang? Why would this new Mazu in Yongchun be respectfully called ‘The first Mazu in Yongchun’? Many local officials basically do not believe in folk religion. They do not care about the inferior or superior status of Mazu images and temples. If building a Mazu hall promotes unity with people from Taiwan, the local officials might even receive appreciation from higher levels of the government. And since the old village temple had lost believers for decades, the villagers did not believe any harm could come from adding a Mazu image. All the money and statues were donated by Xingang, so why not accept them? And in fact, after Mazu was installed in the temple, more villagers and outsiders came to worship, and even Daoist Master Zhang received more worship and donations.

Professor Chen and his mother, who still lives in the village, were invited to be consultants for the Chenban Temple (Chenban gong 陳坂宮). Professor Chen suggested that the new Mazu be taken on an annual inspection tour around Yongchun County in order to protect her new believers. From 2011 to 2016, we observed Kaiyong Mazu inspect her new territory, consisting of the villages of Yongchun County, during the Chinese New Year holiday. Increasing amounts of donations were collected from every village with each passing year. Chenban Temple will be able to distribute rice, oil and clothes to the poor, and set up a scholarship for middle-school students using these donations in 2016. As long as Chenban Temple is doing social welfare work, the local government is inclined to be tolerant of folk religion. Professor Chen told us that he runs the village temple in accordance with the management practices used at Xingang Temple, and is proud of naming the Mazu ‘Kaiyong Mazu’: ‘No one ever heard of Chenban village before. But now, because of this Mazu, people all over Yongchun County welcome our New Year inspection tour and donate money to our temple’.

Why have the people of Xingang donated money and several divine images, and why do many travel to Yongchun every year to teach ritual techniques, management practices, and fiscal skills, and to maintain their relationship with Yongchun? By dividing power and dividing the spirit of
Mazu with Yongchun, Xingang now sponsors a branch temple in China. In this way, Xingang Temple has increased its rank, as Dajia Temple did in 1988 using different means. The more branch temples one sponsors, the more powerful one’s temple is. Most of the small Mazu temples in Taiwan are affiliated with a larger Mazu temple, and the rivalry between temples in Taiwan has nearly reached a deadlock. Ever since 1990, however, the competition among the larger Mazu temples in Taiwan has extended to China. Whichever temple has a stronger China connection and more believers, the higher its rank in the hierarchy of the Mazu cult. A higher rank means the more efficacious power the temple is able to command, and greater ability to attract believers and donations. No temple committee member will publicly admit to this competition, and they instead usually attribute their actions to the power of Mazu. It is Mazu’s power that decides the rank of the order. There is nevertheless a strong sense of parochialism among Mazu’s believers. If we compare Mazu and the Virgin Mary, we can imagine competition among Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Our Lady of Lourdes. The Holy Spirit is personified, localized, and endorsed in conjunction with strong community identity.

Xianliang Harbor, in the coastal area of Putian, Fujian, is Mazu’s hometown, and apart from Meizhou Island, Xianliang Temple is the most sacred place for Mazu believers. Descendants of the Lin family still hold a memorial ceremony on the morning of the day of Mazu’s death on the seashore at Xianliang Harbor. Members of the Xingang and Chenban temple committees attended the morning ceremony of 23 October 2012 to offer incense and bow to Mazu. In the afternoon, the Xingang and Chenban temple committee members were invited by the Meizhou Temple to offer incense and bow at the same memorial ceremony, but now held on the Shore of Meizhou Island. The members of the Chenban temple committee were invited by the Xingang temple committee members to the Xianliang and Meizhou Mazu temples. To the members of the Chenban temple committee, this was an unexpected honor and an acknowledgement of the status of Chenban Temple. But had there been no recommendation from Xingang, this mountain village temple could not be guest incense-offerer at the Xianliang or Meizhou temple. Likewise, if there had not been the unification promotion policy from the central government of China, Xingang Temple would not have had the prestige to be entertained by Xianliang or Meizhou temple. The Mazu temples at Meizhou Island and Xianliang Harbor can be likened to the imperial court. Mazu was granted the title of ‘Empress of Heaven’ (tianhou 天后) by the Kangxi Emperor in 1684, and was worshipped by local governors with subsidies from the state every spring and autumn.
afterwards. If one recalls that the celestial hierarchy of Chinese folk religion mirrors the Chinese imperial bureaucracy, one will understand that Mazu is the eternal-living empress to its believers. While Meizhou Ancestral Temple is the irreplaceable eternal-sacred court that houses the Empress Mazu, Xianliang Temple houses the Empress’ parents.

There are thousands of Mazu temples in China, and even the Chinese communist government continues to acknowledge the supreme status of Meizhou Mazu, and seeks to develop the island into a national scenic area welcoming Mazu believers worldwide. Members of both Xingang and Chenban temples were proud of having the opportunity to offer incense and bow at the hitherto restricted ceremony. Thereafter, the believers of Chenban Temple were even more grateful to Xingang Temple. Kaiyong Mazu and the believers of Chenban Temple were invited to visit southern Taiwan in the spring of 2014, and were asked to take part in the Big Offering (jiao 醮) of Xingang Temple in December 2015. It was felt that this would enable believers in Taiwan and in Fujian to communicate face to face, and also enhance the two temples’ social capital.

One Mazu, multiple political interpretations

Associations between symbols and objects are arbitrary, conventional, and culturally determined. To the boat people in Hong Kong, Mazu promised mastery of the seas and protection from storms; to the land elites she symbolized territorial control and social stability. Mazu was ‘Aunt Lin’ (Lin gu 林姑) to the residents of Putian and was ‘Empress of Heaven’ to the state. Nowadays, Mazu symbolizes different things for people in Taiwan and people in China. Most believers in Taiwan venerate Mazu because she was a filial daughter, and she is merciful and responsive. In contrast, the few Mazu believers in China think that Mazu will bring fortune and good luck, otherwise why would the Taiwanese worship Mazu. For the local government of Fujian, Mazu is ‘Goddess of Peace of the Taiwan Strait’

12 Most Daoist scholars define this Big Offering of Daoism as a seeking of cosmic renewal (Saso 1972, p. 36). It is held only by temples, and not by individuals, when a temple has been constructed or renovated, or after a disaster, and expresses gratitude to the temple’s deity (Dean 1993, pp. 45-47; Lagerwey 1987, p. 51; Schipper 1974, p. 313).
13 Firth (1973, p. 60).
(Haixia Heping Nushen 海峽和平女神.\textsuperscript{15} This politically laden title implies that Fujian has been authorized to have broad links with Taiwan before other provinces.

The believers in Taiwan who escorted Mazu to Meizhou were not necessarily pro-unification, and saw the event simply as a religious pilgrimage. In the words of some believers, 'Mazu came from Fujian and she needs to enhance her power annually! We are settled in Taiwan. My parents and grandparents were born in Taiwan. I am a Taiwanese'. But religious contact will bring cultural and economic communication, and the cult of Mazu is the most mature platform that can be used by the government in Fujian. As a consequence, alliances and coalitions of different Mazu temples on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have been growing steadily since 1987. We can see that the titles of eighteen temples have been carved on the wall of Xianliang Temple. These temples, led by Dajia Temple, made donations for the remodeling of Xianliang Temple. Before the renewal of Xianliang Temple in 2002, every gate, pavilion, hall, room, tower on Meizhou Island that had been renovated in 1980-1990 bore the engraved title of a Taiwanese temple. All these donations and inscriptions are suggestive of the intimate relationships between the temples on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

It is no secret which Taiwanese temples have alliances with or branch temples in China. Many, including Xingang Temple, are proud of having close relationships with Chinese temples. Another example is Songshang Mazu Temple in Taipei, which published a new version of its temple brochure in February 2012. In this new brochure, the story of a visit by a prestigious Chinese temple in Xianyou 仙遊, Fujian in August of 2011, receives great emphasis. The Xianyou temple in question is two-hundred years old, and has nine branch temples in Fujian area. It has nevertheless been searching for its ancestral temple for a long time, and finally, on the basis of matching historical tablets, Xianyou temple successfully traced its origin to Songshang Temple. In the pamphlet, the term 'acknowledge one's ancestor and return back to one's lineage' (renzhu gueizung 認祖歸宗) is used. To celebrate this reunion, in April 2012, Songshang and Xianyou temple jointly visited temples in southern Taiwan to strengthen their relationships with these temples. Many other temples in Taiwan advertise their relationships with Chinese temples. Beigang Temple is allied with Meizhou Temple, and they have called each other sister temples since 1988; Dajia Temple established a branch temple in Macau in 2003, and one in

\textsuperscript{15} This term was coined around 1984 by some scholars in Fujian, and has finally been accepted by the central government of China.
Tianjin in 2008. In addition to Yongchun, the Xingang Temple is also allied with a temple in Quanzhou. Lugang Temple in central Taiwan established a branch temple in Shanghai in 2010.

When discussing Chinese nationalism, there exists a certain degree of ambiguity. At the level of the state, the people of Taiwan like to quote the ‘1992 consensus’ (jiuer gongshi 九二共識), which means both sides recognize there is only one China, but agree to differ on its definition. This consensus can also be applied to religious nationalism. For Taiwanese temples, ‘to build a branch temple in China denotes to devour, to eat China,’ whereas for Chinese temples, ‘The Taiwanese have acknowledged us as ancestors and returned to us’. During the 2011 trip to Yongchun, friends and team members said, ‘We are triumphantly fighting our way back into China!’ Some Dajia pilgrims challenged the legitimacy of Meizhou by saying: ‘All the images of Mazu in Meizhou were carved after Cultural Revolution, and they are younger than most of the statues in Taiwan’. These believers opposed going to China to enhance the power of Mazu. Instead, a small number of temples in southern Taiwan rely on shamanism as a localized source of power. For example, a Yunlin Mazu temple claims that their Mazu is Meiyun Lin 林美雲, instead of the traditional Lady Moniang Lin 林默娘.

We can see that complicated feelings arise when Taiwanese believers go to China. Once they have the opportunity to go to Fujian or China, no one refuses to take a look at their place of origin. The sense of being orphaned which some people in Taiwan feel disappears after one has got to know one's roots.16 Most believers visit their place of origin in Fujian after they finish their pilgrimage to Meizhou. Nevertheless, more than one hundred years' separation has decreased the emotional attachment, and increased differences in lifestyle. Temple-to-temple interactions can be linked with the production of different levels and types of identity. There exist multilevel and multifaceted forms of identity production, and these identities may be both spiritual and ethnic, as well as local, regional, provincial (Taiwan-centered), interprovincial (Taiwan and Fujian), and even international (Taiwan and China) as Rubinstein also has observed.17

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16 Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing Dynasty and was a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945, at which time the Japanese surrendered to Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang. Taiwanese singer Luo Dayou 羅大佑 dubbed Taiwan ‘the orphan of Asia’ in one of his most famous songs.

17 Rubinstein (2003, p. 182).
Community consciousness and temple competition

Temples of folk religions have been allying as well as competing with each other to survive the political pressure they face in both Taiwan and China. As mentioned earlier, temple committee members of Dajia flew to Meizhou illegally in 1987 without the Taiwan government’s permission. For self-protection and for raising funds to rebuild Meizhou Temple, Dajia Temple organized a temple association called Taiwan Mazu Fellowship (Taiwan Mazu lienyihui 台灣媽祖聯誼會). Its membership increased gradually from eighteen temples in 1990 to sixty temples in 2010. Being the richest temple and having the widest connections in China, for the past twenty and more years, the vice-president of Dajia Temple, Mr Zheng, has won the chairmanship of the Taiwan Mazu Fellowship. Chairman Ho of the Xingang Temple has won the vice-chairmanship of the Taiwan Mazu Fellowship because of his generosity and willingness to serve. Mr Zheng and Mr Ho take turns at leading the Taiwan Mazu Fellowship members to visit China every year. Members of this association are friendly to China and are willing to invest in various items of infrastructure in Meizhou and Fujian.

There is another association organized by Lu-er-men 鹿耳門 Mazu Temples in southern Taiwan called Taiwan Golden Orchid Association of Temples (Taiwan Simiao Jinlanhui 台灣寺廟金蘭會, TGOAT). Membership of this TGOAT is not limited to Mazu temples and has risen to seventy. Their main purpose is in-island oriented social welfare for allied communities and to enhance inter-temple communication. Though a few temples have joined both the Taiwan Mazu Fellowship and the TGOAT, the two temple associations have different political stands. The former is more pro-Chinese nationalism and the latter is pro-Taiwan nationalism. When there are local elections for county mayors or representatives, we can see candidates of Kuomintang (KMT) approaching the Taiwan Mazu Fellowship for support while candidates of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) visit the TGOAT.

Temple alliances and competition can be observed in China as well. Adam Chau has shown that in northern China, temples of folk religions are constantly facing threats from the State. One of the strategies is to expand temples’ secular functions. ‘The temple’s functional expansiveness and concerns of legitimacy necessarily draw in social forces beyond the village. These trans-local maneuvers include former inter-village alliances, securing support and protection from local state agencies, attracting media attention, and engaging with cosmopolitan and even foreign non-governmental...
organizations. In Mazu’s case, we see that foreign social forces are from Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities. From Tianjin 天津 in northern China, to Shanghai in central China, to Quenzhou 泉州, Xiamen in Fujian, we see Mazu temples along the coastal China have statues from Taiwan and these are allied with different temples from Taiwan. All of these Mazu temples deliberately lower their status rank by receiving statues and donations from Taiwan to expand their foreign capital.

After securing approval from the Chinese Ministry of Culture 中國文化部, the Chinese Mazu Cultural Exchange Association (CMCEA, Zhonghua Mazu Wenhua Jiauliou Xiehui 中華媽祖文化交流協會) was organized by the Fujian local government, Meizhou Ancestral Temple and CCP local members in October 2004. CMCEA supervises 150 Mazu temples and organizations in China; its chairman is Mr Zhang Kehui 張克輝, who is a Taiwanese who stayed on in China during the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party and has been elected as the vice-chairman of the CPPCC (Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference 全國政協). CMCEA has represented the Chinese central government to arrange all possible cultural exchange activities with Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities. These exchange activities between various temples along the coastal cities in China and Taiwan were all approved by CMCEA. Even the Chenban village receiving statues from Xingang in 2010 and 2011 were permitted by CMCEA. I saw a red banner celebrating the alliance with Xingang hung on the wall of the Chenban Temple written by Zhang Kehui during my trip on 30 December 2011.

The cult of Mazu is not one of the five legally recognized religions in China and it is not controlled by the State Administration for Religion Affairs. It is regulated by the Ministry of Culture and the CPPCC. The CCP maintains its control over the rapidly expanding religious and cultural activities of the Mazu cult. CMCEA shares the CCP’s enduring efforts to eliminate social and ideological competition. Ashiwa and Wank correctly pointed out that ‘[t]he Party eliminates competition by such measures as: co-opting clergy and believers into state-approved religious associations; confining religious activities to such registered sites as churches and temples; recognizing only clergy trained in state-approved seminaries; vetting sermons and monitoring foreign contacts of religions’. We can notice that the CMCEA is doing exactly the same thing. Putian University

19 Chen (2012, pp. 92-95).
20 Ashiwa and Wank (2009, p. 4).
(Putian Xueyuan 莆田學院) established by the Putian City government is responsible for research and training scholars for the Mazu cult. The Committee Organization of Meizhou Ancestral Temple (Meizhou zumiao dongshihui 湄洲祖廟董事會) is the apex organization and no competition among Mazu temples in China is allowed by the CMCEA.

Knowing that Mazu temples in southern Taiwan and the TGOAT are more pro-Taiwan independence, CMCEA arranged for the statue of Meizhou Ancestral Temple to visit Taiwan and had an inspection tour around Taiwan in January 1997, in an attempt to earn southern Taiwanese' hearts. Unfortunately, CMCEA chose Tainan Big Tianhou Temple (Tainan da tianhou gong 台南大天后宮) to be its host and overruled Dajia, Beigang, or other allied temples. This irritated the allied temples and they refused to receive the Meizhou statue. Public opinion in Taiwan thus accused the Meizhou Temple’s visit of being more a political event than a religious tour. Why did CMCEA choose the declining Tainan Big Tianhou Temple instead of other popular temples? Mass media suspected that it was because Tainan Big Tianhou Temple was remodeled from Koxinga’s 國姓爺 or 郑成功 official residence into a Mazu temple by General Shi Lang 施琅 after defeating Koxinga’s grandson in 1683 and hence became the state temple in the Qing Dynasty. This officially favored temple bears the memory of Koxinga’s failure and humiliation of Taiwan’s return to China. Thus, during the one-hundred-day tour in Taiwan, wherever the Meizhou statue stopped, there were protest groups. CMCEA or the Chinese Mazu was even more repelled in southern Taiwan.

Meizhou Island and Meizhou Ancestral Temple have been planned and designed by central government to be the only and the best place to host foreign believers and tourists since 1987. Apart from the political considerations of isolation, and the ease with which it can be quarantined, Meizhou Island was religiously the destination of all pilgrimages for Mazu. Committee members of the Meizhou Ancestral Temple are selected from smaller Mazu temples on the island by throwing divine blocks (zhijiao 擲筊). On the island there are fourteen smaller Mazu temples that belong to different villages but they are voiceless and are ignored by most visitors. This is deliberately arranged by the Meizhou Administration Bureau (Meizhou zumiao jingqu guanli chu 湄州祖廟景區管理處) to have better control of the island.

Within these state constraints various smaller Mazu temples still manage to thrive. They forge new networks and have activities outside of the state as mentioned earlier. Competition therefore is unavoidable but it is playing underground. Leave alone Quanzhou or Shanghai, just look at Mazu
temples in Putian City, where we have heard of competition among Meizhou Ancestral Temple, Xianliang Harbor Temple, and the Wenfeng Temple. The latter two temples dug up all the documents, sediments, cultural relics, and created legends to compete with Meizhou Ancestral Temple and thus attract believers and tourists from Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

Religious tourists coming from abroad need more sightseeing spots apart from Meizhou Ancestral Temple. Airplanes stop at Xiamen or Fuzhou, from where one takes a bus to Putian City and spend hours waiting for the boat to Meizhou. On their way back to the airport, again, some visit Putian City. Taiwanese pilgrims told me that most of the hotels in Putian City were built after 1987 to house hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in the third month of the lunar calendar each year. These pilgrims pay homage to Mazu in the Xianliang Harbor Temple, and the Wenfeng Temple before they continue their trip to Meizhou. I have witnessed a new building coming up in front of the Wenfeng Temple and a new hall behind the Xianliang Harbor Temple in 2012. Chairman Ho of Xingang Temple and we were entertained by these two temples with great hospitality showing that both temples had received large donations from Xingang/Taiwan Mazu Fellowship.

There were many conferences and forums held by the Meizhou Temple since 1987. All the proceedings or publications sponsored by Meizhou Temple favored Meizhou as the birthplace of Mazu. All the scholars and bureaucrats praise Meizhou Temple and no other temple dares to challenge its sacredness. Professor Ye of Fujian Normal University invited several scholars from both sides of the Strait (I was one of them) to conduct an ethnological investigation in Xianliang Harbor in April 2012 and held a conference in Xianliang Harbor in October 2012. This conference was, and had to be, sponsored by Xingang Temple (from Taiwan), or it would not have been permitted. Yet, these two events were initiated by the Xianliang temple committee members and the main purpose was to verify its sacredness: being the birthplace of Mazu. It was the first time temple committee members of the Xianliang Harbor openly gathered scholars of history, folklore, and ethnology to declare the temple’s sacredness for them. Retired local cadres of Zhongmen town and Gangli village were invited to speak at the conference. They were more than pleased to see their hometown hosting so many scholars and becoming well known to the outside world.

One of the reasons why Xianliang Temple dared to openly hold this international conference, I believe, was the implementation of the Project of the North Shore Economic Development (湄州灣北岸經濟開發區計畫).
This is a ten-year (2007-2017) project undertaken by the Fujian local state. The project plans to connect Xianliang harbor with Meizhou Island and build a bridge eventually to link these two areas. This huge project must have given local people confidence to compete with Meizhou Ancestral Temple. On the seashore of Xianliang harbor we saw construction vehicles busy reclaiming land from the sea, villagers were moved to inner-land areas, empty houses were abandoned, and shrines of earth gods were ruined. It is quite ironic that all this construction is for tourists/believers from outside. If there are no foreign worshippers and donations how can villagers sustain this newly built gorgeous Xianliang Harbor Temple?

To promote tourism in Putian city meant to help Xianliang Harbor Temple and Wenfeng Temple become famous, but that would have triggered competition and this obviously was not welcomed by the Fujian government or the state. Scholars of the Putian University were in a dilemma and were under pressure from the Meizhou Administration Bureau. Professor Ye from Fujian Normal University and scholars from Taiwan therefore were requested to strengthen their social forces. Thus, when we discern the relationship between state and religion, we might need to distinguish between local and central government and provincial government from the county office. Different levels of the state administration might have different positions. Furthermore, temple competition might just be superficial, what is deeply involved is community consciousness.

To conclude this section, we explicate that conflicts among Mazu temples in Taiwan mainly focus on which is the oldest temple in Taiwan, meaning which has the highest sacredness (ling 灵 or efficacy). In reality, disputes among Mazu temples in Fujian have been mainly about which is the birthplace of Mazu, the accepted validation of sacredness. The logic for competition among temples on both sides of the Strait is about the sacredness or efficacy. But the logic of competition between Taiwan Mazu and Chinese Mazu is about the political legitimacy of unification. This is elaborated in the following sections.

Localized resistance: Xingang Mazu Temple and local factions

Variations in national identity can also be observed among Mazu temples, and among believers of one temple. Over the past ten years, Chairman

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Ho and the committee members of Xingang Mazu Temple have shown enthusiasm for friendship with temples in China, and have developed new alliances in southern Taiwan. The price of this is that they have neglected the benefit of local people, which has given the opposing faction time to make its appearance.

Dr Chen is a well-reputed doctor in Xingang. An NGO organization, the Xingang Cultural Educational Foundation (XCEF), led by Dr Chen has been famous in Taiwan since the 1980s, which was a time when Taiwan was implementing a program of comprehensive community construction. Generally keeping a low profile, Dr Chen has been a public opinion leader in connection with many community projects. Politically speaking, Dr Chen has a strong Taiwanese identity. In Taiwan’s political circles, doctors are typically advocates of modernization and democracy. No exception to this general rule, Dr Chen has long striven to create a progressive community from the poor, backward rural Xingang of the past. During the presidency of Chen Shuibian of the DPP, Dr Chen was appointed a state policy advisor. Dr Chen also recommended a performance group to design an event for Xingang Mazu’s visit to New York. The DPP had been trying through many channels to secure Taiwan’s admission to the United Nations. In 2007, believers from Xingang Temple flew to New York with their Mazu statue and palanquin. While this was nominally for the purpose of making an inspection tour to bless Taiwanese immigrants, the group also went to the headquarters of the UN to support Taiwanese demonstrators. Today, a tablet bearing the inscription ‘UN for Taiwan’ presented by President Chen Shuibian hangs from the roof of Xingang Temple.

The New York trip of Xingang Mazu was planned by a performance group, Paper Wind Mill Theatre Troupe (Zhifengche jutuan 紙風車劇團) and the Paper Wind Mill Cultural Educational Foundation (紙風車文教基金會), to be scheduled as part of an international cultural event on 15 September 2007 in New York. This project was supported by Chairman Lu of Xingang Temple at that time, and most importantly, by the Executive Yuan, and by President Chen Shuibian, as President Chen visited Xingang Temple to show his gratitude after the group had returned from New York. No doubt, Xingang Temple attracted the attention of the whole island and outweighed Dajia Temple for its boldness. Not only politicians but also Mazu temples were involved in this debate of Taiwanese identity. Mazu temples were forced to take a position on this issue which made the temple competition worse, and which also opened up the political struggle among Mazu temples. The DPP was planning to have a referendum on the issue of admission to the UN (入聯公投) in March 2008, and the DPP knew this
would imply a change of ‘Republic of China’ to ‘Taiwan’. In other words, Admission to the UN implied Taiwan’s independence. This issue became the top debate of the presidential election at the end of December 2007 between the presidential candidate of KMT, Ma Yingjiu, and the candidate of DPP, Xie Changting 謝長廷.

The XCEF was established in 1987 by Dr Chen as a means for local elites to learn local politics and make contact with the government’s bureaucratic system up to the central government of Taiwan. The chiefs of Xingang Township over the past twenty years or more were all members of the XCEF, which helped train them in modern political skills. The many projects and branch units run by the XCEF include a library, gallery, theater, and restaurant, and almost every knowledgeable local person has been recruited to hold a post. Xingang Temple is the richest temple in town, and is also supported by the XCEF. With the help of XCEF, Xingang Temple and its surrounding area has resurged from 1990 to be a new tourist spot and famous for its environmental protection.22 There is a biweekly meeting of the members of XCEF, and many honorable guests or successful Xingang businessmen are invited from other parts of Taiwan to give talks and to share new information. By playing these roles, the XCEF serves as a pressure group for Xingang Temple and the whole town.

When the KMT instituted local elections for county mayors and representatives in the early 1950s, the KMT needed to work with local elites to win elections. Native politicians filled local factions of the KMT, especially during the presidency of Li Denghui. As a consequence, not just the members of the DPP have a Taiwanese identity, a large number of KMT members also have been localized and have a Taiwanese identity. The difference is that grassroots KMT members may not be pro-Taiwan independence.

Community temples have long comprised a public sphere in traditional Han Taiwanese society, and are still the most efficient organization for public-opinion formation. Both traditional elites and modern politicians commonly try to get involved in temple affairs in order to manipulate local communities. The localization of the KMT began with involvement in local religion. Despite the KMT’s official hostility toward popular religion, its local politicians have used religion to build up support. Gradually, the higher levels of the KMT changed their attitude, and recognized that believers can be mobilized to vote. ‘Connection’ (guanxi 關係) and service are the most important means of getting elected and reelected in local politics. Most

22 Chang (2013, pp. 115-160).
voters do not vote based on issues or the ideological positions of candidates. Instead, they vote for those who serve them.23

Although Chairman Ho of Xingang Temple is a KMT member, he nevertheless accepted Dr Chen and former Chairman Lu’s arrangement to visit New York, and he also had Dr Chen's acquiescence for establishment of the branch temple in Yongchun. It was for the benefit of Xingang's development that Dr Chen and other local leaders tolerated Chairman Ho for such a long time. But ten years was long enough to accumulate many complaints. Local elites criticized Ho in these words: ‘He didn't care about our feelings. He worked with outside scholars and enterprises too much. We are humiliated when outsiders think there are no talented persons in Xingang’. They disliked Ho's paying more attention to China than to Xingang, and wondered about the benefit to Xingang of constructing a branch temple in Chenban village. What they thought was urgent was to protest the building of an incinerator in Xingang, or to create more investment in Xingang. The Big Offering festival in December 2015 was the first victory for the opposing faction, which successfully replaced some of the temple committee members. And preventing the operation of the World Research Center for Mazu Culture, Fengtian Temple (奉天宮世界媽祖文化研究暨文獻中心) was their second attack. This faction planned to take over the presidency of the temple in 2016 but did not succeed.24 Chairman Ho won the election and he told us that the election of Xingang Temple became harder and harder. He had to put in more money and more personnel to run the temple. Friends of the temple are worried that Xingang might follow the step of the expensive election of Dajia Temple.25 We can see that, at the local level, all the elites and leading figures are relatives of each other, or are working together. Even when a member of KMT wins an election, he has to work with members of DPP. Resources have to be shared, and posts in the temple or township have to be shared as well.

After the first direct presidential election in 1996, the distance between local and national politics has drawn closer and closer in Taiwan. The very same group of voters can vote for temple chairman, town mayor, legislator, and the president of Taiwan. If the times of the elections for these different posts are close to each other, voters tend to vote for candidates belonging to

24 There are twenty members in the committee organization of Xingang temple. Some of them are pro-DPP and some are pro-KMT. Election of the temple presidency therefore overlapped and was influenced by local politics.
25 Local faction and gangsters have intervened in the election of Dajia Temple governing committee for the past twenty years (Santos 2007).
the same faction. Ideological positions concerning unification with China are less clearly differentiated in the case of local KMT and DPP politicians. The benefit they can derive from a faction, the balance between factions, and services received from the candidates are the factors considered most by voters.

**Identity politics and new religious nationalism**

That Mazu may venture into political affairs is not a new thing. After the goddess arose from the coastal area of Putian, she was reputed as having helped defeat the northern barbarian army of Jin in 1205. The eunuch General Zheng He of the Ming Dynasty went to Southeast Asia on seven diplomatic missions between 1405 and 1433. Every time he set sail, he first worshipped Mazu at the harbor of Fuzhou to seek a peaceful journey. It was Mazu who helped General Koxinga successfully land on Taiwan and defeat the Dutch at Tainan in 1662, after which he took over Taiwan as his base for fighting the Manchu invaders who founded the Qing Dynasty. Again, it was Mazu who assisted General Shi Lang to overcome the grandson of Koxinga in 1683 and hand over Taiwan to Qing Emperor Kangxi. This was also the reason why Emperor Kangxi granted Mazu the title of ‘Empress of Heaven’ which was the highest rank of a female deity in Chinese folk religion.

After immigrants from Fujian in China settled in Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty, Mazu was localized in Taiwan. During a battle between the French and Chinese in 1884 in Danshui, the Chinese general Liu Mingchuan sought the blessing of Mazu and won a victory. Lastly, during World War II, Mazu was seen by many believers in southern Taiwan catching bombs with her skirt to save people. Luckily, Mazu has not appeared in the war between the KMT and the CCP after 1949. ‘Mazu has no political stand. She protects and blesses whoever has a sincere heart’, a believer explained. This provides free space for interpretation. To believers in Taiwan, Mazu is the patron goddess of Taiwan and a symbol of Taiwanese identity. Mio also argues that Mazu has intensified Taiwan’s new nationalism. To the Fujianese, Taiwanese believers are their descendants, and cultural nationalism trumps political nationalism.

26 Sangren (1988).
In some way, Mazu reflects Hokkien cultural identity which in a way transcends both Taiwanese and Chinese identities. Many Taiwanese have invested in Fujian and lived in Fujian since 1980. The dialect spoken in Xiamen is exactly the same as in Taiwan. There is no gap between living in Xiamen or in Taiwan. Retired scholars moving to Xiamen and teaching in Xiamen University or students pursuing a Ph.D. degree in Xiamen University told us that direct flights make it easier to commune between Taiwan and Xiamen. Taiwanese who live in Kinmen spend their weekend in Xiamen which is cheaper than Taiwan. The first wave of Taiwan business migrants from 1980 to 1990 is now accompanied by highly educated elites who have attained Ph.D. degrees from Western universities. To these people, cultural and religious identities are far more realistic than political identity.

Mazu was mobilized to influence Taiwan’s 2016 presidential election. A new giant statue of Mazu was consecrated in the main hall of Xianliang Temple on 31 December 2015. As many as 500 temples in Taiwan, Singapore, and Indonesia, etc. were invited to partake in the awesome ceremony. Twenty-seven statues of Mazu from Taiwan were brought back to receive worship in Xianliang Temple. ‘This is an old trick Chinese Mazu temples will play whenever Taiwan holds an election’, commented members of DPP in Xingang. To members of KMT ‘[t]his is an event to be celebrated’. It turned out that the DPP won the presidential election in 2016 and froze the official communication with China. Cross-strait policy moved backward to that of 2007. Many of the pro-KMT temples complained this new policy caused them trouble because the Chinese temples resumed the hostility upon them. They wonder if the pro-DPP Mazu temples will in any way assist the DPP to strengthen the Taiwan independent policy just as they did in 2007. Will new religious nationalism in Taiwan beat old Chinese cultural nationalism? Under the DPP regime we might anticipate stronger resistance and more boycotts to Chinese temples, but the result is hard to foretell.

**Conclusions**

The relationships between state and religion are far more complicated than just seeing their antagonism or conflict. Multiple actors and political processes need to be examined. In this chapter, I have shown that KMT or DPP have different attitudes toward Chinese Mazu, resulting in their

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29 Ashiwa and Wank (2009, p. 3).
involvement in different groups of Mazu temples, and different degrees of communication with Chinese temples. I also have revealed that the CMECA is the agent of the Chinese central state, and CMECA is consistent with Meizhou Administration Bureau in developing Meizhou Island into the homeland of Mazu believers from around the world. But the Fujian provincial government welcomes foreign religious tourists to visit Xiamen, Quanzhou or other Mazu temples. Putian City and Putian University have a different planning for Xianliang Harbor and its future.

Politics within the state are unavoidable, just as competition within Mazu temples. Debates among politicians and bureaucrats over the interpretation of the Mazu cult and its application to cross-strait relations occur in Taiwan and in China. To worship a Chinese Mazu symbolizes unification with China. The religious mirror reflection of the political system reminds people that Chinese Mazu tour-inspecting Taiwan in 1997, under the acquiescence of the KMT, denoted Chinese political leader tour-inspecting Taiwan. In order to balance the symbolic unification function of Mazu, the DDP and its agent, Xingang Temple, in 2007, carried a Mazu statue and joined the demonstration in front of the building of the United Nations, New York, to quest for Taiwan’s independence.

Competition among Mazu temples used to dispute on the orthodox/legitimacy of the history. After 1987, cross-strait relation has made the competition more complex. Competition within Taiwan has been extended to China. Pro-KMT temples try to ally with Chinese temples in different cities to uphold its status in Taiwan. Pro-DPP temples try to collaborate with each other to resist forces from China. Still, some temples will change their political preferences from KMT to DPP or vice versa. Xingang is one of these temples. Chairman Ho of Xingang Temple has changed the temple’s political position from pro-independent to pro-unification. He is the vice-chairman of the Taiwan Mazu Fellowship which has deep relations with Chinese temples. Nevertheless, he is facing more and more pressure from the local faction.

After the Cold War, ideology has no longer defined the difference between East and West. To most Taiwanese, the vital issue regarding China and Taiwan may not be the choice of unification or independence, or even economic development, but rather the difference in lifestyle and tastes. Taiwanese complain that Chinese tourists create noise and chaos wherever they stop. Chinese tourists don’t follow traffic rules or maintain orderly conduct in public spaces. Chinese tourists haggle about everything they buy. Taiwanese merchants in China complain that bribery is necessary for the local Chinese government to get things done, as well as in hospitals if one
wishes to receive decent medical treatment. Taiwanese pilgrims complain that Chinese worship Mazu without sincerity, have no accurate knowledge of ritual or liturgy, and all the Mazu images in China are too new and young.

Although, at the central-government level, there may be a debate concerning unification and independence, at the local-community level, when we look at the traditional public sphere, the community temple, Mazu is used as a symbol of peaceful unification across the Taiwan Strait, which is juxtaposed with a symbol of Taiwanese identity. We also see that local politicians are involved in the temple affairs and use temples as election resources, where believers are mobilized and transformed into voters. The very same Mazu temple can be at one time pro-unification, and at another time pro-independence. Because local KMT politicians and DPP politicians are interrelated and intertwined when it comes to temple affairs, they each take turns electing the president of the temple committee. Local community temples have thereby become a basic unit of local politics in Taiwan.

The ancestor veneration and temple-based deity cults of Taiwan’s traditional popular religion inevitably have a different performance from those of their original places of origin in Fujian. After rapid political liberalization, economic expansion, modernization, and urbanization since 1987, there are new forms of religious expression, and these have been accompanied by the spread of island-wide deity cults and politicization of temple organizations. Whereas the power of popular religion is often used as a symbolic lever in debates concerning ‘Chinese’ and ‘Taiwanese’ identity, Taiwanese identity is not necessarily equated with Taiwan independence. In Taiwan, the older generation is politically as well as religiously committed to the identification of Taiwanese and Chinese culture, while the younger generation has exclusively a Taiwanese identity. They are working on narrating the uniqueness of Taiwanese culture and religion.

The situation has been changing rapidly in the past two years. In the legislative election of 2016, a new political party, the New Power Party (shidai liliang 時代力量) organized by the younger generation won five seats in the Legislative Yuan. This new party helped the DPP win the presidential election in 2016. After DPP has regained its regime, for the next four years, we foresee more pro-independent young people trying to participate in the public sphere and to join the election to public office.

Bibliography


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